Abstract. The article focuses on the process of naoné—nationhood—of the Palikur, a Native American people of northern Brazil and southern French Guiana, from 1500 onward. It is described how, in counteraction to colonial expansion, a corpus of preexisting clans combined with diverse other ethnic entities to create, at its height (c. 1800), a dominant regional polity, itself linked to wider cross-ethnic macropolities under a single leader. New data are offered to support the thesis that such formations, which coevally existed elsewhere in Amazonia, were not just a response to new circumstances but also the renewal of a pre-Conquest sociopolitical strategy. The article also addresses the role of leadership in historical Amerindian macropolitical systems and suggests that a chief’s skills as a peacemaker were no less necessary than his skills as a warmonger.

At its simplest, the word naoné, in the language of the Palikur, an Arawakan-speaking people of Brazil and French Guiana, means nation. It also signifies among other things each of the separate subgroups, or clans, that jointly comprise that nation. It is with these two senses and the relationship between the phenomena they represent that this article is concerned. Building on an earlier article (Passes 2002) and on Françoise Grenand and Pierre Grenand’s important ethnohistorical work (1987) on Amapá state, North Brazil, the article discusses the creation of the Palikur nation as a bipartite formation, structured along geographical lines, before and immediately after the Conquest, and its subsequent transformation, through constant agglomeration, into a powerful political confederacy of mutually independent “clans” based in northern Amapá. It will be shown how, throughout the period of colonial expansionism, and in spite of the prolonged Franco-Portuguese rivalry regarding its possession, this region of marshes
and watercourses served as a safety zone for the Palikur as well as for other Amerindian peoples seeking refuge there. This region then went on to develop into the center of an important indigenous macropolicy in which the Palikur played a major instrumental role.

Thanks to the efforts of the Grenands (1987), Jonathan Hill (1988a, 1988b), Peter Mason (1990), Peter Gow (1991: 252–74), Simone Dreyfus (1992), Neil Whitehead (1992, 1993a, 1994), Joanna Overing (1995), and others, the notion of Native South American peoples inhabiting an ahistorical present in a state of immutable, homogeneous primitivism has been comprehensively discredited. We know now that, with respect to their social, political, and cultural makeup, each of these peoples has a distinct and dynamic history whose representation is culturally constructed by them, no less than by whites. Yet, as Robin Wright (2002) points out, we continue predominantly to focus on one of this history’s most catalytic aspects, relations with the white world, that is, Contact, in terms of its external factors and as these relations are seen from the colonial and the national perspective rather than the Amerindian one. I will thus endeavor here to combine both perceptions, as well as seek to acknowledge indigenous internal factors, through the inclusion of Palikur representations of their ethnogenesis, as defined by Hill (1996a: 2): “[The] synthesis of a people’s cultural and political struggles to exist as well as their historical consciousness of these struggles.”

Also, inasmuch as they have received much less ethnohistorical attention, pace Curt Nimuendajú (1971 [1926]) and the Grenands (1987), than other Arawakan peoples—particularly those of the Northwestern Amazonian and Pre-Andine regions—this work provides an opportunity to fit the Palikur into the broader Arawakan historical and anthropological picture.

This article aims primarily to add to our understanding of pre- and post-Contact Arawakan political systems and those of the Amazon and Guianas generally. Although the conquest spelled the decline, atomization, or obliteration of some Native societies, it also, as is now recognized, allowed for the expansion of others with respect to trade, territory, and political and military power (see, e.g., Dreyfus 1992; Whitehead 1993a, 1994; Arvelo-Jiménez and Biord 1994). Such growth is not to be seen in simple cause-and-effect terms. It is enabled, for Arawakan peoples and others, by a notable preexisting constitutional propensity for inclusive sociolinguistic formations based on a principle of aggregation and incorporation and is expressed in pan-regional interethnic confederation and even fusion. These unions typically grow out of prior networks of exchange (trade, war, ritual, culture, knowledge, people) linked by a far-reaching web of communication. Post-Conquest, they will act either in strategic step with foreign expansion, by ally ing themselves with the colo-
nial and national powers, or in opposition to it, through migration or resistance, the latter sometimes having a religious dimension, as in the mid-eighteenth-century Juan Santos Atahualpa uprising in Peru (see, e.g., Santos-Granero 1992). The formations are both inter-Arawakan and trans-ethnic and thus run within and across linguistic boundaries. Bonding not just Arawak-speakers, but also others, such as Carib-, Tupi-, Tukano-, and Pano-speakers, these cross-linguistic and cross-cultural ties frequently resulted, as they still do today, in the creation of transcultural identities (see, among others, Dreyfus 1983–4, 1992; Butt Colson 1985; Whitehead 1992, 1993a, 1994, 1996; Arvelo-Jiménez and Biord 1994; Hill 1996a, 1996b; Vidal 1997, 2002; Vidal and Zucchi 1999, Hill and Santos-Granero 2002; Wright 2002; Passes 2002).

A key feature of the macropolitical systems that I will address is leadership. In the last decade or so, in their concern to disprove the supposed stasis, monadism, and virtual apoliticalness of Native South American societies, scholars have not only demonstrated the historical evolution from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries of large, powerful, multicellular polities, they have also explained the leadership of such bodies in terms of hierarchy and martial and/or priestly power. For instance, according to Whitehead (1994: 38–42), there emerge, in response to the European threat to the traditional political and economic setup, panethnic hereditary elites of warrior-traders and theocrats. Dreyfus (1992: 81) describes the leaders as “Big Man-types [who are] makers of war and not makers of peace” (my translation; cf. Roosevelt 1987; Descola 1988). This contrasts sharply with representations of modern Native Amazonian leadership, in particular the Clastrean model of the structurally and personally powerless chief (Clastres 1974)—a difference due as much to theoretical perspective as to the time gap (Descola 1988; Brown 1993: 309; Whitehead 1993b: 498). I argue here that the present-day chiefs’ well-known skills, such as a capacity for keeping the peace and sustaining group morale in small-scale and largely egalitarian communities, would have been just as instrumental for the establishment and maintenance of ancient macropolities and therefore, notwithstanding Clastres, must also constitute power.

A contemporary ethnohistoric/ethnolinguistic rethinking (Hill and Santos-Granero 2002; Santos-Granero 2002) of the “culture area” concept, in connection with a relatively comprehensive Arawakan purview (including the Palikur), highlights and seeks to revalorize the relationship between linguistic affiliation and cultural patterns while rejecting deterministic theses of genetic language-culture interrelatedness (see also Butt Colson 1983–4: 11; Dreyfus 1983–4: 39–40; Manelis Klein 1994; Whitehead 1994: 33–34, 2002). Instead, it stresses the historical construction of (possibly pan-Arawakan) cultural practices as opposed to assuming an
essentialized prototypical Arawakan culture that is somehow endogenous for all Arawakan peoples in spite of temporal and spatial separations.\(^1\) As Jonathan Hill and Fernando Santos-Granero (2002) reveal, the Arawakan case appears to be one of an ongoing creation of diverse entities through a process of transformation pivotally involving extensive cultural interaction, cross-linguistic ties and multilingualism, factors whose roles we noted in relation to regional macropolities and the phenomenon of tranethnic identity. Further distinctive cultural factors are the widespread presence of clan or phratric organization; a pattern of riverine distribution; similar processes of toponymy and toponymy; inter- and macroregional linkages organized in relation to a shared sacred center; a relative absence of endo-warfare; an ideology of hierarchy based on ancestry/descent/consanguinity and/or everyday social egalitarianism; and intense mobility and expansion. The latter trait, according to archeological (e.g., Heckenberger 2002; Zucchi 2002) and mythological data, is not necessarily the result of Contact but predates it. Taken comprehensively, these features, some of which are also of course possessed by other Amerindians, may be said to comprise a profile, or “ethos,” as Santos-Granero (2002) calls it, of Arawakan-ness. As I hope to show, the Palikur conform to this profile to a markedly high degree.

The Palikur

Pitched about halfway between the rivers Oyapock (the natural frontier between Brazil and French Guiana) and Cassipore, the Palikur’s territory in northern Amapá is located, today as for a long time past, on the river Urucaú (or Rocawa in French), a tributary of the Uaçá, which flows into the nearby Atlantic at the base of Cape Orange in the top right-hand corner of Brazil (see Figures 1 and 2). The Urucaú and surrounding wetlands are known to the Palikur as Aúkwa—and Aúkwa, many if not most Palikur will tell you, is where their nation originated (Dreyfus 1981: 304; Montout 1994: 26) and where they have always lived. Others, however, declare their ancestors’ provenance to be in the south (cf. Nimuendajú 1971 [1926]: 16–17; Grenand and Grenand 1987) and, in particular, on the Amazon.

The two claims are not incompatible. As I have discussed elsewhere (Passes 2002), the historical and ethnolinguistic evidence in support of a southern descent for at least part of the modern-day Palikur nation appears secure. For Nimuendajú (1971 [1926]: 16), for example, who undertook the first serious ethnographic study of the Palikur in the mid-1920s, “All the signs concur in indicating that the Palikur clans progressively immigrated [to Aúkwa] from a common homeland situated in the south-east, beyond the Cassipore” (my translation). However, the specific location of
Figure 1. Palikur migration to North Amapá, Brazil. Map by Alan Passes.
Figure 2. Present main location of Palikur in Aúkwa (northeast Brazil) and French Guiana. Map by Alan Passes.
the base (or, as I argue, bases), which would appear to have been probably originally sited beyond the river Amazon, remains uncertain and, perhaps, ultimately unknowable. For there is significant disagreement in the linguistic research, with the Palikur language being historically linked to certain Arawakan (Maipuran) languages spoken either south of the Amazon, in the Upper Xingu (Noble 1965), or in northwestern Amazonia, in the Upper Rio Negro (Matteson 1972: 234–38), and also in the Pre-Andine region (Rivet 1924). To the extent that I will be pursuing here the theme of the historic north-south duality, it is not in order to propose an answer, definite or otherwise, to this conundrum. It is, rather, to try and contribute some possible further insight into the part played by both the southern and northern constituencies in the construction of the Palikur naoné (nation).

In line with this thought, I should observe that this article in no way purports to offer a comprehensive and conclusive history of the Palikur and of their relations either among their different subunits or with the outside world, both indigenous and nonindigenous. This it cannot do, if for no other reason than the many serious discontinuities and lacunae that continue to exist in respect to our knowledge of that nation’s past. As Pierre Grenand (1987: 76) has said of it, to accurately follow “the vital leads linking the old society to today’s” is problematic because “whole swathes of it . . . remain obscure” (cf. Dreyfus 1988: 21). It is regrettable that little of the Palikur’s own account of their history seems to have survived. Such a loss, itself part of that history, is both far-gone and ongoing (Passes 1998: 231–2, 238). Already in 1925, Nimuendajú (1971 [1926]: 16) rued the fact that the clan myths, and thus any possible geographical and historical information contained in them, were largely forgotten “apart from a few small and incomprehensible fragments” recounted by a single informant who tended “to contradict himself anyway” in the telling (all translations mine). I will refer, where appropriate, to such “fragmentary” Palikur historical narratives as I managed to come across some seventy years later.

Aúkwa

No historical discussion of the Palikur would be viable that omitted to take into consideration the critical factor of Aúkwa, both topographically and as a topos (cf. Green and Green 2003).

Whatever the actual geographical point of origin (north or south) of their early ancestors, today’s Palikur consider Aúkwa their homeland. I have described elsewhere (Passes 2002) the centrality of this area with regard to their identity and social universe and the way in which it coexists with the parallel factor of their perceived marginality within the two
nation-states of Brazil and France. As I stressed in that earlier work, the sense of place attendant on this “centredness” is compounded for the Palikur by a deep emotional, and what can only be characterized as a quasi-mystical, attachment to Aúkwa. This feeling is expressed by both its inhabitants and the Palikur of French Guiana and not just by recent immigrants from the homeland, but by “French-born” individuals who have never been there (see also Passes 2003).

Aúkwa, then, is clearly a keyword (Williams 1976) in the Palikur mental lexicon, and its centrality is in fact marked etymologically. The Palikur’s own name for themselves is Pa’ïkwené or, less frequently, Aúkwayené, each of which signifies “the people of the middle [river]” (Dreyfus 1981; Ricardo 1983: 19; Grenand and Grenand 1987: 22 n. 22; Montout 1994: 26; Passes 1998: 2–3, 2002). The appellation is substantiated on grounds that are jointly geographical and cosmological, the Palikur name for Aúkwa being the “Middle River,” owing to its position between the Wassa (Uaçá) and the Kwip (or Curípi in Brazilian), which Palikur describe as “to the east.” The calibration is based not on these rivers’ terrestrial orientation, but on its mirror image in the night sky. There Aúkwa is depicted as sitting at the centre of the “great river” of the Milky Way with Kwip on its right-hand side and Wassa its left (Dreyfus 1981: 301–2; Passes 2002). The stressing of the center, metaphysically, toponymically, and sociologically, appears to be a key Arawakan trait (Hill and Santos-Granero 2002; Hill 2002; Zucchi 2002).

The name Palikur was, according to Dreyfus (1981: 302), bestowed on them by their neighbors on the Kwip and Wassa: the Karipún(a); the Galibi, a branch of the Karinya/Kaliña of the northern and western Guianas; and the so-called False Galibi, or “Wassa People,” consisting of a mixture of Arúa and Itútan (both now extinct) and others.4

A Palikur person will tend to employ the exonym Palikur to designate a generic “Indian” (including himself or herself) and the endonym “Pa’ïkwené” to distinguish one special type, namely, themselves (see Descola 1996: 221–3 on the Achuar). Such a manipulation of the two appellations is linked to the Palikur self-image, whereby, ethnocentrically, they constitute an exclusive people, naoné, and, in widespread Amerindian fashion, the “real humanity” (see Lévi-Strauss 1967a; Viveiros de Castro 1998: 474–7; Gow 2000: 47ff.).

Naoné

Despite the ancient, cosmogonic, and sentimental tie with Aúkwa, Palikur do not primarily conceive of naoné in terms of place, and there is no sense
in which it or its inhabitants are deemed intrinsically more Palikur than the communities in French Guiana. Nor is nationality seen as an “essentialist” matter of language (Herder 1986 [1772]; Glissant 1990, n.d.: 4ff; Santos-Granero 2002), although like other Amerindians the Palikur hold speaking one’s “own” language a critical marker of group identity or ethnicity (Passes 1998: 26–27, 44–45; 2003; see also Thomas 1982: 19; Santos-Granero 1991: 87–88; Whitehead 1994: 34; Rosengren 2000). However, such identity is not restricted and exclusive since non-Palikur incomers who adopt the Palikur language, pa’ikwaki, as part of a Palikur lifestyle shared with others can themselves acquire “Palikur-ness” and be considered Palikur. Naoné, as a construct at once symbolic, political, and pragmatic, is, then, not an innate property of the person, but, in widespread Native Amazonian fashion, something ontologically produced, like personhood itself, in the practice of sociality. For external beings, this means the creation of safeness, “sameness,” and mutuality through the transformation of their dangerous, predatory alterity (Overing 1993a, 1993b; Overing and Passes 2000a: 6–7; see also Viveiros de Castro 1996: 188–90) and thereby the possibility of pursuing a sociable communal life. The latter entails, among other things, a common language (whether acquired by birth or adoption) and knowledge, common cultural and economic practices, and an aesthetics of coexistence predicated on the productivity of positive states and emotions, such as generosity, affability, tranquillity, and compassion. Thus, as with other Lowland Amerindians, Palikur “nationhood”/“ethnicity” is substantially posited in terms of social, moral, and affective values associated with belonging, relatedness, and sociability, which are embodied and generated in the ongoing process of intersubjectivity (Passes 2000, 2003; Overing and Passes 2000a, 2000b; Rosengren 2000).

This sense of connectedness is represented linguistically. Translated into Créole and Brazilian-Portuguese as nation, naoné in pa’ikwaki means “my family/clan.” It also reconciles sameness and difference by further signifying “my other.” Thus, notwithstanding their “aukwa-centrism” (Dreyfus 1981: 302)—the particular disposition of the people who call themselves Pa’ikwené to situate themselves historically and politically center stage in the region—naoné also ambiguously expresses, like the denomination Palikur, a concept of inclusivity. For a Palikur person will typically ascribe the term to a wide social field of interrelating referents, or “other selves” (Overing 1996), radiating beyond ego and the immediate community and clan. This term will variously embrace other communities and clans: the naoné as an assembly of clans; all the Native groups of Amapá, including the Palikur; and finally all other foreign (i.e., indigenous non-Palikur) ethnic entities, barring enemy ones, such as, most typically, the Palikur’s
“traditional foe,” the Galibi (cf. Grenand and Grenand 1987: 16–7; see also Lagrou 1998: 10ff; Gow 2000: 47ff; Rosengren 2000, on the Cashinahua, Piró, and Matsigenka, respectively). The separate nonindigenous “nations” of Amapá and the wider region, namely, the Brazilians (Parahna), French (Pa’asi), and Créoles (Atiwi), are deemed nonassimilable to the Palikur naoné; however, members of these entities can be incorporated into the naoné on an individual basis.

The assumption of a potentially unbounded, outward-flowing social environment whose multiple relationships involve, moreover, not just other humans but nonhumans, is not uncommon in Native Amazonia. It underlies a multiperspectival (Viveiros de Castro 1998) and horizontal, or “rhizomic” (Deleuze and Guattari 1972), model of relatedness and identity, which is extensible and absorptive. The paradigm appears to be particularly characteristic of politically egalitarian systems, such as the Palikur’s own (Passes 2004), in which recognition of difference eschews the asymmetry and hierarchy (social, political, sexual, moral) implied by a verticalist perspective (see, e.g., Overing 1996; Rosengren 2000; see also Passes 2003).

Thus, in respect of its philosophical and semantic aspects no less than its morphological ones, the idea of naoné illuminates a key feature of Palikur history. This is the connection between the formation of Palikur society as a clan structure and its long-term evolution as a greater geopolitical entity through amalgamation with, and absorption of, various non-Palikur groups or elements of groups, both Arawakan and non-Arawakan, which in the process metabolized into ancillary clans.

Clans

According to native history there were once eighteen clans in all, of which seven or eight (depending on the researcher8) survive. Whether originally Palikur or foreign and palikurized, they are all identically designated as Palikur (or Pa’ikwené). In terms of dual organization (Lévi-Strauss 1986 [1958]: 108, 132ff), they are arranged into two subsets: inner clans (i.e., an “original Palikur” nucleus) and outer or peripheral ones (later incomers). No distinction seems to be made between subsets or clans in terms of political status. All the clans used to have their own home territories until the migration of the southern ones to the Urucauá (Aúkwa) resulted in a structural separation of the clans into two moieties, Walavidi and Kwapi, residing on the left bank of the lower and upper Urucauá, respectively. Each was further demarcated by its own mortuary ground (Nimuendajú 1971 [1926]: 15, 60; Arnaud 1968: 7, 1984: 32; cf. Barrère 1743; Fauque 1839 [1729–36]).
Nowadays, though, the members of the surviving clans are, to use Nimuendajú’s expression (1971 [1926]: 17), “all mixed together.” On his 1925 visit to Aúkwa, Nimuendajú found them to be living “without any laws” (ibid., my translations), a statement that presumably conveyed his feelings about the aforementioned egalitarianism of Palikur community life. Politically, the clans were autonomous. They possessed no clan leaders as such but accepted the general authority of a supraclan super-chief, on which more will follow.

Clan affiliation is patrilineal and marriage interclan exogamic, though mythic evidence indicates a shift from endogamy in the seventeenth or eighteenth century (Grenand and Grenand 1987: 17). Since the Palikur’s large-scale conversion to Protestant fundamentalism of various types in the mid-1960s (Passes 1998: chap. 9; cf. Arnaud 1984; Montout 1994: 95–98), marriage choices would seem to have become as much, if not more, affected by sectarian affiliation as by clan affiliation.

Present-day Palikur continue to categorize the clans along old geographical lines. Thus, despite the fact that they are now located in northern Amapá, four of the eighteen clans are classed as southern, thirteen as northern, and one as situated in-between. Details are given in the list below (an asterisk denotes “inner clan”):

(a) southern clans (i.e., from the Amazon and near-Amazon region):
   - Kawakúkyené*
   - Kamúyené (extinct)
   - Masamainé (extinct)
   - Túkúwené (extinct)
(b) clan classified as originating between the Araguari and the Amazon:
   - Maikyúné (extinct)
(c) northern clans (i.e., originating above the River Araguari and largely in the Curipi-Urucaú-Uaça region):
   - Akamaiyené (extinct)
   - Auniyené (a.k.a. Nasisyené)
   - Kwimyúné* (extinct)
   - Maiúyené (extinct)
   - Paimioné
   - Pa’uyené
   - Uwanyúné* (extinct)
   - Wadayené
   - Waivayené*
   - Washiyené
   - Wakapúyené*
Wakaoyúné (extinct)
Yatúwéyené (extinct)

The Grenands (1987: 22 n. 22) suggest that the aforementioned alternative self-appellation Aúkwayené refers not to the Palikur globally, but to the northern section only and therefore possibly constitutes evidence of an original bipartite entity.

Initially, each of the clans possessed its own language. In time, one of these, known as kamúyúné, ended up being universally spoken by all the other Palikur subgroups, probably between 1630 and 1760 (Grenand and Grenand 1987: 54). Kamúyúné belonged originally to the peripheral, southern clan Kamúyené, the “People of the sun” (ibid.: 23, 25, 30–31; Arnaud 1968: 7). According to myth, this now-extinct clan was the product of a non-Palikur woman and a Palikur man of the Wakapúyené clan (Nimuendajú 1971 [1926]: 17–18; cf. Grenand and Grenand 1987: 59–62; Fernandes 1948). This couple is also said to have introduced another innovation on moving to north Amapá, namely, metal graters.

Before the general adoption of kamúyúné, which today is more commonly known as pa’ikwaki, communication between the clans was effected by means of a ceremonial and diplomatic language called kíaptúnka (Grenand and Grenand 1987: 31–33; Passes 1998: 93–95). Literally signifying “the language of respect,” this was an elite tongue spoken by chiefs (see, also, e.g., Rivière 1971; Sherzer 1983: 91–99). Today it is largely forgotten and, apart from its application in shamanry (Passes 1998: 94, 213), appears to have fallen into disuse.

Kíaptúnka was also employed for dialoguing with other Amerindian peoples, some of who were to become incorporated over time as clans in the Palikur confederation, for example, the Paragoto. In other cases, subgroups of foreign entities were absorbed. Thus, elements of the Maráon and Arúa developed, respectively, into the Washiyené and Auniyené clans, and (inner, southern) clan Kawakúkyené is said to have emerged from the marriage of Palikur women with Karipún migrants on the Amazon (cf. Fernandes 1948).

Chronology

I now move on to place the spatial, social-relational, and ethnic universes of the Palikur within a temporal framework. The period involved spans more than five hundred years.
Ceramic tradition and funerary customs link the Palikur to the Mazagão-Aristé civilization. This culture developed in the first half of the fifteenth century from disparate groups (e.g., the Maraca) either occupying south Amapá and the islands of the Amazon delta or advancing through them in response to demographic pressure and/or the expansion of southern neighbors (Grenand and Grenand 1987: 45–54). The Mazagão and Aristé originally constituted a single entity that split into two distinct branches. The Mazagão remained in south Amapá, while the Aristé settled north of the River Araguari and eventually occupied the area northwest of the Bay of Oyapock, where they established relations with some Guianese peoples (e.g., the Koriabo). Correspondences in pottery design connect the Palikur in a direct line (ibid.: 51) to the Aristé, who survived in north Amapá until around 1680. Conversely, Palikur pre-Christian burial practices derived from those of the Mazagão and early (i.e., southern) Aristé. These factors point to the probable existence of two prehistoric Palikur primary groups, or matrices, a circum-Amazonian one and the other based in northern Amapá. During their progress north the Aristé came into contact with, and to a greater or lesser degree overran, earlier indigenous implantations, such as the Mayé and Kükúyúné, which had become Arawakanized under the prior influence of the Arúa, who had themselves migrated from the Amazon delta (late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries).

A lexical relatedness between the Arúa language and pa’ikwaki confirmsthe existence, attested to today’s Palikur, of Palikur-Arúan relations, probably (ibid.) at the time of the Aristé’s advance northward.

Coevally, there occurred the expansion of the so-called Caribs, that is, the people(s) variously known as Karinya, Kaliña, and Galibi, into coastal Amapá from the north and northwest. This had implications for the other indigenous peoples of the Guianas, in particular the influence of the Carib language on such non-Carib groups as the Palikur (ibid.: 52; see also Dreyfus 1983–84; Santos-Granero 2002; Whitehead 2002).

The picture in Amapá immediately prior to the Conquest was of a multiplicity of heterogeneous ethnic groups, clans, and languages (Arawakan, Carib, and Tupi). Out of this patchwork there evolved a unified (albeit nonhomogenous) culture based on peaceful, interdependent relations and sustained through interethnic festivities, trade, and marriage (see also Butt Colson 1985; Dreyfus 1992; Whitehead 1993a, 1994; Arvelo-Jiménez and Biord 1994). Supporting it was a panregional macropolity regulated by a unificatory chiefdom that shared a diplomatic-cum-ceremonial language (cf. Grenand and Grenand 1987: 51–52; Whitehead 1994: 40), whose function appears identical to that of Kíaptúnka, the Palikur “language of respect” described above. Up to about the mid-sixteenth century, European
impingement in Amapá was slight and its effects were scarcely felt, save for the arrival of some groups beginning to gravitate toward the north of the region consequent to a growing Spanish presence in the Antilles and northwest Guianas (e.g., the Yao from Trinidad).

At the time of contact, the Aristé civilization having declined, the Palikur and Maráon would appear to have become the dominant groups in the region. As was mentioned, the ethonym “Palikur” was conferred on them, at least according to Dreyfus (1981: 302), by their indigenous neighbors in northern Amapá. It is noteworthy, however, that the earliest known European report of the Palikur, by Vicente Yañez Pinzón in 1500, the very year of Cabral’s landing in Brazil, identifies their territory as being on the upper bank of the Amazon delta, that is to say, in southern Amapá. Pinzón recorded the territory in question as the “Province of [the] Paricura” in 1513. Two years after that the area figures on Vesconte de Maiollo’s map as the Paricuria Coast (1515) and then, again, in his new map of 1527. The name sporadically turns up, in various orthographic guises, in Western documents from then onward. Thus, a century later, Jesse de Forêt’s reference (1914 [1623–4]) to the river Paricores, a small confluent of the Amazon, (today’s river Jupaty?), which is described as the land not of the Palikur but the Maráon. Some twenty years later the word Paricori, designating an Amerindian zone on the north bank of the lower Amazon, appears on Robert Dudley’s chart of 1646. An example of an infrequent reference to the northern Palikur during this time would be de Gomberville’s, which records that in 1644 the Karinya of Cayenne broke off their war with them in order to pursue their trade in jade (in Dreyfus 1992: 82).

In contrast to the Palikur, European references to the Maráon abound from the late sixteenth to the mid–seventeenth century. Their presence was plotted from the southern end of Amapá to the northern, namely, the Urucuá-Uaçá region and lower Oyapock—that is, the very same territory now known to have been contemporaneously also occupied or traversed at some point by the Palikur. Some other tribes cited for that area include the Arikare, “Caribs,” Yao, Mayé, “Caripous” (Karipuna), “Arawaks,” and Aracosy.

How to account for the Palikur’s sparse appearances in the European texts up to the middle of the seventeenth century? It has been argued (Whitehead 1996: 21) that the omission, sometimes relative, sometimes complete, of particular native peoples from such documents, as opposed to the more frequent descriptions of them in later years, can be ascribed to two reasons. The first relates to the poor intelligence at hand in the earlier period (when there was but a weak colonial presence anyway) about the regions into which those groups were withdrawing from contact: as
European expansion increased, so, proportionately, did their knowledge of the indigenous populations. The second and possibly more important reason is the fact that the latter were continuously engaged during the time in question in a process of evolution that led not only to the dissolution of some formations, but also to the ethnogenetic recasting of others into new formations. This operated in step with an ongoing forging of identities, often entailing the production or adoption of new names. The Palikur themselves underwent transformation and regeneration at this time and also migrated (retreating from the Portuguese in the south). It is the case, too, that some Palikur groups, as well as certain others who were in the process of becoming Palikur, were known to Europeans by other names. For instance, the Carib-speaking Paragoto, who were also called the Paracostes and the Pararweas, transmuted into the Palikur and Arawak-speaking clan Pa’uyené probably at some point in the sixteenth century during their migration to Amapá away from Spanish encroachment in the northwestern Guianas. Inversely, the Ourouraroura/Ouranarioux/Ouraroyou were actually Palikur clan Uwanyúné; the Tocoyennes/Tokyen/Tocujos, Pa’ikwené clan Túkúwené; and the Maika/Maycas/Amaycas, Palikur clan Maikyúné (Grenand and Grenand 1987: 12–14, 20, 24, 26–27).

Another factor that needs to be taken into account was the longstanding incorrect conflation of the Palikur and Maráon by outsiders. The notion that the two were actually one and the same people persisted into the twentieth century (Deyrolle 1916; Rivet and Reineburg 1921) and was forcefully rebutted by Nimuendajú (1971 [1926]: 4, 11–12). It is moreover repudiated by the Palikur themselves. The distinction between the two groups had in fact already been clearly established in the mid–seventeenth century by Father Antoine Biet, a French missionary based in Cayenne, and subsequently by a succession of others, among them Fathers Théodore Lombard (1857) and Elzear Fauque (1839 [1729–36]), Lefebvre de la Barrère (1743), and Jean Antoine Bruletout de Préfontaine (1749). Biet, who set out to locate the Palikur in 1653, placed both groups in the north, between the Curipi-Uaça area and the river Cassipore, and south of the Cassipore, along the Maricary (river Amapá?) (Biet 1664).

Biet himself, however, inaccurately identified the Yao and, like Moquet (1617), the “Caripous” (i.e., Karipuna) as the Palikur; whereas Keymis (1596) and Harcourt (1906 [1613]) seem to have mistaken the Palikur for the Arikare, as noted by the Grenands (1987: 21–22), who argue convincingly that the Palikur were the Arricouri and Arricours, reported respectively by Keymis (1596) and de Forêt (1914 [1623–4]) on the Cassipore, and also the Arracoory, reported by Harcourt (1906 [1613]) between the Cassipore and “Arracow”; that is, Urucauá (Aúkwa). Thus, to sum up, it would
appear not only that the name Palikur featured but rarely in the early colonial records, but also that whenever it did appear, there was a tendency for it to be attributed not to the Palikur themselves but to various other peoples.

Then, from the middle of the seventeenth century onward, direct references to the Palikur in various locations south of the Cassipore started increasingly to emerge. Biet’s was the first in 1652 (i.e., the year before his expedition to locate them), followed throughout the next century by Des Marchais (in 1727), d’Anville (in 1729), the Jesuits (in 1741), and de Bellin (in 1760) (all in Nimuendajú 1971 [1926]: 16–17). Nimuendajú (ibid.: 17) suggests a correlation between these sightings and the Palikur’s progressive move through Amapá to Urucauá in the north.

There exists a Palikur myth that explicitly provides details of their southern territory and their movements within it. The excerpt below recounts the events that took place following an incursion into Palikur territory, not in this instance by Europeans, but by the Maráon. Some of the latter’s northern subgroups, which were based between Cayenne and Surinam, are known to have been allies of the Galibi, the Palikur’s long-time enemy, and to have undertaken forays into southern Amapá (ibid.: 4; cf. Biet 1664). According to the narrative, the Maráon invaders poach two sacred birds named Kaú and Súyen, spirit half-brothers possessing the same human (Palikur) father, thereby obliging the Palikur to migrate and relocate elsewhere.

In their land were many birds for the Pa’ikwené [i.e., Palikur] to hunt and eat. . . . But the Maráon people came and killed and ate Kaú and Súyen. The Pa’ikwené were angry and left that land, and went to another one where there was a lot of animals to catch, and they stayed there. This place was called Mapérepkit. It is far from here [Aúkwa] . . . in the south. . . . But Kaú and Súyen’s father did not remain in this new country because there were not many birds there. . . . And he returned to live in the old country, which was called Úméyoni and is even further away from here than Mapérepkit. It is far, far in the south. (Full text in Passes 1998: 239–40)

When I was told this story, some Palikur who were present interrupted at this point both to stress the distance in question and to situate for me the land of Úméyoni. This is the Palikur name for the Amazon and translates literally as “the river of canoes.” The father’s village, they explained, was at a place where now stands the city of Belém—which, interestingly, is in fact south of the river Amazon, on the Pará. Notwithstanding, this reference alone would show that, despite claims to the contrary (Dreyfus 1981:
modern-day Palikur have not forgotten their origin in the “old country” in the south. Likewise, an origin myth of the Kamúyené clan fixes their genesis in the “land of the southeast,” that is, the Amazon delta (in Nimuendajú 1971 [1926]: 17–18; cf. Grenand and Grenand 1987: 59–62).

Moreover, the different journeys undertaken by the father in the story—north from Úméyoní to Mapérepkit (itself south of Aúkwa), then back again—would seem to indicate that Palikur migration was not a consistently one-way (south-north) process. Nor, equally significantly, was relocation “permanent”; in the version I heard it was described as being three months long. Among other things, this acknowledgment of (albeit dateless) temporality shows Palikur representations of the past to be fully historical, rather than expressions of some putative mythologically replicated present that are impervious to history (Lévi-Strauss 1974 [1962]: 231–44, 256ff, 1986 [1958]: 209–11; see also Fabian 1983; Hill 1988a; Turner 1988; Chernela 1988; Gow 1991: 252–74; Whitehead 1993a: 289; Rapport and Overing 2000: 274ff). One also cannot help wondering whether the aforementioned naming (by de Forêt) of the river Paricores as the territory of the Maráon might not have been the Palikur land referred to in the story, which the Palikur had temporarily abandoned. If this were so, it could help to explain the repeated mistaking of the Palikur for the Maráon by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European travelers.18

The story, furthermore, gives one ground for doubting whether Palikur migration northward, be it due to European pressure or (as here) Amerindian, necessarily entailed the exodus from the Amazon region of all the southern clans at the same time and at the same rate. Rather, as Nimuendajú (1971 [1926]: 16) suggests, such a process can only have been gradual and progressive. Some of these bodies, for example, the Maikyúné and the unidentified one in the story (whose narrator, it is perhaps worth noting, belonged to a northern clan, the Pa'úyené), seem to have settled in central Amapá or, like the Maiúyené, on the Cassipore before eventually heading for northern Amapá and, eventually, Aúkwa. In contrast, it would appear that a number of them were established in north Amapá and French Guiana before the Conquest.

The intensifying European penetration on the Amazon in the south and in the Guianas in the north, which involved the participation of the Portuguese, Spanish, French, English, and Dutch and the concomitant competition for territory and resources, triggered the deportation and atomization of the indigenous groups. It also provided the impetus for their flight toward northern Amapá, which was to become increasingly consolidated as a secure haven. This process coincided with, and conceivably contributed
to (Grenand and Grenand 1988), a period of intense and protracted inter-Amerindian conflict that, in particular, pitted the Galibi (Karinya/Kaliña) against the Arawakan groups and others. The Palikur, who were notably active in this war and who to this day speak of the Galibi as their enemy, teamed up in about 1590 with the Yao and some elements of the Maráon (whose relations with the Palikur, as the foregoing myth demonstrates, could also on occasion be unfriendly). This alliance was led by the famous Yao chief Anakayúri, who was known to such European travelers as Keymis (in 1596), d’Avity (in 1604), Moquet (in 1604), Harcourt (in 1603), de Forêt (in 1623) and de Laet (1630s and early 1640s) (cf. Green and Green 2003; see also Dreyfus 1992; Whitehead 1994; Vidal 1997, 2002 on other fifteenth- to eighteenth-century multiethnic confederacies in Amazonia and the Guianas).

The Palikur also produced great leaders of their own such as Ipero, whom Harcourt (1906 [1613]) calls the chief of the Arracoory, a probable corruption of their alternative name, Aúkwayené (Grenand and Grenand 1987: 22 n. 22). In about 1650, with the war against the Galibi still ongoing, the Palikur allied themselves with the Maráon again.

By the middle of the seventeenth century the Palikur had come to dominate the area between the Cassipore and Uaça. From the 1650s, they and other native groups (among them the Yao, Maráon, Arikare, Arúa, Mayé) were caught up in the struggle between France and Portugal for control of north Amapá. This was a prize that, since at least 1580, had also attracted the interest of the English and Dutch, as well as diverse Irish colonists and traders (Lefebvre de la Barre 1666; de Oliveira 1994: 100). Like other Amerindian groups who strategically joined forces with one or other of the colonial powers (see Dreyfus 1992; Whitehead 1992, 1993a), the Palikur took the decision to throw in their lot with one of the contending parties. Thus they sided with the French, with whom they already had trading relations. The alliance was to profit both partners. The Palikur, embarking on what was to prove a long-term association (d’Anville’s map of 1729 designates their territory as belonging to “Friends of the French”), obtained weapons for their war with the Galibi in exchange for aiding the French against their mutual enemy, the Portuguese (Nimuendajú 1971 [1926]: 4–6). The Palikur had prior cause to fear the latter anyway, having been subjected, like other indigenous peoples, to their slave raids.

In 1722, under the pretext that the French were inciting the Indians against them in Pará, the Portuguese “ethnically cleansed” the adjoining southern Amapá territory of the native communities that had not yet managed to flee. The French governor of Cayenne responded by explicitly forbidding the Portuguese from pursuing the Palikur north of the Cassipore
Some seventy-five years later, between 1794 and 1798, the Portuguese again depopulated the area from the Amazon right up toward the Oyapock in an attempt to deprive the French of further potential indigenous allies (Nimuendajú 1971 [1926]: 8; de Oliveira 1994: 105).

By the mid-1730s, the Palikur were congregated, in large numbers (according to Coudreau 1893: 274), on the Urucauá and upper Uaça, where they enjoyed good relations with their neighbors (e.g., the Arúa, Maráon, Mauyuné). The larger Uaça region and the lower Oyapock continued to prove an effective sanctuary for the different indigenous groups seeking refuge from European encroachment and enslavement. Palikur oral records relate that among them were the southern clans: Masamainé, Túkúwené, Kawakúkyené, and Kamúyené; as well as a fifth clan, the Maikyúné, from central Amapá.

This period (mid-eighteenth century) saw the beginning, as if in counteraction to Portuguese geopolitical pressure, of a process of interethnic fusion in northern Amapá, which, in time, notably gave rise to the distinct entities we now know as the Kariipún (a compound of “acculturated” Amerindians and cabocloized Whites and Blacks) and the “False Galibi” (comprising elements of Arúa, Itútan, and sundry others) as well as the Palikur. It would seem, on the basis of native history, that the latter people developed from a body of nine original clans (inner and peripheral) that amalgamated with nine non-Palikur groups (palikurized as peripheral clans) under the authority of a “super-chief” (Grenand and Grenand 1987: 17–29). One such chief was Youcara, an important ally of the French, whom Fauque encountered in 1736 (1839 [1729–36]). This process of absorption into the Palikur clan system, in which alien entities were gradually assimilated either in whole or in part, as happened with fragments of various depleted groups, both Arawakan and non-Arawakan, such as the Itútan, Arúa, Maráon, and Kúkuyúne (Leprieur 1834; Nimuendajú 1971 [1926]: 17), was to continue into the nineteenth century.

The Power of the Palikur Chief

The Palikur have a myth that touches on the institution of chieftainship as well as two other important interconnected themes germane to the present discussion, the contact between the Palikur and White worlds and the link between the Palikur polity and the Urucauá area (Aúkwa). Featuring an apocryphal but unnamed culture hero, the narrative starts by relating how, “a long time ago,” God (Ohokri) created a clutch of powerful rulers, to wit, in order of appearance, the kings of the Pa’ikwené (Palikur), the French, the
English, the Portuguese, and the Brazilians (see also Whitehead 1994: 35, 40). Deciding to submit these kings to a trial of strength, Ohokri sets them the task of slicing a certain rock in half with their knives. The non-Palikur kings step up to the rock first, and each in turn manages to cut it, but “only a little bit,” and not one of them any more than the other. After which,

Ohokri got the king of the Pa’ikwené to test his strength too. The Pa’ikwené king exerted his strength . . . not all of it, just a little bit of it . . . and sheared the rock in two. Then Ohokri said to the Pa’ikwené king, “You’re the strongest king but I can’t have you staying here for you would take command of all the other [i.e., White] nations.” So Ohokri sent him away, far from all the others, to Aúkwa. (Full text in Passes 1998: 238–39)

A Palikur leader like the one in the story could very well have been a super-chief of the kind mentioned above. In the days before demographic decline led to the disintegration of the clan territories, these individuals governed the Palikur pan-clan confederation under a system of chieftainship known as úkiwara. As we have seen, at various phases in their history, such as during the war with the Galibi, panregional alliances binding the Palikur to other groups were also under the similar authority of a single leader like the previously cited Yao chief Anakayúri.

The primary function of these paramount leaders, of whom the most famous Palikur examples would be the aforementioned Ipero (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) and Youcara (eighteenth century), was to institute and sustain harmonious and friendly relations, not only at the interclan, intra-Palikur level, but also at the interethnic one. The separate subgroups and their leaders were autonomous, and the local peoples egalitarian, according to early European observers (Boyer du Petit Puy 1654; Biet 1664; cf. Arnaud 1984: 35–36). Given this, it is unlikely that, for all the apparent hierarchical structure of Arawakan polities like the úkiwara, the Palikur super-chiefs would have governed through authoritarianism. Similar to their modern counterparts, the village leaders (híaptihi) and the leaders of many other present-day egalitarian Lowland Amazonian groups, the super-chiefs would conceivably have tended to eschew coercion and giving orders (Lévi-Strauss 1967b [1944]; Clastres 1974; Thomas 1982; Rivière 1984: 12, 73–74; McCallum 1990; Overing 1993a). Instead, I suggest, their power to attract and hold large followings and foster alliances with other groups would largely have rested on the same requisite leadership attributes and responsibilities as were, and are still, needed in the immediate community: leading by example, persuasive force, organizational competency, oratorical and ritual expertise, and an aptitude for
engendering good morale (Lévi-Strauss 1967b; Thomas 1982; Rivière 1984: 72–74, 82–84, 91; Viveiros de Castro 1992: 110–1, 116–8; Overing 1993a, 2000; Alès 1995, 2000: 137–9). No less instrumental would have been an ability at mediation (Rivière 1984: 74), conciliation, and diplomacy, hence, the coining of the designation “peace chiefs” (Grenand and Grenand 1987: 19) to describe this historical Palikur leadership. The emphasis, then, was on the ongoing generation of relations of the kind glossed as convivial by Overing and Passes (2000a), that is, tranquil, sociable, and pacific, with war chiefs being appointed, as elsewhere in Native South America, on a provisional basis whenever the occasion demanded (Boyer du Petit Puy 1654; Grenand and Grenand 1987: 18).

As a representation, the chief as peace maker rather than as “war maker” (Dreyfus 1992: 81) neither necessarily disagrees with nor cancels out that of the supremely powerful and mighty leader portrayed in the above narrative, for it can be argued that the chief’s (superior) physical strength stands for political and moral power rather than, or just as much as, the martial kind on the grounds that the former would have been as structurally indispensable as the latter for the defense of the Palikur naoné against European incursion. Likewise, it was also a fundamental necessity that concord be reproduced, among both the Palikur themselves and other members of the wider regional, interethnic naoné (see Basso 1995: 91–189).

Although present-day Palikur chieftainship is nonhereditary, it is possible that the opposite might have been true in the past. Such appears to have been the case for other Arawakan groups (Santos-Granero 2002; Heckenberger 2002) as well as among other peoples in the Guianas, for example, the Guayano (Ralegh 1928 [1592–6]), Yao (Whitehead 1994: 40), and Galibi. Fernandes (1948: 219) has claimed that the office of chief was indeed hereditary among the Palikur until the practice was terminated at the end of the eighteenth century under the combined pressure of the French authorities and Catholic missionaries.

Nimuendajú (1971 [1926]: 60) maintains that the chief is always an old man (see also Ricardo 1983: 28). The basis for this assertion seems to be the fact that both Youcara, whom the French Jesuit missionary Fauque reported having visited in 1736, and Wotulairá, the Palikur chief Nimuendajú himself encountered just under two hundred years later, were the eldest members of their community. Wotulairá’s age he puts at between sixty and seventy (Nimuendajú 1971 [1926]: 74). Whatever the situation might have been even in the recent past, my own observations do not bear out this contention, however. For instance, Tchikoi, the chief in Aükwa, whom I interviewed in the early 1990s, was in his thirties (Passes 1998: 87–
90), while Capitaine Louis Norino, the headman of a community on the Oyapock (Premier Village Espérance), was probably about forty. Neither could be said to have been the most senior male chronologically.

Furthermore, to reveal another facet of contemporary Palikur leadership, the chief at Macouria (near Cayenne), whom I also met, was not only not old, but also a woman (Mauricienne)—a not entirely unique occurrence among a people conspicuous today for their strong gender equality and for the social and political power of their female members (Passes 1998: 99–105, 2004; cf. Nimuendajú 1971 [1926]: 54–57).

In the almost allegory-like tale referred to above, the supreme Palikur champion, and implicitly the nation he represents, may be said to have scored a victory and paid the price of exile through one and the same action (cleaving a rock in two)—a paradox that betrays the characteristic Palikur sense of being simultaneously, as I defined above, central and marginalized (Passes 2002). However, I would suggest that the Palikur king’s relegation to Aúkwa should not be thought of only in terms of banishment. Inasmuch as it is at the same time manifestly a divine recognition of Palikur preeminence, it can itself also be seen as a triumph. It is one, moreover, confirmed by historical success. For under the then-existing chiefdom system of úkiwara, the political context in which the story should be understood, the Urucauá region (i.e., Aúkwa) and north Amapá generally represented more than a (relatively) secure natural fortress that offered immigrants a provisional bolt-hole from ever-increasing European invasiveness and oppression. Rather, it came to constitute a fully established and instituted homeland, both for the Palikur already located there (the so-called northern clans) and the Palikur who joined (the southern clans), as well as for groups like the Maráon, Itútan, Arúia, Yao, and others. The Palikur forged alliances with some of these, and some they incorporated, wholly or partly, as (outer) clans.

From the late seventeenth century onward, to return to chronological matters, the entire region of Amapá also experienced the European presence in the shape of several waves of Christian missionary activity, both Portuguese and French. The indigenous populations either already resident in the northern zone, as well as in the contiguous zone of southern French Guiana, or else constantly arriving in these territories to swell the ranks of the migrants from Portuguese colonial pressure, were targeted with varying success by the Jesuits in the 1680s, the 1720s, and from 1735 to 1762, when the order’s missions were shut down (though two new ones managed to maintain themselves until 1794) (Nimuendajú 1971 [1926]: 5–8). Thus, from the late 1720s, the Palikur were caught between the French
Catholics, who were intent on converting and missionizing them, and Portuguese slavers frequently operating in complicity with other Amerindians, for example, the Wayapi from the Upper Oyapock (Grenand 1979: 4).

The experience of Portuguese slave raiding, which lasted well into the nineteenth century (Nimuendajú 1971 [1926]: 9), is still remembered by the Palikur and expressed in certain of their narratives (Green 1988; Passes 2002). The forced abductions entailed in slavery—and the many deaths incurred in resisting it—are cited by some individuals as the main reason, greater even than imported Western epidemics, for their people’s small population and also as the cause for their present loss of political status in the context of the national state (Passes 2002, 2003).

As a consequence of the multiple negative effects (fighting, deportation, slave raids, flight, and diseases) of the European presence, the end of the eighteenth century found the Palikur much depleted, both demographically and socially.

There is not much information about them during the next hundred years, but it would seem the Palikur were now firmly established both in Aúkwa and on the Uaça, Curipi, and lower Oyapock. Catholic missionary activity had abated, save for a push in the 1890s that garnered a small number of converts, and the Palikur were left unmolested by the French authorities, who held de facto power in north Amapá. They were thus free to pursue a relatively undisturbed existence in their largely isolated and ecologically bountiful territory, in which they found the resources to recover.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Palikur’s habitat appears to have contracted, however, being again concentrated on the Urucaúá, under Chief Rousseau, and their population was now estimated at between two to three hundred (Coudreau 1893). Contacts with other indigenous societies on the Oyapock continued to be maintained, in part through interethnic marriages. Relations of trade with the French Guianese Créoles, whose cultural and linguistic influence was to become ever more important, and others (including Chinese merchants), provided a ready market for such Palikur products as fish, manatees, basketry, and manioc.

In due course, the Palikur began to reemerge as a powerful entity. When, in 1900, the long drawn out conflict over possession of Amapá was finally resolved, with Brazil being granted entitlement by the Treaty of Berne, many Palikur accepted the invitation of the authorities in Cayenne to settle on the French side of the Oyapock. It could be argued that this was not so much an immigration as a return to a land in which some of them had been born (Dreyfus 1981: 306 n. 9) and where, indeed, Palikur communities are known to have existed as far back as the early sixteenth century (Grenand and Grenand 1988) and probably before that. The new
community, however, was decimated by malaria and influenza in the 1900s and a measles epidemic in 1914, and most of the survivors chose to return to Aúkwa. A decade later there remained in French Guiana about 50 Palikur out of a total of 240 (Nimuendajú 1971 [1926]: 15). Seventy years on from that, according to my own rough census (Passes 1998: 7–8), the population figures were more evenly balanced, in that there were now approximately 720 inhabitants in the “French Guianese” community as opposed to 790 in the “Brazilian” one.

Another important round of migrations from Aúkwa to French Guiana occurred from the early 1960s onward, the first being the result of a shamanic war and the ensuing community schism (Arnaud 1970: 14–15, 1984: 45–46; Dreyfus 1981: 306–8). A further significant factor was the impact of Protestant fundamentalism, which over time was to have far-reaching implications for both Palikur social and cultural life and patterns of residence—for example, the establishment of large multiclans settlements with membership determined on sectarian grounds (Passes 1998, chap. 9, especially 190–6 and 223–6; cf. Grenand 1987: 76). Missionary efforts in the mid-1960s, initially at the instigation of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, culminated in the conversion of a large proportion of the Aúkwa population. This led an opposing group, which had independently become Seventh Day Adventists, to relocate to Premier Village Espérance (or La Savane) by St. Georges de l’Oyapock, which was then largely a community of creolized Palikur founded by people who had chosen to remain behind after the exodus back to Aúkwa in the 1910s.

The departure of a Palikur leader, prominent in the Assembleía de Deus church, and his followers around 1980 signaled the start of more migrations and the establishment of new settlements such as, for example, Deuxième Village Espérance (or Persévérance) at St. Georges and Macouria, which is near Cayenne. A stream of Aúkwan incomers constantly replenishes the population of these communities. The traffic across the Oyapock is very much two-way, though; and at the end of the twentieth century (see note 3), as it has done for many centuries past, a long-established system of mutual visiting was still successfully maintaining communication and generating ties between the two sets of Palikur communities, the “Brazilian” and the “French Guianese.”

Conclusion

This article has been concerned with the historical creation, composition, and renewal of the Palikur naoné, or nation, in Amapá, from the beginning of the sixteenth century onward. This can best be summarized as a con-
tinuous process of accretion, incorporation, and political confederation. In this process, a preexistent nucleus of inner clans, both “northern” and “southern” and nine in number, according to Palikur’ oral records, agglomerated with other ethnic entities, which over time were palikurized as outer clans (and Arawakanized if initially non-Arawakophone). The product of this ethnogenesis consisted of a corpus of autonomous parts, reckoned by today’s Palikur to have been eighteen strong at its height (probably circa 1800 C.E.), which were holistically bound together in a confederacy under the overarching authority of a pan-clan chief. This structure, centred in northern Amapá and with its main domain on the river Urucauá—or, in Palikur parlance, Aúkwa—was itself joined in alliance, for shorter or longer periods, with other elements in a cross-ethnic panregional macropolity, similarly under the leadership of a super-chief.

As noted earlier, recent ethnohistoric research (e.g., Dreyfus 1992; Whitehead 1993a, 1994, 1996; Hill 1996b; Arvelo-Jiménez and Biord 1994; Vidal and Zucchi 1999; Vidal 2002; Wright 2002; Santos-Granero 2002) demonstrates that sociopolitical agglomeration and confederation were equally present post-Conquest in a number of various other Arawakan and non-Arawakan groups but should not be seen as a homogenous pan-Amazonian cultural phenomenon. Nor was it simply a reaction to colonialism. Thus, while the latter factor, in the Palikur case, clearly affected the process of confederation, it cannot be said to have caused it as such. In Amapá, as in other regions of Native South America, a strategy of interethnic amalgamation was in operation before the advent of the Whites. These multipartite unions, both small-scale and large, were active at the political level beyond the local networks of exchange (see also Dreyfus 1992; Whitehead 1993a; Arvelo-Jiménez and Biord 1994; Vidal 2002; Hill and Santos-Granero 2002). This is not to downplay the importance of the European presence, but only to redefine its role, which could more properly be described not as the determinant of a new process, but as a stimulus to one already in place. For, notwithstanding the erosion or outright appropriation of their territories by the colonial powers, both on the Amazon and in the Guianas (and the Antilles in the case of at least one group, the Yao), many of the diverse indigenous entities that relocated to northern Amapá entered into political, military and/or commercial partnership with the Palikur. In other cases (e.g., the Paragoto), they or some of their sub-units became part of the Palikur nation proper, being incorporated as clans. Or, alternatively, they recomposed themselves as constituents of the other ethnic composites that were to evolve over time in the region, for example, the Karipún and False Galibi.

Thus, although northern Amapá provided the Palikur and these others
with a safety zone away from European expansion and war (intertribal, against Europeans, and between Europeans), they are not to be seen as fragmented—and therefore somehow unstructured—survivors. Rather, they were agents of ongoing ethnic—or, in indigenous terms, “national”—construction, growth, and cohesion (see also Dreyfus 1992; Whitehead 1993a, 1994, 1996; Arvelo-Jiménez and Biord 1994). With others (e.g., Garcés Dávila 1992: 72–73; Hill 1996a), I propose that this process itself constitutes a strategic political response to such alien invasiveness.

Notes

I am indebted to the Economic and Social Research Council (esrc, u.k.) and the Royal Anthropological Institute, whose generous financial support helped to make possible the fieldwork involved in this article, which in part is based on an earlier paper presented to the conference Comparative Arawakan Histories, Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, Panama City, 24–27 May 2000. I would like to thank Neil Whitehead for his informed and enthusiastic interest in the subject as well as the unnamed reviewers.

1 It should perhaps be noted, however, that in South America, thanks to extensive indigenous paths of communication, vast distances and natural frontiers like rivers “have never constituted cultural barriers” (Dreyfus 1992: 78, my translation; cf. Butt Colson 1983–4b, 1985).

2 As others have indicated for the South American context, the use of language distribution as the key criterion (together with ceramic distribution) for establishing ancient migrations and diffusion can be unsafe (Dreyfus 1992; Whitehead 1994: 33–34; Roosevelt 1994: 17–18).

3 My research for this article covered the period 1993–1995.

4 For information on these peoples, see Nimuendajú 1971 [1926]: 83ff; Grenand and Grenand 1987.

5 For which there exists the term givétúnya (cf. Grenand and Grenand 1987: 17).

6 On Palikur relations with the “nations” of the French, Brazilians, and Créoles, see Passes 2003.

7 For a modern, global take on rhizomic relatedness, see, for example, Glissant 1990, 1997, n.d.: 2–3.

8 Nimuendajú (1971 [1926]: 15–16) gives a figure of seven extant clans and four extinct ones for 1925; Arnaud (1984: 31–32), six extant and five extinct; and the Grenands (1987), seven extant and twelve extinct (cf. Fernandes 1948: 210–6; Montout 1994: 37–38). Passes (1998: 8–9) records eight surviving clans, seven of which are “real” according to informants, and one of which is declared “false” yet legitimate, namely, the Auniyené, which is the Palikur term for the Arúa, some of whose remnants formed its basis.

9 Or possibly different dialects of the same language, according to Françoise and Pierre Grenand (1987: 30).

10 Forgotten, that is, as a spoken language but not forgotten about, for what was originally a political tool has come, in its present moribund state, to attain near sacred status and high affective value for the Palikur (Passes 1998: 94–95; cf. Grenand and Grenand 1987: 32 n. 32).
Sidney Facundes (2000) informs me that research into kíaptúnká is currently being undertaken.

Namely, a second burial of the bones in an urn (Fauque 1839 [1729–36]; Nimuendajú 1971 [1926]: 60).

The Arúa eventually disappeared as an integral entity in north Amapá circa 1750. Their remnants were absorbed by the Palikur (see note 8) and other groups, or else they became founders of the so-called Uaça/Wassa people, or “False Galibi” (Nimuendajú 1971 [1926]; Grenand and Grenand 1987: 40–42, 51). They became extinct in south Amapá in the nineteenth century.

One is tempted to wonder whether kíaptúnká might not have descended from it.

Such variations in spelling are to be found from the earliest documents onward, thus apart from the examples already given we have “Palicour(s)” (Biet [1664], d’Anville, Fauque, Lombard [late 1720s–1730s], Bellin, de Préfontaine, Leprince [1831], Dabbadie [1854], all in Nimuendajú 1971 [1926]: 3–11); “Parincour” (Fernandes 1950); “Parincur Iené” (Fernandes 1963); “Palicur” (Payne 1991; Roosevelt 1994: 20).

For example, Keymis 1596; Harcourt 1906 [1613]; de Forêt 1914 [1624]; de Laët 1633; the maps of Robert Dudley (1646, 1661) (in Nimuendajú 1971 [1926]: 3).


The Palikur report of the Maráon in Úméyoni would seem to confirm the early Western references to their presence in south Amapá (e.g., de Forêt 1914 [1623–4]) as well as the north (Keymis 1596; Harcourt 1906 [1613]; de Forêt 1914 [1623–4]; Biet 1664; and others). The Palikur say that, like themselves, the Maráon originated in the south before evolving into a northern group (in Urucaú/lower Oyapock) and a southern one (on the Amazon). On being eventually deported by the Portuguese, the latter joined the former in the north, where both groups later died out (Grenand and Grenand 1987: 36).

A fuller list is to be found in ibid.: 34–39.

Palikur understanding of the asociality of personal power-seeking in chiefs is, I believe, well expressed in a variation of the story given above, in which a super-chief declares, “I cannot make war; I am so strong I would win, and then there would soon be no other nations but mine” (quoted in ibid.: 18, my translation).

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