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The Social Use of Kinship Terms among Brazilian Indians

Author(s): Claude Levi Strauss

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THE SOCIAL USE OF KINSHIP TERMS AMONG BRAZILIAN INDIANS

By CLAUDE LEVI STRAUSS

THE kinship system of the Nambikuara Indians of the Western Matto Grosso is one of the most simple in Brazil. At the same time it is typical of a sociological pattern, cross cousin marriage, which according to our present information seems to have been very common throughout South America. The object of this article is to compare the familial organization of the Nambikuara with that of other tribes described in the older literature and to show that a certain kinship tie, the brother-in-law relationship, once possessed a meaning among many South American tribes far transcending a simple expression of relationship. This significance, still observable in Nambikuara culture, is both sexual and politico-social; and, owing to its complexity, the brother-in-law relationship may perhaps be regarded as an actual institution. Since the sixteenth century travellers and sociologists have failed to devote sufficient attention to the phenomenon, probably because it could readily be interpreted as a development of the imported Iberian *compadre* relationship. In our opinion, on the contrary, the brother-in-law relationship, together with its remarkable implications, constitutes an indigenous aboriginal institution based on the pattern of native culture. Nevertheless, it presents a striking example of convergence in which the native and Latin-Mediterranean institutions show numerous apparent similarities overlying important structural differences.

The Nambikuara Indians are settled on the upper courses of the feeders of the Tapajoz River, between the eleventh and the fifteenth parallels. Their territory consists of a semi-desert savanna, which contrasts with the narrow gallery forests along the main waterways. The fertile soil of these forests allows the natives to cultivate a few gardens in the rainy season, but during most of the year the Nambikuara subsist mainly by hunting and gathering wild food. Compared to the majority of Brazilian tribes, their cultural level is low. As they were discovered only in 1907 and as they had practically no contact with white civilization between the year of the Rondon-Roosevelt Expedition in 1914 and the time of our own field work in 1938-39, their familial and social organization may be considered still intact.

The Nambikuara kinship system may be summarized as follows: All the father's brothers are classified together with the father and are called "father," and all the mother's sisters are classified with the mother and are called "mother." The father's sisters and the mother's brothers are classified together with the spouse's parents and the parents' parents in a single category which denotes simultaneously the cross aunts and cross uncles, the mother-in-law and father-in-law, and the grandparents. Passing to Ego's generation, the parallel cousins, both the children of the father's brothers and of the mother's sisters, are merged with siblings and are called "brother" and "sister," Turn-

ing to the children of the father's sisters and of the mother's brothers, a man calls all his female cross cousins (to one of whom he is or will be married) "wife," and all his male cross cousins "brother-in-law;" conversely, a woman calls all her male cross cousins (among whom her actual or potential husband is numbered) "husband," and all her female cross cousins "sister-in-law." No terminological difference is made between actual and potential spouses. The members of the next younger generation are similarly divided into "sons" and "daughters" (Ego's own children and parallel nephews and nieces) and "sons-in-law" and "daughters-in-law" (Ego's cross nephews and nieces), since these are or may be the spouses of his children.

The system is somewhat complicated by secondary distinctions made between elder and younger siblings and by the fact that another kind of marriage—between a maternal uncle and his niece—is also practised. This new pattern usually appears in the polygynous unions which, in the prevailing monogamous Nambikuara society, are the privilege of the chief. This point needs some elaboration. Nambikuara polygyny results from the fact that, subsequent to a first marriage having all the characteristics of the common (i.e., the cross cousin) form; a man may contract one or more unions of somewhat different nature. Actually, the position of his new wives is not the same as that of his original one, and, although constituting real marriages, the later unions are nevertheless psychologically and economically different from the first. The atmosphere in which they evolve is less conjugal and more like a kind of amorous friendship. The younger wives cooperate more extensively in the numerous tasks imposed on their husband because of his special social obligations. Furthermore, the activities of these women do not conform as closely as those of the first wife to the general pattern of the sexual division of labor. Finally, they are younger and are classified, in relation to the earlier wife, as "daughters" or "nieces." Such "oblique" unions (that is, between members of different generations) may also take place in monogamous marriages, but less frequently. Although their occurrence among the Nambikuara is an important point in our demonstration, the consequent modifications of the kinship system are not essential for the purposes of this article and we may therefore omit further mention of them. Our present observations will be limited to the special implications of the brother-in-law relationship which is expressed through the reciprocal terms *asúkосу* (Eastern dialect), *tarúte* (Central and Western dialect) or *iópa* (Northern dialect).

It must be emphasized immediately that this useful translation of the native term is not in any way accurate. While the *asúkосу* is a man's male cross cousin and also his potential brother-in-law, since the persons calling each other *asúkосу* (or *tarúte* or *iópa*) call each other's sisters "wife," it is only in particular instances that one or more of the individuals involved is, in fact, the wife's brother or the sister's husband or both. The meaning of the term *asúkосу*

is consequently much wider than "brother-in-law" as we understand it, including as it does approximately half the masculine members of a man's generation; the rest, of course, receive the name "brother" (consanguineous or classificatory). It should be noted that in the Nambikuara kinship system men alone have brothers-in-law and, conversely, women alone have sisters-in-law.

Only in the case of brothers-in-law are the Nambikuara conscious of a link between a special type of behavior and the position occupied by a kinsman in the relationship system. Generally speaking, there are no rules of avoidance or of privileged familiarity between particular kinds of relatives. The relations with the spouse's parents do not differ substantially from those with the parallel uncle and aunt and, although it is true that relations between consanguineous or classificatory siblings are rather reserved, the natives are unable to define this diffuse behavior. As a matter of fact, while siblings and parallel cousins do not avoid each other, they do not joke or even talk together unless there is a special reason for doing so. Sisters-in-law, on the contrary, comport themselves very freely. They laugh and joke together and render each other small services, such as rubbing each other's back with urucu paste. And, more especially, exceptional relations are revealed when one passes to the brothers-in-law.

We have already mentioned the partial polygyny which exists in the group. The chief or shaman periodically withdraws several of the youngest and prettiest women from the regular cycle of marriages; consequently, young men often find it difficult to marry, at least during adolescence, since no potential spouse is available. The resulting problem is solved in Nambikuara society by homosexual relations, which receive the rather poetical name *tamindige ki'andige*—"sham love." Relations of this kind are frequent among young men and are more publicly displayed than heterosexual ones. Unlike most adults, the partners do not seek the isolation of the bush, but settle close to the camp fire in front of their amused neighbors. Although the source of occasional jokes, such relations are considered childish and no one pays much attention to them. We did not discover whether the partners aim at achieving complete sexual gratification or whether they limit themselves to such sentimental effusions and erotic behavior as most frequently characterize the relations between spouses. In any event, the point is that homosexual relations occur only between *male cross cousins*.

We never learned whether or not the same relations continue to exist between adult cross cousins; it does not seem likely. Nevertheless, the freedom and demonstrativeness displayed by brothers-in-law toward one another are not characteristic of the relations between brothers or between the members of any other class of relatives. One often sees among the Nambikuara (who, in fact, like to indulge in expressions of affection) two or three men, married and

sometimes the fathers of several children, walking together at dusk and tenderly embracing each other; always

tarúte ialásiete

(these are) brothers-in-law embracing (each other).

Certain games, too, such as the "scratch game" (in which the opponents try to scratch each other especially in the face), are commonly played by brothers-in-law.

But the close relationship between "cross cousins actually or potentially allied through a sister's marriage"—the more accurate translation of the aboriginal term for brother-in-law—may extend far beyond the family tie. Actually, it is sometimes used to establish between individuals not belonging to the same kin group new links of a special nature, the function of which is to amalgamate into a single familial unit several formerly unrelated groups. This is brought out clearly in the following case.

During the past twenty years, several epidemics nearly destroyed the central, northern and western divisions of the Nambikuara. Several groups were decimated to such an extent that they could no longer successfully maintain a socially autonomous existence. In the hope of reconstituting functioning units, some of these, therefore, attempted to join forces. In the course of our field-work we met and worked with such a merged group made up of seventeen individuals using the northern dialect (*Sabâne* group) and thirty-four using the central dialect (*Tarúnde* group). Each of the originally distinct groups, however, lived under the guidance of its own chief, although both leaders closely cooperated. It is probable that the demographic crisis did not by itself account for this situation, since the people of the second group formed merely a fraction of a more numerous unit from which it had split off for reasons unknown to us. However, from several events which occurred during our stay with them, we deduced that the break had been caused by political dissention, the details of which remained obscure to us. In any event, these groups now travelled and lived together although two separate but contiguous camps were maintained in which the families formed distinct circles, each around its own fire. The most amazing feature of this curious organization was that the two groups did not speak the same language and were able to understand one another only through interpreters; fortunately, one or two individuals belonging to each group had sufficient knowledge of the other dialect to act as intermediaries. Even the two chiefs could not communicate directly. The problem of whether these dialects belong to the same linguistic stock need not be raised here; but the Northern group undoubtedly must be classified with the Nambikuara cultural family because of the similarities of material culture and of the life pattern, and chiefly because of the psychological attitude of the people, who very evidently believed in their close affinity to the Central group.

A more fundamental problem raised by the union of the two groups, namely the nature of the relations to be established between their respective members, was solved by the common statement that all the male members of the Sabáñe group were to be acknowledged as the "brothers-in-law" (*tarúte*) of the male adults of the Tarúndę group, and, conversely, that the latter were to be acknowledged as "brothers-in-law" (*iópa*) by the former. Consequently, all the "wives" belonging to one group became the "sisters" of the "husbands" of the other, and the "sisters-in-law" of the latter's wives; and all children of both sexes in one group became the potential spouses of the children in the other. As a result, these two groups will be welded into a single consanguineous unit within two generations.

The conscious and systematic nature of this solution cannot be doubted. When asked for their kinship relation to any male adult of the allied group, the male informants, irrespective of the group to which they themselves belonged, never gave a different answer, but always emphasized that the question was meaningless since all the Sabáñe men were their *tarúte*, or all Tarúndę men their *iópa*. On the other hand, no one seemed to have a clear idea of the exact relationship between the women, the children, or the adults and the children of the two groups. Occasionally the correct theoretical relationship could be deduced; more frequently only the group name was given in reply to our queries: She is calling the other one "Sabáñe"—or "Tarúndę." Thus it may be assumed that the system was conceived of and applied according to (and exclusively according to) the *tarúte* (or *iópa*) relationship. This inference is rather important because, of course, the same result could have been achieved by other means.

If the sole aim of the system had been to ensure inter-marriage, it could have been brought about equally well in two other ways; perhaps we should say that two different interpretations might have been made of the same phenomenon. In the first place, the women might have been regarded as "sisters-in-law"; or, in the second place, all the men of one group and all the women of the other might have entered a brother-sister relationship. In both cases the result would have been the same as in the accepted interpretation, in which, indeed, these relationships are implied though not expressed. Nevertheless, the solution itself was actually based on the relationship between the male and his allied collaterals, the consequences of which must now be examined.

Two of the three possible interpretations implied the consideration of women; only one was purely masculine, and it is the latter which was adopted by the natives. The reason for the choice is obvious since the problem to be solved was a purely political one, concerning the chieftainship, which is exercised by men, rather than the normal mechanism of filiation, the pattern of which seems to be matrilineal. In a simple system of cross cousin marriage, such as that of the Nambikuara, the brother-in-law may be either the matri-

lateral or the patrilineal cross cousin; nevertheless, the chosen interpretation stresses the male side in Nambikuara society, or, let us say, it shows a strong tendency in this direction. At the same time we can see in such a solution a specifically social structure beginning to superimpose itself on the formerly simple familial units.

We do not intend in any way to base a theory of the origin of dual organizations on these restricted observations, the character of which is mainly anecdotal. However, this is a case where "the characteristic features of the sib organization are in some measure prefigured among sibless tribes";¹ as a matter of fact, in order to fulfil the main requirements of a system of exogamic moieties, it would be sufficient for the new unit, once fixed, to retain the recollection of its dual origin by preserving the habit of not mingling the camp fires.

Moreover, the extension of the "brother-in-law" relationship provides an instance of the increasingly superior position of the men within the group, since it is through the men that group alliances are brought about, just as wars are waged by men.

The preceding observations have a further value, since with their help we may be able to interpret sociological information found in the older literature on South America, especially that dealing with the Tupi of the Brazilian coast.

There are striking similarities between several features of the Nambikuara kinship system and what may be inferred about the ancient familial organization of the coastal Tupi. When describing small details of Nambikuara daily life, one is often tempted to quote Jean de Léry or Yves d'Evreux, so accurately do their words apply to certain live features of Nambikuara society, notwithstanding the fact that they were written four centuries before this culture became known. As a matter of fact, several metaphysical themes are common to both cultures and, indeed, certain names in the Nambikuara religious vocabulary have a conspicuously Tupi origin. The most important similarities, however, are those involving the kinship systems. In both cultures the same three principles of familial organization are stressed and are apparently similarly expressed: First the dichotomy of the parents' brothers and sisters between parallel uncles and aunts, called "fathers" and "mothers," and cross uncles and aunts, called "fathers-in-law" and "mothers-in-law;" secondly, the marriage of cross cousins with the correlative assimilation of parallel cousins to "brothers" and "sisters"; and, finally, the avuncular marriage, which, among the ancient Tupi, seems to have taken the form of a preferential union between the mother's brother and the sister's daughter.

An excellent text by Anchieta gives evidence of the occurrence of the first principle, as well as showing signs of the existence of the other two:

¹ Robert H. Lowie, *Family and Sib* (AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST, Vol. 21), p. 28.

In questions of relationship they never use the word *ete* (true) since they call their father's brothers "father," their brothers' sons "son," and their father's brothers' sons "brother"; when they wish to designate their actual father or son, they say *xeruba xemonhangara* "my father who engendered me," or, for a son, *xeraira xeremimonhangara* "my son whom I engendered." I never heard an Indian call his wife *xeremireco ete*, but simply *xeremireco* or *xeracig* "mother of my children," and I never heard a woman refer to her husband as *xemenete* "real husband," but simply *xemena* or *xemembira ruba* "father of my children." They use these terms indifferently for their husband or lover. If the husband calls one of his wives *xeremireco ete*, he means the most esteemed or best loved wife and she is often the last one he took.²

This text also shows that the Tupi encountered a difficulty in their kinship system, namely, how to distinguish the classificatory parents or children from the consanguineous ones. This stresses the structural similarity between their kinship system and that of the Nambikuara, since the latter met with the same problem. Apparently the Tupi, like the Nambikuara, felt no need for special terms, but when it was necessary, made comments based on physiological considerations. When the Nambikuara are asked to point out the real status of their consanguineous children, they add to the name for "son" or "daughter" another word, the meaning of which is "child" or "little one." The physiological implication of this new term is perfectly clear, since it is ordinarily used to designate newly born animals, while the former terms are applied only to relationships within the human family. Complementary indications regarding the assimilation of the father's brother to a classificatory father may be found in Soares de Sousa.³

The old authors give numerous examples of cross-cousin marriage and of marriages between uncles and nieces. Here again Anchieta will be our main source:

Though many Indians have several nieces, and very attractive indeed, nevertheless they do not use them as wives. However, brothers have such authority over sisters that they consider their nieces as belonging to them and that they are entitled to marry them and to use them ad libitum if they wish. In the same way they give their sisters to some and refuse them to others. Taragoaj, an important chief of the village of Jaribatiba in the plain of San Vicente, had two wives one of whom was his niece, his sister's daughter.⁴

Both types of marriage are treated as symmetrical institutions in the same document: ". . . because the fathers give them the daughters and the brothers the sisters. . . ." ⁵ Furthermore, cross-cousin marriage is referred to by Staden:

² *Informação dos Casamentos dos Índios do Brasil* (Revista Trimensal del Instituto Historico e Geographico Brasileiro, T. 8, 1846, I 2da Seria), p. 259.

³ *Roteiro do Brasil* (Revista do Instituto Historico e Geographico Brasileiro, T. 14, 1851), pp. 316-317.

⁴ *Loc. cit.*, p. 259.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

“They make presents also of their daughters and sisters . . .”,⁶ by Soares de Sousa,⁷ Claude d’Abbeville,⁸ and others. With a sound sociological feeling, Anchieta establishes a link between the custom of a man marrying his sister’s daughter and the recognition of the male as the only one responsible for conception, a theory also shared by the Nambikuara. On this matter, Anchieta writes:

They call the brothers’ daughters “daughter” and treat them as such. Therefore they would not have sexual intercourse with them, since they believe that the true kinship link has its origin in the father, whom they consider the only agent, while the mother, according to them, is merely a container in which the children are formed. . . . For that reason too, they use the sisters’ daughters “ad copulam” without sin. . . . For the same reason, the father will give his daughters in marriage to their uncles, their mother’s brothers, a thing which, until now, was never done with the nephew who is the brother’s son. . . .”⁹

Cross cousin marriage seems to have a very wide distribution throughout South America.¹⁰ But among the Tupi avuncular marriage in particular aroused the interest of early travellers. For instance, Léry notices: “As to the uncle, he marries his niece”,¹¹ and Thevet: “As soon as they are born, the maternal uncle lifts them from the ground and keeps them for his future wives.”¹² Magalhaes de Gandavo expresses himself as follows:

It is their custom to marry the women who are their nieces, the daughters of their brothers or sisters; these are considered their legitimate and true wives. Fathers of the women cannot refuse them, nor can any persons other than their uncles marry them.¹³

But this statement seems to be doubly inaccurate. For other references to the same phenomenon one may turn to Nobrega,¹⁴ Vasconcellos,¹⁵ and Soares de Sousa.¹⁶

⁶ Hans Staden, *The true History of his Captivity* (Ed. Malcolm Letts, London, Vol. II, Ch. 18), p. 146.

⁷ *Tratado Descritivo do Brasil em 1587*, nova edição (São Paulo, 1938. Cap. CLVII).

⁸ *Histoire de las Mission*. . . (Paris, 1614).

⁹ *Loc. cit.*, pp. 259–206. The same interpretation is made by Manoel de Nobrega, *Cartas do Brasil 1549–1560, Cartas Jesuíticas I* (Publ. da Academia Brasileira, Rio de Janeiro, 1931).

¹⁰ For instance, Breton gives clear evidence of its occurrence among the Antillean Caribs: “First cousins whom we call father’s brother’s sons call each other ‘brothers’ and the father’s brothers are also called ‘fathers.’ The children of brothers do not marry, but they may contract marriages with the children of their father’s sisters.” *Dictionnaire Caraïbe-François* (Auxerre, 1665), p. 11.

¹¹ *Voyage fait en la Terre du Bresil*, ed. Gaffarel. (Paris, 1880. Vol. 2, ch. 17), p. 85.

¹² *Cosmogonie Universelle*, p. 932.

¹³ Pedro de Magalhaes de Gandavo, *The Histories of Brazil* (The Cortes Society, New York, 1922. II, ch. 10), p. 89.

¹⁴ *Cartas do Brasil. Loc. cit.*, p. 148.

¹⁵ *Chronica da Companhia de Jesu do Estado do Brasil* (Lisboa, 1865. I, 82), p. 133.

¹⁶ *Tratado*, pp. 157, 152.

Regarding polygyny and the sharp differentiation made among the Nambikuara between the first wife who devotes herself to feminine activities and the younger wives who are their husband's companions and share his tasks, it may be recalled that Magalhaes de Gandavo¹⁷ refers to a special category of women, single indeed, who shared in masculine activities.¹⁸

The preceding similarities may perhaps allow us to establish a valid comparison between our observations concerning the extension of the "brother-in-law" relationship among the Nambikuara and what seems to have been a very similar institution among the ancient Tupi. We first quote Yves d'Evreux: They scattered part of the French through the villages so that they might live according to the custom of the land, which consists in having *chetouasap*, that is to say, hosts or god-sibs (*compères*), giving them merchandise instead of money. Such hospitality or god-sib relationship is very close among them, for they regard you as their child as long as you stay with them. They hunt and fish for you and, what is more, they used to give their daughters to their god-sibs (*compères*).¹⁹

The same author refers later to the "French who were established in the villages in a god-sib relationship (*compérage*)."²⁰ Evidence of the aboriginal institution may also be found in Jean de Léry:

It is worth remarking that the words *atour-assap* and *coton-assap* differ, because the first signifies a perfect alliance between them and between them and us, so much so that the belongings of the one are common to the other. And also that they cannot have the daughter or sister of the first named.²¹

From this one may infer, conversely, that marriage is authorized with the sister and the daughter of the *coton-assap*. Therefore, the *coton-assap* is granted a double privilege: first, marriage with his partner's sister, which makes him a "brother-in-law"; and, secondly, marriage with his partner's daughter, which is equivalent to his assimilation to the rank of "maternal uncle";—then, because he is considered a theoretical brother of his partner's wife, he also becomes a theoretical brother-in-law. Actually, therefore, both privileges have the same result.

One more similarity between the Tupi and Nambikuara brother-in-law relationship remains to be pointed out. All the texts quoted agree that there existed among the Tupi a kind of authority held by young men over their

¹⁷ *Loc. cit.*, II, ch. 10, p. 89.

¹⁸ Other indications on the familial organization of the ancient Tupi may be found in: Métraux, *La Religion des Tupinambas* (Paris, Leroux, 1928), passim; Lafone Quevedo, *Guarani Kinship Terms as an Index of Social Organization* (AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST, Vol. 21, 1919), pp. 421-440; Kirchhoff, *Die Verwandtschaftsorganisation der Urwaldstämme Südamerikas* (Zeitschrift für Ethnologie, Vol. 63, 1931, ch. 15), p. 182.

¹⁹ *Voyage dans le Nord du Brésil*, ed. F. Denis (Leipzig et Paris, 1864, II), p. 14.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, XXVIII, p. 109.

²¹ *Loc. cit.*, II, ch. 20, p. 133. Cf. also Cardim, *Tratados da Terra e Gente do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 1925), pp. 169-170.

sisters. Cross cousin marriages seem to have resulted chiefly from a reciprocal exchange of their respective sisters by the male cross cousins. (The same holds for the giving of a daughter by a father.) The potential or actual brothers-in-law then enter into a relationship of a special nature based upon reciprocal sexual services. We know that the same thing may be said of the Nambikuara brothers-in-law, with the difference that, among the Tupi, the sisters or daughters of the brothers-in-law provided the object of these services, whereas among the Nambikuara the prestations are directly exchanged in the form of homosexual relations.

We may now summarize our observations. The ancient Tupi acknowledged two forms of marriage; namely, cross cousin marriage and avuncular marriage. The first was usually practised in the form of an exchange of sisters by two male cousins; the second appears to have been a right to the sister's daughter exercised by the mother's brother or granted to him by his sister's husband. In both cases the marriage is the result of an agreement between cross cousins, actually or potentially brothers-in-law—which is the definition we retained as a suitable translation of the Nambikuara terms *tarúte* and *iópa*. Now, this special "brother-in-law" relationship could be established, under the name of *chetouasap* (Evreux) or *coton-assap* (Léry), between individuals not united previously by any kinship tie, or else only more remotely related, or even between strangers (as was the case of the French and the Indians). The reason for such a step was to ensure intermarriage and by this means to amalgamate familial or social groups, previously heterogeneous, into a new homogeneous unit. One recognizes here the same process described in the analysis of the relations between the newly joined groups, Sabáñe and Tarúñde.²²

²² The widespread South American custom of using kinship terms to express social relationships is attested to by Von den Steinen (*Unter der Naturvölkern Zentral Brasiliens*, 2 Aufl. Berlin, 1897, p. 286), who was called "elder brother" by the Bakairi and "maternal uncle" by the Mehinaku. We have just established the equivalence of the terms "maternal uncle" and "brother-in-law" in a system of cross cousin marriage combined with avuncular marriage. Regarding the use of the term "elder brother," two observations should be made. First, in a kinship system such as that of the Bororo, not far distant from the Xingu, each generation is to some extent split into two layers, the elder half being assimilated to the younger half of the generation above and the younger half to the elder half of the generation below. In such a system an "elder brother" may well be a true uncle and a potential brother-in-law.

The use of the term "brother" for social purposes may also be understood in another way. Among the Nambikuara, there is a special term, sometimes used to designate a sibling of the same sex, the meaning of which is "the other one." This term is applied not only to describe a familial relationship, but is also used to name objects belonging to a class which includes several units (for instance, the posts of the huts or the pipes of the whistles). Friendly groups may also consider themselves to be "brothers" and the exclamation, "You are no more my brother!" may often be heard in discussions between angry adversaries.

This suggests that the term "brother" possesses, in addition to its kinship significance, a very wide meaning, both logical and moral. Nevertheless, when the technical problem of establishing new social relationships is put up to the Indians, it is not the vague "brotherhood" which is called upon, but the more complex mechanism of the "brother-in-law" relationship.

The objection may be raised that the old authors have interpreted inaccurate observations in the light of European data. Since we shall suggest the use of the word *compérage*—borrowed from the French—to identify the institution, which we consider to be an authentic aboriginal one, it will be useful to discuss briefly this aspect of the problem.

Without any doubt there is a striking analogy between the facts related above and the Latin-European institution of *compérage*. Originally the *compère* and the *commère* were connected with each other, and both with the child's parents, through the mystical link of parrainage. However, the relation was very soon secularized in all small rural communities, or rather, wherever the familial structures were of greater importance than the social ones; it was then used to establish an artificial link of kinship, or, more precisely, as is the case among the Nambikuara, to express in kinship terms a purely external relationship of spatial promiscuity.²³ The stranger or newcomer was adopted by means of the reciprocal appellation of *compère* or *commère* which he received from—and returned to—his male adult contemporaries. On the other hand, since the stranger usually assimilated himself to the group by marrying within his new community, the terms *compère* and "brother-in-law" soon became synonymous, so that men allied by marriage usually called each other only by the first term. In all small communities of Mediterranean Europe and of Latin America, the *compère* or *compadre* is an actual or a potential brother-in-law. No doubt in certain regions of Central and South America the analogy between the European and aboriginal institution has helped the latter to become fixed and modernized. Thus, in Mexico the primitive institution of the *mošte*, that is, of the heads of families bound to exchange gifts at certain periods, now expresses itself by means of the "compadre" relationship, the Spanish term providing an easy translation of the earlier Otomi.²⁴ The formal analogy between the institutions cannot hide, however, the fact that they are really opposite in character. In Latin-Mediterranean society, the formerly mystical and, actually, social link of *compérage* may be changed, through marriage, into a real kinship tie. Among the ancient Tupi, as among the Nambikuara, the actual kinship provides the type of link used to establish wider relations.

This being admitted, there are two strong reasons why our authorities cannot have constructed a pseudo-institution based on a European pattern from inconsistent observations. In the first place, men as well acquainted with religious problems as were Yves d'Evreux, Cardim and Léry could not have assimilated a relationship whose first consequence and probable aim was to per-

²³ The same sociological derivation is expressed in English through the etymological origin of the word "gossip" (god-sib).

²⁴ Jacques Soustelle, *La Famille Otomi-Pame du Mexique Central* (Paris, Institut d'Ethnologie, 1937).

mit new forms of marriage to the relationship between godfathers and parents, the main purpose of which, especially since the thirteenth century, had been to impose new and very rigid restrictions upon marriage. At the time they were writing, the matter was of immediate interest and was being discussed by the Council of Trent, where the earlier rules were somewhat mitigated. But there is a much stronger argument: From the moment of the arrival of the European missionaries both institutions, the European and the aboriginal, actually co-existed among the Indians, at least among those who were baptized, and neither they nor their European priests ever interpreted the Christian "god-father" relationship in terms of the native "brother-in-law" institution. On the contrary, and much more logically, since the new relationship placed restrictions on marriage, they considered it as a modality of the relation of paternity; thus, they assimilated the "god-father" to a classificatory "father."

They [the newly baptized children] regarded their god-fathers as their true fathers and called them *Cherou*, that is to say, "my father," and the French called them *Cheaire*, that is to say, "my son," and the little girls *Cheagire*, "my daughter." . . .²⁶

Therefore, it cannot be doubted that the *compêrage* is quite distinct from its European parallel.

A sufficient number of convergent indications have been recorded so that we may consider the outstanding character of the "brother-in-law" relationship a specific feature of South American sociology, constituting the core of an original institution of *compêrage* which appears clearly among the Nambikuara and which, as suggested by the documents presented in this article, may formerly have had a much wider distribution on the continent.

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²⁶ Yves d'Evreux, *loc. cit.*, II, I, p. 234.