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## Historical and political anthropological inter-connections: the multilinguistic indigenous polity of the “Carib” Islands and Mainland Coast from the 16th to the 18th century

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### Introduction

Our symposium is dedicated to Carib social organization with an emphasis upon polity. Its title implies that “Carib linguistic affiliation” designates a sociological and cultural entity and that, as such, we are stressing the notion that Carib-speaking societies constitute not only a linguistic unit but a sociological one as well, and therefore we can speak of a specific Carib political organization. It also implies that we are absolutely clear about what a “political organization” is in Lowland South American Indian societies. We can additionally take the position that these two points — that of Carib unity and an accurate and wholly accepted definition of “political organization” — may not only be discussed but also may be contested.

What we label as Carib unity in fact appears to be based more upon the characteristics (geographical, ecological, historical and sociological) of culture areas in general and, especially, of the Guianas where most Carib speakers live. We have been told this for many years by Métraux, Steward and Rouse, and it has been demonstrated by Butt Colson in her “Comparative studies of the social structure of Guiana Indians...” (1971b: 114), where she also stresses the important *differences* between the Akawaio, the Waiwai and the Wayana, all of whom are Carib speakers. The question of unity was discussed, once again, in the 1972 symposium in Rome, which resulted in the publication edited by Basso who wrote in the Introduction

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I wish to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Joanna Overing Kaplan for her kindness and friendship in helping me to rewrite this paper - English not being the easiest language for me.

(1977: 18-19) that "it is presently possible to distinguish three Carib 'types'," the second of which "...consists of the majority of Guiana Caribs," but that:

Each "type" is not uniquely Carib, and in fact each could include non-Carib-speaking tribes sharing many of the features that make the type distinctive for Carib speakers. This suggests that many, *if not most, lowland South American tribes should be considered as falling into general social and cultural units that often encompass local groups of different language affiliation and history* (Basso 1977: 19; emphasis added).

I do not entirely agree with the set of eight "traits" she lists as being specific to the Caribs. If we change the formulation of the second trait (which would be better expressed in terms of symmetric, two-section, *alliance systems* instead of being expressed in terms of *descent*, as Basso did), I think that, as a whole, they characterize "many if not most" Lowland South American Societies, with the important exception of the Gê and the Bororo. I presume that one could more briefly list the non-Carib speakers who do not share the set of "traits" or features, than those who do so.

In Basso's opinion, these "social and cultural units" quoted above "represent different responses to ecological pressures." Certainly ecological pressures do exist, but ecology entails an interaction between environment and social systems. So pressures come both from inside and from outside as also do responses. How could the interaction of the "ecological pressures and responses" be sufficient to explain unity and diversity in similar environments, and furthermore, how can we analyse long-term processes in a non-static way?

It is not a wrong explanation, just a partial and insufficient one although it is very "à la mode." As Kloos wrote about Arawak and Carib settlements, "...it is quite possible that historical factors are just as important as ecological ones" (1971: 11).

In this paper I do not wish to deal with *explanations* for differences, similarities, diversity or unity. Instead, I wish to argue that unity and diversity are relative to analytical foci. For instance, several societies may be part of a common polity, where diversity itself provides the unity achieved. Indeed, it is precisely such a polity that I will be discussing here —one the very base of which is defined by the dynamic relation that holds between unity and diversity.

I shall discuss later the propositions advanced by Rivière in his contribution to Basso's publication (1977: 39). For now, I simply note that Rivière lays stress upon the direct, symmetric, prescriptive alliance system (and the two-section terminology which "expresses it," as Dumont, 1953a, demonstrated thirty years ago) as a "central" element in all Carib societies. As a second element (more common, as far as I know, in the Guianas than elsewhere), he notes a type of hierarchy, that of the asymmetric relationship between affines which, according to him, means that wife-givers are superior to wife-takers. This exhibits a strange and double contradiction, and one pointed out by Rivière himself, i.e. that present-day Carib societies are all very egalitarian. Not one recognizes a principle of hierarchy operating within its social relationships (Rivière 1977: 40). The second contradiction I myself point out: how does a symmetric alliance system work in conjunction with an asymmetrical relationship between affines? This is not a matter of kinship and

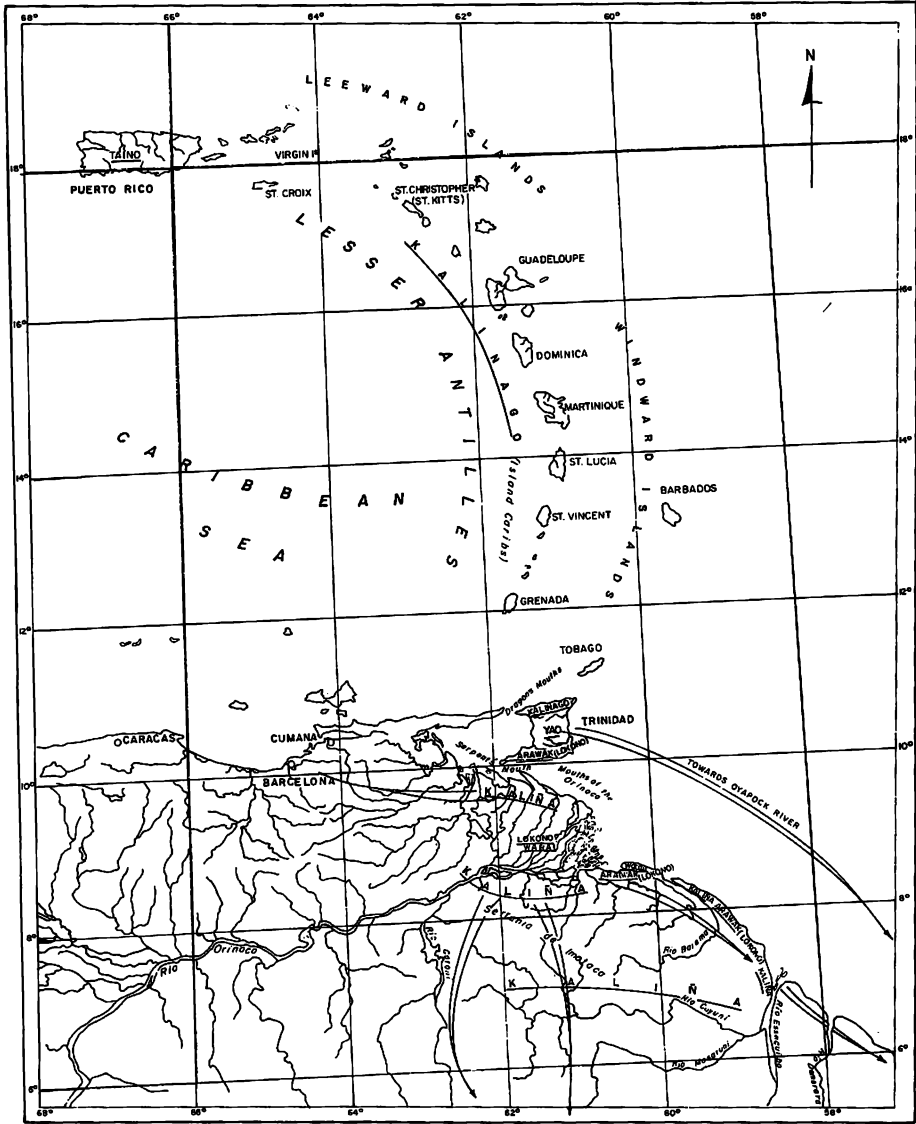
marriage only; it is also a matter of *politics*. (We may recall the Kachin case, Leach 1964, which gives an answer to the exact opposite question: how does an asymmetric alliance system work in conjunction with a symmetric, non-hierarchical relationship between affines, in the *gumlao* type of social organization?) This interesting conundrum is, then, best handled by looking at the political functions of alliance systems. Such an investigation, which includes an emphasis upon history, will throw light upon the shape and content of this type of polity and the social field it might cover.

Taking into account that social life and social and political organizations are ever-changing —sometimes very quickly, sometimes very slowly, but, for certain, change does always occur (because it is inherent to life)— I think we cannot study social and political organizations only through synchronic analysis. This kind of analysis, *absolutely necessary as it is*, gives us a static picture and therefore does not enable us to understand their very nature and leads us, perhaps, to over-hasty generalizations. The reason for the insufficiency of synchronic analysis is that social and political organizations are both produced by and are producing history. Perhaps nobody to-day —at least among French anthropologists— would still speak of "sociétés sans histoire" as American Indian societies have been metaphorically, but erroneously, labelled. We are now convinced that history is operative, everywhere and forever. Of course we know that some societies are not "historically-minded," as our Western society is. This is quite another question, since it does not prevent non-historically-minded societies from being produced by, and from producing, history.

No wonder that the functionalist, empirical, ahistorical position of Radcliffe-Brown and his followers prevented them from giving us an adequate theoretical framework for the study of processes of social transformation. It is especially on this point that I share the opinion of Newson (1976: 4-7). Historical studies of past Guiana political organizations do transform our view of present-day ones; valuable documents, contemporary with the systems described, are numerous. The Caribbean Islands and the mouth of the Orinoco River were discovered in the last years of the 15th century by Columbus. According to all the travellers and explorers at that time the Islands and the Mainland Coast were densely populated, and for the conquerors this presented many problems. For more than two centuries, there were continuous contacts, struggles, wars, and even alliances made between Europeans and natives. So we have a wealth of precious materials through which we can make our ethnology richer with the aid of time depth.

### **Political organization from the 16th to the 18th century**

Elsewhere (Dreyfus 1977) I have given a brief sketch of the political organization of the so-called Islands Caribs. In spite of their retained name, it is well known that they were "Arawakan" speakers (Taylor 1958a). To be more precise: an Arawak language (distinct from both Taino and Lokono, or Arawak proper) was everyone's mother tongue and the only spoken language used by women and children (both boys and girls). Mature men used many Carib words (to be precise,



**MAP 1**  
**APPROXIMATE LOCATION OF ETHNIC GROUPS FROM THE 16TH TO THE 18TH CENTURY**

Kaliña ones) with an Arawak syntax; they employed them in their private meetings and councils (and, even a third, different, probably archaic language was spoken during their meetings by older men who were formerly war chiefs). The women were not supposed to understand male idioms nor to participate in male politics. The so-called "men's speech" was used also in contacts with the continental Kaliña allies. Furthermore, a kind of pidgin, a compound with native, Spanish, English and Dutch words, was spoken as a trade language during the expeditions to the Mainland on the turn of the 17th century (D. Taylor, personal communication). Individual *multilingualism* and linguistic specializations (mother tongue, men's speech, trade speech and so on...) seem to have been characteristic of Kalinago social practices, accompanying a kind of division of social tasks. As we shall see in the following pages, *plurilingualism*, the linking in a big political unit of ethnic groups speaking different languages —even belonging to different linguistic stocks— was also characteristic of the polity we are studying.

The social system can be defined as comprised of networks of local groups, interconnected by marriages and other exchanges. Most of the local groups were exogamous and were constituted by one uxori-local, extended family whose headman was the father of married daughters. Some of the villages were larger than others; the largest were those whose headmen were also renowned war chiefs and who played an important political and ritual role as suppliers for anthropophagous ritual performances.

Thus, political institutions (the village men's assembly, the inter-village old men's council, marriages and alliances) rested basically on very frequent if not continuous war and trading parties, often very long-lasting and entailing long distances (Breton 1965: 108). They were led by highly esteemed men chosen for their courage and strength, as demonstrated by their battle behaviour and by the number of war prisoners they had personally taken. When a man was elected as a prospective war chief he had, for several days, to submit to a ritual initiation including fasting, repeated whipping and ant biting. Once acknowledged as a chief, he had to muster other warriors and to organize expeditions that were as large as possible, gathering up to one hundred or more sea *kanawa* (the original native form for "canoe"), each of which contained a fifty- or sixty-man crew. Obviously the size and character of the expedition depended on the *prestige* of the leader and the extent of his clientele. The more numerous the expeditions the greater the increase in his prestige and clientele. The position gave him privileges: he had more wives than the common men, who often were monogamous, and he had the right to virilocal residence for himself and for *his sons*. Thus his village was larger than that of the uxori-local commoner; so too was his network of relatives, affines and allies.

Both his sons-in-law, as is usual in uxori-local residence, and his sons provided the war chief with services in clearing gardens, hunting and fishing. His numerous wives, daughters and daughters-in-law produced vast quantities of manioc beer which enabled him to conduct more drinking-bouts for more guests than could men with less prestige.

The more prestigious the chief, the more wives he possessed. To the famous warrior, people came to offer wives and to become his affines and supporters. In

this way he constituted his clientele. Contrary to the commoner who, as the head of an uxori-local family, was, in his local group, superior as a wife-giver, *the war chief was superior as a wife taker and had no obligation to provide services to his fathers-in-law* in their respective local groups. Furthermore, as his power increased so did his network of affinal ties, for it was through marriage alliances that he built his political alliances with both friend and foe. Thus, men in affinal relationship to him included both those we speak of as "prescribed affines" (i.e. in the preferential categories of mother's brother's son, father's sister's son and father's sister's husband; see Dreyfus 1977: 40; Breton 1665: 11, 268; Taylor 1946), and those he acquired of unknown relationship, who became his political allies through marriage. In fact, there were three categories of affines of the war chief: 1) prescribed, 2) those who came to offer wives to him, and 3) those to whom he went to ask for wives. More than likely both the second and third categories of affinal relationships were established between those of different islands and between Islanders and Mainlanders (e.g. Kalifia and others). Finally, the war chief had slave-wives who were captured from enemy villages in the course of warfare. One wonders if the kin of such wives were considered as affines or not. Documents say nothing about this matter. The status of those within these various wife categories differed one from the other, a differentiation that was also lexically marked.

For long distance expeditions allied settlements had to be available. Such contacts were necessary for the purpose of trading, acquiring food and fresh water and resting. Crews and their chief used to stop over for some days or weeks in friendly territories before going to war and to raid. We may therefore outline a political system which had some similarities with the Melanesian Big Man institution.

The position of the war (and political) leader was not everlasting, being based upon his own personal capacities, which had to be strong enough to enable him to lead victorious raids and to bring back numerous prisoners. When he became old, this Amerindian pre-eminent man lost his position, his dominant place being taken by a younger successor through election, at which time the former chief joined the council of elders which gave advice and helped the new chief to make decisions.

Taking into account the implications of the rules of residence, the rules of preferential patrilineal marriage, and the prevalent polygyny of war chiefs, I suggest that two kinds of social relationship networks were simultaneously working at two levels, one, to some extent, including the other. 1) The level of dispersed, uxori-local, extended families of common men whose network must have linked at least three local groups in accordance with the relationship of prescribed affinity: the headman's sons marrying out with their (real or classificatory) father's sister's daughters, and his daughters marrying in with their mother's brother's sons. 2) The level of war chiefs' villages, where the network was extended to allies in the neighbourhood and, more than likely, even farther to the continent.

This political organization had to be territorially circumscribed. To the North, political and linguistic frontiers were coincident. At the time of the Discovery, Columbus found Taino captives from Boriken (later named Puerto Rico) in all the

so-called Carib Islands, including the Virgin Island of St. Croix which was the only inhabited island of this archipelago. There was the "Historical Frontier Between the Tainos and the Caribs" as noted by Figueredo (1978: 393). Southward delimitations are much more complicated to map out; language, political and ethnic units were not so congruent as in the North. What is interesting to point out is that the Arawak idiom, peculiar to the Carib Islands,

...was spoken, at the time of contact, in those islands lying between the Taino area (beginning at Puerto Rico) to the north-west and the Lokono area (beginning at Trinidad) to the south and south-east (Taylor 1958a: 153).

This means that Grenada was the southernmost island whose inhabitants were still Island Carib-speaking. However, in the 17th century some Kalifña settlements were reported in this island. The presence of an Island Carib population in aboriginal Trinidad is doubtful, although this island was certainly populated by "Natives... of Different Nations" (British Library, Sloane Ms. 3662, f. 43) who were not linguistically homogeneous. We know that its Arawak inhabitants were enemies of the Island Caribs who came to attack them. The situation was even more puzzling on the continent. As the Island Caribs themselves repeatedly asserted, their main enemies and favourite prisoners (to be eaten), were the Lokono, whom they called *Arwag* and whose language was distinct but close enough to theirs, while their best friends were the Kalifña with whom they recognized a common origin and shared almost the same name: they called themselves *Kalinago* in the men's speech and *Kaliponam* in the Arawak mother tongue (Taylor 1958b: 156). They paid visits to the Kalifña, traded with them (using the male mixed language of Kalifña words and Arawak syntax), and with their friends' friends, directly or indirectly, employing Kalifña as go-betweens. Kalinago warriors traded also with the Lokono among whom they contracted formal partners named *Bawana* (Breton 1665) for special exchanges (Dreyfus 1977: 42). Of course, one's personal partner was never taken as one's personal prisoner. Partnership was as important as warfare in inter-ethnic relationships. This, truly an institution, has survived to the present day, even with the disappearance of war (Butt Colson 1973; Thomas 1972: 20, 1982: 124).

The coastal Lokono were not the peaceful and merely victimized people sometimes depicted. They had slaves of their own and went, as did the Kalinago, on regular and frequent raiding expeditions. Keymis (1904: 455) considered them to be a "vagabound nation of Indians." Rodrigo de Navarrete, an earlier 16th century chronicler (c. 1544), noted that "...they consider it the greatest glory to wage war" upon their enemies, the Caribs; for this "they build a great many ships forming an 'Armada' of thirty or forty schooners... capable of carrying thirty to fifty men."<sup>1</sup> This reminds us of Kalinago fleets. The aim of the raids was to get goods, women and slaves that they could use and/or exchange. We have no record of *exocannibalism* (roasting and eating enemy flesh) among the Lokono. Gillin does not make a precise statement when he writes that (1948: 852): "Cannibalism was

<sup>1</sup> Williams (1924: 357-359) quotes a number of early sources on Arawaks, including Keymis and Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés.

practiced not only by the *Carib* but also by the *Arawak*." We do know they practised the so-called *endo-cannibalism*, making powder of and consuming the bones of their dead kin. In this matter they were both symmetric to the Kalinago (they consumed the dead), and the opposite to them (they were *endo-cannibals*, not *exo-cannibals*).

In fact, relations between Kalinago and Lokono were based on a kind of *reciprocity*, reciprocity through being each other's favourite enemies and formal partners, each one being necessary to the working of the other's economic, political and, more than likely, ritual system. As early as 1596, Sir Walter Raleigh noted that the Cari and Lemon Rivers were active traffic centres, under the control of the "Cannibals" (i.e. "Caribs") but which the Arawak used to frequent.<sup>2</sup>

It would go beyond the aim of this paper to discuss the role and place of the shaman (*boye*, in Kalinago idiom), whose presence and ritual activities were absolutely necessary to war performance, for he alone enjoyed the only truly recognized powers: that is, those given to him because of his knowledge of supernature. He was the *man of power*, alongside the *man of prestige*. We shall have to explore the efficacy of this distinction and on this subject I shall merely observe that the shaman's role has been recorded among all the 16th and 17th century "tribes," the Kalinago, the Kalifña and the Lokono.<sup>3</sup>

The Island Kalinago and the Mainland Kalifña were on friendly terms and shared enemies. Some alliances, like theirs, were well established, just as were the ambiguous and long-lasting hostilities — those which held between the Lokono and the Kalinago-Kalifña, whereas other enmities fluctuated according to circumstances. In this matter, too, the arrival of the Europeans brought tremendous changes in the situation of native conflicts and social communications of whatever kind. For example, at the beginning of the 16th century, the Carib-speaking Yao of Trinidad were on friendly terms with the Kalifña of the mouth of the Orinoco and fought against the Lokono who, according to Keymis, "had taken from them many of their wiues and children" (Keymis 1904: 456; see also Williams 1924: 359). Fleeing from the Spaniards, the Yao moved to Eastern Guiana to the mouth of the Oyapock River where, one century later, the Kalifña of Cayenne were their worst enemies (see [Charles Leigh in] Purchas 1905-1907: 317).

Another most interesting example is given by Figueredo (1978: 395-396) who observes that when the Spaniards depopulated St. Croix and began to settle in Puerto Rico, many Tainos, northern enemies of Kalinago,

...went down island with the Caribs rather than submit to the Spaniards...Not only did Caribs come to Puerto Rico to aid the Taínos in their wars against the Spaniards then, but [they] also received them as refugees and sheltered them from their enemies...At this point the frontier [which had been clear-cut in

<sup>2</sup> Taylor (1958b: 157) writes: "...arch-enemies of historical times, the Arawaks and the Caribs, were once close friends, as their traditions indeed relate;" and Civrieux (1976) notes the meaning of the Lokono word *maku* as "slave, dependent man."

<sup>3</sup> Im Thurn (1883: 212) referred to it, quoting Schomburgk, and wrote: "This system of authority -that of the peaiman, of the head man of the settlement... is probably the remnant of the system which was in use before the intervention of the white men."



native times] became one of common resort and cooperation, the Virgin Islands being a battle ground where Tainos and Caribs together put up whatever resistance they could to the Spanish Empire.

From the beginning of the European conquest, the Kalinago and the Kalifña fought consistently against the invaders, i.e. the French and the English in the Lesser Antilles, the Spaniards, the English, the Dutch and the French on the continent. In the Orinoco area, the Spaniards soon became the main enemies of the Kalinago-Kalifña, who made frequent, but temporary, alliances with whoever might be at enmity with them (Da Prato 1981: 6). On the other hand, it seems that the Lokono constantly aided the Spanish who considered them as "good," friendly Indians: *wabío*, as they said, using a Taino word. In any case, "aid" and "alliances" between natives and Europeans meant that the former provided the latter with slaves and goods (at least food, but preferably gold) in exchange for iron tools, cloth, beads, and alcoholic beverages. It is obvious that this type of exchange, the need for slaves and gold from inland deposits, on the one hand, and the need for European iron tools and alcohol on the other, must have both exacerbated native conflicts and further extended trade circuits.

In summarizing our argument relating to the shape and the content of the political organization under discussion, we must distinguish various historical moments which correspond to our unequal knowledge of the events and to different stages in the process of repelling Amerindians on the part of European settlers.

As far as we know, mostly through oral traditions recorded at the very beginning of the conquest or in the immediately following decades, the Kalinago domain consisted, at the eve of discovery, of the Leeward Islands and some of the Windward Islands, such as St. Christopher, now named St. Kitts. These islands can be characterized as their homeland, unshared with other ethnic groups, (we do not know whether the Kalifña population of Grenada was pre-Columbian or not), and which provided the territorial core of their polity. There they lived with some of their kin, affines and with some of those I have called their "political allies." Within these islands they cleared and planted their gardens, they chose their "Big Men" who, once elected, recruited their clientele and performed their anthropophagous rituals; they brought back their prisoners and the precious goods that they received through trade on the continent, such as Amazonian green stones, *guanin* ornaments, feathers, shell-discs, salt, and jaguar pelts. In their homeland they spoke their mother tongue and buried their dead.<sup>4</sup> I would say that this territory was a *large political unit*, in spite of not being centralized nor under the control of one paramount leader. In other words it was not a chiefdom, and coercive power was in the hands of no one person. The war chiefs enjoyed prestige but no political power in the usual sense of the term. They were neither similar to the powerless headmen we observe at the present day and whose lack of authority has been described by Clastres, nor to the powerful Taino "cacique" of the neighbouring Greater Islands.

<sup>4</sup> After a fight or a raid Kalinago men never left their dead companions on the ground. They took as many risks as necessary to come back and pick them up, even in the path of the enemy or inside their village.

The political structure of the Kalinago islands was clearly based upon the complementary relationship that held between the war chief, the shaman and the ceremonial rituals of anthropophagy. This political unit was functioning in such a way that to the North, from whence came prisoners and slave wives, it was bounded by wholly hostile territories. However, to the South some territories maintained a friendly relationship with the Kalinago, e.g. the Kaliña, while others were ambiguous in their dealings, e.g. the Lokono, and yet others were hostile, e.g. the Cabre. With these Mainland territories to the South the Kalinago established trading alliances, often through formal partnerships, through which certain valued goods could be acquired. Such trading expeditions and the relationship they entailed connected the Islanders to a broad and ramified network of social communication with Mainland territories, which worked as a maximal political unit but whose frontiers were very fluid.

The situation began to change in the course of the 16th century. As I have said, the northern frontier became inconsequential, as the island of St. Croix was depopulated and as the Taino refugees themselves died out. Kalinago raids against Spanish settlements in Puerto Rico<sup>5</sup> were not so rewarding as when such raiding was against the Taino. Not only did they receive no edible prisoners from the Spanish settlements, but they also suffered more severely from the superior weapons, such as firearms, of the Spaniards.

Nevertheless, the home territory was not very much disturbed in spite of some tentative Spanish attacks against Dominica Island, repelled with poisonous arrows, and epidemics probably brought by European ships regularly calling in at Dominica, St. Lucia and Grenada. Spain was engaged in the conquest of Mexico, then of Peru, and so lost interest in the tiny islands except as places for supplying wood and fresh water. We lack accurate documentation from European sources about the Eastern and Southern Orinoco area until the end of the century, when the first travels along the coast and the first entries up the Orinoco River began. It is to Laurence Keymis (1904) that we owe the first list of river and tribal names, in 1596. On the continent, the political situation was such that it enhanced the role and the importance of war chiefs.

The critical changes that began with the onset of the 17th century are better documented because the new sea powers, England, France and the United Provinces, arrived upon the Caribbean stage. Wars in Europe had their counterparts in the West Indies and some battles for islands and continental positions came merely in the wake of fights among the Powers for their respective colonies. The slave trade became highly developed. Not only were Africans brought to America from the very beginning of the 16th century —as early as 1504 in the Greater Antilles— but Europeans also tried to capture more and more Amerindians for

<sup>5</sup> A young woman from Puerto Rico had been kept as a prisoner for four years in Dominica Island. When she was delivered she related that there were still more than thirty Spaniards (men and women) and forty black slaves in captivity among the Kalinago. She also said that since the Indians had been sick after once having eaten European flesh, they decided not to consume it any more. (Extract from a letter by the Bishop of Puerto Rico, 1574; British Library, Venezuelan Arbitration Transcripts, I: 1530-1584, f. 184-188).

plantation work. In the Antilles they failed, because the native population disappeared. Autochthonous and "imported" Indians mostly died, and some fled to the continent. It may be recalled that at this same time, 1623-1624, the English and the French settled in St. Christopher and in 1629 jointly organized the massacre of the native population during one night. Most died, while a few escaped to Guadeloupe and Dominica. In 1635 the French seized Guadeloupe and Martinique and did their best to rid them of their aboriginal settlers. After a twenty-five year war and punitive expeditions from both sides, a treaty was signed in 1660 between the French and the English on the one hand and the so-called "Caraïbes" on the other (Archives Nationales Françaises, Ms. C<sup>8</sup> B<sup>1</sup>, f. 5). This treaty gave the Indians full property rights and the retention of two islands, Dominica and St. Vincent, in return for their renunciation of all the others. Dominica became for a while a "Caraïbe" bastion. European promises were not fulfilled; European settlements grew and developed in St. Vincent, the Amerindian population of which was estimated from six to ten thousand people after the 1660 treaty. But by the first half of the 18th century this native population was extinguished. The only "natives" remaining there until their deportation in 1797 to the continent (to British Honduras, now Belize) were a mixed population called Black Caribs, the offspring of Maroons and Indian women. Colonists settled more slowly in Dominica which remained the core of the Kalinago political organization. Despite its reduced territory, this polity still remained operational until about the first half of the 18th century, *thanks to its continental allies and "enemies"* to whom the Kalinago brought cotton, tobacco, indigo and cacao, and from whom they received local products (for a list of items see Da Prato 1981: 7, 16-23).

In spite of their losses, the Kalinago made numerous incursions into the continent. Slave trading was more important than ever; the Lokono sold slaves to the Spaniards, while the Kalinago and the Kaliña sold them to everybody else, especially the Dutch. The Kaliña (Galibi, as they were named by the French) were still strong, their territory extending from the Llanos de Guarapiche to Cayenne, although not always to the sea where the Lokono lived, sometimes mixed with the Warao. The Kaliña settlements were for the most part along the lower watercourses, from where they went upriver for the purpose of raiding.

Apart from the Kaliña, Carib speakers were numerous in the area known in Venezuela to-day as El Oriente. Some were allies to the Kaliña and the Kalinago and lent help to them in raiding, in search of slaves as far as the Middle Orinoco and its affluents. Many riverine and inland population, either Carib or Arawak speakers, disappeared during the 17th century (Da Prato 1981: 13). The Carib-speaking Cabre (or Cabere) were notorious as obdurate enemies of the Kaliña.

As Da Prato (1981) concludes, from the time of European discovery until two centuries later, the Kaliña and the Kalinago kept under their control through shrewd shifting alliances, the Lesser Antilles, the eastern part of Venezuela, the northern part of the Llanos, the Lower and Middle Orinoco and, intermixed with Lokono coastal settlements, numerous points on the sea shore that extended to the Oyapock River and even farther, where they had to fight against other Carib speakers, such as the Yao, and Arawak speakers, such as the Palikur who considered

the Kalifña their worst enemies.

The definitive breakdown of the polity occurred during the 18th century, as the Kalinago of Dominica Island became more and more reduced in number, as the Kalifña and the Lokono became weaker and weaker through the pressures of European settlements and raiding and as their smaller allies and "enemies" disappeared. Near the coast and the lower watercourses, native warfare and trade networks did not survive after the 1760s. By this date the Spaniards had occupied and missionized the Llanos de Guarapiche and the banks of the Lower and Middle Orinoco. In this period the English, the Dutch and the French had control of their colonies. Many Kalinago had fled from Dominica to settle among the Kalifña, who themselves either were "reduced" (in the Spanish meaning of "reducidos") and taken away to the missions of the Llanos de Barcelona (in the present-day Venezuela State of Anzoátegui) and to the missions of the Caroní River, or they escaped southward and westward (Civrieux 1976: 988). Between 1757 and 1760 precisely, most of the remaining free Caribs, including Kalifña, decided to abandon the Orinoco basin and to withdraw to the Rupununi and the Mazaruni Rivers. Catalan Capuchin Friars pursued Indians along the entire coast, from the Orinoco to the Essequibo and, as usual, employed the enemies of the Caribs to catch them. Some were caught and brought to the missions, while others escaped once again and probably went as far as the Parime (Uraricuera) River. This happened just two centuries ago.

Little by little, as a consequence of the death of numerous groups, of shifts in settlements, of forced adaptations to new environments, of loss of their seamanship and their control over the sea, of their probable intermixture with Southern Brazilian groups, the present-day situation came into being. I cannot speak of new systems, rather of transformed social systems, the contemporary societies being, in fact, the product of a series of historical changes.

Exactly a century ago, im Thurn described a broad long-distance network of social communications and trade circuits based on tribal specialization entailing both native products and the transference of European goods. It was like a ring, circling from the East to the West, from the West to the South and to the North, and back to the East. It moved from the inland Waiwai, Taruma, Macusi, Arekuna and Wapishana to the coastal Warao, Galibi and Arawak (im Thurn 1883: 271-273). But "Big Man" systems, the setting up of expanding clienteles, anthropophagy—which is deeply rooted in a particular world view and notions about the relationship between the dead and the living, between self-identity and alter-identity—were no longer working. This is understandable, in that they were all inter-connected in what we may label "un fait social total," as Mauss said, which, in this case, was warfare. Nevertheless the transformations of the previous system, trade circuits and marriage alliances, with weakened political functions, could have been reviving.

To-day, local groups are much smaller than four centuries ago; some are almost closed by local endogamy. There are no more continuous wars nor big war chiefs. Instead there are powerless, appointed "captains." There is no basis for the hierarchies as they existed in the past, e.g. as those that were extant within

communities, between clienteles and prestigious leaders, and those that extended beyond the community level between dependent allies and prominent raiders. However, the asymmetrical relationship term *peito* is retained, which marks an affinal relationship, the hierarchical meaning having become defunct (here I come back to Rivière's paper, 1977). In former times *peito* or *pito* belonged to the semantic field of sister's son, son-in-law, dependent man and, perhaps, "slave."<sup>6</sup> The evolution of language is slower than the evolution of institutions. The asymmetrical content of *peito* can fit with present-day egalitarian institutions thanks to the retained rules of uxori-local residence which entails a certain kind of asymmetry between father-in-law and son-in-law. But asymmetry is just between two men, belonging to two consecutive generations and never between two groups nor between corporate units. It does not extend beyond the local group or the extended family where the father-in-law (mother's brother and/or father's sister's husband) is superior to his son-in-law (cross nephew).

Furthermore, as a consequence of cross cousin marriage, two men in the respective relationship of sister's husband and wife's brother are superior to each other's son. This balance cannot, by itself, create asymmetry within a social network. Even uxori-locality does not everywhere create asymmetry between wife givers and wife takers. Let us have a look at Turner's model (1979), through which he attempts to discover in uxori-locality the basis and the key for explaining the peculiarities of Gê social structure. To my mind, the comparison between Gê and Guiana systems is not valuable, for they share just one common element, i.e. uxori-locality, about which I would say further that the dissimilarities of its implication for these respective social structures are greater than any similarity that might make it appear that we are dealing with the same institution or, indeed, residence rule. We deal with social systems and not with isolated elements. Uxori-locality, so widespread in Aboriginal Lowland South American societies, as for example among the Jivaro-speaking groups, among the Arawak groups of the Peruvian Montaña, etc., has idiosyncratic implications for the social structure in question. In fact, it may well be associated with certain alliance-based structures. But in itself, it is never more than a trait, an element which, I repeat, must not be isolated from the whole to which it belongs.<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion

I hope to have shown that 1) social, and especially political, organizations are always in process, and that 2) in the area we are dealing with, linguistic boundaries

<sup>6</sup> In a personal communication, A. Butt Colson kindly provided information about the meaning of *paito* (or *peito*, *paido*, *peido*) among the Akawaio and Pemon: *paito* means either sister's son (male speaker), or son-in-law, or helper, assistant. Instead *ëtoto* (*ëdodo*) is synonymous with *kanaima*, sorcerer. This does not confirm Civrieux's statement according to which *ëtoto* could have been another form for *peito*, meaning enemy, foreigner, prospective prisoner (Civrieux 1976: 875).

<sup>7</sup> In pointing out the structural differences between Gê and Guianese groups, let us remember that 1) all of the former are characterized by a *Crow-Omaha alliance structure* (see Héritier 1981: 73-136) and *not only a Crow-Omaha terminology*, and that 2) they prohibit cross cousin marriage.

were never political limits, although they could have provided people with a feeling of ethnic identity. The Kalinago knew perfectly well the difference between themselves and their close friends, the Kaliña. Was it in the main because they spoke different languages? This did not prevent some Kaliña settling, at the beginning of the 17th century, in the island of Grenada which was then a Kalinago homeland; nor did it prevent some Kalinago definitively joining the Kaliña on the Mainland one century later. Ethnicity, or more accurately "native self-consciousness of ethnic identity," is a modern concept; we are just beginning to investigate it systematically, for in past centuries little was known about it and nothing can be strictly proven. Only now are we "on the trail" of the link between political organization, ethnic identity and linguistic affiliation. We may suppose that different linguistic configurations, e.g. the sharing of one mother tongue, the use of mixed idioms in trading, multilingualism, unintelligibility between languages, and so forth, created something akin to gradations in the political field: gradations that moved from "selves to the [most foreign] alters" (paraphrasing Crocker, 1979), keeping in mind that the latter could have been also linguistically related to the former.

My last point will be about the second question I asked at the beginning of this paper: how can we define a political organization? Functionalist, empirical and synchronic models, as used in Africanist anthropology ever since the publication of *African political systems* (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940) and *Tribes without rulers* (Middleton and Tait 1958), are of little use for us because both define political systems 1) by reference to the State or to "Rulers;" or 2) in accordance with the type of "descent" system or the type of "authority" which maintains "social order," especially in reference to stateless and "segmentary" societies —not very adequate starting points, in my opinion, for the study of Lowland South American societies; and 3) without consideration of historical process.

More recently we had Clastres' attempts (1974, 1980) to give a specific definition of "primitive" Amerindian political systems. In spite of several correct observations concerning the essential nature of warfare, concerning what the powerless chief is *to-day* in most Lowland Indian societies, and concerning the non-autonomous, politically non-determinant role of the economy (the economy itself being said to work as what Marshall Sahlins, 1972, called the "domestic mode of production"), Clastres did not give us a really satisfactory model, for at least, three reasons: 1) For the most part he saw still isolated, present-day groups, the Yanomami for example, as existing in a state of stasis, as representing forever what a "primitive," that is to say stateless, society is.<sup>8</sup> Studying the 16th century Tupinamba, he considered them as an "exception," as a shifting society, just "passing the line" towards the State; this was because their chiefs were "powerful" and in conflict with some shamans who became prophets. He found other examples of hierarchical societies, e.g. the 18th century Chaco; but, obviously, the social and

<sup>8</sup> Clastres (1980: 175): "leur séculaire isolement a permis [aux Yanomami], sans doute la dernière grande société primitive au monde, de vivre jusqu'à présent comme si l'Amérique n'avait pas été découverte."

political organizations among such peoples were the results of the Spanish introduction of horses and of the intensification of native warfare against the Spanish settlements for the purpose of acquiring booty. So he concluded that hierarchy and chieftainship were not, among these groups, genuine phenomena. For him, there was no intermediate position between a system that entails coercive power and one that does not, i.e. one that exhibits a vacuum with respect to political power. Clastres did not take into account Amazonian societies, such as the Manao, or groups of the Andean Foothill ("Montaña") and Guiana, which were neither chiefdoms nor "primitive" —in the sense of societies that are strictly speaking egalitarian— at the time of first European contact. Thus, 2) according to Clastres, there were only two possible kinds of political organization: a State organization and an organization "against" the State, which implies, in my view, a teleological explanation, that is to say a strange prescience of the oppression of the State in societies which are not supposed to have experienced it. Elsewhere I have tried to show that even the so-called chiefdoms in the Greater Antilles differed from the organization of "chiefdoms" as they are usually and loosely defined (Dreyfus 1980-1981). I am convinced that Amerindian societies provide us with a very large sample of different kinds of political organization, ones which have never been "imagined" in European political science. Our task is not to label them, somewhat ethno-centrally, but to look for their originality and, thanks to historical depth, this is still possible. 3) Even in present-day societies where the headman is powerless, someone stands beside him, who has controlling "powers," not directly over men, as do true "rulers," but over spirits who control men. Thus, in raising the question of "power" in Amerindian societies one must not set aside the question of shamanism, nor must one fail to distinguish between power and prestige and the different ways of acquiring these. Paradoxically I would say that we do find "powers" outside of the realm of the political, whilst im Thurn (1883: 211-212) referred to the authority of the peaiman, which "depends on the power which the man is supposed to exercise over spirits of all kinds."

I have tried to depict a type of political system which reminds us, as I suggested, of a "Big Man" institution. Certainly this model can be helpful to us. But Melanesia is not historically, geographically, nor ecologically similar to Lowland South America. Early contacts with Europeans were quite different. Our continental lowlands were connected with islands and people from both areas took advantage of the numerous and easy fluvial means of communication, a very different situation from that of the mountainous and separated high valleys of New Guinea or of the wholly insular territories of the smaller islands of Melanesia. In fact, Guiana and Caribbean social organizations were based on direct (at home) and indirect (abroad) territorial control over networks of local groups, accomplished through the war chiefs' clientele who engaged in continuous and long-distance warfare and trading expeditions, war and trade being carried out jointly thanks to partnership between allies and/or enemies. These networks were characterized by their extensive ramifications, a probably unstable equilibrium between egalitarian and hierarchical relationships of alliance and affinity, prestigious but not everlasting positions of war leaders. The actualization of fluctuating inter-individual

and inter-group relations produced gradations along a series of what must always have been fragile alliances—a gradation that moved from friendship to ambiguous but institutionalized partnership, to rough hostilities—and, finally, complicated circuits entailing the exchange of women and goods.

As I have already said, kinship and marriage ties, the most important ritual performances and the circulation and the possession of goods not produced locally, were all articulated and embedded in the political organization, which appears to have exhibited the property defined by Leach as the maximal capacity of inclusion (quoted in Balandier 1967: 30). Thus, the "general social and cultural units that often encompass local groups of different language affiliation" referred to by Basso (1977: 19), are in fact political units, and we have to consider, what she denied, that they do share a common history.

If my analysis is correct, we are presented with the task of understanding how the semi-hierarchical and inter-twined systems of the past have become transformed into the egalitarian, atomized, and often closed small units of to-day. May we take as a serious hypothesis that the disappearance of warfare smashed the former and gave place to the latter?

### **Abstract**

*The symposium title implies that Carib-speaking societies are both linguistic and sociological units—that there exists a specific Carib political organization. It also suggests that we have a complete understanding of the nature of "political organization" in Lowland South America. These assumptions can not be taken for granted.*

*The study of an extensive political system, encountered at the time of the European conquest and linking the Caribbean Islands to the coastal Mainland, shows firstly that linguistic boundaries were never political limits, and secondly that political systems are more precisely defined and better analysed with the help of both holistic and diachronic perspectives.*

*Political organization among Carib and Arawak speakers of the islands and continent consisted of networks of local groups, interconnected by marriages and other exchanges. It was characterized by very frequent war and trading expeditions, led by "Big Men" providing prisoners for anthropophagous rituals, enjoying prestige and the support of numerous official ties and clientele. This polity had extensive ramifications, a probably unstable equilibrium between egalitarian and hierarchical relationships of alliance and affinity, prestigious statuses for war leaders, gradations along a series of fragile alliances, complicated circuits entailing the exchange of women, goods and prisoners, and symbolic displays of strength.*

*Destroyed as a polity during the 18th century, a Guiana network has persisted up to the present day in the form of exchange circuits. Our task now is to understand how the semi-hierarchical and inter-twined systems of the past have become successively transformed into the egalitarian, atomized and often closed small units of to-day. One hypothesis is that the disappearance of warfare as a "fait social total," destroyed the complex polity, leaving relatively isolated and much reduced units.*



## Resumen

*El título de este simposio implica que las sociedades de habla Caribe constituyen no solamente una unidad lingüística, sino también sociológica; por este motivo, podríamos referirnos a una organización política propia de los Caribes: el mismo título también implica que estamos completamente claros en torno al significado de una "organización política" en las sociedades aborígenes de las tierras bajas de Suramérica. En realidad, esto no se puede dar por sentado: surgen dos preguntas a las que esta contribución trata de responder a través del estudio de un amplio sistema político que estaba funcionando desde, por lo menos, el inicio de la conquista europea hasta el siglo XVIII: este sistema conectaba las islas del Caribe con la costa de Tierra Firme. La descripción y el análisis tratan de demostrar, primero, que los linderos lingüísticos no fueron nunca fronteras políticas y, en segundo lugar, que los sistemas políticos, en la medida en que producen Historia y, a su vez, son producidos por ésta, se definen con mayor precisión y se analizan mejor con la ayuda de la perspectiva diacrónica.*

*Entre los hablantes Caribes y Arawaks de las islas y de Tierra Firme la organización política constaba de redes de grupos locales que estaban interconectados por matrimonios y otros intercambios; se basaba además en expediciones guerreras y comerciales muy frecuentes que iban dirigidas por los llamados "big men" que disfrutaban de prestigio, una amplia clientela y numerosos lazos afines que los apoyaban. Este sistema político se caracterizaba por sus extensas ramificaciones, un equilibrio (probablemente inestable) entre relaciones igualitarias y jerárquicas de alianzas y afinidad, el prestigio de los jefes guerreros, unas alianzas frágiles y, finalmente, unos circuitos complejos en los que se daba el intercambio de mujeres y bienes.*

*Después del ocaso definitivo de este sistema político en el transcurso del siglo XVIII, la red guayanesa siguió funcionando hasta el presente para los circuitos de intercambio y las comunicaciones sociales de este a oeste y norte a sur. Nos toca ahora entender cómo los sistemas semijerárquicos y entrelazados del pasado se han transformado sucesivamente en las pequeñas unidades igualitarias, atomizadas y, frecuentemente, cerradas de hoy.*