

## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

No somos muy unidos aqui “We are not very united here” were nearly the first words Orna Johnson and I heard from “Maestro,” as the people of Shimaa called their schoolteacher. His words, spoken on our arrival in the community in July of 1972, were meant to be discouraging, not from any opposition to our doing research there, but from embarrassment. He assumed that we, like other outsiders, only respected communities of some size, where individual households could pull together in building a political entity capable of taking its place in modern Peru. He had learned in teacher training that building such a community was one of his missions as an employee of the department of education.

His words were a lament, for himself and for the haphazard collection of families that had come to settle in the vicinity of the schoolhouse at Shimaa since 1964 but had achieved only a scant and shaky

political cohesion. Few could understand better than Maestro what a frustrating and contradictory task it was to try to persuade some 125 Matsigenka in five loose hamlets and several scattered homesteads that they were part of something bigger than themselves, to which they owed loyalty and for which they were being asked to make sacrifices.

I was not discouraged by Maestro's words. Anthropological instinct told me that the lack of political cohesion in Shimaa was an advantage, a sign that modern change was too new to have penetrated far into the core of Matsigenka society and culture. The Matsigenka men and women dressed in shirts and pants and floral print dresses, who had watched us as we passed the Catholic missions on our route down the Rio Alto Urubamba, held little interest for me. But that first day in Shimaa, when Julio--dressed in brown cushma, bow and arrow in hand, face streaked red with achiote, hair half-curled in a ragged halo--came up to me, brought his face so close to mine that I could smell him and see the pores of his skin, looked right into my eyes and began speaking incomprehensible Matsigenka, I was gripped by an overwhelming sense of strangeness. I told myself excitedly, "Well, this is it. This is the Amazon and here is an Amazon Indian. This is what you came for!"

Within days the strangeness began to fade and in time, as I learned the language and was drawn into family life, I would experience the Matsigenka as people like any others. But the strangeness never completely left. Sometimes my companions would do something unexpected whose basis in motivation and belief was a complete mystery to me, and I would feel once again utterly estranged. I moved back and forth between these extremes of familiarity and strangeness throughout my fieldwork with the Matsigenka, and have been revisited by that old vacillation on many occasions, including the writing of this book.

## A Family Level Society

The Matsigenka of Shimaá at the time of my research (1972-1980) lived at what Steward (1955: 120) called “the family level of sociocultural integration.” The idea of a family level society has been discussed and disputed by anthropologists for nearly half a century, and continues to raise doubts (Johnson and Earle 2000: xx). My central purpose in this book is to provide a well-rounded ethnography of the Matsigenka demonstrating that the family level of sociocultural integration is a reality for them, and that they cannot be understood or appreciated except as a family level society. I intend to show how it is economically and politically feasible to live at the family level, why it is advantageous under their circumstances to do so, and what the implications are for their personal development, social organization, and patterns of thought and feeling.

At least some of my sense of the strangeness of the Matsigenka arises from their being a family level society, profoundly different in many ways from my own experience in complex societies. Not only are they completely animistic and shamanistic in their world view--an attribute that, while strange to the “civilized” sensibility is not entirely absent even in contemporary society--they also feel entitled to avoid contact with and responsibility for anyone outside their immediate extended family, particularly as realized in hamlets of three to five single family households. This means that they do not even fulfill a more or less standard notion of what “tropical-forest villagers” or “tribal peoples” are like: the Matsigenka of Shimaá are not engaged in suprafamily activities like calendrical or initiation rituals, raiding and warfare, structural patterns of gift exchange, descent group exogamy and spouse exchange, feasting or gift exchange.

In a phrase, the Matsigenka have not been subordinated much to the constraints of the “Social Cage” (Maryanski and Turner 1992). It is extremely difficult to motivate them to participate in any group activities at all--they listen to exhortative speeches attentatively but with blank expressions, and then generally walk away and refuse to join the proposed group activity, whether it be to maintain the central clearing of the community or to attend Maestro’s Columbus Day celebration. They are most reluctant to be led. Maestro has had to use strong words of persuasion backed up by his considerable access to steel tools, manufactured clothing, and medicines to overcome this reluctance even among families that have lived in the vicinity of Shima for four or more years.

Steward originally proposed the family level as a construct to account for the Great Basin Shoshone (Steward 1938). In his account, the Shoshone spent most of the year as dispersed familistic foragers who lived in a “competitive” mode (Steward 1955: 105-107)--that is, they found little benefit in cooperating in the food quest with other families and so scattered to stay out of each other’s way. By dispersing much of the year, they avoided conflict and did not have to experience the frustration of trying to forage in areas recently exploited by another group. Seasonally, they would tend to congregate in somewhat greater numbers around pinenut groves where they could harvest and store nuts to help tide them over the harsh winter. This pattern of seasonal aggregation and dispersion is common in family level groups, particularly foragers.

Steward was criticized, however, for implying that the family level was a normal possibility for human social organization. Service (1962: 64-66) denied that any human community organized below the level of the “band” of 60 or more members would exist unless disrupted by modern contact. A similar criticism has been leveled at Lee’s (1979) description of !Kung camps, which are a form of

family-level organization (Johnson and Earle 2000: xx)--here again it is argued that the small-scale fragmentation evident in their group organization is a result of long-term contact with powerful outsiders who have marginalized them and somehow inhibited them from displaying the more complex social order to which they are naturally inclined.

This is a difficult criticism to counter, since all contemporary social groups, no matter how isolated they may appear, have had centuries of exposure to powerful and intrusive expansionist societies seeking their labor and the resources of their land. For both the Shoshone and the !Kung, however, it was possible to test archaeologically whether a family level model accounted for their prehistoric record, before Europeans invaded their landscape. The archaeology solidly supported Steward's and Lee's versions over their critics' (Johnson and Earle 2000: ; ). Although comparable archaeology has not been done on the Matsigenka, there is no evidence to suggest that at any time in the past they ever formed larger social groups than those we discover in the recent settlements in the region around Shima. To postulate a breakdown of a formerly larger scale of sociopolitical organization for the Matsigenka--something that makes more sense for cultural groups such as the Panoan-speaking tribes downriver--would be a purely theoretical exercise a la Service: the family level is not within the possible range of Amazon political economies and therefore could not have existed in a postulated natural (pre-contact) past (cf. O. Johnson and Johnson 1988).

The anthropological discovery in the early 20th century of kin-based societies, and particularly those with unilineal descent groups and their tribal elaborations in ceremonial, sodality and war, obscured the real occurrence of family level societies. Anthropologists like Steward who studied them were often put on the defensive. Steward (1955: 120) even appeared to accept Service's critique of

his concept when he call his Shoshone case “typologically unique.” And Gulliver (1955: v), upon introducing his ethnography of the Turkana herders, an almost-family-level society in Kenya, sought to defend himself to anthropologists who might “search for a more truly anthropological description”--by which he apparently meant a more typically structural elaboration of African society. Anthropologists who work with such groups are often reduced to describing them in terms of what is missing: e.g., they have no lineages, no formal obligations between kin, their “chiefs” have no power, etc. (Holmberg 1969: 128; 140; 144-45). The Matsigenka have been described in the same negative terms (Chapter 5).

Hopefully we have come some distance from the insulting terms used by Lauriston Sharp to describe the Siriono in his Forward to the re-issue of Holmberg’s (1969: xii) Nomads of the Long Bow:

The lowly but instructive Siriono are an Old Stone Age people. They may have degenerated to this level from a more advanced technical condition, a view long rejected by the author, or they may simply be survivors who “from the beginning” retained a variety of man’s earliest culture. The problem is intriguing, but is irrelevant....

We can do without terms like “lowly,” “degenerated,” and even “Old Stone Age” as applied to contemporary populations. Furthermore, Siriono political structure seems to be more elaborate (less purely family level) than even the Matsigenka. But we may still agree with Sharp that the question of whether this is a pattern enduring from millenia past or representing some more recent adaptation can remain moot. What I believe I can show conclusively in this book is that the Matsigenka of Shimaas as of the 1970s constituted a thriving family level society, well-adapted, reasonably happy, and not forced or coerced into their lifestyle, even though one adaptive aspect of the family level is that it has to some extent helped them avoid enemies and exploiters. Living at the family level of sociocultural integration

suits the Matsigenka: it is really the only way they can meet their “cultural standard of living” [need Sahlins ref. here].

## Images of Amazonia

The Amazon River and its surrounding forest have been part of the consciousness of the literate world since the first reports of European explorers were written. The name evokes vivid and powerful images, of wildness and beauty, danger and promise. The problem for the ethnographer is that such images emerge from our own culture history. They often have little to do with Amazonia as it is, and everything to do with the way we view nature and humanity, particularly those remote peoples and places that we neither understand nor control. Such strange lands, which in popular culture are often represented in dark tones, can act like ink blots into which we project the inchoate forms of buried imagination. And these images can profoundly affect the way an ethnography of an Amazonian people is read, or written.

Green Hell--. The night before leaving Lima for Cuzco, on the first leg of our first journey into Matsigenka country, Orna and I had dinner with a Peruvian friend, an anthropologist. After dinner, with a mischievous grin, he told this story:

A man, the uncle of a friend, had traveled into the selva with a party of men, exploring for gold. They camped out each night on their journey. One morning, as the others were breaking camp, they noticed that the uncle in question had not yet risen. When they went to wake him, they found him dead. Then his mouth fell open and a large black tarantula stepped out.

I felt slightly nauseous at hearing this story, and annoyed with my friend. Why try to frighten us when we were already sufficiently nervous about the journey ahead?

What I did not realize then was that our narrator shared the view held by many of his compatriots that the tropical forest is a place of danger, of poisonous creatures, carnivores and gruesome death. Such stories are told and retold on the Peruvian coast and in the highlands, always with the “relative of a friend” as the protagonist. I had not yet read Harper Goodspeed's similar experience:

... there was an American mining man aboard who claimed to have had large South American experience.... He told me about some of his terrible experiences among the wild Indians of eastern Peru and Ecuador. He said that a German professor with a good head of hair and a fine large mustache made a trip among the head-shrinking tribes. Nobody knew what happened to him until a few months later his shrunken head was offered for sale in a curio shop in Guayaquil....

Now, I have heard these identical tales more than once in the smoking rooms of west coast liners when an old timer found the proper audience of tourists. Of course, they may be true. (Goodspeed 1961: 14)

The charm of this story is, no doubt, the image of that shrunken European head with its flowing tresses and drooping mustache. Tales like these about Amazonia, portraying “its violent wilderness and the potentially lethal elements in its fauna,” are regular fare among those who live near the forest, or even do business within it, but do not call it home:

Beriberi, malaria, leprosy, and blackwater fever are among the many diseases which do well here, and there are still hostile Indians; to read or listen to most accounts of Amazonas is to conclude that only a maniac would ever set foot out of doors. The truth, which is something else again, is obscured by the fact that, in this country of unknowns, the legends are not only not readily disproved but are even occasionally confirmed. Finally, it is very difficult not to defer to an apparently honest man who has been in the wilderness, when you and your whole gang of pale authorities have not. (Matthiessen 1961: 24)

Descending the Urubamba valley past Machu Picchu, I increasingly realized that many of the local inhabitants knew very little about the selva and its inhabitants. I was unmoved, therefore, by the following conversation with the waiter in a Quillabamba restaurant where we had steak and soup one evening:

Waiter: "Where are you going?"

Us: "To the selva, to do research among the Matsigenka Indians."

Waiter: "Aren't you afraid?"

Us: "Of what?"

Waiter: "That they will shoot you. With their arrows!"

I was surprised at our waiter, because I had no fear of being attacked by the Matsigenka. Everything I had read about them indicated their peaceable nature. All violence involving them was only known from rumors and was attributed to the kogapakori, "wild Matsigenkas" who always lived beyond the next river system or far up some unexplored tributary. But here in our waiter was a man who lived on the edge of the montaña, in a town where Matsigenka children attended Catholic boarding school, and he did not know anything at all about the people of whom he was so afraid.

Our conversation with the waiter came back to me years later when I read that Paul Marcoy (1872: 181), travelling the same route more than a century ago, had a similar conversation. He tells of his decision to leave Cuzco for the selva, and his Quechua guide's response:

“‘Where then is monsieur going?’ he asked, with an astonished air.

“‘Always forward!’

“‘One might go a long journey that way,’ he said, ‘only monsieur does not know that beyond the Cordillera he will find heathen--Chunchos we call them--and these savages will pierce him with arrows like St. Sebastian.’”

Indians have killed Peruvians in the selva, of course, many times. But there is much more to this fear than some retaliatory killings by abused and terrified native Amazonians.

In April of 1960 Peter Matthiessen (1961) travelled down the Rio Urubamba, passing the mouth of the Rio Kompiroshiato but not venturing up it. Earlier, in the Brazilian Amazon, he had remarked: “... There is something strange in these jungle airs, no doubt about it, something of foreboding. Man seems ill at ease here ...” (Matthiessen 1961:28). From the moment of his departure from Quillabamba he found the going along the Rio Urubamba increasingly rough: travel was difficult and dangerous; he and his companions were frequently soaked in the rain or a water-logged canoe, refused help by hacendados and priests alike, required to abandon a large share of their equipment and provisions, forced to eat unfamiliar foods, and “left by ourselves ... [to contemplate] the insects and the mud.” (1961: 174).

On such a journey, as Orna and I can confidently attest, the novice is at first a complete misfit. A few bites from mosquitos trigger a major histimine reaction, with disfiguring swellings as a result; nausea, constipation and diarrhea take turns in cruel succession; sores appear in inconvenient places and do not get better; it is more difficult than expected to sleep on the ground; Mestizo guides are friendly one minute, truculent and suspicious the next, while the Matsigenka just watch without embarrassment and say nothing.

The newcomer is often mystified and easily misled. Not knowing what or whom to believe, attributing deep significance to trivial matters, hearing the stories of how people died here and there

along the route, without a clue to what is coming next, he can easily become alienated from these otherwise beautiful surroundings: "...I kept asking myself what in the name of God I thought I was doing here in the first place" (Matthiessen 1961: 198).

This is the inevitable experience of the stranger in the real selva, beyond the reach of modern comforts. Everything is difficult, every place is uncomfortable, everyone who lives there is amazed at the newcomer's incompetence and utter naivete. This all passes, but it requires time, weeks and months of daily coping and learning to achieve a degree of ease and comfort in the selva. Since many visitors do not remain long enough to pass this period of adjustment, or else try to avoid it by travelling in large parties with special gear to create a microenvironment that effectively shields them from the forest and its people, they never get past Matthiessen's sense that "Man seems ill at ease here." We must remind ourselves that the "Man" in that generalization does not include the forest Indians, or the mestizos and others who have taken up long term residence there.

I identify two sources for the "Green Hell" image of Amazonia. One of these is the projection onto the selva of night terrors and internal demons by people who have never been there. Novelists and film makers capitalize on these projections to make exciting works of popular culture that reach their audiences by giving them a disguised version of their own interior landscapes. These are the images of snakes slithering hissingly among the foliage, birds mating, jaguars stalking prey, insects engaged in ferocious battles, bloody slaughter of missionaries by painted savages, all to the accompaniment of alternately sinister and passionate music. These are also the popular books that fill the bookstalls in Lima, focusing on the sexual lives of the Amazon Indians. These "jungle stories" have much less to do

with Amazonia than with the repression and fear of “wildness” in contemporary society, where being civilized is everything.

The other source of negative imagery is the inevitable string of distressing experiences any traveller must experience in Amazonia. If he does not get past the initial discomfort and fear, then he may well return home to write books, make films, or give lectures that portray a threatening and miserable place. It will be impossible for him to convey to others the full range of attributes of the forest and its people, if he has not found peace with the selva on its own terms. I thought that Matthiessen had made this breakthrough toward the end of his journey in the Peruvian selva, when he wrote eloquently about the simple loveliness of a pristine rainforest stream and the humanity of the Indians who showed it to him (Matthiessen 1961: 239-241).

The most potent consequence of the Green Hell image is the antagonistic attitude and behavior of the outside world toward the selva and its people. In this view, the selva must be tamed, that is to say, cut down and transformed into a landscape dominated by human purpose. Its marketable trees should be removed to lumber or paper mills, its useless ones eliminated and replaced. Its game are for eating, its pests for exterminating. In analysing the effect of the tropical forest on outside visitors, Marcoy (1872:338) referred to “... an inexpressible sentiment of terror and admiration--the sacred horror of the woods, as ancient writers have called it...” In our era, however, the sacred horror appears to have degraded into simple loathing for that which civilized humankind does not control, a hatred of the Wild.

This monstrous Amazonia, however, is also imagined as an opportunity and a worthy challenge for heroic men and nations:

We realize now that no one man or small group of men ill prepared can hope to vanquish the mighty river or its valley or any part of either. But we know, too, that the tasks which are inherent in the conquest are not insurmountable in character, for all of them have been discharged elsewhere in the tropics. They are unique in magnitude, to be sure, but that means only that the conquering must be done by more powerful forces, by groups of men, types of facilities, and sums of money greater by far than those which have been employed in that service heretofore. (Haskins 1943: 102)

Here is Amazonia as a mighty dragon to be slain, or at the very least defanged and taught to do tricks.

A convenient fiction that supports this attitude is the pervasive description of the selva as “uninhabited.” People like the Matsigenka who live there, who may well have lived there in reasonable ecological balance for thousands of years, are dismissed in a word; they do not exist. I recall in Lima in early 1973 reading a newspaper account of a speech before the Peruvian Congress, in which the congressman decried the Amazon Indians as a disgrace and embarrassment to Peru, beings who did not even have the decency to put on civilized clothes.

The congressman's attitude was just a version of the general view, expressed at the turn of the century by a Peruvian colonel who,

with a graceful flourish of his cigar, ... could tell the missionary that his deliberate opinion concerning the savages of the Montaña was that the only way to deal with 'the beasts' was to kill them off as rapidly as possible (Guinness 1909: 29).

This Peruvian version of General Sherman's infamous jibe, “the only good Indian is a dead Indian,” was put into practice in actually hunting down and killing Indians like game animals, as well as in slavery and debt peonage.

The attitude persists in some scholarship as well. It may be what led a historian in a recent 400-page scholarly book about pre-Conquest Peru to ignore the selva completely, as though nothing of

consequence could ever have happened there (Valcarcel 1982). And it may account for the utter ignorance of the historian who, as late as 1971, had almost nothing to say about the selva except to mention a tribe “that had an extremely simple language, that only consisted of the words inje-inje, with which they explicated everything according to the modulations and gestures with which they accompanied them” (Alarco 1971: 142). What must he have thought of the humanity of such a people, that he could ascribe to them a language even less elaborate than that of baboons?

Tropical Paradise--. The alternative image of Amazonia is of a tropical paradise, or a repository of buried treasure (cf. J. Wilbert 1972: viii). This is the other kind of Rorschach projection, where hopes and desires are projected instead of terrors. What is it you want: health, wealth, peace, spiritual power? It has been sought, and is being sought today, in the Amazon.

Some write of miracle drugs that “lie hidden in the wilderness” (Gottlieb 1985: 237). The movie Medicine Man serviced this fantasy, which is continually reinforced throughout the western world by popular tales where the “uncle of a friend” was miraculously cured of cancer or other terrible condition with a potion from Amazonia. Although there are no doubt important medical mysteries to be solved through careful study of Amazon biology and ethnopharmacology, we will see in the Matsigenka case that the powers of native medicine can easily be exaggerated by hopeful outsiders.

We also are told of native populations that conserve nature out of a sense of harmony and spiritual connection with it (Posey 1982). This is a powerful image, strengthened politically in North American by native Americans’ valuable efforts to establish the legitimacy--so long denied--of their religious traditions. Yet, again, the Amazon reality is far less ideal and more complex than the image suggests (Alvard 1995: 789; Hames 1987), and the Matsigenka are no exception.

And there continues to be a strong subcurrent of the temporarily out-of-favor economic development stance, the possibility that the right combination of technology and public policy "... could open vast new areas to productive farming, mining, and forest use" (Krebs 1960: 59). It has been argued, for example, that with existing technology Amazonia could feed the world's starving masses and eliminate hunger for the foreseeable future.(Sioli? in Meggers). In recent years, recognition that earlier pathways to development were irreversibly destructive has led to a moderating focus on "sustainable development." But even here there is a danger that the hopeful image of sustainability will blind us to the harsh realities of rapid population growth and drug trafficking (cite May? in Redford/Padoch, and my review).

As with the negative images, there is a kernel of truth in such positive images, but we must still be willing to see the elements of unreality that arise from a yearning for poetry, optimism, and wonder:

Wierd, mystic, fascinating is this strange unknown forestland. What secrets lie hidden beneath its leafy sea? What wonders lie unrevealed in its remote recesses? What strange people wander through its glades, and what revelations of plant and animal life await the explorer in its shadow-haunted depths? (Guinness 1909:6)

At its most far-fetched, this positive imaging produces fairy tales that vastly distort the Amazonian reality. For example, the commercial film [Emerald Forest](#) depicts a native Amazonian tribe where men achieve mystic unity with soaring spirit beings, where lovely firm-fleshed women go naked in joy, and where the shaman is able to marshall the living forces of the forest (including, preposterously, an army of frogs) to stave off an assault by developers equipped with Caterpillar tractors and dynamite. While [Emerald Forest](#) may have been enjoyable to watch on one level--one might say, "its heart was in the right place"--its complete unrealism was dismaying, and potentially damaging. If we are to gear our

actions, political and otherwise, to defend what is of value in Amazonia, we need to do so in possession of the facts, as far as they can be known, not in pipe dreams.

I do not suggest that I did not carry my own burden of images into Shimaa with me in 1972 or thereafter. As a young anthropologist, I was excited by the ideas of the Amazon and the Primitive. I hoped to find a world fundamentally different from my own. I expect that part of the excitement was a sense that this fieldwork was a dangerous, and in a way heroic, undertaking. I felt a sense of mystery about the Matsigenka. What was it like to subsist with a stone-age technology? To live with the most elementary of what Levi-Strauss had called the “Elementary Structures of Kinship” (Hornborg 1988: 122)? To believe intrinsically and without clerical challenge in an animistic, shamanic world view?

I did not articulate it at the time, but I think I hoped to discover something essentially human that had been lost, or suppressed, along the road to our proud civilization. In retrospect I felt something missing in my own life to that point and was convinced that there had to be more, although I could not define what that “more” was. In this sense, you could say that I too was looking for buried treasure in the Peruvian Amazon. Add to this the expectable career anxieties of a non-tenured professor, with a corresponding need for his research to be found “interesting,” and my images of Amazonia become as complex and worthy of scrutiny as any others.

I do not, however, intend to place myself at the center of this narrative. I still believe in objectivity as a goal, however unattainable in the purest sense. Much of what I report in this book is an effort at responsible and detached description, based on explicit methodology, which has the advantage that the assumptions guiding the research are fairly evident.

I will close this section, however, with an anecdote and an affirmation. Once, after I gave a lecture at UCLA in a series called “The World's Great Rivers,” a woman in the audience asked me, “Isn't there anything at all wrong with those perfect Matsigenkas of yours?” Taken aback by her angry tone, I agreed that they had problems. But in thinking about my lecture afterwards, I was ambivalent: Had I painted too rosy a picture of the Matsigenka, or had my questioner taken umbrage at the idea that primitive people might deserve the respect and even admiration of civilized beings? I suspected both elements were present.

For my part, I see my role as an anthropologist as contradictory. I want to be fair and truthful in describing the Matsigenka, but I also feel close to them and want other people in my own culture to understand them and feel some of the affection and respect that I feel. Making the situation more complicated, as a member of my own culture I embrace values and assumptions that alienate me from Matsigenka culture: infanticide and cruelty toward captured animals are two obvious examples. When I first read Padre Ferrero's (1966) book about the Matsigenka before my research began, I ridiculed his two chapters named, “Good Aspects of the Matsigenka,” and “Bad Aspects of the Matsigenka.” As an anthropologist, I told myself, I would not be guilty of such ethnocentrism.

Now, however, I feel more sympathy for the Padre. Not that I accept his criteria of good and bad: he criticizes the Matsigenka for alcoholism, loose sexuality, laziness, and lack of ambition in clearly ethnocentric terms (Ferrero 1966: 250-260). But I have learned that anthropology only diagnoses the venom of ethnocentrism--it does not provide the complete antidote. Armed as I was with an array of scientific field research methods, I did manage to develop as “objective” a description of certain aspects of Matsigenka life as possible, and I stand by these. But it is also true that some of what humanizes an

ethnography is the anthropologist's all-too-human responses to the people being studied. These responses being--inevitably--tinged with value judgements, the anthropologist and the missionary become more similar than either might like to admit.

For better or for worse, therefore, throughout the remainder of this book, I have described my reactions during fieldwork when I felt they would bring the Matsigenka more to life for the reader. My experience has convinced me that in the vast majority of my reactions I was behaving like a fairly typical member of my own culture. That is, although I cannot prove it, I believe most readers placed in the circumstances I was in among the Matsigenka would react much the way I did, however far their background and values might have led them to prefer to react otherwise. But by describing my reactions, perhaps I also supply information about my own Images of Amazonia, including those not evident to me, and these will help the reader to sort at least some of the wheat from the inevitable chaff in what is to follow.

#### Plan of the Book

I have always enjoyed reading ethnographies. The old-fashioned ones I first read as a student tended to be highly descriptive and quite comprehensive, such that a reader could browse across a range of subjects from economics to social organization to politics and religion. More recent generations have moved away from preparing such compendia toward more theoretically focused monographs, unfolding arguments bolstered by extensive evidence (Johnson 1987). My goal in this book has been a mixture of both traditions. I have tried wherever possible to discipline my descriptions to the flow of argument analysing the Matsigenka as a family level society. Yet I have also tried to

provide descriptions of adequate enough detail to be useful to readers with other interests in mind.

Although the purely descriptive ethnography is a thing of the past, it still remains true that readers come to an ethnography with agendas far broader than any single ethnographer's, and it remains the ethnographer's task to provide them with accounts as comprehensive and holistic as feasible.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the history and geography of the Matsigenka, establishing the likelihood that their current settlement and adaptation continues a most ancient heritage. Chapters 3 and 4 then explore the development of Matsigenka character, with Chapter 3 focusing on childhood and 4 on interpersonal relations. These two chapters discuss the interpersonal functioning of the household-centered families of the Matsigenka, and establish the emotional bases for living at the family level of sociocultural integration.

Chapter 5 expands the discussion to the social world of the Matsigenka, showing the remarkable extent to which their everyday lives and interactions focus on the gardens and hearth of the nuclear family household, even in cases of hamlet living and polygynous marriage. Chapter 6 lays out the economic basis for family-level autonomy, demonstrated with quantitative data on production and consumption. Chapter 7 concludes the book with an account of Matsigenka cosmology that reveals the concern with impulse control and harmonious living that the Matsigenka recognize as central to their family-centered way of life.

#### A Note on Naming

A most unusual feature of Matsigenka culture is the lack of emphasis on personal names (W. Snell 1964: 17-25). When I first read Snell's discussion of the phenomenon, before I had gone into the

field myself, I wondered if he hadn't missed something despite his compelling presentation of evidence and his conclusion:

I have said that the names of individual Machiguenga, when forthcoming, are either of Spanish origin and given to them by the white man, or nicknames. We have known Machiguenga Indians who reached adulthood and died without ever having received a name or any other designation outside of the kinship system. Smith, in dealing with this subject, says, "It is indeed a primitive group that does not name its individuals. Very few tribes have been discovered that exist without some sort of personal appellation, although certain aborigines in Australia have been found to be without personal names.... When you consider it, you will see that men without names can be little higher than animals when they can live together without feeling the imperative need to designate each other in some exact way by the spoken word" (E. Smith 1950: 178). Smith in my opinion is entirely wrong. Living in small isolated groups there is no imperative need for them to designate each other in any other way than by kinship terminology. Although there may be only a "few tribes" who do not employ names, I conclude that the Machiguenga is one of those few (W. Snell 1964: 25).

Experience has taught me that Snell was right. Although the Matsigenka of Shima did learn the Spanish names given them, and used them in instances where it was necessary to refer to someone not of their family group, they rarely used them otherwise and frequently forgot or changed them. When they did use them, they made their pronunciation conform to Matsigenka patterns: Florinda became Pororinta, Carlos Karoroshi, Domingo Omenko, and so on. When Matsigenka words were used to name individuals, these were derogatory nicknames referring to physical deformity or amusing incidents, not proper names in the usual sense of the word.

I have vacillated in what might be the most meaningful way of naming the Matsigenka in this book. To use kinterms is out of the question, since I must describe members of many family groups. The Matsigenka handle the problem of having to refer to more than one sister, for example, by adding

some information such as: “Sister, the one who slipped in the river...” This would not work here. I then considered assigning them their nicknames, in the instances of those who had them, and borrowing nicknames from other Matsigenkas not included in this study. But this would be to risk giving the people I am describing ridiculous or insulting names. Finally, I settled on using in most cases the Spanish names they had been given by the time I arrived in 1972, keeping for some their distinctive Matsigenka pronunciations. I know that many of the people I write about here have since died, and others have no doubt changed their names. I can only hope that I have not said anything about anyone still living at Shimaa that would cause them any inconvenience should they be identified by future visitors. I have supplied a glossary of personal names at the end of this book, along with an identifier linking them to the census provided in Chapter 5.