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| T h e m e |

Bureaucratic Anxiety

Asymmetrical interactions and the role of documents in the Orinoco Delta, Venezuela

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This article, which focuses on relations between Warao Amerindians and nonnative agents, describes documents as an opaque medium of interaction whose meaning is far from being shared, and which also create doubts as to the identity of the people involved. It suggests that such uncertainty is integral to the Warao's involvement in asymmetrical relations with outsiders, which are inextricably political, economic, and moral. The current situation largely results from past administration by Spanish Catholic missionaries, and from the later involvement of Venezuela's native population in national politics. Nowadays, documents are used by the Warao to switch between appeals to personal compassion and claims to administrative rights, and bureaucratic dealings are primarily articulated around the performative nature of writing. This also accounts for the mix of hope and anxiety that pervades the Warao's interactions with nonnatives, when they use the latter's own technology to impinge on them.

Keywords: Bureaucracy, documents, missionaries, patron-client, writing, South America, Warao

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During certain periods of my fieldwork in a Warao village, my hosts were constantly engaged in administrative processes: almost everyday, various government agents visited the villagers and had them fill in forms so that they could take part in official programs. Local politicians arrived to campaign for the coming elections, while some Warao traveled to bigger settlements and to the regional capital in order to seek out baptismal certificates from the missionaries or to check whether their names had appeared on the lists of state pensioners. Obviously I had no illusions of finding a pristine or isolated exotic tribe when I decided to work with the Warao—a lowland native South American population mostly living in the state of Delta Amacuro (i.e., the Orinoco Delta) in Venezuela—for I was well aware that their interactions with non-Indian outsiders dated at least from Raleigh's 1595 expedition, and that patterns of local existence had been successively affected by Spanish Catholic missionaries since the 1920s, as well as by the current

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Venezuelan government's social outreach programs.[1] Yet I was surprised by the extent and intensity of the bureaucratic processes I witnessed, and also by the way the Warao dealt with them—granting documents and procedures an automatic efficacy, as if they were a form of magic. During my last visit to the Delta, in autumn 2011, some of my friends showed me a list with the full names, as well as ID card numbers, of themselves and their relatives. They had composed it after hearing that some politicians had come to Guayo (the neighboring mission-village and local administrative center), telling me that it was an easy and foolproof way to obtain gifts: all one had to do was to present such a list to the visiting political leaders, get them to read and sign it, and then go and collect free food from the local store. In this instance, my friends were unsuccessful because the politicians had left early, but the efficacy of the list itself was never doubted. Of course, the local system of political clientelism helped foster such attitudes, but my friends did not believe that they were more likely to receive gifts during periods of electoral campaigning; nor did they consider that the applications they were filing for grants and funds would need to be assessed and approved, rather than being automatically and directly efficacious. Although the conceptions held by the Warao are not completely at odds with official logics of administration, their practices rely heavily on an assumption of unmediated potency: procedures and documents are not merely necessary, but are deemed sufficient, to produce the desired results.

My experiences tally with evidence recorded in other settings, which have given rise to divergent interpretations: some authors analyze these events in terms of a dialectics of state control and local resistance (for a discussion, see for instance Hawkins 2002: 12; Reed 2006: 158–59), whereas others attempt to locate writing and textual objects within native ontological categories (see for instance Guzmán-Gallegos 2009: 228–30; Miller 2007: 172).[2] However interesting such perspectives are, both suppress or eclipse the uncertainty that pervades bureaucratic interactions: the former because it subsumes them under a macrosocial logic, the latter because it reduces them to (new) instances of a preexisting conceptual universe. By contrast, I argue that it is possible to do justice to such uncertainty by recognizing that documents are the site of equivocal adjustments and partial compatibilities. Moreover, their opaque nature is in fact constitutive of bureaucratic interactions in the Orinoco Delta; it is doubtful whether the Warao could reach any agreement with Creoles[3] and foreigners regarding what exactly they

1. The Warao here number about 35,000 individuals. I conducted fieldwork primarily in a midsize settlement in the vicinity of San Francisco de Guayo, a large mission-village, with additional research in other areas of the Delta.

2. Amerindian appropriations of writing are common, but should be contextualized: the Ye'kuana used to reject the writing down of their oral tradition (Guss 1986), but have now adopted it in the context of land claims (Medina 2003).

3. I use the term "Creole" to translate Venezuelan Spanish *criollo*, meaning a nonnative Spanish-speaking inhabitant of Venezuela. The Warao term *hotarao* is usually used as an equivalent, although it can be more encompassing in other contexts (where it means "nonnative"), while I have never heard it used to refer to other Amerindian populations, as used to be the case according to Barral (1949: 47).

were doing in their appeals to bureaucracy. Rather, they attempt to impinge on others through recourse to a technology that does not need to have a shared meaning in order to be effective.

In this paper, I try to account for the power that the Warao grant to documents. More importantly, I analyze the role documents play in asymmetrical interactions that are always negotiated and whose outcome is always uncertain. Indeed, bureaucracy can be seen as one mode of action among others, a way of influencing or coercing people that can be used as an alternative to shamanic rituals or ceremonial dialogues. Bureaucracy's capacity to generate extended and unfamiliar social relations is a chief source of its uncertainty: like mobile phones (see Bonhomme; Carey, this volume), paperwork introduces mediated interactions between people who do not necessarily know each other. The Warao sometimes question who exactly is trying to impinge on whom, who are the authors or the recipients of documents—is it local Creole politicians, president Chávez, or the administration? Although different individuals have unequal access to administration and its techniques, the question is therefore not just one of the state controlling its population, or of the dominants coercing the dominated, because even marginalized people can play the bureaucratic game (see Hull 2008). My contribution should, however, not be seen as a case study in the "anthropology of bureaucracy." The very lack of a "common ground" between Creole bureaucrats and their Warao clients implies that formalism is not the main trope used by both groups to justify their behavior (Herzfeld 1992: 15). While bureaucracy is a complex form of organization, defined by respect for formal procedures, and intended to achieve impersonal decision-making, only one of its features is crucial in my analysis and in the process of partial compatibility I am describing: the use of documents, and more precisely the act of writing them.

There has been much research into the specificity of documents as textual artifacts, most notably the work of Goody (1977, 1986) who stresses that lists, accounts, and legal treaties dominate the documentation we have about those societies that invented written scripts. However, rather than study the quasi-universal cognitive and social effects of writing and documents, I want to adopt an approach inspired by pragmatics. Documents are often performative texts, endowed with a force that stems from their linguistic and graphic properties (Fraenkel 2008; Hull 2003), as well as from the procedures that have to be followed for their production (see Garfinkel 1967: 186–207). In other words, "writing acts" are often as important as the written documents they generate, to use a term coined by Fraenkel (2007) in a creative appropriation of Austin (1962). This is why they can generate "considerable anxiety," for instance in situations when they engender—and not merely record—the responsibility of their authors (Hull 2003: 289). I will try to show how this Western "social magic" (Bourdieu 1982: 62) enables productive misunderstandings when it is used by (or on) Amerindian people. Writing is indeed the activity through which contemporary Venezuelan (Creole) and Warao practices are articulated, and the Warao have taken it, especially the writing of names and ID numbers, as acts that entail commitment—although maybe not for the same reasons or with the same consequences as their Creole counterparts. This is why my exploration of bureaucracy will eventually lead into a discussion of the literacy practices of the Warao, and especially the way they articulate speech and writing.

Although documents share some general features and a specific logic, we can distinguish in them various "written genres" (Hull 2003: 291); I will also consider several discrete levels of interaction, since documents mediate between agents of varying size (from individuals to institutions) whose encounters are rarely face-to-face. This article thus departs from the canonical research conducted within the fields of interactionist sociology and anthropological linguistics, but is still driven by the certainty that detailed contextual analysis is the most fruitful way of understanding what happens when the limits of a given situation are thrown into question (see Bonhomme; Carey, this volume). The broader social and political context is not only the background that constrains or shapes microsociological phenomena: through the administration and writing of documents, institutions are involved as ambiguous interlocutors in interpersonal interactions whose understanding is at the core of this paper.

In order to analyze the ambivalent effects the missionaries had on the Warao, I shall begin with a historical excursus that shows how they bound them through "letters of appointment" that established positions of authority, but also provided them with an administrative identity through baptismal records. The latter represented less a form of control than the very means that made possible the involvement of the Warao in national politics from the 1960s onward. A second step of my argument will be devoted to describing this phenomenon and the appearance of lists of political supporters, and of ID and electoral cards. Documents became a key to obtaining wealth and favors, but their use was still embedded in relations of personal patronage. Finally, I will try to analyze the changes, regarding both literacy practices and political relations, that result from Hugo Chávez' Bolivarian revolution. Nowadays, the Warao use the power of documents to switch between appeals to personal compassion (drawing on a logic similar to that which would bind them to their patrons) and claims to administrative rights that are impersonal or imputed to the abstract benevolence of Chávez. It does not mean that their claims are always granted; yet they deploy writing as a newly available mode of action, which entails both assertiveness and anxiety in their interactions with outsiders.

Religious administration: Learning to be bureaucratic subjects

During my period of fieldwork, Adventist missionaries came to the village where I was living, sparking some debate as to whether people should convert and join them. One argument put forward by a mature man particularly struck me: Catholic missionaries are preferable to Protestants, he said, because they "write paper [documents]" (*karata habata-ya*). This is an example of the contemporary importance attached to documents, but also reveals the historic role still granted to missionaries, echoing the administrative work of the Capuchin Order that settled in the Orinoco Delta in 1925. The missionaries ruled the native population of the area, in lieu of the Venezuelan government, and introduced documents in their dealings with the locals in order to formalize and legitimize their new authority. What is remarkable is that they did so in a very ambivalent way. On the one hand, they turned textual artifacts into potent objects per se (more than was the case before); but on the other hand, they grounded the efficacy of documents in the pragmatic features of writing that were beyond the grasp of the Warao. It was a way of forcing the Warao to submit to the power of documents while retaining a

monopoly on their production. This ambivalence is characteristic of the control exerted by the missionaries: they did not really attempt to establish a shared and stable understanding about what documents were, but rather actively maintained and capitalized on a situation of "equivocal compatibility" (see Piña-Cabral 1999: 225), at least until new generations of "civilized" Warao had been raised in their boarding schools. Let us explore this situation by way of a brief historical contextualization.

Until the arrival of the Capuchin missionaries the region was a frontier for Venezuela, and its native population were only nominally controlled by the Creoles, most of whom had arrived toward the end of the nineteenth century. The central government of Venezuela was well aware of its weak grip on the peripheries, especially when trying to protect the border with English Guyana, and therefore signed a treaty in 1923 with the Capuchin Order of Castile in Spain. The treaty authorized a Mission that would benefit both sides: the Spanish missionaries would turn the Warao into Venezuelan citizens, and in return would receive state support in their civilizing and evangelizing work. The missionaries were thus granted administrative and police jurisdiction over the native population, and were able to found several missionary centers. Their appearance caused a major change in the relationships between the Warao and outsiders: the missionaries behaved as bureaucrats, much more so than any other local actor had before, which is perhaps not surprising considering that the Catholic Church itself has been regarded as essentially a bureaucratic organization, administering "grace," in an entirely institutional way (Weber 1978: 560).[4]

The primary effect of documents produced by the Capuchin missionaries was to bind the Warao into hierarchies of obligation: as part of their attempt at reorganizing the sociopolitical morphology of the Delta, they granted some local leaders authority over others by giving them appointment letters. They had instituted a neat pyramidal structure: the whole area was under the general authority of a Creole who had the title of "Captain Settler" (*Capitan Poblador*), and was divided into three zones headed by "General Governors," each of which was split into several centers led by "Captains" consisting of settlements ruled by "Prosecutors" (*fiscales*) and "Policemen," all the latter being Warao (EE. UU. de Venezuela 1942). It is difficult to measure the extent of the change introduced by the missionaries in the organization of the Delta, and the missionaries' own reports seem to imply that they mostly appointed people who already enjoyed local legitimacy.[5] But it is extremely significant that the Capuchins' administrative system sacralized letters of appointment. A missionary describes one instance of a "patriotic-religious feast" that they organized in their mission of Araguaimujo, in

4. The reason why those missionaries embraced their bureaucratic function and the nationalist goals of the Venezuelan government may be specific to the Spanish Capuchins of the first half of the twentieth century. The Salesians who worked among the Ecuadorian Achuar, for instance, conversely made attempts to disconnect Christianity from technological and economic matters (Taylor 1981: 652).

5. The titles granted to leaders (*aidamo*) were also already used among the Warao with a phonological adaptation: *kobenahoro* (*gobernador*), *kapita* (*capitan*), *fiskari* (*fiscal*), *komisario* (*comisario*). This is thought to be a legacy of missionary rule in colonial times (see Turrado Moreno 1945: 56; Wilbert 1996: 75–76).

order to name the chiefs who would rule their settlements for the year. Its aim was "infiltrating in the heart of these natives the sacred love of God, the Nation [Patria] and Authority" (Muñecas 1942a: 215).[6] He records his amazement at the number of Warao who asked him when it would happen and promised to come, calling it "the ceremony of the document" (*fiesta de la carata*). At dawn, a great number of Warao arrived in canoes from their settlements and the missionaries organized a solemn mass celebrated by the Apostolic Vicar, followed by a procession along the river. The actual nomination process then commenced.

> Father Rodrigo read in loud voice the new Hierarchical-Organic Order of authorities, which was to exist in all the settlements. He announced the names of those who had been distinguished with the title of Governor, Captain or Prosecutor, warning each of them of their respective duties and rights, which had to be fulfilled and respected. He then gave to each of them the letter of nomination that recognised their office and authority over others. . . . [Other missionaries] meanwhile, were pinning on their chest, as an emblem of power, a medal of the Liberator, tied to a sash of the national flag. It is impossible to describe the transports of joy and intimate satisfaction felt by those men, at seeing they had been given authority over the other natives and reflecting on the trust that the missionaries had in them. Even the famous Aladdin with his magic lamp, was not as happy as our Guaraunos [Warao] with their "carata" [document] and medal. (Muñecas 1942b: 265–66)

In such ceremonies, which took place annually for several years at least, the missionaries went even further than other introducers of writing and documents in South America. While traders and bosses have used account ledgers to bind their debtors since the nineteenth century (see Gow 1991; Hugh-Jones 1992, 2010), the Capuchin missionaries of the Orinoco Delta did not produce mere written artifacts: they mobilized the full potency of the institution (represented here by the Apostolic Vicar, the head of the Mission) to issue letters of appointment that were administrative artifacts and, by themselves, conferred power on some over others. Indeed, since respect for "Authority" is repeatedly described in their narratives as just as important as the fear of God, this fusion of a religious and a bureaucratic ritual is not surprising. But the missionaries, just like the traders, subjected the Warao to the efficacy of documents whose full mastery they kept for themselves. If some youths had already been educated in their boarding schools, mature men still did not know how to read and write, and when they occasionally pretended that they, too, could write letters to authorities, the missionaries always laughed at such implausible efforts at appropriation (Barral 1942: 294). Through theatrical ceremonies, the missionaries promulgated an idea of documents as material objects (so much more effective upon people who do not know how to read), and one maliciously noted that the Warao leaders kept all their letters of appointment as "treasures," long after they had expired (Turrado Moreno 1945: 59).[7]

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6. This ceremony is strikingly similar to those described by Wilde (2009: 80–81) among seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Guarani who belonged to the so-called "Jesuit republic."

7. Gordillo, building on a comparable situation, argues that the Argentinean Toba fetishized documents insofar as they saw the power of ID papers "as a quality that, even

Yet this is only part of the story. For in other contexts the missionaries did precisely the opposite and rooted the potency of documents in their textual content and graphic properties, which are the essential vehicles of their illocutionary force (Fraenkel 2008; Hull 2003; Riles 2006), therefore switching the focus away from the material existence of the papers.[8] This alternation between two uses of documents on the part of the missionaries was thus a way of controlling the Warao: the opacity of the devices they produced and deployed was a crucial source of their power rather than an obstacle to interethnic communication.

Father Barral, who worked in the Delta from 1933 until 1988, tells how a shaman called Moreno once asked to be named chief, promising he would bring all the Warao out of the forest so they could be evangelized and civilized by the missionaries—but only if he received a letter of appointment (Barral 1972: 195). Barral apparently complied, writing something on a sheet of paper that he handed to the shaman and telling him that this was his document and that he was now a chief. The Warao went back to his settlement of Siawani, announced his appointment, and started giving orders to others. But this caused a split in the village, which already had a leader. The preexisting leader eventually decided to refer the matter to the Captain Settler. Moreno was asked to produce his document, but it took some time before anyone could decipher it and read it aloud (the Captain Settler was impeded by blindness, while others just did not know):

> "Risum teneatis, amici! [Have a laugh, friends!] Of all the tramps of the neighbourhood, of all the crooks, layabouts and slackers, of all the thugs and thieves, I name supreme and perpetual chief the friend Moreno. Made and signed on a moon crescent. General Mao-Tse-Tung" (includes a signature with flourish). (Barral 1972: 196)

The priest ends the story with his hoax letter, and does not tell what happened next, although one can imagine that Moreno was ridiculed and that the other leader resumed his authority. This was clearly a way for Barral to stress that only he and other missionaries were able to produce authoritative documents, and that not all pieces of paper bearing some writing had an effect. Naming Moreno the foremost chief of tramps and thieves in the area already turns his letter into a parody. But his parody of the pragmatic features that ensure the efficacy of bureaucratic documents is in my view much more revealing, for inscribing one's

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though originally granted by the state, has been incorporated by the substance of the object, in which it acquires a dynamic and force of its own" (2006: 164). During the "pacification" period, the Toba were protected from military violence by certificates of good conduct written by merchants, landowners, and missionaries. In the events described here, one might argue that the question is not whether documents were fetishized by the Warao, but rather how the missionaries played on the unequal legitimacy of (their own and others') attempts at document fetishism.

8. Riles stresses that documents are "aesthetics objects with uses distinct from their quality as 'texts'" (1998: 378). However, to perform "verdictive" or "exercitive" acts (judging what is and what should be, cf. Austin 1962: 152–56; Bonhomme 2009: 908), both material and linguistic conditions are necessary: a statement of appointment is effective only once a signature or a seal has been affixed to it, but also requires the use of assertive verbal forms.

location, name, and signing are writing acts (Fraenkel 2007: 108–10; Hull 2003: 294) required to perform the "exercitive" act (Austin 1962: 154) of appointing someone to a post. By stating that the act had been produced at a place no one had been to at the time, and by inventing a caricature of signature that he imputed to someone else (even though the Warao were likely not to know who Mao Zedung was), Barral played on the Warao's incapacity to control what makes a document effective. He made fun of the fact that he and his brothers had managed to subject the Warao to the rule of documents, while retaining the knowledge for themselves of where their real power lay. In this—admittedly exceptional—case, as in many other instances of bureaucratic interactions, documents are used so as to deny explanation and deliberation (Graeber 2006)[9]: it was particularly unsettling for the Warao, who were constantly outwitted.

Letters of appointment are nevertheless only one among various written genres (Hull 2003), and instituting a political order was only one of the missionaries' aims. During their first decades in the Delta, they also performed mass baptism in the settlements they visited, with the primary aim of "saving souls," recalling the attitude of their forerunners in the colonial era. Nowadays, baptism is alternatively called in Warao "to put water" (*ho aba-kitane*) and "to put a name" (*wai aba-kitane*), and both acts are obviously at the core of the ritual. But, as my host who mentioned the production of documents by the missionaries was well aware, the administrative aspect of baptism is as important as holy water and name giving, and missionaries themselves stress that they recorded the personal data of the newly baptized in a register (Barral 1972: 241). The missionaries have been reluctant to baptize unprepared people for several decades, but it remains an important moment in the interactions between the Warao and the outside: parents now take the lead in having their children baptized, bringing them to the missionaries or complaining that the latter have stopped visiting them. And many people still regularly come to the mission in order to ask for written certificates, although most administrative responsibilities have been transferred to state agencies.

Documents such as baptismal certificates, and nowadays ID cards, have become constitutive of the mixed identity proclaimed by the Warao: they are indeed "Warao," but not "pure Indians" (*warao-witu* or Sp. *indio*). They live in villages on river banks rather than deep in the forest; they wear clothes rather than a mere loincloth (*bua*, the mark of savagery); they understand at least some Spanish and therefore do not look dumbstruck when they are talked to by Creoles; they eat store-bought food and not just moriche palm starch, etcetera. This modern Indian identity is materialized in their baptismal records and ID cards: both feature the term "native" (*indigena*) while being essentially Christian or Venezuelan objects, and they are both therefore important instruments for constituting oneself as a Warao that is not *indio* (cf. Gow 1991: 59). To a large extent, this situation is recognized as a result of the missionaries' presence, and their action was therefore not unilateral: while subjecting the Warao to their bureaucracy, they also progressively gave their pupils the means of actively taking part in the Creole world. This reflects the oft-noted ambivalence of documents and writing as both a medium of control and a source of empowerment (Goody 1986:

9. See the revsied version in this issue.—Ed.

87–88; Gordillo 2006: 173; Guzmán-Gallegos 2009: 218–19). The missionaries founded several boarding schools where the Warao were not merely taught the love of "God, the Nation and Authority," but were also taught to read and educated in a Creole way. Some of their former pupils became schoolmasters in the new settlements created for those who had married (religiously) after completing their studies, while others obtained official responsibilities. The missionaries' presence in fact touched most of the population, for the systematic recording of baptisms and births produced the documentation that later permitted the Warao to obtain ID cards and passports, to vote, and to claim old-age pensions, in a word to perform bureaucratic acts. At the same time that they were subjecting the Warao to the power of documents whose conditions of production they monopolized, the missionaries were also laying the foundations for the later incorporation of their flock into bureaucratic processes—although such a process only took place after the Capuchins had lost their jurisdiction in the 1960s and 1970s.

Wealth, political clientelism, and mastery

The period that follows the end of the delegation of state authority to the Mission is particularly interesting because it marks the introduction of national politics to the Delta, and the distribution of salaries and gifts that accompany it.[10] I argue that documents began at that time to create extended—and therefore more unpredictable—forms of interaction, whereby the Warao were linked to unknown members of bureaucratic organizations and political parties. In Venezuela in general, the crucial date is 1958, which marks the end of the dictatorship of Perez Jiménez. Under the so-called "Punto Fijo Pact," political parties pledged to recognize the result of future democratic elections, which in practice led to the establishment of a clientelist bipartisan political system. In the 1960s, AD (Acción Democrática), and later COPEI (Cooperativa Política Electoral Independiente), started to establish party houses in each town, where voters could negotiate the terms of their political support and the redistribution of material benefits they expected (Rodriguez 2011: 60). This process relied heavily on the "lists" drawn in each party house of those supporters who would receive gifts from winning candidates (ibid.: 112–13). The Warao were at first only marginally affected by the new system, although probably more than other Venezuelan indigenous groups (cf. Alès 2007 on the Yanomami); after all, at the end of the twentieth century, most Warao inhabiting remote or small settlements did not have ID cards. The first campaigns of registration had taken place in the 1970s, but mostly targeted the larger villages, which had often been the outgrowth of missionary activity. There, people were considered to form a reserve of votes easy to control in exchange for material gifts such as an outboard motor, or a position on the local government's payroll for well-chosen leaders.

10. The prerogatives of the Capuchin missionaries were progressively reduced in the new treaties signed between Venezuela and the Order in 1956 and 1967, which were not renewed in 1972 (Lavandero 2004: 21). The substitution of the Order by civil institutions was slow and rather chaotic—whether one considers schools, civil registry, or economic development programs—and the Capuchin missionaries continued to act, as one organization among others, with a tendency to focus more on its pastoral duties.

I want to underline two features of this system. On the one hand, documents (lists drawn by political parties, ID and electoral cards) started to represent a key to wealth, in addition to their older status as devices of authority, or tokens of identity. On the other hand, their use was embedded in relations of political patronage. A narrative recorded by J. L. Rodriguez shows the full extent of this ambivalence. His main informant had become a supporter of AD candidate Emery Mata Millán, and went to the party house in Tucupita after the latter was elected governor of Delta Amacuro in 1992. "There they looked up [his] name in the forms" and, since "it showed up . . . they nominated [him]" (Rodriguez 2011: 118). Since that time, he has been employed by the regional state to work the electricity generator in his home village, receiving a monthly wage that he explicitly justifies by his presence on the payroll book (ibid.: 120), even though there were long periods without any generator in his charge. The presence of his name on administrative lists is a direct cause of his lucrative position. Rodriguez' informant also narrates how the documents were an objectification of his personal relation with a political patron: when Emery Mata Millán quit AD, joined COPEI, and founded another party, he always followed him. But the politician was jailed for embezzlement in 1999, and, when he tried to run again for governor after a few years in jail, the Warao leader was torn between his feeling of allegiance and the intuition that a new era had started; he eventually joined the supporters of Chávez and became a member of the PSUV (Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela).

This form of political patronage is suggestive of the important research devoted to patron-client relationships, especially in Latin America and the Mediterranean area. Yet this is another case of equivocal compatibility between Warao and Creole concepts and practices, for it evokes the very Amazonian relationship between master or owner on the one hand, and subordinate or "pet" on the other hand, which is defined by control and care in equal measure (see Fausto 2008). The Warao indeed see political patronage as an instance of a general form of asymmetrical relations between a protector (master, foster parent, leader, shaman, etc.) and a dependent being (pet, foster child, followers, auxiliary spirits, etc.). The missionaries as well, who had initially appeared as predators when they came to forcefully "collect" children for their boarding schools, forcing the Warao to flee deep into the mangrove, eventually turned into bosses (*aidamo*), who strictly controlled their flock, but also fed and cared for the children. Some of my older informants who had been raised at the mission even applied to some of them an expression that stresses the affective nature of fosterage—"we grew into their hands" (*a-moho eku ida-e*)—and such a relationship "altered" the Warao, turning them into the Venezuelan Indians that they are nowadays (Allard 2010: 117–23; cf. also Bonilla [2005: 56] about the Brazilian Paumari). In the case of political patronage, there is admittedly no such educational aspect, but the relationship is one of the main methods available to the Warao to access wealth: political gifts are seen as reciprocal help for the votes given by constituents, but also as a sign that bosses care for their followers.

The Warao often appeal to the compassionate benevolence of others in order to acquire commodities and stored foodstuffs (or the money to purchase such things). They also regularly have to engage in arduous work, but these two modes are far from contradictory: things and commodities are a means of alleviating suffering or of offering pleasurable consumption without effort, and are directly

linked to a central concern for others' well-being and pain. People therefore suffer (work) out of care for their loved ones, but they also try to evoke compassion in their interlocutors, who should take their suffering into account (see e.g., Alès 2000: 135; Walker 2012a: 148). Such notions echo anthropological discourses about Amazonian ideals of generosity and sharing (Overing and Passes 2000), but I have argued that these processes are better understood in terms of "moral performances" aimed at extracting a reaction from others, with the critical notion that the uncertain outcome of such performances is not just a material product, but the revelation of what one is (an influential person) and what the other is (a moral person) (Allard 2010: 28–33; cf. also Fausto 2008: 347; Kelly 2011: 101; Strathern 1988). The Warao often try to induce compassion in others as a means of obtaining gifts from them, and this is why they so frequently stress their poverty and suffering in their discourses and behavior. My closest friend in the field, for instance, emphatically stated that he would wear rags and go without shoes if Chávez was ever to visit, so that the president would be compelled to help him after making such a visual impression. Similarly, H. Dieter Heinen has published a compilation of narratives recorded with some of his Warao informants in the 1970s and 1980s, with a whole section entitled "We, the Warao, are poor" (*Oko Warao sanera*), which details a visit by some outsiders who take pity on the Warao villagers and promise they will help them (Heinen 1988).[11] Such logic is also at the heart of the durable relationship between bosses and their subordinates, the latter of whom constantly attempt to maximize the care they receive from the former.

In contexts of political patronage, forms and lists therefore play an important and yet relatively straightforward role: they essentially materialize a connection and a due, and are fully in the hands of politicians and Creole administrators. From such a perspective they could be compared to the account ledgers used by bosses and traders. Yet they differ from the latter in that they enable the extension of interaction in space and time. Whereas written accounts are only used by local bosses who show them to their clients in order to ascertain a debt, lists of political supporters have an effect on unknown people throughout the state of Delta Amacuro. The impersonal nature of bureaucracy is thus becoming evident for the Warao, with the Warao leader discovering that the presence of his name on a list has an effect on people to whom he is otherwise unknown, namely local members of the political party to whom his patron is affiliated. His main surprise is probably that everything turns out well, but it will give way to new forms of uncertainty when it becomes unclear whom exactly one is interacting with through bureaucratic documents.

Administrative rights and claims

The situation has changed radically with the election of Chávez as president of Venezuela in 1998, the new constitution ratified in 1999, and more generally the "Bolivarian revolution," as Chávez has labeled his ambitious program of social and political change—sufficiently ambitious that it is beyond the scope of this paper to

11. This also explains why Venezuelan Creoles consider the Warao to be much more natural beggars than other Amerindian groups (cf. D'Aubeterre 2007). Alès (2007) recalls how she published a book on behalf of her Yanomami informants in which they stressed that they were not to be pitied.

describe. Alès (2007) and Mansutti and Alès (2007) have critically argued that, in spite of a very progressive constitution, the situation of indigenous peoples has not improved in Venezuela: neither their territorial rights, nor their right to be governed according to their culture and customs, have been implemented in practice. All they note is a tendency toward politicization, which creates a gap between the new leaders and those they are supposed to represent, and accentuates the subjection to Creole ways of being. Similar processes are noticeable in Delta Amacuro, but I argue that the new policies have had other—unexpected—consequences on the Warao, offering them the possibility to behave in new ways in their interactions with Creoles.

Targeting the most marginal sectors of the Venezuelan population, the "Bolivarian revolution" has entailed massive registration campaigns for ID cards and electoral lists from which hardly any Warao is now excluded; this has been accompanied by a proliferation of social programs designed to redistribute the benefits of the national oil wealth, and a partial renewal of the political personnel. The practice of clientelism has obviously not been abandoned, but rather transformed: alongside direct payments or gifts on election day, and appointment of followers to positions of regional or local employee, most of the social programs are also ways of distributing benefits to constituents. For instance, educational "missions," as they are called,[12] offer grants to some students, and a small salary to teaching assistants, while the housing mission both organizes the construction of decent houses and pays local residents for the work done. The institution organizing communal day nurseries pays the women who run them and provides food for children. The "communal councils," through which the national government funds grassroots initiatives organized along collective lines, are also sources of wealth and commodities. The list is almost endless, with projects targeting specific issues and more general programs such as the old-age pension, which theoretically benefits anyone over sixty. These changes have not caused the disappearance of forms of asymmetrical relations, because most Warao men, at least in the settlements where I lived, have bosses for whom they work or to whom they sell their produce, while local politicians still act as patrons who negotiate material benefits in exchange for electoral support.

Nevertheless, Chávez has provided ways to bypass direct bosses, both practically and ideologically. Whereas allegiance was previously directed to local politicians, nowadays those politicians are only links between the population and their supreme leader: they are legitimate only insofar as they support his policies and receive his backing. Pictures of local politicians posing with a smiling president (thanks to Photoshop) are displayed all over their constituencies, at least in the state of Delta Amacuro where the opposition is nonexistent. All the social programs find their origin in Chávez' care and generosity, as state employees are prone to remind the beneficiaries, and he becomes the ultimate master or foster father—even though he has never been to the Delta, and the Warao have to use the mediation of bureaucracy or lesser politicians if they want to reach out to him.

At the same time, Chávez has insisted since the start of his first mandate that the newly distributed wealth is a right of the Venezuelan people, from which they

12. Misión Robinson for primary education, Misión Ribas for secondary education, and Misión Sucre for university-level education.

have been deprived by previous generations of politicians and profiteers. Hence a motto of the regime: "Oil now belongs to everyone." This discourse, widely reported in the media and relayed by local politicians and government agents, has had a major impact on the whole population and especially on the Warao. Whereas commodities can been seen as foreign to indigenous people, as revealed in the myth concerning the origin of the difference between the Creoles and the Warao,[13] commodities are also now a Warao entitlement insofar they have become Venezuelan citizens, and it changes radically the way they interact with wealthier outsiders.

The Warao still try to elicit caring compassion in their interlocutors, but discourses about their right to national oil wealth have also offered them an alternative possibility: to claim their due. A comparable dual strategy of inducing compassion and asserting claims has been noted among lowland South Amerindians, but in other groups the latter often takes the form of "wild" Indians dressing as warriors and speaking "hard" or "without fear" in their own language (see Alès [2007] and Kelly [2011: 164–68] on the Venezuelan Yanomami and Gordon [2006: 210] on the Brazilian Xikrin). Conversely, the assertiveness of the Warao is essentially bureaucratic. They try to compel others to release wealth, not through fear, but because they have filled in the forms and drawn lists of names and ID numbers. Indeed, compassion and bureaucracy are sometimes intertwined. During my last visit to the Delta, I accompanied Amador Medina, a young Warao employed by a local radio station, who was conducting interviews with elders who were not receiving their pension. Their speech, later broadcast in a daily program, was very straightforward and alternated between two stances: "we the Warao are helpless, we have no money . . . " (*oko warao sanera, ka burata ekida*), and, "our names have been written down / taken away, the money must come now!" (*ka wai abanae/konaruae, burata ehobo-kitane ha!*). This practice in fact points to the Warao's ambivalence toward paternalistic relations, which they consider desirable as a source of protection, care, and wealth (cf. Bonilla 2005; Walker 2012a), but which they also want to be able to avoid in other instances, such as when they act as autonomous people (cf. Gow 1991: 214)—that is, as Venezuelan citizens accustomed to modernity. They alternate between the two logics because the most effective way to trigger a release of wealth is never known in advance, and also because the two logics remain intertwined: is bureaucracy a technology that enables the indirect elicitation of Chávez' compassion? Or does it trigger the release of a due?

In the discourses that Amador Medina recorded, and that I heard on other occasions, what interests me is that the Warao in question always made a direct causal link between the manipulation of documents and the claims for relief: they had a right to their share of national wealth, but it could only be triggered by means of bureaucratic procedures. From the Warao's point of view, the outcome of their applications for pensions, grants, or subsidies does not depend anymore on the benevolence of their patrons or interlocutors (the exception being the distant figure

13. Such myths are very common in lowland South America, and take the form of a choice made by the original Indian, for instance between "the gun and the bow" (Hugh-Jones 1988). Among the Warao, the native character usually refuses the overabundant commodities and replenished store that he is offered (Allard 2010: 14).

of Chávez), which, in a way, is in line with our own conception of the ideal bureaucracy. Whereas according to the Western ideal model of bureaucracy it is the use of formal procedures that frees decisions from being tainted by personal connections and personal interests, the Warao grant this function directly to the power of documents, independent of any accompanying bureaucratic ritual or procedure. This is why they insist on having filled in forms or written lists of names when they confront interlocutors. It can be seen as a legacy of past interactions with missionaries and politicians. Although belonging to different genres, forms and lists share, along with the letters of appointment produced by the Capuchins, and with the lists of political supporters posted outside party houses, the property of having automatic effects. Yet they also create new tensions.

While political theorists treat bureaucratic procedures as key to rational organization, its users often have the experience of "hateful formalism" (Herzfeld 1992: 4), of an "arbitrary, secretive, and devious" system (ibid.: 140, see also Graeber [2006] on arbitrariness). Yet this does not fit what I witnessed in the Orinoco Delta. Indeed, the Warao are often disappointed when they travel to the regional capital in order to check whether their names have appeared on the lists of payees, in the same way that the outcome of their moral performances is never a given. Documents may have an automatic effect, but the Warao are far from the sources of wealth, on the margins of the country. Failures are not seen as a consequence of indifference and arbitrariness on the part of bureaucrats, but rather as the sign that others have misappropriated their due. This issue is admittedly acknowledged by most observers, and embezzlement is common in the Delta, but here again it seems that the Warao have a different take on the matter. I argue that their feeling of bureaucratic uncertainty stems from the involvement of unknown agents in the extended interactions enabled by documents (as with mobile phones), which requires us to look more closely at the written genres and literacy practices at work.

Writing anxiety

The Warao's understanding of bureaucratic efficacy in fact turns the moment of writing into a critical and uncertain step. More than discussing what happens to their forms and lists of names once such documents have reached the administrative offices of the mainland, the Warao focus their anxiety on the moment their names are written down on sheets, either by themselves or, more importantly, by others. I want to describe this process briefly, before suggesting an interpretation of why writing is the crucial step in bureaucratic processes.

The Warao sometimes write their own lists of names and ID numbers, as in my initial example, but very often Creole state agents directly record the data of their target population, and the Warao always comply with reluctance. What is in doubt is obviously not the Creoles' technical knowledge, but rather their morality, which is continually assessed—similarly to interactions with doctors among the Yanomami, as described by Kelly (2011: 128). On one occasion, some agents of the literacy "mission" (Misión Robinson) came to have everyone fill out registration forms. This was recognized by the Warao as a potential regular source of income (much more than a way of learning how to read and write) thanks to the student grants and teaching assistant wages from which my host village had so far been excluded. Yet this was an ambivalent moment, for the excitement at being

potential recipients was counterbalanced by the fear of being cheated. The Creole state agents acted in a highly patronizing way, making cheeky jokes at the expense of the Warao,[14] bossing them around while they were asking for their personal data, which they inscribed on sheets pompously titled "Patriotic student registration form." Everyone complied, adopting a shy and submissive attitude, apart from the village leader who showed he knew how to interact with Creoles by answering or relaying their jokes. About a week later, a Venezuelan engineer working for the social branch of the French oil company Total, visited the village and carried out a rudimentary census of the population. He had organized the installation of solar panels about six months before (so everyone already knew him) and was now preparing a drinking water system for which he required demographic data. Yet villagers were slightly anxious about why he was recording the name of each head of household and the number of inhabitants, until the village leader confronted him angrily, demanding an explanation. He was easily convinced that it was a harmless process, but concluded by saying that it was unacceptable to come and record people's names without presenting oneself and stating one's purpose. Finally, the following month, it had been the turn of employees of the "communal councils" program to come and take down everyone's name. But on that occasion I learned that my host had left angrily when asked to give his name. Some told me that he had been foolish, but I believe that he acted upon an anxiety shared by many others, which had built up over the previous months.

The Creoles were performing a bureaucratic act (i.e., writing) for the Warao, but also in place of the Warao, often acting in a patronizing way or without making any effort to explain their behavior. They therefore differ markedly from literacy mediators, who have been shown to play an important role in asymmetrical relations (see Papen 2010), and rather evoke other situations of bureaucratic violence. Graeber (2006) for instance mentions how his Malagasy informants were reluctant to give him any information on the size of each family and its holdings, since such questions appeared too similar to the enquiries of government agents trying to register taxable property. However, there is no threat of violence backing such bureaucratic interactions in the Orinoco Delta, but rather a fear of not receiving the share of the wealth available to other Venezuelan citizens.

As the village leader had told me, too often the Warao are taken advantage of when their names are written down and manipulated without their knowledge. Being dispossessed of action was a source of uneasiness. It is interesting to interpret such concerns by freely adopting a Strathernian idiom (Strathern 1988: 268–305). The Warao act (drawing up lists or filling out forms) in order to be the cause of the Creoles' acts (i.e., their release of a flow of wealth). This elicitation of the latter's acts is proof of their efficacy—they have compelled others to act with them in mind—and of their being Venezuelan citizens capable of using bureaucratic techniques in order to do so. These are obviously moments of "uncertainty and anxiety" since "there is nothing automatic about elicitation" (Strathern 1988: 299), but even more so, insofar as it involves a mode of action the Warao recognize as foreign. The anxiety surrounding writing documents can therefore be read as the fear that, by being prevented from acting themselves, the

14. Which is characteristically "disrespectful" behavior, see de Vienne (this volume).

Warao would be deprived of the opportunity to cause Creoles to act with regard for them—or rather they would be confined to previous technologies of persuasion, such as direct attempts to evoke compassion. I argue that such an idiom is apposite to the situation that I am describing because, in the Warao view of bureaucracy, acting is tantamount to writing, an equivalence that I will now try to analyze.

The reluctance of the Warao to have their names written down by others, or on others' forms, contrasts with their self-confidence when they draw up their own lists, which can be freestanding or sometimes support a communal council project. Writing down names and ID numbers in fact does not only entail a referential use of language, but could also be compared to signing: "Autographic writing is supposed to accompany, produce, or *be action*" (Hull 2003: 294, my italics; see also Fraenkel 2007). In the Orinoco Delta, it seems to hold true when someone else inscribes one's name: it is an illocutionary act that commits people, which is why it is such a potent—and therefore dangerous—moment. Rather than discuss how such documents are indexes of identity and personhood (e.g., Guzmán-Gallegos [2009: 228–30] on the Peruvian Runa; Herzfeld [1992: 92–93] on Greece), I want to argue here that writing is a specific form of action, at the core of bureaucracy according to the Warao. Since names and ID numbers are those that appear on Venezuelan identification cards (*cédula de identidad*), lists and forms can also be understood as complex graphic genres that recontextualize other written artifacts—an equivalent of reported speech (Hull 2003: 295). Words and signs indeed circulate between various written artifacts, but they only exceptionally cross the line between writing and speech. Among the Warao, there seems to be a radical disjunction between both forms, which I shall explore further in order to show that the very act of writing is much more than the material recording of speech.

Contrary to practices described for the Peruvian Amazon (see Déléage 2010; Gow 2001), among the Warao there is no integration of books into shamanic rituals and visions, nor are textual artifacts used as a support that would give authority to ritual speech. On the contrary, ritual speech and ritual writing are radically opposed and incompatible practices. Warao shamanism heavily relies on nomination (Olsen 1974): to name autonomous or master-less entities is a way to subdue them as auxiliary spirits for practitioners of *hoa* shamanism, while a curing shaman gets control over the pathogenic entities that have penetrated a patient's body if he utters their right name, causing the entities to vibrate and allowing them to be extracted. On other occasions, some of my informants also mentioned that it is possible to sell someone's soul to Creole sorcerers (Sp. *curioso*) by giving them a piece of paper bearing someone's written name: death will then be instantaneous. Although both practices rely on a specific use of names, my informants systematically stressed the contrast between native shamanism, practiced through speech and thought, and the magic imputed to the Creoles, which relies on reading or writing texts. When it comes to administrative texts, it is also striking that documents are not read aloud to their recipients, as is the case among the Peruvian Urarina, where it creates effects through a "displaced voice" that echoes that of the shaman (Walker 2012b). Indeed, the archetypal textual artifacts among the Warao are the ID card, the baptismal certificate, or the list of names; that is, something which is written, exhibited, glanced at, or copied, but does not offer a narrative to be read. Goody has stressed the "non-syntactic" use of language that characterizes

such documents (1986: 94; see also 1977: 78). Yet instead of trying to study the broad cognitive and social effects of such technological changes, I want to focus on a specific "practice of literacy" (Scribner and Cole 1981).

Hispanic names have existed as purely written objects ever since the arrival of the Capuchins. The missionaries gave names to the Warao in order to provide them with a civilized identity and to perform bureaucratic acts. Most men already had Spanish first names because they were in regular contact with local Creoles, but this was far less common among women and children, and almost none had a family name. The priests therefore chose the first name for those they baptized and gave family names when enrolling children in their boarding schools (Barral 1972: 122, 231; cf. Alès [n.d.] for the Yanomami). In other instances, family names could also be given by Creole godparents.[15] Indeed, what was at stake for the missionaries was also to be able to fill out the forms properly: the first entries of the baptismal registry that I consulted in Guayo were only half completed, and the progressive civilization and evangelization of their Warao flock was revealed by the fact that soon they were able to inscribe family names for the baptized and his or her parents.[16] But those names are hardly ever uttered by the Warao to address or refer to someone. It is, of course, never the case with the full sequence of first name, family name, and number (as it appears on the ID card), but even first names are hardly ever spoken, for the Warao systematically use Spanish or Warao nicknames and kin terms, which in turn are never written.[17] They therefore differ from the Yanomami, who are less reluctant to use Creole than native names, because, among the Warao, official Creole names are nowadays their "real names" (*wai witu*). There is not a proscription on speaking out loud the real name of one's coresident, but people usually do it with unwillingness or hesitation, and the connection between writing and speaking is therefore made in rare and significant moments. Names are occasionally read, for instance when taking a roll call, and the manager of the literacy program told me that, in remote settlements, people

15. This practice seemed irregular among the Warao, but it can be compared to the case of the Venezuelan Eñepa, whose male population systematically received first names from their Creole godfathers (Dumont 1978).

16. It could be said that there is something as aesthetically unpleasant in a partially filled out form, as in an international resolution full of brackets (Riles 1998), and that the pattern of the document exerts its agency on those who manipulate it (Reed 2006), compelling them to complete all entries. Such a logic appears even more explicitly in the case of vaccination campaigns, which are a modern version of mass-baptism, since both involve a bodily manipulation meant to ensure salvation, and a written administrative record: health officials explicitly told me they give names to the children they vaccinate (although, being given to very young children, such names are usually discarded and later replaced by the Warao), *because* they need to fill out records.

17. Data about indigenous forms of naming about the Warao is very lacking. Assuming that Turrado Moreno (1945: 265–66) can be trusted, it seems that they were similar to contemporary nicknames: referring to a particular event or physical resemblance, they were randomly given by someone and quickly adopted by other villagers—for instance *Mesi* (cat), *Mojoko* (white worm), *Akaida* (long legs), etc. Nowadays, comparable names are sometimes in Spanish—for instance *Sapo* (toad) or *Negro* (black)—although they often do not have any meaning at all.

were amazed to discover the official name of their coresidents when he did so. On other occasions it is a serious matter, especially when names are uttered in order to be written: the only time that a Warao spontaneously told me a full name was indeed a very tense moment. Several children had died in a row, and most rumors were targeting one of the shamans of the settlement, as people whispered his nickname to each other. The eldest and most respected shaman of the village then came to see me, and he very slowly and deliberately told me the full name of the accused, which I did not previously know. He stressed that this was a name I should write down—probably in contrast to the irrelevant data I was scribbling in my notebooks—in order to denounce him to the authorities and have him put away. The exceptional character of this event is further evidence that it is not harmless to speak names. Indeed, when my hosts were reluctant to have me take down their genealogies (including their names), during the first months of my fieldwork, I believe that they were not just wary of inquisitive outsiders, but were also skeptical that the writing of their names would be of no consequence: their assumptions about the performative nature of writing underpinned their hopes but also their fears.

Conclusion

In describing interactions that are about the production and use of documents, or that are mediated by such documents, I have tried to show that the introduction of an administrative logic has changed the way the Warao manage asymmetrical relations with outsiders. They have learned how to act as bureaucratic agents, and use documents in their attempts to obtain wealth without being confined to a subordinate position; by writing documents, they can cause others to act with regard for them. Having to elicit compassion or to work strenuously are not their only options when they desire money and commodities, since they can now be assertive and claim their rights. However, such an attitude rests on their conception of documents as producing automatic effects, of writing lists of names and ID numbers as being a powerful act in itself. Without this partial misunderstanding, this "equivocal compatibility," the Warao would probably not dare confront Creole administrative agents and politicians, in spite of recent appeals to enhance the political agency of indigenous groups in Venezuela. Yet this also makes any bureaucratic interaction a particularly uncertain event and accounts for the mix of expectation and anxiety that I witnessed each time outsiders visited the settlements where I lived, or when my friends traveled upriver to local or regional centers. The Warao's hold on administrative processes is tenuous and tangential, since Creoles are always prone to misappropriate their due, and yet they are dependent on these opaque agents and procedures if they want to obtain Venezuelan oil wealth. They therefore inevitably subscribe to most of the social programs they are presented with, but always try to avoid "being written" by others whenever they can act themselves. I could have studied the same topic adopting other perspectives, for instance focusing on the ontological status of paper documents in relation to personhood, or limiting myself to large-scale historical changes of power relations with bosses, missionaries, politicians, and bureaucrats. However, only by dealing with actual events taking place in asymmetrical interactions could I do justice to the uncertain nature of the processes involved, to the fact that, when the Warao try to

coerce Creoles using their own logic, they engage in a foreign "magic" that often has unforeseen consequences.

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Anxiété bureaucratique : relations asymétriques et rôle des documents dans le Delta de l'Orénoque, Venezuela

Résumé : Cet article s'intéresse au rôle que jouent les documents dans les interactions entre Indiens Warao et acteurs nonindigènes. La signification de ces documents est loin d'être partagée, et leur opacité contribue à créer des doutes quant à l'identité des personnes impliquées dans l'interaction. Une telle incertitude fait partie intégrante de l'implication des Warao dans les relations asymétriques — inextricablement politiques, économiques et morales — qui les unissent aux autres Vénézuéliens ou aux étrangers. L'état actuel de ces relations doit être éclairé par leur histoire, et résulte de l'administration de la région par des missionnaires catholiques espagnols pendant une partie du XX^{e} siècle, puis de la participation de la population indigène du Venezuela aux processus politiques nationaux. Aujourd'hui, les documents permettent aux Warao de revendiquer des droits administratifs et non plus seulement d'en appeler à la compassion d'autrui, et la nature performative des actes d'écriture est au cœur de leurs transactions bureaucratiques. Ceci permet également de rendre compte du mélange d'espoir et d'anxiété qui traverse les interactions des Warao avec des non-indigènes, auxquels ils empruntent leur propre technique pour mieux les influencer.

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