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Note on Ethnoanthropological Notions of the Guiana Indians*

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RÉSUMÉ

Les Indiens Caribes et Arawaks du nord-ouest de l'Amérique du Sud croyaient connaître un très grand nombre de tribus qui nous semblent aujourd'hui bizarres et monstrueuses (des hommes sans tête, des hommes à longues oreilles, etc.; Pline étant le premier à faire un catalogue de ces peuples imaginaires, on les appelle aujourd'hui 'des races pliniennes'). Ces races extraordinaires, pourtant, n'étaient pas conçues comme étant extraordinaires dans le sens que nous donnons à ce mot et elles étaient classifiées au même niveau que les tribus historiquement connues. Cette constatation faite, l'étude approfondie des 'ethnologies' des Indiens américains pourrait nous apporter des données supplémentaires pour réfléchir sur la nécessité apparemment universelle des ethnologies imaginaires. Après une brève discussion de ce qu'on pourrait définir comme 'ethno-ethnologie', l'auteur analyse quelques notions ethnoanthropologiques des Indiens de la zone, en particulier celles d'homme, animal, nature et culture.

"Et vidimus ihi multos homines ac mulieres capita non habentes, sed oculos grossos fixos in pectore, cætera membra æqualia nobis habentes [...] Vidimus et in inferioribus partibus Æthiopiæ homines unum oculum tantum in fronte habentes..." (Saint Augustine, in Latifau 1724).

"Il est certains détails que je crois ne pas devoir omettre, surtout au sujet des peuples qui vivent loin de la mer. Je ne doute pas que plusieurs de ces détails ne paraissent prodigieux et incroyables à beaucoup. Qui, en effet, a cru à l'existence des Éthiopiens avant de les voir? Et quelle est la chose qui ne nous paraît pas étonnante quand elle vient à notre connaissance pour la première fois? Que d'impossibilités supposées avant d'en avoir vu la réalisation!" (Pline, *Histoire Naturelle*, Livre VII)

"El nombre de este libro justificaría la inclusión del príncipe Hamlet, del punto, de la línea, de la superficie, del hipercubo, de todas les palabras

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genéricas y, tal vez, de cada uno de nosotros y de la divinidad" (Jorge Luis BORGES and Margarita GUERRERO, *El libro de los seres imaginarios*, 1967).

Until recently, the Caribs, Arawaks, and other Indian tribes of northern and northeastern South America have classified other groups inhabiting their territories or beyond according to their unusual physical features or unusual customs. Among them, they told of the *aku:ri:yana* (*aku:ri* = aguti (*Dasyprocta aguti*); *yana* or *yano* = people, tribe), a tribe whose members had two-fingered hands and feet; the *aku:si:yana* (*aku:si* = acuchi (*Dasyprocta acuchi*)), men not taller than acuchies and whose language had only one sound: *pit-pit-pit;* the *aruto*, a wandering tribe whose diet consisted of fish, seasonal fruits, and their own feces; the *haibohe*, men whose feet grew directly from under their jaws and who had jaguar's teeth; the *Kainemo*, a tribe of warriors whose shoulders were higher than their heads so that their arms hung down along their ears; they were nocturnal and like the *aruto* ate people's feces or even people's behinds; the *ka:mbo:yana* (*ka:mbo* = barbecued fish), a people who slept on wooden grills; the *ko:ko:yana* (*ko:ko* = night), a group of nocturnal Indians who became tools during daylight, the *kuwa:ta:yana* (*kuwa:ta* = spider monkey, *Ateles paniscus*), hairy men who slept among tree branches; the *le:re:yana* (*le:re* or *re:re* = bat), people who slept like bats, i.e. hanging down from tree branches or people who became bats at night; the *me:ku:yana* (*me:ku* capuchin monkey, *Cebus appella*), people who lived in trees and had no gardens; the *no:no:yana* (or *popoyana; no:no* = earth, ground), nocturnal Indians who dwelt in subterranean caves during the daytime; the *paira:ndîpo*, men whose mouths were on their stomachs and whose eyes were in their chests; sometimes they are believed to have more then one mouth; the *pake:ru:yana* (or *palikuyana; pake:ru* = donkey), a race of men who brayed like asses at fixed times of the day; they unually slept in hollow tree trunks; the *paki:ra:yana* (*paki:ra* = collared peccary, *Tayassu tayacu*), people who wandered day and night, had no fixed place of residence and, like the peccaries, fed from everything; the *pa:nali:yana* (*pa:na* = ear), people with long ears resembling those of deer; their ears were, however, so large that they used them to protect themselves from the rain; the *pa:yawa:ru:yana* (or *paiwariyana; pa:yawa:ru* = cassava-beer), Indians who never slept; the *pi:ri:yana*, people not taller than 3 feet; the *poñ-poñ-poñ:yana*, a tribe of men whose language was like the call of a bird: *poñ-poñ-ponñ;* the *tu:na:yana* (*tu:na* = water, river), Indians who lived underwater; the *waiyokule* (*waiyo* = salt), long-eared Indians with white eyes and who ate only salt; the *warakuyana*, read Indians who went around naked; the *wo:rîi:yana* (*wo:rîri* = woman), a tribe of women. Other

tribes included people with tails, white hair, their feet turned backwards, one-eyed people, dog-headed people, bald people, one-legged people, men with oversized penises, and so on[1]. This list and the summary description of the main features of these tribes constitutes only a small fraction of the reports that have been gathered concerning 'unusual' men' among South American Indians. Basically, all these tribes deviate from a standard anatomical definition of Man or are characterized by unusual customs; most of them can become 'things', or 'animal' and 'vegetal species', and native views vary over some of them as to whether they are 'supernatural beings', 'animals', 'men', etc. Although these distinctions – and the doubts about the status of these tribes – are important, they were (are) thought of as pertaining to the same 'order of things' as the historical peoples with which the Guiana Indians have been in contact since the 16th century (neighbouring indigenous tribes, Dutch, African slaves, Spaniards) (Penard and Penard 1907: 58-64). Some of these tribes were (are) said to live far away in unknown countries or to have lived in times past and are now extinct. Nearly all of them should be (and are) classified as 'wild tribes' (Labat informed us that Caribs called all 'wild tribes' *'ticoyennes'* (1730: 353) though de Rochefort (1658: 575) claimed that the Island Caribs applied the word *'savage'* – he did not give us the native word – only to 'animals' and 'wild fruits').

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Perhaps one of the most striking things about these unusual men of the South American Indians is their similarity with the peoples described in European classical and medieval ethnology. Some of these men can indeed be found in Herodotus, Ctesias, Pliny, Benjamin of Tudela, etc., etc., and their study in the context of the history of Western art and thought and in the history of Western anthropology constitutes a growing field of research since the beginning of this century (Chinard 1911; Bernheimer 1952; Adams 1962; Vázquez 1962; Hodgen 1964; Tinland 1968; Elliot 1972; Poliakof 1975; Vigneras 1976; Kappler 1980; Block Friedman 1981). Earlier and more recent studies in this area, however, concern the idea of man as expressed implicitly or explicitly in classical Greece and Italy and in medieval Europe. None of those concerned with the 'idea of man' in Europe after the 16th century fails in attributing the reports sent back by

1 Cf. E. MAGAÑA, "Hombres salvajes y razas monstruosas de los indios Kaliña de Surinam." in *Journal of Latin American Lore* 8 (1), 1982.

travellers, explorers, and missionaries in the New World regarding the 'Plinian races' – as Block Friedman has appropriately chosen to call these unusual men – to the 'medieval mental exuberance'. Ethnographic evidence from South America, however, definitely proves that many – if not most – of these accounts were based upon native informants' reports. Schomburgk heard the same stories about the South American *Blemmyae* that Raleigh had reported in 1596 (Raleigh 1596: 85) and Tylor dealt extensively with non-Western myths and tales about unusual men, analysing materials from the most diverse cultures of the world (1870, I: 368-416). As for the Indians of Surinam, the brothers Penard compiled a list of more than 90 tribes, real and imaginary, that the Caribs, Arawaks, and Warrau professed to know at the beginning of this century (1907-1908). Such unusual peoples often appear in myths from throughout South America and many of them, as Tylor had already noticed, are practically universal: the anthropophagous, of course, but also the *Blemmyae* and the men with the feet turned backwards.

Though we usually assume that anthropology, as we now understand it, could not have developed in the same way in all societies, it is unthinkable for us that any society could do without an implicit or explicit idea of Man as Man. South American tribal Indians, (despite a lack of writing), seem to have gone beyond myths: ethnological concern has always been present among them. We know by very early reports that Caribs made use of some kind of ambassadors that were sent to distant places and that they "cherchaient à se former une idée d'ensemble du peuplement du pays" (Hurault 1972: 60). Contemporary reports recounting native ethnological preoccupations can also be found in Lévi-Strauss (1955), Huxley (1956), and Reichel-Dolmatoff (1975). On the basis of what we know, however, the reports on distant peoples by native explorers/ethnologists must have included, in addition to practical information on historical tribes, travel routes, commercial items or products to be found elsewhere, etc., descriptions of Plinian races of the kind expounded upon at the beginning of this paper. In fact, I have collected some of these ethnographic descriptions among the Kari'na of Surinam myself but, as I have dealt with them elsewhere, I will only focus here on more general aspects.

Lukesch recorded a myth among the Cayapo of Central Brazil that looks very much like an ethnographic report of the kind we are discussing. This myth tells us that:

> The place where stands the tree trunk that holds up the sky is also the place where all evil and wicked creatures live. The Indians had never seen these creatures until one of them left his village and kept on wandering until he reached the foot of the sky at the

> end of the world, where the sky rests on the earth and where the tree stands which supported the firmament above. After the man returned home safely and reported all that he had experienced and seen, many Indians departed, curious to see with their own eyes the strange and eerie things of which the other had spoken and to find out whether he had told the truth. They found that everything was just as he had described it, and when they went back home they took with them a child of the ugly, frightening creatures they had seen. The whole village marveled at the child, who was the offspring of a frog-man. The head was that of a frog and the legs were those of a frog; only the body was that of an Indians [...] [Another excursion follows]. There [in the East] the Po-po people live, along with the frog-people and many other strange creatures. The Po-po people are bird-men who, with human bodies and heads, look just like Indians, but their call sounds like "Po, Po, Po", the call of a bird [...] [Another excursion follows]. This time the Po-po people met them, and the sight frightened the Indians so badly that all their longing for adventure left them. Gone was their desire to push on to the limits of the earth and explore the most distant land. What they had already seen of it was more than enough, and they wanted to have nothing more to do with it. They fled head over heels toward home, and when they arrived they told the other villagers about their adventure (in Wilbert 1978: 29-31).

Many similar myths where 'Plinian men' appear are told by the Gê and they are also connected, as in the myth just quoted, with cosmological ideas (cf. the red-haired men, etc.; cf. Wilbert 1978). What is striking here is that the image of man that these myths give does not differ much – at least on a formal level – from that of European medieval and 'classical' ethnology. In 1870 Tylor had indeed already pointed out that until recent times (mid-19th century) anthropology "classified among its facts the particulars of monstrous human tribes" (1870, I: 385). He dealt at length with these Plinian races, using several approaches in order to explain why there seemed to be a universally felt need for imagining such unusual men (ethnocentrism, fear of the unknown, lack of positive ethnographic and geographic knowledge, etc., etc.) and why they seemed *believable* not only to 'primitive' peoples but 'even' to his own countrymen. I definitely do not believe that the primitive mind can be equated with classical or pre-logical, mind as has been assumed by several anthropological schools in the past; what I want to point out here is merely that on the level of possibility both concepts envisioned man as much more than we could now possibly do. It is also striking that man, as defined by Tylor, and as we still define him, is believable for us while the man of the Gê or of the Caribs is not. Perhaps Foucault is right when he says that before the 17th century man simply did not exist (1966: 343-387). Whatever the case, he did not look like what he does now and he was still much more hypothesis than fact.

Tylor felt the need to state that "[...] uncivilized men deliberately assign to apes an amount of human quality which to *modern* [my emphasis]

naturalists is simply ridiculous" (1870, I: 379). He also observed that while 'savages' attributed too many human qualities to animals, 'civilized' men attributed too many animal qualities to humans (ID.; 380). In both cases, the shape and the content of man remained a fertil ground for discussion. As this theme has already been dealth with by other researchers I will simply cite a few examples.

In his *The City of God Against the Pagans*, Saint Augustine devoted an entire chapter to the discussion of the status of several monstrous races of men. He wrote:

> Another question is whether we are to believe that certain monstrous races of men described in pagan history were descended from the sons of Noah, or rather from that one man from whom they themselves sprang. Among such cases are certain men said to have one eye in the middle of their foreheads, others with the soles of their feet turned backwards behind their legs, others who are bisexual by nature, with the right breast male and the left female, who in their intercourse with each other alternately beget and conceive. Then there are some with no mouths, who live only by breathing through their nostrils. There are men only a cubit high whom the Greeks call pygmies from their word for cubit. Elsewhere there are said to be females who conceive at the age of five and do not live beyond the eighth year [...] [He describes other tribes]. To be sure, we do not have to believe in all the types of men that are reported to exist. Yet whoever is born anywhere as a human being, that is, as a rational mortal creature, however strange he may appear to our senses in bodily form or color or motion or utterance, or in any faculty, part or quality of his nature whatsoever, let no true believer have any doubt that such an individual is descended from the one man who was first created (1965: 41-45).

We know in addition that Saint Augustine the apocryphal preached among the *Blemmyae* (see epigraph; for the discussion about this see Block Friedman 1981) and that Saint Christopher himself was a dog-headed man (ID.). Another strange and beautiful description is found in Mandeville:

> [...] In one of these isles be folk of great stature, as giants. And they be hideous for to look upon. And they have but one eye, and that is in the middle of the front. And they eat nothing but raw flesh and raw fish. And in another isle toward the south dwell folk of foul stature and of cursed kind that have no heads. And their eyen be in their shoulders. And in another isle be folk that have the face all flat, all plain, without nose and without mouth. But they have two small holes, and round, instead of their eyes, and their mouth is plat also without lips. And in another isle be folk of foul fashion and shape that have the lip above the mouth so great, that when they sleep in the sun they cover all the face with that lip. And in another isle there be little folk, as dwarfs. And they be two so much as the pigmies. And they have no mouth; but instead of their mouth they have a little round hole, and when they shall eat or drink, they take through a pipe or pen or such a thing, and suck it in, for they have no tongue; and therefore they speak not, but they make a manner of hissing as an adder doth, and they make signs one to another as monks do, by the which every of them understand the other. And in another isle be folk that have great ears and long, that hand down to their knees [...]

> And in another isle be folk that go upon their hands and their feet as beasts. And they be all skinned and feathered, and they will leap as lightly into trees, and from tree to tree, as it were squirrels or apes [...] Many other diverse folk of diverse natures be there in other isles about, of the which it were too long to tell, and therefore I pass over shortly (1499: 133-135).

The last long quotation I will indulge in brings us closer to our subject. As late as the beginning of the 18th century Latifau, who was previously convinced that reports on unusual races were mere fables of ancient authors and modern explorers, felt the need to revise his scepticism when two reports concerning these fabulous peoples reached him. One of these came from America:

> Le second fait est arrivé en Canada, où un bruit semblable se répandit l'an passé parmi les Sauvages [...] Un Iroquois, disent-ils, étant dans le païs de chasse pendant l'automne de 1721 [...] apperçut un de ces hommes monstrueux; et soit que ne se distinguant pas assez ce que ce pouvoit être, il le prit de loin pour un bête feroce, soit que la vûe d'une objet si extraordinaire lui eut causé quelque frayeur, il tire et le tua. S'étant ensuite approché pour le considerer plus à loisir, il vit un homme, tel que j'ai dépeint ces Acephales; et ce qui augmenta sa surprise, c'est qu'il le trouva lié et attaché à un arbre [...] La chose neanmoins paroît très-réelle, et il a apparence que ce miserable ayant été fait esclave par des Sauvages de quelque Nation éloignée, aura été ainsi attaché et abandonné dans les bois par ces Sauvages qui l'avoient pris, et que se trouvant en païs ennemi, et se sentant peut-être découverts, auront été obligez de fuir et de pourvoir à leur sureté. Quoiqu'il en soit, ces faits se rapportent fort les unes aux autres, en (supposant leur verité) ils peuvent donner idée des transmigrations des peuples Barbares. Car ces Acephales étoient autrefois habitans de l'Afrique aux environs du Nil ou de la Mer Rouge. Aujourd'hui, selon ces Relations, il doit en avoir au moins deux Nations, l'une qui est celle des Chevelus que Walter Ralegh place sur le fleuve des Amazones et dans le centre de la Guyane, et l'autre qui est située au Nordest de la Chine et du Japon, où l'Asie confine avec l'Amérique. Il y a même apparence que c'est de-là que seroit venu celui qu'on suppose avoir été tué par l'Iroquois dont je viens de parler. Cela même peut confirmer que l'Amérique et l'Asie sont jointes ensemble (1724: 65-67).

I could go on quoting reports such as this of Lafitau – almost all travellers' books and ethnographers' reports on South America contain some notes on such unusual men believed in by the travellers themselves or by native informants – but this brief survey will suffice for my purposes: what I want to show is how much the criteria of possibility regarding man have changed in Europe in the course of time and how much our 'man' does indeed differ from that of classical and medieval thinkers. All of the reports quoted attest to the fact that their authors deemed it *conceivable* that 'Plinian man' with all his odd features could exist somewhere and beyond this, when classical/medieval as well as South American native ethnology is taken into account, to how fragile and ephemeral the concept of man has been. It would now be a matter of common sense to state that every culture

has its own conditions and limits of possibility and necessarily its own 'man', 'nature', 'culture', 'animals', and so on, but it is rather astonishing to observe that in our field no systematic efforts have been made to handle these topics. I think it is now time to deal with them in a more systematic way. As a tentative definition of what I would like to call ethno-ethnology I propose it to be the study of the way in which man has implicitly or explicitly defined himself in all of his cultural settings and as the anthropological approach to the conditions determining what is 'possible' and what is not in man's conception of himself in any given culture. I know this is a somewhat restricted definition but, as a starting point, I think we can work with it[2]. Let us now turn to the idea of man of the Indians of northern South America.

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When we consider all these tribes (I left many unmentioned) of unusual men that Caribs, Arawaks, and other native nations claimed to have known, the following common attributes can be discerned: many have physical features that deviate from the standard shape of man and/or they are assigned animal characteristics (the two-fingered men who, due to this, cannot cultivate the ground and have to rely on seasonal fruits for food; the dwarfs – from those who are 3 feet tall to those not taller than acuchies; the howler-monkey men who live in trees; the jaguar men; the men whose feet grow directly from under their jaws; the men with mouths on the stomach; the spider-monkey men; the bat-men; the crab-men; the capuchin-monkey men; the bird-men; the peccary-men; the longeared men; the tailed men; the fish-men, and so on); many on them can become tools, torches, or even 'meat'; others invert the normal daily cycle as they are nocturnal and sleep during the day, live in a country where there is no daylight but eternal night, others never sleep; some are characterized by the unusual places they inhabit (trees, subterranean caves, caves in the mountains, hollow tree trunks, underwater); others lack articulate language; some go around entirely naked; many walk in odd ways: jumping, with hands and feet, and

2 Pierre VIDAL-NAQUET sums up in the following way the proposal by Poliakof: "[...] il propose une vaste enquête anthropologique comparative où interviendraient les spécialistes des différentes disciplines qui entrent en ligne de compte, pour essayer d'analyser quelles sont dans les différentes cultures les représentations sur les rapports entre l'homme et les animaux, et, en définitive, sur l'hominisation" (Poliakof 1975: 8). Leaving aside the last sentence and limiting ourselves to the study of the idea of man in all cultural settings, I feel pretty much at home with this definition.

one tribe cannot sit down as they have no knees; many are characterized by their diet: they eat only seasonal fruits, raw fish or meat or feces; some hunt on men; many do not form villages and are always wandering around in the forest, they do not know agriculture, etc., etc.

All these traits seem to indicate that the basic categories at the root of this ethnology are the distinctions between 'man' and 'animal' and/or between 'culture' and 'nature' since all these men share animal attributes or lack what we call 'cultural goods'. Block Friedman, when discussing the basic categories sustaining the Greek-Roman accounts of the 'Plinian races' listed the following: food and dietary practices (Appel-Smellers, Straw-Drinkers, Raw-Meat-Eaters, snake-eating men, dog-milking men, parent-eating anthropophagi, Panphagi who devour anything); the possession of articulate language and later on the distinction between those who spoke Greek and those who did not; the forming of villages and cities and connected with it the practice of 'urban faculties': law, social intercourse, worship, art, philosophy; industry (textile, metals, wood) or the lack of it (1981: 26-36). All of these categories can be found in Guiana ethnology, although – as with the Greek-Roman materials – some of these must be inferred. On some accounts the South American materials are richer than those collected from classical sources. For instance, for many 'races' it is specified that they eat raw food, since they lack fire and cooking implements, and almost all 'hunting tribes', besides eating raw flesh, lack hunting instruments and so, prey on their victims in the same way as carnivorous fish or mammals or birds of prey do. On the other hand, while 'food specialization' (which also denotes lack of commerce) carried negative connotations for the Greek-Roman Plinian races, it is the dependence upon seasonal fruits – and especially the lack of food discrimination – that marks the South American Plinian races in negative terms. One of the unusual tribes described in most negative terms by the Caribs is precisely that of the peccary-men, who eat everything, and while one of the most common features of the American Plinian men is anthropophagy, among the Greek-Roman materials this custom appears only in a few races. But it is not my purpose here to compare classical with native ethnology[3]. What I want to point out is that whenever we apply categories like 'culture' or 'man' as opposed to 'nature' or 'animal', the apparent facility with which the materials fit into these categories leads us to forget to explore the possible native definition of these and like concepts.

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3 Cf. POLIAKOF 1975. All the articles compiled by him concern the idea of 'man' and 'animal' in classical and medieval Europe and in some cultures of the Middle East.

I am not implying that these categories are of no use in contemporary ethnology. We have proof enough that they reflect real intellectual processes taking place in many cultures. Lévi-Strauss himself, who preferred this approach, said in 1971: "On m'a souvent dit que l'opposition de la nature et de la culture [...], dont je fais un si grand usage, était une création des ethnologues et qu'on ne pouvait pas la plaquer sur les systèmes de pensée qu'ils étudient: je crois que rien n'est plus faux. Les ethnologues n'ont pu concevoir cette opposition que parce qu'ils l'ont empruntée à leur objet d'étude. Bien entendu, elle ne s'exprime pas toujours de façon aussi directe; ce peut être aussi bien sous la forme d'une opposition entre le village habité et la brousse, la forêt et le terrain défriché, la cuisson et la crudité, etc., mais elle nous est toujours donnée par la matière de nos études" (in Bellour 1978: 384-385). A little earlier, however, he had warned that this opposition was of a methodological nature rather than the expression of real processes: "Dans *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté*, j'avais eu tendance à considérer que l'opposition nature-culture relevait de l'ordre des choses et exprimait une propriété du réel. J'ai pas mal évolué depuis sous l'influence des progrès de la psychologie animale et de la tendance à faire intervenir dans les sciences de la nature des notions d'ordre culturel [...] Aujourd'hui l'opposition nature-culture me semble moins refléter une propriété du réel qu'une antinomie de l'esprit humain: l'opposition n'est pas objective, ce sont les hommes qui ont besoin de la formuler. Elle constitue peut-être une condition préalable pour la naissance de la culture" (Id.: 37-38; see too Lévi-Strauss 1962). Lévi-Strauss himself has convincingly shown that the passage from 'nature' to 'culture' is the major theme of native American thought.

Will respect to Carib societies, this approach has proven to be equally fruitful. Rivière, analysing a Trio myth, for instance, informs us that "the main theme of the myth is quite clear; Pereperewa was living in a state of nature, without cultivated food, fire, and artifacts" (1969: 261) and then he goes on at length to show how, among the Trio, nature : culture :: incest : marriage rules :: moon : sun :: chaos : order :: periodic : routine :: individual : co-operative :: death : birth :: sky : water :: *entuhtao* : earth :: soul : body :: above : below :: night : day :: black : red (Id.: 263). Dumont (1972) has interpreted Panare views on the passage from nature to culture in a similar way. To look at one theme, that of incest, Dumont writes: "The mere idea of incest provokes a strongly emotional reaction among the Panare. They say *'arkon monkay usotnö"* ('to have sex like monkeys'), therefore meaning that incest is essentially natural, not cultural" (Id.: 98). Although the analyses by Rivière and Dumont are far more refined than

what I can convey here, and while I believe there must certainly be, as Lévi-Strauss puts it, an 'initial capital' (1952: 408) in mythic materials as well, what strikes me is the 'solidity', the 'concreteness' into which these concepts ('nature', 'culture', 'man') appear embedded. In our field, these concepts are now *ce qui va de soi.* We know, however, that even in the history of Western thought, these concepts have had a hazardous, constantly changing, and frequently challenged existence (Moscovici 1972; Poliakof 1975). The very notion of 'nature' has no less than 66 applications (Boas in Wiener 1968, III: 346-351) and that of 'culture' 164 different meanings (Barnard in Wiener 1968, I: 613-621). The reliability of these concepts seems to be illusory[4].

Returning to the Plinian peoples of the Guiana Indians, can we say that since they lack 'culture goods', they are, in the native mind, on nature's side? Are they assimilated into that which is 'animal', 'bestial', or 'natural'? Do they stand for that which is non-'human' or non-'cultural'? Are they thought of as being 'pre-human'? Are they headed towards 'culture'? Or are they conceived of as reverting to 'nature'? What do they tell us when considered as part of the natives' discourse on man?

These are truly not rhetorical questions but I will not be able to answer all of them. I shall limit myself to exploring some possible approaches. A study of each of the South American Plinian races and of its particular theoretical foundations (i.e. what makes them *possible* and *believable* in the natives' mind and what explains their particular features) being beyond the scope of this paper, I will deal in general with trying to ascertain what they might tell us concerning the ontological status of man among native Americans. All conclusions are tentative.

Though we usually equate 'nature' = 'animal' as opposed to 'culture' = 'man', the Guiana Indians seem to have had other conceptions regarding the differences between men and animals. Roth observed that among them all birds and forest beasts "are represented as thinking, talking, and acting as do sentient human beings. They are also believed to possess spirits just like those of human folk [...] To put the matter shortly, these creatures with human ideas were born so: they 'growed' [...] The Indian [...] is firmly convinced himself that animals and birds associate with man; that they are all of one and the same breed; that they may equally live, eat, drink, love,

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4 See SCHINDLER'S criticism of Dumont (1972). In spite of my reservations I think that to simply abandon these concepts will lead us nowhere. For our purposes, they should be taken as a starting point.

hate, and die. It is small wonder then that the Indian folklore is so largely crammed with this same idea of Man and Animal (used in its widest sense) being so intimately interchangeable" (1915: 199). De Goeje, however, later wrote that the Caribs considered all animal species as materialized passions and explained that some animal met with in myths were indeed human beings transformed into the animals that represented their passions (1943: 95). I don't know if de Goeje was right about this. Some of the Plinian races can transform themselves into a wide array of animal species, but also ordinary men can (or could) become 'animals', 'things', and even phenomena such as rain. Shamans of course can adopt many shapes. And men and animals can even become 'something else' unwillingly: during lunar eclipses such transformations are said to occur.

But the idea of 'animal' is not similar to the contemporary Western ones. Generally speaking, Caribs distinguish between *tono:mî* (land quadrupeds including turtles and iguanas) and *tunadano tono:mî* (aquatic *tono:mî;* this category includes the manatee and the dolphin); *tono:ro* (large birds) and *wansi:ri* (little birds), with an additional distinction between *aurindono* (flying birds) and *auripuman* (land birds). *Wo:to* includes all fish. there are other categories which are not included in any of these: *oko:mo* (wasps), *oko:yu* (snakes), etc. Some authors have emphasized the fact that at the root of these conceptualizations there is a culinary distinction (edible and non-edible species) but this is no longer tenable (Jara n.d.).

Many of the forest animals, eaten or not, appear in Carib zoology, as Roth had formulated in the language of his time, as having what we now call 'cultural goods': To begin with, 'Language', since animals can, according to the Caribs, communicate among themselves; 'Social organization', 'social order', or the recognition of categories like 'chief' and 'followers', 'shamans', etc. It is said of the *meku (Cebus appella)* that they form groups of about 20 individuals who live forming monogamous couples; no sexual indiscrimination or incest is attributed to them. The *alawa:da (Mycetes seniculus*) reportedly form groups of about 12 individuals; they form monogamous couples and then choose to live alone or in the group although the 'chief' has two or more 'wives'; again, no sexual indiscrimination and no incest is apparent. The *pîiñgo* (*Dycotiles labiatus*, white-lipped peccary) form hierarchical groups with a 'male chief' who leads the group and a 'female chief' who must always be accompanied by an escort; she does not die. The howler monkeys also have a kind of 'religious cult': every morning they 'chant' – led by their 'shaman' – to the Morning Star. It its assumed that 'animals' love and hate; more explicitly,

they fall in love: a *me:ku* (Capuchin monkey) can fall in love with an *akarima* female *(Chrysotrix sciurens)* and then follow the squirrel monkeys group till he finds the opportunity of raping and/or kidnapping her; the new couple thus formed lives then among the capuchin monkeys. 'Animals' also mourn (I have in mind what Pliny said of man: the only animal who can mourn): Caribs explicitly state that the *Kuwa:ta (Ateles paniscus)* mourn their dead. I am not certain regarding agriculture: Caribs know some species of 'agriculturalist' ants and state that those manioc-eating species 'cook' the tubers: they put them to dry under the sun till the poisonous juice evaporates. Regarding 'incest', the only species that the Caribs characterize as being incestous is the tapir: they are monogamous in the breeding season and the offspring (if a male) can become the next 'husband' of his 'mother'.

This brief excursion into Carib zoology shows that 'animals' for them are rather 'cultural' or 'cultured beings'. I am not certain that the re-examination of the opposition between nature and culture by Dumont and Monod would be of much help here ("The latter asserts as a rule what the former asserts as a law..."; Dumont 1972: 164) since, as we see, in Carib zoology or animal ethology many species are definitely part of the 'realm of the rule', a number of them being able to break some of these, and on the whole animals are not thought of as reproducing behavior patterns of which they should be unaware. In addition a certain species is explicitly characterized as relating to the 'super-natural' since it communicates (or tries to) with the Morning Star. Again, I do not know if the concept just introduced, conveys the same meaning to each of us nor if there is any concept of super-nature among the natives similar to ours. 'Super-nature', in the sense of the belief in a 'superlunary world' associated with (predicted) invariability or long periodicity (stars), and/or associated with life after death, is part of the native symbolic views; on the other hand, 'super-nature' in the sense of 'that which is beyond man's control' also exists (many Plinian races are seen as being indifferently beneficial or mischievous spirits) but then, as the Plinian men are on *this side*, they are also doomed to die and therefore belong to the 'sublunary world'.

Not everything thus conveys the meaning of 'nature' in the sense already known to us, since for the Caribs and other Guiana groups animals appear endowed with almost all of the properties that in Western thought have served to differentiate men from animals. On the other hand, the distinction between men and animals, or rather among some of them, is clearly present in mythic materials: the opposition between men and tapir (the incestous animal), between men and white-lipped peccaries (the

voracious and demanding animals) (Kloos 1971: 226-233), between men and cultures (those which eat rotten or decaying flesh) (Thomas 1982: 187-226). What this indicates is that the opposition between 'nature' and 'culture' operates along rather different lines than it does among us, or that it operates at another level or embedded in another set of categories since men and animals share almost all features in native thought and since men can be as demanding and as incestous as peccaries and tapirs. By this account, the Guiana Plinian tribes are on an equal footing with men and animals.

Now the Plinian tribes share a feature that form a Carib point of view seems to be a possibility only for man himself: many of these tribes are 'anthropophagous' or rather 'endophagous' since man is apparently the only species that can consider other members of the species as food. I do prefer the term 'endophagous' over 'anthropophagous' in describing these tribes since Caribs recognize many species that 'hunt' on men (carnivorous fish, jaguars, etc., as well as imaginary men-eating animals) and yet I am not certain that the Caribs would agree that this category ('endophagi') should only include man as species. In any case, the man-eating Plinian peoples of the Caribs can be divided into two groups: the first is composed of those men who become carnivorous animal species and therefore eat men only because they are carnivorous (I would define this category as 'natural men'): the second group includes all tribes that are properly 'endophagous' since, whether or not unusual in their physical appearance and not lacking cultural goods, they have made men part of their diet (this category would include the 'wild men').

Though we lack sufficient materials concerning the native views on the origin of these imaginary tribes, some myths where 'cannibalism' or some form of it takes place indicate the path we must follow to define their status. Some man-eating forest or river spirits were 'normal' men who became men-eaters after having been hurt or ill-treated by the villagers. Thus one man-eating water-spirit became an ogress after her neighbours cooked her child and gave it to her as food. A forest spirit became mischievous toward men when a group of hunters threw its eyes into the fire. A legend narrating the origin of war between Caribs and Arawaks tells that a Carib (or an Arawak) killed and roasted his wife (an Arawak or a Carib); when the crime was discovered, war ensued. There is a myth in which a young man feeds his mother-in-law to carnivorous fish when he discovers that it was she who stole the fish from his fish-weir. In another myth, a man kills and roasts his wife and gives her to his mother-in-law to eat. Common to all these myths and tales is the fact that a man considers other men (other

villagers, affines) as food (though generally he does not eat them) and therefore equates them with 'edible animals' ('nature') although his act is wholly on the side of 'culture' since he is the only species with this possibility at his disposal. But what is more noteworthy here is that the 'wild men' of the Caribs are neither to be seen as Man in a state preceding 'culture' nor in a state of 'nature' to which they should have arrived at *from* 'culture': these 'wild men' derive from 'social or cultural corruption' or from the 'breakdown of a social contract', for men reach at this state when the conditions for social life threaten to be or are disrupted by one of the 'poles' engaged in the building up of the social network. In the case of the last two myths mentioned the 'wife-givers' group disrupts the equilibrium they should maintain with that of the 'wife-takers': in the first myth, a mother-in-law demands too much from her son-in-law; in the second, a wife and her brothers interpret literally what a man means metaphorically or, when considering other versions of this myth, kills and roasts his wife due to his anger with the continous demands of his mother-in-law. A more refined analysis of these myths could readily lead us to the opposition between nature and culture once again, and would force us to consider the more specific sociological context in which they acquire their full meaning, but this is beyond the scope of this paper. I only want to point out the general direction that native thought seems to follow when considering the wild state of men. What the materials so far considered do indeed indicate is that it is 'civilization' itself (i.e. the social network formed by 'wife-givers' and 'wife-takers') that threatens man with death at the hand of his fellow men or with the prospect of being considered as food. The fragility of the concept of man must probably be sought in this context.

The myths I am referring to are far more complex and have far deeper connotations than my brief account of them implies. The last two myths, in fact, purport to explain the origin of some constellations and connect violent death at the hands of men with the long periodicity of stars, the 'supernatural' 'superlunary' world of the ancestors, the annual cycle of seasons, etc., etc. They are not at all explicitly concerned with the nature of man. There are however some myth whose apparent purpose is to explain man's origin (descended from the sky through a hole in the clouds or out of the rotten body of a snake) but we are already entagled enough not to be able to withstand the temptation of analizing them.

* * *

Conclusions. I close this discussion here with a feeling of uneasiness. I have not dealt with the Plinian tribes in connection with the realm of the supernatural (especially when all indications point to men's disruption of the social order as at the root of it) and have not even attempted to explain (in the context of Guiana cultures) their particular features (i.e. why they are *thinkable* for the native mind and why they are – with all their odd features – *believable* for the Indians). I have left aside a discussion of their origin myths and, I did not even mention that villagers actively engage in discussing these kinds of topics: 'Since when are men agriculturalists?' 'How did we cook the meat when we had no fire?' 'Why do we have the names we have?' In fact until now I have not mentioned that many villagers simply refuse to talk about these unusual men – the mere utterance of their names would be harmful – and they reserve this sort of talk to shamans. And, yet, all these themes are central to our discussion. It is thus with the utmost reservation that I dare to propose some conclusions: in Carib ethnology the 'Plinian races' seem to be divided into those who are 'natural' (those who become carnivorous animal species, who have odd physical or 'cultural' features but who are not necessarily 'anthropophagous') and those who are 'wild' (having made other men part of their diet). The first group is on an equal footing with the historical tribes. Animals are thought of as 'cultural' or 'cultured beings', in our terms, since they possess all that we call 'cultural goods' (articulate language, social rules, religious cults, etc.). Men differ from animals in that man as a species is the only one with the potential for becoming predator of himself. This notion seems to be at the root of the fragility of the concept of man since it is this pessimistic view of man which underlies the possibility of the 'Plinian wild men' as well as the possibility of attributing to them features of carnivorous species (jaguar's teeth, prey birds breaks, etc.). The notion of 'supernature' (super-an sublunary) as opposed to 'culture' (including animals and men) seems a better approach to the native view than what we usually call the opposition between nature and culture. In any case, we must make an effort to (re)-define these concepts in their cultural contexts. My (general, and) final suggestion is to define *ethno-ethnology* as the anthropological approach to what has been (is) possible for man to think of himself and ultimately to give an account – from a cross-cultural perspective – of the fragility of the concept of man.

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