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POWER, IDEOLOGY AND THE RITUAL OF PRODUCTION IN LOWLAND SOUTH AMERICA

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The political power of Amazonian shaman-chiefs is embedded in economic processes, for they are believed to participate directly in productive and reproductive processes through their monopoly of the ritual techniques of life-giving or the 'mystical means of reproduction'. The article shows how power and ideology, ritual and production are related to generate political authority. In those Amazonian societies where shamans participate mystically in the productive and reproductive processes they also have a political role, whereas in those societies where shamans are not chiefs a warrior leader or priestly figure possesses the power, through ritual, to guarantee the health and fertility of both humans and their environment. In lowland South America political power and the ritual of production are two sides of the same coin.

In his analysis of political power in lowland South America, Pierre Clastres claims that chieftainship in Amerindian societies is characterised by the absence of coercive power and control over economic activities. These features, according to Clastres, characterise political power in state societies. He also contends that the violence and economic control that are characteristic of the exercise of power in state societies are not a function but a precondition of economic divisions.

The political relation of power precedes and founds the economic relation of exploitation. Before being economic, alienation is political; power preceded labour, the economic is derived from the political, the emergence of the State determines the appearance of class divisions (1974: 169).

The dividing line between the political and the economic drawn by Clastres for stateless societies has not generally been challenged by those studying Amerindian societies¹. In this article I shall attempt to demonstrate that in the shamanistic configurations of lowland South America political power is frequently embedded in economic processes and that, in those societies in which shamans are political leaders, their power is economic in nature. It is true that the economic nature of the shaman's power is not the same as that of political power in state societies. 'Power' and the 'political' are realities whose form, content, nature and scope must be carefully determined for any given case. It seems, however, that in our efforts to emphasise that which is specific to stateless societies we have oversimplified the phenomenon of political power.

This is what Clastres does in his collection of essays *La société contre l'état*. On one side of his binary political taxonomy Clastres places stateless societies where

power is thought of as 'good', being based on consensus rather than coercion, its source being the warlike and/or hunting abilities of the chief; on the other side, he places state formations, where power is 'bad', is based on violence, and has its source in less personal elements such as control over economic processes. This generalisation does not account, as I shall attempt to demonstrate, for shamans who are also political leaders. What distinguishes power in one or another type of society is not whether it is exerted on the basis of violence or consensus, nor whether it is based on economic factors. I argue, first, that wherever political power is present there is bound to be both consensus and violence (whether physical, ideological or metaphysical); and, second, that political power always entails certain economic (in a broad sense) privileges, and a certain degree of influence or intervention (whether direct or indirect, material or mystical) in the economic processes of the society in question.

That which really distinguishes political power in one or another type of society is the amount of power retained by the majority. Foucault asserted that power is exercised as much from below as from above. In his view power 'is exercised from innumerable points in a set of unequal, shifting relations' (Sheridan 1980: 184). This conception of power relations is similar to that of Jean Baechler who defines power 'as a tension between two individual or collective wills, but as an asymmetrical tension in that the one is imposed upon the other' (1980: 16). Both authors emphasise the fact that power relations are not unilateral. This would hold true for both state and stateless societies. In the case of the latter, however, the social groups or categories at the bottom of the power relation have a qualitatively larger amount of power than in state societies, for they have at their disposal a wider range of mechanisms to check the power exerted by their leaders.

In the first half of the article I argue, on the basis of my reading of Joanna Overing's detailed writings on the Piaroa of the Orinoco basin (1974; 1975; 1982; 1985; Overing & Kaplan in press)², that in Piaroa society the political and the economic are strongly intertwined. This is so because Piaroa shamans are believed to possess what I call the 'mystical means of reproduction'—the mystical knowledge and ritual operations which are thought, symbolically and literally, to ensure the well-being and reproduction of both the social group and the natural environment. A. M. Hocart pointed out the importance of ritual, as a 'life-saving technique', in the political organisation of stateless societies. In *Kings and councillors* (first published in 1936) he argues that 'the machinery of government was blocked out in society long before the appearance of government as we now understand it', and that the roles and functions of government that we find today 'were originally part, not of a system of government, but of an organization to promote life, fertility, prosperity by transferring life from objects abounding in it to objects deficient in it' (1970: 3). And he concludes: 'It is not indeed government that man wants . . . It is life he wants . . .' (1970: 299). It is one of my objectives to show that this also holds true for the Amazon region, where political power is linked to the possession of, and monopoly over, life-giving knowledge, ceremonial techniques and ritual paraphernalia. Hocart opposes 'ritual' to 'economics' and implicitly suggests that, while ritual is the basis of political power in societies 'without government', economics is the basis

of political power in 'societies with government'. I shall argue against this that it is precisely because political power in Amazonian societies is based on the leader's positive mystical intervention in productive and reproductive processes that their power is economic. It is in this sense that I speak of the 'ritual of production' and the 'production of ritual'.

Thus I hope to reveal, by means of the Piaroa example, the intricate ways in which power and ideology, ritual and production are related to generate political authority. In the second part of the article I shall move a step further to show that in lowland South America shamans traditionally had a political role only in those societies in which they controlled and/or possessed the mystical means of reproduction. Knowledge always confers some kind of power on its holders. This is particularly true of shamanistic configurations where, as Rivière points out, 'ritual knowledge is regarded as an essential but scarce resource' (1984: 12). If it is true, however, that knowledge always presupposes and constitutes power relations (Foucault 1979: 27), it is not necessarily true that those power relations are at the same time political relations. The ritual knowledge of the shaman is recognised as a scarce resource in most parts of Amazonia, but not everywhere are shamans simultaneously political leaders. What Rivière does not indicate is, first, how essential to social life the shaman's ritual knowledge must be for him to become a political leader and, secondly, to which particular area of social activity his ceremonial practices must be directed for his mystical power to be transformed into political power. I shall argue that for a shaman to become a headman his ritual knowledge must be regarded by the actors as an essential element in the reproductive processes of both society and the cosmos. In those societies where this is not so the political role is played either by priest-like figures or by warrior leaders, it being they who control the symbolic and ceremonial aspects of the reproduction of the social and the natural orders.

The ideological aspect of the ruwang's mystical power

The land of the Piaroa is divided into twelve to fifteen *itso'fha* or territorial units which are the largest Piaroa political units. Each of these territories consists of about seven *itso'de*, or semi-endogamous, kindred-based residential groups, each headed by the *ruwang itso'de* ('owner of the house'), who owes allegiance to the *ruwang itso'fha* ('owner of the territory'). The *ruwatu* (plural of *ruwang*) are powerful shamans who use their healing powers, mystical protection and ceremonial activities on behalf of their followers (i.e. members of their local group or territory). An *itso'fha* or 'territory' is above all a political unit. It is defined by the followers any given *ruwang itso'fha* has been able to gather around him through his reputation as a mystically powerful individual and his establishment of a series of politically strategic marriage alliances (Overing 1975: chs. 3 and 7).

The leadership of a territory is constituted by a number of shamans endowed with different degrees of mystical power and ritual knowledge. Together with their respective followings they owe allegiance to the 'owner of the territory'

who is the most powerful shaman of them all. The shaman's power is thought to derive from his ability to interact with spirits and gods. He learns his ritual chants from the *tianawa* gods, who dwell in celestial space, and he wars against or manipulates other spirits for good or evil purposes (Overing 1974: 14–15; 1982). The ruwang's power is measured both by his ability to tap ever-increasing sources of mystical power, and his control over the power thereby obtained. Differential access to mystical power and ritual knowledge among shamans is manifested by a series of rituals and ceremonies hierarchically organised according to the power required to perform them. Only the *ruwang itso'fha* is believed to be capable of performing, without harm to himself and to the land and people, the most important of these ceremonies, the *sari* ('festival of the gods'), a powerful increase ceremony (Overing 1974: 21; also 1975). The fact that the Piaroa shaman has mystical powers is not enough to account for his political role. In many Amazonian societies there are shamanic practitioners who have such power, but who have no equivalent political role. What makes the ruwang socially and politically powerful are certain very particular representations about the nature of his mystical power and about how this power is put into action and for which purposes. This is where ideology comes in.

The concept of ideology was incorporated into the social sciences by Marx and elaborated by thinkers such as Lenin and Mannheim. Since, in their usage, 'ideology' is the product of class relations, stateless (classless) societies should lack the conditions for the production of ideological representations. But as class relations are no more than power relations in the sphere of economic processes (albeit very specific ones), and since power relations exist within the economic sphere in classless societies (e.g. between men and women, fathers-in-law and sons-in-law, etc.) ideological constructs can also exist in these societies. By ideological constructs I mean the ways in which people represent their social (power) relations and how they explain them and give them content. Ideological representations do not necessarily distort or mystify reality. In fact they create 'reality' by attempting to represent it. The mechanisms by which reality is represented in ideological discourse are numerous, but in the last analysis they all tend to legitimise a certain set of power relations. Ideology usually does not constitute a set of fixed representations: it is fluid and has blurred boundaries. Furthermore, it may feed on the discourses of a number of fields of social life: science, religion, literature, art, etc. What distinguishes ideological representations is the objective they serve: the legitimisation of the *status quo*. It should be pointed out, however, that we may frequently find in the ideological representations that legitimise a certain set of power relations the elements to challenge it.

The generation of ideological constructs takes place at the level of power relationships that are established in the processes of production and reproduction. These processes comprise (1) relations between people and (2) relations between people and their environment. The ideological representations that legitimise the political role of the Piaroa shaman-leader have to be looked at in the second set of relations. The Piaroa think of the environment not as an object but as a subject: the natural environment is *personified*. For the Piaroa, as for many other Amazonian societies, the Masters of the Land and the Water, the

celestial gods, the primordial essence of animals and plants, and the spirits of the forest, caves and rivers lead a life that differs little in important respects from their own.

According to this conception, everything that we include under the term 'environment' is not only alive, but is part of a single cosmos composed of multiple worlds in which plants and animals, gods and spirits interact between themselves and with humans in very much the same way as humans interact among themselves. This personification takes place as the result of the human need to act upon the environment in order to produce the necessary means of subsistence to ensure biological, social and cultural reproduction. In order to act on their environment humans need to understand it, and this they achieve through classification (Lévi-Strauss 1963). Through a process of discriminating, classifying and conceptualising, humans make their environment intelligible and, in the process of so doing, they become intelligible to themselves. Classification is therefore a two-way process. On the one hand, humans utilise elements that the natural environment puts at their disposal to classify social relations (e.g., in the Piaroa case, the division of moieties into clans named after a number of physical and organic elements), while on the other, they utilise the language of their own interaction to describe the natural environment (e.g. the Piaroa conception that animal and plant species, and the spirits of the land, water or sky are related amongst themselves through kinship and affinal ties).

The 'personification' of the environment is not ideological *per se*, but constitutes a classificatory device as does our own 'natural' taxonomy. But once the natural environment is personified (once nature becomes a subject in the actors' minds) people think of themselves as engaged in a power relation with it. It is when humans consider themselves in the position of imposing their will upon the personified environment so that it yields to their needs (or vice versa) that we may say that we are in the presence of an ideological construct. The Piaroa are represented in this power relation by the ruwatu, their shaman-leaders, upon whom they lay the responsibility of the success of material production and socio-biological reproduction. According to Overing, the ruwang:

. . . knows the origin and nature of the world and the place of society within it. Because of this knowledge, the Piaroa *ruwang* has within his power . . . 'the techniques of life giving'. As a *ruwang* increases his knowledge of the proper order of things, so too does he gain in power in his ability to control the world of spirits (1974: 11).

This control allows him to ensure the fertility and increase of land, plants, animals and human beings within his territory (1974: 5). In the Piaroa conception of the world:

The giant of the jungle, *Rey'o*, and the river spirit, *Ahe Itamu*, co-operate as guardians of garden food. As guardians of the products from the jungle, the river and the gardens, these two spirits must be contended with by the shaman on a daily basis (Overing 1982: 25).

Through his mystical powers the ruwang is believed to ensure the success of various central subsistence activities. Moreover, he gives all individuals the 'forces of culture' that he has acquired from the crystal boxes guarded by the divinities in their celestial abode. Thus, as the master of the 'forces of culture',

the ruwang grants the powers and abilities to use natural resources (Overing 1985). The ruwang imparts magical hunting abilities to the young men (Overing 1985); he also ritually purifies and thereby makes usable the wooden cassava graters that women use to make cassava bread (Overing & Kaplan in press). The ruwang's mystical powers are also used to protect the members of his territory from the threat of the sorcerers of neighbouring tribes and from the dangers posed by the 'diseases of the animals' (Overing 1975). In order to achieve these goals, the ruwang performs a series of daily rituals (e.g. the 'blowing' of water, the transformation of the dangerous animal nature of game into a beneficial vegetable nature, etc.) and a series of public ceremonies the most important of which is the annual *sari* or increase festival.

We may divide the ruwang's ritual activities into those concerned with the environment, and those concerned with society. In the first case the ruwang is seen by the Piaroa as ensuring the fertility of the land, animals and plants of his territory. This is paralleled in the social sphere by the ruwang's ability (and duty) to ensure the health and fecundity of both individuals and the group. As in many other Amazonian societies, there is a symbolic relationship between human fecundity and the fertility of the earth, with its corollary, the relation between the health of human beings and the healthy development of plants and animals. The Piaroa shaman plays a mediatory role between society and the environment, securing not only the life conditions of his individual followers, but also the natural conditions for their socio-biological reproduction. The ruwang is thought of as engaged in a power relation with the personified environment on behalf of the social groups for which he ritually performs. His 'techniques of life giving', as Overing puts it, play an essential role in the productive processes of Piaroa society.

The ruwang's economic role is not exhausted by his mystical participation in the productive processes. His mystical powers and ritual knowledge are also exercised, as we shall see, in the broader economic activities of distribution and consumption. His ritual practices are oriented not only towards particular individuals (e.g. in healing), but also towards the collectivity as a whole (his following). These practices are socially significant because, in the eyes of the people, they ensure the viability and success of productive and reproductive processes. I would even say that they are part of these processes. It is in this sense that I use the term 'ritual of production'. This ritual knowledge constitutes, then, in Rivière's words 'an essential but scarce resource' (1984: 12). Without the ruwang's ritual knowledge and practices the existence and perpetuation of the collectivity would be in peril.

The ruwang's powers are thought of both as life-giving and as potentially evil, but this does not reduce the ruwang's prestige in the eyes of his followers; on the contrary, the life-giving aspect of the shaman's power is only feasible as long as he also has control over illness and death—both to give and to take away. For the ruwang's power to be legitimate in the eyes of his followers, however, its evil influence must be directed outwards. The ruwang is perceived to be powerful not only because of the good he may bestow on one's own group but also because of the harm he may inflict on another's.

The economic nature of the ruwang's political power

In capitalist societies political power is derived from economic power, which is based on the 'fiction' of the *private* ownership of the *material* means of production (e.g. land, capital in the form of assets or money, etc.). I say 'fiction' because this conceptualisation of the relation between people and objects is socially constructed and, therefore, historically defined. It is, however, a 'real' fiction in so far as it is legally sanctioned and there is a large consensus with respect to its 'reality'. In capitalist societies, those who have political power are those who have economic power in the above sense, or those who represent the economically powerful classes. Among the Piaroa, political power is also based on a 'fiction'—although different in nature and content from that of capitalist societies. It is based on the fiction of the *personal* ownership of the *mystical* means of reproduction. In contrast, the material means of production are, in principle at least, available to everybody.

The parallel I have drawn is based upon three sets of binary oppositions: 1) private/personal; 2) material/mystical; and 3) production/reproduction. The mystical means of reproduction are the personal property of the ruwang, for they have been personally acquired and enhanced. These mystical means cannot be transferred by ascription: they may only be transferred by the ruwang through the personal quest of his disciples. In capitalist societies ownership of the means of production can be obtained by personal effort, but its transference is legally sanctioned by inheritance, with no personal effort on the part of the beneficiaries. The material versus the mystical is an operational opposition that does not express the Piaroa's point of view. The ruwang claims to own, and is thought of as owning, the intangible (from a Western point of view, since for the ruwang they are both visible and tangible) mystical means of reproduction. These consist, amongst other things, of chants, charms, auxiliary and protective spirits and magical darts. He also possesses, however, certain material objects which are, in a sense, the objectification of what, in other respects, is intangible in essence. Thus his 'beads of knowledge' are, simultaneously, an 'inner clothing' containing his mystical powers, and the actual strands of beads he wears on his chest, legs and wrists (Overing 1985). Finally, whereas in modern societies it is the ownership of the means of production which gives political power, amongst the Piaroa these means are available to everybody (except for the land which, as we shall see, is nominally 'owned' by the *ruwang itso'fha*). In Piaroa society what 'counts', politically, are the means of reproduction: the means by which harmony and a 'balanced flow of energy' is established between the environment and the social realm, the means by which the health and fertility of the one sphere is mirrored by the health and fecundity of the other.

Whereas in capitalist societies a minority has the monopoly of the material means of production, in Piaroa society a minority has the monopoly of the mystical means of reproduction³. This monopoly is ensured by the *ruwang itso'fha*'s control over the process of acquisition of sacred knowledge (Overing 1985; also 1975); and by the hierarchical nature of the acquisition of ritual knowledge, which consists in the gradual tapping of sources of ever-increasing power. The ruwang determines who has the personal qualities (self-control,

morality, humility) to go further in the process of accumulation of mystical power. He can reject people as initiates or stop teaching those who, although already initiated, have proved themselves unable to handle properly the power they have incorporated. Ritual knowledge, moreover, has to be paid for by the initiates. This monopoly of the mystical means of reproduction differs in several fundamental respects, however, from the monopoly of the material means of production in capitalist societies: it cannot be inherited, it does not lead to control over the labour of those who have no access to it, and it does not entail ownership of the end results of the productive and/or reproductive processes.

The power relation between the ruwang and his followers is represented, at the ideological level, as reciprocal, though asymmetrical, exchange. The ruwang is perceived as making an indispensable contribution to the reproduction of both the cosmic and the social order. It is only 'natural', then, that the group should reward him for this. This reward assumes an economic form, which is how the mystical power of the ruwang becomes economic power in a double sense: on the one hand, it is part of the processes of production and reproduction, and on the other, it is reciprocated in economic terms. It is also reciprocated in terms of prestige, respect and political power.

Mystical power is exchanged for economic privileges and for key positions in the actual organisation of production. At the level of the local group (*itso'de*) the *ruwang itso'de* does not participate fully in the daily productive processes (Overing 1975), for in ideological terms he participates in these processes through his ritual practices. He has the right and duty to redistribute game brought in by members of his local group (Overing 1975); this is also thought of as an exchange, for the ruwang transforms the dangerous animal nature of meat into a nutritious vegetable nature. Finally he has the right to receive tribute in exchange for his protection of the household and the land from malevolent beings, especially the *marimu* spirits (Overing 1975). This tribute consists of gifts (such as combs, cigarettes and manioc flour) from his individual followers or their households.

At the level of the territory (*itso'fha*) the *ruwang itso'fha* has the right, as nominal 'owner' of the land, to give or deny permission to anyone who wants to join his following and settle down in his territory (Overing 1975: ch. 3). 'Ownership' of the land is neither based on ancestral occupation nor on birth rights, but rather on the *ruwang itso'fha's* control over the land through the extension or reduction of his protective ritual operations. He thus exchanges his ritual protection for political (and economic) allegiance. If one of his followers decides to break the relation of allegiance, the ruwang withdraws his mystical protection from the land occupied by the man and his family, and that portion of land is automatically considered outside the boundaries of the territory controlled by him. If someone who formerly lived outside the reputed boundaries of a given territory decides to join the following of the ruwang who controls it, the land he occupies is incorporated into the nominal territory of the *itso'fha* and the ruwang extends his mystical protection over it. Thus, although the ruwang does not have direct control over the land and cannot allocate it, his monopoly of the mystical means of reproduction gives him, as far as the actors are concerned, power over life (by extending his ritual protection over a portion of land) and

death (by withdrawing that protection). The *ruwang itso'fha* also has the monopoly of trading activities with neighbouring 'territories' and other ethnic groups, since his mystical powers enable him to counteract the metaphysical dangers entailed in visiting foreign territories (Overing 1975). He also has the right to solicit the labour of all the members of his territory to carry out the large scale productive activities required for the celebration of the great increase ceremony (*sari*): hunting, cultivation of the maize gardens, preparation of beer, etc. (Overing 1974: 21; also 1975). He has the right to solicit the labour of the members of his local group in order to build the *uchuo'de*, the large conically-shaped house which only the most powerful shamans are entitled to build. Finally, in his role as host to every visitor, the *ruwang itso'fha* offers those who come for a long stay the use of his cleared gardens. This enlarges the labour force at his disposal, and the increased garden production enables him to hold larger ceremonial gatherings, thus enhancing his prestige and political power. Here again, however, the *ruwang* is thought of as giving more than he receives.

Overing points out that: 'Although the *ruwang* plays little part in daily economic activities, he does have considerable power over economic processes through the increase ceremony he performs' (1974: 20). I would go further. The *ruwang's* mystical power is economic in nature both because it springs from the productive practices of the Piaroa (who conceive of themselves as engaged in a power relation with the personified environment) and because it is embedded in economic practices. We should not, therefore, think of the *ruwang's* mystical power as resulting in politico-economic power and, thus, power over people. I would rather see it as an *essential part of the productive practices of Piaroa society*. It is in this sense that mystical power amongst the Piaroa is economic. I shall argue in the second part of this article that, were it not so, the *ruwang* would not have a central political role.

I suggested earlier that power relations should be interpreted as 'asymmetrical tensions' between any two given parties. This implies both that the holders of power have the possibility of reinforcing their authority through a variety of 'sanctions' (to be defined for any given case), and that those who are in a subordinate position have the possibility of challenging or resisting those who hold it. Although the *ruwang's* power is not based on the potential use of physical violence he does have a range of sanctions to apply against those breaking taboos, the impious, thieves, 'enemies' of the community or personal adversaries. These sanctions may take the form of negative coercion (e.g. social silence), or metaphysical violence which, as far as the actors are concerned, is as physical as 'actual' physical violence, for it may entail death for the transgressor (Overing 1974). This latter sanction may be 'positive', through the use of mystical powers to bring about illness or death, or 'negative', by withdrawing mystical protection from the wrongdoer.

The *ruwang's* political and economic power can only be maintained, however, while his relation to his followers is seen as one of the asymmetrical exchange of vital services: the *ruwang* performing for his followers qualitatively more essential services than those that his followers perform for him (see Godelier 1978). Were this not so, were the *ruwang* perceived to tap sources of power which he could not handle properly, were his power perceived to be

uncontrolled or used for anti-social or evil purposes, his power would lose its legitimacy. When a ruwang loses control over his mystical powers his followers may turn their backs on him and his political power may not be recognised any more (Overing 1974; 1975). Other ruwatu, moreover, may even 'take his thoughts' away, i.e. deprive him of his mystical capacities (Overing 1975; 1985).

When institutionalised means of social violence are not at the disposal of those holding political power, legitimation, by means of ideological constructs, is of the utmost relevance and mechanisms to restrict abusive power are stronger than in class societies. Among the Piaroa, a ruwang has to demonstrate continuously that his powers are oriented to the welfare of his followers. It is through the representation of his relation with his followers as one of asymmetrical reciprocal exchange—in which he is perceived as giving more than he is receiving—that the power of the Piaroa shaman-leader is made legitimate and acceptable. On the basis of the Piaroa example, and those I shall analyse in the second half of this article, we may disagree both with Lévi-Strauss's generalisations about 'the social and psychological aspects of Nambikuara chieftainship' (1944), and Clastres's conclusions about the philosophy of Amerindian chieftainship (1962). In his famous essay, Lévi-Strauss concluded that there is:

. . . a game of give-and-take played by the chief and his followers . . . which brings forth, as a basic attribute of leadership, the notion of reciprocity. . . . Between him and the group, there is a perpetual balance of prestations, privileges, services and obligations (1967: 59).

In brief, Lévi-Strauss suggests that the political relationship between Amerindian leaders and their followers is one of *symmetrical* reciprocal exchange. According to Lévi-Strauss, in granting polygamous privileges to the chief, the group exchanges '*individual elements of security* resulting from the monogamous rule for *collective security* provided by leadership' (1967: 60; his emphasis). Almost twenty years later, Clastres asserted that, on the contrary, political power in lowland South America is based on the negation of exchange between the leaders and their followers insofar as the most significant 'objects of exchange' (women, goods and words) are transferred in a unilateral, non-balanced fashion: either from the group to the leader (women), or from the leader to his followers (goods and words) (1974: 37–8):

It is evident that for the group, who gives away for the chief's profit an important amount of their most essential values—women—the daily harangues and meagre economic goods which the leader disposes of do not constitute an equivalent compensation (1974: 35; my translation from the French).

Clastres argues that it is this 'non-exchange' that accounts for what he sees as the lack of authority and/or coercive power of Amerindian leaders. It is because the political relation is one of *asymmetrical* reciprocal exchange, the group giving more to the chief than it receives in return, that the chief becomes 'a kind of prisoner of the group' (Clastres 1974: 42; my translation).

I suggest that Lévi-Strauss has underestimated the extraordinary value and prestige attached to the ritual practices and life-giving powers of the Amazonian leaders. He himself provides evidence that the political power of the Nambikuara chiefs has the same foundations as that of the Piaroa shaman-leaders.

Although in his 1944 essay on the Nambikuara Lévi-Strauss asserts that 'More often chieftainship and sorcery are divided between two different individuals', and that 'magical functions are only secondary attributes of the leader' (1967: 55), in his 1963 entry on the Nambikuara for the *Handbook of South American Indians* he states that 'the shaman is sometimes distinct from—but more frequently identified with—the political chief' (1963: 369). He adds that the Nambikuara chief plays 'the leading role in ceremonial life' and that 'Dances are performed under the leadership of the chief' (1963: 368–9). He asserts, moreover, that 'Most of the dances and songs are connected with hunting and seasonal ceremonies . . .' (1963: 368). Thus, although the information provided by Lévi-Strauss is not very detailed, there seems to be enough evidence to establish a correlation between the Nambikuara shaman-leader's political power and his possession and control of life-giving techniques. Clastres, on the other hand, has failed to apprehend the relevance of the life-dispensing ritual operations of Amerindian chiefs. These should be added as a fourth and most essential element to his triad of women, goods and words, thus, altering the balance of asymmetrical reciprocal exchange in favour of the Amerindian chief.

Other Amazonian examples

I hope I have demonstrated that political leadership amongst the Piaroa is embedded in economic processes, particularly in the realm of reproduction, but also in production, distribution and consumption. In the remainder of this



FIGURE 1. Location of the Amazonian societies mentioned in the text.

article I shall present ethnographic data from other Amerindian societies in order to demonstrate that the Piaroa case is not unique. I argue, first, that shamans are political leaders only in those societies in which they are considered to possess and control the mystical means of reproduction and, secondly, that when this is not so, political leadership is exercised by a secular (war) chief or a priestly figure who does possess such knowledge and power. Amazonian societies have undergone and are undergoing a process of deep social change and their political systems have been one of the first areas of their social life to be affected. It should be understood, therefore, that I only claim validity for my argument in the context of traditional Amazonian political economies. I shall begin by discussing two societies (Panare and Barasana) where political leadership, as among the Piaroa, is in the hands of powerful shamans. I shall then discuss three 'belligerent' societies: two which are characterised by the co-existence of powerful war chiefs and prominent shamans in a kind of symbiotic relation (Makuna and Shuara) and a third where political leadership is exercised by a war chief and the office of shaman is unknown (Akwẽ-Shavante). Finally, I shall present the example of a society (Amuesha) in which I have done fieldwork myself, where a priestly figure with political power co-exists with shamans and temporal war leaders (see map for the location of these societies).

(1) *Shaman-leaders*

Panare (Carib; Guiana shield; Venezuela)

Dumont writes that 'although the Panare do make a distinction between shaman (*tukuraxtey*) and headman (*iyan*), the political authority of a headman is legitimised by a religious sanction: his shamanistic initiation' (1978: 38); someone who has 'not yet been initiated as a shaman (is) disqualified . . . as a potential headman' (1978: 99). Accordingly, amongst the Panare we may find local settlements without a headman (when there is nobody with shamanic training), as well as settlements where there are several shamans, but only one is recognised as headman. Henley disagrees with Dumont in this respect, and asserts not only that the Panare have no term for headman, but that, in fact, they have no role of headman as such. According to Henley, the term *i'yan* 'denotes an individual condition rather than a social role' (1982: 137, his emphasis). This remark is consistent with his view of Panare society as an 'atomistic social organisation' characterised by an absence of 'political or economic allegiance' to any individual (1982: 153). This interpretation not only contradicts Dumont's analysis, but also many of the data that Henley himself presents.

Although Henley claims that the Panare shaman 'derives no political or economic power from the services he renders to the community' (1982: 141), he also asserts that though not every settlement leader is a shaman 'many of them are' (1982: 137). Such a contradiction arises, I believe, from the common underestimation of the power of Amazonian leaders, an underestimation which in turn results from the Western paradigms of power and authority as contrastive models. The lack of formal political institutions, visibly coercive means of control, overt commands and the direct organisation of the productive

processes, which Henley emphasises (1982: 136) and which are all characteristic of Western societies, should not lead us to conclude that there is an 'absence of any form of socially integrative political organization' (Henley 1982: 152).

As I have tried to demonstrate for the Piaroa, an individual need not own the material means of production in order to have political power; ownership of the mystical means of reproduction is enough to ensure him an important role in the political affairs of his group. This seems to be the case amongst the Panare. The Panare shaman-leader or *i'yan* is not only an effective healer, but also a powerful mystical warrior who protects the members of his settlement against the attacks of evil beings and enemy sorcerers. In addition to this, he also plays an outstanding religious role as ceremonial leader (Dumont 1978: 112; Henley 1982: 141). According to Henley, apart from the minor dances organised by individual households, the Panare have four major ceremonial dances: the dance of the dead (*pahpëto*); two dances in celebration of subsistence activities (*muran-kinto* and *kaimoyonkonto*); and the male initiation dance (*katayinto*) (1982: 78, 144). The Panare shaman-leader plays a central role in all four of these, as it is he who has the monopoly of the songs that are crucial to all of them (Henley 1982: 141).

Henley is not very precise about the character of these ceremonies, and what exactly is the role of the *i'yan* in them. He only describes at length the male initiation ceremony, while asserting that 'the process of male initiation is linked with the celebration of subsistence activities' (1982: 144). In effect, these three major dances constitute a ceremonial cycle that is celebrated by every local settlement during the dry season every two to three years (Henley 1982: 81). Little is said about the first two dances in celebration of subsistence activities, but Henley provides what I believe is the clue to a plausible interpretation when he says that: 'the songs sung during the *katayinto* (male initiation dance) are not dedicated to the *kaimo*' as are the songs sung in the first two dances' (1982: 146). The *kaimo*' is the smoked game meat wrapped in banana leaves which is the result of the collective hunting efforts of all the male members of the local settlement (1982: 78). Such a ceremonial bundle of meat is partially consumed during the first major dance; it is increased with new supplies during the following weeks until the second dance is performed when 'it is hoisted into the rafters of the house during a special ceremony' (Henley 1982: 79).

From Henley's data it becomes apparent that the *kaimo*' is the central element of the 'subsistence celebrations', and that it is the shaman-leader who is responsible for singing his songs to the ceremonial bundle of game meat. It would not be going too far to suggest, then, that these songs are meant to ensure the future abundance of game and, therefore, to guarantee the success of the hunters of the settlement whose ranks the young initiates will join after undergoing the male initiation rites. This would account for one of Dumont's rather cryptic remarks which he does not explain in his book: 'Whenever big game becomes more scarce, the blame is placed upon the headman, and it is mainly his prestige which is tarnished' (1978: 75).

Barasana (Tukanoan; Northwest Amazonia; Colombia)

As his account of the Barasana is centred on the analysis of the *Yurupary* cult,

Stephen Hugh-Jones does not provide much information about their political organisation, but from the brief description he gives of this subject it is clear that shamans play an important political role in Barasana society. As amongst the Piaroa, shamanic knowledge is not the preserve of a few individuals. Most Barasana men know the spells to treat the less dangerous foods, and the techniques to cure minor ailments (1979: 33). Shamans may therefore be arranged hierarchically, according to their degree of mystical knowledge. From Hugh-Jones's account it seems that the headman of a Barasana *maloca*, or long-house, is one who ranks high in this hierarchy. He asserts that in any one area composed of several *malocas* there are always one or two shamans who are considered to have achieved the highest degree of shamanic knowledge. Such shamans are generally themselves headmen of large and prestigious long-houses, and they are the only ones who have sufficient knowledge and power to perform the most important Barasana ceremony: the *He* House male initiation festival (1979: 36–7, 120). Mandu, the headman of the *maloca* where the Hugh-Joneses carried out their fieldwork was one such shaman (1979: 72).

The *He* House festival is the culmination of a ceremonial cycle that is marked by the organisation of several previous Fruit House ritual celebrations. The most powerful Barasana shamans 'are responsible for the proper conduct and ordering of (all these) rituals' (Hugh-Jones 1979: 40). I argue that it is precisely because of their role as 'masters of ceremonies', and because of their mystical capacities, that Barasana shamans are the leaders of their people. According to Hugh-Jones, the breath of full fledged shamans 'not only has curative and protective power, but also imparts life force . . .' (1979: 32). During the performance of the rituals that constitute the male initiation ceremonial cycle the Barasana shamans blow on the food, the sacred musical instruments, the ornaments and ritual paraphernalia, and the initiates themselves not only to exorcise evil and dangerous forces, but also to impart life force, to ensure fertilisation and abundance, and to guarantee the reproduction of cosmic, social and biological order.

In both the Fruit House and the *He* House rituals the shaman who acts as ceremonial leader blows tobacco snuff into the *He* sacred trumpets. In this way he brings the instruments to life, and his life-giving breath is amplified into a roar when the *He* trumpets are blown during the ceremonies.

The *He* instruments, brought from the forest, breathe life into the house. At Fruit House, this same life-giving ancestral breath is blown from the trumpets over the piles of fruit so that its soul is changed and becomes ripe and abundant, and at the *He* House, it is blown over the initiates themselves to change their souls and turn them into strong adults (Hugh-Jones 1979: 151).

The act of blowing the *He* trumpets over the piles of forest fruits is known as 'encouraging the fruit' (1979: 54), and the Barasana are quite clear that the Fruit House is an increase ceremony intended 'to make the fruit grow and mature so that it ripens in abundance' (1979: 207). On the other hand, by blowing the *He* instruments over the penises of the initiates, the Barasana shamans ensure male fertility. This is also true of female fertility, for it is believed both that the *He* instruments 'open' women's vaginas, therefore, facilitating birth (1979: 123–5),

and that the burning of wax in the *He* House ritual causes menstrual blood to flow (1979: 179).

Hugh-Jones's detailed and complex analysis of the *He* ceremonial cycle in relation to Barasana mythology reveals that the themes of fertility and increase characteristic of the *He* ceremonies are also deeply ingrained in the symbolism of the rituals themselves, and particularly in the contrast between the *He* sacred trumpets owned by the male members of the local settlement, and the gourd of beeswax which only the most powerful amongst the Barasana shamans possess (1979: 163). At the *He* House celebration, these two ritual objects representing the male and female principles are brought together to symbolise

the conjunction of the sexes in reproduction, the conjunction of men and women in productive activities, the conjunction of the two major seasons in an annual cycle, and the conjunction of the Sun and the Sky, the two principles from which the Barasana universe was created (Hugh-Jones 1979: 192).

For this reason, Hugh-Jones asserts that the '*He* House is not simply a rite of initiation; it has also a life-giving and life-ordering function' (1979: 192). At a certain level the *He* rituals manifest the control of women by men who, through their possession of the *He* trumpets and the gourd of beeswax, are able to control fertility by cultural means; but, as Hugh-Jones says: 'at a more general level, it [also] involves the dominance and control over the cosmos through shamanic activity' (1979: 251). It is this dominance and control over the reproductive processes of both society and cosmos which is transformed into political power.

(2) *War chiefs*

Makuna (Tukanoan; Northwest Amazonia; Colombia)

Although the Makuna resemble the Barasana in many respects (they both share a Tukanoan cultural background), Makuna leadership seems to constitute a link between those societies in which the role of shaman and leader converge in a single person, and those in which political leaders have ceremonial functions but are clearly distinguished from shamans. Leaders amongst the Makuna are found at two main levels: the level of the 'residence group', a descent-ordered exogamous social unit, and the level of the 'local or territorial group', a unit 'composed of a cluster of neighbouring residence groups' (Århem 1981: 34). To become a leader at this latter level

a man must combine a series of ascribed and achieved statuses, the minimum number of which are the status of headman and house owner, senior status within a numerically strong and high-ranking sib . . . and, finally, one or more important ritual statuses (Århem 1981: 85).

Amongst the Makuna, then, it is not necessary to be a shaman to become a territorial leader. In fact, Århem regards both roles as separate but complementary: the shaman (*kumu*) in his role as a 'supernatural mediator' and the political leader (*huh* = house owner) in his role as a 'social mediator' (1981: 88).

This is only half the truth, however, for Århem himself stresses the importance of the ceremonial activities of the territorial leader who is the organiser and master of ceremonies of the most important of Makuna rituals: the main *Jurupari*

(*Yurupary*) ritual which 'is held at most once a year in the same territory' (1981: 75). Thus, for instance, Antonio, leader of the lower Komeña group, performed twelve out of twenty-six communal rituals held by the Komeña Makuna, and three out of five of the major *Jurupari* ceremonies held over a period of two years. The rest were performed by less powerful headmen (Århem 1981: 86). The Makuna shamans, like their Barasana counterparts, have an important role in these ceremonies but, in contrast to the latter, they have no control over the ceremonial paraphernalia. While the Barasana shaman-leaders possess the beeswax gourd which is crucial to the performance of the *He* House celebration, the Makuna shamans have no control over the feather headdresses without which the *Jurupari* rituals cannot be performed. These are, instead, possessed by the Makuna territorial headmen.

The career of a Makuna local leader may be seen as an incessant struggle to gain, keep and expand his control over political resources, the most important of which are the ritual property—the ceremonial feather head-dresses—and ritual specialists, both equally necessary for the performance of communal rituals (Århem 1981: 88).

It is clear, then, that amongst the Makuna there is no need to be a shaman in order to become a political leader: it suffices to have control over the ritual paraphernalia and access to the services of a co-operative shaman. This makes an interesting contrast to the Piaroa, the Panare and the Barasana examples where political leadership and shamanic knowledge are ideologically intertwined.

The Makuna consider that the proper performance of the communal ceremonies ensures the well-being of the territorial group. These ceremonies have almost the same ritual effects and symbolic meaning as those performed by the Barasana. They are also associated with the themes of fertility, abundance and increase, and with the perpetuation of social and cosmic order. Without the ritual ornaments the communal ceremonies cannot be held properly and the productive and reproductive life of the territorial group would be endangered (Århem 1981: 85). So important is the control of the mystical means of reproduction that Århem asserts that in the recent past hostilities and raids between different territorial groups only occurred as a result of disputes over women or ritual property (1981: 89). A Makuna leader who loses control over the ritual ornaments or who has no more access to the services of a friendly shaman, has no chance of maintaining his authority.

After providing a detailed account of the relationship between political power and the ownership of ritual paraphernalia, Århem undermines his findings by claiming that the control of ritual life is a 'fragile basis, which in itself does not produce strong leadership or authorize physical coercion' (1981: 85). This might well be true, to a certain extent, with respect to the relationship between a leader and his own followers, but when we consider that the stealing of ritual property is an invitation to war that sets different territorial groups against each other with fatal consequences for both sides, one should be clearer as to what is meant by 'lack of strong leadership and physical coercion.' Political leadership in lowland South America is more clearly manifested in intergroup than intragroup relations, and in this context the Makuna are far from having a 'weak' leadership.

Shuara (Jivaroan; Western Amazonia; Ecuador)

Amongst the Shuara (better known in the literature as Jivaro) 'about one out of every four adult men is a shaman' (Harner 1973: 123). In any given locality shamans (*uwišin*) are organised hierarchically into one of two 'guilds' according to the nature of their predominant activities; thus, there is always one guild of curing shamans, and one of bewitching ones (1973: 124). Lesser shamans buy their mystical power in the form of magical darts (*tsentsak*) from more powerful shamans; the highest ranking amongst these 'often wield considerable power in the neighborhood' (Harner 1973: 117). Harner is not, however, very precise with respect to the nature of this power, and the evidence he presents suggests that their power as leaders is limited to the 'guilds' or 'secret partnerships' into which the shamans of any given locality are organised: 'often a single shaman is the formally recognized leader of all the shamans in a specific neighbourhood' (1973: 123).

In this sense, and in spite of the fact that Harner points to the absence of a formal political organisation (1973: 111) and even of a proper chiefdom (1973: 170), it could be said that the *kakaram*, or powerful Jivaro warrior, is closer to what could be defined as a political leader than the high-ranking local shamans. In effect, despite the fluctuating nature of his authority, which is greatly enforced in times of war and seriously diminished in times of peace (Harner 1973: 185), the *kakaram* has great influence in the political affairs of his locality *vis-à-vis* other neighbourhoods. This is especially true of intertribal disputes, which frequently lead to the organisation of a war expedition.

The prestige of the *kakaram* is based on his abilities as a warrior, and the number of enemies he has killed. Once a man has gained a reputation as a 'great killer' by frequently participating in the revenge raids organised by his relatives and allies, he himself is in the position of organising one such raid and eventually of acquiring the status of war chief respected not only by his friends but also by his foes (Harner 1973: 112). Successive killings not only enhance the reputation of a man as a warrior, but also endow him with 'additional supernatural power' (Harner 1973: 112). This is achieved through the ceremonial cycle involving the *tsantsa* or shrunken head trophies. According to the Jivaro, in order to be a warrior a man must obtain an *arutam* soul through a vision quest. Later on, with each killing, the successful warrior is able to 'accumulate power through the replacement of old *arutam* souls with new ones' (Harner 1973: 141). He is also able to generate life-giving mystical power and to transfer it to the women of his extended kindred. The Jivaro believe that the killing of an enemy releases his *muisak* or 'avenging soul' (Harner 1973: 143). They remove and shrink the heads of their enemies to neutralise the *muisak* soul of the dead as well as to utilise and re-direct its power (Harner 1973: 146). This is achieved by shrinking the head of the dead warrior and capturing within it his avenging soul. Once the power of the *muisak* soul has been thus contained, it may be transferred to the women of the victorious warrior's kindred in a ceremony that is held shortly after the successful raid.

This power, transmitted from the *muisak* to the women through the 'filtering' mechanism of the head-taker, is believed to make it possible for them to work harder and to be more successful in crop production and in the raising of domesticated animals, both of which are primarily the responsibilities of women in Jivaro society (Harner 1973: 146–7).

Arutam soul power has an ambivalent nature: it is destructive in so far as it incites its owner to kill (Harner 1973: 139), but it is also generative in so far as it makes its possessor stronger and immune to death (Harner 1973: 135). *Muisak* soul power, once it has been ritually neutralised, is an eminently life-giving power connected with the fertility of the gardens and the fecundity of domesticated animals.

Only the *ti kakaram*, or very powerful warriors, may accumulate and transfer a large amount of this power. And only someone who has achieved this status and has reached the appropriate age may perform the rituals concerning the shrunken heads as a *wea* or master of ceremonies (Harner 1973: 183). Such a man is prestigious not only for his numerous killings, but for his 'considerable ritual knowledge' (Harner 1973: 193). Harner is not explicit about whether it is necessary to be a local headman in order to be chosen as the master of ceremonies for the rituals that are performed after a war raid carried out by members of any given neighbourhood. But since only the most powerful warriors may become *wea* it seems likely that this task should fall to one or other of the two most powerful political leaders that are to be found in every neighbourhood (Harner 1973: 111). Be that as it may, the fact remains that only the most successful warriors, and amongst them the political leaders of any given locality, may neutralise, capture and transfer the life-giving powers of the *muisak* soul of their dead enemies. I agree with Harner, that it is this which makes Jivaro feuding and head-hunting intelligible; and I would add that it is the control and accumulation of such power that enhances the prestige, and legitimises the political authority of the Jivaro *ti kakaram* or 'very powerful ones'.

Akwē-Shavante (Gê; Central Brazil)

My discussion of leadership in war-like societies would not be complete if I were not to include an example from the Gê-speaking societies of central Brazil amongst which the role of shaman is unknown. I have chosen the Akwē-Shavante, for the detailed ethnography of Maybury-Lewis allows us to trace the connexion between the secular and ceremonial functions of their war leaders. The qualities required of an Akwē-Shavante political leader (*he'a*) are 'self-assertiveness, oratorical skill, athletic prowess and ceremonial expertise' (1974: 198). This last characteristic is, according to Maybury-Lewis, the least important of a leader's capacities (1974: 198), but I believe he has underestimated the significance of the ceremonial activities of the Akwē-Shavante leader. In general terms, chiefs are leaders of settlement factions which are organised on the basis of lineage alignments; there may be two or more factions, but frequently there is one that is dominant and provides the settlement's paramount chief. Such was the case of Apewe, the political leader of São Domingos. These chiefs stand as representatives of their settlements *vis-à-vis* other communities; they direct communal hunts and organise clearing, planting and harvesting activities; they

officiate at ceremonial food distributions; and they hold court and act as arbiters at the daily meetings of the men's council (Maybury-Lewis 1974: 199–201). In addition it is the prerogative of such chiefs 'to make ceremonial arrangements' and to direct the ceremonies for his group (1974: 200). Maybury-Lewis places particular emphasis on the collective character of the ceremonial functions of the Akwē-Shavante leader, and asserts that 'his most important ceremonial functions are those in which he acts as the embodiment of his community as opposed to its constituent factions' (1974: 201). In his role as master of ceremonies he is advised by the community's elders. The Akwē-Shavante have several other ceremonial roles that are filled by individuals other than the chief according to moiety affiliation or age-set membership; but even these other key roles are filled by outstanding members of the chief's lineage (Maybury-Lewis 1974: 193).

The cycle of male initiation rites is the most important collective ceremony of the Akwē-Shavante and the chief plays a central part in its organisation. The cycle starts with the *oi'o* in which the uninitiated boys are painted with red *urucú* paint and are given reddened *um'ra* clubs; the Akwē-Shavante say that this ceremony is meant 'to make the boys strong' (Maybury-Lewis 1974: 241). In effect, the *urucú* paint is believed to have 'beneficial, creative properties' (1974: 241). The *um'ra* clubs, on the other hand, constitute a symbol of manhood and fertility, being as they are a smaller version of the *uibro*, the clubs that only mature men may possess. These latter clubs are used both as weapons and as digging sticks. They are said to represent a human penis and are, therefore, related to concepts of fertility and generative power (Maybury-Lewis 1974: 243). Through the *oi'o* ceremony the boys are believed to incorporate such creative powers. This ceremony is followed by three others (immersion, ear-piercing and ceremonial races) through which the boys are finally initiated into the young men's age-set.

Initiation entitles a man to participate in the most important of Akwē-Shavante ceremonies, the *wai'a* (Maybury-Lewis 1974: 255). There are three types of *wai'a*: one for the sick, one for the arrows, and one for the *wamñōrō da* masks. Women are forbidden to participate in this last type of *wai'a* which constitutes the culmination of the male initiation ceremonial cycle. The ceremony is divided into three stages, the last of which involves the killing of *Simihēpāri*, a forest mystical being who is the paradigmatic Akwē-Shavante hunter (Maybury-Lewis 1974: 264). This last stage of the *wai'a* is clearly an increase ceremony associated with animal resources and the activity of hunting, with the success of men in their roles as hunters and warriors, and with the fertility of both men and women.

The last stage of the *wai'a* for masks starts with a series of dances in which two young men from each moiety imitate the movement of sexual intercourse. The men from one moiety carry the ceremonial arrows (*ti-pe*) while the men from the other carry the phallic emblems (*tsi-uibro*) (Maybury-Lewis 1974: 259–60). This seems to symbolise the creative (fertilising) and destructive (hunting and murdering) aspects of men, the same association as we find amongst the Jivaro where the fiercest warriors are believed to be simultaneously the ones who release the most life-giving power. Following these dances the celebrants of the

wai'a select a woman from each of the clans represented in the settlement, and proceed to have ceremonial intercourse with them in the forest (Maybury-Lewis 1974: 262). They then return to the village where they all dance together. Sometimes before and sometimes after this, the participants run into the forest where they engage in a mock battle with men impersonating *Simihepāri*, the mythical paradigmatic hunter. It is *Simihepāri* who gives the ceremonial arrows and phallic emblems to the *wai'a* celebrants at the beginning of the ceremony (Maybury-Lewis 1974: 262).

Maybury-Lewis interprets this ritual as 'a communication of power to the *wai'a* celebrants' (1974: 266). As in the *oi'o* ceremony there is a conjunction of a creative sexual power represented by the phallic emblems and a destructive aggressive power represented by the ceremonial arrows. The Akwē-Shavante receive from *Simihepāri* the generative and destructive powers which are thought to be the essence of manhood (Maybury-Lewis 1974: 269). I would add that the ceremonial intercourse that takes place in the forest, and the killing of *Simihepāri*, the master of hunters, also associates this ritual with human and animal fertility and the abundance of game. Thus, the *wai'a* ceremony constitutes another example of the ideological battle between humans and the personified environment.

(3) Priestly leaders

Amuesha (Arawak; Western Amazonia; Peru)

Political leadership amongst the *Amuesha* was in the hands of the *cornesha*', a priestly figure whose political and moral influence transcended the boundaries of the *Amuesha* local settlements and, frequently, those of the ethnic group itself.⁴ The *Amuesha* ceremonial centres (*puerahua*) were not residential units, but pilgrimage sites visited by a variable number of people from the surrounding settlements. Attendance at the ceremonies carried out at any given centre was a public statement of political allegiance to the officiating *cornesha*'. In this way the *Amuesha* priests removed themselves socially and geographically from the conflicts and petty feuding characteristic of the local settlements, and created a social and moral space of a higher order (Santos Granero 1982).

Local settlements were the loci for the activities of the *pa'llerr*, the *Amuesha* shamans. These were (and still are) healers who sucked pathogenic objects from the bodies of their patients with the aid of *Yachor Coc*, our Mother Coca, and *Yato' Yemats*, Our Grandfather Tobacco, and with the assistance of their personal spirit auxiliaries. Their beneficial ritual practices were mainly performed on behalf of the members of their local settlements who formed their 'cliente'. Thus, they kept watch over their localities, surrounding them with a mystical barrier that had the power to fend off the malignant attacks of both evil beings and shamans from other local settlements. The ambivalent nature of their mystical power and their 'short scope morality' contrasted sharply with the moral nature of the activities of the *cornesha*'. These activities were aimed to solicit the loving compassion (*muereñets*) of the higher divinities—*Yato' Yos*, the supreme creator, and *Yompor Ror*, the present solar divinity—who have the

power to increase the output of the gardens, the number of game animals and the fertility of both women and men.

The Amuesha priest organised large ritual gatherings (*orreñtsopo*) in his temple. When such a gathering was being organised he would summon his followers who would attend the ceremonial centre to perform the different tasks (collective hunting and fishing, cultivation of the centre's gardens, and preparation of food and manioc beer) necessary for such a large enterprise. These festivities lasted several days, during which the celebrants ate, drank manioc beer, and performed *coshamñats* sacred music. The knowledge of the *coshamñats* celebration was stolen from the land of the 'murdered ones' in mythical times; its appearance marked the establishment of harmonious social relations amongst the Amuesha who in the mythical past had wasted themselves in futile struggles and constant murders (Smith 1977). Only those who had received a divine revelation in the form of one of these *coshamñats* sacred songs could lay claim to the status of *cornesha*'.

During the celebrations at the ceremonial centres the Amuesha priests directed prayers to the higher divinities to ensure the health and well-being of their followers. The *cornesha*' solicited the 'blessing' of the divinities who shared with the Amuesha their vital breath (*pa'ïoreñ*) and vital strength (*po'huamenc*). This was accomplished through the ritual offering of manioc beer, which was placed on the upper floor of the temple, or outside on an eastward-facing altar-like structure, and left there for a whole night. By ritually blowing over the consecrated manioc beer at sunrise the Amuesha priest shared with the creator and the present solar divinity that which the latter shared with the Amuesha in mythical times. In this context manioc beer is referred to as 'Our Father's Food'. During this sacrificial act the divinities deprived the consecrated manioc beer of its strength (an act known by the term *a'mchecheñets*), while at the same time infusing it with their divine vital breath (an act known by the term *a'ïoreñets*). When the celebrants consume it they incorporate this divine force within themselves.

The *cornesha*' was seen by his followers as a spiritual guide who, through his correct and moral way of life, was an example of all the Amuesha virtues: consecration to the divinities (*amporeñ*), love and compassion (*morrenteñets*), wisdom (*eñoteñets*), and generosity (*yema'teñets*). He was a peacemaker and mediator when conflicts arose among his followers. In return for these services he had the right to solicit the assistance of his followers for large-scale enterprises such as the construction of the *puerahua*, the large two or three-storied building whose circular plan and conical roof are characteristic of Amuesha religious architecture. He also received gifts and 'tribute' in the form of smoked or dried game meat and fish, coca leaves, and textiles which he would later re-distribute amongst the celebrants. Although his functions were eminently religious, his role as a political leader becomes apparent not only in the arbitration of intragroup disputes, but also in the resolution of intergroup conflicts. Thus, although a *cornesha*' would never intervene directly in warfare, he had the right to appoint temporary war leaders (*açllaraña*) if all other means of settling a conflict had failed.

Conclusions

In his introduction to the second edition of *Kings and councillors*, Rodney Needham points out that Hocart supported his arguments with ethnographic examples from all over the world, 'a notable omission being South America' (1970: xxxvi). I hope this article has begun to fill the gap. There are good reasons to believe that, in this region, political power was traditionally based on a claim to possess the ritual knowledge necessary to guarantee the existence and reproduction of both humankind and its environment. This ritual knowledge, for which I have used the term 'mystical means of reproduction', may take different forms and be manifest in different activities, but in all cases it is assumed to be the monopoly of either shamans, priests or war chiefs, and to be an essential part of productive and reproductive processes. For these reasons we may conclude that political power in Amazonian societies is not only embedded in economic relationships, but that it is economic in nature. Political power and the ritual of production are two sides of the same coin. In addition, the exercise of political power in lowland South America is seen as encompassing the highest of moral purposes: the giving of life. The social and political implications of this are fundamental. First, it means that the power of the Amazonian leader is bounded by the ethical precept that his power is legitimate if, and only if, he is perceived to give more, and more essential things (life), than that which he receives. Secondly, it demands that the exercise of his political authority, at least towards his own followers, must be consistent with the virtues accorded to life-givers: love, generosity and self-control, but also strength, wisdom and determination. Failure to comply with this ethical precept or this expected behaviour (which makes the leader one with the gods) results in a loss of power and moral authority. Political power in the Amazon is based upon the ritual knowledge of life-giving: its exercise is based on the principle of unrestricted generosity and its continuity on the morality of its holders.

NOTES

¹ An exception is Peter Rivière's book, *Individual and society in Guiana*, in which the author explores amongst other things 'the nature of the political economy in Guiana' (1984: 87).

² I am deeply grateful to Dr Joanna Overing for allowing me to quote from some of her unpublished papers and particularly from the manuscript of her new essay on the Piaroa, *Los Wótuha*, which is presently in press. I would also like to thank her and the participants of the Occasional Seminar on Lowland South American Anthropology held at the London School of Economics in March 1985 for their invaluable comments on a previous draft of this article.

³ It should be noted that, according to Overing, everybody may acquire at least some degree of mystical knowledge through the *sariha* ceremony performed by the ruwang for the children and adults of his *itso'de*: 'With this ceremony, and similar ones participated in in later life, the initiate slowly increases his internal beads (of knowledge) (*reu*), the source of his powers as a hunter, a fisherman and later perhaps as a chanter or sorcerer' (1982: 31). This mystical knowledge is different in extent from the shamanistic powers which only very few individuals may attain.

⁴ The last fully established Amuesha priest died in 1956, and although his only disciple attempted to erect his own temple with the aid of his followers, he only succeeded in maintaining it for a brief time. The data for this outline on the Amuesha priest/temple complex come from my doctoral thesis, 'The power of love: the moral use of knowledge amongst the Amuesha of Central Peru,' which is in preparation.

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