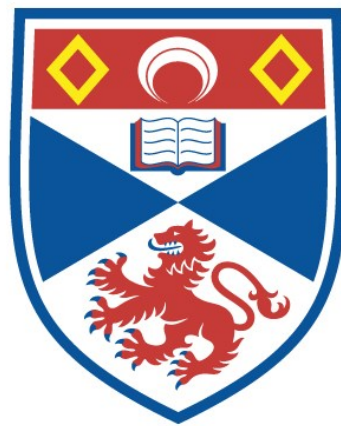


"DOCTORS OF OUR KNOWLEDGE" : KINSHIP,  
RESEARCH, AND EMBODIMENT IN AN AMERINDIAN  
VILLAGE IN GUYANA

Sebastian Arze

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St Andrews



2018

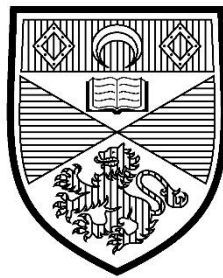
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“Doctors of Our Knowledge”; Kinship, Research, and  
Embodiment in an Amerindian Village in Guyana

Sebastian Arze



University of  
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of PhD

at the

University of St Andrews

October 2017

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## Abstract:

Ethnography of how people in Surama—a mostly *Makushi*, Amerindian Village in the North Rupununi of Region 9 in Guyana—conceive of “work” as social formation, “development” as a local manifestation, and *knowledge* tied to *being* supports an argument that foreign power is obviated through the formation of similar bodied kin in the community.

The focus on a single community, Surama, is a methodological choice born out of previous anthropological understandings of community-settlements as fluid, comprised of consanguineal kin, and leadership as non-coercive and limited to each community. Today, Amerindian Villages are spatially fixed, and administered by Village Councils—the most local branch of government. To understand how people in Amerindian Villages conceive of politics and kinship today, I had to myself become more familiar. I resided in one community, with one family. I took part both in what my hosts described as “tradition”, and “development”.

People in Surama described tensions in changing ways of being social. While they champion sociality associated with “tradition”, they manifested “development” as a contribution to the wider world. In this way, they carried what they considered proper social personhood, sharing and willingful contributions, to the wider world.

People in Surama conceive of “tradition” and “culture” through a history of mediating outside researchers’ and policy-makers’ interest in their lives. They recognize foreign interest in their visible knowledge of the forest, and share this knowledge through these concepts. Simultaneously, these concepts keep certain ways of knowing distant from researchers. Embodied ways of knowing and interacting with persons in the forest are called “*belief*”, and are limited to *believers*. My hosts maintained this as a fundamental difference in our ways of knowing. Their knowing is a *doing* with kin; ours is writing about that doing. Through extending their knowing and ways of being social to researchers, however, they turn us into similar bodied kin.

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## Introduction

“Just from looking at my house you know I does cook mixed food!” Auntie Paulette looked over to her house (11/06/2015).<sup>1</sup> Victorine and Caroline (Paulette’s daughters), Scott (Paulette’s youngest son), Evanie (Paulette’s granddaughter), and myself (visiting researcher) were with her in the kitchen, across the yard from the house.

Victorine had come over with her daughter, Evanie, around breakfast time. She sat on the bench at the kitchen table, and we spoke about the recently published exam scores for Surama Village Primary School students. I had assisted teaching sixth grade in the primary school before final exams, and I felt somewhat responsible for students’ success or failure. I was happy to hear that they had all earned entry to secondary school.

“I promised Evanie present for she to do well in she exams, and I never give she nothing to this day! I did promise she gold chain,” Paulette exclaimed. Evanie had recently finished secondary school, and Scott would start that August.

“And what you promise your son now?” Victorine asked.

“I goh give he the house, nice house,” Paulette responded to her daughter with a chuckle, and looked over at Scott who continued eating his breakfast between a subtle smiling blush. Months before, Paulette had told me that when Scott was smaller he had looked over to the house and asked his mother “It’s what kind of house we have really?” (11/08/2014).

When Paulette asked him to clarify, he said that the house “wasn’t nice,” because it was made with different kinds of materials: wooden and burnt brick walls, cement and wood floors, zinc and kukrit thatch roof.

“Well my dear, when you grow up you can make what kind of house you want.” Paulette said she had replied to him.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this thesis, I include quoted conversations’ dates as they appear in my field-notes. These conversations were typed from memory daily, and as such the date refers to the day the conversation took place. While my editing is meant to allude to the grammar and cadence of the speech, the quotes have been rewritten from Guyanese Amerindian “Creolese” English in which the conversations took place. I include dates to note the different kinds of interactions I had as the year of fieldwork progressed. The reader will note that quotes from my first months in the field, (started August 2014), include some of my general confusion, and the way people often volunteered information they found important to social science research. Contrastingly later in my fieldwork, which ended September 2015 (13/09/2015), we seemed to talk about things that interested my hosts more than what they thought would interest me. As such, dates subtly indicate the changes researchers go through as we progress in fieldwork, and the way we interact and become part of our field sites.



I told Paulette I liked the house.

“But Sabba say he like the house,” Paulette continued, “When we was working CMRV [a natural resource monitoring project] and we came to say what kind of house you had, it was hard. Zinc house? Thatch? It hard to say...*just from looking at my house, you know I does cook mixed food!*”



Figure 1: left: Paulette and Daniel's house, kitchen, and little house.  
Right: View of the house from the kitchen

This brief interaction, nine months into my ethnographic fieldwork in Surama Village, in Guyana's North Rupununi district of Region Nine (Upper-Takutu, Upper Essequibo), provides a window to the whole thesis. For Fourteen months, I resided with Auntie Paulette and her husband, Uncle Daniel, in their household along with their two sons, Birthlan and Scott while I conducted fieldwork in Surama. The household consisted of Paulette's kitchen, a separate living house, and a small house where Uncle Daniel slept and kept his tools. Their household, like many in Surama, was on a small hill on the rolling savannas about four hundred meters from the surrounding forest. Just down the hill, about seventy meters away, Paulette and Daniel's daughter, Caroline, and her partner, Vitus lived with their four boys. In the other direction from Caroline and Vitus' house, Paulette and Daniel's eldest daughter, Victorine, lived with her husband, Kurt, their son, and Victorine's two children from her first partnership. A little farther away, near Daniel's parents' house, Frank, Paulette and Daniel's eldest son lived with his partner, Jolyn, and their three children. I refer to these four households as Paulette and Daniel's extended household. Paulette and Daniel's children and grandchildren often came to visit, prepare and cook food, chat, eat, and share each other's company. While I call this an extended household, and the people living in the household, 'extended family', a major argument of this thesis is that family is fluid. Just as these four households form Paulette and Daniel's extended family, they are also part of a larger extended family: Daniel's parent's extended household. Daniel and Paulette live about two-hundred meters from Daniel's parents, Fred and Fransisca Allicock; as do two of Daniel's brothers and their partners, Bertrand and Marcela, and Glen and Jean; and one

sister, Loreen, and her partner, Collin Jarvis. There are other households nearby these Allicock households, and they make up the fourteen or so households that people (living there) refer to as, “this side of Surama.”

Everybody in Surama (pop. ~300), is considered family. People can trace their lineage and connection, either blood (consanguineal) or through marriage (affinal), and even when there is no explicit connection, they call each other close family-friends—a word that refers more to the mixed family/friend status, than to the person or individual being a friend *of the* family. People conceive of Surama as (consanguineal) family, and of people outside Surama as potentially part of that family. As the whole Surama community is considered family, people “take partners” from outside Surama. These people become family-friends in the community. I suggest that while Surama is a federally recognized *Amerindian Village*,<sup>2</sup> people in Surama primarily consider Surama a community of family-friends, not a politically denominated Village. Part of the argument of this thesis is that even the Village Council is mediated by kinship connections between community members.

Paulette’s statements above point to the connection between the food she cooks, and the kind of house in which her family lives. Paulette and Daniel’s house is a “mix” of what people in Surama call “traditional” and “development”<sup>3</sup>; it has a kukrit thatch and corrugated zinc roof, wood and mud-brick walls, with a cast cement and wood floor. In Surama, “traditional” usually refers to a past way of doing things, and the tools used to do things that way; cassava work (the process of turning raw cassava into food and drink), especially with handheld graters; hunting, especially with a bow and arrows; and building a kukrit thatch roof with the help of family are all “traditional”. Contrastingly people in Surama call their use of corrugated zinc roofs, computers and phones, and gas-powered vehicles and tools “development”. The knowing and experience of Surama’s “development” over time informs their ideas of previous practices and tools being “traditional”. Simultaneously, their experience of “tradition” informs them that newer ways of doing things are “development”. “Tradition” and “development” thereby inform each other.

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<sup>2</sup> The Guyanese legal category for communities with federally recognized land and Village Council.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout the thesis, I use quotes to refer to things that people in Surama say or have said. The words “tradition”, “development”, “culture”, *belief* are used as such. The thesis describes the way people in Surama elaborated the meaning of these concepts. While “tradition” and “development” are like our concepts of tradition and development, *belief*, I argue, is very different from our anthropological or popular analytic categories of belief. I refer to *belief* in Surama in italics, *belief*, throughout the thesis. Contrastingly, single inverted commas refer to popular concepts we use e.g. ‘Western’, or ‘scientific’. This is meant to distinguish between what my hosts and informants say, and what we social scientists say. At the same time, my need to distinguish between *our* use and *their* use in this thesis points to the way we have both come to render these categories analytical in continuing exchanges with each other.

The thesis suggests people in Surama elaborated these conceptual categories since the early 1990s when Guyanese national political party leadership shifted for the first time in over two decades. Where the government prior to 1992 encouraged Guyanese self-sufficiency, and closed borders (especially in Region Nine), political policy post-1992 has been geared towards attracting foreign investments, national development, (especially sustainable development), and conservation. In Surama, the post-1992 period has been characterized by the establishment of the Iwokrama International Centre—a nearly 400,000 hectare protected area that borders Annai Village land, of which Surama forms a part—and the increased visit and influx of development economists and workers, and natural and social science researchers. Surama categories of “culture”, “tradition”, “development”, and especially “*belief*” have come to have meaning through a history of experience with these transitory outsiders. Through these categories, people in Surama mediate outsiders’ interest in their lives.

Paulette and Daniel feel a tension between “tradition” and “development”. They feel that the ways of being social, (or sociality), surrounding “development”—working for money, buying store-bought food and alcohol, and paying people to build your house—are in opposition to ways of being social associated with “tradition”, namely working with family (without pay) in *machrumani* (family-hosted collective work parties), fishing, farming, doing cassava work, and eating and consuming family-processed food and drink. People note a tension between “tradition” and “development”. While they value “traditional” ways of being social—exemplified by the concept of “work” as a sharing and free contribution of time, jokes, and food—over “development”, they take part in “development”, and often work paid jobs themselves. Thus, Paulette’s “mixed” food and household point to mixed ways of being social, which over experienced time, are conceived as changing ways of being social.

The changes they most often pointed out to me had to do with the way younger generations—specifically their children—behaved and acted. Elders in Surama saw their children as more invested in “development”, and were worried that they did not want to farm, that they worked in wage-jobs, and had to rely on shops for food. For Paulette and Daniel, changing ways of being social—symbolized most strongly by changing subsistence practices—lead to different kinds of persons. Paulette and Daniel recognized their part in their children’s differing personhood—“just from looking at my house you know I does cook mixed food”—and while they worried about these generational changes, they also seemed to encourage them; they sent their children to school and post-secondary education, encouraged them to work (in wage) jobs, cooked them mixed food, and built them a mixed house. Thus, I suggest that people in Surama consider that recent history is changing kinship in “development” times.

Anthropologists understand that the bodies of indigenous peoples living in the Guianese<sup>4</sup> Amazon must be made of the “work” of family and family-friends. Bodies and vital substance (or “spirit”) are fluid in Amazonia, and the vital substance of a person is not tied to their bodies from birth; by sharing food, jokes, and time with family, vital substance is stabilized in bodies. As vital substance is fluid, persons may also take other bodily forms. Anthropologists working in the Guianas have pointed out that tobacco, cotton, cassava, jaguars, peccaries, tapir, as well as other beings we recognize as plants and animals, are persons. In Surama, I was told that Jaguars “may be” people. These plants and animals are important in stabilizing the spirit in a body. Cassava provides the major staple, farine, which when worked by (usually female) kin, builds the body; cotton is used to make hammocks that house and form the bodies of people; and jaguars kill their enemy’s bodies, allowing the spirit to move. The growth of bodies in the community necessitates exchange with persons in the forest (or forest-turned into farm). Indigenous peoples in Guiana exchange with these persons, and in so doing, contribute and form the bodies of kin in the community. As such, community sociality is never isolated, but formed with these exchanges.

In Surama, interactions with these beings is called “*belief*”. By *believing*, people can interact with persons in the forest, who would otherwise be invisible and inaccessible. Persons in the forest have a different kind of body; exchanges with them often have to do with people in Surama’s bodily fluidity, and the embodied ability of people’s “spirit” to commune with these beings in the forest. I call this embodied communion a ‘way of knowing’.<sup>5</sup> This way of knowing is about a way of forming kin with beings in the forest. Daniel notes that his knowing is directly tied to his family-friendship and kinship in the community. Daniel and Paulette are concerned that this way of knowing is particular to their generation, and that their children—as well as visiting researchers—are more interested in new ways of knowing more associated with “development”.

Paulette and Daniel’s *belief* with otherwise invisible beings allows them to contribute to similar bodied kin in the household and community. Thus, kinship is not limited to the community of the three-hundred people in Surama, but extends to interactions with persons in the forest through *belief*. The other side of the coin, “*not-believing*”, is about not having the embodied potential to

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<sup>4</sup> Northern Brazil, Suriname, French Guyana, Suriname, Guyana, and Venezuela.

<sup>5</sup> My approach to embodied states of being as a way of knowing is based on Christina Toren and Joao de Pina-Cabral’s argument that, “What exists for us and how we know what we know are, for any one of us, lived as inextricable from one another,” (2009: 4). *Belief* was primarily described to me as a way of knowing; one separate from our academic ways of knowing based on its relationality. Thus, my ethnography aims to address Toren and Pina-Cabral’s concern that, “There is little ethnography concerning either our own processes of knowing...or what exists for us...” (2009: 2), precisely by looking at how my host-family conceives of their knowing and researchers’ ways of knowing.

interact with these invisible beings in the forest, and as such, differing embodied ways of being social.

We in academia or in the ‘West’ conceive of ‘belief’ as a personal ascription to ‘truth’ which does not need to be ‘true’ to others (Lindquist and Coleman 2008). It is a cultural relativizing term, which, while affirming truth, also creates doubt in the ‘truth’ affirmed. In short, ‘belief’ is about truths we consider non-scientific. In the closing chapter of this thesis I argue that Surama use of the word “*belief*” to refer to embodied interactions with otherwise invisible beings has three socio-political implications. Firstly, it distances people in Surama from the potential dangers of these beings. *Believing* means that the body is susceptible to potential dangers, (often death), from these persons in the forest. One of these persons is *kanaimĩ*. Many indigenous groups throughout Guyana talk about *kanaimĩ*, and each group has a slightly differing idea as to what *kanaimĩ* is. Amongst the people with whom I worked, mostly Makushi people, *kanaimĩ* is an assassin. *Kanaimĩ* may have a similar body, but can also change bodies when (s)he feasts on the “spirit” of others (Canherio de Carvalho 2016). Other beings are also potentially dangerous. Their spirit can overpower the human body, killing the person and potentially turning them into a different kind of body. *Belief* casts doubt on the veracity, and thereby the dangers of these interactions, and accusations of communing with or being *kanaimĩ*.

Secondly, *belief* distances people in Surama from the popular—Guyanese, though it is present elsewhere—stereotype of timeless, superstitious, or backwards Indians. People who live on the more urban coast of Guyana—where the capital, Georgetown, is found—consider the interior “hinterland” of Guyana to be a dangerous place characterized by death in the forest. Stereotypes associate Amerindians’ ability to live there with timeless history: their ability to work without tools, and their ability to manipulate *kanaimĩ* (Whitehead 2002). Calling these “*belief*” makes Amerindian bodies seem similar to coastlander bodies, and relativizes their interactions with beings in the forest as the same as coastal religious beliefs.

Finally, *belief* makes it difficult to investigate ways of being social with invisible beings. People in Surama conceive *belief* as part of previous ways of being social. I was told that ancestors, or “long-ago people,” had interactions with dangerous beings in the forest because they *believed*. Similarly, I was told dangers were only present because people *believed* them. This seems to cast off *believers* as merely superstitious, making it difficult to understand these embodied interactions. I suggest this difficulty is not accidental. Daniel often reminded me that his knowing and my “doctor’s” knowledge were not the same thing. He championed his *doings* in the household, farm, and forest; and contrasted it with my ability to write about that doing. I could write about his “*belief*”, but I could

not *believe* by writing. I later learnt that these embodied interactions with the spirits of plants are purposefully kept—through a decision by the Village Council— from visiting researchers. They are considered “Makushi Cultural Property” and are not made available to researchers.

My concluding chapter asserts that this thesis, while focused on concepts like “work”, “tradition”, “culture”, “development” and “*belief*”, is about ways of knowing and conceiving kinship in the world. The concepts above are important for people in Surama because they indicate ways of being social—forming kin. People in Surama extend kinship to all beings. Their community is a community of family-friends, and everyone outside the community, visible or not, is a potential part of that family. History is changing ways of being social to extend to, and incorporate those beings. As a final thought, I reinforce Clastres (1974[1989]) argument that the extension of kinship obviates all forms of outside power, and that in this way of conceiving the world of potential kin, lies humanity’s best hope in a struggle against extractivism, personal property, and the concentrating power of the State.

### ‘People in Surama’

While this thesis is about changing ways of being social—“tradition” to “development”—I do not focus on the way specific practices themselves transform. I do not, for example focus on how the *Parishara*, a “traditional Makushi dance” disappears, and suggest that the contemporary Amerindian Heritage Celebration is a continuation of this way of being social. Instead, I look at the way people in Surama understand these kinds of changes, and how they inform their experience in the world. I look at how people in Surama conceive the world through a specific history of interactions with outsiders—specifically researchers—forming and reforming kinship. I am not therefore interested in a ‘History of the Makushi’, but in how people in Surama, many of them Makushi, form history: Makushi history.

My focus on a community’s, and more specifically, a household’s experience of history is a methodological choice, but one based on my anthropological interest and goals. I do not feel I can take what we know about Makushi People, their culture, traditions, and history, and map them onto people in Surama. This is firstly because, as I suggested above, people are not born Makushi, but become Makushi through the work and sociality of family-friends, particularly elder female family friends. Similarly, a community becomes a community through working together. If I were to write about *The Makushi* I would invariably have to write about Alleluia, Kanaimi, and Curare (poison), all quintessentially Makushi. These things seemed to have little bearing on the daily lives of people with whom I worked. Instead, their experience with researchers today spoke to what they find to be of interest in their own lived experiences.

I agree with Canheiro de Carvalho (2016) that *Makushi* is a continuous becoming. Surama is a fractal example of that becoming. Two “mixed” brothers who married Makushi women, started a community with family friends, and had several children. Their male children largely married Makushi women from Annai, and the females largely married non-Amerindians from around Guyana and the world. Many of these people moved to Surama, and the Makushi women formed Makushi children. But as the thesis suggests, Makushi itself, is constantly changing as people’s ways of being social change. Furthermore, many people in Surama are not Makushi, they are East Indian, Afro-Guyanese, Portuguese, Arawak, Patamona, Wapishana, and other Guyanese Amerindian groups. Their experience, however, contributes to the conception of Surama and of Surama’s place in the world.

This does not mean that my research should not have academic implications. My approach hopes to take seriously the things that people say about “culture”, “tradition”, “development”, and “*belief*” in order to understand how they conceive of a history of experience with us, specifically with researchers. Their understandings of my ways of knowing point to ways of conceiving the world that go far beyond what they consider to be characteristically “*Makushi*.”

As I said above, family-friends consider Surama more of a community of kin than a place or political designation. The community of Surama is on a grassland interspersed with “islands” of trees, and surrounded with forest. From Paulette and Daniel’s house on their side of Surama, you can take the dirt road through Surama to the Village Ecolodge, or away, to Madonna’s house by the junction with the unpaved national highway which cuts through Guyana from the northerly capital of Georgetown (about sixteen hours away by mini-bus or four hours away by propeller plane), to Lethem about 180 km away (three hours when conditions permit). Under the Amerindian Act, Surama is a satellite of Annai Village along with Wowetta, Kwatamang, Rupertee, and Annai Village proper. As a federally recognized Village, Surama has a Village Council, which coordinates with the other Village Councils at the Annai meetings, and with the sixteen North Rupununi Village Councils at the North Rupununi District Development Board meetings.

## Methodology

My focus on a community stems from the anthropological understanding of indigenous political organization in the Guianas. Rivière (1984), Overing (1983-4), and Butt-Colson (1983-4) and Thomas (1982) have argued that there is no form of indigenous pan-settlement political organization in indigenous Guiana. They told us that each community is politically autonomous, formed through the kinship relations of its residents. Settlements were synonymous with family, when family became too large conflicts tended to arise, and households split to form new settlements. Like many

descriptions elsewhere in Amazonia, leadership did not exercise a coercive force over people's decisions. Rather, each person made autonomous decisions to participate with, and form, family.

About five years before these publications, Surama was established as a federally recognized Village, with a democratically elected Village Council to 'Administer a Village' (Amerindian Act 2006). Less than fifteen years after these findings were published, people living in the North Rupununi established the North Rupununi District Development Board (NRDDDB), a pan-Village organization comprising of the senior councillors of each community. These institutions seemed to be living contradictions to anthropological findings of 'Amerindian Sociality.' I was not satisfied, however, with calling these foreign, new, or non-Amerindian political institutions. Amerindians elsewhere in Guyana had been allocated recognized land since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and Amerindians indeed run and administer Village Councils and pan-Village organizations such as the NRDDDB. How could contemporary ethnography reconcile these political institutions with previous anthropological descriptions of politically autonomous kinship settlements?

As anthropologists had tied Amerindian political organization to kinship, my investigation would have to first understand kinship to understand political organization. Drawing from "Becoming a Real Woman: Alterity and the Embodiment of Cashinahua Gendered Identity" (2009), in which McCallum describes her embodied changes and kinship with her Cashinaua hosts; and on Bashkow's (2006) *The Meaning of Whitemen: Race and Modernity in the Orokaiva Cultural World* where he writes about how his hosts conceived of *him* in order to tell *us* about *them*, I set out to understand Amerindian kinship by becoming, to the best of my ability, a family-friend.

I met Auntie Paulette and Uncle Daniel in July of 2009 when I took part in an undergraduate field methodologies course taught by George and Laura Mentore. Though I and my colleagues slept at the Surama Ecologe, I spent much of the four weeks of the course in Paulette and Daniel's kitchen and house-farm, learning cassava work, "gaffing", and trying to understand what it meant to be Makushi. Towards the end of my stay, Laura Mentore asked me if I would return to Surama. George Mentore joked, "are you kidding? Sabba is going to come back to do his PhD here."

In 2011 I stayed with Paulette and Daniel for six weeks. I had been travelling throughout South America and decided to stay with them to experience Surama away from the framework of the course. While I kept a personal journal, I did not write field-notes or conduct a specific investigation during this stay. I wanted to get a feel for what it was like to live with a host-family, and live in Surama. I went to the farm, played football, and went fishing.



In 2013, when I started the PhD, I considered changing field-sites. Though I had expressed to George Mentore the difficulties of turning family-friendships in the world, into academic knowledge—to which he suggested I do fieldwork farther south, and use Surama as a staging area—my supervisor and I decided that my familiarity with Paulette and Daniel was the cornerstone of my understanding of kinship in Surama. After a staying with Paulette and Daniel for four weeks from August to September 2014, they told me I was welcome to stay with them for the remainder of my year of fieldwork, should I desire.

Paulette had vast experience with visiting researchers. She and Daniel had hosted many researchers for anywhere from a couple days to six months. Early in my research I found it difficult to express to her that I was not interested in quintessentially *Makushi* things or practices. She wanted to tell me about “tradition” and “culture”. She told me “long-ago stories”, myths about personified animals that changed bodies, and encouraged me to go to the farm, fishing, and machrumani. She said that if I really wanted to learn about Makushi I should go to somewhere like Crash Water, a Makushi Village where Makushi was spoken more prominently, and where people were “more indigenous”. I told Auntie Paulette that I was interested in daily life, whether it be “development” or “tradition”, *indigenous* or not. I was very interested to know what life in Surama was, if it was not indigenous.

I went to the farm with Uncle Daniel, I went fishing, I went to Village Council meetings and other Village gatherings like Monday community work, I played on the Surama Football Club, and wrote fieldnotes daily on an old Italian type-writer, the sound of which amused my hosts. I asked as few questions as possible, and instead tried to accompany my hosts during their daily activities, and lend a hand where I could. For the first eleven months of fieldwork, I did not conduct interviews as I thought these would associate me more with the category of researcher, a common sight in Surama. I hoped to break from this category of person and cultivate a kinship connection. While Paulette encouraged me to call her “mamai”, for the rest of my host-family, I was a researcher. My apparent lack of interest in *Makushi* was strange to some people in Surama, but I think many people, especially younger people, appreciated it. I was not interested in harvesting their *Makushiness*, but in taking part in their lives.

Auntie Paulette was the fulcrum over which I came to understand much of my research. In the mornings or evenings while she prepared or served her family a large meal, she would ask me about my day. As I told her, she would fill in certain blanks, she told me about the family-friend relation between the people I had visited; she told me old myths relating to interactions I had had; explained the meaning of words I had heard in Makushi; she told me where machrumani were taking place; and encouraged me to work with her family-friends or in community work. Early in my fieldwork, her

reflections about my day pointed to the “traditional” and “cultural” side of life in Surama. Later in fieldwork, it seemed she related stories of my day more closely with her own experiences and her family. These conversations, in which Paulette called upon her history of interactions with researchers, and family-friends, shaped the way I came to understand Surama as a community of family-friends.

Early in 2015 I was asked to help the teachers at Surama Primary School. I taught at the school for two months. This experience marked a change in my category of personhood in Surama. Children in the community started addressing me with the title “sir”, instead of ignoring or shying away from me. Their parents appreciated my volunteering, and I appreciated that they had given me an important role in the community. After my tenure teaching, mamai started calling Uncle Daniel my father, and her sons, my brothers. Frank and Birthlan, too, started referring to me as their “buddy”: brother in North Rupununi. I participated in other work with my host-brothers, and at the Ecolodge. Fieldwork no longer felt awkward—I was contributing to the community—I laughed, worked, ate, and lived alongside my new family-friends.

In my last two-three months of fieldwork I conducted four un-structured interviews. Each had to do with something I had heard the interviewee discuss earlier in the year. I asked Uncle Mike, Daniel’s cousin, and the senior councillor of Surama for most of my stay, about leadership and family; I asked Vitus about what he meant by “civilised” and “modern” Amerindians, and about his job with Conservation International; I asked Kurt about his experience guiding, and working in the carbon monitoring project; and I asked Grandfather Fred about his experience with Iwokrama and with researchers. The interviews were over beers or ‘kari, they were recorded, but they did not tell me much I did not already know after having gaffed with these family-friends over the year. In any case, they served to remind both me and my hosts, that I was still doing a research project.

As fieldwork came to a close, I thought about what Daniel had told me in my first week of fieldwork, and alluded to often, “...you will go and write your book. When you come back you will be a doctor...but I will always be Uncle Dan” (29/08/2014). I thought Daniel’s comment was a statement about the global socio-economic inequalities we faced. My ability to come and go from Guyana, to enrol in a PhD program and potentially become recognized as a doctor; and his lack-there-of. This was undoubtedly part of what Daniel said. What this thesis argues is that he was also saying that his knowing comes from his being kin to many persons in Surama and the surrounding area. He was saying that by my leaving, and writing his knowing, I was necessarily not knowing the way kin know. I aimed to become a doctor, but his knowledge is about being *Uncle Daniel*.

Daniel and Paulette have hosted several researchers over the years, and continue to do so. Their interest is not in the academic products of our investigations, but in our embodied knowing. They take us to the farm, to the forest; they teach us cassava work and to weave hammocks; they teach us Makushi language, to gaff, and to be willing to help family. While we express interest in academic ways of knowing, they teach our bodies to know in the ways that their bodies know. Their interest is turning us into kin.

## Part I

### Chapter One; Household and “This side”

Beginning with a description of daily life in the household, I am tempted to describe a typical day in the field. Finding a 'typical day' however is not possible because people in Surama do not do the same things every day. They decide what to do, taking daily and annual weather patterns and possible employment; the amount of farine in the household; the activities of family and family-friends; Village activities; the availability of game and fish; national development projects, elections, festivities, or visiting-research season; and other personal preference into account.

On February 2nd, 2015 I woke up, and walked to the front of Paulette and Dan's house right when Caroline and Vitus were riding through from the junction on their motorbike. They stopped in front of me, Caroline whispered to Vitus, he nodded, and she said, "Sabba, we want your help with the tractor this morning."

They rode to their house and I walked down behind them. Vitus called his two secondary-school-aged sons to help push-start the tractor. The eldest responded that it was Monday, and didn't want to miss the Village school bus, which left earlier on Mondays.<sup>6</sup>

"It's only 6:56 ya'll still get time," Vitus responded.

We tried to push start the tractor. Vitus sat in the driver seat to pop the clutch into second gear, but the tractor did not start. We tried again with the tractor in reverse, which was usually more successful, but the earth was too damp and did not allow enough traction for the tires to turn the motor to life. After a few minutes, Uncle Dan rode over from his sister's shop with a bottle of parakari (fermented cassava beverage) in his hand.

Caroline suggested we try again with her father's help, but we were again unsuccessful.

We stood around the tractor and Daniel looked towards me and asked, "What you doin' today?"

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<sup>6</sup> Though Vitus' two eldest sons were enrolled in secondary school in Annai, their parents elected for them to continue living at home, and take the daily mini-bus instead of residing at dorms. While the bus is expensive, (about a quarter of Guyana's minimum-wage salary, per student, per month ~30GBP), most parents preferred keeping their children at home and sending them to school daily, which often meant going into debt with the Village bus service, over the free of charge secondary school dorms. Parents said that in dorms, children are bullied, become rude, and pick up bad customs from the older students. Parents sometimes added that they spend the same amount of money replacing stolen uniforms and buying extra food for their children staying in dorms as it would cost to send them on the bus. Many former students (some now parents themselves), have negative memories of staying in dorms, and told me about the times they ran away, sometimes to the farm looking for more familiar food.

"I don't have any plans."

"I want somebody help me fetch *lu*."

"Let's go," I replied.

Though I did not know to what he was referring, and thought he had said he needed help to fetch 'load', I decided to accompany him. Afterwards, when we found the *lu*, I understood it was a palm fruit, similar to açai, that was in season. Daniel had brought the fruit once before, and Auntie Paulette and Victorine pounded and mixed it with sugar to make lu-drink, to which they recommended adding farine for a filling snack. After changing into closed shoes and trousers, I met Uncle Dan in the kitchen. He wore his camouflage trousers tucked into black military-style boots, a camo-jacket with no shirt underneath, and the long knife he had been given by the Bushmasters, an eco-survival-tourism company, partnered with the Surama ecolodge, which hires guides from Surama.

"It have coffee here, Sabba." Daniel said.

I took him up on the offer, pouring myself a mug of parakari from the bottle he had indicated. We moved out of the yard and he went into his house to pick up his shotgun, and recently sharpened cutlass (machete).

Daniel was well known for his fondness for fishing, farming, and being in the forest, and often went out to walk in the forest, doing these things. I accompanied him when I could, and have notes of the *things that happened* during these trips. More difficult to express with words were the long periods of silence we shared, his gestured indications, or barely audible questions and suggestions he would utter to me under his breath.

We walked into the forest and over the creek where Daniel and Paulette's family often set fishing nets during the rainy season. I walked behind Daniel through forest paths, some clearly marked, others hidden by short saplings. Daniel occasionally quickly flicked his wrist in a direction, to the side or above where we were walking, indicating something I was meant to see. I would look and sometimes make an agreeable sound, not always sure—six months into fieldwork—of what he was indicating.

After a couple hours of walking in the forest he stopped by a tree and looked up, "Seeing it?"

"No," I said as I stared through the flowering palm.

We gathered lu from that tree and another nearby, filling a polythene bag. Daniel's dogs had accompanied us and sniffed out two land turtles which we carried with a strap that Daniel had made by stripping the bark of a thin straight tree (Black Mahu).

We continued walking, perhaps another hour, and Uncle Dan continued pointing off the path without breaking stride. We rounded two large trees, more than a meter and a half wide, where Daniel stopped and hacked a piece of bark from one, revealing white pulp underneath.

"This is good Kubucali. All like this here, I should tell Vitus, let he cut tractor-line to carry them."

"'Til here?"

"Yeah!" Daniel said assuredly, "From here is straight out to the savanna," he gestured with both hands back in the general direction we had come indicating the proximity to the savanna, "Right here used to be the old-boy's farm. Glen's too. Cows used to come from 'til by Stella them, around right through to here. Before, 1970s time. Then when they build the new road now, maybe 1991 or '92, daddy move he farm out by the road."

We turned and started walking back in the direction we had come. I hollered a curse at the sharp pain on the back of my neck, and I retreated three or four steps.

"*Marabunta* sting you?"

I got over the initial surprise and realized that that was exactly what had happened. I had heard about the wasp stings before, but did not expect them to hurt as much, or for as long as they did. Daniel turned and continued leading, stopping more often to point different things out to me. He showed me the shrubbing plant from which he cut the centre stalk to use as a mixer for parakari. A shallow pool of water where a tapir had stopped the night before. A row of ants he said they used to use to bite boys behind the knees, elbows and under arm, so the boys wouldn't be lazy. He said they would rub a certain plant on the bites, "*bina*, (charm)", and the boys wouldn't be lazy. He said they could use the same ants to bite a dog's nose, which would cause the dog to sneeze everything out and allow it to smell nearby animals.

As we walked back onto the savanna and up to the house, Paulette called to us from the backdoor of the kitchen.

"You catch turtle?" She said with a smile. "Must check for ticks, Sabba."

She spoke to Daniel in Makushi, telling him there was *kashiri*, and then repeated in English, "Come and take fly, kashiri, Sabs."

While we were gone, Auntie Paulette had cooked enough chou-mein and chicken to nearly fill up one of the forty-litre wash-basins. It was Birthlan's birthday, and after saying a prayer, we toasted with mugs of kashiri (fermented cassava drink). Paulette handed everyone a plate of chou-mein and chicken, and pointed out the farine bucket for us to add however much we should like. Daniel drank the kashiri and returned to butchering one of the turtles. He didn't like chou-mein, and sometimes called it hospital food. After I ate, I watched him and asked if his father had taught him how to clean the turtle.

"No, Malcom them."

Daniel's reference was to Malcom's family, the Rolands, who live on the other side of Surama. They are related to Daniel through his mother's side of the family. Malcom is known for his *piai* (shamanic) abilities, and the reference to his family indicated to me that he learnt to clean turtle from people who were well known for spending time in the forest.

While Daniel butchered the turtle, the rest of the family left the house to tend to various things in the Village centre, and I went to check myself for ticks. After Daniel finished, I sat with him at the kitchen table.

"You see me homemade pressure cooker?"

I looked over at the fireside where Daniel had placed two bricks over the lid of the large pot where the turtle was boiling. I sat with him and he gave me some tips about cooking turtle; not cutting the pieces before boiling it, lest the meat get hard. Then he reflected more broadly on our walk.

"I always bring home something," He nodded and repeated, "I always bring home something. I go to the forest...first of all, to see what is it that is there. You have to know what is there, what is around you. People these days just want education and sit in an office all day. Forget about their tradition, well if that is them, they have that opportunity let them have it.... You like the pressure cooker?"

Later, that evening as we celebrated Birthlan's birthday Daniel said to me that he was supposed to go fishing the next day, but that he wanted to walk in the forest instead.

"You have a lot to learn," he said to me, "I did watching you today, when we walk. All like when that marabunta sting you, you have a lot to learn. Remember, he sting you from the back. So why you go back? If it had more, they would have all sting you. See, I know what is it. You have a lot to learn."

Daniel often brought up his knowledge and ability to be in the forest, especially in conversations about his time with foreigners with whom he often worked as a guide and boat captain. These conversations highlighted his ability to be in the forest as part of, and derived from, what he called

“Amerindian knowledge”, “Makushi knowledge”, or sometimes “tradition”. In one such talk in August of 2009 with Daniel and his long-time family-friend, Lionel James, Lionel said, “In the nineties some people come, come to Surama and get some people with sense. People like Daniel and myself. Carry us into the forest so we can show them our plants. To become doctors of our knowledge.”

Daniel repeated something similar to me during my first week of PhD Fieldwork in 2014. After asking if I had come back to do research to write my book he said, “John come, do his research too. I tell he, ‘when you come back you will be a doctor. Doctor John, but I will still be Uncle Dan.’”

Throughout the year, Daniel suggested this to me in different ways. I initially took the statement to mean that while foreigners visiting for research had the opportunity to leave and return with a PhD, Daniel would not have the opportunity. To add to the imbalance, it was his “Amerindian Knowledge” that allowed us to acquire or become PhDs. While this is undoubtedly the case, Uncle Dan was also telling me something else about “Amerindian Knowledge”. He was telling me that “Amerindian Knowledge” is inextricably tied to his intersubjectivity with family-friends in Surama. Daniel’s statement associates PhD knowledge with writing, but the knowledge he values is in its doing, particularly where that doing contributes to his family. This was mirrored in the way the family spoke about Birthlan’s ‘practical’ knowledge. Meanwhile, Frank’s “theory”—gained from many more years of schooling—was less valued. Though Frank had completed a college degree at the University of Guyana faculty of Agriculture and Forestry and had been employed by non-governmental organisations and national projects, Birthlan could plank boards and work timber in a way that Frank could not. In this light, Daniel’s comment about “wanting education” and sitting in an office all day, is also about enacting ways of knowing in different social environments. While theory-knowing is associated with urban centres, modern technology, and people from outside of Guyana—researchers in particular; practical knowledge is more closely tied with local family and friends. Of course, these different ways of knowing are both a part of sociality in Surama, as is evident in Paulette and Daniel’s descriptions of their sons’ ways of knowing—one practical, the other theoretical. Paulette and Daniel, along with other elders in the community, similarly talk about younger people’s interest in different ways of living, working for money; not farming, sharing food nor doing cassava work. Paulette and Daniel saw that farming, cassava work, and eating brought their family together in ways that office work or working for money, and buying food did not. Their concern with younger people’s differing ways of working, subsisting, and knowing is part of the way that people cultivate different socialities of knowing. These ways of being social are not mutually exclusive, however, nor are they strictly divided on generational lines.



## Generational ways of Knowing

Daniel saw differences between his way of living and that of younger generations, particularly surrounding subsistence decisions, and what he regarded as an overreliance on money amongst younger generations. Often in the same breath as his critique of relying on money, he brought up his ability to “get money” when needed, to support his family. Similarly, while some of his children worked or had worked in office jobs, they came together continuously to farm, do cassava work, and share meals. I thereby understood that both generations cultivated socialites of knowing both around working for money and contributing with family. It seemed to me that Uncle Dan conceived his knowing differently, however, he associated his making money with his ability to walk in the forest. Daniel earned money through his knowing in the forest, guiding and boat-captaining, selling ‘handicrafts’, and tree-spotting for loggers.<sup>7</sup> In this way, Daniel interacts in the monetary economy through walking in the forest, and knowing “what is around [him]”, without having to dedicate his day to working for the acquisition of money, as he would if he ‘worked in an office’. In the same way, from his walks in the forest he contributes to his family, “always bring[ing] something back [to eat]”, and possibly sharing the site for a small-scale logging camp, or materials to make a handicraft or tool for the house or to sell. In this way, Daniel’s conceives his family-sociality and subsistence, his walking in the forest, and his ability to earn money as parts of each other.

Two of Daniel and Paulette’s children had office jobs, and the other two occasionally worked month-long shifts at the lodge.<sup>8</sup> Their grandchildren were all enrolled in primary or secondary school, or had recently graduated. Daniel and Paulette pointed out that these jobs and institutionalized education, limited the amount of time they could dedicate to the kind of sociality that they found to be a priority; namely one revolving around subsistence; the social relations (with family and the environment) surrounding the acquisition and fulfilment of desires of food (Gow 1989). Like others

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<sup>7</sup> Tree spotters could make 5000 GYD (1/6 monthly-minimum-wage; ~20GBP) per tree they ‘spotted’, sharing it with a logger who could then harvest the tree.

<sup>8</sup>Birthlan worked on and off as a mechanic at the lodge, and worked timber, or carpentry, and had worked as a miner. Frank had recently resigned his position with the Guyana Forestry Commission, and with a forestry NGO to pursue logging. His partner, Joy, was a community resource officer (CSO, governmental paid position without a specific job description, to be allocated by the community, this position ceased to exist with the change of government in 2015). Caroline was the Village accountant and a CSO; she sometimes worked for the lodge, especially during the research season. Her partner, Vitus worked as a field agent for Conservation International in several communities in the Region. With the main office in Lethem, Vitus split his time between Surama and office. Victorine worked at the ecolodge office as the accountant. Her husband, Kurt, worked as monitor for the MYC logging camp, making sure that logging complied with local regulations. Paulette herself was the head of the Makushi Research Unit, an unpaid position, but it meant that she was sometimes contracted for translations from English to Makushi, or did outreach in various communities. She also sold cassava bread to the school for the students’ snack. While Paulette and Daniel’s children and their partners shared their farm, Victorine (the eldest sibling) and Kurt had also cut their own “house-farm” nearby.

in their generation, they seemed to argue that monetary work cultivated a different sociality of knowledge, different ways of being social. While my experience in Surama—sixteen months over 6 years—is perhaps too narrow to speak to generational changes in ways of working, I saw Daniel and Paulette’s concern through daily life in their household. Victorine often had to leave her cassava work to go to the office, Kurt often could not help in the farm because of his job monitoring logging, Vitus and Caroline wanted a farm, but Vitus’ job kept him away from Surama, and Caroline did not want to shoulder that much responsibility. Frank and Birthlan often received request orders for wood, for which they spent a few nights at logging camps, and were not around the house. I too was drawn away from this kind of subsistence work when the community asked me to volunteer at the primary school and spent six weeks as a full-time teacher. During this time, I felt I was missing the knowing that Daniel championed. I was not able to accompany him fishing, walking in the forest, or to the farm, all activities he would usually do in the early morning as I prepared to go to the Village centre.

This is not to say that Paulette and Daniel’s children did not farm, fish, hunt or do cassava work, but that their choices to work in the monetary economy limited their interactions in these kinds of subsistence to their parent’s household. Thanks to the mutual support of the family and physical proximity—all of Daniel and Paulette’s children lived within a five-minute walk—the family often came together around these subsistence activities at Paulette and Daniel’s house. For example, animals Frank hunted were cleaned and distributed from his parent’s household; Victorine did cassava work before leaving for work, and took a month off to help in the farm. Furthermore, all of Paulette’s children, particularly her two daughters were a big part of “cassava work”; the harvesting and preparation of bitter cassava [manioc] into food and drink, which my host-family did throughout the year. Chapter One focuses on these interactions in the household to approach ways of knowing and being social in Surama. The chapter’s focus *of* the house shifts to one *from* the house as Part I continues. Organizing the thesis in this way is meant to better describe the way people (in Surama) are an inextricable part of each other, and no interaction is devoid of kinship. These descriptions hinge on local conceptions of *work* and the tensions Paulette and Daniel perceive between their ways of knowing and those of younger generations.

### Cassava Work and the Kitchen

Cassava work is a family affair, and like all work in Surama, it is easier when done in a group of people having a good time. Paulette usually started cassava work before travelling away from Surama or when the household farine was running low. The coarse cassava flour swells up when combined with liquid, and was part of every meal. Even when eating coastal non- “Amerindian”

food, we mixed in farine, which has a subtle sweet taste when prepared well.<sup>9</sup> While it may seem tedious to recount all the steps involved in the three plus day process of cassava work (especially for those familiar with the process), I note some of the steps to highlight the involvement of the whole family in processing cassava, poisonous in its raw form, into edible food.

To start cassava work Paulette would dig about a half polythene bag of cassava, “scrape [peel]” the tubers, and set them to “rotten [ferment]” in water over the course of three days in a basin in the kitchen. Usually she would have the help of one of her daughters or some of her grandchildren to dig and bag the cassava and would ask one of her sons or husband to fetch the bag with a motorbike or bicycle, or wheelbarrow if it was from the house-farm nearby. On the second day of fermentation Paulette and her daughters would dig three or more bags of cassava, and the boys would bring them from the farm. We emptied the bags on the kitchen floor and anyone who was around that day participated in scraping the tubers. The scraped cassava was washed, usually by one or more of Paulette’s grandchildren after they arrived home from school, combined with the rotten/fermenting cassava, and grated via motor-grater by either Paulette or one of her daughters or daughter-in-law. The grated cassava was left in a wooden box overnight, and in the morning Paulette, Victorine and Caroline, sometimes with the help of one of their children, drained and sifted the cassava mass using a *matapi* and sifters made by uncle Dan from local plants. After it was sifted, Caroline would usually start the parching while some of the boys brought firewood or fallen palm leaves from around the yard. Cassava parching can take over three hours of constant stirring to avoid burning so anyone strong enough can help or take a turn stirring. Meanwhile, Paulette or another female family member would use the fireside to bake the cassava bread, which one of Paulette’s grandchildren would take out to set on the zinc roof to dry. Victorine made very delicious parakari, and would usually be the one to set the cassava mass for some further couple days of fermentation before it was ready to be mixed with water to be consumed. While some members of the family parched or made cassava bread, another family member prepared lunch for the family.

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<sup>9</sup> Mentore (2007) describes the conception, popular in Guyana, that only Amerindians eat cassava products. He further suggests that Amerindian cultivation of this staple gives credence to the idea amongst Amerindians and non-Amerindian Guyanese alike, that Amerindians are poor. He points out the Amerindian perspective that “being wealthy did not include successful subsistence farming; indeed, to be known to work with one’s hands to produce one’s food – rather than having to buy it – was considered an irreducible aspect of one’s poverty and social identity,” (2007: 65). Taking this into account alongside Uncle Daniel’s conceptions of the socialites of knowing, putting farine on store-bought food can be taken as a further evidence of cultivating economic and family ways of knowing in each other.

Besides farine, two kinds of cassava bread, parakari, and cassareep are all products of cassava work. I highlight farine because it was the ‘go-to’ for most of the family, it kept the longest, and was usually the last to run out before the next round of cassava work.

While the name implies a physical intensity, “cassava-work” is also an opportunity for the family to be together, share stories and news, and catch up on things going on in the community. Like other kinds of ‘work’ in Surama, cassava-work is not so much about finishing the job quickly, but about enjoying each other’s company while the work is being done. Caroline told me that when there was cassava work, everyone would come together to do it; sometimes more distant family members would also come and lend a hand to enjoy the *gaff* (jokes or gossip). She distinctly remembered one occasion, however, in which cassava-work was particularly “hard.” Victorine was working at the lodge and Paulette was outside of the community, leaving Caroline to *matapi*, sift, and parch by herself. She remembered it as particularly difficult, especially as her eldest son had just been born and was crying from the smoke from the fireside.

I suggest this work was particularly hard because Caroline was alone. Caroline has parched entire sets of farine on her own, but always with her mom or sisters present doing other work, keeping her company. For this reason, Caroline’s comment about this work being particularly difficult highlights the idea that work done alone is more difficult, not mainly because the physical stress is spread across less people (though this of course is a factor), but because there is no one with whom to gaff, no one to keep you company to help the work go by.

Though Amazonianists and others who have participated in staple food production may find it tedious or redundant, I cannot overstate the importance of cassava work to family life. This is the case not only during cassava-work but in eating cassava products. Not all farine is the same, and people prefer farine made in their household. If Paulette is particularly busy and cannot do cassava work before the farine runs out, she will sometimes buy farine from the shop, usually made by another woman in Surama. Paulette’s children instantly know the difference between their mother’s/sister’s/wife’s farine and that of another lady in the community. This extra-household farine will often draw comments, either being too hard, sour, or having a strange colour. Paulette and her daughters can estimate the household in which the farine was produced based on the colour and taste, (which indicates how long it fermented, and which strains of cassava were used). I have heard Paulette insist to Birthlan that the farine she had purchased from the shop was “very delicious,” and that the person that made it was known for making good farine, but Birthlan insisted that it was not sweet (like his mother’s).

Paulette knows that her family likes her cassava bread and farine and any time she was leaving the community she would do cassava work. Once in June as she was preparing to go to Annai for translation work she told me she would do cassava work and leave Daniel a set and another set for Birthlan and myself, and when we all finished our set it was “blows.” I found her punchline more

than appropriate. While “blows” can reference any hard time, it is also the term used to talk about infidelity in a marriage or partnership. Someone “takes blows” when their spouse commits an infidelity. Paulette’s joke was that instead of eating our family’s farine, we would have to get our farine from another lady.

Eating farine with every meal, especially that made by a close family member, is also part of the sociality of household cassava processing. Satisfying family members’ hunger is important to Paulette’s idea of proper sociality in the household and Surama more widely.<sup>10</sup> What Paulette considers important about this sociality is not only the satiation of hunger, but the coming together around cassava-work. In this way, following ethnographic passage which describes cassava work among Caroline, her niece, sister-in-law, and cousins while her mother was away for the day, points to the ways that cassava-work creates not only food, but recreates relations which constituted the work.

*Gaffing and cassava-work*

“If you know your father like a certain food, you must cook that food,” Devon said in a half-joking tone to everybody and nobody in particular (18/06/2015). It was not a command, nor a judgement and seemed to be something he had just concluded and said aloud. His cousin, Caroline, had just offered me some tomatoes that she had left on the kitchen table, saying that the children did not like tomato, so she could not cook them.



Figure 2: Some of the family at Paulette’s kitchen table at breakfast

<sup>10</sup> Gow (1989) points out that in Amazonian societies eating the products of each other’s work does not operate around proprietorship of abilities or objects or products, and their exchange, but through relations between people and their embodied desires. This was closely associated with desires for sex and for the product of cassava-work (a part of embodied womanhood), and meat (embodied manhood). Looking at the “production” of farine (i.e. cassava-work), we further see how relations between people’s bodies and food constitute each other.

We were in Auntie Paulette's kitchen. Evanie and Joy were sifting cassava into one of the large plastic tubs like those we used to wash clothes. They picked up the pieces of dried cakes that had been *matapi'd* (drained of liquid) earlier that morning, breaking up the pieces before rubbing them through the holes with the palms of their hands. Caroline was parching at the large farine pan. The wooden oar-like stirrer continuously working the cassava meal to keep it from burning. Inez was at the other side of the table preparing lunch. From time to time Caroline would hand the stirrer to Joy to take a break. Both doors to the kitchen were open, providing a cross-breeze, but the smoke from the burning not-quite-dry palm leaves made parching even more demanding. When Joy handed Evanie, Paulette's granddaughter, the stirrer Evanie chuckled with feigned embarrassment, "Ya'll want eat burnt farine?" she asked jokingly as she took the stirrer.

Auntie Paulette had left that morning before dawn on the Ecolodge's Bedford truck with the shipment of planked wood to Lethem. Her sons had been working the timber request-order along with Devon and Orwill for about a week, and Paulette went along to see that the money for the wood was all accounted for.

"Mommy gone, right Sabba, so them don't drink all them beers on the truck coming back," Caroline said.

"Who them?"

"Frank them na?"

Seeing everyone congregated in the kitchen, the ladies parching the farine we would eat over the next few weeks I wanted to contribute something to the work environment, so I went to Auntie Viola's shop and came back with a slightly frozen chicken and two quarter bottles of rum.

"Next time Auntie Paulette goh have to *carry all of we* on the truck," Devon said laughing from where he was seated. My two bottles of rum next to his on the table in front of him.

Inez cut garlic and onion while the chicken thawed on the zinc platform outside that Paulette used to dry cassava bread. We moved some fire over from below the parching pan to the fireside and the smell of roasting garlic and onions mixed with the smoky smell of the burning leaves. Devon brought more dead palm leaves to add to the fire below the parching pan, and sat across from me at the table again.

"So, what the *ites*, Sabba?"

"I just there here," I said, while thinking of how to reply to Devon's invitation to start a conversation, "I gone down by Baptist for an interview, but he not there about."

“Why you want to interview he?”

“Surama history. How Uncle Glen said no man born in Surama before forty years ago, but [Baptist] born right there by he farm.”

“Oh yeah, them man did come here for work and thing. Back then people did really work. Like before, right Sabba, I did work on the pontoon...boy that is work, four in the morning to ten at night. Sometimes we work right through the night.”

“Yeah?”

“Serious! All like Christmas and new year times, high season, we did work right through. It did always have people [from Surama] working there. Frank. Frank did work there, na Jacks?”

Caroline looked up from the parching, wiped some sweat away with her shirt and nodded.

“Frank Rensford, Bertrand, Orwill,” Devon resumed.

“When you worked there?”

“I start 2001 and go to 2008 or 2009. But them other man nah work there all the time, just a couple years. I had to stop. It did start to have bandits come...I say, ‘nah man, I don’t want to dead for this man.’ But I gone good though, I write the letter and thing, tell him I have to go...I don’t think it have no one [from Surama] working there now.”

“You work all night like how Kurt and Dudes work all night?” Caroline said jokingly changing the subject to the party that had taken place in Surama about two weeks prior.

“Haha, boy I see that man, I say, nah man...” Devon continued the gaff.

The ladies continued parching as we all gaffed. Each person offered their version of the party, which was met with laughs from everyone else. Joy took four or five bowls-full of the sifted cassava and spread it on the parching pan while Caroline stirred and broke some clumps by hand. Caroline and Devon told jokes about who they had seen dancing with whom, who had snuck off with whom, and who had had too much to drink. Jolyn, Inez, and Evanie would add a comment here, a punchline there, and egged them on. We continued gaffing, taking the occasional shot of rum mixed with coconut water from the trees outside. As the cassava meal roasted to farine, turning from whitish to very yellow, Joy and Evanie picked it up in bowlfuls and filled a ten-gallon plastic basin and another five-gallon pickle bucket, covering them both with a cloth.

“I don’t want to serve out the food, Caroline, you serve it out,” Inez said as she stepped away from the stove.

“Jolyn, serve it out na? or we could all serve ourselves?” Caroline asked.

“Boy when you work, best you get the food first because if you come last it’s sheer bone you goh eat, farine and gravy.” Devon said.

There was hesitation as nobody moved to serve themselves until Devon picked up his plate, “Eat, Sabba, before food done!”

We took a spoon and bowl each and served ourselves rice from the big metal strainer in the wash basin. The large plastic container where Paulette stored the farine was nearly empty, and as Devon served himself the last crumbs he repeated everybody’s favourite cassava-work-day joke, “Farine done, Sabba!”

“Here is where I come to parch farine you know?” Inez said, “Here is the only family I ever know. Before, I did not know how to make farine.”

I wasn’t sure if she was referring to Surama, or Auntie Paulette’s kitchen more specifically. Devon, her partner, had grown up with Caroline and her brothers and sisters. He had gone to work on the pontoon when he was around sixteen and returned to live at Surama junction with his mother (where Surama road meets the main highway that connects Lethem and Georgetown) eight years prior. I figured he must have met Inez while he worked on the pontoon as she was from Fairview, close to the river crossing. Their son was in second or third grade in school.

I thought of how Paulette had also told me that she did not know how to do cassava work until coming to live in Surama. Though she had been brought up in Annai, she went to the coast for secondary school where she boarded with a coastlander while enrolled in secondary school. She came back when she was around fifteen, and moved to Surama with Daniel soon after. She said she learned to do cassava work with Daniel’s mother, with whom she also relearnt Makushi, remembering it from her years as a little girl. This supports the general argument of Part I of the thesis, that “work” is a way of being social with each other and forming family. In this context, cassava-work is a constant (re)making of family sociality.

Though Paulette was not home for the day to matapi and parch, she had prepared all the grated cassava, and asked her daughters to finish the cassava work while she was away. Though her absence made it a kind of atypical cassava-work, I chose to include the passage to show the way that cassava work draws people into the kitchen. It is not only about work, but about joking, telling stories, and sharing time and food together. As Caroline said to me on another occasion, “When mommy home, you would always find me coming here. Make food here by the fireside, and be here. But if she not here, I would stay down by me. All like Birthlan and daddy them would come down by



me looking for food, hahaha,” (22/08/2015). This statement suggests that Caroline’s attraction to the kitchen is being with her mother (often making food for the family). In my undergraduate thesis, I noted that households with two generations of mothers present were more likely to form grandchildren that spoke Makushi because the older women would initiate conversation in Makushi with the younger woman, which the children would hear and incorporate. This does not have to be limited to language, of course children pick up and influence all aspects of sociality amongst adults present. While Paulette left her household at a relatively young age and moved to Surama with Daniel soon after returning from the coast, meaning she couldn’t learn cassava work at home, she learnt with her mother-in-law while her youngest daughters were toddlers. Similarly, Inez learnt cassava work from her mother-in-law, Madonna (Daniel’s sister), and from Paulette and the ladies in her household. Along with *doing* cassava-work, they also contributed to one another through the constant sharing that takes place during that cassava-work.

Like other cassava-works, Victorine had helped matapi before going to work, and a large meal was cooked which was shared so that Joy, Caroline, and Devon and Inez’s children could eat when they arrived home from school. As most of Paulette’s children help her during cassava-work, the grandchildren come over and stay around the house during cassava work as well. This gives Paulette a chance to speak with them with their parents around, where any praise or criticism to the grandchild is picked up by the parents. She particularly likes speaking to her grandchildren in Makushi, and dotes on them when they understand her. The children themselves enjoy these days as they spend the day playing with their cousins, and eating delicious food.<sup>11</sup>

Like Devon’s comment at the beginning of the passage that part of being in a family is about cooking food for each other, cassava work is the preparation of food that Paulette’s family enjoys. For Paulette, however, her cassava work and its ability to satisfy her family’s hunger is not only central to her personhood as a mother, but also a part of what she takes to be part of her inclusion in a wider social network that makes her a *Makushi* person. Early in my fieldwork I was scraping cassava with Paulette, Evanie, and Victorine while Paulette told us about her work doing outreach in other communities in the region.

“In Katoka they said, ‘Paulette, we selling farine, 14,000GYD a bag [~55GBP for about 100lbs],’ but I tell them, ‘no, I do my own cassava work.’ They could not believe I do my own cassava work, maybe because of my clothes, I don’t know. They asked me ‘Paulette, I didn’t know you did your own cassava work!?’ I said, ‘Yes, what you think I am? I am Makushi woman,’” (5/09/2014).

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<sup>11</sup> As exclaimed by Victorine’s son, “I want to marry a girl that can make pepper-pot just like granny own,” (27/11/2014).

The centrality of cassava-work to Paulette's feeling of Makushi personhood is something she brought up often. Since my first time doing cassava work with her family in 2009 she has mentioned her concern that young people in Surama do not want to have fire-sides and farms anymore (necessary for cassava work and smoking game and fish), they prefer store-bought food and gas-ranges. During the first week of PhD fieldwork Paulette repeated something she had told me in 2009, "I think that soon, Surama people won't have farms, only Annai people. My children don't have farms, Frank don't have, Caroline don't have, only Victorine. Frank has a piece cut from our farm. Before, my mother-in-law used to come on donkey from 'til in Annai to cut cassava in our farm. Every other week. She had a farm here. People don't want to have farm," (7/09/2014).

#### Farm and Personhood

The farm is central to Daniel and Paulette's ideas of personhood. The importance of the farm, and cassava as an intersubjective person in the family has been elaborated upon by Laura Mentore (2013) in her discussion of cassava-mothers in Waiwai communities. Mentore describes not only how cassava sits in a social relation with the Waiwai people it feeds, thereby contributing to Waiwai personhood, but also the way Waiwai womanhood and the cassava (mother) are embodied intersubjective fractals of each other. While I did not hear about cassava-mothers amongst Makushi people, people in Surama do stress the way interactions with certain plants and animals contributes to "Makushi" personhood. In the following passage, Daniel expands on this idea as he urges his children to plant farms and grow fruit trees, through which he draws a connection between Makushi people who inhabited the area in the past and his and his children's lives in Surama today. This idea of 'Makushi' personhood anchored in previous ways of being social is put forward by both Paulette and Daniel.

I woke up Saturday morning and walked towards the kitchen. Uncle Dan was standing by the cassava bread platform stabilizing his bicycle to tie a set of cassava sticks to the carrier.

"Morning."

"Morning."

"Goin' to the mountain-foot-farm, Uncle Dan?"

"Yeah," he paused and looked at me, "Old time people say you have to plant cassava the day after you burn your farm. If you don't plant cassava the day after, then armadillo will come and dig all under it so that when you plant cassava it wouldn't bear, he already dig it all out. He dig it all out!" He repeated the punch-line with a chuckle, "That is what they say. They get their ways to get you to work, to get you to plant cassava right after burning."

He looked me in the eye and grinned, “It’s *belief*, like a trick they get to get people to work more. They want you to work, but they right. Next thing you might want a girl and you uncle ask if you got any food and you don’t get. So, you have to at least plant you little cassava to get, right after burning” (2/05/2015).

“You get bread here, Sabba, and it get nut-butter,” Auntie Paulette said handing me a bun as I stepped into the kitchen, “You have plans for today?”

“No, not yet.”

“Uncle Dan wants help in the farm, and he want to clean out the well.”

“I will go and help.”

After breakfast Paulette asked me to go buy rice and when I returned she asked if Trevor’s shop had beef, “I tired eating chicken,” she added.

“Lodge get mutton.”

“Oh, go long on the motor-bike and bring for mamai. I want to make a little cook-up in the farm.”

The motorcycle wouldn’t start, so I went on my bicycle.

The last time I had been in the farm we were cutting some smaller trees on one side of the clearing and expanding the path so that the tractor could get through to where Uncle Dan and his sons had cut a bullet-wood tree to 10’x5”x5” lengths that would be the posts for Birthlan’s house. Uncle Dan had done a lot of work on the farm since then, all the trees had been felled and I watched him to see what I should be doing.

The farm was a little smaller than a football pitch, and Daniel was at the opposite end from me, at the base of the mountain cutting the felled tree-trunks to shorter lengths with a chainsaw. Victorine and her eldest son were stacking logs and sticks parallel in a pile. She cut the roots of weed-stumps protruding from the earth with a cutlass, pulled them out and piled them onto the heaps of logs.

“Look, Sabba, Snake!” Troy said to me pointing to the top of a heap where a labaria lay burning.

His enthusiasm was surpassed by his little brother, Tai-chi, who ran around on the earth despite his mother’s plea for him to stay by the camp as he didn’t have footwear.

“I junkin’ up,” Uncle Dan said from beside me, “bring out the air so it burn more easy. Find a raw piece of earth and pack up the heap there,” his hands moved together packing the invisible heap, “Must pack straight and neat or it wouldn’t burn. See how Victorine pack she own?...Pack all the

logs and thing straight so it would burn easy. If you pack the other way, all about, it wouldn't burn. We does say it's like bird nest. Where we burn now, the heap, that is where we put banana to grow. Remember that part does get plenty potassium and that is what banana does need to grow."

I nodded in agreement and he told me he had burnt the farm starting from one side, but at one point the winds changed and burnt most of the rest. He said there was a Silverballi tree that he had felled not so long ago, and that if he waited six weeks it would have burnt.

"We does usually wait six weeks to burn farm after cutting, or at least a month. But here on the mountain foot it always have moisture coming off so we wait six weeks." He paused and looked towards the unburnt portion, closer to the high forest, "I would probable leave that part and burn in August. We does really burn farm in August, you know? Them old people come and clear farm, we could leave for them."

Dan read my lost expression, "Earth Wilderness people."<sup>12</sup>

Daniel warned me to watch for ants and pointed to the ground, chainsaw in the other hand, as he walked back towards the mountain-side of the farm.

I spotted the inch-long ant walking across the ashy earth, "Bullet ants them?"

"Yeah,"

"See Tai-chi, that is why I don't want you walking there!" Victorine said.

"That is why I tuck my trousers into my boots."

"That ant would bite right through them cloth," Dan said turning back with a grin.

I gathered the half-burnt logs and stacked them where Uncle Dan had indicated. The web of lianas was rubbery and extended for meters just below the earth's surface coming together in notches with deep roots. My cutlass did not cut through them and I could tell it was becoming duller each time I slashed at the root, hitting mostly sandy earth.

I was just about done with my third heap when the sun popped out from behind a cloud. I had been in the farm about an hour, but with the temperature picking up, it felt like much longer. Uncle Dan was taking a break under the tarp he had set up by the path back to the farm-camp and I went over to join him.

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<sup>12</sup> Daniel was talking about the Wilderness Explorer tourism company that leads tour-groups to Surama during July and August, what I call 'research season'.

“You learning something, Sabba?”

I could not possibly explain how much I was learning, but looking back, I think he understood better than I. In any case, I could only nod.

Dan turned the bottle in his hand towards me.

“Snacks?” I asked

“Snacks.”

I reached for the quarter bottle of high-wine (over-proof rum) he had offered. It had just been mixed with water and was still warm.

We heard Kurt’s motorbike before he arrived wearing an orange reflective vest, which he used when he went to monitor the logging at the “MYC” (Makushi Yemekun Cooperative) concession. He had been hired to check that all the cut stumps had tags and that the area was not being over-logged. He had shown me the GPS he was given as part of the job, but he was not happy with it himself. The trees were supposed to be cut ten meters apart, he told me, but the GPS had an accuracy of +-3 meters, so it would sometimes appear as though one tree was right on-top of another. He said his phone GPS, which was given to him as part of the Low Carbon Development Scheme carbon measurement training was more accurate. Kurt went up to the heap closest to the tarpaulin.

“Get labaria here boy, how he burn up so?”

Uncle Dan walked up towards him, “I want to plant corn right through.” His hands marked the parallel lines straight back to the high forest, “Then banana by the heaps. Then after the corn, once banana get big I could plant cassava. If you grow cassava when banana still small it wouldn’t grow,” He looked towards me as he repeated, “You plant corn first, give banana time to grow, then plant cassava so the banana don’t punish.”

We went back to the heaps until Auntie Paulette called to us.

“It get swank here! Lemonade, Sabba.”

I finished the heap I was working on and went over to sit down, as did Uncle Dan and Victorine. Uncle went for his bottle of high-wine and I looked away trying to avoid him offering me any. It didn’t work and I accepted the drink remembering an interaction we had had years earlier.

“You want a cigarette?” (16/07/2009).

“Not now, thanks.”

“Let me tell you something,” He had said, ‘Amerindian man does offer you once, if you say no, it means you don’t want, and he wouldn’t offer again.’

I had accepted the cigarette, and tried to remember to suspend my Latin-American courtesies, which required me to politely decline any food offered at least twice before the host insisted. I chased the high-wine mix with swank. The copious sugar seemed to return some energy.

“You see that part there different, Sabba?” Victorine motioned with her index to the shorter section Uncle Dan and I had been cutting about a month before.

“It more short?”

“That is eleven-year growth. This here on this side is high forest, but that side we did cut with Adelita, eleven years, when Scotty boy did just born. Now we cutting again.”

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“You want to make like your hands hard, but you could only use them to go and chase around girls, like you can’t work?” Daniel said jokingly to Troy from the top of the well, “You don’t know that when you steal a girl it’s right here you coming? You believe you living somewhere else?”

We had finished with the heaps, and the cook-up Paulette had prepared for lunch. After a break, we started bailing the well. Daniel had been giving indications to Troy about how to dig the well. Troy was at the bottom, about four or five meters down, knee deep in the slushy mud that had accumulated with the dry season, trying to dig out the well as per his grandfather’s indications. Daniel himself had become more visibly displeased that his sons had not come to help in the farm. He said that before Kurt’s medical complications he would come and help cut the forest. He said that if they had all come to work we would have been able to burn the whole farm.

Birthlan had dropped off his mother on the motorbike in the morning, but had returned home to rest. We had all been at the weekly volleyball match the night before at Lola and Kamash’s shop close to the Village centre. The boys from Rupertee had come to play, and after the volleyball, the party continued to Uncle Glen’s benab (circular thatch-roof building or house) where he was celebrating his daughter’s birthday, purportedly with eight buckets of parakari. Having skipped the party, I was sober enough to make it to the farm in the morning.

“People want to work for money. How much a chicken cost? Must be 1600, you need two to eat in a day, that is at least 3000. Eat for a week how much is that?”

“About 20,000.”

“Pay check gone right there, so what you working for really? Just to survive?”

I remembered what Victorine had told me a few weeks earlier, “Daddy say, so long as you have farm and so long as you have hunting dogs, you could never be hungry. But even if you have a job that is making you millions of dollars you wouldn’t be able to use that every time, and sometimes it might run out before you even get to buy food,” (18/02/2015).

Uncle Dan handed me the rope and I took over pulling out the bucket while he went to cut a stick. Victorine looked on into the well, keeping her eye on Troy. I pulled the bucket out and handed it to her, she dumped the slush, handed it back, and I lowered it to Troy.

“Gold!” Tai-chi exclaimed, as he saw the shiny dirt come out of the well. He was noticeably less energetic than he was when I arrived a few hours earlier.

“If you find gold in truth you don’t have to worry about bailing well,” Dan said with a grin, a rolled cigarette of dark tobacco perched on the side of his lip, “Excavator come right up here and dig it out. You believe them man would allow Amerindians to have gold to he-self?”

“You know last time we dig this well was since before you were born, Scotty?” Victorine said.

Scott’s eyebrows raised in contemplation of what she said while he responded, “Tsssh.”

After we finished with the well Paulette said I could go home. I didn’t want to deny her invitation to leave, but Daniel was walking back towards the clearing and I was curious to see if he would be going back to work. He was fifty-eight years old, and never seemed to tire. I went after him and found him sitting under the tarpaulin, looking at the smouldering heaps, the fires of which had been half outed by the midday rain. I took a seat on a log next to where he sat on a makeshift bench of a board between two stumps, and pretended to gather my things.

“You goin’ home?” I asked.

“I want to junk up some more,” He paused, “You think you would do anything like this?”

It was the second time he asked me something similar. I wondered if he was thinking about my project. Looking back, I believe Daniel was interested in the distinction between what I would write for my thesis, and what I would do. For him, *farming* was the only way to *know* farming. Earlier he had asked me if I was learning, now he wanted to know if I would *do* anything like what we were doing. He wanted to know if I was learning these things for my thesis, to be written, or if they would be lived. I did not realize this at the time, and said, “I just think, my friends could not do something like this, my friends in Paraguay. They could not work as much as me, just like how I can’t work so much as you. I don’t know how you don’t stop working.”

“Sabba, let me tell you something,” He nodded and pointed to the clearing with his forearm, his elbow resting on his knee, “I work, right? When I tell myself I am going to do something, I set it like a mission, and I do it. Some other people don’t do like that. You know how far we could have come if more people come and work like Victor[ine]? I tell them to plant fruit trees, but they don’t want to listen. I tell them to plant farm, but they don’t want to listen. When my grandchildren coming to me saying they want food. When I put myself a mission I do it. If it’s work, then it is work. I don’t mind what my wife tells me because I have to do it...”

At the beginning of the passage Uncle Dan told me about what “old time people” said about planting cassava. He said this for my benefit, so that I would have something to write in my notes. This is not to say that he has not told his children or grandchildren a similar story, but I, being new, had never heard about armadillos eating out the cassava if the farm wasn’t tended to punctually. Had his sons been there, he might have made it into a joke, pushing us to get to the farm before the armadillo beat us there.<sup>13</sup> Daniel was interested in sharing the things he heard growing up. He knew I would be interested in the story because of my stated interest in histories, and because researchers tend to be interested in things that “old-time people” said. More than this, he found the story amusing, and thinks about these kinds of stories. He calls it “*belief*”—which I will discuss further in Chapter Five—and a trick. The trick is meant to get young people to work. He adds, however, that it wasn’t just a trick because to marry a woman, a man must be able to provide food for her, which Daniel finds to still be the case today. In this way, Daniel makes old time people’s knowledge part of planting a farm today. The fact that old time people are still ‘right’ today means that this social practice is not to remain in the past, but is important for healthy social relations today. As Daniel’s story points out, people still want to get married and still need to demonstrate to their prospective father-in-law that they can feed their future family.<sup>14</sup>

The phrase “old time people” becomes part of the speaker’s point of view. In the introduction chapter, I quoted Daniel’s grandson using the phrase to refer to Daniel, and here Daniel uses it to

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<sup>13</sup> When someone told a joke in Surama the people listening almost always repeated the punchline. If they did not, then the teller would retell the punchline until somebody repeated it. Repeating the punchline was a way of showing that you understood the joke, such that when I merely laughed at jokes people would ask me if I understood the joke. In this way, the punchline gets told and retold as though it were the whole joke. In 2009 Kurt told a joke whose punchline was “I man is a me!” For the rest of fieldwork in 2009 he repeated the punchline. He repeated the punchline to me when I visited in 2011, and in 2014 he repeated it again. We always laughed at the punchline, until one day he asked me what the joke had been. I told him I didn’t remember it well, he said he didn’t remember it either.

<sup>14</sup> Like the stories Daniel tells of hunters asked to bring back game to a woman’s father before they were married. The inverse is also true, Daniel and I once had a lot of laughs as he told me about the hoops he made his daughters’ suitors jump through, challenging them to parakari drinking, or fishing competitions.



talk about the people who told him stories growing up (his mother's mother). Similarly, people in my generation refer to grandfather Fred, Daniel's father, as part of 'old time people'. There are differences in the way different generations talk about this time. Daniel speaks about it as something that endures and still has validity to this day. His grandson, however, talks about hunting as something that is no longer done, but restricted to 'old time people.' In Chapter Three I explore the way my generation 'remembers' their grandfather's day as a kind of golden age of knowledge.

Daniel goes through a lot of effort to explain to me the intricacies of farming. Besides his willingness to help in my project, he is aware of my desire to start my own farm, and like Birthlan calling on me to help work on his house after I expressed my interest in house-building, Daniel's interest in my 'learning' went beyond his perception of my academic interest. When he asked me if I would ever do anything like that. I didn't know how to respond. I could not pretend to provide food for a whole family—Daniel had decades of experience, which I felt I would be downplaying by suggesting I would do something like that. By not farming, however, I could never learn about it, or know about the way Daniel does. I suggested, however, that as he taught me, my ability to do the work was increasing, which I hoped would be enough for him to keep me as his pupil. Daniel said he did not mind the work because he knows he has to do it. He cites his grandchildren asking him for food; by continuing to farm he can feed his family. In this way, he directly relates his work to his family's desires. After this conversation, Daniel told me about his Uncle, Fred's brother, Theo, who took care of his children and grandchildren until he felt he was of no importance to them. Daniel said Theo's children didn't listen to him, at which point he died. Daniel feels that his work directly feeds his family, which makes it worth doing, and what makes him a father/uncle/grandfather. At one point on that day I asked him how much a chainsaw cost; he told me he had been given the chainsaw by a friend of Paulette's on the coast with the condition that he did not cut too big a farm, to which he said to me, "How I wouldn't cut a big farm, you know how many grandchildren I have to feed?"

Towards the end of the day, the work and high-wine had loosened Daniel's tongue. As I stated before, in Surama all work goes more smoothly and is more enjoyable with a little bit of alcohol. Usually this would be parakari (cassava beer) or kashiri (potato and cassava wine), or another locally made fruit-wine. In their stead, the cheapest option is high-wine, a clear over-proof cane rum.<sup>15</sup> Consuming these "local" drinks that family-friends had made was constructive of sociality, and was

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<sup>15</sup> It was further suggested that high-wine, by being purer in alcohol content, did not produce the sugar spikes like dark rum or vodka. What I found to also be interesting about high-wine was the way we always drank it mixed, unlike vodka or dark rum which we would drink with a shot and chaser. The mixing with water, and consumption during work made it like the way we drank parakari. These were the only similarities, however, as parakari, and other local wines were made by family or family-friends in the community, namely female family-friends.

not seen negatively as the case of foreign alcohol. In any case, Daniel was feeling more comfortable, and voiced his frustration about not receiving more help in the farm that day. Daniel's sons often helped him in the farm, but because of the party the night before, they happened to be hungover and couldn't make it to help, (they helped the next day and later in the week). Besides pointing out the lack of sociability in not responding to their father's call for help, accompanying him to the farm, two things are interesting here. First, Daniel mentioned that they usually wait six weeks after cutting the farm before burning, but on this occasion, had only waited a month to burn. From conversations I had with Birthlan and Vitus that morning, they did not seem aware of Daniel's plans to work in the farm that day. It is possible Daniel wanted to teach his children a lesson, being at the shop partying and playing volleyball kept them from being in the farm. He decided to burn the farm early, both to teach them this lesson, and because he himself felt pressured by the things he had to do before going back to work as a boat captain during research season.

Secondly, the comments that Daniel made point to his ideas of personhood based in sociality around the farm. He again brought up the point that money is not enough to maintain a family. Fruit trees and a farm provide food and thus help in creating a certain kind of sociality in which one works with, cares for and feeds the people around them. In this way, Daniel's criticism of 'money' is based on the idea that even if someone in Surama were to accumulate vast monetary wealth, complications in importing food, due to poor road conditions, would prevent that person from being able to feed the people around him, (along with this is the idea I explore in Chapter Three that food bought with money is not shared the same way as grown or caught food). Of course, the farm too is susceptible to climate related problems. These problems, however, are answered by further contributions from family members sharing in that sociality. Family would not allow other family members to be hungry.

Once, in the house-farm, pulling cassava with her grandchildren, Paulette told me about a time when all the cassava in the region was dying out due to flooding. She said, "Guyana ask Brazil, Lula, and he give us this stick" (17/02/2015). citing the Amazon Stick she was cutting to replant. The strain of cassava is resistant to weather extremes including flooding. This is similar to the way Mentore talks about her friend acquiring new strains of cassava from new places in which, "These new varieties would mark an expansion of her subjective experience of the world," (2013: 153), and contribute to cassava foods and drinks in her community. The way Paulette phrased it made it sound like Lula's gift was like that of a family-friend giving cassava to hungry family members, and an expansion of Guyana's family to include Brazil.

Daniel and Paulette tie this idea of personhood to the past. Fruit trees are a marker for places that are or have previously been inhabited by Amerindians. One afternoon Daniel took a distant relative

with interest investing in Surama to Turtle Savanna, an open area just over some hills from Surama. Paulette asked Daniel what they thought, and he said that people had lived there, he had seen fruit trees in some of the “islands” in the savanna.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, on trips downriver my hosts shared the names of the various camps we passed, Dutchman Camp, Labaria Camp and others. I could not tell how these camps were distinguished from the rest of the forest that abounded on the sides of the river. When I asked why they were called camps I was told that in the times when Amerindians moved a lot, they moved between the camps. I asked about how they identified those camps from the rest of the forest, and was told it was because of the fruit trees that grew on those spots by the side of the river. In this way, fruit trees—which create family space by feeding those around—become a marker for proper social spaces where persons lived. Today, planting fruit trees thereby not only creates social space, but creates social space in a way that extends and draws on an idea of the past.

Paulette and Daniel’s house also carries this marker. At least six coconut palms, a cherry tree, two guava trees, three orange trees, and an immense mango tree surround the house providing shade, snacks, and a marker of history. In this way, the sociality that Paulette and Daniel create in their household carries the ideas of past. In a conversation with Paulette, I commented on the tastiness of the mango, comparing it to the fibrous mango to which I was accustomed. Paulette suggested that I take a mango to plant in my future house, then she told me the history of the mango tree, which she planted over thirty years prior when she and Daniel built their house. She told me about the rules of the Village regarding how much land a household could use, and she brought up the story of the work the community did together to build the school. Again, fruit trees become an enduring marker of sociality and history.

There are of course similar ideas of the farm as a social space. I noted earlier that Paulette learnt cassava work from her mother-in-law, and the memory of her going to the farm every other week. Besides these recollections in Paulette’s living memory, there are several “long ago” stories revolving around the farm. These mythic stories in which animals incorporate both human and animal characteristics are both parables about proper family relations, and describe how certain animals came to be the way they are. On one occasion Paulette told a story about how Duck and Owl had taken a pair of sisters as wives. Everyone thought Duck was lazy and slept in his hammock all day while Owl left to work early and came back late at night with corn, cassava, and watermelon. Duck became frustrated with being the subject of ridicule and asked his wife and mother-in-law to accompany him to his farm, full of crops. He then took them to Owl’s farm where they found Owl in

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<sup>16</sup> “Islands” in this case refers to the growth of clusters of trees and undergrowth in otherwise open savanna.

his bed under a large Mora tree with corn husks and watermelon rinds he had taken from Duck's farm strewn about. Paulette said that parents-in-law not getting help from their son-in-law might call him Owl (*Prototo*), and that to this day, Owl sleeps all day.

On another occasion in the farm, Dan told me that some people are not good about replanting their farm, "He could farm, he could plant, but it's up to there he gone. They would never replant. We does call that *abuya* [peccary] people. Well people get their way for calling things, we does call it wild hog because the wild hog only harvest, but never replants. My father always says that if you go to the farm with a lazy mind your crops wouldn't come out good. Yes, if you farm lazy then it wouldn't come out good," (28/06/2015).

Farming thus becomes a statement about embodied human personhood. Being willing to replant and maintain a farm is part of what makes one human. The mismanagement of the farm, in this case not replanting, leads to different kinds of personhood, such as that of a lazy owl, or bush-hog that only harvests and never replants. The point about embodied relation to crops is further brought up in statements about laziness. The opposite of 'laziness', willingness to work—particularly along with family and friends—in the farm, leads to good crops, which in turn feeds the same people, and leads to persons. This again shows that 'work' is more closely associated with collective sociality than with temporal efficiency. Farming is about constituting sociality and bodies, by farming people embody proper human sociality. At the same time, housework, or other kinds of work outside the house also recreate sociality as they enforce ties between family-friends.

#### Machruman

A machruman (plural: machrumani) is a voluntary collective work/party hosted by a household in which people from several households come to participate and contribute.<sup>17</sup> When people talk about Surama's history they often talk about the work they did with family and friends. From these stories, and participating in machrumani today, it becomes clear that *work* is conceived as something not only capable of transforming physical spaces, but also as an enjoyable event, productive of community. Family and friends machruman working together, usually with a fermented drink, and a meal provided by the hosts. While the hosts initiate machruman towards a task, often clearing farm ground, building a house, or collecting roofing materials, machrumani foster positive feelings more than they complete these tasks. Machrumani are not so much about the efficient work, but about reinforcing social relationships by working together, and sharing food and drink. Working with friends is enjoyable, and the call for help that begins a machruman is a call

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<sup>17</sup> Originally an Arawak word—mashramani—referring to the party after collective work; it is also the name of the Carnival/Republic Day celebrations in Guyana.

to enjoy the company of family-friends while working. By sharing work and jokes with family friends' in machrumani, people in Surama contribute to the social relations and physical space in which they and their neighbours live.

Machruman draw people from beyond the household to work together. Where each household or extended household does most of their own farm or cassava work, people from across the community—neighbours, family, and friends—machruman together. To start a machruman, a member of a family tells family-friends about pending work; clearing the farm, gathering roof materials, or on the house. In the following days, those family friends come help the host family with their work. In my experience machruman hosts never explicitly asked anyone to come help, but rather said they would be working. In my first conversation with Uncle Dan he told a fellow student and myself he would be clearing his farm. When we asked if we could come and lend a hand, he replied, “That is why I told you I am working.”

Others in the community learn about the machruman by word of mouth (not from the hosts), and are also welcome. Female hosts prepare food, and will have some “local” drink—parakari, a fruit wine, or a purchased alcohol in their stead. Hosts and guests work together for most of the morning or day, with a meal in the middle or at the end, or both, and finish the day with a little party. In this way, I suggest that the members of the host household, and the family friends contribute towards the machruman, which itself is the food, drink, jokes, laughter, and physical work.

In this way, machruman is not a system of delayed reciprocity, in which family and friends go to work towards the host-household's goal in hopes that the members of the host household then return the favour. Nor is it a direct exchange; work for some drink and a meal. People are not “working” towards a physical object. Rather, I would argue that machruman is more closely tied to the enjoyability of contributing—sharing jokes or playing music, contributing food or drink, bringing tools or gasoline, cutting leaves, lifting logs, or other physical work; laughing and repeating punchlines, listening, eating and drinking, allowing others to help, and working. While there are hosts and guests, both contribute to the work. In this way, work is not only towards the established goal of the machruman, but towards the positive feelings amongst those present, which then turns to a strengthened family-friendship.

The following extended passage is from my third week in the field. It both describes a machruman, and my own sensation of being out of place. While I was focused on helping Uncle Bertrand finish his benab, which I thought would make me more a part of Surama, my friends around me were more focused on having a good time, gaffing, and being a part of the work.

In the couple weeks before Heritage Day, my first weeks back in Surama after three years, we met almost daily for community work on the Village office, which gave me a chance to meet people I hadn't yet met, and catch up with old friends. Word had gone around that there would be a break from community work after Heritage Day, and I had wondered how I would continue meeting people without this organized encounter. After Heritage Day, I was finding it difficult to find people. Several people in the community were recovering from the celebrations, or still celebrating, and the farthest I went from Paulette and Dan's was down to Auntie Viola's shop. I did not feel I knew people from the other side of Surama well enough to just go visit them.

Dudes, a Guyanese coastlander who had been granted permission to reside in Surama (by the Village Council), had mentioned that he would be cutting kukrit to rethatch his roof. I decided to see if he was working, was only halfway down the hill from Auntie Paulette's when Birthlan came up from the opposite direction on his sister's motorbike.

"You goin' by uncle Bertrand them?" he asked.

"I thought I might go to Dude's. He wanted to cut kukrit."

"Oh, Uncle Bertrand them holding machruman," he said and continued up the hill.

I rode past the little island at the bottom of the hill and to the edge of Uncle Bertrand's house. Bertrand (Daniel's younger brother), and Sparrow (a family-friend/ Bertrand's adopted brother), were sitting in the shade under the half completed benab, a pitcher of parakari sat between them.

"Morning" I called without getting off my bike.

"Morning, how far?"

"Dudes says he wants to cut kukrit, I might go lend a hand."

"You can't go to Dudes' machruman," Uncle Sparrow said, his body chuckled while he added a jape about Dudes' mango-wine, and he pointed at the pitcher of 'kari between them.

We drank most of the pitcher while Uncle Bertrand waited for more people to arrive. I listened to Sparrow and Bertrand's gaff about Heritage Day. Bertrand brought up my silence in the conversation.

"Sabba, you does understand what we are saying?"

"Yeah," I nodded.

"Okay, you just quiet like," he said unconvinced.

Bishop, Bertrand's cousin, approached on his bicycle and came to join us on the benches. Sparrow handed him his mug and Bishop filled it himself. Bertrand did not drink, but sat listening to and giving the gaff. Orwill (a family/friend/distant nephew), arrived on his motor-scooter just after Bishop and after the good mornings, Bertrand said we would go. He served out the rest of the 'kari and went towards his house.

"You comin' too?" Orwill asked me.

"Yeah."

"Gona learn to cut some leaf!"

"This man know, he done come already." Sparrow replied.

Bertrand came out of the house with a chainsaw and carried it to the tractor, "Bishop you could be the saw-man?"

"Alright, no problem."

Bertrand dropped his wife, Auntie Marcela, and three of their children at their farm and we returned to the 'tunnel' where kukrit trees on either side of the road meet overhead creating continuous shade on the road. Bertrand came around and spoke with Bishop

"See if you could cut some trees there near the road, na."

"The tank full, full tank is good for fifteen trees," Sparrow chimed in.

While Bertrand, Sparrow and I wore long trousers tucked into closed shoes, Bishop wore checkered shorts and blue slippers. He often handled the power-tools and saws during the community work on the Village office and I hoped the "safety precautions" of the chainsaw meant little to someone with his experience. Sparrow came off the bed and we followed Bertrand just off the road to a pile of a dozen or so leaves on the ground, another few leaves had been discarded seemingly haphazardly to the sides. The head of the tree was completely cut off leaving only the palm trunk coming out of the ground.

"You only carry the ones what he stack," Sparrow said as I moved a couple other leaves out of the way.

He lifted three stalks of leaves over his head gripping them from the thick end, and hunched over slightly such that the weight of the leaves rested on the top of his back. The thin ends of the long stalks dragged on the ground as he moved back towards the tractor. While Bertrand continued stacking the leaves I followed Sparrow's explanation, carrying leaves to the tractor.

We carried all the stalks from one cut tree and moved to the next, a little further off the road, where Bertrand was already stacking. Sparrow and I would cross each other coming back and forth, one of us with leaves the other returning for more. At one point, I returned to carry a set and there were only four leaves left. I tried to carry all four but the difficulty in gripping the fourth leaf caused me to drop the whole load.

"Hahaha. You could only carry three Sabba! Left the other two, I would carry them."

The chainsaw revved and idled, and from time to time we heard a whoosh as the heads of the kukrit leaves came down. After hauling leaves from three or four different trees we came to one about thirty or forty meters off the road. As I brought my first set out from this stack I saw Sparrow standing by the tractor.

"You have to work hard to get a buck-girl!" he laughed. "This is nothing. Back in the days, when I was growing up, I was here from before, when the Allicocks come, but really I am from Bartica. You know Bartica? It's like city, goldmining," He searched for the words to explain it and paused often as he spoke. "All money in that part of Guyana. When we were here, we had to work hard to get Amerindian wife. You had to cut *mora* tree with the thing, what's that thing? Foist? Axe, ne?" he asked as he hacked the air slowly with his hand, "Yeah, axe. We had to climb twenty feet with axe and cut off the top. And if you couldn't do it...now we have all these tools and people with chords in their ears. It's not like before."

Sparrow had brought the gallon of parakari out from the tractor cabin and held it out to me so that I could pour myself a mug. Bertrand came out from the forest and walked towards the trees Bishop had freshly cut. I felt odd stopping to drink while he continued working. Sparrow saw me looking over at Bertrand, "We'll just take a lil' five, Sabba."

I downed the mug and Sparrow threw out the dregs before serving himself, finishing the shot, throwing out the dregs, and placing the mug over the gallon bottle back in the cabin.

Bertrand brought another set of three leaves and set them beside the tractor-bed.

"Sabba, you could keep count," Sparrow said.

"Just three piles," Bertrand said indicating the three piles I would stack on the tractor bed, "put five, and then five, and then five so."

They handed two or three leaves up at a time and I piled them at one side of the bed, then the middle and then the other side. Soon there was no place to stand but on the leaves themselves.

"Mash them down, Sabba," Bertrand repeated putting my worries about breaking the leaves to rest.



We had about fifty leaves packed when Sparrow suggested we take another “five”, and brought out the gallon jug. Once again, Bertrand continued moving more leaves from where Bishop had cut. Bishop himself came over to the truck and took a drink of water before Sparrow brought the ‘kari container to his attention, and he came over to join us.

"Yes, um, Sabba, this is our machruman," Sparrow said as though picking up an ongoing conversation, “or machrumani. I have been friends with the Allicocks, with Mike and Bishop's father many years, and they are my closest family-friends. I have never had any argument with them. Mr. Sydney, Sydney Allicock, him too. It's with him I grow up...this thing we do, machrumani has been going on for a long time, must be, fifty, fifty years ago that the government picked up the word machrumani as a kind of celebration. An Amerindian thing. I think it's a Makushi word, but you'll have to ask Bertrand. It's not a thing you have to do, not forced, but maybe for a friend. Like a friend tells me he needs help with something and I want to come and help him. He provides a little alcohol, you don't have to drink to get drunk, you choose, you choose how much you are going to drink. If somebody wants to drink and get drunk and fall all over the place that is up to them. But we come here and help each other, and that has been going on for a long time, these Allicocks, they are my friends, my closest family-friends."

Around that time, Jabo and Clive came from the direction of the junction, Clive drove the motorbike and Jabo was on the back wearing his usual red, green, yellow, and black knitted hat. They stopped alongside us, and Jabo quickly got off while Clive exchanged greetings with Bertrand.

"Ya'll just there gaff-gaffin'" Jabo smirked walking over to us, "Let me come and show you how to work, we goh full up this truck one-time."

Sparrow handed him the mug and Jabo helped himself with a mischievous grin.

"Who is the load man? Sabba come, don't laps you know? Must pack them leaves."

I climbed back up and called the total number of leaves each time I switched piles, "60, 65, 70, 75..." Sparrow and Jabo handed me the leaves and Clive went with Bertrand to bring more, refreshing the pile behind the tractor bed.

Jabo continued calling out japes and jokes, filling in Clive or Bertrand when they came over to the tractor. He would repeat the punchline a few times before moving on. I was feeling the effects of the ‘kari. I felt less out of place, less reserved, and joined in on some of the jokes.

I did not recognize Rob as he rode up from the junction on his bicycle, his little boy riding the crossbar between his arms. His camouflage trousers, black vest, and long beard made him appear

stern until Sparrow pointed to the 'kari container by the tractor tire, and he broke a three-toothed smile.

"Let me help ya'll out."

Rob took over handing up the leaves with Sparrow, and Jabo accompanied Clive and Bertrand in bringing another set before returning to the motorbike.

"Alright we goin' in front" Clive said as he and Jabo returned to the motorbike.

"Yeah, thanks, right?!" Bertrand said to them with a wave before they left.

I started to feel tired loading the leaves, '130, 135, 140...' I counted to myself as I balanced on the growing mass of leaves.

"How much it get there count-man?"

"Like 165, 170."

"Alright."

Sparrow stood by the truck and looked at Bertrand. I couldn't tell when the determination was made to return to the house, but Bishop loaded the fuel, chainsaw, and Robert's bike alongside Auntie Marcela's. Marcela had just joined us from the farm with several lengths of sugar-cane tied to her bike frame. Bertrand hoisted the kids up to Bishop and we piled onto the heap. Robert's son sat on the bicycle frame, and Auntie Marcela kept hold of her daughter. Sparrow sat on the running board next to Bertrand and we rode back towards Surama.

The leaves remained on the tractor bed beside the benab as we took our seats on the benches in Bertrand's front yard. Bertrand placed a fresh pitcher of 'kari on the bench between himself and Sparrow, and each of us had a large plastic pint mug.

"Must stay for some lunch, right? Marcela cooking up a thing there."

Orwill had already said his farewells and returned home, but the rest of us remained seated facing the road in front of Bertrand's. Bishop and Bertrand were having a chat and Robert listened to them, joining with a laugh from time to time. Sparrow was telling me about building benabs in Surama.

"Yes, Sabs. My good friend, Mr. Sydney Allicock, he once said that every household should build a benab. That one day it would have tourists, maybe students, them want to come and see how the way Makushi people live how the way Amerindian people live. I myself, I am not Makushi, I am from a different, how you say it? Tribe. But that is what he said, and people come very well. He has been

ruler here for many years. He started out as councillor, then he became the ruler, the Toshao, and he is still. Well, I don't have a benab, but some people have. Emily..."

"Uncle Glen" I chimed in.

"Yes, Glen does have a big one."

Uncle Bertrand went into the house from time to time to refill the 'kari container. After a few pitchers, he came out with plates piled high with peas and rice, chicken and farine. A small hot pepper on the lip of the plate.

"You does use farine, Sabba?"

"Yes, please," I answered.

"Alright, haha. Marcela wasn't sure."

After lunch and another mug, I asked Bertrand if they were going to unload. With the food and the morning of work I was getting sleepy. When he said they wouldn't be working for a while, until the sun went over a little further, I took my leave to go back up the hill and take a nap. I wanted to return with my camera to catch a shot of the tractor overflowing with kukrit leaves, but by the time I went back they had unloaded, and Sparrow and Robert had returned home.

I felt guilty about having eaten, drank a good amount of 'kari, and gone home without helping Uncle Bertrand unload the leaves from the tractor. I thought that since I had eaten, I was expected to stay until all the work had been done. And indeed, it is usually good form to remain 'willing' until the work has been done. At the time, I thought of the machruman as an equivalent exchange, Bertrand and his family would feed us and give us drink in exchange for us working towards his benab. At the time, it did not seem we were going to be doing any more work, and so long as we remained in Bertrand's yard with a seemingly endless supply of 'kari, Sparrow and I weren't going to be in a condition to work for long. After a few more months, it became clear that my concern with machrumani, specifically as a kind of exchange of labour—or of favours—between potential-affines, was not helping me participate or understand these get-togethers.

Now, looking back, I think of Bertrand's concern with my quietness. Where I was preoccupied in demonstrating that I could work physically along with others, Uncle Bertrand was interested in my participation in jokes. Sparrow was interested in my drinking 'kari, and explained that Bertrand was a close family-friend. As the year went on and I participated in more social events I learnt how to gossip, what made a funny story, and how to tell things in an amusing way without offending anyone. These stories and jokes, known as the 'gaff' are an important part of any collective work.

Uncle Bertrand was particularly good at gaffing, and could talk about people in the community, social events, blunders, and share any number of anecdotes in a very amusing way. These jokes were not self-aggrandizing, but rather put people at ease and let his audience have a good time. In the same way that Bertrand was particularly good at gaffing, people can be good at receiving the gaff. I often wondered why Kurt would repeat the punchline of any joke back to the person telling the joke in the form of a question. The teller would then reaffirm the punchline, and we would all laugh even louder. After having spent more time with others in the community, I realized that nearly everyone did this in some way or another. By repeating the joke, it seemed that the teller was reassured that it was a good joke. Throughout the rest of the machruman people would repeat the punchline here and there, and we would laugh at the memory of the joke. I suggest that sharing these jokes is not only *part of* the machruman, it is part of the work itself, and can help us understand *work* as a contribution.

Uncle Bertrand's machruman was full of these jokes and repeated punchlines. When Jabo and Clive were riding into Surama they stopped to help for an hour. They drank 'kari and provided jokes to which Sparrow, Bertrand, and Bishop responded. Later when Rob participated, he was quieter, but still laughed and responded to the jokes. This was part of their contribution to the machruman, which fomented a personal family-friend connection between those working. In this way, some people would also go to machrumani after the physical 'work' had finished. Though they did not help the physical work, their presence, accepting food and drink, and sharing and participating in jokes were a contribution to the work atmosphere, and to the relation between those present. Rather than think of it as indebtedness for going to drink his 'kari and not working, the contribution is made *by accepting* the drink. Work brings people together in this socially productive space.

All of this is well summarized by Uncle Sparrow's explanation of machruman. Sparrow highlights his closeness to Bertrand and his family. His desire to help them because they are friends. He never mentions any expectation that they will reciprocate, or that he felt coerced to attend. Sometimes people stay at a machruman long after work is done enjoying their hosts 'kari and hospitality, "falling all over the place." The last thing Sparrow said was that people come to help each other, and the Allicocks are more than friends, they are quite nearly family. Indeed, Uncle Dan has referred to Sparrow as a brother.<sup>18</sup> Besides the fact that they grew up together, they retain their relationship by working alongside each other, helping each other when they need help, drinking, gaffing, and sharing.

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<sup>18</sup> Sparrow was adopted by grandfather Fred, Daniel's father, but given to Auntie Susan as she had no children.

On a slightly different note, I would like to touch on the importance of benabs in the community. Benabs are thought of as a more “traditional” building. They use leaves for the roof, and can easily support hammocks between the posts for guests, which are both thought of as more Amerindian than other roof materials or ways of sleeping. The fact that Sydney, the most influential person in the community, suggested building benabs for guests to see an 'Amerindian way of life' points to Surama villagers' awareness that foreigners, both guests and researchers, are interested in how 'Amerindian people live.' Sparrow said visitors are interested in 'Makushi', but as he like many others in the community are not Makushi he added that it is the Amerindianness that can draw in visitors.<sup>19</sup> This openness and awareness is important to Sydney and others in the community. People in Surama know that non-Amerindian people, particularly those outside of Guyana, are very interested in learning from Amerindians. More specifically Amerindian 'knowledge', the ability to survive in what is thought of as dangerous forest, medicinal knowledge of plants, and the popular image of their relationship to the past makes them the subject of global attention. I explore these ideas in more detail in Parts II and III of the thesis. For now, Sparrow's comments serve as a transition to think about Surama as a community of family-friends.

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<sup>19</sup> Roopnaraine says Amerindians only distinguish their ‘tribes’ amongst themselves, but the distinctions break down in the presence of foreigners or non-Amerindian Guyanese (1995: 40). In this way, Amerindianity more than Makushiness, is what is thought to attract non-Amerindian visitors.

## Chapter Two; Surama, Community and Village

Surama Village is home to approximately three-hundred people living in about fifty households. People who grew up in Surama, and chose to make it their home after taking a partner, most often built their households close to their parents' house, such that household groups formed around the parent generation's households. Family household groups are not enclosed, however, and just as a person may choose to build their household farther from their parents and/or closer to other family-friends, *family* also changes, and is not limited to the household in which children grow up. People in Surama refer to their parents' siblings, parents-in-law, and community elders as "auntie" and "uncle", (common in the West Indies and parts of South America). The eldest members of the community are almost always referred to with the title grandmother/*kogo*, or grandfather/*mogo*, either in English or Makushi.

While kin titles are not often used between people of the same generation (with the exception of "buddy" colloquial for 'brother', used widely between family-friends in the community), people in Surama know how they are related, as the following conversation between two young single men suggests,

"Surama got to get some nice girls to hustle," (22/04/2015)

"It get, but them is all family."

Indeed, most people in Surama are from just a few families—Allicock, James, Captain, Roland, and Salvador—and these families intermarried before or since the founding of Surama. People conceive of nearly everyone within the Village as "family", and young people find spouses outside of Surama. Community exogamy is not limited to Surama. As Sir Scipio, a long-time Surama resident and former headmaster of Surama Primary School said in Forte and Melville's *Amerindian Testimonies*, "My grandfathers, in typical Amerindian fashion, met their wives while they were travelling about in other areas, a practice which is still common..." (1989: 51). Many couples decide to reside near the Surama resident's parents (in Surama whether uxorilocally or virilocally), in part because of the economic opportunities afforded in the Village and nearby area.

Though Surama is conceived as a community of kin or "family-friends", people nurture certain relationships—whether with classmates, parents, siblings or cousins, work colleagues, neighbours, or other friends—more than others (conversely not everyone in the community is a close family-friend with everyone else). As people foment certain relationships, which span the space of the Village, they constitute the community of family-friends. At the same time, Surama is a federally

recognized Amerindian Village with a body of leadership, and various committees. This chapter explores interactions in Surama at the community and Village level, particularly the way kinship or family-friendship extends from the household to form community while also looking at the Village as a political State entity. I have thereby separated discussions of household sociality (Chapter One) from community and Village sociality (this chapter) to better understand how they are parts of each other.

As Surama is an Amerindian Village, the State mandates it to have a ruling body, the Village Council, organized in accordance to the Guyanese Amerindian Act of 2006. Similarly, Surama has a federally funded primary school. While these are organized according to national law, they are mediated, and indeed constituted daily through people's lived experience. As school staff and Village councillors are all Surama residents themselves, the rest of the community relates to them as family-friends as well as teachers and councillors. Political organization—even when nationally organized—is manifested locally through family-friend sociality, and, inversely, family-friend sociality is not devoid of Village politics. Where machruman can be thought of as the contribution or extension of households working together, the Village is also an incorporation of the community. In Chapter Three I discuss how the school, ecolodge, and Amerindian Village are conceived as a continual part of Surama residents' boundedness in a history of family-friends, (rather than an external force binding them together). For now, I turn to how people in Surama constitute that boundedness in daily life.

“By the school,” the Village Centre

From Paulette and Daniel's house—close to the opening of the savanna on the road through the forest from the junction—it is a twenty-minute walk to the Village Centre. A couple of hundred meters before the Village Centre, Surama road straightens, and the Village office can be seen in the distance. Construction of the Village office started in 2011, and the office has been built largely through voluntary community work with a few paid contracts for specialized parts of construction, such as the bathroom facilities and the cast concrete floor. These contracts were fulfilled by Surama community members, or friends from nearby communities. The office replaced the old Village Centre, a fenced area with a guest house, kitchen and storage facility, and resource centre, which still stand just behind the office—across from the health post, a government building staffed by a local health-worker. Continuing past the old Village centre is the start of the airstrip, also a recent (2012) addition.

The school area and football field on the opposite side of the airstrip are easily visible from the Village office. While the office is the official seat of the Village Council, and place meant to welcome people into the Village, the old school is the most common meeting point for people in Surama. Village meetings, games, markets, and special events all take place there. The area by the school includes the church (Anglican), the new primary and nursery schools, teacher's quarters, old school-come-event centre, a newly added kitchen, the football field, and pavilion (bleachers). Grandfather Fred's brother, Theo, built his house on a hill just behind the football field in the early days of Surama, and many of his children have since made their households nearby. Similarly, Harold Captain lives just behind the new school, and many of his children near him.

Besides being the venue for special events and Village meetings, the old school is also an unofficial meeting place, and many people, especially those in their teens and twenties meet almost daily by the old-school to catch-up, play volleyball or football, listen to music, joke, and hang-out. When bumping into friends throughout the day, we would inevitably ask each other if we would be going by the old-school, and agree to “catch-up later.” When the sun lowered in the sky people would meet to chat by the school or on the pavilion, somebody would play music on their phones, and if someone brought a football we would start a friendly match.

The pavilion was also a meeting point on Sundays after church. Even those who did not attend church service would often meet up with the church-goers to catch-up on whatever was going on. Usually these meetings involved people from older generations and we could play cricket. On the last Sunday of the month, the church-goers would also hold a market to gather funds for the church. These markets varied from a couple ladies selling greens to large gatherings with ‘kari and barbeque—but like the inter-school track competitions, Surama Football Club matches, Heritage Day Celebrations, and other special events—they were always held by the school. This made the school the nexus of community social life in Surama.

The other main gathering points were Surama’s three shops. During the week, soon after hearing her generator come on, people walked to Auntie Emily’s shop by the large benab on the hill where her parents used to live. The generator powered her freezers and the television, which would usually be switched to the BBC news. Similarly, Auntie Viola and Trevor hosted dominoes night on Saturday evenings at their shop, and for two months of the year, Auntie Lola's shop turned on the gas generator to power two spotlights for volleyball games on Saturday nights. While one didn't necessarily have to buy anything at the shops to hang-out there, and anyone from any part of Surama could go to any given shop at any different time, the three shops were in different parts of Surama, and people most often went to the shop nearest to them, especially during televised



football tournaments. This made them qualitatively different from the old school where people would come from all parts of the Village, (without the incentive of TV, sweets, or alcohol from the shops).

### Community Work

I timed my arrival in Surama to coincide with the preparations for Guyana's Amerindian Heritage Month. As part of Heritage Month, each Village held their own celebrations including competitions for parakari drinking, archery, cotton weaving, cassava grating, and best tuma pot. I had planned on accompanying my host-family as they prepared the 'kari, arrows, and other "traditional" items to contribute to the day's competitions—and by doing so, learn something about how young people learn these skills. Instead, I contributed most of my first days in Surama to community work preparing the grounds and office for the Heritage Day. Community work increased from once-a-week, to daily in hopes of completing the Village office in time for the celebration. Several villagers gathered daily to work on the office, and, closer to the day itself, to clear and lop the area around the old school and football grounds.

When I had last visited Surama in 2011 the Village office was nothing more than a hard, flat area of cleared ground—the future foundation—and a large squared hole that would be the latrine. It had been since built to a two-story structure with matching floorplans on both stories; four rooms facing an open veranda, about 50 feet in diameter. The rooms were to be the offices for the Village Council, as well as rooms for important guests, and the open area would be the new meeting space. Though the office construction had advanced, there was still a lot of work to be done. The staircases, second story floor, and ground-floor cement had yet to be installed. Other aesthetic details, such as the harpy eagle painted on the zinc roof, would have to wait until after Heritage Month.

While the plan was to complete the office for the Heritage Day opening ceremony on the 10th of September, it seemed like there was not enough time to finish everything that had to be done. Fewer people were coming out to work every day, and besides the Village office, Michael Allcock, the senior councillor, wanted to remake the pavilion, which would divide the workforce between the two projects. After daily community work, people speculated and made comments about whether we would finish the work, what had to be done, and what parts of the work were unnecessary. Tensions rose, and talk went around that some people were making money on the work, while others were only volunteering. Bertrand was out at the office daily, and was to oversee the completion of the staircases. Once, gathered with some friends at Viola's shop talking about community work on the office staircases, he said, "People think they are paying me for this, I am not being paid for this. This is for community development. I get my guys together, we have a little

lunch, a little drink prepared. Anyone could come and help. If you can't work you could just have a drink and gaff with we,"(1-09-2014).

Rumour had gone around that Bertrand had been given a paid contract to do the staircases, which was the reason fewer people were going to help him.<sup>20</sup> Leaving the work in his hands, Michael Allcock had decided to remake the pavilion, which he found to be a priority ever since a child had fallen between the seats. One morning at the office, before splitting up to work on the two projects, Sydney (Daniel's eldest brother) approached in one of the ecolodge pick-up-trucks. Somebody commented, "If he's coming here, best he's ready to work." Sydney was wearing an oxford shirt tucked into pressed blue jeans, a leather belt, and closed shoes. I wish I had had a recording device, or had better trained my memory by that part of fieldwork to better remember exactly what he said, "You have identified the problem. What I suggest..." He didn't say anything specific about working on either the office or the pavilion, but spoke about working together, how far things had come, priorities, and the importance of following the "vision." We stood around him listening as he looked up at the side of the office. He finished with, "What you all think?"(4/09/2014).

We were quiet for a while until Caroline said, "Come, let we do this thing, na?" And we started working on the office. Nobody went to work on the pavilion.

"Sabba you come for work, or you come for watch?" Uncle Bertrand asked me.

"I come for work if you have work for me."

Groups divided around different tasks. Some wheelbarrowed and cleared the construction debris from the area, others brought wood from the workbench by the large island near the office, and others worked cutting boards to length for the office steps. The wood was two-inch-thick hardwood, about 18" wide, and I switched between sawing with my right and left hand as I grew tired through the first hour of work. A bottle of high-wine mixed with water and another mixed with cola sat on one of the completed steps. Every now and then somebody would point it out to another worker, or to new-comers to the work, and they would obligingly take a shot before continuing with the work. Birthlan arrived, taking Bertrand up on his offer to give the gaff, and his jokes helped us break up the day and keep monotonous silence at bay. Grampa, joked with Duncan calling him

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<sup>20</sup> Indeed, he probably was receiving some money with which to buy gas for the generator that powered the tools we used to prepare the boards for the stair-cases, as well as food and drink for the people coming out to community work.

“father-in-law”, which he was not. Others would tell punchlines from past jokes, or new ones about how the different races in Guyana work.

"You know how car does work in Guyana? In Guyana, white man imports the car, coolie man sells the car, black man steals the car, and buckman take the car apart and put it back together!"

or

"Dashabout gaff me a joke. It only have two man in this world, Blackman and Buckman, all the rest is boy. Chinie boy, coolie boy, white boy! All is boy! Only buckman and Blackman is man!"

All met with laughs, and reiteration of the punchline, "The rest is boy!"

The ladies who had been clearing the debris left around lunch-time, and came back about an hour later with two large pots and a bag of farine. After initially ignoring the call for lunch, taking another shot from the high-wine instead, we all went over for swank (lemonade), farine, beef, and chou-mein. We were quiet while we ate.

"Sabba, you see what I say, buckman does get quiet when he eat," Caroline joked to me, and the others laughed.

Freddie, Madonna's youngest son, was telling a joke about someone who had returned from Georgetown and gone to one of the Surama shops asking for mineral drinking water.

"People want to make styles, next thing they don't want to eat beef and farine. You ain't know it's that what brought you up?!" some people nodded, and he mocked the voice "“You have mineral watah?”"

After lunch, I was eager to get back to work and asked if we would still be working in the afternoon. I was halted and reminded that first we would “take a five.” We had a shot of the high-wine mixture to wash down the food, and found spots to sit or lay in the office for about a half hour before moving back towards the work.

The office was not completed in time for Heritage Day, but we were able to complete the second-story floor and most of the stairs such that we were able to hold the opening ceremony there. As with machruman, the emphasis was on working together, as was put forward in Sydney's speech, and in Bertrand's open offer to come and have a drink and gaff while working. What I perceived to be a looming deadline did not stop others from taking a five when needed, or gaffing and taking an occasional shot instead of labouring. While I couldn't help seeing flaws in efficiency, for example, the idea that two people should not be occupied doing the work one person could do, the preference was often for doing things in groups. The wooden boards we carried from the shed were

light enough to be carried by one person, but rather going back and forth carrying a board each, we split the load between two carriers.

Through community work I familiarized myself with villagers I hadn't met, heard the Village gossip, and generally began to feel more included. After returning home in the afternoons, Paulette sometimes asked me who had come out, and would help me put faces to names. As I continued community work, I became (slightly) less concerned with the time it took to complete a task, and enjoyed myself more working together. I also started to see a dynamic between the two 'sides' of the community as many of the more difficult, sometimes dangerous tasks, were taken up by villagers from the other side of Surama. I mentioned this to Paulette, and she said that they were excellent "helpers." Anytime there was a project or something that had to get done, their help would ensure it was completed. She said Marcus was always willing to help, and though he was not looked upon as a leader in the community, he was an example of how people could work together.

Community work thereby resonated with machruman. Michael, Caroline, or other councillors made sure that a lunch was prepared, and the workers pitched in for some drink to ease the work. At least one member of each household was supposed to take part in community-work, and those households that could not participate were expected to make a contribution; farine or drink, or tools towards the weekly project. This rule made community-work different from machruman, which was completely voluntary. Of course, there was nothing enforcing the Village rule, and besides humorously hounding passer-by's, particularly those on motorbikes, for their contributions in the form of high-wine, each household was left to determine the way they would (or wouldn't) contribute.

When the Village was preparing for special events, more villagers would contribute. Other weeks, when there was nothing in particular for which to prepare, fewer of us worked, usually towards general maintenance, cleaning the buildings and lopping the trees around the field. Paulette mentioned that the Cobra Project had done research, including a film about community work, which was meant to be shared with other indigenous communities in South America. She said this ethic of "self-help" was the way Surama had developed to where it was today. She referenced the church, office, and ecolodge, which were made without funds or help from the government, but through community work.

Given the importance of community work, I was surprised it dwindled from early to mid-2015. Fewer and fewer people had been participating until eventually there was no more community work. It wasn't until after national elections had been held, and a new Village Council elected locally that we resumed community work, and I understood that community work, like Village meetings, had been

put on hold because the national government had been “prorogued,” which meant there was technically no Village Council. The Village Council was part of the national government, and in late 2014, in anticipation of unified opposition and the possibility of a vote of no confidence, the President of Guyana prorogued Parliament, effectively halting local governance as well. From what we understood, this would give the President six months without parliamentary oversight before he had to formally disband the Parliament and new presidential and parliamentary elections would be held. There was much speculation and conversations about what would happen, both in shops and in the Village centre. At a cancelled Village meeting in early February, Uncle Tony said that according to constitutional law the elections had to be held within ninety days of Parliament being dissolved. Michael, the senior councillor, said that there was no Parliament, that “*the whole thing*” had been put on hold. Large events, like the regional music and arts festival had been postponed, but I had not expected Village meetings and community work to also be on hold. I knew the Village Council was technically a government institution, but had not realized that community work was part of the Village Council. In lieu of community work, Michael and others were working on contract work remaking some of the Surama bridges, and the rest of the community continued with their own work.

Within the confidence of my household I suggested to Paulette and Victorine that Surama could hold its elections without the government, but they reminded me that the District Development Officer (DDO) had to oversee the elections. There was no government, so there was no DDO, and elections could not be held. After much confusion and waiting, national elections were held in May, and elected officials began implementing their regional and district workers such that Village Council elections were finally held in July. Surama, as well as a large portion of the Annai communities were particularly happy with the national election outcomes. Not only had the most popular party won, ousting the previous political party, but Sydney Allicock had also been elected as the Minister of Indigenous People's Affairs, and as one of the Vice Presidents of the nation. He would be the first Minister of Indigenous Affairs from Region 9, and people in the North Rupununi were excited that he would tackle issues facing Amerindians in that part of the country. In Surama, the first community work with the new Village Council was lopping Surama road, and it drew more participants than any previous community work in which I had participated. Auntie Veronica, Sydney's wife, contributed two buckets of ‘kari from the Women's Centre for the workers, meant to keep us working through the afternoon. Victorine pointed out to me after community work, "If they would have bring the ‘kari from before, people would have worked more."

I did not understand what she meant. We had cleared all the road from the junction to the opening of the savanna, including the overhanging brush.

"Remember," she added, "People started to get hungry so they sit down and start to wait. If they would have bring the 'kari now, they would have continued working."

In community work, like machruman, people come together to work, gaff, and help one another for "community development" (which I explore further in the following chapters). The hosts of community work were not family-friends, but rather the Village Council itself. This leads me to look at how the Village Council is considered. A State agency? As family?

The Village Council is the most local institution of Guyanese government, yet community work shares many characteristics with working for and with family-friends. Besides the common bantering atmosphere and volunteer ethic, community work is not wrapped up in monetary exchange, which is largely associated with wider ideas of development and the State. Bertrand noted that his work was not paid to point out that he was doing community work. When people suspected he was making money from working on the office, fewer people helped. He then enforced the idea that anybody could contribute by gaffing, working, or drinking. He made his work like a machruman, calling people to contribute in any way they liked. As the Village Council organizes work in this way, it cannot simply be looked upon as an agent of the State. Rather, it is necessary to look at how the Village Council, and the status of Amerindian Village is manifested locally, and experienced.

#### The Village Council, and the School



Figure 3: Family-friends after community-work before an impromptu meeting

The February Village meeting was supposed to be held Monday the 2nd after community work, but given the low turnout, and absence of the Village secretary and treasurer, the assembled villagers decided to postpone until Thursday.

“Them not respect the senior councillor,” Mistress Abeiola said as she slowly made her way away from the pavilion with the other villagers. Most people went home, but some of the older men stayed on the Village stands with a small bucket of ‘kari, and a bottle of fly left-over from someone’s contribution to community work.

“We ain’t get enough people for meeting, but we get enough to have a drink,” Uncle Tony said.

We sat and gaffed about the latest goings-on for a few hours before each of us went home for the last hours of sunlight.

On my way to the rescheduled meeting on Thursday, I found Frank and Joy in the area behind the old Village Centre. Frank had hung his hammock under the mango trees and Joy was seated on a log beside him, their youngest daughter on her lap as she helped her eat a mango. I stopped without getting off my bike.

“Going to the meeting?” I asked.

“It not starting yet.”

My watch read 1:26pm, and I circled the rest of the airstrip, approaching the grounds from behind the pavilion. Many villagers were already gathered, seated on the stands. I found it odd that the men and women were seated, for the most part, on opposite sides of the stands. The division wasn’t typical of Village meetings, and was probably a coincidence arising from the way different household couples arrived, each partner taking the opportunity to catch up with friends (of their gender) before the meeting. I said my ‘good-afternoons’, and joined the men on the near side in their quiet chat. Michael and Udel, the senior councillor and secretary, were seated at a square table at the base of the pavilion, facing the assembly. After about ten minutes the senior councillor spoke,

“Okay, thank you all for coming,” he stood from his chair, “We still waiting for some people, but we are going to start. At this time, I would ask Jean to come and give us a prayer.”

Jean walked in front of the assembly and faced us. Jean and her husband, Glen (a catechist who often led church gatherings), often gave the prayers before meetings or celebrations. Sometimes they led in Makushi, but this time it was in English; among other things Jean asked for “truth” and “good discussion.”

“Thank you mistress Allicock. We say the pledge.”

Those of us who sat after the prayer stood again. Some placed their hand over their hearts and we joined the councillor in facing the school compound where the Guyanese flag hung from a flagpole in the courtyard. I did not know the pledge, and listened to the collective hum.

“Hey boy, must say your own pledge,” Julian whispered behind me.

I chuckled quietly at the joke. Was he suggesting that I could participate with them by invoking my own national affiliations?

Besides the students at the school, I had not seen any other collective display of nationality in Surama. I had not previously thought of Village meetings as associated with the Guyanese State. Villagers had recited the pledge at the previous meeting, but I thought the display of nationality was a formality given the presence of Brazilian and Italian visitors. I wondered to what degree people thought of the Village as associated with the Guyanese State. I thought of the other evident markers for the Guyanese State that I had seen in Surama. Two shops had recently bought TV-Satellites, which provided the first Guyanese broadcasts to the Village besides Radio Paiwomak (based in Annai). Guyanese flags had been painted on the new signs at the Ecolodge and Surama junction, and a Guyanese and Brazilian flag was painted on the old school before the 2014 World Cup. I readily noticed these, and tried to make sense of them in terms of the famous Clastresian (1989) analyses of Amazonian societies as continuously keeping the State, or concentrated power, at bay. If Amazonian societies were “Societ[ies] Against the State”, how did people in Surama, an Amerindian Village with a Village Council recognized by the Guyanese government, experience themselves as part of, or in a relationship with, the Guyanese state?

I had been told that twenty-five years ago, the Rupununi was associated more closely with Brazil than Guyana. The only reminder of Guyana were the political parties that would show up every five years making their promises in exchange for votes. Yet Paulette told me there was no conflict between being Amerindian and being Guyanese. After telling her about my own mixed national background, she told me that the mother-child relationship was an “Amerindian thing”, which determined the “tribe” of the child, but “we have [nationality] too, the nationality is still Guyanese,”<sup>21</sup> (1/08/2009).

If Amerindianity was mediated through a child’s relationship with their mother, how was Guyanese nationality experienced?

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<sup>21</sup> Unlike some low-land South American Indigenous peoples in Paraguay, for example, who call non-indigenous people *Paraguayos*.



State-Amerindian relations are mediated through the Amerindian Act of 2006, the Amerindian Act of 1976, before that, and agreements between crown-lands which guaranteed Amerindians land during the British colonial period. The Amerindian Act of 2006 largely focuses on assuring local, community-level governance of lands; protecting and guaranteeing Village Council administration. According to the act, each Village elects its Village Council, comprised of a senior councillor or Toshao, and other positions of their own choosing. The Council then has decision-making power over the administration of Village land, taxes, and “development”. The Village is represented by their senior councillor and Toshao in the National Toshao Conference, where national and local concerns are meant to meet.<sup>22</sup>

This seems to explain Amerindians’ position in Guyanese government, but it did not tell me how people in Surama constitute governance, decision-making, and development. One of the mandates in the Amerindian Act, is the quarterly Village meeting. Village meetings are thereby (structurally at least) the local manifestation of a national policy. In Surama, Village meetings were held nearly monthly, I take them as a starting point to explore the way people in Surama manifest or conceive of (their relation with) the Guyanese State.

When the pledge had been recited, the senior councillor took his seat.

“Okay, the Village meeting is now in session. Well, you all know where the [Ecolodge] guides are. Anybody else want to present an absence?”

Some people explained why their family members were not present, some were in the farm, out of the Village, or working at the lodge. After the absences, the senior councillor asked the secretary to read the minutes from the previous meeting. Udel read the minutes in detail, beginning with the recitation of the pledge and the previous minutes. She elaborated the points of the previous meeting for about ten minutes—the protected area was being used for farming, hunting and fishing.

Sir Floyd, the education councillor, made his way to the pavilion from the school compound where he taught first and second grade. He brought a chair from the old school and sat next to the other councillors facing the stands. Surama Primary School, like many schools in the region, draws its teachers from the local community. As Nappi Village teacher, Stephen Demetrio pointed out in *Amerindian Testimonies* (Forte and Melville 1989), there is a lack of teachers in the region, and

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<sup>22</sup> The National Toshao Conferences were three-day events held annually. According to one of Surama’s senior councillors, Village concerns were ignored, (in part because of the over one-hundred communities represented, which had to voice their concerns in such a short period). Janette Bulkan (2013) notes this in her description of the struggle for Amerindian representation, highlighting the way that the National Toshao Conference is largely for the government to inform Tshaos of national policy.

teachers coming from the coast do not tend to stay in the area. Floyd himself is from the South Rupununi, but came to Surama to live with his partner in the mid-2000s, and became a teacher soon after. He had since completed teacher training in Lethem and Georgetown, and been voted as a part of the Council.

“Everything sound all right?” The senior councillor’s question at the end of the minutes was met with an initial silence, “Any corrections? Omissions?”

After the initial silence, came a stream of concerns regarding the previous meeting, all surrounding the budget. Sir Scipio was the first person to bring it up.

“I would like to say, there was a mention of monies that came in. Who has this information? What has actually been received? These informational records have to be precise.”

Other villagers echoed his concern, reiterating the main point that the treasurer had to keep proper tabs of transactions. Some joined Scipio in enquiring as to the receipts and expenditures. Though it seemed that the point had been made, people added their concerns, which in turn fuelled Scipio’s initial concern, which he rephrased a few times throughout the discussion, eventually adopting a scolding tone, which reminded me that he had once been the headmaster for Surama Primary School.

I looked across the field to the school compound. It was the third primary school to be built in Surama. Though the first was no longer standing, Paulette had told me about how it was built through community work without help from the government. The second school was the cement building next to the pavilion known as the Old School. The New School is in a fenced compound. It is a rectangular cement building with a zinc roof and glass windows (the only building with glass windows in Surama), where two-sided free-standing chalkboards divide one classroom from another. At the time of fieldwork there were roughly seventy students (the minimum for a government-funded primary school), and three staff teachers, with a teaching assistant (funded through the Community Support Officer program) helping third and fourth grade.

Surama Primary School students are between six and twelve years of age. Before class, children fill buckets from tapped 500-gallon reservoirs to water the plants and small fruit trees in the fenced courtyard, others play, and some stay inside the school. Between 8:20 and 8:35 (a fifteen-minute lee-way from the schedule, which persists throughout the day), Mistress Ellen, the head teacher, rings the bell that usually rests on her desk between the third and fourth grade classroom, and students line up in the courtyard according to their height. One of the students, usually from one of

the higher grades, is selected, steps forward and turns to face the assembly. She then recites instructions, giving the example herself:

“Hands up,” she raises her hands and the assembled students, either looking at her or at each other, catch the prompt and follow suite. The older students are better about responding in a timely manner, and some rest their hands on their head while shushing the younger students and waiting for everyone to join the example. When all students have their hands up, the student in front continues and is mirrored by the assembled students.

“Hands out. Hands up. Hands down. We say our prayer...” Though each student can recite it on their own, the prayer sounds like a melodic hum, the words hardly discernible.

“...we say our creed.” The children’s creed is equally difficult to decipher.

The hum accents the unison of the melody, more than the words. On the occasions when the head teacher asked the students to repeat the creed or prayer, students repeated by articulating on their own. The effect was a disjointed, albeit louder recitation.

Mistress Ellen then gives the announcements, which range from listing the week’s activities and asking students to bring money or signed permission slips for field-trips, to admonishing them for improper bathroom use. On Fridays, the morning assembly runs slightly longer as students also recite the Guyanese national pledge. Most of Surama, anyone under forty years, would have gone to school at Surama Primary. Other Surama residents went to school in the community where they grew up. Had they, too, recited the pledge on Fridays?

After the morning assembly, students enter the school, youngest students first, and classes begin. They take their seats at blue painted wood benches, two to a bench with a matching two-person desk. Text books usually come from Trinidad and Tobago, something which two acquaintances—teachers in St. Ignatius—had strongly criticized. The Guyanese sixth-grade social studies textbook highlights the independence movement, the first president, national and religious holidays, and the colours of the flag. Students learn about the different environments in Guyana, from coastal swamps to rainforests and savannas. The national curriculum seemed odd on certain points, as it seemed to require a level of familiarity with the coast, which most Surama students did not have. Contrastingly, ideas that were familiar to Surama students, such as descriptions of the rivers and forested areas, were treated as novelties. Speaking with a local teacher, we discussed how class lessons could draw on student’s first or second-hand experience of these familiar topics to make the curriculum more valid for them.

The national curriculum attempted to adjust the curriculum for the Amerindian population. In the North Rupununi, foreign language classes had been replaced with Makushi language class. This marked a change from the harsh punishments older Surama residents used to receive for speaking Makushi when they went to school. Uncle Glen, sir Floyd's father-in-law, remembered these punishments along with the isolation they felt while completing their schooling in St. Ignatius, over a hundred-miles south of Annai on roads that were hardly traversable. The distance and difficulty of travel meant that secondary school students had to stay in dorms for the duration of terms, many only coming home for the two month break in June and July—until the establishment of Annai Secondary school, around 2004. The relative proximity of Annai gave students the possibility of commuting to school daily rather than boarding at the school. Paulette was happy her grandchildren had the opportunity to commute, and said that besides getting bullied and not eating well, students in dorms tended to become 'rude' towards their parents, and there were high levels of student pregnancy.

When I volunteered at the school, the Makushi language/foreign language class was often skipped all-together, in part because not all teachers spoke Makushi. Floyd, for example, was Wapishana and spoke little Makushi. When I asked Paulette about this she said the government had offered a salary of 12,500 GYD (~50GBP) per month to part-time Makushi-language teachers. After an initial attempt, teachers passed on the positions, as the time away from housework cost more than they earned. My Makushi hosts told me the program was successful in Wapishana communities in the South Rupununi, however, and that most people in these communities, even children, could speak Wapishana.<sup>23</sup> During my time in the school, I tried to hold Makushi classes by flipping the roles, and having the students teach me. While this worked initially, the class relied too heavily on the only two fluent Makushi-speakers, who became timid and chose to maintain their ignorance rather than teach the class.

Around noon, students break for a 'snack' funded by the government's 'snack program'. Through the program, the government provides each school with 160 GYD (~65Gp) per enrolled student per day, which the school uses to buy snacks for the students. In Surama, the parent association arranged for juice and cassava-biscuit-nut-butter sandwich snacks. Paulette was one of the ladies who prepared cassava biscuits for the snack. She sometimes did cassava work specifically for this purpose. The school bought the cassava biscuits, which provided Paulette with a "little pocket piece."

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<sup>23</sup> This may have been a case of the grass being greener on the other side. Researchers working in Wapishana communities have since called my Makushi hosts' assertion into question.

Before returning to the description of the Village meeting, I want to look more closely at certain aspects of the school, starting with this snack program.

As I mentioned in Chapter One, Paulette considers cassava production to be part of what makes her a *Makushi* person. Cassava work incorporates the whole family, and feeds the extended household. Paulette's cassava work for school biscuits is slightly different. She did not ask for as much help from her daughters when making the cassava biscuits. Sometimes, she would pay her granddaughter, Evanie, to help her scrape and matapi the cassava. While this may seem to be an abrupt change from the communal cassava work, it also provided Evanie another space in which to learn cassava work. While Paulette paid Evanie, she also doted on her granddaughter, noting aloud all the help she provided. Paulette cuts the biscuits (into the 2.5"x2.5" squares) out of the cassava bread, (which is the size of the tawa upon which it is baked). The fact that these biscuits must be cut out of a larger piece of cassava bread means Paulette cannot set out to produce a precise amount of cassava biscuits. Instead, she makes extra, which stays in her household. This pleased Uncle Dan, who preferred cassava bread over farine. These school-cassava work sessions gave an extra supply of cassava bread for Daniel to last him until the next household cassava work. The school buys the biscuits for 40GYD (~15p) each, and Paulette sells anywhere from 200-600 biscuits each time she does the work.

The students then received two cassava biscuits with a spread of nut-butter between them, and a cup of juice, prepared by another member of the community. Paulette said that the parent association had selected to do things this way because the cassava biscuits were more filling, less wasteful, and less artificial than the alternatives, (store-bought sweet-cookies); and because it gave Surama ladies the opportunity to earn an income, rather than sending the money out to whoever made the sweets. The fact that the cassava bread and juice was made in Surama meant that students were eating cassava bread that a family-friend had produced. Members of my household did not consider this to be the same kind of sharing of food that happened in "traditional" communities, but were pleased the money from the government was circulating in the households which needed it, and that their children ate food that satisfied their appetite. The knowledge that this food could satisfy hunger more than other foods derives from the memory of food that "brought them up"; the food they ate at home, made by their family.<sup>24</sup> Though they are taken out of the household environment where they are both products and producers of family, their

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<sup>24</sup> I suggest that in this way cassava products are like ceremonial objects described by Wagner, "Already relational and implicated in the congruence that underlies the remaking of human form, feeling and relationship" (1991: 165).

consumption in the school adds to proper childhood development, and re-creates knowledge, in both the parent and child generation, that this food creates human bodies.

The cassava-biscuit snack program points to one of the many ways local governmentality and family-friend sociality are parts of each other. As the community are extended family and family-friends, so too are their class-mates extended family. All school related activities are therefore carried out between family members. Even discipline between students and teachers is part of the kinship relationship between these generations. Where students' physical exercises at the beginning of the day appears to be a way of disciplining students' bodies, it is also an exchange between family members. The student demonstrating the exercise is an extended family member to the assembled students. The assembled students follow her, or the classmates to their sides—more family members. Students are reminded of these relationships at home. Paulette often reminds her grandchildren that their classmates are family, (in part to prevent them from developing crushes on their cousins). Students foment these relationships through friendship with classmates over the many years of school, forming further family-friendship. Students who choose to live in Surama will continue to draw on and build this family friendship. Such was the case of Birthlan Allicock and Victor Captain, who, while sharing no direct family relationship, grew up in school together, and were closest family friends.

Teachers, too, are related to the students. Surama teachers and staff all lived in the community and were the children or sons and daughters-in-law of long-standing community members. Mistress Ellen, the head teacher, is Madonna's daughter in-law (and Kurt's auntie), sir Floyd is Glen's son-in-law, and miss Salome is both Paulette's sister's daughter and Daniel's brother's daughter. These teachers, aunties or uncles, mothers or fathers at home, were referred to as miss, mistress, or sir at school. I found it amusing, though not surprising to hear Floyd's daughter refer to him as "sir Buckly" when in school. This was often his title in meetings and other Village Council encounters, but the title was replaced with "daddy" as soon as his children left school. Shifting titles keep family ties from affecting the space of the Village or school in which people relate to each other as villagers, teachers or students. It also is meant to keep the conflicts that arise in these public spaces from affecting family relationships. I was surprised by how often titles were invoked in daily conversations in the household, particularly when criticizing one of the councillors. The title of the position was always commented on, not the person filling the position. This is not to say that people create a neutral relationship built solely upon their political relationship. The memory of family-friendship could never be divorced from the political/public sphere. Shifting titles rather were a kind of strategy which attempted to mark a kind of separation between these very interrelated spaces.

In this way, what I initially thought of as the nation disciplining students' bodies could perhaps be better understood as a way family friends create a public/political space in which they can address Village concerns. The physical positioning of students during these exercises—one student facing a larger group that face her—and the positioning of the Village Council during the meeting—an elected council facing the Village community while the community faces them—are strikingly similar, and uncommon in other parts of daily life. People generally avoid walking in front of a large group. This physical positioning only happens in certain organized events and environment; namely league football games where teams face the crowd for the opening ceremony, church in which the catechist faces the congregation, and “culture shows” in which the artists dance or sing in front of spectators. At other times, people avoided walking in front of pavilions or stands with people, choosing instead to walk behind or around any such groups, as to walk in front “makes [them] feel shame.”<sup>25</sup> In the cancelled meeting, for example, Michael had reported on the district meeting from his seat on the pavilion next to the other villagers, turning slightly so that the people behind him could hear.

Further similarities in Village meetings and morning assembly point to the way the community of family-friends creates a public/political space. A student is chosen to demonstrate the exercises and lead the student's creed and prayer changes daily; the senior councillor elected to the role of leader changes biennially. When they are not the leader, they do not stand in counterpoint to the rest of the group. The demonstrating student is a kind of mediator for the school, but she does not have power over the students, indeed the assembly shushes and coaxes their peers to follow the leader. Neither she, nor the assembled students may continue with the day until they all do the exercise together. Similarly, the councillor may lose power from the state, as was the case when the Guyanese government was prorogued, and community work dwindled—however, his influence amongst the community is not derived from the State as his title provides no coercive force over villagers that could make them participate in meetings or do community work. Finally, the student leader's physical position puts her into a potential position of shame, not because she may fail the school, but because she is singled out from her community of student-family-friends. She was selected to be in a position of potential shame, and as students cannot move forward in their morning exercise until all have joined together, community work and the Village Council will not be successful unless many villagers (family-friends) participate.

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<sup>25</sup> This was the case when we travelled to other communities for football games, while team members prepared, and made their way to the field, we spectators waited until we were all assembled and made our way onto the stands together, thus avoiding being singled out.

More people joined the Village meeting. A truck brought the lodge staff. Devon came on his motorbike and stood watching the seated councillors from under the stands. Auntie Verna came over from the health post (where she was the health-worker), and sat with the ladies on the stands, facing the senior councillor, her husband.

“Well, it seems this is a concern that people are having. Perhaps we can go into the budget reports?”

The senior councillor indicated to the treasurer.

Michael continued mediating the meeting without further intervention. He had received criticism in the previous year about not consulting with the community, and “doing things own way”. Some people said he wanted to do things the way he had seen them done in Germany where he had studied cinematography for animal documentaries. More recently, however, many previous critics had become highly supportive. They said that the senior councillor was asking for help, consulting elders in the community, and asking for people’s opinions before making decisions. It was said that he would go up for re-election, whenever elections were finally held.

Caroline, the treasurer, came forward with the clipboard.

“Well, I have been working on the budget, but I have not been able to get it balanced as yet. So far [X] has been collected from head tax, which has been used to build the office. Bushmasters have paid [Y]. And I have not been given any monies from the bus. This money is being collected by the bus-driver, so I don’t know why people saying that I have these funds.”

Another discussion arose around the importance of a properly balanced budget. Some people wanted to know who had been selected to collect funds for the school bus, others lectured indirectly saying that “the treasurer” had to keep a balanced budget. Villagers added their opinion to other similar opinions voiced before theirs. None of the comments were personally directed, and the conversation continued until Mistress Loreen said, “Well, the budget has to remain balanced, but the treasurer has not presented a balanced budget, so I think somebody should help this person and report back in the next meeting with the balanced budget.”

Using people’s titles instead of their names was not restricted to the meeting, people also opted for the title when discussing Village affairs. I first noticed it when Auntie Paulette asked her daughter whether the Village office would be completed in time for the Surama Cup.

“It’s that I tell Uncle Mike!” Caroline shook her head, “I mean, Senior Councillor,” (19/11/2014).

On another occasion, Victorine, Caroline, and Paulette were discussing a letter the senior councillor had received late.



“This is a problem because by rights, the Village Council should have responded by the 28<sup>th</sup>... So, I tell the secretary she have to hand in these letters when she receive it, not wait until the next meeting,”(07/02/2015).

“Yes. How she could give in—wait, it’s who the secretary?” Paulette asked.

“Udel”

“Well, secretary have to know she must give the letters when she receive it.”

In this way, the criticism is on the fulfilment of the position. Of course, this is not always delineated clearly. Though people talk about and criticize the title, everybody knows to whom the title refers. Furthermore, the criticism might draw on something the person has done outside of the realm of the Village Council. Such was the case of Michael being criticized based on his time in Germany, far before he was senior councillor. It was also part of the tension around Caroline’s budget.

Caroline had told me that she was worried about not having balanced the budget before the meeting. She and Vitus were handling logging orders, and she was also overseeing and participating in the completion of the Village office. While the office was made with local wood, many materials, such as the cement for the bottom floor, nails, paint, and the corrugated zinc roof had to be purchased in Lethem and brought to Surama. This accumulated to a large portion of Surama Village’s expenditures. As materials for the office entered Surama with money from Caroline and Vitus’ timber sales, people became suspicious of where the money was really coming from.

The money from the school bus was also missing, in large part because families could not pay the high prices of bus-fare. Caroline deflected the mis-budgeting onto the bus-driver, and by extension, back to the families who had not paid, some of whom were in attendance. The senior councillor handed the floor to the bus-driver, his brother, who similarly deflected onto the families that had not yet paid their dues. Like the unbalanced budget reports, this was met by a lengthy discussion after which it was agreed that the driver would work with another community member to balance the budget.

“If we come back and meet again, and those families still ain’t pay the bus I would feel shame for ya’ll.” Mistress Loreen added.

It was about 4pm, and the senior councillor continued the meeting, allowing each councillor to give their report. Sir Floyd presented the school report, highlighting the events in which the school had participated, and the date for the upcoming sports committee meeting. Then Sydney spoke about the CDP meeting to be held two days hence in which members of the “CDP” (Community

Development Project) would come to meet with the community, and locally chosen CDP team. He spoke from the stands about how important it was that the community collectively put forward the paving of the airstrip as the Village CDP, “If they come and ask ya’ll, what is Surama CDP, you know it, and you tell them. It’s to pave the airstrip.”

Surama’s CDP team had been selected in a smaller meeting the previous November. The team was to be comprised of people regularly in the Village, which ruled out some community leaders. It was also to be comprised equally of villagers from both sides of the community and an equal number of men and women. Nominations to the Village Council followed similar concerns. After the nominations, Sydney was disappointed that Surama did not seem to be a “unified community”. Few people from the “other side” had been nominated, and most prospective councillors were Allicocks. Allicocks were known throughout the Rupununi to be the family most explicitly involved in Village leadership in Surama.<sup>26</sup> Some of the other families were known to be great “helpers”, and were the backbone of work done in the community. While this seems to imply a hierarchy—leaders over helpers—leadership had no coercive power over helpers, or other villagers. Leaders had to attend to the food and drink, tools and materials for work, and the organizational details of events. They set the stage for work to be enjoyable, which would draw people out to participate and contribute. If they could not interest helpers and villagers to work, nothing would get done in Surama (as was the case between February and May when the council stopped organizing community work). Dispelling the idea of a hierarchical relation between these groups rests on understanding work as enjoyable and egalitarian, hosts and participants contribute by their own decision. At the same time, the community was interested in making sure “both sides” of the community were represented in the Village Council. In the end, the gossip about Sydney Allicock’s disappointment had the desired effect, and sir Andries, a retired teacher who lived on the helper’s “side”, was elected senior councillor in the Village elections.

Two days after the Village meeting, on the Saturday of the CDP meeting, when two development economists—from the United Nations Development Project (UNDP), and CDP—came to discuss Surama’s plan, I was helping to clean a tapir Daniel’s dogs cornered late the previous afternoon. Victorine had heard the dogs barking and ran to tell her father, who found the bush-cow in a shallow pool surrounded by the dogs. The bush-cow hung in quarters from the mango tree overnight and in the morning the family was busy shaving off the hair and distributing different cuts to neighbours. Paulette told her granddaughter Evanie to get ready for the meeting and a few minutes later said

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<sup>26</sup> Myers notes that certain Makushi families in the 1920s and 30s were more closely associated with community leadership, and distinct from “ordinary Makushi” people (Toshao quoted in Myers (1993[1944]: 62)

the same to me. She and Uncle Dan would look after the rest of the preparation. Before I left, Paulette emphasized that I was going on behalf of the household, and if nobody brought it up, I was to reinforce the importance of the airstrip for medical evacuations.

The meeting was on the second floor of the office, and upon arriving I found several villagers seated along the wall, some on plastic chairs others on the ground, with Michael and the Regional Development Officer sitting by a table near the two UNDP economists, who had arrived the night before and stayed at the Ecolodge. One of the economists was introduced and briefly described the reason for their presence, opening then the floor for questions. Sydney asked about the scope of Guyana's Low Carbon Development Scheme (LCDS, Guyana's REDD+ initiative), and reminded those present that it was the way the CDP was being funded. The UNDP economist was unable to answer the questions posed, but made a statement about the benefits of the LCDS to the “custodians of the forest”, a common qualifier when speaking about Guyana's Amerindian population. The LCDS was meant to channel funds from the global REDD+ initiative back to Amerindian communities. The form this took in practice was unclear; I was told the solar panels on Surama household roofs were funded by LCDS, but the political party in power had distributed them as a campaign promise.

The representative from the UNDP spoke next about the difficulties involved in implementing projects such as this one, where there were different expectations from the project, vaguely suggesting that the project could benefit some members of the community more than others. The speaker continued, enumerating vague objectives of the project—community benefit—receiving little feedback from those in the audience, even when he asked for a show of hands.

Eventually Sydney made clear that the airstrip was to be Surama's CDP, which seemed to be a breakthrough. The first UNDP economist spoke again, going into the budget, and asking how the project was to *generate funds*. Sydney in turn spoke about the importance of medical evacuation, to which the economist responded that there was no value to human life, however, as an economist, he had to present a budget to the CDP committee. Mistress Loreen, the head teacher for the nursing school, said that they didn't know the prices for things like tar and hiring a team. The information had been gathered some years before, but prices had changed. What followed was a back and forth between the economist and Sydney Allicock. Every unknown cost the economist brought up seemed to be countered by Sydney. At the very least, the airstrip would need tar; Sydney stipulated it could be donated by a construction company friendly with the community. Airstrips required engineering consultants familiar with aircraft; volunteers familiar with Annai airstrip would be brought over to Surama. Workers had to pitch the tar; Surama villagers would lay the tar through community work.

The economist became subtly frustrated and shifted from a budget to a time-frame. To which Sydney also had an answer.

“How we could know how long it would take?”

The economist was now more visibly frustrated, and said that the community would have to come up with the figures before the project could be implemented (funds granted).

I had been watching the back and forth between the two intently. Both Sydney and Michael had spoken about how the airstrip had been Fred and Theo’s (their respective fathers’) dream. Worried that the funds would not be granted, I calculated the size of the airstrip and the average number of workers at community work, and suggested a time frame. The economist’s face lit up, and he wrote the figure on the large paper-pad he had on an easel. The senior councillor then procured a paper of the original feasibility study for the airstrip and gave the projected price of tar, sand, and other materials, without going into specifics about how much would be needed. The economist seemed pleased and wrote down the figures. He reiterated the specificity of Surama’s CDP; it was not an “economy creating venture.” To which Sydney responded that this was an opportunity to demonstrate the “resourcefulness of the community,” the willingness of others to help Surama, the willingness of people to become capacitated, and to “stretch the dollar.” Sydney concluded by saying, “We want to show how people here have the capacity to grow.”

Throughout the meeting, Sydney highlighted the way friendships and community relationships would offset the cost of implementing the project. With his comments, he seemed to be pushing two main points. Surama had something to contribute to the rest of the world. Surama villagers’ way of working, “stretching the dollar” through community work with family-friends, lowered costs for everyone, facilitating development not only in the Rupununi, but abroad. Paulette understood this as the interest and goal of the Cobra Project, which filmed community work to show how to work together as a community. The second point Sydney was stressing was that the airstrip, like development more generally, was a “...Human right, it belongs to everyone.”<sup>27</sup>

“Development” is not the same thing for the economist and for Sydney. The airstrip, I was quite sure, could not generate more funds than were actually being generated by Surama. According to Victorine’s report in the Village meeting, the lodge had received 1,250 guests that year. The

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<sup>27</sup> I had seen the same statement written on one of the four signs marking the kilometres from the junction to Surama. When I brought up the quote to Kurt, however, he said he did not recall what any of the signs said, and just thought it was something Sydney often brought up. Nobody in the community used these signs as markers, they were relatively new, and anything along the side of Surama road was positioned in relation to one of the bridges, a bend in the road, or before or after the “tunnel.”

maximum number of guests allowed per year (safely hosted without adversely affecting wildlife) was between 1,400 and 1,500. So, the airstrip was not going to be able to bring in many more guests than were already arriving (many already via air charter). When I explained this to Victorine and Caroline, their lack of interest in my assessment made me recognize the difference in what we meant by “development.” It was also evident during the meeting when I had started contributing with figures, and Sydney pointed out,

“Bucket-man turn count-man.”

I had recognized the two different logics the economist and Sydney were reproducing, and tried to bridge the gap between the two; I estimated the amount of time it would take to complete the project through community using the logics of time that were of most interest to the economist. Sydney could have written me off as a noncommunity member, invalidating my perspective, but instead he reminded me that I would be the one spreading the tar, bucket by bucket, integrating me. He reminded us that the important thing was not completing the project in the allotted time, but that it would be completed by community work.

This communal factor was driven home at the end of the meeting when the UNDP economists handed the senior councillor, Michael Allicock, an eighteen-page document which he was to sign before the project could move forward. The document was an agreement stipulating the terms and conditions of the grant. The community watching, Michael proceeded to read the document aloud. Would that I had a picture of the economist’s face. It was not his place to tell the senior councillor of the community what to do. As the representative, elected political official of the community, Michael had to sign the agreement, or there would be no money. Michael of course knew that he was only a voice for his community, family, and friends, the decision to move forward had to be shared. He was somewhere on page three when he said he would read the remainder of the document at the CDP training that afternoon, and those interested in reading the document were free to read it before.

I returned from the meeting slightly peeved at the CDP and UNDP, whom, I said to Paulette were only concerned with how much was going to be generated.

“They want to know how much *income going to be generated*. All they care about is the money,” I said.

“They don’t want the villagers to know how much it is,” Paulette said.

“All like if I was there I would have tell them it depends,” Daniel said with a smirk, “If it’s foreigners it could generate but if its Guyanese them not going to raise... ‘cuz them is all thief.”

“Daniel!” Paulette exclaimed, “Victorine has all those figures, I don’t know why them doesn’t want to tell them. Udel and them have to tell them, them know how much people is coming from the bookings in the lodge, them done book it already.”

“Must be they will discuss it in the training this afternoon,” I said.

Paulette and Daniel had shared out the bush-cow meat, and the remaining fatty skin was smoking on the fireside. Paulette would later put it in the pepper pot gradually as the week went on, We ate pepper pot tapir skin the entire week, and shared with Michael, Marcus, and anyone else who came to visit; it seemed to me there were more visitors that week than normal.

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The meeting lasted about four hours, finishing up around 5:30 without much ceremony.

“Okay thank you for coming. It was a good meeting I think you are all well, um, briefed,” Michael said.

“We ain't even row that bad,” Mistress Loreen said, sounding almost disappointed.

“That's ‘cuz Dango not come,” Julian teased again.

People mostly cleared out of the Village centre towards their homes. I went back up to the house before it got dark to use the “phonebooth”, a wooden post with a small surface on which to place a cellular phone such that it would get one or two bars of reception.

After making my call I was surprised to find the house empty, I went to Trevor’s shop where Caroline, Victorine, Evanie, Frank, Devon, Udel, Inez, Birthlan, and Uncle Dan were discussing the meeting. Over beers, they discussed points of tension and concern, and put many of the finer points of the meeting into context for one another. Post-meeting discussions in which meetings spilled over into shops or the household were common. Besides creating a sense of closure and another opportunity to vent frustrations in the proximity of closer family-friends, they filled in absent villagers, in this case Daniel and Trevor.

Concluding thoughts

Similar to the way Victorine leaves cassava work when she goes to work at the lodge, students sometimes miss school to help in the farm, go fishing, or work on the household. Alternatively, they miss being in the household to go to school. The guides missed the Village meeting because they were working, and others chose not to attend so that they could continue their farm work, cassava work, or rest. While Uncle Mike was regarded as a good senior councillor, and was encouraged to take up a nomination for a second term, he declined, stating that he wanted to spend more time

with his family, and on house work. Both housework and opportunities for income are compromised when taking the position of senior councillor. As Vitus told me when I asked him if he would accept a nomination to join the council, "Surama is a Village ruled by one family. Here Caroline has more power than me because of her family. If I went for councillor people would say Caroline was telling me what to do, when maybe she was only advising me time to time. Also, if I went for Toshao, that is maybe 30,000 dollars (~100GBP) a month, and that is not good for me. I think I am a person who could better myself, I am a person who believes in self-development." (Paraphrased 4/04/2015)

Being a councillor effects both economic and family life. When telling me about different councillors, Caroline once told me that a person could be a good councillor, but that they could also become "power drunk." She spoke about certain family-friends specifically, noting that they had been a good councillor for one or two terms, but by the third they became power drunk, not listening to people's opinions and wanting to do everything, "own way."

While the Village, and school are manifested in family friendships, they can also affect these relationships, causing a person to feel entitled to make decisions based on their position. Councillors who become power drunk, or tell others what to do without listening to the community's opinions are not well regarded, and people soon stop listening to them all together. This can be even more problematic for the people living with the councillor, as the attempt at bringing external authority is often met with renewed resistance, and disregard for the person with whom they had previously been fostering positive familial relationships.

My analysis thus-far has been ahistorical. I looked at the primary school to suggest how Surama residents conceive of markers of the State, such as the pledge. Neither the school, nor the Village Council is completely a part of local sociality, nor are they a completely foreign political system. People grow to understand these together as they go to school and spend time with family. Connecting the pledge in the school and Village meeting, I would be tempted to argue that Guyanese nationalism is ingrained from an early age, but this tells me little of how the Nation-State, or rest of the world is conceived in Surama. Sydney's comments, however, suggest that the State is like the Village. Similar to how households contribute to machruman or community work, Surama can contribute something to wider politics and world sociality. They can show how to "stretch the dollar" and that "development" need not be about time, money, and labour. While Sydney champions these ideas, people in Surama seem to be more interested in money, and outside goods, something that concerns many members of its founding generation. In the following chapter I bring in local conceptions of history and "development", through which Surama residents' experience of the Guyanese State, and wider sociality and politics can be better understood and put into context.

## Chapter Three; History, “Work”, and “Development”

In the early 1970s, brothers Fred and Theo Allicock convinced some family and family-friends to build their houses on a large forest-enclosed-savanna where they would be closer to better farming ground. The Captains, Salvadors, Rolands, and Jameses joined the Allicocks and formed the founding eleven households of what is now Surama Village. The Village was established—recognised by Guyana—in the mid-late 1970s as a sub-Village of Annai. In the late seventies, Surama built its first school entirely through the collaboration of the resident families. Families grew fruit trees and made a living through farming, they grew peanuts, rice, corn, and the staple, cassava. In the 1990s, they established a community owned ecolodge, which has since grown in importance, creating income and work opportunities for Surama’s residents. New generations, the founding generation’s children and grandchildren, have grown. Many brought their partners to live in Surama, and, with the help of friends and family, they’ve built households of their own. Entirely new families have also moved to Surama, and the Village Council, after a trial process, has given them permission to make Surama their permanent home. They too have become part of the community of family-friends. There are now about three-hundred people living in Surama in over fifty households. Younger generations build their households close to those of their parents such that household clusters can also be thought of as one extended household.

The older generations in Surama contextualize what they see today in terms of their memories, and understanding they have incorporated throughout the life they have lived, an embodied outlook undoubtedly common amongst the world’s grandparents. In conversations about younger generations’ interest in wage labour and “development”, Auntie Paulette, Uncle Dan, and Grandfather Fred, told me stories about the early days of Surama when they used to work together. These stories dismissed today’s community work, and highlighted the difficulty of the work in the past, the interrelatedness of those working, and the proper way in which they celebrated when the work was completed; drinking locally fermented drinks on the weekend and going to church on Sunday.

Just as these stories highlighted early Surama work-sociality, they seemed to withhold any indication of Surama before the arrival of the Allicocks. I heard stories of Surama’s early days told and retold, but did not know what Surama was like before the arrival of these families in the early 1970s. I had read the published histories in the Makushi Research Unit book, *Makusipe Komanto Iseru* (Sustaining Makushi Way of Life, 1996) and on the North Rupununi District Development Board website, which spoke about families coming and going from the area. The stories people told me, however, did not address the period before the arrival of the Allicocks. I decided to ask elders, “What was Surama like before the arrival of the Allicocks?”



“There was nothing here,” was the most popular response. They told me that before Surama, they lived in Wowetta and other parts of Annai. “Nobody over forty [years old] was born in Surama,” Uncle Glen said as part of the church sermon one Sunday (29/11/2015). He encouraged children to ask their parents to tell them about the history, how they came together to make Surama; and to draw family-trees to see how everyone in Surama was related. Oddly enough, this sermon was around the same time as Baptist James’ 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. Before his birthday I was walking from the Ecolodge towards the old school, when he waved me down, inviting me into his newly fenced yard. We sat on a bench in the shade of the benab he was working on, and his nephew brought a pitcher of the parakari his household had prepared for the birthday celebrations.

“I was born right here you know, Sabba? You know my farm? Right down so?” He pointed away from the Village centre to a space I couldn’t see, but would soon learn was about a half kilometre away, “I was born right there in my farm. My mother’s farm,” (22/11/2015).

I thought that Glen’s account of Surama, nobody over forty being born there, and the story of the brothers Allicock was missing something. I tried to piece it together. Paulette said that the Allicocks did not have relations with the Captains or Jameses, but that anytime there was work to be done, these families would contribute, and work very hard. She sometimes referred to them as “helpers”. Knowing the association that people in the region made between the Allicock family and the leadership of Surama, I thought that the story of Fred and Theo Allicock coming to Surama was meant to mask the fact that people were already living in the area. I thought that if the Jameses were known to have been here before the Allicocks it would somehow delegitimize the Allicock ‘control’ of the Village.

Later in my fieldwork I was told that people lived in the area before, but malaria, other diseases, and evil spirits (jumbee or kanaimi), killed them, and the survivors went back to Wowetta and Annai. I thought that these stories had taken place many lifetimes ago, and did not realize they were part of the elder generation’s living memory. I had not imagined that Baptist James could be one of the survivors of these forces. At the same time, I knew the Jameses were close family-friends with the Allicocks. Daniel told me they had shared a back-dam (farming space) in Wowetta, where both families spent time working with each other. These families were close, but it seemed to me that the popular discourse of the James family “following” the Allicocks detracted from their influence in the community.

This discourse did not *mask* or obscure a ‘claim’ to the area. My idea that the James family would have a claim to leadership based on their prior residence in the area was rooted in ideas of Western leadership and colonization; ideas in which arrival—evidenced by a national flag, or boot prints in

moon dust, for example—implied a claim of conquest and property. Land, however, is not owned in Amerindian Villages, nor was it demarcated until this became politically necessary. Stories about Fred and Theo convincing family-friends to move, are not about leadership or ownership, they are about contributing to work. Without the contribution and participation of these families, Surama could not have been formed. Similar to how machruman is not an exchange, but a series of contributions, from the call to work, to the answer to the call and strengthen family-friendship; the start of Surama is a call to form community. I came to realize that my question, “What was Surama like before the Allicocks?” was a trick question. “Surama” does not refer to the area, but to the community of people living. Answers to my questions that there was nothing before the Allicocks arrived, or that there was disease before “Surama” were not meant to discredit other histories, but rather highlight the work done, and the family-friendships strengthened through coming to live and work together.

It is perhaps in this context that Paulette and Daniel’s disquiet about young generations can be better understood. Elders hold that their children’s community work is qualitatively different from the work they did in the early days of Surama. They are distraught their children do not want to plant farms or fruit trees, and that younger generations only want to work for money. I suggest that these observations point to the way changes in “work” create different kinds of personhood. The memory and continued experience of working in the early days of Surama are inextricably linked to the way Daniel and Paulette continue to relate to the community. Of course, younger generations’ work also shapes the way they relate to each other and make community—my point here is that Surama’s founding generation sees this work as qualitatively different from their way of working.

As my descriptions of contemporary housework, machrumani, and community work have suggested, work is not about getting things done efficiently, but about sharing time, jokes, food and drink, such that as many people as possible can come together and enjoy each other’s company. At the same time, Victorine’s comment (Chapter Two) suggests that a friendly crowd with a supply of parakari will contribute more towards the project at hand. What Paulette’s generation see as changing work habits, namely working for money in which only certain people are included, are different ways of relating to one another in Surama; different ways of being social. More specifically this is a different kind of work-sociality than that of Paulette and Daniel’s experience forming the community by fomenting family-friend connections.

People associate these changes in work with “development”. Just as “development” means something different to Sydney than to the economists that visited Surama, (described in Chapter Two), its meaning varies within Surama. Development can refer to the building up of the community,

the creation of the school, and the opportunities this has provided. In a conversation with Birthlan, Frank, and myself, Paulette spoke about the people who had lived in the area before the Allicocks.<sup>28</sup> There had been a balata, (latex extracted from balata trees), company; Paulette said that in those times the Moses and James families would come through and work balata. Later, with the spread of malaria, they left, returning to Annai. Then, "...the Allicocks come here in 1973. That is what I learn from my work. My research with Auntie Susan,"<sup>29</sup> (14/04/2015).

"Allicocks come and develop the place, na?" Birthlan added. And Paulette quietly agreed.

Paulette heard about pre-Surama times from the Jameses and Moses, and Auntie Susan with whom she had done research. Where this period is described as full of dangers and disease, Surama's early history is one of kin coming together to work and become family-friends. Birthlan associates Paulette's stories about work and family-friendship forming the Surama community, with development. His comment above resonates with his experience of increased infrastructure, facilitated access to outside tools, goods, and money in the community and Region. I suggest that he, like others his age, read the changes they have seen during their lives back into the stories of the foundation of Surama. In other words, younger generations' experience of "development" becomes part of the way they understand history, in this case, the foundation of Surama. Where for elder generations Allicocks sparked the formation of family-friendship, for younger generations that family-friendship goes hand-in-hand with "development".

Contrastingly, the founders of Surama were not thinking about development, but about family and access to better farmland. "Development" policies, and the discourse surrounding it, were part of political changes that occurred in the early-mid 1990s when the People's Progressive Party took over national leadership after more than three decades of People's National Congress leadership. This party change also brought about a change in policy. Where Guyana had isolated itself from outside investment, pushing national self-sufficiency, new policies pushed outside investment, and development. While Birthlan may have been too young to remember the changes during this period, his older sister, Caroline remembers it well. In a conversation with myself, Birthlan and Bertrand (under his completed benab), she reflected that her family used to be "poor," not even having boards for the walls of the house, ovens, or zinc. Her description of poverty is also associated with a lack of outside goods. Like Birthlan, she describes the increase of goods and infrastructure as part of

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<sup>28</sup> The continuation of our discussion about fruit trees in Turtle Savanna I mentioned in Chapter One.

<sup>29</sup> Auntie Susan, Paulette told us, was an Arawak woman who had come with the balata company and married one of the managers. She stayed in Surama after the balata company left until she died in the 1990s.

development, but remembers the time before this as poverty. Contrastingly, Paulette and Daniel champion this period as a time in which people could rely on family-friends.

These different experiences lead to different conceptions of “development”. For Birthlan, development is history; for Caroline, it is a move away from poverty; for Paulette and Daniel, it is a move away from proper ways of being social, and changing ways of working, partying, and sharing alcohol with others. In this way, “development” envelops memories of kin coming together, and the perceived contemporary breakdown of kinship relations. Though “development” may be conceived differently by people of different ages and experiences, it has become a growing concern to all generations. Experience of development in the North Rupununi and Guyana, has led Surama villagers to the conclusion that development is omnipresent. They perceive that all communities are in different states of development. “Traditional” or isolated communities are least developed, and thereby able to maintain “tradition”, however, the idea is that someday soon a road will be built to the community or an investor will arrive, and people will develop the area. This outlook is based on people in Surama’s own experiences, and the changes they see in other communities are further evidence of this development.

In this way, people see evidence for development on various scales. Zinc roofs mark households’ development, several zinc-roofs or a new bridge mark Village development, and the improvement of the national highway connecting Georgetown and Lethem—referred to as “The Road”—marks development for the region. Large scale development, such as improvements to the Road affect development in all smaller scale, as it facilitates access and lower costs for zinc, and other foreign goods for the household.

To better understand the relationship between time and development, and the changes in work-sociality I now go into more depth on what “work” means historically. Work is integral to the formation of a community of family-friends. I will then look at development stories associated with the Road and other communities, and finally I look at monetary work in Surama. My underlying suggestion in the following sections is that while work changes, it continues to be integral to the formation of community in Surama. As ways of working with others change, so too does the community. These changes have become known as development. This conception of time will serve as the basis for the way people in Surama constitute “culture” and “*belief*”, elaborated in Part II of the thesis.

## Work

I have already described the importance of work to family-friend sociality. People remember working with others as an integral part of the establishment of the community, and their connection

with fellow community members. As the community grows, new people come, work, and are incorporated into the community. Today, as younger generations associate community change with development, the incorporation of new people to Surama is more closely associated with development than with family-friendship. *History is kinship*, as Gow (1991) pointed out, and development, a new historical force, marks new ways of forming kinship.

The first school was made completely through community work. Grandfather Fred had solicited the government for assistance in constructing the school. After several months, he received the word the government would fund construction, and would be sending someone to survey the area before building began. Grandfather Fred told me the delegate tried to come in on a land-cruiser, but when they were unable to traverse the overgrown and flooded road, they turned back, and the first school was built through "self-help".

I asked Paulette what year the first school was built.

“The school? When I came in, in 1978, they had already started. The roof was up and part of the foundation. We bring in boards for the floor. And those bridges out there. I don’t know why them change [the bridges] from big logs. Now they have to change the bridges every three years. And now people don’t work together. We used to work together everybody would come out,” (15/06/2015).

Paulette often spoke about the early days of Surama. Her stories focused on the difficulty of the work and the way it was done with family-friends. She spoke about how people worked together, and said that men would cut trees with axes, and even board them with axes, afterwards they would put the hard-wood boards on the ladies’ heads, two to a board so they could carry the boards to the Village centre.

“I would carry with Madonna, Daniel’s sister. Those days I had Victorine in the sling, and Adelita was playing. Then, Frank was in the sling, and Victorine was playing. Madonna too, she had her baby in the sling. Even with the children we worked.”

Work was an integral part of Paulette’s incorporation to Surama. Paulette was born in Annai. She spent a lot of her youth living on the coast where she went to secondary school. Soon after returning to Annai, she moved to Surama with Daniel, who she was still getting to know. Her stories date back to the beginning of her Surama family-friendships. Madonna, Paulette’s sister-in-law and closest family-friend, was likely not very close before Paulette came to Surama. Paulette’s stories of working alongside others speak to the way people in Surama helped and cared for each other, and became closer family-friends. They also speak to what she considers to be proper family-friendship sociality, willingness to work alongside each other.

“Times gone there was no drinking during the week in Surama, if there was a machruman, maybe there would be one or two on Thursdays and one or two on Fridays, and Saturday they would drink. Sunday, they might continue if there was a balance, but those days everybody went to church.”

“Captains and James too?” I asked.

“Everybody! Those days people really worked together. Uncle Fred and Uncle Theo would call everyone to work, but now you would hardly have people going to community work.”

The way that Paulette describes community work in the past resonates closely with machrumani today. Fred and Theo were the leaders of the community work, they, along with Sydney and Daniel called people to work. Like machrumani, the call to work wasn't mandatory, but just a way of letting people know when work was happening. Paulette's memories of community participation are thereby also memories of people being closer together, more willing to help each other.

The community was small, about fifty people. Some households were united through marriage, but other community members, such as Paulette, were new to the community and did not have relatives beyond their household. In any case, working together fomented family-friendships. The small size of the community also meant that people formed connections directly. Contrastingly, today there seems to be a greater distance between kin. Paulette's grandchildren relate to their friends as school-mates. Paulette reminds them they are close kin. Similarly, while children refer to people in older generations as auntie or uncle, when asked how they are related they say that “auntie” is “granny's friend” rather than describe their consanguinity or affinity. This points to a division that is part of the daily reckoning of kinship in which younger people separate themselves from “big people” or “old-time people”. This is not to say that younger people are not also fomenting family-friendships with their classmates or with “big people”, but that the way of forming these ties has changed. As I have suggested, in Surama kinship is not a given, but rather enacted through working together in family-friendships.

In Paulette's stories, the difficulty of the community work or machrumani attests to the strength of family-friendships. While people today often choose zinc and cement buildings, households were previously mostly made of burnt brick and kukrit leaves. These materials had to be harvested from the nearby area. Kukrit was cut by axe and carried, rather than cut with chainsaws and hauled by tractor. As such, construction did not require money for gas, and more people contributed with their own work. Where Sydney contributed to Bertrand's machruman by lending him the tractor (Chapter One), he might have previously contributed by cutting kukrit with him. In this way, the households in which people lived were made through the work of close friends and family. Some of these older

households are still standing today, but most families have since made new houses with walls of hardwood, or concrete blocks. Paulette and Daniel's first household, for example was made entirely from kukrit; leaves all the way down to the floor, with no windows. Their more recent household did not entail as many people coming together, as the corrugated zinc sheets for the roof were purchased and brought from Lethem on the truck. Similarly, they paid two close friends, both Surama co-residents, (both of whom refer to Paulette as "nana", older sister), to rethatch the kukrit roof for the kitchen. Again, while they strengthen some ties, the way of working (paying friends), the people with whom one works (mostly people from the household), changes. Though many houses are made from purchased materials and paid contract work, households often host a machruman where closest family-friends from across the Village come and help set up the posts and start the frame for the household.

From experiences in household work, machrumani, and community work today, we can think of work not only as the physical completion of the project that each household hosts, but simultaneously constructive of relations. This is readily evident in cassava-work, which not only produces food for the household, but also entails the coming together of family, both genders and all generations. Cassava products then "grow them up", and through consumption and sharing become the consubstantial substance of people's bodies. The 'product' of cassava-work is thereby not separate from its 'producers'. Similarly, the products of work—households, bridges, farms, the school, and family-friendships—are not separate from the producers—family-friends forged through life experienced in the physically experienced community. The physical households and buildings in which people live, and the community of family-friendships that built them are integral parts of each other. The positive feelings that grew out of (and into) these relationships, are a part of the physical households through which people in Surama grew up, and created the community of Surama.

The idea of reciprocity, particularly the embedded idea of the obligation to return the favour, does not sufficiently explain what happens between family or community members in these calls and responses. I suggest that family-friend relationships do not entail the expectation to return the favour because the physical place being built is a fractal part of the relationship between the people working. Going to someone's machruman, after they have gone to yours is not a reciprocal gesture, as reciprocation has the implication of returning to a base relationship, rather each machruman is a part of the sociality with the people present. Perhaps this can be better explained with a more recent experience, beer-sharing. There was a lot of money circulating in Surama when I arrived in 2014. Many members of the community had just come back from setting up camps at a gold-mine where they were paid handsomely. Others had recently sold orders of wood. Different households bought different goods with their earnings, sewing machines, generators, boat engines, motor-

powered cassava graters, motorcycles, refrigerators, cement for new houses, and other goods. Shops sold tinned beer in large quantities, and groups of people could often be found drinking in the afternoons and evenings. As such, I often found myself being hailed down by one of Daniel's relatives, eager for me to come join him and share a gaff. This person would buy beers for everyone around, sometimes until the shop ran out. Because there were often several people gathering and the imported beer was expensive, I found that I could not reciprocate and buy the next round. I tried to avoid the shops, reply to calls to drink saying I was busy, or didn't have money, but it did not seem to matter, and friends came to Paulette's house to take me to the shops on their motorbikes so they could buy me beer. My relative lack of spending money did not seem to be a problem as the same one or two people bought everyone present several rounds. Still I felt bad that I could not repay the rounds. It wasn't until many months later when I began to understand that even this buying of rounds did not carry the expectation that the rounds would one day be returned. The people who bought the beer were buying it for friends who did not have the money to repay the gesture, and could not be expected to get that kind of money. The buyers did have the money, but nobody with whom to drink. I started to think that this was more about making sure that everyone around felt good and was having a good time. Money, as Paulette often points out, can be a point of contention. It causes greed, and the breakdown of proper sociality; in part because excessive drinking uses money which would be better spent on food for family. Though the beer was purchased, it was shared, and those who could not buy beers offered a gaff, laughed, and repeated punchlines, and created an atmosphere of inclusion. Of course, this is just the overall structure, and the buyers usually bought beer at the closest shop to their house, such that the people congregated at the shops were close co-resident family-friends.

Though this was purchased tinned beer, its circulation points to the limits of reciprocity. In Machrumen, answering the call is like accepting the beer. There is no expectation to reciprocate. This is to say, in Surama 'reciprocal' processes are not 'completed' by going to work for someone that has come to work for you. They are ongoing. If we were to arbitrarily isolate a single exchange, I would argue that the exchange is complete when one answers the call to a machrumen. The jokes, parakari, and food shared are not products or producers, but social processes that collapse these categories.

This might help understand work-sociality at the Village level, particularly in Surama's early days. People's work was not reciprocated by Theo or Fred or any other organizer, but rather directly contributed to the creation of the community both physically, seen in the tangible school or church buildings, and in the relations between family-friends, which constitute "Surama". As a result and



cause of this sociality, Surama villagers, leaders, and helpers worked towards each other's lived community.

Today, the senior councillor cannot respond to everybody's machruman. There are too many households, such that most people work with their closest or oldest family-friends. Still, work constitutes family-friend relationships. New partners and spouses in the Village are often not (previously) related to Surama villagers.<sup>30</sup> By working with the community however, new members become part of the community relationship. When someone new arrived in the community, I would see them working and drinking all over the place. One Wapishana man who arrived about mid-way through my fieldwork, *Punar* (a nickname, Wapishana for friend), helped numerous households in their farm and housework. He worked at the lodge, and contributed to community work. People praised him for being a "hard-worker". While he came to Surama to earn some money to send back to his family, through the work he contributed to and became part of the community.

#### The Road and Development



Figure 4: On the way to the farm

Work is part of the formation of family-friendships and community that becomes Surama. When talking about the establishment of Surama, people often brought up stories of the work they did

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<sup>30</sup> As I described earlier, all people in Surama are considered family, and unsuitable for marriage.

with family-friends to form the community. Work continues to this day, and the community is always changing along with that work. In Surama, these changes have come to be known as development. Part of conceiving development in passing time is the Road. The Road attracted people from across the region to work. Some of these workers then became part of Surama. In this way, the Road is a kind of metaphor for Surama, for the coming together of many people in development-time.

People reference the state of the Road to elucidate the way things were different in the past. When talking about their time in boarding school in St. Ignatius, my friends and hosts often prefaced with explanations, “Those days, the road wasn’t like now.” When I asked Vitus, “When did you come to Surama?” He spoke about the state of the road (and did not otherwise mention a temporal period). These descriptions highlight the difficulty travelling, the kind of equipment necessary to get through the mud, and the time it took to travel from one place to the next. Similarly, when I asked Uncle Dan about the early days of Surama, he told me of the narrow road when he used to drive cattle on horseback to sell in Lethem.

Just as the road is a marker for memories of travel, it is also integral to the beginning of Surama. As Sir Scipio points out in *Amerindian Testimonies*, “[Surama] was started by the workers on the Road to Brazil operation who saw the possibilities for farming...either originally from Annai or had worked on the road project.... There are eleven families in Surama now: here you will find the Allicocks, Captains, Rolands and Salvadors,” (Forte and Melville 1989: 60-61).

Sir Scipio mentions that he worked on the road, first as a labourer and then as a heavy machine operator, and many people in his generation worked on the Road as well.<sup>31</sup> I was told the worst part of the Road was north of Annai (towards Surama), past the “bush-mouth” (the start of the forest), and beyond. Surama is in a patch of savanna in that forest, such that Road-work would have drawn people closer to the area that is now Surama, but what role did the Road-work have in drawing people together?

Once, while taking-a-five from farm-work with Uncle Dan, he told me a bit about the work he had done with his father, Fred, monitoring the Buro-Buro river “It’s he clear the road you know? He push it right through down there. Before, it used to just be a small road passing till at the back so,” he

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<sup>31</sup> Like Scipio’s explanation, Ronald Salvador told me that he came in large part because of the road work in the early 1970s. Kurt, Milner, Ronald, and I were having ‘kari with Uncle Sammy after a machruman. We were talking about politics and the upcoming elections, and Ronald told me, “I come here first in 1971, then it wasn’t like this. The Road didn’t go through so,” he pointed towards the highway, hidden behind the forest, “I was from that side, Karasabai, Tiger Pond area. I went there when it was just building up, just putting up them buildings... I come here first, then I went to work on the Road, then I come back in 1973,” (18/04/2015).

pointed South East towards the farm mountain. I asked If Fred cleared the road before they started Surama.

“He push the road in 1972. Then it did have one cap, no land cruiser couldn’t pass through, sheer tractor and bull-dozer. Any land-cruiser try and pass through it’s sheer,” he spun his arms in a circle, “sheer mud. ‘Til to Kurupukari, even 10km passed that. Then when PNC lose the election, them want to close the road. Sheer plane flyin’ out then. They want plane go, carry beef. But its best we have at least the road, to have it,”<sup>32</sup>(10/04/2015).

As another quote from Sir Scipio in Amerindian Testimonies attests, the Road-work in the 1970s did not have any lasting change on accessibility to the area, and was more of a public relations campaign on the part of the government to demonstrate control of the area. Still, Road-work was an opportunity for movement, earning money, and learning new skills. It wasn’t until the mid to late 1990s, however, that the Road would become readily navigable. As the Road improved, bus services started connecting Georgetown and Lethem. Nowadays, the road tends to flood in the rainy season, but bus services are not interrupted for extended periods of time, as in the past. With improvements to the Road, the cost and danger of moving goods has lessened such that more shops have opened in the North Rupununi. Most, including the shops in Surama, bring their goods from Lethem, and do some occasional restocking by buying goods in nearby Annai (larger shops which themselves bring in goods from Lethem). This Road development, and the access to goods, has accompanied a wider ‘opening up’ of Guyana after the change in national government in 1992. This change in government also brought renewed interest in international investments from development organizations. This contrasts with policy in the preceding twenty years, which was largely about self-sufficiency.

The lodge was also built and founded in the early 1990s, originally as an extra stop for researchers visiting the Iwokrama nature reserve, which shares a boarder with Surama on the burro-burro river. Along with small-scale logging, the lodge became the largest source of income for the community. With this income, Surama residents have been able to purchase more goods, which has led to mixed subsistence from shop-bought food, fishing, farming, and occasionally, game. As Paulette once told me on one of her check-ups on me while I was writing notes, “Back then [in the 1980s] there was no work at all in Surama. In those days, Sydney used to go Annai, and them people [Surama residents] would all give him money. He was always kind hearted. He used to go with horse and donkey, so he

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<sup>32</sup> Though Uncle Dan cited a specific year for the road work, I was never able to get a consistent specific year for the time when people made the permanent move to form Surama (or for the roadwork). This is perhaps because the Allicocks and Jameses already had farms in the area and would come to stay in camps while they worked their farms. Different families moving at different times, and the fact that Surama wasn’t officially recognized until the mid-late 70s probably also contributes to the range of years.

would write down what people give he, because those times it had no shops here. Well, he would go and bring back all them people things. He was always helping people,” (31/05/2015).

She said that they would buy the most basic things, salt, oil, and soap, and that her brother worked at the government shop in Annai and would always save her ‘a little something’ he would send with Sydney. The rest of subsistence, in those times, did not include store-bought food. This change in subsistence came with the improvements to the Road, change in government, and new job opportunities created locally.

People in Surama thereby use the Road to mark changes in time. These changes in time are closely linked to development such that the increased use of purchased goods including store-bought food, chainsaws and other machinery, and (especially) zinc roofs for households—all facilitated by improvements to the road—are part of development. People in Surama have seen these changes in their own community, and in other nearby communities, and view these changes as part of the passing of time. To phrase it differently, Suramans understand that in time, all communities will develop as Surama has. This was evident when people in Surama visit other communities in the Region. On a trip to Taoshida Village with the Surama youth church choir, Ovid (Daniel’s cousin), Roy (a family-friend), and I were resting while the children played.

“Quiet, na?” Ovid asked (11/04/2015).

“The children gone and play over by the field,” I replied.

“No, it get no music playing, no generator, nothing.”

“Yeah for real. In Surama it always get somebody at least playing a little music. Then they have to play the music louder than the generator, haha”

“Yeah. Once the road build-up, then you would start to get that kind of thing in here, but all like how the road is now. How them going to bring that in?”

“Yeah, you can’t carry it over [the mountain].”

“Once that road, them build it up, you would get all kind of thing coming in here. But that is how a place like this build-up. Only thing is you don’t really get farming ground nearby.”

“Yeah,” Roy joined the conversation, “Or hunting ground.”

“Or water,” they said at the same time.

“The way you seeing it now, Sabba, is how it starts, when a place like this builds up. You might get a group like us come in and see, then one person come, start to build it up. Sometime, you might get a

idea for a business, you see something and say you could get money here.” Ovid said this would draw people in and make the place grow, “All like you know Crash Water? It’s people from Yakarinta go and build that place up. Yeah, only thing Yakarinta got that river you have to get across. Anyways, now Crash Water must get like 400, 500 people living there.”

Similar to Ovid’s expectation of Taoshida’s development, many family-friends in the field noted how villages were changing in appearance. Thomas, a Wapishana man who came to Surama with his family in the 1990s spoke about roofs in Sand Creek (in the South Rupununi), which used ité palm rather than kukrit palm leaves. He said they lasted longer, and that if I were to go to Sand Creek I would only see ité roofs, though, he was told, now all the roofs were zinc. Similarly, on a school sports trip to Rewa Village, Caroline explained that, “It had a time when all the houses here was sheer mud and thatch roof. Now people living upstairs with zinc and brick and I don’t know what more. From the way I see it, Rewa people getting a little bit of money.”<sup>33</sup>

Because similar changes are seen throughout the Rupununi, “development” is understood as inevitable. One evening at dinner in Paulette’s kitchen, Vitus reflected on a flight over Karasabai Village, “All them roofs zinc now. I wonder if Gunns would be like that someday,” (28/06/2015). Gunns is a Waiwai Village at the headwaters of the Essequibo in Region 9. Vitus had been there often for his work, and referenced it as a very “traditional” place. He thought of the Waiwai as more “indigenous” or “real Amerindian”, in part because they shared their food and ate communally.<sup>34</sup> Linking the idea of zinc to development more explicitly, Uncle Dan was once telling me of his plans to remake the back-dam camp. He was explaining how he wanted to redo the roof, which was half zinc and half kukrit, when I asked him,

“Uncle Dan, this wasn’t all kukrit leaf before?”

“No, it did both. This is tradition and development,” (13/04/2015).

Recognition from the government, the increase of population, move to zinc roofs and other economic growth are all seen as development. Development brings people and money to new places, and is generally seen as a positive thing. Paulette told me that after surveys done in Surama, most people said that development “was good”, because they could have new goods, such as TVs and motorcycles. Paulette was more cautious and thought it could be possibly damaging as drugs

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<sup>33</sup> “little bit” here was a kind of sarcastic pun. Often in conversations people flipped verbs sarcastically for humorous effect. Hot days referred to as “coldest.”

<sup>34</sup> As Forte notes in her review of Rivière’s *Individual and Society*, the image of “the ‘exotic’ Waiwai” contributed to them being one of the few Indigenous peoples in Guyana that have received anthropological attention since the 1950s (1987: 77).

could also come into the community. She further cited a well-being survey a researcher had done in Surama in which both the visiting researcher and Paulette had independently found that the households with a higher degree of well-being were also the households with fewer outside goods; less motorcycles, no motor-powered cassava-grater, and lived more “traditionally”. Still, most people, especially from my generation, looked favourably upon development.

On a fishing and hunting trip downriver with Frank, Birthlan, and Devon, we were on the boat heading to a camp a few hours away when Devon asked us, “You think you could make your own Village?” (01/06/2015). He said that if he asked Granger (the newly elected Guyanese president) for five wives he would have a primary school in ten years. He chuckled and added, “Then they goh need five maids to look after them children, and even more children coming.” He said that then he could go to the president and show him how he was developing Guyana. Building Schools, and making a new Village.

This was meant as a joke, and drew a lot of laughs, but it also highlights the way development is about the expansion of people to new places, the influx of goods from the outside, and gifts from the government or development agencies. Often when political parties campaign in the region, they promise construction equipment or other goods. At a People’s Progressive Party campaign rally, Paulette requested (on behalf of the Village) and was granted the bus that takes the students to secondary school daily. These requests work on larger scales. In the CDP meeting (described in Chapter Two), Sydney was asking for a large amount of money from the development agencies. Sydney downplayed the financial aspect while highlighting local development. He foregrounded Amerindian’s right to have the airstrip, which would allow them to demonstrate the knowledge and ability to effectively run it. In this way, Sydney hoped local development would overcome wider negative stereotypes of Amerindians in Guyana as part of the past or unable to be a part of the contemporary world. By bringing markers of development to a new place, first people, a school, and a church; and later zinc, machinery and paved roads, *Amerindians* bring “development” to parts of Guyana that are otherwise regarded as dangerous, and “uncivilized” (explored further in Part II). They thus demonstrate their ability to handle environments which they know non-Amerindians cannot. This is best brought together in Devon’s joke. The president of Guyana himself was giving Devon the wives, which he would effectively repay with the development of Guyana. Though it was a joke boasting his own virility, it takes as given that non-Amerindians cannot handle the terrain in which Amerindians lived. Through his (infamous) knowledge of the forest, he will be able to populate—through his own family—a new area, and bring a government school. This is not dissimilar from the stories he heard about the early days of Surama. In this way, family-friendly development, it’s growth and kinship ties, are linked to regional and national development.

While changes are associated with development, development is *not* the goal or motivation for changes. For example, zinc roofs, often associated in hindsight with development, are not chosen *because* they mark the household as development. While everyone knows that zinc roofs make households hotter in the Rupununi sun, people select them out of convenience, and a concern for sustainability. Kukrit roofs require “damag[ing]” several trees, and sometimes costs money, as work is not solely through machrumani, but also with payments to family-friends to help rethatch. With an increasing number of households in Surama, harvestable kukrit trees get “further away”; closer trees have already been harvested, and the plant takes fourteen years to regrow to a harvestable state. As kukrit trees get farther away, thatched roofs require more money for gas and diesel to cut and transport the leaves to the building site.

Ron, Sydney’s son, explained that zinc was not only chosen out of sustainability, but out of a concern for fellow community members, as well as for the benefit of tourism in the Village. Ron says that the influx of money has created monetary disparities in the community such that some families cannot afford zinc. Thereby, families who can afford and choose to use zinc are indirectly helping families without monetary income by allowing those families to use the available kukrit leaves. Furthermore, Ron said that Surama villagers’ use of zinc roofs for households allows the eco-lodge to use natural materials for their guest accommodations, benabs and bungalows. This is important for guests as they are looking for an ‘authentic’ experience in a sustainable ecolodge.<sup>35</sup> So long as households use zinc, the Ecolodge can use kukrit without trees getting farther away.

This resonates with what Uncle Clifford said while we were working on uncle Bertrand’s benab. Clifford said that Sydney had recommended that everybody build a benab, so that researchers and guests looking to stay in an Amerindian community would have somewhere to visit. Bertrand, for his part built a benab to have a place to entertain guests when they come to visit him; not necessarily tourists, but friends and extended family in the region. While Bertrand, through his work as a mechanic and driver at the Ecolodge had enough money for gas for the tractors and chainsaws to cut and transport the kukrit, (and a family-friend relationship with Sydney, his brother, who lent him the tractor), other families that rely on kukrit for their benabs may not have these funds available. As such, though they would have access to the tractor through their own ties to community members, they may not have the money for gas or diesel. These families then rely more closely on their family-friend connections to build their houses. For example, when working on uncle Sammy’s roof, one of the ways Kurt contributed was by dragging leaves to the household on his motorbike. Ronald, Milner, and Sammy could then put up the new roof, and we all drank ‘kari after the work.

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<sup>35</sup> Researchers and guests’ search for authenticity will be the explored in Part II of this thesis.

These brief examples point to Paulette and Daniel's concern that working for money fosters different ways of being social than the kind of work they did in the past. The use of zinc roofs means that further machrumani to rethatch will not be held, and the use of store-bought food means families do not farm as intensively. In both cases there is less work with family friends, and more need for paid work. These changes are further illustrated in a story of community work in 2009. Several community members cut the high grass with cutlasses and foists, and then a villager came from the Ecolodge with a gas-powered string trimmer. Everybody with handheld tools stopped working, and watched as the string-trimmer completed the work. The use of these gas-powered tools makes work easier or faster, but they also diminish opportunities for people to work together.

### Monetary Economy

Thus far I have described the relation of family-friend sociality to work, particularly the way working voluntarily with neighbours creates closeness and community. Paulette and Daniel suggested that working with family in the farm or in machrumani is part of proper personhood. Shifting focus now, I do not suggest that money impedes or replaces family-friend sociality, but rather that family-friend relationships and personhood change as people work with each other in the monetary economy. While access to money is part of life for people in Surama, older generations see that working for money fosters different kinds of personhood. This changing personhood is associated with two different ways of knowing—one associated with “development”, non-Amerindians, and money; the other with the past, the forest, and indigeneity. These ways of knowing will be explored further in Parts II and III. Here, I look at some of the main sources of income for people in Surama, and for Surama as a Village, and some villagers' reflections on paid work.

While Surama's older generations conceive of wage labour as a recent development affecting sociality, the Rupununi has been part of the monetary economy for a long time.<sup>36</sup> Ranching has been an important part of life in the Rupununi since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the area that is now Surama was previously the site of a ranching company as well as a balata company. Where balata extraction often took the form of debt peonage, we have been warned against conceptually isolating this system from the Amerindian economy. Hugh Jones reminds us that “...The Indian economy has its own internal logic which reacts and adapts to outside forces,” (1992: 44). In the Rupununi,

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<sup>36</sup> As I explained above, ~1970-1992 is remembered as a time of poverty. During this time, Guyana largely closed itself off in an attempt at economic self-sufficiency. People in Surama do not talk about working for money during this time and say that they sold farm produce for cash to buy soap, oil, and salt. It is possible that money during this period was much less a part of daily life than periods before or after, and that these variations are part of wider shifts. If this is the case, people who grew up during this period, Paulette and Daniel's generation, would see the changes post-1992 (“development”) as an unprecedented increase in the importance of money in people's daily lives.



“balata days” (the period of balata extraction), are remembered as a golden age of travel during which people travelled with family and had the opportunity to marry people from far away (Kamash Scipio in Forte and Melville 1989). In this way, people remember a potentially oppressive extractive industry as an opportunity to extend kinship ties. Similarly, Amerindians in the Rupununi sought kinship with ranchers, incorporating them through marriage to uxori-local work relationships. This points to the way that the monetary economy could not be separated from family-friend sociality. Family-friend sociality has historically extended into the monetary economy, such that balata, ranching, and farming are not considered to impinge on autonomy, but increase kinship opportunities. Ranching, balata, and farming, however, were not part of the wage labour economy; they did not hire people to work a set amount of time for set wages, but rather offered an exchange of money for goods or services without a set period.

Contrastingly, many people in Surama see wage-labour as impinging on personal autonomy, particularly as it occupies a set period of time. They further describe the unpleasantness of being told what to do by their superiors in the workplace-hierarchy, often family-friends. Wage labour is not devoid of family-friend sociality. Rather, the extension of family-friend sociality into the wage economy—as well as the inverse, wage economy in the space of family-friend sociality—is often accompanied by conflict or discord between family-friends. This may be part of the reason people prefer extractive industries, like small-scale logging, to full-time work; logging affords a higher degree of autonomy (from time and kin/bosses). I look at how conceptions of work and sociality in the monetary economy, specifically the Ecolodge and logging, points to the importance people in Surama place on autonomy, particularly in work and other social relationships.

#### *“By the Lodge”*

Surama’s Ecolodge was established in the mid-1990s. As the story goes, students came to Surama and wanted a place to stay. They were offered accommodation in local households, and upon leaving, offered to pay their hosts. This gave Sydney the idea to start a lodge so that visiting students had a place to stay and money could be generated. Another story adds that the students were researchers visiting the Iwokrama nature reserve, and that students themselves helped build the Ecolodge.

Since its establishment, the Ecolodge has hosted backpackers, researchers, birdwatchers, wilderness survivalists, and other tourists. In recent years, the lodge has received heightened national and international recognition, and hosted increasing numbers of guests especially from schools, both secondaries and universities (mostly from the USA and UK), which hold summer courses in field-methodology in Surama. The resulting income has allowed for new additions such as a vehicle repair

garage, solar-powered kitchen and internet-equipped office. It has also created further opportunities for employment, especially during and leading up to what I came to call ‘research season’, (during UK and USA summer breaks).

Like the Old School, the Ecolodge is a meeting point in the community. People use the internet or phone booth, receive pay, buy food, and work on contracts or for wages. The number of employees working at the lodge depends on the number of guests. Besides the full-time office staff, head-cook, cleaner, head-mechanic, handyman, and manager, the lodge employs extra cleaning and kitchen staff, assistant mechanics, drivers, guides, and builders when needed. Where office-staff usually work year-round, and take a month break when requested, other positions, such as mechanics, manager, kitchen staff, and cleaners are offered to a different community member monthly such that different people in the community have opportunities to generate income when needed.

Full time employment at the lodge is usually taken up by women from the community, but I did not hear enough about their work impressions to include their voices in my work. One thing women in Paulette’s household mentioned was that employment limited the amount of cassava work one could do, and full-time employment meant having to purchase farine. A (~100lbs) bag of farine costs between 15 and 20 thousand GYD (50-75GBP, more than half of the minimum wage salary). They said working created a net loss, as they spent more to feed the family than they earned at work. Perhaps this is why most women who worked at the Ecolodge were young ladies who still lived close to, or with their mothers, and therefore always had family to do the cassava work.

Part time workers are either hired through the lodge itself, or through the UK-based wilderness survival tourism company that partners with the eco-lodge. My own participation in the lodge was alongside laborers building a camp, which would host three groups of students over summer. My main colleague while I worked, Milner, usually a guide for the lodge was hired as a day labourer, which he appreciated because it gave him more money per day than he made as a guide, and allowed him days off so that he could help his wife with cassava work.

Work at the lodge was necessarily different from community work or other kinds of work I had done in the community. Milner and I were mostly alone throughout the day, and had I not been there as a volunteer intern, Milner would have mostly been working alone. As there were only two of us, the gaff was much reduced. While digging holes for the latrines one of us dug while the other provided the gaff. After lunch provided by the kitchen staff (beef or sometimes fried fish—likely from Uncle Dan’s extra catch, which he sold to the lodge—rice and farine) we took a break, and drank some of the ‘kari I had brought in my bag. While nobody said anything to us about having a ‘kari during work, lodge workers would most likely have not been drinking had I not snuck up ‘kari. The most

uncomfortable aspect of lodge work was constantly being told what to do, where to dig, and how to dig, by the lodge manager. This was in stark contrast to community work or other work where everybody seemed to show up, know what to do, and split into groups doing different tasks. When something had to be done during community work, a comment would be made, and others would fulfil the implicit request. For example, once lopping the area by the school Floyd said, "I want some help from you and Thomas to clear out them bats in the school." Later in the week Thomas and his son cleared out the bats. On another occasion, clearing up the road from the junction, someone said that the vines that hung from both sides of the canopy overhead didn't allow the road to dry. Ovid was driving the mini-bus that had been shuttling people back and forth to community work. On one of his passes, his cousin, Glen, told him, "We want to cut the vines." Ovid turned the bus around, and two volunteers climbed onto the roof with a foist to cut the vines. On another occasion, laying the cement for the floor of Frank's house, Frank left Kurt and Sammy to do the ground, when I suggested to them that the cement wasn't perfectly level, Kurt said, "This is just Frank's house, it is not the president's house." The way people contribute to community work depends on each person, contrastingly, at the Ecolodge the lodge manager told us how deep the latrines were to be, and where to dig the drainage for showers. It stood out to me, such that when Paulette asked me how work at the lodge was going, I told her that I didn't like it because we were always being told what to do, to which she could only laugh. Milner felt similarly, and after being asked to work on plumbing he said he would be asking Glen for time off to help his wife in the farm.

"It's me alone dig that other hole," he said, "I think I would talk to Glen, maybe, I don't think I would come back tomorrow. I have to look after my house. That plumbing thing, that is Tony's project. It's not me working on them things. Jackie ask me to put the linings on for them other bathrooms, in the bathroom. The whole lodge I do, but this one here is not my project," (9/06/2015).

I went to visit Milner a couple of days later while he was taking some time off. I found him at home, under the shade of his porch working on a bowstring. He asked if I was on my way to the lodge. I said I was not, adding that I did not like being told what to do. Milner told me that Jackie (who had recently been appointed as the CEO for the lodge) always trusted him. He said the lodge was looking for somebody who could do all the things he could do. He said that when something wasn't working he would check it and fix it without being told. He mentioned fixing the shower head, and the other plumbing in the office. By the way he framed the work he did with the lodge, it seemed that Milner was foregrounding the work he did with Jackie, helping her in a personal way when she needed help around the lodge. On her birthday he had even bought beers to share with other lodge employees after work. Contrastingly, Uncle Tony did not have the same way of asking for help as Jackie. He had worked with us one morning on the plumbing, afterwards only occasionally came to check on us,

showing us where to dig before going back to other things. I think, if he had asked Milner for help and stayed working on the pipes, Milner might have been more inclined to work with him and help him in his endeavour, the way he seemed to work with Jackie. When things were wrong, somebody would say it was wrong and he would go and fix it, nobody had to tell him to fix it.

While there was a distinction between the home and work environment, family-friend relationships were very much a part of the work at the lodge. Much of Milner's gaff was about times he had helped co-worker family-friends. When I asked him if he knew of a cure for kidney-stones he showed me a plant that he used, pointing it out right next to the steps of the main building of the Ecolodge. He said that Jackie had once come to him with a problem, "Me and she gaff, we are friends and she tell me." Milner said he had made a tea for her, "I experiment with that plant and it really work," (9/06/2015).

He went on to say that though he didn't know much about medicines, people often called on him for help, and in that way, he had helped Sydney, the ex-CEO of the Lodge, recover from a rattle snake bite. He told me about how he had cared for an intern visiting from another community. She had had seizures and he had carried her back to the lodge. He told me that she said she missed her 'kari, so he had taken her some 'kari from his home. On another occasion, while digging, Milner told me about digging a grave for a close family friend, Theo. He told me of the people he was with, the family-friends that had given them vodka to help with the work, the hardness of the earth, and the closeness between him and Theo.

Milner also spoke about the lodge as an opportunity for younger family members to learn. Once at a party at his house he told me he was excited because his nephews, Larindo and Carlos, would be learning with him at the lodge, "Sabba, this boy here say he wants to be a guide. I tell he that is good. It's he himself tell me he wants to be a guide," (14/04/2015). Milner explained the way incoming interns would rotate; one would work in the kitchen while he would take the other into the forest, and then they would switch. His nephews were sitting next to him in his kitchen, "I tell this chap here that is how we goh do. It is nice, that is how we pass on the knowledge. I get this knowledge what I learned from many years, since I was twenty I carry them people (lodge guests), and I do not know them language, but I hear it and I start to know. German, Dutch, them people. I never understand them, but I start to listen and know them is German. I can tell! This boy here wants to be a guide, I can pass on to he my knowledge."

Milner values the knowledge he and other ecolodge workers have developed about guests. They can anticipate that people from different countries will have different expectations about the food, the guiding, even the prices. Milner says that through the lodge he has been able to communicate with

even Dutch and German people, anticipating their interest by listening to them speak in their language, and responding to them in English. He is eager to pass this knowledge on to his nephews, demonstrating to them the things in which guests are interested.

The anticipation of guests' or interns' desires is not only thought of as a professional opportunity, or good for the lodge. On occasion, guides risk professional relations with companies to take care of guests personally. Between mid-October and November, the Bushmaster's company brought the reality television show, *Naked and Afraid*. The show's premise is that two strangers, a man and a woman, should survive in different 'wilderness environments' with only one tool each, and no clothes, for twenty-one days. The show makes a point of demonstrating the couple's weight before and after their time in the wilderness, which is meant to attest to how well they were able to find food. This quickly became a topic of discussion in the community, and drew several guides and boat-captains to work with the film crew. In talking about the show, Surama villagers spoke about the strange things that foreigners did or wanted to do while in Surama, whether it was eating strange things, or just 'surviving' alone in the forest without fire starters or food. Uncle Dan was one of the boat captains/guides for the film crew. He was often away from home minding the crew, but would come home with fish from the pond every now and then.<sup>37</sup> He told me how the couple were "so skinny," how they were bitten by marabuntas, and how he would sneak into their camp at night and, when switching the camera memory cards, leave fried fish or chicken for them to eat. He explained his prowess in taking a couple extra minutes to switch the memory cards, or leaving the food just out of the camera's gaze. He said he even caught a fish, and secured it to the shore with a fishing line so that the naked couple could spear the fish themselves, making it seem like they had caught it. Knowing Daniel, I was not surprised about his concern with the couple's hunger. His caring for them, as though they were staying in his household could have jeopardized his position as an employee, but he cared for the participants anyway. When filming wrapped, the guest crew left mementos with the Surama guides. Daniel and Lionel would often carry their combat knives, or short cutlasses on their belts; gifts and memories of the friendships they had made with incoming visitors.

This relation with the foreigners is cherished, and since the internet has become more public in Surama many people have had the opportunity to stay in touch with friends they have made, particularly amongst the visiting students and teachers. Daniel often spoke about the things he had

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<sup>37</sup> Fishing was another opportunity that accompanied much of lodge work. On a week trip downriver finishing the latrines on a camp, we hardly slept as we would go check fishing lines and nets after work in the evening and again around dawn. The catch was distributed amongst the workers. Daniel sold one fish to the lodge, but took the rest home. He told me he received criticism for fishing too much and not working on the camp, but responded that he could not be expected to eat the chou-mein they provided, and successfully work all day.

shown visiting teachers or film crews, demonstrating his knowledge of the environment to help them get what they needed in terms they could understand. For example, teaching guests how to fish with a line, reminding them that sound travels faster and farther under water, so they should not make noise while fishing. Or that the oils from the repellent and creams they used spread on the bait such that they were repelling their prospective catch. Daniel said that a visiting teacher, a friend of Daniel's, had accused him of liking things the hard way, to which Daniel replied, "If you don't learn the hard way, you don't learn," (27/09/2014). Daniel appreciated the exchange of fishing techniques with the teacher.

While these Ecolodge relationships—with family-friends, or guests and interns—are appreciated, the economic growth is not always seen positively. In the Village meeting described in Chapter Two, I drew attention to the discussions that tend to surround budgets, the head tax, and the Ecolodge funds.<sup>38</sup> Concern over the monetary economy is not restricted to the Village meeting. Daniel speaks about employment as not really benefiting himself, but rather putting himself at risk for the sake of his employer. He says that after he "expires" (retires) he will get little benefit from the work he has done for Iwokrama and the eco-lodge, but he will have to deal with all the long-term effects on his body. He said that on one occasion he was working for the Bushmasters and someone from the lodge asked him to take something down-river. He took it and when he returned he asked for the payment for the hire, "Scotty [Sydney] try to tell me it's a favour. You know how much work I do for them already? From 1972 to... must say 2000, yes, I do community work, build up that place there. I tell them, how many days you worked on this building here? And you going to tell me to do this? I tell Sydney, look at the people who really build this thing up, what do they get? I build this thing for free. Same Madonna ex-ex-boyfriend, Kenneth. We come to here and cut cedar," He pointed to the back where they had cut materials for Birthlan's house and for the water trestle, "We cut it and carry it upon we heads. No tractor to build up that thing at the lodge. For free you know? Community work. I didn't just save that wood and go and sell it now. All that time we put into that place, six to six everyday... first money we get in Surama we start to develop there. Tourism, but who is it really benefitting? And they don't want to pay me, when if it's a vehicle they pay them. I tell them, you know what? Keep it. I don't want the money, just don't come tell me nothing," (3/05/2015).

Daniel has a similar feeling about his work with Iwokrama. In a conversation in which he was telling me about the researcher with whom he'd worked, I asked him why he didn't work there anymore.

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<sup>38</sup> The Village charges visitors a "head tax" of 1,200GYD (about 4.50GBP). For Ecolodge visitors, this tax is taken out of the first night's stay, and given to the Village accountant.

“It’s me and the old boy set up all them camps there. Work with all them researchers. But now, my expiration date coming up. I sacrificed ‘nough health building up them place, ‘nough malaria,” he said.

He went on to say that he just wanted to live balanced now, (which is also his reason for not hunting animals anymore), he didn’t have a need for money, he just wanted to have his farm. He continued discussing the different researchers with whom he’d worked and guided. The things he had shown them, the interests they had had, fishing, amphibians, and wilderness. In this way, Daniel seemed to cherish the relationships with the researchers and guests more than the economic changes that the lodge had brought. Furthermore, his anecdote about boating for Scotty (the lodge manager, and Daniel’s brother) highlights the potential conflicts that arise between family-friends. Scotty asked for a favour as he would from a family-friend, but Daniel expected the pay he would receive from a work environment. Other comments Daniel makes suggest that money estranges him from the work-relationships he has forged, both at the lodge, and Iwokrama. He was appreciated because of his work and knowledge, but being paid made it so that people always “told him” to do things, and he said, “I don’t want people for tell me skunt.”

*“How we does work”; logging*

Conversations between friends, family, and acquaintances often veered towards logging, especially conversations between men in my generation. When Vitus and Frank were in Paulette’s kitchen for a meal or chat, Frank would ask about orders coming in. At the shop or a friend’s house, young men spoke about work they had done; boasting about the size of the trees they had cut, or their abilities with the saw. Gossip went around about somebody who had an order rejected for being cut too small. Friends visited friends and asked about orders to see if there was any spare work. It seemed that most able-bodied men in the community were at one time or another, and in one form or another, associated with the timber industry. Even people with permanent jobs, such as Floyd, took the opportunity to make some extra cash logging when school was not in session. Timber was described as Surama’s resource. It enabled the Village to “develop” in the way they saw best.

This resonates with something Uncle Dan told me over breakfast before community work. It was January, the short rainy season, and Daniel was talking about arapaima fishing. Somebody was fishing arapaima out of season. Daniel explained that arapaima was a protected species and only supposed to be harvested at certain times of the year. He then considered his statement, “There is a harvest, yes, but the thing [non-Amerindians] doesn’t understand is that arapaima is them villages’—Apoteri, Rewa, Crash Water—that is their resource like how timber is ours,” (26/01/2015).

He went on to say that if communities followed the “government’s development plan” they would starve, and foreign fishermen did not understand that the fish were for the people from those riverine communities. Paulette added, “Yes, them people [people from riverine communities] just work for them little soap, and that is how them make them income.”

Daniel’s parallel shows that, like fish in riverine communities, timber allows people in Surama to determine the way they engage in development. It allows them, as Amerindians living near the resource, decision making power in contemporary life. One morning while having breakfast with Paulette, Birthlan, Vitus, and Scott, Vitus said that he had a little order. Vitus read out the sizes of wood requested, and Birthlan asked if it was all bullet wood.

“Got to be,” Vitus responded (8/08/2015).

“I got to see where I would get gas,” Birthlan said.

“I might get some,” Vitus said, “Or I could go see if I could reason Amazad [a shop owner to loan gas]. I could take down the 500 BM on the tractor see if I could fix it up.”

“When he wants the order?”

“Soon.”

Vitus added that the order had come through his sister in Lethem, and Birthlan asked who the order was for. He recognized the name of the person asking for the wood, and Vitus said that he was good, paying cash-in-hand. Birthlan and Frank had not been paid for their recent delivery, an order they handled on their own, which had made it difficult to buy the necessary supplies to continue working. The starter for Vitus’ tractor was also not working, and he did not have the money to get it fixed. Vitus and Birthlan discussed that school would be starting soon and Birthlan had to buy materials for his daughters. Paulette added that Frank also had to send his children to school. Ten days later, another small order came in, and I accompanied Frank, Birthlan, and Orwill, their second cousin (and Milner’s adopted son), to the logging camp. Though I did not feel completely comfortable with logging, it was an essential part of life in Surama, particularly economic life, such that I felt I could not solely rely on what I heard in conversation, but had to see it from the inside.

Logging first started in the early 2000s when Mark Simpson, Jackie Allicock’s partner, and Ricardo Cabral, Sydney’s step-son, began filling orders from Lethem. Logging grew in the later 2000s with the Chainsaw Milling<sup>39</sup> project, which aimed to curtail illegal logging by involving local communities in

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<sup>39</sup> With chainsaw milling, harvested trees are turned into boards at the site the tree is cut, either with a mill, which attaches to the chainsaw (for finer sized boards), or by free-handing (for thicker boards).



policy decisions, empowering and training them in sustainable forestry management. Daniel participated in this project, and harvested the materials for his house. In the past few years, other villagers including Caroline and Vitus have started logging for income. Having attempted to manage a shop selling soda, beer, and frozen Brazilian chicken, Vitus and Caroline realized they were not making money as most of their income was on credit. Caroline said she could not deny friends and family who would come asking for chicken, promising to pay her back when they had money. Rather than buying another shipment of chicken to sell, they decided to buy a chainsaw. They leased the chainsaw, and quickly bought another. Soon they had eight chainsaws, and several chainsaw operators leasing them out. Vitus developed a relationship with a lumber yard in Lethem and began receiving orders himself. He and Caroline provided operators with food while they worked, and hired a tractor to pull out the cut lumber before transporting it to Lethem—a couple hundred kilometres south on the Road—receiving cash-in-hand with which to pay their operators and the Village Council tax on the wood. More recently Vitus bought a used tractor (on credit), which eliminated the need for the hire. After passing an order to Sydney, however, the lumber-yard in Lethem started working with Sydney more than Vitus. Due to the tractor's mechanical problems and lack of funds to maintain the chainsaws, their operation slowed down. Nevertheless, logging is still the largest source of income in Surama.

Most of the logging in Surama takes place in the MYC (Makushi Yemekun Cooperative) an area of forest set aside specifically for small scale logging of North Rupununi communities. The MYC junction is on the Road, about 7km north of Surama. From MYC junction, a web of roads lead to the various logging sites. Logging is not exhaustive and there are restrictions on harvestable sizes and species, and the distance between harvestable trees. Wood cannot be transported or sold without a permit, and to get a permit, the local forestry officer must verify that the stump conforms with the regulations. These permits are inspected when entering Lethem where the wood is sold. Besides MYC, logging is also carried out on Village lands. This logging must be approved by the Village Council, and is similarly taxed. The Village Council, however, discourages extraction from Village land unless it is for the construction of Surama households or bridges. On the other hand, Surama villagers may sell any harvestable trees they happened to cut when clearing land for their farms.

Through relationships with lumber yards in Lethem, orders come in to Surama. These orders request a certain amount of a specific type of wood, usually measured in BMs (board-foot) cut to different sizes. The kind of wood requested depends on the prospective use, and trends in popular woods. These orders come to one of a handful of people in Surama, usually the owners of the tractors, who then ask chainsaw operators for help. These operators, Surama residents or sometimes family-friends from a nearby community, are usually people with whom they have worked in the past.

Payment agreements between the order managers and chainsaw operators vary. Some hire operators on day-pay, others pay them a percentage of the total amount of the order. In both cases, the group of three to five operators and one or two chokemen (runner/helper) spend a few days in the MYC camp, or commute back and forth from Surama, before the wood has been planked and is ready to be pulled out. It takes the tractor two trips to pull out the wood from the camp to fill the Bedford truck that will take the wood to Lethem. From the junction, about four hours from Lethem, the Bedford truck leaves early in the morning, trying to arrive at its destiny before nine in the morning to avoid the heat that stresses the truck tires.

The Bedford truck can carry approximately 2,500BM of wood per trip. Besides the wood, many Surama residents take advantage of the transportation, and catch a ride to Lethem to go shopping, or visit family. In Lethem, the wood is delivered to the lumber yard, and, ideally, a payment is received. From time to time, the order is paid for in credit, which can cause serious problems for the person fulfilling the order as he/she will not be able to pay the chainsaw operators, purchase new tools, such as chainsaw chains, or get more gas for the next order.

The Bedford truck does not return empty. Shop owners buy goods in Lethem, and households collect cooking gas-tanks, or get other goods to bring back on the vacated truck. The Ecolodge and Village Council also take advantage of the trip to visit the bank, and purchase any materials or fuel that might be needed for ongoing building projects. The PVC, zinc, and paint for the Village office, for example, were purchased on timber delivery trips. These free-rides became a topic of tension during my time in the field.

The Bedford truck is technically owned by the Ecolodge. As such, any hire to Lethem costs the logging manager 60,000GYD (~210GBP). The Village Council sees the transportation of materials and merchandise for the community or Village as community work, but logging managers have expressed that they are already paying a tax to the Village for the wood, plus a tax for the permit. While fulfilling an order can bring in almost 3,500GBP, expenses including tax, gas and diesel, hiring or repairing the tractor, hiring the Bedford truck, food, and tools and maintenance on chainsaws, means that less than a quarter of the money goes to the manager and chainsaw operators. While logging, or waiting to be paid, chainsaw operators go into debt with local shops. Due to the cost of imported food, attractive high earnings from logging are matched with a high amount of expenditures.<sup>40</sup> Though logging is intensive for a few days, leaving little time for other activities, it was appreciated because loggers only worked a few days every so often, and were free to do other

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<sup>40</sup> Logging curtails the high price of imported goods. Shop owners bring back goods without paying for transportation, which has been paid by the logging managers who hired the truck,

activities in the interim. This autonomy and ability to make money when needed is greatly valued, as Daniel's comments earlier in this Chapter have shown. Before big events, the beginning of the school term, or travel, chainsaw operators often seek orders to have money for celebrations.

The autonomy of this work may be further explored as chainsaw operators do not equate expected incomes with the amount of time it takes to complete the order. Rather they see the monetary value of their work in how many BM's of wood they will bring out. Thus, jokes about buying a bottle of rum or some beers by leaving a 10'x5"x5" cut of cedar in the shop-owners front yard were not uncommon. Like other community work or machrumani, chainsaw operators seem to feel little hurry in finishing an order, especially if they are being paid a daily wage. This is not necessarily the case for the manager, who is usually on a deadline from the lumber yard. When I accompanied my host-brothers to the MYC, our concern was not with time, per-se, but with how many meals our farine would last as their two-gallon tub of farine at the camp had been redistributed in their absence.

Another reason there was little rush to finish the work was that Frank, Birthlan, and Orwill enjoyed being in their logging camp; they were proud of their ability to stay in the forest while working, but also enjoyed the work process. On the first evening in the camp, Birthlan asked me, "If it was you alone you think you could stay here?" (18/08/2015).

"Maybe if it was me alone and we have the things we have here."

"Buddy, me alone used to stay out here. Daddy would go out for the weekend, and he not come back 'til Monday. Roy used to come out too. See that last camp, with the cruiser? That was we first camp. There I used to stay alone. I would cook, then lay down. You hearing all kinda thing, bana, everything. No arrow, no gun, just cutlass."

"That is where I might get frightened."

"Yeah. I had motorbike, but I never liked going 'til home."

"You prefer to stay out?"

"Yeah. Sometimes I might go junction, watch a movie, come back."

"Haha!"

"Yeah, buddy, serious!"

Birthlan turned and spoke to Orwill, "That camp we pass up there we call balata camp. If it get a order for balata I would go work there. That man did take 30,000BM bullet wood from that same place you know? Bana! If you see bullet wood!"

Our camp was a tarpaulin draped over a rope slung taught between two tall posts that had been cut from young nearby trees. Under the tarpaulin, our hammocks hung from posts dug into the earth. At one end of the tarp was a scrap board that had been turned into a table to prepare meals, which we cooked over a quick fireside. We had brought our packs, chainsaws, rations (courtesy of Caroline and Vitus, the managers of the order), and other tools on the tractor bed.

After breakfast, we walked about a kilometre to where Birthlan, Frank and Orwill harvested timber from a tree that had been felled for a previous order, and two additional trees. Orwill planked freehand while Frank used the chainsaw-mill. I moved between the sites, running gas and oil for the saws and topping up the operators, my family-friends, whenever they ran low. I watched them sharpen the saws, and they said if I accompanied them again, I would have to sharpen the saws myself. When the four of us were together, on breaks, or at lunch we joked with each other. Joked about our abilities or disabilities in the forest. Orwill had brought a bottle of rum, and I had brought one as well. After lunch, we would take a shot and continue working until around five when we would return to the camp. Besides one moment when we had difficulty rolling a length of tree over and Birthlan became frustrated saying that we were not strong enough, the atmosphere was jovial. They teased Birthlan about his girlfriends, gaffed about the upcoming sports finals, teased me about my ignorance and run-in with a tick-nest, and Birthlan boasted jokingly about his abilities.

When I asked how long the work would take Orwill responded, “Why you want to go back baaad?”

We all laughed. Frank responded that he didn’t know, and that we could stay as long or as short as we liked.

In the evening, we cooked chou-mein with fried tasso (cured beef) or corned-beef, and loaded our plates with farine. Afterwards we laid down, and continued the gaff for a while until most of us went to sleep. Frank stayed up or got up in the middle of the night to go hunting. Though he was unable to catch anything, he regaled us with stories about the one that got away.

As our food supply dwindled, Birthlan tried to fish in a nearby creek, but the fish he caught were too small, and in the afternoon, we stashed our backpacks in the tarpaulin and walked out of the camp towards the junction.

Without making any conclusions, I want to draw attention to what I see as some important similarities and differences between logging and machruman work. I have described machrumani and housework as constructive of family-friend sociality. The joking, drinking and food shared between all members of the household. Logging work is similar. The boys working were close family friends, hired by family-friends. We gaffed, and enjoyed the “hard-work”, and each other’s

company. The food we ate was provided by Caroline, our sister, but beyond that, differences outweigh similarities. We cooked the meals ourselves, and the boys were all away from their families while we worked. While I noticed a gendered separation at meal-time in machrumani—and a division between the guests and hosts, as hosts often waited for the machruman to finish before eating, or ate separately—people in machrumani shared the same food. While at logging work, Orwill and Frank’s families necessarily did not share time or food with them. Another difference is the call for help. Where machruman’s host will ask others for help, logging work seemed to be the opposite. Family-friends ask managers for work. Orwill, for example, joined us after meeting Birthlan during community work and asking for work. He said he wanted, “some bread before [football] finals,” (17/08/2015). When we returned, Marcus asked Frank if we would be going again because he wanted work.

A further difference is of course the money involved. Though operators are not told what to do while working, nor do they have to stick to a daily schedule, money can create problems between people. There were many instances of payments not being received, or a certain promised sum of money being smaller than expected, which caused people to break work relations. Birthlan started logging as a chokeman when he was sixteen. He received two payments but when he was never paid for the third order he stopped working for his manager (his aunt’s husband). Similarly, Daniel stopped working with Vitus and Caroline after they sent an order to Lethem but did not receive the payment, and were unable to pay Daniel. Vitus and Ricardo had sent an order to Georgetown, but when some of the wood was rejected the amount of money received was different from the projected income. When Vitus checked with the buyer, there had been a discrepancy between what was rejected and what Ricardo had reported as rejected. These discrepancies are not limited to the work environment and affect family-friendships

This is not to say that problems do not arise in non-monetary work such as machruman. I have already pointed out Daniel and Paulette’s disappointment when their children and grandchildren did not help in the farm, but other problems may also arise. A friend was known for his laid-back attitude and quietness. He was a proponent of “taking a five”, for which some people had started calling him “Pegue Cinco”, (take-a-five in Portuguese). When he suggested we take-a-five during community work someone laughed and let slip the joke that had been circulating; shortly after which, he left community work. Nobody was mad at him for leaving, and to my knowledge nobody apologized. As I suggested before, there is no expectation to reciprocate this voluntary work. By showing up, Pegue Cinco had already fulfilled the call to work. Though he left before lunch and ‘kari, there was no work imbalance. Contrastingly, when a payment is not made or received, or a person is accused of not paying their workers, resentment can accumulate.

Problems with payments often stem outside the Village, starting with the lumber yards or businessmen who do not pay for orders they received. These problems, however, permeate relationships in Surama. The networks of credit that are established between shops and villagers can run wide, such that while Caroline could easily explain to her father why she was not able to pay him (when she was not paid for an order), this creates further problems for Daniel. Like most chainsaw operators, Daniel had likely bought food on credit from the lodge or some shop while working. The excuse he received from his daughter would not help him repay this debt. Meanwhile, all shop owners in Surama are Daniel's family-friends (sisters or cousins), and his debt might weigh on that relationship as well. Similarly, Paulette's friend from the coast had loaned Frank and Birthlan the money for one of their chainsaws. Paulette asked them to repay the money, but having not received a payment, and owing at the shops, they were not able to repay the loan. At the same time, however, Paulette knew that her sons liked to have a few beers from the shop from time to time, and expected them to forgo this luxury until they had paid back the chainsaw money. They did not share in this expectation. This caused tension in the household as anytime the boys had a drink, or bought something she found superfluous, she would remind them of their outstanding debt, which she was eager to pay back to her friend.

Despite possible conflicts, logging work is appreciated because of the degree of autonomy it affords. The way Frank, Birthlan, and Orwill talk about the "back-dam", as hard work, which requires a degree of strength and knowledge, and provides autonomy, is similar to the way they talk about "balata days"; the days when their ancestors extracted and sold raw rubber for exportation. The trees the boys were harvesting had the bleed marks, now about two meters over my head, a physical marker from latex extraction. Balata days are thought of fondly, especially by my generation, as a kind of golden age of exploration and knowledge when Amerindians travelled far, and knew the forest well.

On a fishing trip downriver with Birthlan, Frank, and Devon, we were talking about previous trips downriver. I was surprised that Birthlan had only been downriver a couple times, and that he had never gone without his father. For the four of us, it was our first trip downriver without "big" people. Decisions had to be made about who would captain the boat and who would be the bow-man, making sure we didn't hit under-water logs which could damage the boat engine. As we proceeded cautiously, discussing our relative ignorance about the river, Devon said, "Your father know this river good from when he used to walk side the boat in balata days," (23/04/2015).

Despite the fond perception of this time, there seemed to be a discrepancy in *who* or what generation worked balata. When I asked Frank about the bleed marks on the trees and when the balata days were, he told me it was in the 1950s and 60s.

“So, grandfather them used to bleed balata?” I asked.

“Yeah, they was top man for that. They used to come Surama for that. They did live Kwatamang side, but what made them come in Surama was the fertile farming land,” (19/08/2015).

I asked Daniel a similar question, but he said that grandfather Fred had not bled balata. He rather suggested that his maternal grandfather had, and that he had gone only once to see how it worked; how the shipments went out from an airstrip by Apoteri.

I mention this discrepancy because it points to the different ways that Frank’s generation, and Daniel’s generation think about balata-days. The different ways of remembering balata days point to different ideas of work and sociality. As Forte writes in Makushipe Komanto Iseru (1996: 45):

The heyday of balata bleeding is also recalled with great affection. Balata bleeding was a rainy season activity, and often a man and his entire family would work together bleeding the trees and then paddle down to Apoteri to sell the latex and buy food and other goods from the company’s store. Many friendships, courtships and marriages resulted from these journeys. Today, other opportunities for socializing between villages have taken the central place of the balata trade.

While my generation foregrounds the opportunities for personal autonomy and knowledge provided by balata days, Forte’s describes it as a way of expanding kinship ties and strengthening family-friendships. These are, of course, not contradictory. The decision to attend a machruman, for example, is an autonomous decision to strengthen family-friend connections. In this light, it is interesting that the balata trade in the Rupununi ended in the 1970s (Forte 1996:14), and that Surama started in the wake of its collapse, strengthening family-friendships while making a living through farming, which in the 1970s became not only a subsistence activity, but also a way of earning an income. Along these lines, it is also interesting that Surama was selected for its proximity to farming ground, (whereas people living in Annai or Kwatamang have to travel long distances to get to their farms), especially since the area now occupied by Surama used to be the headquarters for a balata company. The Allicocks coming to ‘develop the place’, and all that this entails in terms of kinship and economic growth, was in the wake of outside investment in the form of balata trade, which according to Forte, had previously fomented kinship and trade amongst Makushi people. Like

government development plans that Daniel mentioned, however, this was foreign controlled development. Meanwhile farming, family, and current development in Surama is remembered through work and family-friendship. I will draw further conclusions on this in Part III of the thesis.

#### Concluding thoughts

People in Surama, (particularly the men with whom I worked more closely), value their autonomy in work relationships. This is the case in monetary work and machrumani. The kind of monetary work that is most appreciated does not occupy a worker full-time. Frank quit his job, which required him to be at the office in the lodge in order to peruse logging. He was then able to hunt, fish, and do other things during his day. Daniel says he doesn't need money, but can get it when he needs. He sells some of his fishing catch to the lodge, makes matapis that the lodge then sells, or works as a tree-spotter. He also works as a boat-captain, but seems to value the relationships he makes with guests more than the money he is paid for this work. Milner, too, took days off to spend time at home, rather than at the Ecolodge.

In machruman the caller asks for help, and others fulfil that request. The caller does not take the help for granted, and family-friends answer the call of their own accord, stemming from a desire to help. Though I never asked anyone why they helped each other in machruman, and I would not doubt that some might explain it in terms of the possibility for reciprocation, I like uncle Clifford's explanation in Chapter One best, "...they are family friends, this is an Amerindian thing."

Amerindians help their family friends. This sentiment does not stop in the household or in community work, but continues into the monetary space as well, such that people often work for money alongside their close family-friends. Similarly, people value the relationship they make with outsiders through work.

Thinking about this degree of autonomy, the history of Surama, in which Fred and Theo convinced some family-friends to make the move to an enclosed savanna, apparently haunted and malaria ridden is quite remarkable. The reason for the move was fertile farming ground, but it entails a degree of trust between the families that moved. A network of autonomous people, who are willing to develop family-friend relationships. The history of Surama is one of forming community through work, strengthening family-friendships. It is also a history of becoming Makushi. Fred and Theo were not Makushi. They married Makushi women and moved to start Surama. Their sons, who would be considered Makushi through their mother, then married Makushi women from the Annai area, and brought those women to Surama. If people doubted that Fred and Theo's children were Makushi, they would not doubt that the grandchildren, were Makushi. So, Surama is also a history of



becoming Makushi. New people from the area similarly incorporated to the community through marriage, such that the children and grandchildren of Surama are Makushi.

Today, Surama is spoken about as a development. My generation—the sons and daughters of Surama’s founding generation—heard stories about the first school and the founding of Surama. The older ones experienced the changes that have accompanied the establishment of the Ecolodge, and improvements to the Road. They draw a line between the stories of the early days of Surama and the changes they see today; the new school, work opportunities in the Ecolodge and logging, and the influx of goods. In this way, the history of Surama is development.

The founding generation, however, does not share this view. For them, Surama was about work, and the family-friendly relationships created and strengthened through working together. The work they did was hard, without machines, and they did it with and for their families and closest friends. They consider development associated with the monetary economy quite different from the kinship of Surama’s early days. Monetary work, logging, teaching, and Ecolodge work necessarily pull people away from the house and household relationships, which their parents value highly. This is evident in the explanation of balata work as a family enterprise, versus the balata work idealized by youth which highlights the autonomy and travel involved. While balata days were the autonomous coming together of family, the younger generation stresses the personal autonomy, while the older generation stresses the coming together of family.

Meanwhile, the youngest generation, primary school aged students, my host-siblings’ children, see their grandparents as “old-time people”, who are different from themselves. Old-time people hunt and go into the forest. Surama’s grandparents, for their part, admit that their children and grandchildren do not go into the forest, “But it is our own fault, we didn’t carry them,” Paulette once told me (27/02/2015).

At the same time, logging, boat captaining, guiding, and other similar work in the monetary sector, in which my generation is involved, requires a certain degree of knowledge about being in the forest. This discrepancy, the way Daniel goes to the forest, versus the way his children go into the forest is about the way they embody knowledge. Once, Vitus asked Paulette if there was ever *bina* (plant/charm) to turn into different animals. Paulette said that Daniel was taught all that knowledge, but he never passed it onto his children. Daniel said, “You ain’t see how them have it on their computer?” (25/02/2015).

Paulette and Daniel see that changes in work-sociality have changed the kind of personhood embodied by themselves and their children. Their children, too, know that they do not have the

knowledge that the older generation values. This change in embodied ways of knowing (to which I will return in Chapters Five and Six) have led to very particular ways of thinking about time. This can be best explained by an interaction between Vitus, Caroline and their children while they ate.

Their youngest son cried because the fish from their grandmother's pepper-pot was too spicy, "Stay easy na man," Caroline said, frustrated, "You believe daddy made a separate pot without pepper for we when we were growing up? Must eat," (23/08/2015).

"That's because you were living in culture days. Amerindian culture. Now is." Vitus said in a calm tone. The clear accent hinting at the mocked sophistication in his statement.

Vitus, and others in the community had said similar things to me before. About other tribes not being "civilized" or not being "modern" like people were in Surama. Like other community members, Vitus said that all Amerindians would one day be "civilized" and that "development" was going to be a part of everyone's life eventually. This reflects the widespread way of thinking about "culture" in the past, and "modernity", "civilization", or "development" as the present and future.

## Part II

### Chapter Four; Researching “Tradition”

This chapter is about how people in Surama constitute “Makushi culture” through certain objects, practices, stories, and memories. People in Surama use the phrase “Makushi culture” to refer to practices and objects they consider to be authentically indigenous. In this regard “Makushi culture” is associated closely with the past, an association present in many similar phrases, “real[ly] Makushi”, “real[ly] Amerindian”, and “traditional”. “Makushi culture”, and similar concepts, are also conceived as part of a temporal and spatial move emanating from the forest and the past, and culminating in contemporary Amerindian Villages. The corollary of these concepts is “modern”, “civilised”, and “developed”, more closely associated with the way people live today. The chapter begins with descriptions of these concepts based on interactions I had in the field, then looks at how the concepts are informed by a history of interactions with non-Amerindians, particularly researchers; finally, it looks at how the concepts come to have a bearing on daily life today. These concepts inform people in Surama’s understandings of past practices of family-friends.

“Makushi culture’s” association with authenticity, and the past, will not sound new to anthropologists working towards overcoming both the popular image of indigenous peoples as remnants of the past, and the concept of ‘culture’ as an ahistorical, bounded unit. Beyond looking at how ‘Amerindian cultures’ fit into ‘our’ history, recent anthropology in Amazonia focuses on what history *is* for the people we study, and the way changes and transformations are negotiated locally (see for example Fausto 2009; the authors of Fausto & Heckenberger 2007; Gow 1991, 2001; High 2015; Rubenstein 1997, 2001, 2002). My analysis in this chapter speaks to this scholarship by looking at how daily life is contextualized as part of a broader move from “culture days” to “modern times” (see Chapter Three). Analysis focuses more on the way people talk about, and project “Makushi culture” into the world (and then pick up on this projection), than the way the practices and stories that constitute “Makushi culture” change.

My work thereby diverges from other descriptions of Amazonian social transformations, which focus on how visible changes are indicative of invisible continuations; local responses to outside power.<sup>41</sup> These analyses look at the continuing (invisible) social structures in (visible) transformations. In Surama, or amongst the Makushi people, a similar analysis might look at the practices or objects that are said to constitute past “Makushi culture” dancing, Makushi language, or cassava work, and look

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<sup>41</sup> Such as Ewart’s (2013) descriptions of changing moieties and physical village layout amongst the Panará in which *white* Brazilians came to be a kind of ‘other’ moiety to local Panará; or Århem’s (2001) discussion of Makuna move from “Longhouses to Villages” while maintaining the model of “consanguineal sociality of the endogamous group” (150-151).

at how these practices are manifested in new ways; a response to wider changes. Due to the limited existence and availability of descriptions of these practices in Guyana over the last seventy years, this is currently outside of the scope of my thesis. Instead, I look at how the concepts “culture”, “tradition”, and “civilisation” are conceived by people in Surama and come to have significance through interactions with visiting outsiders, especially researchers. While this focus is due in part to a limitation of the research, it also allows me to focus on how people in Surama view themselves in changing time, and in-so-doing takes seriously their concern with changing sociality.

From “Culture days” to “Modern times”

People in Surama conceive time as a move away from the forest. Their ability to live near and use resources from the forest stems from the past, when they lived closer to the forest. Contrastingly, their ability to access “foreign” goods, and have peaceful exchanges with non-indigenous people is part of their present state as “civilised” Amerindians. Here, Amerindianity refers both to a history with Guyana, and with the forest. Thus, while people in Surama seem to argue that changes in daily life are an inevitable part of time—often described as “development”—changes in time are also conceived as move away from the forest.

*“Civilised” and “uncivilised”*

In the afternoon of Easter Sunday, 2015, I watched a Spanish Premier-League football match at Auntie Emily’s shop before going by the old school to participate in the Easter activities. Several people were gathered buying, selling, and sharing food and local drink they had brought to contribute to the gathering.

I stood on the veranda of the old school watching a cricket game between the Sunday-school and non-Sunday-school children when Auntie Jean approached me and struck up a conversation.

“So, Sab, how would you do your Easter back where you are from?” (5/04/2015).

I told her about my previous Easter celebrations. How we didn’t have time off work during the week, but, “We would roast some beef in the afternoon and invite some friends. Even if they didn’t go to church we would invite them...”

“Oh, that’s nice. Because I notice that some people, they don’t really observe Easter, they believe other things, like the big bang, or something so. So, they don’t celebrate Easter like Christians.”

“Yes, many people now start to believe in Science,” I said, “Well for me, I believe in that too, but the way I see it, that does not interfere with me being a Christian.”

“I asked you because sometimes people come and they ask us how we can believe in God and still go to the piaiman [shaman], and well, these are things that you have to think about before you answer,” Jean moved her hands as she spoke, and I turned from the cricket to give the conversation more attention.

“Well, people say that white people came here to tell us about God, but we had a supreme being before,” She continued, “We believed in a God, and we worshipped. And like in the Bible, we have a wise man and a wicked man and they were brothers, but the Bible, it has Aaron, Eron? Anyways they have a thing and it’s similar. The tradition and way of living, it can go with being Christian.”

She added, “Glen, my husband, wanted to go and research with uncivilised tribes. I wonder how they live. All like we, I know about bush medicine, but they must really be protected from disease if they are living until now. But indeed, a friend from Brazil told me that they are still around. I know that the Yanomami—it had a time I went to Boa Vista and my daughter had to get some medical testing. They ask us if we have somewhere to stay in Brazil. I said, ‘no’. They told us to try *Casa do Indio*... So, we went. I told a lady there if she could speak Makushi, ‘*Urusé Makushi?*’ But their way of speaking Makushi is more faster than ours so I couldn’t always understand them. They had Yanomami people there and they were really from far. *Uncivilised*. They didn’t have no clothes, the government had to give them clothes [when they came to the city], and they would pick at it,” She tugged at her own blouse, “They said that it would itch their skin.”

Jean continued telling her experience about how the Yanomami people at the hostel had been chanting and she went to see how they danced and ended joining them, “I signed to them,” she pointed to herself and then to the memory of the dancers, now on the cricket pitch, “I dance with you? The other Makushi ladies there told me not to go. If I go they might be *blown*.<sup>42</sup> They tell me, ‘remember they are not Amerindian[s] like us.’ But still I gone and dance with them. They made a space and I joined the circle, chant with them, dance with them,” Jean said she pointed to her own mouth to sing, “They sing like animals. Their song sounds like, spider monkey. I sing a Makushi song for them and they did the same kind of movement. After I said thank you, well, they wouldn’t understand me, but I bow and take a step back and close back their circle. The ladies say, ‘You really make new friends!’” Jean giggled as she finished the story. The next day the Yanomami dancers signed for her to buy them some slippers, and she did.

Before telling me the story of her encounter with “uncivilised” Yanomami, Jean and I were having a conversation about Christianity. Jean highlights that Makushi people “had a supreme being” before

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<sup>42</sup> A shamanic curse.

white people came speaking about God. Jean said that Christianity did not introduce anything new to Makushi people's lives. Her statements suggest that though white people had a different name for the supreme being, and for Ishkirang and Inega (Makushi mythical brothers),<sup>43</sup> they were not unknown for Makushi people. In Jean's words, this means that being Christian does not interfere with her traditional way of living. That both whites and Makushi people having similar *beliefs*<sup>44</sup> suggests that they could interact more readily in peaceful exchanges. They are both "civilised" people, in continuing relations with [the same] God. This contrasts with "uncivilised" Yanomami, who are in a relation with beings in the forest, which Jean brings up later in the conversation.

Jean's retelling of her experience brings insight as to what it means to be civilised or uncivilised. Jean notes that for Yanomami people to continue living in the forest, they must have an incredible knowledge of bush-medicine. This contrasts with her own more modest knowledge, which is complemented by her access to the Surama Health Post, a public government institution in all Amerindian Villages.<sup>45</sup> This access to outside medicine is further elaborated as Jean's encounter with Yanomami people was due in part to her travel to Boa Vista—the capital of the Brazilian state of Roraima—for medical testing for her daughter (before she went to Cuba to study medicine *circa* 2010). Jean is therefore suggesting that in lieu of access to 'Western' medicine, Yanomami must have an elaborate knowledge of the forest.

Jean notes that, being in Brazil, she felt out of place, not knowing where she and her daughter would stay, nor being able to communicate fluently with the hostel manager, even though they both spoke Makushi. Her own position as an outsider is dwarfed by Yanomami, who were "really from far". I consider this to be less a measure of distance as a marker of isolation from centres of "civilised" population. The Yanomami have a protected *terra indígena* in Roraima on the border with Venezuela, so in direct spatial terms, Surama is only slightly closer to Boa Vista (something of which Jean may not have been aware). In this context, spatial distance or travel-time is less important than other markers of familiarity and access to "civilised" centres. Isolation is not about distance, but about the possibility of access and exchange. Rewa Village in Guyana, for example, is closer to Surama than Lethem, however, because of the conditions of the road and the limited exchange with

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<sup>43</sup> I believe Jean was associating Ishkirang and Inega with Cane and Abel, though I have heard them associated with Jesus Christ and Satan

<sup>44</sup> This is consistent with my assertion in Chapter Five that *belief* is about embodied potential for relations/exchanges/interactions with potentially dangerous beings. In Jean's account, *belief* in God allows Makushi people to exchange peacefully with non-Amerindians making these, 'others' into similar kinds of people; i.e., through their relationship with the same kind of potentially dangerous beings, God, Makushi people evidence that they, and early Christian missionaries have similar bodies.

<sup>45</sup> In Surama, the health post is staffed by Auntie Verna, Jean's husband's cousin's wife. Thus, the complement to her knowledge of the forest is her family-friend. Accessing the outside is also about maintaining proper family-friend relations.

people in Rewa, it is felt as farther away. Similarly, in Chapter Three I described the Road not only as facilitating movement, but as a broader marker for development. In this way, Jean's statement about Yanomami being far from Boa Vista is about them living more closely with the forest.

The idea that Yanomami are "uncivilised" because of their ties to the forest is reinforced in Jean's description of their exchange. Though she was from Guyana and could not speak Portuguese, she was able to communicate to some degree because the manager of the hostel spoke Makushi. This is not surprising or limited to the *Casa do Indio* hostel, others in Surama mentioned that they could get by in Boa Vista speaking Makushi. This reinforces the idea that Makushi people are civilised because of their association with non-Amerindian societies. On the other hand, Jean's exchange with the Yanomami was through sign. Furthermore, she likened their singing to the sound of spider monkeys. This gives the idea that "uncivilised" is about non-verbal, forest communication. Taking up the way multi-natural ontologies have been described in Amazonia, Yanomami people are different kind of body, a different nature to Jean's. This points to what I take to be the crux of the exchange, "they are not Amerindian like us", Jean's Makushi companion said to her. Jean's description of Yanomami people echoes Surama conceptions of civilised and uncivilized. The Yanomami had no clothes and had to receive what clothes they had from the government (or Jean), whereas a "civilised" people would be able to buy clothes themselves. "Uncivilized" people are also potentially dangerous, particularly via witchcraft; Jean was warned she might be *blown*, an ability that in Surama is reserved to the piaiman. Contrastingly, "civilised" people can have non-violent exchanges. Jean's position between her wary Makushi companions, and new Yanomami friends is meant to highlight her own fluidity. As an Amerindian, she can still cultivate relationships with beings from the forest, while being civilised herself. Jean highlights a shared sociality; contributions of friendliness in the context of joining the circle. Afterwards, the fact that she was asked to get her new friends slippers, further points to their potential similarity. She is able to interact with them, and they are also able to acquire goods that will little by little make them more civilised.

#### *"Civilised" and "modern"*

As noted above, being "uncivilised" is about associating and relating more closely with beings in the forest—whether plants, "bush-medicine"; animals (spider monkeys); or dangerous spirits (being blown)—than with broader "white" or Guyanese society. In this conception, being "civilised" is about the potential to access these urban centres, and manifest development *in* the community. People in Surama consider themselves, as "civilised" yet separate to these urban "white" spaces. In terms of space, this is about their ability to also access the forest, which surrounds the place where people live in the community on all sides. In temporal terms, people in Surama consider that they

are at a midpoint between “uncivilized” and “modern”, which allows them as “civilised” to manifest aspects of both in everyday life.

One morning, Kurt came to Paulette’s house while I was having breakfast. He asked if I had seen the movie *End of the Spear*. I hadn’t seen it. He said it was an old movie from Ecuador about Indians.

“Them is not like we,” Kurt said (15/02/2015).

“Fierce Amerindians?” I asked using a phrase I had heard him use before.

“Yeah. Guyana don’t really get that you know? Most of the Amerindians are modernised,” He said.

I told him I would watch the movie.<sup>46</sup> That evening I asked Vitus if he had seen the movie. He had, and I asked him if he too thought that Guyana’s Amerindians were “modernised”. He had visited Gunns Village, a Waiwai Village, and had voiced the idea (early in my fieldwork) that Waiwai people were “straight indigenous” (4/09/2014); more indigenous than other Guyanese Amerindians.

“I wouldn’t call Guyana Amerindians modernised,” he said.

We had been playing Dominoes at Auntie Viola’s shop and were continuing the evening with some beers at Auntie Emily’s shop benab.

“To my way of seeing it, it is more like they are civilised,” he said.

I think he could see the befuddlement on my face as I did not recognize the difference.

“Modernised would be more like Georgetown. Internet, water, and electricity,” He added. “Maybe later they would be modernised.”

“So, it’s like civilised is before modern?”

“Yeaaah,” He said nodding, as he sometimes did when I understood something.

From other comments Vitus made (discussed in Part I), it seems that this “civilisation” and, later, “modernisation” is expected to get to all parts of Guyana eventually; poles in the movement towards development. Kurt’s comment earlier in the day, that Guyana’s Amerindians were not fierce, further suggests that the very definition of Amerindian is associated with being “civilised”, constituted by their relation to the Guyanese State and the forest. This contrasts with Vitus’ assertion of being “indigenous”, more akin to “uncivilised”, and close to the forest.

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<sup>46</sup> A 2005 movie based on the encounter between American Christian missionaries and Waorani hunters in the 1950s in which five missionaries were killed.



A couple months later, Daniel made a similar observation when we were setting the posts to Birthlan's house. Birthlan had already cleared a space for his house between his parent's kitchen and Caroline's, house. As we were staking the place where the posts would go, Daniel drew an imaginary line between the front of his kitchen and his daughter's house.

"You got to build it in a line," He said. "The kitchen and [Caroline's] house are in a line. You have to look at uniformity to make it look good, and sometimes if they want to put a pipeline or electric post [the houses] have to be straight," (19/04/2015).

I found it odd that he would talk about water-mains and electricity posts. Each house already had its own solar panel, which provided enough electricity for a couple of light bulbs every night, or to charge phones or a laptop during the day. I thought Daniel's comments suggested that the government would come and install water pipes and centralized electricity. Later, when I found out about Paulette and Daniel's plans to install a pump and pipes to bring water from the well in Caroline's yard to their kitchen, I thought about Daniel's comments. Where I had previously thought about modernity and development as necessarily coming from the outside, and from a kind of State, Daniel's plans for water-pipes—which he was planning to install himself—suggests that while "civilisation" and later "modernisation" may "come to" all parts of the Rupununi, these are not necessarily equated with a foreign incursion. While modernisation can "get everywhere", it is enacted in each place locally. This is an important distinction to make as it demonstrates that people do not conceive of wider changes as the *cause* of local changes; rather, "modernisation", mediated and manifested locally, is a part of wider changes.

This is reminiscent of Sydney's comments that Amerindians can "demonstrate the capacity to grow" (Chapter Two)—quite different from the capacity to *be grown*. The difference here is that development, which I was thinking of as part of a globalized force that stretches across the world, is experienced in Surama, as it surely is elsewhere, through a series of local choices. This change is still part of a temporal line, however, as Daniel plans the construction of his son's house with the idea that these goods/services, typically "modern" will be a part of Surama in his or his children's lifetime.

#### *Traditional and "Real[lly] Makushi"*

Thus far, I have discussed people's concern with "(un)civilised" and "modern", and how these are manifested. Where "modern" is associated with ways of life in the city—household plumbing, electricity, and paved roads—which may be manifested in Surama in the future, "civilised" is about maintaining relations with an array of powerful others, both in the forest and in urban areas. While maintaining ties with the forest, people in Surama would never consider each other "uncivilised".

“Uncivilised” holds a potential for danger that is necessarily outside the community space of family-friendship. Instead, the temporal and spatial proximity to the forest is spoken about as “living traditionally”.

In Surama, people talk about and consider certain objects and practices to be more “traditional”. These include sleeping in a hammock and living in a house made of materials from the forest; doing cassava work, particularly done without motor-powered graters; and eating bush fish and meat, especially in tuma/pepper pot. Tradition is furthermore associated with practices in the past. For example, while nearly all households do cassava work, most today use a motor-powered grater. Doing cassava work with a hand or cycle powered grater, as parents did growing up, would thereby be considered more traditional. My closest family members widely considered that people living on the other side of Surama were more “traditional”. In this way, “tradition” is also spatially and temporally distanced from daily life.

One morning as Paulette’s grandchildren were preparing for school, I asked about boarding school. Caroline said, “before” girls used to have to be alone during their first menstruation, not talk to anyone, not even their brothers, and couldn’t eat any bush meat or certain fish; only boiled cassava and fish. She spoke about it as though it was part of the distant past, but then clarified,

“...Mine was the last generation to go through that, thing. Older people, them say that is why the girls now get on crazy like. We used to have tradition,” (1/09/2014).

While Caroline remembers the initiation right, the fact that it is not practiced today is part of what makes it “tradition”. She says that older people note this as evidence for young women’s changing behaviours today. Similarly, houses, depending on the materials and style, may or may not be “traditional”. Houses with two doors, one on either end, round houses, firesides, and kukrit or ité thatch roofs were all described as traditional at some point during my research. The amalgam of choices leading to more corrugated zinc roofs, gas ranges, and Western style brick houses in Surama, has lead people to conceive of houses made of local materials as “traditional”. These choices, manifested as visible changes over time, contribute to the idea that “tradition” is not being passed down, or at least not by everyone in the community. Older people I spoke with, particularly those on my side of the community, take this to be a problematic shift (described in Part I).

It is important to note that practices and objects which my hosts call “traditional” have been associated with Amazonian cosmology and embodiment in Amazonian ethnography. Harry Walker (2009) describes the importance of hammocks in forming the bodies of kin; Hugh-Jones (1995), Guss (1989), Mentore (2005) and Århem (2001) describe the symbolic and embodied importance of what

my hosts call “traditional” houses; and countless authors, most notably Seegar et.al. (1979), and Joanna Overing and her students, note the importance of commensality to the consubstantial bodies of kin (For example Gow 1989; McCallum 2001; Mentore 2005; Overing 1999). The importance of these objects and practices elsewhere in Amazonia point to the reason Makushi people find changes away from tradition to be disturbing. These shifts indicate changes in personhood, and ways of being social which Makushi people value. Such was the case of older people’s concern that young women no longer “go through” the initiation rites. While both generations see the lack of initiation rites as a loss of “tradition”, older people’s concerns have to do with the knowledge and exchange with which the practice was associated. Where young people see tradition, “Older people [*know*] that is why girls get on crazy...”

“Modernity” is about knowing in urban spaces, “uncivilised” is about knowing in the forest, and “civilisation” is about maintaining a balance. In this regard, becoming too modern would be problematic because people in Surama consider that their contribution to wider “civilised” society comes from their Amerindianity; their ability to negotiate the forest and development. This is evidenced by social science researchers’ interest in “tradition” and “culture”; and in life science researchers interest in the forest. This has become a kind of self-reinforcing idea such that non-Amerindian interest in Surama is an interest in Amerindianity.

One afternoon, I was telling Auntie Paulette about the machruman I had attended at Sammy’s. Sammy lived in a group of closely built households in an island where several trees provided shade for the households. The houses were made of adobe bricks and wood, and the roofs were kukrit thatch. Paulette said she liked that part of Surama and described it as a “nice area”. At that point, the conversation paused, and we heard a low rumble in the distance. Paulette pointed out that Jean was doing cassava work. I asked if anyone used cycle-powered graters like the one in the corner of her kitchen, out of use for years. She said that people still used them, but they would become difficult to work if too much cassava was grated. Daniel pointed out that gas-motors similarly became slow when being heavily used. Paulette said that people where Sammy lived used the cycle-graters, adding, “Them is *Makushi* people down there,” and that I should work there more often (21/04/2017).

Though I had been careful not to explain my research as focused on *Makushi people*, hoping to obviate the community presenting me with “tradition” and “culture”, instead of their ‘actual daily life’, Paulette understood my interest as being closely tied to “tradition”. This is perhaps in part because of my interest in history and the past, itself born out of scholarship of time and transformations in Amazonia, and how this informs life today. In any case, through my experience

with research in Surama, I was faced with rethinking “tradition” and “culture”. The practices and objects that constitute “tradition” and “culture” were not foregrounded solely to interest researchers, willy nilly, but were historically informed categories of daily life, in relations with “others” over time. When my hosts spoke to me about Makushi tradition, they were aware of, and consciously manifesting, the differences in daily life that constituted the idea of “tradition” as distant. As I suggested above, these categories are closely tied to foreign researcher’s interest. In the following section I elaborate on the exchange between Makushi peoples and non-Amerindians, particularly researchers.

North Rupununi kinship in the world

In the previous section I noted that certain practices and objects associated with the forest become “tradition” as they become less prominent in daily life. As analytic categories, anthropologists widely consider these outdated, however, they continue to hold significance outside of academia in popular images of “other” peoples. Indeed, tutors and lecturers alike spend a significant amount of time convincing our students that tradition and culture are not *given* categories—not the cause for people’s actions, nor an explanation—but socially constructed aspects of life. Surama constructions of “tradition” and “culture” respond in part to wider ideas that Amerindians are supposed to live traditionally or culturally. These wider ideas of culture and tradition in turn come from visiting researchers and policy makers. At the same time, tradition and culture are not solely responses, or representative strategies, or aimed towards political ends. Elders consider it important that their children participate in “tradition” and “culture”—visual manifestations of valued ways of being social, and of proper personhood.<sup>47</sup>

Before showing (in the following section, *Researching “tradition” and “culture”*) how the categories are reinforced through local interactions with non-Amerindians—researchers—I reconstruct a historical narrative leading up to contemporary research in Surama. This narrative brings together the ways people in the North Rupununi—some Surama residents—formed kin out of outsiders, then looks at popular opinions of Guyana’s Amerindians as too ‘acculturated’, and finally at the

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<sup>47</sup> My goal here is to round off some of the anthropology of representation of these “traditional” elements of life. Beth Conklin (1997) analysis of the politics of body images notes a similar process in of foregrounding cultural images throughout the Amazon “...that is both a dimension of self-production of Amazonian activists and a channel through which they communicate with non-Indian audiences” (712). I would add that images—which I call objects and practices—associated with “tradition”, not only communicate with non-Amerindians, but are a historical way of manifesting a community of kin. Conklin’s focus is statedly not on how these categories and images come to have meaning for local Amerindians, instead she looks at the efficacy and wider political consequences of these representations. My interest, is precisely on how these categories come to have meaning for the people with whom we work. As such, I do not deny that these are (partly) outward political strategies for representation, but by focusing on the local significance I better understand how people in Surama understand and live these transformations themselves.

establishment of Iwokrama and the Makushi Research Unit. This approach suggests that current research in Surama is the most recent in a history of kinship interactions with non-Amerindians. Foreign non-Amerindian interests in the region are understood through local ways of being social. To situate these interactions, I begin with some of the history of interactions with non-Amerindians over the last century.

*Outsiders and family-friends*

Makushi people in the north Rupununi have had a long history with outsiders. In these accounts, Makushi people are often described as seeking out outsiders. They travelled vast distances for trade, were quickly drawn in by early religious missionaries, served as guides for travellers, and have been instrumental in the ranching and balata industries in the Rupununi. I touch on exchanges with the balata industry and with foreign ranching families to suggest that foreign interest in the region, particularly economic interest is mediated through family-friend sociality.

Ranching has played an important role in the history of the Rupununi, most notably through interactions with the Melville family, who arrived in the early 1990s and intermarried with local Wapishana families. Farage (2003) notes that in the 1930s, it was impossible to determine whether Dadanawa and Wichibai were Wapishana Villages or Melville homesteads. Indeed, they were both. Similarly, farther north, D'Aguiar a Portuguese rancher had married a Makushi woman, and writer Evelyn Waugh notes of his travels in 1932 that the area that is now Surama was occupied by "sophisticated Macushis who were in constant contact with the ranchers and the traffic of the trail...most of them had worked for Europeans at one time or another; there was a black man living among them, married to one of their girls," (1986:57). Undoubtedly, the physical location put this Makushi community in a privileged position for trade and exchange.

Similarly, Hugh-Jones (1992) notes that in the Vaupes region of Colombia, Barasana people sought out debt-peonage because it allowed for further relations with in-laws. He shows that the exchange with white foreigners can be considered an extension of Amerindian models of exchange. Similarly, I suggest that Amerindians, Makushi and Wapishana alike, sought out these relationships with powerful outsiders, but the two sides may not have been fully aware of each other's understanding of the relation. While white ranchers required Amerindian workers, those workers were exercising affinal kinship relations with the ranching families. Thus, outside working relationships are met with local notions of kinship. This is also noted in balata bleeding in the North Rupununi. While we can assume that a similar model of debt peonage as that elaborated in Colombia was in place in the Rupununi, this time is described by Makushi people as an opportunity to extend kinship ties and travel with family (Scipio in Forte & Melville's *Amerindian Testimonies* 1989 cited in Chapter Three).

This is to say that “work” or other extractive industries in the Rupununi may be understood locally as opportunities for extended kinship affinity, which has been described earlier in this thesis as family-friendship. The overall thesis explored in Part III of this thesis is that research in Surama (like ranching in the Rupununi a century ago) is an extension of kinship. This helps us rethink the idea of Amerindian interactions in foreign work economies, or development strategies not as ‘acculturation’, but as interactions that are always negotiated through local understandings, particularly understandings of kinship.

#### *“Acculturated” Amerindians*

In his highly regarded work, *Individual and Society in Guiana*, Rivière notes the lack of ethnography amongst Makushi people, adding that it is strange that one of the largest Amerindian groups in the Guianas would have the least amount of anthropological investigation (1984:5). In a review of Rivière’s monograph, Forte explained that this lack applies not only to Makushi people, but Guyanese Amerindians more widely, and suggested that the lack of investigation in Guyana was perhaps due to the long history of contact, which has led to the idea amongst anthropologists that Guyanese Amerindians were too “acculturated” (1987:77). Indeed, while research had been carried out amongst Brazilian Makushi (See Soares Diniz 1965, 1966, 1972), the only work amongst Guyanese Makushi between 1965 and 1990 was Forte and Melville’s (1989) Amerindian testimonies, a series of edited interviews with trained school teachers in Region 9. Undoubtedly, Forte’s assertion is part of a wider critique of anthropological predisposition towards working with *authentic* peoples. Even when we work with people with a history of contact, thirst for *authenticity* tends to creep into our analysis.<sup>48</sup>

“Acculturation” was not the only reason anthropologists were dissuaded from research in Guyana. Foreign policy in the post-independence years led to Guyana quickly closing itself off from foreign investment and trade. In the wake of the Rupununi Uprising in 1969 in which a group of Wapishana Indians led by members of the Melville family failed to maintain control of the Regional capital, the Guyanese government changed policy, and attempted to keep non-Guyanese out of the region. While coastlanders were encouraged (through grants of farmland) to move to the region, particularly areas surrounding Amerindian land, to halt its growth (Hennessy 2013), trade networks and exchanges with powerful outsiders largely decreased.<sup>49</sup> The balata industry, and Rupununi Development Company (with headquarters in what is now Surama), both left the region. This is

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<sup>48</sup> Frankland (1999), for example, discusses the ways anthropologists and tourists search for the authentic peoples they have read about in anthropological literature. Through this search (Turnbull Syndrome), certain “Forest People” become the standard for “tradition.”

<sup>49</sup> Amerindians and coastlanders have since largely intermarried.

perhaps partly the reason Paulette and others remember the 1980s as a time of poverty. Where there had previously been a great deal of trade and exchange allowing for the influx of foreign goods, national policy cut these ties. This also made it nearly impossible for foreign anthropologists to work in Region 9 after the Rupununi uprising. This policy persisted until a change in party political power in 1992.

While twenty-two years may seem brief, we must consider what this period means for our ideas of Makushi people having a long history of ‘permanent contact’ (Rivière 1984: 5). Surama was founded at the beginning of this isolation period, and the people born in Surama during this time would have grown up without large scale outside involvement. The networks of kinship that extended to balata companies and ranching families would have largely not been present. At the same time, Surama itself is an example of the way Makushi kinship extends towards the foreign. The Allicock family that moved to the region from the coast (long before the uprising) held several key political positions in the region. Through a history of work, fomenting family-friendships, and marriage with Makushi women, two *mixed* brothers, Fred and Theo Allicock, are attributed with forming a community of Makushi people. When the regime changed in 1992, Surama was already politically influential in the Region, and its proximity to the soon to be founded Iwokrama International Centre nature reserve would bring people from Surama again into close contact with powerful outsiders.

#### *Iwokrama and the Makushi Research Unit*

With the opening of Guyana in the early 1990s came the establishment of the Iwokrama International Centre for Rainforest Conservation and Development, which would allow for the protection of 371,000 hectares of Iwokrama Rainforest. This protected rainforest borders Surama Village, (itself part of Annai Village lands). According to the Guyanese parliamentary act that signed the Iwokrama Centre into law, the goal of the Iwokrama Centre is to “develop, demonstrate, and make available to Guyana and the international community systems, methods and techniques for the sustainable management and utilization of the multiple resources of the Tropical Forest and conservation of biological diversity...” (The Iwokrama International Centre for Rain Forest Conservation and Development Act. 1996: preamble).

From these opening lines of the Act the importance of the forest for the international community is highlighted. Other parts of the Act note Amerindian’s rights in the forest, as well as the importance of their cultural and traditional knowledge of the rainforest. The importance of ‘Amerindian knowledge’ was made tangible by the Iwokrama Centre through the establishment of a baseline biodiversity study from which to gauge the impacts of various programs. Part of this baseline study, (funded by the United Nations Development Project-Global Environment Facility Project) was a

study of Makushi Lifestyles and Biodiversity Use, and Makushi Women's Ethnobotany and Ethnomedicine. To carry-out this study, the Makushi Research Unit—a group of eight women and one man, each from a different community in the North Rupununi—was formed and underwent training in field methodologies. Under the guidance of forestologist and leader of the University of Guyana Amerindian Research Unit, Janette Forte, the Makushi Research Unit (MRU) completed the study. These projects were combined into the (1998) book *Makusipe Komanto Iseru: Sustaining Makushi Way of Life*, attributed to the Makushi Research Unit and edited by Janette Forte. The information therein is the copyright of the North Rupununi District Development Board (NRDDDB).<sup>50</sup>

The importance of the book was summed up by the Director-General of the Iwokrama Centre, David Cassel, in his forward, “While scientific knowledge of tropical forest is still rudimentary, the knowledge of the forest people who depend on the forest for their daily survival is often encyclopaedic,” (1998). This notes the world's increasing interest in Amerindian knowledge, and the popular distinction with scientific knowledge. In part three of this thesis, I will further argue that Amerindian knowing is necessarily *not* encyclopaedic—written, amassed—but rather lived, experiential, and embodied. Here I want to note the interest in Amerindian knowledge of the forest, and how this might have been understood in Surama at that time.

As stated previously, before the national regime change, people in Surama considered themselves poor, there was little exchange with outsiders, especially from outside Guyana. Programs like Food for the Poor distributed tinned food, rice, oil, and crackers unevenly throughout the community, adding to the idea that Amerindians were poor, recipients of outside aid. The establishment of Iwokrama brought people in the North Rupununi into close relations with outsiders once again. Like ranchers and balata bleeders Iwokrama was interested in Amerindian work, setting up various camps for foreign researchers. This work required Amerindian knowledge. Besides the MRU's baseline study, local Amerindian rangers setting up camps noted that non-Amerindians were not able to navigate the environment. Daniel, and his father, Fred Allicock were instrumental in setting up the various camps and keeping rivers clear of debris, facilitating the exchange with researchers.

After the establishment of Iwokrama, foreign interest continued to be directed towards Amerindian knowledge. I have noted people in Surama's awareness of this interest in Chapter One. Along with this foreign interest came an increased sense of pride in Amerindianity. Janette Bulkan (formerly Forte), now a professor of Forestry at the University of British Columbia, notes that when the

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<sup>50</sup> According to Paulette, the NRDDDB—an NGO run and led by the communities in the North Rupununi to coordinate development and offset the negative effects of development—was funded with money from the *Makushipe Komanto Iseru* project and sales.



research that would lead to *Makusipe Komanto Iseru* started, many ladies shared information at meetings in Makushi. Younger people, particularly children were embarrassed that their mothers and grandmothers could not speak English, and had to be translated. By the end of the study, however, women openly reported in Makushi; embarrassment had faded, and was replaced by a sense of pride in their Amerindianity (J Bulkan 2017, personal communication 26 April). With the proceeds from the sale of *Makusipe Komanto Iseru*, North Rupununi communities had funds to run the NRDDDB. As I suggested in Chapter Two, and throughout this thesis, political organization in the Village is mediated through kinship. As Village councillors form the NRDDDB, I suggest the NRDDDB, too, is not devoid of kinship. Wider interest in ‘Amerindian knowledge’ facilitated Amerindian political organization beyond the Village, similar to the way wider interest in Rupununi resources—cattle ground, and balata—facilitated formation of new kin.

Interested in maintaining these relations with researchers, and funders at the Iwokrama Centre, people in Surama exercised knowledge of the forest to help set up the Iwokrama Centre, and cater to the various researchers that it brought into the region. Around this time, the Surama Ecolodge was established to accommodate and create another destination for visiting researchers on the Buro-Buro River. As noted in Chapter Three, the story of the establishment of Surama Ecolodge is almost mythic; Surama residents, having always been accommodating, were offered money to host visitors. The idea of earning a living—creating job opportunities such that families would not have to travel to mines or logging—was formed.

Since its creation, the Makushi Research Unit has doubled in membership and incorporated a member from each of the now sixteen member-communities of the NRDDDB. Though at the time of research the Unit did not have any large projects, some of the ladies, led by Paulette Allicock, were working on some translations of pamphlets and documents from English to Makushi, and doing outreach to more isolated communities, about the information in these pamphlets. Sydney Allicock, now Minister of Amerindian Affairs, is on the Iwokrama board of trustees.

In this chapter I am suggesting that the Iwokrama Centre was not only established through a legal act, but through the participation and involvement of Makushi people, most notably people from Surama. In this way, people in Surama have made Iwokrama one dimension of their understanding and ways of being social; interactions with researchers, policy makers, and other Amerindians. The experience of Iwokrama thereby was an outside opportunity for local extensions of family friendship, manifested in exchanges with visiting dignitaries, and the vast array of researchers that travel to the area annually. This was a marked change from the preceding period where these kinds of connections were in decline. While the shift in the 1990s took on growing interest in sustainability

and rainforest conservation, I hope to show that interactions between Amerindians and non-Amerindian researchers and policy makers are like interactions in the balata or ranching industries. Besides the similar extension of kinship, some people in Surama also talk about research as an extraction of knowledge, which will be explored further in Part III.<sup>51</sup>

#### Researching “tradition” and “culture”

With the establishment of Iwokrama, people living in the Rupununi made connections far beyond the region, and Guyana. People in Surama were encouraged to travel to Europe and the Americas for conferences, studies, and other meetings. In Surama, work as guides, laborers, paid researchers, cooks, and managers also increased their interactions with visitors to the Rupununi. Not unlike the road project in the early 1970s, Iwokrama drew many people to the area for work. Several Surama community members, including Paulette’s son-in-law, Vitus, originally from the south Rupununi, came to work in Iwokrama, and eventually married and settled in Surama. International agencies like the Canadian Caribbean Gender equity fund, United Nations, and Conservation International also increased their presence in the region. People in the Rupununi started participating in these agencies, as well as re-establishing an increasing participation in the Guyanese government in the wake of the establishment of Iwokrama.

While these new agencies and government actions influenced the broad strokes of changes in the region, daily interactions in Surama were mostly with researchers, and other nature tourists. Today, a significant part of hosting visitors in Surama is teaching them about “Makushi culture.” This is not limited to students of the social sciences, but includes students of natural sciences as well. As part of their research visit or field school, Surama hosts organise a day for students to be shown cassava work, farming, or other “traditional” activities. I suggest that teaching what my hosts call “tradition” and “culture” has a lot to do with visiting researchers in the early 1990s. While I cannot speak to the specific ontogeny of Makushi concepts of "culture," or "tradition", ethnographers in the Rupununi in the 1990s speak about increasing pride and happiness in Makushi language and culture, particularly amongst those women who participated in the Makushi Research Unit (Wihak 2009). I suggest that this increased pride was in part due to interactions with researchers in the 1990s through which

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<sup>51</sup> This is the topic of Conklin’s (2002) article, exploring the way shamans have taken up leadership and representative positions for their communities along rising global interest in Amerindian knowledge. She notes that “shamanic knowledge, perspectives, and imagery are being put to new uses in mediating relations with the state” (1051). She also notes that in Guyana, shamanism isn’t only associated with knowledge, but with dangerous sorcery. Indeed, while people in Surama, as well as other parts of Guyana, share their knowledge of the forest in interactions with outsiders, shamanic knowledge is not shared. I explore the reasons for this in Chapters Five and Six.

people in Surama and the Rupununi learned of the value outsiders placed on Amerindian knowledge of the forest.

During this period, the world was becoming more interested in environmental conservation, and Amerindians were described as "Custodians of the Forest". Visiting researchers were interested in cultural and traditional practices and objects, which they associated with Amerindian closeness to the forest. Increased Amerindian pride in their daily activities likely reflects researchers' interest in those activities, which researchers deemed to be of value to global conservation efforts. While this interest was made possible in part because of the national and regional policies that established and guided Iwokrama, I find it important to highlight again that researchers were the representatives of these international moves. Interactions between visiting researchers and Surama guides, cooks, fishermen, and other villagers would have been an influential contribution to the way people in Surama would come to constitute "culture".

People in Surama often told me stories about "traditional" practices disappearing in the 1990s. Their stories suggest that people did not take pride in Amerindianity; however, they also evidence that "tradition" is necessary part of the past. Wihak (2009) points out that the happiness that people felt in their Amerindianity did not often extend beyond those people who participated in the Makushi Research Unit. Along with increased research, the opening of the region also brought new items and ways of exchanging information, such as computers. While older generations have been less interested in these items, younger people in Surama note that the changes in the 1990s brought new things, they alleviated poverty, they were development. Traditions, such as the female initiation rite Caroline spoke about lost their breadth.<sup>52</sup> While these rites and practices became part of fewer people's lives, they became even more associated with "tradition" and "culture" *because* they seemed to mark the past.<sup>53</sup> Older people in Surama will also point out that their way of knowing in these rites is not the same as research ways of knowing. Research ways of knowing cannot grasp the exchanges happening in these rites, but only note the visible aspects of the rite. As such, researchers' interest in the visible in the early 1990s particularly with visible solutions to rainforest degradation, did not take into account the ways of knowing associated with "tradition" and

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<sup>52</sup> At the same time, these may still be practiced, but are withheld from researchers. Gow notes how common it is for a researcher to show up to a community and be told, 'Too bad the last shaman just died.' This is explored further in Chapter Six.

<sup>53</sup> I focus on "tradition" and "culture" as valued aspects of people's lives and history, in negotiation with visiting researchers. However, they may also associate Amerindians with the "uncivilized". Conklin (1997) notes that international interest in *authentic* Amerindianity often contrasts local/national conceptions of Amerindians as backwards or less developed. People in Surama were likely not spared from these national negative stereotypes in the 1990s, however, international interest also affects national perceptions. By the mid-2000s, projects such as Guyana's Low Carbon Development Strategy, demonstrated that, at least at the policy level, Guyana was heralding Amerindian involvement in national development.

“culture”, but more the physicality and scientific explanation of tradition and culture. The ways of knowing associated with these practices, and the politics of that knowing are the topics of Chapters Five and Six.

### *Anthropological Research*

Visiting anthropologists did not *introduce* the words “tradition” or “culture”, but their interests have informed the way these concepts have come to have meaning locally. In a conversation with Auntie Jean, she gave her impression of what social science researchers were looking for,

“Yes, like, it had a time, some years gone by that Auntie Paulette was taking a researcher around on a tour. Well at that time, years long, we did have a...cow hide like, covering we door. It’s cow hide and it had two stakes in the side by the ground. [Paulette] brought the researcher now. It must have been after [the researcher] gone there by [Paulette’s] house and [they] come, but it’s not like what [the researcher was] looking for. Well [Paulette] took [the researcher] by Captain’s; PJ, Cecilia, and it was what she was looking for. [The researcher] read an article and must be that she was looking for. She say she found Cecilia with no top, half naked, like five, six [in the afternoon], must have just come back from river, and as soon as she get close—Paulette must have not told them she was coming—so when she get near, PJ hide. The children them too, they must have been naked. [The researcher], say it’s this what she was looking for. Like this is the real thing. This is what the researcher want to come see, real traditional,” (25/02/2015).

While it does not seem that this visiting researcher explicitly stated that she was interested in “tradition”, her interest is understood as an interest in the traditional. Undoubtedly, Makushi people would have encountered foreign fascination with their nudity. In this passage, however, we see the way foreign interest is understood as an interest in the tradition. Nudity, therefore becomes part of tradition, and everything with which tradition is associated, including the past. Jean was unclear about the researcher’s impression of the cowhide covering the door. Jean seems to consider the cowhide covering her door “traditional”, given the long history of the Rupununi with ranching and the fact that she now has a wooden door, but this did not satisfy the researcher. Cows are not of the forest. Jean understood that the image of the “naked Amerindian” coming back from the river fulfilled the interest of the researcher.

Jean’s statement came shortly after asking me if I was “living traditionally”. I responded by saying that I was living happily with my host family, eating from the pepper pot. I suspect she related the anecdote above to point out that Paulette and her family were not “traditional”, and that the Captain’s “side” of Surama is generally considered more “traditional”. She seemed to suggest that I, as a researcher, should be more interested in tradition.

Paulette and Daniel arguably are known in Surama to have close interactions with several researchers. They often reach out and host visiting researchers, due in part to Paulette's position as a researcher herself.<sup>54</sup> I first met Paulette and Daniel as an undergraduate student staying at the Ecolodge while participating in a field methodology course along with another six members of my cohort. Daniel was returning from the river behind the Ecolodge and stopped to tell us he would be working in the farm the following day. After working with him, Kurt, and Floyd through the morning, Paulette suggested we prepare *parakari* for my birthday, and by doing so learn cassava work. We participated in cassava work, and through spending time in Paulette's kitchen we developed our research focus. My interest was in the transmission of Makushi personhood, and towards the second half of my four weeks visit I asked several questions about culture, identity, mothers, and children, until I felt that I was being too intrusive, and decided instead to continue participating in local work without asking so many questions. My colleagues developed their own projects, one on local clothing styles, another on the local experience of the Low Carbon Development Scheme project, craft, shamanic plants, and others. All of us were interested, to some degree or another, in what *things* were Makushi; dress, trees, crafts, plants. As eager students, we aimed to get at the core of what it meant to be Makushi, which was interpreted by our hosts as an interest in "tradition".

Paulette has since told me of her experience with the successive field methodology cohorts. She highlighted our level of participation and willingness to contribute to household activities, and said this was how she grades us. She also notes how well we learned cassava work. Paulette remembers researchers who have learnt to speak Makushi, to weave hammocks out of cotton, or "do their own cassava work", dotting fondly on them in her retelling.<sup>55</sup> Her stories of previous researchers' successes and blunders serve as a kind of guide for new researchers. Thus, over the years, she has guided our participation in these particularly "traditional" endeavours, encouraging us through compliments and thank-you's when we do something well. Where most people of my generation were involved in the monetary economy, either logging or working at the lodge, I was encouraged to participate in machruman, learn handicrafts, and go to the farm. While I enjoyed these tasks, Paulette would sometimes compliment my interest by comparing me to her other two sons, which estranged me from them, and my stated interest in the daily tasks in which they participated. The things my generation did were not considered traditional, and Paulette, like many other elders in the

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<sup>54</sup> Paulette told me many times that they hosted anyone, researcher or not, and indeed when outsiders came to the Village Paulette often hosted and even fed them at no charge. She said the Lord would return the favour.

<sup>55</sup> These are mostly female students. A couple of male students learned Makushi, but they would not have learnt hammock weaving, or cassava work on their own, as these are closely tied to femininity. Paulette's stories of male researchers are about their helpfulness, the way we drank *parakari*, walked the community looking for machruman, and helped around the house.

community, encouraged me instead to continue farm-work and machruman to learn about “Makushi culture”.

Since the establishment of the MRU, Paulette like many of her family-friends have participated in research in the district. Paulette’s favourite research, as well as Caroline’s, was about wellbeing in the community, this involved them developing their own categories and questions to gauge the level of well-being in the community. This research further proved to Paulette the importance of “tradition” and “culture”. Paulette’s research results noted that those people with less outside goods—motorbikes, motor graters, zinc roofs, and alcohol—had the highest index of wellbeing; they fought less, consumed less alcohol, and had less problems with money and securing food. Research continuously suggested to the community that “tradition” was “good”, and was of most interest to researchers.

I have already noted this of my own work. While my stated interest was in “how people live”, whether it be farming, buying food, logging, mining, fishing, or whatever my host family and family-friends were doing, I was encouraged to participate more in those activities that were considered part of “traditional” subsistence and life. As my actions and interests were interpreted and encouraged, “tradition” as a category was recreated. Though research did not always fit people’s ideas of “tradition”, as researchers, ours was an interest in “culture” and “tradition”. I noted through fieldwork how these categories were almost reworked to fit these research interests. My interest in volunteering at the lodge, for example, was understood as an opportunity to spend more time with Milner, learning from his extended knowledge of plants; and to go downriver. While researchers were quite common in Surama, we were still often the topic of conversation. I noted through the conversations and gossip in my household, the way research projects were understood, and in some cases, catered to. This is not to say that research findings were inauthentic, or not genuine, but that “culture” and “tradition” take on new meanings through research, and are the means through which people in Surama mediate the exchange of knowledge with outsiders.

While Paulette spoke to me about my research, I have to assume that she and others also conversed about my work when I was not present. I could approximate how they understood my fieldwork, but conversations surrounding a colleague’s research (who I will call Jack), speak more clearly to the way outside foreign research is understood, and reinterpreted; particularly as an interest in the past. Furthermore, discussions of Jack’s research points to the way foreign research interest sparks conversations amongst family about certain aspects of history, which may not otherwise have come up. Finally, I want to draw the reader’s attention to the way research questions are sometimes met with declarations of ignorance, particularly questions regarding shamanic practices and knowledge.

Milner once told me that Jack had come to interview him, and asked about Makunaima, a Pemon mythical figure associated with shamanism. Milner said that those were long ago stories, and he didn't really know about it. This will be explored further in Chapters Five and Six.

Jack's project was geared towards an ethnohistory of The Makushi. His main investigative method was interviews, and when I was in the field he was on his third and final annual two-month fieldwork trip to Surama.

"I tell he I don't know anything about this *Wang* (Bichiwang, the first Alleluia prophet). Just what my father used to tell me about Joang," Auntie Paulette said about her talk with Jack (14/06/2015). She continued in a discussion of Joang, the last man to have an affair with his daughter, "Well, [Jack] said, 'Auntie Paulette, it must be the same man, the same man I'm looking for, the one I ask you about because that is the same story I have.' I ask he to tell what is the story and he say it is the same thing. Same. Just a different name. I tell he that is what my father used to tell us."

Victorine came into the kitchen and Auntie Paulette continued washing the dishes.

"He did ask about Alleluia," Victorine said, "What we know about it. I tell he I don't know about Alleluia, just granny tell me they dance in a circle. She tell me that those times it didn't have no priest, but the people would come together on a mountain and dance in a circle and as they were dancing, food would appear. Oh, and before that they would put the sick people in the middle and dance around them."

"Granny used to tell us about them things," Uncle Daniel added, looking over at me, "them used to be up Roraima side, that is where they went."

"They would sing all them songs, only in Makushi and Arekuna," Paulette said.

Daniel and Paulette spoke about the different Makushi dances. The things their grandparents, particularly their grandmothers, had told them about dances. They said that if Jack wanted to know about them he would have to ask their mothers or grandmothers, but Paulette said that Jack didn't have research permission to work in Rupertee, where her mother lived. Daniel said he knew part of one of the songs, but the only person in Surama who knew the whole song was Mogo Malcom, the *piaiman*. They described the Parishara dance, the way girls would offer parakari to the men. They said little of the purpose of the dance, or when it was held, and focused more on how it looked, the headdresses participants wore so that the vomit of the man behind would not hit their neck. They repeated that people did not know about the dance anymore, but that since it required a lot of 'kari

drinking, and girls now did not want to drink 'kari, they could not know about it. They described the dance as wicked.<sup>56</sup>

“For me, Jack’ project is about seeing how much we know about our culture,” Victorine said.

The comment struck a chord with me, and I said, “Well, if those things like Alleluia, you don’t do it now, and mommy said it was long, when it didn’t have priests, well it is not part of culture, culture has changed, it is not your culture he is talking about.”

Paulette agreed with me, that culture had changed, but Daniel seemed to agree with Victorine, that Jack wanted to see how much people knew about their culture.

I participated in, and heard several conversations about Jack and his project, and there were several commonalities throughout these discussions; particularly his apparent interest in *kanaimĩ*, (described in Surama as a short forest man who killed people) and Alleluia. Common in the retellings of Jack’s interviews were my hosts’ declarations that they did not know about the things he was asking, *kanaimĩ*, Makunaima, and Alleluia. Older speakers would often go on to tell everything they knew about the topic, usually adding that a grandparent had told them about it. Though they declared, “I don’t know nothing about...” they could speak a lot on the topic. Younger people also asked their parents about the issue, but parents seemed to maintain their ignorance. Knowing that Jack was a researcher, and interested in culture, younger people’s difficulty answering research questions leads to the idea that they know less (than their elders) about their culture. If Jack is asking about culture, and young people do not know the answers to his questions, they know less about “culture”. Contrastingly, elders’ declarations of ignorance were about not knowing *how to do* the thing Jack asked about. They knew *of* Parishara, but did not *do* Parishara themselves.

Of his work amongst the Waorani in Ecuador, High (2015) has argued that professions of ignorance are an ontological dimension, affirming “having” knowledge of shamanism means having the bodily capacity to enact shamanic power through adopting shamanic perspectives. This seems to also be the case in Surama, where people can recount stories or anecdotes their grandmothers said about dances, or other “tradition”, though they maintain their ignorance of how to do them. This is important when discussing *kanaimĩ*, an assassin closely associated with *piai* (shamanry). People may be the victims of *kanaimĩ* attack, but knowing *how kanaimĩ works* would be knowledge of the ability to attack someone else. In this way, *piai* in Guyana, more than elsewhere in the Amazon, is associated as closely with death and violence as with healing.

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<sup>56</sup> The NRDDDB website, under the history of Annai Village, suggests that the Parishara dance was “ended” between the 1940s and 1950s.



Interestingly, however, while my hosts professed their ignorance, they spoke about the topic as a memory, or, more specifically, a memory of an old-time person's story. In the retelling above, Paulette and Daniel said they knew little of Parishara, but described certain visual aspects of the dance in detail. In this way, exchanges of "cultural" aspects of stories are exchanged in part because they were brought up by foreign researchers. Contrastingly, the doing, or invisible exchanges, of many of these "cultural" phenomena are not shared.

A couple of weeks after Paulette told me about her interview with Jack, and while having dinner at her kitchen, Caroline told us (Evanie Paulette, Vitus, and the children) her experience.

"Jack come and first question he ask me is what is Alleluia, or what you know about Alleluia. I tell he I don't know. Alleluia is what we say in church and he ask me how often I does go to church. What is Alleluia mommy?" Caroline asked.

"Alleluia is a people, them did dance and sing Alleluia songs."

"But them not living anymore or them still living, Auntie Paulette?" Vitus asked.

"Them still living, they living still in region one," Paulette answered.

"And Region Eight, granny. We hear a radio broadcast about it. Them Alleluia people come and talk about it on Paiwomak," Evanie said.

"Yes, also in Region Eight," Paulette said.

"But, what is it they believe, like?" Vitus asked.

"They does do healing, they believe in God. Them Patamona does believe in Makunaima, that is like their God. Like how Makushi is Ishkirang, they have Makunaima."

"In Wapishana it don't get no God," Vitus said, "I never heard none of them things."

"It get kanaimi?" I asked.

"It get kanaimi, but kanaimi is not God," Vitus said.

"Ishkirang is God," Paulette said.

"So, it's who bring them Alleluia things to the people there?" Caroline asked.

"The Patamona still practice it. They pass it on, but they live up in the mountains in isolated communities," Paulette said.

Discussion surrounding Jack's project was therefore not only about his project, it sparked interest in an array of topics throughout Guyana. Myers (1993) notes that at the time of her research, knowledge of Alleluia was hidden, and though it was practiced in some parts of Makushi territory, this was not a fact openly shared. In the preceding conversation, Paulette also distances herself from the action and embodied knowledge of Alleluia, while telling her family about it as a cultural trait of others.

I spoke with Jack about his interest in Alleluia and Kanaimi, hoping to better understand his project, and let him know of the way people were reacting to his questions fervently. I told him about the conversation that I had had with Paulette about their interview, and he noted that she had not shared her Joang story. His record of the interview had him sharing the story, and Paulette agreeing, stating that she had the same story. Indeed, I had heard Paulette tell parts of the story before, but I wonder why she would not have told Jack. I suspect that she was interested in Jack's research, and the things *he* knew. It was Jack's third time in Surama, and she had told me that he was repeating several questions. This did not make sense to Paulette; she told me that Jack already had the answers to these questions, and that people in Surama had already answered. This gave further credence to the suspicion that Jack's project was about finding out how much of their "culture" people in Surama knew. After all, knowing culture is the basis for much of the post-1990 exchange with outsiders. Paulette told me she suggested to Jack that there were places he could go to learn more about the things he was questioning; similar to the way she suggested that if I wanted to learn Makushi I would have to go to another community where Makushi was (still) more widely spoken. While Paulette seems to have met Jack's project with some suspicion, others in the community shared as much as they could, which led to a joke about Caroline, who, hoping to share something new with Jack, combined three different myths. This is to say that people were happy to help Jack with his work, though the contradiction between his professed ignorance and his previous "cultural" knowledge was met with some apprehension. In any case, his research sparked conversations about "culture", throughout the community.

### *Culture and Tourism*

Similar to the way Jack's research interests were interpreted as interests in "culture", things in which researchers professed interest were interpreted as *Makushi*. Why else would they come all the way to Surama to learn about these objects and practices? When new visitors come—tourists, or natural science students—people in Surama remember the things that interested previous researchers, and share it with the new visitors.

During my first fieldwork in 2009, Lisa Grund (who would later become a colleague at St. Andrews), suggested to me that people in Surama saw what interested foreigners, things like cassava work, bina and farming, and these were then brought to the forefront in later interactions with visitors. While some may consider this

(re)presentation to be artificial, it sparks conversations and exchanges between community members through which "Makushi culture" is understood locally. There are local motivations for interactions with foreigners, and the categories exchanged have a certain meaning and significance for people in Surama. At the same time, in telling "culture", people in Surama can control the way information is shared, and how much is shared with researchers. Nevertheless, not everyone in Surama is motivated to highlight local "culture".

Late in my fieldwork, a group of MA in Education students came to Surama, and Paulette and Daniel took them to the farm. The students, mostly teachers, were interested in the different ways knowledge is exchanged. Paulette and Daniel took them to the farm, taught them to plough, how to replant banana, and explained how the cycle of swidden agriculture worked. Afterwards, they returned to Paulette and Daniel's where they sat under the mango tree. Daniel spoke to them about hunting. He had some plants on his workbench and held them up, presenting them as his *bina*. He explained how he would bathe with one, and clean his dog's nose with another so it would pick up the scent of the animals more readily. It seemed to me that he was specifically highlighting the practical, over the 'mystical', properties of the bina. He described what he did with the bina, but not how or why it worked. Furthermore, Daniel no longer hunted, (though his dogs did occasionally corner animals on their own), and said to me on more than one occasion that he only wanted to live in harmony with nature.



Figure 5: Daniel speaking to MA students about bina

As the students packed and left, Frank rode up to the mango tree on his motorbike and asked if his father had shown them his bina. Then he asked if his father had had his high wine bottle. I replied that he wasn't showing it.

“Chap should have told [the students] that was the spirit. He could have tell them, the plant cannot grow without the spirit,” Frank said chuckling.

Bina is an embodied relationship with plants that allows people to access animals in the forest through hunting. It is said to give hunters strength, and different binas have a variety of uses. Frank's jokes about spirits (while also a play on words, and jibe at Daniel for drinking high wine when farming), suggests that Daniel could tell the students anything as long as it sounded 'mystical'. In this way, Frank recognizes that talking about bina is not *knowing* and using bina. I also suspect that he does not *believe* bina's embodied properties. Though he goes hunting, I took his joke to be a jibe at bina itself as an outdated superstition. Because “culture” and “tradition” are associated with the past, and known *about* through the stories that old-time people tell—not necessarily practiced or still used—the importance or relevance of “tradition” and “culture” varies between the generations, but also from person to person. While Paulette tells of her mother bathing her with bina, she and Daniel both told me that they did not pass that knowledge down to their children. Thereby, for Frank, bina is more closely associated with what his father tells visiting students, than with his own practices, hunting or otherwise.

Tourists and other visiting groups often participate in similar excursions to the farm or to do cassava work. They are told the steps of cassava processing; they scrape cassava, try the hand-held and motor-graters, and parch farine. While they are told of the ubiquity of farine and parakari, and are invited to taste them, they are not told of the invisible relation with cassava as a family member or of the way women exchange varieties of cassava over vast distances (see Mentore 2012). The kinship of Surama is not shared with researchers, though they are taught how to do the cassava work. Cassava work, is the quintessential “cultural” trait shared with outsiders. Many have been taught to do the physical process of cassava-work, while the invisible exchanges necessary to turn the poisonous plant into food, are not shared.<sup>57</sup> Thus, the visible is shared with researchers, while other perhaps invisible exchanges involved in cassava work are maintained invisible. I will return to this in Part III.

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<sup>57</sup> Guss (1989) describes the way Yekuana people in Venezuela sing to appease the spirit of cassava, making it edible.

Sharing “culture”

Thus far I have suggested that “culture” and “tradition” came to mean what they do through interactions with researchers and other outsiders. These exchanges with researchers also spark conversations within the household and community, as was evident of the conversations surrounding Jack’ research. “Tradition” and “culture” are not only part of a dialogue with researchers; in local conversations, they also frame various practices and objects associated with the forest, and the past. While more people favour outside goods where available, they also value members of the community for maintaining “tradition”, value their own knowledge of “Makushi culture” and the knowledge necessary to prepare and make these traditional items.

Paulette suggested that people living on the other side of Surama were more *Makushi* (above, this chapter), and people living on the other side also suggested to me that they were more traditional. They said that they were older Makushi, whereas some of the things from the side of the community where I lived were brought in from Brazilian Makushi, considered a recent incursion. They suggested to me that if I wanted to know the “real Makushi”, particularly Makushi language, I should spend time with them. I do not mean to suggest that there might be internal debates as to which side is more “Makushi”, but rather that a certain amount of *Makushiness* is positively valued. Those who steered away from this *Makushiness* were considered stuck-up. In Chapter One I explained how Freddy spoke disparagingly about a person who did not want to eat the farine and beef that “brought them up”. I heard similar remarks about local food throughout fieldwork. People in the community who did not want to eat farine, or did not do cassava work were questioned, not only by older members of the community, but by their own age group.<sup>58</sup> Various women in the community were highly regarded for their skill in preparing farine, cassava bread, and parakari. Similarly, men in the community were regarded for their hunting and fishing ability, or knowledge of the river.

Similarly, people were interested in their children learning skills and abilities from elders. When Uncle Dan started weaving two new matapees, one for the household and one to sell, Victorine wanted her son Tai-chi to watch his grandfather, so he could pick up the skill himself. In our household, Frank, was regarded for having amassed an array of long ago stories, and could entertain his children and nephews for hours. Paulette’s youngest son, usually quite quiet, was well-known among his classmates for having the same ability. Similarly, when I expressed interest in the establishment of Surama, Caroline suggested that I visit Harold Captain, who was known to have very good old-time stories. Other abilities included setting up camps, working in the forest, and

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<sup>58</sup> This not only had to do with “tradition”, but with being economically savvy. A bag of farine cost nearly a month’s salary; for most people it made more sense to stay home and do cassava work than to do remunerated work.

knowing bush-medicine. These were not only positively valued for their *Makushiness*, but for their applicability in the community. These abilities could be shared to heal, to entertain, and to build the community for events. Thus, *Makushi* abilities, considered to stem from the past, contributed to the Surama community today.

People spoke about people with the best abilities as traditional. The best tasting burnt cassava drink was the one in which only local ingredients could be tasted; the best farine was the one with the nicest colour, consistency, and flavour (with some sweetness); and, though most people use cement and zinc when building a new house, I heard the most beautiful houses were those with thatch roofs and mud brick or burnt brick walls. Though these seem like disparate abilities with little in common, taste, origin of materials, and aesthetic quality, could make them part of “tradition”. The best farine, the nicest house, and the best parakari, were the most “traditional”.

As was already suggested by Paulette and Caroline’s surveys, which found that the households with the highest index of well-being were the most traditional, maintaining “tradition” is positively valued. This is perhaps best seen in the annual Amerindian Heritage Celebrations.

#### *Amerindian Heritage Month, and Surama Heritage Day*

In 1995, President Cheddi Jagan declared September Amerindian Heritage Month to commemorate the first Amerindian appointment to parliament; Stephen Campbell, September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1957 (“Amerindian Heritage Month” 1/09/2016). Every year, Amerindian Villages celebrate with a day of games, friendly competitions, and a party. In the North Rupununi, preparations for these celebrations often start a month in advance. Besides each Village holding their own celebrations, one Village volunteers to host District Heritage Day, bringing together participants and spectators from across Villages and settlements in the North Rupununi. Winners of the friendly District Heritage competitions move on to compete in the Regional and National heritage competitions in Lethem and Georgetown.

Below I discuss some of Surama’s Heritage Day competitions to argue that “tradition” and “culture” are not only means of representing Amerindianity to outsiders. People in Surama, young and old, are interested in “traditional” activities, and hold people who know how to do these activities in great esteem. Much of the competitions during Heritage Day are taken from daily subsistence practices. Unlike daily practice, however, their practice in Heritage Day brings them into a friendly competition. Furthermore, effort is put towards making the competition practices more “traditional”. That is, the competition does not make use of new tools or strategies that are used in daily life. Instead, the practice is made to seem like a version of the practice done in the past. This draws people to appreciate the abilities of people that can (still) do the daily practices as they were

done in “culture days”. The following descriptions of Surama Heritage Day competitions point to the way practices are made traditional.

- Cassava Grating: In the cassava grating competition, contestants line up with a predetermined amount of cassava, which they must peel and grate. Where most families today use motor-graters, the competition uses the hand graters. Similarly, palm leaves are sought out to hold the grated cassava. If the leaves cannot be found, a plastic wash bucket is used in their stead. Contestants are judged on how quickly and how well they grate their cassava.
- Archery: Like cassava grating, archery is split into categories of men and women. Contestants have three rounds of three shots each to hit a target, which is placed at a longer distance on each round. Daniel had strong opinions of the archery event, and was strongly and vocally against using a fixed target, which he said was “European; Robin Hood style.” Instead, he proposed a moving target, which was more faithful to the way Amerindians used bows to hunt. This was accomplished by tying a string to a coconut and pulling it in front of the competitors. The second year, Daniel carved a labba out of a spare piece of wood and put it on wheels for the moving target. The hunter able to hit the moving target most times before it moved across was the winner. Daniel pointed out that this also forced each competitor to have his own bow set, which he said was also more traditional, because a hunter had to know his bow, and would not share it with others on a hunt.
- Best Tuma-pot (pepper-pot): The best tuma pot competition is a culinary competition in which ladies compete for the tastiest, and most traditional pepper pot. Contestants try to use game or fish where available, and are judged by three elder community members who gauge the presentation and taste of the tuma. In 2014, after contestants tied in taste, Auntie Verna was awarded the winner for her use of clay pots, and traditional dress when presenting the tuma. While Tuma-pot is a common, almost daily dish, it is usually eaten served from the aluminium pot on which it is cooked, Verna’s delicious tasting tuma, and use of the traditional pots won her both Surama, and District competitions.



Figure 6: Auntie Jean presents tuma-pot at Heritage Day

Other competitions include cotton spinning, in which the longest, finest, and most consistent handspun thread wins; fire-lighting, in which contestants start a fire with no match or lighter; and parakari drinking, in which contestants drink a litre of 'kari from a half calabash without leaving a drop, cleanest calabash wins. Competitions are about enacting "tradition", and having fun. The games are things that usually happen in the house, but when put in the context of the celebrating heritage, they are done slightly differently, without machines, or other "modern" tools. The day is rounded off with games for children, a football match, and a party in the evening, which draws nearly the entire community. The festivities not only celebrate heritage, but the work that went into preparing the community for the event. In this way, it is like a community wide machruman.

Competitions are a stage upon which "tradition" is shared in a positive way throughout the community. Heritage Day is a family affair and children and young people are encouraged to participate in the activities. While the activities may seem like a ludic flip of their practice in daily life, the flip is a celebration of the past, and an appreciation of the people that carry out these practices in their "traditional" form. The point I want to make is that people in Surama make great efforts to have an enjoyable and eventful Heritage Day not to demonstrate their Amerindianity to outsiders—since Villages later come together for a joint District Heritage Day, few outsiders attend



Village heritage celebrations—but to promote the sharing of these activities. Tradition has a specific local meaning, a local valuing.

While the practices are not the same as they would be in the household, they point to the importance of certain abilities in daily life, specifically subsistence activities. Passes (2000) points out the way subsistence activities amongst the Pa'ikwené are valued for being difficult. The difficulty is met with group participation such that subsistence is made easy through social cohesion. While a successful Heritage Day is also very difficult and requires social cohesion to plan and execute, the competitions themselves are for individuals. In the household, these activities are collective; women cook, and do cassava work together, and men hunt with their closest family-friends. Competitions reflect the continued importance of these gendered practices in daily life. While people today use motor-graters, shotguns, and aluminium cookware; subsistence activities are still often gendered and require the gendered pair (Gow 1989) to be practiced. In the Introduction I mentioned Tai-chi's comment about wanting to marry a woman who makes Tuma-pot like his grandmother. For his future wife to do cassava work, he will have to know how to make her a matapi with which to strain cassava. Thus, individual competitions during Heritage Day point to collectively practiced knowledge in the household.

Another part of celebrations, particularly at District Heritage Day is the Culture Show. Each participating community has its own culture group, which prepares songs and dances for the competition. The competition is held in the evening, and is one of the most popular. The winning group often continues to regional and national heritage competitions. Contestants are judged on their costumes, songs, and overall performance. Costumes using natural materials, particularly local cotton, are the most highly prized, as are songs using local rhythms, instruments, and Makushi singing. While I was in Surama, the Culture Group had been criticized for using soca rhythms too often in their music, rather than relying on the Makushi style syncopation (more like Brazilian *forro*).

#### *Culture Group*

While most Surama Culture group performances are for non-Surama community members, their performances draw local interest, both from participants and spectators. The Culture Group is not solely a display for outsiders, it is looked upon positively as a valuing of “tradition”, and young people were encouraged and commended for their participation. Uncle Glen was the leader of the Culture Group, and put Auntie Jean's lyrics to music, but most of the participants were between secondary school age (fourteen), and thirty years old. Songs were meant to reflect “traditional” Makushi or Amerindian practices, such as cotton spinning, or other gender roles like men's hunting

and women's cassava work. When surveyed as to whether traditions were being passed down in the community, Culture Group members largely replied that they felt traditions were being passed down. This contrasted with others in the community who felt otherwise. Indeed, while the Culture Group uses patterns and designs that may not be historically Makushi, such as Waiwai designs for the costumes, the songs call on "traditional" practices, use locally woven cotton, incorporate old-time stories, and are sung in Makushi, encouraging non-speakers to learn the language.

The Culture Group often performs for visitors to Surama, whether students, researchers, or other group of tourists. In Surama, performances are usually held by the school or the Ecolodge, and many other members of the community watch the performance, some record it on phones or cameras. These performances are called, "cultural exchanges", and the audience is given time to participate by giving their own performances—poems, songs, or dances—and are then called upon to participate with the Culture Group in a final dance. Like most gatherings, these are opportunities for community members to make friendly jokes or jibes of the performers. These are not malicious, however, and in my experience, many of those making the jokes also participated in the Culture Group in other occasions. This is to say that the friendly laughter at the Culture Group is inclusive rather than isolating.<sup>59</sup>

The main event for the Culture Group, as suggested above, are its trips to Regional and National heritage. These trips allow for the Surama group to share their "culture" more widely, and are an opportunity for the members to travel. This travel is attractive, especially for younger members of the Culture Group. Upon their return to Surama, gossip and jokes about the trip quickly circulate amongst the households. On some occasions, group members are also given a stipend or commissioned contract for travel, which is further motivation for participation. Though the Culture Group can bring in funds in exchanges with outsiders, it is considered "cultural", and not part of development.

On one occasion, during the preparation for the heritage celebrations, we were talking about the work that had gone into (nearly) finishing the office for the opening ceremony. Frank, Paulette, and I were in her kitchen, and Paulette had mentioned the different ways the community was contributing to the office and the community. She made positive analysis of the Culture Group, to which Frank replied, "People want to see development. Uncle Glen say he is developing the community, which the way I see it, Culture Group is more of promotion, that is not development. How culture is development? Office is development."

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<sup>59</sup> Of her time in Surama, Scherberger (2005) similarly describes 'collective' laughter meant to share positive feelings, versus 'directed' laughter meant to shame and push away unwanted actions.

Frank's comments were meant to draw attention to Glen and the Culture Group for not contributing to the office. Paulette, for her part, saw the Culture Group's rehearsal as a kind of contribution to the Village. For Paulette, the Culture Group was a way for young people to participate in tradition. At the same time, they made a little bit of money, which could help in the household. For her, the Culture Group both helped pass down "tradition", and promoted the right kind of "development". Frank's comments, particularly his question as to how a thing could be both traditional and developed, points to the way these categories are conceptually opposed, tradition being part of the past, and development being associated with the present.

### Tradition and Development

Tradition and Development are conceptually opposed. Where development is characterized by "modern" times, money, and making work easier through using foreign materials and power tools, "tradition" is characterized by the "forest" and "culture days"/long-ago—use of local materials, and working collectively. Part I foregrounded the way older people in Surama are apprehensive about development because of the changes it is bringing to ways of being social. At the same time, however, these are historically interrelated categories.

Development, both as it is conceived in Surama and at the national level, took off after the change in Guyanese national policy in 1992. This change in policy also opened the door for foregrounding "tradition" and "culture" as foreign researchers and policy makers have been interested in Amerindian knowledge of the forest. Locally, as "culture" and "tradition" are manifested in current development-time, the practices, and objects they frame are re-evaluated and shift to fit more closely with ideas of the past. This happens in two interrelated ways. As new practices and materials become more prominent through the decisions and interactions of various households, previous materials and practices become associated with "tradition". Then, these older household objects and practices, are repackaged when shared at the community level to further fit the spacio-temporal aspects of "tradition".<sup>60</sup> At a wider scale, the relation between the two is more evident.

Developments in the community, such as the paving of the airstrip, are meant to draw attention to the way Amerindians can "develop" without compromising their own ways of being social. At an even wider scale, national Guyanese policy and development decisions recognize Amerindians as key partners for projects like Guyana's Low Carbon Development Scheme (part of REDD+). This relies on the recognition of Amerindians as Guyana's "first residents" and "custodians of the forest", which

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<sup>60</sup> This analysis is closely tied to Surama Heritage Day in which the tradition, usually found in the household, is foregrounded in the community, and made even more traditional. The centre of the community becomes associated with continuity of the past.

also plays on the association of contemporary Amerindians as grounded in the past. In this way, wider development, in exchange and interaction with Amerindian people in the North Rupununi, contributes to “tradition” as a concept.

National and International attention are not the main motivation for sharing “tradition” and “culture”. In the household, cassava work, farming, and the ability to negotiate the forest are not done *because* they are valued as “tradition”, they are part of everyday life. As such, they are part of people’s sociality of sharing and contributing to each other. In Amazonia, this exchange is not about bringing the forest into the community, but extending sociality—family-friend relations—into the forest. It is through this exchange with the forest that people in the community and (otherwise invisible) people in the forest constitute each other. While Amerindians’ ability to conserve the forest draws international attention, local attention is on the forest to create social connections. This is a structured analysis. But it can be seen in daily interactions of local research into “tradition”.

Many visiting researchers bring opportunities for local Surama residents to learn (about each other and “others”), earn a salary, and travel. These are not the only motivations for locals to participate in research. My host-family appreciated the research in which they participated and treated it as a further contribution to community sociality. While research may change the context in which practices and objects are shared—being told about bina versus using bina—the repackaging provides an opportunity for this information to be exchanged, and learnt. Makushi hunters who use a gun prepare bow sets for tourists or for Heritage Day, providing an opportunity to their children or grandchildren to learn the skill. Amusing long-ago stories are collected and shared with children and friends, and people find new relevance in old stories, many of which they had never heard before. In this way, the relationships with the past and forest are remade in development at the local level. At the same time, their importance and ubiquity in Surama, in the face of researchers and other outsiders, means that people in Surama mediate the way they are shared with non-Amerindians.

Other aspects of Amerindians’ relationship with the forest, such as the existence of dangerous forest beings—*kanaimi* and *piai*—are not part of this widely shared “tradition”, which further points to the fact that “culture” is not constituted to satisfy outside interest. *Kanaimi* and *curare* have been hot topics for foreigners interested in Guyanese Amerindians for centuries, perhaps because they have remained so elusive. When researchers ask about these parts of life, they are met with statements of ignorance. Knowing these dangerous interactions with the forest is knowing how to use them, which implies knowing how to kill. As Jean’s comments in this chapter suggest, “civilised” people do not kill, and therefore, do not know about these exchanges. This points to the fact that dangerous knowledge is not only hidden, it may also be ontologically untranslatable to researchers, necessarily

interested in books, reports, and the like. Contrastingly, dangerous ways of knowing are more closely associated with embodied exchanges. In this way, dangers also associated with the past are kept away from visiting researchers. My discussion of *belief* in the following two chapters explores this relationship.

People in Surama talk about *belief* in very similar ways to “culture” and “tradition”. It is associated with the past, and it is a way of presenting certain practices to researchers, in this case potentially dangerous practices. As *piai* did not seem to be a part of people’s everyday life, I was not very interested in pushing an investigation into this invisible part of being. A few months into fieldwork, however, I overheard Paulette, Vitus, Jolyn, Frank and Scott telling stories before Frank went hunting.

They spoke about bina, how there were different binas that could make one change shapes, turning into a bird or lizard.

“It don’t have bina like that anymore, nah?” Vitus asked (17/04/2015).

“They lose it,” Paulette said.

“Them not pass it on?” Jolyn asked.

Paulette said they knew about some binas, but there were others that let you talk to the spirits, that were not being passed on.

“Yeah, Scott, if you go into the forest without eating pepper you would see them,” Paulette said, “That is evil spirit. Like Bible say. You would see them, like girl whining on them. But we wouldn’t see them, only you.”

“Pepper is evil spirit?” Scott asked.

“No, you have to take pepper to keep them away,” the group replied.

“You have to burn your mouth with pepper,” Auntie Paulette began, “Put it in your eye.”

“And your beatie [anus],” Vitus said humorously, and Paulette agreed with him.

“Kamash say that them rocks there, by he, is Oma,” Frank said, and then repeated, looking for a response from his mother.

“That is Ishkirang barbecue post,” Paulette said.

‘For real?!’ Jolyn asked in a sharp upwards tone.

“Yes, that is Ishkirang barbecue post. Look how it have four there with space in the middle.

“Remember he did find them rocks and move them there when he was building his house,” Frank said.

“They fix it up,” Paulette said, “Remember it had malaria coming to Surama, bad, bad malaria, plenty. Mogo Malcom fix up and he say a prayer there. Why you think malaria ease up?”

Here bina, invisible or ‘mystical’ knowledge, is spoken *about*. It is made practical, replaceable perhaps by more recent developments. The *piai* that Malcom practices is made to seem like a kind of “tradition”, part of the past, however, It is not passed down the same way as tradition.

I had not heard this story of malaria, but it seemed to contrast to the way that people often spoke about Malcom, as a remnant of a past without power. In retrospect, however, my misunderstanding of the way people spoke about Malcom had to do with a misreading of what people meant by *belief*. I remembered one of my first days in Surama, we were in Paulette’s kitchen and she asked about a tattoo I had. I told her it was a shaman who could turn into a crow. She had a concerned look on her face, and told me that Mogo Malcom said he could turn into a humming bird.

“That is what he trick me. He also turns into an eagle, but it’s how he tricks,” She said with a light chuckle (30/08/2014).

She went on to tell me about a time Laura Mentore went to the *piai*-man. Laura had a pain in her knee that would not go away. Paulette said Laura told her about how Malcom sucked out the pain.<sup>61</sup>

“I tell she it’s trick. ‘He trick you, and now you trick me,’ I tell she,” Paulette said with a laugh.

“What Laura said?”

“She said, you have to *believe*.”

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<sup>61</sup> Laura Mentore’s account of this story can be read in her 2005 article in *Anthropology and Humanism*, “The Janus-Faced Shaman: The Role of Laughter in Sickness and Healing Among the Makushi.”

## Chapter Five; *Belief* and Embodied Knowing

In this chapter I explore the ways people in Surama constitute *belief*. From ethnographic descriptions, I suggest that for people in Surama *belief* is an embodied state through which interactions with potentially dangerous beings, particularly those in the forest, may be negotiated. Contrastingly, those who do not *believe* negate the possibility of having these interactions themselves, though they do not necessarily deny the potential for other family-friends to carry out *belief* relationships. From this analysis, we see that *belief* is not a choice of ascribing to a body of knowledge, or a cognitive position regarding the ‘mystical’. Rather, it is a bodily (pre)disposition, which we can better understand as an embodied way of knowing. In chapter six, I look at the politics surrounding this way of knowing.

In Surama, people talk about potentially dangerous experiences with beings in the forest—whether *kanaimi*, or the spirits of animals—as their “*belief*”. *Belief*, in its association with the forest, is thereby similar to “tradition” or “culture”. Indeed, during fieldwork I found it difficult to distinguish Surama *belief* from “tradition” or “culture”. After analysing the way people talk about markers of the forest I distinguished that *belief* was not about daily practices and objects (past or present), but consistently about relationships with otherwise invisible beings.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, unlike “tradition” and “culture”, *belief* is not foregrounded or highlighted in exchanges with researchers; I was not, for example, recommended to spend more time with a person because they *believed*. In Chapter Six I argue that framing embodied relationships with the word “*belief*” calls their ‘reality’ into question, and suggest that my hosts use the word “*belief*” for these potentially dangerous interactions because it plays on our popular association of ‘belief’ as something that does not actually exist in the ‘scientific’, ‘natural’ world. For researchers interested in Amerindian ‘knowledge’ of plants and animals, ‘beliefs’ are of secondary importance. By treating *belief* as an embodied way of knowing, I hope to better understand my hosts’ experience of the immaterial aspects of the forest, and their political relation with researchers and development.

### *Believing*

At a glance, *belief* seems to highlight a particularly *Makushi* relationship with the past. Like “tradition” and “culture”, *belief* has been historically elaborated in exchanges with researchers, and seems to be a statement about authentic Amerindianity; authentic Amerindians *believe*. While

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<sup>62</sup> While this chapter focuses on relationships in the forest, the conclusions I draw can also be used to explore the way people in Surama access God. Looking at local practices, like Alleluia, God is experienced as an exchange relationship with a powerful other. While a full analysis of this relationship is currently outside of the scope of this thesis, the relationship between potentially dangerous beings, exchange, and family-friendship may be extended to tell us more about Amerindian conceptions of God.

“tradition” and “culture” are more closely related to the way objects are brought into, and shared, in the community and with researchers, *belief* is about relations with beings outside the community, usually in the forest. These *beliefs* and the interactions they point to are usually invisible to everyone except the *believer*. At the same time, not experiencing interactions with these invisible beings does not deny an other’s experience with that being. One does not have to *believe* to accept that other family-friend’s interact with these dangerous beings. As such, the kinds of relations and dangers framed by *belief* may also affect someone who does not think they are possible. This forms the basis for an understanding *believing* in Surama not as a cognitive position, but as an embodied potentiality.

*“That is we belief”*

Some weeks before our conversation about “civilised Amerindians”, Jean and I were having a chat during church market. We were talking about various researcher’s experiences in Surama; the things we find to be new. I told her about a prank I had played on a colleague during my first visit to Surama. Jean and Glen had invited our cohort to enjoy a “traditional” meal at their house, and I tricked a fellow student into eating a full hot pepper by telling him it was a miniature tomato.

Jean then told me two stories about a hunter going to hunt without first eating pepper. In one story, the hunter went to the savanna, and in the other he went to the forest. He encountered different animals in each story, but the stories were otherwise seemingly the same. That evening, I told Paulette what Jean had told me.

“What did you do today, Sabs?” Paulette asked me, as she often would in the evenings while I ate supper and she waited for the pepper pot to boil (25/02/2015).

“I went down by the school for the *Mash* thing and Auntie Jean told me a story about a man who went drinking. In the morning, his wife asked him to hunt. The man gone, and soon he came across a house in the savanna. He heard voices coming from inside and a woman called, ‘Your brother in law come to see you.’ A man came from where he was dancing in the yard. The man’s sisters danced and offered the hunter *‘kari* and soon he catch a high and was dancing with the man’s sisters. When he woke up his head was under an ant nest. Auntie Jean said it’s where an animal lives, but—”



Figure 7: Auntie Paulette preparing Fish. Photo by Ariane Arze Torres-Goitia



“Savanna armadillo.”

“Savanna take over he spirit,” Uncle Dan joined the conversation from his seat on the doorsill.

“Yes, your spirit would get weak,” Paulette added, “If you go without taking a little pepper. Like how we does say, ‘burn your mouth’, your spirit would get weak. That is we *belief*.”

Jean presented her story as a “long-ago” story in which things were possible that are not possible in daily life today. In these Stories, people are animals and animals are people, floods cover the earth, and different kinds of beings inhabit the world. Jean’s prelude to her story was, “My mother say a man should never go without at least a little bit of pepper in his belly”. In the story, the hungover hunter goes hunting at his wife’s insistence, and the wife does not feed him before he goes. In this way, the story seemed to me a kind of fable about the importance of classic gender roles and relations. Paulette’s assertion that this *is* their *belief*, however, places the story alongside a set of phenomena that are very much a part of contemporary life. Her comments highlight the message of the story, that a hunter should always eat before leaving the community, which she then relates to how her family always eats (meals she prepares) before going to the forest. From time to time this message is made explicit in half jokes. Frank would often stop by his mother’s kitchen on his way to hunt, and sometimes repeat the joke, “Let me burn my mouth before I catch schrang-schrang,” before serving himself from the pepper pot. His joke hinges on the ludic image that he would be dancing with spirits in the forest—like the hunter in the story dancing with armadillo girls—rather than hunting. It also frames his breakfast in what his mother calls *belief*. The importance of eating pepper further points to the connection between the body and beings outside the community. Eating pepper keeps the body from becoming weak such that other (animal’s) spirits may take it over.

A connection with Amazonian multi-naturalism can here be drawn. The hunter’s spirit temporarily left his body, and he saw the armadillos as beautiful girls, possibly because his spirit temporarily inhabited the body of an armadillo. While interested in this aspect of the story (perhaps in part because of the way ontological positions have come to be associated with *authentic* Amazonian Indigeneity), the story seemed to distance this perspectivist view of the world. It was framed as a long-ago story in which many of these connections are possible, but not possible today. The reach of the story was further called into question by Paulette calling it “*belief*”, which while bringing the story to bear on the present day, seemed to brush aside the message, rather than emphasize the way it resonated with daily life.

Thinking about Vitus' reply to Caroline's comments about her children not eating pepper, I first equated *belief* with "culture". Caroline had been frustrated about her children not eating the pepper pot she served them, and told them that when she was small she ate the same food as her parents, not a separate, less spicy boil. Vitus' comment that those were "culture days" and now is "modern times" (Chapter Three) influenced the way I thought about pepper. While people found pepper tasty, and many adults ate them raw with their meals, both Vitus' comments and Jean's story seemed to equate eating pepper with "tradition". That is, the memory and stories of pepper seemed to be what made it important. After hearing *belief* used in other contexts, however, I re-evaluated the way I thought about pepper, and the story about the hunter's spirit becoming weak. *Belief* meant that pepper affected the body.

*"He start to believe"*

Paulette said people should eat pepper before going to work in the forest or their spirit could become weak. Her use of the word "*belief*" suggested to me that others, with different cognitive tendencies and upbringings would not be in any danger of having their spirit taken-over. Thus, while I accepted that *they* had to have pepper, or at the very least *thought* they had to have pepper, someone with different 'beliefs', would not be interested in pepper. Looking at the way the community reacted to an encounter Jack had with a dangerous being from the forest, caused me to re-evaluate *belief* not as a conscious decision, but as a potential bodily disposition.

I was told that Jack had asked so much about kanaimĭ, he had an encounter with kanaimĭ. After this encounter, he became sick, and had to leave Surama ahead of schedule. I heard this on my first day back to Surama after a ten-day absence. I was doing some repairs to my bicycle when Uncle Dan came over and caught me off guard with a comment, which I didn't quite catch, but sounded like, "Jack doesn't have to ask about kanaimĭ anymore," (17/07/2015).

I asked Uncle Dan what he meant.

"He did come out and see the football finals," he started, "Well, after the match he decide to go back up to the lodge, where he staying. Uncle Bertrand offer to take he but [Jack] said he would walk. He walking there by the bridge, by the island and he say he see a short man in front of he with a knife. He turn now and see a next short man with a knife. When he turn back, going towards the lodge now, the man not there. He gone. Well you know how Jack always go around to everybody asking about kanaimĭ? He don't have to ask anymore, he get first-hand knowledge."

"People going to ask he about kanaimĭ now," I said.

"Yes, it's he that know about the kanaimĭ now."

Daniel clarified that after the encounter with *kanaimi*, Jack got sick, and Glen recommended that he go home. For weeks, people speculated about what had happened. The story was retold several times. Jack was walking along the road through an island when the “short man”, as he was usually referred to in conversation, appeared before him wearing a mask and wielding a knife. Jack got scared and turned, but the short man was there again, knife in hand. Jack turned once more and ran to the lodge, falling several times along the way. He developed a fever, and in the following days when the fever wouldn't go down, he expedited his flight back to the United States. The details of how many times he had fallen, his exact symptoms, and how much he had to drink beforehand varied. There was consensus, however, as to why the short-man, or *kanaimi*, appeared before him. This was excellently summed up one afternoon a few weeks later at Auntie Viola's shop in a conversation between Victorine and her cousin, Abigail (Jean and Glen's daughter),

“...what I think, right, he did asking about *kanaimi* and jumbie and them things so much, he did start to *believe*,” Victorine said (08/09/2015).

“He start to *believe* in *kanaimi*, na?” Abigail agreed.

“Yes, He start to *believe* it, that is how comes he appear in front of him.”

“Yes, it's like how grandfather Fred says, *belief* cures and *belief* kills,”

It was generally agreed that the short man caused Jack's fever, and eventual departure from Surama. The retellings did not explore other alternatives. Rather, the focus seemed to be on how, or why the short-man had appeared to him. When I suggested to Uncle Dan that perhaps somebody was upset that Jack was asking so many questions about *kanaimi*, he said that nobody would be mad with him for doing his research. He said, “The thing of it is; he really want to know, it's what is this thing. Jumbie thing, so that is how he find out.”

Daniel's comment was made half-jokingly, but his explanation, and his niece and daughter's, similarly draw on Jack's desire to *know*, leading him to see the *kanaimi*. Auntie Viola, Abigail and Victorine called this knowing “*belief*,” and it was *belief* that allowed him to see and become afraid. Here, the desire for knowledge suggests equating *belief* with choice or thought; I would not suggest, however, that this was Jack's choice, Jack did not *think* that *kanaimi* really existed in the world. While many anthropologists, especially those working among indigenous people, are drawn by the ‘mystical’, Jack was not. His approach and thoughts were pragmatic, and from the conversations I had with him it seemed that he kept himself very removed from the ethno-history he was studying. This leads me to think that Jack did not think *kanaimi* was real, nor did he choose to *believe*, yet this is what happened. Looking at desire in the story of the hunter, this becomes clearer.

In Jean's story, the hunter is initially startled, but drawn in by the girls' dancing and their offer of *parakari*. In this way, the 'other', the spirit becomes an object of desire over which the hunter has little control. The desire rests on the hunter's embodied capacity to perceive the armadillos as people; an embodied state or way of knowing. Had the hunter eaten pepper, he would not have been in a position to desire the girls, his body would not have perceived them. Similarly, Jack's interest in research knowledge, was not the catalyst. He already had the research knowledge from previous visits to Surama, and his continued investigation into beings in the forest was understood as a desire for what Daniel called "first-hand knowledge." Daniel distinguishes this first-hand knowledge as relational, coming through interactions and kinship with various persons in the world. Jack's *belief* encounter with *kanaimi* was his knowing "first-hand." It came about because of a bodily disposition, over which he, being an outsider interested in research ways of knowing, had little control. His desire to know in a new way was part and parcel of a gradual changing of his body that came about through his several weeks stay in Surama.

This analysis rests on *belief* being an embodied state. *Belief* as an embodied potential for interaction becomes clearer when thinking about the relation between the *believer* and the thing *believed*. Though not everyone can see or interact with the potentially dangerous being—*kanaimi*, or animal spirit—they do not deny that the *believer* had the interaction.

#### *Believers and non-Believers*

While we can accept other people's 'beliefs,' we also—whether consciously or not—doubt the reality of that person's belief-related experiences. We may accept that *for Catholics* the communion wafer becomes the body of Christ; we hold that for non-Catholics, however, it remains a wafer. This is generally not regarded as a problematic position, and it is part of our culturally relative sensibilities. If, however, a Catholic *believed* they had been visited by saints and instructed to take up arms for the liberation of their country, these beliefs may be called into question on the basis that they are *only* beliefs, not 'reality'. The experience of saints cannot be proven by others, and the interaction is thereby made invalid. This may seem an extreme example, but it points to the way that 'belief' has become a problematic category of investigation, precisely because it devalues experiences of believers. Ultimately, and perhaps behind closed doors, the actions and experiences of *believers* are disregarded, and other explanations are applied in their stead. Thus, we may accept allegations that Jack thinks he saw *kanaimi* while attributing Jack's experience—both the vision and subsequent illness—to fever, malaria, malaria medicine, dehydration, or alcohol. My hosts, however, did not treat Jack's *belief* in this way. Their comments that he *believed* were not meant to invalidate his experience, nor did they question its reality. Rather, his *belief* reflected the seriousness and reality of the matter.

By shifting ‘belief’ from a cognitive position, to *belief* as an embodied state, (pre)disposition, or potential for interaction, we see that one explanation need not invalidate the other. Catholics receiving communion are in an embodied state in which they can *and do* commune with God. Contrastingly, those who do not share in that embodied state are not in an interaction with Christ, they experience only a wafer. Similarly, the hunter saw the ant nest, where savanna armadillos are known to live, as a home like his own because he was in the embodied state of the armadillo. He saw the armadillos as beautiful girls. Had he been in the embodied state he usually occupies in the Village, he would have seen them as armadillos. Similarly, calling Jack’s experience *belief* does not call into question the thing that affected him, instead it allowed him to have that interaction. The existence of the short man is never called into question, only Jack’s perspective in relation to the short man. Similarly, if we do not experience Christ, armadillo-women, or *kanaimi* it is not because they do not exist, but because we are not in an embodied position in which we may interact with them. While ‘belief’ may not be a useful anthropological category precisely because it calls ‘other’s reality’ into question, the *belief* I experienced in the field was a way of interacting with realities in different embodied states.

### *Believers*

One evening, after having supper with Paulette, her children, and grandchildren in the kitchen, Frank began telling long-ago stories. His nephews enjoyed the funny and scary stories the best, and Frank obliged them with stories of a man whose skin was inhabited by fish skeletons, and one about children being chased by a giant in the forest. Though most of his nephews enjoyed the story, one became increasingly scared, and shortly after Frank left, Paulette tried to reassure the boy by telling him it was a long-ago story.

“If it was a story, how did they make it up?” He asked (1/06/2015).

“It’s a long-ago story. Long-ago people did *believe* in giants,” Paulette said.

While the boy’s family was consoling him, assuring him not to be scared, he wanted to know how there could be a story about giants if people had not had experiences with them. Paulette’s answer to this story, that long-ago people “*believed* in giants” could be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, it could suggest that long-ago people made up stories about giants they imagined to be in the forest; giants could be metaphors, hallucinations, or misunderstandings of other phenomena. My analysis of *belief*, however, suggests that long-ago people were able to interact with giants. It is not clear why, perhaps because they did not have a differentiated embodied state, they were spirits without bodies, or because people’s bodies were more fluid in the past; a feature common in long-ago stories. Subsequent stories about giants are tales of these embodied interactions with giants.

This is not to say that every experience with the forest, or unexplainable phenomena that occurred was phrased or equated with *belief*. Rather, *belief* spoke to the experienced interaction, and did not need to be explained away. At the same time, *belief* as embodied knowing can accept interactions in various embodied states.

One morning, Paulette received some sad news. A family-friend in Annai was coming home after a party, and died. From what I understood, the woman had been walking home with her partner when a motorcycle with no lights hit them, injuring her partner, and killing her. The next day, Paulette said that some people would inevitably say *kanaimĩ* had killed the woman, and others would say it was the motorcycle. She seemed upset by this and said, “That is them *belief*. If they *believe* it was *kanaimĩ*, I don’t know why people have to go and argue with them saying it’s motorbike,” (05/02/2015).

Indeed, I heard both interpretations. While Grandfather Fred suggested that in the Rupununi, nobody dies unless *kanaimĩ* kills them, other younger Suramans listed the motorcycles they knew not to have working headlights, trying to pinpoint the guilty party. While the bike was identified, we learnt the owner had apparently lent it to a friend from outside the Rupununi, who was now missing. This was further evidence of both *beliefs*. The motorcycle had been pinpointed, but the driver was not from the area and was missing. This fit with explanations and expectations of *kanaimĩ* attacks; *kanaimĩ* are usually from elsewhere.

Of course, Paulette’s comment was not geared towards trying to find the culprit or explanation. She found the death saddening, and the struggle for an explanation detracted from her experience of the tragedy. Furthermore, Paulette knew the woman personally, and I suspect she did not want her friend’s death to be a source of invalidating her *belief*.

It seems that for Paulette, invalidating *beliefs* does not merely invalidate one interpretation of an event, but rather invalidates the array of interactions associated with that way of knowing the event. When there are two explanations for a dangerous encounter or death, she does not find a need to invalidate other’s ways of understanding the tragedy. This is a cornerstone of the way she talks about *belief*, seemingly culturally relativistic. This relativism is part of the way she allowed other people to understand her friend’s tragedy as a motorcycle accident if they wished, so long as they did not invalidate her own *beliefs*.

This relativistic approach was evident in explanations of other tragedies. Later in my fieldwork my mother came to visit Surama. She and Paulette were talking about their families, where children lived, how old they were, and Paulette told my mother about a grandchild who had died very young.

Paulette explained that they *believed* the short man had come to kill the girl. When a person sleeps with their hand or foot outside the hammock or bed, the short man could come and touch the person, killing them in their sleep. Younger children were more likely to succumb to this, Paulette explained to my mother, “We *believe* this was what happened. They said it was malaria, but Daniel went playing with she the night before and she was fine, and in the morning, she was dead. We *believe* it was the short man,” (09/08/2015).

Again, *belief* revolves around dangerous exchanges, known through the body. Paulette explained that Daniel was playing with the baby, who had no signs of fever. While Paulette denies the explanation of malaria, she does not deny the possibility of other deaths being attributed to malaria in the ways some younger community members, usually young men, deny the existence of *kanaimĩ*. When possible encounters with *kanaimĩ* or other potentially dangerous beings happened, people’s *beliefs* suggest the possibility of them having or not having *kanaimĩ* interactions. While Jack could encounter *kanaimĩ*, Birthlan, who did not *believe*, would not be able to encounter *kanaimĩ*. Birthlan did not deny that Jack had. Contrastingly, others deny the existence of *kanaimĩ* and the system of *beliefs* all together.

#### *Non-Believers*

This chapter has been analysing *belief* as an embodied way of knowing. The suggestion is that people’s encounter and interactions with potentially dangerous beings depend on their *belief*, or (potential to be in an) embodied state. Some have the embodied potential, or are in the embodied state to have these interactions, while others are not. This seemed to be what Birthlan expressed to me once after I returned from a relatively isolated river camp, and asked him if it was haunted.

I had been to the river camp with Birthlan, Frank, and Devon two months prior, and returned to do some repairs with Uncle Dan, Benji, Thomas and his son. We stayed at the camp for a few nights, working during the day to get it up to par before research season. On our several hours boat ride back, Thomas and Benji told me they had had nightmares, and heard voices, and preferred not to sleep. They said this had been happening all week, but they had not said anything about it until we were on our way back to Surama. Curious about the spot being haunted as Thomas and Benji suggested, I decided I would ask Birthlan and Frank if they had had a similar experience. A couple hours after getting back, Birthlan and I were sitting in the kitchen while Paulette scraped cassava.

“Hey Birthlan, when we went down by Rain Camp, did you dream bad?” I asked

“Why?”

“I don’t know. Uncle Thomas them said they dreamed bad the whole time we were there. They said the place was haunted like.”

“I’ll tell you why they have them bad dreams, because they *believe* that stupidity.”

“Birthlan!” Auntie Paulette exclaimed from her seat on the doorsill, “You have any dreams Sabba?”

“No, well yes I dreamed, but not bad dreams.”

“What you dream?”

“I dreamed two pretty girls were bringing me beer in my hammock”

“Hyeeee hyeee-hya! Sabba nearly get schrang-schrang.”

“I don’t *believe* them things. That is why they have them dreams.” Birthlan stood from the table and strutted out of the kitchen. His mischievous grin turned to the subtle snarl he often wears when joking with his friends. He met with Frank outside and they resumed their conversations about outstanding logging payments out of their mother’s earshot.

Birthlan said that Thomas and Benji heard and dreamed because they *believed*. In this case, nobody else dreamed (except me) because they did not *believe*. Birthlan could have suggested that there was something at the camp, the noises of the water, or the forest, and that we had allowed it to scare us, but he did not. He suggested that he did not dream, because he does not *believe*.<sup>63</sup> If I were to take the concept of ‘belief’ with which I was familiar, I did not ‘believe’ either. I could accept Benji and Thomas’ assertion of hearing sounds and dreaming, but interacting with beings in the forest seemed to me, at the time, to be a deliberate decision. I was familiar with descriptions of Amazonian ontologies, but what I had read did not translate to an understanding that my spirit had nearly been taken over by the forest, as Paulette’s assertion of my getting schrang-schrang<sup>64</sup> suggests. Yet, like Jack, I had had a *belief* experience. Before returning to Birthlan’s *not-believing*, I hope the reader will forgive my exploration of my own *disbelief*. I find it necessary to unpack as it was the way I came to understand *belief* as an embodied interaction.

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<sup>63</sup> Waking up seems to be a common part of the end of these exchanges with dangerous beings. This was the case with the hunter who “woke up” with his head under an ant-hill; his “dream” about dancing with girls was an interaction with armadillos. Similarly, Butt-Colson (2001) explains that in a *kanaimi* attack the vital forces leave the body. This is similar to the way dreams work in various parts of the Amazon, in which the spirit travels to other bodies (see for example McCallum 2001; Rubenstein 2012).

<sup>64</sup> From this comment I was better able to understand schrang-schrang. Early in my fieldwork it just sounded like a funny word with explicitly sexual connotations. From Paulette and Frank’s comedic use of “schrang-schrang” at various times—the joke revolved around vital or spiritual weakness, particularly after sexual relations—I learn that it had to do with a bodily weakness through which one loses vital force.



At the time, I did not give this interaction much attention. I had not pieced together what Paulette meant by *schrang-schrang*. Explaining the event away as a dream was not a valid explanation as both Thomas and Benji, and Paulette were suggesting something else had happened. I found Marcio Goldman's (2013) prologue to *How Democracy Works* essential when looking for a way to write about and explain these interactions. Goldman describes his experience hearing drumming while on a bridge with Candomblé adepts. Later, when he asked which *terreiro* the drumming had been coming from, he was confused to find out there were no *terreiros* in the area from which he heard the drumming. The person he asked said the drums he heard were the drums of the dead, which corresponded to the ritual happening on the bridge. Goldman could not deny what his informant told him of the drums of the dead, but he could also not find the source of the drumming. Goldman asked Peter Gow how he would interpret the event. Gow told him he often heard flute music as well, and suggested:

“...in highly sensitized states, complex but regular patterns of sounds in the world, like gurgling rivers or a tropical night, can evoke musical forms which you are not conscious of having found aesthetically problematic. Because you are learning these musical styles without knowing it, you then project them back onto the world in the right circumstances. So, you hear Candomblé drumming, I hear flute music. I think a similar process is happening with the people we study. Because they clearly also hear this stuff too. But they simply accept that it is a feature of the world, and don't worry about it. But it is still impressive, and its mystery is not resolved by this explanation. What I reckon is that it means we have to radically rethink the whole problem of belief, or at least stop lazily saying that 'X believe that the dead play drums or that Y believe that river spirits play flutes.' They don't believe it—it's true! It is knowledge about the world...” (Goldman 2013: vi)

As Goldman heard drums, and Gow heard flutes, I had been brought beer in my hammock. I could not write it off as a mere dream. Following Gow's explanation I thought of this episode of fieldwork not as 'belief' or superstition, but as 'knowledge about the world'. Ironically, my hosts refer to this way of knowing in the world as *belief*. Looking at the way people *believe/know*, and what counts as this kind of knowing, I have suggested thus far that *belief* is an embodied way of knowing, particularly one with the potential for interactions with dangerous beings. This is consistent with Birthlan's assertion that he did not *believe*.

*Belief* is about an embodied position, particularly one associated with the past, and the forest. In Part III of this thesis, Paulette explains that she and Daniel did not take their children into the forest. As Birthlan told Devon, Frank, and myself when we were on the river going to Rain Camp, he had only been down the river twice, and never without his father. He did not hunt, or often walk in the forest. He was experienced in logging, mining, and was a good mechanic, but his denial of *belief* was not surprising since his way of knowing has not developed in direct experiences of the forest in the

way his father, Daniel, or Thomas or Benji experience and know them. Daniel highlights this “first-hand knowledge” when he speaks about Jack’s encounter with *kanaimi*. *Belief* allows you to have first-hand knowledge of these kinds of encounters. Contrastingly, Birthlan denies his ability to know in this way, denying his negotiation with these dangerous beings, while not denying that others may have them.

Contrastingly, some younger people do deny these ways of knowing. When talking about the old days of Surama I often heard that the long-ago people who lived in the area were killed by jumbees and evil spirits, and the survivors would leave to Annai for a generation before returning. Others said that it was malaria that drove them away. Paulette’s explanation of this time (in Chapter Four) highlights the way Mogo Malcom, the *piai*-man assuaged this malaria. She seems to equate the spirits with malaria, different ways of knowing the same thing; Malcom’s embodied experiences with these beings could assuage them. I heard some people laugh at the possibility that jumbees were killing people. They argued that it was malaria, and that once the Rupununi had better medicine they were able to survive in the area. They de-relativize these exchanges, favouring what they could see over ‘superstitions’ of *belief*.

Looking at the way Paulette and Daniel talk about *belief*, it seems Paulette is making a culturally relativistic statement. *Belief* experiences’ relation to spirit loss and incorporation of other animals’ perspective suggest it could be better understood as a naturally-realistic term. In this case, *believers* would be those with the bodily potential for interacting with these beings. Those who do not *believe* have different kinds of bodies, their sociality is built up through different natures. Looking at the way younger generations favour goods from the outside, the way older people see different ways of being social in their children, and the way younger people are less likely to *believe*, also suggests that different ways of being social may also be different states of being. In the following section, I briefly explore the relation between *believing* and being properly social.

### Belief and Sociality

As I have stated before, *belief* is closely related to “tradition” and “culture” in its association to the forest and the past. Thinking about the way older people *believe* and pass down the experiences of their *belief* to younger people further connects *belief* to “tradition”. A quote from Daniel, included in Part I about going to work in the farm points to this relation:

“Old time people say you have to plant cassava the day after you burn your farm. If you don’t plant cassava, the day after [burning the farm] armadillo will come and dig all under it, so that when you plant cassava, it wouldn’t bear, he already dig it all out...That is what they say. They get their ways to get you to work, to get you to plant cassava right after burning. It’s *belief*, like a trick they get to get people to work more. They want you to work, but they

right. Next thing you might want a girl and you uncle ask if you got any food and you don't get. So, you have to at least plant you little cassava to get, right after burning" (02/05/2015).

Here he suggests that *belief* puts a person at the mercy of the armadillo, but it also has the potential to put one into a positive relationship with their (potential) father-in-law. Those who might not *believe* in what Daniel is saying might find themselves in a situation where they cannot form proper family-friend ties with a wife, or other affines. At the same time, demonstrating that a person has other means of acquiring food, namely money and other kinds of connections to people on the coast, would also demonstrate the ability to care for a partner, but it would not be through the same kind of social (*belief*) relationships that Paulette and Daniel value as having constituted Surama.

In other conversations, Daniel suggested that the importance of *beliefs* today was to scare children into being properly social. He told a story of a young man who liked to ride his bike chasing girls. His father told him not to stay out late because if he came home late, spirits from the graveyard would come and catch him. Still, the young man went out looking for girls. When he was riding back he passed the cemetery and felt his bicycle shake, as nothing else happened to him, however, he kept going out looking for girls. In the end, his father could not control him.

The shaking of the bicycle suggests that something was there, but it had little effect on the young man. The young man, for his part, was exhibiting the wrong kind of social behaviour, going to see a girl at night, instead of going to see her father-in-law during the day first, as Daniel would prefer. The father's assertion of spirits in the cemetery is *belief*, which he shares with his son, trying to scare him. In this story, it seems the son does not *believe*, and after getting away with his behaviour, despite his father's *belief* (read as potential to interact with dangerous beings), he equates *belief* with "tradition". In the end, Daniel seems to suggest with his anecdotes that *belief* today is a moral story for youths to be properly social.

Indeed, as I was trying to better understand 'the mystical', I encountered similar instructions on proper sociality. During the second half of my fieldwork there were many incidents with community members and the short man. He was often heard whistling or walking around in the community. When I asked Paulette 'why' so many people were seeing the short man, she said hunters had damaged too many peccaries. A herd of white lipped peccaries had recently run through the Village (for the first time in six years), and Paulette said some villagers had killed too many and not shared the meat. The short man was upset. Thus, *belief* was also closely associate with proper ways of being social. My search for other explanations of *belief* did not reveal alternate 'beliefs', it only reinforced the veracity of these invisible beings.

The fact that a way of knowing associated with interactions with invisible beings might also be about being properly social in the visible space of the community resonates with previous descriptions of indigenous sociality in Guiana and wider Amazonia. Amazonian anthropologists have studied the way their parents form the bodies of their children through interactions with beings in the forest (Gow 1989; McCallum 2001; Mentore 2005; Mentore 2013). My analysis particularly resonates with Guss' (1989) observations among the Yekuana; by exchanging with the invisible parts of plants and animals in the forest, people bring potential food into the community. This food is made safe for human consumption and shared with family friends. This brings together “work”, which I elaborated in Part I as the contribution and sharing of food and jokes to foment family-friendships, with *belief*, the potentially dangerous (exchange) relationship with (invisible) beings in the forest. *Belief* and “work” are two aspects of being social. Work brings together similar bodied family-friends, creating community; and *belief* exchanges in the forest with dissimilar bodied beings (which ultimately form the bodies of family). *Belief* and work feed into each other in the creation of human bodies, and communal space.<sup>65</sup>

When discussing the subject with Janette Bulkan, she further pointed out that *belief* was not just about potential dangers, but about caring for people, and Amerindians in Guyana, particularly Makushi, were known for their hospitality. Miners, loggers, and any travellers could always find a place to hang their hammock in a Makushi settlement. Indeed, Paulette told me many stories of hosting travellers, sick people, tradesman, and even researchers without receiving or asking for anything in return; always confident that her good deeds would be repaid. Throughout this thesis I mention historical Makushi openness to others, and to the way they create and extend sociality into these ‘other’ relationships. In Chapter Four I described the way “culture” and “tradition”—certain objects and practices—have been elaborated through interactions with some of these ‘others’. Contrastingly, embodied ways of knowing such as *belief* are not passed down in the same manner. While *belief* can become a story about tradition, *belief* is about having the embodied potential to interact with invisible beings, and can only be learnt by having the experiences, not hearing *about* them.

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<sup>65</sup> Similarly, anthropologists have noted the way too much consanguinity is not productive in Amazonia (Rivière 1984; Viveiros de Castro 2001). Proper kinship is a balance of consanguinity and affinity. In Guyana, Butt-Colson (2001) described the way that improper community sociality—communities demonstrating strong patriarchal lines—are more closely associated with kanaimi sorcery; kanaimi knowledge passed down the patriline. Thus, social imbalance may indicate potential dangers.

Thinking about these changing ways of knowing, and my host-parents' apprehensions and fears about changes they see in Surama I think of something Daniel once said to me. "First, we had *kanaimĩ*, then cell-phones, later it will be something else" (26/2/2015).

Daniel seems to suggest that the embodied state of knowing *kanaimĩ* has shifted to a way of knowing about cell-phones—development—and later there would be other changes, but these are always relational. In Part III, I explore the politics of *belief* as a way of knowing, and how it is elaborated in exchanges not with beings in the forest, but with persons in development time—researchers, policy makers, and the world of development.

## Part III

### Chapter Six; Politics of *Believing*,

Chapter Five explored the way, in Surama, *belief* is the potential for interacting with otherwise invisible beings. Analysis showed that *belief* is different from our category of ‘belief’. *Belief* is not a cognitive outlook, but rather an embodied way of knowing. This final chapter looks at the politics of this embodied way of knowing, and the implications of framing this knowing in “*belief*”, which seemingly casts doubt on the veracity of these embodied interactions. I suggest that framing these interactions with the word “*belief*”, rather than treating them as a given, is a part of Surama navigating political interactions with development—the experienced wider world. Part Two elaborated on interactions with researchers, and I revisit this focus in this chapter, taking myself and my research as an example of Surama’s engagement with the wider world.

Part of my Makushi hosts’ framing these interactions in *belief* is their recognition that I, a foreign researcher, would interpret *belief* a certain way. Specifically, Paulette, Daniel, and others in the community, knew that stories associated with *belief* would be incredible to me. My hosts expect that visiting researchers, the most recent in a history of colonial visitors, cannot accept there to *really be* an otherwise invisible short man in the forest. At the same time, my hosts’ reference to short man as a “*belief*” allows us to invoke our cultural relativist sensibilities, and represent this embodied way of knowing as part of Makushi Culture, alongside an array of other ‘mystical’ or ‘unproveable’ ‘superstitions’ in the world. My hosts’ recognition that foreigners would not give full credence to their *beliefs* is part of their experience in a history of interactions with the wider world, which has continuously marginalised them. Disguising their embodied interactions with beings in the forest as “*beliefs*” distances people in Surama from the popular image of timeless or superstitious Amerindians.

Furthermore, framing these interactions, *belief*, makes it difficult for invisible interactions to be further investigated. *Belief* was a kind of stop, over which further inquiry was complicated. It is difficult to question other’s *beliefs*, except to assert or refute them as part of how you see the world. In Chapter Five I pointed out that refuting *beliefs* could be a negation of one’s own interaction with potentially dangerous beings, or a negation of the existence of these beings all-together.

Finally, framing these interactions in terms of *belief* protects Surama villagers and foreign researchers from the potential dangers of these beings in the forest. Knowledge of these potential dangers is knowing how to interact with them, and interactions with these dangerous beings opens

the knower to accusations of communing with *kanaimĩ*. Furthermore, framing these potential interactions in *belief* suggests that they are neutralised in a culturally relative “tradition”.

To review, framing embodied ways of knowing in *belief*...

- 1). Keeps these ways of knowing from being easily investigated.
- 2). Is part of the politics of representation through which people in Surama distance themselves from a set of practices associated with the “uncivilized” forest.
- 3). Ontologically protects my hosts and myself from these potentially dangerous interactions.

As this chapter deals with how *belief* is manifested by people in Surama, and interpreted by non-Amerindians, I take research—specifically my research—to be the main ethnographic focus. I take my relationship with Paulette and Daniel to be the most recent in a history of close interactions with an array of social scientists, other natural science researchers, and development program coordinators. These range from the coordinators for the Makushi Research Unit, COBRA Projects, and Global Canopy Programme, to high school or undergraduate social science researchers participating in field research schools, as well as PhD students in sustainable development, sociology, and anthropology. Paulette and Daniel have hosted several of these researchers, and have had close interactions with other visiting groups, inviting them to work in their farm, and learn cassava work. Paulette and Daniel have had more interactions with researchers than others in Surama, and I suggest the way they talk about interactions with potentially dangerous beings as *belief* with me is informed by this history of interactions with non-Amerindian visitors. As Paulette and Daniel’s interactions with researchers are informed by a specific history (discussed in Chapters Three and Four), I suggest *belief* also points to “Makushi” representations to, and of the ‘world beyond [their] own’.<sup>66</sup>

#### *Making the dangerous familiar*

*Belief* is not solely about embodied interactions with potentially dangerous beings, and representing these interactions. As I explored at the end of Part II, *belief* also contributes to family-friendships in the community. Through relationships of exchange with beings in the forest—not necessarily *kanaimĩ*, but other forest persons—people in Surama turn potentially dangerous substances into food, which can then be shared with family and friends, contributing to relationships that constitute the community. Thus, relationships with beings in the forest are a part of community kinship

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<sup>66</sup> Here I draw specifically upon the fact that Paulette and Daniel not only interact with researchers; they are also Villagers, and leaders in the community, and experienced with an array of outsiders. Informed by this history, they mediate the *Makushi* world to outsiders in a way they think we can best understand.

relationships.<sup>67</sup> In other words, this way of knowing allows for a community of similarly bodied (commensal and consubstantial) kin. *Belief* relationships with others in the forest, while potentially dangerous, are the same kinds of interactions that Amazonianists have described as leading to family-friend relationships in which the invisible contributes to embodied personhood (for example Guss 1989; Mentore 2005; Overing 2003). Paulette and Daniel neutralise the potential dangers of these forest relationships, and contribute to the bodies of family-friends.

In Chapter Four I described the way “culture” and “tradition” are marked with ideas of the past through which the bodies of family-friends were made. “Traditional” items are formed in the community, but the materials to make them cotton, cassava, and prey are from the forest, and associated with *belief*. These materials are not produced, but rather acquired through *belief* relationships with the spirits of the plants and animals. These plants have been described as having their own personhood. Exchanging with them brings their ‘products’ (food, cotton, etc) into the community. In this way, *belief* in the forest allows for “tradition” and family-friend contributions inside the community. Once made safe through Paulette and Daniel’s knowledge, they contribute to the bodies of family-friends.

By participating in farming, cassava work, and weaving hammocks researchers too are the subjects of Paulette and Daniel’s bodily creation. While *belief* relationships seem to resist investigation, researchers and visitors are encouraged to learn and participate in their safe correlates “tradition” and “culture”. Though my hosts recognised that researchers were expected to produce for academia, the best researchers are those willing to integrate in the community; our academic requirements were secondary. I was often asked if I would return, if I would *do* the things I learned in Surama, if I had made friends, if I liked farine, parakari, and fish; meanwhile only one person expressed interest in the academic product of my work.<sup>68</sup> Less interested in the academic products of our research, my hosts were more interested in the exchange between us.

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<sup>67</sup> Relationships with plants and animals have been described by Amazonian anthropologists as kinship relations. While it may be safe to suggest that in Surama these are also kinship relations, (relations of potential affinity), plants’ most evident contribution to kinship is in the way people in the community turn relationships with the spirits of plants into food for family-friends. This may in turn suggest that potential affinity is essential for the continual process of consanguineal kinship relations, however, as *belief* hides these ‘potential affinal’ relations, I am pushed to suggest instead that amongst my hosts, potential affinity is masked by family-friend relations. In other words, affinity, or potential affinity, is obviated by consanguineal relations. This is consistent with the way people in Surama treat each other as kin, not only at the level of sharing (or the preferred model of sharing), but the way they consider everyone in the community to be consanguineal kin.

<sup>68</sup> When I asked Grandfather Fred in an interview if there was anything he felt we should know about people living in Surama, he reminded me to send my report back. He said researchers came and did their work, but they didn’t all send their reports, and he was interested in these being available in Surama.



Paulette's *culture, tradition, and belief* were meant to guide my research interests into her way of life. "Cultural" or "traditional" items, while seemingly detached from daily life, point to the historic ways that people made kin. When shared with researchers, hammocks, cassava, and thatch roofs appear to be representative of Amerindian *authenticity*, but they are also demonstrations that Makushi people make Makushi bodies. While my hosts wear 'Western' clothes, sleep in beds, and make their houses' roofs out of corrugated zinc they teach researchers to weave and sleep in hammocks, go fishing or farming, and do cassava work. I do not deny that this is part of an avenue for asserting political claims, but it also shows that we too have the possibility to contribute to the bodies of others, and know in other ways. By teaching us "tradition", they change our bodies into bodies more like theirs, and show us that we both have the ability to contribute to each other's bodies.

Daniel describes foreign research as a becoming "doctors of [his] knowledge." I would add that as we research, we also become "bodies of their knowledge." Through working with community members, we are made into family friends. As we do this work, our bodies are changed. While we create knowledge out of their bodies, their bodies know us into creation.<sup>69</sup> Thus work and *belief* are two sides to becoming family. Where work is highlighted and made visible, *belief* is hidden.

I conclude the chapter by returning to an analysis of *not-believing* alongside recent anthropological scholarship of social transformations in Amazonia. Amazonian Amerindians have been described as able to occupy different bodies, taking the perspectives of the bodies they inhabit and create. This multi-natural embodiment has enabled us to rethink Amazonian acculturation or enculturation not as a change in culture, but as a change in natures; maintaining ontological fluidity (and monoculturalism) as a key characteristic. In Surama, multi-natural perspectives are described through *belief*, and it is through *belief* that the bodies of kin are made. Considering current literature alongside my ethnography, I ask what *not-believing* means. Gow (2007) has described that ontological changes also assert changing kinship obligations and ways of being social. Birthlan's statement about *not-believing* is similar to those made by 'ex-Cocama' who deny kinship obligations by asserting themselves as Peruvians, not indigenous. Taking Gow's analysis onboard, Birthlan's assertions seem to claim that he can be kin to an array of other *non-believers* in current "development time". Looking at his statement diachronically, however, Birthlan's denial of his parents' way of knowing suggests that his children will similarly not participate in these embodied *belief* relationships. If Amazonians are characterised as spirits loosely attached to bodies—

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<sup>69</sup> The implicit next step in this analysis is to suggest that we, researchers, and other foreigners, are the 'new' *belief* relationships. We are the potentially dangerous beings, not from the forest, but from a similar place of differing sociality and corporality. This will remain only an implicit suggestion.

attachments made stronger by family-friends—what happens when this attachment is stabilised through different ways of knowing? Talking about embodied ways of knowing the forest suggests that by returning to the forest, Amazonian people could again *know* as their ancestors did, through the same kind of embodied interactions. This hypothetical will mark the end of my analysis into Amazonian ways of knowing.

#### Ways of Knowing

In a conversation with Laura Mentore Paulette called Mogo Malcom's *piai* healing a "trick", to which Laura responded, "you have to *believe*" (Chapter Four).<sup>70</sup> Paulette's retelling casts doubt on the efficacy of *piai* practice. The account suggests that *piai* is not something in the world, but only real through the experience of the gullible *believer*. I find it important to note here that Paulette and I had this conversation in the first weeks of my fieldwork. From the way she spoke about Mogo Malcom later during my stay, both to me and her family, I know that Paulette has the same kinds of *belief* interactions as Mogo Malcom. Distancing herself from these *belief* interactions early in my fieldwork, was a way of guiding my research and stay in her household. It also asserted her as a research colleague and intermediary to me; making me feel more at home with her in an otherwise unknown, possibly dangerous place. In any case, talking about *piai*—the ability to interact with the spirits of various animals—as a trick is a way of seemingly demeaning *piai*. *Piai beliefs* were made to seem incredible, and not a viable subject of investigation.

In a special issue of *Social Analysis*, discussing 'Belief' as an analytic concept, Lindquist and Coleman argue that "while believing is indeed 'holding true', the verb 'to believe' expresses doubt..." (2008: 5). Paulette evokes this doubt when she speaks about *belief* as a way of interacting with otherwise invisible beings in the forest. By framing these ways of knowing in "*belief*", Paulette leads visiting researchers to doubt the credibility of that way of knowing. This doubt in Paulette's embodied ways of knowing is drawn out by our own preconceptions of what is possible in the world. Lindquist and Coleman point out that social scientific analysis of 'beliefs' resonate our own ontological distinction between the natural and spiritual world, through which we ultimately consider *belief* to be a (natural) cognitive knowing. In their words, "...what we call the 'natural world' (the abode of humans, animals and plants), and the 'world beyond' (the abode of God, deities spirits)" (2008: 5). The suggestion here is that through scientific observation we can know the 'natural', visible or observable world, but this objectivising observation cannot be extended into the invisible. Paulette's assertion of *belief* calls upon researchers' ontological distinctions—she knows we will interpret her

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<sup>70</sup> This was Paulette's retelling of the interaction, Laura does not recall the conversation herself, agrees it may have happened.

*belief* as we would interpret other invisible natural/invisible distinctions. Thus, the word “*belief*” keeps the embodied ways of knowing which it frames out of my knowing’s reach. Paulette’s *belief*, not bound by our ontological preoccupation with visibility and science, are an embodied state of being through which she interacts with, and knows, beings in other natures. The embodied potential to know in other natures, *belief*, highlights that knowing and being are mutually constitutive (Toren and Pina-Cabral 2008: 4).

Where anthropologists have tasked themselves with taking assertions of other ways of knowing seriously, natural scientists visiting the Iwokrama/Surama area may have been less interested in this invisible aspect of plants and animals. Iwokrama interest was in *Makushi Lifestyles and Biodiversity Use*, and *Makushi Women’s Ethnobotany and Ethnomedicine*. Ethno-botanical research surrounding Iwokrama looks for the ways Amerindian practices with plants can teach the wider world how to protect the forest, while taking advantage of the products it can afford us. These investigations are interested in rendering Amerindian *belief*, scientific. The healing properties Amerindians have learnt through experience, are brought into the scientific fold in observable data of ‘natural’ phenomena. In these contexts, *belief* relationships—ways of knowing the invisible—are not necessary, and are not foregrounded.

Contrastingly, embodied ways of knowing plants are often about invisible kinship exchanges, which can be better understood by taking on multi-natural analysis. Amazonian natures—the connection of the spirit to the body—are not stable *a priori*, they are made stable. The observable body is made so by the work/knowing of similarly bodied kin, namely parents and grandparents. *Belief* exchanges that form the farm, and in hunting, allow parents and grandparents to bring food into the community to form the bodies of family-friends. *Belief* foregrounds the ontological distinction between myself and my hosts. I, and other foreigners, conceive nature as stable, and can only believe in the unobservable as a function of our natural minds. Contrastingly, Paulette’s *belief* is about the interactions her spirit has with different kinds of embodied others. Her *belief* is knowing in a state of being science does not access. Of course, Paulette’s knowing is not concerned with our distinction between her and our conceptions of natures. She is, however, concerned with the politics of that knowledge, the way she presents it to me and other foreigners.

#### *Researching the Invisible*

Potentially dangerous embodied ways of knowing, called *belief*, are kept out of researchers’ reach. How does one ask about ‘belief’ without relegating it to something untrue? In conversation, *belief* was a stopping point for these invisible aspects of life. The potentially dangerous interactions were turned into conversations about “Makushi culture”; instead of the invisible beings, people

foreground the visible practices or objects in the social space of the community with which they are associated.<sup>71</sup> Nearing the end of my fieldwork, I found that this was not the only barrier to investigations into the invisible. In an informal interview, Kurt told me there had been a meeting between the communities in the North Rupununi in which they decided upon the kinds of information that would be shared with researchers. He said the meeting of North Rupununi Villages decided on a colour system, red, yellow, and green, related to what could be shared. Green information could be shared openly, while red information was not to be shared at all. My interviewee did not go into detail about the kinds of information that could or couldn't be shared, instead he highlighted his own experience with researchers and environmentalists, carbon monitoring for the implementation of Guyana's Low Carbon Development Scheme. From other interactions in the field, however, I conclude that the information that can't be shared with researchers is that related to shamanry, *piai*, *belief*.

Caroline told me that a researcher had wanted to work with Mogo Malcom, apprenticed himself to the *piaiman*; the Village Council, however, refused his request. Malcom had been willing to take the researcher as his apprentice, but the refusal called Malcom's knowledge cultural property, and said only a Makushi person could learn from Malcom. The researcher offered to pay the Council to do the research, but was refused. From what I was told, nobody in Surama has yet apprenticed themselves to Malcom in large part because of the long periods of separation from their family, time alone in the forest, and fasting necessary for the apprenticeship.

Later, when Paulette and Daniel were telling me about the Parishara dance, and how Malcom was the only person that knew all the songs, there seemed to be a concern that the songs would be lost when he died. I suggested that someone should record the great-grandfather's songs, so they would not be lost. Victorine said that her mother had recorded his songs already, to which Paulette replied, "I have it somewhere in there, recorded, but I don't know what them do with it," (14/06/2015).

In the conversation, Paulette was upset these songs were being lost, which was why I recommended that somebody record the songs. More than being upset about not having the words, she was concerned nobody would learn the songs through the apprenticeship with Malcom.<sup>72</sup> Paulette's response suggests that having the recordings is not the same as knowing, singing, *believing* the song.

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<sup>71</sup> Of his travels amongst Makushi people in Guyana in the early 1930s, writer, Evelyn Waugh, reflected (1986) "...were it possible for primitive man to express what he believed—it is hard enough for the highly educated—he is invariably reluctant to do so," (132).

<sup>72</sup> Alternately, Paulette may have had the recordings well kept, and only said she didn't know where they were so that I would not ask to hear them, which she may have had to refuse. I do not think this was the case, however, as she had made similar statements about previous researchers' reports and work being lost somewhere in her house.

The power of the song is different if it is recorded or sung. Guss writes that amongst Yekuana people in the Venezuelan part of the Guiana shield, singing is a way of detoxifying materials that come into the community before they are “rendered safe for cohabitation...it is through these chants, with the help of paints and herbs when appropriate, that the invisible dangers inherent in each object are neutralized,” (1989:66). Along these lines, the Parishara sings the coming together of several communities. In Parishara, parakari and music would be shared with the leaders of several communities, contributing to the bodies of others in the same way one’s own body is made, reinforcing extended family-friendships, and overcoming potential dangers and conflicts between communities.<sup>73</sup> Singing here is testament to the visible and the *belief* parts of life. Recording the song does not capture the relationships that *belief*, singing the songs, is able to foment. Paulette and Daniel consider that song recordings are more closely associated with the ways of knowing in which their children or researchers are more interested. This distinction came up in the conversation I had with Paulette and Daniel about the hunter who got schrang-schrang in the savanna.

After telling me “...your spirit would get weak. That is we *belief*,” (Chapter Five), Paulette spoke about her childhood, when her mother would prepare bina for her and her siblings in which they would bathe. She said her mother would talk to the bina, putting it in their hands. She did not tell me the words her mother said, and I did not ask. Then she said, “All like how Daniel get he bina, one for tapir, one for accouri, one for whatever. He supposed to pass that down to he children, but I don’t think he ever show it to them.”

“You ain’t see them have it on they computer?” Daniel said, still facing the savanna out the back door.

“All the generations supposed to pass that down, generation to generation, but like we generation ain’t pass it down,” Paulette said.

“Why this generation didn’t pass it down?” I asked.

“They don’t go into the forest but it’s we own fault. We didn’t carry them into the forest, that’s why they don’t go,” She said, “I tell my daughters like how they shouldn’t lay with men on them menstruation, at least they know how to do cassava processing. I teach them.”

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<sup>73</sup> This thesis has explored the way political organisation is inevitably impregnated with kinship. Today, organisation such as the North Rupununi District Development Board extends political organisation beyond the Village. While I therefore agree with Carneiro de Carvalho’s analysis that amongst the Makushi, “Physical proximity does not equal affinity and empathy. A person could have someone living 500 meters from his house, and siblings living 2km in the opposite direction, he will interact more with his siblings [than] with his neighbours,” (2016: 122). I would add that people visit their siblings to continuously reinforce that family friendship. Their siblingness is part of the time they spend with each other asserting this relation.

Daniel's pointed comment reinforces the idea that ways of knowing associated with the body, the invisible *belief* aspect of bina, are learnt through practice. This is further enforced by Paulette, who suggests that to teach these things, the children must do them, which often involves going into the forest. They say this way of knowing is not being passed down. While Paulette suggests that both she and her children are responsible for not going to the forest, Daniel suggests that there is a choice about whether or not to engage in this way of knowing. People interested in technology, part of development within the community, do not go to the forest.

Further connections can be made with the status of books in Surama. Through her work with researchers and the Makushi Research Unit, Paulette has amassed two or three long shelves of manuscripts, books, and magazines about the Rupununi in her household. She does not, however, seem to have much interest in the books, beyond her bible, her continuing work on the Makushi dictionary, and her family finance notebook. She often said that she had this-or-that researcher's work in her house, but didn't know where it was. The books are in a continuous state of degradation as pages are lost or faded due to humidity, and children take them off the shelves to peruse and play with them. These books are emblematic of non-*belief* ways of knowing.

Perhaps, had I been more forceful, I may have convinced Paulette to show me some of the books, and in so doing attain better idea of her attitudes towards them. Having attempted to incorporate myself into daily life in the household, I did not take this approach. I did not want to express interest in research knowledge. I did, however, express interest in the Makushi Research Unit book, Makusipe Komanto Iseru, and though Paulette invited me once to observe their translation of a pamphlet to Makushi, we never sat down to go through the MRU book as I had imagined us doing, pre-fieldwork. My understanding of Paulette and Daniel's lack of interest in researchers' products contrast hallway stories I have heard from other's fieldwork with indigenous people in Chiapas, Mexico, for example in which upon receiving a request for an interview, informants volunteer the recordings and transcriptions themselves with previous anthropologists. While my hosts were invaluable for my understanding and research, they did not volunteer previous academic work in attempts to assuage my interests.

That said, younger generations were more interested in anthropological literature. Vitus and Caroline brought various anthropological texts or reports to my attention, asking for my opinion. Vitus volunteered a photo-copy of Jens Yde's *Material Culture of the Waiwai*, which Caroline used when making patterns for her son's culture group costume. Caroline had also saved a copy of Lisa Grund's book of *panton* (Makushi stories), which Grund gathered and published as a gift to the communities in which she worked. These were amongst other reports published in collaboration

with visiting organisations and the North Rupununi District Development Board. The different ways Daniel and Paulette, and their children treat these books, as well as the importance younger people give to smart-phones, computers, and other technologies associated with development, is in line with Daniel's observation that the two generations are not interested in the same ways of knowing.

### *Generations*

Throughout this thesis, I have discussed different behaviours and attitudes towards development as closely related to generational differences. This model, like the distinction between the two sides of the Village, is based on the way people in Surama talk about change as a spatial and temporal move from forest, uncivilised, indigenous—to civilised, communities/towns, and “modern”. My adherence to this model in analysing these behaviours and attitudes has been aimed at seeing how and why this model has meaning for my host-family, and people in Surama more generally. At the same time, this scope overlooks specific family relationships, varying personal attitudes, and looks more at experienced trends. Paulette and Daniel's comments in the section above, however, lead me to take a closer look at the aspects of family history that weigh on the formation of this model.

Daniel suggests that he didn't teach his sons about bina—taking them into the forest—because they were interested in other ways of knowing, specifically computers. Surama received computers from the Inter-American Development Bank in the mid-2000s, about the same time the satellite internet connection was set up in the old Village office. At the time, Frank was about twenty years old, and Birthlan two years younger, and their walks in the forest learning bina would already have happened. Furthermore, Daniel's own work outside of the community, both in the Guyana Defence Force, and as a ranger for Iwokrama—as well as Frank's several years of boarding school—played a larger role in their time apart, leading to less walks in the forest. When Frank and Birthlan were growing up, Surama school went up to the ninth grade; after ninth grade, students went to Saint Ignatius Secondary School, just outside Lethem, for the last two-three academic years. Just before Frank's final year of secondary school, Annai Secondary was established. Due to the immense distance between Surama and St. Ignatius, his family decided to have him transfer to Annai Secondary, but this meant he had to restart secondary school and remain in dorms. While Annai Secondary, (about twenty-seven kilometres from Surama), is closer than St. Ignatius, Frank was still away for most of each academic year. His long vacation at home, from June to August, would have coincided with the high season for visiting researchers, keeping Daniel away from the community. After completing secondary school, Frank went to work on the pontoon (ferry) crossing, about twelve kilometres from Surama, and then studied Forestry at Guyana School of Agriculture, just outside Georgetown. This is to say that his father's assertion about computers may have referred to his extensive schooling, or time apart more generally, not to computers specifically.

As the family sometimes points out, Frank is well versed in “theory”, which they consider different from “practical”. Birthlan, who did not continue school beyond Surama—his parents preferred keeping him closer to home as he was their youngest child—but instead worked in lumber, mining, and later did some training in mechanics, is good at “practical”. While I would associate “theory” ways of knowing to development and researchers, this does not mean that “practical” is more closely associated with *belief*. While Birthlan is recognised as more able with a chainsaw, with repairing vehicles, or as a miner, and enjoys staying at camps in the forest while doing this work, he openly expresses that he does not *believe*. The recognition he receives for his “practical” abilities creates a kind of fraternal tension as “practical” knowledge seemed to be more highly valued—perhaps because, like *belief*, it was associated with doings the forest.

While Birthlan often makes boastful jokes and remarks about his strength and abilities, Frank shoulders the tension. Referring to himself as the black sheep of the family, he often walked in the forest himself, hunting; as did Victorine (who also did secondary school) looking for turtle and lu palm. Frank is proud of his hunting, and attributes his skill to hunts he took as a young man with his father. Today, Frank occasionally takes Victorine’s son hunting. Birthlan and Caroline, contrastingly, did not hunt or often walk in the forest for food. Birthlan lived with his parents while building his house so that his partner could join him in Surama, and as such, continued enjoying his mother’s cooking—from food which she or his father would bring home daily, and to which he would occasionally contribute with beef or mutton purchased in the store. While Caroline had her own household, she did not eat much game. She said most game was too strong for her, and would make her sick. She ate river fish, and store-bought food.

I point out these personal detailed differences between siblings, but do not make conclusions, merely the following observations. While school and work draw people away from home, they are not the only things that keep people from living “traditionally”, farming or hunting. As I mentioned in Part I, Caroline and Vitus do not have a farm because Vitus is often away and Caroline feels it would be too much responsibility, they instead help in her parents’ farm. Victorine works at the lodge, but still finds time to mind her farm and her parents’, and walk in the forest. Birthlan and Caroline spent less time in school, more time close to home, but do less “traditional” work than their siblings. Frank and Victorine are the elder siblings, but I saw or heard nothing in the field that would suggest this as an explanation for them spending more time hunting or farming.

Daniel, is well known in the community for his ability and affinity for being in the forest. Though the other side of Surama is more closely associated with these “traditional” activities, Daniel’s family said that every family has someone who loves to be in the forest, and that amongst their family that



person is Daniel. Daniel says he learnt about being in the forest from his family-friends, “Mogo Malcom, them”.

These observations are meant to throw my model of generationally different sociality into question. Differences in forming and understanding sociality, or proper personhood, are not only generational. They are formed through complex family histories and experiences. Experiences vary from family to family, and person to person. My descriptions of generational differences are based on the way my host-family spoke about changes in the Rupununi, and general trends I noticed between generations in Surama.

In Chapter Five I assert that *belief*/knowing is not a choice, but an embodied state. Here I would like to add that while *belief* is not a choice, it is cultivated through bodily exchanges with the forest, and sharing with family-friends. From Paulette’s stories of her children’s upbringing, it is clear that while parents and other older family-friends cultivate and care for their (and each other’s) children, young people decide how they will participate and enact these family-friendships. The older they grow, the more autonomous they become. Surama Village is very much a mixed community, and young people spend time with the friends to which they feel closest; and participate in activities they choose. This was the environment in which Victorine, Caroline, Frank, and Birthlan grew up, and it is similar for their children, spending their time in various friends and aunts’ households. Daniel’s brothers, sisters, in-laws, cousins, and friends live the way of living that was most suited for them, taking the opportunities and making the choices with which they felt more comfortable. Some people are expert hunters, guides and fishermen, others are professional cameramen, politicians, or ornithologists; some are researchers, craftsman, electricians, and farmers, others are shop-owners, loggers, catechists, teachers, and labourers; they are Amerindian, East Indian, Afro-descendant, Portuguese, mixed; Brazilian, Guyanese; Wapishana, Akawaio, Arawak, Warrau, Patamona, and Makushi; helpers and leaders. Some titles are ascribed at birth; all are cultivated through experience and learning. Who you are, is the mix of ways our body has been made, is who you chose to share with, exchange with, and learn from.

#### *Gendered Embodiment*

Thus far, most descriptions of *belief* in this thesis have been tied to men; hunters interacting with potentially dangerous beings in the forest. Though hunting and *kanaimi* are more closely associated with masculinity, *belief* is far from limited to men. Like the *kanaimi*, associated with patrilineality and made safe through socially preferred uxorilocality (Butt-Colson 2001), I pointed out (in Chapter Five) that potential dangers are brought into the community and made safe through the abilities of women. Drawing on previous ethnography in Guiana and elsewhere in Amazonia, I have suggested

that Surama women's *belief* makes potentially dangerous foods safe for human consumption, allowing them to feed their families. In Guyana, certain plants in the farm, closely associated with women, particularly cotton and cassava, have been described as having a spiritual element (Mentore 2013; Rival 2001). The cotton song, for example, has been described as a neutralisation of potential dangers of this spiritual element when bringing items into the community of people. Interacting with this invisible familial aspect of plants points to the way *belief* contributes to the bodies of kin.

While *belief* hides embodied knowings from me, my gender further limits my investigation into women's interactions with the spirits of cassava or cotton. While Paulette reminded me of the successful female researchers that she has worked with, highlighting their ability to learn Makushi language, to weave their own hammocks, and do their own cassava work, she made it clear that these were not my goals. Though I could contribute to household activities, I would not be learning to do my own cassava work, but rather accompany Uncle Daniel or my host-brothers to the farm, fishing, or to work. Thus, the spiritual interactions—belief—that women know through weaving and cassava work eludes me. Did researchers also commune with the spirits of these plants? Did they sing the songs and *believe*? Do they *believe* without being aware that they *believe*?

While there are no strict gender divisions in Surama today, many practices, such as hunting, drinking alcohol, cassava work, specific handicrafts and different jobs are gendered. These gender divisions are far from rules, but they tend to correspond with models of gendered personhood in Amazonia. While men are more closely associated with the hunting or working in the forest, and political leadership, both inside and outside the community, women are associated with the creation of social space through cassava work, and caring for children in the community. As elaborated by Gow (1989) and Overing (1999) these two incorporate a gendered pair that continuously creates social space, sharing the exchanges with cassava, and meat and money from outside of the Village with family-friends.

When Frank or Daniel hunt, they are engaged with these potentially dangerous beings, both visible, such as jaguars—some of whom persons themselves, as a family-friend from the other side of Surama once pointed out to me—and invisible, such as the spirits of game animals in the forest—as described in the story of the hunter who didn't have breakfast—or the short man, as experienced by Jack. When game is brought to the household, men butcher it under the mango tree in the yard, and Paulette cooks it into food. This combined process assuages children's hunger, and stabilises their bodies. Parent's—as well as older aunts' and uncles'—gendered interactions allow for children to grow into persons. This elaboration of gendered embodiment is not limited, however, to “traditional” or “cultural” practices, and can be extended into the political and monetary spheres.

As my hosts pointed out to me, money is the reason people do not share anymore in Surama. Monetary exchange foments different kinds of social interactions as it limits the extended family-friend sharing common with “traditional” game animals. People don’t share store-bought food as widely as game. Money is thus indicative of improper social interactions, or a lack of family-friend contributions. At the same time, the potential danger of money—its improper use and limited sociality—is tempered by women who spend money on food for their families, while men spend it on alcohol.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, potential political conflicts between brothers outside the community are tempered through the consanguineal ties that keep them together in the community. After fieldwork, it was brought to my attention that two brothers were having a political conflict of which I was not aware because in the community, their wives were explicitly supporting the in-law’s position. In this way, the dangers associated with *belief* seem to correspond more closely with masculinity, while women are continuously the nexus through which proper family-friendship (kinship) is enacted. I say seems, precisely because I have not been able to focus on Paulette’s exchanges in the farm, or understand the potential dangers involved in these interactions. As Laura Mentore’s (2013) work has pointed out amongst Guyanese Waiwai, plants, specifically cassava and tobacco, have embodied personhood. While tobacco is associated with shamanry and masculinity, cassava mothers are kin to women in the community, and through their relationship with cassava mothers, women form safe food for their families. It would be easy for me to describe this as a safe family relationship, and males’ interactions with the forest persons as more dangerous, but there is no clear reason why the invisible spirit of cassava would *not* be potentially dangerous as well. Guss (1989) points out that all forest materials must be made safe for human consumption, and Mentore stresses that more work needs to be done with female gendered plant/persons.<sup>75</sup> While I did not hear the songs or other intricacies of this embodied knowledge, which Paulette remembers as part of the way her mother and grandmother did cassava work, Paulette knows the songs, and sings them with her daughters and granddaughter.

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<sup>74</sup> This is a generalization, of course, but it further points out to the improper sociality around money. When men acquire money, and spend it on alcohol they place less emphasis on their wives or children. If it were like a game animal, they would give it to their partners. Spending money buying beers for each other, enacts a relationship between friends or family, but one that does not enact men and women in a gendered pair.

<sup>75</sup> While danger could be analysed in terms of inside/outside, safe and unsafe, visible and invisible, these are inevitably parts of the same processes. Furthermore, these inside/outside distinctions are not clear-cut. As my analysis emanates from the household, to “this side”, to the Village, to the district, to the Region, to Guyana; some outsides become insides, and dangers may come from outside one scale, yet inside another. Sociality does not begin and end, and with kinship spreading across the Rupununi, insides and outsides are like a Klein bottle, folding into one another.

## *Belief* and Development

Where the word “*belief*” ontologically distances researchers and Surama community members from the potentially dangerous interactions with invisible beings in the forest, it also affirms Amerindians’ place in the “modern”, “developed” world. In this section I look at the political implications of maintaining knowledge of the invisible, *belief*, separate from knowledge of the visible, “tradition” or “culture”. Amerindians’ ability to interact with potentially dangerous beings in the forest has become part of the way they are stereotyped by wider Guyanese society as timeless Indians, stuck in “culture times” or “uncivilised”. Whitehead references Appadurai’s *Modernity at Large* to argue that, “Kanaimi is also understood as a culturally ‘authentic’ act, expressing a hyper-traditionality, and resistance to colonizing modernity” (2001: 237). Contrastingly, people in Surama are interested in demonstrating their ability to contribute to Guyana and the wider world. Surama’s negation or marginalisation of *belief* interactions, demonstrate the similarity between themselves and non-Amerindians. Calling interactions with potentially dangerous beings in the forest “*belief*”, sets these interactions alongside religious (Christian) beliefs common in the “developed” or “civilised” world. Calling these interactions “*belief*” reflects our ontological state of civilised ‘believers’ back to us.<sup>76</sup> *Indigeneity* is therefore not stereotyped as an association with ‘mystical’, but as a unique contribution to development based on generations of experience, and invaluable knowledge with the natural world.

This ability to contribute to the developing world is foregrounded in the media, and in politics. In a 2016 article in Kaieteur News about the Makushi Research Unit partnership with a company marketing their facial cream as using Makushi plant knowledge, Paulette Allicock is quoted, “This product from our environment stems from our ancient indigenous knowledge, and through this marvellous product, our culture, knowledge and environment shall be showcased and recognized throughout the world. Women involved with this project are from the grass root level. And we are ecstatic to see our grassroots efforts transported through this partnership to such a global reach,” (Rupununi Essence project, 12/12/2016).

In the same article, Honourable Minister Sydney Allicock, Paulette’s brother-in-law, is quoted, “This product endorses the notion that development and poverty alleviation in our hinterland communities need not follow an exploitative, extractive trajectory, but can be entirely in consonance with principles of sustainability and environmental stewardship. We need to replicate

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<sup>76</sup> Similarly, Frank and Birthlan’s assertions of *not-believing* are assertions of their experience and abilities in the monetary economy, and academic spheres.

this in all indigenous communities and to continue to harness our ancient indigenous knowledge – old pathways, in new directions.”

Both statements posit indigenous knowledge as something that can contribute to global development. Furthermore, it highlights Amerindians as able participants in the market economy not only as consumers, but as producers. This is something that Sydney championed in Surama, noted in detail at the end of Chapter Two where I describe his interactions with the development economists in which he foregrounds Surama’s ability to complete the airstrip through community work, and in so doing, demonstrate their “ability to grow”.

While development appears to be about the influx of goods and ideas, people in Surama reconstitute outside goods to have their own meanings, and use in the community context. In the evenings family-friends gathered to watch BBC World News at Auntie Emily’s shop. They shared jokes, bought each other sweets and beer, and shared with their family-friends. In this way, development can be rethought, not as the influx of goods, but about the manifestation of Amerindian uses and management of these foreign goods. This was the case of Milner’s nephew who by becoming a tour guide learnt Milner’s “traditional” knowledge, and fomented exchanges with outsiders. Similarly, Paulette’s mixed house with a roof of zinc on two sides, and thatch on the other two keeps rain out while allowing air-flow, and preserving kukrit trees. As Daniel once said to me pointing to the half zinc, half thatch farm-camp roof under which we were sitting, “this is tradition and development”. If tradition and development is about the mixing of these ways of knowing, reconstituting “traditional” or *belief* knowledge in development, Makushi development reconstitutes knowledge outside of Surama, bringing Amerindian solutions to the rest of the world. While foreign goods and services are used in local ways, local knowledge is shown to be of use internationally.

Part of the demonstration of local knowledge for international use is undoubtedly to assert Amerindian’s political rights in an effort to change popular stereotypes that are not only present outside the community, but are an important part of people’s lived memory. Paulette and Caroline both pointed out to me on different occasions, their previous poverty. This stereotype is relived in conflicted experiences with coastlanders and other non-Amerindian Guyanese people through which both Amerindians and non-Amerindians confirm Amerindian’s poverty. George Mentore (2007) describes standing in a bountiful farm with an Amerindian friend while they described their poverty. The farm’s bounty is made not to fit with wider ideas of wealth. Development discourse, focused on sustainably making more money, informs the idea that everything except the nationally accepted development plan is poverty. Part of the continuing struggle against these stereotypes in micro and

macro interactions with non-Amerindians, is the ability for Amerindians to self-represent in the national government.

Due to Guyana's history of racially divided party politics, Amerindians have historically carried political power as a swing vote between Guyana's two major political parties (Bulkan 2013). This has put Amerindians in a key political position as voters, and both of Guyana's most powerful political parties have made promises to secure Amerindian votes. These promises, however, do little to change popular opinions towards Amerindians. Quite the contrary, they reinforce the idea that Amerindians simply receive free gifts and commodities from the government. Recently, the coalition of Amerindian, East Indian, and Afro-Guyanese parties in the A Partnership for Unity party, brought further decision making power to Amerindians, particularly those from Region Nine, and Sydney Allcock became the first Minister of Indigenous People's affairs from Region Nine, as well as one of Guyana's vice presidents.

It is perhaps because of Amerindian's historical role in national and colonial politics (their alliance with Dutch and British colonial powers), that Guyana has arguably the best set of laws protecting Amerindians in South America, the 2006 Amerindian Act. At the same time, land-rights and land-usage continues to be a thorny issue for Guyanese Amerindians, especially given the importance of land tenure in international development projects such as the LCDS through which funds introduced to Guyana are portioned to large land-owners who promise to protect from carbon waste. The Rupununi is particularly prone to extractive practices as it is far away from the political gaze emanating from the coast. While small scale extraction has always been carried out—some monitored like Amerindian timber in logging concessions—larger concessions such as that made to Bai Shan Lin continuously trouble Daniel and his father. In this regard, demonstrating Amerindian knowledge of the environment, and the economic potential this knowledge can contribute to wider Guyanese development, helps Amerindians lobby for more land rights, and further government support against extractive industries.

Similar to the way people distance themselves from *belief* interactions, some people in Surama also choose to withhold other *Makushi* aspects of life. Sir Scipio, the old headmaster once told me he did not want his children to learn Makushi language. I thought this had to do with the way speaking Makushi was previously punished in government secondary schools, but Scipio described it instead as his secret language. He said he and his wife could speak it and no “boss man” or even his children could understand him. In this way, he said he could get out of any situation he didn't like without those around understanding (04/12/2014). When I suggested that keeping it from foreigners was one thing, but keeping it from his children would contribute to its loss in his generation, he did not

seem to mind. This further suggests the rift between generational ways of knowing, but it also points the way foregrounding or backgrounding certain ways of knowing creates shifts in ways of being social. Certain ways of knowing, in this case Makushi language, are important to his life, but perhaps not his children's.

Taken alongside Paulette's comments that she and Daniel did not take their children into the forest, it seems that withholding certain ways of knowing fosters children with different bodily dispositions; namely bodies that do not *believe*. Projected outwards, as Scipio's children, and Paulette's children interact with political and economic powers beyond Surama and the Rupununi, they project the ways of knowing non-Amerindians champion. What Vilaça (2007) says of 'Western' clothes being an Amerindian way to be *white*, may be applied more broadly to embodied ways of knowing. Using a zinc roof, eating store-bought food, and *not-believing* are Amerindian ways to be "developed". Instead of putting on *white* clothes, younger generations cultivate *white* development. In this way, new economic pathways foreground certain aspects of knowledge. The knowledge is presented as rootedness in the past, "ancient", which is particularly important to 'Western' valuing of knowledge. While hiding *belief*, people in Surama project similar bodies to non-Amerindians.

*Makusipe Komanto Iseru* can similarly be analysed as a presentation of local knowing in a "developed" context. This 'encyclopaedia of knowledge' was made through Amerindian ability to take oral history, and create 'Western' or "doctor's" knowledge. In this work, Paulette and seven other Makushi women turned their family-friends' experience of their enviroing world into written knowledge, digestible to a wider audience. This was not about asserting indigeneity, but about demonstrating their affinity to knowledgeable others. They turned their experience—"traditions" and "*belief*"—into the relativized culture of science. It is not surprising then, that this book is not particularly valued in Surama. Its main purpose seems to be a demonstration of Makushi ability to research, and produce knowledge out of exchanges. Beyond representing Amerindian abilities to know in 'Western' ways, it also distances Amerindian ways of knowing. By enclosing numerical and finite knowledge in a volume, the MRU placed a limit on what others can know about Makushi life. The selection of what to include, the titles for the volume, may have been suggested by the Iwokrama project, but the information in the project was chosen through a dialogue of Makushi people; researchers, with a guiding academic editor, Janette Forte.

By translating embodied knowing into a book, it becomes devoid of the family-friend relationships and *belief* exchanges with the forest. These are rendered as "culture" and 'belief'. While one set of potentially dangerous *belief* relationships are backgrounded, another set of potentially dangerous relationships are foregrounded, those with researchers. As we do research, we enter exchange

relationships with our hosts and informants. *For Paulette and Daniel, knowing is not devoid of a kinship relationship in which the knowledge is constituted. Belief* points to their knowing with otherwise invisible beings in the forest, and with researchers. Thereby, people in Surama enact development as a set of potential exchange relationships with the wider world, and this exchange relationship is a potential sharing, family-friend relation. When I arrived in Surama, I had a different way of knowing, I was ignorant, and I didn't know how to eat proper food. As time went by, my body too was cultivated, and I started knowing not only "theory", but "practical". When Daniel asked whether I would ever grow my own farm, he wanted to know if I really was learning what he was teaching, or just translating the knowledge for my book.

While parents foment "development" in the bodies of their children, they cultivate *belief* ways of knowing in the bodies of foreigners. Daniel points this out often when he talks about his history of interactions with non-Makushi people outside of Surama. He told me the stories of how he taught afro-Guyanese people to eat farine instead of rice. He pointed out that where a packed rice lunch would spoil before lunch-time, farine would stay fresh, and could be moistened in any stream. Daniel pointed this out as "Makushi knowledge", through which he is not only referencing the ability, but the kinship relationships through which he had the farine in the first place. Farine is a quintessentially Amerindian food in Guyana, specifically hinterland Amerindian (versus coastal Amerindian), and is part of the kinship knowing therein. Similar teaching to other's bodies also takes place in research relationships in Surama.

#### *Transforming the bodies of researchers*

I have referred to scholarship amongst other Amerindian peoples, Waiwai, Yekuana, Piaroa, to argue that *belief* relationships must be made safe before contributing to family-friendships in the community. Contrastingly, in Surama *belief* backgrounds these relationships, and it is unclear to what extent younger generations manifest *belief* relationships. While *belief* as relationships with potentially dangerous beings are backgrounded, "culture" and "tradition" are foregrounded in exchanges with researchers, and in the community.



Figure 8: Students help collect cassava, 2012  
<http://www.umw.edu/greatminds/2013/12/05/experiencing-guyana>



While these are safe from the potential dangers they also contribute to the bodies of family-friends and of researchers.

“Tradition” and “culture” are not only told to researchers; in Surama, visiting researchers have an open invitation to participate towards the “work” of any event. We are often invited to machruman, and we learn cassava work. Participating in work may not be related with spirits or beings in the forest, but it is related to family friendships, and by participating we learn to contribute to sociality in the community. This may seem obvious to anyone who has done fieldwork, however, it brings together the relation between “culture”, valued ways of knowing, extended kinship, embodiment, and foreign research.

I have had several conversations with young anthropologists about the way indigenous peoples push “culture” forward. The political and global reach of Amerindian representation has been examined, and analysed as a way of asserting rights, especially for a disenfranchised community with limited resources for self-representation. When discussing Surama specifically, “tradition” and “culture” seem separated from daily life. This separation adds to the tension that people feel as they talk about “losing culture” and the conflicts development brings to their families. As an aspiring anthropologist looking to experience daily life and family in a community experiencing changing *Makushiness*, I too attempted to circumnavigate these cultural constructions. I told my hosts that I was interested in people, not *Makushi* people, that I wanted to farm, work, and learn how to build a house. Concerned with the way anthropological constructions of indigeneity were becoming a limit to my hosts, I wanted to get at what it meant to be a person in Surama today. This may be another kind of search for the authentic, but instead of authentic indigeneity, I hoped to get at authentic family and community. These were my conceptions going forward.

Despite what I considered to be my careful navigation of people in Surama’s concerns, my experiences—through conversations with Paulette and Daniel, and other members of their generation—were rendered as interests in “culture”, “tradition”, and *belief*. Participating in cassava work, sleeping in a hammock, helping in machrumani, and volunteering at the primary school were signs that I was willing to contribute and learn with them. People in Surama around my age were concerned with showing me how they work today, logging in the forest, how they hunt, and how they socialize. They were happy when I expressed my interest in building my house, starting my garden, and were frustrated by my inability to hunt. Both young and old were interested in how I ate, particularly if I ate farine and fish.

Similarly, my hosts, young and old, were concerned with my experience outside of Surama. Paulette and Daniel wanted to know about my family, where they lived, how often I saw them, how they felt about my work; they asked about my girlfriend, and if I would *do* the things they had taught me. My host-siblings were also interested in members of my family coming to visit, drinking beer with me, playing football with me, and the things I could bring them, to which they did not have access in the Rupununi.

My proudest moments were when I could successfully participate and contribute with my friends. When I started to understand people's jokes—and that I had to repeat the punch-line so they would know I understood—when a friend heard me say, “You does speak like we”, when Paulette confused me for her grandson because my stomach and chest had gotten bigger, and when the Guyanese police stopped asking to see my passport (I guess racially profiling me, tanned skin and dark hair, as someone from the area).

In this thesis, I have elaborated on Paulette and Daniel's concerns that their children are growing up as different social persons to them. While both young and old contribute to the household and family, albeit in different ways, they seem to value different ways of knowing. *Belief* highlights the diverging value of different ways of knowing. But *belief* is not the only way people's bodies are grown. By participating in cassava work, machrumani, social events, guiding, farming, and daily life in the Rupununi, Paulette and Daniel, and their family, cultivated my body as well.

Listening to Paulette recount the experiences of other researchers, I was not surprised to hear that many before me had participated in farming, drinking parakari, and doing cassava work. While they may seem like constructions to us, for Paulette and Daniel, researchers' participation in these “cultural” practices, are more important than the reports we will write after field-work. Some young men focused on handy-crafts, trying their hand at warishis, other young women wove hammocks. All researchers fetched water from the well, and did cassava work. For Paulette and Daniel, these are part of what constitutes personhood. By learning to weave a hammock—a quintessentially “traditional” practice—young researchers learn how to contribute and form the bodies of family friends anywhere they might go in the future. The people that teach them these abilities foment the ability to create particularly *Amerindian* bodies. “Culture” guides our learning of these tasks; our willingness—to contribute, to eat, to work—shows the similarity in our bodies; and our learning shows that we can contribute to the bodies of others. The “practical” embodied knowledge that Paulette and Daniel have exemplified contributes to the bodies of others, and makes people all over the world a little bit Amerindian. Thinking of the hundreds of researchers that have been to Surama,

we do not often write about the amount of family, honorary Amerindians they have created. As Frank once said, “How Sabba come and make all them researchers call she mamai,” (15/02/2015).

To which I responded, “She say I can call she mamai. She makes me food, takes care of us...she is mamai very well.”

“I know,” he said.

Surama researchers are now all over the world. We are teachers, policy-makers, natural scientists, office assistants, and social scientists.

Rubenstein (2001) uses Barthes to argue that villagization creates boundaries over which ethnic definitions are made, these boundaries create whiteness and Amerindianess. Rubenstein goes on to say that boundaries are part of the State project, making Amerindians into citizens. It is over these boundaries that we constitute each other. In recent development years in Surama, research and “tradition” have similarly mutually constituted researchers and Amerindians. “Tradition” highlights people in Surama’s research, and the way they turn us into people capable of enacting those traditions. Representation is not just a ‘Western’ political tool to assert rights, transforming Amerindians into political agents. It also makes *us* more into *them*. Where *belief* relationships are about exchanges with potentially dangerous beings in the forest, *not-believing* and *development* are about exchanges with potentially dangerous beings in the city. Through both processes, dissimilar bodied beings are made similar, and materials from outside the community are rendered neutral and are used to house, clothe, and create the bodies of family-friends.

#### Two Worlds of Knowing

I have come to the limits of the knowledge I can draw from ethnographic experience that will be of relevance to this thesis, and I wish to explore my hosts’ impression of that limit. Before doing so, however, I want to review Birthlan’s *not-believing* in the context I have elaborated above.

When Birthlan said he did not *believe* (Chapter Five), he was negating one set of exchange relationships and placing himself in another position of exchange with a different kind of wider world. He was negating potentially dangerous interactions in the forest, for potentially dangerous interactions with ‘Western’ knowledge. Summarizing Paulette and Daniel’s fears described in the first chapters of this thesis, *development* and money create a break in what they consider to be proper family friend relationships, and put people into relationships with the wider world in which Amerindians fight the stereotypes and class inequalities in which we find them.

When all subtleties are eroded, *belief* was part of survival near a dangerous world of spirits and potential enemies, and *not-believing* is a part of survival in the dangerous world of *development*,

near foreigners and potential enemies. While the shift in ways of knowing seems to accompany the new kinds of potential dangers, Paulette and Daniel feel that their embodied knowledge is no longer relevant as the world around them changes. They continue to enact their knowledge in the world, just beyond the reach and sight of foreigners, and feel that this is the only place that this kind of knowledge can be accessed and enacted. When researchers visit, Auntie Paulette and Uncle Daniel teach them this knowledge, and when we leave and write about these family-friend relationships, the exchanges we enact are, by definition, those of *not-believing*; we foreground different ways of knowing.



Figure 9: Daniel at the farm, Photo by Ariane Arze Torres-Goitia

Daniel examined his impression of this epistemological break. We were in the farm, clearing an area of underbrush, where we had machrumaned earlier in the week. He was unhappy with the work that his friends had done, and joked that if you wanted work done, do it yourself, and drink the ‘kari yourself. Then he asked me how I felt doing my research. The question caught me off-guard, and I told him some of the difficulties I encountered, most notably how people planned and coordinated their activities so subtly that I couldn’t contribute because I didn’t know how or where to go. I asked if this was what he meant, and he repeated his question. I told him I felt good, that I had always wanted to have the experience and opportunity to stay with them; that I felt fulfilled. I then asked how he felt about my staying there.

“You are not the first researcher to come...When Ellen come, I tell she, if you want the real history of what it is like to be an Amerindian, you have to take a man,” Uncle Dan chuckled and continued, “She did come with all she food. Vegetarian, her vegetables, tin cans too, and she left meatarian, carnivore,” (30/06/2015).

This comment highlights that for Daniel, being Amerindian is about proper kinship. It is about being part of a gendered pair, and everything that that entails, including, for Ellen, eating the meat her (potential) husband would bring home, and not relying on foreign tinned food. In this way, people are made through the continuing family-friend relationships they constitute. That evening Daniel told me a long-ago story.

He said there was a man who used to always see deer tracks leading to and away from a spring. He saw the tracks every day. Every day fresh tracks. So, he decided to stay up late and wait for the deer, but he didn't find it. He woke up early and went to the spring, but didn't find it. After telling his father, his father said he had to stay up and wait for midnight for the deer. He followed the advice and when he looked at the spring, it was not a deer, but a girl. He wanted to go with her. She took him. Her father was an anaconda. She took the man to where they lived in a cave. Her father came home, so he hid under a bag. Her father smelled the human so the girl told her father what happened. The man came out, and the father took him to hunt. He hunted with the bow, but the anaconda hunted by coiling around its prey. They came back with meat (the anaconda hunted), and the man said he wanted to take some home to his mother. The anaconda told him if he left he would never find the spring. He would never be able to find the spring that led to the cave. The man said he knew where the spring was, so he left with some meat. When the man returned, he could not find the spring, and so long as he looked, it could never be found.

I consider this story, and what Daniel said about Ellen to be the same. I think Daniel was the anaconda, and I was the man, as was Ellen. Surama was the spring. The meat was the embodied product of his kinship, his knowledge. If I left with the knowledge, as the hunter taking the meat to the wrong place, I would never again be able to find him, or the kinship relationships that constituted the knowledge. Indeed, this writing is not his knowledge, but my enactment of that knowledge without his kinship. It is the same thing Lionel James said of the people that came and took him and Daniel to the forest to learn their plants, to become “doctors of [their] knowledge.” Becoming a doctor happens away from the relations that Daniel has with the plants and with the people that use them. Daniel summons this tension in the statement he told me when I started fieldwork, “...you will go and write your book...but I will always be Uncle Dan.” He highlights that my approach allows me to produce a book, while his allows him to enact kinship.

The tension in the story of the anaconda and the young man brings something else to my mind. It tells me that while I can theorize transformations in Paulette and Daniel's lives—the way their children's bodies are not like their own—the tensions still weigh heavy on them. While anthropology has successfully moved away from theorizing these changes as ‘culture loss’, ‘acculturation’, or ‘enculturation’, and have demonstrated that they are Amazonian ontological transformations (Gow 2007; Vilaça 2007), they are still distressing to the people involved, and through a history of interactions with researchers and other foreign powers, my hosts have themselves taken up the acculturation, “culture loss” discourse to describe this tension.

Transformations take time, and happen through a series of face to face encounters, daily interactions and exchanges—trips to the hospital in Georgetown or participation in Iwokrama projects—microhistorical changes. But through these small daily transformations, younger generations forge different bodies from those of their parents. This is troubling in Amazonia where becoming a person is about parents enacting proper kinship relations with the envired world, building up children’s bodily substance. As Paulette says, this is partly their own doing, their own *not* taking their children to the forest. I saw Paulette’s grief in this matter, the tension between her and her children, and felt it as I gradually became (like) one of her children. This is capitulated by my leaving, breaking my connection with what she knows about the world.

Besides Paulette’s experience of these tensions, there is something else that troubles me, perhaps stemming from my eagerness to learn, and eagerness for a diversity of knowings of and in the world. I cannot help but think about knowledge in the way I experienced it growing up, as cumulative and quantifiable. As Daniel rightly pointed out, I *know* in a “doctor’s” kind of way. I cannot get away from the idea that *knowledge of the world*, the songs, the interactions with spirits cassava, or other beings in the forest, are no longer being enacted, and thereby there is *less* knowledge in the world. Though transformations in ways of conceiving knowledge draw structural continuities in Amazonian ways of being, I cannot help but become distressed at the prospect that this way of knowing in the world—*belief*—might no longer be enacted. By leaving, I have accepted that I will not see the outcome of these transformations. As my adopted siblings grow, they may learn the songs, somebody may complete an apprenticeship with Mogo Malcom; but this is *belief* and not our way of knowing.

## Conclusion

This thesis was about my conceptions of the way Amerindians in Surama constitute time and family-friend relationships. While they constitute time, people in Surama constitute their place and themselves in terms of time. In Surama, time has to do with the way kinship changes, and people contribute to *global* development by championing sustainability, family-friendships, and political unity. Through this constitution, and the recent exchanges with the wider world, Makushi society reproduces itself and changes. Similarly, the way they constitute the “outside”, us, also changes.

Of course, this has always been the case. The memories of people forming kinship ties through their experience as balata bleeders obviates balata companies as powerful outside exploiters. Makushi people remember balata-days as a time in which alliances and marriages extended over a larger scale. Similarly, Alleluia brought distant kin together into villages. Here powerful outsides were turned into extended insides. Today, however, these are outside of most people’s living memory; they are now stories that “old-time people” tell.

The 1970s and 1980s were a time when people had to rely on each other for food, work, supplies, and for life. It was a political period in which it was made to seem Amerindians had little to contribute to the nation or world stage. It is hard now, at a time when monetary exchanges are ubiquitous in daily life, to think of how Makushi people obviate the power of these market exchanges, and reproduce society in their own terms. Exploitative powers create inevitable tensions. Though balata-days are remembered as an opportunity for travel and extending kinship, they also made slaves out of Amerindians (see Hugh-Jones 1992 for similar obviations of power). I cannot say at this point how the changes that Paulette and Daniel fear might be remembered positively, but their conception of *development* already suggests that Amerindians reproduce kinship in harsh environments, making the dangerous familial; a testament to the way they obviate power.

In Guyana, Amerindians’ ability to survive and exchange with the forest while forming citizens is considered unique. These abilities are also valued on the world stage, helping Amerindians demonstrate contributions to the development of Guyana, and the world. What remains unclear, however, is just how this different way of knowing makes Paulette’s children different beings from herself.

I encountered little in the field to suggest that Makushi people view the world in a multi-natural way. *Development* ways of knowing, however, repackage embodied ways of exchanging with potentially dangerous beings as *belief*. These ways are hidden from non-Amerindians who have

different ways of knowing/being the forest. In this case, enacting ‘Western’ ways of knowing, *not - believing*, champions a different way of knowing.

Daniel knows the forest and farming because he walks in the forest and farms, he has experience doing so, and has forged his *belief* through decades of knowing. He too worked, encountered non-Amerindians and taught them about how to survive in the forest. He was in the armed forces, he worked for Iwokrama, and lived on the coast for a brief period. He has since returned to Surama to settle, to hunt less, to live in peace with the forest and the animals in it. My supervisor, Peter Gow, suggests that this is something that young people do. When Amerindians are young they seek employment, make connections, and later, they settle and grow their farm. I will have to wait and see if Frank, Birthlan, and Caroline end up growing their farm.

I cannot say if Paulette and Daniel’s children are ontologically different from them. Only Paulette, Daniel, Frank, Birthlan, Victorine and Caroline can answer these questions. What I can say is that our anthropological analysis about Amerindians in the Guianas, while forming a diachronic description, particularly when we look at villages and exchange over settlements (Overing 1983-4; Rivière 1984) takes settlements to be synchronic and their change to be diachronic. People typically moved during marriages, and when people died, creating new communities, or recycling old communities. Now that Amerindian land has been demarcated, and settlements are diachronic, we must look at the way they change over time while bound to a certain space. We have categorized ‘Amerindian Society’ as multi-local; their political institutions, kinship, power, and ritual all surround negotiations of space over time. How do these get worked out on a local level?

This thesis has been an attempt to look at the way these political/kinship/power/epistemic questions are worked out and reconstituted on a local household level, in the creation and continued life of a settlement or community that is also a politically recognized Amerindian Village. The boundary I have chosen is a political construction that seems to stem from a neo-colonial government, but it is reconstituted by the community of people in Surama in daily life. The boundedness of the community does not keep people spatially attached to the community, people leave, some return, others do not. New people come, some leave, others stay. Rubenstein (2001) suggested that ethnicity and identity are created over this boundary. I suggest that it was over this boundary that we created an idea of Amerindian ethnicity, which was then picked up by people in Surama, and reflected to us as “culture”. Sociality does not stop at the borders of Surama, or Annai, or even the Rupununi, or forest; it extends, and as Amerindians conceive of the world and their place in it, we too are conceived. Anthropological investigation, not unlike my own, focused on the social and cultural qualities that make people Amerindian, cause the boundedness of Amerindianity



to appear self-evident. Amerindian vision does not end at the end of ethnic Amerindianity; all people, Amerindians or not, are potential family-friends waiting to be forged through working together, and since we are potential family-friends, we are already affines; potential consanguines.

People in Surama do not bound us in order to make ideas of us, but rather place us in a continuum in relation to themselves. As Paolo Santilli (2000) has noted amongst Brazilian Makushi, villagization has put limits on otherwise endless unbounded space, but conceptions of self and other do not adhere to these bounds. In Guyana, Amerindians advocate and reinforce these limits because they are important to the 'Western' political machine. The Amerindian Act maintains a stop to outsiders over which Amerindians can mediate our involvement in their lives. My hosts, however, continue to conceive the world as fluid, unbounded; the inside-outside distinction that is crucial for ideas of predation, alterity, and even reciprocity and exchange, does not exist in their lives the way we conceive of it.

In this thesis I have looked at the way sharing and contributions, rather than reciprocal exchanges, form fluid community space of family-friendship, while exchanges mark potential dangers with potential kin. Everything is an inside, it only hasn't become inside yet. Like a Klein bottle that appears to contain liquid until it is on the outside, or keep out air until it is on the inside. Amerindians may recreate the place of kinship, a kind of inside, but all places are potential insides, and when they become inside, they reproduce society in(side) sharing, and recreate it through exchanges. It is this distinction that leads to problems between Paulette's ideas of personhood and those of her children. While the community had to be physically created, it is remembered as the place of family-friend kinship. Once human memory and work entered Surama, it made a community of kin. My concern with the time before the beginning of Surama relied on a spatial shift of people, but in stories of that spatial shift, the community existed through working together. George Mentore suggests, "Amerindian modes of knowing, I believe, do not have the desire to close on the foundations of truth, for truth, already is: truth already experienced and not, as it is so often with us, desired," (2006: 22). The question of whether Paulette's children might plant farms is based on my conception of truth. They already do farm, their farm is not their parent's private property, it is a shared knowing and sharing with each other, and an exchange with beings in the forest.

My response to this question may seem overly ephemeral; however, it is born out of a very specific study. An in-depth look at sociality and ways of knowing in a community. The study extends to other communities not on the basis of their ethnicity as Makushi people, but through the way people in Surama conceive of the social world. Quotes I have included, like "this is *we belief*" suggest an array of relationalities between Paulette and her extended family. Who is the "we"? The *we* are the

people that exercise the *belief*. The statement demonstrates Paulette's interactions with researchers and her awareness of the boundaries of our knowing. At these boundaries exists the fluidity of being.

The focus on a small community has not only been to better approach local views emanating outwards towards us, it was also meant to address our desires for truth; what I perceived to be 'lacks' in the anthropology of the Guianas. There was little scholarship about the political kinship in Makushi communities. The work that exists takes a larger scale, and as such the internal relations are sacrificed for the way networks relate to each other. My focus on the very small scale is to show the way many of these affinal relations are obviated at the level of co-residence. While there are physical boundaries to residence, the households, this side/that side, the Village; my lens flips potential conflict and enforces the family-friendship inside. For example, I was unaware of political tensions I was told existed at a regional and national level between Sydney and his brother Glen. Another study may have looked at these tensions to suggest that national-political tensions permeate to the local level, causing conflicts in kinship. Such an analysis cannot help but maintain that tensions are caused by the outside, globalizing world. Similarly, development could be made to stem from the wider world, rather than manifest itself uniquely in local uses. Through the close focus of my thesis, I did not see the brothers' conflict, I only saw the way that Sydney nominated Glen for senior councillor and Jean nominated Ron, Sydney's son for senior councillor. While this seems like a political move, elections for governmentally recognized Amerindian Village leader, I see the position as constituted through kinship. In the end, no Allicock won the election, it was a family-friend living on the other side of Surama. Governmental positions, and political leadership is constituted through family-friend relations; working and sharing together, and the memories of those times.

We try to describe to the best of our abilities the people we encounter in the field. Inevitably, we view them through our eyes, and as our fieldwork progresses, our view changes, and the way they see starts to come out of our eyes, and we are faced with making sense of it for the first time. It is noteworthy here that Amerindian ways of knowing and ways of being are particularly suited to anthropological analysis of the ethnographic encounter in which our hosts know we can become them, and take on their views, and in the moment of becoming, we have always been them and can see ourselves (see McCallum 2009). Upon returning we gradually lose that being, which gives us a new-found anthropological perspective on the ethnographic experience. We end up having to fill the things we miss or cannot remember with our amalgamated selves, a mix of experiences from birth through our research, and the reflexive time since that research. Every ethnography I've read is the writer and the reader. It is therefore not surprising that I have focused on this very small level, and

elaborated on how kinship and family-friendship obviates external power relations. Having grown up spatially distant from my own extended family, I make sense of my host's extended sociality. I see the world as a fluidity of potential consanguinity; anything can be constituted as local. My hosts can make family out of anyone, and I can be at home anywhere.

In the end, my interest has always been in obviating power (of the State), and my thesis merely suggests what Amazonian anthropologists have known for many years, but I could only experience being in Surama. It is Clastres famous thesis that at the local level, society constantly mediates against the accumulation of power. It is my *belief*, my embodied knowledge, that in this level of familiarity exists our strongest resistance to the State.

This idea is alive. Of course, wealth disparities exist in the world, and local monetary economies are wrapped up in wider poverty and wealth disparity, but you don't need money to feed your neighbour, you need a farm. You do not need permission to look for knowledge, you just need a library card, or a pair of shoes. You do not need followers to start a movement, you just need to start it. Paulette did not need a university to teach anthropology, she only needed time and willingness. Her sharing and contributions have extended her family to researchers throughout the world.



Figure 10: Auntie Paulette and I washing clothes, Photo by Ariane Arze Torres-Goitia

## Appendix: “This side,” and the rest of Surama



Figure 11: Surama from the airplane to Georgetown 2015

### A) Paulette and Daniel's

- B. Their daughter, Victorine, and her partner, Kurt's house
- C. Their daughter, Caroline, and her partner, Vitus' house
- D. Their son, Birthlan's house, in construction before he brought his partner
- E. Their son, Frank, and his partner, Jolyn's house.
- F. Daniel's father, Fred, and his wife, Fransisca's house
- G. Daniel's sister, Loreen, and her partner, Jarvis', house
- H. Daniel's brother, Bertrand, and his partner, Marcella's, house.
- J. Daniel's brother, Glen, and his wife, Jean's house
- K. Road to the Junction
- M. Village Office
- N. Village Centre/ By the School
- O. The “other side” of Surama
- P. Paulette's sister, Dilys' house
- Q. Daniel's Uncle, Fred's brother's house
- R. The Ecolodge

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University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee

28 May 2014

Sebastian Arze  
Department of Social Anthropology

Dear Sebastian

Thank you for submitting your ethical application, which was considered at the School of Philosophical, Anthropological and Films Studies Ethics Committee meeting on 28 May 2014, when the following documents were reviewed:

- Ethical Application Form
- Risk assessment forms

The School of Philosophical, Anthropological and Films Studies Ethics Committee has been delegated to act on behalf of the University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC) and has granted this application ethical approval. The particulars relating to the approved project are as follows -

|                |  |              |         |                  |         |
|----------------|--|--------------|---------|------------------|---------|
| Approval Code: | SA11020  | Approved on: | 28/4/14 | Approval Expiry: | 27/4/17 |
| Project Title: | Producing 'Makushi Knowledge': Research practices, knowledge and power amongst Makushi Amerindians in Guyanese Amazonia. |              |         |                  |         |
| Researcher(s): | Sebastian Arze   |              |         |                  |         |
| Supervisor(s): | Professor Peter Gow  |              |         |                  |         |

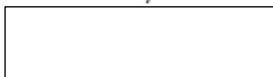
Approval is awarded for three years. Projects which have not commenced within two years of approval must be re-submitted for review by your School Ethics Committee. If you are unable to complete your research within the 3 three year approval period, you are required to write to your School Ethics Committee Convener to request a discretionary extension of no greater than 6 months or to re-apply if directed to do so, and you should inform your School Ethics Committee when your project reaches completion.

If you make any changes to the project outlined in your approved ethical application form, you should inform your supervisor and seek advice on the ethical implications of those changes from the School Ethics Convener who may advise you to complete and submit an ethical amendment form for review.

Any adverse incident which occurs during the course of conducting your research must be reported immediately to the School Ethics Committee who will advise you on the appropriate action to be taken.

Approval is given on the understanding that you conduct your research as outlined in your application and in compliance with UTREC Guidelines and Policies ( <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/utrec/guidelinespolicies/> ). You are also advised to ensure that you procure and handle your research data within the provisions of the Data Provision Act 1998 and in accordance with any conditions of funding incumbent upon you.

Yours sincerely



Convener of the School of Philosophical, Anthropological and Films Studies Ethics Committee

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School of Philosophical, Anthropological and Films Studies Ethics Committee  
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