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The Enigma of the Great Cities: Body and State in Amazonia¹

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The laconic evidence supplied by Orellana, who sailed down the river as far as the estuary in 1541-2, and still more so the existence of native oral traditions, whose extreme complexity, artificial composition and mystical tone suggest that they must be attributed to schools of sages and learned men, argue in favour of a much higher level of religious, social and political organisation than anything that has been observed since . . . [T]hese previous documents . . . [are] the remnants of a genuine civilization common to the whole of the Amazon basin . . .

—Lévi-Strauss (1973:271-272)

According to a recent museum exhibition on Amazonia, “Por mais de 10,000 anos, nós, os indígenas vivem em harmonia com a natureza, eram e são parte da floresta.”² This quote neatly sums up centuries of Western preconceptions about Amazonian peoples. Who penned the words or where they appear is not important. The image is deeply embedded, almost archetypal, in the Western imagination, reproduced time and again in popular films, rock videos, or in magazines on newstands in São Paulo, Paris or New York. The image of Amazonians living, since time immemorial, in a delicate and unchanging balance with nature, and representing a precivil or primitive condition of society, has also underpinned, at least implicitly, much regional anthropology. Such imagery of Amazonian “primitivism” has undergone trenchant critiques, on both philosophical and anthropological grounds, paralleling those from throughout the non-Western world (J. Fabian 1982, Lévi-Strauss 1963, Said 1978). The empirical question nevertheless remains: to what degree do the indigenous social forms of recent Amazonia—characterized by small social groupings, ecological “homeostasis,” and relative political autonomy and social equality—adequately represent an aboriginal or typical condition of Amazonian societies prior to 1492?

Some anthropologists have long suspected that recent ethnographic groups differ dramatically from the social formations that dominated

Amazonia c. 1492, based in large part, as Lévi-Strauss (1973:271) notes, on the “laconic evidence” provided in early chronicles.³ Recent, more detailed studies of these early documents and prehistoric archaeology in several areas document that, before Europe’s expansion into the New World, large and densely settled societies thrived along much of the Amazon River and its major tributaries, at least many of which were organized into regional, hierarchical polities (see, e.g., Heckenberger et al. 1999; Porro 1996; Roosevelt 1991, 1994; Whitehead 1994). Nonetheless, the early accounts and archaeology from the Amazon River have had only a limited impact, overall, on general portrayals of Amazonian peoples. Furthermore, regional specialists are presently ill-equipped to evaluate the nature or the distribution of “complex” societies in Amazonia. The question today is not whether there were “civilizations” in Amazonia, but how was sociopolitical complexity constituted in these past societies, *vis-à-vis* other societies worldwide and, more specifically, how do ancient societies compare with contemporary ones.

In the present essay, ethnographic and archaeological patterns from the Upper Xingu (Mato Grosso), an area far removed from the Amazon floodplains, are briefly summarized. They suggest that Xinguano society, considered over the long term, shows characteristics, such as large, sedentary communities, an “elite ideology,” a developed political economy, and regional sociopolitical integration, that are considered indicators of sociopolitical complexity elsewhere. Xinguano ethnography and oral history suggest that (a) an idiom of hierarchy, not equality, underlies most social relations, (b) social actors are differentially transformed (constructed) based on the symbolic and ritual objectification of this hierarchy, and (c) weighty actors, i.e., those who can accumulate a surplus of symbolic resources (e.g., ritual prerogatives, names, and control of certain exclusive objects and places), transform these into economic capital, in the form of both wealth and labor, thus providing the basis for a truly political economy. Archaeological evidence from the Upper Xingu provides the means to extend these observations into prehistory in local and broader contexts and also to consider the nature of ancient complex societies in Amazonia.⁴

THE STATE OF NATURE

The idea of Amazonian peoples living in a pre-civil or “primitive” state of society has a deep history, extending back to the earliest accounts of the Age of Discovery. General formulations of the primitive “Other” took shape during the Enlightenment, as authors such as Hobbes and Rousseau

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self-critically reflected on European society. The “state of nature,” as Hobbes (1996 [1651]) dubbed the archaic condition of society, was seen to represent an imagined past through which Western humanity passed in ancient times, a natural or pristine state of society founded on social equality (Fabian 1982).

The primeval state of nature, the early days of human experience, as Gadamer (1979:243) refers to such a notion,⁵ represents an ontological mirror or prism for the West, reflecting its own values and preoccupations, alternatively its dark or luminous faces. But, the image is not only part of an abstract or philosophical history, it is also part of the intellectual apparatus of European colonialism (Kehoe 1998; Said 1978). In Amazonia, images of primitivism have pervaded Western representations, to the point that many feel that the very notion of native cities, regional bureaucracies, kings, priests, slaves, and the like, is untenable. Thus, many commentators take for granted that, by and large, the image that has come down to us over the centuries (i.e., smallish, relatively self-contained, and egalitarian social groupings “at one” with nature) is, for one reason or another, a reasonably good representation of most native Amazonians.

Until recently many anthropologists shared this view and, although at odds over whether nature imposes order on culture or vice versa, most agreed that a dynamic equilibrium is (or was) maintained between the two, keeping social groups relatively small, productivity relatively low, and social inequality minimal and contingent. The State is an entity imported to Brazil only after 1500 as part of the “Columbian exchange” (Crosby 1972) that accompanied the expansion of the European world system into the Americas.⁶ Hence, the question that anthropologists have most commonly asked is not why complex societies emerged in the region, but why they did not. The usual answers take one of two forms—either the natural environment is unable or society unwilling to support the necessary transformations.⁷ The transition from personal equality and local autonomy to hierarchical authority, political economy, and regional integration, was the result of extraordinary conditions of superabundance (and population growth) or diffusion.

Generalized anthropological images of Amazonian peoples—e.g., as small- to medium-sized, impermanent, autonomous (even isolated), and egalitarian communities—are largely distillations of what we know about the present or recent past. The ancient, and now largely extinct, societies that inhabited the sliver of floodplain land along the Amazon (the *várzea*)—known solely through archaeology and ethnohistory—are the one exception. Recently, many regional specialists suggest that the unique ecological conditions of the *várzea* (less than five per cent of greater Amazonia)

enabled unusual population and economic growth, thus transforming the underlying structure of these societies and providing the basis for large settled populations, sociocultural complexity, and inequality—the initial rumblings of the State. We ought to be skeptical, however, of a comparison that places a *várzea* “derived” social form, existing only in ancient Amazonia, alongside a “primitive” or “aboriginal” form known almost entirely from recent times.

The fact is that we know precious little about the remote past, or even the pre-20th century past, for that matter, in most areas where relatively unacculturated Amazonian communities still exist—the so-called *terra firme* (covering some 95–98% of Amazonia). Our anthropological understanding of the region comes from the demographic nadir of Amazonian populations (reaching the low hundreds of thousands in the mid-1900s); the apogee of perhaps five million or more was achieved circa 1500 (see Denevan 1992). This suggests overall depopulation between c. 1500–1950 of some 80–90 per cent, which is not surprising, considering the figures from the Caribbean, North America, Middle America, the Andes, and eastern Brazil, but this is certainly unexpected and at odds with many models of Amazonian cultural development. Amazonia was not insulated from the demographic collapse associated with European contact, and therefore we ought to be skeptical of models which portray societies during the nadir as somehow “traditional” or “typical” of Amazonian societies. Specifically, does the apparent lack of political power, social hierarchy, and political economy, suggested for most ethnographic groupings, represent an underlying (traditional) Amazonian pattern? If it does not, as I suspect, then alternative models of personhood must be formulated that address the complex societies of ancient Amazonia.

THE MARK OF HIERARCHY

The purpose of the initiation, in its torturing phase, is to mark the body: in the initiatory rite, *society imprints its mark on the body* of the young people . . . [so as] not to lose the memory of the secret imparted by the tribe . . .

—Pierre Clastres (1987:184, emphasis in original)

In his classic volume on political power, Pierre Clastres suggests that archaic societies, like those of ancient Amazonia, are “societies of the mark,” since, unlike the coercive power (violence) invested in the written word, the law inscribed on the body, the “mark on the body, on all bodies alike, declares: You will not have the desire for power; you will not have the

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desire for submission” (Clastres 1987:188). Societies of the mark, those without writing, are therefore societies without the State, since “writing points to the existence of a separate, distant, despotic law of the State . . . [and] it is precisely in order to exorcise the possibility of that kind of law—the law that establishes and guarantees inequality—that primitive law functions as it does” (Clastres 1987:188). The secret thus imparted to the initiates, marked upon the body, according to Clastres, is: “You are one of us. Each one of you is like us; each one of you is like the others” (1987:186).

The secret that Xinguano society passes on to its youth, however, is rather different—the message inscribed on the body is difference, not sameness. The law written on the body is precisely that law that establishes and guarantees inequality, specifically the type of inequality that is formalized or institutionalized in a hierarchy of ranked kin groups. The essence of this hierarchy is clear and marked at birth: some people are born high ranking (*aneti*)⁸ and some are not. But, although chiefness (to be *aneti*) is a matter of heredity, to be a chief is not. Chiefs are not born but made, constructed through a series of life-crisis rituals which distinguish individuals as chiefs and, in turn, further legitimize their lines. The regular (and necessary) performance of the rituals not only express hierarchy, but in fact create and perpetuate it. Here only the most skeletal sketch is provided of the primary chiefly rites of passage, the *tignonho* male puberty ritual and the *egitse* funeral ritual, better known as *kuarup* (the Kamayurá term),⁹ but it suffices to show how hereditary chiefs are constructed through the differential treatment of the body in public ritual and, thus, symbolically separated from (and placed above) the rest of society. As symbolic valuables (exclusive objects, body markings, knowledge, names, and ritual space) change hands from one generation to the next, chiefs get far more than their equal share, and these actors can parlay their prestige, or symbolic capital, into control, if not accumulation, of economic wealth.

The ear-piercing ceremony, *tignonho*, is enacted when the son of a “true” or “great” chief (*aneti-bekugu*) reaches the appropriate age. The adolescent *aneti* is positioned in the center of a line of stools in front of the men’s house (*kuakutu*), he is painted with special facial markings, and wears special adornments (feather headdress), thus setting him apart very obviously from his peers. Like his fellow initiates, other *aneti* boys who are graded in rank from the center outward, he is subjected to the same piercing that marks him as a member of society, but, unlike his cohorts, his ears are pierced with special spikes, including exclusive woods and even jaguar bone (Basso 1973:147)—unmistakable emblem of chiefs. At this moment he is publicly exalted, before the eyes of all, including those guest chiefs and their sons invited from other villages, not only as *aneti*, which was already taken for

granted, but as potential *aneti hekugu*. It is important also to mention another element of this ritual that metaphorically demonstrates continuity between these chiefly initiates and deceased chiefly ancestors. This is the use of, not only the special body paints—employed exclusively by chiefs and on the idols (wooden trunks) that represent them in death, during the funeral ceremony (*egitse* or *kuarup*)—but also the *oilape*, which is used on only two occasions, when the heirs of primary chiefs are recognized in the *tiponho*, becoming potential *aneti hekugu*, and when chiefs are buried, becoming ancestors. The primary initiates¹⁰ are thus placed on a unique pathway to political power, becoming, to use Sahlins' (1991) apt phrase, “living ancestors.” In other words, the secret imparted to these young *aneti* in the initiation rite is clear—“you are different, special, you will be apart.”

The most profound expression of difference, however, is not when boys and future chiefs are initiated, but when past chiefs are commemorated in the elaborate funeral ceremony (*egitse*). When they die, major *aneti* persons, including primary female chiefs (*tango*) are buried with special ceremonies and amidst general laments. All *aneti* are given special burial treatment and, in theory, merit commemoration in a *kuarup* ceremony, but only the death of *aneti hekugu* or their principal heirs, be they men or women, prompts a community to request a *kuarup* of their next-of-kin. The *kuarup* cycle begins with the principals of the ceremony (the next-of-kin) lined up in a row of benches in the village plaza, again with higher-ranking individuals in the center, spatially representing the hierarchy of living family members. A *tafite* (“house of the dead”) is built over the *aneti* grave, using short *uengifi* trunks, to mark the initiation of the *kuarup*. First-fruits (*piqui*) and manioc flour are collected for storage by the chief. For months leading up to the final phase of the ceremony *atanga* flute dances are held regularly. Formal messengers are sent out just prior to the ceremony, when the spirits of the dead ancestors are invoked to occupy the large *uengifi* trunks.

The day of the ceremony the trunks are decorated and *aneti* family members of the deceased chiefs are painted with special body designs marking their chiefly status. During the ceremony the principal *aneti*, the “owners” (*oto*) of the festival, wear jaguar skin and claw ornaments, the special yellow-feather earrings, and carry the black-wood bows, all exclusive emblems of high chiefly rank. An even more obvious representation of deference to hereditary chiefs occurs when the principal *aneti* call out their champions into the plaza (those who will wrestle the strongest of the guest villages), who come and kneel before the *aneti* sponsors with head to ground, in a graphic gesture of supplication. At the end of the ceremony, the *aneti* sponsors kneel before the three *anetao* representatives of each guest village, who sit upon stools before their people, and present them with gifts of

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food.

The *kuarup* cycle, which can last well over a year, is the core ritual in Xinguano society.¹¹ It simultaneously recreates Xinguano history through the invocation of the spirits of recently deceased ancestors, the recitation of genealogies of founding ancestors (see Franchetto 1993, 2001), and the use of exclusive ritual objects that pertain to the divine ancestors. It affirms existing hierarchical social relations, through spatial arrangements and ritual prerogatives. Through the veneration of past chiefs, living chiefly persons are positioned within sociohistorical trajectories that concretely link them with ancestral chiefs and, metaphorically, divine culture heroes. The *anetão* (plural *aneti*) are the worldly heirs of these sacred lines of power, created at the dawn of human time when the initial *kuarup* was held to commemorate the divine mother, the mother not just of chiefs, but of the creator twins Sun and Moon. They too were the sons of chiefs, their jaguar father being a chief and their mother being carved from the wood of the *uengifi* tree (the chief of the forest).

Hierarchical social relationships are described in terms of the degree of respect or “shame,” *ihuse* (to be in a state of deference or “shame” [*ihuse-ndagu*] to a social superior), that one individual has for another (cf. Basso’s 1973 description of *ifutisu* among the speakers of the closely related Kalapalo language). Children and their spouses are *ihuse-ndagu* to their parents and parents-in-law, wives are to their husbands, younger siblings are to older siblings, and, most notably in the present context, commoners are to the primary chiefs. This relationship is metaphorically represented in chiefly discourses where community members are called “my children,” “my sons,” or simply “children” (Gregor 1977:81; Viveiros de Castro 1987:61). Structurally, hierarchy is based on primogeniture within an otherwise cognatic kinship system, whereby the higher ranking individuals derive status from their relative position in the chiefly hierarchy. More or less similar structural patterns, variably referred to as status lineages, conical clans, or house societies, have been identified for a wide range of moderately to highly stratified societies.¹² It is typically the case in these other hierarchical societies that the temporal extension of birth-order ranking is branching, what Firth (1936) called “ramification,” whereby chiefly lines (e.g., the oldest sons of oldest sons) become separated from subordinate lines (the youngest sons of youngest sons). Such a structure of hierarchically organized kin groups simultaneously divides society into upper strata (chiefs) and lower strata (non-chiefs) while incorporating both in a unified structure.¹³

This is why some Xinguanos are highly preoccupied with issues of genealogy and history, and others much less so; some nonchiefs, in fact,

show so little interest that they seem to have a genealogical amnesia (Gregor 1977:263). The position of each person is a reflection of distance from common chiefly ancestors, relating to chiefly “lines” which extend back to the middle 1800s.¹⁴ In the most sacred, secret lore, *aneti hekugu* remember these chiefs through a specialized chief’s language called *aneti itariñu* (Franchetto 1993). The invocation of powerful past chiefs legitimizes both the orator and the chiefly lines of which he speaks (through name transmission, chiefly lines equate to chiefly individuals), and metaphorically links the orator with the powerful human and divine ancestors (chiefs). Beyond the chief’s language, knowledge is not tightly controlled, but the chiefs, in particular, make it their business to know their chiefly history and genealogy. They are both authorized and encouraged to learn the chiefly discourse style in which they give regular public orations. But what “stories” (*akiña*) do they learn? They describe the first *kuarup*, the great ancestral chiefs and culture heroes, special places and ancient villages, and the singular events that make up their history. These legendary tales and sacred lore punctuate and authorize their public discourses, including orations regarding the mundane activities of the community or affairs of the day.

The Xinguano past is peopled with heroic figures and history is focused on the lives and acts of culture heroes and political leaders, elite genealogies, and signal events. It is a heroic history. Esoteric knowledge, such as the *aneti itariñu*, is guarded by chiefs and passed from elder to younger *aneti*. Writing is often used as a definitional characteristic of the nascent state (cf. Clastres 1987), but it is equally important to consider what is written about. What are the issues and concerns deemed important enough to remember, in whatever form? These are perhaps more illustrative of the basic values, preoccupations, and principles that motivate society than the medium with which they are remembered, that is to say whether histories are penned, drawn, carved, or otherwise put into durable form.

Initiation rites, as Clastres (1987:180) notes, reveal basic values and principles of social life. As public symbols made present in the body, in objects, and in spatial arrangements, they make explicit certain underlying assumptions in a way that legitimizes (naturalizes) existing social relations, giving them an external reality that motivates in a way no purely implicit ideology can (see Bourdieu 1977). Just as it is inscribed on the body, hierarchy becomes inscribed in spatial patterns, ranging from where one sits to how a village is laid out on the ground, as Lévi-Strauss (1963) noted long ago with respect to the organization of circular plaza villages.¹⁵ What is important to recognize here is the significance or symbolic weight of the central plaza. Virtually all public rituals and political actions are focused

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in the plaza. It is not only a way of inscribing cultural knowledge and social relations in place but also can be viewed as a container of power. As with all public structures, it is “owned” by one of the two or three principal village chiefs, including most notably the *eté òto* (“owner of the village”) and the *hugogó òto* (“owner of the center”). Although one of the titular chiefs is always dominant, in the Kuikuro village both are *aneti hekugu*, since they speak the chiefly discourse style, formally receive visitors from other villages, and are accordingly afforded considerable respect by the vast majority of villagers. Many people, particularly younger adults, will not speak or will only speak softly in the presence of the *aneti hekugu*, and will not sit too close to them, even in informal situations. This is an extension of the basic *ihuse* deference one pays a social superior. The importance of plazas as enclosures that control and exclude the actions of persons, disciplining the body, is explored in greater detail elsewhere (Heckenberger 2003a).¹⁶ It is worth noting here that not only do chiefs control major roadways and the central plaza, but prominent chiefly families control cardinal points of the house ring, and do so for generations.

The *hugogó òto* in 1993 (now *eté òto*) was also *kuakutú òto* (“owner of the men’s house”), one of two communally constructed structures in the village. The other community-built structure is the chief’s house, *tajife*, which was also being built for the *hugogó òto* in 1993, although the chief cancelled the project due to the death of his eldest son and heir. These two structures are the only structures that can display the symbols of chieftaincy—special paintings, *uengifi* house posts, and special roof finishings, among other things. Thus, in chiefly initiation rites, in the learning and use of esoteric ritual knowledge, and in the trappings of office bestowed upon chiefs, the body of the chief is symbolically not only transformed but also amplified as the chief accumulates a surplus of symbolic resources, which are inalienable since they are written on the body.

THE BODY POLITIC

Xinguano peoples “socialize” nature according to the same principles that guide social life. Like other Amazonian peoples, Xinguanos have a “view of the relations with nature that privileges social and symbolic interactions with the animal world,” but, like society, nature is composed of beings with distinctive social roles: chiefs, warriors, and shaman (Descola 1996a; Viveiros de Castro 1987, 1996:194). The father of the creators (Sun and Moon) was the chief of the village of jaguars and their mother was constructed from a forest tree, *uengifi*, which is the chief of the forest.

These two symbols of chiefness, *uengifi* wood and the skin and claws of the jaguar, are exclusively used or owned by the *aneti*. In fact, virtually all villages—including those of the present and recent past, that of the ancestors, the village of the dead where the mother of the divine twins rules, and those of natural and supernatural “others”—are remembered by their founders, both the chiefs who reign currently and those already buried there. Thus, while there is no rupture (dualism) between nature-culture in native Amazonian ontologies, a transformation does take place: human society and nature become divided into a more divine upper half, peopled with chiefs, and a less divine lower half. Animism, or more appropriately monism (Descola 1996b; see also Viveiros de Castro 1998), is thus structured by hierarchy, and we might note that a continuity of animism (and shamanism) within a broader holistic religious system, what Chang has called “cosmogonic holism,” is a characteristic feature of many ancient states, including diverse Mesoamerican, Andean, and “Asiatic” societies (Demarest 1981; Furst 1976; Lathrap 1985; Chang 1989).

The chief, sitting at the pinnacle of human social hierarchy, represents that separate power that while poised above society also embodies it: the chief symbolizes the group and represents the macro or “socio-historical” individual (Sahlins 1991) or what Clastres (1987) calls the “One.” In ritual, the *aneti hekugu* is the representation, in earthly form, of the lines of chiefly ancestors, and is thus poised between the social and the divine. Here, as Sahlins (1985:35) points out, we need make “no taxonomic issue of the differences between ‘divine kings,’ ‘sacred kings,’ ‘magical kings,’ and ‘priest-kings’—or even between ‘kings’ and ‘chiefs.’”¹⁷ As society becomes anthropomorphic, isomorphic with the body of the chief, so too does cosmology, which is no longer confined to tracing the contours of nature—an existential contradiction (Giddens 1984:196). The distinction of high and low born, an “ethos of aristocracy” created by the metaphorical divinization of a small segment of society (and nature), produces an internal alterity, what Giddens (1984:196) calls a structural contradiction. Lévi-Strauss noted as much long ago: “In the final analysis, the difference between totemic groups and functional castes comes down to the fact that in one case the society conforms to the natural model or one that proports to be so, whereas in the other case it adopts a cultural model” (1987:35).

The question remains, however, whether chiefs, even though pregnant with symbolic capital, can transform this into economic capital, in the form of goods and labor, to achieve greater political power. Most discussions of the development of classes or the State depend on a particular characterization of political economy that has, by and large, excluded Amazonia, since it focuses on the emergence of private property, food

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surplus, and centralized economic redistribution, characteristics generally absent from the ethnography of the Amazon lowlands. Hierarchy, as expressed in ritual contexts, might thus be seen as merely a symbolic illusion of inequality and power, where actually none exists, since power is seen to emerge from the control over economic forces. But a narrow focus on material resources, particularly life-sustaining resources rather than symbolic resources, not only neglects the intrinsic interpenetration of the two but ignores the fact that the latter, as much or more than the former, underlies and justifies the reproduction of relations of power in society. Indeed, throughout much of the Americas, no convincing argument can be made that economic control—ownership of land or centralized food surpluses—was the primary bases of power. If a relation of political power must precede one of economic exploitation, as Clastres rightly suggests, political power itself must be preceded by, authorized by, symbolic power—the distribution of which is mediated in the Upper Xingu by structures which are inherently hierarchical.

In such a political economy, based as it is on the control of public ritual, ceremonial space, chiefly structures or “works,” special knowledge, and specialized or exotic objects, power and inequality are legitimized or naturalized through reference to founding ancestors, including chiefs of the recent past and more distantly related cultural heroes, or the divine creators. Power and inequality are based on an ideology that, through ritual, sanctions the centralization of symbolic resources. Chiefs mobilize labor and wealth, in ritual contexts and public works, through their surplus potential (that is, their ability to raise temporary surpluses of food and even goods on an *ad hoc* basis). Thus, “weighty actors,” principally major chiefs, who accumulate a surplus of symbolic resources or capital—a fund of symbolic power—situationally transform it into material resources and political power, creating the basis for even greater symbolic power and for a developed political economy. The powerful chiefs, however, can “cash in” symbolic capital in exchange for goods and services in almost any context. Therefore, the political economy is, above all, a symbolic economy of power.

The question we might then ask is what are the valued things, and how and by whom are their production or distribution controlled? In Amazonia, there is little evidence of agricultural surplus or hoarding of wealth by elite families. If there is something controlled it is labor, not material goods (Harner 1975; Rivièrè 1984). The scarce resources which are accumulated also include such things as names, esoteric knowledge, sacred lore, precious rarities, external contacts, control of information flows, and attachments or ownership of place, as well as labor. High-ranking individuals are thus defined symbolically, genealogically, and socially, not

materially through the accumulation of a surplus. In fact, as a general rule, as Fausto (1999:934) suggests, “Amerindian cultural systems are primarily oriented towards the production of persons, not material goods.” Thus, we might say that the surplus resides in the body of the chief.

In many contexts, substantial quantities of non-subsistence goods do in fact cycle through local political economies, for example, the great quantities of highly decorated, “elite” ceramics, undoubtedly the works of specialized artisans, circulating in the late prehistoric political economies of the Amazon River. Here we can distinguish between two (ideal) systems, one being more materially or economically oriented, whereby status derives from accumulation (big-man-like societies), the other more ritually or ideologically oriented, whereby accumulation derives from status (hierarchical societies). As Bourdieu (1979) clearly shows, subordination is symbolic as much as it is economic or political and, in either case, it is clear that both economic and symbolic capital are caught up in the political transactions of the powerful, a surplus of one potentially offsetting the deficit in the other. The point here is that the Upper Xingu represents a case of the latter and, as such, provides a unique perspective for understanding political power and cultural development in Amazonia.

The diminutive scale of Amerindian economies in present times (i.e., during the demographic nadir)—perhaps unlikely to conjure up images of political economy—is deceiving as to the scale or configuration of past systems. Xinguanos do, in fact, have some rather elaborated economic features, which might not accord well with a view that material goods are not somehow central to the operation of power relations. Among Amazonian groups, generally, the material culture of the Xinguanos is highly diversified and technologically sophisticated. There are part-time craft specialties, and village specialization is a primary feature of supralocal exchange, which is tied to a system of equivalencies (one shell necklace or belt = one large pot = one black bow). They maintain well kept silos for storage of manioc flour (sometimes well over a thousand kilos each). Their counting system ranges into the hundreds and they have a fairly developed, although not rigid, sense of personal property, including heritable plots of land planted with *piqui* fruit, prominent (cardinal) places in the village ring, and symbolic ownership of the village and its communal structures.

The crucial point is that diverse economic and symbolic resources, situationally varying in importance, are differentially cycled through the system, but overall circulation is channeled through the hands of a few (i.e., centralized). This is most clearly expressed on those occasions, such as an anthropologist’s visit, when large payments are made to the community at large and redistributed by the principal chiefs. The difference is

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accumulation: material capital is not generally accumulated, except in occasional ritual contexts, but symbolic capital is. Some individuals have a capacity, due to their accumulated symbolic capital, to transform symbolic power into political or economic power that far outstrips that of others. This is particularly evident in terms of labor control, the true measure of chiefly power.

In the context of major ritual activities, control of labor and, ultimately, materials, is clear. At the request of other villagers, prominent men organize communal rituals or activities to gain prestige. However, not all men have the necessary support for these efforts, including the ability to muster labor and payments to ritual specialists. The largest rituals, such as the *kuarup*, require substantial quantities of food and payments. Like all ritual activities, a ritual is conducted only when a *tijope* (an “asker”), representing the general will of the community, formally asks its “owner” (*oto*) to perform it; the *oto* gains prestige by accepting and loses prestige by not accepting. In certain rituals, notably chiefly rituals, only some people can become *oto*, namely the *anetão*, and the most powerful chiefs have exclusive control over the ritual and the symbolic capital it yields. The *kuarup* and other chiefly rituals (including the construction of the *tajife* and *kuakutu*) are initiated at the request of the community at large, but it is the primary chiefs¹⁸ who must authorize, administrate, and finance the ritual.

The following sequence of events, related to the creation and maintenance of the *kune* anti-witchcraft (divination) ritual following the death of the primary heir to the village chief (the *hugogó òto* of 1993), shows that symbolic capital can be transformed into economic capital in nonritual, private dealings as well.¹⁹ The process began with a trip of nearly one thousand kilometers to a Karajá village, requiring substantial travel costs and payments to a Karajá ritual specialist and to other Karajá who aided in the expedition. A second trip to a specialist from the Aueti (Xinguano) village also incurred major expenses, including a payment of five shell necklaces. Once the divining pot (*kune*) was functioning, the chief hired both a young man to help his younger brother, a *tijope* of the *kune*, to collect firewood to keep it boiling constantly for the four months of its operation and a young woman to help his wives collect water for the *kune*, among other tasks. Occasionally he would hire other individuals for specific tasks. Perhaps the greatest cost was contracting the services of the most powerful of eight village shamans, who went into trance nearly every other night for four months to protect the *kune* from the witch it was meant to dispatch. Ultimately, presuming successful divination, one bicycle and other payments were promised to each of seven men who were to carry out the witch execution, although this never came to pass. These payments (or

obligation for payment), in addition to numerous “incidental” expenses, were all made within the relatively short period of four months, during which time and long afterward large payments were also due in support of the upcoming *kuarup* for the chief’s son. Considering that some adult men in the village do not own a bicycle, or even a decent shell necklace, this is a remarkable amount of wealth for one person to have (over 30 shell valuables, eight bicycles, several large aluminium pots, and a one hundred meter fishing net, among a wide array of other objects, were ultimately paid). The overall ability of the chief to draw upon this amount of wealth, none of which was part of his existing patrimony, demonstrates the ability of chiefs to turn their symbolic capital or prestige into economic wealth on an ad hoc basis, i.e., their surplus potential.²⁰

Today, we are witnessing a manifestation of this political economy on a scale much greater, in terms of the quantity of material goods that pass through the system, than at any time in the historical past—probably greater, person per person, than at any time in their history considering the current demographic situation. External or self-developed projects, film crews, research, medical assistance, and installation of communications equipment, all cycle thousands or tens of thousands of dollars through individual communities. This wealth passes directly through the hands of the primary chiefs who, to a great extent, control these goods and their distribution. It would be easy to interpret the present-day political dimensions of the economy, e.g., prestige goods, chiefly power, or political federations, purely in terms of the effects of greater and greater encapsulation in national and international political economies—the effect of the world system—as seems to be the case in some areas of Amazonia. Broadening our scopes to include prehistory, however, indicates that these complex characteristics are the contemporary manifestations of structures with very deep histories, that is, the changes we see today are, in part, guided by ancient ideologies.

THE BODY OF THE “STATE”

So far I have largely passed over the issue of demographic scale, mentioning only in passing the dramatic depopulation after 1492, and focusing instead on questions of a more strictly social or political nature. The early State, here including both chiefdoms and small-scale states, after all, refers mainly to certain types of political organization or structures of power, specifically, that type of society that divides itself into upper (elite) and lower segments, forming social classes or class-like structures that are founded, in part, on an ideology of hereditary hierarchy. Questions of the

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State do, however, involve matters of scale, and here we might note that the largest and most complex Amazonian societies are those of the past. When we look to the past, particularly focusing on cultural sequences that can be reconstructed over long stretches of time, different things come into focus, among which are social hierarchy, inequality, and complexity. Indeed, considering the present demographic or economic scale of Xinguano communities, they are remarkably hierarchical, and, although this image may not fit general images of native Amazonians over the past few centuries, it makes perfect sense in the context of a deeper history.

For a long time, some regional specialists have suggested that some societies of ancient Amazonia show features that, were they to be found elsewhere, would be called “chiefdoms” or “states.” Today, there are some reasonably good, if preliminary, characterizations of terminal prehistoric and early historic occupations along the Amazon River:

Based on their large populations, public works, differentiated settlements, elaborate ceramic art, long-distance trade, and elitist symbolism, these societies are often judged to have been complex chiefdoms. Indeed, European observers in these areas in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries described paramount chieftaincies with large domains, organized large-scale warfare and diplomacy, elite ranking based on descent from deified ancestors sometimes identified as female, and far-flung interregional trade and tribute systems (Roosevelt 1994:7).

Some leaps of faith are required to accept this statement entirely, given the vagaries of the ethnohistoric and archaeological records from the Amazon River but, in my opinion, it does not greatly overshoot the mark.²¹ Indeed, the Upper Xingu evidence from the past century or so indicates the presence of many of these features, albeit in very small-scale or attenuated form. In the Upper Xingu, far removed from the Amazon *várzea*, hierarchy and hereditary inequality are part and parcel of the regional Xinguano culture throughout the cultural sequence, one of the longest currently known for any identifiable indigenous groups in Amazonia. However, we might note that such notions of hierarchy and political economy do not accord well with many portrayals of ethnographic Amazonia, including those from the Upper Xingu.

The cultural sequence in the Upper Xingu basin, as presently known, extends from at least circa 800 C.E. until the present (see Heckenberger 1996, 2003a). Within this sequence, cultural continuity can be demonstrated based on conservatism within three fundamental and archaeologically visible aspects of Xinguano culture: (1) ceramic technology; (2) village spatial organization; and (3) settlement location within the basin.

The earliest occupations, apparently related to colonization of the region by Arawak groups from the west, represent the ancestral foundation of contemporary Xinguano culture. Today this distinctive cultural pattern is shared by various linguistically distinctive groups, including the descendant Arawak-speaking communities and Carib and Tupi peoples who have come to share the Xinguano culture.²² Beyond demonstration of cultural continuity, these resilient features of regional cultural patterns provide the basis to reconstruct changes in regional demography and economic organization, based primarily on *terra firme* (manioc) agriculture and fishing.

The most obvious difference between contemporary villages and prehistoric sites is scale: prehistoric villages are immense by comparison, up to ten times the residential area. The difference in scale is immediately obvious, since contemporary Xinguano villages are commonly situated within or adjacent to ancient settlements. When mapped in their full extent, the substantial earthworks, apparently (re)constructed more or less simultaneously in the fourteenth century, provide a ready plan for archaeologists of late prehistoric settlement organization. Their intentional construction according to an integrated architectural plan is unmistakable. Although prehistoric villages were much larger and more structurally elaborated than today, the village plan obviously reflects the same underlying concentric model of spatial organization shared by contemporary Xinguanos. In other words, domestic areas are oriented towards a central plaza(s) with spokelike radial roads leading out of it.

Late prehistoric communities, unlike their ethnographic descendants, constructed huge barriers around their settlements. The most prominent earthworks at numerous sites in the Upper Xingu, are large, semicircular ditches positioned at the outer margin of domestic occupation areas and/or within the village area. These ditches often reach a depth of several meters (3-5 meters including the ridge created by excavation overburden heaped on the inside berm) and, in several cases, extend over two kilometers. Linear ridges (0.5 to 1.5 meters or more in height) that are situated at the edges of central plazas, as well as at the margins of intravillage causeways, were also prominent features of the integrated architectural plan. It is likely that a primary function of this plan was defense, at least as a justification for chiefly projects and labor mobilization, although the earthworks undoubtedly had important aesthetic, symbolic and, perhaps, economic functions. They are monumental and quite impressive, although lateral rather than vertical in perspective. Like contemporary public works, they likely were associated with certain chiefs (or perhaps chiefly lines) and, thus, constructed as a result of the dynamics of rivalry between competing chiefs.

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Settlement growth over time, perhaps accelerated by population nucleation in fortified villages, was conditioned by the placement of artificial earthworks and conformed to the pie-shaped space between causeways and within the confines of peripheral ditches. The pie-shaped partitioning of each site created discrete intravillage precincts, or “neighborhoods,” situated between roads and also delimited by the plaza and excavated ditches. At their maximum, domestic areas surrounding the plaza were many times larger than today (up to fifty hectares). However, the dimensions of plazas are comparable to those of contemporary villages (250 meters maximum). Without entering into a detailed discussion of population estimates, it is reasonable to suggest that populations in prehistoric villages ranged into the low thousands. Regardless of exact village populations, population size at the regional level must have been dramatically higher than historically documented (three thousand people during the 1880s when historical documentation began), due to the much higher incidence of contemporaneous sites, as suggested by the density and regular placement of large fortified villages, circa 1400–1500 C.E., integrated through roads connecting settlements throughout the region.

Given the scale of prehistoric Xingu villages, *vis-à-vis* contemporary patterns, we can assume that prehistoric chiefs held even greater sway over public affairs. More restricted access to ritualized public space and, hence, public ritual and political action, would have likely amplified the social inequality embodied in the plaza and the chiefly status, i.e., unlike present-day villages, not everyone had front-row seats and public areas were secluded by large obstacles. For the present purposes, we need not speculate on the presence of greater chiefs or more rigid patterns of inequality. The picture provided above shows that even in recent times, when settlement and regional populations were at their lowest, hierarchy is a pervasive metaphor that structures all social relations and the differential treatment and power of the elite (*anetão*) chiefs is obvious (Heckenberger 2003a). It is important to mention, however, that the monumental scale of earthworks documents that labor was mobilized on a much larger scale in prehistory.

Another aspect of Xinguano cultural patterns that was different in the past relates to regional organization, although this too is clearly a difference of degree not kind. Like contemporary villages, prehistoric settlements were interconnected by a well-developed system of roads and paths (i.e., extensions of the intravillage causeways), but the scale and elaboration of this system was much greater in the past. Settlements were articulated into clusters that included several large communities tied to a central hub, according to an architectural logic of cardinality.²³ These clusters formed integrated spatial and social units, representing a level of organization

between the local community (*otomo*) and sub-regions within Xinguano society that has no contemporary counterpart. Smaller satellite plaza villages were also linked to the residential nodes by roads. Hamlets, marked by dark earth and archaeological remains, are occasionally located between major settlements along roads. All this suggests that a more rigid settlement hierarchy characterized late prehistoric occupations, since some settlements were dramatically larger and in a general sense more powerful than others, but research in the upper Xingu to date suggests that numerous large settlements with extensive earthworks were present in the area. It is also important to note that in the present-day Kuikuro territory, where over the past 150 years there have been one to three villages (25–350 persons), there were two primary clusters of villages, each comprising one hub, three to four major nodes, and numerous satellites and hamlets. Nonetheless, it is possible to suggest that large villages existed as more or less peer communities that were integrated within a common system of ritual and shared ancestry, rather than through systems of economic or administrative centralization across the region.

Similar dense, sedentary social formations apparently characterized the Pareci groups, Arawak-speaking peoples culturally related to Xinguanos, who lived west of the upper Xingu. In the 1720s, Pires de Campos noted that they existed

. . . in such numbers, that their villages could not be counted and often in a day's march, 10–30 villages were passed, each with up to 30 houses of 30–40 paces [meters] width . . . even their roads they make very straight and wide and conserved so clean and in good repair that not even a leaf is to be found (1862:443–444, author's translation).

The regional organization of Xinguano (and perhaps Pareci) poses certain problems for a “chiefdom model” as it is traditionally elaborated—it does not exhibit the classic “central place” settlement hierarchy considered by many to be the *sine qua non* of complex society. The diverse Xinguano villages form a regional society, rather than merely a regional interaction system, since not only do communities share the same system of values and meanings (i.e., forming a moral community) they are dependent upon one another for social reproduction. By this I mean that the chiefly rites of passage, upon which social reproduction depends, cannot be carried out by a single village (I call this regionality, sociality that by necessity encompasses various communities). As an extension of the structure of chiefly hierarchies based on primogeniture, hierarchical relations (through the extension of *ihuse* relations) extend from mother to daughter villages, but this pattern apparently never crystallized into a pattern of institutional hierarchy at the

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regional level. The lack of a “rank-order” settlement hierarchy—that is to say, meeting the criteria of formal central place models—suggests that power relations between villages were flexible and contingent and, over time, centers of power shift throughout the region.

The Upper Xingu is obviously not a unique case. By way of comparison, we might note Métraux’s observations with regard to other hierarchical societies close in space and time (circa 1700 in the southern Amazonian periphery), what Steward and Faron (1959) later called the “theocratic chiefdoms of eastern Bolivia.”²⁴ With respect to a village of Pareci (which together with Upper Xingu form the central Arawak language group), Métraux notes:

It was presided over by a hereditary chief, who presided over religious ceremonies and received guests, but shared some of his authority with influential and strong-willed individuals. The chief’s eldest son enjoyed some prestige. The heads of monogamous families formed a kind of aristocracy. They controlled a class of dependents, whose status was that of serfs and who had, among other things, to make farm clearings, carry wood to the village, build houses, and give their masters everything they earned. The inhabitants of different villages visited one another frequently and maintained active intervillage commercial relations (1942:165).

Regarding Bauré chiefs, who lived west of the Pareci in eastern Bolivia, he relates that:

The Bauré chiefs, called *arama*, formed an aristocratic caste . . . and only his son by noble mother was eligible to succeed him. Chiefs did not work and were provided with food and drink by their subjects. They enjoyed great power and even could impose a death sentence. Some control upon a chief’s authority was, however, exercised by old men who represented the community and reminded him of his duties . . . Chiefs also decided when a village was to be moved . . . (Métraux 1942:69)

Among the Manasi (neighbors of the Bauré), Métraux notes:

Nobody dared leave the village without the chief’s permission. Young people never sat in his presence, but stood respectfully at a distance. Commoners addressed the chief in a very formal manner. The chief organized feasts to which he invited neighboring villages by sending messengers. The main chief lived in a huge house built by the people . . . had two large fields which were tilled by his subjects . . . Dead chiefs were buried with special ceremonies and amidst general laments (1942:128–129).

In most respects, Metraux' observations, summarizing available accounts up to the mid-1900s, fit perfectly the ethnographic context of the Upper Xingu, with the caveat that these accounts were largely made in the period between circa 1700–1800 C.E., when societies were much larger and more powerful across the entire region. In fact, the sociopolitical characteristics he notes are defining elements of the southern Arawak and related groups. These groups apparently entered the southern Amazon as part of the Arawak diaspora over 2,000 years ago and already with the characteristic features of settled agricultural life, social hierarchy, regional socio-political organization, and the plaza-ritual complex (Heckenberger 2002, 2003a). Steward (1949; Steward and Faron 1959:252–259) recognized these as “theocratic chiefdoms,” but failed to identify their phylogenetic relationship or truly Amazonian origin, thus making it possible to overlook their connection with the Upper Xingu: they “emerged” in eastern Bolivia and adjacent Brazil as a result of the unusually high agricultural productivity of the sub-Andean savannas or through diffusion from the highlands. If they had recognized the historical relationship between the groups, as did Schmidt (1914, 1917), they would have likely come to a startling conclusion: culture, as much as ecology or demography, plays a determinant role in differential development in the Amazon.

The distributional pattern—the correlation between language and culture in this case—is unmistakable: where we find Arawak speakers we also find social hierarchy, sedentism, and regionality. Obviously, the historical processes are far more complicated than this simple correlation might suggest and cultural diversity between regions and within language groups is considerable, but we should not overlook a valuable lesson: “hierarchy” and “equality” need not represent stages of regional development, one for whatever reason leading into the other, but reflect different social solutions or cultural choices with their own internal inertias (Dumont 1970) and represent alternative social postures—alterities—in regional political economies.

THE ENIGMA OF THE GREAT CITIES

Returning to the question of the State, or of states and chiefdoms, in Amazonia, the reader might note that nowhere have I defined the terms with precision. This is because my objective is not to conclude that there were or were not states, or chiefdoms, in one or another part of Amazonia, as if there was agreement as to what constitutes “states” and “chiefdoms,” definitions that can then be applied to Amazonia. There is a dizzying

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variety of opinions about what we ought to consider as a state, in contrast to some other less stratified and differentiated social formation. Many authors, such as Clastres, simply distinguish between kin-based, acephalous, and largely egalitarian societies (*societas*) and centralized, hierarchical, civil societies (*civitas*). In Amazonia, as elsewhere, discussions about the emergence of complex societies more closely revolve around the concept of the chiefdom: what we might loosely define as a regionally integrated, moderately hierarchical (minimally stratified) society, neither very large nor very small in demographic and economic scale. Thus, this paper does not present a model of *the* State, in terms of its origins or nature, nor does it attempt to define *the* body, i.e., a generalized body associated with hierarchical or complex societies in Amazonia, models which can then be verified or falsified (although many parts of it could easily be framed as such), but instead is something of a stocktaking. Now that most everyone working in the region agrees that there were complex societies in Amazonia prior to 1492, perhaps numerous and populous, then we explicitly must reconsider assumptions regarding Amazonian societies and persons and why they should or should not be considered “statelike.” My intent here is not to convince but to provoke, to stimulate us to frame new questions and develop a dialogue directly related to what, when, where, and how we address social complexity in Amazonia.

The question posed here—“the enigma of the great cities”—is thus not the anomalous presence of cities in the *várzea* amidst an otherwise vast block of noncomplex or minimalist Amazonian societies. The enigma, following conventional wisdom about the “State” or states, is the absence of cities (an “Urban Revolution” constituted by economic and administrative centralization in cities) among a variety of Amazonian societies that are, in a word, complex. But this should be no more a mystery than the apparent lack of surplus or redistribution of foodstuffs, since social complexity is not programmatic. As Carole Crumley suggests, it is possible “for elites to govern without benefit of nested settlement hierarchies, however, and for marked class distinctions to be played out without leaving the spore of cities” (Crumley 1991:186). Likewise, Fausto (1992) reminds us that extensive communities or large population aggregates do not necessarily require hierarchical or centralized political institutions. In this sense, we must recognize that hierarchy, while often suggesting social complexity, is not necessarily coterminous with it. Nor should we conflate complexity or hierarchy with inequality. All societies contain some structures of hierarchy alongside others that are better described as heterarchy (where elements are unranked or ranking is contingent). The real task is to describe both the hierarchical and nonhierarchical relations in complex societies (Crumley

1991).

Even in the most hierarchical of them, complex societies are not simply structured on power hierarchies that extend from commoners to kings but also on a heterarchy of power centers of all varieties (Hassan 1991:156). Furthermore, forms of power associated with “middle-range” societies that are neither acephalous, egalitarian communities nor bureaucratic states, are inherently fragile and negotiated, and regional power centers shift over time (Earle 1989:87; Gledhill 1994:40). Indeed, we might suggest that nonhierarchical complex societies are more “complex” than hierarchical ones, insofar as hierarchy is a means of simplifying social relations, creating one out of many. However, beyond its value as critique of conventional views of evolutionary imperatives, this suggestion leads to the type of semantic hairsplitting I wish to avoid. What seems clear is that divine authority and social hierarchy, as systems of value *and* structures of power, are common if not typical of middle-range societies, and may have been a fairly common feature of ancient Amazonia.

In thinking about Amazonian social complexity, however, it is also important to keep in mind that the definition of the ancient state, the characteristic trait list, has a long history, and is largely based, as Chang (1989:166) notes, on “the historical experience of Western civilization and may or may not be appropriate to non-Western experiences.” This historical experience, he goes on to say, emerges from what “must have represented from its beginning a qualitative break from the ancient substratum common to the lot of the rest of men” (Chang 1989:166). The rupture occurs, first and foremost, in what he refers to as “cosmic” or “cosmogonic” holism (separating humans from nature, kinship from economy and statecraft, the sacred from the secular)—the death of society is the birth of the State. These “total” transformations, of course, are seen to be the result of great technological innovations and revolutions in human history, that is, changes in the means of production. However, if we take a wide array of “Eastern” states as our model, continuity (gradual transformation of the relations of production) and not rupture is typical. In other words, the concentration of power is accomplished not through innovations in productive technology but through increased control and manipulation of labor and symbolic resources.

The question we might ask, then, is what should we expect to find if we go looking for Amazonian states? Should we look for agricultural surpluses, livestock, centralized economic redistribution, writing, or large urban centers—things that, while the stock-in-trade of Old World models of complex societies, find few correlates in contemporary Amazonian peoples? Or conversely, should we look to find more local solutions, such

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as continuity between the demonstrably large and hierarchical societies of ancient Amazonia and descendant ethnographic communities? If we must choose some state as our model for understanding Amazonian complex societies, surely we are best served to select the Maya, Andean, or North American examples. Framing the problem in this way reveals a rather more subtle gradient between “simple” and “complex” (or highland and lowland, in a more narrow South American arena) than might otherwise be expected. The complex societies of the Andean or Maya areas are more developed or elaborated in scale, in the concentration of power, in elite ideology, et cetera, than those of Amazonia. However, in terms of structure and symbolic content, the parallels and similarities are striking, e.g., the continuity of animism (that is, cosmic holism or monism), kinship as a major organizing principle (for example, the Andean *ayllu*), shamanism as a significant sociopolitical and medical institution, and the organization of ceremonial space.²⁵

Just as there can be no single model of the State, we should be skeptical of general models which claim to have revealed the basic character of Amazonian societies, particularly considering the extreme paucity of evidence prior to the demographic nadir. Rather than assuming that we must uncover some underlying ecological or structural solution, laying bare basic features of indigenous cultures across much or all of the region, past or present, we should instead attempt to understand the interaction of societies with distinctive ideologies and value systems in common political economies extending across broad regions. In short, the general view of the State, as the end of an evolutionary trajectory, and of a generalized person or body (both individual and social) in Amazonia, creates an artificial exclusivity that impedes our understanding of cultural variability in the region. Continuity between the past and the present, between “simple” and “complex” societies, is a striking feature of sociocultural evolution in Amazonia. Perhaps by recognizing the similarities and continuity between Amazonian peoples and their closest neighbors, notably including native American states, we would find less reason to consider Amazonian complex societies an enigma.

NOTES

1. An earlier Portuguese translation of this paper was published in *A Outra Margem do Ocidente* (Brasil 500 anos: experiência e destino), edited by Adauto Novães, pp. 51–72, São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1999. The ideas presented here are elaborated upon in much greater detail in Heckenberger 2003a.

2. The English translation is: “for more than ten thousand years, we, the indigenous

people, live in harmony with nature, we were and are part of the forest.” While the quote is obviously attributed to an indigenous speaker, the reference to a fairly accurate archaeological date of initial occupations suggests that it is at least influenced by an undisclosed Western voice.

3. The idea of “social complexity” in Amazonia has long been suggested, first explicitly discussed by Max Schmidt (1914, 1917) in his suggestion of an Arawak “high culture” and the historical connection between the Arawak and Tiwanaku peoples. In the mid-1900s, Carneiro (1970, 1986), Lathrap (1970), and Denevan (1966), each made poignant claims that large chiefdoms, if not states, had emerged in some parts of Amazonia prehistorically, a line of argumentation most forcefully made in the late 20th century by Roosevelt (1980, 1991, 1994). These later authors all agreed that unique ecological, technological, and demographic conditions brought about the change.

4. Field research in the Upper Xingu includes over eighteen months in residence in the Kuikuro and other Xinguano villages (January to December 1993; August 1994; July and August 1995; October and November 1996; July 1999; August 2000; and July to September 2002), over five months of which have been largely devoted to archaeological survey, mapping, and excavations (summarized in Heckenberger 2003a). An additional eight months have been spent living and traveling with Xinguano leaders in Brazil and the United States of America.

5. Gadamer specifically criticizes Rousseau’s romanticism of the “noble savage.”

6. In the text I use “the State,” with a capital, to refer to the underlying ideology that supports a systematic and institutionalized distinction between power holders (elite) and subaltern groups (e.g., castes, social classes, or class-like structures), regardless of whether the full apparatus of the bureaucratic state is present (i.e., standing armies, law enforcement entities, formal taxation, etc., cf. Carneiro 1970). Conversely, “state” or states, noncapitalized, refer to social formations that have these bureaucratic and administrative entities.

7. The ecological determinist view that has been generally adopted by students of culture history in Amazonia (see Carneiro 1995) asserts that emergence and growth of social complexity is a result of unique ecological conditions that promote economic intensification and demographic growth. The alternative view is that societies must first undergo a radical social transformation prior to economic or demographic growth, and that this transformation had seldom occurred in greater Amazonia (see, e.g., Clastres 1987; Descola 1988, 1996a; Overing and Passes 2001; Viveiros de Castro 1996).

8. In the text Kuikuro words are used, although the terms have general correlates in other Xinguano languages, such as Arawak Waura, Mehinacu, and Yawalapiti, Carib Kalapalo, Matipú, and Nafuqua, and the Tupian Kamayura and Aueti; pronunciation is generally as in English, except for *i* which is a high, central vowel not present in English, roughly similar to the *i* in *it*, but more posterior.

9. See, particularly, Agostinho 1974; Basso 1973:65–70, 140–147; Carneiro 1993; Franchetto 2001; Gregor 1977, 1985, and Heckenberger 2003a, for fuller descriptions; my observations are derived from personal observations of the *egitse* in the Kuikuro village in 1994, 1995, 2002, in the Yawalapiti village in 1993 and 2002, and in the Kamayura village in 1993; the *típonho* is summarized following Basso’s published account 1973:140–147, a performance in the Kuikuro village (2001; video-taped by Carlos Fausto and Bruna Franchetto), and testimony by Kuikuro community members. Other ceremonies, such as the *taquara*, *ibagaka* (atlatl), and other intercommunity rituals that can also be held to commemorate prominent *aneti*; virtually all rituals are controlled by *aneti* and adolescent *aneti* also undergo other trails of initiation, such as cutting off the tail of live anacondas.

10. This included three of the over a dozen *aneti* initiates in the ceremony conducted

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in the Kuikuro village in 2001.

11. Xinguano society here refers to the groups that share the basic patterns of circular plaza village and plaza-ritual complex, focused on the chiefly rites of passage summarized here. This includes the four dialects of Upper Xingu Carib (Kuikuro, Kalapalo, Matipú, and Nafuqua), the two Arawak languages (Waura and Mehinacu, dialects of one language, and Yawalapiti), the Tupi-Guarani Kamayura, and the Tupian Aueti. These groups have all shared the same basic pattern, introduced into the region by the Arawak speakers over a thousand years ago, for at least the past 300 years (see Heckenberger 2001). Other groups, such as the Suyá, Trumai, Bakairí, and Ikpenge (Txicão), have come to share some elements of this pattern, but are not part of the Xinguano system as recognized by indigenous groups throughout the area (i.e., forming a moral community; cf. Menget 1993). While there are significant differences between the subgroups, the essential characteristics of the plaza and plaza-ritual complex, basic economy, and social patterns, are shared by all.

12. The concepts of “status lineage” and “conical clan” have been employed for Polynesia to describe generally cognatic hierarchical social structures found among most Austronesian speakers in Oceania (Goldman 1955; Kirch 1984). Firth (1936) earlier had described these structures as “ramages.” Lévi-Strauss’ (1987) concept of “societies of houses” or “house societies” resonates with many features of Xinguano sociopolitical groups, as generally cognatic and hierarchical social formations (see Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995, and Joyce and Gillespie 2001 for general discussions; and Lea’s 1995 and 2001 articles for more specific discussion of Kayapó houses).

13. Evidence of preferential first cross-cousin marriage and greater tendencies for strategic exogamic marriages *among high-ranking individuals* may be remnants of a more rigidly stratified structure, with rank endogamy, in the past.

14. Based on my discussions with the Kuikuro and Yawalapiti, but also supported by unpublished studies by Franchetto (personal communication) and Ireland (personal communication).

15. Numerous authors have expanded upon Lévi-Strauss’ classic text, particularly in relation to Gê-Bororo groups (Da Matta 1982; S. Fabian 1992; Lathrap 1985; Seeger 1976, 1981; Turner 1996; Zeidler 1998). Irmhild Wüst (1990; Wüst and Baretto 1999) shows that the probable ancestral model of circular plazas in central Brazil appeared relatively quickly in central Brazil circa 800 C.E. Arawak circular plaza villages show a much greater time depth in Amazonia. Our knowledge of the Upper Xingu is unique in terms of the time depth of our data. Upper Xingu people can also be distinguished from most Gê-speaking peoples in emphasizing not dual or “dialectical” organizations but rather the hierarchical (“concentric”) distinction between sacred and political center and periphery.

16. Another distinctive feature of Gê groups is that hierarchy between defined social classes is entirely absent and operates according to systems of gender and domestic political economics within closed village systems, rather than as a component of regional political economies (see Seeger 1981; Turner 1996).

17. These ideas of divine authority have a very deep lineage, including Max Weber, Bertrand Russell, and, among anthropologists, James G. Frazer and Arthur M. Hocart (1936). More recently, they have been discussed by Foucault (1995), Geertz (1980), Sahlins (1985), and Tambiah (1985), among many others.

18. It is important to note that there are often two or more chiefs who understand and can conduct the full complement of actions required, having not only the requisite knowledge but community mandate. These chiefs are ranked according to their prestige and power within their respective houses and, by extension, that of their houses. Parenthetically, a recent election of officers of the newly formed Associação Indígena

Kuikuro do Alto Xingu recapitulated the hierarchy of traditional chiefs in the village.

19. At the invitation of the chief, the author participated in each aspect of this four-month long ritual process, which included travel to several other villages, including to areas distant from the Upper Xingu (Heckenberger 2003b).

20. We might also note that shamans can transform symbolic capital, in the form of esoteric knowledge and skills, but this is only as direct payment for specific tasks and is not as an obligation of other individuals to higher-ranking persons.

21. Space prohibits a longer treatment of Roosevelt's critical discussions of social complexity in the Amazon and Orinoco floodplains (1980, 1991, 1999) that build on earlier discussions by Carneiro (1970), Denevan (1966), and Lathrap (1970). Suffice it to say that, although I might take issue with her specific definitions of hierarchy (as economic exploitation or political coercion, rather than as a social system of valuation), and with her notion of the nature of social change (insofar as she, like these earlier authors, assumes technoeconomic and demographic forces to be generally determinant), I agree wholeheartedly with her characterizations of late prehistoric Amazon polities as regional, hierarchical societies.

22. Xinguano Caribs, although culturally distinctive, were present in the area prehistorically and Tupian groups (Kamayurá and Aueti) apparently entered the area after c. AD 1700. Other groups have also come to occupy portions of the Upper Xingu over the past two centuries but have not become fully acculturated into the distinctive regional cultural system that I refer to as Xinguano society (see Heckenberger 2001, 2002).

23. Two such clusters are known, Ipatse and Kuhikugu. The former consists of a hub site, Hialugihiti, with only limited evidence of significant residential occupation, even though the site is extremely elaborate in architectural design and engineering, which is the center of a cruciform pattern of large roads (10–45 meters wide) obviously oriented to, although not exactly corresponding to, cardinal direction. The Kuhikugu cluster shows a similar cruciform pattern oriented to cardinal directions, although the hub site is the major residential site of Kuhikugu (see Heckenberger 2003a for a more in-depth discussion).

24. Archaeological work is currently underway, since 1996, by Clark Erickson and colleagues in the area of the Baurés in northeastern Bolivia and is planned by the author in the area of the ancient Pareci.

25. See, for example, Furst 1974; Isbell 1976; Fabian 1998; Hornborg 1990; Lathrap 1985; Turner 1996; and Zeidler 1998.

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