

the younger man was never mentioned, but the message was heard and accepted.

As kin leaders develop *marandú*, they develop reputations that extend beyond their immediate kin group. Where several *tapyí* occupy a small area, a single leader may lead the religious ritual for the entire group. In the region of Itanaramí, several leaders have considerable reputations as wise men and therefore have influence throughout the area's Guaraní population. For the older men with broader political aspirations, this type of reputation can develop into a position of more general leadership.

In the past, it is possible that Guaraní leaders commanded influence over large populations. The first conquistadors reported Guaraní leaders who could amass armies of thousands against the Inca. During the famous religious migrations of the nineteenth century, we have seen that some leaders developed large followings and convinced them to travel thousands of miles over difficult conditions. Today, few Guaraní leaders achieve this type of influence and are more likely to provide guidance for a small, tightly knit kin group.

Guaraní leadership depends on influence, rather than power. Unlike political leaders in highly centralized state systems, Guaraní leaders do not have the ability to force their will on others. There is no corporal punishment or police force to enforce leaders' decisions. There is no structure that can coerce submission of dissenters. Rather, leaders appeal to religious ideology and practice to manipulate their followers. The political freedom of Guaraní society is in part based on the generalized access to resources. As every Guaraní household has membership rights in several *tapyí*, families can leave a *tapyí* at any time and join one of several others. Unpopular leaders soon find their *tapyí* diminished as families move to more suitable groups elsewhere.

## GUARANÍ ECONOMICS

### Guaraní Families and Generalized Exchange

As in politics and religion, Guaraní economic relations are organized around an infrastructure of kinship. Goods and services flow along kin and religious ties, allowing households to get the things families need to survive. Economic networks are broad and diverse. First, Guaraní families practice free and uncalculated sharing with other households in their *tapyí*. Second, Guaraní households carry on reciprocal trading with people who are more distant in geography and kinship. Finally, Guaraní are integrated into market networks, selling commodities to mestizo merchants and purchasing manufactured goods from world markets.

Economic exchanges with the three different levels are not simply broad, they differ in fundamental ways. Close kin engage in a generalized pattern of gift giving; distant relatives trade goods and work of an equal value in balance exchanges; and Guaraní sell commodities to mestizo patrons in hopes of making a profit. In a sense, these three types of exchange occur in separate spheres, with different actors, meanings, and social contacts for each. The value of a kilo of rice, for example, would be fundamentally different in each of the three social spheres.

Most economic exchanges occur among Guaraní who are close relatives. When Avarijú leaves his house on a hunting trip, he usually stops briefly to visit the family of his wife's sister who lives near the path. Being early in the morning, he often arrives as his relatives are roasting corn or having a breakfast of boiled beans. Guaraní etiquette demands that anyone arriving during a meal be offered food and Avarijú will unashamedly accept a healthy portion. When finished, he will make small talk for a while, but continue on his way without a word of thanks.

Returning from his trap line that evening with a *paca* or peccary over his shoulder, Avarijú will retrace his steps to his relative's house. This time he will take his machete and, without much fuss, slice off a portion of the kill for his sister-in-

law. She will take the portion as if it were expected and quietly hang the meat in the rafters for the next meal. Thus, with little attention, goods move quickly among Guaraní households.

Guaraní exchange almost any personal belongings among close relatives, including food, clothing, and tools. A man without an axe must borrow one to clear his field. Likewise, the hunter who owns a gun will find it in great demand by his less fortunate friends and relatives. Once, at the be-  
 seaching of a close friend, I gave him a bright red baseball cap that was my most prized personal possession. He wore it for several days, then gave in to the entreaties of his brother and passed it on. In the subsequent weeks I saw my hat travel around the community, worn successively by each adult male. Finally, after several months, I came across a young boy proudly balancing its tattered remains on his head. My hat had been well used.

Food is one of the primary goods shared among households. Guaraní harvest most goods in large quantities. Killing a peccary, or even a paca, provides more meat than a family can consume immediately. Although planting is staggered to assure that all crops do not mature simultaneously, corn, beans and rice need to be harvested in quantities that are too great for a single family to consume in a short period. Excess food is wasted. Meat rots quickly in the warmth of the forest and pests soon invade bags of corn and beans stored in the rafters. By sharing the abundance, families assure that all foods are put to good use.

In addition, sharing food evens out the abundances and shortages that characterize the food-getting process of the Guaraní. Even a dedicated hunter like Avarjú is only sometimes successful. Today, he left fresh meat for his sister-in-law's family. Tomorrow he may come home empty-handed, but find that his brother has left a leg of a deer at his house. Thus, although a hunter is successful only one day in three, exchange systems assure that his family will have meat or fish most days.

These food exchange systems also guarantee that houses have access to the diversity of goods produced. Each household selects its own crop mix. Some plant rice in the low and

wet areas along streams, others choose to plant peanuts. Some families have large stands of bananas, others devote themselves to tending stands of orange trees in the forest. The relatives you give oranges to today, may give you a stem of bananas next week. These generalized exchange systems assure that families have access to some of each good produced in the community.

Finally, food exchanges between relatives create safety nets to assure that all families have sufficient goods. A hunter who wounds himself with the machete, or the woman who burns herself seriously in the fire, may be unable to care for their family. Or the family who recently arrived from another *tapyí* may find itself without a garden. Exchanges with close kin assure that these households have at least a minimum of food.

In addition to goods, Guaraní labor is shared between households. Men seek out their male relatives to help clear their garden; women, their sisters and sisters-in-law join forces to harvest it. Work gangs sometimes include as many as eight workers. This mutual assistance not only allows people to join forces, but it relieves the tedium of what would otherwise be boring work. Women banter as they dig manioc and cut weeds. Men joke and gossip to reduce the loneliness of long treks through the forest.

This type of community exchange can be characterized as *generalized reciprocity* (Sahlins 1972:193). Exchanges are from each according to their abilities to each according to their need. The gift does not create an immediate debt for a gift of commensurate value from that person. Instead, all members are assured that when they need something, somebody in their network will provide it. The gift may not be in the form it was given, nor from the same person, but the network assures that everybody's needs are eventually satisfied.

Generalized exchanges assure that all members of the *tapyí* have access to the tools and resources of production. It restricts disparities of wealth and power within the community, keeping all families at a similar standard of living. Although there are no formal mechanisms that force individuals to share, there are powerful social ramifications to attempts to hoard possessions. Families who accumulate a

2

storehouse of food are called upon to share or suffer the criticism of their compatriots. People ridicule friends or relatives who do not share labor saving tools. In fact, retreating from these exchange networks calls into question a family's community membership.

### Guarani Trade

The second type of exchange in Guarani society is with distant kin in other tapý. In these exchanges, individuals expect a return for the good they give. A Guarani from another kin group who took a fancy to Kai Tani's knife would be expected to offer something in return. This counter gift would need to be of roughly the same value, maybe a particularly nice baseball hat or a roll of wire.

Many people come to Itanaramí from distant Guarani communities in search of medical attention from Avarijú. Avarijú is an accomplished herbalist, collecting plants and preparing effective medicines for many ailments, such as diarrhea and parasites. Even in cases when he cannot provide a clear pharmacological cure, his elixirs invariably provide some relief. He collects his pharmacopeia in the forests surrounding Itanaramí, harvesting roots, berries, foliage and the tender fibers underneath the bark of trees. A quick catalogue I made of his plant knowledge showed that almost all plants of the forest have some medicinal uses, and he has a prescription for almost all native diseases.

Although Avarijú treats members of his own tapý within the framework for generalized exchange, Guarani from other tapý are expected to compensate Avarijú with a gift. This gratuity is not defined in advance nor is its value explicitly negotiated. The giver is expected to be generous and thoughtful. Avarijú is especially appreciative of patients who arrive bearing gifts of toucan or macaw feathers. He uses these feathers as religious decorations and they are worthy of the sacred power of his medicines. Patients present their gifts to Avarijú either before or after being treated. He is not embarrassed, however, to casually admire something his patient owns and suggest how much he would like to own it. The requests are not always immediately granted; many tense mo-

ments sometimes pass as patients try to negotiate the exchange without offending Avarijú.

Exchanges between distant kin and Guarani acquaintances can be termed *balanced reciprocity*. Equal values flow between two trading partners. While in generalized reciprocity a compensatory gift is not expected from the recipient, in balanced exchanges the giver demands something in return from that specific individual. Thus, trading partners form a *dyad*. Rather than saying that "what goes around, comes around," here one would suggest that "what goes to you, comes back from you." This repayment need not be immediate, but both members are aware that the debt remains outstanding until the value has been returned. Neither partner intends to extract a profit from the transaction, nor wishes to lose wealth.

### Guarani Producers and Mestizo Patrons

Not all economic exchanges are among Guarani. Indigenous people sell yerba, skins, honey and labor to mestizos in nearby Paraguayan communities. These inter-ethnic exchanges occur under a third set of social rules. Rather than generalized or balanced reciprocity, Guarani enter trading relations with hope to give as little as possible and receive as much as they can. This type of exchange is often termed *negative reciprocity*. Both parties hope that the gift they offer in the transaction will be returned with greater value, that the trade will result in a net flow of value to them. In short, both people intend to make a profit and assume that their trading partner does as well.

Although Tangará grows most of his food, he also enjoys soap, salt and cooking oil. These goods are not available in Itanaramí, nor from his Guarani acquaintances in other tapý. To get access to salt, Tangará must enter the market economy and bargain with a mestizo for goods brought from the capital city. His desire for salt will most likely lead him to gather up his excess yerba and set out for one of the general stores that dot the muddy streets of the nearby frontier town.

Although the Guaraní could isolate themselves from the market economy, they choose not to. The average Guaraní family depends on local stores for basic cooking supplies, clothes and a few small luxuries. A survey of Guaraní expenditures shows that almost half of Guaraní expenditures are for food. Purchases include flour products, meat, rice, beans, lard and salt. These not only add diversity to the Guaraní diet, they give families access to basic necessities when hunting fails or between harvests. Clothing accounts for about a third of Guaraní expenses. Although most Guaraní prefer to work in simple soccer shorts or a skirt, many adults have an outfit of imported, polyester clothing for dressy occasions. The rest of Guaraní purchases go for tools, medicine or an occasional treat.

Guaraní earn cash by collecting yerba leaf from the forests surrounding their communities and selling it to local and regional patrons. In addition, Guaraní men cut fence posts, collect citrus leaves and sell animal skins for cash.

The Guaraní are suspicious of their patrons. Despite the fact that many Paraguayans have worked with the Guaraní for decades, their transactions are primarily self-interested. Patrons seek to maximize their profit by convincing Guaraní to accept the lowest possible price for the leaf. Patrons are wary of Guaraní producers as well. The Guaraní yerba gatherer seeks to take home the greatest profit possible from the yerba he brought to market. These two self-interested traders must bargain to discover a price they both are satisfied with. If no price can be arrived at, they will separate and seek new business partners elsewhere.

The traders have good reason to be suspicious of one another. Each tries to manipulate the other. Buyers have greater knowledge of the national market and try to convince the Guaraní that the price of yerba is low. They often short change sellers in the weighing or the math of the transaction. The Guaraní producer, in turn, will exaggerate the quality of the leaf or may even weight it down with sand or other leaves.

The exchange between Guaraní and mestizo takes place within the context of a hierarchical social relationship. The mestizos of the region once lived in fear of the Guaraní of the

forest. Over the last century, however, the Paraguayan military and rural caudillos have established their authority in rural areas, using brutality to avenge any wrongdoing, especially any misdeeds they perceive by the Guaraní. The mestizo merchant, then, has the might of the state defending his business. The Guaraní, on the other hand, have little recourse when they are swindled in trade. This places the Guaraní trader at a disadvantage to the mestizo merchant and increases the profits of Paraguayan patrons.

The social tie between the mestizo patron and the Guaraní producer is fundamentally different from links among the Guaraní. Among the Guaraní, exchanges flow along kinship ties and are both a personal and permanent tie. Relations between Guaraní and patron are for the prime purpose of transacting business and can be dissolved by either partner. Trading among Guaraní is based on equality and trust; trading across ethnic lines is characterized by power and suspicion. Each party enters the transaction with self-interest and expects the same of the other.

In sum, Guaraní society is organized through kin relations. The ties between parent, children, and siblings provide the infrastructure for religious, political, and economic activity. Family connections determine where you reside, who you can marry, and where you can farm. This kinship network also serves as the primary arena for religious activity. Older men gather their progeny and other relatives around them, asserting kin connections to draw ever wider groups together into community and ethnic identities. Kin connections serve as political relations as well. Older leaders provide guidance and direction to their followers, calling on religious knowledge to legitimize their claim as guides for individual behavior and representatives of communal desires. Finally, kinship serves as the primary arena for economic relations. Family connections distribute goods and services throughout the community, assuring that the needs of all are attended to. Even in cases where Guaraní engage in economic exchanges with non-relatives, they do so in distinct and fundamentally different spheres.