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From Prisoner of the Group to Darling of the Gods

An Approach to the Issue of Power in Lowland South America

Fernando SANTOS GRANERO, *From Prisoner of the Group to Darling of the Gods: An Approach to the Issue of Power in Lowland South America*.—There is a certain consensus among Amazonists as to the general lack of political authority wielded by Amerindian leaders. This would be associated to their lack of means of physical coercion. On the basis of an analysis of the political power and authority of the Amuesha priestly leaders of Central Peru, the author suggests that these are neither prisoners of the group, deprived of political authority—as purported by Clastres—, nor darlings of the gods, acting as petty tyrants—as asserted by Lowie. Though the religious factor is crucial to the potential increase of the political power of Amerindian leaders—providing elements of coercion other than physical—it is not enough to account either for the political authority of the Amuesha priests or for the eventual emergence of state formations.

La polygynie peut s'interpréter de la même manière: au-delà de son aspect formel de don pur et simple destiné à poser le pouvoir comme rupture de l'échange, se dessine une fonction positive analogue à celle des biens et du langage. Le chef, propriétaire de valeurs essentielles du groupe, est par là même responsable devant lui, et, par l'intermédiaire des femmes il est en quelque sorte le prisonnier du groupe.

P. CLASTRES 1974: 42.

Nevertheless, equalitarianism recedes when confronted with putative supernatural favour. The very same men who flout the pretensions of a fellow-brave grovel before a darling of the gods, render him "implicit obedience and respect".

R. H. LOWIE 1967 (1948): 87.

The 1948 publication of Lowie's reknown essay on the political organization of the American Indians marks the emergence of a consensus among many Americanist scholars as to the general lack of

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power wielded by Indian leaders.¹ According to Lowie, the typical American chief—which he places in the category of titular chiefs—“may enjoy social standing, but [. . .] lacks sovereignty” (1967: 73). In contrast, strong chiefs “possessing unquestioned authority” (*ibid.*: 71) are rarer and tend to enjoy such power only temporarily as required for the completion of specific activities: large-scale productive tasks, collective ceremonies and war raids (*ibid.*: 79). Lowie concentrated his analysis on the predominant titular chiefs and concluded that their most important leadership attributes were their capacity to be skillful peace-makers, generous dispensers of goods, and eloquent orators (*ibid.*: 73-75).

In a similarly well-known essay on the philosophy of Amerindian chieftainship published in 1962 Clastres, following Lowie's lead, asserted that “the most remarkable property of the Indian chief consists of his almost complete lack of authority” (1974: 26).² Clastres agreed with Lowie's characterization of the constitutive traits of Indian leadership, but added another element: the privilege of polygny (*ibid.*: 29). Furthermore, he distinguished the function of “professional appeaser” from the other three attributes of Indian leadership which he understood were not functions, but were rather constitutive elements of the flow of prestations and counterprestations established between the leader and his followers: the former exchanging goods and words for women provided by the latter. Clastres pointed out that the “values” exchanged—words, goods and women—are precisely those which, according to Lévi-Strauss, gave origin to society and therefore mark the passage from nature to culture.³ Thus, the political as the social relation appears, at first view, as based on reciprocal exchange.

Clastres contended, however, that the meagre goods and daily harangues provided by the chief do not represent an equivalent compensation for the women the group bestows on him. The flagrant asymmetry of this exchange “places the political sphere not only as external to the structure of the group, but as its negation: power is against the group, and the rejection of reciprocity, as the ontological dimension of society, is the rejection of society itself” (*ibid.*: 38). According to Clastres, it is the negative character of the relation between leaders and followers, as well as its “externality”, which accounts for the “impotence of the political function” (*ibid.*). In essence, Clastres argues that the very externality of the political with respect to culture and society, allows power to be identified with nature. This in turn renders power as a potential threatening to that which culture represents. Paradoxically, according to Clastres, to neutralize this threat Amerindians establish power relations whose negative essence is self-evident. By bestowing their most essential values—women—on their chiefs, Amerindians place the latter in the position of debtors and stress their “dependence with respect to the group”. By demanding in exchange only goods and words—elements clearly linked with the establishment of peaceful relations—followers oblige their leaders to constantly manifest “the innocence of [their] function” (*ibid.*: 41). It is in this sense that the Amazonian chief appears as a sort of prisoner of the group.

There are several common elements between Lowie's and Clastres' papers. To start with, both authors owe much of their reading of indigenous power relations to Lévi-Strauss' essay on the social and psychological aspects of chieftainship among the Nambikuara of Brazil (1944). Lévi-Strauss was one of the first to stress "the small amount of authority enjoyed by the chief", in addition to the fact that "the chief has no coercitive power at his disposal" (1967: 51-53). Lowie's and Clastres' contention about the lack of sovereignty or authority of the Amerindian chiefs is also based upon this latter consideration.⁴ This, in turn, derives from the fact that the three authors adopted Radcliffe-Brown's 1940 narrow definition of political organization as "the maintenance or establishment of social order, within a territorial framework, by the organized exercise of coercive authority through the use, or the possibility of use, of physical force" (1978: XIV).

A third common denominator between these authors is that they all left aside the question of the relation between politics and religion when discussing the characteristics of Indian leadership. Lowie and Clastres did not consider at all magico-religious knowledge or ceremonial expertise among the generalized attributes of the Amerindian leaders, while Lévi-Strauss, referring to the specific case of the Nambikuara chiefs, argued that "whenever they exist, magical functions are only secondary attributes of the leader" (1967: 55).

This omission is hard to explain insofar as in the same work in which Radcliffe-Brown suggested that the exercise of physical coercion was the diacritical element in the definition of political power, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard—the editors—contended that: "sacred symbols, which reflect the social system, endow it with mystical values which evoke acceptance of the social order that goes far beyond the obedience exacted by the secular sanction of force" (1978: 17-18). Expanding on this subject the authors asserted that: "If we study the mystical values bound up with kingship in any of the societies of Group A (i.e. state societies), we find that they refer to fertility, health, prosperity, peace, justice—to everything, in short, which gives life and happiness to a people" (*ibid.*: 18). As I have attempted to demonstrate elsewhere (Santos Granero 1986a), these symbols and values, under the form of life-giving mystical knowledge and powers, are crucial components in the construction of power and authority in the Amazon basin. This would hold true whether we are talking of settlement headmen, war chiefs, shaman-leaders or priestly leaders.

Lowie and Clastres did not totally dismiss this association between politics and religion, but in what appears to have been a non-explicit agreement with Fortes and Evans-Pritchard they only considered it in the context of state formations. In fact, both Lowie and Clastres imputed the emergence of coercive power and, thus, of state societies to the manipulation of self-attributed supernatural or mystical capacities. The former suggested that the awe which surrounded the prophets or darlings of the gods "formed the psychological basis for more complex political developments" such as the appearance of the state formations (Lowie 1967: 84-87). Clastres asserted, in turn, that: "In the

discourse of the prophets one may find in embryonic form the discourse of power and under the exalted traits of the conductor of men [. . .] one may find in disguise the silent figure of the Despot”, and asked whether it is in the prophetic discourse that we are bound to find “the beginning of the state within the word” (1974: 186).

This stance, which views the possession of mystical capacities as a way to the development of state formations and the Indian prophet or priest as a potential despot, contradicts the authors’ own definitions of political power, insofar as there is no evidence whatsoever that this type of Amerindian leaders had at their disposal physical means of coercion which their supposedly secular counterparts did not possess. If the authors admit, as they do, that these religious leaders had real or unquestioned political power, while not having the means of physically coercing their followers, we must conclude that their definition of political authority is too narrow and that there are other means of exacting obeisance than the mere use of physical force.

In the present article I shall explore these other means as illustrated by the example of the *cornesha*’, the former politico-religious leader of the Amuesha, an Amerindian society of the Central Peruvian lowlands. I shall contend that the *cornaneshas*’⁵ power, authority and influence derived from their possession both of key mystical means of reproduction, and of divine messages essential for the attainment of immortality. The use of these means and messages on behalf of the collectivity, together with the strict monogamy of the *cornesha*’ priestly leaders, redresses the traditional asymmetry which, according to Clastres, characterizes the relationship between Amerindian leaders and their followers, and eliminates the ideological argument upon which the political function is rendered impotent. I shall also analyze the causal factors that explain the emergence of the kind of unquestioned authority held by priests and prophets. Moreover, I will critically assess Lowie’s and Clastres’ assertion that it is this type of power which gave birth to state formations. Finally, I shall present a few reflections on the issue of the emergence of the state which I hope may open new ways of looking at old topics.

Outline of the Amuesha political system

Classical definitions of political system, political unit or political organization, as those expounded in *African Political Systems* (1940), are generally built upon notions of leadership and power.⁶ This is quite clear in Radcliffe-Brown’s definition which privileges the use of physical force; but is also true of Wagner’s definition, who suggests that: “In so far as the concept of the political unit involves the notion of power and authority, it would have to be defined as constituting that group of people which submits persistently and in an organized manner to leadership for the purpose of maintaining itself as a unit” (1978: 199). If it is true that relations of leadership, power and authority are important

components of a political system, it is also true that they do not account for what a political system is about, but rather for what it looks like. Paraphrasing Lucy Mair's reflections on "primitive government" (1962: 16), I would suggest that rather than asking: what ought a political system to look like?, we must ask what does a political system do? or what is a political system?

It is for this reason that I prefer Schapera's wider definition of political organization, which he sees as a "total organization which is concerned with the establishment and maintenance of internal cooperation and external independence" (in Mair 1962: 20). Thus, the essence of a political system depends on ensuring the proper conditions of reproduction for the individual members of the political unit as much as for the political unit itself. This entails not only the maintenance of social harmony and the defence of the political unit, but also the ensurance of the success of the productive and reproductive activities undertaken by the collectivity. In stateless societies this latter aim is achieved, as I have suggested, through mystical means (Santos Granero 1986a: 658). Accepting this definition, we may assert that in Amuesha society priests were responsible, directly or indirectly, for all of the functions characteristic of the political system, though they shared some of them with other characters of the Amuesha formal political scene—mainly shamans, war leaders and local headmen.

The Amuesha are an Arawak-speaking people who live in the eastern forest-covered slopes of the Central Andes of Peru. Their settlement pattern before the 1960's was dispersed. The extended family under the direction of an elder member was the basic social unit. Small clusters of extended families, frequently interrelated by links of kinship and affinity and occupying well-delimited areas, were sometimes—but not always—organized around a local headman—whom in the 17th and 18th century chronicles appear under the title of *curacas* and in the late 19th and early 20th century accounts were known as *captains*. These local groupings frequently contained one or more shamans (*pa'llerr*) who used their healing capacities on behalf of their collectivity and their bewitching powers against similar but rival units. In times of violent conflict war leaders (*amcha'tarēt*) emerged or were appointed. Their power was temporary. The political system was not institutionalized and there was no central political instance with authority over the entirety of the Amuesha people.

The only indigenous supra-local authorities were the *cornaneshas*, the Amuesha politico-religious leaders.⁷ These were priests who officiated in temples located in the interstices of the Amuesha socio-geographical space and who, for that reason, were above the conflicts and petty disputes characteristic of the local groupings. Subjected to a similar training as that of shamans, priests differed from the latter both in the range of their moral influence and in the kind of the aural revelation they sought. While shamans sought a revelation from the masters of the different plants and animals, priests expected a revelation from the higher divinities or from the *mellañōieñ* lesser spirits (see Santos Granero 1986b, 1991). These deities and spirits revealed to the would-be

or already established priest divine messages or sacred *coshamñats* songs, which he in turn transmitted to his followers. Temple sites had the character of ceremonial or pilgrimage centres. Only the priest, his extended family, and some disciples lived in these centres. Devout followers visited them when summoned by the residential priest for the observance of religious ceremonies.

Followers of a particular priest came from different local groupings, some having to walk several days to reach the ceremonial centre. Regular attendance at a ceremonial centre was indicative of one's political allegiance to the centre's officiating priest. Followers of a particular priest could not attend the religious festivities conducted in another ceremonial centre unless they were led there by their own priest in a formal visit. Attendance at another centre marked an individual's desire to change political allegiances.

Amuesha priests carried out all of the functions characteristic of a political system, that is, the ensurance of: 1) internal order, harmony and cooperation; 2) external independence; and 3) the success of the productive and reproductive activities of the political unit. In the following paragraphs I support this assertion through the use of ethnographic information. Usually the responsibility of synthesizing and presenting such information falls upon the ethnographer. In this occasion and in order to have a more direct view of the Amuesha politico-religious system I shall resort to the informants' own recorded words. I recognize, however, that the action of translating already constitutes a kind of filter, and that the selection and ordering of portions of the interviews also allows for a certain bias. The multiple meanings of most of the central concepts of Amuesha religious discourse have been discussed elsewhere (Santos Granero 1991). The interested reader may turn to that work for a discussion of the complex concepts embodied in these quotes.

As to the first point—the ensurance of social harmony—Chomñ, a man who was 55 to 60-years-old in 1984, declared that priests “had to teach us how to behave correctly”; and added that his father—a *cornesha* named Espereto—used to admonish his people with the following words: “Listen to Yompor Ror, Our Father the Sun, and have good thoughts. Do not entertain bad thoughts. Otherwise you shall not have a long life. You must lead a correct life, so that you shall be all right.” In Amuesha thought to lead a correct life is, firstly, to abide by the principles of unrestricted generosity and generalised reciprocity and, secondly, to establish harmonious or friendly relations with as wide a range of people as possible. Chomñ said that priests had to be and generally were good-tempered men and that it was because of this quality that “they could tell their followers not to hate each other”. And he added:

When Pashco, my quarrelsome [classificatory] father, got angry, my father [Espereto] admonished him in the following terms: “Do not get angry. It is not due to your own strength that you stand on your feet [and] that you live. If it were not for Yompor Ror you would have no life with which to live.” That is how he used to admonish him. Then he would stop quarrelling for a while.

Priests also admonished and, with the consent of their parents, sanctioned disobedient or rebellious adolescent boys and girls. Sanctions included seclusion, dietary restrictions, vigils, the consumption of tobacco brew—meant to make the children vomit and thus purify their bodies—and reprimands *qua* sermons delivered by the officiating priest.

As to the issue of internal cooperation, according to Choñ, when his father's followers congregated at his ceremonial centre the former told them:

“If you want to solicit Yompor Ror's blessing we then have to work together, so that we can help each other”. Those who agreed to work together formed teams of four or six persons who helped each other. When they finished sowing one garden, they left in order to help another member of the team. After helping each other they returned home.

According to other reports, priests also organized collective hunting and fishing expeditions to provide meat for the centre's festivities, as well as the building of the temple, while their wives organized and led collective gathering parties, as well as the collective sowing, weeding and harvesting of the centre's gardens, and the preparation of food and manioc beer for the temple's celebrations. From these remarks it becomes evident that priests were not only talented peacemakers and arbitrators, thus ideally guaranteeing social harmony, but also fostering internal cooperation.⁸

As to the function of ensuring external independence, informants are agreed that though priests did not participate directly in military actions, they did have an important indirect participation in them. In the first place, war leaders (*amcha'tarēt* = “those who are strong and instill fear”) were generally appointed by the *cornesha'*, and acted as their “generals”. In the second place, priests prayed for a successful outcome of the confrontations. Referring to his grandfather, *cornesha'* Tsachopeñ⁹, Totsoper, a man who in 1984 was 70 to 80-years-old, declared:

When my late grandfather waged war against the Whites only the warriors fought [. . .] the *cornesha'* did not fight. They did not participate in wars except for praying. [. . .] When people organized a raid to kill the Whites, only the warriors participated; all of those who were the warriors of my grandfather, the late Tsachopeñ.

Priests were also in charge of what we could call the sphere of diplomatic relations: they acted as hosts to foreign visitors from neighbouring societies as well as to other priests who came with their followers in a formal visit to their ceremonial centres.

With respect to the third function, that of guaranteeing the success of the productive and reproductive activities of the collectivity, Choñ's words are illustrative:

We adored Yompor Ror, Our Father the Sun, by offering and sharing with him manioc beer and the mashed manioc used to prepare it. The *cornesha'* placed the

manioc beer in a small ritual armchair [or altar-like structure] and solicited Our Father's blessing so that the manioc yield would increase; so that manioc would not become scarce; so that it would not abandon us. After adoring him, the *cornesha'* withdrew the manioc beer from the ritual armchair and started singing and dancing in praise of the divinities to the sound of the sacred *coshaññats* music. [. . .] Afterwards he prayed. He prayed to Yompor Ror so that he would continue to dispense his life-giving breath and ensure the abundance and fertility of the earth, plants, animals and people.

In the eloquent words of Huepo, a woman who in 1984 was about 70 to 80-years-old:

In those times they used to pray to the sacred fires. When they were afraid because of the threat of heavy rains or floods, priests asked their followers to prepare manioc beer. They then adored Our Father the Sun and dry weather came back. They did so whenever they were afraid or sad. Thus it was that priests listened to Our Father; thus it was that they said they talked with Our Father. That is what all of them did.

The sacred fires mentioned by Huepo spontaneously appeared in the forest without human intervention, and as such were considered portents of Our Father the Sun (*Yompor po'yorochen*). These fires were taken to the ceremonial centres, where they were constantly kindled. Through the mystical ensurance of the fertility of the land, the fecundity of animals and human beings, and of propitious climatic conditions priests participated directly in the productive and reproductive processes carried out by their followers. In sum, these reports confirm the political character of the Amuesha priest's activities.

Amuesha priests and the character of Amazonian leadership

If we accept Clastres' view of the political relation as a relation of exchange between leaders and followers one could agree with him that in the Amazon basin the main values exchanged are goods and words provided by leaders in exchange for the right of polygyny, i.e. women furnished by the group.¹⁰ However, as I have argued elsewhere (1986a: 666-667) the possession of mystical means of reproduction by most of the Amazonian leaders adds a fourth element to this relation of exchange which: 1) breaks the balance that, according to Lévi-Strauss (1967: 59), results from the symmetrical reciprocity that characterizes the relationship between Nambikuara chiefs and their followers; and 2) shifts the weight—in favour of the Amerindian leader—of the asymmetrical reciprocity which, according to Clastres (1974: 35), characterizes the relation between leaders and followers in the region. In the following paragraphs I shall demonstrate, that this is even more true in the Amuesha case, insofar as the *cornanesha'* were generous dispensers of goods, words and ritual actions without at the same time benefitting from the privilege of polygyny enjoyed by most Amazonian leaders.

According to oral accounts, the *cornanesha*' priestly leaders had the obligation of being *amueraña*. This term refers to the quality of kind and loving generosity which, according to the Amuesha, is characteristic of the dominant partner in any hierarchical relation. When asked whether followers had to bring presents to his father, *cornesha*' Tsachopeñ, Totsoper answered:

There were some who brought nothing. Those who came from Anetso brought well dried coca leaves. Others brought dried meat or fish. [. . .] After the *cornesha*' received these things he prayed and thanked Our Father until dawn. Next day he distributed the meat, fish and coca leaves amongst those of his followers who were present. Afterwards they all ate. He could not say: "I shall eat all this alone". He counted how many followers were present so that all of them could eat of the offerings presented to Our Father.

Presents brought by followers appeared as offerings to the deities. Priests were responsible for the redistribution of these offerings amongst all the participants of the celebration. Though they kept a portion for themselves, generosity was the sign of their office.

Oratorical skill was another fundamental trait of Amuesha leadership. To the question as to what was the most important attribute of the *cornanesha*', Huepo said that it was the fact that "they mastered many good words with which they taught their followers". Choñ confirmed this remark:

Priests were not quarrelsome, they were good. They had to know *coshaññats* sacred songs. They had to know how to talk in order to teach us how to behave correctly. They had to admonish their people. [. . .] Even if he was a short man like everybody else (sic), if he had words to express and he expressed his words nicely, then people used to say: "You are going to be *cornesha*'. You express your words nicely."

Words, *ñoñets*, whether under the form of speeches, sermons, admonitions, prayers or songs, were omnipresent features in the exercise of the politico-religious authority of the Amuesha priests. Persuasive words, pedagogic words, hard words, beseeching words; words spoken and words sung. It was in this world of words that the political and moral power of the priests was firmly anchored. Dominating among these words were, as we shall see, the sacred messages revealed to the *cornesha*' by the divinities.

As already stated, the generous dispensation of goods and words by the *cornesha*' was not, however, compensated by the right to polygyny typical of Amerindian political leaders. This does not mean that polygyny was unknown among the Amuesha. As a matter of fact, shamans as well as other prestigious men could (and to some extent still do) marry several women. Priests, however, did not on the basis of religious considerations. In effect, sexual abstinence or moderation, together with other ascetic practices, were considered as facilitating the devoted man's contact with the divine sphere. Totsoper's remarks with respect to this point are very clear:

My father, who was a *cornesha*', had only one wife. All the priests I met had only one wife. I heard that in Metraro there was a priest who had five wives; others had

four, others three. [. . .] In the area of Oxapampa we did not have that. The *cornesha*' had only one wife. That is why he summoned his male and female followers so that they would help him to open, sow, weed and harvest his gardens.

Choñ confirmed Totsoper's assertions: "The *cornanesha*' of past times [. . .] did not have more than one wife. In contrast, in the area of Metraro priests had five wives." From these remarks it appears that the Amuesha priests were generally monogamous, notwithstanding those of Metraro who appear to have been rather an exception. These latter priests were of mixed Amuesha and Asháninca descent. This was possible, firstly, because Metraro was at the frontier between the territories of these two Arawak-speaking peoples. Secondly, because of the mixing that took place between segments of both peoples when Juan Santos Atahuallpa, the messianic and anticolonial rebel of the 18th century, established his headquarters in the area.

The priest/temple complex which emerged in Metraro differed in a fundamental way from its Amuesha counterpart. Priests of Metraro like Senyachshopañ—"Santiago el barbudo" or "James the bearded"—are said to have been warlike and authoritarian. In the political landscape of the memories of my informants the priests of Metraro appear as the antithesis of those considered to be typically Amuesha. It is unclear, however, whether the traits developed by the priests of Metraro were inherent to the Amuesha politico-religious system or whether they were modifications introduced by the more warlike Asháninca.

The possession of life-giving mystical capacities and powers tipped the balance of the exchange relationship between leaders and followers on behalf of the former. The *cornanesha*'s rejection of polygyny deepened the asymmetry of the relation, placing followers as debtors—rather than creditors, as Clastres would have it—of their priestly leaders. For this reason, the Amuesha priests were seen as performing for the collectivity more, and more essential, services than those that the collectivity performed on their behalf, i.e. construction of the temple, collaboration in agricultural tasks, the giving of presents, etc.

Amuesha priests were perceived as generous dispensers of goods, words and ritual actions on behalf of the collectivity while asking less of it in return. I would suggest that it was this ideological representation which endowed the moral authority of the priests with a much greater mobilizing power than the authority derived from the control of means of physical coercion. The apparent material disinterestedness of the Amuesha priests enforced their moral position, endowing their requests with the quality of orders, rendering their summons almost unquestionable, and allowing them to exact more obeisance from their followers than the typical Amazonian leader. In brief, it is as if in the Amazon basin the renunciation of the prerogative of polygyny became the only way to accumulate power. In other words, it is as if priests renounced the sensual, but innocent pleasure derived from the right of polygyny in exchange for the more cerebral, but also more wilful pleasure derived from the practice of unquestioned power.

The religious factor in the construction of unquestioned power

After reviewing a large corpus of ethnographic information on what the author called titular and strong chiefs, and after verifying their lack of political power, Lowie goes on to argue that it is the religious factor which accounts for the potential increase of the political power of the Amerindian leaders and indeed for the eventual appearance of the state. Lowie argued that this is particularly true of the Amerindian prophets or messiahs similar to those found among the Tupi-Guarani and concluded that: "Assume the urge to leadership, as found by Lévi-Strauss in the Mato Grosso, to be combined with an awe-inspiring supernatural sanction, and the way is clear to a formative stage on the way toward a government by divine right" (Lowie 1967: 86).

Although Clastres' characterization of the Tupi-Guarani prophets differs markedly from that of Lowie, his conclusions are very similar. Clastres (1974: 183) suggested that the emergence of prophets among the Tupi-Guarani of Brazil is best understood as an attempt to neutralize the increasing political power of secular chiefs. The prophets' fight against the evil that supposedly permeated social life, their millenaristic discourse and their search for the Land Without Evil were interpreted by Clastres as key elements in the struggle that the Tupi-Guarani society waged against the coercive power of their chiefs and against the possibility of emergence of state structures. In fact, Clastres asserted that the evil against which the Tupi-Guarani prophets were struggling was the state. Clastres concluded, however, that: "due to a strange twist of things, the insurrectional act of the prophets against the chiefs bestowed the former with infinitely more power than the latter ever had" (1974: 185).

Like their Tupi-Guarani peers, the Amuesha priests were prophets who enunciated a discourse of millenaristic salvation. This led neither to the appearance of a despotic kind of authority nor to the emergence of an elementary form of state apparatus. According to Queñfoya, the grandson of the late *cornesha*' Meclleñ, who in 1984 was about 55 to 60-years-old, priests told their followers:

that Yompor Ror, Our Father the Sun, was about to come. They said that we should lead a correct life, so that when Our Father arrives and finds out that we have been behaving correctly he shall express his love and compassion for us. It was for this reason that we visited the *cornesha*' and that we sang and danced at his ceremonial centre. We used to go there because Our Father was about to appear.

And referring to his grandfather he added:

He listened to Our Father. Before building his temple he had heard the *mellañoïeñ* spirits that dwell in the hills. That is why he told us that Our Father was about to come. He said that we were going to become [immortal] like the *mellañoïeñ* spirits. That is why the people used to go to the ceremonial centre to visit the *cornesha*'. They went so that they could also see Our Father.

The content of the divinely revealed messages and songs revolved around the hope for attaining salvation. The latter, as becomes evident from the above quote, found expression in the achievement of the state of immortality, a condition that was lost after the ascension of Yompör Rör to the heavens at the beginning of the present social era.

According to the Amuesha, salvation shall be announced by a messiah of divine origin. Juan Santos Atahualpa, the 18th century rebel of Andean origin, was considered one such messiah and has been registered in Amuesha oral tradition as Yompör Santo. The Amuesha priests, as becomes evident from the following quote, appeared as prophets who proclaimed the imminent arrival of the divine messiah, as well as the imminent end of the world. This latter event would be preceded by the arrival of Our Father the Sun to this earth. According to Queñfoya:

It was the end of the world that worried the *cornaneshá*'. They had heard that the end of the world was imminent, and that we had to build a temple so that Yompör Rör may come. The earth was going to tremble like in ancient times. For this reason they said that we had to build a temple where we would be saved. [. . .] They said that we had to devote ourselves to Our Father the Sun in the temple, so that when the end of the world arrived we might be saved there. Then, when we mortal beings see Our Father we shall stop dying. That is what worried them: to build temples everywhere, to practice vigil in wait for the day Our Father would arrive.

The millenaristic hope and the imminence of its fulfilment imbued the discourse of the Amuesha priests with an urgency and a mobilizing power over their followers never enjoyed by the Amuesha shamans, local headmen or war chiefs. However, this authority was based on a consensus about the credibility of the priests' words and could only be maintained insofar as that consensus persisted. In effect, power predicated on the promise of imminent salvation cannot be maintained for a very long time; once the promise is not fulfilled, the legitimacy of the priest is undermined and his power reduced. There were many excuses that a priest could muster in order to explain the failure of his search for salvation, e.g. the arrival at the temple of someone who had "bad thoughts"; the desecration of the temple by people who slept in it or who entered into the sacred taboo areas; the incapacity of the priest or his followers to resist sleep while in search for a divine revelation; their failure in recognizing the visiting solar divinity, etc. However, the effectiveness of this kind of arguments could have only been temporary. The recurrence of such justifications probably resulted in the progressive erosion of the consensus upon which the priests' power was founded. This partially explains both why some priests had large followings whereas others had very few followers, and why the following of a particular priest waxed and waned with the passage of time.

We may then conclude that due to the generous dispensation of goods, words, ritual actions and prophetic promises, together with the renunciation of the privilege of polygyny, the Amuesha priests were able to accumulate a much greater

amount of power than the typical Amerindian leader. Though the *cornaneshá* did not have the means to enforce their admonitions, summons and requests, their moral influence was usually enough to exact obeisance from their followers. This is expressed in what the Amuesha considered to be the appropriate attitude of followers with respect to their priests. Smith (1977: 239) suggested that this combined three feelings or sentiments: *morrenteñets* or love/compassion, *mechaneteñets* or fear/respect, and *ame'ñeñets* or faith/obedience. The first of these terms refers to the reciprocal and symmetrical love/compassion felt between two parties in either a hierarchical or an egalitarian relation. The second refers to the fearful respect or reverential fear—similar to the feeling expressed by the English term “awfulness”—felt by young people with respect to their elders, by followers with respect to their priestly leaders, and by men with respect to the divinities. The third concept, *ame'ñeñets*, is more complex. According to Smith, it might be rendered as both “to believe in” and “to obey” and it is associated with the discourse of power. In effect, the term implies obedience to the commands and faith in the teachings of a superordinate party (*ibid.*: 240).

The use of the latter concepts to express the appropriate attitude of followers allows us to assert that although the power of the priests was not based upon the potential use of physical force, it nevertheless resembled certain aspects of what we would expect of power within state societies. However, there were two important limitations to the exercise of this power. The first was that in spite of the existence of a term for order (*yecheñets*) reminiscent of its meaning in the West, the discourse of power had to be disguised through the language of reciprocity where orders were either phrased as an invitation (*menqueñets*) to do something or as the giving of permission (*llesens*) to do something.

The second limitation was that the hold of the priests' power could not be maintained for long periods of time. In effect, the power of the *cornaneshá* remained unquestioned as long as they could maintain alive the hope for salvation and the idea that the end of the world was imminent. The permanent establishment of Franciscan missionaries in Amuesha territory and the subsequent subjection of the Amuesha people in the first half of the 18th century provided favourable conditions for the development of such messianic hopes and prophetic power. This situation crystallized in 1742 in the messianic revolt led by Juan Santos Atahuallpa, which resulted in the expulsion of the Spaniards from the region. Similar conditions obtained during the last quarter of the 19th century, when the Amuesha territory was re-conquered and their temple-forges destroyed after one hundred years of isolation (Santos Granero 1988); and again in 1947, when an intense earthquake struck the land of the Amuesha persuading the people that the *mellapo*, or “end of the world”, was about to take place. But when these times of crisis were overcome the power of the Amuesha priests probably relapsed into more moderate forms.

Amuesha findings indicate quite clearly that the religious factor cannot by itself explain the emergence of coercive power and of a state apparatus.

Prophetic charisma may certainly enhance the power of the Amerindian leader, but its appeal weakens with the passage of time, rendering it a poor basis for the development of a stable formation. What seemed to happen in the Amuesha case was a sort of constant oscillation in which the political system experienced centripetal and centrifugal forces; a sort of oscillation as that of the *gumsa/gumlao* political structures described by Leach (1954) for the Kachin of highland Burma. This comparison may sound rather outlandish, but the fact is that the Amuesha political system seemed to be, as the *gumsa* system, quite unstable. Leach argued that the *gumsa* political structures became fully intelligible only in reference to the polar types of *gumlao* "democracy" and Shan "autocracy" (1979: 9). In a similar fashion the Amuesha politico-religious system fluctuated between moments in which the priests' power underwent a process of build-up and accumulation, and moments in which it experienced deflation and dispersion; and between moments in which priests enjoyed the moderate kind of authority characteristic of Amerindian leadership in general and those in which they developed a stronger kind of authority which might be understood as prefiguring the appearance of the state.

One such moment of power build-up was the period from 1742 to 1761¹¹, during which time Juan Santos Atahualpa ruled over the Amuesha and segments of the Asháninca as a kind of *super-cornesha*'. Another such instance took place in the years subsequent to the re-occupation of the Amuesha territory in 1847. According to Huepo, on that occasion four important priests gathered their warrior-followers in a joint effort to wage war against the foreign intruders. But their enterprise failed and with it the possibility of an autonomous development of their political structures. From then onwards Amuesha politics was to be thoroughly modified by the colonial situation.

Some reflections on the genesis of state formations

Lowie himself refrained from tracing "in detail the sequence of events that led from Ona 'anarchy' to the close-knit structure known as the Inca state" (1967: 87). He only attempted to demonstrate, through the extensive review of ethnographic data, that the use of armed force by war leaders or military societies had not been enough to lay the foundations for the emergence of a state apparatus, and suggested instead that the crystallization of such an institution could be accounted for by the manipulation of what he called the religious factor. We have seen however, that this element, crucial as it is, is not enough by itself to ensure the stability of unquestioned power.

On this same issue Clastres was similarly vague. As Terray (1989: 16) has quite rightly pointed out, in trying to account for the appearance of the state Clastres proposed two different types of explanation: one philosophical and the other historical. According to the first, the appearance of the state was a "tragic accident", an "irrational event" by which society abandoned itself

to those demons (i.e. inequality, tyranny, etc.) it had constantly rejected. According to the second, the emergence of a centralized power was the result of demographic increase and of population density. Given that Terray has persuasively demonstrated how these two propositions contradict each other, and negate the very principles upon which Clastres' theory rests, I shall not analyze them in more detail.

A third kind of explanation resorts, though not explicitly, to the idea of cultural diffusionism. Clastres himself—offering a third alternative explanation not taken into consideration in Terray's analysis—asserted that unquestioned authority had only been reported in societies located in north-west Amazonia, and suggested that these societies “were linked to a cultural tradition that was closer to the Chibcha and Andean civilizations than to the so-called tropical forest cultures” (1974: 26). This kind of argument had already been put forward by Métraux, who explained the development of priestly roles in some Amazonian societies as the consequence of Inca cultural influence (1949: 575). Though tempting, this explanation is too limited, and does not account for such phenomena as the appearance of prophets amongst the Tupinambá of the Atlantic coast of Brazil, or the development of strong chieftainships amongst the Omagua of the upper Amazon river.

Without attempting to solve the matter, I suggest that perhaps the answer lies in the control by one individual of a kind of power derived from religious millenaristic claims as well as the armed power of a group of warriors. The emergence of a permanent group of warriors subject to the commands of one or more priests, or a group of warrior-priests could have ensured the reproduction and stability of the power construed on the basis of religious charisma. Juan Santos Atahualpa seemed to have achieved that aim appearing simultaneously as a charismatic messiah and an artful military leader who surrounded himself in his Metraro headquarters with both a group of priests and a large personal guard. The authoritarian priests of Metraro reported by the Amuesha informants at the beginning of the present century might have followed this political model inaugurated by Juan Santos two centuries earlier.

There are several indications which suggest that this model was, in fact, developing among the Amuesha: 1) the *cornanasha*' had the authority to appoint war chiefs and had among their followers a group of men who acted as their warriors; 2) all informants agree that priests visited each other regularly and held informal meetings in which religious matters were discussed; 3) the office of *cornasha*' was becoming hereditary and when not so, priests could designate their successor (although the latter had to be approved of by their followers); and 4) after the expulsion of the Spaniards in 1742 many priests adopted the Spanish forging techniques or were associated with smiths, thus, monopolizing the production of highly valued metal tools.¹² In brief, there were signs of the potential constitution of a formalized warrior association and of an institutionalized priestly council. Furthermore, in addition to their possession of key mystical means of reproduction, priests had a direct or indirect control

over indispensable material means of production such as axes, machetes and knives (Santos Granero 1988). Finally, the possibility of designating their sons (biological or classificatory) as their successors, together with the consolidation of the *cornaneshamrey* group—or the group of those who descended from priests—suggests the possible conformation of a lineage-like priestly group which could have eventually monopolized the exercise of political power in Amuesha society.¹³

Though not prisoners of the group, as Clastres would have it, Amuesha priests were neither those darlings of the gods who “tyranically imposed their will” depicted by Lowie (1967: 86). The question remains, however, as to which was the combination of factors that allowed for the genesis of state formations in South America. A new reading of the ethnohistorical and ethnographic information on the above, as well as on other similar, historical experiences could provide us with innovative insights on this important theoretical issue.

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NOTES

1. In the recent past, however, this consensus has been contested thanks, in part, to the emergence of ethnohistorical studies devoted to the understanding of Amazonia's complex riparian societies of the xvth and xvth century (see, for instance, Roosevelt's paper on this issue).
2. All quotations extracted from CLASTRES' book *La Société contre l'État* have been translated into English by the author.
3. I disagree with both Lévi-Strauss and Clastres in considering women as values in an exchange relation. Although in many societies this may well be the view of the social actors, I would argue that it should only be considered as an ideological perception which cannot be taken at face value.
4. LOWIE (1967: 64) asserts: “I shall indeed retain the exercise of force as the criterion of a full-fledged political organization”; while CLASTRES (1974: 40) contends that “coercion is the essence of power”.
5. *Cornanasha'* is the plural form of *cornasha'* = priestly leader.
6. I have chosen *African Political Systems* as a theoretical referent, in spite of the geographical and ethnographic distance that separates it from the Amazon region, insofar as many of the definitions related to politics, power and authority present in that book have been widely accepted in later works of political anthropology.
7. The last fully established *cornasha'* died in 1956 and although his only disciple managed to erect his own temple with the aid of his followers it lasted only a few years. The traits of the Amuesha priest/temple complex depicted here, as the information provided by elderly informants in the following pages, roughly correspond to the period 1900-1940, when this complex was still fully functioning.
8. One could argue that the informants' assertions refer to normative rather than actual behaviour and that, in this sense, they could be considered ideological. It should, however, be borne in mind that ideology is much more than simply a way of mystifying reality—as it has been purported—, and that even though an individual's actual behaviour may deviate from the norm, in the political field it cannot deviate so much as to put into question his or her legitimacy. People have to “live up” to ideology in order to keep power positions.
9. Tsachopeñ was the last priest of the ceremonial centre of Palmaso (in the valley of Oxapampa), where Yompore Yompere, his wife Yachor Mamas, and his two sons were adored by the Amuesha and by many Asháninca visitors under the guise of four large stones. SMITH (1977) has pointed out the similarity between the stones adored in Palmaso and the *huacas* venerated by the Andean peoples. Such a similarity would betray an Andean influence in Amuesha religion.

10. Although I prefer BAECHLER's understanding of power relations "as a tension between two individual or collective wills" (1980: 16) to the "exchangist" stance of Lévi-Strauss or Clastres, I do not entirely disagree with this latter view. Relations of power can be understood—and are ideologically represented—in either way depending on whether the emphasis is placed on their conflictive nature or on their structuring quality. I would contend, however, that the perpetuation of a certain set of power relations can only be guaranteed when the actors involved place greater emphasis on the dimension of exchange rather than on that of tension.
11. The explorer La Combe suggests that Juan Santos died in 1761; other authors, like Carranza, place the date of the Indian leader's death around 1755-1756 (SANTOS GRANERO 1980: 153).
12. These smiths were known collectively as *aïorrañanasha'* and whether they were or not simultaneously priests they were also referred to as *cornesha'*.
13. It must be said, however, that all the informants asserted that it was not indispensable to belong to the *cornaneshamrey* descent group in order to become a priest. Although this was probably true one should not dismiss the prestige of this descent group. In fact, it is no coincidence that most of the top leaders of the Amuesha Federation during the past 23 years were known to belong to the *cornaneshamrey* group.

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RÉSUMÉ

Fernando SANTOS GRANERO, *Prisonnier du groupe ou chéri des dieux : une approche de la question du pouvoir dans les basses terres d'Amérique du Sud*. — La plupart des spécialistes de l'Amazonie s'accordent à reconnaître l'absence d'autorité politique des chefs indiens ; cette faiblesse s'expliquerait par leur incapacité à mettre en œuvre une coercition physique. À partir de l'analyse du pouvoir politique des chefs religieux amuesha du Pérou central, l'auteur suggère que ceux-ci ne sont ni prisonniers du groupe, privés d'une forte autorité, comme le voudrait Clastres, ni des chéris des dieux agissant en tyranneaux, comme l'entendait Lowie. Bien que le facteur religieux soit crucial dans l'accroissement éventuel du pouvoir des chefs amérindiens — les dotant d'éléments de coercition autres que purement physiques —, il ne suffit pas pour expliquer l'autorité politique des prêtres amuesha ni l'émergence éventuelle de formations étatiques.

RESUMEN

Fernando SANTOS GRANERO, *De Prisionero del grupo a querido de los dioses : una aproximación a la cuestión del poder en las tierras bajas de Sudamérica*. — Existe un cierto consenso entre los amazonistas en torno a la carencia de autoridad política de los líderes indígenas amazónicos. Esta carencia estaría asociada al hecho de que estos líderes no cuentan con medios de coerción física. Sobre la base de un análisis acerca del poder y de la autoridad política de los líderes sacerdotales Amuesha del Perú Central, el autor sugiere que éstos no son ni prisioneros del grupo, carentes de autoridad política — tal como afirma Clastres —, ni queridos de los dioses, que actúan como pequeños tiranos — tal como lo afirma Lowie. Aún cuando el factor religioso es crucial para el incremento potencial del poder político de los líderes amerindios — otorgando medios de coerción diferentes a los físicos —, no es suficiente para explicar ni la autoridad política de los sacerdotes Amuesha, ni la emergencia de formaciones estatales.