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EVERYDAY ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN THE PIAROA OF ALTO CARINAGUA AND THE VENEZUELAN STATE

(Spine title: The Piaroa and the Venezuelan State)
(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

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Graduate Program in Anthropology

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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Abstract

This thesis examines the everyday life of the Piaroa people of Alto Carinagua, an Amerindian village in Venezuelan Amazonia, and their interactions with Venezuelan state officials and institutions. It provides ethnographic information about the Piaroa and explores the processes of state formation of the Venezuelan modern state as well as the integration of the Venezuelan Amazonian region to the national territory, and analyzes the everyday interactions between the Piaroa and the state which on occasions can fuse these two entities in complex ways. I argue that the Piaroa of Alto Carinagua are involved in processes of social and cosmological transformations that allow outside resources, including state resources and programs, to be integrated into the social realm of their community thanks to the specialized knowledge of their leaders.

Keywords: Piaroa, Venezuelan State, Amazonia, socio-cultural interactions, everyday life, ethnography.

Acknowledgments

The greatest lesson I learned in all these years of travelling and sharing time with Amerindian people, especially the Piaroa, is that they make me, not realize, but experience that there are other ways of seeing and making sense of life and these ways have also many possibilities. I certainly liked very much most of their ways. Sometimes when I was spending time with Miguel and Rafael in Puerto Ayacucho and we went to grab a bite I noticed that they always put some of their food in their bags. I once asked Rafael what the reason for this was, he immediately responded, "I'm saving it for my cachorritos (Spanish word for little cubs and the affectionate way he calls his children)". Another time while comparing himself with other people who work with him in Puerto Ayacucho Alonso told me, "Every time someone brings us food everybody jumps and eats everything right away; you know they are very hungry. Not me, I always save something for my kids". Families are gracious entities they are comprised of people caring for one another, people that are linked in many interesting forms, that I learned. During the process of researching that helped me to compose this thesis I experienced the birth and the loss of two beloved members of my family. This happened in the order it is supposed to happen: first was the birth of my daughter Isabella who next to her sister Zoe has told me so much about how to live life and that some things really do matter but others not really. Another lesson about family — the writing of these acknowledgments had to wait until I drove Zoe and her Abuelita to the shuttle station (they went to visit aunts, uncles and cousins… more about family) and my little one Isabella was fed and napping while my wife Tania was teaching a class. But life also has sad chapters and in January of 2008 my long time partner and friend, our family dog, passed away after living with Tania and me for a little over 12 years. John Lennon, this was his name, accompanied me many times on my trips to the Venezuelan Amazonia. Some people really love him there; he was always happy when he was outside surrounded by loved ones and trees. Amazonian anthropology has told, particularly the work of Descola and Viveiros de Castro, that for the people who live in this region humanity is a condition that does not have anything to do with the species, humanity is the result of a becoming process. Persons are made in their relation with other persons with whom they share the same humanity. John was all this to me and to my family and this is why I dedicate this thesis to him and Isabella.

I would like to say thank you to Tania who has shared with me many trips to the Amazon, not only to the physical geography but to the imaginative geography of ethnographies and conversations, she is my best editor and sometimes I don't know how much of what I know has come from her invaluable lessons — the mistakes I made are the result of my bad learning, not of her lessons; to my parents, abuelitos Josefina y Homero, who have collaborated with my work in so many different ways, through conversations, care and love; to Tania's mom, Abuelita Tania who has given us a lot of her time so we can accomplish some work.

A famous singer from Panamá once wrote in one of his songs that friends are the family we choose in our life. Some of these family members have also taught me a lot about Amazonia, I thank them all: Germán Freire, José Antonio Kelly, Javier Carreras and María Teresa Quispe.

A good academic environment is that where we can grow intellectually not only by what we have been taught in classes but by discussions and conversations with professors, peers and students as well. The Department of Anthropology at Western has been all this and more. I will like to particularly thank my supervisor Kim Clark who was wise enough to let my itinerant spirit fly but who also brought it down when it was necessary; otherwise this wouldn't end. Other faculty members who have had a direct influence in my research are John Gehman, Andrew Walsh, Adriana Premat and Dan Jorgensen; I thank them all for the many conversations and I hope they forgive me for bugging them in the hallways, classroom and university gardens with my anthropological babbling; they have also helped me in other important ways. I have had many conversations with my peers and learned a great deal from them. One particularly important person during these two years was Mark Dolson; I thank him for always listening and commenting on my strange train of thoughts. I thank the University of Western Ontario that through the UWO Graduate Thesis Research Award and Regna Darnell Award funded part of my fieldwork in July and August of 2008

While in Puerto Ayacucho I had the help of my great friend Magda Magris and CAICET. They took me in one more time and gave me a place to stay while things in Alto Carinagua were finalized for my stay in the village. I thank them for this and many other things I do not have space here to mention.

And last but not least I would like to thank the people of Alto Carinagua who allowed me to stay in their dwellings and included me in their lives as one more member of their community; they are my family. I would like to mention some of them: Alonso, Miguel (senior), Miguel, Soraida, Rafael, Rufino, Juan Bautista, Buré, Elena, Julia, Jose Crimaco, William and Elick.

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Chapter I: Introduction

This is a thesis about the dwellers of Alto Carinagua, a Piaroa village in the northwestern region of Venezuelan Amazonia. In the forthcoming pages the reader will find a discussion about some aspects of the everyday life of the people of this village, particularly those aspects that are involved in the interrelations among themselves and between them and elements, agents and entities that are situated outside of the village's social realm. In other words this thesis is about how these Piaroa produce and reproduce their sociality and shape and are shaped by a particular social philosophy while doing this. This thesis is also about how the Piaroa experience citizenship. The Piaroa recognize themselves, and are recognized by others, as being part of a particular Amerindian society, one of the 44 Amerindian societies that are living today in Venezuelan territory, altogether representing almost 2 % of the total population of this country.[1] The indigenous people of Venezuela, as they are recognized today by mainstream Venezuelan society and by the Venezuelan state, have been through some very important changes during the course of the XX and XXI centuries. They have been officially recognized as Venezuelan citizens since the 1940s, although in 1915 the state had delegated its responsibility vis-à-vis these people to the Catholic Church. In the 1940s public policies and special institutions were created to reach these populations. However, it was not until the 1970s that the state had the economic and political power to reach more effectively the territories where these people live. Nevertheless all the policies directed to the

[1] This percentage is a calculation based on the official numbers provided by the government of Venezuela. They estimate the entire population of Venezuela to be about 26,127,351 people and the indigenous population is somewhere around 500,000 people.

indigenous population were integrationist and saw their socio-cultural particularities as obstacles to their integration into national life and the development of the territories where they lived. The year 1999 marked another turn in state policies as a new government headed by Hugo Chavez stepped into the executive branch of the state and a new Constitution was voted on and promulgated. This new Constitution includes a whole chapter dedicated to the indigenous people's rights and declared that these rights are of a special character due to the particular condition these populations have as Venezuelan citizens and indigenous people at the same time. Since 1999 they have the right to have their own territory where they can live according to the way of life of their particular societies. They also have the right to speak their own languages and these are considered official languages in the areas where they are spoken. And last but not least they have the right to be different, to have their own "culture". This policy reflects some political changes that have been happening worldwide since the 1990s, but in Venezuela they gained a new expression, one that had no precedent in the history of this country. Indigenous movement leaders occupied important posts in the Venezuelan bureaucracy, and a whole Ministry was created to deal with indigenous affairs as well as special offices in other important ministries were kept and strengthened for the same purposes. It seemed like the indigenous populations were heading for better times and indeed they gained spaces and visibility they never had before in mainstream Venezuelan society. But the times after 1999 have also revealed difficulties that derive from the complexities inherent to Amerindian societies and the Venezuelan state; this thesis explores some of these complexities.

The argument here is presented in the form of a short ethnography and pursues three main aims that interweave through the course of my discussion. The first of these aims is to offer a portrait of the everyday life of some of the dwellers of Alto Carinagua as well as some of the sites where their lives are situated. I present accounts of situations I shared with them during the time of my fieldwork in the months of July and August of 2008. However, I should also point out that my arguments, understandings and descriptions of people's lives, places and situations are also informed by past experiences in this and other Amerindian villages of Venezuela. During a good part of 2004, while accompanying my wife Tania Granadillo, who was conducting fieldwork among the neighbouring Kurripaco villages of La Esperanza, Pavoni and Sarón, I had the opportunity to work in Alto Carinagua as a research assistant in a multidisciplinary project conducted by the Amazonian Centre for Research and Control of Tropical Diseases (CAICET), a dependency of the Venezuelan Ministry of Health. Most of my relationships with villagers who I consider my friends were created then and built up from that time to the present.

A second aim of this work is to present the interactions of the villagers with what is perceived by them as well as by other Amerindian people who live in the region as the Venezuelan state. In doing this, I offer, next to ethnographic accounts that situate my discussion in the village, historical analysis of the processes of state formation of what is conceived as the Venezuelan modern state. I also present a historical account of the intervention of this state in the Amazonian region. My discussion about the state is constructed over villagers' discourses about the Venezuelan national and local governments as well as state programs, actions and events that involve villagers, state

officials, institutions and the historical processes that have created the situations that have made possible the interaction, and sometimes the bonding, between the people of Alto Carinagua and the Venezuelan state.

A third aim is to link my discussion with those of other Amazonian anthropologists who have created a particular theoretical framework for the region. Specifically, I engage those discussions that have to do with the production of sociality and personhood, interrelated processes that in Amazonia are bound together and create a sense of community based on mutual care within the same residential group and the common goal of bringing elements that are outside of the social realm of this group to the inside thanks to complex processes of social and cosmological transformations. What is behind these transformations, besides the care for one another, is a sense of equilibrium that is to be achieved through the actions and knowledge of community leaders but also through the action of every person of the community. People tend to see the space of the community as the social space, thus the space of sociality, and what is outside as the un-socialized that, although representing great danger to the social and cosmological equilibrium, is a potential source of resources and people that complete the sociality of the group (see for instance the relation between people and game, and kin/affine and potential affines).

While thinking about writing this introduction, I sought an analogy that describes what is contained in the pages of this thesis and the best I could find was the analogy of an orchestra playing a symphony, partly due to the musical sense of this act but also for the joint effort that represents the work of multiple entities for a common end. All the aims of this thesis are combined in a way that one cannot do without the other, sometimes

some of them will be the melody of the symphony the orchestra is playing; at other times they will be the baseline or the chords that accompany the melody or they will share parts forming polyphonic melodies or they will establish dialogic relationships.

There are some theoretical notions that underlie the whole thesis. One of these notions is the ideal of well-being, or living well (Gow 2001; Rivière 2000). This is an ideal that is found in many Amazonian societies and it is tied to an idea of equilibrium that is achieved when the people are living together as part of the same kin and also lived in a prosperous community. In the case of the Piaroa, prosperity is derived from having productive gardens, wealthy fallows and secondary forests, and multiple hunting grounds. They also need good leaders who among other things are capable of protecting their communities from external/dangerous entities, transforming desirable external resources into internal/socialized products through the use of their specialized knowledge, and distributing the recently transformed products among the dwellers of their communities. People have to feel free to make decisions; leadership is based on the capacities of the leaders to create consensus in this context, and not act through coercion. This equilibrium has aesthetic (Overing 1989; Taylor 1996), people expect to live good and full lives and this is expressed in the everyday actions of all the people who live in the same village. To live well is not something that can be achieved individually, it requires the actions of all those who live together, those who are kin.[2] This is why the concept of sociality is an appropriate one in this thesis; I understand it as the interrelations that make possible

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[2] The ideal of living well is one that is manifested throughout the whole Amazonia. The work of Peter Gow and his discussion of this ideal based on his work among the Piro of the Peruvian Amazon is a good source for learning more about this (2001). His work follows on that of other Amazonian anthropologists such as Overing (1975, 1989 and 1999) and Taylor (1996).

mutual conviviality. Altogether this is what I am calling the Piaroa social philosophy in this thesis.

It has been argued that in the last forty years the Piaroa, including the villagers of Alto Carinagua, have gone through a process of drastic socio-cultural changes that made them modify most of their everyday practices and dwellings. The loss of traditional (specifically ethno-botanic) knowledge (Zent 1992), the collapse of their religious system (Freire 2002; Freire and Zent 2007; Zent 1993 and 1997), a migratory process that brought them from inland forest — where they lived in small semi-mobile settlements — to areas located on the edge of their traditional territory (close to the drainages of the bigger tributaries of the middle-Orinoco River) — where they now live in large sedentary settlements — (Freire 2002; Freire and Zent 2007; Zent 1993 and 1997; Mansutti 1995 and 1988) are some of the most notable changes reported in the literature. Another aim of this thesis is to offer an alternative way of seeing these changes; a way that without denying the effect of external forces and pressures, situates the Piaroa — alongside external forces and pressures — at the centre of these processes of social-cultural change. I argue that the Piaroa have been active agents in the processes of change and have made and are still making decisions that affect greatly the outcomes of these processes. I also argue that elements that come from their own social philosophy have a great deal of influence over these decisions and thus over the outcomes.

To set the tone of the pages to come let me introduce an ethnographic account that presents the site(s) of my fieldwork. I was living in Puerto Ayacucho (the state capital) during the first week of my fieldwork in July 2008 and every day, early in the morning, I had to take a taxi to Alto Carinagua, the Piaroa village where I was conducting my

research. Once there I started the routine of visiting houses and talking to people to find out what was going on in the village. This served two purposes: on the one hand, to obtain relevant information that would help me understand the life of the people I came to study; and on the other hand, I cultivated my personal relationship with them. This was not the first occasion I had spent some time with Piaroa people. In 1996, I first met some Piaroa of the Parguaza area in the neighbouring Bolívar state when I was doing research to collect data for my undergraduate thesis in Anthropology. Then in 2004, as I stated above, I was hired by CAICET as a research assistant to do survey and fieldwork in Alto Carinagua. Since then I have deepened my friendship with some of the villagers and this is the reason I went back to work there.

The day I moved to the village was an important day for my research. Although I had agreed with the villagers since my arrival that I was going to stay in the village during the time of my fieldwork—Miguel had offered me a room in his house right from the beginning—it took a week for them, the villagers of Alto Carinagua, to grant me permission to move into their community. The final word, as Miguel suggested, had to be given by the Capitán Juan Bautista — Capitán is a title given to one of the political leaders whose function is to act as representative of the village to the local government, the latter being the Governor of the state office and all its dependencies. The reason for the delay was not due to doubts that they might have about me staying in their village, but to the fact that it was very difficult to coincide with Juan Bautista and therefore get his permission. He is very often in town, Puerto Ayacucho, keeping up with his responsibilities as Capitán of the community and doing other personal errands. By then I had realized that this was not a particular situation derived from his functions as Capitán,

but one in which most of the adults of the village are involved. They all have to travel to town on a regular basis to deal with state officials, to run personal errands, such as withdrawing pension monies or scholar grants from the banks, to pay medical visits to the multiple health posts in town, to make bank deposits, to participate in meetings at governmental facilities, to buy groceries from the stores run by private owners or governmental enterprises such as Mercal (an acronym that simply stands for Food Market in Spanish), to attend religious services at one of the many Protestant churches located in Puerto Ayacucho, and so forth.

Until the day of the move my work, as I mentioned before, had consisted of paying visits to different people who live in the village. For this purpose I developed a system for my visits in order to know who was there and who was in town or in other places. This was my system: First, I stopped at Miguel's house and talked to him and Soraida, his wife. Second, I asked Miguel or his wife about the location of people with whom I would like to talk. The purpose of this was to find out who was in the village, who was in the gardens or forest, who had travelled to town, and who was out of the village visiting some relatives in other villages — the latter is one of the Piaroa's favourite activities, they call it *chahuäruhuäcu cuedächino moro* (visiting others with my family). Miguel's house faces the main street and this gives him a good idea of the movement of people in and out of the village as they usually hang out on his front porch while they wait for the taxi that will take them to town. Third, when I had a pretty good idea of the itinerary I wanted to follow, after I had mapped the presence and absence of the villagers, I set off walking through the multiple trails that connect the houses. I stopped at houses where there were people I wanted to talk to and if they allowed me I

lingered at their places; we talked about topics that were set by the particularities of our encounters. Sometimes Miguel came with me on these walks; other times he sent his seven year-old son, Miguel Angel, with me; but when none of this was possible I just walked by myself. As I did this I greeted the people I found on my way in my silly *Huottüja tihuene* — the language of the Piaroa. "*Ta' hacua*" I said to them, and they laughed as they answered my greetings "*ta' hacua*". This translates as something like: "*How are you, my relative?*" This expression coming from me was laughable for two reasons. First I am clearly a non-Piaroa person, thus I am not their relative. And second my accent and my willingness to talk to them in their language was somehow funny. The village was usually pretty quiet; occasionally I could hear the laughter and joy of some kids as they played in the background, but more likely I only heard my footsteps in the gravel paths. To someone who has not interacted with the Piaroa, the village would appear deserted, but I knew that some of them were around. I knew from past experiences and passages that I had read about the Piaroa that they are soft-spoken and self-controlled people. They do not like to seem to be people with uncontrolled behaviour; this is one of their socio-cultural values. That was how I saw Alto Carinagua on the very day I moved in after having made daily visits to the village for a week.

To recapitulate, I saw Amerindian people who lived very close to an urban centre and travelled constantly to this centre to take care of business, who rode in taxis and wore clothes very similar to mine, who appeared to know very well the multiple transactions that take place outside of their village, but who also used their own language to communicate in their everyday life and to claim their indianness in a context of very drastic changes. To me it was clear that the limits between tradition and modernity were

not as neat as we scholars would like them to be. Life was messy and very difficult to read. This was the situation lived by the Piaroa people of Alto Carinagua, one of the many Piaroa villages located in the municipality of Átures, in the Amazonas state of Venezuela. This was the context of my fieldwork. To me it was obvious that if I wanted to understand the life of the Piaroa of Alto Carinagua I had to follow them to the different places where they went and understand the multiple scenarios where their lives take place. I also had to know and understand the multiple agents with whom they interacted in their everyday lives.

The former account represents some of the situations I experienced during my fieldwork in July and August of 2008. However, this "experiencing" was not an exclusive particularity of me as an anthropologist visiting and working among people who are members of a society that by definition is "opposed" and "different" to the one I am ascribed to, the anthropological "Other", or what I called somewhere along these lines "them". I was being experienced too. My presence in Alto Carinagua represented to "them" an opportunity to interact with another type of "Other", their "Other". This thesis is about these kinds of interactions, in particular with "Others" that represent or are identified as being part of the Venezuelan state. In the forthcoming pages I explore some of the complexities involved in these situations, the coherences and the contradictions produced in these processes of inter-cultural interaction. I show some of the multiple accommodations, the relational configurations, and the creation of special spaces that serve the purpose of bringing together various groups of different people who have to interact with one another due to historical and political contextual reasons. I argue that these encounters are not only produced by the political pressures imposed on them by

external factors but also depend on the particular inclinations and agendas of the group of people being pressured.

The roadmap

This thesis is divided into three main chapters. Chapter II starts with an ethnographical account of a shamanic ritual I witnessed while living in Alto Carinagua, alongside some analysis and interpretation of this ritual. Then I give some information about the Piaroa people using as a base line the migratory process they have been involved in since the 1960s. After this I present the main site of my fieldwork, Alto Carinagua and relate its particular history to that of other Piaroa settlements. The last part of this chapter presents the elements involved in the production of Piaroa sociality, the configuration of their social philosophy and the different types of leadership that can exist in Piaroa communities.

Chapter III presents a discussion about the Venezuelan state as it is perceived by the villagers of Alto Carinagua. This chapter starts also with an ethnographic account that places my discussion about the state in the everyday life of some of the villagers. Then I present a more analytic exploration of the Venezuelan state, particularly the idea of the personalistic state, and try to problematize it in order to give the reader some elements for the understanding of some of the different components that make up the Venezuelan state. I also discuss some of the dimensions of the process of state formation in Venezuela, specifically the formation of what some authors call the Venezuelan modern state and the source of its wealth, which as the reader will see is also considered the Venezuelan nation's wealth. Finally I present a historical analysis of the process of

integration of Amazonas state to rest of the nation, adding more elements to understand the experience of citizenship of Venezuelan Amerindian people.

Chapter IV is the core of this thesis; in it I discuss the Consejos Comunales, the latest state program applied in the region, and how this state program is perceived and made effective by the villagers of Alto Carinagua. I present various ethnographic accounts that situate my discussion of this state institution in the village. In this chapter I return to the discussion of Piaroa leadership, already presented in Chapter II, specifically in the context of the structuring of the Consejos Comunales in Alto Carinagua. Finally I present an ethnographic account and analysis of the process of choosing the name of the village's Consejo as a way to tie together the themes discussed in the course of this thesis.

A word about the writing

In this thesis I switch between tenses in order to provide the reader with a comprehensive description and analysis of the topics discussed. Sometimes I use the past tense alternated with an ethnographic present. I am aware of all the discussions about the problems involved in ethnographic writing, and I agree with what has been said about the problem of freezing the people we write about in a temporal time that is different from that in which they live (Abu-Lughod 1991; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Fabian 1983); however, and without the pretension of offering an ultimate solution to this dilemma, I navigate through the practices offered by other ethnographers, recognizing that self-consciousness is important and necessary but it cannot be paralyzing.

The reader will find a combination of Spanish and Piaroa terms inserted in the text, the latter written in italics. I made this choice for several reasons. One is to present

to the reader the form in which my encounters with the villagers occurred. We used a combination of Piaroa and Spanish to communicate. Another reason is that some terms are difficult to translate, and although I always provide my translation next to the terms in the original language, by providing the original term I am offering the reader additional information to assess my sources of analysis. In writing Piaroa words I also honour the way of speaking of those with whom I shared time during my fieldwork. The use of their own language in everyday life reveals something of how they use their social philosophy to read and make decisions in the situations they confront day by day.

Chapter II.
Ta'hacua: How are you my relative?
Presenting the Piaroa

1. "This Sunday we will have a Baptism and you are invited"

On an August morning in 2008, at 5:00 a.m., I walked to the waterfalls located upriver in the Carinagua approximately three kilometres east from the village. My reason for going was to attend a ceremony that was to be performed there and to which I had been invited two weeks previously. I knew something about this practice, as Oldham writes about it in one of his works (1997), and I had been told that these ceremonies happened with some frequency in Alto Carinagua, but this was the first time I was invited to be present at one of them. The villagers called this ceremony "Bautizo" (Spanish word for Baptism), but paradoxically the people who participate in it are not those who identify themselves as evangelicals; the participants are the followers of the village's *Rúa*, José Antonio Bolívar, or *Buré* as they also called him in the region.[3] *Buré* and his followers are practitioners of the Piaroa traditional religion which according to recent ethnographies has declined greatly since the 1960s (Freire 2002; Zent 1993 and 1997; Mansutti 1995). The Piaroa call their religion "Chamanismo" using the Spanish word for shamanism as an effort to translate across socio-cultural borders the ontology of their beliefs. It sounds odd to hear them using a Spanish word in the course of their conversations; Chamanismo and Chamán (Spanish for Shaman) are words they use quite

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[3] *Buré* is the Piaroa word that means little river frog. The Piaroa tend to use Spanish names nowadays and I suspect people are not naming their children with Piaroa names anymore. However, it is common to hear Piaroa names among people of *Buré*'s generation. They refer to these names as nicknames. I have been told that they reflect people's personalities, thus they are assigned when people are old enough to know things about the nature of their personalities. *Buré* has a very high-pitched voice when he is performing shamanic chants. At the end of each baptism he emits sounds that emulate the little river frogs.

frequently. However this is a rather common practice when they are referring to objects or ideas that are foreign to them. Their beliefs are not foreign to them but the idea of a social institution separated from other elements of their everyday life is rather strange to them. Chamanismo then becomes a good categorization when they are distinguishing their system of beliefs as the counterpart to other religious systems present in the region such as Protestantism.

To get to these waterfalls people have to walk through a path that runs parallel to the Carinagua River, going toward its headwaters. Although the river is always next to the walker right after you leave the last houses of the village, which you do by crossing one of the bridges of the Carinagua — a tree trunk resting on each bank of the river and embraced by a structure of branches that functions as rails to help those with bad balance — it becomes almost impossible to see the river until you have to cross it again and by then you are at the waterfalls. The river's presence is a constant companion on this walk, its murmur is always there and this is even more marked if, as I did that day, you walk this path in the month of August, a time when the generous rainstorms of the tropical wet season have increased greatly the volume of water in the river.

The difference in sunlight duration does not vary much during the whole year here; the sun rises every day between 5:45 and 6:00 a.m. and it sets between 6:45 and 7:00 p.m. At 5:00 a.m. when I started my walk that morning, it was still dark out. It took me about half an hour to get to the point where I was going to meet up with some of the people who were going to the ceremony, thus by the time I reached this point the sun was showing its firsts rays of the day. The aforementioned point is a *pätä* (the Piaroa word for garden) not too far from the waterfalls, and, as in almost every Piaroa *pätä*, there were

some houses there. This is not an ordinary *pätä*, however: this is *Buré*'s *pätä*. This is the place where he spends most of his time nowadays and where he receives the visitors who come to see him while he is in the village.[4] One of the houses of this *pätä* has the structure of the traditional Piaroa longhouse, an *isode* (the Piaroa word for house) of palm-thatched conical shape, and although it is starting to show signs of deterioration it is still an impressive construction.[5] As for the other houses in this *pätä*: one has the shape of a little dome, also palm-thatched, and is known as the Men's House. Here is where the masks for the *Sári* ceremony are stored, and no children or women can ever enter it.[6] The other three houses are mud wall constructions with palm-thatched roofing. They are used for everyday activities such as cooking, preparing mañoco (local word for grated manioc) and casabe (Venezuelan generic word for manioc bread), sleeping, or simply gathering after a long day of work in the *pätä*. One of these last houses was the place where the

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[4] Sometimes *Buré* travels to places outside of the village, and occasionally even to other countries. The reasons for these journeys are multiple as I have been told by the people who travel with him, usually one or two of his grandsons who act as translators of *Buré* — he claims not to speak Spanish or any other language but Piaroa — but almost all of them involve his participation in events and practices as a Piaroa shaman. The nature of these journeys and the networking that *Buré* and other villagers create with people who live in other geographies is a theme that interests me greatly, although so far the information I have collected on this topic is limited. However, I don't discount future research on this theme.

[5] By the time I was about to leave the village in 2008 they were building a new *isode* next to the old one as a substitute for the latter. I had the opportunity to see how they erected the central and some lateral posts. They were still waiting for the palm tree leaves that were going to be used for the constructions of the roof and the negotiations were quite advanced for obtaining them from other Piaroa villages located at distant areas upriver in the Orinoco. What was delaying the transportation were difficulties in obtaining the necessary permits from the Environment Ministry, however negotiations on this matter were well advanced thanks to the good relations between Rafael, the Vocero Principal of Alto Carinagua's Consejo Comunal, and some of the functionaries of the Cultural Ministry in Amazonas.

[6] *Sári*, also known as *Warime*, was the yearly Piaroa festival. It was an inter-village festivity that was hosted by a grand *Rúa* and was the only time in which Piaroa from distant villages came together; this was possible thanks to the sense of security that the grand *Rúa* inspired in them. *Sári* is also the name of the manioc beer that was produced and drunk during these festivities; the use of this name as the identifier of the festival shows the importance that making and drinking this beer has for the festival. For an interesting discussion about the importance of production and use of manioc beer among the Piro of the Peruvian Amazon see Peter Gow (2001 and 1991) and for a discussion that links together this case and the Piaroa festival see Heckler (2004).

people I was to meet had spent the night before. *Buré* was there as were two of his sons, a son-in-law, some of his grandchildren, and other relatives who live in the village. There were also some visitors from outside of the village: they were three *Sa'bararí* (Piaroa word use to identify non-Piaroa, non-Amerindian people, particularly Criollos)[7], one man and two women, who came from Caracas to "learn" about Chamanismo. They claim to see *Buré* as their mentor and believe that by coming to the village and participating in ceremonies directed by him they would become "Chamanes" themselves. *Buré* does not tell them the contrary but I hear from other villagers who are very close to him that to become a *meñérua* or *yawárua* (the two types of Piaroa religious leaders catalogued by Zent (1992)), people have to go through a lifelong learning experience under the close supervision of one grand *Rúa*.[8] In her ethnography Overing (1975) also talks about the implications involved in the learning process of becoming *Rúa*.

As I leave my house Miguel alerts me to be careful and watch for snakes. People in the village claim snakes are very active during the wet season and especially after a night of rain since they like to rest in the water puddles that form in the gravel paths. The permeability of the soils here is minimal, which is why the water on the ground runs with

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[7] Criollo is the Spanish word for Creole. I decide to use the Spanish word here because in this context Criollo works as a category that includes Venezuelans who do not recognize themselves as Amerindians and that are not recognized as such by others. In Amazonas and Bolívar states, indigenous peoples and non-indigenous as well use this category as the counterpart to indigenous identifiers, as a marker of the differences between indigenous societies and that of other Venezuelans (e.g. Piaroa ≠ Criollos, Hiwi ≠ Criollos).

[8] José Crimaco as well as other young men who live in the village sometimes use the Piaroa term *Moosä* when referring to *Buré*. I noticed this tends to happen when the interlocutor is a non-Piaroa person who is interested in Chamanismo or in the personal history of *Buré*. At other times they use the words Chamán (Spanish for shaman), Abuelo (Spanish for grandfather) or *Chänó* (Piaroa for grandfather). José Crimaco told me *Moosä* means Grand *Rúa* and he, as well as everybody in the village, claims *Buré* is a grand *Rúa*. I don't have a corroboration of this translation for the word *Moosä* and other villagers, especially those of Miguel's family, do not recognize the term, however I will argue that the implications of José Crimaco's categorization are important in establishing the prestige of *Buré* as a Piaroa traditional leader inside and outside of Alto Carinagua.

the slopes of the terrain until it reaches a river or a lagoon, but sometimes due to the features of the ground surface the water stays in puddles until the sun evaporates it.

The villagers refer to the waterfalls as the Sacred Waterfalls. They say that its murmuring is made of the voices of the ancestors performing sacred chants. Waterfalls are important elements in the mythology of the Piaroa. They use the Spanish word Bautizo when referring to the ceremony performed in this place, because as in the Christian baptism, people are immersed in water while a "priest" holds their bodies and utters some "prayers" as he spreads the water over their heads. Aside from this, the Piaroa Bautizo has no similarities with the Christian baptism, and the ceremonial officer, the *Rúa,* has nothing in common with Christian priests. This Bautizo is a cleansing ritual that is performed on a regular basis to take away from people's bodies the impurities that can potentially harm them and with this endanger the equilibrium of the village. By performing this ceremony, *Buré* is fulfilling two of his functions as the village's *Rúa*: he is protecting those under his care from external dangers and he is maintaining the cosmological equilibrium of the village.

After my arrival at *Buré*'s house, José Crimaco invited me to go with him and two other fellows, Manuel and Eliks, to clean and weed the banks of the river near the waterfalls. They should have done this the day before but nobody can obligate them to do so and it is up to them to decide when it is going to happen.[9] By the time we walked

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[9] Every person in the village is free to decide the activities in which he or she will participate. This is an important characteristic of the Piaroa political rationale and is one that they share with other people of the Guianese region. Sometimes this can upset other people inside or outside of the village who are expecting them to fulfil particular tasks, but aside from protesting and trying to convince them to do these tasks nobody can impose these activities on them. In the end it depends on their judgment to decide what they are going to do and when this is going to happen. The works of Thomas about the Pemon of the Venezuelan

the rest of the way to the waterfalls the sun was already out and the forest was showing its very distinctive green enhanced by the layer of moisture left by the previous night's rain. We crossed the section of *Buré*'s *pätä* where he grows his tobacco, the only section where he works directly in his garden, and then we immersed ourselves in the deep dark *deä* (Piaroa word for forest), once again guided by the roar of the waterfalls telling us of its proximity.[10]

Right after we finished cleaning around the banks of the waterfalls, the rest of the people arrived, led by *Buré*. There must have been about 50 people, the majority under 25 years old of age, and about 10 above this age. *Buré*, his wife Elena, his son Rufino, and his son-in-law Félix José, and *Buré*'s lifelong helper Julio Bravo, were the only people over 50 years old. In other words, there was almost a complete generation missing: with the exception of Rufino, Manuel (*Buré's* younger son who turned 29 the month before the ceremony), Félix José, and Julio Bravo, the generation between *Buré*'s and that of his grandchildren were absent from this event.

Grand Sabana (1982) and Rivière's comparative study of people of Guiana (1984) offer good discussions about this political rationale among Guianese societies. In a more recent article Rivière (2000) introduced a variant on his thesis; he brings attention to the relation between parents and children, observing that among the Trio parents are sometimes severe when ordering their offspring to do something or when correcting their behaviour. I agree with him as I observed somewhat similar behaviours among Piaroa parents, although not with the level of severity that he described for the Trio. Piaroa correct their children when they are doing something they consider inappropriate and also they order their children to fulfil specific tasks, but the level of control over children's actions decreases as the children get older. There is another element that is important to mention here and it is the self-controlled attitude that Piaroa value so much; it is my understanding that this is learned during childhood and through the constant advice the youngsters receive from their elders. Offering advice (Consejos in Spanish) is the preferred method for teaching among the Piaroa.

[10] Adjacent to the village is a dense secondary forest, especially on the side that faces the headwaters of the Carinagua (the east side). This is where the majority of their gardens are located. The only place where the forest has been cleared is around the houses in the village and in the active gardens. This seems to be an aesthetic pattern in all the Piaroa villages I have visited since 1996, and it is consistent with the descriptions given by other authors. I have also discussed this with Freire and he seems to agree with me (Freire personal communication).

As *Buré* approached the waterfalls, I saw that he was holding a fresh branch that he had just cut on his way there. With this branch he would "open" the waterfalls while a line of people waited for their turn to pass and get bathed as *Buré* sang the chants that would expel all the impurities from their bodies. Behind *Buré*, on each side and in the centre of the river, Julio Bravo, Félix José, and Rufino were looking after *Buré*. Rufino blew a queen conch shell (*Strombus gigas*) every time a new person went under the waterfalls, while Félix José and Julio moved their arms up and down in the air, each holding a quartz crystal in one of their hands. Eliks approached me from behind and whispered in my ear "they are his bodyguards, they make sure nothing happens to him".[11]

In the remainder of this chapter I will discuss, first, the current geographical distribution of the Piaroa and the relation between this distribution and their demographic situation today. I see both, as do other ethnographers, as the partial result of a migratory process that has made people move in both directions of what I will call the Piaroa migratory axis. Then, I will present the site of my fieldwork using a historical perspective; by doing this I will establish parallels between the greater migratory process the Piaroa have been involved in since the 1960s and the particular history of the people of Alto Carinagua. Finally, I will conclude this chapter with a discussion of what I will call elements of sociality of the Piaroa and how these elements constitute their social philosophy. In this part I aim to define the characteristics of Piaroa leadership and the

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[11] Two villagers, Eliks and Wilmer, recorded this ceremony on video. This was part of a parallel project I did in collaboration with the villagers during my stay in Alto Carinagua in 2008. They wanted me to provide video cameras and editing devices, as well as advice, for the production of various Piaroa documentaries. This was one of them, which they entitled "*Chäno aditähuä to'cö*" (About the work of my grandfather). Days later while watching the video in Juan Bautista's home — Juan is the Capitán of the village and one of the sons of *Buré* who was not present in the ceremony — he referred to the group of men looking after *Buré* during the ceremony as los jefes (Spanish phrase for the chiefs). I am sure this reference included *Buré* as well.

responsibility of their leaders in the processes of social transformation that allow the reclassification of external resources as internal products, thus bringing these resources into the realm of Piaroa sociality.

2. "And then we moved"

The Piaroa are approximately 15,300 Amazonian Amerindian people who live in the tropical forest near both banks of the middle-Orinoco River and in the sources of water, headwaters and drainages of some of the major tributaries of this river (Freire 2002; Freire and Zent 2007). There are also some Piaroa living in the upper Apure, the middle Ventuari and in the Manapiare Valley, as well as others who live in urban centres like Puerto Ayacucho, the capital of the Venezuelan state of Amazonas. With the exception of a few Piaroa who live on the other side of the west bank of the middle-Orinoco,[12] in Colombian territory, the majority of the Piaroa population is concentrated in a territory that goes from the headwaters of the major tributaries of the middle-Orinoco — the Sipapo , Autana, Cuao, Guayapo, Samariapo, Cataniapo, Paria and Parguaza — to the eastern margins of this river, in an area of approximately 30,000 square kilometres (Freire and Zent 2007). This territory is located in the Venezuelan state of Amazonas and the south-western part of Bolívar state. The Piaroa people living in Venezuela are about 14,500 according to the last Venezuelan Indigenous Census carried out in 2001 by the Central Office of Statistics and Information (today National Institute of Statistics). However, although there are some Piaroa living inland today (near the headwaters of the aforementioned rivers), the majority of the Piaroa population is concentrated in the periphery of their territory, near the eastern bank of the Orinoco, the drainages of its

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[12] Arango and Sánchez (1998) reported about 800 Piaroa living in Colombian territory.

major tributaries, and close to the national highways and roads of the north of Amazonas and south-west of Bolívar states. This geographical distribution represents a relatively new situation for the Piaroa, as has been reported in the most recent ethnographies (Freire 2002; Freire and Zent 2007; Zent 1993 and 1997; Mansutti 1995).[13] About forty years ago Boglár and Overing reported that the majority of the Piaroa were living near the headwaters of tributaries of the middle-Orinoco (Boglár 1970; Overing Kaplan 1975). Twelve years before this, Wilbert reported a similar situation in his brief ethnography about the Piaroa (1958).[14]

This new geographical distribution implies that the Piaroa underwent a massive migratory process that brought most of them from the heartland to the periphery of their territory.[15] Zent argues, as do Mansutti and Freire, that the motivation for this massive migration was the search for services and goods offered by the non-indigenous populations who live in areas of easy access: that is, the eastern banks of the middle-Orinoco, the highways and roads located in the northern part of Amazonas and south-western part of Bolívar, and the proximities of the capital of the Amazonas state, Puerto Ayacucho.[16] Freire and Zent argue that during the 1960s, the Piaroa were undergoing a

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[13] Zent (1997) argues that the migration process that brought the majority of the Piaroa to the areas where they live today began at the end of the 1960s, more or less the time when Protestant missions started to operate in the area.

[14] Wilbert's work is to the best of my knowledge the first modern ethnography about the Piaroa.

[15] The land they have lived in and used during the course of the past four hundred years defines what I am calling here the Piaroa's territory. Later in this chapter I will discuss some of the mechanisms they use for establishing land ownership, an idea that will add on to the notion of territoriality from the Piaroa's perspective.

[16] Some religious mission settlements, Catholic and Protestant, have the same attracting effects over the Piaroa population. In some cases these settlements were established in remote areas, thus some Piaroa stayed inland but changed their settlement patterns to larger and sedentary villages. This happened particularly with Protestant missions which have the tendency to establish their settlements near existing indigenous villages. On some occasions, Protestant missionaries acted without the knowledge of the

as saying that they are vulnerable people not capable of defending themselves; rather, avoidance is their mechanism of defence. On the other hand, Piaroa shamans are sometimes the object of fear by Piaroa and other people as well. The *Rúa* were, next to avoidance, their best response to protect themselves. This is another reason why traditional Piaroa settlements were distant from one another: they were avoiding harm that could potentially come from other Piaroa as well. This is why it was so important to live under the protection of one grand *Rúa*. In short, if the Piaroa were not participating in physical violence, they were nonetheless engaging in a constant spiritual war that kept their *Rúa* very active and that made them live apart from one another to minimize contact with potential sources of harm.[18]

The later Piaroa migratory process represents not only a geographical redistribution of their settlements but also resulted in a series of important socio-cultural changes such as the enlargement and sedentarism of their settlements, the adoption of new religious practices, direct participation in the market economy (Freire 2002; Mansutti 1995 and 1988; Freire 2003 and 2007), and more recently an active political participation in regional and national political affairs. Together, the geographical redistribution of their settlements and the socio-cultural changes represent a drastic departure from the image drawn by the classic ethnographies written only four decades ago (Overing Kaplan 1975; Boglár 1970).

However and without denying the importance of these social-cultural changes, which represent a whole realm of new elements for this people to deal with, I would

[18] See Overing and Passes (2000b) and also Overing (1986) for a discussions about this topic.

argue that this situation does not necessarily imply an irreversible departure from their sociality or social philosophy. There has been a great deal of external pressure put on the Piaroa during the course of their history and they have reacted to this and created accommodations to deal with these situations, but they have also made decisions and intervened actively in their own history. The outcome of these situations has been partly the result of their actions, and the guidance they had for these actions came from the realm of their social philosophy.

Based on what we know about the localization of the Piaroa's settlements and the concentration of their population in the different moments of their history, we can establish a pattern for their mobility. From this pattern we can establish an axis that defines on a greater scale the limits of the Piaroa territoriality from their standpoint.[19] This territory, according to this migratory axis, is set in between two extremes: the centre of their territory, located inland near the headwaters of the tributaries of the middle-Orinoco, an area characterized by mature rainforest and a multiplicity of small water sources; and the periphery, located close to the banks of the middle-Orinoco, an area that represents the limit between the rainforest and the plains of the pre-Amazonic savannah. As stated before, the majority of the Piaroa are currently living close to this second extreme. Very few Piaroa have abandoned the forest and moved to the savannahs or even towns like Puerto Ayacucho located right on the bank of the Orinoco. This is due to the Piaroa's lack of knowledge of how to obtain agrarian products from this environment.

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[19] Later in this thesis I will discuss how this territoriality is defined at the level of the villages, in other words how particular Piaroa communities establish land ownership over specific territories.

The forest is of great importance in Piaroa sociality. The Piaroa see themselves as agricultural people who know how to live and produce in the forest.[20] The Piaroa have a tendency to produce more than they need for their subsistence, or sometimes even for trading in the local markets. Piaroa gardens are more than places where food is produced; they are demonstrations of the reproductive capacities and knowledge of their owners. For the Piaroa to produce more is of great socio-cultural value: it shows the prosperity and equilibrium of their village; it shows that they are living well. This knowledge is one of their more important forms of socio-cultural capital: when they differentiate themselves from other people who live in the same region, this would be the first characteristic they would point out. They would say things like "we know how to plant, grow and harvest the plants of our conucos (generic word used in Venezuela for gardens). We know also how and when to gather fruits of the rastrojos (local generic word used for fallows and secondary forest), what is it that these other people want to teach us?" or "We are not like those Hiwi (another Amerindian people who live in the region). We know how to live here". Knowing the forest is a fundamental element of their social philosophy. Thus for a Piaroa to live in the savannah not only represents a significant change in his or her residential location, but a drastic opposition to the characteristic that they consider as one of their most important identity markers. For instance, another name that they use to identify themselves is *Dearua*, which literally means master of the forest.

Up to this point, I have discussed the Piaroa as members of a single unified society, as if the 15,300 Piaroa living in Venezuelan and Colombian territories identified

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[20] I am using the category of agriculturalist due to the diversity and quantity of products Piaroa grow in their gardens. (See Freire 2002, 2003 and 2007; Heckler 2004; Heckler and Zent 2008 for discussions of this theme)

themselves as members of the same group. This classification works well to a certain extent due to the fact that the limits of their grouping mechanism are flexible and fluid. It is to this topic that I will now direct my argument.

3. "Yes, they are Piaroa, but they are different people, they are not family"

Judging from the classic ethnographies I think it is safe to say that until recent years all the Piaroa did not consider themselves as being part of one single unified group (Overing Kaplan 1975). Although they speak the same language, *Huottüja tihuene*,[21] share the same political and economic practices, share the same cosmology and belief in a common mythological origin (the Piaroa mythology affirms they all came from the same original couple created by *Wahari*, one of the Piaroa demiurges (Boglár 1970; Boglár 1978), and recognize the potentiality of establishing ties with people who live far away through marriage alliances,[22] people in their everyday life do not conceive other Piaroa who live in far areas to be part of their same group.

This is another important characteristic of the Piaroa identification process, one that they share with other Amerindian societies of lowlands in Amazonia. The Piaroa rely on kinship relationships to determine who is in or out of the residential group.[23] In

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[21] Linguistic affiliations are often used by Amerindian people to establishing shared identities between distant groups. This is more marked when these people are distributed over extensive territory and constitute a population of considerable numbers, as is the case of the Piaroa. Thomas provides an explanation of this in his ethnography about the Pemón people of the Venezuelan Gran Sabana (1982).

[22] The Piaroa kinship system does not make distinctions between consanguine and affinity to identify who is part of the group and who is not; they favour endogamous ties when it comes to creating marriage alliances. Transforming affinity into consanguinity is another way Piaroa bring external elements to the realm of the sociality of the residential group. (See Overing and Passes 2000b for discussions on this theme).

[23] It is important to keep in mind that kinship and affinity links are not as simple to define as identifying consanguine and marital rights, and they involve a myriad of other elements. I have already described some of these elements but there is more involved. For now I will say though that as stated by Evans-Pritchard in

everyday situations a Piaroa person will consider as part of his or her group only those individuals who have a kinship relationship with him or her. This categorization works within Piaroa residential groups, and also outside of these groups when they recognize the presence of kinship links or the immediate possibility of creating them. It is only when they address agents that are outside of what we can call the whole Piaroa society, in the task of negotiating issues in the interest of multiple residential groups, that they will present themselves as the Piaroa, a single unified society.[24]

The structure of the residential groups also defines land ownership and rights to produce and to gather products from the land (Freire 2003). A Piaroa family will claim ownership over certain fallows and gardens when they can identify and demonstrate that relatives have made use of these locations in the past. This shows that the use of kinship categories not only functions in a same temporal frame to identify people and land tenure rights but that they are extended to at least three generations in the past to fulfil the same purpose. It is not uncommon to hear a Piaroa, while walking in the forest, trace mental maps or itineraries by identifying who owns certain gardens and whose garden was located where today there is a fallow or a secondary forest. The Piaroa are experts in growing food in the forest but they also are experts in identifying different ecological niches such as recent fallows and older secondary forest; they can almost always identify human intervention in the forest.

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his kinship analysis among the Nuer, people reorder the categories in order to fulfil the prescriptions (Evans-Pritchard 1960).

[24] The first time that this happened, as has been reported in the literature, was in 1984 after a conflict with a non-indigenous "land owner" which resulted in a heated legal dispute and in the "Primer Congreso Piaroa," an inter-village Piaroa meeting held in the Guanay Valley (Freire 2002 and 2003; Congreso Piaroa 1984).

4. "We came from Roma and build our first *isode* there, behind the school"

Most of my fieldwork was carried out in Alto Carinagua, a village of 161 dwellers in the municipality of Átures of the Venezuelan Amazonas state. This village is located approximately six kilometres from the state capital Puerto Ayacucho. Its current location is one of the results of the aforementioned migratory process. According to the villagers, Alto Carinagua was founded in 1980 by a family group originally from the headwaters of the Cataniapo River.[25] The dwellers of this village identify themselves as part of the Piaroa people.

The majority of the original villagers belong to the kin of *Buré* and all of them identify him as the village's *Rúa*. From the Piaroa point of view, his position in the community has greater implications than what is commonly understood as a shaman, the *Rúa* is the traditional religious and political leader of a Piaroa community. Overing (1975) discussed for the first time the difficulties involved in the translation and the identification of the responsibilities of these leaders; she called them *Isode Rua*, which literally means master of the house. This name is more appropriate in traditional settlements where the whole community lives in a single *isode* but today it is more appropriate to talk of a village's *Rúa* since the majority of the Piaroa now live in multi-house communities. Zent identified two types of *Rúa*, the *meñerua* which he described as the masters of chants and the *yawarua* which according to him are the masters of *yopo*, an hallucinogenic substance that gives the person who takes it access to the sources of

[25] I have different versions narrated to me by different villagers, some are from my fieldwork in 2004 and others are from 2008. Others were passed on to me in written form. There is not great variation among these versions. One very important topic raised in these versions is the importance that learning Spanish has in order to deal with the local and national governments. This was considered to be the responsibility of the younger dwellers, so that some of them could later become the new leaders of the community.

knowledge necessary to protect the people who live under his care (Zent 1992).[26] In short, the traditional leader is the person who can guarantee protection to the people who live under his care. The Piaroa live in a state of permanent threat from things which are outside of their village, their gardens and the fallows. In the past these dangers came from the forest and other distant villages; today the world of the Criollos also represents a source of external danger. The narratives I gathered that talk about the history of the village present Alto Carinagua as the result of a migratory process that started in a little river, Agua Blanca located in the Upper Cataniapo. Rufino, the older son of *Buré*, told me they call this river *Wara Aje*, but is possible that this is a generic name for rivers like this (*aje* is the Piaroa word for river). Rufino said that this is the place where his father was born. In Agua Blanca they dwelt in a single longhouse with a small group of people. They later decided to move down river (this time the Cataniapo), to a place not too far from where the village of Gavilán, another Piaroa settlement of the middle Cataniapo, is now located. They named the new village Roma.[27] Both Rufino and Luis López, whom I interviewed in 2004, said that in Roma they first had contact with the regional government. They said the government gave the Bolívar family some construction materials (tin sheets for roofing) to help in the construction of the houses and a small gas power plant for the illumination of the village. Later on the family decided to move

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[26] During my fieldwork in 2008 I was told of another substance that they called *dadá* which they said also gives access to this knowledge. This drug is a stimulant that helps them to be awake all night during the purification ritual before the cleansing ceremony in the waterfalls. It could be that these substances are paths and it does not matter much which one is used. For instance, I was asked once by Rafael to write an email to some friends of the Chamán (J. A. Bolívar) in Peru requesting some ayaguasca that he needed to perform a ritual.

[27] They use the term found, *fundar*, every time they talk about the establishment of a new village; this coincided with the way other stories about different settlements in the state are told. Today there is not a village named Roma in the area they are describing.

again, keeping the same direction of the previous movement, down river. The reason Rufino gave me for this move was the family's discomfort with the incursion of missionaries from the New Tribes Mission. *Buré* disliked the missionaries' insistence on trying to convert him, as they already had done with his wife's family. Elena, *Buré*'s wife, left part of her family behind in this new move, as did *Buré* who said goodbye to his brother who had become an evangelical. All this created serious tension in Roma and ended with the fission of the families.[28] Some of them stayed in the Middle Cataniapo and today live in the village of Gavilán and others; *Buré* with his wife, sons and some grandchildren moved to the area of Alto Carinagua where I encountered them in 2004 and where they are still living today. They built a conical traditional longhouse in which various nuclear families dwelled. I am not sure how strong *Buré*'s leadership was at that point; he was on the move, which means he did not have a garden or had to leave whatever he had in Roma behind. This is a serious issue for a Piaroa who is building his reputation as a *Rúa*: first, he needed a garden to provide food to his family; and second, without a garden he could not give a *Sári* or *Warime*, the annual festival of the Piaroa, where among other things the *Rúa* proves his capacities as a political and religious leader.[29] Next to the conical house there were two other small dwellings housing other

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[28] According to Rivière (2000 and 1984) this is a common mechanism among the people of Guiana, when the tension between dwellers become unbearable the tendency is to split and move somewhere else.
[29] The *Sári* or *Warime* as I mentioned before was the only inter-village festivity that involved the presence of Piaroa who lived in distant villages in the past. The Piaroa believe that one of the ways their well-being could be threatened was by adventuring without protection into the places outside the village. These are the locations where potential danger is to be found. The forest is the opposite to the village in a relation that stands as the space of sociality versus the un-socialized outside space. I will argue that the Piaroa are involved in a continuous process of classification that consists in categorizing elements that fall into their social rationality and those that do not; in other words, identification of what is controllable and what is not. Garden products for instance are controllable because the Piaroa have the knowledge to reproduce them, the same applies to fruits and fibres that grow in the secondary forest which as Freire says are part of the Piaroa manipulation of their environment (Freire 2002, 2003 and 2007).

nuclear families. They mention 17 nuclear families living in the village in these initial stages. It is important to keep in mind that everybody in the village is considered part of one big extended family (consanguines and affines are considered kin as well).

From that moment, the residential area has been relatively fixed on an area of about one square kilometre in relation to where the village's school is located today. However, internally the community shows a high mobility within that square kilometre. Families move from one house to another, especially within those that due to their construction characteristics are more long-lasting,[30] but they also build new houses and annexes.

A year after the arrival of *Buré's* family, a fellow Piaroa named Luis López moved into the village. He too was from the Upper Cataniapo and possibly the Upper Cuao. He married a daughter of *Buré*. Luis López was a Piaroa schoolteacher who had just separated from a former wife and arrived in the village with his son Alonso Moreno, who was a small child at that time. Alonso became one of my best friends in Alto Carinagua and main collaborators during my fieldwork in 2008. It could be that Luís López's parents also moved in with him as did other relatives. With the exception of Alonso, they all moved out of the village with Luís López when he left. Alonso stayed in Alto Carinagua under the care of Juan Bautista Bolívar, son of *Buré* and now Capitán of the village, and ultimately under the protection of *Buré*. I deduced this from the insistence

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[30] These would be the houses with concrete walls and floors and with roofing build with tin sheets or the newer version that combine petrol with steel sheets (like a sandwich) know as Acerolit. Initially these houses were provided by the national government as part of its health policy to prevent tropical diseases like Chagas disease or intestinal parasites. Later there was a plan to "improve" people's life styles (more in agreement with the national aesthetic of the Venezuelan urban modernity). Today the Piaroa as well as other indigenous people from the region imitate these constructions, sometimes combining them with traditional material like mud walls or palm thatched roofing.

of Alonso that it was his grandmother who took care of him since his mother was absent; the only way this could be possible is if his grandmother was living in Alto Carinagua when he was a child. However, it is also possible that Alonso was evoking the Piaroa ideal of living with his grandparents. Both of Alonso's grandparents are now living in Sardi village, founded by Luís López after his departure from Alto Carinagua. Alonso is fantasizing about moving to Sardi, but this situation is complicated by the fact that he is married to Rosa Fuentes, whose family lives in Alto Carinagua.

As mentioned, Luis López was a schoolteacher and thanks to his ability to speak Spanish on his arrival he became the intermediary between the village and the people of Puerto Ayacucho, especially the local government. He started then to do all the work necessary to establish an elementary school in the village, with success in 1983. It is interesting that although Luis López arrived one year after the arrival of *Buré*, other villagers see Luis as one of the founders of Alto Carinagua, thus as one of the village's leaders.

Buré acted as Capitán[31] of Alto Carinagua until 2003, when he resigned voluntarily from this position and passed it on to his second son Juan Bautista Bolívar. The political structure of the community does not just depend on a single leader; the different families that comprise Alto Carinagua are free to make their own decisions and

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[31] Capitán is a political position created by the Venezuelan state. The Capitán is the political leader of a community and acts as the face of the village to external actors. The role used to be fulfilled by the traditional leaders, as was the case in Alto Carinagua until 2003, but this was not necessarily a norm. Little by little, the traditional leaders were substituted by new leaders that thanks to their ability to speak Spanish and their knowledge of the state's bureaucracy seemed more suited to the function of dealing with external actors. Nevertheless in Alto Carinagua the situation at the interior of the community was a different one in respect to the political leadership. Internally, *Buré* never gave up his leadership, he just delegated the post as a Capitán to his son who knew Spanish and who *Buré* knew would consult with him about any important decision.

the head couple of these families are also leaders of the village. As we will see later in this thesis leadership among the Piaroa is a relational and contextual entity and can be held by multiple villagers. This resonates with what previous ethnographies have reported for Piaroa political rationale and leadership. Leaders have to convince people that their decisions are appropriate for whatever situation they are dealing with. This is not an easy task, and usually is very time consuming and leads to endless meetings, either in people's houses with particular families or of the entire village in the communal house. There are many leaders in the community and this leads to a very complex political dynamic. For instance nowadays, in addition to the *Rúa*, head couples of the different families and the Capitán, there is the Comisario (today Promotor Comunitario), who is the officer of the local government in the village. There is also the AMS (Auxiliar de Medicina Simplificada) who they call simply el Enfermero, the nurse. Then there are other types of leaders like the evangelical pastors, and those who for one reason or for other are seen as leaders by the villagers. People also expect these new leaders to capitalize resources like those offered by the local and national government and state programs and distribute them among the villagers in a way that resembles the way the *Rúa* distributes shamanized game.

Luis López left the village in 1995, and with this he ended his functions as an intermediary between the village and the local government. He then founded Sardi in the Middle Cataniapo. I visited Luis in Sardi in July 2008 with Alonso, his older son. Alonso is the only son of Luis who remained in Alto Carinagua after Luis' departure. I confirmed during this visit that Sardi is a very small village that appears to depend greatly on Gavilán (a neighboring Piaroa village in the Middle Cataniapo). Everybody in Sardi is a

close relative, everybody is *tuku chawarua*. Luis López is trying to convince Alonso to move to Sardi and has given him a piece of land to build a house. However, despite the fact that this possibility looks attractive to Alonso, since he would then live among close relatives, such a move would not be easy. Alonso is married to Rosa Fuentes, the daughter of Miguel Fuentes (senior), who with María Mota forms the head couple of one of the extended families in Alto Carinagua. I will discuss below who comprises these extended families.[32] For now I will just say that one factor that holds them together is the economic dependence of members on one or various gardens; the members of the family work in varying degrees in these gardens, which is part of what guarantees their membership in the family; these families usually have a married couple as their heads, but they can be also headed by a widower and one of his daughters, or a widow and one or various of her sons, just to mention some of the possible alternatives. For Miguel (senior) to let one of his daughters go would create a stressful situation for his family: first the family would lose a female member and a valuable helper; second a significant number of grandchildren would leave the community, reducing the size of the family greatly and taking away beloved relatives from their grandparents (Miguel senior and María Mota), affecting negatively their conviviality; third a male head of an extended family is a leader who has some of the same expectations as other community leaders. For instance Miguel (senior) is also a type of *Rúa*, and his ideal situation would be one where he attracts new members by marrying possible affines to his descendents (usually a daughter), thus losing a member goes against this ideal. If Alonso and Rosa move out of

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[32] According to a particular theoretical framework, what I am calling here extended families could be considered a household unit, however I am not sure about the use of this category because this does not include the relational implications in terms of kinship that I understand these units have among the Piaroa.

Alto Carinagua, they will be going against the ideal of leadership from the Piaroa point of view but more importantly they will be undermining the Piaroa ideal of well-being or living well if we use the terminology of Peter Gow (2001). However, we have to bear in mind that this is a dual-sided situation: by affecting negatively the ideal of well-being of the Fuentes-Mota family and that of Alto Carinagua as a healthy and prosperous community, they would be contributing and adding to the ideal of well-being of Sardi and the family of Luis López.[33]

Today *Buré* is still a strong leader in the village. As I stated before he represents the figure of a Piaroa traditional leader. There is a delegation of functions to younger leaders today due to the knowledge that these last have of Spanish and of some details of the Venezuelan bureaucracy. The political function of José Antonio Bolívar, however, persists inside the community. Nevertheless, there is a leadership competition that affects both types of interrelations in the village, the external and the internal. Though we have to bear in mind that even in the traditional political structure this competition for leadership was present: the *Rúa* had to be constantly demonstrating his ability to protect his community, to maintain the equilibrium in all the aspects of the everyday life of his

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[33] I believe that an appropriate analogy would be a bicycle wheel. A wheel is constructed of various spokes, which are laced in order to connect the hub and the rim, located on the two extremes of the spokes. This not only adds to the physical shape of the wheel as a whole but it also adds to its strength and roundness. The tension in which these spokes are tied define how round the wheel is and how straight it is laterally when it is turning, they do this by acting as a group, thus a modification of the tension of one spoke affects the entire wheel. Similarly, if one side of the wheel loses tension the other side will gain tension. The strength is determined also by tension, if the spokes are too loose they will bend too much and in the time the fatigue created in this bending will make them break. If they are too tight they will break by not having enough room to bend, thus the tension has to be within a tolerable range to work properly. I think all this has to do a lot with the way society works: what I am talking here is about equilibrium and the way to achieve it and the aspects that are affected in this process (negatively or positively according to the ideals of the particular society). There is also an aesthetic involved in the lacing of the wheel and this adds to the harmony of the wheel as a whole, accomplishing a state of well-being has also an aesthetic, the aesthetic of the everyday life of the community (Gow 2001; Overing 1989; Overing and Passes 2000a).

village, and if he failed in demonstrating this or people had doubts about his abilities, they would move to other villages searching for the care of a more powerful *Rúa*. Today the younger leaders look to *Buré* for advice; this is a fascinating issue about leadership standing between traditional Piaroa and modern Piaroa, and the way they are dealing with the socio-cultural changes. Traditional leadership depends on the capacity of the *Rúa* to guarantee the well-being of the people living in his community. People who live under his roof (in his village nowadays) depend on what he does to maintain the equilibrium of his community. If he fails to cope with this effectively, then villagers eventually leave him for other *Rúa* who prove to be better versed in these functions.

Alto Carinagua has had a school since 1983, which started as an elementary school that until 2004 offered up to the seventh grade of the basic level (primary and elementary in the North American system). At that point, villagers began to complain about losing a say in the school's affairs. By 2008, this situation had changed, and it had become clear that the community had lost all control of the school since it started to take students from outside of the village. Students of other Amerindian groups and Criollos started to attend classes, and the majority of the teachers are from outside of the village. This has created some stress in the village, to the point that they complain about the now abandoned character of bilinguism of the school, and the lack of Piaroa education for their children. In 2008 the grades offered included up to the last year of high school. A parallel version of the official curriculum called "bachillerato integral" was the form in which this expansion was undertaken (part of the fast programs developed by the current government to avoid the low rates of formal education presented in situations where the regular school curriculum was imparted). The school also has a night program for adults

that not only are part of these parallel programs in their even faster version for adults, but there are also literacy programs for adults and children who have not previously had the opportunity to attend school. The school has some Piaroa teachers in its staff (for the regular curriculum and mainly in the basic level), as well as some Piaroa maintenance workers and cooks from the village. This indicates some of the dilemmas that the school presents for the village. The school is the place where their children learn Spanish (both oral and written, which they consider important in order to take advantage of the resources that the Criollo world has to offer). The school is also one of the major employers of villagers, and it depends on the budget of the local government, thus all the villagers who work in the school are state employees.[34]

Here I would like to introduce another topic that has been worked on by Heckler (2004 and 2007) and partly by Heckler and Zent (2008): this concerns a different type of leadership that is practiced by the women in the Piaroa communities. This also resonates with recent scholarly discussions about gender in Amazonia (Gregor and Tuzin 2001; McCallum 2001). This leadership is based on different types of specialized knowledge about activities such as food preparation, gardening, childcare and organization of social events, etc. This knowledge helps those who hold it to establish their political leadership. Heckler argues that this form of leadership practiced by women has escaped the view of most of the ethnographers that have worked among the Piaroa, due to the emphasis scholars have placed on other aspects of Amazonian societies that are part of the domain

[34] For an interesting discussion on salaries and the effect they have in Piaroa communities, see Freire (Freire 2004).

of men. These elements include shamanism, cosmology, hunting, warfare and distribution of resources, among others.

In order to support the validity of her statement, Heckler shows the similarities between the Piaroa case and evidence presented by scholars for other Amazonian societies. Heckler argues that attention has not been paid to other elements that are vital in the everyday life activities and interactions which are also important in the configuration of the social philosophy of these groups. She raises the points that it is a mistake to think of these different aspects in terms of hierarchical relations; that is, to think of warfare, hunting and shamanism as more valuable aspects of the sociality of one group at the expense of other aspects such as gardening, food preparation and childcare (these are also part of the male activities among the Piaroa as well as in other Amazonian societies). This hierarchical valuation has led to a political theorization of Amazonian societies that downplays the role of people like the Piaroa who value self-control over physical warfare and agriculture over hunting.

According to Heckler (2004), the origin of the situation I will call the invisibility and visibility of leadership practiced by women can be traced to the work of Rivière (1987) where he compares the manioc processing methods in the Guiana region to the Western Amazonia, particularly the Tukano groups. Rivière's work is mostly based on Hugh-Jones' study of the Barasana of the Pirá-Paranà River in Colombia (1978). These authors have emphasized the prestige of hunting, particularly in Western Amazonia over that of other activities such as gardening and food preparation. On the other hand, Descola (1994 and 1996) , Viveiros de Castro (1996) and Guss (1989) referring to different aspects of the sociality of diverse social groups highlight the importance of

everyday activities in determining to some extent the cosmologies of the groups among whom they work. Specifically, Descola discusses the process of gaining control over plants in the Shuar garden that otherwise would be risky and dangerous. Viveiros de Castro writes about the complementarity of the sexual division of labour instead of a hierarchical categorization of this relationship, introducing a theoretical framework he called "the moral economy of intimacy" in which he argues that the responsibilities of each gender stand in a relation of complementarity. And Guss explores the implications involved in the preparation of manioc bread and grated manioc that not only involve the technicalities represented by the transformation of a poisonous tuber into an edible food through a very complex procedure, but also, when seen in its cosmological implication — in terms of what it represents to domesticate or transform the potential dangers of the tuber into a element that is primordial to the diet of the Amazonian people, in other words an element that is present in most of their everyday life activities — shows deeper levels of the social philosophy of these people and opens up a new way of thinking about everyday activities that goes beyond their mere practicalities. Next to the works of Descola, Guss and Viveiros de Castro we should place also those compiled in Overing and Passes' book (2000a) and their discussion of the notion of conviviality and Gow's notion of "living well" among the Piro (2001).

Other points raised by Heckler include the importance of gardening plants for medicinal purposes, as ways alternative to shamanism of treating illnesses which give, to some extent, the power of healing to the people who run the gardens, who are generally women. Because the Piaroa view the work in their gardens as another way of transforming external resources by incorporating as many species as possible as a way of

demonstrating the productive capacities of the owner of the garden, there is high value given to the diversity of plant species. Foreign species are incorporated, usually by being brought to the person in charge of the gardens by relatives and then incorporated to the body of plants already cultivated as another way of transforming external resources into internal products (Heckler 2007) see also (Heckler and Zent 2008). The Piaroa consider a good garden to be one that shows a great variety of plants, as to some extent this is a demonstration of power — of the power of garden productivity. Similarly, Freire (2002 and 2007) discusses the importance of experimentation and domestication of foreign plants as a valued activity among the Piaroa, since this demonstrates their abilities as agriculturalists. He also points out the over production and waste of food in Piaroa gardening; according to him, rather than simply producing food for consumption, the Piaroa also produce food to demonstrate how good they are at it (Freire personal communication).

The last point that I will introduce here from Heckler's work is the importance of women in the *Sári* ceremony. *Sári* is the name of the annual festival of social reproduction among the Piaroa and it is also the name of the beverage — a kind of beer made of fermented bitter manioc that is consumed by men during this ceremony. The women, particularly the wife of the *Rúa*, are in charge of the preparation of the drink and the food that will to be consumed during the ceremony. The wife of the *Rúa* is also known as the Master of the *Sári* and a good part of the success of the ritual depends on her performance. Masked characters that represent the deities involved in the ceremony, the three *Warime* who wear tapir masks (tapir is the shape of the *Wahari,* one of the

demiurges of the Piaroa), dance and sing in front of the Master of the *Sári*. This happens multiple times during the peak of the ceremony.

I will add to Heckler's argument three elements that come from my ethnographic experience and that show that the women play a very important role in the political decisions that take place in the villages. This perhaps has been downplayed because it is found in the internal interaction of the community and not in the interaction with the outside. However, according to some of the Piaroa people I talked to in 2008, such internal relations also determine the outcome of these relations with external actors. I was told once by José Crimaco that if I wanted to get the approval of *Buré* for carrying out the collaborative project of making the Piaroa videos, it would be a good idea to ask Elena, his wife, before approaching *Buré*. José said, "you know that with Piaroa it is the woman who really rules". I also noticed various times during the course of many conversations I had with Piaroa men that at moments they were silent. I thought that they were thinking about what they were going to say next, but later I realized that they were listening to their wives talking to them in the background. I did not realize this at the beginning due to the low volume of voice the Piaroa use when they are talking to one another.[35] What the women were doing was correcting or completing information that the men ignored or had forgotten. On occasions, I realized that I was having conversations with the women through their husbands. If the women have some level of control over the information that goes out of the village, they must have some level of political power. The last

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[35] Rivière (2000) offers a good discussion about the low volume of voice use by the Trio in the course of their conversations and the relation between this and the sense of well balanced relation of the interlocutors. Piaroa are very soft-spoken people as well and some of the principles Rivière offers in his chapter apply also to the Piaroa.

element comes from women's participation in multiple communal meetings I attended during both of my fieldwork seasons; they were very active and played an important part in the decision-making processes. These are three examples of the political participation and power that women have in village's affairs internally and externally.

5. Some words about Piaroa Sociality

Let us turn now to an exploration of what I called elsewhere elements of sociality, and the implications these elements have in situations of social-cultural change like those experienced by the Piaroa since the 1960s. People who claim to and believe that they have things in common with one another integrate social groups. They identify themselves as part of a social entity and therefore while doing this they identify those who are part of the same group as their self-same (self-same opposed to self-other, or sameness opposed to otherness, or perhaps We opposed to Them). The borders of these groups are flexible and fluid, and depend on the many social-political processes, contexts, relations, interactions, etc., in which the members of these groups are involved. For instance in a nation-state some of these elements of sociality could be a common history (or the belief in one): events in the past that involved my ancestors and those of my self-same. They could be also national symbols, economic or political enterprises, aesthetic elements, and so forth. However, let us not forget that these are just glimpses of very complex social dynamics. There are processes of identification, incorporation and grouping inside of the nations and there are also processes beyond the borders of these nations. This is why I am saying that the social groups have flexible and fluid borders, which also imply the imagining of what it is on the other side of these borders. I am partly using here Tsing's understanding of borders. She says: "Borders are particular kind

of margin; they have an imagined other side" (1993: 21). However we should not assume that these processes are entirely voluntary and recognize that there are many elements of the sociality of one group that are outside of the individual and determine greatly his or her identification, incorporation or grouping. These processes of identification, incorporation and grouping are selective and by definition discriminatory, thus some individuals will be left out of these corporate social groups — these individuals will not be recognized as self-same. They will represent and be recognized as the others, or to be consistent as the self-other: those who are different from my self-same and my-self. Sometimes these individuals will be grouped in categorical entities seen as the group or groups of the others. Other times they will remain unclassified or be re-invented. The combination of all these elements of sociality conform the social philosophy of a particular group.

The people who recognize themselves as Piaroa believe themselves to be part of a particular social group, with a particular social philosophy. Sometimes the limits of these groups will only include the self-same with whom they interact in their everyday life, more or less the people who live in the same village. At other times people from other villages who are also identified as Piaroa will be part of the group, especially if there are consanguineal or affinal links. More recently, and especially since the 1980s due to land conflicts with ranchers who were starting to invade their territory, all the villages can present themselves as the Piaroa society, but this is circumstantial and in their everyday life the associations are with those who are considered to be in close relation, *tuku chawarua*, literally close relatives, and those who can become part of this category through marriage alliances.

Today the Piaroa, among other Amerindian societies living in Venezuelan territory, are being mentioned and classified by the Venezuelan State as part of the social group that comprises the Venezuelan Nation. Needless to say, this group is very different from the social group the Piaroa recognize themselves as belonging to. Thus how is it that now they become part of a group with a social philosophy quite different from the one they use to identify their self-same, to associate with them, and to conform their groups? This dynamic is one of struggle and negotiations. On one side of this complex, the state declares the incorporation and tries to apply policies to show that this incorporation is more than mere words. On the other side the Piaroa, who do not recognize the state and its officials as their self-same, are debating the paradox of recognizing the incorporation or not. The resources the state has to offer are too attractive to not consider taking them.

Let us explore now some of the elements of sociality that conform the social philosophy of the Piaroa. A Piaroa person will distinguish: first, those who are in close kinship relation with him or her, the *tuku chawarua*; then, those who stand at some distance but can become *tuku chawarua* by moving into their villages and ideally entering into marriage alliances with his or her residence group, the *oto chawarua;* and finally, those who are outside of their group, the self-others. Behind this distinction there are the mechanisms of social reproduction of the groups. In other words the way to define who lives with whom, who feeds whom, who marries whom, and if the tensions of co-residence become unbearable, where can they move to in order to start a new life with fewer tensions. Close relatives, according to the social philosophy of the Piaroa, will be those who live under the same roof, the *isode*, and grow food together in the same *pätä*. As mentioned, the Piaroa are agriculturalist people, and they recognize themselves as

people who have the knowledge to grow food in the *deá* (the Piaroa word for forest). In the past when the Piaroa villages were comprised of no more than sixty people who live in a single *isode*, these close relatives were the units that comprised the village. Each of these units would have their own *pätä*, and every member of those units would work in those *pätä* and consume the produce grown in it. As I state before, the members of these units or families were led by a married couple or the other possibilities that I mentioned before (see page 42). Other members of these units are the descendents of the head couples and their spouses, if there are any, and their offspring. Sometimes these families could include members of the generation above the head couple, usually one of their parents who by losing their spouse and their *pätä* become economically dependent on the head couple. This can still be seen today with certain variations due to changes in settlement patterns, particularly the adoption of nuclear-family houses. Various groups of close relatives conglomerate under the power of one village *Rúa*. The village *Rúa* as stated before is responsible for maintaining the equilibrium of the village.

As I also stated elsewhere, the Piaroa consider the products grown in their gardens to be the result of their knowledge; therefore the production of *pätä* food is controllable. The same applies to fruits gathered in the fallows and secondary forest since they are former *pätä*. *Deá* resources, on the other hand, depend on forces that are beyond the control of the regular Piaroa. They belong to a specific master as for example the Master of the Cabeza de Manteco (*Leporinus friderici, Leporellus vittatus* and *Leporinus friderici*), Master of Peccary (*Pecari tajacu* and *Tayassu peccari*), Master of Paca (*Cuniculus paca*), Master of Macaw (*Ara macao*), etc. The only person with the knowledge to control these *deá* resources is the village *Rúa*. He knows the chants that

make forest resources edible, placing them alongside the *pätä* products. This is one of the functions of village *Rúa*, which allows external/dangerous resources to become internal/safe products. In other words, what he does is to transform foreign entities into the realm of the Piaroa social philosophy. However this transformation is not completed until the village *Rúa* distributes the recent transformed resources among the people of his community. He does this by following the kinship links throughout the distribution and by specific rules that determine which part of the animal has to be given to which recipient, and also when is a good time for them to get their shares. For instance, hunters are the last to receive their portion; otherwise their hunting skill could be jeopardized. These regulations respond to the strict food rules practiced in the past by the Piaroa.[36]

Now, the combination of the processes of identification, association and grouping and the village *Rúa's* practices of transformations, along with a myriad of other elements (some of them mentioned earlier in this chapter), lead to the ideal social equilibrium of the Piaroa people. This equilibrium also implies emotions and ideals of conviviality that allow people to live together and to reproduce their sociality, and when this is not possible, also offer possibilities for relieving the tensions or finding alternative solutions (for instance village fissions).[37] All this resonates with what other authors have said about other Amazonian groups, and especially with the ideal of living well introduced by Peter Gow (2001 and 1991) (for other cases in Amazonia see Rivière 1969 and 2000; Descola 1994 and 1996; Viveiros de Castro 1992); and for the particular case of the Piaroa, (Overing Kaplan 1975; Heckler 2004, 241-259; Overing and Passes 2000b).

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[36] For more detail on the food regulations among the Piaroa see (Overing Kaplan 1975).

[37] All the articles compiled in Overing and Passes (2000a) offer good examples of what I am referring to here in different societies of the Amazonia.

I use all the elements presented in this chapter as a stepping-stone to consider how the Piaroa view the resources offered by the Venezuelan state and the relations with the Venezuelan state officials. The Piaroa are transforming foreign resources and practices through the work of their community leaders. The work of these leaders is to bring these entities into the realm of the Piaroa social philosophy. This allows them to explore new possibilities in ways that are very much Piaroa.

In the next chapter I will present some of the characteristics of the Venezuelan modern state as it is perceive by the villagers of Alto Carinagua and how this perception determines their interrelations with Venezuela state officials. I will focus on its personalized character of the Venezuela state and the way it distributes the "national wealth" among the citizens of the Venezuelan nation, by doing this I will established the way this state relates with the Venezuelan citizens. Then I will explore the history of intervention of the state in the Venezuelan federal territory of Amazonas, today Amazonas state, and the process of incorporation of this region into the Venezuelan Nation. Finally I will discuss some of the implications this incorporation has for the population that inhabits this region, particularly the population who like the Piaroa belong to Amerindian Amazonian societies.

Chapter III
Learning about the Venezuelan state while waiting in line: Situating the Venezuelan State

The focus of my discussion in this chapter will be the Venezuelan state as it is perceived by the villagers of Alto Carinagua and how this perception affects the way they navigate the interrelations with state officials in order to have access to the benefits involved in the state programs these officials represent. It has been argued that the Venezuelan state has a personalistic character (Coronil 1997); in other words, state officials are seen as the corporeal objectification of the state and as the providers of the benefits and resources funded by a wealth that seems to come from the state itself. According to Coronil, this characteristic is the result of a historical process that has defined the way that high-ranking state officials, especially the president of the country and his cabinet ministers, present themselves in the process of distribution of oil revenues among Venezuelan citizens in the form of state programs.[38] This wealth comes from the extraction, production and commercialization of petroleum, a national industry that is controlled by the state. This wealth gives the state a power that seems to come from itself in a way that reminds us, paraphrasing Coronil's argument, of an act of magic; high officials then are portrayed as magicians capable of wonders (Coronil 1997). This personalistic character is manifested in peoples' discourses about state officials, but it also determines in good part their actions when they engage in interrelations with these

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[38] One of the outcomes of the political project of the Venezuelan state known as the Decentralization (1990) was the implementation of local elections in which the candidates were running for governors and city mayoralty posts. Ever since then these governors and mayors have become part of these high officials that are seen as the corporeal representation of the Venezuelan state. In Amazonas the Decentralization was made effective by raising the geopolitical status of the region from federal territory to a state bringing with this the creation of various municipalities that would be governed by elected officials.

officials. Another outcome of this characteristic has been the confusion between state and government, creating an illusion that sets the latter as the totality of the state itself; the assets, and sometimes the failures of state programs, are seen as the singular action of specific high state officials. José Ignacio Cabrujas, a well known Venezuelan writer whose political views helped Coronil in the confection of the idea of the magical state, once wrote "in Venezuela, the state is the government" (Coronil 1997).

There are various ways of theoretically exploring this personalistic character. One could be by adopting a historical perspective and analyzing historical processes as they favoured the formation of this character; in fact this is the path that Coronil chose when he discussed this issue. Another way is to identify the manifestations of this character in people's everyday actions by embarking on ethnographic exercises that allow researchers to experience this perception as they accompany people in some of their everyday activities. There is no better or worse method of exploring this socio-political phenomenon and researchers may choose between one and the other depending on the particularities of their endeavours. In this thesis I decided mainly to use the ethnographic option, since my concern here is with people who, although they have been recognized as citizens by different governments since at least the 1940s, have different histories in approaching and being approached by Venezuelan state officials when compared with the rest of the Venezuelan citizens. Nevertheless in the last half of this chapter I will merge my argument with Coronil's as a way to prepare the terrain for the analysis of the historical processes that led to the incorporation of the Amazonian region to the rest of the Venezuelan nation and how this affected the lives of the people who live in this territory, particularly, for the purposes of this thesis, the lives of the Piaroa people. All

this should lay the foundations for my discussion of the local working of a specific institution created by the state, the Consejo Comunal, in Chapter IV.

1. "Let's go to Ayacucho"

On the evening of July 15, 2008, Rafael came to the house where I was staying and asked me if I could go with him to Puerto Ayacucho the day after. I asked him the reason for this trip and he smiled at me and said: "I have to talk with the people of Misión Cultura."[39] Although he did not mention why he wanted me to go with him I decided to go anyway. Rafael has always been a good friend and a great collaborator when I am in Amazonas, and I assumed that if he wanted my company he must have good reasons for it. On the other hand, I also needed to go to town and buy some groceries. Ever since Miguel and his family left me in charge of their house during their visit to Caño Piojo — they went to visit some relatives and also Miguel wanted to play soccer in an inter-village tournament that was going to be held there — people had been coming more frequently to visit me when I was at home.[40] These encounters were a great opportunity for me to interact with people with whom I had not yet had the chance to talk and also for them to get to know me better. When they came I liked to offer them some yucuta and food to comply with what I understand is a display of courtesy and welcome among the Piaroa.[41]

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[39] Misión Cultura is a state program that aims to promote the engagement of people in arts as spectators but also as creators. It is run by the Ministry of Culture.

[40] Caño Piojo is a Piaroa village located on the eastern bank of the middle-Orinoco (south of the Samariapo port). Miguel's family is originally from this village but all of them, with the exception of one brother, moved to Alto Carinagua. Miguel's sisters are all married to members of the Bolívar Family.

[41] Yucuta is the local generic name for a drink made of a mix of grated manioc (mañoco as it is locally known) and water or the juice of the fruits of seje palm (*Jessenia bataua*), manac palm (*Calyptronoma rivalis*) or copoazú (*Theobroma grandiflorum*). The offering of yucuta to visitors is a widespread practice among the people of Amazonas. The drink is almost always served in a big bowl made of the fruit of calabash tree (*Crescentia cujete*), although in recent times plastic containers are used sometimes. Inside the bowls they put a spoon made of the same calabash fruit and this is used to stir the ingredients of the drink,

Very often when I went visiting other people's homes, they would offer me some food along with yucuta. Miguel left me a good amount of mañoco and behind the house there were some copoazú trees with enough fruit to make juice until his return; the rest of the food I had to buy from the markets in town. The frequency with which visitors had been coming to the house was making me go through the house stock faster than when Miguel and Soraida, Miguel's wife, were at home.[42]

Rafael is one of *Buré*'s grandsons — he is the older son of Rufino — who has assumed the functions as Vocero Principal of the village's Consejo Comunal *Huaduna*.[43] He takes his job very seriously and he often travels to Puerto Ayacucho to meet with governmental functionaries or to fulfil other duties as Vocero Principal. These responsibilities could be: checking for deposits to the Consejo's bank account, making sure that all the paperwork for the different projects has been properly completed and submitted to the right offices, or checking the status of applications for particular projects. Other responsibilities of his job are to pay visits to villagers in their homes and provide them with updates and sometimes ask for their collaboration or support in particular endeavours, to attend meetings out of Amazonas state, and sometimes to

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this is done every time someone is about to take a sip. The bowl is offered to the visitors first and then it is returned to the hosts who also drink some of it. This sequence is repeated a few times without interrupting the flow of the conversation until the drink is finished. Sometimes they prepare two or three servings. In the high temperatures of Amazonas (an average of 30° Celsius all year long with very high levels of humidity) this drink can be very refreshing and people always welcome the gesture.

[42] This is in part because of the increment of visitors I received but also because Soraida was a better administrator of household resources than I.

[43] The Consejo Comunal is the theme of the next chapter; for now I will say that it is a state program that involves the organization of the communities in councils whose main objective is to find solutions for the communities' problems. On occasions they will put together projects and apply for funding to the Fondo Nacional de los Consejos Comunales. The money for these projects is provided by the Ministry of Mines and Energy, the branch of the state that manages the Venezuelan oil industry. These councils are structured by multiple components under the coordination of one executive board; the Vocero Principal is the head of this board.

organize meetings with the people of the village to discuss collectively matters related with the Consejo. All this work is very time consuming and Rafael very often complains or expresses his discomfort because these responsibilities keep him away from his family for long periods of time. This not only separates him from his beloved relatives but also limits the opportunities for helping Carolina, his wife, with the work in their parents' gardens.[44] Rafael's frustration is also motivated by the challenges that the Piaroa's political rationale poses to the capitalization of villagers' support and agreement for particular projects, as I mentioned in the previous chapter. No leader can obligate a person to participate in a particular task, or to give his or her support to a specific position about a village issue; people are free to make their own decisions and to participate or withdraw from any endeavour if it no longer interests them.

Rafael arrived at about 8:00 a.m. and started whispering my name at one of the windows that faces the back of the house. Although he knew I was alone he did not want to disturb me in case I was asleep. I was awake and ready to leave when he arrived, since I knew that if this was not the case he would probably leave without me. Although Rafael and I know each other well enough to treat one another in a very informal way, he was still concerned with bothering me even though we had agreed to meet the day before.

I thought that we were going to leave right away but he wanted to eat something before heading out. Fortunately I still had some leftovers from last night's dinner, when

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[44] Rafael and Carolina hold membership in two extended families or household units. This situation, which shows the fluidity of the Piaroa incorporation and grouping mechanism, allows Rafael and Carolina to participate and take advantage of the production of the Fuentes-Mota garden of Carolina's parents, and the Ponare-López garden of Rafael's parents. This is considered the ideal situation, and shows one of the advantages of marrying within the village and keeping family relations in good standing. Although ideal, this situation is not the most common since there are other elements that can intervene and make the new couple choose between membership in the wife's or husband's extended family.

Alonso and his family had come to visit me and they had brought all the ingredients for preparing a fair amount of fish soup. Besides the offering of food and drink to visitors to their homes, the Piaroa also like to bring and exchange meals and food products as another way to show good standing relations between people. It is accurate to say that to feed and be fed is one of the Piaroa's ways to display their understanding of well-being as it strengthens the already existing links between people. Very often when people visit someone else's home, it is because they consider those people to be related to them, ideally through kinship relationships. At other times they do this because the potential exists to become related. They might say something like: "I give you food because you are family; see, I have to take care of you."

By the time we were ready to leave the house it was about 9:00 a.m. and I knew it was going to be very difficult to find a taxi to take us to town. Puerto Ayacucho is only six kilometres away from the village and I am sure Rafael can easily walk this distance, since I have seen him covering longer distances while walking in the forest. However, going to town is a different situation. The road to Puerto Ayacucho has practically no canopy, since the people living on the sides of the road have taken the majority of the trees down,[45] therefore walking this road can be extremely hot since there is no protection from the sun. Besides Rafael, like other villagers, prefers not to ruin his clothes by

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[45] The people living on the sides of the road are considered by the villagers to live outside of the village's boundaries; they are categorized as different people. There are other Amerindian people living on this road, but the majority of these people do not live in villages but in single-family homes. They are also far from their traditional territories (e. g. Kurripaco, Piapoco, Warekena, Baré who have come from the Río Negro region). The only exception to this situation is a Hiwi village located half way down the road. However the majority of people living along the sides of the road are Criollos (regional term used to categorize those who do not identify themselves as Amerindian or are not considered by others as such).

engaging in this walk; villagers tend to dress in what they consider their best clothes when they go out of the village.

I was sure Rafael was aware of the difficulties involved in trying to find a taxi but he seemed very calm and not stressed about this. The best time to find a taxi in the morning is right after 7:30 a.m. when they come to the village to drop off some of the school personnel who live in Puerto Ayacucho or on the road that goes there. The taxi drivers like it very much when they are able to take passengers back to town because this multiplies the revenues for the round trip. At 9:00 a.m. our chances of finding a taxi were very remote. Sure enough we waited for about half an hour in the front porch of the house and no taxi showed up. I proposed to Rafael to start walking down the road or to leave this trip for another day. He refused either option and informed me that he might have the phone number of a friend from the Misión Cultura, and that if we called him he might come and pick us up. Rafael used a pre-paid stationary cell phone that is in the house to make this call.[46] When Rafael's friend answered the phone on the other side of the line, I heard Rafael saying: "Rafael.... in Alto Carinagua.... can you come pick us up?" At about 10:30 a.m. we were on our way to Puerto Ayacucho aboard Rafael's friend's car.

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[46] Stationary cell-phones are becoming very popular in rural areas of Venezuela. The low cost of this technology, in comparison with other telecommunications systems, the better range of coverage, compared to mobile cell-phones, and the possibility for acquiring these units at relatively low cost under the commercial figure of pre-paid programs has favoured the spread of these phones. In Alto Carinagua mobile cell-phones have no reception at all and there is no infrastructure for regular phones (as is common for almost all the Amazonas state), thus stationary cell-phones present the best option for having a phone in the houses. As a matter of fact almost every house in the village has a unit, however and due to the elevated rates for calls made to phones outside of the provider networks, most of these units have normally no or very little credit to make phone calls. Phones as well as refrigerators have become pieces of furniture in the house that have very little practical use but hold other forms of value (see Freire 2002 for a discussion about the use and value of refrigerators in Piaroa villages of the Cataniapo region).

While we were travelling to Puerto Ayacucho I could not help but remember one of the first conversations I had with Miguel when I came in early July. He said then:

> The biggest problem we have nowadays is the time, it seems like we never have enough of it, especially when you have to go to Town.[47] You go there to do an errand and that can take you the whole day. In the old days people went to the gardens, did everything they had to do there and then came back early enough so they could take a nap and even after that go and visit their relatives before the sun set. Now when you come from Town it is already dark and people have to go to sleep. (Field notes July 2008)

When we arrived in Puerto Ayacucho it was almost noon and all the businesses were closed because people were taking their lunch break. However, while driving along Orinoco Avenue (one of the main roads of Puerto Ayacucho), I noticed the endless lines of people in front of the banks; they were waiting for their turn to be assisted by the bank tellers although the banks also were closed. The majority of these people were indigenous people. I was shocked by the number of people in these lines; I estimated they would be about the equivalent of the entire population of two or three Amazonas villages.[48] I was even more shocked when Rafael patted his friend on the shoulder and asked him to leave us there in front of the Banco de Venezuela.[49] It seemed that we were going to join one of

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[47] Villagers sometimes use the phrase "El Pueblo" (Spanish for The Town) when referring to Puerto Ayacucho; other times they would just say Ayacucho.

[48] The population in Amazonas villages varies greatly in numbers; they could be anywhere from 100 inhabitants to 600, or anywhere between these two numbers. There are other towns in Amazonas other than Puerto Ayacucho, such as La Esmeralda, Maroa, San Carlos de Río Negro and San Fernando de Atabapo. These towns might have more than 600 inhabitants, and they are all capitals of the different municipalities within the Amazonas state.

[49] The Banco de Venezuela is one of five banks that were operating in Puerto Ayacucho during the time of my fieldwork in 2008. All these banks are privately owned, with the exception of Banfoandes, and they are the choice of state institutions, local and national, for distributing the salaries to their employees and other monies for the different grants and financial aid assigned to people in Amazonas.

the lines. Rafael said goodbye to his friend and informed him that we were going to stop by his office sometime after we were done with what we had to do in the bank.

At about 1:00 p.m. the first bank employees started to show up and there was some movement inside the bank. I thought they were going to open right away, judging by the number of people they had to assist, but instead they slowly assumed their working positions as they chatted with one another. It took them about twenty minutes to be ready to open. At this point we had been in line for over an hour and a half — about an hour and fifteen minutes before the arrival of the first employees and twenty more minutes after this, not to mention the time other people who had arrived before us had already waited. When the bank opened I looked back to have an idea of our status in relation to the line and I realized that the number of people waiting had almost doubled. The Orinoco Avenue was overflowing with people who came from all over Amazonas; there were people from Átures but also from other municipalities, some as remote as Alto Orinoco and Río Negro.[50]

While we were waiting Rafael, who was not surprised by the whole situation and looked as calm as he was when he arrived at my house that morning, kindly greeted other Piaroa as they passed by our side. Some of them stopped for a while and had relatively long conversations with Rafael, all in the Piaroa language. They showed expressions of concern on their faces during the course of these conversations, but when the other

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[50] Some of these people were Yanomami and Yekuana as well as Rionegrinos (Arawak people from the Río Negro region such as Kurripaco, Warekena or Baré) who work for the Health and Education Ministries in Alto Orinoco and Rio Negro. The reader should bear in mind the difficulties involved in the mobilization of these people from the places where they live to Puerto Ayacucho. They have to take time off from their obligations and jobs (in gardens, homes, health posts, daycares, schools, etc.) to come to Puerto Ayacucho to obtain their salaries, financial aid or grant monies. In some cases these breaks can take more than a week due to the remoteness of their dwellings and the means of transportation available.

people were gone or returned to their places in line, Rafael turned to me and smiling would say: "it is la política" (Spanish for politics).

The people waiting in line were there because they had to withdraw money from their accounts or to cash checks; all of these funds come from the local or national government, all of this is the state's money. The reasons for receiving these monies varied greatly and depended on individual cases. Some people were obtaining their salaries, others were withdrawing pension monies, others were receiving their monthly financial aid or grants. Others, like Rafael, were there for other reasons: he needed to monitor the status of a big deposit from the Fondo Nacional de los Consejos Comunales (Bs F 300,000, about US $140,000, at the Venezuelan official exchange of Bs F 2.15 for US $1). This money was going to be spent, according to the project the village's Consejo had submitted to the Fondo, on the improvement of some of the houses in Alto Carinagua. Rafael also had to withdraw the monthly payment of his older daughter's scholarship and his mother's pension; she delegated this to him because she had to go to her garden that day.

The hours went by and the line was slowly moving forward. The bank closes at 4:30 p.m. and we were very close to reaching this time. I thought we were not going to be assisted that day and that we had wasted our time and blamed this on our delay in leaving the village earlier. I noticed Rafael was not concerned and I asked what would happen given that the bank was going to close in just few minutes. He informed me they were going to distribute the "numeritos" (Spanish for little numbers), paper tickets with printed numbers, among the people who were in line by the time the bank was closing. The numeritos defined the people who were going to be assisted after the bank closed for the

day, ensuring that no newcomers (people who arrived after 4:10 p.m.) would make the tellers stay any longer than was necessary. It was almost 7:00 p.m. by the time we were assisted; we had spent a good portion of the day waiting in line and it took about 5 to 10 minutes for them to assist us. Rafael got the scholarship money for his daughter and the pension for his mother but the deposit from the Fondo was not in the Consejo's account yet. I asked him if he knew the reason for this and he responded, "*huijá* (one of the Piaroa words for negation), nothing, they have not deposited it yet", without further explanation.

At 7:15 p.m. we left the bank, and I realized it was too late for me to buy my groceries. I still did not know the reason Rafael had wanted me to come with him. After the bank, we went to the office of the Culture Ministry (or as Rafael calls it the office of Misión Cultura) located in the public library of Puerto Ayacucho, just a few blocks away from the bank. As we left Orinoco Avenue behind I noticed that there were a fair number of people still waiting for their turn in the banks. Rafael, who was aware of how amazed I was by the whole situation, tried to comfort me by saying "don't worry, they are used to it (ellos están acostumbrados)."

These situations are repeated every four weeks at the end of each month and there is a smaller version every two weeks. The latter involves fewer people since the lines are formed only by the workers and employees who are paid biweekly. There are times also when these occurrences are inverted and the middle of the month becomes the bigger event and the end of the month the smaller one; these inversions are motivated by various reasons, such as the multiple holiday breaks and the modifications of people's schedules around these dates. The celebration of the birth of Simón Bolívar is on July 24th; this was the reason that this month the big concentration happened on the 16th.

The library was closed by the time we got there (it closes at 6:00 p.m.) but Rafael knew where his friends were. Our next destination was a bookstore called Sur.[51] The IV National Forum of Philosophy was being held in this bookstore and Rafael wanted me to accompany him to this event. I understood then that this was the reason he wanted my company in the first place; he knew about the Forum and wanted me to attend it.

The Forum was a nation-wide series of events held in the most important cities of Venezuela; Puerto Ayacucho as a state capital was included in this category. The organizers of this event, the Ministry of Culture and The League of Intellectuals and Artists for the Defence of Humanity (Red de Intelectuales y Artistas en Defensa de la Humanidad),[52] had entitled the 2008 forum,[53] "Alienation, communication and consumption: challenges for the Socialism of the XXI Century."[54] The aims of the Forum, according to its organizers, was to promote an open discussion among the population about philosophical themes that transcended academic circles, and this year's

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[51] Sur is a state-owned bookstore chain. State-owned publishing presses print the publications sold in these bookstores. The subject of these publications varies greatly, from literary pieces to philosophical treaties, sociological works and sometimes even anthropological books (e.g. Lizot 1978 and Guss 1994). They also have some legal publications (e.g. the Venezuelan Constitution and other laws and regulation and code books) as well as newspapers and governmental pamphlets that are free of charge.

[52] Intellectuals from diverse countries integrate this organization that has its origin in the "International Meeting of Intellectuals for the Defence of Humanity" (Encuentro internacional de intelectuales por la defensa de la humanidad) held in Caracas in 2004.

[53] The Forum has been held in Venezuela since 2004.

[54] The Socialism of the XXI Century is one of the slogans used by the current Venezuelan government under the presidency of Hugo Chávez for their latest political project. This category (sometimes also called ideology) is used next to other categories such as Revolution or Revolutionary Democracy and it seems to be a difference from the original political project of Hugo Chávez that he called Participatory Democracy. Today Chávez still endorses the Participatory Democracy term adding the term Protagonist afterwards but assuring that the new form of socialism he is proposing is the way to achieve the goal of a widespread inclusion of Venezuelan citizens in political matters. The Consejos Comunales is the latest state project that aims to help in this achievement. The implications of this change are not well defined yet, but in theory they aim for a new distribution of the politico-territorial division of the country and a different distribution of the national wealth. The referendum held in February 2009, where two amendments to the 1999 constitution were presented, seems to be heading in this direction. The Consejos Comunales, theme of the next chapter, are another mechanism of this politico-territorial redistribution.

Forum was organized around the question, "What kind of socialism is the Socialism of the XXI Century?" This was at least the intention of the organizers in Puerto Ayacucho and the two invited speakers who started both of their talks around this question, including strong criticisms of the "society of consumption", "capitalism" and "its most recent manifestation, neo-liberalism".

Rafael and I sat down on one side of the room next to a group of about twenty Piaroa from different villages of Átures who seemed to know each other very well. After the speakers introduced themselves and presented the theme of the discussion, the people from the audience started to interrupt them saying they wanted to talk about more pressing and immediate issues; they wanted to talk about "problems they have here in Amazonas." All the people who spoke were Criollos and some of the themes they wanted to talk about were, for instance, local political corruption, waste management, water treatment, sanitation permits and the difficulty these pose for the distribution of traditional foods like mañoco and casabe through state and private channels of distribution (traditional food have become part of the daily diet of the Criollo population of Puerto Ayacucho), "the growth of prostitution and alcoholism that is corrupting our indigenous people", and so on. The speakers did not seem to understand, or ignored, the concerns people were raising and tried a few times, unsuccessfully, to return the discussion to the theme of the Forum. While this was happening, the Piaroa were chatting among themselves in their language. They were chatting about the appearance of the people who were talking and making jokes about things they picked up from the speeches; for example there were accusing one another of being "bad" for liking to drink Coca-Cola.

The Forum went on and the speakers and their Criollo audience seemed to be part of two unconnected dialogues. Meanwhile the Piaroa seemed to be fishing in what people were saying to make jokes about it. Laughter is a common characteristic of interactions among Piaroa and other Amerindian people (Sherzer 1990; Overing 2000). At one point Rafael turned to me and whispered in my ear: "What is philosophy?" I smiled and answered him: "I'll tell you later". I could not help but feel embarrassed about my use of some theoretical categories when writing about the life of the Piaroa.

At some point people were getting tired of the dynamic of the Forum. Someone from the audience said: "OK, if this new order of things and this Socialism is that good for us then I suppose I support it". This statement seemed to be a way to call it a night. Rafael turned to me one more time and said: "Let's go and get something to eat". When we left the room Rafael started to ask me questions about the things discussed in the Forum. We sat down at a food stand not too far from the Plaza Bolívar and then he said "I was very bad in that meeting, they talked about the Indians and were saying things like we have to keep our culture but they don't know how we live, I am bad and I am worried... I am too worried. What can we do?" Rafael's use of the term "bad" as a state of being instead of a sentiment reflects his understanding of the place he and those who are related to him have in situations like the one we had just experienced. His reference to the fact that the Criollos do not know about Piaroa ways of life and his concern with the effect this could have on their lives shows his use of the ideal of living well as the stepping stone for reading their situation in contexts that are outside of their social realm. Rafael not only wanted me to come with him on this trip, he also wanted to corroborate that what he had understood was somehow similar to what I had understood of what the

people in the Forum were saying. He was reading the whole situation with every resource he had.[55]

It started to rain when we finished our dinner and we rushed to a little shelter in front of a closed business. The rain increased in intensity and the roads turned into rivers, the water started to reach us from the holes in the tin roof and also from underneath. We could barely talk to each other, as it was getting too noisy. I thought we were going to have to spend the night in Puerto Ayacucho since there were no taxis because of the rain and then the village's truck passed by our side and we started shouting at it: "Juan! Capitán! Juan!" Juan had sent the truck driven by his older son Wilmer because it was getting too late and they were worried about what would happen to us in Puerto Ayacucho if we stayed too late. People in Alto Carinagua see the town as a dangerous place for people; just like the forest, it is the place to go only when there is an specific task to be fulfilled, otherwise it is no place for wandering because something bad might happen to the wanderers. The forest, the zone that has not been transformed yet by Piaroa intervention, is placed outside of their sociality just like Puerto Ayacucho is.

It is safe to affirm that the Venezuelan state is the main employer of Amazonas indigenous people and that salaries are one important way that money is distributed among these people. But employment is not the only way in which this distribution happens: other forms include for instance a variety of state programs such as the Misiones,[56] scholarships for children and adult education, financial aid for people with

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[55] For an alternative version of the Forum written by one of the speakers the reader can go to the following internet site: http://revista.filosofia.cu/filosofando.php?id=531

[56] Misiones are state programs that aim to assist the population that has been left out of the benefits of the main state programs, such as the public education system or the public health system. Misiones usually

special needs, pensions for seniors and single mothers, just to mention some of the possibilities. On the other hand, money is not the only state resource distributed among these people: there are also construction materials; means for transportation such as trucks, boats, and outboard motors; medical supplies; school supplies (for the schools but also for individuals), etc. There are also the benefits offered by state institutions in the form of state programs. This was not always the case for these populations; this overflow of state resources among Amerindian populations in Amazonas is relatively recent. We can trace its beginnings to the decade of 1970s.

In the remainder of this chapter I will take a more historical approach as a way to offer the reader other tools for understanding some of the reasons behind situations like those presented above. I will return to the idea of the personalistic state and try to problematize it to help us understand some of the different components that make up the Venezuelan state. I will discuss some of the elements of the process of state formation in Venezuela, specifically the formation of what some authors call the Venezuelan modern state (Coronil 1997; Carrera Damas 1983). Finally, I will add a discussion of the incorporation of the Venezuelan Amazon region into the Venezuelan Nation and some of the implications this incorporation has for the population that inhabits this region.

2. Gómez, the last and first backward president of Venezuela

Up to this point, I have referred to the Venezuelan state as a single, monolithic entity, but states are complex corporate entities that pose great challenges to those who try to define them. The Venezuelan state, similarly to what I discussed in the former

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involve fast plans of action to attack the non-inclusion in the short term while the main state agencies are in the process of being restructured around more inclusive policies.

chapter as “Piaroa society,” is comprised of multiple agents that have different statuses, functions, motivations, expectations and agendas. Sometimes contradictions can arise among these elements. Although in the reminder of this chapter I will still be referring to this entity as the Venezuelan state I would like to present to the reader some of the complexities involved in understanding entities like states, in this particular case the Venezuelan one, and in the endeavour of achieving an ethnography of the state in this country.

Next to the personalistic character of the Venezuelan state that I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, which determines people’s perceptions of the state, we have to think about more levels of complexity if we are aiming to have a more comprehensive understanding of what the state is. If we agree with the idea that state officials are the representatives of the state, we also have to think about who these representatives are and what they are representing. One way to face these two questions is to consider all the people who receive salaries that come from public funds and for their work in some type of public policy as state officials, thus they are state representatives. If this is true then in a state like Amazonas where a good number of its population fulfils this categorization we will have to say that a good part of the population is also part of the state. The next step in this problematization would be to know how people perceive themselves and how they are positioned through their actions. My observations in Alto Carinagua lead me to think that none of the people there, perhaps with the exception of the Comisario Pedro, see themselves as state officials, although a good number of them receive salaries for their work in public policies.

So far we have dealt with the first question: who the representatives of the state are, which in Venezuela will be the same as asking who the state is. For the second question, that is what they are representing, I have offered a partial solution: they are representing state programs or public policies, but there are also the state institutions which are responsible for the implementation and administration of these programs. These institutions are seen as the locus of the state; they are the sites that people, like those of Alto Carinagua, approach when they want to have access to the benefits that the state programs have to offer.

The questions to pose now would be first, why is it that the Venezuelan state is considered by its officials and citizens as the provider of benefits and resources among the Venezuelans, especially since other processes of state formation in other nations have very different outcomes? For instance, in many countries the wealth that makes possible the operability of the state comes from money that is provided by tax payers, that is by its citizens. This means that instead of the state providing money or resources to its citizens it is the latter who support the existence of the former. Answering these questions requires a historical approach and it is in that direction that I will be taking my argument now. The second question is what is the nature of the Venezuelan state's wealth, which in the case of this country would be the same as to say the nation's wealth? A historical approach will be helpful here too.

There has been a great deal of discussion of where to locate the entrance of Venezuela to the "modern era". The version most widely accepted, until recent times, was that the event that marked this entrance was the date on which president Juan

Vicente Gómez died, December 17, 1935.[57] According to this version, Gómez was the last of the backward governments that ruled Venezuela for most of the XIX Century and part of the XX, and his death marked the end of this era. This version conceives the time after this event and the governments that came with it as an era of enlightened modernization. This version started to decline after the debacle of the image of Venezuela as a wealthy oil country with the economic recession that came after 1983. After that year there have been other ways to see this history. A group of historians have looked at the Gómez regime with different eyes and defined it as the first liberal government of Venezuela, thus the first modern government of the country, based on the fact that it was Gómez, or more importantly his way of dealing with transnational oil corporations and the oil law drafted by Gumersindo Torres (one of his ministers) that defined the part that oil, among other natural resources, would have in the configuration of the nation's wealth (see for example Carrera Damas 1983). Another thesis, introduced by Coronil (1997), argues that the problem does not lie in the dates for cataloguing the different periods of contemporary Venezuelan history but with the categories used to do so, which fall into the creation of subaltern modernities that place European history at the core of this modernizing process and everything else in the periphery. Although I agree with Coronil's critique and his category of Occidentalism is very attractive, for the purposes of

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[57] It is a suspicious coincidence that this date is the same of Simón Bolívar's death. Bolívar is one of the most prominent independence heroes in South America known also as "El Libertador" (the Liberator). Gómez also claimed that he was born on July 24, the birthday of Bolívar. The cult to Bolívar has been the theme of many scholarly works and it is not my intention here to extend on it, but to point out that perhaps this can be another element behind the personalistic character of the Venezuelan state. Bolívar was the first president of a new nation that was also his personal project, Grand Colombia. Venezuela as a nation is the result of a division of Grand Colombia into Venezuela, Ecuador, and Colombia (and later, Panama)..

this thesis I will still use the idea of the Venezuelan modern state placing its beginning in the promulgation of the oil law of June 27, 1917.

The categorization of Gómez as the last backward government of the country permitted the ideologists of the new modern state to freeze the past, especially the XIX century past, as a time of political and economical disorder and define the new era, the one they were constructing, as a time of modernization, political ordering and stability, and economical consolidation and growth for the nation. In this respect Coronil writes "By defining Gómez as the incarnation of primitiveness, later regimes have fashioned themselves, by contrast, as the deputies of modernity.... In so doing, they have obscured their foundation in the Gómez regime, their shared dependency on the oil economy, and their extraordinary personalization of state power" (Coronil 1997: 8).

Indeed the conception of the wealth of the nation is contained entirely in the oil law drafted by Gumersindo Torres. His study of other countries' oil laws, especially the United States' law, made him decide to propose something that departed from the principles contained in those laws. Torres was a nationalist and considered that granting too many rights to transnational corporations would be the same as giving away what belonged to Venezuela. His law states that although the surface of land can be privately owned, whatever is in the subsoil is property of the nation and that it is the state's responsibility to administer this property. This set the basis for what Coronil categorized as the Venezuelan nation's two bodies, the natural body constituted by its natural wealth, oil being one part of this wealth, and the political body constituted by the Venezuelan citizens. The function of the state then became to be the intermediary between these two bodies and hold them together. By setting its control over the wealth that comes from

Venezuela's natural body and placing itself as the intermediary between the two nations' bodies the state also defined itself as the source of wealth, a wealth that came from the profits of the oil business. Also by becoming the administrator of the nation's wealth the state became the intermediary between the natural wealth of the nation and the transnational corporations that started to extract and commercialize Venezuelan oil. This situation made the state appear as an independent agent with its own source of wealth, which also strengthened its personalistic character and made it appear also as an entity embodied with a power that seems to come from itself. With Gómez the petro-state was born and with this modern Venezuela and its modern state, a state with a particular way of doing business based on a rentist version of capitalism. But Gómez had a way of distributing the oil revenues that was different from the governments that came after his death and especially those that came after 1958. Gómez used the oil revenues to increase his personal wealth and that of his relatives and closest allies, and to buy the loyalty of those who could jeopardize his regime. This was a formula that kept him in power for 27 years; it was only after his death that his power could be overthrown.

One of the first acts of president Eleazar López Contreras, the first president after Gómez, was to expropriate "the nation's wealth" from Gómez' relatives and their allies. This was a move that set a difference between López Contreras and the Gómez regime, although López Contreras was one of the war ministers during Gómez' long administration. The question was now what to do with the wealth that was expropriated; the answer came from a very influential document written by an intellectual of that time. Miguel Otero Silva, a writer and journalist member of the 1928's Generation (a group of students who were opposed to the Gómez regime), published an article in which he stated

that the citizens, who were left in poverty and remained in a state of ignorance, were the lawful beneficiaries of the recently recovered national wealth. This idea, next to the idea contained in the slogan of "sow the oil", that is to use the oil money to modernize the country by creating infrastructure and state institutions and programs that would help improve the lifestyle of the Venezuelan citizens, set the basis for the way the state was going to deal with its citizens in the near future. The social democracy that came after 1958 was one reflective of this ideal and we can say that Chávez' policy also owes a great deal to this ideal as well.

Coronil proposes other landmarks for the modern history of Venezuela that I think are useful to this discussion. He identified two periods in his book (Coronil 1997) and more recently in some interviews he has added one more period. President Marcos Pérez Jiménez was the first president who started to invest oil money in the construction of infrastructure; highways, hospitals, universities were erected during his presidency. His presidency is seen also as an interruption of ten years in the continuum of the nation's democratic period that started with Gómez' death. Coronil categorized Pérez Jiménez' presidency (1948-58) as a period that he calls "the debut". The period before Pérez Jiménez came to power, between 1936 and 1948, was a time of political restructuring and little was done for the modernization the country in terms of infrastructure and attention to the citizens. The second period that Coronil identified is the first presidency of Carlos Andrés Pérez (1974-79); Coronil calls this period "the hallucination". If the state had the intention of modernizing the nation, especially after Pérez Jiménez' regime, its lack of substantial resources was a problem, since transnational corporations were keeping the bigger portions from the commercialization of Venezuelan oil. This situation changed in

1975 with the nationalization of the oil industry which gave almost absolute control of the oil revenues to the state. Cabrujas said in this respect that this period was characterized not by building a more modern state but rather by creating a "fat state": the state got bigger during these years as did the budget for its operation. However, international oil policy and the influence of Venezuela over this policy was quite substantial: these were the years of OPEC's consolidation and the Venezuelan oil policies and its conceptions were very important in building OPEC policies. The third important period proposed by Coronil started in 1999 with the presidency of Hugo Chávez (1999 to the present); Coronil calls this period "the Justicialista". It is in this period that portions of the population that had never been reached by state projects, or if they were reached it was not for long, or generally were never included in the political life of the nation (except when there was an electoral event), were now called to come forward. This is the case of indigenous populations such as the Piaroa.

3. The conquest of the southern borders

The Amazonian territories of Venezuela and the indigenous populations who live in these territories have been out of the scope of the Venezuelan state throughout most of the republican history of the country.[58] It has been argued that this situation is responsible for the delay in the social, economic and political integration of these territories to the rest of the country. We can affirm that due to this situation of invisibility the Venezuelan

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[58] The categories used to divide the periodization of the history of what today is recognized as the Venezuelan nation have been the focus of many scholarly debates in the last two decades of the XX century. My reference here stills attached to the most extended version, which divides this history into colonial, independence war and republican periods. Although I use these categories, I acknowledge the contradiction and difficulties that they pose to the historical comprehension of the social processes that have taken place in these territories. See for instance Carrera Damas' (1983) discussion in this respect.

Amazon fell out of the developmental flow that characterized the process of modernization of Venezuela during part of the XX century. This situation changed after the oil boom of the 1970s. The revenues produced by the oil industry, and more importantly, the almost absolute control over these revenues by the Venezuelan state, made it possible to enhance the scope of the state and regions like Amazonas, and the population who lives there, came to be considered of some significance for the process of modernization on which Venezuela had embarked after 1917. In this new political panorama Amazonas' anonymity was reconsidered and new plans were designed to promote the inclusion of these territories in the life of the nation. These were new times in which the state assumed a new ideological framework, a policy that aimed towards social integration and the assumption and praxis of a new political ideological framework, social democracy. While this ideological framework was at the base of all the governments that came after the coup d'état of 1958, which took down the presidency of Pérez Jiménez, it was not until the nationalization of the Venezuelan oil industry in 1975, as I mentioned above, that the Venezuelan state took control over revenues obtained from the commercialization of petroleum. However it is important to keep in mind that the interpretations given to this political ideology, along with the complex characteristics of the political history of Venezuela, some of which I have mentioned above, created very different conditions of praxis for this ideology. Social democracy gained a very different meaning in Venezuela than what it has in France, Spain, Norway, Denmark, etc. In Venezuela perhaps it is more correct to talk about populism or political clientelism. The flow of money that came from the oil industry in the 1970s made it possible to subsidize a great number of state programs, which reached an important portion of the population.

This created: first, a situation of dependency of people on these programs; and second, a situation of internal economic vulnerability. The reliance of the nation on oil revenues compromised its economy and made it very dependent on international oil prices, and when in the decade of 1980s those prices crashed, Venezuela entered a deep economic recession. Subsequently, most of the state programs were cut and a big percentage of the population found themselves in a situation of extreme poverty. The applications or promises of applications of the state social policies before the crisis generated a massive migration of people from the countryside to the principal cities of the country; these people moved in order to position themselves in strategic locations to have access to these programs. This compromised their ability to go back to a subsistence economy based on the agriculture which they practiced in the past, and limited their capacity to react to the crisis. At the macro-economic level the state accumulated an important external debt and the solution that the governments found was to refinance this debt according to the policies of the World Bank and the IMF. The social cost of these actions has no precedent in the country's history and radiated out to almost all the other sectors of the national life deepening the crisis even more. People's salaries were insufficient to guarantee their subsistence and a bankrupt state, which a decade before had generated high expectations and projected an image of economic prosperity, was unable to offer any solution. The consequences of this crisis are still affecting the lives of many Venezuelans nowadays and have marked the internal politics in a way that will be very difficult to change in the future. However, this phenomenon is not an isolated one, and was more or less felt in the same way in all the Latin American countries. Scholars refer to this period as the Lost Decade.

However in the Venezuelan Amazon this crisis was felt differently due to the particular historical characteristics of this region. The antecedents of the Lost Decade were perhaps a situation in which the region was considered by the state for the first time and the cut in social programs and the politics of austerity that characterized the rest of the country in the 1980s were almost un-felt in this region, mainly because in this new situation, in a region where the money flow had never been significant compared to the rest of the country, what was really important was the demographic and social changes and the expectations generated by the actions of the state provider. In other words, what was important was the perception of the responsibilities of the state, the way in which people related to it, and how they positioned themselves in the process of political interaction.

The thesis of lack of control of the state over the Amazonian territories is to be found in various discourses of politicians, activists and some scholars who have done research in or about the region. However we can find explanations beyond the simple statement of affirming that there has been a lack of interest on the part of state officials in the region; or, at least, this affirmation, as it is presented, is insufficient to explain this historical situation.

Let us focus on three reasons for this situation in order to show some of the layers of complexity of this problem. The first reason can be found in the difficulties that the geographical conditions presented to access the different areas of these territories. It is safe to affirm that even today access to a great part of the Venezuelan Amazon is very limited. The national highways and roads are scarce and when present they only reach some areas in the north of the state, mainly giving access to the state capital Puerto

Ayacucho and some of its surroundings. The rest of the region can only be accessed through river navigation on the Orinoco River and its major tributaries, or through flights by airplanes or helicopters.[59] These difficulties of access make the state's control over and assistance to these territories very problematic and costly and condemn most of this geography to be out of the reach of governmental policies and programs.

A second reason, one that has persisted through a great part of the republican history of Venezuela and one that started to decline just a few decades ago, is that these territories have "too little to offer" to the economy of the rest of the country. One thesis handled by the Venezuelan state officials and other actors and agencies that operate in the region in the past is that this was a land mostly "depopulated" and the few people who inhabited it were savages in a state of "un-civilization". Thus, in this conception they did not represent a significant work force that could contribute to the progress and development of the region or even worse they were insignificant consumers, condemning them to exclusion from the market economy that characterizes modern nations. As a result of this assumption, these people were considered to have little or no potential to contribute to the economic development of the nation. We can perceive this disposition from the following excerpt from the IV National Plan, which expressed this ideology as recently as the 1970s:

> A considerable percentage of the population [who lives in the region] does not speak the language of the country and is dissociated from the national

[59] In the last few decades it has been possible to travel to the inside of the state through commercial flights on small planes owned by two private airlines that operate in the region. However, the operations of these two airlines have been notably reduced due to the decrease in their fleet as a result of the multiple plane crashes that have occurred in the last two decades. Another possibility of access is through the military flights that regularly travel to the interior of Amazonas to assist military and state posts located in different areas of these territories.

> life.... [O]f the 60,000 inhabitants [of the region] about 40% corresponds to what is called 'forest indigenous population', at the margin of the economic and cultural life of the country (Jaffé 1983: 30).

This type of conception in time would justify the non-intervention of the state and later, at least at a discursive level, after the 1970s would be an incentive for the expansion of the social frontiers of the country and the state's intervention in Amazonas.

The third reason is one that resulted from the combination of the two given before. The resources that these territories had to offer to the wealth of the nation were mainly unknown throughout most of the XVIII and XIX centuries. When they were known to exist, first their extraction was difficult to achieve due to the scarce labour that could be capitalized in the area, and second, their transportation out of the region was very difficult due to the conditions outlined above. In this panorama, all the economic activities carried out in the region were directed to satisfy local necessities and very little production was sent to the outside.

Now, an interesting situation is that if the products travelling to the outside of the region were scarce, products moving in the opposite direction were not so strange. This was the way in which manufactured goods, like metal tools and firearms, reached remote territories of the Amazon. This happened even before the indigenous population met the people who manufactured these goods. This relative isolation created a situation in which the population remained in a state of political autonomy with little or no knowledge about the events happening in the rest of the country, but there was a relative state of dependency on external goods that started to increase in quantity as time went by. The relations with the outside were established through the action of local brokers who

functioned as bridges with other geographies and as suppliers of the desirable goods manufactured outside of the territories.

There was one exception to the norm of invisibility of these territories and this was during a small boom of rubber extraction experienced by the region during the first two decades of the XX century. During this time the local governor José Tómas Fúnes, also known as Fúnes del Orinoco, took control of the region and ruled with an iron fist, as if it was his own plantation. This situation generated a political scenario in which the authority of the then president, Juan Vicente Gómez, was challenged, which made him take action in order to recover his political control over this region of the country. However, for the reasons that I have explained before, this control was mostly symbolic. This brief period of political attention to the region ended with the public execution of Fúnes by a firing squad, leaving behind a short but macabre story that attracted some attention to the region and created a legend of a bloody governor with more than one hundred murders on his record. After this, the region went back to the situation of anonymity that has characterized its history. One important consequence of these events, however, was that the state capital was moved away from San Fernando de Atabapo to an area in the north of the state, an area that could be accessed more easily from other regions of the country. This was the beginning of Puerto Ayacucho as the state capital and also explains why the northern area of the state is today the region where the state has more control and where most of the resources of the state are concentrated.

This general lack of attention from the state to the Amazonian region, as I mentioned before, was to change after the 1970s, in part due to the political and economic phenomena described above and in part due to the pressure of national and

international actors on the Venezuelan state. The state's perception of these territories also changed radically in this period of time. The Amazon went from being a region with little or no significance for the nation to being an area with geopolitical importance due to its condition as a border region. The Amazonas state has large stretches of borders with Brazil and Colombia. Another element that made the state turn its eyes toward the Amazon was the discovery of strategic resources like gold, uranium, timber, etc., that make the necessity of control a matter of national security.

There were some other antecedents for this situation of change of attitude and policy. One of them was the creation in 1948 of a state office dedicated exclusively to matters that involve the national indigenous populations, mainly with an integrationist agenda. This institution was called the Oficina de Asuntos Indígenas (OAI, Office of Indigenous Affairs), and in 1959 was transformed into the Oficina Central de Asuntos Indígenas (OCAI, Central Office of Indigenous Affairs), which was attached to the Dirección de Cultos del Ministerio de Justicia (Direction of Cults of the Ministry of Justice). This was part of a continent-wide indigenista movement informed by the 1940 international meeting in Pátzcuaro, Mexico, that led to the establishment of government indigenista institutes in many Latin American countries.

There is one fact that is important to mention here: the Venezuelan state delegated its responsibilities in matters that involved indigenous populations to the Catholic Church and their mission policies. This was done by the creation of the Mission Law of 1915, where the state designated Catholic missionaries as the people responsible for the education of indigenous people in a way that they could participate in national life. This education involved, at least in its beginnings, a total abandonment of traditional ways of

life (for more details on this issue see Arvélo Jiménez 1972). Various strategies were implemented; the creation of boarding schools was the most common. The 1940s represented then the beginning of the regaining of state control over matters related to indigenous populations, however it was not until the 1970s that this control began to be exercised more vigorously.

The Venezuelan Amazon did not receive serious attention from the state until the implementation of developmental programs proposed through a presidential plan in 1972 which aimed to integrate the region to the social, political and economic life of the nation. This plan, although short lived, marked the beginning of the new governmental attitude and set the tone in which future policies would be implemented in the region (Freire 2002). The name of this plan was CODESUR, an acronym that in Spanish stands for Presidential Commission for the Development of the South. The main function of this commission was to promote a great number of projects that aimed to achieve the economic and social development of the southern frontiers. CODESUR was also known as the "The conquest of the southern frontier", a name which indicates how the Venezuelan territories in the Amazon were conceived by the state in this period of time, as a territory mostly depopulated and out of reach of the political control of the state but one that had to be conquered and integrated to the nation.

These projects have in common a developmental character and an integrationist approach toward the indigenous populations. The necessity for geopolitical control over the nation's southern borders with Brazil and Colombia became of great importance for the Venezuelan state. The following excerpt from a CODESUR document provides an

example of the state's conception of the indigenous population and the territories where they lived.

> [The indigenous populations] differ in their economic activities, social organization, customs, norms, cultural values, spiritual life and their psychological characteristics. Hence, each tribe is a problem in itself, with regard to the process of integration to national life.... The indigenous peoples of the Southern Region, like other indigenous groups in Venezuela, have a subsistence economy in spite of inhabiting geographical zones with abundant natural resources most of them unexploited... the technological backwardness of their means of production hinders them from improving in a kind of vicious cycle. As a consequence, the Indian is a small producer, despite having cultivable land, and an insignificant consumer (CODESUR 1970: 45-47).

Put in perspective, the plans of CODESUR were condemned to fail right from the beginning, at least from the perspective of the ideologues that were behind them. There was little or no consideration of the particular characteristics of the region. For instance, in some ways the indigenous populations were treated the same way as peasants of other regions, and state policies designed for these people implied a vertical application that was the same as other developmental plans implemented in other regions of the country. A good example of this situation was the application of the Agrarian Reform of 1960, which aimed to grant small plots of land to individuals for agricultural activities. This did not take into consideration the communal ideas of land tenure that in the case of some Amerindian people are based on kinship and affinity principles, or the consideration of other spaces utilized for economic activities like hunting, fishing and gathering, without even mentioning the importance of other social and symbolic purposes like sacred places and pathways of intra- and inter-village communication. On the other hand, the

application of the Agrarian Reform proved to be problematic in the rest of the country, even with the peasant population. It was a mistake to think that with all the complexities the indigenous population presented the situation in Amazonas was going to be any better than that lived in the rest of the country.

To make matters even worse, the agricultural projects implemented by the programs of CODESUR did not take into consideration the ecological characteristics of the region, for instance the challenges that sandy ground and the low level of nutrients present to intensive methods of agrarian production. Some of these projects aimed to introduce outside species with more commercial value but with little adaptability to the Amazonian environment.

And in public policy issues, too, the situation was no different. Health policies like the creation of medical posts, vaccination campaigns, substitution of traditional housing for conventional cement houses, etc., fell short in reaching areas beyond the north of the state, which motivated a massive migration to this area resulting in an overgrowth of population in the state's capital.[60] This contributed to the near collapse of the scarce services present in the area, not to mention the decline of the sources of food available.

Despite the governmental support that CODESUR had, the commission was soon to disappear after only one decade of existence, from 1972 to 1982, mainly due to the lack of real economic support that condemned the majority of the projects to never advance beyond the planning stages, and those which were started were abandoned at

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[60] The population growth in Puerto Ayacucho has been calculated at rate of 100% for the last thirty years of the XX century.

very early stages. In spite of its short life, however, we cannot deny the importance of CODESUR for the region; what came after was to be highly influenced by the way this presidential commission operated during the time in which it functioned. Today the state is the main supplier of economic resources to the region, as well as being almost the only employer in the area. This creates a situation of dependency and a disposition of the people to deal with the state in particular ways. Even today Puerto Ayacucho is still the main destination for migrants coming from the interior of the state; almost every state agency has offices in this town; and these agencies hire the available work force for the construction and maintenance of their buildings (Perera 1995). The state represents the main source of money that these people have through the payment of salaries or through the allocation of loans and credits for the development of projects that they present to the state (see Freire 2004for a discussion about the perception and effects of salaries among the Piaroa of the Cataniapo area). There are a great number of specific grants and forms of financial aid directed to sectors of the indigenous population like seniors, teenagers and children. And more recently local government and national state institutions have started to hire indigenous people to work in the implementation of state policies like health assistance and education. The latest manifestation of this process is the implementation of the Consejos Comunales, the theme of the next chapter.

In this chapter I have presented ethnographic accounts that portray the way the Piaroa people of Alto Carinagua and other Amerindians of Amazonas are navigating their interrelation with state officials and programs. I also discussed the personalistic character of the Venezuelan state and the process of state formation that helps in the configuration of this character. I presented a historical discussion of the configuration of the petro-state

and the consolidation of oil wealth as the nation's wealth. I offered also a discussion about the process of incorporation of the Amazonian territory and its people to the Venezuelan nation.

Chapter IV
Huaduna, a tale on how to provide for the family: The work of the Consejos Comunales and other state programs in Alto Carinagua

In this chapter I will discuss the Consejos Comunales and how this governmental program is perceived and made effective by the villagers of Alto Carinagua. I have already mentioned some aspects of this program in Chapter III, when I talked about the responsibilities and actions of Rafael as the Vocero Principal of the village's Consejo. Here I will give a more detailed account of the nature of the Consejos as well as a discussion of what the current government of Venezuela is seeking with the implementation of these programs, locally and nationally. However the emphasis of my argument will be on how the Consejos Comunales are perceived from the village and how this was determining the interconnections between the villagers and the Venezuelan state officials, at the time of my visit to the village in July and August 2008. As I did in the former chapters I will use ethnographic accounts to situate my discussion within the fieldwork context.

1. "The Cruzadas are coming and the Governor is coming with them"

Early one morning in July 2008 Pedro, the Comisario of the village,[61] came to the house and asked me if "we" could use my computer to type "the history of Alto

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[61] Although the Comisarios are now called Promotores Comunitarios I will still use the former name in this thesis as it is widely used in Amazonas and very few people recognize or use the new title. A Comisario is a villager who functions as an intermediary between the local government and the villagers; they are chosen by the community and they receive a salary from the local government. However even though in some cases they are recognized by the villagers as community leaders the general opinion is that their positions are the result of a decision that comes from the local government. In Alto Carinagua Pedro is recognized as one of the community leaders but sometimes people complain that he spends too much time in Puerto Ayacucho; Pedro admits this fact but he argues that this is derived from his responsibilities as Comisario. Pedro is also a member of the same political party as Governor Liborio Guarulla, PPT (Patria Para Todos) which is one of the national parties that endorses the policies of President Hugo Chávez and has been one of his allies in the local and national elections. Recent changes in the organization of the

Carinagua"; the expression that he used was "Reseña Histórica", which in this context means a written summary about the origins of a particular entity, in this case the village.[62] In Alto Carinagua, as well as in other indigenous villages in Amazonas, to have a written history of the origins of their village is perceived as the objectification of the legitimacy of their settlements when they are dealing with external agents, especially if these agents are state officials. Two characteristics that are very important for these documents: first they have to be written down, preferably typed; and second they have to be in Spanish. The reader should bear in mind that the villagers use the Piaroa language in their everyday interactions in the village and wherever they find Piaroa speakers; although there are some systems for writing in this language they are not commonly used.

I told Pedro that typing the Reseña on my computer would not be a problem, but I pointed out to him that I did not have a way of printing it in Alto Carinagua. "A printer? Is that what we need?" he asked and then said: "I think we have one in Juan's house, in the office of the Consejo Comunal".[63] I knew the national government had been installing computer laboratories with satellite connections to the Internet in rural areas of Venezuela; this has been done through a program directed by Fundación Infocentro, a

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followers of Chávez led to the abolition of MVR (Movimiento Quinta República), the former party of Chávez and the creation of the PSUV (Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela); the idea was to consolidate all the followers of Chávez in a single political party. This action was seen as imposition by some of Chávez' followers, especially among those who were not part of the MVR. This has created some divisions among them and has presented some difficulties of the type: "I endorse Chávez' politics but I will not be part of the PSUV". Governor Guarulla is one of the followers of Chávez who did not change parties and this created some tension between him and other leaders of the new PSUV in Amazonas. He is been elected two times with Chávez' support, but as the PSUV will present its own candidate in 2009 it is unclear how Guarulla will present himself. The recent Approbatory Referendum (February 2009) removes any limits on re-election of elected officials.

[62] Reseñas Históricas are generally local accounts about the origins or other important events of the villages, but these Reseñas can be also about the origin or other important events of particular organizations such as Consejos Comunales or co-ops (see account later in this chapter).

[63] He was referring to Juan Bautista, second son of *Buré* and Capitán of the village.

dependency of the Ministry of Science and Technology.[64] In Átures I only knew of one facility of this kind in one indigenous village, Betania de Topocho, another Piaroa village in the northern part of the municipality. I was not aware of the existence of any Infocentro in Alto Carinagua. I asked him: "Is there an Infocentro here in the village?" "No, no... it's Chávez, he is giving computers to the people so the Consejos Comunales can work better." This was quite a surprise for me and then I understood why Juan, Rafael and Miguel had been insisting that I have to teach young villagers how to use computers. I have also made a few trips to Puerto Ayacucho in the company of some villagers to visit Infocentros and Internet cafés. If they had a computer in the village and they wanted to learn how to use it, I did not understand why it took all these days for someone to tell me. I learned later that the computer has been a source of dispute between some families in the village, a dispute that led to the restructuring of the órgano ejecutivo (executive board) of the village's Consejo.

Pedro insisted on the urgency of typing the "Reseña Histórica" and that we should start as soon as possible. It is unusual to see a Piaroa stressed out about the urgency of a task. His attitude revealed the importance of the action he was asking me to undertake. Thus I asked him about the reason for this urgency. He responded, "It's the Governor, Liborio; he is coming to the village to inaugurate an activity we will have in the

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[64] Infocentros are a network of computer laboratories with access to Internet and other computer applications spread throughout the national territory since 2007. They are provided by the Ministry of Science and Technology through its Fundación Infocentro. There is no charge for using these facilities and they are open to all members of the public. Infocentros are of three types: Infocentros, the bigger facilities; Infomóviles, mobile units with few computers; and Infopuntos, smaller laboratories.

Infirmary".[65] I learned that this activity was part of a series of events sponsored by the Government of Amazonas that happen with a certain frequency in towns and villages across the state, especially in those located in the municipality of Átures. They called these events "Cruzadas de Atención Social" (Crusades of Social Attention) and they involve the simultaneous visit of representatives of different state programs to assist people on the spot and to inform them about the implications of the program they are representing. On this particular day Alto Carinagua was going to receive a joint visit of Misión Mercal and Misión Barrio Adentro, among others. Misión Mercal is a governmental chain for the distribution of food and household supplies; on this day Mercal installed a booth in the Infirmary's front yard where food and other supplies were on sale at very low prices. Misión Barrio Adentro is a program dedicated to providing medical and dental attention in areas of difficult access. The village has one Cuban MD appointed in the infirmary; Cuban doctors are working in Venezuelan medical posts for the Barrio Adentro program as part of an exchange treaty between the Venezuelan and Cuban governments.[66] On this day there were additional medical personnel and dentists who were giving talks to villagers in an effort to promote preventive habits of dental health; there was also distribution of medication.[67] Moreover, there was a booth with

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[65] There is a rural infirmary in Alto Carinagua that has been operating since 1997. Rural infirmaries are part of the network of attention of the public health system. Rural settlements with small populations like Alto Carinagua should have an ARI (Ambulatorio Rural Tipo I), which should be operated by a nurse or auxiliary of simplified medicine (AMS), and in areas where malaria is endemic, there should also be a microscope technician. Humberto, a village dweller, is both the AMS and the microscope technician. The higher levels of this network of attention are: the ARII, operated by a rural physician, usually a recent MD graduate; urban infirmaries that have medical specialists and a bio-analysis laboratory; and finally, hospitals.

[66] Cuban doctors stay in the country for a period of two years, sometimes rotating among different posts and other times remaining in the same post for the whole period.

[67] Villagers like to collect medications. Every time an event like this happens they will request medication from MDs and nurses; the same would happen when they go visit medical post outside the village. They

haircut services sponsored by the local government that runs a school for training people in professional skills in an effort to reduce underemployment in the state. Piaroa men, like other Amerindian men who live in the region, like to have their hair cut very often, sometimes at one- or two-week intervals. When they do this in the villages they gather together with electric clippers, when they are available, and cut each other's hair. Haircut services are not rare in activities like the Cruzadas, and the Piaroa welcome this type of service very much. The year 2008 was an election year, and soon there would be the municipal elections, so the Consejo Nacional Electoral (National Election Council) also had a booth for voters to register or to make address changes in the system so they could vote at a different location than where they had voted previously. It would be a busy day in the village.

I told Pedro that if there was a computer with a printer installed in Juan's house, we should go there and type the Reseña directly on that computer. He agreed but said that we only had half an hour to do so. Juan's house is not too far from Miguel's house, where I was staying; none of the houses are very far apart. A walk of three or four minutes took us to our destination. Behind Miguel's house there is a path that crosses a little creek, a tributary of the Carinagua River, via a bridge made of a few planks laid on the ground, then a web of gravel paths connect the houses of the village and a few small gardens that are close by for quick harvesting in case people do not want to walk to the main gardens. Juan's home is one of the most remote homes of the village, meaning it is located on the opposite location from the main road in the direction of the gardens and secondary forests

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can also ask visitors like me for medications. Some times they will use these medications in the way they were prescribed; at other times these medications will stay in their boxes for years. It is possible that they see this as another way of capitalizing external resources.

that constitute the rest of the village territory. There is a dirt road that departs from the main road and goes to Juan's house. Villagers rarely use this road; more often visitors to the village use this road when they go to talk to Juan, usually to ask for his permission for a particular endeavour such as surveys, research activities or the Cruzada that was going to take place that day.

Juan's house was not built by any of the state housing programs, although it was made with cement walls and floor as well as Acerolit roofing. Juan's house is bigger than the houses built by the state but he replicated the aesthetic of these houses. Pedro entered the house and started to talk to people we could not see and I could barely hear. I followed Pedro into the house. Nobody came to receive us but I understood Pedro had already informed them of what we were going to do in the house. The room with the computer was close to the entrance door. There was a long table made out of planks of a local tree and a few plastic chairs; the computer and the printer were on the table. The window was covered with pieces of tin sheets, like the ones used for the roofing of some of the houses; a barred window was holding these pieces in place. Barred windows are rare in this village and probably not necessary, I thought, since people usually do not take other people's possessions without permission. The only explanation I could think of for having bars on this window was that a computer was an object of special value and they were protecting it from people from outside the village or from the people of the village that were part of the former Consejo's executive board. As soon as the tin sheets were removed, the sunlight filled the room. I also noticed that underneath the table was an air conditioning unit that was still in its box and asked Pedro if the Fondo Nacional de los Consejos Comunales provided this as well, but he informed me that Juan bought it with

his own money. This was the office of the village's Consejo, a facility of the Venezuelan state inside the house of one of the villagers.

As I turned the computer on and noticed the welcome message on the screen that said "El Computador Bolivariano" (the Bolivarian Computer), the younger dwellers of the house started to show up full of curiosity about what was happening in the room. Pedro pulled out of the folder a sheet of paper with the history of the village written in beautiful calligraphy, and asked me if I was ready. It took me few minutes to prepare to start typing since I was not familiar with the operating system of the computer and I did not know which applications were installed on it. I surfed through folders searching for a word processing program until I finally found it, but not before noticing a folder that was entitled "Documentos del Consejo Comunal" (Consejo Comunal's Documents). I typed and printed the Reseña Pedro read to me, and I asked him about the contents of the folder I had just seen in the computer and if it was OK for me to look at it. He responded that he did not know and that I should find out for myself. I did not want to open this folder without formal permission from Juan or Rafael and although I was very curious and anxious to obtain relevant information for my research, I decided to wait and talk to Juan about it before opening this folder. I turned around and saw that Julia, Juan's wife, was standing behind me. I also noticed that the room was now crowded with people. I asked her about Juan and she told me he had gone to town and that he would be back in the afternoon. I would have to wait until then to ask for his permission and so I did.

Pedro and I rushed back to the main road where the infirmary is located. By the time we arrived the Cruzada personnel had already installed the booths and villagers were starting to arrive. There were also other people there who live on the road that goes to

Puerto Ayacucho, but no sign of the Governor. As soon as all the Cruzada installations were in place the personnel started to assist people. The biggest lines were in front of the booths of the Consejo Nacional Electoral and the haircut service. A high official of the local government was present, Dilio Mirabal, who is the chief of transportation and who was coordinating the Cruzada. He told Pedro and me that the Governor was not coming after all due to other responsibilities. Pedro and I had spent all this time getting ready so he, or some other villager, could read aloud the recently-typed Reseña Histórica for the attendees to this event, especially the Governor, but in the end this did not occur. I was disappointed about this but Pedro, who is more used to these situations than I am, moved on and started to check out the different things the people in the booths had to offer. He even got a haircut.

The event continued as more people arrived at the village's infirmary. I chatted with various people including Dilio Mirabal, the highest representative of the local government in attendance. It was about noon when I saw Rafael getting out of a taxi. "*Ta'hacua*" he said to me as he smiled, and continued by asking me: "What is here for me?" I know Rafael well enough to understand his irony. I told him that I did not know, but perhaps if he checked around he might find something; he smiled again and extended his hand to me as an invitation to shake his hand. This sign is quite distinctive among Amerindian adult males and some women in this region; it is a formal greeting, but also can be a very affectionate gesture depending on whom it is directed to. I asked Rafael about the status of the bank deposit from the Fondo Nacional de los Consejos Comunales he had been waiting for, and he said "*huijá*... nada," combining both Piaroa and Spanish words as a way to be emphatic in his answer.

Rafael and I joined a group of men that were sitting on one side of the infirmary yard. We joked and enjoyed each other's company. Alonso came along and joined us in our amusing chatter. At one point Alonso said to a group of Hiwi that were sitting at some distance from us: "Piaroa say: 'I don't eat tapir because it is like eating my grandfather'. But nowadays I eat everything". This joke involves a very important aspect of Piaroa social philosophy, the reference to a mythological hero and the importance this has in the establishment of Piaroa social rules; it also reveals some aspects of how Piaroa are seeing their current situation in comparison to their recent past. The tapir is one of the forms that *Wahari*, the mythological hero creator of the Piaroa, adopts when he is wandering in the forest. When Alonso said eating tapir is like eating his grandfather he was literarily saying it is like eating his ancestor. There are many versions of the myth of origin of the Piaroa.[68] One version that I obtained from José Crimaco and that I think fits perfectly here says that the Piaroa came from an incestuous relationship between *Wahari* and his sister *Cheheru*. The version goes like this. *Wahari* was madly in love with *Cheheru* and proposed to her a few times to meet her in her hammock. She refused every time and argued that this was wrong because they were brother and sister. One night *Wahari* crawled into *Cheheru*'s hammock but before this he covered his face with soot from the fire pit. *Cheheru* was tricked by this disguise and by the fact that *Wahari* refused to talk to her.[69] When she found out she had been tricked, she got really angry and threw *Wahari* out of her hammock. The first Piaroa was conceived from this encounter. José

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[68] See (Boglár 1970; Wilbert 1958) for alternative versions.

[69] In his discussion about the low volume used by the Trio when they speak, Rivière (2000) points out that the increment in volume is a sign of anger and disequilibrium in people's relations. He also mentions that the opposite, absolute silence, is undesirable too because means bad relations or no relation at all.

said that later, *Wahari* got very mad with the Piaroa and tried to eliminate them. He was also a grand *Rúa* and sent illnesses to the Piaroa inside the animals, each animal carrying a different illness. *Cheheru* felt very bad for the Piaroa and taught their *Rúa* the chant that would cleanse the animals and make them edible. José only talked about the creation of the first Piaroa and claimed that he had heard this story from his grandfather *Buré*. Other versions say that what *Wahari* created was the first Piaroa couple and this is the reason all the Piaroa are related; this also justifies why they do not make a distinction between consanguine and affine when establishing kinship relationships. In theory, all the Piaroa are family and because they prefer endogamy all the Piaroa could potentially be marriage partners. Conceptions of close and distant relatives redefine or narrow down the options, however when this last mechanism cannot stand, the former condition justifies marriage unions as long as the couple are both Piaroa. Alonso was also referring to the strict norms for consumption of game that ruled Piaroa lives in the past. I have already mentioned some implications of these norms; there was an absolute prohibition on eating forest animals due to the risks of becoming ill from the contamination carried by these animals in their meat. The above-mentioned version of the Piaroa creation myth explains the reason for this. The only way they could consume this meat was after the *Rúa* had uttered the sacred chants learned from *Cheheru*, blown tobacco smoke over it, and redistributed the parts of the animal using the kinship links as a guide for this distribution.

Rafael pulled some money out of his wallet and asked Miguel Angel, Miguel's seven-year-old son, to buy some casabe and katara (local name for a hot sauce made of a combination of the starch that is obtained after the squeezing of bitter manioc during the preparation of mañoco or casabe, hot peppers, and sometimes red ants) in the booth of

Mercal. Miguel Angel handed the casabe and the katara to Rafael and Alonso also passed him some cooked chicken that he had in a plastic container. Rafael then started to make little casabe chicken sandwiches and passed them to the people who were sitting around him. They were all Piaroa men from the village and they were all closely related to him; they were all *tuku chawarua* with the exception of me, but I was a difficult person to place among their categories. They indulged me that day and Alonso joked saying: "he is like family, I only hope that he marries my cousin".[70] Everybody started to laugh and I could not help but feel embarrassed, but I got my portion of chicken and casabe that I dipped in a generous amount of katara that Alonso poured on the plastic container which had held the chicken. Now I think again about what Alonso said to the Hiwi "nowadays I eat everything" but I think it would be safe to add, as long as it comes from close relatives or I share it with them.

When everybody was heading home, I asked Rafael if he knew about the existence of the folder in the Consejo's computer. He said that he did not know about it and encouraged me to show him where this folder was in the computer. We walked together to Juan's home and we found him working on the village's truck. I asked for his permission to check the folder in the computer and he said "Go ahead, I know nothing of

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[70] Viveiros de Castro presents an interesting example that comes from how the Cashinahua of the Jordão River of Brazil use the term: *txai*, which among other things means "brother-in-law". When this term is applied to outsiders or people who are out of the kin, it is a marker of distance and difference, it refers to the other or the affine and in the case of the more distant entities is exclusive (Viveiros de Castro 2004). The Yanomami have a term that they use in a similar way: *shori*, some Yanomami that I have met have called me *shori*. In both cases *txai* and *shori* could be a way of marking the possibilities of becoming kin and closing up the kinship distance, but in the case of those who do not share a mythological origin it is a way to establish some relation where there is none, but to also mark the difference in a way (see Kelly Luciani 2004) for a discussion on this theme among the Yanomami). This theme enters in a theoretical framework that Viveiros de Castro identifies as "the symbolic economy of alterity" (Viveiros de Castro 1996).

computers but you, you should teach the kids how to work with those things". I opened the folder in the company of Rafael and found three subfolders: one labeled "Ideología" (ideology) that contained ten files, with written pieces by Noam Chomski, Che Guevara, Laurence Lessig and Hugo Chávez as well as an interview with David Velásquez (the Venezuelan Minister of Participation and Social Protection) and three documents that defined the aims of the Socialism of the XXI Century. Another folder was labelled "Legislación" (legislation) and contained copies of the Constitution, the land law and the law of Consejos Comunales. And the third folder labelled "Literatura" (Literature) had a digital version of Don Quixote and a selection of Cervantes' other writings.

As seen in this chapter so far and in the accounts presented in former chapters, the presence of governmental programs and the participation villagers have in these programs is well extended in Alto Carinagua. Every adult in the village knows about these programs; and a good number of villagers benefit from one or more of these programs, and those who do not benefit directly from them nonetheless know who in the village represents each program and who has to be contacted in order to be considered for benefits. As we have seen, the new community leaders are forged in their capacity as representatives of these programs; see for instance the case of Rafael whose leadership derived from his functions as Vocero Principal of the village's Consejo. In other cases, already existing leaders reinforced their leadership by participating as representatives or collaborators of these programs, such as in the case of Pedro who as the Comisario negotiated the presence of the Cruzada in Alto Carinagua, or Juan who by designating a room in his house and providing the conditions for the installation of the office of the village's Consejo is facilitating the operability of the Consejo. These examples can all be

considered as successful cases of leadership and they all share a common element of redistribution of the resources obtained from the government programs among the villagers in general. There is also the case of *Buré* who promotes the participation of the villagers in these programs and encourages the young people of the village to learn the idiom of the state as a way of maximizing the possibilities of becoming beneficiaries of these programs. One element that was mentioned in the Reseña Pedro dictated to me was that *Buré* stressed the necessity that young people learn Spanish as a way of improving the villagers' relation with government officials. In dictating the Reseña Pedro told me:

> [When the community was founded] [c]oincidentally a son of the Chamán got sick and they brought him to CAICET's facilities to be treated. [The doctors who work] there gave him a medical prescription. This was a problem because nobody in the village knew how to speak or write Spanish. After this situation the Chamán saw the necessity for his grandchildren to learn to speak and write in Spanish, so they could act as interpreters in the creation of bridges with the Criollo world.

There are also examples of failed leadership, and I will refer to one of these at the end of this chapter by presenting a case where potential leaders fell into disgrace and their leadership capacities were highly questioned. For now I will just say that in that situation the people involved failed to distribute resources among the villagers and were categorized as greedy.

In the remainder of this chapter I will offer a more detailed discussion of the village's Consejo Comunal, using an account of how the villagers chose its name as a way to illustrate how they see the Consejo Comunal and what they expect from it. I will also present some of the aims of this state program as well as some of the rules that govern it and the restructuring of the national geopolitical distribution and what this

means for the redistribution of the state's resources. Finally, I will present the case of the former Consejo's executive organ and the reason they failed to capitalize the villagers' support.

2. "*Huaduna*, yes this is a good story. It goes like this..."

Ever since my arrival in Alto Carinagua in early July, I had noticed that the Consejo Comunales are a recurrent theme in villagers' conversations. People discussed what projects they should put together for applying for funding to the Fondo Nacional de los Consejos Comunales (National Fund of the Communal Councils). Sure, resources coming from the local and national governments have been in the sights of the villagers ever since the village was founded, but this time the institution of the Consejo Comunal, besides being a new state program, brought with it a fundamental difference from former and other contemporary programs. The Law of the Consejos Comunales was approved by the Asamblea Nacional (Venezuelan parliament) in April of 2006, and Alto Carinagua's Consejo was first established in 2007. However, since the executive board had been restructured two months before my visit, the process of becoming operational was still in its early stages. Through the program of Consejos Comunales, the national government is asking the inhabitants of the different communities to organize themselves in councils, to discuss the most pressing necessities they have, and to prioritize these necessities in order to design specific projects and submit these to the Fondo Nacional de los Consejos Comunales. If approved, the village would receive the funds they applied for and they would carry out the projects themselves; that is, they would be the people in charge and it would be their responsibility to fulfil the goals of the projects. This program contemplates the existence of treasury inspectors, named Contralores Sociales, from the same

community as well as from Fondo Nacional de los Consejos Comunales in order to guarantee that the funds are being used for the objectives the project applications defined. There are also other functions of the Consejos Communales, such as to promote the arts and sports in the communities, to seek alternative ways to produce and administer their own resources (monetary or otherwise) by implementing new forms of exchange that activate the local economy, to create solutions for some of their problems using their own resources, when this is possible, and to promote community organization and political participation in the resolution of issues they, as a community, consider important.

By the time of my visit, the dwellers of Alto Carinagua had applied for two main projects. One was for the drilling of a well, under the care of the former village executive board; this project was never implemented and it is not clear if the applicants received the funds. The second project is for the improvement of housing and by the time I left the village they were still waiting for a response from Fondo Nacional de los Consejos Comunales (this is the funding Rafael was expecting, discussed in Chapter III).

As I have done in other parts of this thesis I will introduce here an ethnographic account to illustrate the way this state program is perceived by the villagers of Alto Carinagua. The account concerns how the name of the village's Consejo was chosen. The name of each Consejo Comunal is an important element that has to be recorded in the Constitutive Document (Acta Constitutiva) of the different Consejos. This document has to be produced within the first few meetings of the Asamblea de Ciudadanos y Ciudadanas (Assembly of Citizens who belong to the community) of each Consejo; this Asamblea is a component of the Consejo that is comprised of all the inhabitants of the

community who are fifteen years of age and older.[71] The Consejo's name must be voted on and approved by the majority of the members of the Asamblea. The document produced in this meeting is very important because it is one of Fundacomunal's requirements for the legalization of the Consejo[72]; in other words this document, once presented and filed by Fundacomunal, is the title that certifies the legal existence of this particular Consejo Comunal.

The day after the Cruzada visited the village, I found Pedro in front of the house as he was waiting for a taxi that would take him to Puerto Ayacucho. I told him that I had just learned the name of the village Consejo, *Huaduana*, and that I had heard some stories about the meaning of this word. After a brief conversation about this meaning I added that I was interested in recording this story for my research, "Ah… *Huaduna*," he responded and then continued by saying "this is very important for your research and you should be given a formal account of it." I was delighted by his reaction and asked him if he could give me an interview where we could talk about the meaning of *Huaduna* and how they chose that name for the village's Consejo. He said yes, but that we would have to do it another day because he needed to go to Puerto Ayacucho at that moment. It took a few days before I could see Pedro again and then we agreed to meet the day after. The day of the interview Pedro showed up at Miguel's house with a notebook in one hand and

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[71] The law of Consejos Comunales contemplates that any decision and resolution of the Consejo must be approved by at least 10% of this population since the decisions must be made and recorded in a single Assembly meeting.

[72] Fundacomunal (Fundación para el Desarrollo y Poder Comunal) is a dependency of the Ministry of Popular Empowerment. This foundation aims to facilitate the socialist transformation of the state institutions through the implementation of Consejos Comunales. Fundacomunal next to the Fondo are the executive organ of the program nationwide. These are part of the geopolitical transformations that Chávez' administration is implementing in pursuing a new distribution of the nation's wealth. The money given to the Consejos Comunales by the Fondo comes directly from the Ministry of Energy and Mines.

a pencil in the other. We sat at the same table I used for eating with Miguel and I asked him if it was OK to record our conversation. He agreed and after I did the proper presentation for the record, he started his narrative.

> Well we are now in the *Hohutija* community of Alto Carinagua and we are going to talk about the Reseña Histórica of the Consejo Comunal of this community. This community has 46 families and 206 inhabitants [according to the calculations] we made about two months ago when we started this new, restructured Consejo Comunal.[73]

Before continuing with Pedro's narrative I think it would be helpful to point out and explain a few of the elements he mentioned in his discourse so far. 1) *Hohutija* is the name that was chosen by the Piaroa in the first Piaroa Congress held in 1984 in Guanay valley; this name is rarely used by them and it is my understanding that it only comes up in very formal encounters. 2) Community is the term used by Amerindians as well as Criollos from Venezuela when they are referring to indigenous villages.[74] 3) Notice that here he is using again the category of Reseña Histórica; the reader should remember the discussion I presented above about the meaning of this category. Pedro asked me at the end of the interview if I was going to type his tale; when I said yes, he asked me for a copy. 4) One of the guidelines set by the Law of Consejos Comunales is that for

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[73] The word in Spanish he used for starting was "aperturó" which is an awkward way to say "the opening of". Sometimes the Spanish used by Amerindian people in Venezuela seems to be closely related to their interpretation of the institutional idiom as it is used in the interactions with state officials. In a fair number of cases Amerindian people have learned Spanish specifically to interact with these officials. The Piaroa of Alto Carinagua's delivery expressed this in all the accounts I recorded about the history of their village. The study of the Spanish spoken by the Piaroa and other Amerindian people who live in Venezuela is a fascinating topic that remains to be researched. Despite its importance and interest, I have to leave this theme out of this thesis for reasons of space although I am aware of its relevance.

[74] Villalón (2002) offers a discussion of the use of the term comunidad (Spanish for community) in the Venezuelan context. She argues that in Venezuela it means "town/community" and "people". I debated during the writing of this thesis between using this term instead of village; and although I agree entirely with Villalón in this topic I decide to use the latter for the sake of clarity (see also Jackson and Warren 2005).

statistical purposes the family is the basic unit to count in the communities. This law established that indigenous villages should have at least 10 families for opting for their own Consejo; in non-indigenous rural settlements the number is 20 families and for urban areas the number ranges from 200 to 400. Nevertheless, the law is referring to nuclear families, which poses other difficulties when this program is implemented in Piaroa villages, given the importance of Piaroa extended families or household units (see Chapter II). 5) Both of these numbers, "46 families and 206 inhabitants" came from a calculation they did during the first two meetings of the Asamblea. These meetings are seen nowadays as the first public acts of the village's Consejo; they argue that because the former board was dismissed, the Consejo did not become operational before these meetings. Demographic statistics and the territorial borders of the communities are other elements that have to also be recorded in the Constitutive Document.

> Before this [Consejo] there was [a different one with] different members but today we are working with new members.[75] They call these [components of the Consejo] Working Committees (Comités de Trabajo), and they are integrated by: the treasurer, the president or the Vocero Principal, then the secretary, the finance coordinator, the coordinator of education, I think it is something like this. These are the requirements [as they are] filed in Fundacomun.[76] The Vocero Principal of this Consejo Comunal -- we named this Consejo *Huaduna* -- has a copy of the Acta that contained all this.[77] We made the first meeting, and then the second and

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[75] The law establishes that altogether the Asamblea, the executive board, the working committees, the finance component and the treasury inspectors are the Consejo Comunal.

[76] Fundacomun was the former name of Fundacomunal. It was changed by presidential resolution on August 18, 2008 (Presidential Decree # 6,342)

[77] He used here the Spanish word "reposa," a term that means: "has been filed," "it is there". Reposa is another term that comes from the institutional jargon and it is another example of what I mentioned before about the Spanish spoken by Amerindian people.

> we put together the [Constitutive] Document and the Consejo was restructured.... Some people talk about 14 or 15 committees. Then we have to demarcate the village's territory (Demarcación y habitat).[78] We have one [committee] for sports. I don't know, there are a lot of things, all those things that they call committees. They are integrated by two people, one is the principal and one substitute [the law calls these Voceros of the working committees].

As the reader can see Pedro was not too far off when he described the legal procedure for constituting a Consejo Comunal. At times his description revealed confusion and I think this is derived from two sources: first, the constitution of the village Consejo has been a long and problematic process, as the Consejo was not yet operational and already had been through two executive boards; second, the information available for the Consejos Comunales is sometimes misleading, especially when it comes from the state officials themselves. There have been workshops and some of the structural information has been passed on, but the politicians also use these workshops as a platform to campaign for their political parties, which makes the information flow very confusing at times.

> The tale of *Huaduna* is... *Huaduna* is the name of a bat. I haven't seen this bat yet. I don't know what size he is or what is it that he has, but [I know] that he is an animal.... *Huaduna*, this is a Piaroa [word] you know, well *Huaduna* is [also] the Consejo Comunal's name.... *Huaduna* is a good animal because he sees the necessities of his family, then he goes out of his cave. He goes out hunting or gathering little things, little animals. [Whatever] he [can] find. He does everything he can [to do this]. For him

[78] Demarcation as I mentioned before is another element that has to be included in the Constitutive Document.

it is a great effort to go out but he goes anyway. And then he has to bring something back with him and if he doesn't find anything he has to bring information. [Information like] why he didn't bring anything. But he does all the work [that is necessary]. He tells how long he is been out. Then he comes back with everything he found out there. He comes back home and he sees his family, he can see his father-in-law, his wife, his son, [all these he sees] when he comes back. He tells them [things] in his own language, in the same way that his family [talks to him], just like we all do, us beings. Perhaps he gives them information,[79] how many hours he spent to get to the places [where he went]. He tells them everything, all that he saw… [all] the struggles he has to overcome, the scary moments he confronted, everything, if he collected enough, if he did enough shopping (mercado). Well then he starts to distribute everything. What can I say, he shares new ideas [too]. He shares with all his family, they have to be satisfied, and nobody can be left hungry. This is the Consejo Comunal, I am talking of the Consejo Comunal *Huaduna*, this is its name, this is [also] the name of the Vocero Principal. He has to fulfil [properly] his role, [his work] is like *Huaduna's* work, the one that is a bat. He [the Vocero Principal] has to make the effort and go to the offices, [and] if he has to travel, he goes wherever he has to go. Over there they will tell him what is that we have to do here, all the activities… he acquires knowledge. And this is what the Vocero Principal has to do, exactly the way his name says. I mean, he does all the transactions, he runs all the errands and then the day the funds are approved he has to give this information too, give it to everybody, because in these projects there are people, how do you say? The beneficiaries. They are the first that have to have their problems solved. He has to act to help in the solution of the problems of the most needy families, and then to solve the problems of everybody else. [After

[79] He used the Spanish expression "bajar informacion"; this is another institutional expression, meaning to pass on the information that has been obtained from higher levels of the state bureaucracy. A similar expression is "bajaron los recursos" meaning "the resources came down to us".

this is done] he has to keep working for the rest of the inhabitants, in the same way [he has done for the most needy]. And this is what the Consejo *Huaduna* has to do, he has this name and he has to be good, he has to be proactive... like the bat does, he has to be aware of everything.... [Now] to translate this word... [it took a lot of work] and the word I came up with was provider (proveedor), and then I told the other Compañeros,[80] those who work in the Committee of the Consejo Comunal (he is referring to executive board) that we have to know how to express the meaning of this word, in a way we can make others understand this meaning. They (the Compañeros) have familiarized themselves with this word; this catches the attention of many people, like [we caught yours]. Didn't you get surprised when you heard what the word *Huaduna* means? But they ask themselves "*Huaduna, Huaduna*, what is that?"... The Capitán said in one meeting "we have to find a name that is typical of our culture", but it was like we forgot that word like that word did not exist anymore [other Consejos already have taken the other names]: *Cheheru*, *Wuahari, Buoca*, the Pauji (*Crax globulosa*) and the Autana mountain. They all have been taken. We thought that "we have no more options", but the Capitán said "let's go and consult the Chamán (*Buré*), he always knows." We asked him, "what name can we use?" We asked him to attend one of our meetings so he can explain, you know all the animals' names, he knows a lot about this. One of those names was *Huaduna*, and we saw this as the name we were looking for. In the beginning people asked "Who is this animal?" "ah... yes, yes he is a Bat" and that was it, we had a name, we selected this name... but I am a person who doesn't like to have any doubts, I said "the work isn't over... we have to see how we can translate this".... "not only to say the he is a bat and that he only gathers things". This is not a

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[80] Compañero is a word that is widely used throughout Latin America. It literally means partners but when used in the way Pedro did it strengthens the links of members of a political entity (for instance members of the same political party), or like in the case of the Consejo, members of the same legal corpus, assuming that this is one of the things the Consejo is. This word also adds a level of intimacy in the interrelations between the members of the group highlighting commonalities that aim to bring them together.

> concept I said "it has to be a word that will make us and them [the Criollos] understand. Over there are educated people and they are going to ask: "What does this mean". Little by little, thinking, we translated it, it wasn't easy, I think it took like a month to come up with the translation, we have to find a concept that expresses clearly what we meant, so when they ask the Vocero Principal or another member [we can say] not only what does it means but why we chose this name.... This is the tale of how we choose this name, it wasn't the Chamán who picked the name, he only said the name for the first time, we all have to agree "well yes there is not a problem... we approved it" the Asamblea has to agree with it. So until today that is the name, *Huaduna*, we even had to make a rubber stamp with the shape of *Huaduna* in it... the rubber stamp has to have the animal on it.

In this narrative the reader can identify some of themes I have already discussed in different parts of this thesis. It is not my intention to do an exhaustive discourse analysis but an analysis of certain elements that resonate with the main argument of this thesis. I heard various versions of the story of *Huaduna* and they all share common details, especially when they talk about the personality and the description of the bat and the responsibilities he has to his family. All these versions were told to me by men of various ages. It is interesting that although they all are active Piaroa speakers, the majority claim to not have known the word *Huaduna* before *Buré* proposed it in one of the meetings. At the beginning I thought that this was perhaps the result of a vocabulary loss among younger generations, especially if it involves a word for elements that they do not see in their everyday life nowadays. This might hold true in other cases, but some of the men who told me the story and claimed to be ignorant of the existence of the word for the bat were close to the age of *Buré*; for instance, Miguel (senior) was one of them. The only person who claimed prior knowledge of the bat was Rufino, *Buré*'s oldest son who

has been his helper in shamanic practices (some people in the village even call him Chamán). My second hypothesis was that the word is part of a vocabulary used by *Rúa*. I have asked people if they understand what *Buré* says when he is uttering his chants and I have received various answers. Some people have said that they do not understand him at all; others have said that they do understand him after they have consumed yopo, the hallucinogen they use during shamanic rituals. Juan, one of his sons, told me that he understands him perfectly. Perhaps one of the reasons that people have difficulty understanding him -- among others like his high-pitched voice, the speed of his uttering, and the tonal variations -- is that he uses a different vocabulary. *Buré* and his followers claim that his chants are descriptions of what he sees when he is travelling; when *Buré* starts his chants what they say he is doing is travelling to various places, looking for knowledge (conocimiento), and the chants are the description of these trips. However, there are also patterns in his chants; remember that they are the results of the lesson of *Cheheru*. Chants sounded very similar every time he performed them. This description of what shamanic chants say also replicates some of the elements present in Pedro's narrative. By recounting what he sees, *Buré* is passing information on to others in the same way that *Huaduna* has to give accounts of his excursions outside of his home; similarly, Rafael has to pass on the information of what is happening with the Consejo's issues every time he returns from a trip out of the village.

I decide to include Pedro's version here not only because I have an audio-recording and transcription of the entire account (although here I have only presented a partial version with slight additions in brackets to make it more readable), but because he introduced in his narrative a relational character that I think is important to highlight. He

sees the relevance of finding a way to tell the story so that it is not only understandable for the villagers but for Criollos as well, especially state officials, to explain what they meant and how they interpret the role of the Consejo Comunal and its Vocero Principal. Pedro's concern with the translation of the word *Huaduna* shows his willingness to reach out beyond the community. However, like in his narratives, he never loses sight of the main objective, as he sees it, of the Consejo. The bat always comes back to the place he lives, he always comes back to see his family, and he always shares with them what he has found on his travels. The establishment of parallelism among the Consejo Comunal, the Bat and the Vocero Principal is quite revealing: on occasions Pedro presented them as if they are essentially the same entity, like differential bodies with one single ontology. They all provide not only food but also knowledge. By placing these two elements in the same category he is claiming they are different types of resources, resources that can be capitalized. Last but not least is the reflection of their political process: *Buré* can propose the name but it is only after community agreement that they can use it for the Consejo. Sure, *Buré* is very clever and he will present what he thinks are the best options, but every villager has the right to agree or disagree with his proposal.

Huaduna represents some of the elements that are expected from a Piaroa leader — he shares what he catches — but the tale does not say anything about transformation in the way the *Rúa* transforms game into edible food. This seems to be missing from the narrative, but there is one brief mention of a father-in-law; it is possible that this father-in-law is a *Rúa*. However, I will argue that distributing the resources following patterns of kinship is part of the transformation; the other part, the one that involves the use of specialized knowledge, is covered by the knowledge necessary to capitalize the resources

and bring them home. *Huaduna* knows where to travel; Rafael knows Spanish and the bureaucratic idiom; *Buré* knows the chants and how to use them. All these leaders show care for the people they are related to, their family. Adding to what I said before about how the Piaroa family is defined by who feeds whom and who is fed by whom, another way to see this is who takes care of whom and who is being taken care of by whom.

Now I would like to introduce the case of the former Consejo's board. Two months before my arrival in Alto Carinagua the Asamblea dismissed the Consejo's first executive board. The reasons people provided for supporting this decision are sometimes ambiguous. The version of the current members of the executive board is that the former board acted in secrecy and did not share the information with the members of the Asamblea. They applied for the well project and according to the other villagers, the latter were never informed about this project. This not only violates the ethical principles of the Consejos Comunales as set out in the regulations, but also goes against the ideal of leadership among the Piaroa. Another element that I was told provoked a problem was the presence of the computer in the village without informing the villagers and facilitating their access to this resource. Villagers see this as a way of monopolizing resources. After the former board was dismissed, there was a division in the village and the members of the faction that endorsed the old board are opposed to participating in the activities the new board is proposing. I witnessed Rafael's concern with this issue: although he affirms that the old board acted improperly, he wants to include them in his activities. Rafael knows that his success as a Piaroa leader depends on the inclusion of the entire village.

3. Final thoughts to conclude

In the context of what has been explored above in this thesis, I would like to argue now that there is an apparent coincidence, or to borrow a category introduced by Viveiros de Castro (2004), a "controlled equivocation" between the ideal of leadership among the Piaroa people and the way the Venezuelan state, through the work of its representatives, relates with the citizens of the Venezuelan nation. This apparent coincidence allows the Piaroa to navigate their interrelations with Venezuelan state officials and institutions in ways that are very much Piaroa and by this to have some level of control over the outcomes of this interrelations. The processes of social transformation that I describe throughout this thesis for the case of the Piaroa of Alto Carinagua replicate some elements that other ethnographic studies of the Piaroa carried out in the past, particularly that of Overing (1975), establish for the ideal of good leadership among the Piaroa. According to this ideal a good leader is a person who is able to demonstrate, among other things, his or her ability to transform what I have called external/resources into internal/products; that is to say, to bring them to the realm of the Piaroa social philosophy by reclassifying these resources and putting them into the same category of the products grown in the gardens and fruits and other products gathered in the fallows and secondary forest. I have also said that what underlies and enables these transformations are different types of specialized knowledge that give the Piaroa leaders the power to perform such transformations. This specialized knowledge includes: knowing shamanic chants that protect villages and their dwellers from external aggressors; knowing the chants and rituals that transform game into edible food; knowing how to control hallucinogenic substances that allow shamanic travels and open communication channels between the travellers and other entities of the Piaroa cosmology; knowing how to speak and read in

Spanish; knowing government officials and being in good standing relationships with them; knowing about bureaucratic transactions and procedures that take or could take place between Piaroa and local or national state officials; knowing about gardening and food preparation; and to introduce Heckler and Zent's argument, knowing about medicinal plants and controlling and accumulating a great deal of diversity of plant species in their gardens (Heckler and Zent 2008). These types of knowledge allow the practitioners of these ways of knowing to demonstrate or show a way of gaining control over resources brought to the community. Once this control is demonstrated, the next step to fully bring them into the Piaroa's sociality is to distribute them among (ideally) the whole village. Usually these patterns of distribution follow the logic of kinship relationships, where the proximity of these relationships determine who benefits sooner. Although this goes against their ideal, it may also determine who is going to be left out in the distribution; this is mainly due to the limited amount of resources to be distributed, which makes it very difficult to distribute them among every single member of the community. There may also be other factors like particular agendas and the quality of the relation between the leader and the recipients of the resources, just to mention some other possibilities.

In this chapter I added more elements for the understanding of the perception that the villagers of Alto Carinagua, among other Amerindian people who live in Amazonas, have of the Venezuelan state and how this perception is used to navigate their interrelations with Venezuelan state officials and institutions. I presented also some connections between the cosmology of the Piaroa and specific actions of their everyday life. In doing this it was not my intention to show continuity between Piaroa traditional

ways of life and modern Piaroa ways but to point out that although changes happened, and as in the case of the Piaroa they can be quite drastic, people use the elements that come from their social philosophy to read, made sense of, and made decisions about the situations they have to confront in their everyday life. The tale of *Huaduna* shows us that in the case of the Piaroa of Alto Carinagua they have been active agents in the inter-relational processes with other agents that are located outside of the community's sociality. The uneasiness that the situation with the former board of the village's Consejo provoked among some villagers shows the continuous danger for potential disequilibrium that could come to the village life. Rafael's efforts to include the entire village into his leadership, even the members of the former board, give us elements to think that the sociality of the Piaroa and their social philosophy are determinant aspects in their interrelation between villagers and with agents and entities that are placed outside of Alto Carinagua's social realm.

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Appendix 1: Map of the indigenous people of Venezuela

Appendix 2: Map of Piaroa Territory

Appendix 3: Map of Cataniapo River watershed and location of Alto Carinagua

Appendix 4: REB approval form

Office of Research Ethics

The University of Western Ontario
Room 00045 Dental Sciences Building, London, ON. Canada N6A 5C1
Telephone: (519) 661-3036 Fax. (519) 850-2466 Email: ethics@uwo.ca
Website: www.uwo.ca/research/ethics

Use of Human Subjects - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. A.K. Clark
Review Number: 15048S **Review Level:** Full Board
Review Date: April 4, 2008
Protocol Title: (Re)inventing the forest from its Master's eyes: the Piaroas' creation of a documentary about the Venezuelan state
Department and Institution: Anthropology, University of Western Ontario
Sponsor:
Ethics Approval Date: June 5, 2008 **Expiry Date:** August 31, 2008
Documents Reviewed and Approved: UWO Protocol, Letter of Information and Consent (English and Spanish)
Documents Received for Information:

This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information. If you require an updated approval notice prior to that time you must request it using the UWO Updated Approval Request Form.

During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the study or consent form may be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazards to the subject or when the change(s) involve only logistical or administrative aspects of the study (e.g. change of monitor, telephone number). Expedited review of minor change(s) in ongoing studies will be considered. Subjects must receive a copy of the signed information/consent documentation.

Investigators must promptly also report to the NMREB:

a) changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
b) all adverse and unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected;
c) new information that may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study.

If these changes/adverse events require a change to the information/consent documentation, and/or recruitment advertisement, the newly revised information/consent documentation, and/or advertisement, must be submitted to this office for approval.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussion related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

Chair of NMREB: Dr. Jerry Paquette

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information			
☐ Grace Kelly	☐ Janice Sutherland	☐	☐ Denise Grafton

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