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Amerindian Torture Revisited: Rituals of Enslavement and Markers of Servitude in Tropical America

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Masters all over the world used special rituals of enslavement upon first acquiring slaves: the symbolism of naming, of clothing, of hairstyle, of language, and of body marks … The objective of the rituals was the same: to give symbolic expression to the slave's social death and new status.

—Orlando Patterson (1982:8–9, 53)

In a now famous essay entitled "Of Torture in Primitive Societies," Pierre Clastres (1998a [1974]) argued that Amerindian initiation rituals always revolve around the marking and transformation of the initiates' bodies. "It is the body in its immediacy," Clastres contended, "that the society appoints as the only space that lends to bearing the sign of *time*, the trace of a *passage*, and the allotment of a destiny" (1998a: 180). The marking of the initiates' bodies, he further argued, always entails some degree of torture. Clastres is not very precise about what he means by "torture," but it is clear that what he has in mind is not torture in the sense of inflicting pain "as a means of hatred or revenge, or as a means of extortion," but rather a more morally neutral notion of torture, understood more simply, following a definition from the *Oxford Universal Dictionary Illustrated* (1974:2331) as the infliction of "severe or excruciating pain or suffering (of body or mind)." The examples Clastres provides, involving the painful scarification and piercing of the backs, chests, legs, arms, and genitals of initiates, can be clearly considered as an instance of torture in this latter sense. Clastres does not back up his argument with a wide range of ethnographic examples. But we know from the past and present ethnographic record that these and other forms of torture—such as subjecting initiates to tattooing with spines, stinging by various poisonous ants and wasps, whipping with lashes or nettles, or rubbing wounds with poisonous or burning substances—were, and in some cases continue to be, extremely common in relation to initiation rituals in lowland South

America (see Nimuendajú 1939:72; Wagley and Galvão 1949:82; Huxley 1957:147–148; Murphy and Quain 1966:84; Gregor 1980:228; Seeger 1981:167–168; Basso 1988[1973]:68–69; Hugh-Jones 1988:64, 80; Pétesch 2000:119; Oakdale 2005:149–150).

According to Clastres, initiates are made to suffer in order to prove their courage and personal worth. By undergoing torture without betraying pain they demonstrate their readiness to achieve a new, more mature, social status. In addition, the modification of their bodies in collective public ceremonies marks them as fellow tribespeople. Through ritual torture, initiates are reminded that: "You are one of us, and you will not forget it" (Clastres 1998a:184). Clastres argues that Amerindian ritual torture is not only meant to put the initiates' valor to the test or to mark them as members of the tribe. More importantly, the cruelty involved in the marking of the initiates' bodies is fundamentally meant to indelibly imprint a vital civic lesson on them. The main message of this lesson, according to Clastres, is: "You are one of us. Each one of you is like us; each one of you is like the others … None of you is less than us; none of you is more than us. *And you will never be able to forget it*" (1998a:186).

Clastres' argument on the social significance of Amerindian ritual torture is in accordance with his particular view of tropical forest societies as "societies against the state," that is, as relatively egalitarian societies striving to keep in check the social forces leading to centralized and hierarchical forms of power and authority. What distinguishes most Amerindian societies is "their sense of democracy and taste for equality" (Clastres 1998b:28). In Clastres' view, with a few—mostly Arawak—exceptions, Amerindian societies are characterized by a lack of internal stratification and strong forms of authority. In this paper I contend that Clastres' perspective is right in emphasizing that in Amerindian societies the body is the most important means for the inscription of social knowledge. He is also right in asserting that such inscription of the body often takes place under the form of torture during rituals of passage. I disagree, however, with his interpretation that the message imparted through ritual torture is one whose main objective is to stress tribal membership and social equality.

I argue instead that the kind of Amerindian societies Clastres had in mind when he elaborated his society-against-the-state theory were societies extremely modified by centuries of foreign diseases, encroachment, displacement, genocidal policies, enslavement, and marginalization. They were often the stubborn remnants of their former selves. Even those isolated peoples who were thought to have escaped the horrors of contacts with European agents were subsequently discovered to be regressive survivors of such processes, experienced in a more or less remote past.

By the time Clastres elaborated his theory, powerful paramount chiefs, regional confederations, large political centers, elaborate temple ceremonies, extensive public earthworks, and native forms of servitude[1]—including slavery—had ceased to exist (see Heckenberger 2003). Consequently, these features—attested to by abundant archaeological and historical evidence—were ignored, or simply disregarded as being the exaggerations of overly enthusiast European adventurers eager to impress their royal patrons. Only much later would anthropologists like Claude Lévi-Strauss acknowledge that: "There where we believed ourselves to have found the last evidence of archaic lifeways and modes of thought, we now recognize the survivors of complex and powerful societies, engaged in a historical process for millennia, and which have become disintegrated in the lapse of two or three centuries, a tragic accident, itself historical, which the discovery of the New World was for them" (1993:9, my translation).

In this article I will analyze the role of ritual torture in three non-Arawak Amerindian slaving societies, which, at the time of contact,[2] practiced large-scale raiding and capturing of enemy peoples and presented important signs of social stratification and supralocal forms of authority. I argue that in these societies war captives—mostly young women and children, since adult men and older women were generally killed in warfare engagements—were not integrated immediately as wives or adoptive children, but were rather marked and retained as slaves. This was achieved through rituals of enslavement in which the bodies of war captives were marked actually or symbolically, by imposition or default. Such rituals were the opposite of tribal initiation rites. Rather than stressing social membership and equality, they were meant to set captives apart as alien, less-than-human and inferior subordinates. Thus, I contend, Amerindian ritual torture should not be regarded only as an inclusionary mechanism at the service of social integration and egalitarianism, but also as an exclusionary means at the service of social marginalization and stratification.

RITUALS OF ENSLAVEMENT

The widespread notion—based mostly on twentieth-century ethnographic information—that most Amerindian raiding is aimed at taking women as wives and children to be adopted has had the unfortunate consequence of concealing the violence inherent to native raiding. More importantly, it has concealed the production of captive slaves as a social process. In many contact-time tropical forest societies, war captives were not meant to be incorporated immediately into their captors' households as concubines or adopted children. On the contrary, they were marked as

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being alien, inferior, and subordinate, hence, not eligible for full membership in the society of their captors. Such marking was achieved through what Patterson has called "rituals of enslavement" (1982:52). It should be noted, however, that Amerindian slavery was not a fixed, permanent status. Through the passage of time and after undergoing what from the captors' point of view was considered to be a "civilizing" process, war captives—but more often their children or grandchildren—were incorporated fully into the capturing society.

The main feature of captive slavery in native tropical America, as elsewhere, is not only that the lives of war captives are alienated by their captors, but that they are "socially dead," a condition of uprootedness, loss of identity, and disenfranchisement violently imposed upon them through war, capture, and ritual debasement (Patterson 1982). In contact-time tropical America, the transformation of captives into slaves was symbolically accomplished through elaborate rituals of enslavement and desocialization. Aimed at depersonifying captives—depriving them of their previous identities and social personas—and repersonifying them as generic dependents (Meillassoux 1975:21), these rituals involved various symbolic acts including the rejection by captives of their past lives and kinship ties, the imposition of new names, the marking of their bodies, and the assumption of a new status within the capturing society (Patterson 1982:52). Ritual torture was as central in these rituals of captivity as it was in initiation rites.

Despite their new status, war captives found themselves in a limbic condition, no longer belonging to their societies of origin nor fully assimilated into the society of their captors (Vaughan 1977:100). The fear of death that led them to captivity (Taussig 1999), and the fact that they owed their lives to their masters (Condominas 1998), marked captive slaves indelibly as both inferior and marginal in the eyes of their captors. In tropical America, this stigma—which generally persisted long after captives had lost their slave status and had been assimilated into the capturing society—was expressed in a variety of linguistic and bodily markers.

The terms used by members of slaving societies to refer to captive slaves were multivocal and could be used alternatively to designate "strangers," "enemies," and "captives." This suggests that, at least in some Amerindian worldviews, all strangers were considered to be potential enemies, and all enemies potential slaves. Noting that a similar logic operated in ancient Rome, where the term "*hostis*" meant both "stranger," "enemy," or "virtual slave," Lévy-Bruhl argued that slavery should not be regarded simply as a juridical relationship, but that it contained an ethnic dimension that made

the servile relationship indelible (1931:7, 10).

This also holds true for native tropical America, where exoslavery was the predominant form of extreme dependency.[3] Members of slaving societies considered their enemies closer to the animal sphere and thus as less human than themselves. The alleged lack of humanity of their enemies is expressed in a series of reference terms, metaphors and myths, which captors used to justify raiding and enslaving them. In some instances, these Amerindian representations are coupled with a hierarchical gendered imagery in which masters are seen as occupying a masculine position, whereas subordinates occupy a feminine one. In other instances, they go hand in hand with metaphors that equate war captives to the young of killed game adopted as "pets" by the killers of their parents (see Fausto 1999).

The following examples taken from widely distant geographical and cultural areas provide abundant evidence of the linguistic and bodily markers used to denote the subordinate status of war captives in Amerindian slaving societies.[4] They show that, from an Amerindian perspective, captive slaves were alien peoples in the process of being civilized.

THE KALINAGO OF THE LESSER ANTILLES

Kalinago people, inhabiting the Lesser Antilles and speaking a hybrid language with an Arawakan substratum modified by important Carib influences, were contacted in 1493, during Columbus' second voyage to America. Kalinago villages were composed of a group of interrelated families under the leadership of a grandfather or great-grandfather, who acted both as village and war leader (Breton 1978 [1647]:134).[5] In some islands, village leaders recognized one or two among them as paramount chiefs with authority over several villages or over the entire island (de las Casas 1986 [1560]:I, 454; Rochefort 1666 [1658]:313–4).

At the time of contact, the main social division in Kalinago society was that between Kalinago people and captives taken in war or obtained through trade. During the tradewind season, Kalinago warriors embarked on long-distance maritime expeditions against the Arawak-speaking peoples of the Greater Antilles and the Guiana coast. These were large-scale expeditions that could muster several dozens of war canoes, each carrying twenty-five to thirty warriors (Anonymous 1988 [1620]:185). Most enemy warriors and old people were killed in battle or executed after being defeated. Only a few adult men, and as many children and young women as possible, were spared and taken back to the victors' settlement.

The fate and status of these captives varied according to gender, ethnic origin, and age. Adult male Amerindian captives were tormented, executed, and eaten in cannibalistic celebrations shortly after their capture. In contrast, African and European male captives were excluded from this symbolic system of exchange with the enemy and put immediately to work. Amerindian boys were raised as household servants, and would be executed and consumed in cannibalistic rituals when they became adults (Coma 1903 [1494]:250–1; Anonymous 1988 [1620]:187). Young captive women were either taken as concubines by their captors, or given as maidservants to their wives (Coma 1903 [1494]:251).

Kalinago had a rich vocabulary to refer to enemies taken in war and kept as servitors or concubines. This vocabulary was all the more elaborate, since Kalinago language comprised female and male registers. Here I only present the male terminology. The Kalinago term for enemy is *etoutou*, or *itoto* (Rochefort 1666 [1658]: Appendix). Among the related Carib-speaking Kali'na of Guiana, this term is not only used to designate foreigners and enemies, but also prospective *poito* or sons-in-law (Whitehead 1988:225). This semantic equivalence has been taken as an indication that war captives were not meant to become slaves, but rather to be incorporated through marriage as subordinate sons-in-law. This was not the case of Kalinago people, among whom male captives were never allowed to marry Kalinago women.

Kalinago people equated war captives to animal prey. Rochefort (1666 [1658]: Appendix) asserts that one of the terms by which Kalinago masters called their captives was *nïouitouli*, which he translates as "my prisoner of war." But in his dictionary Breton renders the root of this term, *ioüítouli*, as "the capture that I made," in the sense of "the prey that I have hunted" (1665:390). Thus, the term *nïouitouli* could be better translated as "my prey that I have captured in war." The differential fate of captive slaves was also marked linguistically. Adult male captives destined for execution were called *libínali*, whereas female and infant captives meant to be kept alive as servitors were known generically as *támon* (Breton 1665:45; 1666:152).[6]

The ritual marking of war captives as slaves began shortly after their capture. After arriving to their captors' village, all war prisoners were subjected to the fury, insults and beatings of the local people, which were to be dreaded (Labat 1724 [1705]:I(2), 11). Almost immediately, Kalinago masters proceeded to shear the hair of the female and infant captives they had taken (Anonymous 1988 [1620]:187–8; Du Tertre 1654:421). Never again were they allowed to grow their hair long, as both Kalinago men and women normally wore it. Thus, long hair was conceived of as a sign of "independence and liberty," whereas short hair was regarded as a mark of

servitude (Breton 1978 [1647]:60–61).

Kalinago people cut their hair on only two occasions: at around the age of two, when children were weaned and allowed to eat fish or whenever a spouse or close relative died (Rochefort 1666 [1658]:340; Anonymous 1988 [1620]:191). In the first case, the ritual cutting of hair marked the end of infancy. In the second case, it marked the end of an affinal or kinship tie. In light of these practices, the shearing of female and infant captives must be seen as marking the end of the captives' past lives and the obliteration of their previous social ties.

From then onwards, all captives were not addressed by their names but simply as *támon*, male captive slave, or *oubéherou*, female captive slave (Anonymous 1988 [1620]:187–188). French sources assert that young male captives were also sometimes addressed as *mon boucan* ("my smoked meat") in reference to the fate that awaited them when they became adults (Chevillard 1659:118). This contributed to the process of depersonification of war captives and their repersonification as subordinates. By refusing to use their names, Kalinago masters deprived their captives of their past identity and even of their humanity, since the naming of a Kalinago boy or girl one month after their birth marked the beginning of their existence as human and social beings (Anonymous 1988 [1620]:167).

At the same time, by addressing them as "my (male or female) captive slave," Kalinago masters provided their captives with a new, generic identity as servitors. Only much later, after they had adopted Kalinago language and customs, did captives go through a second process of repersonification, and were given a personal name (Chevillard 1659:117). However, since these names differed from those they had when they were captured, their new identity must be seen as simply one more step in the process of removing captives from their societies of origin and moving them into the society of their captors.

In addition to being deprived of their names and having their hair cropped, in contact times captive boys were also emasculated. Reporting on Columbus' second voyage to America, Diego Alvara Chanca (1978 [1494]:31) writes that when Kalinago "take any boy prisoners, they dismember them." He claimed to have seen "three of these boys … thus mutilated." This was confirmed by other authors who participated in this trip, such as Guglielmo Coma (1903:250) and Miguel de Cúneo (1928 [1495]:280), who affirms that in Guadeloupe he saw two adolescent boys, each around fifteen years of age, "who had their genital members cut close to their bellies." Such witness information is confirmed by later, generally reliable sources (such as, for example, de las Casas 1986 [1560]:I, 370). These sources are not clear about whether captive boys were also castrated

(meaning having their testicles removed, apart from having their penises cut off close to the belly). But Ferdinand Columbus' version of his father's encounter with Kalinago people suggests that such castrations might have been the case. "These men" he says, "had had their virile members cut off, for the Caribs capture them on the other islands and castrate them, as we do to fatten capons, to improve their taste" (1992[1593]:117).
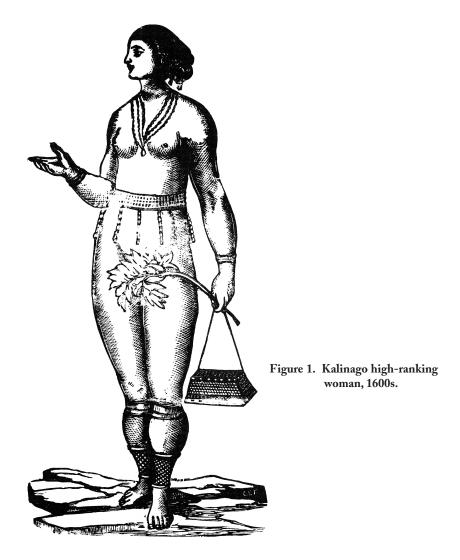
It is difficult to assess the veracity of this information, but it is telling that these allegations were not directed at any other indigenous peoples within the Caribbean region. In general, Spanish agents seldom accused Amerindians of such practices. In contrast, accusations of cannibalism, sodomy, and incest were made quite frequently. The fact that at the time of the Conquest of America, penis excision—involving either the removal of the testes or the excision of both testes and penis—was still common under certain circumstances in the Old World, suggests that this practice was not necessarily viewed with the same horror then as we do nowadays. Thus, it seems likely that imputing this practice to Kalinago people was likely not a Spanish fabrication meant to make them seem to be "savages."

If emasculation was indeed an important practice in Kalinago rituals of enslavement, by the seventeenth century it had been abandoned, for it is not reported in any other source. There is, however, evidence that Kalinago continued to cut off the penises of killed enemies, which were then thrown into the sea (Anonymous 1988 [1620]:189). There is ample evidence that Kalinago continued to execute and consume captive boys in cannibalistic rituals once they reached manhood.

Female captives were not only forbidden to grow their hair, but were not allowed to wear the *echépoulátou*, the leg bands used by Kalinago women (Breton 1978 [1647]:62). This practice was reported very early on by Chanca, who claimed that it was the lack of leg bands which allowed the Spanish to distinguish Kalinago women from female captives (1978 [1494]:29). *Echépoulátou* were ligatures made with cotton thread right above and below the calves, so that the latter looked puffed (see Figure 1). Kalinago girls were given their first leg bands after undergoing puberty initiation rituals (Labat 1724 [1705]:5). These cotton ligatures were protected with natural oils from getting wet, and were never taken off unless they rotted, or as a consequence of some grave accident. Kalinago women "value these leg bands as the most beautiful of their ornaments and the most infallible sign of their freedom, and because of this they do not stand any slave to wear them" (Breton 1665:197).

Deprived of their names, addressed only as captive slaves, and with their bodies marked by mutilations or the absence of ornaments that were the sole prerogative of their masters, war captives in Kalinago society were

forced—at least during the years immediately after their capture—to lead a limbic life of alienation and marginality.

Figure 1. Kalinago high-ranking woman, 1600s.

[Source: Taylor 1888:110; based on a 1667 engraving by Sebastien Le Clerc.]

THE CONIBO OF EASTERN PERU

Conibo people, the largest and most powerful of the Panoan-speaking societies of eastern Peru, occupied both margins of the Ucayali River,

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from the mouth of the Tamaya in the north to that of the Mashansha in the south, as well as the lower portion of the Pachitea River. They were first contacted in 1557, when the Spanish conquistador Juan Salinas de Loyola navigated upriver along the Ucayali and Urubamba rivers (Alès 1981). While traversing Conibo territory, Salinas found numerous villages composed of 200 to 400 houses (Alès 1981:88). Each village had its own leader, who, according to the chronicler, "were obeyed and respected much more than those downriver [along the Marañon River]" (in Alès 1981:90).

   Conibo people formed part of a heterogeneous regional power system in which they not only competed for supremacy with the equally powerful Cocama and Piro, but constantly raided their weaker semiriverine and interfluvial neighbors. Among these, their favorite targets were fellow Panoan peoples such as the Uni (Cashibo), Amahuaca, Remo, Sensi, Capanahua, Mochobo, and Comabo, and their Arawak-speaking neighbors, the Asháninka, Ashéninka, Machiguenga, and Nomatsiguenga. Conibo regarded all their neighbors as *nahua*, a term meaning both "foreigner" and "enemy" (Anonymous 1927:413). The action of taking captives was described by the term *yadtánqui* (to make captives), where *yadtá* means "captive," and *áqui* means "to make" (Marqués 1800:143, 160). Since *yadtánqui* also means "to grab" or "seize" (Marqués 1800:145), the literal meaning of the root *yadtá* (captive) must be "the seized one."

   Conibo people had a second term to refer to war captives, to wit, *hina*, which had the double meaning of "household servants" and "domesticated wild animals" (Marqués 1800:143; Anonymous 1927:405). The implications of the simile between captive slaves and pets have been explored by several authors (Viveiros de Castro 1992; Menget 1996; Fausto 1999, 2001). Here I stress the idea that Conibo people regarded most of their neighbors as being less human than themselves or, at least, as representing a different form of humanity, one closer to animality (DeBoer 1986:238).

   This was especially true of those peoples who did not wear tunics and who did not practice head elongation or female circumcision—cultural practices that Conibo people regarded as the utmost signs of civilization. From a Conibo point of view, their most savage neighbors were the Panoan-speaking Uni (Cashibo), Amahuaca, Remo, Sensi, Mayoruna, and Capanahua, who went around naked, had round heads, and only in the case of the Uni practiced female circumcision. These backwoods peoples were considered to be cannibalistic, dirty, and savage. Slightly less savage were the Arawak-speaking Ashaninka, who wore tunics but did not practice head elongation and female circumcision, and Piro, who wore tunics and practiced female circumcision, but did not elongate their

heads. The Pano-speaking Shipibo and Setebo, peoples who had all these practices, were considered enemies but not savages. At the other extreme of this continuum were the Conibo, who viewed themselves as the epitome of civilization.

Most Conibo raids were directed at peoples with round heads, a situation reminiscent of the Pacific Northwest Coast, where the southern Wakashan-speaking peoples who practiced head elongation only took captives from the northern British Columbia coastal peoples who did not, and vice versa (McLeod 1928:645–6477; Ruby and Brown 1993; Leland 1997; Hajda 2005). The preferred victims of the Conibo were the "savage" peoples of the interfluvial regions. Conibo were very aware of the difficulties inherent in the process of *hináqui*, the raising or making of captive slaves and pets (Marqués 1800:148; Anonymous 1927:405). Adult males were killed immediately, for Conibo warriors knew that they would attempt to escape no matter how far away they were taken, or that they would otherwise languish and die soon thereafter (Ordinaire 1887:288). To avoid revenge or any future proprietary claims, Conibo warriors also killed all close relatives of the young women and children they abducted (Ordinaire 1887:288). To lessen the feeling of regret that captives might experience after being removed from their villages, Conibo raiders torched their homes. With no family or place to go back to, female and infant captives were expected to submit more readily.

As soon as Conibo raiders returned home, they dressed whatever captives they had brought with them in the Conibo manner: wraparound skirts for the women, cotton tunics for the men (Roe 1982:84). Since most interfluvial peoples wore only string belts that left their genitals exposed—something that Conibo people abhorred as a sign of immodesty and savagery—the dressing of war captives must be considered a "civilizing" act, as well as a first step in their process of social integration.

Together with this, they cut the hair bangs of female captives two fingers above their eyebrows with the double purpose of distinguishing them from true Conibo women, whose bangs reached their eyebrows, and denoting their status as "half civilized" people (Roe 1982:84). In addition, they cut the hair of young male captives to differentiate them from Conibo warriors, who wore theirs long. Male captives were also deprived of facial hair if they had any on the grounds that they otherwise looked "ugly and monkey-like," and resembled the hairy forest ogres of Conibo mythology (Roe 1982:84).

In some cases, the youngest, prepubescent female captives were also circumcised (DeBoer 1986:238). Female circumcision of Conibo nubile girls was carried out in large celebrations known as *ani shreati* ("the great libation") after having undergone a year-long period of seclusion (Morin

**Figure 2: Conibo warrior with captive woman, mid-1800s.
[Source: Marcoy 1869:I, 648.]**

1998:392).   Circumcision consisted in the removal of the clitoris and *labia majora*, and the perforation of the hymen (Stahl 1928 [1895]:161–163).   Conibo people argued that clitoris excision impeded women from developing "uncivil desires" and thus made them more "civilized."   Female circumcision was thus considered to be a sign of true Conibo womanhood. For this reason, captive women who were past their puberty and could not be circumcised were regarded as being inferior and not appropriate as prospective wives.

Conibo rituals of enslavement had the purpose of marking captives both as outsiders and insiders, as ugly foreigners but also as prospective concubines or adoptive children.   But most captives had physical characteristics (round heads), or cultural marks (facial tattoos, like the Remo, Capanahua and Mayoruna), that marked them indelibly as foreigners and captives no matter how Coniboized they became. The lack of elongated heads was especially significant.

Head elongation was achieved by compressing the forehead and occiput of babies between a soft pad and a padded board during the first months of their lives. According to Stahl, this practice was considered as important a feature as female circumcision in the definition of legitimate Conibo men and women, since it was believed that the flattening of the head repressed capriciousness and rebelliousness and thus induced a civil disposition (1928 [1895]:164). In this context, having a round head was a sign both of captive status and of irremediable incivility (Morin 1998:390–391).   Thus, the contrast between Conibo people, with their elongated heads, beautiful tunics and profuse decoration, and their round-headed, "naked," and unadorned captives could not have been greater, as is well depicted in a nineteenth-century engraving by Marcoy (see Figure 2).

THE GUAICURÚ OF THE GRAND CHACO

The first Europeans to enter in contact with the Guaicurú of the Paraguayan Grand Chaco, in 1548, depicted them as having some type of dominance over neighboring populations such as the Schenne (Chané, better known as Guaná) and Tohannos (Toyana), who were said to be the subjects of the Guaicurú "in the same way as German rustics are with respect to their lords" (Schmidel 1749:22). In subsequent centuries, and especially after they adopted the horse in the late 1500s or early 1600s, Guaicurú slave raiding and dominance over tributary populations became legendary.

At the time of contact, Guaicurú were located on the western margins of the Paraguay River, close to where the Spanish founded the city of

Asunción (Núñez Cabeza de Vaca 1585 [1544]:76v; Techo 1897 [1673]: II, 159). They were divided into several named *cacicatos*, or chieftainships (Lozano 1733:62; Sánchez Labrador 1910–1917 [1770]:I, 255). These chieftainships were in turn divided into *parcialidades*, or regional groups, headed by a principal chief, and into numerous *capitanías* or *tolderías*, local groups or camps led by lower-rank "captains." The most important among the local group chiefs was recognized as paramount chief of the regional group. The most important of the regional group chiefs was recognized as paramount of the chieftainship. There were no chiefs, however, with authority over the entire Guaicurú "nation." Significantly, the number of chieftainships varied through time.

Since the first contacts, European sources pointed out the high degree of stratification of Guaicurú society (Schmidel 1749 [1548]:21). According to these reports, Guaicurú were divided into people of chiefly status, warriors, and ordinary freemen or commoners (Lowie 1948:348; Steward and Faron 1959:422). The status of captive slaves, *nibotag'ipi* (Unger 1972:89), was even lower than that of commoners, and that of the tributary Arawak-speaking Guaná—highly stratified themselves—varied according to their position in their own society.

Guaicurú people regarded themselves as superior to all their neighbors, including the Spanish and Portuguese, whom, they claimed, they had "pacified" despite their much proclaimed bravery (Sánchez Labrador 1910–17 [1760]:II, 52–3; Serra 1845 [1803]:204–5). For this reason, according to Portuguese chroniclers, Guaicurú people considered all other nations as their *cativeiros*, or captives, who "owed them tribute and vassalage" (Florence 1941 [1829]:62–3).

The term that Portuguese authors translate as *cativeiros* seems to be *nibotagi*. This term designated people in a broad range of situations. It comprised individuals taken as captives in raids and intertribal wars, families or individuals from tributary populations who attached themselves as servants in Guaicurú households, people from tributary populations who were sent by their local chiefs to perform servile duties temporarily for Guaicurú high-ranking families as part of their tributary obligations, and people who had sought an alliance with the Guaicurú either to put an end to constant raiding or to avert the threat of war.

Victory rituals included the parading of handcuffed captives and the display of head trophies or scalps. Local women danced and sang around the village holding these remains, all the while praising the valor of their fathers, brothers and husbands (Jolís 1972 [1789]:314). There can be no doubt that one of the aims of these ceremonies was to mark captives as despised foreigners, but the sources are silent about how war captives were

dealt with during the first stage of their incorporation into the society of their captors. We know, however, that there were several ways in which war captives were marked as such to distinguish them from their Guaicurú masters.

One of the cultural practices for which Guaicurú people were renowned was that of plucking all their body and facial hair, including eyebrows and eyelashes (Prado 1839 [1795]:28). They did this so as "not to look like the greater rhea (*Rhea americana)*, to whom, they say, the Spanish resemble" (Lozano 1733:64). In other words, they did so not to look like animals. This concern was extended to the use of the feathers of the greater rhea itself. Guaicurú men wore a variety of feather ornaments—headdresses, arm bands and leg bands—made of all kind of colored feathers (Prado 1839 [1795]:29; Lozano 1733:65). They refused, however, to use headdresses made of greater rhea feathers. These were reserved for the making of shamanic feather fans and women's parasols, and were the only feathers that male captives were allowed to use (Sánchez Labrador 1910–1917 [1760]:I, 214).

Given that greater rheas seem to symbolize the epitome of animality in the Guaicurú worldview, their use by captives must be regarded as marking their closeness to the sphere of animals and, thus, their less-than-human humanity. Guaicurú men painted their bodies with red *bixa* (*Bixa orellana*), black *genipapo* (*Genipa americana*) and the white flour of the *namogoligi* palm (*Acrocomia totaî*) when they went to war. However, male captives were only allowed to paint their bodies with black charcoal (Sánchez Labrador 1910–1917 [1760]:II, I, 286). Thus blackened, and with crowns of greater rhea feathers, male captives looked like the antithesis of the carefully painted and profusely ornamented Guaicurú warriors.

Female captives differed from their mistresses by their facial designs and by the methods they used to apply them. Guaicurú women painted elaborate designs on their faces and bodies. The higher their rank, the more elaborate the designs. Sometimes they even tattooed their arms from their shoulders to their wrists, which among Guaicurú people was a mark of extreme nobility (Sánchez Labrador 1910–1917 [1760]:I, 285). However, no high-ranking Guaicurú woman would, under any circumstance, tattoo their faces. Facial tattoos were considered to be "the mark of their inferiors and servants," meaning captive slaves and Guaná household servants, but also Guaicurú commoners (Sánchez Labrador 1910–1917 [1760]:I, 285).

Sánchez Labrador reports that female captives and low-ranking women were tattooed "from the hairline to above their eyebrows with thick black lines resembling the keys of an organ" using a fishbone and the ashes of the leaves of a certain palm (1910–1917 [1760]:I, 285). In addition,

they sometimes tattooed their chins. This pattern—indicating servile status—was still in use fifty years later, when Hercules Florence visited the Guaicurú around 1825 and drew the portrait of a Chamacoco captive woman bought by the Commander of the Brazilian Fort of Albuquerque from her Guaicurú masters (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Chamacoco slave woman, early 1800s.
[Source: Florence 1941:52.]

Apart from these differences in personal ornamentation, Guaicurú marked their captive slaves with their own personal marks (Boggiani 1945 [1895]:228). It is said that these marks were applied to all their personal belongings for example, animals (horses and dogs) or objects (combs, smoking pipes, weaving utensils, gourds, and boxes). Sometimes, Guaicurú

chiefs displayed their personal marks in flags planted in front of their tents. It is reported by Boggiani that personal marks were also applied to people, especially women.

Confused about this practice, some authors affirmed that Guaicurú women bore on their bodies the same marks of their horses (Prado 1839 [1795]:30). Other observers asserted that most Guaicurú women bore these marks on their chests, but claimed instead that they were the marks of the male heads of families, who "applied them to all which they possessed" (Castelnau 1850–1859 [1845]:II, 394). Boggiani, who lived many years among Guaicurú people, claimed, however, that both Guaicurú chiefs and their wives had their own personal marks (1945 [1895]:228). This indicates that personal marks were not a male prerogative. It also suggests that Castelnau's interpretation is wrong and that only certain women, namely captive women, were marked by their masters in such a way.

At first sight, it would seem that this custom derived from the Spanish and Portuguese practice of branding their horses. This practice would have been adopted by Guaicurú people in the late 1500s together with the horse. There is, however, strong evidence that the practice of marking people existed in America prior to contact. Thomas Hariot (as depicted in Lorant 1965:271), the English astronomer who in 1588 wrote a work on the native peoples of Virginia, reported that: "All inhabitants of this country have marks on their backs to show whose subjects they are and where they come from." Among native Virginians chiefly marks signified personal allegiance and local affiliation rather than personal possession. But in other areas, such as lowland Costa Rica, it was reported early on that one of the most valuable trade items was a certain black powder obtained from burning pine wood that was used "to brand [i.e., tattoo] Indians as slaves with as much inventiveness as their masters seem fit" (Oviedo 1851 [1535]:204). This suggests that Guaicurú marking of war captives—and especially of female captives—was a pre-colonial practice. If this is the case, we should conclude that the elaborate marks that Guaicurú branded on their horses in colonial times were inspired by the tattooing of captive slaves and other personal possessions rather than the other way around.

MARKERS OF SERVITUDE

As it is clear from the above examples, the depersonification and repersonification of war captives often entailed the imposition of special markings on their bodies. This is consonant with the Amerindian propensity to use bodies as the main instruments to convey social and cosmological meanings (Seeger et al. 1979; Turner 1995), as well as the

privileged means for imprinting and preserving the memory of changes of status (Clastres 1998a). It has been argued that in these societies bodily modifications do not "symbolize" changes in social identity, but rather that corporeal transformations and transformations of social position are one and the same process (Viveiros de Castro 1979:40–41). For this reason, the inscription and transformation of bodies is a central aspect of all Amerindian initiation rituals. But precisely because bodies constitute the main instrument to denote changes in social position, Amerindians also privilege them to mark the passage from personal autonomy to servility. Having been violently deprived of their previous social personas and identities, captives were provided with a new, servile identity through the inscription on their bodies of symbolic or actual markers of servitude and slavery.

The imprinting of servile status through what Mauss (1936) called "*les techniques du corps*," was achieved through several means: by emphasizing those bodily marks that betrayed the foreign, less-than-human condition of war captives; by underscoring the lack of bodily marks characteristic of their captors and considered to be signs of full humanity; by prohibiting the use of items of clothing or ornaments that were the prerogative of full members of the capturing society and by imposing debasing ornaments, body marks, and bodily mutilations. Although not all of these body techniques can be described as forms of torture, all rituals of enslavement involved some degree of ritual torture.

Some authors have dismissed these markers of servitude as an inconsequential attempt to introduce distinguishing traits between captors and captives (Whitehead 1988:182). This view seems to be influenced by the highly egalitarian ethos of Amerindian societies today as well as by the characteristics of present-day Amerindian forms of intertribal raiding. As we have seen, however, there is much more to these marks than is apparent. As long as captive slaves retained their servile status—and this often lasted their whole lives—such bodily markings identified them as different and inferior. In contrast to the bodily markings inflicted in initiation rites, which are meant to mark youngsters as belonging to their societies, these other marks were aimed at underlining the social distance existing between masters and subordinates. Paraphrasing Clastres (1998a:184), it could thus be argued that rituals of enslavement and markers of servitude were aimed at notifying captives in unambiguous terms that "*You are not one of us, and you should never forget it*." Thus, rather than being a means to ensure social equality and to reject authoritarian notions of power, hierarchy, and submission, as Clastres (1998a:188) has argued, in slaving societies body marks served the double purpose of signaling some people as equals, and others as subordinates.

In both cases, the symbolic modification of the body constitutes a key element in what Viveiros de Castro (1979) calls the "fabrication of bodies," and Seeger et al. (1979:4) the "social production of people." But whereas initiation rituals produce people like us, that is, equals, the imposition of markers of servitude serve the purpose of repersonifying the depersonified captives as alien subordinates, thus institutionalizing their inequality and marginality. In the process, however, the imposition of such markers— some of which were meant to stress their difference and some to stress their similarity—produced a social hybrid, that is, people different from us, but integrated to our society as subordinates. It is in this sense that Patterson insists that slaves had the "liminal status of the institutionalized outsider" (1982:46).

CONCLUSIONS

The discussion above should dispel any idea that the handling of war captives in the slaving societies examined in this essay is in any way similar to that found among the ancient Tupinambá (Carneiro da Cunha and Viveiros de Castro 1985) or, more recently, among the Txicão (Menget 1988), Matis (Erikson 1993), or Parakanã (Fausto 2001). These captives were neither meant to be executed gloriously in cannibalistic rituals, nor to be swiftly assimilated into their captors' societies. On the contrary, they were marked linguistically and physically as both captives and servants, a status that often persisted until the end of their lives and, in some cases, was even transmitted to their children (Santos-Granero, in press).

The analysis of the terms used by Amerindian slaving societies to designate subordinate or dependent people allows us to draw another important conclusion. Almost invariably, the native terms translated by European authors as "slave" would be better translated as "captive." The Kalinago *támon*, the Conibo *yádta*, and the Guaicurú *nibotagi* all convey the notion of "someone seized in war, hunting or fishing," that is, the notion of "prey." They also imply notions of "inferiority" and "servitude," which would explain why Europeans rapidly equated these native terms to their concept of "slave."[7] Whether or not these captives can be analytically considered as slaves is something that I address in another work (Santos-Granero, in press). Here I stress that apart from these basic terms, Amerindian slaving societies had a rich vocabulary to describe situations of subordination and extreme dependency.

It should also be noted that in all the above examples, slaving societies singled out specific neighboring peoples as enemies and potential captives. They did so by referring to them by terms that brought to mind notions of

inferiority, enmity, and servility. The enemies and potential captives of the Kalinago, Conibo, and Guaicurú, were the Lokono, interfluvial Pano, and Guaná respectively. This suggests that members of slaving societies saw their preferred enemies as marked with the stigma of servitude even before they were actually defeated and subjugated. Ushique, a late nineteenth-century Conibo headman, offered an interesting rationale for this particular conception. He asserted: "Cashibo [Uni] are mostly our maroon servants who have taken to the woods; they speak our language, although badly, and we go from time to time to retrieve their offspring as they reproduce" (Stahl 1928 [1895]:150). Similar notions are present among the Guaicurú (Serra 1845 [1803]:204), indicating that Amerindian slaving societies saw their preferred enemies as slave-breeding or servant-breeding populations. If this is the case, the markers of servitude imposed on war captives during rituals of enslavement would only be a confirmation of a presumed and preexisting "natural" condition. They mark, however, an important change of status, that is, the passage from "virtual" to "actual" slave.

Indeed, in tropical America the reinforcement through a variety of ritual mechanisms of the social distance separating masters from subordinates—whether captive people, servant groups, or tributary populations—seems to have been only a way of giving material expression to what captors viewed as an original, almost essential, dissimilarity. The marking of the bodies of captives, whether actually or symbolically, by imposition or default, set them apart as less-than-human and inferior foreigners. This is true even in those cases in which the markings imposed were those of the capturing society, since they were always slightly deficient—shorter hair bangs, cruder facial designs, and so on.

Torture, the essence of initiation rituals according to Clastres (1998a:182), shows its dark side in the context of Amerindian rituals of enslavement. Instead of being a way to mark and celebrate initiates as equal, full members of their societies, it becomes a means for marking war captives painfully and indelibly as inferior, subordinate members of the society of their captors. In such contexts, the inscription of the body is not a condition for the "social production of people" (Seeger et al. 1979:4), but rather for the social production of "nonpeople," that is, of socially dead slaves.

The widespread Amerindian notions that enemy peoples are less than human, that they share traits with animal species, or that they represent a different, lesser kind of humanity, coincided with European views of Indians as animals. Such notions facilitated opportunistic alliances, between European slavers and slaving societies, to subjugate weaker indigenous peoples. This was the case of Kalinago, Conibo, and Guaicurú

peoples—but also of Mundurucú, Tupinambá and other nonslaveholding capturing societies.

The cases mentioned above collectively provide a good example of how apparently similar Amerindian and European conceptions and practices conspired to bring forth a new reality (see Whitehead 2003:x). Members of Amerindian slaving societies viewed Europeans as sharing their warrior values, notions of superiority, and contempt for weaker, perhaps less bellicose peoples. They believed that an alliance with them would benefit both. It is doubtful that they suspected—at least in the initial stages—that European treatment of war captives was in any way different from their own. Even less so, that Europeans considered all Indians as almost animals, and thus, with the passage of time, they themselves would become the subject of European slave raiding.

There were, however, important differences between Amerindian and European notions of slavery, not the least of which was whether they conceived of slavery as a permanent or temporal status. Although through the use of linguistic expressions, physical markers and ritual gestures Amerindian slaving societies marked subordinates either as socially distant or as socially dead, not even the markedly alien war captives were ever considered to be total outcasts. They had a defined status, played an important role, and eventually could be assimilated into the society of their captors. Indeed, although the status of captive slaves was well defined, it was certainly not definitive. They, but more often their children, could become assimilated to their captors' society once they had adopted the language and mores of their masters, that is, when they became "civilized." Such processes of "civilization"/"domestication" involved mind/body modifications effectuated through the sharing of memories and substances, such as those described for present-day Panoan peoples (Frank 1990; Lagrou 2006). But the change of status was also marked linguistically and imprinted on the bodies of former captives. Thus, we may conclude that rather than a fixed status, slavery was a social process in native tropical America. Physically marked as both outsiders and insiders, the status of captive slaves was liminal and transient, and perhaps could eventually lead to full assimilation.

NOTES

1. By servitude I understand all forms of institutionalized subjection relying mainly, but not exclusively, on physical coercion. Whereas slavery is a form of servitude, not all forms of servitude fall under the category of slavery. In contact-time tropical America other common forms of servitude adopted the form of

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attached servant groups and subordinated tributary populations (see Santos-Granero, in press).

2. By "time of contact" I mean the long period characterized by multiple, intermittent, and temporally variable phases of interaction between Amerindian and European peoples that culminated in the conquest of native peoples and the settlement of their lands. In other words, it refers to the period in which a given indigenous society came in contact with Europeans, but still retained its political autonomy.

3. In tropical America, "endoslavery," that is, the enslavement of people belonging to one's own ethnic group, is only found in state societies such as the Aztecs, often under the form of debt slavery (Davies 1973:81, 93).

4. I have consulted the earliest sources available for each case, as well as other sources produced during the period in which the societies surveyed had not yet been conquered by European colonial powers. Because the societies in the sample were located in areas disputed by more than one of these powers they were able to retain their autonomy for very long periods. In addition, because colonial powers were competing to subject these indigenous societies, they produced abundant documentation on their cultural practices. The quality of these sources varies significantly. In order to ensure a maximum of reliability, here I have considered only data verified by more than one independent source. When this is not so, I indicate it in the text.

5. In all historical references included in the text, the date in between square brackets indicates the time in which the authors made their observations, rather than that of the first edition of their work, except where the date in brackets in the "references cited" section specifically indicates the original date of an earlier published version of the cited text.

6. It should be noted that Kalinago also had a term for servants not captured in war, or "hired servants, such as the Christians have": *nabouyou* (Rochefort 1666 [1658]:Appendix; Breton 1666:362). Such linguistic distinction should dispel the notion that European chroniclers mistook Kalinago "servants" for "slaves."

7. Among the Northwest Coast and Plateau Indians, terms translated by European chroniclers as "slave" also carried a connotation of inferiority (Ruby and Brown 1993:27). Klamaths called captive slaves "load carriers"; Yuroks called them "bastards;" whereas Yakina called them "insignificant people."

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