



## The spatial component in the political structure of the Carib speakers of the Guiana Highlands: Kapon and Pemon

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### Introduction

The basic theme of this paper refers to the nature of the correspondence between social space and geographical space in the structure of two Carib-speaking Peoples, the Kapon and Pemon Indians of the Guiana Highlands. I consider three levels of structure, each occupying overlapping segments of space. These are the levels of the ethnic unity (a People), the regional group (or tribe), and the river group which resolves into its component settlements and neighbourhoods.

Land is important in this system of relationships because it is basic to internal segmentation —each sector of social relations being linked to a greater or lesser expansion of territory within the area which constitutes the homelands of these two Carib groups. Strong and enduring ties with territory are expressed in European languages in terms of the most fundamental of social, and biological, relationships —that of parents to their children, being emotively phrased as either “the fatherland” or “the motherland,” or simply, “the homeland.” For these Carib speakers today, their land is that prepared place (*patasek*) given them by God. There, as myth recounts, their culture heroes adventured and, having transformed

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it and its life, passed it on to the forebears of the present holders. It is therefore their "ancestral land," internally segmented but ultimately a symbol of unity.

Most of the published work on the Guiana Caribs refers almost exclusively to village and local community levels of structure and organization;<sup>1</sup> that is, to those most intimate and tightly knit sets of relationships centred on the household with its joint, extended and nuclear family components and to the nature of their association. Economy and its organization, the nature of leadership and the operation of ritual experts, have been discussed almost solely at these levels. Here I attempt to assess the wider and more diffuse groupings, which are those unities greater than the local community since they are systems of compounded segments and, even though they have no overt political organization to ensure their coherence and direct their action, they are nevertheless named sets of social relationships and group interactions. The villages, settlements and local communities are enmeshed in these larger unities and relate to each other through them.

Two conceptual systems are involved in this study. One is composed of the way these Caribs see themselves, their own internal structures and the boundaries which they conceive to exist between themselves and other surrounding populations with which they are in contact or they know by hearsay. The other system is that of the non-Indian and of the ideas which have been fabricated in piecemeal fashion of what constitutes, or ought to constitute, Amerindian society and culture, so incorporating pre-conceived ideas deriving from centralized, nation state systems. It can be argued that there is a need to achieve an understanding of the articulation of these two conceptualizations and of the structural reality to which each belongs, since they are today in headlong collision.<sup>2</sup>

The naming system employed by Kapon and Pemon affords one of the best markers of group affiliation and distinction. We inherit names which in most instances date back to pre-Conquest times and which, in the case of the Guianas, were adopted by the Old World invaders from the late 16th century on. Once taken into general conversational use and the colonial literature, and further added to as sporadic exploration of the interior of the region took place, it rarely occurred to anyone that the nature of the terms might be open to question and investigation. The names have, in my opinion, often served to confuse rather than to enlighten us as to the exact identity and nature of the people they seem to designate.<sup>3</sup> Moreover,

<sup>1</sup> An exception, for example, is the discussion of the trading network which links groups of the Kapon, Pemon and Ye'kuana Peoples (Coppens 1971; Thomas 1972; Butt Colson 1973).

<sup>2</sup> From 1959 on, the Upper Mazaruni District has been progressively opened to free-lance gold and diamond miners, predominantly negroes. For the first time non-Indians are able to move freely into what, hitherto, has been Amerindian occupied territory. Reports state that problems of drunkenness, prostitution and disorder have dramatically increased in certain areas and the indigenous inhabitants have begun to emigrate.

<sup>3</sup> The main data I use for trying to resolve this confusion are derived from my personal field research and reading of the literature. However, the size of the Kapon and Pemon territory and the relationships they have with neighbouring Peoples are too extensive for a single researcher to cover, so that my information is incomplete and indicates a need for further research. One can make informed guesses about lesser known areas, based on analagous situations. More importantly, because of the factor of relativity in spatial and social relations in segmentary systems, the principles elicited in one sector can be postulated to have a broad application in other sectors and there are certain regularities throughout.

the confusion in the literature takes the form of a welter of designations, apparently archaic in some instances and often associated with only the vaguest information on the territory occupied by the owners of the names, their languages and their connections with neighbouring groups. It has often been assumed that the group in question has become extinct, or at least has disappeared somewhere, at some time after last reported seen. The questions posed concerning these mysterious names relate to basic identities. Who were they? What was their provenance? Can they be related to present-day peoples? Were they —are they— a part of an inter-connecting structure of the indigenous relationships in this particular area of the Guianas? My research shows that there are three major systems of group naming in use, each one corresponding to different segmentations of structure. There is that of autodenomination; that of the attributed name or nickname; that of ecological derivation. A conscious realization of these different naming systems, their nature and application, has never penetrated to the national societies and their local representatives. This fact in turn, has greatly assisted in masking the segmentary structures which they demarcate and so has inhibited any major study of spatial interrelationships, their accompanying conceptual systems and modes of behaviour evoked by the different levels and sectors of social relations.

This study may not have immediate applicability in the case of Caribs who have become greatly reduced in population and are relatively isolated, but it should assist in understanding interrelationships where there exists a number of groups which are contiguous, if scattered. It may perhaps serve to cast light on some thorny historical problems and also indicate how loose confederations of Amerindians interacted with each other in the past as a series of segmentations at various levels of structure.

#### *The circum-Roraima area<sup>4</sup>*

The circum-Roraima area, comprising the highlands and neighbouring lowlands of which Mount Roraima is the approximate centre, is that part of northern South America lying between approximately 7° - 3°N. Lat. and 59° - 64°W. Long. It includes the North and South Pakaraima Mountains; the Middle and Upper Caroní River basin and Gran Sabana, and the Upper Mazaruni basin. The surrounding lowlands are the Upper Cuyuni valley in the North; the middle reaches of the Mazaruni and Potaro Rivers to the East; the Paragua River valley to the West; the savannas of the Rio Branco headwaters (the Cotinga and Surumu valleys) and the Rupununi savannas and Kanuku Mountains to the South. The rivers are tributaries of three great fluvial systems, the Orinoco, Essequibo and Amazon. Three nation states exercise sovereign rights in the area: Brazil, Guyana and Venezuela. Three European languages and cultural derivations have been superimposed: Brazilian-Portuguese, Guyanese-English and Venezuelan-Spanish. Not only is Mount Roraima a spectacular table mountain and a convenient topographical

<sup>4</sup> The term "circum-Roraima" has been coined by Cesáreo de Armellada as a useful, short, reference term which avoids long geographical descriptions and denotation of shifting national boundaries.



landmark with three nation states uniting their political frontiers on its summit,<sup>5</sup> but it has great significance in the cosmology of the indigenous inhabitants, the Kapon and Pemon, who relate to it through myth and sentiment.

Exploratory expeditions up the main rivers took place from the middle to late 18th century, but the more inaccessible mountain areas and high savannas remained unknown for much longer owing to difficulties of travel. Thus, Roraima was reported "discovered" only in 1838;<sup>6</sup> the Upper Mazaruni in 1864 (Appun 1871);<sup>7</sup> the Kaieteur Fall and Upper Potaro in 1870 (Brown 1876: 203-205). Although the middle course of the Caroní was traversed in the latter half of the 18th century through expeditions of the Capuchin missionaries of the Guayana Lowlands (Armellada 1960: 115-160), followed by military expeditions up the Paragua and into the Rio Branco headwaters where a Spanish-Portuguese conflict ensued, the Upper Caroní basin and the Gran Sabana were not penetrated from the North and West until the last decade of the 19th century.<sup>8</sup> Effectively, most of the Gran Sabana region was unknown until the 1930s, when intensive missionary activity began and air contact was established. To the East, the first permanent, non-Indian settlements were those of Seventh Day Adventists, founded in the Kamarang valley in the 1930s, and the Government Station, founded on the Upper Mazaruni River in 1946.

### *The circum-Roraima Peoples: the Kapon and Pemon*

Those who call themselves *Kapon* have two main territories. A northern group (Akawaio) which lives primarily in the upper basin of the Mazaruni River valley and a southern group (Patamona), which lives in the Potaro, Ireng and Siparuni valleys. Most Kapon settlements are found on the upper reaches of the rivers in the Pakaraima Mountains, but a few communities are located below the escarpment where they are interspersed with creoles. Thus Kapon are found in the Kurupung-Pashanamu-Issano region of the Lower Mazaruni, and in the Mahdia-Kangaruma-Tumatumari region of the Lower Potaro. To the West, some of the S. Kapon (Patamona), extend into Território Federal de Roraima, Brazil, living on the right bank of the Ireng (a tributary of the Rio Branco branch, the Takutu). N.

<sup>5</sup> The position of the international frontier is disputed between Guyana and Venezuela. Here I use the present, provisional assignments of sovereignty as they were made in the Award of 1899. It should be noted that these frontiers make no sense for the occupants of the disputed territory, for they cut across and divide geographical, ecological, social and cultural unities. The superimposition of the nation states has divided into separate political areas indigenous people who formed interacting groups long before the "international carve-up," and who are far more closely interrelated than are the peoples and cultures of the two nation states disputing sovereignty.

<sup>6</sup> R. H. Schomburgk (1841a) and his fellow expeditioners arrived at Roraima in 1838, travelling northwards through Brazil via the Cotinga and Surumu valleys.

<sup>7</sup> Appun entered the Upper Mazaruni basin by walking the Kurupung trail, an overland route between the lower and upper reaches of the river, so avoiding some 20 miles of rapids where the river falls over the Pakaraima escarpment.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas (1982: 20-33) gives a useful outline of the historical sources for the discovery and penetration of the Caroní and Paragua river basins.

Kapon (Akawaio) also have a western extension, a few hundred of them living at the very head of the Cotinga River, immediately South of Weitepui Mountain and Roraima. Further North, in Estado Bolívar, Venezuela, Kapon are interspersed with their Pemon neighbours in the easternmost sector of the Gran Sabana, on the Wenamu River and in the lowlands at the headwaters of the Cuyuni.<sup>9</sup> Apart from these territories, there are also two small, isolated communities: those who live at Kwabanna, on the Waini River, a few miles above Barama River mouth in the North West District of Guyana, and a few families at Mabora, Great Falls, on the Upper Demerara River, Guyana. Isolated families are to be encountered in many parts of Guyana (Amerindian Lands Commission Report 1969: 133-145).<sup>10</sup>

In 1978 Fournier calculated a population of 2,700 Kapon (Akawaio) in the Upper Mazaruni, (an area of some 4,500 sq. miles or 11,655 km<sup>2</sup>),<sup>11</sup> and 250-300 on the Lower Mazaruni and scattered on other rivers throughout Guyana. The Demerara group comprised about 65 and Kwabanna about 450. The figure of 2,000 was given for Venezuela, in the areas on the Upper Kamarang, Wenamu and Cuyuni (Fournier 1979: 97-99).<sup>12</sup> If these figures are correct, then there were some

<sup>9</sup> The Kapon population in Venezuela has been steadily increasing in size during the last decade or so. Kapon have been drawn westwards by greater economic opportunities and to escape the troubled political and racial climate in Guyana. Notably, the entry of freelance miners into the Upper Mazaruni has led to considerable emigration of those with relatives among the Pemon.

<sup>10</sup> In 1969 about 2,500 Akawaio (Kapon) were living in the Upper Mazaruni basin (excluding the Cotinga River group in Brazil and any in Venezuela). This figure is arrived at by adding up the populations of the separate communities. Thus, the 3,000 given on p. 132 of the Report includes 500 "Arekunas" (Pemon) living at Paruima on the Kamarang River. Akawaio leaders however, mentioned a total figure of 5,000 for their District at that date (p. 217). Some 2,000 Patamona (Kapon) were calculated for the Potaro-Ireng-Siparuni area to the South (Amerindian Lands Commission Report 1969: 116), but this figure presumably did not include Patamona Kapon living on the Brazilian bank of the Ireng. At Kwebanna, North-West District, there were some 300 Akawaio (Amerindian Lands Commission Report 1969: 171), but no estimate is given for the Upper Demerara River group, which the Commissioners never visited.

<sup>11</sup> The total number of Amerindians living in the Upper Mazaruni is given as 3,435 (Fournier 1979: 97, Table 3). Of these, 2,700 are said (Fournier 1979: 99) to be Akawaio (Kapon) and the rest Arekuna (Pemon). These numbers reflect the degree of intermingling of Kapon and Pemon families in the Middle Kamarang River area —which is largely a result of Pemon migration accompanying the establishment of Seventh Day Adventist missions there in the 1930s. However, genealogies suggest that a limited intermarriage always occurred between Kapon and Pemon in this area. Territorial extensions of the N. Kapon (Akawaio) and N. Pemon have fluctuated over the centuries. In the past, the Cuyuni and the Middle Mazaruni have been settled by Kapon and were, at one period, disputed with the Kariña (Caribs). Migrations of small groups have occurred consequent on non-Indian intervention, whether due to the attraction of trading at Dutch posts in the 18th century or, in the 19th century a movement to the East to escape the Venezuela War of Independence, to attend mission schools or to engage in lumber work. These explain most of the present-day locations of families outside the circum-Roraima area.

<sup>12</sup> Fournier also gives population estimates made informally before 1960, whilst his Table 3.1 on p. 97 gives a comparison of five population counts before his own, with the breakdown of numbers by community. Note that no differentiation exists in the Table between Kapon and Pemon, but that on p. 101 he states that there were about 750 Pemon in the Kamarang River area, mainly around Paruima village and in adjacent settlements. Since many of the Kamarang River families are now mixed Pemon-Kapon, it is impossible to make an exact calculation without a very careful and detailed investigation, both of actual genealogies and of personal attributions by the people themselves. Fournier's estimate for

5,500 Akawaio Kapon in 1978 (not including the Cotinga River group in Brazil) and an estimated 2,200 Patamona Kapon.

Those Carib speakers who call themselves Pemon are western neighbours of the Kapon. They cover an extensive territory. In Estado Bolívar, Venezuela, they occupy the whole of the Middle and Upper Caroní basin above San Pedro de las Bocas at the confluence of the Paragua River with the Caroní. They have settlements on the Lower and Middle Paragua. Notably, they occupy the vast area of upland savanna (c. 30,000 km<sup>2</sup>) known as the Gran Sabana. Their northernmost settlements are in the forested lowlands of the Upper Cuyuni valley, above the township of El Dorado and along its tributaries, including the Wenamu River. They extend down the Kamarang valley into the Mazaruni basin, where they have extensively intermarried with the Akawaio Kapon.<sup>13</sup> South of the Orinoco and Essequibo catchments, in Brazil, they occupy the Cotinga and Surumu valleys and the Rio Branco savannas. Further South, they curve round into the Upper Essequibo valley where, in the Rupununi District of Guyana, they occupy the southern sections of the Pakaraima Mountains, the North Rupununi savannas and the northern slopes of the Kanuku Mountains. On these, their southern and western flanks, they have intermingled and intermarried with neighbouring Wapishana Indians, Arawak speakers.

There are no exact census figures available to include all Pemon. In the 1982 Venezuelan census some 11,600 Pemon were registered.<sup>14</sup> In 1978 Fournier estimated 750 Pemon ("Arekuna") in the Kamarang valley in Guyana (Fournier 1979: 101). Diniz, for 1964-67, gives 3,000 ("Makuxi") for the Rio Branco area in Brazil (Diniz 1972: 49), while Migliazza, quoting for 1969, gives 3,750 (Migliazza 1972: 21). Also in 1969, the Amerindian Lands Commission calculated 5,530 ("Macusi") for the Rupununi District, Guyana (Butt Colson 1971b: 66-67).<sup>15</sup> For the period of the 1960s to the present, therefore, over 21,000 Pemon have been calculated, giving a very conservative estimate and not allowing for a probable Makushi increase.

Adding together the figures we have available for Kapon and Pemon, we arrive at a total of some 27,000. It is likely that, given the present increase in numbers reported, their combined population is now approaching 30,000, scattered the S. Kapon (Patamona) is on his p. 103. The Guyana-Venezuela figure of 2,000 derives from Mosonyi (1972: 58) who in turn had obtained it from Layrisse and Wilbert (1966: 103).

<sup>13</sup> The Kamarang River valley is a major East-West trade route and, moreover, the forested middle and lower region, down river from the Gran Sabana sources, has superior soils and animal life which must always have been an attraction - as Kapon informants commented. However, an extensive, peaceful immigration of Pemon into the Upper Mazaruni basin would have been impossible without the protective cover afforded by the Seventh Day Adventist Mission from 1932 on, so that infiltration must have formerly been by sporadic intermarriage. (See note 11.)

<sup>14</sup> There has been a great increase in Pemon speakers on the Gran Sabana since 1935, when Armellada counted a total of 2,500 for the entire area. Thomas' demographic study confirms a fast-expanding population. His research demonstrates a high level of female fertility, which he considered to have been constant over the years, and a relatively high survival rate amongst infants 0-4 years, which he considers to have prevailed since the 1930s (Thomas 1973: Chap. 2).

<sup>15</sup> This figure was given me by W. H. Seggar, member of the Amerindian Lands Commission which reported in 1969.

over the vast territory encircling the Roraima Range of mountains. Albeit under a variety of different names, historical sources indicate that Kapon and Pemon were occupying their present territories at the time of first contact with Old World colonists and that they have lived in and traversed this extensive part of the Guiana area, regarding it as their home (*patasek*)<sup>16</sup> from an unknown time in the distant past.

### The autodenominations Kapon and Pemon<sup>17</sup>

The two names, Kapon and Pemon, are autodenominations: that is, each is used by individuals who thereby proclaim themselves as belonging to a common unity, distinguishable from other, different groups. Even when the autodenomination is extended by courtesy to others, the receivers do not use the term as their own autodenomination, since it conveys a unique identity which is not theirs.

Those Amerindians who have generally become known as Akawaio and Patamona refer to themselves as *Kapon*. They say "we are *Kapon*" (pl. *Kapon yamök*, the many Kapon).<sup>18</sup> Their language is *Kapon maimu* (lit. Kapon word) and their culture is *Kapon teseru* (Kapon custom). An ultimate relationship is recognized between all who call themselves Kapon, for they say that they are all *tomba* (or *domba*), a word which translates as "family" or "relative" (pl. *tombadong*, a group of relatives): that is, they are interrelated and form a social unity.

Those Amerindians who have become generally known as Arekuna, Kamarakoto, Taurepan and Makushi, refer to themselves as *Pemon*. Their use of the name for themselves, their language, culture and society, parallels that of their eastern, Kapon, neighbours. They are *Pemonton* (or *Pemonkon*), or *Pemon dama*; their language is *Pemon maimu* (or *Pemonton maimu*); their culture is *Pemon eseruk*. Thomas states:

The Pemon concept of kinship begins with a single term, *uyomba* — "my relative". The term has several levels of meaning. At the broadest level all Pemon are kinsmen— *tukariri uyombaton*. This usage is

<sup>16</sup> *Patasek* means "prepared place;" "home" would be a good translation. Like these English words it is relative and can be used in a variety of contexts. (Refer to p. 114.)

<sup>17</sup> Brett (1868: 255) probably made the first, detailed literary reference to "Kapon", but he associated them only with the northern group, the Akawaio. He stated: "The word *Kâpohn* (or *Kâpông*) which, like the 'Carinya' of the Caribs, in the language of the Acawoios signifies 'the people', is that by which they designate the various branches of their widely-extended and enterprising race." In Guyana the southern Pemon (Makushi) have scarcely ever been referred to as Pemon. Farabee (1924: 131) has it in his word list, deriving from the Expedition of the University Museum of Pennsylvania to South America, 1913-1916. He gives *pemongöng* and translates it as "person." An enquiry as to the plural — "persons," elicited the reply "we." It seems that his informants were saying "we — are the Pemongong"! As regards the northern group, Armellada states (private communication) that "so far as we know, the first reference to Pemon was made in its plural form of *Pemonton* by the Capuchin Padre Nicolás de Cármenes," who began his exploration of the Gran Sabana in 1929.

<sup>18</sup> *Yamök* or *amök* in Kapon and *dama* in Pemon, is a regular plural and adds the meaning "plenty" or "many"; *-gon* or *-kon* seems to be a group plural, used when an entity is being stressed. Pemon sometimes refer to *Kapongon*, which perhaps translates best as "the Kapon group of people."



metaphoric and is not found in everyday reference but in the explanations of informants upon direct questioning. The second level refers to the personal kindred of an individual... (1982: 60).<sup>19</sup>

There is an etymology discernible for these autodenominations. *Kapon* is composed of *kak*, "sky" or "high place"<sup>20</sup> and *-pon*, meaning "those in."<sup>21</sup> Its exact meaning is "sky people" or "people on high." The etymology of the autodenomination *Pemon* is still not identified beyond all doubt. Armellada<sup>22</sup> considers that it may derive from a contraction of the phrase *pe-woi-mon*, literally a fence, palisade or stockade (*pe*), around (*woi* or *wui*), a hillock (*mon* or *mun*); that is, a "hill stockade." If this is so, then the name refers to a type of settlement very characteristic of Pemon groups in the past, which frequently consisted of a round or oval house sheltering an extended or joint family group, protected by a circular wooden fence (and sometimes a ditch), situated on a rise in the savanna. Such a settlement is clearly depicted in Charles Bentley's engraving of Roraima in R. H. Schomburgk's *Twelve views in the interior of Guiana* (1841b).<sup>23</sup>

Others Carib speakers similarly use autodenominations, which are often not widely known and are not used outside the group of people so referring to itself. Thus the *Ye'kuana* (or *Soto*)<sup>24</sup> are better known in the literature as Makiritare living in Venezuela on the upper tributaries of the Orinoco from the Upper Paragua and Caura Rivers westwards; the *E'nyëpa* are known as the Panare, Carib speakers of the Cuchivero, Guaniamo and Suapure Rivers in Venezuela (Henley 1982: Chap. 1). Nor is the fact of obscurity of autodenomination a purely Carib phenomenon. The Arawaks for example, call themselves *Lokono*. In the Guianas at least, it may prove that the *Kariña* (Caribs) are unique in that their autodenomination (or variants of it), seems to have been in general use amongst their neighbours as well as themselves, and this despite their widespread dispersal even at the time of the first contact with Europeans on the mainland.

Autodenominations have been translated by anthropologists as meaning "people." It is at this general level that *Kapon* and *Pemon* sometimes use their own autodenominations to describe each other and their neighbours. It is clear, however, that they are then used on a sliding scale of perceived likeness and difference. The *real* people are those who call themselves by the name in question, so that the

<sup>19</sup> *Uyomba* is made up of "my" (*u-*) "relative" (*yomba*).

<sup>20</sup> Sometimes a high place, such as a mountain top or tree top, is used as a metonym for sky. This occurs in shaman symbolism and in myth, for example. A general translation of *kak* might therefore be "on high" and, in some religious contexts, "celestial."

<sup>21</sup> Armellada and Gutiérrez Salazar (1981: 159) give *pon*, the noun, as meaning companions (*compañeros*, *acompañantes*, etc.). The adjective *po-n* they give as "that which is in, inhabitant of..." (*que está en, habitante en*).

<sup>22</sup> He also states (private communication) that *pe* refers as well to the fringe of hair around the forehead: thus, *pe-kaiyi-pang*, bald in front. *Pe-mudung* is the name of a mountain near Kavanayén in the North-east Gran Sabana; it has a long, white (*mudun*) cliff below its summit, which appears as a border (*pe*). See also, Introductory Note by Armellada in Salazar Quijada 1970: 10.

<sup>23</sup> A fenced settlement is mentioned in the tale of Apichuai (Armellada 1964: 139). Fenced settlements were not unique to Pemon. *Kapon* also had them, but they are perhaps more striking when seen in open savanna, on hills, and probably more necessary and frequent there than in forested areas.

<sup>24</sup> See note 26 and refer to Arvelo-Jiménez 1971: 10-11.

assignment of it to others is by courtesy and as an indication that these "others" are Indians (not creoles), and in some instances at least, have similar customs and speak a Carib language (i.e. communication is possible). The difference between the holders of the autodenomination and those to whom it is assigned (and who, by its nature, do not use it for themselves), is usually signalled by the addition of the suffix *-be* or *-pe*. This changes the noun to an adverbial form, giving the sense of "as," "like," "in the manner of," "similar to." Thus Carib-speaking neighbours may be described as *Kaponbe* or *Pemonpe* by the holders of the autodenomination in question. However, there is always some hesitation in using even this modified form for distant Peoples who are not known definitively to be Carib speakers, intelligible and with the same customs, and who moreover, may have unfavourable stereotypes.<sup>25</sup> This practice of extending an autodenomination is also reported amongst other Carib speakers. Thus the Panare apply their own ethnic name of *E'nyëpa* to all Amerindian neighbours save one (Henley 1982: xiii), and the Ye'kuana use *Soto* to include other Amerindians similarly.<sup>26</sup>

At the maximal level of classification, using the system of autodenomination, the structurally equivalent groups in Western Guiana may be presented as:

Kariña    Kapon    Pemon    Ye'kuana-(Soto)    E'nyëpa

These can be identified as unitary ethnic groups on the basis of common name, language, way of life, feelings of kinship and cultural interrelationships. Certainly in the case of Kapon and Pemon, the unique identity which an autodenomination signifies is supported by a mutual classification of each other as "other people," so further defining the conceptual boundaries.

### The classification of "others"

Referring to the Pemon and their neighbours, Thomas asserts that

... language is the major identifying emblem which the Pemon use to separate themselves from others...

and he goes on to say

That language should be the major "marker" of ethnic identity for the Pemon is not at all surprising, particularly in view of the degree of technological and cultural similarity among the Pemon and their indigenous neighbors. The Pemon and their Carib-speaking neighbors share marked similarities in material culture, social organization, and mythical and religious concepts. Given the absence of any major visible differences in physical types among the aboriginal populations of the Guiana Highlands, language is a convenient point of difference (1982: 19).

<sup>25</sup> A particular example is the *Shiriana*, the name attributed to the Sanema of the Yanomama groups. The name is always said to refer to "those who shoot arrows at you." A warlike stance is the only character which was known to my Kapon informants, who probably had heard about the Sanema via Pemon neighbours who, in turn, might have acquired this knowledge from the Ye'kuana who had fought Sanema earlier this century.

<sup>26</sup> Layrisse and Wilbert 1966: 72, quoting D. Barandiarán. It seems that Ye'kuana and Soto are terms which require careful definition. (See note 24.)

My conclusion concerning the primary criterion for classification used by N. Kapon (Akawaio) is similar. For example, on being shown photographs of Caribs from Gillin's well-known book (Gillin 1936), and seeing that the people depicted appeared very much like themselves, my informants sometimes said, spontaneously, "*Kapon*," meaning "people" or "Indians." But often there was hesitation and the first question was whether these people knew "*Kapon maimu*," the Kapon language. After discussion of linguistic and other characteristics of these *Kalitna* (Caribs) with me, a consensus might be reached that they were "rather like" or "a little like" (*mararö*) Kapon.

As a marker of identity, language differences assist in isolating a unique set of relationships which constitute a structure. It is perhaps because of this that it is a factor which the people themselves manipulate, small variations being exaggerated to indicate differences, or glossed over in other contexts in order to indicate similarities or identity. Thus it is not infrequent for (Akawaio) Kapon to complain that they cannot understand what (Arekuna) Pemon neighbours say, and yet on first encounter individuals carry on long and animated conversations with no apparent difficulty. Similarly, when Thomas (1982: 20) records that Ye'kuana is not intelligible to Pemon speakers, this does not coincide with an assertion by an elderly Kapon informant who, recalling a *Maiongon* (Ye'kuana) trading visit to his settlement in his youth, and having had no previous contacts with them, said he "could understand their words a little."

Linguists such as Armellada have argued that the two circum-Roraima Peoples, Kapon and Pemon, form a linguistic unity. Edwards (1977: 34),<sup>27</sup> engaged in linguistic research among the Akawaio (N. Kapon) and Arekuna (N. Pemon) in the Kamarang River area of the Upper Mazaruni, noted that

... in many cases conversations can be carried on between monolingual Akawaios and Arekunas with near-perfect intelligibility. The linguistic differences between the languages are mainly at the phonetic level... but there are some grammatical differences as well.

Im Thurn (1967: 165) had come to the same conclusion in the previous century, but from his knowledge of Makushi (S. Pemon), and he remarked that a "Macusi" (i.e. a S. Pemon), an "Arecuna" (i.e. a N. Pemon) and an "Ackawoi" (i.e. N. Kapon) "speak quite intelligibly the one to the other." During my field research I was able to use a Makushi grammar as an aid for learning Akawaio, and although my informant had never met a Makushi he understood the words and phrases without difficulty and gave me the equivalents. There seemed to be no significant obstacles in making the transposition. This undoubted unity of language is given a more positive value by the speakers concerned when they are associated with others who are non-Caribs. For example at the Georgetown Depot, a hostel for Amerindian visitors to Georgetown, the capital of Guyana, it was noted that individual Kapon (Akawaio) associated with Kariña (Caribs) in preference to

<sup>27</sup> His work contains comparative grammar notes, vocabularies and phrases. Pemon data is listed as "Arekuna," but as immigrants from the Gran Sabana into the Upper Mazaruni came from a wide variety of settlements we can safely assume that all subdivisions of the N. Pemon are represented.

non-Caribs such as Arawak or Warao. The same kind of reaction was noted at the Anglican missions in 19th century British Guiana, when those of similar language always built their houses near to each other and apart from others.

Both Kapon and Pemon recognize a specific unity within their conceptual boundaries which they express in terms of being kin. Indeed, Thomas noted in the case of the latter, that

... the diffuseness characteristic of Pemon boundary concepts in terms of relatives (*-yombaton*) and the process of bringing unrelated persons into relatedness is quite adaptive in a vast regional system (the Gran Sabana and neighboring areas as a whole) in which marriage and sibling relationship can span huge distances (1982: 106).

Although members of each People regard themselves as a family, and despite considerable distance often between their respective communities, the overall ethnic unity is not an endogamous one. Thus N. Pemon have long intermarried with N. Kapon in the area of the Wenamu and Kamarang Rivers. Thomas also comments on this intermarriage between the two groups, but adds significantly that it is not so frequent as between Pemon and Makushi, that is, within their own ethnic grouping (Thomas 1973: 3).<sup>28</sup> Considerable intermarriage between S. Pemon (Makushi) and Arawak-speaking Wapishana neighbours is reported by Diniz in the Rio Branco area.<sup>29</sup> Intermarriage at a greater distance was formerly very rare. I encountered one instance of an Akawaio (N. Kapon) man having married into the Ye'kuana and who had not been seen or heard of for many years. A Wapishana had entered the Upper Mazaruni basin in search of minerals and had stayed to take a Kako River Akawaio as his wife. Only in recent years has the degree of contact and intermarriage greatly increased, in the case of the Kapon being due to Government agencies bringing in other Indians trained in Government services (Fournier 1979: 107).

A network of trading relationships and the paths along which the goods are carried, have served to knit together the territories and inhabitants of the Guiana Highlands into a mutually obligated association of Peoples. In it, goods pass between Kapon in the East and, via the Pemon, to Ye'kuana in the West and beyond. A North-South interchange also occurs, from the Wai-Wai to the Kariña. Each People has its role in the interchange, with the Ye'kuana acting as the manufacturers and purveyors of valuable items such as blow pipes and cassava graters whilst, at the eastern end, the receivers of these feed industrial goods such as metal tools, beads and various shop items into the system, having obtained these from the Guyanese coastlands. The Pemon have mainly acted as middlemen, drawing off a profit whilst passing on the various items to the South, East and West (Coppens 1971; Thomas 1972; Butt Colson 1973). Marriage, visiting and exchange between their own internal communities have served to unite Kapon and Pemon respectively. The same activities have created other interrelationships between the

<sup>28</sup> The Makushi are referred to as if they were not Pemon, but this is corrected by Thomas in his 1982 publication: see note 75.

<sup>29</sup> Diniz 1972: see his map of Makushi, Wapishana and mixed settlements.

two Peoples, even if they occur more sporadically, for myths, tales, songs, dances, news and exchanges of knowledge and experience, all pass via the same links and create an overarching cultural unity.

Nevertheless, as the use of two distinct autodenominations suggests, differentiation is maintained, structurally and conceptually. Although friendly trade occurs, Kapon recall that sometimes their people, on visiting the Gran Sabana Pemon for trade, were attacked and killed. Inter-marriage quickly dissolves to suspicion of sorcery on the part of in-laws, if illness or divorces occur. Although Pemon and Kapon relate the same myth of origin, that of the Makunaima, the twin children of the sun,<sup>30</sup> nevertheless, tales of separate origin are also recounted. For example Kapon relate an origin in the mythical deeds of Saraman (or Salaman), who was living in savanna country, at Komalai'ing, a place in the country of the *Töselökma* (probably a S. Pemon, Makushi, group).<sup>31</sup> Saraman's wife was barren, so one day he copulated with tree stumps and in this way produced the first Kapon. He was their ancestor and they are the children of trees — a story apparently contrasting the forest environment of Kapon compared with the predominantly savanna country of the Pemon with which the tale connects them. Akawaio Kapon relate stories of origins for the Warao and several tales accounting for the origins of *Kalitna* (Kariña). The latter give reasons for the wars which were waged between the Kariña and Kapon.<sup>32</sup> Active hostility occurred in the past between communities of the circum-Roraima Peoples and beyond, but today the most explicit indications of bad feeling are to be found in accusations of sorcery (Kapon: *edodo*; Pemon: *kanaima*), of cursing (lethal *taren*) and malpractice. Kapon and Pemon mutually accuse each other, and also neighbours such as the Ye'kuana and Wapishana, of sending sickness, misfortune and death. Such accusations do not single out individuals or families, or even communities, but are expressed in terms of, and directed at, the total ethnic unity. Fear of unfortunate consequences from contact with other groups and other Peoples have stimulated the use of special measures (protective invocations for example), and adoption of a low profile, and inhibited the degree of long distance travel and visiting.

Counteracting the legacy of past warfare and of mutual suspicion and accusation, a new factor for unity between the two circum-Roraima Peoples has developed over the last 100 years. Unique to them is the syncretic religion of Hallelujah, inspired by contact with Christianity and having its origins among the (Makushi) Pemon of the N. Rupununi savannas during the last quarter of the 19th century. It spread northwards, up the Cotinga and Surumu valleys to the area of Roraima. Then it travelled eastwards to the two Kapon groups. It re-entered the Gran Sabana via the Akawaio Kapon of the Kamarang River and then spread

<sup>30</sup> Thomas (1982: 189-207) records this tale in full and analyses it.

<sup>31</sup> The *Töselökma* are probably the same as the *Keseruma*. See note 45.

<sup>32</sup> An oft repeated tale of both Kapon and Pemon relates that *Kalitna* (Caribs) entered the Upper Mazaruni and were put to flight. They retreated up the Kako River, tried to re-enter via the Ataro and Kukui Rivers to the South but failed. They then turned into certain rocks on the Gran Sabana, which can still be seen there and from which reports as of gun shots may be heard. They are said to be the spirits of the Caribs inside, letting off their guns.

amongst the N. Pemon.<sup>33</sup> Apart from being a unique set of beliefs and ritual held in common, active participation occurs whereby church leaders from both Kapon and Pemon communities, supported by sectors of their respective congregations, visit each other for sessions of combined worship and celebration. The most celebrated prophets of either People are held in mutual esteem whilst the religious centre of Amokokupai, in N. Kapon country in the Upper Mazaruni basin, is held in universal veneration. It is a place of pilgrimage which Pemon have also visited. Although Ye'kuana and Wapishana have heard about Hallelujah and have even sung the songs, they do not adhere to the cult or participate in the religious unity which is expressed by it.

Neither the Kapon or Pemon can be described as possessing a state structure or as having a centralized political system of even the most rudimentary kind.<sup>34</sup> They are acephalous. Each is identifiable as a unitary ethnic group on the basis of its members holding an autodenomination in common, occupying a particular territory, adhering to a distinct language (or dialect) and holding a specific set of cultural characteristics. The members of each conceive of their own interrelatedness, using the family as a model, and they recount distinct origins. This unique identity is reinforced by their classification of each other as "different" people, as also, to a greater degree still, they classify their neighbours. Ethnic stereotypes, suspicion and hostility expressed via sorcery accusations, further define conceptual and operative boundaries. Despite all these many distinctions, it is nevertheless clear that the two Peoples have intermarried, inter-traded and interacted, sometimes peacefully and sometimes feuding. That they have not, and do not unite politically as total units, either internally or in respect of each other or "others," is the consequence of the absence of any unifying political apparatus, controlling and directing action.

How do we classify such systems, with their loosely defined, interrelating sectors of social relations? Although autodenominations do, as I have shown, have specific meanings, it has become the general practice for anthropologists to translate as "people" the name which the members of a group use to describe themselves at this maximal level of unity. It is this term which I have adopted here, as expressing a "folk unity" with perhaps the same kinds of sentiments asserted as in, for example, phrases such as "the British People," when centralized political institutions are disregarded and a common descent, historical experience and cultural unity are being stressed.

### The nicknaming system

Nicknames are substitute names. They frequently express stereotypes and can be used to differentiate groups of people considered to be similar to, yet distinct from, one's own group. When referring to their neighbours, when referring to each other's segments and also when specifying certain of their own internal divisions,

<sup>33</sup> Butt Colson (1971a) relates the story of the origins and diffusion of Hallelujah from the S. Pemon to the Kapon.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas (1982) significantly entitles his book *Order without government*.

Pemon and Kapon do not use autodenominations but apply nicknames instead.

A good example of nicknaming of neighbours occurs in the case of the Ye'kuana (Soto), whom they refer to as *Maiongon* or *Maionkon*, or a variant of this. According to Armellada (Salazar Quijada 1970: 12), *Mañongón*, or *Mañonkon*, is a transformation of *Muadonkón* which Pemon use, and he asserts that it means "those who live in their gardens" —which is very exceptionally the case among the Pemon whose normal dwelling place is some rise or hillock in savanna, their gardens being set apart in neighbouring forested patches. Another name attributed to Ye'kuana by Pemon and Kapon neighbours incorporates a different stereotype. This is *Pavana*, or *Pawana* (pl. *Pavanaton*). It means "traders" and is notably applicable to the Ye'kuana because they are traders who make, or obtain, a variety of important items for the inter-People trading network. Since it is a general denotation in this instance, it is a term which can be applied to other groups which trade and, in its singular form, to any trading partner. For example, Akawaio Kapon apply the name to another group of unknown provenance, whom they know to be traders even beyond the Maiongon and whom I suspect to be the Piaroa of the Middle Orinoco since they are the ones making and selling curare poison (Butt Colson 1973: 30).<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, in terms of the overall trade network, the real *Pavanaton* are the Maiongon (Ye'kuana). As the shamans' seances among the N. Kapon clearly indicate, the Ye'kuana image is inevitably depicted in terms of their being the manufacturers and traders of the greatly prized and vital cassava graters. In seance after seance, the interviews between shaman and a Maiongon spirit become obsessed with the subject of graters and the songs sung refer to the same topic.

The exact meanings of nicknames are often difficult to discover, even apart from the fact that they may be terms of opprobrium or ridicule and, consequently, there is a certain reluctance on the part of those so named to discuss them. The suspicion is that they are malicious references assigned by neighbours to some peculiarity which is ridiculous or disgusting —or both! Armellada states (private communication), that he has had only limited success in tracing their etymology, for they seem to have been coined in the distant past and may be archaic forms. Also, in some instances at least, they were perhaps assigned by non-Carib neighbours. If so, then their meaning ought to be investigated amongst those neighbours —as among the Arawak-speaking Wapishana, for example.<sup>36</sup>

Table 1 lists names in general use which refer to Kapon and Pemon, the names which Kapon and Pemon use to refer to each other, and the names which each uses to designate their own, regionally based subdivisions.

#### *Kapon and Pemon mutual nicknames*

WAIKA (Spanish: Guaika, Guayca, Uaika). This designation is used by Pemon

<sup>35</sup> Butt Colson 1973: 16-18 refers in detail to the Akawaio use of the term *pawana*.

<sup>36</sup> For example, the name Makiritare, regularly used to refer to the Ye'kuana, is said to be of Arawak origin and to mean "River People" (Layrisse and Wilbert 1966: 72).

for both North and South groups of Kapon,<sup>37</sup> without differentiation. It is a conglomerate term which disregards Kapon internal segmentation. The name emerges in the mid-18th century in the reports of the Capuchin missionaries on the inhabitants of their lowland missions in Guayana (Venezuela). By 1816 over 4,000 "Guaycas" (with "Arinagotos" in some cases —see pp. 91-92) were reported as inhabiting nine missions (Venezuela-British Guiana Boundary Arbitration 1898, 3: 165). In 1817, during the war for independence, occupation by the patriotic forces led to an immediate decline of the mission villages and to the flight of the majority of the Indian occupants, including the Waika. They went off to the East where they took refuge in the Essequibo forests, then virtually uncolonized. Probably, many of them returned to areas where they had lived before being drawn westwards by the missions, and some at least may be presumed to have joined relatives still living autonomously. A few years later, the literature of British Guiana began to contain references to "Waikas" or "Waicas."<sup>38</sup> A considerable muddle then ensued, for the Dutch and subsequently the British had been accustomed to use the term Akawaio, and later Patamona, for members of this same group. It was not realized (or not stated publicly) that Waika was simply an attributed name for Kapon, notably those who had been living for over fifty years in the Roman Catholic missions to the West.

The derivation of Waika proposed by Armellada and Gutiérrez Salazar (1981: 214), is *ewai* (which is often heard as *ewaik* or *await*, sometimes uttered with an indrawing of the breath and sometimes having modifying suffixes tacked on). It means "yes," "all right," and the Pemon, who use *iná* for the affirmative, often poke fun at the Kapon usage and mimic it.

AREKUNA.<sup>39</sup> Kapon (both North and South groups) apply this name to the N. Pemon, disregarding internal subdivisions. It is therefore a conglomerate term. A Dutch dispatch of 1771 refers to Arekuna but it was during the 19th century, in British Guiana, that this name was regularly employed in accounts of explorers and missionaries. The 18th century Capuchin missionaries in Guayana did not use it.

The etymology is uncertain. It might perhaps be compared with *Arijuna* which the Guajiro, Arawak speakers on the Colombian-Venezuelan frontier, use to refer to other groups which have a different language from their own and whose members follow a different way of life.<sup>40</sup> To some degree at least, this supports

<sup>37</sup> This same name has been applied to Yanomama groups in Territorio Federal Amazonas in Venezuela, and has generally been translated as "killer" or "warrior." (See Introductory Note by Armellada in Salazar Quijada 1970: 12). According to Migliazza (1972: 31) it is a derogatory term "used by the Yanomama when they do not like another village." He states that *waika* derives from an archaic root, now found in only one Yanomama language, meaning "wanting to kill," but that it is now used throughout the Yanomama area with the meaning of "backward wild people" rather than its original meaning of "kill." It may be noted that the N. Kapon (Akawaio) have had a reputation, recorded in the literature, for killing secretly (via sorcery and poison). Care should be taken to differentiate between Kapon and Yanomama, who seem to have been attributed the same nickname.

<sup>38</sup> For example, Brett 1868: 261, 277. He denoted the Waika branch of the "Kāpohn" as living on the Upper Demerara and Berbice Rivers.

<sup>39</sup> See Salazar Quijada 1970: 31 and also Fournier 1979: 99 for some variations in spelling.

<sup>40</sup> Armellada (Introductory Note in Salazar Quijada 1970: 10), states that it means "foreigner."



TABLE 1

## KAPON AND PEMON AUTODENOMINATIONS AND NICKNAMES

<i>Common name</i>	<i>Autodenomination</i>	<i>N. Kapon nickname</i>	<i>N. Pemon nickname</i>	<i>S. Kapon nickname</i>	<i>S. Pemon nickname</i>
Akawaio	Kapon	<sup>a</sup>	Waika (Akavado)	Serekong/Akawaio	Akawaio <sup>b</sup>
Patamona	Kapon	Patamöna/Eremagok	Waika	<sup>a</sup>	Patamona <sup>b</sup>
Arekuna	Pemon	Arekuna	Arekuna <sup>a</sup>	Arekuna	Arekuna
Kamarakoto	Pemon	Kamaragadok/Arekuna	Kamarakoto/Arekuna <sup>a</sup>	<sup>b</sup>	<sup>b</sup>
Taurepan	Pemon	Arekuna	Taurepan <sup>a</sup> /Arekuna <sup>a</sup>	Arekuna <sup>b</sup>	Taurepan/Arekuna <sup>b</sup>
Pichaukok	Pemon	Pötsawugok	Pichauko <sup>a</sup>	<sup>b</sup>	Pezak'ko
Makushi	Pemon	Makushi	Makushi	Makushi <sup>b</sup>	<sup>a, b</sup>
<i>Ecological terms</i>					
Savanna people	Pemon	Deigok	Teikok	<sup>b</sup>	<sup>b</sup>
Inkarikok	Kapon	<sup>c</sup>	Inkarikok	<sup>b</sup>	Inkariko
Plains people	Pemon	Remonogok	Remonokok	<sup>b</sup>	<sup>b</sup>
River mouth people	Kapon	<sup>c</sup>	Ikenkok	<sup>b</sup>	<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Nickname rejected: sometimes passed on to others.

<sup>b</sup> Research information lacking, or needing confirmation.

<sup>c</sup> Name not in use so far as it is known.

Koch-Grünberg's assertion (1979-1982, I: 52-53)<sup>41</sup> that it is a name (in the form of "Yarikuna") given by the neighbouring "Wapichana" (Arawak speakers) to the "Taulipáng" group (Pemon). As a nickname, even if not actually unwelcome, it is generally received and used with mixed feelings and unease, since opprobrium is suspected. Many regard its use to be an outright insult and attempts are made to deny local applicability and to pass it on to denote Pemon other than the immediate community concerned. This seems to have been the normal reaction in the past and the tale which suggests that Arekuna are descendants of *are*, a water rat, expresses the disgust implicit in the name (Armellada 1964: 262-265).<sup>42</sup>

MAKUSHI.<sup>43</sup> This name is attributed by the Kapon (northern and southern groups) and by the North Pemon, to the southernmost Pemon who live in the Rio Branco savanna area of Brazil and the Rupununi district of Guyana. It is encountered in Dutch reports from the middle of the 18th century as being applicable to Carib speakers dwelling in the area of the Rupununi River. Portuguese and Spanish references similarly incorporated this name. Coudreau asserted that it means descendants of Maku, the original inhabitants.<sup>44</sup>

The structural status of the group denoted Makushi is not certain and more research on this is necessary. Literary references suggest that it is a unity, which is expressed via external nicknaming, containing a number of subdivisions which are internally recognized also by a nicknaming process.<sup>45</sup> If so then it is a conglomerate term, similar to Arekuna and Waika. However, whereas Waika is a nickname which structurally covers the same grouping as that denoted by the autodenomination Kapon, the Pemon unity as a People is expressed by two nicknames, Arekuna and Makushi.

#### *Internal nicknaming of the Kapon and Pemon*

AKAWAIO.<sup>46</sup> We do not know the derivation of this name for the N. Kapon. It appears early in the literature, through being in general use among the indigenous inhabitants of the old, Dutch provinces of Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo. Thus Keymis in 1596 refers to "Wacawaios" on the Lemerare (Demerara) River and to "Wocowaios" on the Chipanama River, probably the Sipanama or Supenaam River (Keymis 1904: 494),<sup>47</sup> whilst Major John Scott, 1669,

Goulet 1981: 3 informs us that *Alijuna* is a term used by the Guajiro to refer to a non-Indian who lives in villages, suburbs and cities.

<sup>41</sup> See text p. 93 for a discussion of "Taulipáng."

<sup>42</sup> Refer to text p. 102 for a story of origin of the name and people called Arekuna.

<sup>43</sup> For alternative spellings see Salazar Quijada 1970: 28.

<sup>44</sup> Coudreau 1887, II: 378 refers to "Macuchis": "fils de Macous, aborigènes."

<sup>45</sup> For example, Myers (1944: 67-68) refers to descendants of a group called Monoiko, said to speak the same language as Makushi but with a slightly different pronunciation. The name means Twin (*monoi*) people (-*ko*). Diniz (1972: 88-89) refers to segments of the Makushi as Monoikó (Monaikó) and Eliang (Liã) and quotes authors who additionally mention other "sub-tribes" such as the Asepang, Kenólolo, Tewayá, Keseruma and Pezak'ko (the latter being presumably the Pichauko, see pp. 94-95). Such groups are differentiated by name, variation in dialect and locality.

<sup>46</sup> For lists of alternative forms and spellings see Salazar Quijada 1970: 25 and Fournier 1979: 91.

<sup>47</sup> The Supenaam River is in the Pomeroun area, West of the Essequibo estuary.

remarked that the "Ocowyes" were one of the "great powerful nations that live in the uplands of Guiana" (Harris and de Villiers 1911, I: 176).<sup>48</sup> The N. Pemon, whilst generally using the conglomerate term Waika, do occasionally refer to *Akavado*, notably in songs, and Armellada has surmised that this name might derive from the Pemon word for stone adze, *kavadak* or *kavada*.<sup>49</sup>

In the early 1950s some at least of the N. Kapon did not know the designation Akawaio and when I mentioned it on one occasion it was queried and my informants, young adults, wanted to know whom I was talking about. They said that they did not know the name: they were *Kapon*. By the time of my second period of field research (1957) the name of Akawaio was certainly well known and I enquired about its meaning. Mostly, people said they did not know. A few thought about this question and consulted others. A general consensus was that it might mean "big cloth lap" —*eke waikuru*.<sup>50</sup>

PATAMONA: Patamöna (Edwards 1977: 88).<sup>51</sup> This attribution is made by N. Kapon (Akawaio) to refer to S. Kapon. It is first encountered in early 19th century, British Guiana literature and the group is often referred to as the "sister tribe" or "branch" of the Akawaio. Armellada and Gutiérrez Salazar state that *Pata-muna* has the meaning of "local inhabitant," "settler" (Armellada and Gutiérrez Salazar 1981: 150).<sup>52</sup>

N. Kapon also refer to at least one segment of their southern group as the *Eremagok*, meaning "the people of the Ireng River" and this latter term seems to be acceptable to those receiving it. The Ireng (referred to as Mau in Brazil) is a tributary of the Takutu, itself a major tributary of the Rio Branco. The westernmost settlements of the Patamona are situated in its upper basin, on both the Guyanese and Brazilian banks. The river name is said to derive from a water weed (*uring*, or *uling*), which is probably the *Lacis fluviatilis* growing abundantly on rocks from which the pacu fish feeds. The Makushi Pemon to the South call it *weireng*. Kapon char this weed and the resulting powder, which has a salty taste, is mixed with tobacco leaf to form pellets which are placed between lower teeth and lip for sucking.<sup>53</sup> It seems that the river, its characteristic weed and the people, are linked

<sup>48</sup> Other historical references are given in Fournier 1979: 92-94.

<sup>49</sup> Stone implements have long been abandoned in the circum-Roraima area, metal tools having been a primary trade article from the time of the first contacts with Europeans. The Akawaio were notable for having obtained them from the coastal whites (Dutch), whom they referred to as *Paranakiri*, meaning "those who like the sea" —coastlanders.

<sup>50</sup> *Eke* = big: *waigu* or *waiku* refers to a man's cloth lap: *-ru* (or *-ri*) is a possessive suffix. Their explanation was that they wore this item of clothing much longer than their neighbours. As I saw it, it was not just a strip passed between the legs and hung over a cotton belt, leaving a short flap in front and behind. They left a long length in front, passed it between the legs and several times round the waist before knotting it in the small of the back and leaving a long flap to fall behind the knees. On festive occasions sufficient length might be left in front for it to be taken up across the chest, wrapped round the neck and draped over the shoulders. This extravagance was a sign of wealth in trade cloth which gave a temporary prestige.

<sup>51</sup> Lists of alternative spellings are given by Fournier 1979: 102 and by Salazar Quijada 1970: 30. For previous the first reference to the name see Hilhouse 1825 37-38, 46.

<sup>52</sup> *Pata*, place, has a variety of applications according to context: see text p. 114.

<sup>53</sup> I have already published information relating to the Dutch 1778 references to the "Arenakottes"

by the same name. It is very probable that the *Arenakotte*, as referred to by the Dutch in 1778, and the *Arinagotos*, co-residents with Guaycas in some of the Guayana 18th century Capuchin missions, and the Barinagotos, denoted as living on the Upper Caroní (1778) were all "Ireng River people." The structural status of this term is discussed later.<sup>54</sup>

SEREKONG (or SEREGONG). This term appears in Dutch reports of the 18th century and also occasionally in 19th century references.<sup>55</sup> It designates Akawaio Kapon inhabiting the Upper Mazaruni basin. In 1957 the name was freely acknowledged by some elderly people as one referring to themselves. "We are the Serekong: the people here, on the Kukui, Kako and Mazaruni." The name is probably an attribution of the S. Kapon (Patamona) who, it is said, used to refer to their northern group by it, although its application is gradually falling into disuse and today is scarcely ever employed. However, it figures in derisory tales which centre on Serekong (Akawaio) stupidity in confusing the meaning of certain words in a common language.<sup>56</sup> The stereotype conveyed is that of "stupid peasant."

Armellada (personal communication) hazarded the opinion that the name simply means "the people here": "the people of this place" (*sere* = here, *-gong* or *-kong* = a group of people).<sup>57</sup> If our interpretation is correct, then Patamona and Serekong are reciprocal names, attributed to each other by the North and South regional groups of the Kapon People, both terms referring to their being local inhabitants of their respective territories. Despite what Fournier has surmised (1979: 104-105), the Serekong have never been an ethnic group, or tribe, outside the Kapon unity as "a People."

Within the northern group of Pemon, three names are used which apply to communities occupying different regions of the territory. These appear regularly in today's literature and in everyday speech.

KAMARAKOTO (see Salazar Quijada 1970: 31). This name occurs as "Camaragota" in 18th century Spanish accounts of the Capuchin missions. It is today applied to, and acknowledged by, that group of Pemon which lives in or near the area of Kamarata, in the North-west region of the Gran Sabana. *Kamara-ta* means "the place where" (*-ta*) there are *kamara* fish (a species of lamprey). The river in which these small fish are plentiful has the same name and is a tributary of the Akanán. *Kamarakoto* thus refers to the people of the river and to its fish which

who were denoted "a sort of Akuway nation" and also as "a sort of bastard nation of the Acuway Indians..." and stated to be dwelling in the Ciperoeni (Siparuni), in the Caroeni (Caroní), and "above the Supinaam" (Pomeroon-Cuyuni area). See Butt Colson 1971a: 25-28. Also see Thomas 1982: 16.

<sup>54</sup> See text p. 121.

<sup>55</sup> Fournier 1979: 104 gives as first reference a dispatch sent by the Dutch postholder at Arinda on the Essequibo River, in 1769.

<sup>56</sup> Private communication from A. Mansutti, who encountered a Patamona informant when conducting fieldwork for his M.A. thesis; Anthropology Department, Instituto Venezolano de Investigaciones Científicas, Caracas, Nov. 1980.

<sup>57</sup> Some have speculated as to whether the name might not derive from the Sericoeng Falls, where the Upper Mazaruni begins its descent of the Pakaraima escarpment, where miles of rapids and falls cut off the upper basin from the lowlands. Note that *-kong* or *-gong* is the same as *-kon* or *-gon*. Phonetically it is *-kon*.

are of primary economic importance to them. The name is given to all the indigenous inhabitants of the basin of the Kamarata River and, by extension, to all those of the Akanán valley and surrounding area (Armellada and Gutiérrez Salazar 1981: 86). In this context Kamarakoto is a name derived from an ecological fact. It is not derogative as are some of the other attributed names among Kapon and Pemon, and it is freely used by the people to whom it is applied. Its origin lies, probably, in its being a local river group,<sup>58</sup> but today it is certainly more than this because it has also been extended to include communities in other distant localities to which the people of the Kamarata area have migrated. Kamarakoto now refers to a regional group centred on the Kamarata area but which includes some closely related kin at Urimán, on the Caroní River, and families of Pemon living in the Paragua River valley. Residents in the Upper Cuyuni valley, notably the people of the village of Sta. María del Vapor, are also Kamarakoto in some instances. Although several days walking distance away, all of these are closely linked by kinship to the families remaining in the Kamarata valley.

TAUREPAN.<sup>59</sup> This name was first reported by the German ethnologist, Theodor Koch-Grünberg in 1911, under the form of "Taulipang" (1979-1982, I: 52-53).<sup>60</sup> Its probable derivation is the phrase *tauro-pún* or *tauro-puin*, meaning "those who do not know how to speak,"<sup>61</sup> and the name is applied by the S. Pemon (Makushi) to those Pemon immediately North of them, who inhabit the Roraima, Sta. Elena, Icabaru and Uonkén areas. As a nickname it seems to express S. Pemon scorn for those whom they consider to speak the Pemon language in a barbaric way—that is, differently from themselves. According to a Taurepan informant living in Sta. Elena, their forefathers used to live on the Mayarí River, just South of the Venezuela frontier with Brazil, where they modified their speech to some degree (Armellada 1964: 24-25).<sup>62</sup> It is therefore very likely that the Taurepan derived their distinctive characteristics as a regional group from a conjunction of influences deriving from Pemon to the North and South of them (that is, from the "Arekuna" and the "Makushi"), so forming a transitional zone in respect of dialect and perhaps of culture generally.

AREKUNA. The wider connotations of this term, as a conglomerate used by Kapon to include all the Gran Sabana Pemon, has been discussed above. By implication, the Kamarakoto were also being subsumed under this term, although

<sup>58</sup> See text p. 121.

<sup>59</sup> Salazar Quijada 1970: 31 gives alternative spellings.

<sup>60</sup> Koch-Grünberg claimed to be the discoverer of the name "Taulipáng," and attempted to show that it was an autodenomination. Beyond all doubt, the Indians he refers to are Pemon and "Taulipáng" is a subsidiary term and nickname. In his Introductory Note in Salazar Quijada (1970: 10-11), Armellada states that the adjective *tauro-pún* is found in the Carib vocabulary of the 18th century Capuchin missionary Fray Martín de Taradell - which causes Armellada to speculate as to whether it was an insulting term used by the "Guayanos," Indians of the Orinoco lowlands between the Caroní mouth and the Delta, for those who dwelt at the headwaters of the Caroní River.

<sup>61</sup> *Taure* = to say. See Armellada and Gutiérrez Salazar 1981: 192.

<sup>62</sup> The Rio Majary (Mayarí) is a major, left bank tributary of the Uraricoera (Upper Rio Branco), flowing from the Pakaraima Mountains in a South-easterly direction. There, they could have been influenced by a number of indigenous groups, not just other Pemon.

some Akawaio had a vague knowledge that, further over on the Gran Sabana, there was a group of this name which was involved in the trading network. Usually they were referred to as *Kamaragadok* (i.e. *Kamarata-gok* —people of Kamarata). However, among the Pemon themselves the name Arekuna also has a regional implication, being used to designate that group of Pemon living in the North-east sector of the Gran Sabana, in the areas of Kavanayén, the Upper Kamarang River, Irutepui and the Wenamu River. In more recent times it has come to include those Pemon (sometimes of Taurepan and Kamarakoto derivations) who have extended down the Kamarang and intermingled with Kapon (Akawaio) to form a mixed zone. Used in this more specific way, Arekuna is a nickname for a N. Pemon regional group distinguishable from the Kamarakoto regional group to the North-west and the Taurepan to the South, all three being of equivalent structural level.

#### *Other names associated with the Pemon*

Several other names have been used to refer to the inhabitants of the Upper Caroní basin, some of them appearing in 18th century literature.

*Pichauko* (Pishauko: Pösawugok). The Pichauko have been located in several areas, all of them in territory today occupied by the Taurepan Pemon of the South Gran Sabana and the frontier with Brazil. Koch-Grünberg<sup>63</sup> stated that they formerly lived in the Serra do Tepequém, North of the island of Maracá, in Brazil. Other travellers have placed them at Roraima and on the Caroní River between the Kaurú and the Urimán.<sup>64</sup> Ernesto Pinto, Taurepan of Sta. Elena de Uairén, asserted that they lived in the Kukenam and Roraima area, in the Uairén and also the Uonkén areas (Armellada 1964: 24-25). All of these are occupied by the Taurepan.

The assignation Pichauko is unwelcome to those denoted by it. It is rejected and re-attributed to "the next people —over there," with the result that travellers, and even anthropologists, have chased all over the Gran Sabana trying to encounter them. Indeed, Ernesto Pinto recorded that the people of Roraima did not wish to be called Pichaukok or Arekuna, but only Pemon! The name itself means "the people of" (-*ko*' or -*go*')<sup>65</sup> "the gourd drinking cup" (*pichau*). A myth of origin associates a very derogatory stereotype with the name. Briefly, it recounts how a man, not being able to find a wife, copulated with a gourd drinking cup and had children by her. Their descendants are the Pichauko who, when they speak, make gurgling noises, just as people do when drinking noisily from such cups. Both Pichauko and Taurepan are names which denote people who are said not to be able to speak Pemon properly. Some informants have even implied that they speak a completely

<sup>63</sup> Koch-Grünberg (1979-1982, I: 170) states that the Sierra of "Töpeking" was considered to be the main seat of the "Pischaukó." He relates that they spoke a dialect of Makushi; they were bitter enemies of the Taurepan and regarded as *kanaima* (sorcerers). He further added that they no longer existed as a tribe, having been a long time ago destroyed by the present inhabitants of the area. The Tepequém Mountains lie between the island of Maracá and the Majary River (see note 62).

<sup>64</sup> I have referred to the Pichauko in more detail in Butt Colson 1973: 14-15, 41-43.

<sup>65</sup> Here the final "k" has been left off and a glottal stop is heard.

different language which Pemon cannot understand! However, it is clear that they are a particular group of Pemon, perhaps Taurepan, or the Taurepan regional group as a whole, under guise of a second, related nickname.

*Kukuyikok* is a term which is encountered in 18th century Spanish literature. Little is known about them but Ernesto Pinto stated that they lived in Kamarata, Urimán, Kavanayén and Ikén and were opposed to the Pichauko. According to his designation and today's groupings, they comprised Kamarakoto and Arekuna groups (northernmost Pemon) of the Gran Sabana (Armellada 1964: 24). The name itself probably refers to the hawk denoted *kukui* (or *kuköi*) and it is also the name of a tributary of the Apanwao River in the North-east area of the Gran Sabana (Armellada and Gutiérrez Salazar 1981: 109).<sup>66</sup>

*Cachirigoto*, (*Achirigoto*), is also mentioned in Spanish literature of the middle of the 18th century and seems to refer to a Gran Sabana group. It is probably a general attribution meaning *cachiri* (*cassiri: kassili*) people. *Cachiri* is a fermented drink made from the pulp of the bitter manioc root. It is universally drunk among Pemon and Kapon alike.

*Hipurugota*, (*Ipurugoto*), is the name which 18th century Capuchin missionaries encountered for those Pemon living on the Icabaru River, a tributary of the Upper Caroní, on their first entry into that area in 1772 (Armellada 1960: 120). Its meaning and provenance are unknown.

### Ecological designations

Three names are in use which may be denoted as primarily ecological in derivation.

*Teikok*, (*Deigok*).<sup>67</sup> The Gran Sabana consists of a vast stretch of grassland which, in its eastern and highest parts has relatively few and small forested areas.<sup>68</sup> The northern Pemon refer to this, their savanna homeland, using the word *tek* or *tei*<sup>69</sup> contrasting it with *tureta*, forest or woodland. Deriving from their view of their habitat is the name *Teikok*, sometimes heard as *Toiko*, meaning savanna, or rock, people. It is a name which the Kapon also frequently use to refer to all the Gran Sabana Pemon (otherwise called "Arekuna" by them). The latter accept the name and use it to describe themselves.

*Remonokok*, (*Remonogok*). Pemon of the Gran Sabana refer to their country as *wekta*, a place of (-*ta*) mountains (*wek*), and this they contrast with *remonota*, a place of (-*ta*) plains (*remon*), a flat area without trees. They may refer to small, flat

<sup>66</sup> There is also a tributary of the Upper Mazaruni which is called *Kukui* and the people living in the valley; Akawaio Kapon, are referred to as the *Kukuigok* (*Kuköikok*). This is an Akawaio river group (see text p. 107) and should not be confused with the Pemon group.

<sup>67</sup> I am indebted to Cesáreo de Armellada for the linguistic evidence relating to the terms *Teikok*, *Remonokok* and *Inkarikok*.

<sup>68</sup> Urbina has calculated that the forest areas of the Gran Sabana constitute between approximately 10%-15% of the total surface, arriving at this figure by a combination of personal observation and consultation of air photographs (personal communication).

<sup>69</sup> *Tei* is the form used by the Kamarakoto Pemon, who in many words replace the final "k" sound with "ei" (Armellada: personal communication).

areas of the Gran Sabana by this designation, but in particular they use it for the vast expanse of the Rio Branco plains, which lack hills and mountains and which are inhabited by the S. Pemon, the Makushi. The latter are the *Remonokok*, people of the plains.

*Inkarikok*, (*Ingarikok*).<sup>70</sup> This is a reciprocal term, also ecologically based, being applied by the savanna people to those of their eastern neighbours who live in the high, forested lands of the North Pakaraima Mountains. In the main, it is a name used by S. Pemon (Makushi), living on the lower plains (*remon*) to denote Kapon (Patamona and southernmost Akawaio), who live in the mountains. That it is primarily an ecological term rather than an ethnic one, is indicated by the fact that the Cotinga River Akawaio, living on savannas just within the Brazilian borders, tend not to be referred to by this term.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, they themselves use the term *Inkarikok* to refer to other, closely related Akawaio Kapon (the people of the Ataro and Kukui Rivers) who are living in the mountains to their East.

However, ethnic and political connotations do sometimes creep into the use of ecological terms.<sup>72</sup> The N. Pemon consider the Rio Branco plains, *remonota*, to be the home of the Makushi (S. Pemon) or *Remonokok*, and also the land of the *Karaiwa* (*Karaiwa*), the Brazilians. *Tureta*, forest, on the other hand, has been associated with *Inkareta*, England (a play on the Spanish "Inglaterra"), because of the dealings the forest people have had with the "English" along the coastal areas of Essequibo and Demerara.

Finally there is the term *Iken* and *Ikenkok*. This is used by N. Pemon and has the literal meaning of "its" (*i-*) river mouth, confluence (*-ken*), denoting the triangle of land which is so formed. *Iken* refers to a trading area at a river mouth. Pemon designate the North-east direction and the country of the N. Kapon (Akawaio), this being the direction of a major Pemon trade route to the East. It might refer to *Kamarangken*, where the Kamarang River which rises in the North-east Gran Sabana flows into the Upper Mazaruni River. There, is the beginning of another trade route by land, leading to the Lower Mazaruni. However,

<sup>70</sup> Fournier 1979: 101 gives some alternative spellings.

<sup>71</sup> Information given me by José Fernández Avatey, Taurepan, living near Sta. Elena. It is possible that some do denote all Akawaio and Patamona (Kapon) as *Inkarikok*, since only the situation of a minority would fail to conform to it. Similarly, N. Pemon groups are generally regarded as "savanna people" even though some live in the forested valleys of the Upper Cuyuni and Paragua. The term *Inkarikok* is most frequently used in Brazilian literature and there is little doubt that its main area of use is amongst the northernmost settlements of the Makushi: that is, those who live in the flat, low and open plains (*remon*) of the Cotinga and Surumu. From this region the ridges and mountain tops of the Pakaraima escarpment present a considerable contrast. *Inka* is sometimes used in Carib languages to denote spinal column. Whether too, there is a connection with the autodenomination Kapon, is a mute point. *Inka*, meaning summit, ridge, mountain top, even perhaps mountain range, might possibly be related to the word *kak* (sometimes heard as *ka'*) meaning sky, the above, on high, a high place. If so, then *Inka-ri-kok*, (mountain top or summit, *inka*, belonging to, *-ri*, people, *-kok*,) an attributed, ecologically based designation, would complement the autodenomination *Ka(k)-pon*, people dwelling in the sky, the above people, or, people on high. (See text p. 81.)

<sup>72</sup> A comparison might be made with such ecologically based terms as "Highlanders" and "Lowlanders," as used for Scots: or "Northerners" and "Southerners" used in England. Cultural stereotypes and ethnic subdivisions often underlie such designations.



it might also refer to the river system much lower down, where the Mazaruni is joined by the Cuyuni and the two then flow into the Essequibo. This is the famous area of the "three rivers," where the Dutch early in the 17th century, established settlements and plantations and received Indian leaders, visitors and traders at their fortified post at Kyk-over-al. It might even refer to "the Bartica triangle," the promontory formed by the Mazaruni-Essequibo confluence, where the township of Bartica had its origins as an Anglican mission in 1829. This was the prime source for the much prized metal tools and other imported goods, sought by the Peoples of the hinterland of Western Guiana, stimulating months of travel by groups such as the Ye'kuana and being a main source of material wealth for the Kapon, who were strategically placed to descend the main rivers to tap it.<sup>73</sup> Being an imprecise term, *iken* may, over time, have been used to refer to a variety of trading places at river confluences.

### Autodenomination and nicknaming systems

The nicknaming system which operates between the two circum-Roraima Peoples, and also within each at the level of the major regional subdivisions, has been a source of misunderstanding by non-Indians, with the result that the literature is littered with references to a wide variety of designated groups which the authors in question thought to refer to separate "tribes."<sup>74</sup> Whilst the autodenomination of a "People" is used as a referrant at all levels of segmentation of the society, at the regional level a nicknaming system is also in operation. This has the effect of more precisely splitting up the folk unity into localized sub-groups and opposing them. The nicknaming structure of the N. Pemon and N. Kapon is depicted in Table 2 and has tentative reference to S. Pemon. (See note 45.)

It is immediately obvious that two different levels of structure are in operation. Thus, the Pemon nickname *Waika* is a conglomerate, concealing an internal differentiation of two regional groups (or tribes), the Akawaio-Serekong and the Patamona. Similarly, the Kapon utilization of the nickname *Arekuna* envelops at least the two subdivisions Arekuna and Taurepan and also, often by implication, the Kamarakoto, who are scarcely known as a group owing to geographical distance. It is likely that the nickname *Makushi*, applied by all the other regional groups (of both Kapon and Pemon)<sup>75</sup> is similarly a classifying nickname under which a

<sup>73</sup> Armellada and Gutiérrez Salazar (1981: 78) also state that *iken* is a name given to the whole region of Guyana. In this context it would refer to the total catchment area of the Essequibo River, or at least to its left bank tributaries.

<sup>74</sup> Edwards 1977: 8, for example, refers to the "Arekuna" who came into the Middle Kamarang River area with the Seventh Day Adventists in the 1930s, and he states that the families belonged to various sub-tribes. He mentions Arekuna, Kamarakoto and Taurepan, but also the Apangwokok (a river group within the Arekuna regional grouping) and several locational designations, the Roraima people and the Savanna people. Two levels of segmentation and ecological designations are thus referred to as "sub-tribes", yet they are not in the least equivalents.

<sup>75</sup> Thomas 1982: 18 states that all neighbouring groups refer to Makuxi as "Makuxi," though they refer to themselves as Pemon. He also noted that the "Yekuana" on the Paragua River referred to the Pemon and to the Pemon language as Makuxi.

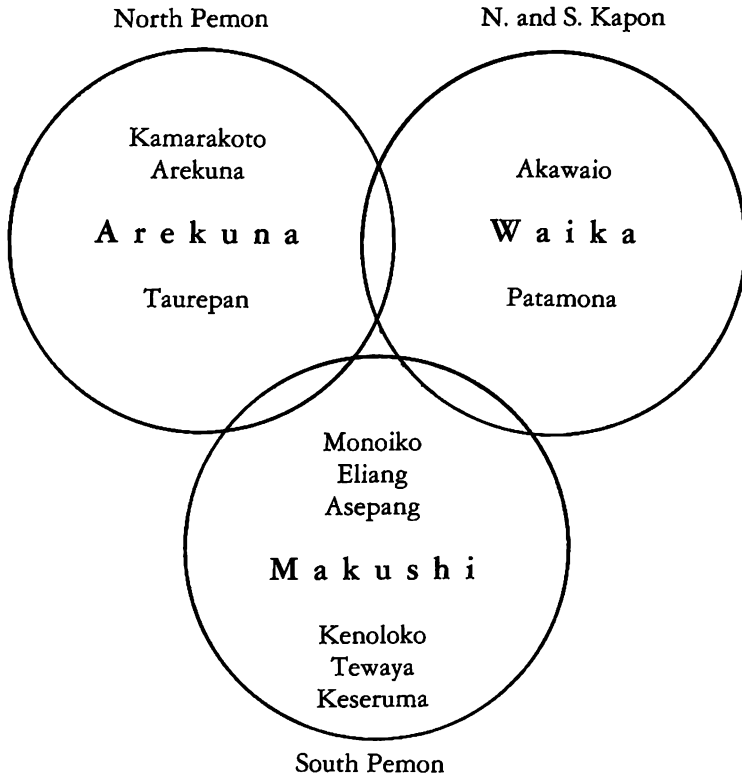


TABLE 2  
KAPON AND PEMON SEGMENTATION AND NICKNAMING

TABLE 3  
NICKNAME INTERCHANGES OF THE KAPON AND N. PEMON

<i>Autodenomination</i>	<i>Conglomerate (nickname)</i>	<i>Regional group (nicknames)</i>	
<i>Kapon</i>	Waika	{ Serekong Akawaio	Patamona
<i>Pemon</i>	Arekuna	Arekuna	Taurepan Kamarakoto

number of subdivisions is subsumed. Perhaps groups such as the Purucoto (Ipurugoto?), Paraviyana and Zapara, which the historical literature locates in what is today territory of the S. Pemon, were part of that unity. Thus, what are denoted as solidary units when seen from the outside, and named as such by opposed groups of similar structural level, are within themselves differentiated structures which are similarly opposed. Differentiation occurs internally only, since members of the complementary larger units see their opposites always in global terms. Thus, group nicknaming is a process in which the principle of relativity is in operation, whereby the name used depends upon the location of the speakers' group within the total structure.

As Thomas states (1982: 18), what is certain is that all the indigenous inhabitants of the Gran Sabana and neighbouring territories who call themselves Pemon, meaning people, or people who speak the same language, "by this term distinguish themselves from named groups of neighboring people." Essentially, the use of an autodenomination expresses unity and a common identity. The attribution of a nickname, or cultural stereotype, expresses disjunctions and distinctions and is a process whereby the conceptualization of segmentation is expressed, for when the members of one group coin a nickname and apply it to those of another, then it naturally follows that a similar reciprocation may be employed by the latter. The disjunction which takes place mutually is underlined by the fact that the names in question pick out some distinguishing feature, usually a derogatory one. As language is such an important diagnostic feature for determining group affiliation, speech is very frequently implicated. When the nickname in question is heard by the recipients, a sense of unease is felt since opprobrium, even if not known for sure, is suspected by the fact of application of a stereotype by another, potentially hostile, group of people.

Thus a common unity exists at the level of "People," expressed via autodenomination. Disunity and separation internally, at the level of regional grouping, is expressed by nicknaming, a device whereby one defines oneself by naming others —and by being named by others.<sup>76</sup> This latter principle is well expressed in Spanish in the following play on the usages comprised in the word *llamar*, to call and to name:<sup>77</sup>

*¿Cómo te llamas?* What do you call yourself? (What is your name?)

*Yo no me llamo.* I don't call myself. (I don't name myself.)

*Me llaman.* They call me. (They name me.)

The use of these two different naming systems at the two widest levels of Kapon and Pemon structure, that of People and that of internal, regional grouping, still awaits a meticulous investigation in the field. Our evidence so far points to the

<sup>76</sup> This is a device which is well-known in other societies. The use of the nickname Arekuna, for example, might be compared with the use of the word "Yank". Traditionally, this was applied by Southerners in the U.S.A. to Northerners (on the basis of locality and differences in culture, etc.). "Other" people often use it now for all nationals of the United States. Various reciprocal terms are applied in Great Britain, between Northern English and the Scots.

<sup>77</sup> Fray Cesáreo de Armellada drew this comparison when we discussed the nature of group naming among the Pemon.

existence of a complex of interlocking units, which are fields of social relations and of a conceptual, moral order, associated with specific geographical space, forming a segmentary system of a formal, if fluid, kind.

### Kapon and Pemon regional groups

What is the nature of these regional groups, differentiated by the mutual application of nicknames and stereotypes within the Kapon and Pemon unities? Each is assigned a territory which is a specific region within the circum-Roraima area (see Map 1). Travelling distance between them varies. The Kamarakoto, for example, are geographically more separate from the other two N. Pemon regional groups, being some four days walk away (at Kamarata) from the Arekuna (in the Kavanayén area) to their East. They are even further from the Taurepan to the South. A trek of several days separates the Akawaio Kapon from their nearest Patamona Kapon neighbours. However, between the Cotinga River Akawaio at Atnareng and their Pemon (Taurepan) neighbours to the North at Roraima, there is a two days' walk only.

Territory is crucial to the identity of a regional grouping and indeed a very close association with a homeland is strongly felt by the members of each. With threats of dispossession, as in the recent case of the Upper Mazaruni Akawaio,<sup>78</sup> this is being expressed more and more explicitly. For example, Akawaio in 1974 stated:

This land keeps us together within its mountains —we come to understand that we are not just a few people or separate villages, but one people belonging to a homeland. If we had to move, we would be lost to those who remain in the other villages. This would be a sadness to us all, like the sadness of death. Those who moved would be strangers to the people, spirits and places where they are made to go.

Linguistic unity may be added to territorial unity. Within the Pemon language (*Pemon maimu*) research workers have referred to three dialect groupings for the N. Pemon:<sup>79</sup> the Kamarakoto, Taurepan and Arekuna dialects. After many years of linguistic research, Armellada finds that there are phonological and lexical differences between the speakers in the three regional groups which can be said to amount to differences of dialect only. He considers that they are most pronounced in the case of the Kamarakoto. For example in structure there is a difference in the imperative forms. In pronunciation they tend to use "i" in place of the final "k": thus for *apok*, fire, one hears *apoi*. Some words are completely different

<sup>78</sup> I refer to the Guyana Government's recent intention to build a dam on the Upper Mazaruni River, which would eventually cause the inundation of most of the river basin and force all the Akawaio there to abandon their territory. See Bennett, Colson and Wavell 1978, and Henningsgaard 1981.

<sup>79</sup> Layrisse and Wilbert (1966: 82, 91) made a glottochronological calculation that the "Pemon sub-tribes" formed "a single group until more or less 1,000 years ago when they split into the various groups now represented by Taurepan, Arekuna, and Camaracoto." They found that the phonetic variation of speech between them corresponded to some 10 m.c. of separation between Taurepan and Kamarakoto, some 6 m.c. between Taurepan and Arekuna, and 4 m.c. between Arekuna and Kamarakoto "so that inter-group intelligibility is not seriously impaired."

(Armellada: private communication). Thomas (1982: 19) noted that "dialectal differences within the Pemon language, particularly between Kamarakoto and non-Kamarakoto-speakers, are used as markers of provenience within Pemon society as a whole." Certainly, Kamarakoto, Arekuna and Taurepan have been heard to complain that they find difficulty in communicating with each other, especially when unaccustomed to the regional differences, but in fact mutual understanding is not impaired —any more than, for example, between English speakers in different parts of the world.

No comparison is available between the language of the N. Pemon and that of the S. Pemon, Makushi. Armellada has maintained (private communication) that the differences might be comparable to those of Portuguese and Spanish, both conventionally regarded as different, if closely related, languages. However, im Thurn remarked (1967: 165):<sup>80</sup> "The Makusi dialect is very closely similar to the Arekuna, from which it differs chiefly in the mode of pronunciation..." and Simpson maintained that linguistically "Makuchi" and Taurepan are so similar that they nearly might be considered dialects of one language (Simpson 1944: 356-357). As I have already noted, exactly where boundary lines are drawn in the linguistic field by the speakers themselves, depends largely on concepts of identity and interrelationships and how people wish to manipulate these for social purposes. By stressing differences, a distancing between segments of a social structure may be expressed and, by stressing similarities, a common unity may be asserted.<sup>81</sup> Often, very fine points are selected to express differentiation. For example, Akawaio and Patamona speak the same language with only minimal dialectal variations, yet they have a series of tales which pinpoint differences in meaning and employment of certain words. One story, which is typical, is as follows:<sup>82</sup>

A Patamona was successfully fishing for *aymara* [the large, much sought-after *Macrodon trahira*]. A Serekong [Akawaio] could not get a bite. The Patamona, when asked for advice, recommended the use of *cuivá* as bait. In Patamona this is a snail, but the Serekong use the word to refer to the buttocks of a person and the Serekong fisherman understood this. One day, the Patamona, the Serekong and his son went out fishing. En route, the Patamona collected snails (*cuivá*). Whilst he was extracting the flesh for bait he heard screaming. Running to the river, he saw the Serekong slashing the buttocks (*cuivá*) of his son. "Those are not the *cuivá* for fishing: these are the ones used for fishing" —and he demonstrated the snails. "Take out the insides and use them." So it was that the Serekong learnt how to fish for *aymara*. (Translation supplied.)

Great hilarity is evoked when linguistic differences are evident.<sup>83</sup> The case of

<sup>80</sup> "Arecuna" is here used as a conglomerate probably, referring to all the Pemon North of the Makushi.

<sup>81</sup> The manipulation of language is now becoming clearer through studies of Basque, Breton and Maltese. For example, see Gullick 1974.

<sup>82</sup> I am grateful to A. Mansutti for relating three such tales (in a private communication of 19 November 1980).

<sup>83</sup> For example, the impact of the Kamarakoto dialect on Arekuna has been described by a civil engineer visiting Kamarata in company with some Arekuna carriers. Excited conversation took place when members of the two groups met, but after they had parted the Arekuna "were convulsed with laughter." There followed a "series of groans, grunts and giggles." The engineer (British) concluded: "Evidently the Camaracoto accent is just as amusing to an Arecuna as that of a Yorkshireman to a Cockney or vice versa" (Colson, J. R. 1964: 99).

the *Pötsawugok* (Akawaio pronunciation) firmly convinced me of the subjective and biased assertions which different regional groups propagate about each other's mode of speech. Akawaio informants laid great stress on the fact that the *Pötsawugok* were not only bad and wicked people but, moreover, could not be understood. They could only jabber and they spoke a "different" language. Since this view was supported by a Kamarakoto (Pemon) I assumed that this was a distant, probably non-Carib group. Later, I discovered that these incomprehensible people were also Pemon (Taurepan) and, although with a rather different pronunciation from that of Arekuna and Kamarakoto Pemon to the North of them, conversation with them was possible (Butt Colson 1973: 43).

Origin myths are related which underpin different kinds of segmentation. I have already referred to those which differentiate Kapon from Pemon, but there are also tales which refer to the origins of regional groups. Apart from that of the Pichauko<sup>84</sup> there is the story of how the Arekuna got their name.<sup>85</sup>

A husband quarrelled with his wife, tied her up and threw her in the river. She belonged to the Arekikmapö and her last words were:

*Arekuna-yamökrö upetoi-non kokwang-tok töng*

The many Arekuna, my relatives, shall remain.

The people of Arekikmapö thus became known as the Arekuna.

Neither of the circum-Roraima Peoples, nor any of their neighbours, possess corporate kin groups which are lineages. Effectively they operate as cognatic systems. The boundaries are inevitably blurred. Thomas' genealogical research for the Pemon shows that male heads of settlements have consanguineal kin in all levels of segmentation of Pemon society, and although men prefer to marry within their local community or its neighbourhood, wives are often sought in settlements at a distance. The result is that a network of kin and affinal relatives exists which covers all settlements and areas within a regional group and beyond (Thomas 1973: 121-122).<sup>86</sup> A similar situation pertains among the Akawaio Kapon. Members of a village and its satellite settlements constitute a close concentration of kin ties, but always there are families with close kin in other distant villages (up to 2-3 days' travel sometimes). The reasons for this are clear. There is no formal endogamous unit, only a strong preference for marrying locally. A system of uxorilocality exists whereby a son-in-law normally spends long periods residing with his wife's kin, if not in the same house then close by in the same settlement. The family he raises there and the visits to his natal group create bonds between the two communities on which other kinds of interrelationships (such as trading and feasting) may be built up. Thus eligible Akawaio men, who can be observed making the rounds of all

<sup>84</sup> A summary of the Akawaio tale is given on text pp. 94-95.

<sup>85</sup> This is related by Edwards 1977: 27. It is noteworthy that the name Arekikmapö incorporates the noun *are*, water rat. (See text p. 90 and also note 42.)

<sup>86</sup> Thomas uses the word region in a more restricted sense than I do, referring to areas of settlement in the neighbourhood of a focal point, such as a major village or mission (e.g. the Uonkén region). Nevertheless, his data show that kinship and the affinal ties of individuals extend throughout the tribal (my regional group) unity, although the kinship core is to be found at the settlement and local neighbourhood level. For his assertion of kinship networks see Thomas 1982: 52.

the villages of the regional territory trying to find a suitable spouse amongst distant kin, are the potential creators of a new, or renewable, web of interrelationships. As already noted (text p. 84) only a few marry right outside the regional territory or into other ethnic groups. I thus find Thomas' use of the concept of "network," as cores of kin relationships which overlap and expand outwards, to be a particularly appropriate one. Certainly the Akawaio regional (tribal) group can be defined as a network of kin relations, constantly renewing and readjusting itself, just occasionally blurred at the edges where marriages into other regional groups (Patamona Kapon and Pemon) have taken place and create links with similar networks and their internal cores of kin.

The overall interaction of the circum-Roraima Peoples within an inter-People trading network has already been discussed (pp. 84-85) but within the system itself the goods involved are conceived to pass between individuals and communities within the regional groupings. This is well illustrated by Urbina's description (1979: 38), of how Arekuna Pemon at the settlement of Tuaukén, North-east Gran Sabana, obtain beads from Pemon relatives down the Kamarang River in Guyana, who get them from the capital city, Georgetown. On the western side, they carry the goods to Kavanayén, the main Arekuna Pemon village, and there they are received and carried by other Arekuna to the Kamarakoto Pemon in Kamarata — some four days' walk between the two regional groups. Then they are carried by Kamarakoto to the Paragua River, and thence to the next ethnic group, the Ye'kuana (Soto). As already noted it is along such paths that ritual knowledge, stories and news of all kinds, are passed between the communities of the regional groups, and in recent times local prophets of Hallelujah have in the same way spread their individual messages from one to the other.

Whilst trading and intermarriage create bonds between communities in different regional groups, geographical distance and mutual suspicion have served to divide. The Arekuna Pemon hid their houses in the mountains, whilst their Akawaio Kapon neighbours hid theirs in the forest, inland from the main rivers, their boats and waterside landings being concealed up the small creeks. A sporadic raiding occurred between all the regional groups throughout the circum-Roraima area and beyond, and although this ceased about the mid-19th century a certain amount of information on it has passed down in oral tradition. From this and literary sources, it is clear that communities in all regional groups of the Pemon and Kapon were involved to some degree, both between those of the two Peoples and those within the ethnic unity of each. Thus, within the Pemon unity "an unusually strong feeling of hostility" was noted between Makushi and Arekuna (in Thurn 1967: 347) in the 1870s, and this probably related to "a great battle between war parties of the two tribes" which was reported to have occurred just before the 1842 Schomburgk expedition to Roraima (Richard Schomburgk 1848, II: 155, 164, 173).<sup>87</sup> The Pichauko (Taurepan) seem to have been the centre of hostilities, which

<sup>87</sup> This might have been the same event which was described by Brown 1876: 142-143, when raiders from the West of Roraima (presumably Taurepan) ambushed and slaughtered the inhabitants of a Makushi village. A raid which had occurred between two Gran Sabana villages just before R. H. Schomburgk's first arrival at Roraima, was another instance of hostilities, but between Taurepan of two river areas.

no doubt accounts for their enduring reputation as "bad people." They were regularly in conflict with Arekuna, Kamarakoto and also Maiongon (Holdridge 1931: 376-377),<sup>88</sup> and they may even have succeeded in uniting communities of the northern sector of the Gran Sabana against them (that is, the Kukuyikok, since Ernesto Pinto recalled his grand-parents telling how in their days there was much fighting between Pichauko and Kukuyikok, in areas now occupied by Kamarakoto and Arekuna in the latter instance and Taurepan in the former (see Armellada 1964: 24). Pemon and Kapon regional groups were similarly involved in mutual hostilities, the "Ingarikok" (Kapon) being reported as mortal enemies of the Taurepan and Arekuna (Koch-Grünberg 1916-1928, III: 5). Elderly Arekuna still speak of wars against Taurepan and Kamarakoto, but also against the Waika (Kapon), (Urbina 1979: 144, note 17).<sup>89</sup> Akawaio of the Kamarang River graphically relate how Arekuna used to raid down the Kamarang River, following the trail down the escarpment into the Upper Mazaruni basin and taking to woodskins to go on down river. On one occasion, a raiding party found the entrance to the trail which led to Warimabia village, 2½ hours' walk inland from the left bank. They attacked at dawn, killing many of the occupants. From then on, until raiding ceased with the arrival of representatives of the national society, the village was regarded as unsafe and, despite its very fertile soils, was abandoned.<sup>90</sup>

Regional groups (or tribes) are not, and never have been, corporate groups organized as total units either for war or other activity. What has been referred to as tribal hostilities in the literature are mainly border hostilities where communities of adjacent regions are in conflict. However, it is possible that the Caroní River area, on account of its comparatively rich resources of fish and forest products, including soils, was the scene of a certain escalation.<sup>91</sup> We are told (Armellada 1964:

<sup>88</sup> Maiongon are the easternmost group of Ye'kuana, being a nickname attributed by Pemon and Kapon. See Butt Colson 1973: 16-18.

<sup>89</sup> In 1952 an elderly Ataro River Akawaio told me how, as a young man, he had personally seen six "Arekuna" houses empty on the Gran Sabana, the inhabitants having all been killed by *Kamaragadok* (Kamarata people). He asserted that the *Kamaragadok* were Savanna People (*Deigok*) who were evil "like the *Pötsawugok*." (See Butt Colson 1973: 16). I had not at that time appreciated the internal divisions within the "Arekuna" unity as viewed from the Akawaio perspective, so I did not enquire which group of Arekuna he meant. He could have been using the conglomerate but referring to the southern group, the Taurepan.

<sup>90</sup> Butt (1958: 83) gives a full account of the Warimabia raid.

<sup>91</sup> In 1772 Capuchin missionaries traversed the Caroní River to its tributary the Icabaru, en route to the headwaters of the Rio Branco. They reported finding many "of the Camaragota nation" all along the Caroní, up from the mouth of the Paragua. On the Icabaru they found "many Indians of the Hipurugota nation." Without leaving the banks of the Caroní and Icabaru they reported that they saw Barinagotos, Cucuicotos, Ipurugotos and Mapisanas and they noted: "They kill each other frequently, and we found empty houses, in which were hung hammocks containing bones of dead people and heads broken by wooden clubs" (Armellada 1960: 120, 139, my translation). It is difficult to judge this conflict from a structural point of view for lack of detail. There is the added factor of the Portuguese presence which was being established in the area of the Rio Negro and Lower Rio Branco. This might have led to refugee groups moving northwards, trying to obtain a foothold in the Uraricoera (Upper Rio Branco) area and Caroní, and being resisted by the inhabitants there. There is also the possible complication of Carib raiding from the East, and the fact that some groups were encountered with arms from the Dutch in Essequibo.



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24) that it was because of increase in numbers that the Pichauko and Kukuyikok (involving the forebears of all three regional groups of N. Pemon) fought over hunting and fishing grounds and, specifically, for the places where poisoning of the rivers for fish could profitably occur. They also fought over women. Such motives underlay hostilities between Arekuna at the headwaters of the Kamarang River (a particularly sterile region of highland savanna) and the Akawaio living down river in an area of some very fertile soils and more game.<sup>92</sup> A number of Pemon and Akawaio Kapon tales also relate how marrying out may lead to fighting, if one or other of the spouses is ill-treated or dies in the settlement of in-laws.

Today, the friction which exists between regional groups takes the form of sorcery accusations<sup>93</sup> and accusations of malevolent invocations or cursing (*lethal taren*), whilst shamans in trance battle with the spirit forces of people of different regional groups, so confirming the suspicions of malpractice which are levied against these "other" groups. Most accusations are structured according to the named segmentation at regional group level, both within the Kapon and Pemon ethnic unities and between them. Thus, the Makushi state that the Inkariko (S. Kapon) and the Arekuna (N. Pemon) are *kanaima*, sorcerers (Myers 1946: 23). In turn the N. Pemon regional groups accuse the Makushi. Akawaio regularly accuse Arekuna (N. Pemon regional groups), and also specify that the Pötsawugok (Taurepan) are all sorcerers, while the Arekuna accuse the Waika (Akawaio and Patamona Kapon). That these are "structural hostilities" channelled according to segmentation, is indicated by the fact that total groups are accused, not individuals, families or settlements. Just occasionally, it is specified that "some bad people" exist in these groups, serving to exclude from blame members of the offending group who are relatives or friends. Ultimate responsibility is collective.

What kind of structures are we concerned with in respect of the regional groups into which the circum-Roraima Peoples are divided, and also their neighbours the Ye'kuana and perhaps other, non-Carib Peoples? Layrisse and Wilbert (1966: 80, 82-83) refer to the three Gran Sabana subdivisions as "the Pemon sub-tribes" and as "sub-groups of the Pemon tribe." But in the 18th century these sub-tribal unities were referred to as "nations" by the Spanish and Dutch, who perhaps identified them as being most comparable to their own national unities through their territorial base, internal cultural similarities, social interactions and broad-based kinship unity and, most importantly, through being named as discrete entities by others of the same order. In the 19th century they became referred to as "tribes" by the Venezuelans and British, and a general crescendo of complaint also developed because there was no overarching authority to be found —only settlement leaders with more, or less, ability to prevail on their followers. Central governments have increasingly sought to convert these sectors of social relationships into centralized entities. Thus the British Government began a system of village community organization among the Akawaio, with elections of local

<sup>92</sup> Refer to text pp. 116-117 for accusations of sorcery related to competition for resources.

<sup>93</sup> A sorcerer, or secret killer of a particular kind, is referred to as *edodo* (*etoto*) by Kapon and as *kanaima* by Pemon.

officials, and proposed to extend these to District election of officials in which all Akawaio would participate (Seggar 1959b: 86-88). Urbina refers to a recent Venezuelan Government installation of a regional Captain of the Arekuna (North-east Gran Sabana) making Kavanayén the centre of administration and seat of office (Urbina 1979: 33).<sup>94</sup> These are only the latest measures of many others which date from times of first contact, for incorporating Amerindian groups into a national State administrative hierarchy at the level of a local governmental system.<sup>95</sup>

Yet, as I have attempted to show, each regional group of the Kapon and Pemon Peoples is but a part of a total structure of segmentation, making a loose association of groups of similar Carib speakers, interacting with each other and, to a lesser degree, with segments of neighbouring Peoples. Like the larger, ethnic unities, within which they are embedded, the regional groups are territorially based, have a cultural unity, comprise a network of formal social relationships expressed in the idiom of kinship and a conceptual and moral identity. They also distance themselves, each from the others, disputing resources and raiding in the past, maintaining into the present a system of mutual accusation of sorcery and malpractice, relating myths of different origins, ridiculing each other's use of the common language and supporting a nicknaming system whereby stereotypes are projected on "others" and rejected by "us." There is no unifying organization in these regional groupings, or tribes, such as non-Indians have envisaged should exist, or should be created, or at least encouraged to develop, but each regional group is a unity in relation to others of a similar level and kind. Each regional entity lacks a totally acceptable name for reference, (except where an ecological designation exists), coherence being expressed through the nicknaming system, and therefore through the conceptualization of others. A distinctive unity only in relation to other unities, each collapses internally into a system of lesser structures. These are the river groups and their local communities and neighbourhoods, where space and organization meet and are operative. The river group system, so far gone unrecognized, is in my opinion a vital intermediary level between regional groups and settlements.

### The river group system

Whilst the regional groups are referred to via a system of interlocking nicknames, the people of the subdivisions of these name themselves, and are named by others, with reference to the fluvial system of their territory. Thus Akawaio internal segmentation is based on occupation of "river areas" and they see

<sup>94</sup> He also describes each settlement as having a Captain and two assistants, under the authority of the regional Captain.

<sup>95</sup> There was the strategy, for example, of confirming Amerindian leaders "in office" by giving them written documents of appointment and various insignia such as staff of office, breast ornaments, hats, jackets and sometimes a small salary. In this way they were allied, and made responsible for law and order, defence of their territory against other, neighbouring Europeans, for providing information on events in their area, etc.

themselves as members of "river groups."<sup>96</sup> This is signalled by the use of the suffix *-kok* or *-gok* (or *-koto*, *-goto*) which, added to the name of a river or stream (in creole English, "creek"), refers to that group of people dwelling in that particular river basin or valley. This concept is linked to the pragmatic circumstance that the rivers in the forested area of their territory are the main, natural highways, and that the easiest mode of travel, especially if baggage is carried, is by boat. This was true in the past, when woodskins (bark canoes) were used, and it is still true with the introduction of dugouts and the addition often, of outboard motors. As a safety measure against raiders, major settlements were previously a few hours walk by forest trail from the nearest navigable stream, but since the 1950s and with the establishment of missions and a central government presence, most villages have moved to the river banks. Nevertheless, although people who live in the same river area are now more frequently in contact with each other, regular encounters of those sharing a river valley always occurred.<sup>97</sup> In support of the basic importance of river communication in the formation of social ties between people living in the same valley, is the assertion by Akawaio that *-gok* added to a river name denotes people belonging to a relatively large river only: one with navigable stretches. It is never added to the names of shallow, winding brooks which meander through the forest, continuously blocked by rocks, trees, mud and sand.

The Akawaio name the following river groups:

<i>Kamalanigok</i>	Kamarang River people
<i>Mazalingok</i>	Mazaruni River people
<i>Kukuigok</i>	Kukui River people
<i>Kakogok</i>	Kako River people
<i>Atarorigok</i> <sup>98</sup>	Ataro River people
<i>Arabarugok</i>	Arabaru River people
<i>Kwatingok</i>	Cotinga River people
<i>Panarogok</i>	Panari River people.

They occasionally refer to river groups of previous times, no longer existing because their inhabitants had moved into another valley. For example, the *Kwialagok*, the Kwiala (Kwiara) being a tributary of the Upper Kako River, and the *Haiekagok*, the people of the Haieka River which is a tributary near the source of the Mazaruni. The *Keiyunigok*, Cuyuni River people were also mentioned, referring to a former time when a substantial number of Akawaio lived in this valley.

A river name plus the addition of *-gok* denotes a structural entity which persists through time. It is activated when people move into a river valley and settle there; from thenceforth, as a group, they take the name of their river area.

<sup>96</sup> I discovered the existence of a river group system, as a component of Akawaio structure, during my first period of field research. The initial material is contained in my doctoral thesis: Butt 1954: 36-39.

<sup>97</sup> In this context, the etymology of *-kok* put forward by Armellada and Gutiérrez Salazar has added significance, for they maintain that it might derive from *akok*: "el que hace camino de, o camina" - he who makes headway, or travels (Armellada and Gutiérrez Salazar 1981: 103).

<sup>98</sup> Sometimes the possessive *-ri* (or *-ru*) may be inserted, indicating the people "belonging to."



Desertion of the valley usually leaves the name and the unity it implies in abeyance, for renewal when repopulation occurs. That the river group system of reference is extended by the Akawaio Kapon to their southern segment, the Patamona, is indicated by their use of *Eremagok* for people of the Ireng River (see text pp. 91-92). They do not, on any regular basis, use this mode of reference for their Pemon neighbours.

Within the N. Pemon unity however, we also find in use local names with a geographical reference and the addition of *-gok* (*-kok*) or *-goto* (*-koto*), indicating that there is a specific group of people dwelling there. In the same way as among Kapon, these link a number of settlements together under a common name deriving from the river valley they inhabit and hold in common. For example, the Taurepan people and settlements in the area of the *Eruani* (Yuruani) River, a tributary at the very head of the Caroní, denote themselves *Eruanigok*. Similarly, there are *Kukenanrikok*, the people (*-kok*) belonging to (*ri*) the Kukenan (*Kukenam*) River: *Apangwowkok* (Edwards 1977: 8),<sup>99</sup> the Apanwao River people (Arekuna), on a tributary of the Caroní River: the *Antuariliko*, probably the people of the Antabari River (Fournier 1979: 100, quoting Koch-Grünberg). However, among the Pemon at least, there are two notable exceptions<sup>100</sup> to the association of the names of rivers with the suffix *-kok*, *-gok*. This occurs in the case of the designations *Roraima-gok*, the people of Roraima mountain, and *komichi-gok*, the people of the cold, referring to the chilly and windy heights of the same mountain and its neighbourhood. It is perhaps the esteem in which this exceptionally striking mountain is held which explains this usage, a departure from the customary incorporation of a river name. However, in the case of the Pemon there is also an ecological factor of difference. On the heights of the Gran Sabana there is a network of small streams which are unnavigable, being shallow or dry for much of the year, although after rain they may become roaring torrents. They have endless rapids, falls and rocks. Even lower down the Caroní River, broad and navigable stretches are interrupted by falls and rapids to the extent that people often find it easier, safer and quicker, to walk. Since the country is mostly open grassland, walking is generally preferred, although this is not true of the Upper Cuyuni River or the Paragua River where Pemon have settlements in lowland forest and the river network is, at the same time, the communication network. We may thus contrast Akawaio country and its river highways with the Gran Sabana Pemon (and perhaps also the majority of the S. Pemon) who are not united by rivers in the same way. Whereas amongst Kapon the designation of river areas and of the people inhabiting them as river groups is a universal, systematic and a prominent structural feature, the Pemon may tend to stress occupation of different regions of the Savanna, the rivers being one amongst other geographical points of reference with social structural significance. Whether the same, systematically formulated

<sup>99</sup> He refers to the Apangwowkok as a sub-tribe of the Arekunas of Venezuela.

<sup>100</sup> Pemon do occasionally refer to the *Kaponokok*, that is, the Kapon group of people (the group of sky, *ka'*, people). It seems as though the suffix can be used in conjunction with topographical and ecological terms other than river names.

river group system exists among them is therefore a matter for further investigation.

Among the Akawaio the occupants of a river area are the holders of its resources. That is, they have usufruct rights against others. The occupants use its fertile soils for cultivation, hunt the animal life, fish the streams, and collect the vegetable and mineral resources for food and technology. Using forest paths and navigable stretches of river, they travel between the various resource areas and the settlements they establish to exploit these. The rights to usufruct exercised by the river area occupants, (to a portion of the course of the river if it is a long one such as the Kamarang and Mazaruni), is respected by others to the degree that they often prefer to trade for some desirable commodity from the area, rather than try to exploit it directly for themselves - even by agreement with the possessors. Thus, Kukui River people lacked trees for making woodskins and either had to travel to the Imbaimadai area of the Mazaruni River in order to make them, or to buy them. They preferred the latter course.<sup>101</sup> Direct exploitation from outside a particular river area depends largely on the mustering of kin ties with the local group and then doing an exchange deal.

River travellers from outside the area are expected to make themselves known and to share food (or receive hospitality to be reciprocated at a later date), and exchange news. A party of people going secretly through a river area without making itself known, is regarded with grave suspicion and might be designated as sorcerers (*edodo*). Whilst, by the 1950s, those traversing a main river might certainly engage in hunting and fishing along the route, they were expected to stop and share any substantial kill made near a local settlement. On one occasion a party of travellers fulfilled this obligation by leaving a piece of meat on the river landing of the settlement near which they had made a kill. Some bitter criticism ensued in the settlement about other people taking the local meat supply, but since a share was left behind, the matter rested there. In former times, when fear of active hostility was justified and settlements were situated away from the river banks, traversing distant river routes was probably a hazardous business if inter-group relationships were not friendly.

Recognition of the occupation and exploitation of resources of a river area, and the possibility of hostility if these rights were to be breached, serve to give a segment of population a spatial framework, an area of countryside to which it is attached by both self-interest and sentiment. Individuals, through ties of kinship and affinity, may have a personal right to extend their activity, as semi-members or adopted members of the group in question, but they always take care to associate themselves closely with the resident family patronizing them. For example, when hunting they accompany a resident as a hunting partner "to show them" the way and to ensure that the personified forces of nature (*imawari*), which guard the environment there, do not see them as "strangers" and make them ill.

<sup>101</sup> Pot clay was just such another resource, the people in the vicinity regarding clay deposits as their own. I found it difficult sometimes, to locate useful plants for identification since their whereabouts were carefully concealed from strangers —basketry cane being a case in point.

River group names then, unify the facts of birth and residence with the occupation and use of space defined by a particular stretch of river valley. The names are employed by the members of the component settlements, as well as by members of other river groups of the same structural level. The river group naming system is thus different from that of the two other systems already discussed, that of autodenomination at the level of "People" and that of attributed nicknames at the level of "tribe" or regional group. Mutual acceptance is facilitated by the fact that the names do not in themselves contain an offensive reference.<sup>102</sup> They denote some natural feature. For example, *Kakogok* translates as the people of the red jasper (*kako*) river: the *Kukuigok* are people of the hawk river: *Eremagok*, people of the *wring* weed river. Such terms are similar in kind to the topographically based terms *Remonogok*, *Inkarikok*, *Teikok*, but are at a different level of segmentation, being more precise and having reference to a river.<sup>103</sup>

### *The nature of the river group*

A river group is a unity as regards dialect spoken. River groups within the regional group show some differences in pronunciation (one may hear an "r" sound instead of an "l" for example) and there are local phrase preferences. Variations in customs take the form of such differences as food and drink preferences and modes of preparation or a slightly different repertoire of songs and of ways of organizing dance festivals. Among the Akawaio at least, the identity of a river group is sometimes supported conceptually by myths of different origin. For example, the original Kukui River man was said to have emerged from a certain tree. One myth of origin for the Kamarang River people stated that they were descendants of a woman who emerged from that river and became the spouse of one of the previous inhabitants, who were all shamans. A second myth related descent from a worm (*wölöwölö*), or grub, which lives in the ground. She became pregnant by a certain man, but was squashed when her mother-in-law was sweeping the floor where she was, according to her custom, living in the dirt. Her child was squeezed out and became the ancestress of the Kamarang River people.

To appreciate the importance of the river group level of segmentation its composition has to be investigated. This varies to some degree between Kapon and Pemon. Akawaio river groups usually comprise one or more major settlements,<sup>104</sup> which I refer to as villages. I define these as such because they have a relatively large population (70-80 people was an average number in the 1950s). They possess a special building for feasting, dancing and general ritual purposes of the inhabitants and their guests. There is a recognized leader (*epuru*) with a number of principal household heads who constitute his assistants (*poitoridong*). Since the villagers are only in part-time occupation, a major role of their leader is to call them together for

<sup>102</sup> Pichauko seem to be an exception to this, in that a very unfavourable stereotype has become attached. However, the name in itself is not exceptional and some Pemon maintain that there is a Pichau River, drinking cup river.

<sup>103</sup> *Roraimakok* is perhaps a substitute for the river name *Kukenanrikok*.

<sup>104</sup> Butt (1970) discusses the Akawaio settlement pattern in detail.



a variety of communal occasions. When not residing in their village house (often occupied by an extended or joint family group) the households live in a scatter of small, satellite settlements situated in the neighbourhood of the village, at a distance of a few minutes' to several hours' travel away. These are the joint and extended family garden places, where households of very close kin maintain a second dwelling house (or houses) and a second set of gardens, often their principal ones.

A large river area, such as the Mazaruni or Kamarang, has several such villages, each with its satellite settlements occupying a specific sector of the river valley. The smaller river areas, subdivisions of the larger ones, are occupied by just one or two village units. (See Map 2.) For example, the Ataro River group, a subdivision of the Kukui River group, had just one village in the 1950s, its joint family garden places at relatively short distances away being linked to it by forest trails. The *Arabaru-gok*, on the Upper Kako River, consisted in the 1950s of just one, large joint and extended family unit. Kinship ties are of the closest kind in these small river groups, taking the form of head of family, younger kin, their spouses, children and dependants. These and the somewhat larger settlements (of some 15-30 people), given favourable conditions, may grow to become villages. Such a growth may be due to natural increase aided by skilful marriage arrangements, but it may also be due to groups of other kin joining up and, via the alliance, creating a multiple, village unit. Akawaio men mostly prefer to marry within their natal river group and so to avoid the disagreeable consequences of matrilineal residence at a distance, with strangers. However, marriage between members of communities in different river groups frequently occurs, so that a network of kin relationships extends throughout the regional group, being more tightly drawn within each river area and with the greatest concentration of ties being found in the village and smaller settlements. Although the members of each village or settlement will regularly traverse their nearest portion of river and exploit the most immediate resources, they join with other communities using the river as a common highway, periodically visiting, collaborating with, and feasting each other at intervals. The intensest interaction within a river area coincides with periods of abundance of food. For example, cooperation of a considerable number of people occurs at times for "poisoning the creek" for fish (Sept-Oct and Feb-March when rivers are low), and feasting, drinking and dancing follow. At such periods, leaders and important men often combine with kin and affines in other river areas and issue invitations to reciprocal fishing parties.

Although large settlements (or villages) were occasionally encountered among the N. Pemon of the Gran Sabana before any direct non-Indian influences were exerted (for example, R. H. Schomburgk 1841a: 205), the typical pattern described by Thomas (1982: 73-74) is a named cluster of houses which may be up to five minutes' walk apart. That is, whilst Akawaio have nucleated villages with satellite settlements at considerable distance, Pemon customarily have a dispersed community pattern. Thomas remarks that there is no recognition of levels of "spatial organization" but: "They do classify persons in terms of space, however, and in that context sometimes refer to the large river nearest the settlement of the

person referred to." He does not follow up the concept of a river group, but turns instead to the idea of a cluster of settlements, or neighbourhood (based on a stream or stretch of river), which he defines as a

...group of spatially proximate settlements (usually no more than an hour's travel across on foot or by canoe) which manifest intersettlement visiting and some concentration of genealogical ties, reckoned cognatically. Neighborhood boundaries are drawn using this combination of spatial and behavioral criteria.

Thomas notes (1973: 99-109)<sup>105</sup> that the Pemon themselves do not explicitly recognize the neighbourhood, so that it is an anthropologist's extrapolation utilizing a certain set of facts. As his genealogical research shows, there is no boundary: "even though the neighborhood is more or less composed of cognatically related persons, the core kindreds of adults span the whole of the tribal territory." The ideal is to concentrate sibling and marriage ties in one's own neighbourhood, but

...no neighborhood ever attains enough critical mass to involute, to turn inward upon itself and become a discrete unit, one to which the term "endogamy" would be applicable. Neighborhoods are composed of settlements, which are discrete but not endogamous. Each settlement is a focus of ties of relatedness which spread outward from it in several directions, sometimes skipping nearby locations to end farther away. While neighborhoods do center on a given river or section of a river system, the drawing of neighborhood boundaries is always a function of visiting and interaction patterns as well as of physical space (Thomas 1982: 106).

Since there is a distribution of kinsmen over the land Thomas, as already noted, favours the term "network":

...if we think of a series of overlapping networks, spread out in time as well as space, connecting the various households and settlements over the Pemon landscape, we have an accurate metaphor for much of Pemon social life (Thomas 1982: 52).

Without having had the opportunity of making a definitive comparison between N. Pemon and N. Kapon structures, it would appear that we might take Thomas' Pemon "neighborhood" to be the equivalent of the Akawaio scatter of satellite settlements, both having a concentration of local genealogical ties and constant mutual visiting and interaction. But whereas the focus of the Akawaio neighbourhood is the making and occupation of a village, the Pemon one is of several small, independent joint family settlements (averaging about 7-8 people in one or two houses), with hospitality and joint activities centred on the household of the most influential leader of the neighbourhood.<sup>106</sup> The problem of comparison is

<sup>105</sup> Refer to his map on p. 100. For example, investigating the "Uonken region" in 1971, with its 36 settlements and a total population of 611, Thomas identified 7 such "zones" or neighbourhoods.

<sup>106</sup> The complex reasons for differences in the settlement patterns of the Pemon of the Gran Sabana and the N. Kapon in the Upper Mazaruni basin cannot be discussed here. I consider environmental factors to be a very important element.

not aided by indigenous naming. Among both Kapon and Pemon, settlement names derive from the name of a nearby stream or natural feature.<sup>107</sup> The term assigned to any inhabited site is just *pata*, meaning "place," or *patasek*, meaning "prepared place" or home. It is a vague word in that it can refer to any kind of settlement, large or small. Ultimately it can even be used to refer to "world" or "earth" and in cult songs it is often used for "heaven." It is the context which defines it therefore. Another way of referring to a settlement is by the name of its leader, or primary household head, with the suffix of *-kon* (*-gon*) added, denoting a group of people, the companions of a certain person, so designating the population of a place.

Among both Kapon and Pemon, fighting, bellicosity and seriously anti-social behaviour are excluded from the local community through a process of fissioning whereby the perennially troublesome person and family eventually leave, either to live apart or go to other, distant, relatives. However, when people are classified with their neighbours to form a group, they become stereotyped in accordance with the experiences of the speakers with "those people." "Sometimes disparaging characterizations are made by reference to place of origin or of residence, thus avoiding a reference in terms of kinship or other relationship" (Thomas 1982: 34). Inter-group hostilities have operated in this context and have taken two forms: that of active warfare and that of accusations of sorcery and malpractice. In this, the kinds of relationships which take place between adjacent segments of the Kapon and Pemon ethnic unities and between the regional groups within each, have their counterpart in inter-river group relationships.

Fighting between communities of two adjacent river groups within a regional group such as the Akawaio, may impede the business of getting a living. Akawaio relate how the Mazaruni River people used to fight with the Kamarang, Kako and Kukui River people, and how when the Kako and Kukui River people fought and attacked families in their gardens, the Kako people had eventually to sue for peace. They had not been able to enter the forest to cut new gardens and were on the verge of starvation. Had peace not been forthcoming, they would have had to abandon their village and go to a more remote area—or even find an unoccupied river valley. On the organization for raiding Akawaio relate that: "One man would think: he would decide to go fighting against another village because of some grievance. He would ask his friends in the village and get them to accompany him. He would perhaps go to another and ask the people there to help him. Some might not want to go, but those fighting would assemble in one place and then go to attack." This mode of recruitment seems to have been customary and, given settlement autonomy, total mobilization did not occur except perhaps in the case of the smallest river groups which were coterminous with one or two allied villages. Large scale war enterprises consisted of the formation of an alliance between friendly

<sup>107</sup> Matallana 1937: 64-68 translated the names of 82 settlements which he visited among the Arekuna and Taurepan and his findings demonstrate well the basic principles in ascribing names to settlements. So *Uonkén* means mouth (*-ken*) of the river *Uon* (the name of a minute fly which haunts these waters). Configuration of ground, an animal or plant name, are customarily incorporated.

village leaders, supported by their immediate following, against a mutual enemy.<sup>108</sup>

Accusations of sorcery and malpractice regularly underline structural cleavages represented by the different river groups. Members of one's own village and neighbourhood are denoted as "good people" and members of the same river group (even if a large one with several separate clusters of settlements) are not normally accused of sorcery. But people in "other" river groups may be accused. The accusations take a structural form. Normally, no individual is mentioned nor is a particular village or settlement pinpointed. Instead, people of the entire river group are categorized as sorcerers and bad people. Thus, if no particular event or specific relationships of individuals and their families suggest otherwise, blame for illness or death is assigned to an opposed unit without further differentiation. River groups which are most distant from the accusers tend to be regarded as the most evil and virulent.

Within the Akawaio regional unity, the structuring of sorcery accusations also indicates a differential in the segmentation of the river groups and the operation of a principle of relativity. There exist two, large river areas, comprising the main Upper Mazaruni River valley and the valley of its major tributary, the Kamarang. Each has tributaries and sub-tributaries, although in the case of the Kamarang in the 1950s only one sub-tributary, the Attabrau, was an operative river group. Under Seventh Day Adventist influence, all the Kamarang population had gathered into villages and settlements strung out along the banks of the main river.<sup>109</sup> The Wenamu River group (on a tributary of the Cuyuni River) was sometimes referred to. When mutually accusing each other as groups, the people of the Mazaruni and Kamarang respectively ignored any internal differentiation in the other. When in the Kamarang valley for example, people advised that one should not go up the Mazaruni River "for all the people are bad up there." Unless prompted they rarely referred to the Kukui or Kako sub-groups or the subdivisions of these. Similarly, in the Mazaruni there was regular reference to the evil practices of the Kamarang River people, and for good measure the total group was condemned as "Arekuna," although sectors in fact still regarded themselves as Kapon despite some intermarriage with Pemon. Within the Mazaruni River area at large, one was not only informed of "the bad Kamarang River people," but it was asserted that the people of the main sub-tributaries of the Mazaruni were also bad, that is, the Kukui and Kako River peoples. Once within the Kukui and Kako areas the mutual accusations of these were soon obvious and so, also, was their hostility towards the people living on the main Mazaruni River. At this level the existence of the bad

<sup>108</sup> Settlements in the region of the mouth of a river tributary often maintain friendly relationships with any near settlement on the main river. Kinship and collaboration due to proximity therefore cut across conceptual boundaries. For example, in the 1950s, the people of Kako Mouth village collaborated with the people of Tagaikapai, a small village on the Mazaruni just above the confluence. Accusations of sorcery were directed by Mazaruni people to those of the Kako group who were living much further up that river.

<sup>109</sup> There was one notable exception, the inland village of Warimabia, which was taking on the status of a large garden settlement as a satellite of the Seventh Day Adventist mission village of Waramadong on the banks of the Kamarang River.

Ataro River people (on a tributary of the Kukui) and of the really wicked people of the Cotinga River people in Brazil, became apparent. Thus, the smaller river groups tended to be subsumed under the names of the main river groups when the accusers were in the larger river areas. Once in the area of the smaller segments then it became clear that these too were internally differentiated and mutually suspicious and hostile—as groups. Clearly, relative position is as important in the river group system as it is in the segmentation conceptualized for the ethnic units with their nicknaming procedures (see text pp. 97-100 and Tables 2 and 3).

The Akawaio system of river groups breaks down as follows:

<i>Cotinga R.</i> <sup>110</sup>	——	Panari R.	
.....			
		Kukui R.	Ataro R.
<i>Mazaruni R.</i>	——	Kako R.	Arabaru R. Kwiara R.
.....			
<i>Kamarang R.</i>	——	Attabrau R.	
.....			
<i>Cuyuni R.</i>	——	Wenamu R.	

A characteristic feature of this kind of segmentary structure, in which the component groups in certain circumstances regard themselves as discrete, is to pass the blame for malpractice on to "other" people. A good example was afforded by Akawaio attempts in 1957 to discover the underlying cause of a whooping cough epidemic which had led to several deaths. At first the river groups were accusing each other, but since settlements in all the river areas were suffering an escalation occurred. The Mazaruni people (where I was residing), had blamed the Kamarang River group but the blame was soon attributed to the "Arekuna" at large on the Gran Sabana. The Arekuna regional group members of the Pemon got to hear of this, being adjacent and having relatives in the Kamarang. They pointed out that they too, were suffering similarly. Then, following their internal segmentation at regional group level, they passed the blame on to the Kamarakoto at Kamarata. So the Mazaruni group eventually learnt that the "Kamaragadok" were sending sickness and, according to the Arekuna in the Kamarang River, were said to be lacking food and hungry, and so were "sending bad spirits and sickness" to the Akawaio with the intention of destroying them and then moving into the more fertile Upper Mazaruni basin to take the food and gardens. This was a motive which Akawaio had long been attributing to Arekuna. The incident shows how accusations may jump from one segmentary level to another, between the regional groups of the Kapon and Pemon ethnic unities and between river groups within the

<sup>110</sup> The Cotinga River belongs to a different river system, being a tributary of the Rio Branco and, ultimately, of the Amazon. However, Akawaio associated the Cotinga people closely with the Ataro River group. There was considerable intermarriage between them and Ataro people seemed the only ones not to accuse the Cotinga River people (*Kwatinmigok*) of unmitigated evil.

regional group. Encountering this kind of accusation system, Henry Roth thought he had found a link between Carib ferocity and sorcery (*kanaima*) accusation when he wrote:

There is another peculiar fact, which I think shows that the Caribs must have been a most ferocious and feared tribe before Vespucci spied these shores... if on asking an individual of the most inland tribes "where does the Kanaima come from" and if you do get an answer, it invariably would be "the next tribe". And tribe after tribe will tell you the same thing, always pointing towards the coast, until you meet the Caribs (1950: 26).

Roth was resident in the Rupununi savannas, in the far interior of Guyana. Had he put the same system of enquiry into reverse from a position on the coastlands, his conclusion might have been the opposite!

This "distancing" (to use a term applied by Thomas for warding off others and for non-recognition of kin), whereby ill always comes from "the next place" and "the next people" (and even occasionally, distancing in time by saying "long ago people had sorcery"), is paralleled in the nicknaming system employed at regional (tribal) level. The term *Arekuna*, which we noted as being used by Kapon as a conglomerate, shows this very well. Simpson (1944: 355-356) recorded the name and proposed that it should be applied to all three regional divisions on the Gran Sabana, and so a return be made to the usage of former travellers of referring to all the Caribs of South-east Venezuela who were not "Maquiritares" (i.e. *Ye'kuana*) as "Arekunas." He criticized Koch-Grünberg for making an *Arekuna* and *Taurepan* division and for failing to realize that the *Taurepan* were not differentiated from the *Arekuna* to any greater extent than the latter themselves were internally differentiated. He stated that, as Koch-Grünberg himself had indicated, "his *Taurepanes* are *Arekunas*" even in the indigenous terminology, for the *Kamarakoto* call them *Arekunas*. The *Taurepan* gave their more personal, or locally specific, name only after he had got to know them.

In reality, the name *Arekunas* is applied by all these Indians to their neighbours and frequently to themselves. The *Kamarakotos* for example, use this latter name for themselves, but call the people in the neighbourhood of the *Caroní*, *Arekunas*, although these people may be of *Kamarakoto* descent or have a close kinship with them and call themselves *Kamarakotos*. The *Kamarakotos* also call all the Indians of the Gran Sabana *Arekunas*, and all the most distant ones of the Upper *Caroní* (translation from Spanish text of Simpson 1944: 355-356).

Simpson ended by saying that he would not only designate the *Taurepan* and *Kamarakoto* as *Arekuna*, but also those of the *Luepa* area (N.E. Gran Sabana), who were also referred to as *Arekuna* by the *Kamarakoto*. Effectively, he was proposing a unitary structure under one name (a nickname), so fusing three, regionally based segments, each of which is differentiated by the other two and all of which dislike being referred to as *Arekuna*! His argument beautifully illustrates a process of fission and fusion at a conceptual level: the passing of a disagreeable nickname from one to the other internally, but with its application to the total unit being made both by neighbouring Indians (the *Kapon*) and by the anthropologist. Had the existence

and nature of segmentary systems been known previously, we might have been spared a great deal of mental contortion as investigators struggled with the problems of inter-group structures and relationships, their system of attributed names and mutual accusations involving a principle of relativity.

## Conclusion

The naming system shows a unity at the level of "People", expressed via an autodenomination. There is another unity at the level of the local groups (river group, village, settlement and neighbourhood) identified by the general recognition and use of an ecologically derived name denoting occupation of a particular locality. Between these levels is a system of nicknaming expressing a complementary opposition involving regional groupings: that is, where unity exists but is opposed to other equivalent unities. There is a dilemma here, for if the nicknames applied to these medial segments should be removed (as the receivers have often expressly wished), in favour of sole use of autodenominations and local group names, how can we refer to the entity which has been denoted "tribe" or "sub-tribe"?

At the practical level of government administration, W. H. Seggar, who spent 14 years as District Officer at Kamarang Station, among the Akawaio Kapon in the Upper Mazaruni basin, stated baldly:

The lack of any kind of tribal organisation has been one of the greatest stumbling blocks to the Administration in its efforts to bring the Amerindians in line with the other peoples of the country simply because there was no one through whom the Administration could work. It had to attempt to deal with the head of each family. When the Upper Mazaruni Amerindian District was established in 1945 the first task was to appoint a Chief for each major settlement (Seggar 1959a: 21).

This epitomizes the problem of the encounter between centralized political institutions and segmentary systems. I have been considering levels of structure which have no differentiated political institutions but which are interlocking sectors of social relationships, linked to geographical space and conceptualized as discrete. It is the interaction of these, one with another over time, which provides the organization of group relationships, the units themselves being acephalous.

Clearly, we are dealing with a segmentary system, but one which is relatively informal and fluid. Unlike the segmentary systems of the *Tribes without rulers* (Middleton and Tait 1958), a work which Evans-Pritchard inspired through his classic study of the Nuer (1940), there are no segmentary lineages or corporate descent groups related to territorial segmentation. There is not even a systematically organized kinship system of groupings of wife givers and wife receivers.<sup>111</sup> Tight cores of cognatic kin are found at the level where overt political organization begins, in the river groups (Kapon), or local groups (Pemon), comprising the villages, settlements and their neighbourhoods. As Thomas noted for the Pemon

<sup>111</sup> Kapon and Pemon languages contain terms which might lend themselves to the concept of lines of descent. Aspects of the kinship terminology, brother and sister exchange marriage and bilateral cross cousin marriage could allow for a two-section system.

(1973: 109, 99), where close proximity exists and visiting takes place, the people are classified as kin, even if actual genealogical relationships are unknown, and he perspicaciously remarks that "the kindred has a spatial component." An overall unity is also present. Assisted by ego-centred terminology, kinship networks occur which overlap with each other, extending beyond local groups and river areas into agglomerations of these (the regional, or tribal, group). Some kin ties extend across regional group boundaries within and between both circum-Roraima Peoples, whilst a very few even assist in linking neighbouring ethnic groups to the total network. Nowhere, however, is there rigidity, for the attitudes of close family groups even, frequently change towards each other according to degrees of amicability at particular times. When they are all happy with each other, each refers to the others as relatives: when they fall out, then they may say that these are not kin, but "other" people! The manipulation of language shows the same features, dialect being used to express closeness or distance in particular contexts of harmony or hostility, relative to the groups implicated. Above all, the naming system is an indicator of both unity and segmentation, and at the regional (tribal) level these two conditions operate together through the mutual attributions of nicknames and stereotypes. There are no discrete institutions which actively govern in such a system of attributions, but a shuffling of group interrelations, mediation and a manipulation of local factions occur through the personally held statuses of shamans and village leaders of repute. Disgust and ridicule implicit in most nicknames, and accompanying tales and myths of distinct origin, express feelings of unease, distrust, opposition and downright hostility. Underlying them often, is a history of conflict and fear of others. Accusations of sorcery and malevolence, which are also expressions of structural cleavage and friction, denote distance between segments in conflict, but at the same time reaffirm the internal solidarity which accusers and the accused both experience.

These processes, indicating cohesion and separation at various levels of interrelationship, although not the systematic, almost mechanical, operations of fission and fusion which Evans-Pritchard propounded for the Nuer of the Sudan, yet involve the same sorts of principles. They are those of complementary opposition. We too can assert that without opposition the higher segments do not exist - as, traditionally, in the case of the regional group (or tribe). We can similarly say that masses are not organized by social structure: rather that the organization is made by certain kinds of massing. That is, a segmentary system is one in which political organization resides solely in the alignment of groups based on a principle of complementary opposition, with mediation by persons of influence, notably in ritual or ceremonial contexts. A principle of relativity operates at the different levels. Such a system, by definition, cannot operate via a structure and hierarchy of offices and administration - the lack of which, in Amerindian society, national state officials have so acutely felt.

How, ultimately, do we classify the Pemon and Kapon political system? It is not a segmentary lineage system of the kind we are familiar with, because there are no lineages. However, hierarchical, centralized political systems of different kinds have different kinship systems associated with them. Why therefore, should we



assume that segmentary systems can be characterized by only one kind - namely one with lineages? I suggest therefore, that we define the Pemon and Kapon type of political structure as a segmentary, cognatic one, the kinship cores and networks providing loosely defined organizational bases linked to discrete territorial segments and the conceptualization of these.

What is the importance of this kind of segmentation for our understanding of Carib Peoples such as the Kapon and Pemon? We can list the following:

1. Most obviously it explains how land is occupied, regarded and used by specific groups of people and how these interrelate in a variety of ways. It explains a particular kind of social system and its formation therefore, even though it is very loosely and diffusely structured at its maximal level.

2. Certain recognized statuses and roles can only be understood fully in the context of segmentation. Leaders (*epuru*) for example, apart from being managers of local community enterprises, manipulating and mediating inter-family relationships within the settlement and neighbourhood, also mediate river group and inter-river group relations and have influence which sometimes extends into the regional (tribal) group at large. Thus, Akawaio leaders preside over large scale, inter-river fishing parties and dance festivals. Thomas noted among the Pemon (1982: 155-156) that conflicts which spread beyond a single river area involve several leaders ("capitanes"). He remarks that:

All Pemon leaders are part of a regional system which encompasses the tribal territory as a whole and extends beyond it. What happens in one river valley can have major repercussions in the next valley over, and beyond that to the next (Thomas 1982: 123).

3. The shaman system, although operating at the conceptual and symbolic level, closely interrelates with the political sphere, being in many ways a ritual counterpart. Using the concept of vital forces, of both the physical and social environment, shamans tackle in their seances the same kinds of inter-personal and inter-group conflicts as the leader, thereby creating a dramatic and symbolic representation of social interactions. Since most of the attributions of sorcery and cursing, believed to cause sickness, misfortune and death, are virtually coterminous with segmentation, seances are dramatic representations of these group tensions, expressing and often reinforcing distinction and opposition.

4. Then there is the role of the prophets (*ipu kenak*: wise man). They are the creators and directors of the syncretic religion which the circum-Roraima Peoples hold in common. Unlike shamans, prophets transcend the segmentary system. Some have united leaders and their followers at the regional (tribal) level and even beyond, for prophets are like God, whose word they propagate: they are for everyone - in theory at least!<sup>112</sup> Abel, the founder of Hallelujah among the Akawaio, won inter-ethnic fame, to the degree that his settlement, now the village of

<sup>112</sup> Hallelujah prophets explicitly state that their teaching of God's word is for every leader, every river group and regional group (mentioning the latter by nicknames) and all Peoples (denoting them by nickname except with reference to themselves —when they use their autodenomination).

Amokokupai in the Upper Kukui valley of the Mazaruni, is the seat of his fifth successor and is a place of pilgrimage for all Kapon adherents to the cult and for many Pemon too. Referring to the anxiety created by the possibility that Amokokupai might be some 40 feet under water on the inundation of their territory, Akawaio expressed their feeling of fellowship with Pemon neighbours via a common adherence to and propagation of the faith of Abel:

This is a land of churches - not one, nor few... and besides, there are other Indians who also wish us to go to them that we may teach them the word of God. To do this, to go with good heart and joyfully to tell them these words, we wish to feel ourselves strong and contented here, in this place. There on the Savanna also we have relatives and we wish to go to them.

The significance of the development of Hallelujah as a syncretic religion, the achievement of its prophets as a force for cohesion within and between the Kapon and Pemon unities, can only be apprehended if, at the same time, the segmentation which is transcended is understood and assessed.

5. Questions of change and flexibility of structure may also be better reviewed in the context of the segmentation of society. Did some of the "tribes" mentioned in the early literature "disappear," or did they transform themselves? If some in fact had the status of river groups within an overall ethnic unity, then a change of river area might mean a change of river group name but nothing more. However, river groups have a potential for change. A structural growth, an escalation into regional status, is a possibility. Thus, increase in population in a fertile valley system, as at Kamarata or along certain reaches of the Caroní River where garden land and fishing give good yields, leads to expansion and consequent fissioning which, in turn, may cause neighbours to impose a nickname on the regional grouping which has resulted. Perhaps therefore, this is why Kamarakoto appears as a river group name and yet appertains to a regional (tribal) group. The name of the mysterious Pichauko also suggests an original river grouping and may belong to a Taurepan-Makushi group which pushed northwards into the fertile Caroní valley, to clash with the northernmost Pemon, including perhaps, fellow Taurepan. The Erema-gok provide an example from the Kapon. This core unity of the Upper Ireng River basin may be the origin of the Patamona regional group (a "sister tribe" of the Akawaio) in the late 18th or early 19th century, the bestowal of a nickname completing the regional identity of this, the southernmost group of Kapon. In this context it would be worth investigating the relationship of the Potaro and Siparuni River groups with the Ireng River group since it was the latter which was dominant formerly. Escalation of the level of segmentation is one possibility: reduction to a river group is another which must have occurred in some cases when a regional group became victim of the successful expansion of others, or of introduced disease or displacement through the advance of Old World colonists. We may suppose that flexibility has always been the hallmark of the segmentary structure, allowing for processes of association and expansion of groups on the one hand and of fissioning and contraction in size on the other, both taking place across time and space.

6. Via the Pemon and Kapon naming system an entrée may be made to the

general question of the significance of group nicknaming. Naming is important in these societies, whether for the individual, for the segmentary system, or in ritual contexts, for in all cases powerful forces are being conceptualized and classified when named.<sup>113</sup> Autodenomination, as already noted, gives a self-recognized identity and unity for the maximal group, but it is the nicknaming system which marks segmentation, at inter-ethnic (inter-People) and inter-regional (intertribal) levels. Nicknames allow a differentiation to be made between groups which are very similar, which is notably the case with respect to the regional groups (tribes) which are almost identical segments within an overall ethnic unity (denoted by an autodenomination). By using the appropriate nickname a specific grouping is immediately located, physically, socially and culturally, by those participating in the same embracing structure. Thus, not only is a group distinguished and located via its nickname but a specific and unique identity is conveyed at the same time, to which other similar groups can relate. This is because a nickname expresses a stereotype or image, which the name contains and conveys to others. Group nicknames are therefore well designed to express the segmentation within a structure, by locating the groups and relating them to each other in a total system of interrelationships. This system can be readily comprehended by those inside it, but inevitably confuses those outside. In the present instance, these are the non-Indians, who are moreover, working with concepts deriving from centralized, hierarchical (vertical) systems, rather than their opposites, which are the acephalous and diffused (horizontal) ones of the segmentary structure and organization.

Everywhere individuals and their kin groups are classified by their group affiliations, in relation to other groups and in accordance with relative positioning in the overall structure. However, in the case of the Pemon and Kapon, personal and family identities are enmeshed in a series of interlocking sets, or fields of social relationships, ordered and expressed in terms of complementary opposition by the system of grouping and its different levels, and not necessarily according to the merits or sentiments of the individuals concerned. The stereotypes which are applied and the attributions made, may be repulsed but cannot in fact be avoided. Individuals and families are automatically slotted into the structure. My final suggestion is therefore, that although a tremendous degree of personal freedom and room for manoeuvre exists in these Carib groups, by reason of the lack of indigenous, centralized institutions and of an organized political system with authoritarian roles, nevertheless individuals and their kindred escape these only to fall into the structural constraints of segmentation, with its own kinds of controls, restrictions on behaviour and action, and its own challenges for manipulation.

<sup>113</sup> The tremendous importance and power of naming is well demonstrated in Armellada's excellent book *Pemonton taremuru*, 1972.

## **Abstract**

*This paper considers the nature of the correspondence between social and conceptual unities and geographical space among the Kapon and Pemon of the Guiana Highlands. Three major levels of structure and their territorial bases are discussed: those of the ethnic group (a People); the regional group (or tribe); the river group, comprising family settlements, villages and their localities. The accompanying naming system is one of autodenomination for expressing overall ethnic unity, of nicknaming used at inter-ethnic and inter-regional group levels and of ecological description for river groups, localities and settlements. The nicknaming system shows the existence of segmentation in which internal unity is seen in opposition and relative to other, equivalent unities.*

*The political system, having no permanent political institutions above village level, consists of the interactions of acephalous segments over time, whilst village leaders and shamans lacking institutionalized authority are managers and mediators in group and family interrelationships. Unlike the segmentary systems of Africa, there is no accompanying lineage organization. Nevertheless, the kindred has a spatial component and from tight cores of cognatic kin there extend kin networks which, ultimately, unite the ethnic group. Common language, a trading network, origin myths and syncretic religion are some of the unifying factors at the various levels of structure, but they may also be manipulated to express distance and even opprobrium, as when stress is placed on dialect differences and myths of distinct origin and accusations of sorcery operate between groups and, in the past, active hostilities took place.*

*It is suggested that this system should be defined as an acephalous, segmentary, cognatic one, which must be taken into account for a proper understanding of the importance of territory and the roles of leaders, shamans and prophets. Change, structural flexibility through time, the significance of naming, family and personal identity and individual freedom, can be assessed only by reference to segmentation, which presents its own restraints and opportunities when compared with centralized political systems.*

## **Resumen**

*Esta contribución analiza las correspondencias existentes entre las unidades sociales y conceptuales y el espacio geográfico entre los Kapón y los Pemón de las tierras altas de Guayana. Discutimos tres niveles superiores de la estructura y su base territorial: el grupo étnico (una Gente); el grupo regional (o tribu); el grupo fluvial, que consta de unos asentamientos familiares, poblados y sitios. Cada uno de estos niveles se denomina de manera diferente: la autodenominación expresa la unidad étnica, los apodos designan grupos interétnicos e interregionales y la descripción ecológica se refiere a los grupos fluviales, sitios y poblados. El uso de apodos refleja la existencia de un sistema de segmentación en el que la unidad interna se visualiza como opuesta a y relacionada con otras unidades equivalentes.*

*Al no existir instituciones políticas permanentes por encima del nivel del*

*poblado, el sistema político consiste en la interacción de segmentos acéfalos a través del tiempo, mientras que los jefes y shamanes locales —al carecer de una autoridad institucionalizada— actúan como administradores y mediadores en las interrelaciones del grupo y de las familias. Contrariamente a los sistemas segmentarios de África, no existe aquí una organización paralela basada en linajes. Sin embargo, la parentela tiene un componente espacial; partiendo de un núcleo de parientes cognáticos se extienden unas redes de parentesco que, en última instancia, unen al grupo étnico. Algunos de los factores que unifican a los diferentes niveles de la estructura son los siguientes: el idioma, una red comercial, mitos de origen y una religión sincrética; pero estos factores también se pueden manipular para expresar distancia cultural e, incluso, oprobio; esto ocurre cuando se enfatizan las diferencias de dialecto y de mitos de origen, cuando hay acusaciones de magia entre grupos y cuando, en el pasado, grupos guerreaban entre sí.*

*Sugerimos que este sistema político se defina como acéfalo, segmentario y cognático, para así entender la importancia del territorio y los roles de los jefes, shamanes y profetas. El cambio, la flexibilidad estructural a través del tiempo, el significado de los nombres, la identidad personal y familiar y la libertad individual, sólo pueden evaluarse a la luz de la segmentación que —al compararla con los sistemas políticos centralizados— se caracteriza por sus propias limitaciones y oportunidades.*