



Curripaco Warfare: Its Causes and Resolutions¹

Paul Valentine

This paper explores Curripaco explanations of the causes of their wars and analyzes their descriptions of how they were resolved. These accounts are relevant because of the considerable current interest, among anthropologists, in understanding what leads indigenous peoples to embark on war. Is it out of revenge (Jorgensen 1980: 509-15; Otterbein 1986: 146, 148-49)? Is it for material advantage (Ferguson 1990; Harris 1979)? Is it to maximize inclusive fitness (Chagnon 1990a), or is it a consequence of structural characteristics of the social organization that propel people into war (Kelly 2000)? These motivations and structures are some of the most common features that anthropologists have recently focused upon when constructing their theoretical models to explain the causes of war (Ferguson 1990; Otterbein 2000). These questions are the issues I return to at the end of this paper.

The data we have on the Curripaco are limited. The Curripaco are not engaged in war now. The descriptions that I collected refer to wars that occurred at the latest in the time of my informants' parents, or grandparents, and sometimes earlier. Therefore, the analysis has limitations. I can only focus on what the Curripaco say they did, and cannot describe events leading to war as they unfolded. That contribution that this paper can make to the debate on the causes of war is limited. Yet, if we were completely to discount the Curripaco evidence, then we would also have to discount many other descriptions of indigenous warfare, and our understanding would be that much the poorer.

I specifically collected descriptions of warfare and narratives of raids, "stories of the grandfathers" (*iakuti wawjerrinaipe*) as they are called, while doing fieldwork on the Guainia River in 2000. Accompanied by a Curripaco research assistant, of 20 years' friendship, who was enthusiastic to learn and discuss the oral histories, I visited four Curripaco villages to ask the old people who lived there to recount them. They were all narrated in Curripaco; none of them spoke Spanish. The accounts more or less confirm and complement one another. Further, they can be approximately dated. On the

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one hand, the narratives referred to outside events -like the arrival of certain missionaries and the appearance of guns- and on the other, the speakers told me that their fathers, when children, had been told these histories by their fathers, who had witnessed them, or that their fathers themselves had witnessed them when they were children. Therefore, I estimate with some confidence that these historical narratives refer to events that occurred towards the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, when a mission station had been set up at São Gabriel, and when the rubber boom was flourishing and the indigenous population of the region acquired a few guns.

These Curripaco oral histories have a bearing on other areas of interest. They provide another view (Chernela 1993; Jackson 1983; Reichel Dolmatoff 1997) of the relationship between the Curripaco, an Arawak-speaking people, and their neighbours, the Eastern Tukanoans, and the ongoing wars waged among them. Indirectly, as this paper will also describe, they show provocative insights into the formation of chiefdoms in the Northwest Amazon.

The Northwest Amazon

The region is traversed by a number of rivers. To the south, the Uaupés is mainly inhabited by Eastern Tukanoan speaking communities. To the north, along the Içana and Guainia, the Curripaco are located in riverine settlements. They used to live on the Tomo and Aki Rivers, but these areas are now almost completely uninhabited. Since the oil bonanza of the 1970s, the Curripaco have been migrating from Brazil and Colombia to the Lower Guainia and Rio Negro in Venezuela.

The Curripaco settlements are located in a black water ecosystem, famous for its general low levels of food production, and periods of considerable food scarcity (Beckerman and Valentine 2001-2; Holmes and Clark 1992; Moran 1995; Sponsel and Loya 1994). Traditionally village locations that were close to good fishing grounds and nearby good garden sites were scarce. Such sites were at a premium, and the Curripaco were prepared to fight for the retention of these prime areas.

Who Are the Curripaco?

In Brazil, the Curripaco are called Baniwa. It is the term that the whites use, and the term that Robin Wright employs in his superb book on their cosmology (1998). In Colombia and Venezuela the same people are called Curripaco, the name the whites use there, and the term Nicolas Journet (1995) uses in his excellent ethnography on them. Jonathan Hill (1993), working in Venezuela, came to the conclusion that their auto-denomination is

Wakuénai. The three terms refer to the same people, who speak mutually intelligible dialects, and are members of a number of named patrilineal clans (or phratries). They also share a common mythology and ritual practices, and have all suffered exploitation and abuse from the whites over the centuries - enslavement, debt bondage at the hands of the rubber traders, and forced missionization among the most blatant abuses (Hemming 1987; Valentine 1991; Wright 1981). Pertinently to the present purposes, the Curripaco say that they never engaged in war among themselves. Rather, war was with those people who spoke other languages, and with whom they shared no kinship or affinal ties. War was with those Tukanoans, such as the Cubeo or Wanano (Chernela and Lee 2003: 7), or those Warakena or Derrunai (Journet 1995: 169), who lived far off along other river systems, not with their fellow Curripaco. However, as this paper explores, the delineation of the boundaries of the Curripaco moral community was not always that clear cut.

Descent, Landownership and Boundaries

The Curripaco delineate carefully the moral community within which, at least theoretically, peace is supposed to reign, as opposed to those people who live outside it, where social relations are more ambiguous and, sometimes, overtly hostile. Their social world is divided into a number of named exogamous patrilineal clans, each one of which owns a particular river section and adjacent land. Each clan is seen as a group or a moral community, living within a peace zone, exhibiting a common descent and a shared language. Clan members call themselves "our people" (*wanaikikha*) as opposed to everyone outside the clan who are called "other people (*apada naiki*)." When clansmen address and refer to each other, they use specific kinship terms, whereas they employ affinal terms for members of other clans. In conversation it is clear whether one is a member of the in-group or not. Nevertheless, there is also ambiguity because, under the surface, there are always simmering disputes about a clan's genealogies, whether a particular lineage (or sib) should, or should not, be included within the clan. In a sense these interlopers, these rogue elements, reaffirm the legitimacy of the purportedly genuine clan members.

Clan boundaries are articulated, legitimized and given meaning in Curripaco myth, which narrates that the trickster hero, Inapirrikuli, pulled the first ancestors from vagina-shaped holes in the rock at Hipana, on the River Aiari, at the navel of the earth. Then after naming them and giving them their ritual objects and knowledge, he sent the various clans' founders on their way to particular locations throughout the Northwest Amazon, where they are to this day. Using the criterion of ancestry, the myth recounts the creation of a sacred and political geography that locates the clans within their ascribed territories.

Each clan is divided into lineages that are perceived to be descended from ancestral brothers, the sons of the very first ancestors pulled from the rock at Hipana. Clans and lineages have added to their names a suffix: "sons of" (*enaŋ*) or "grandsons of" (*dakenaŋ*). The lineages occupy particular river sites within the clan's territory; the highest ranking lineage occupies the most productive site, whereas the lesser ones tend to occupy progressively worse settlements in terms of resources (Valentine: 1991). Notions of ancestry link rank, spatial location, and present and future rights to resources.

Members of other clans can visit; they can hunt and fish on permission. However, if they stay too long, or if, for instance, they were to construct fishing traps, or refrain from obtaining permission in the first place, then that could provoke sorcery or shamanic attacks, and in the past such behaviour led to armed conflict. Such a response is not only common for the Curripaco; Goldman refers to similar practices among the Cubeo (1963: 26), and when some Curripaco recently invaded Warakena territory, the Warakena were so incensed that they called in the National Guard to compel them to leave. In the past that incursion would have undoubtedly led to fighting.

The Curripaco are spatially located in another sense. Clan and lineage territory is defined by symbols of their historical and mythical past, including petroglyphs depicting the exploits of their mythical ancestors, which are linked to the region's topography. Each lineage, it is believed, has a sacred spiritual house (*iŋyarudatŋ*) situated within its territory and it is here, when a person dies, that one of his "souls" (*iŋwaruna*) goes to reside. These symbols of space and location carry enormous meaning. Written into the landscape, they mark ownership and justify practice. They give the Curripaco clans and lineages a sense of identity. Members gain strength and resources from knowing that they are living where they have always lived; that they are connected to their land in a direct and immediate way. If people poach and trespass on their territory, not only will they provoke the ire of the human inhabitants, but the forest spirits (*yopŋnaŋ*) may attack them as well, and when they fall ill, they will not have the local ritual knowledge to cure themselves like those shamen and chanters of the area. So even supernatural forces are working against intruders. Visitors (*nadenda*) should enter only on permission and at their peril.

War

War (*ooŋi*), from the Curripaco perspective, involves indiscriminate killing between groups, carried out in a public fashion. Neither sorcery, nor shamanic attacks, which are carried out in secret, nor individual acts of aggression are classified as acts of war. Rather, war is a social model, part of a general relationship, like an epidemic, a natural consequence of past hostilities pursued between linguistically distinct and unrelated groups. For

instance, the FARC² had just entered the area in 2000, and were patrolling the Guainia in a commandeered speed boat. They were heavily armed and wore ammunition belts slung across their shoulders. The Curripaco pointed to them and referred to them as *oowinai*, that is to say warriors, engaged in war. Their actions perfectly fit the Curripaco definition of war.

In myth there are a number of narratives which tell of the beginning of war (Wright: 1998). The one that I was told referred to the Kuwai myth, the local version of the Yurupary myth, the modula myth of the region. Although I had heard it many times before during earlier field trips, only when I asked specifically about the origin of war and revenge, did I hear the following combination of elements selected and emphasized in the telling.

In this key myth there is a symbolically potent liminal creature named Kuwai, who is the son of the trickster hero, Inapirrikuli and his paternal aunt, Amaro. Kuwai initiates the boys at the centre, the navel of the world, at the only village in the world, Hipana. He is their grandfather. He instructs them, but they break the rules and become *linupa* ("contaminated" or "polluted" are approximate translations). As they have eaten Kuwai's *linupa*, so, he says, he has to eat them.³ Saddened, Kuwai murders and consumes them. Soon after, he returns to the village to "deliver the boys." He vomits up "a dead ball of a boy" into a basket on the plaza, and then another and another, and, as he does this, he knows that because he has committed murder, he, in turn, will be assassinated by his kin.

That night, Inapirrikuli (Kuwai's father) and the shaman (Inapirrikuli's brother) plot together to execute him. They hurl him on the fire. From his burning body, his urine sprays out to become one kind of poison, his intestines transform into poisonous snakes, and his armpit, anal and pubic hair become other kinds of poison. All of these poisons are secretly gathered up and are used today by sorcerers. This, as Kuwai says, is his revenge on Inapirrikuli and upon everyone today for what has befallen him -his execution.

From the ashes of his body grow trees, which are cut down and transformed into trumpets. They are also, as Kuwai says, his revenge. These trumpets are "the shadow" (*tidanam*) of himself, the representation of himself in this world. (Likewise, when a person dies one of his "souls," his *lidanam*, remains on earth). As Kuwai is the child of Amaro, these trumpets are Amaro's children and her property. The women seize them and run off with them and live apart from the men. There then follows a series of ever-increasing violent sorties by the men on the women, and the women similarly

² The Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) is one of the two main guerrilla movements operating in Colombia.

³ According to the Curripaco, Kuwai was performing the first shamanic ritual. A patient comes to a shaman with a polluted substance magically inserted in his body. The shaman sucks out the substance, ingests it and vomits it out. Similarly, Kuwai became ill when the boys ate his *linupa*. He ate them and then vomited them out.

respond to seize the trumpets, their children. Finally, the hostilities escalate into out-and-out war. There is indiscriminate killing by both the men and women. The victory of the men and the subjugation of the women follow. The female war-leader, Amaro, the mother of Kuwai, is forced to flee to Brazil –to the white world.

In summary, the motif of revenge runs through the whole myth. We have the description of a series of murders, followed by an execution performed by close kin which temporarily contains the situation, but the actions spill over into larger conflict, when the children (or trumpets) are seized by the women (who are also affines). The men and women socially and spatially distance themselves from each other, then completely divide and ultimately go to war. Finally, with victory going to the men, the trumpets and property are seized back, and the women's leader is forced to flee. As we will see this is an accurate paradigm of Curripaco narratives of what war entailed in the recent past. It suggests that war was not only something that happened between distant peoples, but that also it could be pursued between erstwhile affines.

Affines: Allies or Enemies

The Curripaco practice virilocal, bilateral cross-cousin marriage. The preferred form of marriage is sister exchange between two local patrilineal descent groups. Each lineage is located in its own village along its river section. On marriage, the wife usually leaves her own village and goes to live with her husband in his village. Generally, therefore, a village is composed of a local out-marrying, patrilineal core of men, together with their unmarried sisters and daughters. Added to this core are the wives, who may be drawn from a number of different clans, and who have taken up residence with their husbands.

Although fraught with difficulties, marriage alliances were a way of attempting to neutralize potential enemies. In these circumstances it is not surprising that marriages were not, and still are not, mere liaisons between two individuals. Often neither partner has much choice in the matter. For instance, one of my Curripaco research assistants never spoke to his wife before the marriage. Rather, marriages are political and economic reaffirmations of relations that often stretch back over the generations. They never occur within the clan. However, unlike the Tukanoan groups of the Uaupés, marriage within the language group is regarded as perfectly proper. Arranged by the men of the older generations, in the past children were often spoken for, and women were married off in raids of mock capture.

The affinal category is saturated with ambiguity. They are "other people," they are strangers, they may be enemies, yet they can be allies as well. In myth, the relationship is frequently depicted as volatile and treacherous, shot through with sorcery accusations and counter accusations, even war. When Kuwai died, his poison (sorcery) was given to Inapirrikuli's affines.

There are two areas, in particular, where affines are prone to show their treachery. Extreme vigilance must be kept in maintaining a tally of the number of wives taken for wives received. Sisters should be exchanged through the generations; either the sisters should be exchanged simultaneously, in one straight swap, which is then repeated over the generations, or the return exchange can be deferred to the next generation when a bride is available. In either case affines have been known to renege on their debts. The lineage that is owed women is then fearful, not only that they will not get a return bride, but that their alliance has been broken in favour of some other marriage partner. This loss creates a sense of vulnerability and indebtedness that can spiral into sorcery accusations and violence.

The second area of ambiguity is often linked to the first. In the past, marriage alliances were sometimes so strong that when ego's lineage went on a raid, ego called on his affines to join him. But ego's affines sometimes had affinal relations who were ego's enemies. Therefore, ego's affines had to choose between two sets of allies. For instance, the Dzáwinai clan raided the Cubeo thanks to the support of their affinal allies, the Hohódenai, but the Hohódenai were the affines of the Cubeo too. Therefore, the Hohódenai clan found themselves in a compromising situation, as did the other clans involved in the struggle. Who could they really trust? Even today, if one local lineage group reneges on a marriage agreement and strikes out and forms new marriage alliances elsewhere, then personal grudges, sorcery accusations and shamanic attacks almost inevitably ensue.

Affines are in a delicate position. They are not total insiders, like close kin, yet if they have been giving wives over the generations they form part of the moral community. At one end of the spectrum, I know of a case of a man who, having killed one of his affines in a rage, was executed by his own kin, who preferred to take this extreme measure than let the conflict escalate into further open hostilities. The Curripaco reminded me of the myth of the execution of Kuwai. Although affines are people with whom ego exchanges women and cooperates with to bring up children, nevertheless their conflicts are not necessarily ego's, and their political alliances are conditional. At the other extreme of the spectrum are treacherous affines who are in alliance with your group's enemies, and who have seized women without the intention of repaying the debt. There are gradations of antagonism between affines. Marriage defines appropriate behaviour and transforms other people into rule-bound in-laws, rendering them less menacing but still potentially treacherous.

War Leaders, Village Chiefs and Raiding Parties

The motif of vengeance runs through all Curripaco accounts of war. The war is managed, bout by bout, by a principle protagonist who is the champion of the debt of the first death, or the first offence, that provoked the war

(Journet 1993: 172). He is called the war leader (*oowinai liminali*) who goes first in the column of warriors. He organises the attack and usually possesses shamanic and chanting powers. He can read the omens, and cast spells on the enemy to make them weak and helpless. A master of treachery and tactics, he can conjure up thunderstorms to distract and delay pursuers. He is fierce, loves war, and has a passion for consuming human flesh. Along the Içana river, for instance, there lived a famous war leader, named Wetsotali, which literally means "itchy thumb nail." The Curripaco explained it to me so: "It is like when an ant bites you and you always want to scratch it. He always wanted to pull back the bowstring and let loose a barrage of arrows." In Western terms, he was trigger-happy.

Curripaco war leaders are always depicted as heroic figures; they are ever prepared to launch raids in their quest for revenge and booty. Yet, as Journet remarks (1995: 171) and Vidal confirms (1997), these descriptions refer to a number of historical personages. How did they launch their attacks and what provoked them to do so?

There seem to have been two main ways they fought collectively. The first involved the war leader visiting his own clan villages and those of his affinal allies, trying to whip up support among the young men to join him on a raid. He would fix a date when they would meet at his village. There they would perform certain rituals, prepare their weapons -heavy clubs, poisoned arrows and spears- and build up the collective commitment necessary to set out on a successful raid. After taking the omens, the war party would be organised by the war leader; he would take the lead, others, often the more vulnerable members of the group, would be protected in the middle, while a strong force brought up the rear. A surprise assault was preferred, launched at night, and no mercy was shown. Babies were seized and brought back as captives, men and women were killed, and eaten if there was the opportunity, and their body parts brought back as trophies.

I was told of another kind of collective act of violence. It occurred primarily when a hunting or fishing party entered the territory of another clan without permission. Then the hosts would line up, as would the visitors, facing each other, usually on the beach, and throw spears and shoot arrows at each other. Both sides sometimes wore capes of tapir skin and carried basket-work or tapir-skin shields that helped them parry the missiles of their foes. It seems these pitched battles were more an exploratory incursion, a trial of strength that might lead to more serious raids later, rather than a fully-prepared war party.

The role of the war leader in the every-day running of a village is clearly distinct from that of the village chief (*enawi*). It is true that the war leader was in charge of collecting the revenge or debt (*kuada*) and sharing the human flesh among kin and participants. Yet they both had the same goal: the vanquishing of the enemy, the collection of trophies and booty -such as prized, specialised pieces of material culture produced by the victims- and the

capture of babies to be brought up as clients (see below). But in other ways they were different. The war leader was an achieved role; the role of the village chief was ascribed to certain lineages. The war leader organised raids; the village chief had the responsibility of looking after the security of the village on a day to day basis. For instance, it was the village chief's job to persuade the villagers to maintain the defensive moat that surrounded the village and to ensure that the various kinds of traps to repel an invading force were in good working order.⁴ He was seen as the restraining hand on the war leader's aggressive propensities. It is true that sometimes the best form of defence is attack, but if the war leader overreached himself, the consequences could be dire. Furthermore, the war leader's power base dissipated when the raid was over and the warriors returned to their villages. Only if there were long wars, in which a number of satellite villages needed his protection, would he have been a threat to the village chief's authority, a point we return to at the end of the paper.

A Case Study of War

To provide a sense of these narratives, I include a summary of one. It refers to the deeds of Wetsotali, who lived on a defensible caño along the Middle Içana:

Wetsotali decided to launch an attack on the Cubeo. He visited his affines, the Walíperédakena clan, farther up river, to persuade the young men to return to his village and prepare a war party. On their arrival, they performed various rituals, took strong medicines and prepared their arms. They set out on a 4 or 5 day trek to attack the Cubeo, who lived on a parallel river system. The Curripaco had no kinship or affinal ties with the Cubeo, so from their point of view, the Cubeo lived on the very edge of their social world. The whole purpose of the expedition was to kill people, perhaps to take a few children and seize some goods, particularly some hammocks and baskets that the Cubeo make especially well. They painted themselves with war paint and Wetsotali wore a splendid feather headdress. The affines, to disguise themselves, painted themselves black. Wetsotali and his kin had marked arrows, whereas their affines' arrows were unmarked. The affines went hidden in the middle of the troop; Wetsotali's clansmen took the front and rear.

On their journey they experienced a barrage of horrendous omens: birds fell dead from the sky, a tapir appeared with its intestines splurged out, their

⁴ Villages were often defended by a moat some 4 metres in depth. The villagers had stones and tree trunks ready to throw down on their fallen enemies below. On the Upper Içana village locations were chosen on hill sides with only one path to reach them. At the top of the path, they had large tree trunks ready to roll down on any ascending enemy. Trees were also doubled over in such a manner that when the intruder stepped nearby they sprang up killing or severely wounding him.

canoe filled with blood. Under normal circumstances such signs would deter the would-be raiders from continuing their attack. But Wetsotali was also a diviner and chanter and read that these omens will befall their victims, not themselves.

They attacked in the dead of night; again Wetsotali showed off his shamanic powers by casting a spell over the Cubeo; they set fire to the house and killed them as they fled. Some Cubeo escaped and were able to launch a counter attack on the retreating raiding party and killed Wetsotali's son, as revenge.

Wetsotali returned to his own village, and because her son had been killed, his wife hurled spears at him and insulted him. "All you care about is your passion for war and eating people, you're endangering everyone," she shouted. But undeterred he launched another attack out of revenge for his son's death, until finally, when the Cubeo acquired guns he realised the cost was too high. The Cubeo were tricked into believing that the Curripaco had guns too, so they also held back. The costs and risks were too high, and the war petered out. Now, as the narrator said as a concluding aside, hostilities are pursued on another level-sorcery.

Here a couple of explanatory points need to be made. Wetsotali's clan, the Arudzanai, owned one river section, and their neighbours, the Waliperédakena clan, lived up river from them. The two groups exchanged wives according to the rules of bilateral cross-cousin marriage. Neither would look kindly if marriage partners were to search for marriages outside this established exchange. So when Wetsotali invited his affines to assist him, there was a real obligation to join in the raid. He managed the war, bout by bout, and championed the debt. They were all allies together; they needed each other to ward off potential attackers. Wetsotali would reciprocate and assist the Waliperédakena if they were attacked. But that obligation did not imply that Wetsotali's enemies were his affines' enemies also. For that reason, the Waliperédakena went in disguise.

Furthermore, the whole Upper Rio Negro area exhibits considerable ecological diversity. There are areas good for fishing, others for agriculture, and others for hunting and so on. The Curripaco have to be able to trade up and down river to take advantage of these differences, and to do that the Curripaco need allies to gain access to these trading and raiding routes. So the Waliperédakena had to weigh up the costs and benefits of saying yes or no to joining Wetsotali on this proposed war party. Their solution was to say "yes", but to try to avoid incurring their victims' revenge afterwards. They were in an ambiguous position, content to take a relatively safe position buttressed at the centre of the raiding party.

Causes of War and the Brokering of Peace

What then provoked the Curripaco to war? The most immediate cause, and the one the Curripaco most frequently cite, is revenge. If, for instance, they do not know what propelled the warring parties into conflict, then they will simply guess that it must have been revenge. In a sense this explanation is true. All wars, once under way, were fuelled by a sense of debt. It was that which gives them their perpetual, unceasing and inevitable quality. It was definitely true that the conflict between the Dzáwinai and the Cubeo was a war that had been going on, at least from the Dzáwinai perspective, as long as they could remember. The next raid was undertaken, ostensibly at least, on the grounds of taking revenge for comrades who had fallen in the previous one.

But the beginnings of other wars can be traced, at least in the oral histories, to specific events. An often-cited reason is a homicide, by a group of people, of a member of one's own lineage. Such a homicide is not merely an individual act of killing, which would be a matter of personal vengeance, but a collective public act that demands a collective response. For instance, I was told that news came to the father of one of my informants that his daughter had died in suspicious circumstances in her husband's village. At the funeral, her husband had poked fun at her in the grave, encouraged by his kin -she had not even been clothed in a shroud- a sure sign that they had all been responsible for her death. My informant's father was furious, and he and his kin set about making war clubs and were about to mount a raid to take revenge. I was told that this raid would undoubtedly have escalated into war. Fortunately, just before they set out, news came that he had been lied to, that the son-in-law had thrown himself into the grave, tore his clothing and grieved pitifully. The whole story had been a malicious concoction. But the point remains that a collective killing will provoke a collective response-even between affines. Note also that the wife's death denied her kin a bride in the next generation, something the Curripaco did not overlook. Her death had negative reproductive consequences for her patrilineage.

Another act that definitely precipitated war was the kidnapping of babies and children. When possible during attacks the Curripaco took prisoners. They kidnapped very young children as booty and brought them back to their own villages as "pets" (*numairre*). They used them as servants, and their descendents became servant lineages in the village. When Curripaco warriors killed people they gloated that they not only had killed a particular individual, but in so doing they had stopped their victim from having children and their children from having children over future generations. In a similar way, in stealing these children from their enemies they were impoverishing their enemies' villages and populating their own. There is a whole range of insults that the Curripaco can throw at others, saying what small villages t hey

occupy, how their houses are run down, and their fruit trees tiny, whereas they, on the other hand, have large houses and large populations and are a productive village. To have these servant-children was an addition to the labour force of a village and enhanced its reputation.

Yet at the same time there seems to have been some control over their "pets" reproductive success. According to some contentious accounts, the first ancestors of these client lineages were forced to engage in brother-sister incestuous relations, or, alternatively, they could only marry on permission of and following arrangements made by their captors. I was also told about fierce and hungry warriors who kept a supply of these children in their village, to kill and eat. A choice had to be made between the opportunity for economic advantage that these clients could offer and the desire to restrict the reproductive potential of their enemies. Note also the parallel here between this practice of seizing children and the Kuwai myth. In the myth, the women separate from the men and take the trumpets, their children, with them. From the men's point of view, the women's control of the trumpets is intolerable, and leads to war. In current practice, if a couple separates, the children stay with the husband. If a woman leaves her husband and takes her children with her to live with her new partner, then her husband will either seize the children or, if that is impossible, engage in shamanism or sorcery out of revenge. The Curripaco believe that stepfathers, not of the child's father's lineage, do not take adequate care of their stepchildren. For Curripaco men it is intolerable to contemplate their children being looked after by men of another patrilineage. War is directly linked to reproductive success and reproductive competition between groups.

Another major source of friction, already alluded to, was the capture of ego's kinswomen for wives, or the failure to reciprocate in an exchange of women between patrilineages. In both instances, a debt is incurred that requires a repayment. For example, one of my Dzáwinai informants told me that when his brother was preparing to marry a Walíperédakena girl, a Hohódenai man visited his father, warning him that if his brother married the girl, the man would mount a shamanic attack against him. Rather, the son of the Hohódenai man was to marry her. My informant's father proposed a solution: the marriage between my informant's brother and the Walíperédakena girl went forward, and later the Hohódenai staged a ritual raid on the Dzáwinai and seized a woman. But I was assured that in earlier times this conflict would not have been settled in such an amicable way. As Chernela and Leed (2003: 6) succinctly write, "[w]ife-stealing -a negative exchange- and its counterpart, vengeful retaliation, was a commonplace alternative to negotiation. Indeed, marriage raids were ritualized war in which the settlement from which a woman was taken would attempt to avenge its loss." It is only through wives that a lineage can reproduce and regenerate itself. By stealing women, hostile lineages are denying the patrilineage the right to exist. Failure to meet that debt can precipitate a

series of accusations and counter accusations that can lead to war. Again war is directly linked to reproductive success.

Finally, as elsewhere in the Northwest Amazon (Chermela and Leed 2003: 4-6), seizure of land and displacement of local populations were other causes of war. In the Curripaco case there are Cubeo who claim to be Dzáwinai, purportedly descendants of captured children, living on the Lower Içana in Dzáwinai territory. Similarly there is another lineage, located on the Upper Guainia; that claims to be Adzanenai. In both instances, my informants assure me that in earlier days they would have been forcibly removed. Not only has the seizure of ancestral land crucial symbolic significance because it undermines the continuity of the lineage, but, given the ecology of the zone, prime sites have always been contested.

Journet (1995: 167-208) argues that at least at a conceptual level and perhaps at a practical level as well, once war had begun, it continued without end. On the one hand, he suggests that there were no institutional mechanisms available to broker the peace. On the other hand, he suggests that at a conceptual level the humiliations that the victims suffered were so great, that no compensation was possible. Indeed, it is true that the victors insulted and treated their adversaries as if they were game animals. They gloated over the fact that they were not only killing their victims, but also denying them their future generations, and they seized their children never to be returned. What could feasibly cancel that debt? Journet asks. Nevertheless, when we look at the oral histories, it becomes clear that there were mechanisms to bring about peace, and although it was extremely difficult to achieve, on occasion a peace was brokered and warring groups became allies. How was this done?

Exploring the mechanisms that the Curripaco used to conclude wars helps us see what factors they considered crucial. We find that the same currency used to create wars -land, women, children and life itself- could be used to resolve them. First, a Dzáwinai informant told me that, once, a conflict between his group and the Waliperédakena, their neighbouring clan located on the Içana, had been resolved by "exchanging" a woman for land. A second case (provided by Journet) illustrates a strategy for ending a war. In the heat of a battle between the Tuukedakenai and the Paiuwarieni, one warrior, at the moment he was about to lose his life, turned to the victor and shouted, "Don't kill me, marry my daughter" (1995: 177). His offer was declined, but the verbal exchange shows he saw an equivalence. A third possibility, when a woman is seized in warfare, is to promise a female child she bears to her lineage. If a violent situation can be created by stealing a woman, a peaceful one can be established by "giving one." Curripaco myth and oral histories recount that wife-giving is one means of ending a dispute. Further, once a wife-giving has taken place, then the affines can come together at a *pudali* ceremony (Journet 1995: 253-282; Hill 1987). These feasts between affines may start out in a decidedly hostile atmosphere, but

can conclude with the two groups bonding. As the Curripaco say, at the end of a pudali those there "form only one group" (*padeeniri*). This fusion is a common trait throughout the Northwest Amazon.

Discussion and Conclusion

No other area of ethnographic investigation has attracted more attention than that into the causes of warfare. Despite this effort there is enormous confusion about the issues involved. Confusion arises over the level of causation -among efficient, formal and final causes; over the distinctions between individual and collective motivation; and between the aims and motivations as articulated by the participants themselves as opposed to those inferred by the external observer. There is also the situation, which we have seen particularly in this paper, where similar grievances and disputes could lead to war in one situation, yet be resolved peacefully in another.

Despite all these ambiguities and confusions, two cross-cultural studies (Jorgensen 1980; Otterbein 1986) that tabulated information on aims and motivations have resulted in remarkably similar conclusions. They found that there are two predominant motivations for pre-state war. The first is revenge for homicide, and the second is economic, the precise nature of which varies from one society to another, depending on their economic activities.

Among the Curripaco, the predominant motivation has been to pay off a debt, that is, to pay back revenge in a continuing cycle of negative reciprocity. The original killing that provoked the cycle may be lost in the mists of time, but the most recent intergroup homicide provided ample justification for launching the next raid. In Curripaco narratives, the precipitating cause of most wars was intergroup acts of violence. These assaults provoked further acts of violence in defence or immediate retaliation. In the absence of impartial third-party arbitration or adjudication, disputes could be prolonged. Yet, as we saw in the case of the Curripaco attacks on the Cubeo, when it was feared that casualties on both sides would be unacceptably high, the war de-escalated.

For the Curripaco the great bulk of commodities were exchanged through various forms of reciprocity. The giver expected a gift of similar value in return, either immediately or at some later time. Failure to reciprocate, especially when it referred to women, because they are so crucial and valuable, created a smouldering resentment that predisposed the aggrieved party to violence. From the Curripaco perspective, revenge was merely another form of reciprocity, a negative form that has to be reciprocated. The notion of reciprocal exchange applies equally to pacific, disinterested or antagonistic exchanges.

It is interesting how women, children and land were commonly the sources of grievance that provoked war. It is true that all three have economic value, but they have an even greater reproductive significance. Curripaco

warfare was directly linked to reproductive success and reproductive competition between groups. They went to war to defend what they had and to gain women, children and land so that they could perpetuate themselves. Declaring that Curripaco wars were fought primarily out of revenge is correct, but only focuses on the most immediate or proximate cause.

The motivations for war that are almost universally absent in tribal societies are that of subjugation and tribute. Generally there is no institutional framework to administer effectively a system of control and taxation. Interestingly, in one of the narratives, the war leader, Wetsotali, offers to protect a number of small villages, kill their enemies, and bring back the bodies to eat -“he will return to them their revenge”- on the understanding they will support him in his raiding activities. As the Curripaco were fully aware, this tactic provided him with a military base outside his own village and beyond the authority of his own village chief. It suggests something of a more permanent political alliance. Besides having the passing resemblance to a protection scheme in an extortion racket, it has significant implications for the formation of chiefdomships in the Northwest Amazon (Chernela 1993; Vidal 1997; 2002). Whether this exploitation and unequal symbiotic relationship among villages on the Içana were the cause of war or were an indirect consequence of war, is impossible to ascertain.

I disagree with Wright's and Journet's interpretation of Curripaco war in one respect. They see war as something that only occurs between distant people; and assert that the Curripaco did not engage in war with other Curripaco or with their affines. I agree that the Curripaco never engaged in warfare within the clan, but I have narratives that recount that Curripaco of the Upper and Lower Içana did go to war against each other, and Chernela and Leed show that the Curripaco, after warring with their enemies, married them (2003). Recall that Lévi-Strauss has characterised trading and raiding as structurally opposed forms of social relations: “war is exchange gone bad, and exchanges is a war averted” (Lévi-Strauss 1943; Ferguson 1984: 17-18). It is only if one looks at these exchanges over the short term, are these alternatives mutually exclusive. Marriage cannot very well take place while active hostilities are in progress. “But in the longer term, assuming that intertribal exchanges of goods or intermarriage preclude warfare is a mistake” (Keeley 1996: 121).

Abstract

The Curripaco are an Arawak speaking people who live on the borders of Venezuela, Colombia and Brazil. Based on their narratives of events that probably occurred at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, this paper argues that there were two predominant motives for Curripaco warfare. The immediate or proximate cause is revenge, seen as a

negative form of reciprocity that has to be reciprocated. The second motivation is linked to reproductive success and reproductive competition among groups.

The paper holds that the Curripaco not only pursued war with their neighbours of different linguistic affiliations, as has been suggested elsewhere, but also engaged in war among themselves. It is also argued that war was not such an everlasting state of affairs as it has been depicted, but could on occasion peter out or be resolved. Further, it is suggested that revenge was a currency that could be traded for military and political support and, therefore, had a role in the formation of chiefdoms in the Northwest Amazon.

Resumen

Los Curripaco son hablantes arawak que viven en los límites de Venezuela, Colombia y Brasil. Basándonos en sus relatos de eventos que probablemente tuvieron lugar a fines del siglo XIX y principios del XX, argumentamos que hubo dos motivos principales para la guerra curripaco. La causa inmediata era la venganza, vista como una forma negativa de reciprocidad que debía ser correspondida. La segunda motivación estaba relacionada con el éxito reproductivo y la competencia reproductiva entre grupos.

Mantenemos que los Curripaco no solamente perseguían la guerra con sus vecinos de diferentes filiaciones -tal como se ha sugerido en otra parte-, sino que también peleaban entre ellos mismos. Además, mostramos que la guerra no se convertía -tal como se ha descrito- en un estado sempiterno, sino que, de vez en cuando, podía agotarse y ser resuelta.

Finalmente, sugerimos que la guerra era una moneda que podían intercambiar por un apoyo militar y político, jugando así un papel en la formación de cacicazgos en la Amazonia noroccidental.

Department of Sociology and Anthropology
University of East London
Longbridge Road, Dagenham, Essex RM8 2AS
United Kingdom
E-mail: p.valentine@uel.ac.uk
