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## C H A P T E R   O N E

### Introduction: Ethnicity in Ancient Amazonia

*Alf Hornborg and Jonathan D. Hill*

By endowing nations, societies, or cultures with the qualities of internally homogeneous and externally distinctive and bounded objects, we create a model of the world as a global pool hall in which the entities spin off each other like so many hard and round billiard balls.

—ERIC R. WOLF, *EUROPE AND THE PEOPLE WITHOUT HISTORY* (1982:6)

#### **STEPS TOWARD AN ANTI-ESSENTIALIST ANTHROPOLOGY OF AMAZONIA**

Attempts to explain the distribution of indigenous languages and ethnic groups in Amazonia since the time of European contact, whether by historians, linguists, or archaeologists, have generally been founded on an essentialist conception of ethnolinguistic groups as more or less bounded, genetically distinct populations that have reached their recent territories through migration. This perception of ethnolinguistic diversity is a phenomenon that itself deserves explanation, as it appears to draw on a Eurocentric experience of nation-building that historically has

struggled to integrate territory, language, identity, and biology (cf. Jones 1997). On closer examination, the evidence in Amazonia suggests a much more fluid relation among geography, language use, ethnic identity, and genetics (Hornborg 2005). Correlations of data on the physical geography, linguistics, archaeology, and ethnohistory of Amazonia indicate that ethnolinguistic identities and boundaries have been continuously generated and transformed by shifting conditions such as economic specialization, trade routes, warfare, political alliances, and demography. To understand the emergence, expansion, and decline of cultural identities over the centuries, we thus need to consider the roles of diverse conditioning factors such as ecological diversity, migration, trade, epidemics, conquest, language shifts, marriage patterns, and cultural creativity.

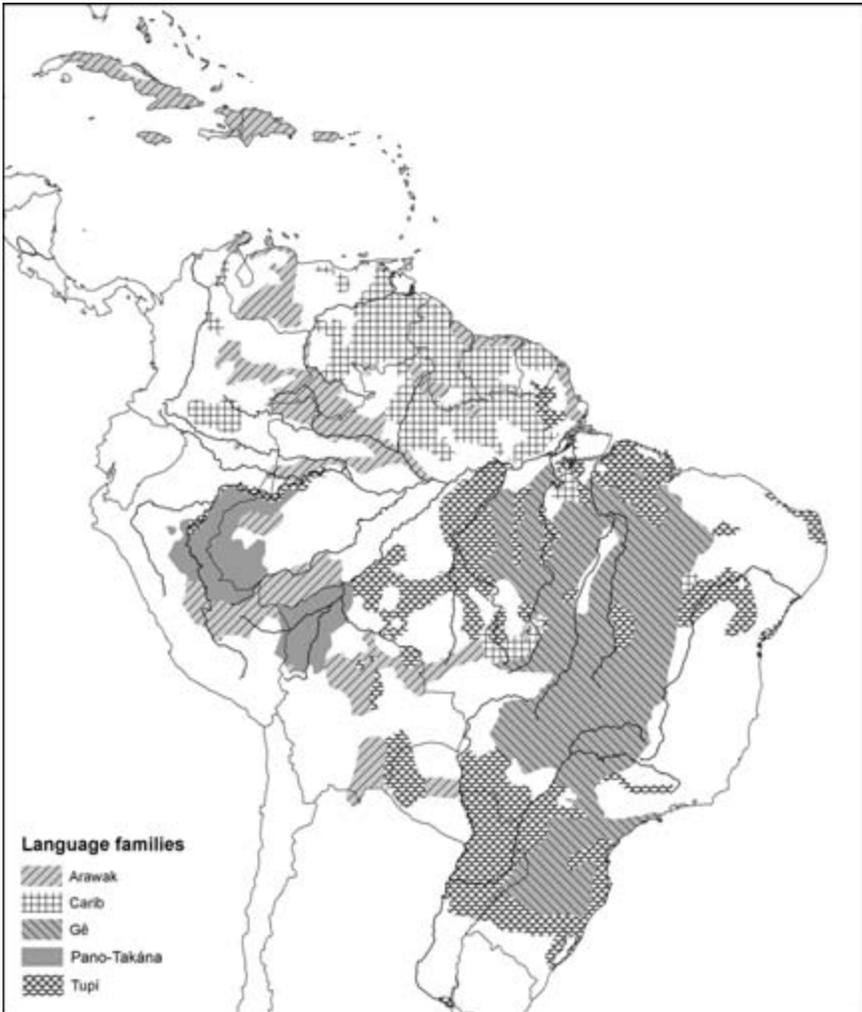
The concept of “ethnicity” that we apply to long-term processes of collective identity formation in Amazonia draws on mainstream definitions within social and cultural anthropology (Barth 1969; Cohen 1978) but may be less familiar to some archaeologists, linguists, and historians. The entry “Ethnicity” in the *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology* (Barnard and Spencer 1996) distinguishes three competing approaches: primordialist, instrumentalist, and constructivist. To simplify a complex and voluminous discussion over the past four decades, we could say that a primordialist approach posits an objective (biological or cultural) essence as fundamental to ethnic identity, while an instrumentalist approach emphasizes ethnicity as a creation of cultural elites in strategic pursuit of power, and a constructivist approach views ethnicity more generally as a form of social organization maintained by contextual, intergroup boundary mechanisms (Sokolovskii and Tishkov 1996). Ethnicity in the last sense is negotiated in the continuous, fluid dialectic between objective sociocultural features and subjective experiences of identity. The three approaches need not be mutually exclusive, Sokolovskii and Tishkov suggest, but the constructivist approach offers the most promising core of an emergent, coherent theory of ethnicity (ibid.). This conclusion would no doubt be endorsed by a majority of cultural anthropologists today. What is novel about the present volume, however, is the ambition to allow this perspective from cultural anthropology and ethnography to fertilize studies of the archaeology and historical linguistics of Amazonia. Although the contributors to *Ethnicity in Ancient Amazonia* represent several disciplines and may employ slightly different definitions of ethnicity (e.g., DeBoer, this volume; Scaramelli and Scaramelli, this volume), they all make serious efforts toward this end.

If ethnicity is understood as a means of communicating a group’s distinctness, we need to explore criteria for recognizing expressions of identity in the past use of language, material culture, and other ethnic markers, acknowledging also that such use may be context-specific, and to trace the specific ways in which Amazonian experiences of distinctness and difference have been shaped by spatially distributed circumstances largely defined by the macro-scale logic of economic and political

structures. Rather than treat human history in the area as explicable in terms of biogeography, this approach to the archaeology, linguistics, and ethnohistory of ancient Amazonia seeks explanations in social and cultural processes.

Although indigenous Amazonia is one of the linguistically most diverse regions of the world, and home to several large language families (Map 1.1) and numerous isolates, many of the chapters in this book discuss the special significance of the Arawak language family. The Arawakan languages of South America at the time of Columbus represented the most widely dispersed linguistic family on the continent, ranging from Cuba to Paraguay. The processes by which this family expanded in prehistory are probably an important factor in understanding the long-term trajectories of several other linguistic groups in Amazonia (see Hornborg and Eriksen, this volume). The expansion of Arawakan languages has generally been attributed to riverine migrations of prehistoric populations through Amazonia and was explained by the archaeologist Donald Lathrap (1970) as a consequence of these populations' adoption of manioc horticulture, which would have provided a demographic advantage in territorial competition with non-horticulturalists. However, this basically biogeographical model of the Arawak expansion in terms of simple demographic displacement does not consider what social and cultural theory might have to suggest on the matter. An anthropologically informed account would need to consider sociocultural factors such as language shifts, multilingualism, intermarriage, politics, prestige, and the strategic construction of cultural identity (ethnogenesis), particularly along the major rivers that have been posited as corridors of migration but that were more obviously trade routes conspicuously often dominated by Arawak-speaking traders. The Arawakan "migrations" definitely involved some movement of people, but probably in a smaller-scale and different way than previously postulated. Several kinds of theoretical and empirical arguments converge in suggesting that the widely dispersed Arawakan dialects encountered by Europeans may be testimony not so much to prehistoric population movements as to the integration of a regional trade network spanning most of the Amazon basin and linking it to the Andes and to the Caribbean. In fact, ritual chants and oral history among current-day Arawak speakers in the northwest Amazon preserve much of the ancient cartographic knowledge that this long-distance trade must have entailed (Hill, this volume).

The Tupian language family was also widely dispersed (Noelli 2008), and its dispersal in central and western Amazonia after AD 1000 may largely have followed routes established by the preexisting, Arawak-dominated trade network. The extent to which this widespread language shift signified displacement of biological populations or their cultural assimilation is unclear, but there are ethnohistorical indications of both kinds of processes (cf. Brochado 1984:402–403; Santos-Granero, this volume). The question remains whether the resemblance between polychrome pottery styles from the far eastern and far western margins of Amazonia, noted by



**MAP 1.1.** *The approximate distribution of five major linguistic families in Amazonia at the time of European contact. (Map compiled by Love Eriksen)*

Lowie and Kroeber in the 1940s (DeBoer, this volume), should be taken as indicative primarily of demic migration or long-distance communication. This question is very much the same as that regarding resemblances, identified decades earlier by Nordenskiöld, between pottery styles from the far northern and far southern extremes of tropical lowland South America. These far-flung resemblances inspired Lathrap (1970) to propose his famous model resorting to demic migration, which in various versions continues to dominate the field, but which the current authors find

less convincing than processes of ethnogenesis and long-distance communication.

To reconceptualize the culture history of Amazonia along these lines, there are at least two pervasive biases to overcome. One has already been mentioned, that is, the inclination to think of “peoples” as coherent, bounded populations with a common language, culture, and identity. Another and equally crippling bias is the assumption that the indigenous societies of Amazonia have always been few, small, and simple. Both these biases are products of world history: the first a reflection of European experiences of nationalism, the second of the state of Amazonian societies when studied by Europeans since the seventeenth century. Although the very earliest reports of European explorers of Amazonia (e.g., Carvajal 1934 [1542]) describe dense and extensive indigenous settlements along the riverbanks, the first undisputedly reliable accounts date from a period preceded by more than a century of devastating epidemics and slave-raiding, when the aboriginal population had been reduced to a small fraction (perhaps only 5 percent) of its former size and its social organization disintegrated into isolated villages of refugees pushed into marginal habitats. These circumstances, although a result of the historical encounter with Europeans, were interpreted by Europeans as determined by the oppressive climate and poor soils of the tropical rainforest.

Both these biases (cultural essentialism and environmental determinism) are very obvious in the influential *Handbook of South American Indians* compiled by the anthropologist Julian H. Steward (1950) in the mid-twentieth century (Steward and Faron 1959). Not only do Steward’s maps suggest more or less neatly bounded ethnolinguistic categories plotted onto geographical space, but his categories of “culture types” in Amazonia are explicitly defined as simple, fragmented, and irremediably constrained by the tropical rainforest environment. This interpretation of the native cultures of Amazonia has been particularly entrenched through the publications of archaeologist Betty J. Meggers (e.g., 1971). The mainstream assumption that climate and ecology represented an absolute limitation on aboriginal cultural development in Amazonia has been persuasively challenged by several anthropologists (e.g., Carneiro 1995; Balée 1998) and archaeologists (e.g., Roosevelt 1994; Heckenberger, Petersen, and Neves 1999) but continues to retard reconceptualizations of prehistoric social processes in the area that posit large sedentary settlements, hierarchical political structures, long-distance trade, and intensive cultivation.

Although the second of the above-mentioned biases now appears to be increasingly transcended by archaeological discoveries, notably of extensive and deep deposits of dark, anthropogenic soils (Lehmann et al. 2003; Glaser and Woods 2004; Woods et al. 2009), the first continues to pose a formidable obstacle. Thus, even researchers determined to rewrite the culture history of Amazonia in terms of hierarchical polities and regional interaction tend to treat ethnolinguistic categories such as “Arawak” as denoting a genealogically definable “people” whose ancient movements over the continent can be traced by arrows on maps. While such cartographic

exercises are no doubt valid for the dispersal of languages, it is important to distinguish between linguistic diffusion and demic migration. Whether the homeland of proto-Arawakan can be identified as the northwest or the southwest Amazon, the subsequent dispersal of Arawakan dialects to the Caribbean, the mouth of the Amazon, and the Andes requires a more sophisticated explanation than the notion that Arawak-speaking peoples simply moved across the landscape.

There are several reasons to question such a simple notion of migration. The Arawak speakers were not expanding into empty space, like their Palaeoindian ancestors moving into the New World from Siberia or the first hominids leaving Africa. They were generally surrounded on all sides by other ethnolinguistic groups, some of whom had been living in Amazonia for thousands of years. Rather than assuming that these neighbors were displaced or annihilated by the Arawak expansion, we should consider it more likely that they were largely assimilated. Multilingualism and language shifts have been extensively documented over much of Amazonia in recent centuries (Schmidt 1917:19–21; Sorensen 1974 [1967]; Jackson 1983; Campbell 1997:23; Aikhenvald 1999, 2002), and we have no reason to think that they were not equally common in pre-Columbian times. Arawak-speaking groups studied by ethnographers show a conspicuous interest in forging marital and other alliances with neighboring groups along the rivers (cf. Gow 1991; Hill 1993, 1996), generating far-flung networks of amicably interconnected communities united by kinship, trade, and an elaborate ceremonial life. This inclination toward regional integration was the pivotal innovation of proto-Arawakan traders, which set in motion a contagious process of communication and unification echoing similar processes that on other continents have been called “the Neolithic revolution.” Here as elsewhere, regional integration and trade stimulated local stratification, settlement growth, intensified production, and ethnicity, but the most obvious medium of integration is rarely recognized as such: a common, prestigious language serving as a mark of identity.

By the end of the first millennium AD, dialects of Arawak languages were spoken along most of the major rivers from the mouth of the Orinoco and Amazon to the headwaters of the Purús and Madeira. This distribution pattern suggests not so much that Arawakan “peoples” were able to displace all other groups along these ancient communication routes, as conventional migration theory would have it, but that a proto-Arawakan language once may have served as a lingua franca from the Caribbean to Bolivia. To date, there has been no genetic research suggesting that Arawak speakers in Colombia are biologically more closely related to Arawak speakers in Bolivia than to their non-Arawak (e.g., Tukano-speaking) neighbors (cf. Cavalli-Sforza, Menozzi, and Piazza 1994:341). Considering the preference for linguistic exogamy in the northwest Amazon (Sorensen 1974 [1967]; Jackson 1983), the very idea seems highly unlikely. On the other hand, there has been linguistic research showing that Arawakan languages often show greater structural similarities

to their non-Arawak neighbors (e.g., Tukano, Pano) than to each other (Aikhenvald and Dixon 1998). All this adds up to something quite different from “migration” in any conventional sense.

Intriguingly, the German anthropologist Max Schmidt (1917) already in the early twentieth century seems to have understood that the Arawakan expansion was not so much a matter of demic migration as a process of ethnic identity construction that did not generally rely on the movements of substantial populations. He made several observations on indigenous language shifts (e.g., among the Kaua and Chané) and explicitly noted that Arawak served as a trade language in the northwest Amazon. Schmidt emphasized the role of elite gift exchange and male exogamy, suggesting that the outward movement of small groups of prestigious, Arawak-speaking men would have sufficed to account for the diffusion of an Arawakan identity (*ibid.*, 36–61). This early, non-essentialist understanding of linguistic dispersal in Amazonia, however, was soon to be replaced by the blunter analytical tools of Julian Steward’s cultural ecology.

#### **TRANSDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO ANCIENT ETHNICITY: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS**

The reconceptualization of Arawakan “migrations” that we have sketched here has emerged not only from a reconsideration of the various kinds of data mentioned above but more fundamentally from modern anthropological theory on the kinds of social processes underlying the construction and maintenance of ethnic boundaries. The point of departure for such theory is usually the seminal contribution of the Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1969). Archaeologists and historical linguists would have much to gain in their attempts to account for past processes of ethnolinguistic diversification from acquainting themselves with Barth’s framework. Following Barth, the general understanding of ethnicity now prevalent in anthropology is that a population’s experience of cultural distinctness is generated by its position within a larger field of interacting socioecological niches. Specialized production of certain kinds of foodstuffs, utensils, or other trade goods, often congruent with a particular ecological habitat, thus contributes to the demarcation of a specific ethnic identity. This identity does not exist on its own but always in relation to those of other ethnolinguistic groups with which it remains in continuous interaction. Ethnic identity is thus simultaneously externally attributed, internally experienced, and above all *communicated*.

One of the central ideas that generated this book is that ethnicity, as defined above, must have been an important factor in generating cultural and linguistic diversity in Amazonia long before the arrival of Europeans. This is not a universally accepted assumption, however. John and Jean Comaroff (1992), for instance, have proposed that “ethnicity” is an exclusively post-contact phenomenon resulting

from colonial domination, whereas pre-contact identities should be described in terms of “totemism” expressing equivalent and complementary identities arranged in non-hierarchical and symmetrical relations between structurally similar social groups. We do not believe that this is a useful approach to pre-contact culture history. Pre-Columbian South America experienced a long series of conquests, expansions, hierarchies, and repressive relations prior to the European invasion (see Santos-Granero 2009a, this volume), and there is no reason to assume that the formation of ethnic boundaries in pre-colonial times operated according to a cultural logic that was significantly different from the pattern documented through historical and ethnographic research. Recent archaeological research in Amazonia suggests that prehistoric discontinuities in the material record, such as the replacement of Incised-modeled by Polychrome pottery in the central Amazon around AD 1000 (Neves, this volume), may be accounted for in similar ways as the more well-known historical ruptures of European colonialism. For millennia, conquests and expansions have generated new constellations of ethnic boundaries as well as new incentives for creatively transcending or manipulating such boundaries through ethnogenesis.

Explanations of the discontinuities that can be detected in the histories and prehistories of Amazonian societies have tended to assume that cultural identities have corresponded to discrete human populations that migrated in various directions because they had tangible environmental reasons for doing so, for example climate change (Meggers 1979) or the adoption of a successful and competitive cultivar that prompted them to exploit new territories (Lathrap 1970; Dixon and Aikhenvald 1999:17; cf. Renfrew 1987; Bellwood 2001). As argued above, an alternative and previously neglected kind of explanation would focus on the internal logic of regional political economy and transformations in networks of long-distance exchange (Hornborg 2005; Hornborg and Eriksen, this volume). Rather than viewing archaeological cultures as representing biologically distinct populations engaged in demic migration prompted by environmental factors, the latter would approach them as products of continuous and fluid processes of identity construction, spurred by the specific cultural logic of regional shifts in dominance and cosmological orientation. This difference of perspective continues to divide the research field and is evident within the pages of this book. We would like to emphasize, however, that a determination to account for social and cultural forms in terms of social and cultural theory (rather than biogeography or Darwinian selection) in no way implies a “postmodern” disregard for facts or laxity of analysis.

Transdisciplinary collaboration tends to highlight the differences between disciplines, and this volume is no exception. Archaeologists are generally not very keen ethnographers or linguists, while ethnohistorians tend to have a limited grasp of archaeology and linguistics. Every reader will thus find him- or herself more at home with some chapters than with others. Hopefully, readers from all the relevant

disciplines will find significant new theoretical and methodological perspectives for the study of ethnic identity construction in the past. A major divide distinguishes chapters that focus on hermeneutic, “inside” views of specific cultural phenomena (which tend to characterize ethnography) from those that prioritize systematic comparison and macro-scale distribution (as in linguistics and archaeology). Both kinds of perspectives are, of course, important but need to maintain a continuous dialogue. Any attempt to grasp processes of ethnogenesis at a regional level needs to be founded on an ethnographic understanding of the local, experiential dimensions of identity construction. Ethnography, on the other hand, needs to acknowledge the extent to which local experience is shaped by macro-scale contexts such as history, politics, trade, and regional geography.

In bringing these diverse chapters together to illuminate ethnogenetic processes in ancient Amazonia, we hope to dispel some of the mutual distrust that so often impedes transdisciplinary collaboration. Whereas several of the contributors are pioneers in building bridges between archaeology and ethnohistory (DeBoer, this volume; Heckenberger, this volume; Whitehead, this volume), the often highly technical nature of linguistic research has tended to exclude readers curious to know what historical linguistics has to say about ancient identities. We are thus happy to have engaged several linguists in this discussion, and we hope that their contributions will encourage colleagues in historical linguistics to demonstrate the relevance of their research for the reconstruction of ethnogenetic processes in the past.

This collection of chapters has emerged from a series of meetings (two in Lund, one in Washington, DC) addressing various aspects of long-term ethnogenesis in Amazonia. We are fortunate to have been able to include some of the most accomplished scholars in Amazonian archaeology, linguistics, and ethnohistory. It is very gratifying to note how much of the discussion on ethnolinguistic distribution patterns in Amazonia in recent years has shifted from a preoccupation with migrating “peoples” carrying various cultural luggage across the Amazon basin to concerns with ethnogenetic processes within regional systems of exchange. Although clearly more interested in cultural diffusion than cultural evolution (cf. Isbell 2008 on this polarity), such a “neo-diffusionism” would differ in many respects from earlier versions, for example, by being firmly grounded in social science understandings of political economy, world systems, interaction spheres, and, not least, the dynamics of ethnicity. Rather than postulating migrating invaders conveying coherent packages of genes, language, pottery style, settlement layout, and agricultural practices, this approach acknowledges that such different aspects of identity can move separately and in different directions within regional exchange networks. Different cultural features will often be derived from different neighbors in a continuous process of emulation and creative reconstruction, in which every semblance of ethnic essence is provisional. Yet, specific constellations of ethnic markers sometimes

maintain long-term continuities that warrant collaboration among ethnographers, historians, archaeologists, and historical linguists.

The specific and characteristic cultural repertoires associated with groups of people who identify with an Arawak ethnolinguistic identity have demonstrated a remarkable coherence and persistence over time (Hill and Santos-Granero 2002; Heckenberger, this volume). The pervasive “hydrocentricity” of Arawakan lifestyles (Hill, this volume) represents a deeply entrenched and indissoluble connection to riverine and wetland environments that strongly evokes Barth’s (1969) use of the concept of an ethnic “niche,” and that may even be possible to predict using GIS software for “ecocultural niche modeling” (see Dahl et al., this volume, as well as Hornborg and Eriksen, this volume, Map 6.1). As Barth observed, the ecological and societal aspects of such an ethnic niche are mutually reinforcing. Having specialized in the occupation and exploitation of a riverine socioecological niche, people identifying with the cultural traditions of Arawak-speaking societies were well positioned to control the emergent long-distance trade networks that began to integrate much of Amazonia during the first millennium BC. This position continued to reinforce their inclination toward intensive horticulture, sedentary and centripetal settlement, social stratification, regional integration, and an elaborate ceremonial life. To account for the expansion and dominance of Arawak speakers over much of Amazonia in this way is not the same as merely saying that the adoption of manioc horticulture gave them a competitive edge (Lathrap 1970).

A significant dimension of Arawakan niche construction is its implications for historical ecology. In various parts of greater Amazonia, Arawak-related societies have “domesticated” their landscapes through earthmoving activities such as the construction of raised fields, mounds, causeways, ditches, and fish weirs (Denevan and Zucchi 1978; Brochado 1984:339–341; Parsons 1985:161; Roosevelt 1991; Myers 1992:87, 91; Denevan 2001; Renard-Casevitz 2002:140–141; Pärssinen et al. 2003; Erickson 2006; Walker 2008; Rostain 2008; Heckenberger 2005, this volume; Hill, this volume; Virtanen, this volume). Such investments in what Erickson (2006) calls “domesticated landscapes” and local population growth are mutually reinforcing, not necessarily in an absolute sense but always relative to other areas. The centripetal growth of settlements prompted by social, ethnic, and ceremonial incentives would encourage labor investments in productive infrastructure, and the assets thus accumulated (sometimes referred to as *landesque capital*) would encourage further nucleation of population for defensive purposes. Similar processes may have been responsible for “Neolithic revolutions” elsewhere in the world.

Given adequate understanding of socioecological processes such as these, historical linguistics could potentially provide very important information on ethnic identity formation in the past. It is gratifying, for instance, to find tentative agreement between anthropological and linguistic reconstructions of Arawakan proto-

history (Danielsen et al., this volume).<sup>1</sup> Without adequate theory of regional systems of exchange, however, linguistic reconstructions risk leading us seriously astray. For instance, a “punctuated-equilibrium model of language development” (Dixon and Aikhenvald 1999:16–19) proposes that linguistic diversity in an area is likely to reflect relative confinement and isolation of the various linguistic groups, whereas anthropological theory as well as Amazonian ethnography would often suggest the opposite. Ethnolinguistic diversity—for example, in the upper Xingú, eastern Bolivia, and the northwest Amazon—may well be a consequence of intensive interaction within regional systems of exchange, where different ethnic groups specialize in particular products and maintain their own cultural specificity precisely through the contrasts generated by such interaction. Linguistic models that do not take such anthropological observations into consideration might interpret linguistic diversity in western Amazonia as an indication of a relative paucity of interaction in the past, whereas archaeological and historical evidence from the area points in a diametrically opposite direction (DeBoer, this volume; Dudley, this volume; Hornborg and Eriksen, this volume).

This is not to deny, of course, that areal contact often can have a homogenizing effect on cultural diversity. Linguists are currently looking closely at processes of language shift and areal diffusion in Amazonia, often with a focus on Arawakan languages (Aikhenvald 2002). The loanwords between Arawakan and Arawá languages can be viewed as indications of past regional interaction for which no other evidence can currently be provided (Facundes and Brandão, this volume; Hornborg and Eriksen, this volume). The significance of multilingualism and regional lingua francas such as the Tupí-based trade language Nheengatú (Jensen 1999:129–131) should not be underestimated in reconstructing the historical linguistics of Amazonia. Which particular language emerges as a lingua franca varies from region to region according to historical circumstances. For instance, in the southern border area between Guyana and Surinam, the most expansive language family is currently Carib rather than Arawak or Tupí (Carlin, this volume).

An important message of this book is that verbal as well as material culture may have served as markers of ethnic identity in the past. At specific points in time and place, ethnic markers such as language and pottery style may coincide. There thus appear to be good reasons to postulate connections, around AD 1000, between Arawakan languages and Barrancoid/Incised-modeled ceramics, between Tupí languages and Amazonian Polychrome ceramics, and between Carib languages and Arauquinoid/Incised-punctated ceramics (Neves, this volume; Heckenberger, this volume). As DeBoer writes (this volume, p. 95), “language affiliation and material culture tend to stick together, not because there is any sticky glue involved but because both are transmitted over similar channels.” This does not imply a general, one-to-one correspondence among specific ethnicities, languages, and material cultures, but it does encourage both archaeologists and historical linguists to renew

their interpretations in light of what anthropology can suggest about ethnicity and ethnogenesis.

In doing so, it is also crucial to consider the extent to which Amazonian societies have been composed of different social and ethnolinguistic strata, whether as a result of marriage practices, captive-taking, military conquest, or voluntary submission. Ethnohistorical and ethnographic evidence from various parts of Amazonia indicates that hierarchical relations between ethnic groups were common, as between the Taíno and Naborey of the Antilles, the Tukano and Makú of the Vaupés, and the Chiriguaná and Chané of southeastern Bolivia (Santos-Granero 2009b, this volume). The role of Arawak speakers in such hierarchies appears to have varied from place to place and time to time, as exemplified by the contrast between the dominance of the Taíno over the Naborey and the subjugation of the Chané by the Tupí-speaking Chiriguaná. As argued above, we have no a priori reason to believe that relations between distinct communities of pottery makers in the Orinoco region were decisively less hierarchical (and the groups less “ethnic”) in pre-colonial than in colonial times (see Scaramelli and Scaramelli, this volume). Such asymmetric relations between the dominant and the subordinate have influenced, in specific and unpredictable ways, the diffusion of loanwords, languages, cultivars, and material culture, including ceramic styles (DeBoer, this volume; Facundes and Brandão, this volume). They have frequently been based on gender, whether the asymmetric relations were established through violent bride capture or through the conventional operation of norms regarding post-marital residence. Ethnographers are in a privileged position to study in detail the nuances of micro-level negotiations of such asymmetries, as in the close scrutiny of genres of ritual (including non-verbal) communication variously shared by different ethnolinguistic groups (Basso, this volume). Basso’s contribution illustrates how trade, marriage alliances, and ritual are not distinct forms of interaction between communities but inextricably intertwined and embedded in each other.

Ethnohistorical and ethnographical evidence makes it abundantly clear that the political economy of ancient Amazonia to a significant extent hinged on flows of prestige goods as much as on flows of people (cf. Santos-Granero 2009a). Most of these objects were made of perishable materials such as bird feathers (see Basso, this volume) and have left no traces in the archaeological record. As DeBoer (this volume) observes, most items of material culture used as ethnic markers in the past will thus be inaccessible for research. This is one reason why ethnographical documentation of the use of such culture-specific items of political economy (Basso, this volume) is so invaluable in the reconstruction of ancient interaction among communities. Given the long-term continuities suggested by several of the contributors (e.g., Heckenberger, this volume), such documentation can at least help us to surmise the nature of such interaction. In some cases, moreover, the geographical distribution of specific kinds of prestige goods can to some extent be reconstructed,

for instance, ornaments in shell or stone and some musical instruments (Eriksen 2011).

The consolidation of an Arawak-mediated regional exchange system integrating much of greater Amazonia by the early centuries AD was no doubt stimulated by exchange relations extending even beyond this vast area, including the Andes and the Caribbean. In the reconstruction of such long-distance connections, it is particularly interesting to trace ethnolinguistic processes at the margins of Amazonia, especially along the Andean slopes. As many Andeanists have suggested over the past century, much of the cultural history of the Andean highlands may have its roots in Amazonia (cf. Isbell 2008:1146–1148). For centuries, perhaps even millennia, Arawak-speaking groups have dominated an intensive sphere of interaction along the eastern Andean slopes of Peru and Bolivia, but the colonial boundaries separating highlands and lowlands left this intermediate zone marginalized and largely unrecognized (Dudley, this volume; Hornborg and Eriksen, this volume).

If proto-Arawak may have served as a *lingua franca* in much of the Amazonian lowlands, its counterpart in the Andean highlands was obviously proto-Quechua. Much as Arawakan languages show influences from neighboring languages in Amazonia (Aikhenvald and Dixon 1998; Facundes and Brandão, this volume), different Quechua languages and dialects emerged in the eastern foothills of the Andean Cordillera, reflecting long-term relations of political expansion and trade between Quechua speakers and speakers of various Amazonian languages. In the altiplano of Bolivia, for example, the Kallawaya language joined together a lexicon that was mainly from Puquina, an “Arawak affiliate,” with Quechua syntax, and the variety of Quechua spoken in the town of Apolo, or “Northern Bolivian Quechua,” reflects Inca expansionism into predominantly Arawak-speaking areas in the mid-fifteenth century (see Dudley, this volume). In eastern Peru, Quechua influences on Amuesha similarly reflect Quechua-Arawak interaction in both pre-Inca and Inca times (Danielsen et al., this volume). In lowland Ecuador, Quechua spread as a trade language before the expansion of the Inca Empire, and Ecuadorian Quechua appears to have been influenced by the Barbacoan and Jivaroan languages with which it came into contact in this region (Muysken, this volume). In the Canelos region of the tropical Andean foothills of Ecuador, a version of Quechua known as Canelos Quichua has become a marker of Runa ethnic identity, closely connected to Jivaroan and Zaparoan neighbors (Whitten, this volume). The region was crucial for highland-lowland trade predating the Inca, and it is interesting to note that the Canelos Quichua language may have originated further south, in the Marañon basin, which has been a major trade route into the Amazonian lowlands since time immemorial (Lathrap 1971; Church and von Hagen 2008; Burger 1992, 2008). Judging from archaeological evidence of early mound complexes along the Upano River, populations in the eastern foothills of the Ecuadorian Andes have also been engaged in highland-lowland trade since several centuries BC (Salazar 2008). Like

the many earthworks in the Llanos de Mojos and in Acre (Virtanen, this volume), they clearly indicate that, for at least two millennia before European arrival, pre-historic inhabitants of the western margin of Amazonia had established sedentary, densely populated settlements that were economically and culturally connected to societies of the Andean slopes and highlands.

### **AN ARAWAKAN ETHOS: SEDENTISM, MOBILITY, AND ELEMENTS OF ETHNIC SPECIFICITY**

The sedentary settlement patterns associated with Arawak-speaking peoples in various regions of lowland South America need to be understood as region-wide phenomena, since local communities or sites may shift from place to place within a region without there being a break in the continuity of a group's control of an entire region. In the archaeological record, this kind of regional settlement pattern can be seen in the juxtaposing of large mainstream sites having deep levels of ceramic phases persisting over many centuries of human occupation, with numerous smaller settlements in interfluvial uplands showing evidence of frequent interruptions and site abandonments (see Neves and Petersen 2005; Heckenberger, this volume; Neves, this volume). The ethnography of lowland South America includes many examples of dual settlement patterns, or seasonal alternations between periods of sedentary social life in communities formed around a ritual center (e.g., male initiation or "bachelors" huts among Gê-speaking peoples or flute houses among Tupí-speaking groups) and periods of migratory movements, whether in search of game animals or the utopian Land-without-Evil. Even among the more sedentary Arawak-speaking peoples of the upper Río Negro region, we find frequent movements into remote uninhabited headwaters of small rivers and streams to exploit richer fish and game resources or to take refuge from oppressive economic and political conditions in more accessible mainstream sites (Wright 1981; Hill 1996).

Moreover, it is precisely because these Arawak-speaking peoples have established such deep historical ties to specific regions (see Heckenberger, this volume; Hill, this volume; Virtanen, this volume) that they are able to travel across great expanses of geographic space and return to the centers of ritual power and mythic creation.<sup>2</sup> As Leal Xavier has written about the Baniwa, an Arawak-speaking group of the Isana river basin in Brazil, "The Baniwa are in the first place great travelers, just like their founding [mythic] heroes" (2008:10, our translation). The history of these regional and long-distance journeys is commemorated in petroglyphs throughout the upper Río Negro region (González N'áñez 1980; Leal Xavier 2008), in highly elaborate mythic narratives about the opening up of an expanding world of peoples and places (Wright 1998; ACIRA/FOIRN 1999; Hill 2009b), and in ritually powerful chants that read this history onto the individual life histories of male and female initiates undergoing passage to adulthood (Hill 1993, this volume).

This mythic process of expansion, described in narratives as the result of groups of men and women playing sacred flutes and trumpets in various downstream and upstream regions, outlines a series of journeys away from and back to the mythic center, or place of ancestral emergence. This indigenous, mythic vision of history as a process of journeying and opening up political-economic relations of exchange with other peoples across a vast stretch of riverine territories, always departing from and returning to a mythic center, is entirely consistent with one of the central arguments of this book: that the expansion and dispersal of Arawak-speaking peoples across lowland South America are better understood as a complex process of ethno-genesis based on regional and long-distance travel and trade than as a simple movement of Arawak-speaking peoples across an empty landscape.

Long-distance travel and trade depend on the existence of a shared sense of civil order among local groups who collectively control access to mainstream riverine territories and those who wish to visit, exchange, or simply pass through the region. This situation is exactly how Wakuénai (Curripaco) people living along the Guainía River of Colombia and Venezuela explain their political economy of ranked, localized, named, exogamous phratries. Outsiders are allowed to pass through or visit and are to be treated with great respect. Ritual advice given to male and female initiates after the performance of *malikái* chants to bless their first meal (*kalidzamai*) as adults makes this semiotic ideology of sharing with and welcoming visitors very clear:

*Apáda nawíki nahliúkawa panáku, pikápawátsa phiúmi nawíki  
Pikápawátsa phiúmi yárinanáitsaka, wanéwe wéyma nápekúriko!  
Pikápawátsa phiúmi nawíki!*

When other people arrive at your house, you share with all people,  
You share with white people, we live together with all of them!  
You share with all people!

However, if outsiders begin to make gardens, fish traps, or otherwise exploit natural resources on a long-term basis without asking for and receiving permission from local people, the entire set of patrisibs can unite as a defensive force to evict the intruders.

Ideologies of a shared civil order that are put on full public display in major rituals and ceremonies are grounded in a multitude of little rituals that pervade everyday social life. Registers of affinal civility, for example, show how ideologies of civil order are continually being constructed at the most intimate level of domestic, interpersonal relations and, through extension beyond households, to social networks and trading partnerships that cut across households, communities, and even entire language groups (see Basso, this volume). In multilingual areas such as the upper Xingú and northwest Amazon, the prevalence of such registers of affinal civility found among speakers of widely diverse languages—Arawak, Carib, Tupí,

Tukano, and so forth—suggests that they work in tandem with large public rituals and a variety of non-verbal metacommunicative activities, such as music, dance, and gesture, in enabling and promoting communication across language barriers.

Although the hydrographical and physical geography of major rivers and tributaries has undoubtedly shaped most long-distance travel in the Amazon and Orinoco basins since the advent of watercraft, it is important to note the frequent use of interfluvial pathways, or shortcuts, that connect major river systems, such as the Cuyari River and small streams that connect the Isana and Guainía drainage areas, or the portage between Maroa on the Guainía River and the Temi-Atacavi Rivers, allowing travel via the Atabapo River to the middle and upper Orinoco and all its vast network of tributaries (Cataniapo, Cunucunuma, Ventuari, Casiquiare, Siapa, Guaviare, Inirida, Meta, etc.).<sup>3</sup> In a similar manner, an extensive network of forest trails connects the “Southern Tier” of Arawak-speaking peoples living in headwater regions of the Xingú, Purús, Madre de Díos, and other southern tributaries of the Amazon River (see Heckenberger 2002, this volume). Such interfluvial shortcuts may help explain the very early stylistic connections between the upper Amazon and the Orinoco (cf. Lathrap 1970), apparently without the mediation of the middle Amazon and Río Negro, where no related ceramics of similar age have been found (cf. Hornborg and Eriksen, this volume).<sup>4</sup>

When understood in broad, pan-semiotic terms as verbally transmitted cultures and associated non-verbal communicative practices—body ornamentation, dance, music, visual imagery, and so forth—languages play a central role in the construction of civil-political orders that allow people to travel and trade across geographic distances and social boundaries. The frequency and intensity of multilingualism, cross-linguistic ties, and the development of transethnic identities are found in many widely separate regions of lowland South America where Arawak-speaking people have resided over long periods of time in close proximity to or interaction with other peoples who are linguistically different: for example, with Eastern Tukano-speakers in northwestern Amazonia (Aikhenvald 2002, 2003), with Carib speakers in the Antilles (Santos-Granero 2002; Whitehead 2002; Carlin, this volume), and with Pano speakers in eastern Peru (Santos-Granero 2002; DeBoer, this volume; Hornborg and Eriksen, this volume). “That these linguistic processes have taken place in such diverse situations of interethnic contact strongly suggests they are intrinsic to Arawakan constructions of social identity” (Hill and Santos-Granero 2002:17). Such “creolizations” of languages and ethnic identities are the result of intensive regional and interregional exchanges over many centuries of contact and in turn form the communicative basis for allowing the expansion and persistence of long-distance trade over time.<sup>5</sup> In many areas, intercommunal relations of respect and reciprocity are also constructed through non-verbal ceremonial practices, such as collective singing of vocables (non- or semilexical sounds), percussion, and dancing and the playing of flutes, trumpets, and other wind instruments. A strong associ-

ation between Arawak speakers and the making and playing of an elaborate array of wind instruments is found throughout northwestern Amazonia, the upper Xingú, and across most of the Southern Tier of Arawak-speaking communities (Izickowitz 1935:227, 235, 242; Hornborg and Eriksen, this volume, Map 6.1; Eriksen 2011; Piedade 2011) but is noticeably absent among Arawak speakers of eastern Peru (e.g., Machiguenga, Ashaninka, and Piro).<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, it is worth hypothesizing that collective music making and dancing played a central role in the expansion and dispersal of Arawak-speaking peoples across lowland South America, given the centrality of these musical instruments and performances in the ritual practices and associated mythic narratives among so many contemporary Arawak-speaking peoples.<sup>7</sup>

Ritual hierarchy figures prominently as a source of asymmetrical social formations among many Arawak-speaking peoples. Such hierarchies are based on centralized knowledge of and ability to perform ritually powerful ways of speaking—narrating, orating, chanting, and singing—and collective enactments of such ritual power, usually by groups of men led by ritual specialists in the making and playing of sacred wind instruments. Among many Arawak-speaking peoples, the integration of sacred instrumental music with shamanic powers is so complete that we can refer to these collective performances as “shamanic musical configurations,” or analytical units in which shamanic and musical spheres are systematically linked together (Hill and Chaumeil 2011). Similar instrumental performances and wind ensembles are also widespread among Tupí, Carib, Sáliva, Tukano, and Yagua speakers of lowland South America. What appears to distinguish Arawak-speaking peoples’ from these other linguistic groups’ uses of ritual wind instruments is the degree to which they are put to use as direct expressions, or collective amplifications, of the hierarchical ritual powers of shamans and other specialists (Hill 2009a; Cruz Mello 2011; Piedade 2011). These shamanic musical configurations are ways of putting into practice a very powerful hierarchical concept: the ideal of perfect transmission of linguistic and cultural forms across many generations, between mythic ancestors and human descendants, both living and dead. Although such ideals are most clearly illustrated today among Arawak-speaking peoples of northwestern Amazonia (Baniwa, Wakuénai-Curripaco, Guarequena, and Piapoco), the Southern Tier (Enawenê-nawê), and upper Xingú (Waurá, Mehináku, and Yawalapiti), similar practices of ancestor veneration are also found among neighboring Eastern Tukano speakers of the Vaupés basin (Hugh-Jones 2009). Among Carib-speaking peoples of the Guyana Shield region, leaders of the Alleluia religion have developed a genre of memory verses (*maiýin*) that are believed to be the only words that will still exist after the end of time; these verbal forms will persist even after their contemporary meanings have long since disappeared (Hill and Staats 2002). The ongoing construction of ritual hierarchies such as these are central to the ways in which many Arawak-speaking peoples and some other indigenous Amazonian peoples have established deep historical ties to specific places and regions.

All these indigenous cultural forms of verbal-cultural creativity are unfolding today in contexts of the globalizing nation-states of Latin America and through the historical processes of expanding colonial and national states as well as the associated catastrophic losses of life, autonomy, land, and other resources for indigenous peoples of lowland South America. In the waning years of the twentieth century and first decade of the twenty-first, indigenous Amazonian peoples have shown a remarkable ability to embrace new technologies and to create new forms of political organization for representing their interests among themselves and at state, regional, national, and global levels. Rapid intergenerational shifts are unfolding in villages, towns, and cities across Amazonia and adjacent regions as indigenous peoples move from oral traditions to literacy and from word-of-mouth to the Internet in a matter of years. Researching these contemporary transformations and the emergence of new forms of identity politics has become a rich field of study for ethnologists and historians (see, e.g., Ramos 1988, 1998; Hill 1994, 2009c; Jackson 1995, 1999; Briggs 1996; Whitten 1996; Graham 2002; Turner 2002; Warren and Jackson 2002; Rosengren 2003; Wright 2005, 2009; Cepek 2009; Virtanen 2010; Hutchins and Wilson 2010; Alemán 2011; Ruedas 2011). Because of their concern for documenting ethnogenesis and other long-term historical processes, including not only socio-cultural and historical but also linguistic and archaeological lines of inquiry, the chapters making up *Ethnicity in Ancient Amazonia* are directly relevant to the rapidly changing cultural politics of indigeneity in Amazonia. The past lives on in the present in a diversity of ways, and the struggles of today's indigenous peoples to create new political and cultural spaces for persisting within the globalizing nation-states of South America both are shaped by and give new form and meaning to cultural transformations that have been under way in Amazonia for at least two millennia.

As wrong as it would be to ignore the momentous historical events and forces of colonial and national state expansions in South America while trying to understand contemporary indigenous forms of creativity and identity, it would be just as incorrect to assert that these contemporary practices have little or no relevance for understanding long-term processes that have been unfolding in lowland South America for at least two millennia and that "pre-contact" Amazonian peoples lived in some pristine, "prehistoric" state of nature. The concept of ethnogenesis, first used in an Amazonian context by Norman Whitten in *Sacha Runa* (1976) and later developed in *History, Power, and Identity* (Hill 1996) and other works (e.g., Clifford 2004), offers a way out of the essentializing of "peoples without history," whether in past or present times. This approach is rooted in Fredrik Barth's pioneering approach (1969) to social differentiation as a process of ethnic boundary-marking and also builds on Edward Spicer's concept of "persistent identity systems" (1982) that have endured across centuries of colonial domination. More recently, James Clifford has drawn upon ethnogenesis and related concepts to argue that emerging indigenous American identities are better understood as a creative process

of “authentically remaking” rather than “a wholly new genesis, a made-up identity, a postmodernist ‘simulacrum,’ or the rather narrowly political ‘invention of tradition’ analyzed by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), with its contrast of lived custom and artificial tradition” (2004:20). *Ethnicity in Ancient Amazonia* expands on Clifford’s characterization of ethnogenesis as a process of “authentically remaking” new social identities through creatively rediscovering and refashioning components of “tradition,” such as oral narratives, written texts, and material artifacts. We can see this ethnogenetic process of authentically remaking identities at work not only in the efforts of contemporary Native American peoples struggling to refashion identities through their ancestors’ material artifacts, which are now stored in heritage museums (Clifford 2004), and in the ongoing constructions of ritual power and deep history among Arawak-speaking peoples living in the upper Xingú, other regions of southern Brazil (see Heckenberger, this volume; Virtanen, this volume), and northwestern Amazonia (see Hill, this volume), but even in the continuous reconstruction of ceremonial and burial mounds built from Amazonian dark earth mixed with contemporaneous and earlier ceramics over a 1,300-year period in the central Amazon basin (see Neves, this volume).<sup>8</sup>

The concept of ethnogenesis, broadly defined as “a concept encompassing peoples’ simultaneously cultural and political struggles to create enduring identities in general contexts of radical change and discontinuity” (Hill 1996:1), when combined with a concern for long-term historical change and long-distance travel and trade across widely separate geographic regions, allows for an integrated historical, linguistic, and archaeological approach to studies of pre- and post-contact transformations of indigenous Amazonian social identities and human landscapes. While acknowledging the profound changes brought about by European colonization and the rise of independent nation-states, we must also avoid essentializing approaches that categorize pre-contact indigenous Americans as “peoples without history” or post-contact indigenous identities as merely artificial “reinventions” of past cultures. The constructivist approach advocated in this book rejects naively primordialist as well as purely instrumentalist perspectives on ethnicity. As recently argued by Alexiades (2009:28), an increased awareness of the contingency, dynamism, and fluidity of indigenous societies in Amazonia in no way undermines the legitimacy of their struggles to safeguard the profound connections that they have established with the land.

## NOTES

1. This tentative agreement is reached even when the issue of linguistic expansion is addressed in terms of directions and recency of migration (Danielsen et al., this volume). As the authors observe, “the fact that many Arawakan languages were in intense contact with their neighbors further complicates the classification.” This should hold true whether these

neighbors were speakers of Arawak or non-Arawak languages. Hopefully future research in historical linguistics will be able to illuminate not only directions and recency of linguistic flows but relative densities of interaction within ancient exchange networks.

2. One measure of the strength of these attachments between social groups and geographic places is the fact that a small group of Baniwa elders from the Hohódeni phratry returned to their lands along the upper Aiari River in the early nineteenth century after a period of captivity and forced labor in Brazilian plantations along the lower Amazon (Wright 1981). Upon their return, the Hohódeni rekindled relations of ceremonial exchange and affinal alliance with members of the Waríperidakéna phratry. In addition, the Hohódeni negotiated an agreement for regular access to Waríperidakéna fishing grounds along the lower Aiari in exchange for permission for the latter to cut gardens in Hohódeni lands along the upper Aiari (*ibid.*, 18).

3. We are grateful to John Hemming (personal communication, 2007) for sharing historical anecdotes that heightened our interest in these overland routes.

4. Also, similar pathways connected Carib-speaking peoples across the Essequibo basin in Guyana and the southern tributaries of the Orinoco (Caroní, Baura), allowing trade relations from the Ye'kuana in the upper Orinoco basin into the lower Orinoco and coastal and inland areas to the east. When these networks were disrupted in the late colonial period by Spanish (Capuchin) missions on the Caroní and the building of forts and missions along the lower Orinoco (Angostura) and upper Orinoco (Esmeralda, San Fernando de Atabapo), the Ye'kuana led a multiethnic uprising in 1776 that drove the Spanish out of the upper Orinoco region for the next 150 years. To reach Dutch trading posts in Guyana after 1776, the Ye'kuana went south through their Arawak-speaking allies' territories along the Casiquiare and Río Negro and then north via the Río Branco, where they could cross by land to the headwaters of the Essequibo (Civrieux 1980; Guss 1986).

5. It is instructive to note that the Xinguano cultural synthesis of Tupí, Carib, and Arawak speakers (see Heckenberger, this volume; Basso, this volume) does not display high rates of multilingualism or the emergence of such "creolized" or hybrid languages. Rather, each individual Xinguano community maintains its own distinct language. This illustrates how intensive interaction can contribute to, rather than reduce, ethnolinguistic diversity. A counter-example is the linguistic situation on the southern border between Guyana and Surinam, where the Carib-speaking Waiwai appear to have absorbed several other ethnolinguistic groups (Carlin, this volume).

6. The Yanésa appear to be the only exception to this absence of wind instruments among sub-Andean Arawak-speaking peoples, since they make and play an elaborate array of panpipes and end-blown flutes (Santos-Granero, personal communication, 2009).

7. The process of musically opening up the world is collectively performed in Baniwa and Wakuénai (Curripaco) male initiation rituals along the Isana and Guainía Rivers. At the very end of these rituals, groups of men send the primordial human being of myth (Kuwái) back to the forests and rivers by playing sacred flutes as they embark in a canoe. The sound of these flutes fading slowly into the distance, or the movement of mythic ancestral power across geographic space, replicates on a micro-social scale the series of place-names and movements that are verbally performed in the long series of *malikái* chants and songs for the initiates' sacred food (see Hill, this volume). Readers can listen to all these ritual chants, musical performances, and mythic narratives online at the website of the Archives of Indigenous

Languages of Latin America (AILLA) ([www.ailla.utexas.org](http://www.ailla.utexas.org)) by navigating to the Kurripaco collection (KPC002). A recording of the final performance at the end of a male initiation held in March 1985 is located at KPC002R002I019, 00°14"–09°55".

8. These mounds were built with large amounts of Amazonian dark earth (ADE) mixed with “sherds from all three ceramic complexes of the site” and display “horizontal, parallel placement” of many large sherds within several mounds (Neves and Petersen 2005:296). They are thus not only concrete manifestations of the recursivity among environmental history, high-intensity landscape management, and hierarchical political economies but also illustrative of ethnogenesis as a process of authentically remaking new social identities through creatively rediscovering and refashioning components of “tradition,” such as oral narratives, written texts, and material artifacts.

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