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- ORINOCO, DELTA
- WARAO, ORGANIZACION E

THE WARAO INDIANS OF THE ORINOCO
DELTA: AN OUTLINE OF THEIR
TRADITIONAL ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION
AND INTERRELATION WITH
THE NATIONAL ECONOMY¹

~~FUNDACION LA SALLE~~ ##

H/ Dieter HEINEN/

~~### INSTITUTO CARIBE~~
~~ANTROPOLOGIA Y SOCIOLOGIA~~

INTRODUCTORY SURVEY

The Warao Indians, an autochthonous population of approximately 15,000, inhabit the Orinoco Delta in northeastern Venezuela and adjacent areas. The term *Warao* is an autodenomination meaning "boat people". All non-Warao are referred to as *Hotarao* or "dryland people". In Spanish the Warao are also known as "Guaraúños", while the reports of explorers and chroniclers refer to them as "Tivi-Tivi" and "Waraweete". All Warao subtribes speak variants of the same language which are mutually intelligible without too much difficulty being experienced. Spanish is becoming more common lately, especially among the young male population. Today roughly two-thirds of the tribal population is concentrated along a coastal strip of some 7,000 square kilo-

1. Fieldwork for the present paper was carried out during numerous visits and extended stays with different Warao groups over the last ten years. Early research was funded through grants from the Centro Latino Americano de Venezuela (CLAVE) and the Venezuelan Indian Project of the Latin American Center at UCLA. Later studies and experimental programs were jointly sponsored by the Fundación La Salle de Ciencias Naturales and the National Agrarian Institute (I.A.N.). Their help is gratefully acknowledged. They are not responsible, however, for the opinions expressed in the present paper. Some of the material has previously been presented in an unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (UCLA, 1972) and in a paper given at the 34th Annual Meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology, Amsterdam, March 1975.

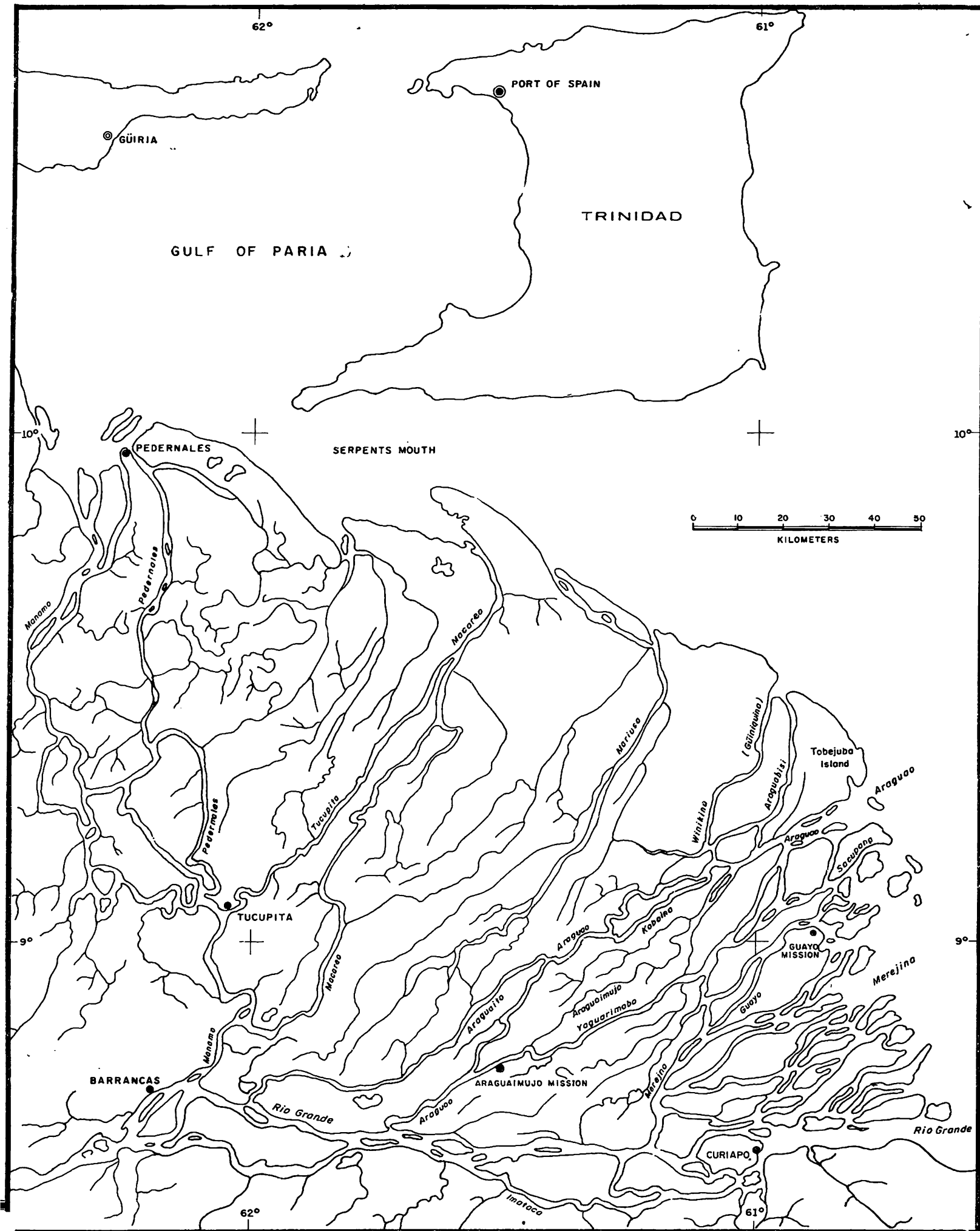
meters between the Caño *Marosa* (Mariusá) and the Amacuro area south of the *Wirimoko* (Río Grande), the main distributary of the Orinoco Delta (Map N^o 1).

For many centuries the Warao have occupied and been protected by their difficult refuge habitat, which comprises an intricate maze of low-lying swamps enmeshed in a tortuous network of distributaries ("caños"). Some students of the culture history of this region (Wilbert, 1957: 7) note important indices which suggest that the Warao are affiliated with groups of hunters, fishers, and gatherers who in pre-historic times occupied vast tracts of eastern Venezuela, but who were forced to retreat into their present habitat by the vigorous expansion of Arawakan and Kariban horticulturalists.

Since the third voyage of Columbus in 1498, the Warao have had sporadic contact with European expeditions such as those led by Diego de Ordaz, Antonio Berrio and Sir Walter Raleigh. Gumilla (1745) reported that European visitors to Warao settlements were received with great friendliness. The Dutch employed the Warao in their morocot fishery and exchanged their metal tools for the Indians' excellent dugouts. Until the 1930's the Warao of the central Delta themselves journeyed as far as the island of Trinidad and up the Orinoco to Ciudad Bolívar for purposes of trade and barter. But it is only in the last 30 years that contingents of "criollos", together with Capuchin missionaries, have entered the heartland of the Warao on a permanent basis.

It is crucial to note, then, that despite those varied contacts the Warao, until recently, have been able to seek refuge in the swamps of the lower Delta where their traditional social system has continued intact. For centuries the Warao have survived in this seemingly marginal habitat by the balanced exploitation of the moriche palm (*obidu*), and riverine and seashore resources.

Until a generation ago the dietary staple of the Warao was "yuruma" (*obidu aru*), the starch extracted from the pith of the moriche palm. To obtain their staple the Warao were forced to move their settlements in the "morichales" (*obiduna, obiduina*), the interior, fresh-water swamps. Settlements located along the caños were occupied only temporarily for fishing.



MAP 1

THE ORINOCO DELTA

Source: Mapa Vial de Venezuela,
Ministerio de Obras Públicas, 1966.

The Warao undoubtedly have known cultivation technology for many centuries through their contacts with tribes of horticulturalists and later with criollos. There were even a few Warao groups which practiced agriculture on some of the islands along the coast, such as *Buroboida* (Burojoida), where they lived on a staple food of sweet and bitter yuca and sweet potatoes which they supplemented by coastal fishing.

South of the Orinoco, in the Amacuro area, contingents of Arawak Indians have transculturated to Warao life, changing tribal identity and adopting the Warao language. There, horticulture was widely practiced. In the swampy environment of the Coastal Delta, however, no crop had assumed any major importance prior to the 1930's. Because of both seasonal and ecological limitations, most cultigens were unsuitable in the Warao heartland.

In the 1920's, however, migrant workers returning from the Guianas to the *Sakobana* (Sacupana)² area of the Orinoco Delta (Damián del Blanco, pers. com.), brought with them a tuber commonly known as "ocumo chino" (*ure*). This tuber has no seasonal limitations, is easily planted and does not require much care during cultivation. It was therefore well adapted to the ecological conditions of the delta swamplands and, more important, did not require the acceptance of an entire technological complex, but could be adopted as a staple food in isolation. Ocumo chino freed the Warao from their dependence upon the morichales and made the distributaries permanently habitable.

The potential of the ocumo tuber was quickly perceived by the missionaries who actively promoted its cultivation. Soon, permanent settlements were established by the Warao on the open river arms and the people left the swampy interior of the deltaic islands, returning there only temporarily for ritual purposes and to supplement their diet with yuruma (*ohidu aru*), *hoku* fish, moriche grubs (*mobo*) and other traditional foodstuffs.

Once settled on the open caños, the Warao population formed an easily available pool of cheap labor and soon criollo traders were busy organizing commercial rice growing, lumbering and, more recently, the canning of "palmito", the heart of the "manaca" palm (*anare*).

2. Not to be confused with the criollo settlement of Cerro de Sacupana on the southern shore of the Orinoco.

Occasional contract labor had been known to the Warao for many generations but now it became a way of life. Outright wage labor also slowly established itself with a detrimental change of nutritional patterns from a balanced diet of yuruma/ocumo, honey, fresh fish and wild fruit to crackers, soft drinks, canned goods and cheap flour. Participation in food quest activities by the female population declined rapidly.

The introduction of autosubsistence agriculture had made necessary a reorganization of the Warao economy, but the core of the traditional economic structure — the mode of production, resource allocation and distribution of the social product — had rather been strengthened.

This core was characterized by long-term social contracts of affinity, distribution of the social product through mechanisms of reciprocity and "prestations" and confinement of the use of money to commercial transactions with outsiders.

The introduction of wage labor and rice growing contracts changed all this. Work teams were constituted on a short term basis made possible by individual money accounting. Money transactions had been known to the Warao for a long time but the use of money became ever more frequent inside Warao settlements and by now is common even among close kinsmen, if only as a unit of accounting.

In Venezuela, there are several government agencies that have been created or restructured to serve the "campesino". The Banco Agrícola y Pecuário (B.A.P.)³ gives credit for tools, seed and fertilizer, while the Corporación de Mercadeo Agrícola (C.M.A.) is charged with furnishing these items at reasonable cost for the producer and with marketing the product at guaranteed prices, often subsidized. The National Agrarian Institute (I.A.N.) is responsible for implementing the Agrarian Reform Law, especially the awarding of titles to land ("dotación de tierras"). The Office of Indian Affairs (O.C.A.I.) has very recently been charged with coordinating all government efforts in indigenous areas.

As we shall see in more detail below, the Indian population of this country by and large has not availed itself of these government services.

3. Recently renamed Instituto de Crédito Agrícola y Pecuário (I.C.A.P.).

The Indian has neither the means for making repeated trips to the administrative center, nor the necessary information to avoid getting entangled in details of administrative procedures. This is the right opportunity for the criollo trader to act as middleman between the Indians and the corresponding government agencies. Nothing has changed, except that the trader now has his operations financed by public funds.

Consequently, the actual effect of the government services is quite the opposite of that originally intended. Instead of freeing the Indian from his debt peonage, the net result is to reinforce the original situation of dependency and submission.

LOCATION AND HISTORICAL SURVEY

The present heartland of the Warao Indians is located approximately between the coordinates of 60°40' to 61°20' west and 8°40' to 9°30' north. Curiapo (*Koreabu*), a criollo settlement on the Río Grande, is the departmental capital, but most government agencies are located in Tucupita, the territorial capital.

The only access to the lower Delta is by river. Tucupita is cut off from the main river system by a dike. One therefore takes the road to a site on the dike called "El Volcán", or to Barrancas del Orinoco, some 65 kilometers away. From there a distance remains of some 200 kilometers downriver to either San Francisco de Guayo (*Osibu Kabunoko*) or the *Winikina* area, and a little less to Curiapo.

All through Spanish colonial times the Río Grande, main arm of the Orinoco Delta, was a thoroughfare for explorers, colonizers and naturalists. Contact with other Indian groups, today absorbed into the general Venezuelan population, even preceded that with European colonists.

Towards the end of the 19th and the early 20th century the Warao were pressed into forced labor in the "balatá" industry. Sizeable migrations of criollos from Margarita Island and the Guianas took place into the western Delta and the area around Curiapo in the southeastern Delta. In the latter zone, some former balatá workers and other migrants had established what was virtually an "encomienda" system among the local Warao population, with veritable "owners" of Indian villages which were inherited from father to son. This system in its original form is now declining.

From the 1920's on, Capuchin missionaries developed their activities among the Warao, establishing two boarding schools.

Due to a land reclamation project in the western Delta starting in the early 1960's, some Warao contingents on the coast of the north-western Delta had to leave their traditional habitat for lack of fresh water during the dry season and were either resettled further up on the Mánamo (*Manamo*) and Manamito rivers, or emigrated to the central and southeastern Delta.

In conclusion, we have to distinguish sharply between different areas of the Orinoco Delta and corresponding Warao populations: strongly acculturated groups in the western Delta; a residual encomienda system in the southeastern part around Curiapo; and a population which only recently abandoned the morichales of the central Delta and now is settled on the open river, practicing various degrees of autosubsistence and cash-crop agriculture, plus wage labor in lumbering and related activities.

DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION AND TRADING CENTERS

The demographic situation of the Warao seems to have been rather stable all through the colonial and early national periods. Gumilla calculated their number from 5,000 to 6,000 ([1745] 1945: 131) and Alexander von Humboldt, half a century later, gave a similar estimate (1824). The official Venezuelan census gave 9,033 for 1936 and 7,183 for 1950 (quoted from Wilbert, 1957: 7n). By 1961, however, the Warao population had increased to 11,712 (*Empadronamiento especial de la población indígena*, 1963: 5) and our best guess for the present Warao population is 15,000. There has been no detailed study to determine the factors influencing this population growth. These figures compare with a total population of the Territorio Federal Delta Amacuro of 48,139 (*Anuario Estadístico*, 1971: 41) of which 21,417 live in the capital of the territory, Tucupita (*ibidem*). Accordingly, the Warao constitute over 50% of the rural population of the territory. This prevalence is even more marked in the Departamento Antonio Díaz which has a total of 10,358 inhabitants (Ministerio de Fomento, Dirección General de Estadística y Censos Nacionales, Centro de Información, Comunicación Personal), of which about 9,000 are Warao Indians.

These 9,000 or so Warao of the lower central and southeastern Delta frequent three main trading centers:

- 1) Curiapo on the Río Grande, a criollo town of some 650 by latest count and capital of the Departamento Antonio Díaz. There is an Indigenista Center (now "Núcleo") operating here, which is run by the Office of Indian Affairs (O.C.A.I.) of the Ministerio de Justicia.
- 2) San Francisco de Guayo, where there is a mission center of the Capuchin fathers who also run the local school which takes boarders. Some 320 of the Guayo population of 600 are tribal Warao from the adjacent settlement of *Osibu Kabunoko*. The rest is fairly evenly divided between criollos and mission educated Indians.
- 3) The sawmill "Nueva Idea C. A.", owned by the Renaud family and located on the caño *Arawabisi* (Araguabisi). There is a trade store not only visited by the Indians of the *Winikina/Arawabisi* area but serving also the whole of the lower *Arawao* (Araguao) and such Warao settlements as *Diaru Kabanoko* and *Bonoima*. The inhabitants of *Bonoima* live for part of the year upriver in the vicinity of the mission center Divina Pastora de Araguaimujo (*Arawaimubu*), where they grow corn. At or near the sawmill live some 30 criollos and twice that number of acculturated Indians.

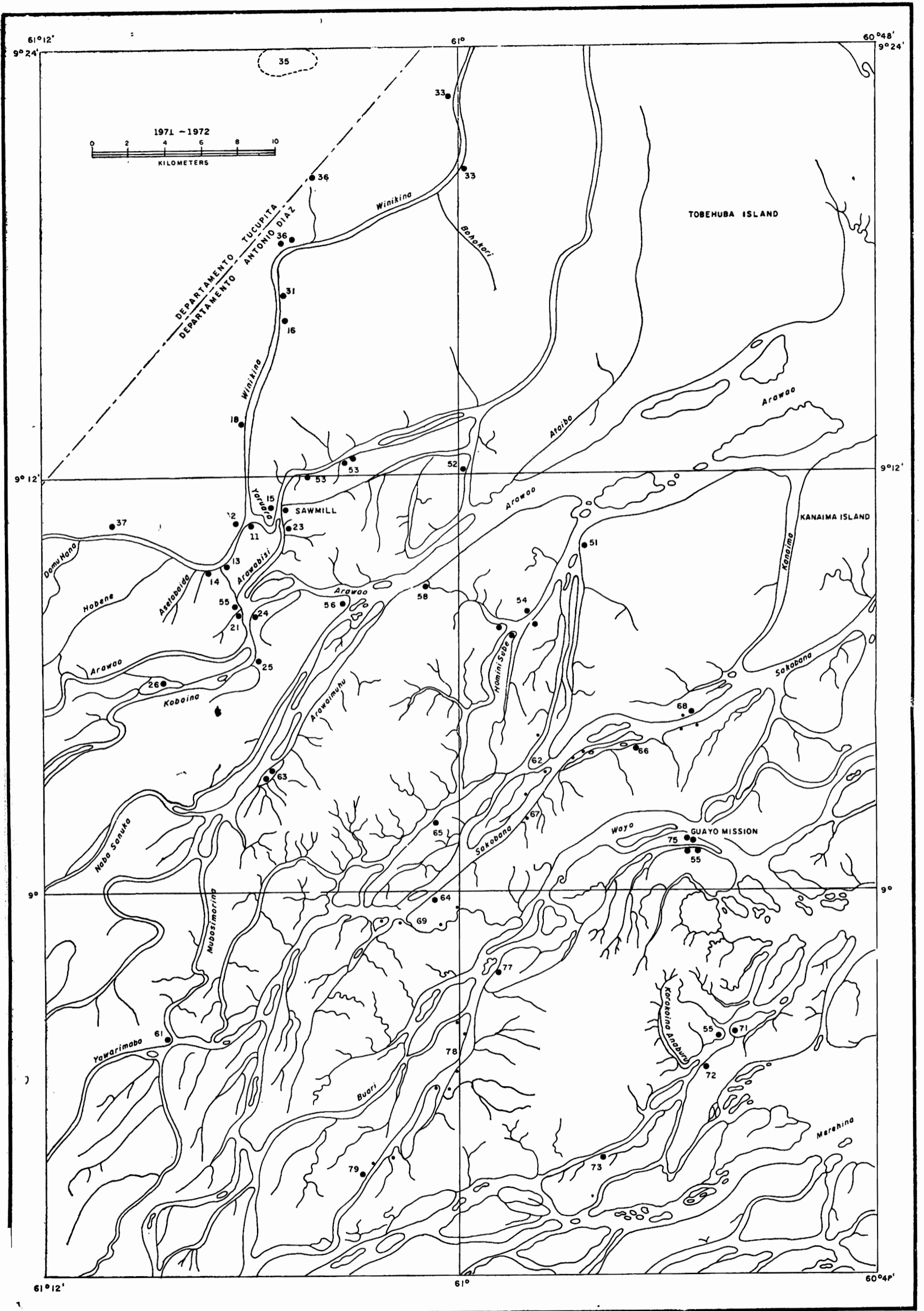
At *Naba Saruka*, a short distance away, there is a small mission center with a village formed by families of mission educated Indians. Besides those living at or near the above mentioned trading centers, there are 500 criollos dispersed through the area. Their settlement pattern, as opposed to the compact Indian villages, is of isolated homesteads. The phenomenon of a criollo living as the "cacique" of a Warao village, frequent in former times especially in the Curiapo area, today is rare.

Acculturated Warao depend very heavily on the trading centers for wage labor as they have by and large lost their traditional skills for living in the forest environment. Tribal Warao depend less on these centers and attendance fluctuates according to the volume of cash crop agriculture and lumbering.

In the following we are mainly concerned with the Winikina and Guayo areas (map N^o 2), but before we examine recent developments, we will turn to survey briefly the traditional Warao economy.

WARAO SETTLEMENTS

Nº	Warao Placename	Criollo Placename	River
11	YARUARA AKOHO	Barranca, Barranquilla	Winikina
13	NAONOKO	— — —	Winikina
14	ASETABA AYABUARA	— — —	Winikina
15	SIMON AHANOKO	Casa de Simón	Yaruara
16	HEBU WABANOKO	España	Winikina
18	MORIKI HANA	— — —	Winikina
21	ARAWABISI AKOHO	Boca de Araguabisi	Araguabisi
23	JUAN MATA AHANOKO	Araguabisi	Araguabisi
24	KOBOINA AKOHO	Boca de Koboina	Araguao/Koboina
25	BARAKARU	Casa de Jesús Báez	Koboina
26	HOBURE	Casa de Zambrano	Koboina
31	KOBERUNA	— — —	Winikina
32	LORENZO AHANOKO	Morichita	Winikina
33	— — —	(casas transitorias)	Winikina
35	RAFAEL AHANOKO	Casa de Rafael	(Morichales)
36	— — —	(casas transitorias)	Winikina
37	HANA KAHAMANA	— — —	Winikina
51	SIAWANI	Siaguani	Homini Sebe
52	DIARU KABANOKO	Diaru Kabanoko	Diaru Kabanoko
54	NABA SANUKA	Naba Sanuka la vieja	Homini Sebe
55	— — —	(Criollos dispersos)	(varios)
56	NABA SANUKA	Naba Sanuka, misión	Naba Sanuka
61	BUMOSIMORINA	Musimurina	Yaguarimabo
63	BONOINA	Bonoína	Araguaimujo
65	YORINANOKO	Yorinanoko	Homini Sebe
66	SAKOBANA (HOANA, MANI AHANOKO)	Sacupana, Casa de Maní	Sacupana
67	HANAKASI	Janakasi	Sacupana
68	MONINOKO	Moninoko	Sacupana
71	MURAKO	Murako	Murako
72	KUAMUHU	Kuamujo	Korokoina
73	DAUIDA HANA	Mora	Korokoina
75	OSIBU KAHUNOKO	Guayo	Osibu Kajunoko
77	HOBURE	Jobure de Guayo	Guayo
79	WAYABOROINA	Guayaboroina	Cuayo



MAP 2

WARAO HEARTLAND

Hydrography: Compañía Shell de Venezuela; Sheet N° 82.
 Demographic data: H. Dieter Heinen.

*THE TRADITIONAL WARAO ECONOMY: ECOLOGY
AND SOCIAL RELATIONS*

Most of the Warao habitat is located in the tidal zone. The area between a sparse criollo population near the vertex of the Delta and the coastal strip is used seasonally only by some Warao groups for the cultivation of maize and by ranchers from Monagas State for cattle grazing. The annual flooding of the Orinoco culminating in August/September, makes permanent settlement very difficult, if not impossible. The mission center of Araguaimujo is subject to a difference in water level of some 5 or more meters and has at times been completely flooded.

The picture of innumerable islands and large expanses of water conveyed by early explorers, who almost exclusively navigated along the Río Grande, is misleading. The large "Island of Mariusa" between the caños *Makiri* (Macareo) and *Arawao* (Araguao), through lack of functional distributaries with their corresponding alluvial deposits, consists of extended backswamps. Warao groups in this area lived deep in the morichales in small 3 by 3 meter huts and their knowledge of boatbuilding was rather rudimentary. They subsisted on a diet of palm starch, grubs, honey and wild fruits. Even their hunting and fishing activities may better be called gathering, because of the peculiar techniques employed.

The climate near the coast is extremely humid with annual rainfall exceeding 2,000 mm., but showing marked variations from place to place and between years. A long-range average rainfall curve shows a rather dry season during January through March with a sudden onset of strong rains in April or May, culminating in June/July. From here on rainfall gradually diminishes with only a small increase in December.

Temperature is fairly even throughout the year with a mean of 26°C., but early mornings can be quite cool, especially during January and February.

We do not know what Warao society was like before the first European arrived. By traditional Warao society we mean the type of social organization still encountered in the area until a few years ago by anthropologists including this writer.

The traditional society consisted of transhumant bands of some 25 to 60 persons grouped into subtribes between which contact was minimal due to fear of witchcraft. On the other hand, bands of the same subtribe formed matrimonial alliances, helped each other out with scarce foodstuff and converged during ritual gatherings.

The composition of settlements was unstable and to the present time it is risky to use riverine settlements as operational units for anthropological research unless one takes account of the underlying band structure.

Bands exhibited various types of residential units depending on the phase of the household cycle which started with the sons-in-law joining the father of their wives until the death of the old headman and the possible fission of the band (Heinen, 1972: 24-33).

Primary social relations of residence units were based on the bond between mother/daughters and the corresponding affinal nexus between the father of the girls and their husbands. The Warao kinship system has been formally described as Hawaiian (Wilbert, 1956; Suárez, 1968: 111, 113) for Ego's generation (N_0) and as bifurcate collateral in the first ascending generation ($N + 1$).

Warao subtribes are endogamous, i.e. marriage alliances are generally formed inside a unit consisting of several bands. Consequently, economic organization was not structured according to consanguinity, which with its multiple bonds is diffuse, but by affinal ties and vicinity. Both of the latter are non-ascriptive and voluntary. They may therefore be regarded as long-range social contracts as opposed to either ascriptive ties of unilineal kinship or the impersonal contracts of short duration that characterize economic transactions in a market economy.⁴ Traditional economic organization, then, is based on the relationship between *wi-fa/da-hu* (*arabi / dawa*) which forms the foundation for all basic production units and, to a large degree, distribution. Extended production units form around this core by means of diverse elements of affinal and fictitious kinship, vicinity and consanguinity. Multiple marriage exchange between bands includes polygynous unions of the sororate type, one variant having the principal wife (*banoko*

4. Most economists prefer the term "price system" in order to avoid confusion with the "market place" (cf. Dorfman, 1964).

arotu) bringing into the household her *br-da* as a secondary wife (*tekoro*).

Political and economic factors prevail in polygynous unions because the division of labor by sex does not tolerate unmarried persons for any length of time. Widows with their offspring are thus taken care of by joining the union of one of their sisters.

THE TRADITIONAL WARAO ECONOMY: PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION

The composition of production units and *work teams* depends on the type of economic activity. In the traditional sector we encounter two types:

1. Activities of basic subsistence, such as gathering, fishing and hunting.
2. Activities that require mutual assistance such as the construction of buildings of all types, footbridges and the procurement of huge tree trunks for the elaboration of dugout canoes.

There are no economic activities that require a major cooperative effort on the part of women. The sole exception is the erection of menstruation units (*nehemanoko*, *nibomanoko*) which is done by the women themselves. Women usually accompany the men on their trips through the forest and use the time for gathering activities, as an expedition is rarely undertaken for a single purpose.

Even though women never enter the deep forest alone, groups of women for the purpose of gathering wild fruits and other forest products form spontaneously on the basis of vicinity and personal preference. Women do form *cooking teams*. Generally, such a team takes the initiative for gathering forays joined by individual women from other teams.

The core of daily subsistence activities among the men is the *basic work team* whose members are called by the headman of the *residential unit* "my workers", "my boys" (*manebu*). The women of the corresponding *cooking teams* participate, and even predominate, in all gathering activities. They take part in fishing and hunting activities according to the traditional norms of the division of labor by sex.

Some aspects of this division of labor are conveniently mentioned here. All construction work, be it of houses (*hanoko*), kitchen structures (*hisabanoko*), temples (*kuai hanoko*), dancing floors (*hobonoko*) or footbridges (*omunoko*, *hobisi*) is the task of men. This also includes the construction of boats (*wabibaka*).

Besides the preparation of food and care of small children, women weave the traditional hammocks (*ha*) made of moriche fiber (*hau*). They keep a fire going day and night and are also responsible for the collection of firewood. Division of labor according to sex varies in some details among Warao subtribes, especially regarding basketry. Women participate only occasionally in fishing and hunting activities, even though they may be seen in parties hunting agouti rodents with dogs, and in boats awaiting packs of peccary being driven to predetermined places on the river. Nevertheless, these activities are confined to the day-time.

For a synopsis of production units with their respective *work teams*, frame of mobilization, participation of women and the allocation of resources under traditional and modern conditions, I refer the reader to Table 1.

Activities requiring mutual assistance, i.e. the utilization of *extended work teams* (Table N^o 1, type II) are house building and traditional logging and, under modern conditions, the clearing of garden patches. The framework for the mobilization of *extended teams*, whose members are called *masanetamo*, "my helpers", depends on the stage in the household cycle and may be seen from the above mentioned table.

To present the foregoing in schematic form:

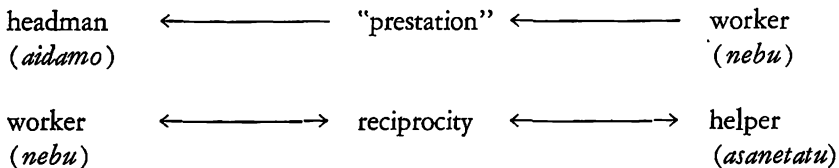


TABLE N° 1

PRODUCTION UNITS

Activity	Phase	Social Structure Framework	Frame of Mobilization (Correspondence to Type of Household)	Male Team	Female Participation	Allocative Mechanism
Type (I): Basic subsistence						
(1) Fishing, hunting	traditional, but importance increasing under modern conditions	traditional	basic/extended households	basic team	help	production and consumption unit, internal accounting
(2) Gathering	traditional, importance decreasing under modern conditions	traditional	basic/extended households	basic team	full participation	production and consumption unit, internal accounting
(3) Cultivation of auto-subsistence crops	modern	traditional	basic/extended households	basic team	full participation	production and consumption unit, internal accounting
Type (II): Mutual help						
(1) House-building; traditional logging	traditional	traditional	(a) household compound	extended team = basic team	help	(a) production and consumption unit, internal accounting
			(b) household group	extended team	help	(b) prestation
			(c) several basic households	extended team	help	(c) reciprocity
(2) Clearing garden patches	modern	traditional	(a) household compound	extended team = basic team	help	(a) production and consumption unit, internal accounting
			(b) household group	extended team	help	(b) prestation
			(c) several basic households	extended team	help	(c) reciprocity
Type (III): Money Economy						
(1) Commercial logging	modern	non-traditional	undetermined	extended team plus	no participation	payment or profit sharing on the basis of individual accounting
(2) Cash-crop agriculture	modern	non-traditional	undetermined	extended team plus	help during harvest	payment or profit sharing on the basis of individual accounting
(3) Wage labor	modern	non-traditional	individual	individual	no participation	[individual payment]

The form of mobilizing work teams determines in turn the allocation of resources, the very core that reflects the basic mode of production of a particular economy. But as the allocation of resources is not only determined by the sum of individual utility curves but decisively by the distribution of the previous social product, we have to examine in some detail the corresponding distribution mechanisms.

Among the Warao, the receipt of food, and object or service is acknowledged simply with the word *yakera*, "good". There is no word for "thanks", because there is no reason to be grateful for what is only your right. He who lacks what somebody else possesses in abundance, has the right to ask for it. Giving generally is not spontaneous but is asked for, either by word or through the appropriate behavior.

Diboto is a tit-for-tat even though deferred. *Nobeanaka* is a "free" gift with no apparent expectation of early reciprocation. Still, even here a kind of mental accounting is carried on with the expectation, sooner or later, of a counter gift which is evaluated, nevertheless, not by the previous transactions but by the relative abundance/necessity of the participants in a particular situation.

Generally speaking, women distribute cooked food or small items, while men are responsible for the distribution of bigger quantities, such as the result of a fishing or crab catching expedition.

In the following Table N^o 2 can be seen in schematic form the main obligations of sharing.

Corresponding to the obligation to share we observe a peculiar form of property. There is definitely some form of *individual property*, but this latter has a completely different sense from our western concepts of the term. More specifically, we find a distinction between possession and different degrees of usufruct. The observer does well to avoid our western categories of *private property* (without restriction and including the right not to use the item or to destroy it) and so-called *primitive communism* without individual property at all. This latter concept was conceived and attributed to tribal societies when first-hand descriptions of tribal economies were still scanty. Incurring the danger of equivocal interpretations, I nevertheless would venture to call the traditional property system prevailing among the Warao one of *communal responsibility*. No statement on human nature is implied. There is no innate altruism just as there is no innate egoism implied in the analytical construct of "homo oeconomicus".

TABLE N° 2
OBLIGATION TO SHARE

Relation	Place	Obligation
Close Kinsmen (<i>awaraowitu</i>)	same settlement	Offer to share
Close Kinsmen (<i>awaraowitu</i>)	different settlement	Share upon request
Distant Kinsmen (members of the same or related band, <i>awarao</i>)	same settlement	Share upon request
Distant Kinsmen (<i>awarao</i>)	different settlement	Share upon request, but may require immediate or deferred payment
Non-Kinsmen (non-Warao or members of other subtribes) (<i>hotarao; warao daisa</i>)	same settlement	Ambiguous, did not occur traditionally
Non-Kinsmen (<i>hotarao; warao daisa</i>)	different settlement	None

Respective social structures are imposed on tribal economies by the need to survive in small groups under a high degree of environmental uncertainty. As soon as these conditions are removed, communal constraints tend to disappear gradually and it would be a mistake to assume their automatic persistence under conditions of different demographic magnitudes.

*CHANGES IN WARAO ECONOMY: THE INTRODUCTION
OF AUTOSUBSISTENCE AGRICULTURE AND CASH
CROPS/WAGE LABOR*

Between the introduction in the 1920's and 30's of the ocumo tuber, bananas, plantains and other plants for autosubsistence, and cash crops,

such as rice, there occurred a small but significant time lapse, especially in the central Delta. Attempts by missionaries to promote cooperative rice growing soon ended in the interference of "bongueros", itinerant traders.

Other rice growing ventures were carried on exclusively with migrant labor from Margarita Island, but these attempts were too sporadic to have any major impact. Wage labor at that time was absent from the central Delta. The local sawmill on the *Arawabisi* (Araguabisi) river was started only around 1954, and contract or wage labor was carried out by migrant Warao in the cacao plantations of the upper Delta and at public works in Tucupita.

This time lag allows us to make some important observations. The introduction of autosubsistence agriculture needed only minor changes in the economic organization and rather seems to have strengthened the traditional social system of the subtribes, while cash crops and wage labor had a frankly disintegrating effect. (See Table N^o 1).

It is significant that the strong leaders the Warao remember⁵ came to the fore precisely at the moment horticulture was introduced.

The new settlements on the open river branches that followed the introduction of autosubsistence agriculture, reflected changes occurring in the economic organization. Houses (*banoko*) became bigger and additional structures such as kitchens (*hisabanoko*) and connecting footbridges (*omunoko* in Winikina, *hobisi* in Murako) became standard features.

People continued to frequent their old grounds in the morichales for ritual gatherings and to supplement their diet by the traditional gathering activities. But these forays were not so imperative any more. From small transhumant bands, large groups of Warao changed to semi-permanent settlements on the banks of major and medium size distributaries.

It is important to emphasize, however, that these changes in the economic organization did not lead to a disintegration of the underlying social structure of the Warao groups involved. The introduction of

5. The most outstanding: Francisco Morales of *Winikina*; Luis Jiménez of the *Arawabisi* group; José Rico of the *Ataisiwari* Warao; Maní of the *Sakobana* (Sacupana) and Ricardo Totres of *Naba Sanuka*. The latter is not identical with the present mission village. Naba Sanuka means "little river" and is a frequent toponymy in the Delta.

autosubsistence agriculture into the central Delta did not change the framework of mobilization of work teams. The same extended work groups that formerly had been mobilized for the construction of houses and traditional lumbering, now served for clearing garden patches. Most important, the core of the traditional economy —the mechanisms of resource allocation and distribution of the social product— have been left virtually intact. According to the stage in the household cycle, household configurations alternatively formed production and consumption units, based on a flow of goods and services according to "prestation"/redistribution or on reciprocity.

In equal fashion, mutual help in horticulture was based on services rendered to the headman of the compound or on reciprocity. Food is offered to the *asanetamo*, the "helpers", but no additional payment is made, least of all in money.

Later on we will see the differences arising from the cultivation of cash crops, such as rice.

One of the most significant indications of these differences can be perceived in the full participation of the female population in the new horticultural activities. While the heavy work of clearing garden patches rests with the men, the principal spouse (*hanoko arotu*, literally "owner of the house") assisted by secondary wives (*tekoro*), daughters and granddaughters, directs the planting and harvesting of the new crops.

Once located on the banks of the easily accessible major river arms, the Warao population formed a pool of potential cheap labor.

As happened before in the Curiapo area and on the adjacent *Merebina* (Merejina), criollo entrepreneurs soon were putting the Warao to work on lumbering activities and rice growing.

There followed the establishment by both entrepreneurs and missionaries of a number of sawmills with outright wage labor. This, according to the conventional wisdom of those times, would allow the Indians to abandon their "savage customs" in the forest and become part of "civilized society". The Indians plainly wanted the goods modern or criollo society had to offer. Some traders were unscrupulous, others were generous. Most missionaries combined an unconscious Iberian aversion to the forest with a strong desire to bring better housing, education and health services to the Indians. Their commitment to proselytizing also played a major role. Whatever the motives, the result

was the same: the Indian became dependent on western industrial goods, but his productive capacity remained low. Unwittingly or by design he was never allowed to acquire the necessary means of production or was judged unable to manage them.

The most suitable cashcrop for the lower Delta is rice⁶ supplemented by some maize growing upriver. Rice cultivation exhibits the most varied organizational arrangements, from wage labor alongside a poor *criollo*, to contract labor, to almost independent growing where the trader only exercises control through the tools, foodstuff and other items advanced on credit.

From a practical point of view, rice-growing integrates well ecologically with the other agricultural activities of the Warao. They were clearing land in any case and growing rice on these clearings created an additional income without precluding later or even simultaneous use for planting *ocumo*, bananas, plantains, both types of *yuca* and sugar cane.

We have already stated that neither the presence of money as such nor the introduction of new agricultural techniques significantly affected the social structure of the Warao. The introduction of cash crop agriculture and wage labor on the other hand, had a frankly disintegrating effect on Warao society.

I cannot share Sahlins' sanguine view of the Original Affluent Society (1972: 1-39) and I have to express strong reservations as to both the ecological safety margin of gathering economies and Sahlins' interpretation of underproduction as being caused by a voluntary limiting of wants (1972: 41-86). I rather suspect that a closer look over a longer period would reveal seasonal bottlenecks periodically in some crucial food items, as were found among the Warao (Heinen and Ruddle, 1974).

Nevertheless, after many years of close contact with the Warao and comparative studies among other groups of South American Indians, there is no doubt in my mind that the disintegrative effect of cash crop cultivation and wage labor brought a distressing array of social ills upon the Warao that are not due to the distorted view of hopelessness

6. A slash and burn technique is employed. Rice is sown, not planted. Wet-rice agriculture cannot be expected to develop for the time being, since with fairly abundant land, the marginal productivity of labor is relatively high in relation to the marginal productivity of land.

romantics but are objectively measurable in terms of nutritional deficiencies and morbidity.

Here and there, individual Indians may be found who are better off than they possibly could be under more traditional conditions, but these are clearly exceptions. There is also at least one Warao subgroup, displaced from its original home by the forementioned land reclamation scheme, whose members collectively seem to consider themselves better off than before, largely due to rather sizeable additional income from the sale of handicrafts. But they are completely ignorant of the fragile nature of their present market.

More insidious than low payment and unjust wages is the effect of cash crop agriculture and wage labor on the traditional economic structure. As the pay and distribution of profits is now on the basis of *individual money accounting*, the mobilization of work teams is short term and haphazard. Anybody can be recruited since payment is effected immediately upon termination of the work or contract. Long-range affinal ties fall into disuse and are substituted by short term arrangements. Since there is no juridical setup in operation, frequent quarrels ensue. To counteract these difficulties, there is now a marked reliance on consanguineal kinship, and fathers increasingly prefer to team up with their sons, instead of relying on their sons-in-law. The authority of the headman (*aidamo*), already weak traditionally, is now practically disappearing, since young men may contract now wherever they wish and work according to their own individual advantage as it might shortsightedly be perceived. Immediately, the consumption pattern changes. Instead of acting as member of a group where fishing and hunting are supplemented by agriculture and other economic activities, the individual worker, who had hoped to buy a shotgun, an outboard motor or other major items, is forced to spend his earnings on food and clothing as he now lacks the time for fishing, hunting and gathering. Not infrequently he even has to purchase his daily ration of ocumo. Soft drinks, crackers, sugar, low grade wheat flour and canned goods—not to mention cheap rum—take the place of the traditional fresh fish, honey and wild fruits with disastrous results as to nutritional quality.

Especially hard hit are infants and the female population which now sees itself gradually reduced to a subordinate role. Saving and capital accumulation, to get some sort of self-sustained development going, are

out of the question. Solidarity inside the tribal communities diminishes rapidly.

It is easily understood that these changes do not constitute a mere reorganization of the economy, but affect the real core of indigenous social structure in that they alter the mechanisms of resource allocation and distribution.

There are some groups that do relatively well. These are tightly integrated household compounds with a fairly strong leader. Typically, such a man has just sufficient working knowledge of our economic system to be able to manipulate it, and is clear-sighted enough to maintain the traditional economic structure. He has several sons or sons-in-law who have been to school and cannot be taken in by fast operators. Such a group sends part of its work force out to earn cash, but keeps enough manpower to assure the necessary food supply for the compound, without being forced to spend the hard earned cash on staples and other basics.

They thus avoid the typical dilemma of the Indian: he either sticks to his traditional values and thus continues without the essential know-how to defend his interests in the framework of the inevitable mechanisms that characterize our present global economic system, or he accepts the way of life of the criollo and lets the social structure of his community disintegrate without ever gaining therefore full acceptance in the criollo world. In this way Indians lose the backing their community could give them and fall prey one by one to unscrupulous operators.

It is important to put available knowledge at the disposal of those groups that have shown sufficient adaptive flexibility in learning to understand the mechanisms of the global economic system, without thereby losing the internal cohesion of their community. This is the only way they can hope to resist our voracious economic machinery. But we should not underestimate the perceptiveness of the indigenous population. The Warao know enough about their situation to be on the look-out for a viable solution. An experimental program at the Warao settlement of Hobure in 1973 was closely watched and imitated step by step by at least two more groups without any further encouragement. Once a successful pattern can be established, we may realistically expect a rapid spread and acceptance.

INDIGENOUS GROUPS, CRIOLLOS AND THE NATIONAL ECONOMY

As we have seen, during the last decades the economic life of the Warao has been increasingly organized according to the requirements of the regional and therefore national economy. The supposed "need to integrate indigenous groups" into the national economy is a convenient myth that disguises their real condition.

The Warao zone of the lower Delta annually exports to other parts of the country several million bolivars worth of rice; timber worth at least that much, and large quantities of palm hearts. This famous palmito of de luxe salads is sold in Caracas at Bs. 5.95 per can, but in the Delta the Warao are paid Bs. 8.00 and recently Bs. 10.00 for processing *one hundred* palms.

What is true is that the indigenous people are in an extremely weak position as to economic power and self-determination. They are at the mercy of market fluctuations and consumption fads which they are not equipped to anticipate, much less to control.⁷

As is generally recognized, the Indians are "exploited". But this term should be confined, in my opinion, to the political arena to rally support. On an analytical plane, it may lead to the grave misjudgment that all that is needed to remedy the situation is the removal of the so-called "exploiters". As long as the underlying structures of the regional and national economy — especially the prevailing condition of oligopolies and oligosponies, the "roscas" — are not changed, every group of new leaders runs the risk of falling into the very same pattern as that of the previous "exploiters", and this is as true of civil servants as of leaders coming out of the indigenous communities themselves.

To regard the population of the lower Delta as two big antagonistic groups, the criollos and the indigenous sector, is too rash. Even the prevailing ideas as to the wealth of the more important entrepreneurs are exaggerated. Though wealthy in comparison with the indigenous sector, they have been continually in debt with the big merchants in the provincial towns, who often operate on a national scale.

As the Warao are exposed to capricious fluctuations on the national and international market, so are the criollos. They are not the ultimate

7. See the recent reader on "Power in Economics" by Rothschild (1971).

beneficiaries of the "exploitation" of the indigenous population, but rather a channel through which is siphoned off what wealth there is. If we speak of ultimate causes we have to look to Caracas and beyond.

On the other hand, an increasingly large sector of the criollo population is living on the back of the Indians. This population, until recently fairly small, has been expanding considerably through natural growth and through immigration. This phenomenon, ironically was aided by the very efforts of the government and the missionaries to improve health and educational services. Schools were monopolized by criollo students and new schools were opened in accordance with the political pressure of criollo groups, leaving large Warao settlements without educational services while teachers were given to insignificant clusters of criollo homesteads.

As the present oil wealth of the country filters down, the criollo sector is increasingly able to absorb the lion's share of the newly available resources by interposing itself between the corresponding government agencies and the indigenous population. Nearly all political and administrative positions are in the hands of criollos. That today, after nearly five centuries of contact, the Warao still do not have the necessary knowledge to fill these positions themselves, carry on their own commercial transactions and handle their contacts with the public administration without intermediaries can only be explained by a series of coercions, especially the furnishing of insufficient or deliberately misleading information. By and large, for the criollo of the lower Delta, "putting the Indians to work" has become a way of life.

Nevertheless, interpretation of the situation has to be made with utmost care. The present situation in the lower Delta is one of a relative peaceful symbiosis and the criollo has strategically placed himself where the Indian needs him and inevitably resorts to him. On innumerable occasions the criollo trader has to help out; some gasoline to take a sick person to the medical post, some tools, a little sugar or flour on credit. How is the civil servant, who often is the "compadre" of the criollo trader and whose living is not tied to any standard of efficiency, to compete with the trader on the latter's home-ground?

On the other hand, the trader manages to create unnecessary and even harmful wants before the indigenous groups have the productive capacity to satisfy them. But the Warao is already dependent on those newly created needs. Some individuals or groups could return to the

forest — as in fact some very few do — where there is seldom a lack of the necessary foodstuffs. But there, the Indian does not find tools, clothing, outboard motors and the type of foodstuff he already prefers.

In short, the Warao do not want to return to the forest. They want self-determination and their dependence on the trader bothers them, but as with other cases of dependency, the remedy is somewhat bitter and requires sacrifice.

The difference between detribalized Indians and criollos is not great. The criollo operating on a small scale also needs help. But it would be a tactical error not to be aware that his relations with the Indians are the most harmful to the latter, since because of his own precarious situation he has to resort to the meanest devices. Recently, some acculturated Warao have tried with more or less success to take the role of the criollo entrepreneur. More ancient is the custom of designating some Warao as foreman of his own fellow tribesmen and the very names of Warao office holders, such as *kabitana*, *fistikali*, *borisia* and *kobenahoro* date back to colonial times.

Unfortunately, the Warao population at present exhibits behavioral traits that make it very difficult to counteract the influence of the traders. Educated Warao tend to reject their ethnic identity and native teachers soon ask for transfer to other areas of the country. Attitudes are those of submission in front of criollos. This attitude is reflected in the most miserable criollo and expressions like "I am not Indian, I am Venezuelan" are frequent on the part of the general population. Few Warao take pride in their own rich cultural heritage. Their spiritual wealth is extraordinary. Moreover, western sciences with their emphasis on taxonomy have barely scratched the surface of the botanical and zoological variety of the Warao habitat, while the traditional Indian has a detailed knowledge of plant physiology and animal behavior. Nevertheless, Warao groups have great difficulties agreeing on and enforcing concerted action. Petitions to stop the palmito exploitation are frequent, but the most efficient move, a general production strike, has not been organized in spite of many efforts.

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE INDIANS AND THE MISSIONARIES

Today the missions do not hold the preponderant position in the indigenous areas they had only a generation ago. Recent government

activities have induced the missionaries to become active in educational and medical assistance within the framework of government programs or supplementing them, or simply to limit themselves to their religious activities.⁸ The outdated Mission Act (Ley de las Misiones) of 1915, which authorizes and exhorts the missionaries to "concentrate in settlements and civilize" ("reducir y civilizar") the Indians is unanimously rejected by the missionaries who work in the indigenous areas of the Orinoco Delta.

Nevertheless, the missions have played a decisive role in opening up the Warao heartland for the penetration of criollo contingents as well as later government activities, and in so doing have had a marked influence on the formation of the present situation. When during the 1920's the first Capuchin missionaries entered the Orinoco Delta, they found a few criollos established there, especially on the upper and middle reaches of the river arms where they contracted Indians for work in their cacao and banana plantations. In the Curiapo area on the southeastern margin of the Warao heartland, the Indians were held in a state of semi-slavery by their criollo patrons.

In spite of this the activities of the missionaries constituted the first *organized attempt* to penetrate and remain permanently in the Warao habitat of the lower Delta. Mission centers with their respective boarding schools were established: Divina Pastora de Araguaimujo in 1925 and San Francisco de Guayo in 1942 (Barral, 1957: 34, 89). Recruitment for these schools involved at first a certain amount of coercion according to Warao informants from the Winikina subtribe. Autochthonous values and customs were substituted as much as possible by European ones, dominant in criollo society in those days.

With these activities the missionaries did no more than satisfy the aspiration of the national society: to "civilize the savage Indian". In fact, if today many missionaries have abandoned this patronizing attitude in favor of one of respect towards indigenous values, it is against generally prevailing public opinion. Evidently, the education of the general population, so that they would respect the ethnic values of their indigenous countrymen, is as important as the growing consciousness of the latter.

8. In the western Delta, especially in and around an Indian settlement called "El Pajal", there are Protestant missionaries. Their exact activities are not known to this author.

Some of the missionary activities had in the last analysis a negative effect. They contributed to detribalization and the shame the Indian feels for his tribal customs. Those Warao groups with the most intense contact are the most reticent to ask for medical help since the indigenous shaman feels his authority threatened. Indians educated in the missions consider themselves superior to their brothers in traditional settlements. Some groups call themselves "los casados", "the married ones", implying that the others still live in a state of savagery. However, it is only just to point out the observation of the missionaries that this is shorthand for "married in the church" and that they themselves today respect even polygynous unions among Indians, being conscious that this institution in many cases plays an important role as a form of social security in taking care of widows and orphans.

On the other hand, that there is a group of Indians who know how to read and write, is due almost exclusively to the efforts of the missionaries, as criollo teachers rarely fulfill their duty. The high quality of the mission schools even had a negative effect on some indigenous groups as they constituted a strong attraction for criollo families to the point where the Indians of the *Osibu Kabunoko* settlement adjacent to San Francisco de Guayo some years ago had ceased to attend school at Guayo completely. Today, thanks to remedial classes conducted in the *Osibu Kabunoko* settlement by a nun, school enrollment by Indians is increasing again. All native school-teachers and nurses of the area have passed through the mission schools where they learned Spanish and other basics.

The economic activities of the mission centers were not very adroit in the beginning, as we can now discern with the benefit of hindsight and new knowledge. In their economic transactions, the mission centers too closely resembled commercial establishments by not separating the dual role of promoting new economic activities and helping with loans for these same activities. Nevertheless, the economic benefit from these activities to the missions is easily overestimated. Rather, they constituted a brake on the rapacity of traders and merchants who circulated rumors of the fabulous wealth of the missionaries because they found their own economic transactions disturbed. Lately, the mission centers have reduced their economic activities. These ceased completely with the closure of the trade store at the Guayo mission in early 1974.

All in all, one cannot deny a certain excessive paternalism on the part of the early missionaries which today, fortunately, is in the process of being overcome.

*GOVERNMENT SERVICES AND PROGRAMS
IN THE INDIGENOUS AREAS OF THE LOWER
ORINOCO DELTA*

In this chapter we propose to analyze up to what point the Indians of the lower Delta use extension services created by the government to serve the campesino, including the indigenous population. As was already hinted at, none of the government agencies had the effects originally planned, at least so far as the indigenous population of the lower Delta is concerned.

There are two basic factors which made an effective functioning of these agencies in the indigenous areas extremely difficult. One is the nature of the administrative structure which has the double effect of a volume of paper work impossible to comply with, even assuming the good will of all civil servants involved, and a fictitious centralism which operates on the traditional principle: "I obey but I will not proceed" ("acato pero no cumplo").

The second decisive factor which keeps official extension services from reaching the indigenous areas, is the considerable distance between them and the administrative center. One has not only to take into account the 8 to 9 hours upriver travel to the Orinoco river port of Barrancas, but also the distance from there to Tucupita. In any case one or two men have to stay behind to watch the dugout, especially in the not unusual event of delays due to complications with paper work.

One may assume outlays of not less than 200.00 bolivars (about US \$47.— at the current rate of exchange) per voyage for gasoline and other expenses of the river trip, the cost of land transportation, and food. This without considering the inconvenience of long hours on the river, broken down outboard motors, mendicancy and increasing prostitution of Indian women in the territorial capital.

The long distance between the lower Delta and the administrative center has two major consequences.

First of all, the civil servant at the government bank finds himself disoriented in facing a large number of Indian peasants, and he has no way to decide if he is dealing with a trustworthy person, or not. Secondly, the Indians who are living close to the subsistence level do not have the means to sustain the habitual delays in the processing of the paper work regarding delivery of seed, sacks, transport of the product and the settling of accounts in several stages (first at *Corpo-mercadeo* and later at the government bank). They do not have the means to undertake the repeated trips required, nor do they have the necessary knowledge to avoid getting entangled in the complicated sequence of administrative procedures — often contradictory. During an experimental program with the Indian community of Hobure we had to make 15 trips to Tucupita during a single cycle of rice growing to comply with the respective formalities required to obtain credit, the necessary inputs and to market the product.

An equally important factor is that the Indian is accustomed to act in the framework of an economic system which is very different from the one we know. This leads him to commit errors of judgment on how to conduct himself in certain situations and what he may expect from a particular administrative transaction he has just made. The civil servant on the other hand, has with notable exceptions a distorted image of the Indian. By and large, the Indian constitutes a problem because in some cases he does not even know how to express himself properly in the national language.

Who would be more suitable to act as middleman than the *criollo* trader? Instead of many small credits he takes out a single fairly large one and, on the other hand, offers a certain guaranty of repayment. His way of thinking, expressing himself and general behavior are familiar to the civil servant. They meet on social occasions, in friendship circles and the like. We do not even have to mention certain cases of corruption, not completely absent, to understand that the Indian does not dispose of the necessary channels to comply properly with the required formalities and take advantage of the services the government has purposely created to serve his needs.

The Indians, who under intimidation as well as the illegal sale of alcohol, have handed their rice harvest to the traders, are unable to pay back the loans awarded to them by the government bank. This in turn is used as an argument for not giving any more credits to Indians wanting to grow and market their rice themselves. Giving

credits to the traders is equivalent to get the Indians into debt with government money.

Consequently, the net effect of the mentioned government services is exactly the opposite of the desired one. Instead of liberating the Indians from their debt peonage and the dominating oligopolies, the government services have so far reinforced the prevailing system since the trader passes himself off as a peasant at the government bank and proceeds to indebt the Indian with the money lent to him by the government.

During the 1973 rice harvest a "quintal" (50 kg.) was changing hands at 20 bolivars in the area of the lower Delta, while it was received at the Corpomercadeo warehouse at a baseline price of Bs. 0,71/kg. In that year Corpomercadeo paid for the shipping as a special incentive to the Indian producer. It goes without saying that many of the traders discovered that they after were also Indians.

Deductions on account of humidity and refuse content are generally higher in the rice of the Indians than that of the traders. Since both come ultimately from indigenous producers, there must be other factors involved. There is no proof that different measures are applied, but it is simply that the traders have well equipped boats while the Indian waits for the official transport sitting on his sacks of unshelled rice which germinates rapidly and deteriorates in many ways. During the rice harvest of 1973, the official IAN program had to approach the biggest trader of the area to have the rice harvest of the indigenous producers transported.

In order not to make empty statements, I would venture to guess that at least half of the 1973 rice harvest was sold to the state marketing agency not by its producers but by middlemen. This is easily proven from the publicly announced settling of accounts by Corpomercadeo. Some civil servants of the respective government agencies were conscious of the problem and tried to solve it in various ways. Nevertheless, the decision that State agencies should not accept rice shipped in by middlemen has not been effective since in this case the traders simply take it to other parts of the country, such as the states of Monagas or Guárico. In fact, many traders operate on a national scale from the lower Delta to Puerto Ayacucho and the upper Orinoco. In this case they would not even deal with indigenous producers but would contract with local criollos who in turn deal

with the Indians. One can imagine what benefit accrues to the primary producer.

Nevertheless, the extension service offered by IAN/BAP/Corpomercadeo had indirect beneficial effects since recently indigenous producers became aware of the final prices paid by Corpomercadeo and began to pressure the middlemen for a better deal.

For the promotional and development programs carried on by the Agrarian Institute (IAN) and the Office of Indian Affairs (O.C.A.I.) to be successful, some preconditions would have to be observed:

- 1) Instead of trying to solve the problems of the indigenous population in a single stroke, which would finally only result in stop-gap measures, more well-planned pilot projects and patient work, village by village, are called for.
- 2) An efficient organization with well-trained and dedicated teams seems necessary.
- 3) The final decision-making process should be put into the hands of the Indians themselves. Their ethnic values and personal dignity should be unconditionally respected.
- 4) Existing knowledge of the indigenous social organization and the subtle interrelation between criollo and indigenous population should be taken into account.
- 5) Government programs should be more consistent and avoid capricious swings from hyperactivity and senseless handouts to sudden slacks. As pointed out before, sudden blanket pardons of all outstanding debts only encourage further negligence and carelessness.

FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR BALANCED DEVELOPMENT IN THE AREA OF THE WARAO INDIANS

In spite of all obstacles mentioned, prospects for a balanced development of the indigenous population in the lower Orinoco Delta are not completely negative. The financial means are there and it needs only the political will to abolish well known abuses and to carry out respective programs consistently and by patient work.

The only viable solution for the indigenous population of the lower Delta is concerted action through voluntary associations while at the

same time, they learn how to manipulate the mechanisms of the regional economy and so achieve genuine self-determination. This, at least is the opinion of their most outstanding leaders.

The indigenous population urgently needs direct access to the government services offered by IAN/BAP/C.M.A. as well as pertinent information on how these agencies function. Specific programs of IAN/OCAI have to be well coordinated and fulfill their function of connecting the indigenous areas of the lower Delta with the administrative center of Tucupita and the respective government agencies. To be effective, these programs have to be applied without consideration of short-term political interests. They might hurt the immediate interests of one or other trader, but in the long run all sectors of the population stand to benefit from the general prosperity of the area. In the face of well-run development programs one might expect the cooperation of all sectors that make up the population of the lower Delta.

ABSTRACT

The economy of the Warao Indians, an autochthonous group of some 15,000 inhabiting the Orinoco Delta in northeastern Venezuela and adjacent areas, has until recently been based on a simple technology of hunting, fishing and gathering. A generation ago the traditional staple food of palm starch was replaced by the ocumo tuber, an autosubsistence crop. The economic organization of the Warao adapted without major structural changes to these innovations.

Shortly thereafter, however, wage labor in lumbering and cashcrop agriculture, especially rice growing, was introduced and the Indians to a large extent became dependent on outside middlemen and traders. The basic mode of resource allocation and especially the traditional mechanisms for the distribution of the social product became seriously affected. Today, the economy of the area for the most part operates according to the requirements of the national economy.

Several years ago, the Venezuelan government started programs to free the Indians from their economic dependency on outside exploiters by offering to them the services of cheap credit and marketing facilities. This paper attempts to analyze the different reasons why the Indians neither would nor could take full advantage of the government

~~A TRIBAL, WARAO~~

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~~INDIGENAS WARAO~~

facilities potentially available. It shows how the traders entered the scene again and are now acting as middlemen between the Indians and the different government agencies. It appears that their position may have been strengthened rather than weakened.

A report, analyzing the situation, has been presented to several government agencies and it is hoped that remedial steps will be taken.

~~INDIGENAS WARAO~~

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~~ORINOCO, DELTA~~

RESUMEN

La economía de los indígenas Warao del Delta del Orinoco estuvo basada hasta hace poco tiempo en una simple tecnología de recolección. Su alimentación básica era la "yuruma", almidón obtenido de la palma de moriche. Una generación atrás se introdujo el cultivo del tubérculo conocido con el nombre de "ocumo chino", que reemplazó el uso de la yuruma.

La organización económica de los Warao se adaptó, sin mayores cambios estructurales, a esta innovación.

Poco después, sin embargo, comenzó en el Delta la explotación de la madera y el cultivo de arroz con fines comerciales, lo cual tuvo por consecuencia convertir a muchos Warao en mano de obra asalariada que pasó a depender de intermediarios y comerciantes. Este hecho afectó seriamente el modo de asignación de recursos y los mecanismos tradicionales de la distribución del producto social. La economía tribal funciona ahora en base a los requerimientos de la economía regional. Por otro lado, el gobierno nacional instituyó varios programas, ofreciendo créditos y facilidades de mercadeo, para hacer posible una autogestión de estos grupos indígenas.

El presente artículo examina algunos de los factores que impedían que los Warao aprovecharan las facilidades brindadas por el gobierno. Los comerciantes sirven ahora de intermediarios entre muchos indígenas y los organismos gubernamentales, fortaleciendo más bien en esta forma la dependencia económica de los Warao.

~~ORGANIZACION ECONOMICA~~

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