

## DEVIANCE AND SOCIAL CONTROL II: COLETA

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This is the second of two articles (see Murphy 1961 for the first of this series) presenting case histories and analyses of tragedies in social life. In both, individuals through no essential fault of their own deviated from the moral order of Mundurucú society and by so doing became alienated from their fellows. In neither of these cases was effective control actually exercised over the individuals, but the control process and the means by which the body politic healed its wounds are manifest in both instances. In the first case, a young chief named Biboi attempted to exercise authorities and prerogatives that were not his by right of office, and we saw the exquisite and inexorable means by which he was destroyed as a social person. The present article gives another case of radical deviation from role, but the principal actor is a woman; her sin was that she loved too many, too much, and too often. It is on the surface a prosaic and unimportant story, and I will relate it as it unfolded before us in just this way. But it is exactly in the vagrant episodes of social life that we see structure, and the conclusion of this contribution will present an analysis of the significance of the events described to an understanding of Mundurucú society and, perhaps, to societies everywhere.

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We first met Coleta at the house of Antonio "Portugués," a trader who maintained a wattle and daub establishment on the banks of the upper Tapajós River. My wife and I were about to embark on the second half of our study of the Mundurucú Indians in central Brazil, and Senhor Antonio was to supply us with transportation to the Indian villages of the interior. He was a small, wiry Portuguese who had spent most of his life on the Tapajós River trading pots, pans, cloth, tools and tobacco to the Brazilian caboclos and the Indians in return for wild rubber. The houses of all these traders harbor a number of dependents, some of whom are related and others of whom simply become attached to the patron. And in this area, the trader's family always includes a few Indians who live there for varying lengths of time, working for him and receiving food and whatever they can cajole. It was no surprise then to find two Indian girls helping in Senhor Antonio's kitchen.

The Indians are always curious and somewhat bemused at the sight of urbanites traveling in the wilds, but they try not to show it. One of Senhor Antonio's Mundurucú girls maintained the usual pose of embarrassed reserve in our presence, but the other made no effort at all to hide her delight with the obviously out of place New Yorkers. This was Coleta. Her free and outgoing manner aroused our curiosity, but our inquiries only drew from Senhor Antonio the muttered reply that she was "shameless." It became apparent that he would like to get her off his hands, and it soon developed that he had promised her a free ride to Cabruá in our boat. The canoe was large, and there was ample room for Coleta and her eight year old daughter. We agreed to take her. Actually, we had little choice in the matter.

The purpose of Coleta's trip to Cabruá was to visit "relatives," as she phrased it. This could hardly be taken as a narrowly descriptive statement as all 1,200 Mundurucú believe themselves to share a common kinship. In a more specific vein she had told us that she wanted especially to visit her "father," which, in the moiety system, cut the field of relatives down to half the men of the tribe in her father's generation. Whatever the distance of relationship of this particular father, she evidently did not intend to live in his house. As we unpacked our things, Coleta busied herself hanging her hammock and her daughter Crescencia's in the far corner of the uncompartmented house. This provoked a hurried conversation between our interpreter, Chico, my wife and me. Chico thought it quite clear that Coleta had adopted us and had every intention to remain part of our household. We were equally convinced that this would rob us of our last shred of privacy and would prove a heavy drain on the family economy. She had to leave, but it was decided to wait a while before telling her.

While this conversation was going on, Coleta disappeared from the house. She and Crescencia soon reappeared with gourds full of water from a nearby stream and proceeded to make coffee. The house was a shambles. The originally hard-packed clay floor had crumbled and become dusty, making a wonderful home for fleas, and litter was scattered all about. Without any suggestion on our part, Coleta improvised a broom from branches and swept the floor as well as possible and then sprinkled it with water to settle the dust. After this was done, she went to the house next-door and borrowed an axe, with which she chopped a two-day supply of firewood. All three of us began to look at her thoughtfully by this time, and when she appeared with a haunch of deer for dinner, we decided that another conference was in order. Chico was strongly in favor of keeping Coleta, for he was thus relieved of all the household chores. He was no doubt already exploring further possibilities for her. Since Chico did his best work as an interpreter and his worst as cook and general factotum, this seemed an ideal resolution of our field problems. It was agreed that we should say nothing to Coleta about leaving and gave her a dress and a handful of beads to insure the opposite result.

After a few days had passed, it became increasingly evident that Coleta was not a very typical Mundurucú woman. Her physical appearance was much like that of the other women in the mid-twenties age bracket. Several pregnancies and hard work gave her a stocky body. She was strong, but her abdomen was distended and her breasts hung low. And like all Mundurucú, her front upper teeth were missing. It was rather in the realm of expression and demeanor that Coleta was different. Old Mundurucú women are shown great deference and have considerable freedom to express themselves and to make demands on others, but a young woman like Coleta is supposed to comport herself submissively and with reticence before men. She should not look directly at a man and she should never catch his eye. And when she smiles or laughs, the proper young lady turns her head to one side and covers her mouth with her hand. Coleta did none of these things. When she itched, she scratched, and she usually itched and scratched in places considered private by most Mundurucú women. She eyed all the men with an alert, sparkling gaze, and she expressed amusement by throwing her head back and laughing deeply and libidiously. Coleta was wonderfully good-natured, and she had a keen sense of humor. Chico and I made a sport out of catching her reaction to earthy comments or to leading questions about her love life.

My wife immediately recorded her life history, a routine chore in most instances, but in this case a lively one. Coleta was first married at the age of twelve or thirteen, but soon left her husband for another man. She bore him three children, of whom one died, another was adopted by a man who had no children, and the other was Crescencia. She deliberately aborted herself during a fourth pregnancy in retaliation against her husband, who beat her regularly. The husband died, a victim of witchcraft, and Coleta wandered through Mundurucú country living with relatives or lovers. She then left and lived with Brazilian rubber tappers on the Tapajós River and in the houses of traders, but she was homesick when we met her.

Although her traveling days were at least temporarily ended in Cabruá, Coleta's inclinations still wandered. The men recognized her symptoms long before we did--in fact Coleta had already achieved some fame throughout Mundurucú country. She occasionally went to fetch water or firewood by herself and thus announced her availability, for any lone woman is considered fair game. And though the men all slept in the men's house, this did not prevent them from visiting Coleta after they thought we were asleep. We soon found out, for it is very difficult to conceal a love affair that takes place in a hammock tied to the beams of a house of bark and thatch placed over a light framework.

After a series of romances, Coleta rested her sights on a young man whose Portuguese name was Simão. He was a strong and handsome person, a few years younger than she, and his attentions grew quite serious. Coleta dropped her other lovers, and we had high hopes that a marriage was in the offing. My wife and I made every effort to encourage a more permanent liaison as, once embarked on the accumulation of an extended family, we could see its advantages. Among the Mundurucú, residence is preferentially, and in fact most commonly, matrilocal, and although the bridegroom lives in the men's house and not actually in the wife's house, he owes obligations to it. Since I was the head of Coleta's household, I would therefore be able to exert a certain amount of influence over Simão and perhaps extract some work from him. Our immediate aims were simple: we wanted game, and the roof needed repair.

The situation was complex, however, and our plans failed. One of the girls in the village had already borne Simão one child and was pregnant again by him. She claimed that Simão was her husband, but he just as vigorously denied the marriage. The dispute was rather academic, as marriage is legitimized only by public recognition of the state and symbolized by the fact that the husband presents the product of the chase to his wife. Simão had stopped bringing his take of game to her, but he apparently had not put sufficient distance between him and his former spouse. Neither of the women wanted to share the connubial state, and Coleta was quite frankly afraid of the first wife. The affair ended when Simão decided that Coleta's notoriety would reduce him to an object of humor, and his nocturnal visits stopped.

The unhappy termination of her love affair convinced Coleta of the necessity of changing her way of life. Not only had her promiscuity ultimately cost her Simão, but the other women of the village had become hostile. "They are talking about me," said Coleta--and this is one of the worst things that

can befall a Mundurucú. Determined to rid herself of her compulsion, she went to one of the village shamans. Such problems as Coleta's are quite sensibly viewed as medical in nature, rather than moral, and the shaman proceeded to make his diagnosis. He made a huge cigarette with a bark wrapper, lit it and blew its smoke over Coleta's body. He then stared at her in deep concentration for some time and finally announced that she was a yapö, or the victim of a love charm. If a shaman desires a woman, he makes a concoction out of the powdered ashes of the uirapuru bird and magically sends it into the body of his intended paramour. The uirapuru, incidentally, is used as an ingredient of love potions throughout the Amazon because of its beautiful song and its supposed ability to attract all the birds of the forest. Among the Mundurucú, the bewitched woman develops an insatiable desire for any and all men, not just her bewitcher, and she becomes a yapö until cured.

The cure would take a few days, so Coleta left our house and stayed with the shaman. He blew more smoke on her body, massaged her and sucked out the malignant charm. To complete the cure, he directed her to spread on her face and body a mixture of tree sap and the earth upon which a jaguar had rolled. She would thus partake of the repulsive qualities of the jaguar, and men would no longer be attracted to her. After the cure she returned to our house.

The change was dramatic. Coleta no longer laughed at our jokes, but turned her head or pretended to go to the stream to fetch water. She sought the company of the other women and the security from the men that this implied. When she felt impelled to smile, which she did quite demurely, she covered her mouth with her hand. And she no longer scratched herself in public. We were quite impressed with the transformation and took care to treat her with the deference and respect that befitted her new role. A couple of weeks elapsed--rather dull and quiet weeks in our house--and then one day we noted that Coleta laughed rather openly at a story that was not even intended for her ears. As the days passed by, other familiar traits reappeared. She began to scratch her crotch again, and she stared at the men with renewed boldness. Instead of shunning our company, she welcomed the teasing. And Chico took renewed interest in her.

Some days later I asked the shaman, "Have you watched Coleta recently?"

"Yes," he answered heavily.

"But I thought that you cured her of her troubles."

The shaman paused and then shrugged, "Sometimes the treatment works. Sometimes it doesn't."

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I have deliberately presented Coleta's story in the simple way that it appeared to two wondering and amused outsiders. The reader may well wonder why it was described at the outset as a tragedy, but I would ask, who was the greater comic bumbler: Shakespeare's Hamlet or Charlie Chaplin's Tramp? To the true humanist, comedy and tragedy are inseparable. It was only after we had known Coleta for many months and had understood Mundurucú society better that we realized that she was desperately lonely and in deep danger. Coleta

had by her promiscuity transgressed the female role and had invaded the domain of the men. Moreover, by playing fast and loose with her procreative powers, she had removed this function from the control of the men and had jeopardized the legal status of her potential offspring in this patrilineal society. The Mundurucú are not puritanical, and her crime was not a delict against good taste and propriety; rather, it was an infringement of the public order. This was not a problem that could be handled by ignoring it--a common technique of social control among the Mundurucú, and elsewhere--for Coleta had continually made public her state by dropping the distance maintaining mechanisms associated with the social use of the eyes and mouth. The totality of her behavior was in violation of Mundurucú standards and elicited countervaleance as part of normal social process.

In another publication, I outlined the structure of sex groupings in Mundurucú society and outlined the corrective steps usually taken against deviant women (Murphy 1959). Of these, the most theatrical was gang rape, and one could ask why this had not happened to Coleta. The reason for this is quite simple; she was under my protection, and as long as I vouched for her status she was safe. This bespeaks a fundamental fact about Mundurucú society that I have not previously enunciated--a woman's legal status, as long as she is in her child-bearing years, is contingent upon the integrity of her relationship with a male. That I was a prestigious outsider no doubt contributed to this protection, but most cases of gang rape in Mundurucú are with the tacit consent of the husband or kinsmen of the woman. Our protection could not be relied upon indefinitely, however, and it is significant that she sought a cure for her condition only after her effort to secure a husband, and respectability, had failed and only in view of the inevitability of our own departure. Coleta was well aware of what happens to the unprotected yapö.

The ideology of male control over the women and over their reproduction appears also in the beliefs surrounding the making of a yapö, for it is significant that she is not, herself, responsible for her condition. That she is the victim of a form of bewitchment and that the spell can be cast only by a man stresses the fact that women are incapable, themselves, of assuming an aggressive posture in sex relations. Granted that once bewitched she is partially out of the control of the men, it is a man in the first instance who controls her sexuality. It is not, therefore, paradoxical that she is punished for something for which she is not responsible. Her problem is treated as are other forms of illness, and she has recourse to a cure before any further steps are taken. It is exactly those women who do not choose to be cured or are recidivists who court the danger of public sanctions; I believe that we can find ample analogues of this in ailments defined as social in our own society. Coleta would have been fully restored to society if the treatment had been efficacious. That she at least underwent the treatment served partially to restore her.

The pressures upon Coleta arose from the women as well as from the men and were more intense from that source and of a different quality. Whereas watchfulness, combined with zest, characterized the male attitude, the women of the village were indignant and resentful of Coleta. They were also extremely uneasy about her fate, for nothing disturbs them collectively more

than a gang rape, which they quite correctly interpret as an assault upon all women. The women were embattled and sought protection in propriety. Coleta had alienated herself from the company of the women not only because she had dallied with the husbands of some but because she had made them vulnerable to the men through a breach in the ranks. As Simmel (1955:96) noted of the treatment of radical deviation among women: "In respect to a particular woman, women as a rule know only complete inclusion or else complete exclusion from the realm of custom." Nobody falls from grace more spectacularly than a woman and nobody judges her more harshly than her fellowwoman.

As in the case of Biboi, I cannot tell you of the denouement of our tale, for we left before it. In fact, we may well infer that there could have been no climax as long as she remained in our house. Personally, our antipathy for Biboi was matched only by our fondness for Coleta, but both shared the element of humanity and lostness that is man's fate for both were thrust into a struggle against society that they neither understood nor invited. This is not a distinctively Mundurucu saga, for who of us has not known a Biboi or a Coleta, and who of us is not in some small way a Biboi or a Coleta?

#### ENDNOTE

1. I wish to express my deep appreciation to my wife, Yolanda, not only because of her continuing encouragement and support, but because she collected all the data upon which this article is based.

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