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# PIERRE CLASTRES AS COMPARATIVE POLITICAL THEORIST: THE DEMOCRATIC POTENTIAL OF THE NEW POLITICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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## **Introduction: Clastres and the Project of Comparative Political Theory**

Within the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century French ideas the philosopher-turned-anthropologist Pierre Clastres holds a significant place.<sup>1</sup> In particular, Clastres' ethnological work detailing the social structure of indigenous Amazonian societies and the political mechanisms through which this structure is instituted – in particular their rejection of coercive power in the name of a principle of equality – influenced a generation of some of the most talented democratic political theorists in France, such as Claude Lefort, Miguel Abensour, and the young Marcel Gauchet (see Breckman, 2013: 168-169; Holman et al., 2015: 12-13; Moyn, 2004, 2005, 2012; Potte-Bonneville, 2011). Despite his contribution to this intellectual lineage, however, Clastres' work remains largely unknown within the Anglophone world, or at least within the world of Anglophone political theory.<sup>2</sup> My suggestion in this paper is that such a situation deserves to be rectified, that political theorists in particular have something to gain through the encounter with the political anthropology of Clastres. Although political anthropologists have attempted to articulate how the application of ethnographic and ethnological methods can greatly enhance our understanding of the being of politics, political theorists have been generally less inclined to endorse such interdisciplinarity.<sup>3</sup> That said, the possibility for establishing a fruitful relationship between political theory and anthropology has not gone completely unnoticed. It has been affirmed, in particular, by several practitioners of the subfield of comparative political thought.<sup>4</sup>

Looking to build on such intuitions, in this paper I suggest that the political anthropology of Clastres specifically, which has thus far not been engaged with by comparative political theorists, has the potential to greatly enrich comparative political thought through uniquely intervening in conversations regarding, for example, the negotiation of the poles of universality and particularity, identity and difference, and self and other. Ultimately I will argue that this intervention reveals a democratic political potential intrinsic to comparative political thought, the type of social diversity revealed by Clastres being a manifestation of the political creativity upon which all democratic projects depend.

The field of comparative political theory is an extremely broad and diverse one, there certainly being no programmatic crystallization of agreement regarding its objects, methods, and ends.<sup>5</sup> One of the fundamental debates animating the field, however, is particularly relevant to my discussion. It may be approached initially through a consideration of a claim made by Fred Dallmayr (1997: 422) in the introduction to a special edition of *The Review of Politics* that largely inaugurated the project as it exists in its current form. Dallmayr maintained, speaking to the geographical and cultural scope of the enterprise, that the field must extend “from Europe and the Americas to Africa, Asia and Australasia.” Despite this declaration, he notes (1997: 423) that the issue would nevertheless focus only on “the segment comprising the Islamic world, the Indian subcontinent, and East Asia.”<sup>6</sup> The coalescence of comparative political theory around these three primary poles only intensified after this point, there developing something of a static regime of classification that neatly divided non-Western thought into a limited set of categories that excluded more than it included. Indeed, it is now not uncommon for textbooks to compartmentalize non-Western political theory into the sole categories of East Asian, South Asian, and Islamic (Parel and Keith, 2003; Dallmayr, 2010; Klosko, 2013: 771-820; Kapust and

Kinsella, 2017b). Hence, for example, Anthony Parel (1993: 12) on his own programmatic text's exclusive emphasis on the Western, Chinese, Islamic, and Indian traditions: "We focus on these four political cultures as, in our opinion, they hold the key to the task of identifying points of equivalences" (see also Salkever and Nylan, 1994; Park, 2009: 7). For Parel (1993: 12) comparative political thought constitutes "nothing more" than the identification and explication of these cross-cultural conceptual equivalences, such as between, for example, "the Aristotelian *politikos* and the Confucian *junzi*, Indian *dharma* and the pre-modern western notion of 'natural justice,' the Islamic prophet-legislator and the Platonic philosopher-king."

The aporia characterizing certain strands of contemporary comparative political theory is that the effort to resist the canonical identification of political knowledge with a singular intellectual tradition has resulted in a new, if more heterogeneous, canonization. Comparative emphasis is thereby displaced, from the sphere of difference to that of identity, or rather, to a difference that is capable of being reconciled in an identity that transcends monoculture: no longer the false assertion of a mere particularity's transcultural universality, but a genuine universality grounded in a fusion of particularities. Indeed, probably the most dominant strand of comparative political theory today is that dialogical one that looks toward the goal of enhancing discursive exchange, and hence understanding, between ostensibly distinct cultural worlds.<sup>7</sup> Hence Dallmayr's (2010: 15) identification of the project with the construction of a genuine universalism that inclusively incorporates a range of particulars that are presently excluded from Western models of universality.<sup>8</sup> As many scholars have pointed out, however, to the extent that the goal of comparative political theory is thought in such terms, the scope of the enterprise risks being reduced to the study of only those traditions and histories that are seen as capable of being situated within the horizon of Western thought. The risk is that non-Western thought is implicitly

affirmed as simply contributing to or advancing a predetermined conversation, deepening – even if decentering – that canon to which it may now be unproblematically inserted into (March, 2009: 552). In Farah Godrej’s words (2011: 28), “the turn toward radically other intellectual resources must be a matter of finding the same kind of methods, resources and questions that animate our own inquiries.”<sup>9</sup> To the extent that scholars of comparative political theory participate in such operations they potentially reproduce, against their own intentions, certain ethnocentric assumptions (Jenco, 2007: 743; Shogimen, 2016). That which does not possess any comparative value, which is to say, that whose alterity precludes or renders problematic its assimilation into the new universality, is ignored, denied entry into the enlarged yet nevertheless ossified canon.

It is within this problematic that I suggest Pierre Clastres has the potential to productively intervene. His anthropological studies, grounded primarily in fieldwork conducted amongst the Guayaki, Guarani, Chulupi, and Yanomami, can be read as oriented toward giving an expression to the unique political philosophy developed by various Amazonian forest societies.<sup>10</sup> Clastres insists that if this political thought is to be grasped, however, it must be detached from all logics that look to orient it in relation to existing Western frameworks, through either the identification or the generation of points of equivalence. These societies, in other words, must be comprehended in their irreducible social-historical otherness.<sup>11</sup> In the first part of this paper I outline Clastres’ rejection of those accounts of Amazonian society that define the latter negatively in terms of the lack of an essential content present in allegedly more developed societies, implicitly affirming a model of political history characterized by the progressive refinement of the State form. In the second part of the paper I highlight some of the key features of what Clastres considered the most significant political institution of Amazonian and other

Amerindian societies, that of chieftainship. To the extent that this institution is, in Clastres' view, irreducible to existing Western presumptions about political self-organization, it has been marginalized as a legitimate object of political study. Finally, in the third part of the paper I argue that reading Clastres as a practitioner of comparative political theory allows for a reorientation of the political significance of the latter, not only enlarging its scope beyond those traditions and figures who are capable of being assimilated into a common field of understanding, but in so doing revealing a new democratic potential that has not been fully recognized. In short, by revealing social-historical alterity and the irreducibility of forms of society to common schemas or principles that delimit the range of human potential, comparative political theory can affirm that radical human autonomy to create entirely new political norms, an autonomy upon which any democratic project depends.

### **The Amazonian Self-Institution of the Social**

Just as certain critics identify a troubling tendency of much comparative political theory to situate the study of non-Western texts and traditions within an intellectual orbit that revolves around a conceptual vocabulary drawn from Western thought, so too does Clastres identify a similar operation at work within ethnology. It is his perception of this movement that leads him to call (1989a: 25) for a Copernican revolution in this field: "A Copernican revolution is at stake in the sense that in some respects, ethnology until now has let primitive cultures revolve around Western civilization in a centripetal motion, so to speak. Political anthropology appears to have made it abundantly clear that a complete reversal of perspectives is necessary" (see also Naishtat, 2011: 283-287). Clastres (1979: 33-34) identifies as one of the features "immanent to our civilization" its "very remarkable intolerance...before different civilizations, its incapacity to

recognize and accept the Other as it is, its refusal to let subsist that which is not identical to itself.”<sup>12</sup> As anthropologists of Amazonia have pointed out, this is precisely one of the most significant differences between societies of the Amazon and Western societies, the former being far more open and receptive to the encounter with others than the latter. They are examples of, in James Clifford’s words (1988: 344), “groups in which exchange rather than identity is the fundamental value to be sustained.” Hence, for instance, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2011: 30) on what characterized various Amerindian encounters with Europeans: “The Indians had no maniac desire to impose their identity on the other, nor did they reject the other in favor of their own ethnic excellence. Rather, they aimed, by producing a relationship with the other – a relationship that had always existed in a virtual mode – to transform their own identity.” To comprehend the difference in the mode of relation would necessitate interpreting the ideas structuring the Amazonian mode as elements of a comprehensive philosophical outlook, as concepts in a precise sense: “Treating indigenous ideas as concepts means taking them as containing a properly philosophical significance, or as being potentially capable of philosophical use” (Viveiros de Castro, 2015a: 19). Recognizing this philosophical significance, Clastres’ project was one of presenting the figure of the Amazonian world in order to allow it to speak for itself, in the fullness of its own identity, unhinged from external logics that would structure its self-expression (see Lefort, 1978: 51). Only under such conditions might “the radical originality of the contribution of the continent’s peoples to humanity’s intellectual heritage...be fully absorbed by anthropology” (Viveiros de Castro, 2015b: 55). Hence, for example, Clastres’ publication of a volume – *Le grand parler* – that looked to literally re-present in French translation various of the myths of Guarani thought, in an effort to communicate the latter’s “proper metaphysical depth” (Clastres, 1974: 8).<sup>13</sup>

On Clastres' account, the main barrier to the reception of self-expression within the field of political theory has been the generalization of the assumption that the essential question of political philosophy is that of the legitimation of coercive political relationships, of the definition of the circumstances that might justly ground relations of unequal authority. In the most general sense, this is the problem of the State, the latter concept referring not necessarily to a particular institutional form or regime, but rather a division within the social order that establishes a relationship of command. The articulation of the problem of politics in terms of the establishment of the proper order of relation between citizens and the State necessarily restricts our potential interest in and understanding of political reality in the forms of society studied by Clastres, if not other non-Western political traditions that have found a more stable existence within the orbit of comparative political theory, perhaps as a result of the proximity of the latter's assumptions regarding the necessity of political stratification.<sup>14</sup> When analysis confuses the study of politics with the study of the various forms of being of the political State, when it takes the question of the legitimation of a separate power endowed with the capacity and right to legislate and delegate to be the singular question of political philosophy, it renders itself incapable of grasping the being of so-called primitive societies. Indeed, Clastres (2010b: 163) defines "primitive societies" as "societies without a State; they are societies whose bodies do not possess separate organs of political power."

If the State is the central object of political analysis, then non-State society can only be defined negatively, in terms of its lack relative to presumably fuller and more complete societies. Such is a characteristic operation within classical anthropology, as noted by John Gledhill (2000: 11): "A familiar anthropological procedure in dealing with the 'exotic': we begin by defining the phenomenon that does not fit into existing Western conceptual frameworks on *negative* terms as

an absence of something we understand (or think we understand) and proceed from there.” This dynamic plays itself out not only in the realm of the political, but in the interpretation of a variety of social spheres where the indigenous practice is logically unassimilable to existing conceptual models. Hence, for example, Hélène Clastres (1995: 15) on the difficulty the early chroniclers had in even perceiving the very existence of a religious dimension of life: for them “the Guaraní worshiped nothing visibly and their religious *practice* did not fit into any known framework; it was only one step further to conclude that it was non-existent, and that was done without hesitation.” Viveiros de Castro (2009: 79), meanwhile, demonstrates how the dynamic is exhibited with respect to the question of thought itself, the orientation of anthropology toward theoretical systematization leading to the consequent interpretation of non-Western thought in terms of a privation, as evidenced through the non-utilization of the logical proposition as a criterion of measurement: “the absence of indigenous interpretation has the big advantage of allowing for the proliferation of anthropological interpretations of that absence, and their disregard for cosmological architecture permits for the construction of beautiful anthropological cathedrals wherein societies are arranged according to the greater or lesser disposition toward systematicity.”

Eschewing such reactive modes of interpretation, Pierre Clastres attempts to show that so-called primitive societies are not just societies *without* a State, but societies *against* the State: not simply *non*-State societies but *contra*-State societies. They are societies that explicitly self-articulate themselves precisely in order to ward off the emergence of the State-form. Whereas in State societies we see the detachment of one part of the social body from itself (through whatever means) and the investment of this part with a title to govern, in contra-State societies we see power deployed so as to ward off this movement, power looking to construct a self-enclosed

social world with no separate organ of authority. The new political anthropology aims to articulate the precise political theory that corresponds to such self-articulation. It is the absence of internal social differentiation, as manifest in the emergence of a separate power which assumes the right and responsibility to orient the historical direction of the community, which has presented such an interpretative problem for Western political thought. To the extent that the latter's horizon of political potentiality is defined in terms of an essential relationship of rulership – hence the elevation of the question of the legitimation of relations of disproportional authority as the fundamental question of political philosophy – it is incapable of grasping the political phenomena characteristic of Amazonian social life. The error is to conflate a particular mode of expression of power with power itself, and then to logically conclude that the lack of the former is evidence of the lack of the latter. The exercise of power is in fact evident in all societies: it is immanent to collective life, the ensemble of political forms and relations within the society functioning to structure the mode of the social being in question (Broquen, 2011: 224; Delacampagne, 1997: 107). The attempt to understand the latter, however, must proceed immanently. The reconstruction of the political articulation of the social form of being, that is, must not be for the sake of the identification of elements that reappear in our own society. In detaching contra-State society from any universal history, that is to say, in appreciating its form in itself as it is autonomously instituted, Clastres reveals the particularity of all societies (Gauchet, 2005: 94-95).

We must not be misled here, however, by the identification of singularity with the general class “primitive society”. The fact that Clastres refers to “State society” and “primitive society” in the singular has led some critics to claim that he conceptually erases essential distinctions between societies, in order to render all social forms subsumable under the binary framework.

Hence Emmanuel Terray (1989: 8), for example, writes that “the distribution of the real under two and only two categories necessarily implies the effacement of differences within both of the distinguished classes.” Although it is no doubt true that Clastres often overstates the generalizability of the characteristics of the Amazonian societies he identifies, it is not true that he is insensitive to the differential articulation of social identity within the category of non-State society. As he points out, not all non-State societies posit a strictly identical social form, nor use strictly identical political arrangements for the reproduction of this form. Indeed, we observe when comparing these societies an “extraordinary diversity of types of social organization” and an “infinite multiplicity of differences” (Clastres, 1989b: 199-200). The reduction of this difference to the category of “primitive society” (an admittedly “massive reduction”) is grounded in the observation that only two types of society are “utterly irreducible to one another” (Clastres, 1989b, 200). Hence the identical logic structures the conceptual formation of the category of State society as well, despite the obvious diversity of forms of State: “It goes without saying that the universal essence of the State is not realized in a uniform manner in all state formations, the variety of which history shows us. Only in contrast to primitive societies – societies without a State – are all the others revealed to be equivalent” (Clastres, 2010c: 176). In the final instance, there is certainly no single perspective or orientation that can unify the diversity of State or contra-State social forms under one logic, providing a universally valid explanatory framework (Richir, 1987: 70).<sup>15</sup>

The unity of the concept of “primitive society”, therefore, is only relationally achieved through the comparison with its irreducibly other, and vice versa. What, however, constitutes the essential content of the concept? At least with respect to Amazonian societies, Clastres (2010d: 260) identifies as fundamental characteristics the community’s existence as a totality and a unity:

“A totality in that it is a complete, autonomous, whole ensemble, ceaselessly attentive to preserving its autonomy: a society in the full sense of the word. A unity in that its homogenous being continues to refuse social division, to exclude inequality, to forbid alienation.” The political institutions of the society are ordered such to ensure the non-emergence of fissure in the unity of the social totality, specifically of a separate power exterior to the social form. The rejection of separate power, however, is not identical with a rejection of social difference. The orientation toward self-expression as unity does not necessitate that society possess a single and homogenous will. Indeed, Clastres is explicit that there is interior social differentiation. Familial units, for example, possess their own internal leaders with their own ranges of authority that look toward the maintenance of the identity of the sub-group: “the fact remains that, far from being indivisible, as it were, authority does divide and becomes multiple; that by retaining its own leader each extended family thereby expresses its ‘will’ to maintain – in a way that may or may not be emphatic – its identity. This releases forces that may be divergent” (Clastres, 1989c: 59). Indeed, one of the political functions of the chief, whose office will be examined in more detail in the next section, is precisely to moderate such divergent forces and reconcile potential antagonism: “it is because there is a central institution, a principal leader expressing the real existence of the community – and this existence is experienced as unification – that the community can permit itself, as it were, a certain quantum of centrifugal force that is actualized in each group’s tendency to preserve its individuality” (Clastres, 1989c: 60). There is thus not a “simple homogeneity of a whole,” but real social difference significant enough to render conflict possible independent of the external intervention: the potential for conflict is immanent to the social structure of society (Clastres, 1989c: 60). The only social innovation that contra-State societies are immune to absorbing without compromising the integrity of the political body are

those that, through the exteriorization of a part of the community, establish a separate power escaping supervision. In the final instance, “The essential feature (that is, relating to the essence) of primitive society is its exercise of absolute and complete power over all the elements of which it is composed; the fact that it prevents any one of the subgroups that constitute it from becoming autonomous; that it holds all the internal movements – conscious and unconscious – that maintain social life to the limits and directions prescribed by the society” (Clastres, 1989b: 212).

The autonomy of these territorial units is confirmed by Peter Rivière (1984: 72), who notes how “there is little evidence for the existence in the region within living memory of any form of supravillage organization. In the absence of any overarching, hierarchically ordered institution each settlement is master unto itself, and its internal political structure is safely studied in isolation.” It is Amazonian society’s desire to institute itself as an autonomous totality that explains its unique relation with other Amazonian societies, and in particular the widely commented upon phenomenon of Amazonian war. In contrast to traditional anthropological explanation, which attempts to explain the phenomenon of war in contra-State societies in terms of naturalist, economic, and exchange models, Clastres views war instead as one of the explicitly political forms for the institution of this mode of being of the social. War is one of the mechanisms that society utilizes in order to ensure the impossibility of the emergence of social division.<sup>16</sup> As a unified totality the political community excludes groups exterior to itself, these external others reflecting back to the society its unity and totality, which must exist in a relation of radical difference with these others: “Here then is how primitive society concretely appears: a multiplicity of separate communities, each watching over the integrity of its territory, a series of neo-monads each of which, in the face of others, asserts its difference” (Clastres, 2010d: 261-262). Relations between these autonomous units cannot take on the form of generalized

friendship, as this would imply a logic of identification that contradicts social unity and totality. War is thus essential to the maintenance of the social being: “there is, inherent in primitive society, a centrifugal logic of crumbling, of dispersion, of schism such that each community, to consider itself as such (as a single totality), needs the opposite figure of the foreigner or enemy, such that the possibility of violence is inscribed ahead of time in the primitive social being” (Clastres, 2010d: 264).

In war social bodies reject the impulse to unification, the multiplicity of equally unified and autonomous societies being ensured through their mutual antagonism. In Clastres’ words (2012: 34), “The effect of war, of the state of war, is to maintain the separation between communities, that is to say the division. The principle effect of war is to create the time of the multiple, and, through this, the possibility for the contrary of the multiple [the One, the State] does not exist.” The non-division of the political community is thus achieved through the perpetual affirmation of exterior multiplicity via war, external heterogeneity strengthening internal homogeneity. It is this affirmation of a multiplicity that actively resists application of the principle of identification that Western thought has such difficulty grasping (see Matos, 2011: 272). Contra-State societies refuse all logics that would unify multiplicity under the sign of an exterior law. Indeed, such logics are nothing other than those of the State: “Now, what is the legal power that embraces all differences in order to suppress them, that exists precisely to abolish the logic of the multiple and to substitute it with the opposite logic of unification? What is the name of this One that primitive society by definition refuses? It is the State” (Clastres, 2010d: 275). The internal non-division of the political community is thus guaranteed through external atomization and segmentation, the fragmentation of relations between societies in an unstable network of war and alliance that is capable of affirming the self-identity of multiple

social beings. Being-for-war, far from being evidence of a Hobbesian non-social condition, is in fact an expression of the very sociality of life, it being one of the mechanisms for the self-institution of society. Needless to say, such a form of organization poses major interpretative difficulties from the standpoint of dialogical modes of comparative political thought: the resistance of all impulses toward unification and identification closes off in advance the potential for the establishment of a multicultural understanding grounded in dialogical transparency. And indeed, Clastres (2000: 96-97) explicitly rejects the possibility of establishing a form of dialogue between civilizations capable of achieving shared understanding (see also Biehl, 2013: 586).

### **The Theory and Practice of Amerindian Chieftainship**

A detailed discussion of all of the different political mechanisms that Clastres understands Amazonian societies to deploy in order to reproduce their form as unity and totality is outside the scope of this paper. Such discussions, however, along with those that pertain to other societies presently understudied by comparative political theorists, should be seen as an urgent task. In this section I will only briefly discuss the institution that most occupied Clastres, that of Amerindian chieftainship, which the latter identified (2000: 106) as the key political order of Amazonian society. Clastres concedes that his analysis of the main features of chieftainship is not grounded in evidences ignored by others. On the contrary, the basic characteristics of the institution have been highlighted by various ethnographers, travellers, and missionaries since the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Clastres, 2010e: 210). The problem, however, was that they attempted to apprehend the characteristics observed from the standpoint of their own historically developed political sensibility, and hence, just as in the case of Amazonian war, were incapable of grasping the concrete social function of the object of analysis. Again, to the extent that social division was

assumed to be a part of the ontological structure of reality, the analysis of contra-State society could only be framed, if it were to be reconcilable with Western assumptions about the necessities of political life, in terms of incompleteness or lack.

How, then, to immanently understand the social function of the political institution of chieftainship? The chief, as one exclusively versed in the Western political tradition might be inclined to presume, is not defined in terms of his exercise of a special coercive authority or his capacity to singularly determine the historical trajectory of the community. On the contrary, “all the efforts of the tribe tend precisely to separate chieftainship and coercion and to render power powerless in a sense” (Clastres, 2010f: 89).<sup>17</sup> Such is achieved through the articulation of the political function of speech, Clastres (1989d: 153) writing, in fact, that “The whole political philosophy of primitive society can be glimpsed in the obligation of the chief to be a man of speech.” The form of the relationship established between power and speech is distinct in State and contra-State societies. In the former the possession of power is identical with the possession of the ability to speak, or more precisely, the possession of a monopoly on what is socially identified as legitimate speech. It is to invoke the capacity to issue interrogative utterances that others are compelled to obey under threat of sanction: the law can be given only by those who occupy a unique position within society, in a detached space from which legitimate speech emerges. Such is the case even if the validity of this space, the space of government, is acclaimed by an ostensibly popular source, as through various modern schemes of sovereignty and representation. Generally the basis for the social legitimation of unequal power is the contention that there exists a certain type of technical skill or proficiency that functions as a qualification for governance, and which may be possessed only by some. In Jacques Chevalier’s words (2011: 315), “The discourse of power insists on the fundamental inequality that exists between

governors and governed in the order of *competence* and *knowledge*: the governor is one who ‘knows’ and who attempts, through discourse, to disseminate knowledge in the direction of the governed.” The monopolization of speech is socially justified to the extent that there exist subjects who uniquely possess valid knowledge regarding the necessities of political reproduction, they thereby assuming through this possession the capacity to orient the historical movement of the community. Hence “The discourse of power is also a discourse of *will*: it postulates the capacity of the governors to act on the real, to modify the direction of things” (Chevalier, 2011: 315-316). The occupation of a detached site of power is ideologically legitimated through the affirmation of qualification, and speech is subsequently monopolized by said occupier.

Although power and speech are also essentially linked in Amazonian society, the structure of the relationship is inverted, such that speech is no longer a representation of the superiority of the subject of speech, but power’s demand that the subject of speech have no potential to establish such superiority: “If in societies with a State speech is power’s *right*, in societies without a State speech is power’s *duty*” (Clastres, 1989d: 153). The chief does not possess a right to speak because he possesses power and knowledge, but the exercise of speech is a duty that the chief must satisfy if he is to be constituted as chief and acquire the social prestige that attaches to the office. This obligation (along with another notable one that commands the chief demonstrate generosity through the constant distribution of goods to members of the community) expresses the chief’s perpetual indebtedness to the group: the chief owes the community.<sup>18</sup> This indebtedness is a manifestation of the nature of power relations in society, and in particular social power’s orientation toward the prevention of the emergence of personal power: “Power relations certainly exist: they take the form of a debt that the leader must forever

pay. The chief's external indebtedness guarantees society that he will remain exterior to power, that he will not become a separate organ" (Clastres, 2010g: 204). If debt flows from the chief to society, society may maintain itself as undivided. If, however, it flows in the opposite direction, society has been divided, political stratification being produced and maintained through the tributary relation.

The chief certainly possesses a competence that is socially recognized, deriving from, most particularly, his capacity for oratory and mediation. The peculiarity, and the only apparent paradox of chieftainship, however, is that although the members of the society acknowledge the chief's skill in deploying words and bestow upon him a certain prestige as a result, they rarely concern themselves with absorbing the substance of these words. Herein lay the secret of the powerlessness of the chief. Although the latter speaks perpetually and incessantly, he is very rarely listened to with seriousness: "there is no gathering around the chief when he speaks, no hush falls, everybody goes about their business as if nothing was happening" (Clastres, 1989d: 153). The reason is that the chief never verbally articulates any information that is new or immediately pertinent to the life of the community. On the contrary, his discourse is exclusively composed of exhortations to celebrate and continue to reproduce the traditional and long-established norms of the community, thus maintaining the integrity of the social form. The chief most definitely has a positive political function within the life of the community, but this function is not only irreducible to, but actively excludes such activities as the giving of commands and the formulation of law: "He is responsible, essentially, for assuming society's will to appear as a single totality, that is, for the community's concerted, deliberate effort to affirm its specificity, its autonomy, its independence in relation to other communities. In other words, the primitive leader is primarily the man who speaks in the name of society when

circumstances and events put it in contact with others” (Clastres, 2010b: 165). Unable to make political determinations independent of the community, the chief is one who simply, through his pronouncements, affirms the identity of the desire of the community, which his speech must map onto precisely: “the leader’s point of view will only be listened to as long as it expresses society’s point of view as a single totality” (Clastres, 2010b: 167). In “listening” to the chief the political community simply listens to itself, the speech of the chief functioning as an expression of the consensus of the community with respect to the fundamental norms governing society. This is why the chief’s is a speech that says nothing: “The discourse of the speech is empty precisely because it is not a discourse of power. In primitive societies, in societies without a State, power is not found on the side of the chief: it follows that his word cannot be the word of power, authority, or command” (Clastres, 1989d: 154).

The failure to correlate personal speech and communal desire constitutes a failure of chieftainship, and will inevitably generate a loss of prestige and eventually a loss of office. There is a certain relation of authority between the chief and the society, but it is the society that exercises authority over the chief, not vice versa: “The chief is there to serve society; it is society as such – the real locus of power – that exercises its authority over the chief” (Clastres, 1989b: 207). The communal capacity to sanction and orient the activity of the chief is evidence that there is a power operative in the community. What Clastres aims to make clear, however, is that this power does not belong to any one person or group of persons within society. It is not a detached or separate power – this being again that which defines the State – but is rather the expression of the undivided unity of the social body: “This power, unseparated from society, is exercised in a single way; it encourages a single project: to maintain the being of society in non-division, to prevent inequality between men from instilling division in society” (Clastres, 2010b:

169). The chief is the member of the group who is obligated to speak, and in fulfilling this obligation he confirms the law of the group to which he is necessarily bound: “The obligation to use the instrument of non-coercion – language – *every time it is necessary* gives the group permanent control over the chief because every word he speaks is an assurance that his power will not menace the society” (Clastres, 2000: 107).

Power is in this way prevented from becoming coercive. The chief does not and cannot give orders, and even should he attempt to upset the relation between himself and society by trying to give orders, thus violating the established conjunction of speech and power, he would be immediately abandoned as chief.<sup>19</sup> Power in contra-State society is instituted such that it cannot be detached from society and exercised by a part of it, for example by the chief. Society is thus structured so as to refuse the emergence of a separate power, a government, which legitimates and expresses coercive speech. The chief does not speak because he can, but because he owes it to the society, and if he fails to fulfill this obligation to produce empty speech, he no longer occupies his office. If the chief were to issue commands, he would not be “listened” to, and in not being listened to, he would cease to fulfill the criterion of chieftainship. What societies against the State have developed, in other words, is a political mechanism to ensure “that the chiefs are prevented from using their position for personal ends: they must take care that their personal desires do not infringe on the interests of the community; they are in the service of the group; they are its instruments. Permanently under the control of the group, the leaders cannot transgress the norms on which the whole life of the society is based” (Clastres, 2000: 107-108). Neither a contradiction in terms nor evidence of the inefficiency of political life, the phenomenon of the chief without power is a concrete expression of the political philosophy of societies against the State, a lived manifestation of society’s will to self-institute its identity as an

autonomous totality.<sup>20</sup> In Clastres' words (1989g: 44), "Far from giving us the lackluster image of an inability to resolve the question of political power these societies astonish us by the subtlety with which they have posed and settled the question. They had a very early premonition that power's transcendence conceals a mortal risk for the group, that the principle of an authority which is external and the creator of its own legality is a challenge to culture itself."

It should be noted that some critics of Clastres suggest that the idea of this type of society against the State is internally contradictory, for how can society be against something of which it has no experience? Veena Das and Deborah Poole (2004: 5) go so far as to suggest that Clastres eternalizes the State form, inscribing primitive society within the latter's inexorable logic: "the primitive was constituted as a nostalgic site for the discovery of the state form as a universal cultural operator – even when not present, it was seen as awaiting on the threshold of reality, as it were." What must be recalled, however, is that for Clastres the idea of the State does not represent a particular institutional configuration, but is only the conceptual representation of the emergence of social division, of a power separate from society. The threat of the possibility of such an emergence is one that all societies are familiar with, to the extent that all societies must negotiate issues of social hierarchy and exclusion (Bestard and Bidon-Chanal, 1979: 226; Capello, 2009: 158). That said, if such is the case then it definitely seems as if Clastres "ignores the potential of other modalities of domination in 'stateless societies'" (Gledhill, 2000: 30). One notable example, for instance, is the much studied topic of the domination of men over women in various Amazonian communities.<sup>21</sup> David Graeber (2004: 23) writes that "Clastres manages to talk blithely about the uncompromised egalitarianism of the very same Amazonian societies, for instance, famous for their use of gang rape as a weapon to terrorize women who transgress gender roles" (see also Murphy, 1987). Clastres (2010h: 314-316; 2012: 23) for his part, far from

denying the existence of such gender stratification in so-called primitive societies, insists that it is of a different quality than the social division of the State, to the extent that the rules governing the former do not emanate from any particular part of society, but are rather norms that are inherited and affirmed by the entire community. Regardless of whether or not one accepts Clastres' argument on this issue, the debate points us toward a further concern, which will be the subject of the final section. This is the extent to which non-democratic societies, or societies that affirm domination through certain instituted practices, may nevertheless essentially contribute to the advancement of democratic theory.

### **Social Alterity and Democratic Potential**

Clastres' account of the political life of Amazonian societies has been criticized by some readers for being highly romanticized, a manifestation of a naive Western desire to return to an ahistorical and originary state prior to what is considered to be our presently corrupted state of being. Bartholomew Dean (1999: 9), for example, maintains that Clastres' *Chronicle of the Guayaki Indians* "stands as an enduring testament to a bygone era of anthropological sensibilities and imperial exploration among putatively 'pristine' peoples in remote corners of the globe." In another critical evaluation of Clastres, Stephen Nugent (2012: 211) notes more concretely that many contemporary scholars reject the notion that the South American forest societies studied by the former existed in any kind of primary social state, but rather "they represented societies – or better, fragments – either cast into the forest by proto state-formations that dominated the major waterways, or represented refugees of the great demographic collapse that accompanied what is mildly referred to as the 'Columbian exchange'" (see also Descola, 1988: 819; Geertz, 2000: 109; Moyn, 2004: 78; Graeber, 2004: 23). Such authors are certainly correct to be wary of that

tendency to interpret various indigenous societies as primordial and outside of time, an operation through which individuals of such societies become “thoroughly alienated both from their historical context and from their contemporary condition” (Wilmsen, 1989: xv). Contemporary ethnologists are increasingly cognizant “that far from being pristine isolates, indigenous communities are always part of a wider social field” (Fisher, 2000: 12). What is not so often recognized, however, is that far from affirming the “pristine” model of indigenous interpretation, Clastres can be seen as actually initiating the ethnological shift toward increasing social-historical contextualization. Hence James Scott (2009: 188) writes that “Pierre Clastres was *the first* to argue that many of the hunting-and-gathering ‘tribes’ of South America, far from being left behind, had previously lived in state formations and practiced fixed-field agriculture. They had purposely given it up to evade subordination.” The lack of agriculture amongst certain groups, for example, is not evidence of their existence in a primal historical condition. As such it is possible “to verify that these are not instances of truly archaic peoples but, on the contrary, *societies that have lost agriculture*” (Clastres, 1989h: 85. See also Clastres, 2010i: 116; Clastres, 2011).

Although Clastres does not succumb to the anthropological temptation to dehistoricize the societies he studies, it is true that he sometimes greatly overemphasizes the degree to which the Amazonian affirmation of political equality may be generalized so as to represent an affirmation of democratic life. Hence his statement (1989g: 28) that “most Indian societies of America are distinguished by their sense of democracy and taste for equality.” As we have already seen, this “taste for equality” does not necessitate the reproduction of unequal social relations in other spheres (such as through the instituted form of gender difference), nor is it reproduced without the utilization of techniques, such as torture and war, that most of Clastres’

contemporaries would not immediately deem desirable in light of the current state of development of Western societies and experiences. Clastres (2010e: 210) insisted that his ethnological work was not concerned with demonstrating the ethical superiority of Amazonian political life relative to his own, but simply with detailing the former's mode of functioning. His abhorrence with existing State societies, however, sometimes obfuscated this fact. Certain of his followers have been much more explicit in detailing the extent to which, for contemporary democratic theorists, contra-State society can function as neither a model nor a goal. As Marcel Gauchet (1978: 66) writes, "Primitive society was not and is not the *good society* from which it would be sufficient to rediscover excellence. On this Clastres was insistent: the Indians pay for their political equality, and the price is not one that we would easily accept to pay today. No law enacted by an exterior power, certainly, but the cruel inscription of marks of the law on the body. No subjective dependency nor alienated labor, but also no conceivable questioning of the organization of society. No servile submission, but the familiar violence of war."

Not only is the Amazonian affirmation of equality not coextensive with an affirmation of democracy, but the former is partially actualized through the denial of the potential for the latter. More specifically, the political institution of equality is grounded in the symbolic alienation of autonomy to an exterior realm that individuals are powerless to intervene in (see, for example, Lefort, 2000: 224-227; Castoriadis, 2013: 33-34; Terray, 1989: 14-15; Arnason, 2003: 84).<sup>22</sup> There is in fact a radical division in primitive society, but this division is exterior to the political community: rules and norms governing the social realm are derived from an extra-social religious source outside the community, being transmitted independently of knowledge of their origin and without the potential for questioning or interrogation. What fundamentally renders the South American religious conceptions of a different order than those most familiar to Western

thought is the lack of a point of mediation between the living society and the transcendent outside, there not existing any divine cult uniting the two worlds. On the contrary, there is only “Alterity that obligates above all from the culture itself: the order of Law as an institution of the social (or the cultural) is contemporaneous not to men, but to a time before men; it originates in a mythical pre-human time. The society finds its foundations outside itself in the ensemble of rules and instructions bequeathed by the great ancestors or cultural heroes” (Clastres, 2010i: 123). As we have seen, it is precisely these rules and institutions that the discourse of the chief aims to valorize. If democracy refers us to the instituted power of the members of the political community to give themselves their own laws, then clearly contra-State societies, to the extent that their norms are entirely produced in this extra-social realm, cannot be democratic. What I would like to conclude by briefly suggesting, however, is that there is nevertheless a strongly democratic potential inherent within Clastres’ new political anthropology, and indeed within comparative political theory as a whole. This potential does not lie exclusively in the presentation or identification of explicitly democratic forms, but rather in the uncovering of social-historical alterity.<sup>23</sup>

There has been an effort by political theorists to utilize comparative political thought in order to advance the commitment to democratic life. Hence, for example, Melissa Williams and Mark Warren’s attempt (2013) to deploy the former in the service of the enrichment of a deliberative democratic project, the former being able to facilitate the emergence of global publics that transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries, thus opening new avenues for democratic mobilization and will-formation in a globalizing world that increasingly breaks down national spaces of public organization. As a field for the mediation of societal difference comparative political theory “contributes to the social conditions of possibility for the emergence

of intercultural collective subjects of practical reason – that is, intercultural politics” (Williams and Warren, 2013: 36). In the final instance it is conceptualized as “a *medium of mutual intelligibility*” that “sets communication as its basic goal” (Williams and Warren, 2013: 38). Needless to say, such a vision is grounded in an understanding of comparative political thought that emphasizes the potential for inter-cultural dialogue and the creation of a common horizon of shared understanding. What I have suggested, however, is that it is precisely such models that have contributed to the ossification of the field, necessarily excluding forms of political thought and modalities of political life that are expressed by subjects who, for whatever reason, are incapable of functioning as such interlocutors without compromising the internal consistency of their inherited traditions. There is no possibility for a universal reconciliation, in other words, of social-historical difference.

Rather than exclusively locate democratic potential in the establishment of a common field of understanding, I suggest that the study of comparative political thought allows us to appreciate the democratic implications inherent in the revelation of social-historical alterity. Amongst current practitioners it is Farah Godrej who has perhaps most stressed the extent to which the study of comparative political theory should reveal such an alterity, one that is irreducible to the senses of otherness one might encounter when one’s comparative analysis remains within the orbit of Western thought (2009a: 139; 2009b: 577). The typical articulation of the idea of cosmopolitanism within contemporary political theory, for example, takes place within Western paradigms and frameworks that obscure the alterity of the texts engaged with. Comparative political theory must thus work to methodologically advance beyond such local perspectives in order to articulate a more genuine vision of cosmopolitanism, one that through the dislocation of established patterns of thought opens breaches allowing for the emergence of

an otherness that is incapable of being contained within such patterns: “instead of restricting our understandings of cosmopolitanism to the categories contained mostly within a Western framework, as most analysts do, a new and more genuine understanding of cosmopolitanism should link it explicitly to dislocation, to existential immersion in the unfamiliar, to the imperative to make intelligible this existential experience of unfamiliarity, and finally to the theoretical illumination that this experience brings forth” (Godrej, 2009: 138).<sup>24</sup>

To emphasize such radical alterity is not to hypostatize socio-cultural entities – through fixing their being or freezing their boundaries – thus ignoring the potential for cross-cultural exchange and learning. On the contrary, it is simply to recognize the historical articulation of modes of existences within concrete socio-cultural contexts that are at least partially distinct and independent. It is to recognize, in other words, that historical multiplicity is a concrete fact of human existence (Godrej, 2009a: 140). If this multiplicity is to be appreciated the impulse to universalization must be avoided, the effort being made to elude both the reduction of others to the categories or paradigms that orient ourselves, as well as the utilization of these others in order to identify a content not yet fully grasped in ourselves. The Copernican revolution of Clastres, by detaching contra-State society from totalizing frameworks and refusing to analyze it in its relation to Western thought and life, reveals the radical discontinuity and ontological difference between modes of social being (Chaui, 2011: 156-157). There is no passage between forms of society within a definite historical continuum, but only rupture between these societies, and “this rupture is not empirical but ontological, because it establishes a change in the mode of being of humans” (Chaui, 2011: 160. See also Deguy, 1987: 88; Verdier, 1987: 26). Serious engagement with this multiplicity, though, must not only affirm this partial independence, but also the potential of self-innovation in light of the encounter.<sup>25</sup> We have already seen that the

forms of society that Clastres engages should not be asserted as models whose specific forms are potentially reproducible in distinct social-historical contexts. They should not be seen as prefigurations of future alternative orders (Vaudy, 1987: 153). This does not mean, however, that reflection on their form of being is incapable of generating impulses or orientations within us contrary to our own preconceptions regarding social-political possibility or desirability. In the words of Viveiros de Castro (2010: 21, 15), the new political anthropology aims to expose “the radical otherness” of primitive society, its object being “one of the conceptual embodiments of the thesis that *another world is possible*.” What the study of social-historical alterity reveals above all else, then, is that our own organization of things might be otherwise, that the potential of human co-relation is not exhausted by the current structure of the real.

It is here that the democratic potential of Clastres’ new political anthropology as a form of comparative political theory is to be found. The democratic content of comparative political thought should not be located exclusively in the reproduction of patterns of otherness, nor in the bridging of otherness through the establishment of a universality mediated by intercultural exchange. The emphasis is here not on a particular form of regime or mode of being, that is, not on the universalization of a particular cultural configuration, but rather on the sense of the self-articulation of political identity and life. Comparative political theory’s democratic core does not lay in the revelation of a specific form of being of society that is substantively democratic, but in the demonstration of the capacity for variation in such forms of being. The affirmation of the potential for democratic life depends upon the recognition of the nature and relation of the concepts of alterity and creation. To the extent that comparative political theory articulates social-historical alterity, it exposes that all societies are the products of a radical and non-determined creation, the affirmation of this creation being a basic precondition for the realization

of genuine democratic life. Societies exist as other than one another only to the extent that they are genuine creations, irreducible to common forms or principles that would unite them in a system that delimits in advance the scope of their articulation. As Clastres aims to show, for example, the being of the political is not exhausted by the categorizable variations in the form of the political State. In the words of Cornelius Castoriadis (2003: 185), “the forms of society, its works, its types of individual that arise in history do not belong on a list, be it an infinite one, of posited and positive possibilities. They are *creations*, starting from which new possibilities – hitherto inexistent ones, because heretofore meaningless – appear.” History is creation, the generation of social alterity. If all societies are the result of non-determined creation, however, not all societies recognize this fact. As we have seen, Amazonian societies themselves largely occult political creativity through the attribution of social norms to an extra-social source that individuals are incapable of engaging with.<sup>26</sup> Only once we recognize that all societies are historical creations, that is to say, are undetermined by sources external to willed human action, can we begin to engage ethical questions regarding what form of society is desired, and most crucially, what individuals in a given society are identified as potential political subjects. The recognition of the universality of political creativity, then, should not obscure the question of the differentiation of forms of society on the basis of their capacity to mediate democratic self-expression, that is to say, generalize the number of these political subjects.

If all societies are creations that reveal social-historical alterity, then democratic societies are those that recognize this fact, and institute media that are able to facilitate the participation of all members of the political community in the formulation of the norms that govern the latter. To once again quote Castoriadis (2007: 95), the democratic theorist who has done the most to articulate this conception of democracy as autonomous self-creation: “Democracy means the

power of the people; in other words, it means that the people makes its laws – and to make them it must indeed be convinced that laws are the work of men. But at the same time, this implies that there is no extrasocial benchmark for laws.” Throughout the history of political thought there have been posited all sorts of such extrasocial benchmarks, from the Tupi-Guarani norms derived from the mythical ancestors, to the abstract natural rights embodied by the subject of classical liberalism. All societies are political, whether they have a State or not: every social-historical community self-articulates a will to live in a certain way in time and space. Democratic politics, however, exist only where this self-articulation is undertaken reflectively and explicitly by the people of the societies themselves, in full knowledge of their legislative responsibility and capacity, and independent of those transcendent norms that would circumscribe in advance the range of their political activity.

It must be stressed that the products of political creativity are not goods in themselves. The totalitarian phenomenon, for example, is just as innovative a political invention as Amerindian chieftainship or the Greek polis (Castoriadis, 1993: 241-242). To highlight social-historical alterity and political creativity is thus not to valorize all institutional novelty. The objects of comparative political theory need not be democratic in themselves, but the practice of comparative political theory itself may be. This is because, through revealing the potential to be otherwise, comparative political theory unhinges political history from all totalizing frameworks, such liberation being the condition of autonomous political life. What all societies reveal, when their alterity from one another is appreciated, is the fact that individual and collective life may be structured other than it presently is. Contrary to the dialogical tendency in comparative political theory, I suggest that the latter should not necessarily look to construct identities or generate new universals, but rather, through the uncovering of alterity, look to expose the always present

capacity to generate the new. It is not possible to reconcile social-historical difference through the establishment of a universal ethic that incorporates all particulars. Certain forms of societies will always be excluded based on their perceived lack. Hence, for example, the typical exclusion of the societies studied by Clastres, as well as other non-State societies, from certain varieties of comparative political thought. However, the impossibility of reconciling difference does not make the study of such difference unimportant, even if one is looking to advance the democratic project. This is because democratic potential does not lie in the discovery of a fixed or terminal organization of political things, but in the generalization of the capacity of individuals to define the direction of their collective life, independent of any determining logics or histories. The attempt to ground political legitimacy in transhistorical principles, be they principles of natural right, historical necessity, human nature, and so on, necessarily obscures the indeterminacy on which democratic self-activity depends. What reading Clastres as a comparative political theorist helps us understand, is that the democratic potential of studying distinct political societies and traditions does not lay in the uncovering of specific political systems or forms that are substantively democratic, but rather in the affirmation of this indeterminacy.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief account of the intellectual context that motivated the move from philosophy to anthropology for Clastres and certain others in France during the 1950s see Dosse (1997: 161-163).

<sup>2</sup> Clastres' work has in fact exerted a considerable influence on, firstly, a certain variety of continental philosophy, resulting from the deployment of various Clastrean categories by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987: 357-359), and secondly, the so-called anarchist turn in contemporary anthropology (Ssorin-Chaikov, 2015; Spencer, 2009). For an account of several ways in which Clastres' thought is distinct from and exceeds the classical anarchist tradition see Kupiec (2011).

<sup>3</sup> For a well-known statement on this political potential of anthropology see Gledhill, 2000. For an historical overview of the development of political anthropology as a discipline, although focusing only on English language contributions and tendencies, see Vincent (1990).

<sup>4</sup> Emphasizing the extent to which the existential understanding of a text is enriched through the active attempt to immerse oneself in the total social world of the latter, Farah Godrej (2009a: 148-149), for example, has specifically pointed to anthropological and ethnographic methodologies as particularly important resources for comparative political thought. On the extent to which individuals who study comparative philosophy may learn from ethnology and the latter's challenge to Western ethnocentrism see Jung (2011: 9). For emphasis on comparative political theory as a form of practice grounded in traveling and active observation, as opposed to merely static contemplation or

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introspection, see Euben (2016) and von Vacano (2015: 466). Compare such positions to that of Chris Goto-Jones (2013: 159), who suggests that practitioners of comparative political theory must be on guard against the reduction of the field to “a species of Areas studies or even Anthropology,” lest the former lose its status as political theory.

<sup>5</sup> For an account of some of the most significant paradigms and methodological approaches characterizing comparative political theory see Kapust and Kinsella (2017a) and von Vacano (2015).

<sup>6</sup> As Dallmayr writes elsewhere (2002: 12) regarding this issue: “Readers may wonder about the possibility and desirability of extending the range of civilizational dialogue to other parts of the world....Concerns of this kind are well-founded and legitimate – and fully shared by the author. However, desirability does not always coincide with feasibility.”

<sup>7</sup> For a critique of the “merely multicultural” approach that emphasizes reciprocal exchange and fusion see Black, (2011: 225). See also Freedon and Vincent (2013).

<sup>8</sup> It must be noted, however, that Dallmayr (1996: xviii; 2002: 6; 2009: 23) concedes that the dialogical structure of comparative political theory may in fact be agonistic.

<sup>9</sup> For a study of the ways in which the main narratives of Western political thought continue to subterraneously inform the practice of comparative political theory, through the uncritical assumption that Western concepts and paradigms can be theoretically converted so as to apply to non-Western contexts, see Hassanzadeh (2015).

<sup>10</sup> For a brief summary of Clastres’ fieldwork in the region see H Clastres (2011).

<sup>11</sup> For a call to emphasize otherness in the face of comparative philosophy’s tendency to strive after the identification of similarities see Schrag (2009).

<sup>12</sup> On Clastres’ critique of Western ethnocentrism see Clastres (2010a), Lefort (2000: 213), Chamboredon (1983: 558), Coulon (1997: 117), and Cervera-Marzal (2013: 48).

<sup>13</sup> Needless to say, however, Clastres was aware that such efforts must proceed reflectively, cognizant always of what Claude Lévi-Strauss identifies (2000: 719-720) as the danger internal to any hermeneutic, that “we insidiously position ourselves to think in the place of those who we believe we understand, and that we attribute to them more or something other than that which they think.”

<sup>14</sup> Loubna El Amine (2016) has made the case, in fact, that within comparative political theory today the very East-West binary may be transcended given the shared experience of modernity, a part of which is precisely the universal acceptance of the legitimacy of the modern state.

<sup>15</sup> And indeed, it was precisely the affirmation of such a framework that motivated Clastres’ break with structuralism and Marxism, the dominant French intellectual currents at the time (Abensour, 1987: 7-18).

<sup>16</sup> For a particularly good explication of Clastres’ analysis of the function of war in primitive society see Abensour (2015).

<sup>17</sup> For the classic account of the Amazonian chief’s lack of coercive authority see Lévi-Strauss (1967).

<sup>18</sup> Identifying the same elements of chieftanship as Clastres, Peter Rivière (1984: 73) notes how even if within the region there is variation in the degree to which particular groups emphasize these elements, nevertheless they seem to be general.

<sup>19</sup> The Yanomami and Apache warriors Fousiwe and Geronimo offer instructive examples regarding the futility of attempting to substitute private ambition for collective will in Amerindian society (Clastres, 1989b: 210-212).

<sup>20</sup> Needless to say, there is a wide range of practices and institutions that look to instill and maintain the sense of equality that militates against the emergence of a private desire to command. These extend from the prohibition on a hunter eating his own kill, thus establishing a relation of dependence of each on others, to the utilization of torture as a means to physically mark the equality of group membership. See, for example, Clastres (1989e: 114; 1989f).

<sup>21</sup> For a classic account of the nature of gender hierarchy in an Amazonian society (in this the case amongst the Mundurucú) see Murphy and Murphy (2004). For the suggestion that in many Amazonian societies gender inequality is not as pronounced as many anthropologists believe, see Passes (2004: 3).

<sup>22</sup> For the argument that within Amazonian societies there is a higher degree of autonomy than most interpreters recognize see Overing (1993).

<sup>23</sup> Needless to say, this is not to suggest that such explicitly democratic forms cannot be identified outside of the so-called West. On democratic potential and actuality in non-Western contexts see, for example, Muhlberger and Paine (1993), Black (2009), Bowden (2009), Graeber (2013: 183-184), Chou and Beausoleil (2015).

<sup>24</sup> Compare such a vision of cosmopolitanism to that of Richard Shapcott. Reading comparative political theory in light of normative cosmopolitan thought, Shapcott (2016: 2) calls for the utilization of the resources of the former in order to develop a “defense of cosmopolitan universalism.” Indeed, “Cosmopolitanism holds forth the possibility of moral universalism as a defensible goal,” and “One of the advantages of CPT is that it can help to identify whether

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different claims can be persuasive cross-culturally or whether they have limited purchase beyond their origins” (Shapcott, 2016: 17).

<sup>25</sup> For a study that criticizes those comparative political theory perspectives that denies that the engagement with others modes of knowledge has the potential to fundamentally alter our own, see Jenco (2015).

<sup>26</sup> On the extent to which Amazonian cosmogonies generally lack any idea of creation *ex nihilo* see Viveiros de Castro (2015c: 206-208).

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