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### The Arawak Diaspora: Perspectives from South America



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### Abstract and Keywords

This article discusses the full range of Arawak and closely related groups. It addresses four primary aspects of the diaspora: histories of studies on the Arawak; language groupings and history; archaeological evidence; and theoretical implications. The idea of an Arawak diaspora reflects a place in the Western imagination concerning the tropics, Amazonia, indigenous people, and their histories in the “Global South.” In other words, it is a model of long-term, large-scale sociohistorical phenomena and how they change through time. The Arawak diaspora is similar in age and scope to other early tropical diaspora, namely the Austronesian diaspora in the Pacific and the Bantu in Africa, which also reflect the movements and interactions of early root- and tree-crop agriculture, hierarchical systems of social value, and regional political integration.

Keywords: Arawak language, Arawak studies, Arawak diaspora, tropical diasporas, Austronesians, Bantu

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The Arawak diaspora is a simple gloss for a very complex set of processes of cultural change and diversity associated with the dispersal of early agriculturalists and their technologies across the humid lowlands of South America after ca. 3000 B.P. It most directly refers to the Arawak language family, but includes a wide range of other groups who were influenced by them over the past three millennia. It is similar in age and scope to other early tropical diaspora, namely Austronesian in the Pacific and Bantu in Africa, which also reflect the movements and interactions of early root- and tree-crop agriculture, hierarchical systems of social value, and regional political integration.

What the term “diaspora” means exactly is not agreed upon and even hotly debated. It is widely agreed that something more than a biocultural radiation, cultural dispersal, sociopolitical expansion, or simple diffusion of technologies and associated economics, but rather elements of each. Questions of the interplay of ecology, techno-economies,

sociopolitics, or modes and relations of production and the importance of historical contingency and agency are critical.

Caribbean specialists agree that the colonization of the insular neotropics was a complicated process. Diverse connections linked initial inhabitants and other parts of the Americas, including not only northern South America but also Mesoamerica and possibly North America as well. Most agree that (p. 112) the movement of Arawak-speaking peoples and associated agricultural economies was a critical turning point in regional history that began ca. 2500 B.P. (see Wilson 2007). It initiated new relations with nature and existing populations and prompted sharing across the region, including strengthening contacts across the circum-Caribbean.

Diversity and plurality was characteristic throughout the humid neotropics, but some common features of Arawak-speaking peoples are distinctive and contrast to other large language groups in long-term trajectories of coupled human–natural systems. Colonist populations settled in diverse insular environments and developed unique social networks and political institutions, with emergent properties that are internally diverse. In addition to specialized agricultural technology, complex settlement systems often tied to networked plaza communities, associated ritual, and everyday life.

The idea of an Arawak diaspora also reflects a place in the Western imagination concerning the tropics, Amazonia, indigenous peoples, and their histories in the “Global South.” In other words, it is a model of long-term, large-scale sociohistorical phenomenon and how they change through time. Diaspora is a word that imprecisely fits any individual case, particularly since by A.D. 1000 across much of the region, integrated regional systems linked social groups across the humid tropics. Plural societies and regions and broad exchange networks characterized much of the region. Nonetheless, virtually all commentators that have considered the Arawak-speaking peoples as a group agree that there is some common ground. They do form a distinctive group when compared over several millennia with similar-scaled groups and language families. Certain material traces can be observed, notably ceramic technology and built environment, which regional specialists widely agree represent partially shared histories leading back in time to a proto-language.

To understand these early societies and change that occurred afterward among descendant groups, it is important to consider the full range of Arawak and closely related groups. This contribution addresses four primary aspects of the diaspora: (1) histories of studies on the Arawak; (2) language groupings and history; (3) archaeological evidence; and (4) theoretical implications.

## Tropical diaspora

The rise of agriculture and its effect on subsequent culture histories is one of the most debated topics in archaeology. One critical aspect of the development of food production economies is changing sociopolitical relations, tied to settled communities and population growth and integration in settled regions, as well as the reconstitution of cultural difference and socioeconomic interaction between these groups and with other smaller, more mobile groups. Early agricultural groups in tropical (p. 113) areas, speaking a common tongue, influenced other groups they encountered and developed into plural regional societies focused on bottomland agriculture.

In the tropics, such radiations began ca. 3000 to 2500 B.P. in the Pacific Islands, sub-Saharan Africa, and Amazonia, making comparisons between these three areas relevant. As Epps (2009) notes, linguistic diversity in Amazonia is immense, including four major language families spread over broad geographic regions (Arawak, Tupi-Guarani [T-G], Gê, and Carib), The Arawak, like Austronesian and Bantu speakers, are characterized by settled root crop agriculture and arboriculture. Social hierarchies based on central places and heredity are taken to be innovations of peoples speaking the proto-language. As in Africa and Austronesia, immigrant peoples mixed with the previous inhabitants and diversified, often becoming hybrid, plural societies over time.

Societies across these regions maintained pervasive and even formal relations of exchange, including warfare and commerce, but they maintained distinctive cultural identities, marked by clear boundaries in language and material culture. In several important respects Arawak speakers stand out as counterparts or alter-egos—enemies or affines in regional social systems—of major upland families (T-G, Carib, and Gê).

In all instances, existing regional social networks in Amazonia can be crudely separated by distinctive ecological orientations. This correlation between the unique conditions of certain ecological settings, notably the distinction between low-lying riverine and coastal areas and “uplands,” reflects broad categories of similarity and difference (Heckenberger 2005; Hornborg 2005; Hornborg and Hill 2011).

Ecological conditions varied greatly within the river/coast-upland dichotomy. Some river and coastal peoples were dispersed in small settlements, like many upland groups, while some upland groups were quite large and “complex,” and alliance and confederation were more typical than settled, hierarchical, and regional polities (i.e., more heterarchical chiefdoms). These were called “militaristic” by Steward and Faron (1959), but refer more generally to charismatic leaders, including shamans, entrepreneurs, and other great persons. Also of critical importance was the internal sociohistorical or cultural inertia and preferences, which guided long-term social change, expressed in dynamic systems of organization and exchange.

## Language and identity

The Arawak were the most widely distributed language family in the Americas in 1492. It was the most northerly Amazonian language, found among tropical forest agriculturalists and related peoples who came to dominate much of the Caribbean during the late Holocene. The family is broken into eight to ten branches, which includes a major “South-Southwest” division, including six branches (from south to north: southern Arawak, Pareci-Xingu, southwestern, Campa, Yanasha, and (p. 114) Chamicuro) and a “Northern” division, with four branches (Rio Branco, Palikur, Caribbean or extreme north, and north Amazonian) (Aikhenvald 1999). Historical linguistics suggests initial divergence of proto-Arawakan ca. 3000 B.P. or before (Urban 1992). There is no well-established origin area. Aikhenvald suggested the NW Amazon, following the general rule of greatest language diversity in the smallest geographic area. Lathrap (1970) and Walker and Riberio (2011) favored western Amazonia.

The question of broad relationships between the co-distribution of language and specific cultural groups was first addressed with respect to the Tupi-Guarani, which was the basis of the lingua franca adopted by the Portuguese and Spanish in various areas. This may in part relate to the existence of such trade languages in pre-Columbian times, tied to Tupi-Guarani population movements and the relative morphological simplicity of these languages and ease of acquisition. Arawak languages were also involved in the emergence of these regional systems and, in some regional systems, may have also been widely used as trade languages.

*The Amazonian Languages* (Dixon and Aikhenvald 1999) is the definitive overview. Aikhenvald’s (1999) reconstruction of the Arawak builds on Payne’s (1991) preliminary analysis of some basic elements of proto-lexicon and major branches. In the Caribbean, there are two extant Arawak languages from the Lesser Antilles: Kalipuna (also “Island Arawak,” “Island Carib,” Kalinago) and Garifuna. These are both mixed languages, reflecting communities where men used Carib in some instances, notably as a ritual language, and women used Arawak, although the latter was generally common in everyday life. The large word list collected by Ramon Pané is also widely agreed to represent a largely Arawak lexicon (Payne 1991). In mainland South America, other members of the northern Arawak branch include Lokono, Caquetio, Maipure, and Piapoco. Linguistic sharing, including ritualized and gender diglossia, is a notable characteristic and all groups maintain some proficiency in other languages. The Northwest Amazon, likewise, has formalized social interaction that encompasses several languages, Arawak, Tukano, and others. At the other end of the spectrum is the development of a language, Kokama-Omagua, that represents a language shift from likely Arawak speakers to a hybrid language, with a Tupi-Guarani lexicon. Some societies maintained linguistic boundaries, amid otherwise shared cultural systems. Other Arawak groups developed a subaltern status in regional exchange systems (Guana, Chiriguano,

Chane) or were “cultures of resistance,” particularly along the eastern flanks of the Central Andes.

Virtually no rigidly “bounded” ethnic group ever characterized Arawak groups and there is every reason to believe that the patterns of regional interaction have deep pre-Columbian roots. However, interaction at local, regional, continental, hemispheric, and global scales varies dynamically through time and space. Indeed, later systems, organized in some cases in regional political economies may have been more ethnically bounded, but still within plural, territorial regional systems.

## The arawak diaspora

The phrase “Arawak diaspora” aims to avoid more agency-neutral terms such as expansion, dispersion, or radiation. It might equally be called a tradition, but this term denotes moments of broad cultural sharing (traditions). “Sloping horizon” has been suggested (Roosevelt 1997), but this focuses too narrowly on ceramic technologies, without contextual articulation of other sociocultural patterns and practices. The term is heuristic, exploring patterns in the archaeological, historical, and ethnographic records and moving from what is empirically known.

The Arawak diaspora is one of several large linguistic diaspora in tropical America. This does not assume that language is primary or necessarily isomorphic with other features of Arawak-speaking peoples. The idea of an Arawak diaspora assumes only that the relation between language, the body, and technology are not autonomous and certain features, relations, and modes of production of social bodies persist over time as revealed in the sociopolitical, spatial, socioeconomic, and ideological arenas. In other words, the roots of genuinely Amazonian deeply situated systems of knowledge/power adhere over time, and in some instances are repeated in the bodily disciplines through language that includes affective and communicative elements of technologies and social space.

The diaspora refers to several things: (a) an expansion of people and ideas in the past, related in some way to the distribution of the Arawak language family; (b) an ethos recognizable in descendant social formations; and (c) a recognizable contemporary identity that can be distinguished today in terms of local and regional histories and indigenous people themselves. The Arawak diaspora thus means different things to different peoples depending on scale and perspective, which in this case, by definition, includes very large-scale and long-term processes in coupled human–natural systems. In earliest forms (ca. 3000 to 2000 B.P.), the Arawak diaspora fits the idea of a “Neolithic revolution” in other tropical regions, with the critical caveat that not only ecology, demography, and techno-economics are at play, but that sociopolitical and ideological factors, historical contingency, and agency are equally important. Later in time (ca. 2000 to 1000 B.P.) less movement and more regionalism, including regional integration in small- to medium-sized polities, seem to be characteristic in most areas. Still later (1000 to 500 B.P.), terminal pre-Columbian polities were enmeshed in vast native world systems that articulated societies across the American tropics that were subsequently impacted by colonial expansion, nation-building, and globalization, marking major transformation of native sociocultural, techno-economic, and political systems, including numerous instances of “ethnogenesis.”

As noted above, Arawak-speaking and closely related peoples stand out as settled, river peoples. The Caribbean Arawaks are the only truly maritime-adapted groups, but even here insular groups practiced agriculture reminiscent of mainland tropical forest groups

(Petersen 1997). This can also be understood in terms of (p. 116) an internal inertia, history, within highly plural and dynamic late pre-Columbian social and geopolitical landscapes.

## **Studies of the arawak diaspora**

Arawak-speaking settled groups, like the ecological settings they dominated, were “basins of attraction,” with permeable and dynamic boundaries in the long-term dynamics of coupled natural-human systems, co-joining the unique ecology of the low-lying forested basins with the particular economies of the settled Arawak farmer-fisher folk. Thus, the *longue durée* can be reconstructed through controlled comparison of the related Arawak groups, permutations of a common prototypical pattern, and how they systematically contrast with other groups.

Schmidt (1917) argued that members of the Arawak language family represented a lowland “high culture.” Arawak-speaking peoples, in general, are characterized by features commonly associated with small- to medium-sized non-Western complex societies, including settled agricultural economies, hereditary social hierarchies, and regional social organization (Heckenberger 2002; Hill and Santos-Granero 2002). He also was keenly aware that diverse processes were involved, against the background of a common history, including Euro-American colonialism.

More recently, several authors have built on Schmidt’s observations. Dole reported on similarities between the ceramics described from the lower Orinoco (Howard 1947) and those she encountered in the Upper Xingu region, relating these to the Arawak speakers in these areas. Rouse and Cruent (1963) elaborated on the Saladoid-Barrancoid series in the lower Orinoco and Cedrosan Saladoid in Trinidad and the Lesser Antilles and related Saladoid (W-O-R) assemblages in Puerto Rico by 2000 B.P. (Rouse 1992). Lathrap’s *The Upper Amazon* was singularly influential in interpreting the prehistory of the Amazon basin by population movements, tied to specific language groups, out of the central Amazon, what Carneiro (1995) called the “cardiac model.” He viewed the Amazon floodplains as unusually propitious for population growth, a view widely accepted by other regional specialists (Denevan 1966; Meggers 1996; Roosevelt 1980).

In the Caribbean, Olsen’s *On the Trail of the Arawak* (1974) laid out a synthetic view of Arawak dispersals in the Caribbean. In his introduction, Rouse, who had promoted the idea of Arawak developments in mainland South America (lower and middle Orinoco) and colonization of the Caribbean reaching the Greater Antilles by 2000 B.P., clarified his earlier position in several important ways, as further developed in his later works (1992). “Island Arawak” was neither a single language nor an ethnic group, but included diverse languages, cultures, and social networks. It was also a mistake to assume that all cultural remains from the Caribbean were (p. 117) associated with the Arawak, which also

included earlier groups, Carib speakers in the Lesser Antilles, and contacts across the Caribbean basin, as well as several possible migrations of Arawak speakers from the mainland (Rodríguez Ramos, this volume).

Zucchi (2010) provides the most sustained analysis of Arawak and Carib expansions in northern Amazonia, focusing on the western and middle Amazon, the Orinoco, and the Caribbean. Most authors focused rather narrowly on ceramic remains as a bellwether for sociocultural change, noting that variations on the incised-modeled traditions, notably parallel-incised rim and bi-chrome designs and adornos. Zucchi's (2010) discussion focuses on aspects of regional settlement patterns and landscapes from contemporary Arawak groups, as well as archaeological ceramics and "cultures."

## The archaeology of the diaspora

As agriculturalists, Arawak-speaking and related groups commonly live in large villages within hierarchical regional systems that are often referred to as theocratic chiefdoms or, more recently, House societies. Following the comparative logic that important elements of regional organization and social hierarchy as dimensions of political power and social networks, often attributed strictly to later periods, are present in the proto-culture, the early Arawak-speaking groups or those closely related to them colonized the Caribbean with these institutions in place. The pattern shows substantial variation and change through time, some got larger and more complex, others stayed about the same in terms of broad sociopolitical integration or population size, and still others became even smaller and less integrated than the colonizing populations, including interaction and influences linking them with adjacent macro-regions in the circum-Caribbean, including the Intermediate Area, Mesoamerica, and North America (Rodríguez Ramos 2010, this volume), and Amazonia, including the Central Andes, Gran Chaco, and eastern Brazil.

Traces of the Arawak diaspora are preserved in diverse aspects of descendant populations. Some initial correlations can be suggested, such as developed domesticated landscapes, including agricultural, wetland, and settlement earthworks, central public space, typically a circular plaza, plaza ritual tied to ancestor cults, including rank-exclusive elite rites of passage, flutes, masks, idols, and thatch "temples." The widely noted commonalities in dwelling and sociality represent routine or habitual practices, habitus, discourse, and performance, involving both words and longer utterances and body language, including discursive gestures and routines, taken-for-granted dispositions (bodily *hexis*), within broader sociospatial relations, technologies, and ideologies (*doxa*). Indeed, the Pacific and African cases are quite clear that such traces are clearly apparent in (p. 118) portable technology (e.g., ceramics, stone, metal, and shell tools and valuables, and built environment). What then are the archaeological indicators of Arawak occupations or influence?

Four commonalities stand out with respect to Arawak groups, both in terms of contemporary “ethos” and the best historical and archaeological examples: (1) ceramics, in terms of cooking and serving vessels, rather than burial urns or prestige goods, related to settled agriculture occupations; (2) plazas and other “sacred” central places in hierarchical settlement patterns, at local and regional levels; (3) a host of related features of ritual and everyday life, such as plaza cemeteries, ceremonial houses, concentric orientations, which commonly involved what many gloss as “feasts,” associated with activities such as rubber ball games, wrestling, masks, dances associated with the life crisis, public rituals of the elites and their ancestors, idols and “weighty” bodies; and (4) river and land communication networks and exchange at all levels, reflected in artifacts but also built environment, notably river and land communication networks.

Questions of origins aside, it is widely agreed by regional specialists that early Arawak agriculturalists colonized the Caribbean by 2500 B.P., associated with distinctive Saladoid ceramics. These people commonly lived in circular plaza villages, which may have been the basic settlement model of the early Arawaks, and imported their developed agriculture, fishing, and navigation skills into this new region. Related Mabaruma occupations in the Guyanas and Saladoid-Barrancoid series in the Orinoco date to the first millennium B.C. Most authors recognize the relationship between Saladoid-Barrancoid ceramics. This includes the broadly defined Caribbean Saladoid, the Saladoid-Barrancoid series in the Orinoco, and the Amazonian Barrancoid, or “Incised Rim” or “Incised-Modeled” tradition of Lathrap (1970), as born out in recent studies from the central Amazon (Petersen et al. 2001) and Xingu in the southern Amazon (Heckenberger 2005). Even skeptics note that it likely relates to one or another expanding group, likely sharing a common general language. Roosevelt (1997) concluded that no Arawak group manufactures the ceramics, making correlations between material culture and language uncertain, but in the Upper Xingu, modern Arawak speakers are exclusive pottery makers in the multiethnic regional society. Xinguano ceramics conform to Incised-Modeled (Amazonian Barrancoid) characteristics, notably monochrome paint over red or white slip or buff, rim incision and punctuation, adornos and other modeled appendages, including griddles, cooking pots, and large storage pots, which are also present in some other pre-Columbian and historic period assemblages.

Do these ceramic industries correlate with particular economic features, namely manioc agriculture and fishing, or regional political ecologies, polity making and regional integration? Early settled communities and agriculture, including manioc, pre-dated first Arawak incursions into the Caribbean. Everywhere they developed into highly interactive cultural groups and even pluri-ethnic societies in many cases. Nonetheless, field farming, “working the soil,” as opposed to casual house gardening or isolated plots, is a common characteristic of Arawak (p. 119) groups. The southern Amazonian groups are revealing in providing a particularly clear example of staple manioc and palm cultivation and wetland management (Heckenberger 1998). In various areas (Bolivia, western Venezuela, Guiana coast, and Greater Antilles) they practiced raised-field or mound agriculture. In

addition to staple crops, including root crops, trees, and occasional cereal crops, thatch for houses is a critical resource. House thatch is typically either palm fronds, such as including *Mauritia flexuosa*, buriti, or moriche palm, which is widely concentrated in managed wetlands (and excellent fish food), or grass (*Imperata* sp.).

Larger, settled communities were tied to this diverse potential, which includes both examples of favored settlement in ecological transitions, tropical forest and coastline in the north, terra firme uplands and várzea along the major Amazonian rivers, and tropical forest and savanna in a variety of settings, from western Venezuela along the coastal hinterlands, to Marajó and then across the southern peripheries of the Amazon. In the southern Amazon, large regional blocks, or islands, of forest in headwater basins formed a “string of pearls” representing another level of adaptation to transitional zones, in this case characteristic of shared agricultural, fishing, and dwelling orientations.

Another question relates to the relation of ceramic technology to other domains of material culture, including built environment. Do these subsistence economies or social values correlate in any meaningful way with settlement patterns, built environment, and landscape? Across many parts of the densely populated low-lying areas, particularly areas historically dominated by Arawak speakers, there are complex built environments, structurally elaborated with a range of features, including domestic and ritual enclosures, economic infrastructure for semi-intensive farming and wetland management, and roads, features that, in most cases, are even more revealing than ceramics in reconstructing sociopolitical relations and connections between regions.

In terms of residential built environment or domestic habitus, houses are commonly substantial pole, thatch, and plank constructions among Arawak groups across the Amazon. Houses are rarely understood archaeologically, in terms of a sample of houses large enough and over enough time to consider domestic spatial organization (Samson, this volume). Plaza settlements are ubiquitous among Arawak speakers in the southern Amazon. These are organized in networked regional systems, often ordered socially and spatially based on hereditary hierarchies, although by the twentieth century this had been so severely decimated as to be barely apparent. The presence of these in both the Caribbean and southern Amazon, the two endpoints, has particular relevance to suggesting this as a feature of proto-Arawak speakers. In Amazonia, few Carib groups share the pattern; some coastal Tupi and southern Amazon groups (Mundurucu, Tapirape, and Xinguano Tupian groups) have plazas, but it is not a widely shared settlement form across the family. The macro-Gê groups share this feature, as well, where it was apparently adopted after ca. A.D. 800 (Wüst and Barreto 1999). Recent discoveries in Uruguay document that central plaza and related enclosure structures were present among agricultural groups in some areas by 5000 B.P. (Iriarte et al. 2004).

**(p. 120)** Circular plaza villages are known from earliest Saladoid sites, particularly as identified in Montserrat and Puerto Rico. Additionally, other possible circular plaza sites from Saladoid sites, ca. 2500 to 1500 B.P. include: Indian Creek on Antigua, Anse à la Gourde in Guadeloupe, Golden Rock in St. Eustatius, and Golden Grove on Tobago

(Hofman, this volume). In addition to plazas, certain basic features are characteristic of the plaza ritual complex. Plaza node settlement networks iterate in regional systems, with central sites, linking other plaza and nonplaza sites in hierarchical patterns. However, while the form changed, content (e.g., public ritual, centrality, ancestors) continued into historic times at circular plaza communities, such as En Bas Saline (Haiti) and El Bronce (Puerto Rico), and other sacred centers (e.g., Tibes and Caguana in Puerto Rico). One thing is certain, plazas and the rubber ball game were common features in the later prehistory of both the Caribbean and tropical lowlands of South America, and both were commonly associated with Arawak peoples in historic times. Such ritual performances were the primary mechanism, not only of local and regional interaction, but broad cultural sharing across Amazonia and Mesoamerica.

What types of settlement systems incorporate these ideas of central places tied to ritual performance and the construction of persons, including ancestors? The central plazas and other enclosures are one critical feature. Stone alignments or ball courts are a feature of Puerto Rican cases, likely influenced by Mesoamerica (Alegría 1983; Olsen 1974; Wilson 2007), but their association with plaza sports and rubber balls has a much broader distribution in Amazonia, notably southern Amazonian Arawak groups, such as Pareci and Xinguano, who played proto-soccer in their large, circular plazas.

In terms of the regional built environment, Arawak peoples have clear spatiotemporal reference to topographic features in terms of origin stories and central places. Other groups are referential to landscape, but tend not to sediment themselves in permanent residential sites or major constructions critical to social and symbolic reproduction (i.e., tied to founder's ideologies, central places, and sacred sites). Such landscapes are surely not restricted to Arawak or closely socioculturally related groups, but it is another feature that is far more common among Arawak speakers than other language families, again suggesting it was a feature of proto-language communities. These are often tied to broader sacred landscapes, which include petroglyph and cave sites and also larger geoglyphs, such as those recently described in southwestern Brazil (Schaan 2011). Crock (2000), for instance, describes a small island network, trade and political interaction with other areas in the region, perhaps centered on the sacred site of Fountain Cavern.

Landscapes built up over millennia make it difficult to attribute common features across the region, but dwelling, including the nondiscursive practices, habitus, or body languages (corporeal *deixis*), which are sometimes more resistant to change (Bourdieu 1990). It is whole regimes, assemblages, which are in motion in communities of practice and broader human-natural landscapes. From an archaeological point of view, studies on materiality and social space should focus not only on limited artifacts or industries, notably ceramics, due to the fact that these are (p. 121) most prominent, but how these articulate and function within broader systems, technologies of the body, material production, and land-use.

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Within the scope of living arrangements, single, more or less autonomous communities are well within the range of variation among Arawak speakers. In fact, this pattern is widespread during the last few centuries and likely characterized many early populations, including proto-typical groups. More common are regionally hierarchical settlement systems, with often numerous satellites, orbiting around major ceremonial and population centers. In the southern Amazon, sociopolitical networks included hierarchically ordered clusters linked by precise road systems. In the Greater Antilles, the polities of larger islands were also organized as peer-regional societies, which constituted peer-polity systems, such as those also recorded among probable Arawak societies in western Venezuela and the central Amazon, among other areas. In all cases, politics was always tied to public ritual.

## Whither diaspora?

The phrase Arawak diaspora seems apt enough as a gloss for an important part of indigenous history in the Americas, after ca. 3000 B.P. It is used in discussions of similar patterns in Austronesian and Bantu language dispersals. It diverges from the traditional anthropological usage (Clifford 1994:304), but fits within the range of cultural “revolutions” (e.g., the “Neolithic”), which advantage social groups with developed systems of land management, which expand over large time and spaces, and over other groups. But, as Clifford also notes, every center is someone else’s periphery.

One aspect that has been critical in contemporary discussions of diaspora is shared identity, notably the idea of an exodus and a cherished homeland. Other diaspora have been described in these terms in the pre-Columbian Americas, but generally relate to imperialism in the Andes and Mesoamerica, including trade diaspora and ethnic enclaves (Goldstein 2005). In the case of the Arawak diaspora, scattering was a cultural and political choice, impelled but not an imperative of impersonal forces, but instead a variety of decisions and actions by individuals and small groups. However, this is not to suggest larger forces or trends do not have their own agency. They may have achieved a level of exodus, not only fission but colonization, but not from starvation and other privation, population pressure, or imperialism, but within a social network composed of small- to medium-sized regional political formations (and if contemporary patterns of fissioning are any measure, exodus from one region to another was political competition between rival elite). Likewise, Arawak immigrants became sociopolitically dominant in many if not most regions and each became an enclave in emerging pluralistic regional systems, which over the past two millennia includes periods of great integration, expansion, and ethnogenesis.

(p. 122) These societies are typically plural, but in several respects, aspects of Arawak societies can be seen as maintaining centers, homelands, and movements away from them defined in terms of ancestors and their places of origin. This central place orientation, tied to a “founder’s ideology, also distinguishes Arawak from most other groups in the tropical lowlands, with the notable exception of the Maya. In Amazonia, the recentering of the world and mythical origins, which, although a simulacra, at first, becomes sedimented over time and turns into a genuine origin place, to which identities are ultimately based in regional systems with sacred landscapes (in the Caribbean, see e.g., Crock and Petersen 2004; Keegan 2007; Oliver 2009; Siegel 2010).

Like Austronesian chiefs, political leaders were both metaphorical and fractal “fathers,” which is critical not only to social valuation but within systems of bio-power that include serial centers (Hage and Mosko 1998; Heckenberger 2005). This pattern involves a form of hetero-substitution, where things stand for other things in exchange networks of social, cultural, and political—symbolic—capital. These networks of knowledge-power, assemblages, and technologies that are inscribed in space, topograms, or entire sacred regional landscapes, including the origin narrative of sacred social birth at a centrally

located place, in the time-space, of specific regions (see Heckenberger 2005; Santos Granero 1998, 2009; Wright 2011; Zucchi 2010), such as eloquently described for major centers in Puerto Rico, such as Caguana and Tibes (Curet et al. 2006; Oliver 2009). Crock's (2000) study of Fountain Cavern suggests sacred landscapes extended across small island groups, as well. Marriage and conception likewise reflect distinctive regimes between Arawak-speaking and other groups, where "predatory" social strategies and partible paternity prevail (Viveiros de Castro 1992). Partible personhood, such as Oliver (2009) so eloquently argues of *cemis* and *caciques*, or, from the other end of the diaspora, noted in the distrusted personhood and agency of magical and musical artifacts (Barcelos Neto 2008).

Obviously, complex processes are involved and, as linguist Robert Blench notes, "The phenomenon of major expansion is very real ... [but] it's inconceivable that there is just one explanation" (cited in Shouse 2001:988). Increased knowledge of linguistic geography, including larger and smaller families and isolates on or near their peripheries, enables discussion of how large families "acquired and maintained their geographic range" and changed through time. It is clear that "explanations do not lie in structures of the languages themselves but in geographic, climatic, technological, socioeconomic, and political phenomenon," must also be considered in relation to larger discursive bodies, emergent properties of human groups under certain conditions, as suggested by comparisons, and the unique self-organization of Amazonian systems.

The Arawak diaspora, in particular, is not meant to imply a uniform process, an impersonal force or inertia of large-scale socioecological systems, but it does draw our attention to singular transitions in long-term history. Quite the opposite, the term was proposed to avoid such assumptions inherent in terms like expansion, (p. 123) dispersal, or radiation and against facile comparisons that often assume a consistency to historical process that is not born out in empirical studies: different times, different customs. Recognizing that the distributions are present, that they reveal commonalities beyond spoken language, does not require simple "essentialist" models of migration, diffusion, or other sociohistorical processes. Diverse internal and external factors and flows were in play. Material culture, built environment, language, or, especially, genes do not change in lockstep, but neither are they autonomous phenomenon. Of most critical importance are in-depth contextualized studies that enable full cultural assemblages to be addressed, rather than isolated artifacts, cultural features, or other residues, or agents.

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