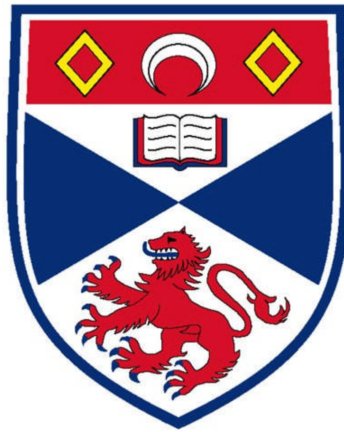
Polarities of Difference:

How Wapichannao Negotiate Identities within a Creole State



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A Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of St. Andrews

September 2008

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Abstract

This thesis is an ethnographic account of how the Wapichannao, who are situated in the Rupununi of Guyana perceive themselves within the nation-state. This is also an account of how non-Amerindian Guyanese envisage Amerindians as 'past' peoples. Hence, distinctions are made between Amerindian and non-Amerindian—us vs. them—where both identities become placed as opposite poles within a continuum.

Emphasis is placed on the shifting relationships between these poles, but more specifically, the cultural paradigm through which these relationships are made possible. This paradigm, I suggest, may be understood in terms of *polarities of difference*, with regard to which Amerindians are constantly ambiguating/negotiating, disjoining, and resignifying notions of 'who they are'.

This thesis evidences this paradigm through an ethnography of some of those aspects of Wapichannao culture—village work, the shop, joking activity, culture shows—that are considered to be traditional on the one hand, and modern on the other. In doing so, an incongruous trend emerges, on which makes the classic imagery of Amerindian ontological homogeneity much more complex. Therefore, this thesis moves from the more traditional aspects of Wapichannao culture towards the nation-state, in order to take into account aspects of Amerindian experience absent from classic ethnographic accounts.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my Family and
to Navada 'Stinky' Fernandes (21st February 1984 - 31st January 2008)

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"You must Learn to Know"
Elle

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Introduction
“I am NOT a Rastaman”

Broken feathers lie on the ground as stocky women rip illegitimate materials from one of the contestant’s garments. “*We nuh supposed to have feathers on the clothes Ms. Stacy*” was one woman’s response to my inquisitive stare. Bits of feather take flight back to the spirits of the ancestors, from whence they came, leaving garments bare of significance.

I watch as women shake their heads as they are forced to change, mediate, and regress from their past, and enter a world—once unknowable—that calls for ‘tradition’, ‘authenticity’, and comes hand-in-hand with conservational tactics: the government’s way of making the indigenous people cooperate in their endeavours to fix the damages of the past.

Unlike the rest of Guyana, and the Caribbean for that matter, the Amerindians’ social milieu is characterised by relative geographical immobility, social stability and homogeneity, which features them outside the ‘global’, ‘modern’, or ‘foreign’ world in which Caribbean peoples identify themselves (cf. Mintz 1971a, 1971b, 1974, 1996; Wardle 2000). Within the state lies the problem of ‘indigeneity’, whereby the nation is constantly attempting to place Amerindians within its context, while, at the same time, distinguishing them from the collective. Hence, the image of women ripping feathers off

their costumes in order, not only to present themselves as “indigenous”, but also, to adhere to a national identity, acknowledges the very “problem” of the indigenous reality. This problem of “indigeneity” is reflected amongst the Wapichannao of Guyana, the subjects of this thesis who constantly try to redefine ‘being indigenous’ within the socioeconomic nexus of the nation-state. The problem is historical in Guyana: a nation built out of ethnic conflicts in colonial (White and Slave) and post-colonial (Black and East Indian) times.

Hence, this thesis is a reaction to what I feel is a ‘lack’, rather than a ‘failure’ within Anthropology; a lack of ethnography that places Amerindians within the context of the Guyanese Creole society. Rather, ethnographies on the Amerindians of remote areas of Guyana (cf. Yde 1965 with the WaiWais; Butt 1956; Butt Colson 1973, 1976 with the Akawaios; Mentore 1988, 2005 with the WaiWais; Campbell 1995 with the WaiWais; Whitehead 2002 with the Patamona) have focused on extracting aspects of Amerindian culture definitive of Amazonia. Yet, we cannot proceed to examine the temporality and causality of Amerindian discourse if we do not consider those events that are occurring around them, and not necessarily to them directly, but which cannot help but influence how they reorganise their practices and understandings.

Guyana, formerly British Guiana, has a colonial past reminiscent to that of Jamaica, Barbados, or Trinidad, and stands within the Caribbean Community in which its peoples are associated (See Chapter 7). However, we cannot place ‘all’ Guyanese peoples completely within this Creole ecumene. Neither is it enough to situate the Amerindians of Guyana—who have had a long history with outsiders—solely within the Amazonian

context. As will be made evident throughout this thesis, as the national situatedness of the country relates less to its South American geographical context, and more to its Caribbean socio-economic and political system, Guyanese people are no more South American than a “coolie man” is a “chinee man”.

Emerging from this are several questions which will be answered throughout this thesis: How is the traditional defined vis-à-vis the global? Where do identity, belonging, and nationalism crystallise and meet for the Wapichannao? How are they dealing with the infiltration of global issues within their social discourse? Hence, this ethnography is threefold in its intentions. Firstly, it is an ethnographic account of the ‘Guyanese’ Amerindians—specifically the Wapichannao—and their place within the nation-state, as “past” peoples. Secondly, it offers an alternate perspective as to how Amerindians, belonging to Creole societies, may be studied by Social Scientists, through what I define as *polarities of difference,* whereby people are studied within the context of how they deal with opposing epistemological and ontological concepts. Finally, I wish to postulate ideas for new ways in which the nation-state can cope with the presence of Amerindians, as well as how Amerindians can cope with the pressures of the nation-state. The latter will be discussed in my concluding chapter, as a theoretical (hypothetical) approach to a practical issue.

I

I am NOT a Rastaman

My first introduction to my field site illustrated how quickly the Wapichannao peoples from the Rupununi Savannahs of Guyana had already been caught up in defining my personhood in relation to themselves. This was illustrated whilst attending the first village meeting since my arrival, where I was asked to introduce myself. Before I spoke, the *toshao* (captain) of the village—then Chief—introduced me by stating the following: "this is Stacy! She is NOT a Rastaman, but a girl who is here to do research on our culture." I had not previously been aware that I was being perceived as "the Rastaman", so tried to make sense of their caricature of me. I reached no conclusion, until I had spent some time in the village, when I noticed that the majority of visitors to the village were black miners, who came from the nearby Marudi Mountains to get their supplies. As I had braided my hair, from a distance I looked as though I had the dreadlocks made famous by Rastafarians. These were the people with whom they were familiar, hence drawing connections with my presence and with the conceptualised 'fact' that I had to be a 'male'. Chief reassured me that I had nothing to worry about as "they", the Wapichannao, were only trying to figure out who I was. I had been defined as a rastaman, and was perceived as such until defined otherwise; a resignification of my identity. This led me to consider the ways in which we go about defining the Other, and how doing so requires an unsystematic approach to alterity and Otherness.

Anthropologists' fascination with alterity is none other than a fascination intrinsic to human behaviour, and our own precepts of Otherness. Mason (1990: 13) states that "all

ethnography is an experience of the confrontation with the Other set down in writing...” The idea of the Anthropologist confronting the Other is only different from the Other’s confrontation with us through the devices used to understand otherness. As we study them, they study us; trying to disambiguate our personhood as we do theirs. Yet, the Anthropologist considers herself different, because she stakes claim to objectivity and research methodology to fulfil commitments to an academic doctrine.

However, my own fascination with the notion of Otherness within the Guyanese context has most to do with my own ambiguous positioning/resignification as I moved between two key “ethnoscapes” (cf. Appadurai 1991; 1995). As a Guyanese from the capital—Georgetown—studying the indigenous community, I knew what the preconceived notions of Amerindians would be. However, the ethnographic material of this thesis not only stems from fieldwork in the Wapichannao village of Bush Rope, situated on the border to Brazil, but it also results from frequent visits to Georgetown during my fifteen months of fieldwork. Hence, the structure of this thesis reflects the move from one to the other: traditional to Creole. This very ethnographic move enabled me to observe how Wapichannao dealt with identity politics. Wapichannao conceived themselves to be both indigenous and belonging to the wider Creole-global society. Yet, at the same time they were participating in a process of ‘exclusion’, where they not only defined themselves as embodying both perspectives, but also not belonging to either one. This flux of perspectives comes down to the ambiguous temporal and causal relation Bush Rope and Amerindianness generally have with the nation-state. As previously mentioned, the Wapichannao are not considered as belonging to the transnational or

translocal arena according to the nation-state. However, these are the very themes surrounding their problem of situatedness.

The issues of transnationalism and world society, and where the individual fits have been presented to us since the eighteenth century through Kant who was concerned with "the kinds of ethics, aesthetics, and rationality which individuals would need in the world society" (Wardle 2000: 2). In light of this, Simmel (1964; 1997) extended this Kantian understanding of universality and raised "the question of intimacy and imaginative engagement" in the 'modern' (or cosmopolitan) individual (2000: 2). This 'modern' imaginative engagement is what the Amerindians face in reverse, as they are positioned ideologically as the "past" or pre-modern peoples of Guyana.

As a result, we can envisage indigenous peoples as operating through a continuum defined by, what I term, *polarities of difference*. The emphasis on 'polarities of difference' in this thesis represents an attempt to model the rapidly fluctuating meanings Wapichannao Amerindians give to their identity within the Guyanese nation state. 'Polarities of difference' describes how Amerindians polarise cultural meanings such as manore (communal labour)/commodity, traditional/foreign, Amerindian/Creole, North/South, real/fake, shaman/Church, and human/non-human, amongst many, in an attempt to define themselves. These oppositions or dualities split parts of a cultural continuum, allowing Bush Rope villagers to hang specific meanings on particular situations. As definitions become blurred as a result of a social stimulus, notions of the world become fragmented, until definitions are assigned (See Figure 1). At one point Wapichannao attach themselves to one pole, but in another instance they might

identify with the opposing end. Hence, identities are constantly being ambiguated, disjointed and redefined so that they can find 'place.' However, not only are identities in a constant state of ambiguity and disambiguity, but also those definitions assigned to them. This, I suggest, is the ideological puzzle of Amerindianness within the Guyana Creolese state.

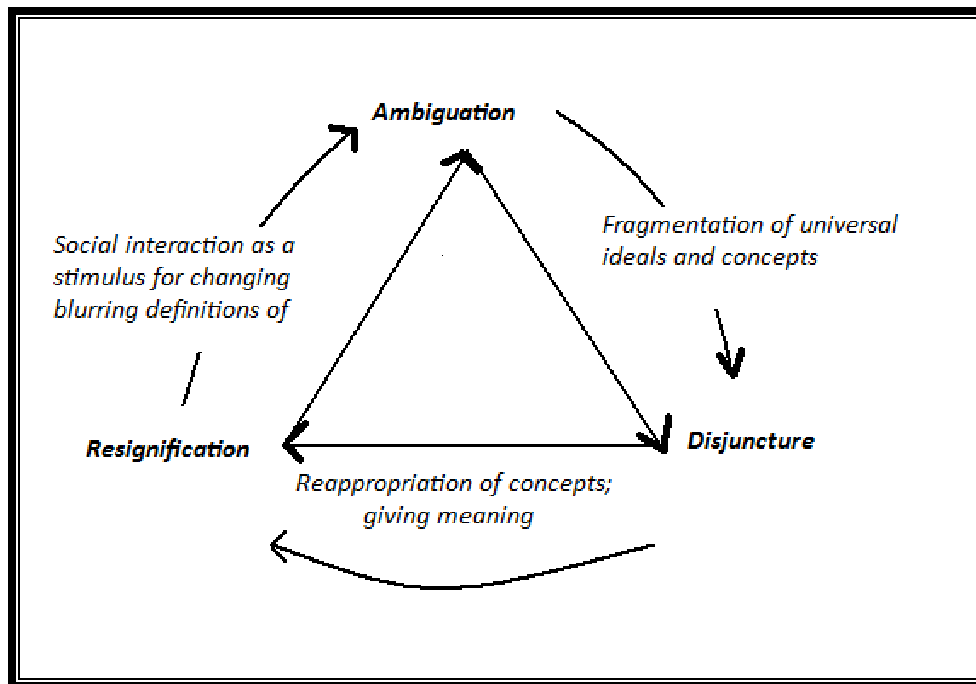

Figure 1: Showing Polarities of Difference

Dualistic approaches within the Social Sciences are far from uncommon (cf. Hegel 1821, Lévi-Strauss 1963, Leach 1964[1954], Marx 1970, D. Miller 1987, Bourdieu 1990, Wilson 1995[1973]). Many of these theories stem from Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, where we see dualism in regards to the state, whereby the state, on the one hand, gives rise to 'freedom' (free will and individual rights), but on the other hand commits the individual to the shackles of law, in which duties are expected to be fulfilled. As we will see in this thesis, the problem of indigeneity within the Guyanese state opposes Hegel's notions, as

although Amerindians are recognised through law—i.e. the Amerindian Act 1976—within the Guyanese state, they are not ‘bound’ to the state. Amerindian legislation situates Amerindians outside the 'time-space' of Creole Guyana. They are seen as a ‘unique’ group belonging and not belonging to the state. Hence, there is ambiguity as to how and where they fit into the Creole system. For Lévi-Strauss duality came in the form of myths (e.g.), whereby “mythical thought always progresses from the awareness of oppositions toward their resolution,” (1963: 224). Not only are myths paradoxical in nature, but at the same time they work so as to disambiguate themselves. Levi-Strauss’ arguments regarding myth are an example of “objectification,” a term used by Hegel and developed in recent times by Bourdieu and Miller, amongst others. ‘Objectification,’ as defined by Miller (1987: 28), may be conceived as a

> …dual process by means of which a subject externalizes itself in a creative act of differentiation, and in turn reappropriates this externalization through an act which Hegel terms sublation.

Unlike Marx’s or Miller’s (or Bourdieu’s for that matter) emphasis on duality as a means of objectifying the self, the important factor in this thesis, is the flux—the constant variation—which Wapichannao are engaged in their attempts to ‘place’ themselves. Some similarities exist here with Leach’s (1964[1954]) study on the political system of the Kachin people in the highlands of Burma, whereby different groups claim that their community is ‘gumlao’ (egalitarian) or ‘gumsa’ (hierarchical). These two ‘category structures’ are seen as divergent or ‘polar doctrines’ on the basis of which compromise takes place. In Bush Rope village, however, we do not merely have concepts in opposition, but also concepts which have no definite signification. Bushropers are

constantly compromising with regard to the definitions they give to concepts such as 'foreign' and 'traditional', or 'shamanism' and 'Christianity'.

Dualism is also common within the ethnography of the Caribbean, as is exemplified by the work of P.J. Wilson (1995[1973]) in his book *Crab Antics*. Here, a distinction is made between the social structure and value system of people in the Caribbean through the notions of Respectability and Reputation. However, I wish to reaffirm that this is not a dualistic approach in the sense that there are two poles which have definitive meanings. As Wardle has described, Creolisation is a "pattern" in which modes of cultural expression are constantly redefining the social forms within Creole society (2002: 493), and we see a similar cultural interface occurring amongst the Wapichannao. The intellectual problem is that we cannot cast them off as Creole, just as we cannot subject them to the stereotypical classification of Amerindian. It is here that I wish to make a reassessment of Wardle's notion of "modes of Creole cultural expression," in relation to indigenous peoples within the Creole spectrum. As they are placed within the category of "past" peoples, they are in fact, constantly trying to create a 'present'—as opposed to a future—for themselves. Hence, this thesis highlights the dynamic and fluctuating patterns within which Amerindians are currently 'dealing with' the nation-state.

II

Chapters in Continuum

In a sense, the structure of my dissertation resembles my own theoretical perspective, as we have the traditional Amerindian at the beginning of this thesis, leading to the Amerindian as perceived from the standpoint of the nation state. In between is the flux of cultural activity that tries to ratify polar perspectives.

The first chapter, introduces the reader to the region, and the context from which this thesis springboards. It is the least theoretical, as it is meant as a description of the area and my 'approach' to the village of Bush Rope. Here, the reader is shown the village as I entered it; the topography of the region, the demographics, language, and other contextual details. This chapter also introduces the notion of identity and how the Wapichannao identify themselves through the villages in which they live rather than as "racial" subgroups. Within this chapter there is also a section called "Inside Bush Rope", which details the everyday, evoking the connection of people to the landscape in which they live.

Chapter 2—*Making a Living and Subsistence*—focuses on the Wapichannao's own ideals of 'living well', an ontology which incorporates those things that are seen as intrinsically Wapichannao, and a way of remembering the ancestors. It is based on the relationship people have with cultivated and hunted/fished food, and those links to the ancestral cosmology which still exists within the society. Hence, there is much reference to the myths told in relation to important crops, such as cassava. However, this chapter also introduces the ideological importance that the commodity economy plays when

opposed to the traditional means of subsistence. Hence, I briefly introduce the shop as a major influence on how relations are formed and sentiments are produced between individuals and commodities. This is not detailed within this chapter, as the Wapichannao's relationship with commodities is detailed in Chapter 3, in relation to the dichotomy between traditionalism and commoditisation.

Chapter 3—*Understanding Relationships: The Politics of Sharing*—explores the networks and constraints found within the fabric of relationships, namely through the ideal of communality. This ideal of community and communalism is based on an ancestral ideology of 'working together'—i.e. *manore*—comparable to practices throughout the Third World (cf. Nyerere 1968[1967]; McHenry 1977; Panikar 1993). The manore may be conceived as a tool in which to create a balance between the need to work together and the individualism that one encounters through commoditisation. Here, levels of commitment, to either manore or commodity, determine how individuals interact with each other. This is further established through the use of Starr's (1954) concept of Levels of Participation, whereby the level at which rapport is played out has been analysed. This is necessary, as it establishes the ideological polarities between manore and commodity, but more importantly, between the communal and the individualistic. In practice these polarities become so ambivalent that instead of any distinguishable differences, they emerge as a paradoxical state of belonging. The second part of Chapter 3, further delves into the understanding of relationships, through the agency of politics, and how the political dynamics of the village intertwine with dichotomies of the communal/individualistic, manore/commodity, traditional/farrin. Here, relationships are

not only based on how individuals relate to each other vis-à-vis the manore/commodity dichotomy, but also with regard to the individuals they support during both village leader elections, as well as the national elections. Village leaders become associated with national political parties, which also translate into local institutions—who visits which shop—which reflects who supports which leader. These political endeavours also reveal how the Wapichannao divide themselves, as well as how they see themselves as a community. However, we will see this more in the ensuing chapters.

As the thesis progresses, we begin to see traditional techniques used to deal with nationalism and the global. Chapter 4 is an exploration of the complex ambivalent 'feeling tones' of village life, namely laughter and joking, gossip, and fear and threat (in relation to non-humans). Not only does gossip, e.g., maintain a collective personification of unity (cf. Gluckman 1963), but it also sets individuals apart from each other in doing so (cf. Paine 1967). However, we need to understand not only *why* people are gossiping, but *where* gossip is taking place. This stems from the previous chapter on politics, as gossip takes place everywhere, but in particular between the two major shops owned by the two leading political rivals (the brothers Chief and Riso). Yet, gossip as previously stated, is used to show how identity becomes ambiguous and is therefore resignified through its disjuncture from a 'true' form. This also goes for laughter. Laughter and types of joking relationships reflect those interactions which occur within the village, where unspoken rules on who can become the subject of laughter, and when such an interaction can take place, are always in constant play. The use of laughter is not just a symbol of conviviality, but also a display of power and understanding of those relations

between individuals. The superiority theory of laughter and jokes (cf. Nietzsche 2005[1883]; Lippitt 1992) works so far as it only distinguishes one type of laughter. A more complex image is revealed in the section on Laughter directed at powerful individuals, such as the shaman (whose office is further described in this chapter, along with relevant myths). This form of sociability is one which I am still trying to understand, but have put forward within this thesis as material to think about further. Laughter and gossip act both to ambiguate and disambiguate people's roles within society. This leads into the section on the *maranao* or shaman, where the relationship between the maranao and the people of Bush Rope try to reconcile the ideal of a "true" shaman as opposed to a "fake" one. With the Church operating as the most prominent form of worship, traditional approaches are being weeded out to an extent. Yet, importance is still placed on the station of the *maranao*, as the uncertainty of others' feelings to oneself is considered to be the cause of sickness. As with the Jivaro of Venezuela, shamanistic sickness is considered to be the "suffering experienced by individuals when they become overwhelmed by the ambiguity of the social environment and thereby lose a clear sense of their identity" (Taylor 1993: 207). As the *maranao* operates on the opposite 'traditional' end of the pole of social discourse, the individual enters into a process of disambiguation. This explains why shamanic practice is sought, as shamans deal with the clarity of the self, and are therefore a mediator between chaos and homeostasis of the self. It is partially through the shaman's expertise that one can regain such clarification, whereas the other option is the arutam, which is a vision that only the seeker can have. The shamanic cure establishes a restored selfhood through

the shaman's mediation of the chaos the individual experiences. This further relates to an Amerindian perspectivism, which Viveiros de Castro (1998) defines as those "ideas in Amazonian cosmologies concerning the way in which humans, animals and spirits see both themselves and one another" (1998: 469). Insights from Amerindian perspectivism help us to understand the different sorts of Wapichannao inhabitants (human and non-human, etc) whose realities or approach to certainty are all different, or more importantly, are apprehended through their individual points of view.

The following chapter—Chapter 5: Culture Shows and the Global Stage—takes us away from the laughter and giggling, and towards performance and pageantry, namely, the Miss Amerindian Heritage Pageant. I see this chapter as being definitive in how I establish the arguments surround polarities of difference in Bush Rope, as they are used and understood by the Wapichannao. The argument follows from the previous chapter, where I discussed the maranao, and the role that an Amerindian perspective plays within the everyday of Bush Rope. Here the notion of national identity, which has long been used in the Caribbean as a tool for acculturation and assimilation of groups of people, is considered to be the stepping stone for how indigenous peoples have been placed within the nation-state (Mintz 1966: 34; R.T. Smith 1962). As these pageants are part of a nationwide attempt to promote Amerindian heritage, stipulations on what constitutes Amerindianness are put in place by the government. Hence, Amerindians take on the anomalous role of the "indigenous" within the wider Creole society, and, therefore, have to present themselves as "authentic" in order to be recognised within the state. Here, the polarities of difference operate on the dichotomy between

traditional and *farrin* aspects of culture on which the organising bodies hang terms and ideas of Amerindianness. However, at the same time, concepts of personhood are in a constant state of variance and interpretation, as is personified by the illegitimate use of feathers and peanuts on "traditional" costumes described at the beginning of its introduction. Feathers, which are intrinsic within traditional costume making, are currently not allowed. Due to the commitments the nation-state has to conservation strategies, materials such as peanuts, which have not been documented as part of the Wapichannao traditional dress, have, on the other hand, been accepted as traditional due to national ideas of Amerindianness (cf. Wardle 2000, Wilk 1997). The second part of this chapter refers to performances—or culture shows as they call them—which are integral to village sociability, and general Wapichan entertainment. In this section, I further illustrate how the continuum between traditional and farrin influences become more evident, when the Wapichannao are asked to 'perform'. Performances, here, are not only meant to entertain, but they also illustrate how the Wapichannao negotiate their own ideals of "cultural self-consciousness" (cf. Calkowski 1991). Looking at the Wapichannao, performance also signals the otherness felt through the introduction of 'traditional' images that are foreign to both the performer and the audience. It is the constant reminder that Amerindians must be Amerindians at the end of the day; they must embody their Amerindianness, which is forever in a loop of disjuncture, ambiguity and resignification. Performances, therefore, present images of the 'indigenous' and the Amerindian striving towards the 'ideal'.

After looking at the inventiveness of performance, I end this chapter with an experimental piece called "Politics as Performance". This illustrates the performance seen through the ways politics are played out, not only the village or regional politics, but also through the national political dynamics of the country. In a sense, the best performer is the best candidate. Yet, there are other factors which combat such a theory; for one, we have the issue of patronage, and loyalty to individual shop owners who also play a role within the dynamics of politics as is seen in the following chapter.

Chapter 6—Patronage, Venezuelan Beer, and Rum-Shop Culture—is an analysis of the socioeconomic relationships that stem from the social, economical and political relations individuals have within the two major shops. This chapter delves into the Wapichannao's sentiments towards commodities, and how their relationship with and their dependency upon commoditisation defines the types of relationships they have. This is comprehensive through the use of a credit system, which the shops extend to their loyal customers, with whom they associate (cf. Gilmore 1977; Wilson 1995[1973]). This extension of credit defines not only who associates with which shop, but also who support which political leader. We see patronage as being "…not so much deliberate as a simple outcome of association and convenience encouraged by advantageous credit arrangements…" (Wilson 1995[1973]: 168). Yet, this form of patronage is not so much a means in which shop owners exercise their power, but mainly a way in which they recognise who wants and does not want to be associated with them. The second section considers those other relationships—namely the relationship between the drunk and the rest of the village, and the crews—amongst those who are seen as

personifications of the shop. Here, I define alcohol as both “substance and symbol” which promotes a shared altered state and communication, since, if one refuses to participate, one is refusing to be sociable (Wilk 1999: 244).This drinking culture is the networking of men, who use the shop as a common ground in which they can meet and discuss important issues, such as politics, the welfare of their village, and women. This section is also an analysis of the role of drinking played within social life, as well as the role the shop played within building relations through the use of alcohol. However, I do not focus on the meanings behind certain structures presented within the forum of drinking, but focus on how people react to drinking, as I do believe that this will illustrate the interconnectivity drinking has with other aspects of village life.

Chapter 7 focuses on those perspectives of the wider Guyanese society, and how they view the indigenous within the context of the “past” and primitive. Here, I have deployed interviews taken whilst in the capital—Georgetown—to aid in the analysis of not only where Amerindians see themselves within the context of the nation state, but also where the rest of the nation places Amerindians. The common feedback shows that Amerindians—in general—are considered to be a ‘past’ people, left behind as natives. Notion of otherness and cultural ideology are brought to light, as we see the disjuncture within the collective ideology of the Guyanese, as well as understandings which keep Amerindians in ‘place’. This is seen in linguistic terms, as Creolese is seldom used by the Wapichannao, who reserve any notions of it to those people in “town” (namely Georgetown, the capital). Thus, the works of several linguists were taken into consideration as to the conception of Creole society and identity which forms (cf.

Devonish 1978; Hancock 1980; Rickford 1987). However, Rickford's (1987) emphasis on the influence of the linguistic transformations of migrant languages, such as those of the Africans, Portuguese and East Indians, on Guyanese Creolese, highlights the lack of a role the Amerindians have had within the linguistic spectrum of Guyanese society. I attribute the lack of Amerindian contributions to the lexification of Guyanese Creolese on two suppositions: 1) Amerindian segregation from migrant labourers; 2) lack of study on any role Amerindians have had. Although, I hypothesise that both of these have great validity, I have not extensively studied and compared the linguistic makeup of Guyanese Creolese. However, it is apparent that a clear distinction can be made between Amerindian and Creole peoples, as they perceive each other as distinctive beings. I conclude this chapter through a theoretical reanalysis of both the Creole Continuum and Perspectival theories which are current theories used to analyse the Caribbean and Amazon respectively.

Finally, the concluding chapter is meant to be innovative, radical and utopian: I embody the role of the Minister of Amerindian Affairs. In this chapter I explore the idea of the eradication of the nation-state within the Amerindian framework. I hypothesise three outcomes: 1) Amerindians will no longer be perceived within the continuum of Guyanese Creolese; 2) a neo-traditionalist movement may occur; 3) intensified internal conflict due to the historical relationship to the nation-state. Here, I draw inspiration from Wardle (2000) who uses a Kantian approach to his study of cosmopolitanism, as well as Hart (2006), who also sees the "barriers of cultural otherness" as no longer an issue, but rather "how the massive diversity of global cultural potential is locally

synthesised and imaginatively rounded out within world-wide networks of social interconnectedness" (Wardle 2000: 200). This, Hart (2006) claims is due to the fact that "the new universal must grant that it can only be realised through those particulars". [1] These particulars refer to the social experience at the local levels, whereby individuals much "extend [themselves] to grasp what kind of world society [they] live in" (Hart 2006).

[1] Hart, Keith 2006. Humanity between National and World Society. In Memory Bank Online.Taken from: http://www.thememorybank.co.uk/2006/03/13/humanity-between-national-and-world-society/.

Chapter 1
Approaching Bush Rope Village

Leaving clouds of red earth behind us as it veils the past, while entering into a present that fills the senses: this is the experience of the Wapichannao world as one approaches Bush Rope Village.

I

The red soil marks one's entrance into the Rupununi Savannahs, located in the south-western region of Guyana. The Rupununi is divided into north and south by the Kanuku Mountains (also known as Blue Mountains) (See Map 1), which stretch 100 kilometres from east to west, and 50 kilometres from north to south (Ali 2006: 165). This area has drawn environmentalists and conservationists alike, as it harbours approximately 80% of all the mammals in Guyana. With emergent threats to their biodiversity and pressures on resources due to mining activities, this region is now considered to be an area of priority for conservation projects. Organisations such as Conservation International Guyana, Iwokrama, and government bodies have stepped in to "conserve" the region. These ventures have extended from the Northern part of the region, with community based artisanal collectives, such as Nappi Balata Artisans[2] and the Rupununi Weavers[3], providing "direct economic benefit to the region" (Ali 2006: 167).

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[2] Balata is a latex collected from a tree, which is used in craft-making endeavours

[3] Rupununi Weavers is a non-governmental organisation established in 1991 as an incentive for generating income for the Amerindians of the Rupununi. They specialise in traditional Wapichannao cotton hammocks.

Apart from its environmental significance, the region is infamous, historically, for the *Rupununi Uprising*, which occurred on the 2nd January 1969, when ranchers, mainly from the Hart and Melville[4] families, attacked the police station and administrative centre in Lethem.

Today, the landscape of the Rupununi is characterised by the sparse caimbe trees, termite mounds and ïté swamps. The savannahs are usually prone to flooding during the May-August rainy seasons, with the other months making up a long dry season. It is during the rainy period that the Rupununi River, which runs north to south, connects to the Takatu River, which drains into the Essequibo River and becomes part of the Amazon River watershed.

Dominating the southern most part of the Rupununi are the people commonly known as the Wapishana (or Wapixana in Brazil). However, the name that they use for themselves is Wapichannao, which will be employed throughout this dissertation. The name is a contraction of the original word *wakadap-sannao*, which means 'people who came from the west".[5] The Wapichannao share the Rupununi Savannahs with the Cariban-speaking Makushi who reside to the north and central regions of the Kanuku Mountains (See Map 1). The Wapichannao may also be found at the bordering areas of Brazil. In total, there are approximately 7,500 Wapichannao dispersed between Brazil and Guyana, with 6000 of the population residing in Guyana.[6]

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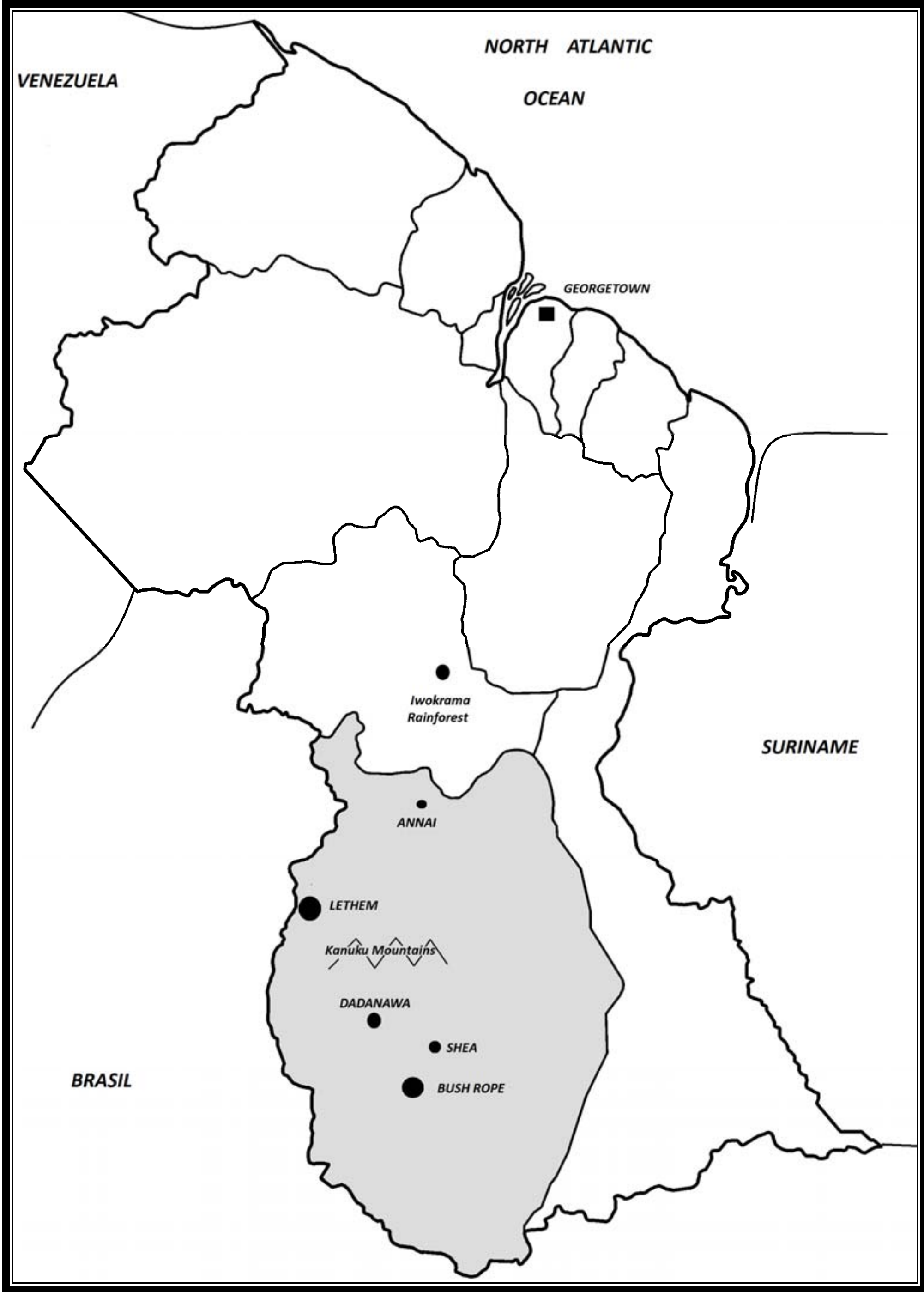
[4] The Harts and Melvilles are of Scottish and Amerindian ancestry and had developed their power through cattle ranching. One famous Melville is Pauline Melville, author of *The Ventriloquist's Tale*. London, Bloomsbury, 1997.

[5] Colette Melville—a Wapichan who lives in Lethem—published a Wapichan-English dictionary for the Wapichan people, which was written in simple English.

[6] Taken From: Ethnologue: <http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=GY>



Map 1: Showing Distribution of Key Amerindian Villages in the Rupununi.

From Achuwib village in the south to Dadanawa Ranch on the banks of the Rupununi River, the Wapichannao consider themselves to be a 'hybrid', having descended from intermarriage with a number of different Amerindian groups who, in the past, lived in the region. This is manifested when referring to their history, where many Wapichannao reference previous groups—such as the Atorais, and Trio—who were believed to have lived in the region until assimilation with other groups, migration, and wars diminished their presence. The Wapichannao are also always keen to mention the non-Amerindian people who once occupied the region, especially the Scottish who left subtle marks within the area during the colonial period.

Within their own understanding of authenticity, they see themselves as not being the "real" Wapichannao people—meaning that they are not like their ancestors. Instead, each collection[7] of Wapichannao tends to index other collectives as "real" Wapichannao stock. However, it seems that the village in which I conducted my fieldwork was considered to be too modernised at both institutional and cultural levels, by most villages. Hence, this made Wapichan perceptions of 'sameness' and 'differences' difficult to represent.

The Wapichannao do not divide themselves into 'racial' subgroups, but rather identify each other vis-à-vis the 15 villages to which they belong (See Appendix 1). Associating a Wapichan with a village is to identify a particular way of "doing," specific to that village;

[7] By collection I am referring to a body of Wapichannao situated together. I do not wish to use the term 'group', as it suggest too much of a spatio-social homogeneity and distinctiveness. The term collection or collective, reinforces that I do not see the Wapichannao as peoples who differ drastically from each other as a result of their proximity to each other and to Other groups (with the exception of Bush Rope, as it was considered to be more modern).

such as their ability to make farine[8] or kari[9]. These differences between them are not plausible enough for them to divide themselves in subgroups, as they all consider themselves equals on the grounds that they share the same language, ancestry, and perceptions (whether it is regarding politics or farming practices). This may, in part, be attributed to the influence of the Deep South Regional Toshaos Council, which is led by all the village leaders within the Wapichannao Deep South district. Furthermore, they do not consider themselves very different to the Wapichannao in Brazil. However, they do consider the Brasilian Wapichannao to be "more real" Wapichannao, as we have seen.

Hence, unlike the traditional ethnographies which dot Amazonia, the Wapichannao of Guyana challenge concepts of how indigenous peoples may be understood, and, henceforth, documented within the region. Typical of the classical ethnographies of Amerindians are strong claims to homogeneity with little room for the heterogeneity, which accompanies any society with a colonial past. As a result, Amerindian perspectives are seen as intrinsic to ancestral teachings which are, in turn, understood as organically Amerindian. Amazonianists, such as Viveiros de Castro and Descola (amongst others), argue that Amerindian peoples do not accept that there is unity in nature and multiplicity of cultures. Instead, they [the Arawete for Viveiros de Castro and the Jivaros Achuar in the case of Descola] perceive a world with unity of culture and multiplicity of natures (cf. Viveiros de Castro 1992, 1998, 2004). It is difficult to bring this sharply distinguished Amerindian ontology, with its "naturalistic prejudice" (Descola

[8] Awarwanau was known for having the best farine, which is a cassava-made byproduct used for everyday consumption.
[9] Kari is the equivalent to manioc beer, which has been placed as the most important drink within Amazonian societies. The best is considered to come from Mururanau

1992), into conjunction with what we know about Wapichannao engagement into the Guyanese Creole nation-state (See Chapter 7).

The Wapichan language is linguistically derived from the Rio Branco language group. Although the Wapichannao belong to the North Amazonian sub-family of Arawakan people, they do not belong to the Arawakan language group, like the Lokono Arawaks who reside on the coastal plains of Guyana. The Wapichan language has borrowed English and Portuguese words to supplement the gaps suffered from the introduction of *farrin*[10] items. The Wapichannao from Guyana have adopted more English words, in contrast to those living in Brazil, who adopted Portuguese vocabulary. However, the language consists of minor regional variations in vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Until the introduction of formal education all the way through the region—solely via missionaries—Wapichan was spoken throughout. However, the use of Wapichan has declined due to a variety of factors, such as intergroup marriage, age, and proximity to large towns, amongst others. This decline may be attributed also to the fact that formal education is predominantly conducted in English.

In an effort to revive the language, several projects have been underway. One such project was the "Wapishana Language Project" conducted by the Summer Institute of Linguistics International (SIL) along with the *Wapichan Wadauniinao Ati'o* (WWA) which means "Wapichan for our descendants". The project aimed to promote the language in a written form, so as to preserve it as a living language. As a result, a dictionary was produced. The project was also geared to teach local villagers how to read and write in

[10] Farrin is their pronunciation of the word 'foreign'. It is a significant ideological marker as will be seen throughout this dissertation.

Wapichan, as well as how to teach their own language. Consequently, *Wapichan Paradan* tutors were dispersed throughout the region. However, despite SIL's efforts, most Wapichannao have not learnt how to read or write in Wapichan.

At present there have been two Wapichan dictionaries published, which are still 'works-in-progress'. The first being the SIL dictionary, which reaches out to both Wapichannao and non-Wapichannao by using international linguistic mechanisms which function to describe and analyse difficult sounds that make up the Wapichan language. The second is that of Colette Melville—a Wapichan woman from the village of Potaruna—who stated that "this dictionary is for the Amerindians, who can't read the international grammar styles[11] in the [SIL] dictionary"[12]. Her dictionary is, therefore, a response to other Wapichan dictionaries, which she sees as

> …compiled by people who are not native speakers. I sometimes detect errors in these works because the grammatical structure and syntax of Wapichan differs in some respects from English and is not easily comparable. Nor have these people always been interested in maintaining the original Wapichan beliefs and ancient understandings…Some people might disagree with the way I have chosen to speak certain words. Our language is passed down by word of mouth and so spelling is not yet standardised (Melville 2004a).

She notes the differences in vocabulary amongst Wapichannao across the villages. One such example is that of the Wapichan word for 'plait' or 'braid', which, in the village of Potaruna, is *tabaraotan/tabarawatan*, as opposed to *tina-kan* as is said in Sand Creek.

The Wapichannao use their language internally, and rarely employ it with outsiders, even when an outsider prompts them to speak it. The elders are amongst the majority of users of the language, as they largely converse in Wapichan, whereas young adults and children speak mainly in English. With formal education being in English, the

[11] She refers to the International Phonetic Alphabet.
[12] Aunty Colette—as I called her—told me this when I first me her in Lethem.

younger generations tend to place Wapichan as their second language rather than their first. Lacking a formal education (in English or Wapichan), the elders consider Wapichan to be their primary language. Hence, the balance of English and Wapichan usage showed the type of education an individual had in the village. Those who speak English and Wapichan fluently are considered to be the most knowledgeable Wapichannao in the village, as these individuals can communicate with foreigners and Wapichannao alike. Young adults in the village who were formally educated—especially those who were sent to Lethem or Georgetown—communicated mostly in English, and were, however, considered to be less proficient in their ancestral knowledge. This, of course, is the opposite for the elders, who, even if educated, are more knowledgeable in their ancestral concepts.

Colonial Encounters Introduced

Interactions between outsiders and the Wapichannao have been recurrent since colonial period, when colonists came to depend on indigenous peoples for labour and socio-economical exchange. This has already been noted with regard to their present-day dependence on commodities (cf. Chapter 3), as well as in more subtle influences, such as stories—e.g. The Wide Mouth Frog—which may have otherwise gone unnoticed. I make reference to this story, as it symbolises the embodiment of the colonial past into the Wapichannao present. When I first heard the story I was led to believe that it was a Wapichannao story, written in Wapichan and given to students to

practice their Wapichan, as well as to preserve such tales. However, earlier this year a few friends and I took a trip to Oban, on the west coast of Scotland, when I spotted a sign marked "The Wide-Mouthed Frog." I asked the Scottish caretaker of the guesthouse where we were staying about the significance of the Wide-Mouthed Frog. She related the very same story to me about a wide-mouthed frog who asked each animal she met what they fed their young, until she met a crocodile who said "I feed my children wide-mouthed frogs. The caretaker told me: "My grandfather used to tell me that story."

I begin this section with this example, as the colonial past has such a great influence on Wapichannao history and their 'identity'. The Wapichannao are believed to have first been encountered by Dutch traders, in 1783, who were travelling along the Essequibo River towards the Rupununi (Farabee 1918). The Wapichannao were noted to have been situated throughout the Brasilian savannahs at this time. They were not considered to have resided in the South Rupununi until the early 1800s (some presume around 1810) (Edwards & Gibson 1979: 167). Hills (n.d.) also approximates the time of Wapichannao migration to the South Rupununi region to be around the end of the 18th century:

> It seems highly probable that the Wapishanas were in fact a smaller part of a large group of Arawak speaking Indians who migrated northwards from the Rio Negro, up the Rio Branco, finally moving across what is now a political boundary into the southern savannahs toward the end of the 18th century (Edwards & Gibson 1979: 167).

Other explorations in the region were led by Sir Robert Schomburgk who, in 1835, noted several Wapichannao settlements along the eastern frontier of the Essequibo River and in the Rio Branco region.

> The Indians who are settled here, and receive instruction in religion and the English language, consist of Macusis, Wapisianas, Caribs, intermixed with some Necanicarus, who have come from the Rio Branco.[13]

During this time, the Wapichannao shared the Savannahs with the Makushi, who had been driven further north of Wapichan settlements by the former. Also, inhabiting the region were the Atorais to the south and the Parauianas to their west (Edwards & Gibson 1979: 167). However, according to Farabee (1918: 13), the Atorais and the Parauianas were subsequently displaced by the Wapichannao due to intertribal warfare and the growing number of Wapichannao who intermarried with them, giving the latter control of the entire South Rupununi region. The historical presence of the Wapichannao and the Amerindians in general, are clarified in Chapter 7, in relation to their importance within the development of Creole society. Rather, here I will focus on their present-day, especially in regards to the Amerindian Act 1976, which not only stipulated the rights Amerindians had within everyday society, but the rights they had to their ancestral lands.

Land Rights

Probably, the most significant grounds for a shared Wapichannao sense of belonging is the land they collectively own. In a recent study (April 2006)—carried out by members of a research team headed by the Amerindian People's Association—entitled "Customary Use of Biological Resources and Related Traditional Practices within

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[13] Reports and Letters of Sir Robert Hermann Schomburgk with reference to his Surveys of the Boundaries of British Guiana.No. 7: Report of Mr. Schomburgk to Governor Light. Pirara, February 24th 1842. Taken From: http://www.guyana.org/suriname/report7.html

Wapichan Territory in Guyana"[14] the very importance of land was emphasised. This research documents the use of biological resources which:

> …can be partly viewed as adaptation of custom in response to economic, cultural and institutional change introduced since colonial times… [which] shows that Wapichan communities in Guyana customarily use the land for farming and use a wide variety of uncultivated plants and wild animals for food, craft, construction, medicines, and cultural activities (David, et al 2006: 3).

As will be later explored in Chapter 2, land encompasses much of the Amerindian customs—such as hunting, farming, and fishing—which intrinsically define them as a people. Hence, the Wapichan land and its resources, which are shared collectively amongst Wapichannao and those who are considered part of the community, creates a shared sense of belonging. However, there is some conflict within land usage and occupancy as new state-designated demarcations of ancestral lands, counter the Wapichannao's own knowledge of what is their land.

Although the Crown Land Ordinances of 1887 and 1903 stipulated the rights Amerindians had to their lands, lack of commitment by colonial powers to these treaties, priorities to do with indentured labour, and the move towards political independence, diverted the colonial power's attention to see these rights through to their fullest potential. However, on May 26 1966—Guyana's Independence from British rule—the government stipulated that

> …the Amerindians be granted legal ownership or rights of occupancy over areas and reservations or parts thereof where any tribe or community of Amerindians is now ordinarily resident or settled and other legal rights, such as rights of passage, in respect of any other lands where they now by tradition or custom *de facto* enjoy freedoms and permissions corresponding to rights of that nature. In this context it is

[14] This project was coordinated by Kirt James, in conjunction with the Amerindian Peoples Association, and conducted by 8 various Wapichan representatives from the South Rupununi over a period of 4 months.

> intended that legal ownership shall comprise all rights normally attaching to such ownership.[15]

As a result, the Amerindian Lands Commission (ALC) emerged as part of the government body whose sole purpose was to determine which areas may be considered Amerindian territory, as well as to "submit recommendations regarding the rights of tenure to be given to Amerindian communities and the nature of any such rights to be conferred"[16] (James 2003: 2)[17]. Although, in a 1969 Report, they noted that the Amerindians claimed 43,000 square miles of Guyana, they only received 24, 000 square miles, with 128 communities receiving freehold titles. This was due to the ALC's beliefs that the amount first requested was "excessive and beyond the ability of residents to develop and administer"[18] (2003: 2).

Following this, the Amerindian Act 1976 replaced the Amerindian Ordinance 1951, by which the ALC had previously been governed. This was the first attempt towards implementing those recommendations of the 1969 Report. However, only 62 communities occupying a total of 4,500 square miles were given titles initially. It was not until 1991 that ten other communities in the Upper Mazaruni mining district were given land titles. In 2003, it was further noted that another three communities were given land titles to a portion of their ancestral land, leaving another 45 communities unrecognised (James 2003: 2-3).

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[15] *Report of the British Guiana Independence Conference* (1965) Annex C, paragraph 1.

[16] *Amerindian Lands Commission Ordinance 1966*; this Ordinance was re-enacted as the *Amerindian Lands Commission Act* Chapter 59:03. An electronic version of this paper may be found at the following website: http://www.cpsu.org.uk/downloads/Land_Rights_Guyana.pdf

[17] James, Tony 2003. Indigenous Land Rights in Guyana: Past, Present and Future. Online Source Taken From < http://www.cpsu.org.uk/downloads/Land_Rights_Guyana.pdf>

[18] *Report of the Amerindian Lands Commission* (1969): para 6, p. 77

As previously mentioned, the Amerindian Act 1976 covers those laws pertaining to Amerindians. It stipulates their land rights, as well as the powers of the Captains—i.e. the Leaders of the villages—the sale of alcohol, as well as who the state identifies as 'Amerindian,' amongst other things. In 1993 this Act was revised by the Guyana Parliament, as pressures from local and global bodies noticed the need to update the Act. However, NGOs, such as the Amerindian People's Association (APA), deem the updated version as out of sync with those beliefs and ancestral rights of the Amerindians.

II

The Approach

Approaching Bush Rope the darkness has already clouded our vision of the village's natural and social splendour. As our proximity to its heart nears, little flecks of light illumine different parts of the village.

The village in which I conducted my research has been given the pseudonym Bush Rope, which belongs to a group of six villages, as well as smaller satellite villages, which, as a collective, form the Deep South District of the Rupununi. These villages, from furthest north to south, are: Shea, Maruranau, Awarwaunau, Bush Rope, Kuraudanawa, and Achiwuib. There are no established roads leading from the nearest urban town, Lethem, which is situated on the border to Brazil. Instead there are trails, which limit travellers during the rainy seasons.

Bush Rope Village is 60 miles from Lethem and can be reached within six hours via pickup[19] from Lethem, during dry season, and anywhere between an eight hour and a few days drive during rainy season. To get to the village one must cross the Rupununi River, which becomes impassable during the height of rainy season, without the use of boats and the makeshift pontoon (barrels and wooden planks). Very infrequently do vehicles use this pontoon; rather transportation is arranged on either side of the river or people wait at the crossing for any vehicle coming through. It is typical to see someone on a bicycle making this journey, along with pickups, sand trucks, motorcycles and tractors. During my time in the Rupununi, the only cars I saw were the ones in Lethem,

[19] There are many modes of transportation throughout the Rupununi. Many times pickups, tractors and Bedford trucks which pass through the region will pick up people wanting to go in either direction. Sometimes for a fee, but in many cases these rides are free (usually with the Bedford trucks and tractors).

and those are either driven by Brazilians who make their way to Lethem to buy knock-off Nike shoes[20], or by Guyanese who, mostly, buy their vehicles in Brazil.[21]

With a population of approximately 1200 people, the community of Bush Rope Village is made up of mostly people who identify themselves as belonging to the Wapichannao 'nation'.[22] However, this does not account for the frequent visitors to the village.

The Wapichannao are considered to be very much westernised by other Amerindian groups, and I found it especially interesting that the Wapichannao in Bush Rope are seen by surrounding communities as one of the most modernised and Westernised of all the Wapichannao in the region. To others, especially those who are more isolated, the Bush Rope Wapichannao are the means for learning about the wider Guyanese society. Mentore (2005) notes the distinction the WaiWais of the southern region of Konashen made between them and the Wapichannao of the savannahs. He specifically notes the attention one Wapichannao woman received within the village amongst the WaiWai men.

> T-tawore spoke Wapishana and Guyanese Creole English. As in the case of most Wapishana young women, while attending a state-administered hinterland school she had felt and experienced the weak effects of precarious modernity. Though not extreme when compared to schooling in the urban and even rural areas of Guyana, this exposure was, nonetheless, sufficient for transforming her into a "modern" citizen and, in the eyes of many young WaiWai men, was regarded as somewhat appealing. A Wapishana wife meant easier access to things Guyanese. A Wapishana wife would know about the strange foods of Creole culture and perhaps even know how to prepare and cook such dishes. She might even know how to decipher the accentuated Creole ways and behaving…Even without such knowledge, however, a Wapishana wife brought an understanding of

[20] I had always wondered why Brasilians would come across and go to this one tiny shop, until my friend Jeremy explained that they were buying the knock-off Nike trainers from Surinam, which they thought were real.

[21] These cars cannot be taken off road, so people tend to buy pickups which can make their way through the treacherous trails all year round.

[22] The word 'nation' has been replaces with 'tribe' by the government, as they see this new term less derogative and more identifiable with the different Amerindian groups in the country. (Dr. Fox's definition)

> savanna[h] life—a long time talked about but little experienced world for most young WaiWai (Mentore 2005: 32).

This perception of Wapichannao is close to that of the people themselves, especially in regards to their transformation into "modern" citizens. This even resonates in the types of foods the Wapichannao of Bush Rope eat. The popular dishes are of Creole nature and even some traditional dishes are given a Western/Creole flare. For example, farine[23] is sometimes soaked until relieved of its hard grainy form and then fried in oil, spring onions, onions, garlic and maggie cubes. However, this is done on occasion, as farine is used in its original form as previously mentioned. Also, general afternoon meals include curry and rice, stew, chowmein, and "English" pepperpot[24], with evening meals consisting of porridge, bakes and tea. Sometimes some fried fish or a light stew is served with bakes—dough which is fried.

It was March 2006 when I first visited Bush Rope. I travelled from Georgetown to Bush Rope via a mini-bus, followed by a 4x4 pickup, with Johnny—the driver—and Mr.

[23] Farine is also known as farinha in Brasil. A cassava made grain, that is parched into its current form. Schomburgk also noted the dependence on farine during his travels of along the Essequibo river: "I had to surmount various difficulties to effect our departure from Pirara; one of the greatest consisted, however, in procuring such a number of Indians to accompany us as paddlers and carriers as were of paramount necessity, there being a report prevailing that the smallpox raged among the Wapisiana Indians, which tribe inhabit the country we had to traverse in our journey to the Upper Essequibo. Equally difficult was it to procure the necessary provisions for our journey; great scarcity prevailed around Pirara, and I was ultimately obliged to send Mr. Fryer to Fort San Joaquim to purchase ten baskets of farinha de mandioca for the use of the Expedition" (*No. 14: Report of Mr. Schomburgk to Governor Light. Wapisiana Village, Watu Ticaba, May 18, 1843*).

[24] English or Guyanese Pepperpot is a variation to an indigenous stew called *damoridu*. However, it is considered to be a traditional Amerindian dish amongst Guyanese. Amongst non-indigenous Guyanese, it is traditionally served at Christmas and other special events and is considered to be one of Guyana's national dishes. It is typically a "stewed meat dish, strongly flavoured with cinnamon, hot peppers, and Cassareep - a special sauce made from the Cassava root. Beef, mutton, and pork are the most popular meats used, though some have been known to use chicken. Pepperpot is popularly served with dense bread and butter, though it is equally as good with rice or roti.Versions of the dish are also served in several other countries in the Caribbean, including Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada and St. Vincent." (Taken from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guyana_Pepperpot)

Houston (both of whom were of Afro-Guyanese origin, both resided with their families in Bush Rope). I met them through Duane, one of my father's clients, who is not only the stepson to Mr. Houston, but who also suggested that I conduct my fieldwork in Bush Rope. Later on, I came to stay with Duane's aunt—Lizzie Andre—who is his mother's sister.

I had previously contacted the toshao at the time—Chief—prior to my arrival, so he had arranged for me to stay at the government owned guesthouse in Bush Rope, where I was met by the caretaker, who I came to know as Aunty Pet. I was immediately taken aback upon seeing the guesthouse. It is a concrete building with zinc roofing, and is located adjacent to the main government buildings in the community; not the traditional dwelling I was expecting. The night I arrived I was led to the Chief's compound[25], commonly referred to as Burning Hills.[26] This consisted of: a main house, a shop, a building of about half the size of the main house that was used as the kitchen and catering area, two sheds for the tractor and for an outdoor oven, a conical shaped dwelling, called a *benab,*[27] adorned with fairy lights, and a larger wooden two storey building which is used as the internet café, as well as a dwelling area, which is soon to be used as a guesthouse and catering facility. The main house, kitchen, and shop are made in traditional Wapichan style, with roofs thatched from the leaves of the *ïté* palm. These buildings, with the exception of the benab, are rectangular in shape and made of

[25] The term compound denotes the area one's property encompasses. This is not a fenced off area, but a perceived space which belongs to the household.
[26] Burning Hills is the name from which Chief's compound is located. It is also the name given to the shop located there. Due to a previous fire on this low sloping hill, this area was hence referred to as Burning Hills.
[27] An Arawak word used to refer to an conical living structure

clay, adobe and wattle, with earthen floors. The main doors to the house and the shop faced the village centre, which allowed for those on the hill to see who was approaching. Apart from these buildings, Burning Hills also has a generator room, which provides electricity for the freezers containing the drinks and produce, as well as for the internet café, which was then operating from 7:00-8:30pm most nights.

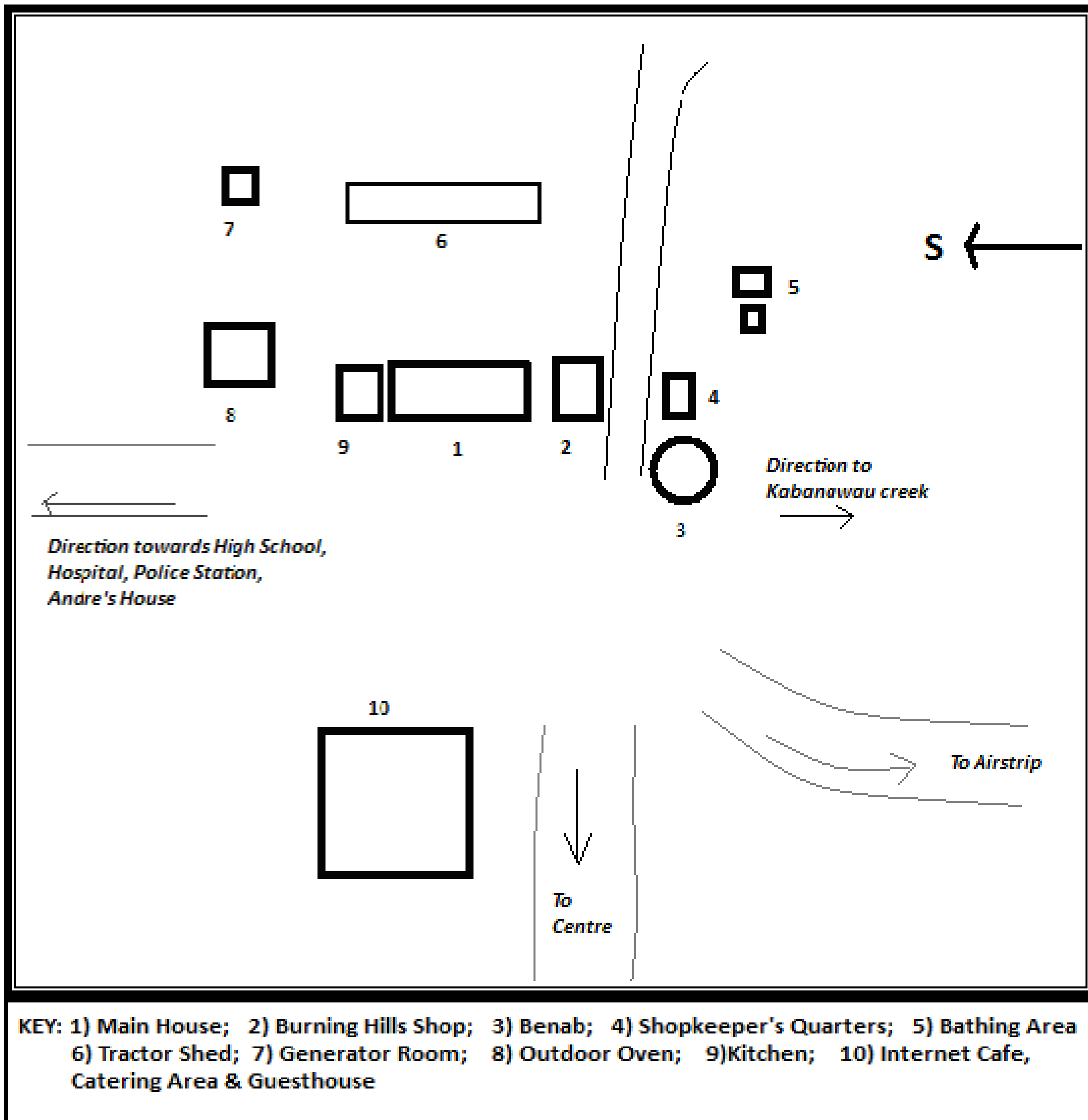
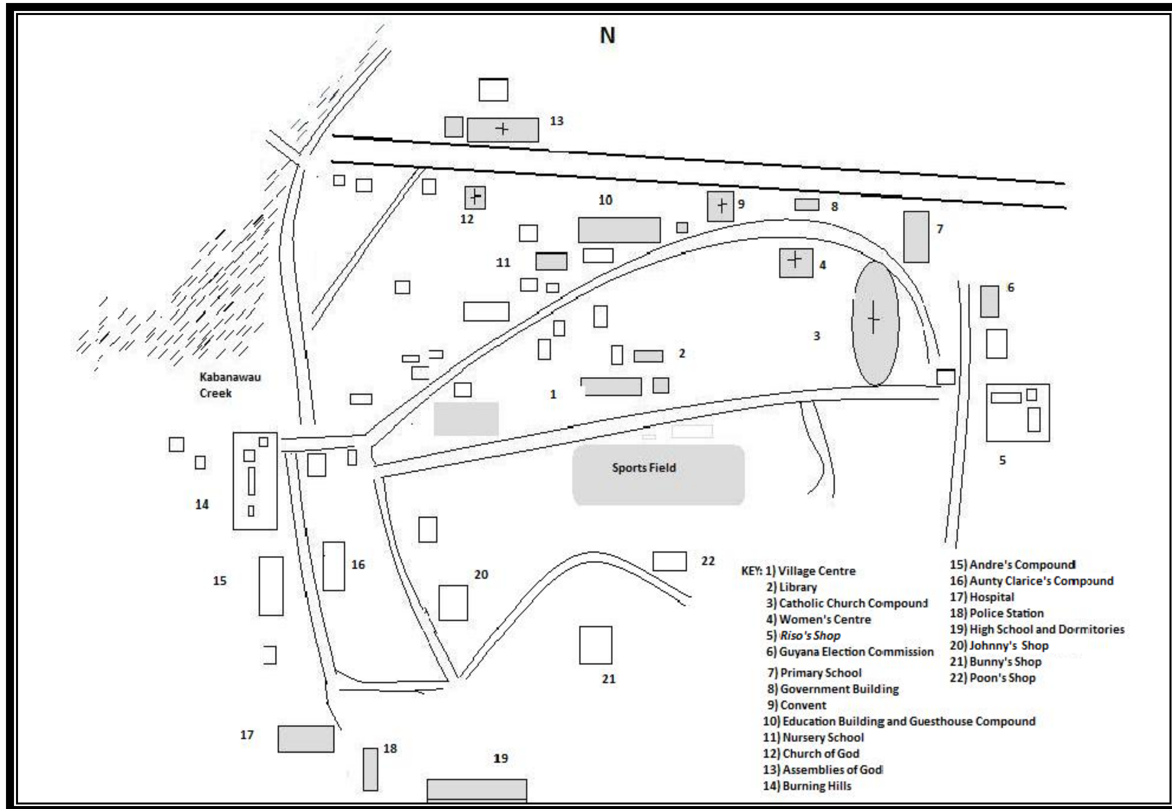


Figure 2: Showing Layout of Chief's Compound

Inside the main house, fluffy sofas, brought over from Georgetown, made the spacious two bedroom house cosy and welcoming. Inside the bedrooms are beds, which were built by local craftsmen, with mattresses brought over from Brazil and Georgetown. To counter the dismal mud tones of the walls, Chief has decorated them with indigenous *objets d'art* from all over the world. He explained to me that he was collecting indigenous crafts to decorate his soon-to-be completed home—the two storey wooden building (See Figure 2: no. 10)—which was still in the process of refurbishment. He described how on cool nights he liked to sleep in his cotton hammock on the verandah upstairs, while his wife slept in the main house, with his youngest son Anton, Anton's wife—Natzy—and their two children Antonio and Kandao.

However, let this not be a reflection of an archetypal Bush Rope dwelling. The Chief's family belong to one of the wealthier families in the village, reflected in the possession of technology and infrastructure which are not prevalent within most households. I did not stay with Chief during my fieldwork in Bush Rope, but as this was the first compound I was able to see in Bush Rope, this was my first impression of what I would encounter.

Layout



Map 2: Showing Southern Side of Bush Rope

To get into Bush Rope, visitors travel via bicycle, truck, jeep, or aircraft. Planes fly in regularly, especially during the regional and national elections, when politicians enter the village to campaign and to offer economic relief during the floods. However, the most frequent flights are provided by the RAMS (Remote Area Medics) plane, which picks up and returns patients from remote areas to better medical facilities. Even though the government hospital has a competent staff of nurses and medics, there are no local doctors present in the village, except for the sporadic and brief visits by Cuban and American medical staff.

Although it lacks geometric symmetry, Bush Rope can be structurally identified by the north-south division, created by an airstrip. This division is not only a physical division, but—as will be explored to in the following chapters—also a representation of a social division. The division may be expressed as 'traditional' versus 'modern' as the southern side contains the government buildings, as well as the two major shops—i.e. Riso's and Burning Hills—as well as the Catholic Church, which has the largest congregation in the village. One also finds the village centre on this side of the village.

The Village Centre is a *locus communis* of sorts, where community gatherings are mainly held. When referenced, the centre acts as the imaginative force that pulls people from all parts of the village to it. Most performances, activities, meetings, and other public events are held within this space, which comprises a meeting house, bleachers, a field for volleyball and staged shows, and another field for football, cricket and school sports activities. It is here that the President and other government officials are welcomed, and where representatives from organisations come to present their concepts to the community.

It is within this centre that everything involving this complexly woven group is played out at the public level. This is not to say that events are not held elsewhere, as there are numerous religious activities—fundraisers and concerts. These are held within their Churches' compounds. Also, other ceremonial activities, such as shamanic rites, are kept out of the public space.

The centre is found on a low plain, lower than the rest of the village, and can be seen from most points of the southern part of the village, and all activities from the village

can be heard throughout this section of the village, and the closely lined eastern houses. It is here that the village meets before heading off to do Monday village work, and it is here that the village 'feed-up' is held, where a village animal is killed to provide meat for the villagers who take part in the "village work" (See Chapter 3).

Further north-west of the centre are the Catholic Church, and the nursery and primary schools. To the west of the centre, one will find the education office, the guesthouse, and the convent. Burning Hills, the Andre household yard, the high school, police station, and hospital—built in the eighties with aid from the Dutch Government and RAMS—are all to the west of the centre. As a result, this side of the village is considered to be the more developed area, where modern technology and ideals are being communicated, as opposed to the northern side, which is seen as more traditional.

On this side, one would find the majority of churches (five out of seven), as well as several little shops with very limited supplies. It is here that people are considered to be more traditionalist, as I was constantly referred to people living on "the other side of the airstrip" when enquiring about myths and traditional methods.

Inside Bush Rope

Any opening to the inner-workings of the village should start with my introduction into the village and how people first perceived me.

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, the villagers had identified me as the Other, spreading rumours that "a Rastaman is living at Mrs. Lizzie." I was, hence,

labelled as an outsider, a stranger, who took the form of a rastaman. It was from this meeting that I decided to work in the shop, not only to learn the language, but also to build relations with the villagers, as they could not escape me when doing their weekly shopping. This occurred at the end of May, about three weeks into my fieldwork, when I decided to offer my services to Moses—the young shopkeeper at Burning Hills.

Walking into the shop, I was met with stares from the customers, who spoke amongst themselves in Wapichan. Although they have had much exposure to foreigners, including the Afro-Guyanese miners from the nearby Marudi Mountains, they still reacted differently to my presence. I could not understand what they were saying, except for *E talian o aye* when a baby started crying. I responded *Aonaa o talian õ aye* (She is not afraid of me), and they all started laughing, with a response of "Rasta woman" coming from one of the ladies.

Initially, people were reluctant to correspond with me in the shop. According to Moses "they are just not used to you." This not being "used to" was not related to who I was or how different I was from them; it was basically the lack of previous interaction and knowledge of my personhood, which will be addressed in the later chapters of this thesis.

When I moved to Bush Rope, I was placed with the Andre family, who live in a more emblematic (even though larger than Chief's) Wapichan compound.

The main house has two doors, and contains four rooms: the kitchen area with a gas hob, two bedrooms, and a living room. All of these are separated by wooden partitions,

which do not reach the ceiling. The house itself is made of clay and adobe and is thatched with the traditional ïté palms. The windows, doors and furnishing are wooden, with the exception of the hammocks slung from time-to-time in the living room. To the back of the house is an old corral which was once used to house cattle, as Mr. Andre was the main *vaquero*[28] for the village.

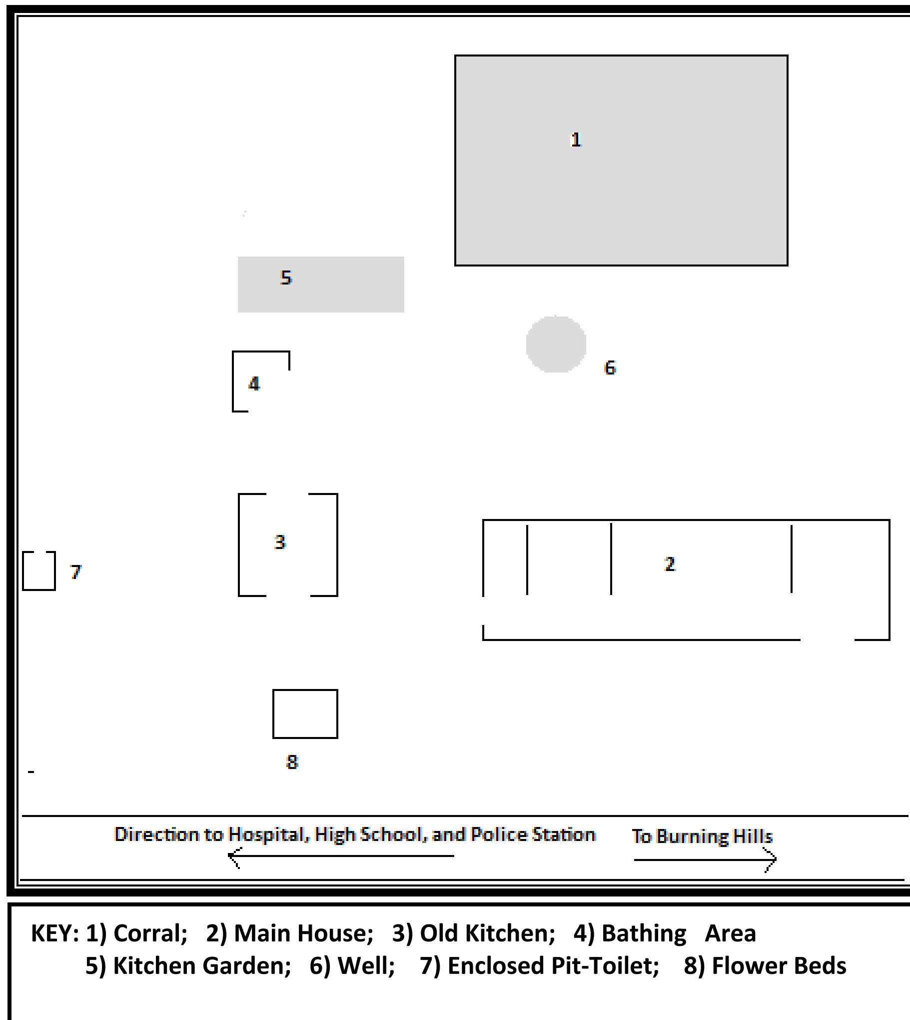


Figure 3: Showing Layout of Andre's Compound

[28] Vaquero is the Spanish equivalent for cowboy.

Their son, Billy, has now taken over the family business, and runs the corral from his house, which is directly behind the high school (See Map. 2). Now the old corral behind the Mrs. Lizzie's house is used as a Jimmy Crow (vulture) perch, where all the Jimmy Crows would gather. Also on the property are: a makeshift bathing area, a well, a latrine, a kitchen garden, and a detached kitchen area. This was used for a short period as a living area for Mrs. Claire—the great grandmother—and Aunty Lizzie—the grandmother and head of the household.

Included in the household is Kara, who was a thirty-three year old single mother of three children: Elle (12), Gerd (9), and Lenny (5). Kara, having three children from three different fathers, was not the only cause to this household being considered atypical within the community since there were four generations of women living in the house at the time, and the only males were the two boys. This was due the absence of Aunty Lizzie's husband, who works on a ranch in Boa Vista[29], in Brazil, making money to send as remittances to his family.

The migration of men is common in this region, as men leave to work mostly in Marudi—the main mining site in the region—Georgetown, and Brazil. This leaves women to provide for their family and organise the household. However, many women also leave the household to work as domestics from Marudi Mines to Trinidad, which also affects kinship dynamics: a topic I will address later in this chapter.

[29] Boa Vista is the capital of the state of Roraima in Brasil. It is located 641km from Lethem.

Aunty Lizzie had also acted as *toshao*[30]—the only female *toshao* in the region—for two years. Her father, Henry Winter (one of the main families in the village), was the "most respected *toshao* in the Rupununi"[31].

The Andres lived on the western part of the village, between Burning Hills and the hospital, police station, and secondary school. As Burning Hills is the main shop, visitors to the village stop there to get most of their rations and supplies. Miners, especially, are the main visitors to the village. They come to Bush Rope to sell their gold and to get supplies such as oil, margarine, flour, rice, sugar, maggi cubes and tomato paste, among other things from the shops.

When I arrived at the Andre's house, I was put in Aunty Lizzie's room, where I was given a desk and a little armchair. I had brought a hammock, but, contrary to my expectations, was the only one to sleep in a hammock every night, as everyone else normally slept in beds. All of the hammocks were bought from the local shops, which brought them over from Brazil. As I had entered through the main entrance, the first thing I noticed was a large tapestry with an interpreted image of Jesus, which was nailed to the wall separating the living room from Kara and her children's bedroom. As I walked into my newly assigned room, more religious icons adorned the walls of the house.

Across the road lived Aunty Lizzie's sister, Aunty Clarice, who is the headmistress of the primary school and whose husband is the District Education Officer.

Living in a household with just women proved not only challenging, but a reality that many Bush Rope households face at different stages. For one, the ideal of

[30] Toshao is the Wapichan word for Village leader or Captain, as is found in the Amerindian Act 1976

[31] Conversation with Chief before taking me to the Andres' house.

separation/distribution of labour based on gender cannot be implemented. Therefore, what is considered a 'man's work' is either taken up by the women or completely eradicated from the everydayness of the home, depending on need. In such a case, a woman might depend on a male relative or on another male from within the village. For example, hunting is not practised in the Andre household, and even though young boys around Gerd's age are expected to go hunting with a male family member—usually fathers, uncles, grandfathers, etc—this was not the case for Gerd whilst I was in the village. Instead he did some fishing, and on occasion went exploring with his friends. On one occasion he returned home with an iguana. However, most young boys are given slingshots, which are either store bought or handmade with the use of old rubber and a piece of wood, to practice their aim. Children as young as 5 years possessed these weapons. Other male activities, such as rounding up the bullocks from the Savannahs are left to the women, more specifically Aunty Lizzie, and then Kara who took over when Aunty Lizzie had to leave for Brazil to visit her husband.

MALE	FEMALE	CHILDREN
Hunting Fishing Firewood Heavy construction Rearing Cattle (usually Bullocks)	Washing Cooking Household Shopping Gardening Tending to chickens Preparing Kari	Weeding and Tidying the yard Washing Dishes Helping female with some household chores.

Table 1: Showing Distribution of Labour within the household

Bush Rope dress is reasonably modern, with the men wearing trousers and shirts or t-shirts, and the women in skirts that reach their knees or mid-calf and t-shirts or handmade blouses and dresses. Ready-made clothes and fabric are bought in Brazil and

Georgetown, with very little variation. Everyone, from the youngest children to the oldest elder, wear Havaianas flip-flops as everyday footwear, regardless of whether it is rainy or dry season. It is here that I first noticed how Western influences have become incorporated into the fabric of Wapichannao personhood.

Wapichan men are not the epitome of muscularity, but are stocky and firm due to their diet. The women vary from slim to slightly plump. They grow their hair longs as it is considered to be attractive. There is no body-paint incorporated into everyday dress, rather it is used on special occasions which celebrate Amerindian culture. On such occasions, the use of *powizi*—the red dye from annatto seeds (*Bixa orellana*)—is seen. The patterns used during these occasions are taken from the 'Bush Rope Rock' which holds ancient petroglyphs from the people who previously lived there.

To a great extent, one could argue that Bush Rope is a Christian community. This is not to say that everyone goes to church, but most people are associated with a church and deploy the rhetoric of the Bible. During my stay in Bush Rope, I came across two people who claimed that they were not religious.

When enquiring about the extent religion plays within the village, most people responded that religion and being affiliated with a religious sect are important. As a result, numerous congregations have settled in Bush Rope. When I asked Chief if he knew how many churches there were in the village he responded:

> There are about 7 churches out here off record, causing more confusion than ever: Catholic, Assemblies of God, Seventh Day Adventists, Christian Brethren, World Wide church of God, Christian Congregation (he was not sure if this is the correct name) then

> there is another part of World Wide but do not know what name it carries and Church of Christ.[32]

Aunty Lizzie and her sisters, Clarice, Leona and Kim are very much involved with the Catholic Church. Aunty Lizzie, the head of my household, rarely missed a service or event at the Catholic Church, from which she would use the teachings of the Bible as a rubric by which her household should perform their day to day lives. Such practices involve the use of family prayers—a process which would take anywhere from 5-30 minutes—in the mornings and the evenings, and at every meal, as well as the use of quotes and the referencing of the Bible whenever a child behaved badly, or something went wrong.

Whilst I was in Bush Rope the arrival and departure of missionaries were frequent. Some were visiting on behalf of the established congregations, which excited those members who were already part of the assembly, but also people from other congregations who had not yet been established in the village. When missionaries from established congregations visited the village, Church members would invite friends from other congregations to come and share in the religious experience. This was more a way to share the experience as opposed to any attempt at conversion, although this was never too far from some people's intentions. On many occasions Aunty Lizzie and Kara were invited to these events. I remember on a few occasions, Kara was invited to the Seventh Days Adventist services, which are held on Saturdays and would not conflict with her regular Sunday services at the Catholic Church. On the 19th November 2006, the Bishop Francis and three other guest priests came to bless the new Catholic Church building.

[32] Taken from a conversation via email 6th February 2008

There were more people than there was space to seat them, as people from other congregations—roughly a minimum of 300 people —came to be in the presence of the Bishop. This turnout was astounding, especially since everyone came to celebrate the resident priest—Father Britt's—70th year as a Jesuit. It seemed that there was a change in the energy and spirit of the village that morning, giving the community a new sense of excitement, as people flocked the compound of the church to be a part of the momentous occasion.

Other visitors came in the hope of establishing a new Church, with very little success. There was one group with whom I spoke about their mission in the Rupununi. It was on my return from Georgetown on August 5th that I met with two American men at the Takatu Hotel in Lethem. They were wearing camouflage hats marked: Amerindian Missions Guyana. Upon seeing this blatant display of religious purpose, I asked them what their intentions were in the Rupununi. Jerry—one of the American Missionaries—replied "we are going to evangelise the Amerindians."[33] They were going to spread the Evangelical word to the Amerindians, and were planning on setting up churches in the region. One group in particular, Church of God, brought a large projection screen and movies, in order to grab the attention of the less-exposed Amerindians. The community centre was packed with people from all parts of the village, who came out to see the film. However, when they left, they were only able to 'convert' a handful of people to join their ministry. The only people I knew who joined this group were Rudy George and

[33] Fieldnotes 5th August 2006

four other villagers, who would meet at Uncle Rudy's house, where he would give the sermons.

The Church, however, is not merely an institution for worship, but also the foreground for community togetherness, and sharing. I found it interesting that the Church—in most cases—is the only institution that promoted the teachings and practice of the Wapichan language. To do so, most of the services for the Catholic Church are conducted in Wapichan, as well as some of the hymns.

The *New Catholic Hymnal* has incorporated most of the Amerindian languages of Guyana into the services. Religious and secular competence has been stamped into the legitimization of the authentic self amongst the Wapichannao. This was an observation Mentore (2005: 34) made whilst living with the WaiWai. However, it was not with the WaiWai that this observation was made, but of the Wapichannao who resided in the village. This religious awareness, however, did not influence the political dynamics of the village.

The purpose of this chapter is to inevitably illustrate the connection between the landscape and the people. However, this connection drew me—the researcher—into those "what-I-see" factors, which I had to distinguish against those underlying meanings. Bush Rope, as the centre of "reality," where the "real" exists within the landscape of the everydayness. The "real" operates in varying degrees as to how one lives and practices these social functions, which create the basis of their conceptions of the "other" or "farrin". This is evident when they are taken outside of the local and

placed outside the centre, into the periphery of the Guyanese otherness. The following chapter takes us to the manore that highlights one end of the pole, which explains how people cope with these farrin elements through a traditionalist approach to contextualising who they are.

Chapter 2
Making a Living and Subsistence

In the previous chapter, a general layout and background to Bush Rope and the surrounding area have been given. Already we see divisions in the village, as well as snapshots of the social dynamics which we will encounter throughout this thesis. This chapter will also try to achieve this within the scope of the Wapichannao's ideas of 'living well'; an ontology which not only encompasses those things an individual may have, but also their ability to embrace the Wapichannao identity through those things they consume.

According to Sidney Mintz[34], to define a place or people is, inherently, to define what foods they eat. The Wapichannao landscape is divided into savannahs and forested (or bush) regions where farming is done. These two zones provide certain types of food at certain periods, making movements across the land symbolic of subsistence patterns.

Dokozuu tapanii Waunao	Grandfather protects us
Ko'okoo tapanii Waunao	Grandmother protects us
Dokozuu tapanii Waunao	Grandfather protects us
Ko'okoo tapanii Waunao	Grandmother protects us
Ko'okoo tapanii Waunao	Grandmother protects us
Kaikapa'a wuru'u wakaduzu	As well as our culture
Ko'okoo tomanii wariwunii	Grandmother makes us drink,
Suuzu idi, suuzua'a	Banana, Banana Wine
Ko'okoo tomanii wariwunii	Grandmother makes us drink,
Kaiwara idi, kaiwaraa	Sugarcane, Sugarcane juice

[34] Taken from the LACNET conference 2007, held at University of St. Andrews: http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/lacnet/conferences/identity07.html

Ko'okoo tomanii wariwunii	Grandmother makes us drink,
Sawarao idi, sawarao	Sawarao, Sawarao drink[35]
Ko'okoo tomanii wariwunii	Grandmother makes us drink,
Nan idi, nanuaa	Pineapple, Pineapple juice
Ko'okoo tomanii wariwunii	Grandmother makes us drink,
Kaikapa'a wakaduzu	As well as our culture

The Wapichannao song above speaks of the rituals and knowledge of traditional customs that are practiced and held by the elders (grandparents) of the village. When asked what the song represents, the lead singer of the Kabishaka Culture group—Aunt Mary—relays that this song points out how the elderly are fundamental to the preservation of Wapichannao *wakaduzu* (culture), and that it is with them, that traditional knowledge exists, and can therefore be passed on. The idea that the elders not only protect them, but also their culture, may stem from the Wapichannao's reality, which is constantly being redefined due to transnational forces. Yet, by making the traditional drinks—which are left to ferment into highly alcoholic, and once ceremonial—one may acknowledge the subject of sentiments towards their horticultural customs. The grandparents, by using the fruits they have farmed, will protect the Wapichan culture.

[35] Sawarao is a "fermented drink made from freshly baked cassava bread" (Melville 2004: 51)

I

Farming

Although Wapichannao subsistence has veered from solely the reliance on traditional husbandry, to a dependence on shop-bought items, and the incorporation of Creole food into the everyday diet, it still relies heavily on subsistence farming. Farming is still widely practiced amongst most families, and part of the weekly village work, which includes tending to the communal village farm, the reliance on foreign commodities is apparent. Nonetheless, the *zakapu*[36] (farm) is still an integral part of Wapichannao discourse, as it is from the zakapu that ancestral knowledge of Wapichannao survival, as a people, is galvanized.

For the Wapichannao *o'i* (farine), *badi* (bitter cassava bread), and *sararo/tasso* (dried salted meat) are staple foods. A shortage of these would cause an imbalance within the community, especially as the lack of *o'i* and *badi* would indicate the shortage of their single most important crop. Yet, not only do these shortages cause disruption to the fabric of community life, but a shortage of 'rations' brought from Georgetown, Lethem and Brazil add to these grievances.

As mentioned, *o'i* and *badi* are part of the Wapichan staple diet, as they are both made from their primary crop, cassava, which carries a variety of names depending on the form it is in. Two distinct types of cassava are distinguished: bitter and sweet cassava. However, each has a multiplicity of variations in usage and meaning, which were not

[36] *Zakapu* is used in reference to garden, field and farm, as it refers to an area of land that is used to provide for the household.

entirely disclosed to me (See Appendix 2 Documenting the various forms and terminologies used for cassava).

Bitter cassava (*kanuzu*) is poisonous as it contains cyanide, and requires a precise series of processes to rid the *kanuzu* of its toxins. This process involves thoroughly scraping off the skin of the cassava then washing it (which is sometimes left to soak between 3-4 days before making *o'i*), and is then followed by grating the cassava on a *chimaru* (cassava grater). After grating the cassava, the pulp is placed into a cylindrical woven basket known and used throughout Guyana by its Cariban name, *matapi*.[37] The *matapi* has loops at both ends, as it is hung from the ceiling on one end, and on the opposite end a long piece of wood is placed. The grated cassava is then placed into the *matapi* from the opening on the top, after which a woman is placed to sit on the piece of wood which forces the *matapi* to contract. In doing so, the poisonous juices are extracted into a bowl below. The juice or *kanuzuu* is then boiled for several hours until it is reduced to a thick black syrup, whereas the grated cassava is then sifted and used for either cassava bread or farine. It is bitter cassava that is important used to make *o'i*, *badi* and *kanuzuu* (casareep/cassava water), which are the three main foods used within everyday cooking (See Illustration 1).

Sweet cassava (*makashiza*) is used in simple cooking, but is not as widely used as bitter cassava. I ate sweet cassava a handful of times, and that was when there was little farine in the village due to the flooding of farmlands. During this period, a high school

[37] Matapii or *Niizo*, in Wapichan, is considered to be a representation of the anaconda; just as the anaconda contracts to crush the bones of its prey, so does the matapii as it extracts the poisonous juices from the grated cassava.

student had given me a bag of sweet cassava farine, as they were forced to improvise and digress from the typical bitter cassava farine. In addition to cassava, other important, but secondary, crops include mostly other root crops, as well as fruits. Some of these include maize, root crops such as yams, eddoes, plantains, sweet potatoes, as well as melons, peanuts, cotton, banana, pineapple, and annatto[38]. Also pointed out to me on a trip to the Andre farm, were the reeds used for arrow making.

Illustration 1: Showing Removal of poison from Bitter Cassava

[38] Annatto is grown both in the farm and within the household yard. It is referred to as powizi amongst the Wapichannao and is used to make body paint. Annatto is found throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, and derives from the achiote tree (Bixa orellana). (Taken from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annatto)

Cassava is an integral part of Wapichannao cosmology, with ancestral myths attached to how it was introduced within their culture. During an interview with Uncle Simon Marcelo, he disclosed the story of how cassava came to the Wapichannao.

> Before people did not know about cassava. It was yam and bananas to eat with fish and meat. One day a man went fishing in a pond and whilst fishing he saw a shadow in the water. So he threw his hook into the water where the shadow was. He saw a person's head and pulled the hook. When he raised the line it was an oyster.
> He took it home and left it. At night the oyster turned into a lady in his dreams. So she asked him to carry back from where she came. He never took the shell back until on day when his little brother saw him sleeping with the lady at night. He checked and saw the four feet. He blazed a fire and pushed his penis to the fire and fell. The oyster began to laugh like a human.
> Only at night could anyone see this lady but not during the day. And the big brother kept thinking was a dream. The small brother didn't know it was an oyster.
> While she was laughing the younger brother said "show me yourself!" It was a beautiful woman and he wanted to have her but she said 'no' because she would do no good. He still forced her to have sex but she had fish in her vagina, so it bit it off. He went away looking for another penis. He asked the animals but none of them wanted to help, until he met a monkey who gave him which is why the monkey's penis is like a nail.
> The lady stayed for awhile until she got fed up of eating meat and fish with yams and bananas. She said "Where I come from we eat cassava with meat and fish. Take me back!" And he did take her back. When they reached the pond she kept saying "Come dad, come and see me. It's your daughter". He came in the form of a person with thunder. She could only see him. She started telling him that she is tired of eating the things they ate on land. So he came out and with him came a red thing and he said to cut it fast. She told her husband to cut it fast.
> The younger brother was also there, and at the same time, the father ate him. The big brother cut the father's belly and got his brother out and this how we have the woodpecker. When he turned behind him he saw cassava sticks. She said "let us go and plant it."[39]

Wapichannao stories tell several tales, and in this one we not only understand how the cassava came to be, but also why the monkey's male reproductive organ is the way it is, and how the woodpecker came about. It is very interesting to note the pre-dating of yam and bananas to cassava, since yams and bananas were crops introduced to the Americas from Africa as a means to feed slaves. The transposition of African influences in Wapichannao myths is not uncommon, as other influences—such as Scottish—have

[39] Fieldnotes: Simon Marcelo's farm 26th November 2006

made their way into Wapichannao storytelling and creation myths as previously mentioned.

In relation to this story, the Wapichannao bury an oyster shell in their new farms to make their crops grow healthy. This practice, Aunty Bibi told me once we returned from the farm, stemmed from this myth. She then revealed her oyster shell, which she uses when starting a new farm. Many practices stem from different myths, and even though I did not hear some of the myths that were attached to the practices, the villagers who did point them out to me would signify their ancestral importance by saying "this is what our ancestors used to do."

To establish a suitable farm site, a survey must be taken of possible sites within the ancestral parameters of the village. When one is found word is taken back to the toshao upon which the proposal for a new farm to be built on that site is addressed in front of the village at a village council meeting. At the meeting, any concerns or disapprovals of the location of the site may be voiced by a member of the village. The household farm is, therefore, a site that not only the household deems suitable, but also involves the approval of the village council and the village members, as land is part of the communal rights of each Wapichannao inhabiting Bush Rope. Once the site has been approved, a date is set to clear the land.

A farm is a site for the provision of crops which may not only feed one household, but could potentially feed other members of the community, residing outside of the household. The site may have also been used previously by others, which may also

explain the need to voice opinions as to who gets land and where they get it. It was made clear that farmlands of all families in the village are recorded. This was revealed during a major flood of the savannahs, where many farmlands were destroyed causing the government to send relief funds to those families who suffered. The Minister of Amerindian Affairs—Carolyn Rodrigues—came and distributed money and rations to those people who had farms, and this was read from a list of names the council had. One person did not have a farm that was in use, and was denied money, as well as another whose farm was not destroyed.

Using the slash and burn method, farms are burnt once a year, with individuals using one farm site for a period of time between one and two years, before moving onto a new farm. As a result, farms are located away from the main village. Some people live on their farms, as was the case with Mr. Simon Marcelo and his wife, whereas others went to their farms for the day or for a few days. Historically, the Wapichannao live in the savannahs, whereas their farms are situated in the forest.

On a trip to the village farm, members from the community bring cassava sticks (the stem) from their individual household farms to be replanted on the communal farm. Usually an individual sets out to the farm early and returns before nightfall. In the case of the village farm, villagers are taken to the farm via the village tractor, but usually people ride bicycles, walk, or travel via bullocks-and-cart to their individual farms. It was via the latter that I travelled to the Andre's farm, and via the tractor that I arrived at the village farm.

I will focus on the village farm experience on the 22nd January 2007, as it also illustrates the notion of *manore* (working together). However, the ideological significance of a manore will be detailed in Chapter 3. It is important to recall that working on the village farm and working a household farm hold separate outcomes. For one, the household farm is meant to provide for the individual household, as well as some relatives on occasion, regardless whether the crops are to be sold or consumed by that unit. Alternatively, the village farm is a communal obligation. The following ethnographic example highlights the movements involved at the community farm, which is similar to the clearing of household farms, with the exception of the use of village tools and vehicles and its overall purpose to provide for the village.

Village Work

The tractor made its halt at the entrance of the farm. We were instructed to grab as many *kankadu* (cassava sticks/stems) and make our way to the farm site. From the savannah a foot-worn path wound its way through towering palms, and intertwining vines opening up to the farm site which would be cleared. We walked towards the back of the farm site, which led to the makeshift campsite. As soon as we arrived to the camp we were fed by some members from the community who had arrived the night before to prepare for the villagers. They had prepared *damorudu* (pepperpot/ stew made from casareep) and rice with nescau tea. After breakfast we went straight to work, clearing the field and piling branches in preparation for burning.

Clearing a new farm involves cutting down trees with chainsaws, and cutting bushes. Then the farm is burnt to clear the shrubs and trees. The ashes from this slash and burning method are considered, by the Wapichannao, to enrich the soil with nutrients, acting as a natural fertiliser. Ashes also hold a place within their medicinal practices as a healing antidote. One case in point was after I had a chigger—a parasitic insect—removed I was advised to put ash on the hole that remained, so as to heal faster.

The land is ploughed with forks, handmade from branches and sticks, which are bound by leaves, as well as with modern farm tools, such as hoes. The Wapichannao principally use axes, hoes, and machetes in clearing and cultivating the forest, but tools such as chainsaws appear on village farms, as the village owns a few chainsaws given to them by the government. These tools are highly sought-after items since the time of their introduction into Amerindian societies. Some of the less modern tools were also coveted trade items, historically, building relations with other groups (Menezes 1979: 31, 38-9, 43; Mentore 2005: 243). However, today, these tools are acquired through purchase, as opposed to barter or trade, in the local shops. I soon realised how integral these tools were for everyday life, and the pride I felt contributing to farm work, by possessing a machete when I went to the village farm. It is with the machete that one can clear, dig, and cut, which were the main tasks that needed to be done.

With these tools pits are then dug with little trenches around to plant crops. In some of the holes we planted banana shoots. In others where there are no holes, but rather a mound of dirt, people began to stick cassava shoots into the mound, while planting

eddoes, pumpkin seeds and watermelons in the trenches around it. *Kankadu* are cut into smaller sticks. This act is called *tiitan*. On the shoots there are 'eyes' which indicate the direction the cassava must be planted. When one is cutting the cassava shoots, one must make sure that the eyes are facing downwards, and when piling the cassava, one must make sure the eyes are facing upwards. This is done in order to make the work easier for the person who collects them to plant. These shoots are then planted into the mounds with the eyes facing upwards, and with a bit of the shoot protruding.

Illustration 2: Showing Elderly Men Preparing Cassava Shoots for Replanting

Everyone has a task, and the elderly are given the task of cutting the *kankadu*, as they are not expected to exert as much energy (See Illustration 2). Whereas women are responsible for clearing, men are required to plough, and both men and women share

the task of planting. On this occasion, there were no children on the farm site, as village work occurs every Monday in the village, and as the academic year had already commenced, children were in their respective schools. However, when on a farm children participate in the weeding and clearing. One may also see pairs of children with a pail of s*awarao, kari,* or *kazudaa*[40], and cups serving those working on the site. Young girls from the age of ten may also be seen preparing the meals for the workers as well. The following table denotes the distribution of labour.

MEN	WOMEN	ELDERLY	CHILDREN
Clear and piling Hoeing Cutting down trees Planting	Cooking Weeding Clearing Cutting down small plants Planting Serving alcoholic drinks	Preparing Cassava stalks Light Clearing Looking after babies	Weeding Clearing Cutting down small plants Serving alcoholic drinks

Table 2: Showing Distribution of Labour on a Farm

Planting is rotated around the two seasons: *wakamoo donun* (dry season) and *wawunu donun* (rainy season). Root crops, such as cassava, are grown all year round, whereas fruits such as banana suckers are grown around Easter, right before the rainy season. This is so the crops themselves are not waterlogged during rainy season, especially with the uncharacteristic over-flooding of farmlands within the past years. If they were left to develop during the rainy season, then they would rot as a result of the excessive amount of water. Even though cassava is grown all year round, it is preferable to plant them between December and April, due to small rainfall. During the April-May months

[40] Kazudaa is sweet potato wine, whereas kari is a highly potent drink made from cassava and fundamental to the manore, as will be examined in the following chapter.

bananas and peanuts are planted, followed by corn and rice during the rainy season's peak, as rice, especially, needs the waterlogged soils in order to grow. In a conversation with Aunty Bibi, she told me of a yam they had dug out of the ground, on her parents' farm when she was a young girl that was over 4 feet long.

> One time a year you burn your farm. Every year you move your farm. The old farm used to reap two crops. Just planted cassava sticks, bell yam. After August that is when you plant yams. You cannot plant yams near rainy season. Cassava is planted any season. I reaped the last set of yams in September.[41]

She showed me a picture of the abovementioned yam, which was when she explained when the right time to grow yams was. During this time they only planted two crops in their farm: cassava and yams. She said that yams should be planted after rainy season—August—as they cannot withstand any bit of the rainy season (See Fig. 4).

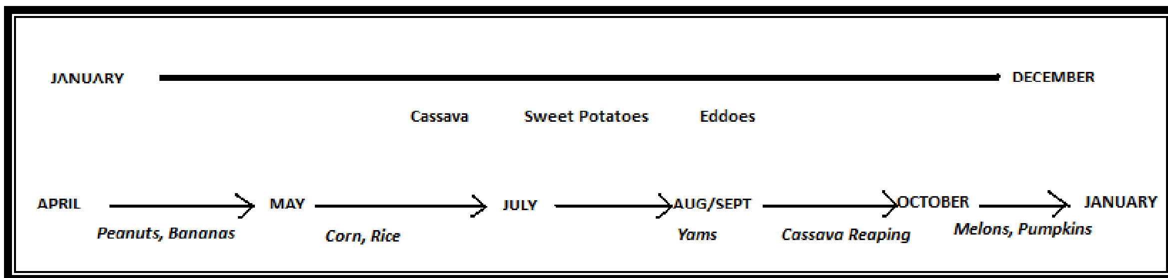


Figure 4: Showing Harvest distribution of crops

Alongside family and village farms, attached to the household, are small gardens used to grown garden vegetables. These vegetables include pepper (didada), bora (a string bean), ginger, tomatoes, oranges, lemons, and thyme. However, households do not rely heavily on these crops as gardens are frequently destroyed by cows and goats that

[41] Fieldnotes: 23-11-06

wander through the village all year round. These cows, bullocks and goats belong to various people in the village.

Although it is not a requirement, most households have a farm from which they grow crops to provide for their family. The households that do not have farms are either those of the less capable, or those who are "outsiders". Such families either have one member who is non-Amerindian—as is the case of Aunty Lizzie's sister, Clarice—or neither couple were born in the village—as is the case of Johnny and his wife, Jacqui. Others who did not have farms either worked on the farms of their kinsmen or could afford not to have one. However, there were only four such families that I knew who did not have farms. This is not to say that there were not more.

Hunting Practices

Hunting is specifically left to the men, with women cleaning and preparing the meat. However, one hunting story came to me via Aunty Bibi, who recounted a hunting trip with her father when she was 11 years old.

> At this time we lived in the bush, 7 miles from where my parents live now. It was here my father shot a *koshara* (bush deer). I was so proud. Hogs were destroying our farm there so we move. We never tassoed [salted it] because in those days salt was hard to come by.[42]

Hunting is done using bows and arrows, knives and, on rare occasions, guns. The use of bows and traps were particularly common. On many occasions Uncle Hoc—Aunty Bibi's husband—let me use his bow and arrows to develop my aim. Not only is one required to

[42] Fieldnotes: 23rd November 2006

learn how to use a bow and arrow, but the ability to make them was also a respected skill. Uncle Hoc was particularly skilled in making them, as in his village this was a part of a man's coming-of-age. He pointed out the particular malleable shoot, which was needed to make the arrows.

When I arrived at his house one afternoon, he was in the process of shaving the bow into shape, which he had put aside to begin the demonstration. He took the shoot for the arrow then, using a rope with two pieces of wood at each end, he wound the rope around the tip of the shoot, then tightened it. This gave the end of the shoot an oval shape, which was desired when attaching the arrow head. Uncle Hoc then proceeded to rub a black gum-like stick to the area of the top portion of the shoot, then he used the *karawa*[43] (sisal fibre), which he had rolled together to make a strong string, to wrap on the top of the shoot, to keep the arrow head in firm position. The black-gum acts as an adhesive for the string and the arrow head. He then adds the majestic black feathers of the powis[44], to the other end. He pointed out that one must use the "right-side" of the feather. He uses two powis feathers, and slits them to create the perfect shape, then ties them with the *karawa.* He then rubs more of the black-gum to the string to hold it in place. For decorative purposes, he adds macaw feathers. Finally he adds a wooden spear, which becomes the arrow hear. This day, he made spear of about four inches long, with jagged edges along both side: "This type of arrow is good for hunting birds". I

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[43] *Karawa* is not the Wapichannao derivative of the word, but has made its way into everyday Wapichan vocabulary via another group. Rather the word for *karawa*, or rather the sisal fibre is *ziini'i*

[44] This Powis is the largest game bird in Guyana, with an average height of 24 inches and an average length of 30 inches. Its wings can span over two feet. Its black feathers carry a purple glossy shine. Its belly, vent and undertail are covered with white feathers. The powis may be found in the forested regions, but can be domesticated. Their feathers are used for decorative purposes as well as on arrows (See http://www.geocities.com/cboodhoo_2000/birds/powis.htm)

was told that long ago they would cut part of the arrow, which they would rub with a poison. The poison would quicken the rate of death, and the tip would be lost in the animal, whereas the rest of the arrow would be salvageable. In effect, the tip would do all the work[45].

Boys are trained from a young age to aim with slingshots at birds and smaller animals. Both Lenny and Gerd had slingshots, which they used to aim at the *chiziki* (parakeets) that would eat the mangoes from their three mango trees. As there were no older male figures in their lives to teach them how to hunt, they were limited to just their slingshots. However, in Aunty Bibi and Uncle Hoc's household their two boys—aged Peter (11) and John (9)—had slingshots, as well as bows and arrows, which their father had crafted for them. They regularly practised the use of this tool, and were my shooting 'buddies' many times as I went over to their house. Often, Peter and John would bring dead animals home, some of which were prepared for dinner. As they progressed in skill and age, they would soon accompany their father on hunting trips, which could last days, and hunt larger game.

Some hunters use *binas*, which are charms used to entice animals. The only person toward whom I heard the use of these charms referenced was Uncle Hoc. Uncle Hoc, being of Patamona descent, has been believed to possess knowledge that is characteristic of a *kanaimà*—a dark shaman. However, even though people spoke of these binas, no one mentioned whether or not they were widely used.

[45] Fieldnotes 24th June 2006

Animals that are generally hunted are the white-lipped and collared peccaries, tapirs, deer, as well as birds of various types—such as trumpeter, toucan, macaw, and other birds—which are used for both cooking and decorative purposes. Smaller animals such as armadillos, iguana, tortoises, and agoutis, amongst other animals are commonly hunted. On one occasion someone mentioned the use of monkey in their diet, however, this is known to be a common delicacy amongst the WaiWais further south, who were known to dine on the brains of smoked capuchin and howler monkeys (Mentore 2005).

Dogs were usually taken on hunting trips to locate the prey. Some dogs were rubbed in cows' blood and fed on blood and the waste from the insides or the intestines after a slaughter. This was to prevent mange and to make the dogs stronger and more aggressive. It was also brought to my attention that horses were traditionally traded for dogs, as they were prized creatures for the Wapichannao.

Today, meats and fish are salted in order to preserve them. As most people consume beef, bush meat has been displaced as a major part of subsistence. This is not to say that bush meat was not consumed, as there were many occasions I ate bush meat in Bush Rope. Beef, which is more readily available, was provided by Ronnie, who opened a butcher shop in January 2007. Sometimes, people kill their own livestock and sell them. However, all meat is checked by a local food inspector before it can be sold.

The Wapichannao also raise fowl, cows and pigs (out of the village). Cows were usually confined to the corral, whereas fowls are left to roam about the household yards. Pigs

are not permitted in the village, as they bring pests with them, and are difficult to maintain in the village (as was relayed to me by Chief). However, people outside of the western part of the village did keep them.

Fowls and pigs are not consumed on a daily basis. Yard fowls—i.e. chickens reared in one's yard as opposed to the pen—are mainly used for collecting eggs and breeding. However, once a chicken stops laying it is then consumed. Chickens can be bought from Burning Hills shop at 220 Guyanese Dollars (GYD)[46] per kg, or from the recently built Youth Club's chicken farm[47] at 160 GYD per kg. However, these were limited, and were bought on special order from the farm or whenever Aunty Dora brought chickens to the village from Brazil.

Fishing Practices

Fishing techniques vary depending on the two seasons. Seines—fishing nets—are used in the dry season. Men dive and spear fish during this season, as the rivers are shallow. Some use bow and arrows, but I never met anyone who actually maintained this practice. I was only informed that it was still practised amongst some. However, the bow strings are not made from *karawa*, as previously mentioned, but from the spokes of bicycles. They also use machetes to catch fish, but this is done at night. The months of January-March are popular for poison, whereby a fish poison, *oko*, is beaten into the still

[46] £1 = $405.19 Guyanese Dollar

[47] Bush Rope's Youth Club, for youths up to the age of 30, had just set up their chicken coop project, in which to rear chickens to be sold. The proceeds go towards the club member's travels and other projects.

waters. This stuns the fish causing them to jump out of the water, or rise to the surface. Sometimes when dragging seines they would also use oko so as to make the fish jump into the nets. This practice of poisoning is frowned upon due to the recent awareness towards conservation, but is still widely practiced.

Farabee (1918: 58) denotes the Wapichannao's extensive use of traps, and credits them for their craftsmanship, which is still used widely. Traps are also used in hunting, but it was mainly in fishing that traps are noted. Apart from putting bait in a basket laid in the water, they also blocked a part of the river, where they would set two large rocks across from each other, then lay a trap in between the two rocks. The large rocks act as a sieve pushing the fish directly into the trap. They then set such traps throughout the breadth of a river or creek.

During the dry season, those who obtain a large amount of fish go around the village to sell, supplying many households with fish. However, most households do their own fishing. It is during the dry season that fish becomes a regular part of Wapichan daily diet, and can be seen hanging in almost every house during this time. Men and young boys mostly fish, but women also participate in this activity. However, women participate mostly by cleaning and salting the fish. The fish is usually prepared as a "boilie" or stew, or fried, after ridding the fish from the salt used to preserve it.

During the rainy seasons—April-September—one may find a lot of the young children—ages ranging from 7-14—at creeks and rivers, with their fishing lines. It is during the rainy seasons that people mostly fish with rods and hooks. Ranging from young children

to the elderly, one may see members of the community with a modest catch. However, it is during the dry season that people catch copious amounts of fish.

II

The Commodity Economy: Jawan T-Shirts and Maggie Cubes

The shop: a setting upon which relations are made based on the dependency of rations and modern needs. These relationships are guided through narratives upon which dependency on these modern items are the focus, as will be explored in Chapter 6 of this thesis. Stories of individuals are gathered based on the credit they take, the children they send, the items they buy and their frequency to the shop (as opposed to another).

The shop acts as an index of how people build relations with the foods they eat and *purchase*, and how some consumption basics are strongly based on manufactured products as opposed to harvested crops. The common household staples are a reflection of the commodities found in the store. Rations, as they were called, were precisely those items found in the shop that people considered necessary to live well from day to day. Rice, sugar, flour, baking powder, powdered milk, matches, salt, maggi cubes, tea bags, coffee, tinned fish, cooking oil, chowmein noodles, onions, garlic, cream crackers, margarine, washing soap, bath soap, split peas, yeast, cornbeef, eggs, and a jawan t-shirt seemed to be the regular shopping list of the customers who came into the shop to make their monthly purchases. Other commodities included batteries, kerosene, kerosene lamps, school supplies, toiletries, files, bicycle parts, Havaianas, and cheap fashion from Brazil and Georgetown. From this list sugar, rice, flour, matches, tea bags, baking powder, and maggi cubes seemed to be the most important of them all, with a great deal of discomfort and unbalance being felt throughout the Andre's household if these items were lacking. These were also the items that people bought

the most frequently, as products such as soap and cooking oil lasted for long periods of time.

Economic activities vary due to the certain lifestyles people decided to live. The Wapichannao of Bush Rope engage in numerous economic activities, which range from traditional subsistence systems to gold-mining in the Marudi Mountains some thirty-six miles away (cf. Cleary 1993; Roopnarine 2001: 54). This all varies on whether one chooses to live more traditionally or more extravagantly.

Some people lived solely off the land, and those were mainly people who lived on their farms. One such person was Uncle Simon, who came into Bush Rope with his wife on Sundays to attend his son's church services. They would then take the thirty to forty minute walk back to their farm. Uncle Simon is one of the elders of the village. To earn a living he would have his children and grandchildren sell his fans and farine for him. As I discovered on a visit to his farm, he made a various number of devices fundamental to the preparation of cassava: the village's most important crop.

In contrast, there were those who worked for the government, in Marudi or travelled to other parts, such as Georgetown or Brazil. Those who moved to Brazil worked mostly on ranches throughout the state of Roraima, particularly in Bom Fim and Boa Vista.

Earning a living to Making a Living

'Making a living' in Bush Rope means that one has all the things needed to have a "good life" and to "live well." As Bush Rope is divided into south and north, it struck me that the good life resonated throughout the entire village, but with slight variations. Those who resided on the southern side, where the modern facilities, such as the hospital, schools, and government buildings are located, referred to the north of the village as that area where you can live the good life, complaining that "we have become too modernised. We have no value for what our ancestors did and how they lived on this side."[48] Another conversation held with a resident from the northern side complained that "it is difficult living on this side sometimes, because you have to travel very far just to get some cornbeef, or rations when it comes in. Sometimes we don't even get beef because we hear about a slaughter too late…It is peaceful and quiet over here, but we are isolated."[49]

'Making a living' signifies that one has all that is needed to live well as a Wapichannao. This, as mentioned, requires that one has the tools needed to hunt and farm thereby providing for the family. However, to 'make a living,' one must ensure that one works for both oneself and for others in order to earn money, which will allow the purchase of those items to which members of Bush Rope are emotionally attached, as well as to reap a bountiful harvest. Together, these activities symbolise that one is 'living well' by 'making a living.'

[48] Fieldnotes August Games, Shea: 18 August 2006
[49] Fieldnotes Mr. Leo: 19th June 2006

Residents of Bush Rope earn a living by:

1. working for others
2. working for themselves
3. stipend from the government – i.e. pensions for the elderly.

The most common would be those working for themselves as everyone makes money, regardless of whether they have a job or not. Even Kara who made money through teaching, made additional money by making fudge or sugarcakes on occasion, but most importantly selling farine and cassava bread. During dry season, it seemed as though someone was trying to sell us fish every other day. People sold what their land could provide for them, whether it was farine, vegetables, local drinks and so forth. It seemed that the women were the major bread-winners for many households, as women were prompted to join the hot-meal programme, where they would cook for the village when there were village feed-ups. However, these women were also trained in culinary art and health practices and were required to have a full physical—one requiring a stool sample—upon which they would receive a card certifying their ability to deal with food and the serving of food to the public. It was the women who provided snacks to the school during the student's break. These snacks ranged from popcorn, kool-down, buns, and solara to burgers, chowmein and curry with rice. Women would also prepare the alcoholic beverages and were allowed to sell snacks and these drinks at public events.

Men did odd jobs, such as building or assisting in the construction of buildings or even brick ovens, as was the case of one man, who made some money building our indoor brick oven. Another example was when we paid some men who had cut down ïté leaves that would refurbish our roof. Such services are quite frequently paid for. However,

young men would go and work on mines as “pork-knockers”. “Pork-knocker” is the local term for gold and diamond prospectors. There were many times, when young men would leave the village for a few days to work on the nearby Marudi Mountain which housed several mining sites. One such person was Rammy—the son of Mary and George—who worked there for a few months and then returned home. Women also went to work on these mines, but as domestics. However, there was a growing concern of the prostitution of Amerindians on these mining sites, with many such cases being brought in on a day-to-day basis.

Both men and women, share the labour when it comes to providing food for the family, and this is centred on the weekly farm and hunting activities. They both share the farm work, and even though hunting is mostly a man’s domain, women still provide a service in regards to preparing the food. It is farming and hunting/fishing that provides the Wapichannao with their staples—meat and cassava—which, in their absence—causes much disorder and distress to their lives.

Agriculture plays an important role within the economic foundation of the community, and it is here that many people earn their money, if not provide for their families. In reaping, many people sell their produce to the other villagers, especially on market day, which is set aside for people to bring the produce, as well as their snacks, to be sold. This benefits both those who have farms and those who do not, as even those who do not possess farms, still depend on the regular supply of cassava and meat, especially farine. Many people buy farine, even if they do have cassava in their farms, so it is a

lucrative food to sell. It becomes more lucrative to sell agricultural produce, that have been refined into farine or cassava bread (e.g.), when the distribution of labour is higher, as more people implies that more work will be done. In larger families (nuclear and extended) there is more productivity, and this way they can earn more. This was the case for Aunty Bibi's parents, as they had six children, whose families (including in-laws and grandchildren) take turns helping at their farm. One experience was when I went to interview Bibi's father—Simon Marcelo—and ran into his grandson's wife and baby, who came to help grate cassava to parch into farine. They had tons of farine, and it was at a time where there was a shortage of farine in the village. I bought a few kilograms and spread the word that they had farine. This is also a common way people make money, as the supply and demand are sometimes quite high, when there is a famine of a staple food.

This is not to say that sales are confined to the village, as villages sell to each other, especially when supplies and produce are low in others. For example, villagers of Bush Rope purchased farine from the villages of Awarawa'onawa and Maroranao during the devastating floods that perished most of the farmlands within the Bush Rope vicinity. This is why most people "pursue several income-producing activities" in order to make a living (Williams 1991:49).

Those who own shops or have a high-ranking government position are usually the highest earning members in the community, as there is a constant flow of funds. Yet, many of these people have other forms of income which contribute to their wealth. For example, Aunty Lizzie's sister's husband, who is the District Educational Officer, not only

earns money through the government, but also owns a corral with a large steed of cows. As beef, especially, is the main meat for consumption he earns a profitable amount when slaughtering a cow. However, his wife also brings in an income as she is the headmistress of the primary school. They do not have a farm, however, so depend on the produce of others, like Aunty Lizzie to fulfil those needs as well as the shops.

Settling In: A typical day at the Andre house

In order to conceptualise what goes on within Bush Rope, we must first understand how households function from day-to-day. Hence, the following section is a narrative of a typical day in the Andre's household.

Between 5:30-6am Kara would wake up and open the windows throughout the house. She would then wake Elle to help with the morning preparations between 6-6:30am. When I arrived at the Andre's house they had given me Aunty Lizzie's room, converting the original kitchen into lodging for Aunty Lizzie and Great, as the kitchen was no longer used for cooking, but just for the preparation of cassava bread (*badi*) and farine (*o'i*). Instead the new kitchen was in the main house, where they had moved the gas stove, kitchen safe, table, and the other kitchen equipment. It was not until my last few months with them when Kara hired a man to come and build an indoor clay oven, where we could cook on the fire pit above and bake in the opening at the bottom, did we use this traditional kitchen. This was because Great had returned to her house, and Aunty Lizzie had left for Boa Vista to be with her husband, as well as to return to the family

with money her husband had made during his time there. As they were not wealthy, and with only one person—Kara—earning a steady income she decided it would benefit the family.

Wapichan kitchens are located in a detached benab or house. Elle would start the fire, while Kara would prepare a meal of bakes and tea. Sometimes we would have bora (belonging to the long bean family), or tasso (dried salted beef), to accompany the bakes. Breakfast also consisted of porridge made from tapioca (*waiwai*) or root crops. The last meal for the day was usually the same as the breakfast meal, as lunch was the largest meal.

Before breakfast was ready Gerd would fetch water from the well to either fill the drinking bucket, or fill the bowls for washing the dishes. Moving into the house, I shared the morning chores by sometimes preparing breakfast, but mostly cleaning the dishes after the morning meal. My everyday role in the house was to prepare lunch and fetch the water for the household. As the family enjoyed my cooking, I was given this role. Sometimes I would buy the meat for the household, as well, but the task of shopping for the house was the job of Kara. However, as a token for allowing me to live with the family, I would contribute by supplying rations that were integral to subsistence, such as flour, milk powder, tomato paste, chowmein noodles, corn beef, sardines, curry powder, canned vegetables, and sausages.

After breakfast, the children would go and have their bath, with Elle in charge of looking after Lenny, which meant, bathing him and clothing him. Afterwards, Kara would have

her bath and get ready to go to work at the primary school as a teacher. Kara works as a teacher for the second grade students, aged 5 to 6. The first person to leave for school would be Lenny. When I first arrived at the Andre's house, Lenny had just received a bicycle from his father, and would ride to school on his bike, until the pedals came off. Afterwards, Lenny would walk to school, which was 10 minutes away on foot. Elle would leave around the same time as Lenny, but it was Gerd who would be last to leave unless his mother towed him on the bicycle, as he also attended the primary school. Gerd proved difficult sometimes in the morning, at times not leaving for school at all.

From May-July, I taught Portuguese at the secondary school. From September I taught Social Studies, as there was a shortage of staff. After school, I would go home and prepare the main meal, which was lunch. Lunch was very much Creole based, as meals would range from rice and beans to curry. The major staple used was rice and farine, which is similar to couscous in its texture and preparation. On Tuesdays I would go to the women's centre to work on craftwork made from stripped dried palm leaves from the ïté palm called *tibisiri*, as the women were trying to teach the younger children, as well as those in the community who did not know how to weave with *tibisiri*. However, on other days I would go between Aunty Mary's house to learn songs and dances, and Aunty Bibi where I learnt to make hammocks and heard stories of their ancestors. Some evenings I would go to Uncle Leo, who was the local shaman, but that was very short-lived as he proved to be very busy. I found myself going to the guest house, where Aunty Pet worked, to learn more about people from the village, and her ordeal as an 'out-of-the-ordinary' woman.

Afterwards, I would work in the shop at Burning Hills, as well as at the school after hours, where I taught an adult Portuguese class. And, as I spent most of my time out of the household, I asked for payment in the form of produce, even receiving wild bush deer meat (*koshara*), which is different from savannah deer (*aro*).

As Bush Rope village had an internet service, which required people to operate it, I was asked to be in-charge of the internet café two nights in the week, which I would do, until closing time, sometimes, not making it home until after 8:30pm. If this was the case, I would have dinner at Burning Hills as Aunty Dora fed all of the people who worked for her. If I did make it home for dinner, it was very simple and would consist of tea and bakes or sardines, similar to the breakfast meal. Evening meals were between 7-8:30pm, and were meant to be light, due to the early retirement to bed right after. After this evening meal, everyone would have a bath, with freezing water from the night-chilled well, and meticulously brush their teeth. Afterwards, everyone would gather in the old kitchen (then Aunty Lizzie and Great's quarters) for prayers, which were done in chants. There were special evening prayers that were recited form the New Catholic Hymnal, which had hymns and prayers translated into most of the Guyanese Amerindian language. However, they said these prayers in English. I never joined into these prayers, as I was never invited to the evening prayers when they were being performed, except once before leaving for Georgetown. When I returned, I came to find Aunty Lizzie departing for Brazil, Great back in her own house, and no evening prayer rituals.

This chapter is an ethnographic account of how the Wapichannao “live”, but more specifically, how they “live well”. In order to illustrate such an abstract notion, we saw what foods were considered essential, as notions of the “good life” and “living well” are encountered vis-à-vis the sentiments the Wapichannao have with the foods they eat. This is not only through the foods they acquire through traditional practices, but also through the shop. Hence, this chapter paves the way for the following Chapter on manores and commodities. In Chapter 3, I explore how relationships are formed through these two polarities: manores and commodities, which constitute much of the ambiguity the Wapichannao face when formulating an identity for themselves. It is in this chapter that the emergent incongruities between traditional and “farrin” influences to their culture are established.

Chapter 3
Understanding Relationships: The Politics of Sharing

Waunao Wapichannao
Mishi'o Wapichannao
Waunao kaudiina'abainao
Watoman wakamichan nii

Wakonaukii-Kirtan atamun'aka
Watoma wakashoro nii
Watoma wakamichan nii
Atamun mada idi

We are Wapichannao
Truly Wapichannao
As we would make our clothes together

We Celebrate with each other
We will make beaded necklaces together
We will make our clothes together
Because we are like the bark on a tree

The song above was sung on many occasions by the Kabishaka Culture Group in Bush Rope to celebrate 'togetherness' through those things that are done together for the common good of the people. It signifies unity by "working together"—*waunao kaudiina'abainao*—in order to accomplish something in which to "celebrate" (*wakonaukii-Kirtan*).

In Chapters 1 & 2, as we approached Bush Rope, we saw the dynamic layers of village life and how they *could* be interconnected to form a perception of the people's own constructs of themselves. However, these previous chapters were merely to provide

insight, or snapshots, into those facets of Wapichannao life, which this dissertation will take into consideration. In this chapter we will explore the networks and constraints found within the fabric of relationships in Bush Rope. To achieve this, the notion of "community"—expressed through "*wakaduzu*"[50] and "*wawiizi*"[51]—will be considered through the lens of *manore* work, communal food preparation, and discussion of rights, usage and access to land as mentioned in Chapter 1.

The ideal of community is based on ancestral ideology, which, much like the song above, is based on the idea of 'working together'. This principle ideology is one which dominates Wapichannao discourse, and may be defined as the "bringing together, through the acceptance of common ritual values" (Evans-Pritchard 1972[1951]: 95). However, the actual mechanics of communal living were strained at times, due to conflicts between maintaining the traditional practices and establishing modern ones. Yet, it is within understanding, not only why modern ideals needed to be established within Bush Rope, but those forces that brought certain people together in a particular social setting in which working together was key. Initially, I accepted this act of communalism as a way in which kin relations were played out, as well as a foreground for reciprocity. However, although this did play out, underlying was a framework for social classifications which, on the one hand was based on the needs of the individual, and on the other, on the obligations towards the collective. The needs of both the

[50] *Wakaduzu* meaning 'our culture'
[51] *Wawiizi* meaning 'our people'

collective and the individual are not only connected, but are in conflict, and strained by the need to upkeep relations whilst, egotistically, maintaining ones' own assets.

Therefore, I will first look at communal work—farming and assisting fellow villagers—and what determines different levels of participation in communal work: who participates and the benefits gained from communal labour. This further relates to the importance the Wapichannao place on community work and levels of participation which link individuals to the socioeconomic community.

Following this section, will be the political dynamics of the group. For one, village work is determined by the village council, but as will be demonstrated, due to both the internal political rift of the village, and that of the wider nation-state, ideas of communalism begin to digress towards schismatic relations within the village.

I

The Manore that Binds Us

Manore is the term used to describe the act of people coming together to work on a particular task at hand. It is the sole means of communal labour which is connected to the Wapichannao's own ideas about village relatedness. As will be further described below, a manore is called upon when a large amount of work needs to be done. Manores are held for: 1) Communal work and 2) Individual Household work. Usually a manore may be called upon during the building of a new home, or the changing of palms on the roofs. A manore may also be organised when clearing a new farm. However, manores are held more frequently in the village due to the weekly village work tasks. To appeal to the collective body, village work is the practice of manore on a more regular basis in order to keep up relations, as well as to force those, who have broken previous bonds, to mend them. This may also include religious calls to work, e.g. the building of the new Catholic Church.

Every villager may hold a manore, but it is left up to the individual to decide whether he or she wishes to participate in another's manore. The host of the manore usually goes from door to door to selected individuals—family members and friends who either owe a favour or who may be expected to join in the manore on their own accord—to invite them to participate. Those who participate are then expected to work for a gift of food and traditional alcoholic drinks. The results of manore work affect not only village-level relationships, but also household networks.

The term "participation," as is used in this section, refers to the "contribution of labo[u]r, primarily physical labo[u]r, for the achievement of some objective. It is, thus, used in a much more limited sense than mere "association" in or with some act" (McHenry 1977: 44).

Part of the manore is not only the sharing of work, but the sharing of food. A manore cannot function if there is no food and drink. Usually a pot of cook-up rice (rice and beans) or rice, farine and a stew (curry, pepperpot or stewed beef) are served, alongside local alcoholic drinks made from cassava, rice or sweet potatoes. This is a form of reciprocity which is expected, as people do not expect to be paid monetarily, but gastronomically. This will be explored later in this section. However, before continuing any analysis of a manore, I wish to refer to an extract from my fieldnotes—dated 20th May 2006—describing a particular manore in which I participated. Using description as an analytical device, I hope to highlight the significance manore played in building relationships.

20th May 2006: The Context

It was about 5:45 am, when I was awoken by the sound of Anton and Ronnie's voices (Chief's sons). It was the day of the manore, and they were the first to arrive. I was still worn out from working at a fundraiser the night before, not going to sleep until 2am that morning. I quickly got out of my hammock and got dressed for the work ahead of me. We moved everything into the building which was once the kitchen, and was now

serving as the sleeping quarters for Aunty Lizzie, Great, and the multitude of bats. Anton and Ronnie got straight to work, with Aunty Lizzie supervising. Soon they were joined by Benny—Aunty Lizzie's husband—who helped to get rid of the old leaves from one/half of the roof.

Manore is used when there are large tasks at hand, calling for a group of people to come together to complete that task. In this case, it was the trashing of the old roof and the installation of the new ïté palms.

In the meantime, Kara, Elle and I were getting the breakfast ready. It was at this time that Gav and Billy, with his children, came strolling into the yard. Everyone sat down for coffee, bakes, and callaloo[52], then went straight to work on the roof.

Later on, more people came to help. Some were invited, while others just showed up upon hearing that the Andres were having a manore. There were children, babies, mothers, women, men. So many people came to help. Even Ally—the British volunteer—came out to participate (See Illustration 3).

First the old leaves must be removed and trashed, leaving the old frame. Those pieces that were rotten were replaced with fresh wood. While other pieces remained as they were or needed additional support. Then, starting from the bottom going up, the ïté palms are bent in a certain way to fit neatly on the beams. For half of the house the estimated number of ïté palms needed was 2000 for a house the size of Mrs. Lizzie's.

[52] Member of the spinach and pak-choi family

Illustration 3: Showing Manore at the Andre's

According to Kara, a true manore involved kari and food. However, we only had cherry wine and Felina *vinho-tinto* from the store. I served it, and made *shiibii*—farine and water—for the first time. Gav said it was the best *shiibii* because I put so much farine in it. For breakfast we had fried farine, with tasso and bora[53], and tapioca porridge. For lunch it was cook-up rice, roti and curry, and *damorudu*[54] with cassava bread, which Aunty Lizzie had been making while people ate.

My share of work included trashing old leaves, bringing new leaves, handing Gav leaves, and then sweeping all the debris from inside which was definitely a lot of work. We

[53] Long beans
[54] A stew made from cassava water.

worked for the rest of the day, cleaning up the debris, which had accumulated into one big dust and sand pit, all the while having more people join the manore. Some came just upon seeing people working; others were called out as they passed by.

The next day, Kara sat me down and explained fully what a “real” manore was supposed to be like.

> A real manore is when you have kari and food before hand and then you go around inviting people to work. As they work they drink and eat all day long until the work is finished or until night. When the work is done, people then sit and chat and drink more, until most of them are drunk or high. This was not a real manore as the kari and food were prepared afterwards. Also many people like Gav, Anton, and Ronnie came on their own.[55]

This was not my first experience of a manore, nor was it my last. My first experience was during a survey trip to the village in March, where the toshao at the time—Chief—took me to a manore where men and women were preparing ïté leaves for a new roof. At the manore they were drying palm leaves for thatched roofs. They used a makeshift sickle or a cutlass to cut the leaves from the palms, and then they laid the palms in rows of 20 to dry. Here Chief explained the traditional meaning of manore:

> Manore is the word from which Mashramani[56] comes from. It means the gathering of people to work together. Depending on the size of the building, the numbers of people will vary. If the building was a community building then the entire community will come out. Activities such as running over spikes, palm tree climbing, piwari drinking, communal feasting and so forth are planned on such an occasion.[57]

In this case, manore refers to communal farming which may be defined as those “agricultural activities which aim at the pooling of the product and its distribution indirectly through collective goods or directly through some system of remuneration to

[55] Fieldnotes: 20th May 2006

[56] Masharami is the Arawakan word used for Guyana’s Carnival, which is held every year on the 23rd February.

[57] Fieldnotes 9th March 2006

members of a group, larger than the family, from which the participants come" (McHenry 1977: 44; Moore 1975). This remuneration is usually in the form of communal feasting, where people are fed well and given an abundant amount of traditional alcoholic beverages.

The drinking of kari plays a large role at the manore. It is stored in a large pail, and is served from few bowls, from which everyone is meant to drink. Sometimes, only one bowl is circulated from which everyone shares. This sharing, of what was once a very ceremonial drink, represents the very bonds that are kindled during a manore.

The incentive of a communal farm is not exclusive to Bush Rope. In fact, the concept of a communal village is shared throughout the Third World, particularly within the 'peasant' populations. One such example was the construction of Ujamaa villages by the Tanzanian government. In 1967, then president, President Nyerere of Tanzania presented "Socialism and Rural Development," a policy paper proposing the use of Ujamaa villages, where people, who had been living in scattered settlements, could now participate in communal farming by living and working together "for the good of all" (Nyerere 1968).

Although Bush Rope is not entirely based on communalism due to the commoditisation of the village, it had been in previous times before colonial, governmental and missionary 'aid' infiltrated and reduced the dependency on the communal. This was also noted in Tanzania in 1969, during the increase of government aid to peasants who had become less interested in the fruits of communal work, and more interested in those

commodities provided by the government (McHenry 1977: 43). However, although the dependency and sentiment towards commodities is relatively high, the need for a communal farm has not been displaced within the society. Rather, it has remained, but in coexistence with a shared dependency on the commodity economy.

Levels of Participation

The extent to which people participated in a manore varied depending on the type of manore—household or village—and the amount of commitment individuals had to the work. On average a village manore may have 50-80 people working at a given time, about 4%-6.7% of the population of Bush Rope. The age ranges from young children to adults above the age of 65, as the elderly are still very much involved with manore, especially village work manores. These figures comprise both men and women.

Those who participate are expected to be ready at 5am when going to the farm, some miles out of the village. However, when the village manore occurs within the village, it commences between 7-8am and until 1-2pm, sometimes even longer, depending on the number of people and the amount of work to be done. Those who participate are provided with breakfast and lunch, and a constant supply of alcoholic beverages, such as kari and sawarao, until the end of the work. During individual household manores, people would sometimes stay at the host's house and drink until the alcohol was finished. Such manores can continue until late evening. In such cases, people would sit, and "gaff" about social issues in the village.

The distribution of gender during manore work also varied, as well as the tasks according to gender. Table 2 in Chapter 2 shows the distribution of tasks according to gender on a communal farm. However, communal manores were not specific to farm work, as village work is ascribed to work that needed to be done in and for the village. These ranged in the construction of new public buildings, and wells. The following table shows the distribution of labour on a typical community construction site.

Men	Women	Children	Elderly
Lifting heavy objects Constructing the building Mixing the materials	Clearing the site Sorting and Handing ïté leaves Fetching items for men Preparing the meals Cleaning during and after construction has been completed	Fetch items (such as ïté leaves, tools, and shiibii or alcoholic drinks) Clearing the site	Preparing Meals Clearing site Light Work

Table 3: Showing Distribution of Labour on a Construction Site.

Although all age groups participate in a manore, the majority of the participants are usually between the ages of 16-65 and partake in village work on a regular basis. This was particularly the case during the academic periods, where those younger could not participate due to commitments at school. However, babies are often seen strapped to their mothers as they work. Unlike other societies which encouraged the younger ones to become involved in village work (cf. McHenry 1977), children were encouraged to stay in school and focus on their studies rather than on the farm, which they could tend

to at the weekends (if their household farm) or during the school holidays, where they could participate in village work.

Wealth appeared to be one of the deciding factors as to whether one contributed to village work or not. Those who were "better off" seldom partook in village work, as their household did not depend on relationships built during manores.

Not only is the manore a way of getting people to work together, but this act of communalism may also be described as a way of integrating individuals into the community as well. It allows for the individual to become situated with the wider community members, and for the members to become familiarised and at ease with the individual. However, this does depend on the differentiation of individual commitment to being a part of the community.

Modes of Relationship

Participation in village work seemed to be dependent on a range of factors. The most prominent factors were age, wealth, political party association, and the individual's sense of belonging to the village. However these levels of participation may also be distinguished based on two wider criteria: *(a)* the different types of social relationships; and *(b)* different types of membership within the village.

At each level of social relationship there is a social setting or "nuclear" where rapport is played out (Starr 1954: 125-6). The following table outlines these different levels of

social relationships, the social setting or "nucleus", and the members who belong to these groups.

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS	SOCIAL SETTINGS	MEMBERS
Household Group	The household	People sharing the same household
Crews	The shops, yards	Belonging to kinship, age, social, and intellectual groups
Village	The centre, Burning Hills, Churches, Schools	Belonging to the village. Members separated by airstrip, and political affiliations.
District	Designated Village	Belonging to Toshao Council and Village Council

Table 4: Showing how Social Relationships are distinguished.

Household Groups: this is the most immediate form of social relations, usually consisting of the father, mother, and children. However, this may also consist of the joint family, depending on the everyday interactions and those who share the same household. In the Andres case this included a matrilineal/consanguineal household—the great grandmother, grandmother, mother and children—which was not typical of Bush Rope household dynamic.

Relationships are therefore stronger within a household group, as the lattice of connections is based on consanguineal and affinal ties. The power within the household is also determined by age, sex and property ownership, with a dominant male figure leading a typical household, or a dominant female head of high ranking. In the case of the Andre's, this was Aunty Lizzie, who had political power, and whose husband had built the house.

Crews: this group consists of individuals, who may not necessarily be related to each other, but are interconnected through similar beliefs, political view and social status. Crews were, for the most part, a male dominated sphere. However, certain women were given access at various periods to be part of this group.

Within Bush Rope, crews found centres, in which to congregate and discuss current issues that concerned them, which were near to hubs in which to gain information from “outside” the village. Such places were shops, and the centre, even though it was usually shops, such as Burning Hills, which received many visitors from outside of the village. This was particular of crews, as their main objective appeared to be one that sought information—the latest—from outside of their village, but which also pertained to their well-being. Unlike, our notions of a clique, Wapichan crews are not based on one’s popularity, or on a specific set of criterion, but rather a varying array of measures. Such measures vary according to the beliefs of the leader. This leader introduces the group to certain issues, which the crew then discusses at length until common grounds are formed. In such a case, not only is the crew affected, but other villagers who may consider them influential. However, the extent to which crews play significant roles within the concept of communal relations, and community building will be further analysed in chapter 6 of this dissertation.

The Village: within the village places where main economic transfers occur become nodes of relations, such as the shop and the village centre. These are also a setting for

gossip and the exchange of information or news. For this reason, important relationships are usually forged and maintained at Burning Hills, the village centre, Riso's shop, and at various locations where people frequently meet and fundraising activities occur. Even though the village centre is a place for the updating of village members on issues affecting their livelihood, as well as national affairs, it is mainly used as a venue for raising money.

> The store or market, in addition to its economic function, also serves as an informal gossip centre, thus making possible the extension of personal relations from the neighborhood to the village level (Starr 1954:128).

The relationships between villagers are masked by social, political and physical divisions. These divisions not only hinder the way people interrelate, but they also determine how, when, and how often people communicate with each other. Social distinctions include the different ways in which people live—traditional vs. modern—as some who live traditionally stay further away from the village centre, unless there is a village meeting, market day, religious or school event, or a village manore. Political distinctions are felt at varying seasons. Only with the visit of varying political figures, issues which are politically based and raised at village meets, and elections are relationships strained and isolated within this distinction. As will be analysed in chapters 6 and 7, the political dimensions are of great importance concerning how people establish relationships with each other. However, this is something that does not affect the village year-round, but at those periods of time where the political foment of the village, country and the region is at its peak.

Region: the region operates on an economic and political level, where relationships are guided by commoditisation as well as political incentives. The dilemma here is the pull between the political incentives, which seek to bring the people 'into the present,' while, at the same time, the need to embrace ancestral practices, and appear 'traditional.' This following section will shed some light into this reality, while pinpointing not the relationships between individuals, but rather the relationships between a facet of Wapichan identity and place.

II

Negotiating Manore

Let us return to the beginning of this chapter, and the topic of manore. In order to understand the Wapichannao's relationships within the regional and national context, one must address the matter of pressures felt when outside bodies—such as the government, miners, the Church, e.g.—try to make their mark within the core group. Relationships become based upon whether one supports foreign ('farrin') influences or not. In this case, the manore—a definitive part of Wapichan culture—offers a good example as to the fissure created due to varying ideologies as to how people should relate to each other and how "culture" should be practiced.

We've already established that the manore relates to those 'traditional' social relations which speak to the ideology of the communal. However, there are shops in the village, and these shops offer commodities that are 'farrin' and gained through the individualistic act of "working for money".

In order to present the dilemma and distinctions between manore and commodity, a table has been created to show how these two paradigms may be distinguished.

MANORE	COMMODITY
TRADITIONAL	MODERN (FARRIN)
COMMUNAL	INDIVIDUALISTIC
CONTRIBUTION/SHARING	MONEY TRANSACTION

Table 5: Showing Socioeconomic Dualities

The manore is a constant reminder of how interactions between individuals 'used to be'. However, even though this is an integral part of Wapichan subsistence and relationship patterns, the commoditisation of Bush Rope has drawn the Wapichannao here to rely heavily on commodities. The reliance on commodities has brought about sensitivity towards not only the items found in the shops, but also the shop itself, as the shop is a main hub for social relations. The feelings towards both the commodities and communal work present us with the dichotomy between the ever present reality of the directedness towards the farrin and the fight for the maintenance of traditional customs. Symbolic of the dichotomy are those entities which are constantly being redefined, as the meanings of farrin and traditional are in a constant state of disjuncture, ambiguation and reassignment. It is, therefore, through this process that they are able to engage in a dialogue between the two as a means to create workable social relationships.

Within the manore and the dependence on commodities, the social relevance of both are constantly being played out within the village. For one, the ability to purchase and possess commodities for the Wapichan is a sign of "progress," "development," and "forward ways." The sensitivity towards commodities is a way in which to link the Wapichannao of Bush Rope to the farrin, presenting them as "forward" people. However, commodities set individuals apart from each other, as opposed to linking them as one. Commodities, as they enter the household, lead to its redefinition as 'private'. In order to obtain commodities one must "make a living" by "earning a living," that meaning individuals must leave their farms and households to work, by selling

crops or by working for one of the local businesses or the government based institutions in the village.

Earning money is a measure of the individual status. The individual sees the item as theirs'—an item not to be shared with others—as the means by which one obtains it does not involve others. This capitalistic venture is not only occurring amongst the Wapichannao of Bush Rope, but also the Makushi further north, as well as the other Wapichannao living in the region. This was clearly indicated when members of a neighbouring village came to buy their rations from Burning Hills. At this time, the usual Bedford trucks that delivered commodities to shops could not make their way into the village due to inaccessible roads.

It seemed that the need to earn money in order to attain things that were not only from the shop, but also from other people's farms was quite common throughout the Rupununi. This, as Chief had once explained, is a result of people's dependence on farrin items. This was also attributed to the lack of traditional knowledge and customs that were dying out in the village. Those things that brought people together are now not so prevalent. Instead, he saw individualism overpowering the communal.

Therefore, if manore is the way people relate with each other through an interconnecting system, whereby shared labour produces shared access to produce and subsistence, commodities act as a counter way in which people define each other within the village. In other words, the possession of commodities symbolizes the individual's sensitivity to profiteering—i.e. working for the individual fulfilment of gaining things.

However, can we really look at this capitalistic exchange as solely a negative form of reciprocity as Sahlins (1972) suggests?

Unlike the manore, where food exchanges are based on members of the village working together to solidify relationships (Sahlins 1972: 215-219), the dependence on commodities within such societies do create a rift, by dissolving bonds and pushing individuals outside the core of the community (Counihan 1992: 55). Yet, it may be too simple to pigeonhole commodities as a form of the modern and manore as a form of the traditional.

Rather, they work on mutual grounds for defining personhood and community. They both do so as they require reciprocity in order to completely function within the society. The need to account for one's property and time given to others has created the need for one to reciprocate when borrowing or asking for a favour. So in actuality, communal and commodities are not as separate as the ideology suggests, but the dichotomy becomes a battle ground for political mobilisation. The following section highlights this point and show another type of relationship.

Give fuh Tek, Tek fuh Give

Within these levels of participations and the relationships that are forged from them, another underlying layer of how people associate with each other may be considered.

The basic transaction between people contributes to understanding the way in which the Wapichannao construct their reality vis-à-vis each other, through the act of

reciprocity. This reciprocity is the way in which people “individuate themselves and mediate their relationships” based on the possessions and favours that are involved (Gose 1986: 298). My interests lie not in the reasons the exchanges occur, but in the need to repay. The act of choosing for whom one does a favour is proportional to the needs of the individual.

We can see reciprocity in light of who goes to whom for a favour. These social ties between individuals are based upon kinship ties, locality and affines, and are not restricted to economic levels of reciprocity, or “objects of material value” (Schieffelin 1980: 505). Rather economic/material reciprocity is “situated within a wider sense of social reciprocity which extends beyond exchange transactions to contexts which may have little, if anything, to do with exchange” (1980: 505). This is highlighted within the very acts of reciprocity that one encounters within Bush Rope. For one, the Wapichannao do not expect the exact gift or favour to be reciprocated; unless money is involved (in this case a deal can be worked out whether that person repays the full amount or repays in something of value to the person owed. This is because, if one asks a favour or accepts a gift, then that person is also agreeing to be called upon at any time for any favour. However, by entering into this continuum, one is aware of the duty to reciprocate or to have a favour returned to them.

With the manore, one can choose to partake or not depending on the needs of that individual. If one does not need to benefit from another, then that individual will choose

not to partake in a manore. However, if that person needs a favour, not to partake in a manore—depending on size—would show laziness and greed on the person's part.

An example of this occurred one morning, when Kara was in the kitchen and her mother's brother's wife appeared at the doorway. She had brought some cassava back from her farm to give to the family. She stood at the doorway without saying a word for about two minutes, and then came in after Kara offered her some shiibii. She then took out some cassava and gave it to Kara, without saying much. The most she said were the usual greetings, and then a bit about the farm. She did not ask for anything in return as this, according to Kara, was her way of returning a favour Aunty Lizzie had done for her a while ago. Kara expressed how Aunty Lizzie was always giving out farine she had made, or would let people take mangoes or eddoes from her farm, so this was probably a way of repaying her. Kara had also mentioned that this could have been a long time ago, as she was not sure what transactions had taken place between her aunt and her mother.

This very transaction was how I established one with Aunty Dora, as our relationship was solely based on reciprocity, as opposed to a relationship built on friendship (e.g.). The first time I met Aunty Dora was during my first trip to Bush Rope, travelling together from Lethem to Bush Rope. She had invited me to have a meal with her and Chief, which I did the following night we arrived to the village. She told me that she did catering and that whenever I chose I could eat with them.

When I returned to the village to start my fieldwork she had invited me again to dinner. The next day she asked me for a favour: to work in the shop. This was the beginning of a string of reciprocal acts involving her inviting me to eat a meal at her house, and me repaying her by working or doing chores. When I stopped eating at her house, I stopped working at the shop. And when I stopped working at the shop, she found little need to invite me to have a meal, or to give me produce she brought from Brazil or her farm. At first, I assumed it was the due to the fact that she had not been seeing me as often, but later I realized that it was because I broke the reciprocal web into which I had managed to intertwine myself. I had broken a bond that we had—that of giving and taking—and as a result I was somewhat shunned from her ever extravagant meals.

The manore takes on a different dynamic when it involves the entire village. During village work, all able bodies are expected to contribute. However, on many occasions this does not occur. Those who do attend village work note those who do not attend, especially the 'big men' of the village, whose job it is to make sure that the work has been completed. However, the political dynamic of the village becomes a factor during village manore work. The turnout of a manore is a reflection of its leader. The excerpt below shows one community member's frustration as to the turn out and the political influences that determined people's participation (cf. Panikar 1993[58]).

[58] Panikar's work amongst Hindu's and their commitment to communalism vis-à-vis the political domains of culture shows the impact politics plays in peoples ideas of who belongs to the communal. This is similarly observed amongst the Wapichannao of Guyana.

> Gav[59] came over from Mr. Houston's for a little gaff. He is angry about Amerindian people's concepts of development, which he sees as a Westernised and destructive view. "I need to write a paper on this term 'development'…some people are so ignorant they would say ***I'm*** going backwards not forwards." He said this to me as he looked at the newly installed electricity poles. He argued that because of this new idea of development and modernization, people did not even want to come out for village work. He blamed it on the current government—the People's Progressive Party/Civic [PPP/C]—as the majority of PPP/C supporters did not want to come out for village work. It is compulsory for everyone to come out and work, as it displays communal responsibilities.
> He pointed to the bush area right in front of our neatly trimmed lawn and towards the west of the village: "See! It was my plan to get the people here to weed this area, but nobody wants to do it…They all busy! Doing what? I don't know. But they all just busy!" We both laughed as we said the last phrase together. [60]

At the following general village meeting, the issue of village work was brought to everyone's attention. Aunty Dora had taken action at the previous one, taking men who were working on the government buildings which had past their deadline for completion. One village member expressed his outrage, as he could not understand why she would take the men, who were already working, away to do village work.

Sociability and Conviviality

To work and be sociable at the same time is the Wapichannao way of mitigating unevenness and imbalance. If one does not treat work and play equally they are considered lazy or unsociable, which limits the perpetuation of social bonds (Kent 1993: 480). This does not only apply to someone who does not work, but it applies to people who do not work at certain times. One example occurred when I was caught resting in my hammock during the early afternoon. Regardless of what I had been doing earlier, I

[59] Gav is the son of Aunty Lizzie's sister who moved to Brasil. He is also one of the leaders of the Padatch Crew, as will be discussed in Chapter 6.
[60] Fieldnotes: 7th February 2007

was resting at an inappropriate time. Instead I should have been socializing with her, or working.

As will be explored in the following chapter, laughter, especially within Amazonia, is considered to be a "powerful tool for social living, and is considered necessary by indigenous people to many aspects of living successfully in village life" (Overing 2000: 67). This is particularly the case amongst the Wapichannao when work or collective endeavours are in play. Here, work and productivity is held on par with that of conviviality. These two—work and conviviality—are not considered to be mutually exclusive, but rather interdependent.

The socialized actor, therefore, builds relationships through the work s/he does, which not only sustains the individual household, but also the village, and everyday interactions. In other words, these social representations are the building blocks of the identity of a well-balanced individual. As Passes (2000: 99) notes, collective work is not only done so as to complete a task in the Western sense of the term, rather it is done in conjunction with

> …the social and affective states…the joint condition of work almost as a game…, of communality, amicability and high spirits, of physical labour and physical exuberance and technical expression…That is, conviviality as, precisely, a 'way of being' typified by these selfsame attributes of friendship, joy, productive playfulness and pleasurable sociality accruing from and dependent on the individual's autonomous, unregimented and creative use of their tools.

The fact that the village members were not coming out to share in the work of the manore made Gav aware of the division in the village. The common goals and needs of the villages were disintegrating. The sharing of work, not only accounted for the fact that each individual displayed his/her dedication to the task at hand, but it also allowed

for a sociable exchange. The exchange of goods, services and information constituted a large part of the social identity of these people. However, with current political interconnectivity affecting the way in which people socialised with each other, the drift between how individuals exchanged amongst themselves became more apparent.

Those social capacities are dependent on social agents who try to balance not only the relationship between work and play—which when not balanced can define an individual as being either antisocial or lazy—but also the interconnectivity of the village. If we refer back to Aunty Dora's action against the men who didn't want to contribute to the village work; in a manner of speaking, Aunty Dora used her power as a village leader to convince the men to leave their own work to complete that of village work.

III

Power of Politics, Politics of Power

The political dynamics of the village rested on its structure and the way in which national politics crept into the political arena of Bush Rope, which will be cover in depth in Chapter 4. However, this section will briefly sketch the layout of Bush Rope politics and how the power of politics played a large role in the making of Wapichannao identity.

Each village is governed by a village council, which is common to all Amerindian villages throughout Guyana. At the head of each village is the Chief or *toshao*, followed by the Deputy Toshao, Secretary, Treasurer and other council members. In order for these members to be recognised, the village and those involved must adhere to an Act, within the Amerindian Act 1976, put in place by the government to "protect" Amerindians and their rights. Amerindians are also protected under laws and rights known as The 1976 Amerindian Act or The Amerindian Act 1976.

The Amerindian Act 1976 outlines those laws and stipulations specific to the Amerindian peoples, as well as defines Amerindian concepts from a government-based perspective. Not only does it describe the powers and duties of village councils and those members who belong to the council, the Act also outlines who should and should not be defined as Amerindian (an issue that will be covered in Chapter 7).

Under section 19 of the Amerindian Act, the powers and duties of the village Council are as follows:

> (1)(a) To hold the village land title for the benefit of the community as a whole;
> (b) To manage and take care of village titled land;

(c) To implement and obey rules and regulations made under the Act.

(2) Provided the Minister approves, the Chief Officer[61] may make rules saying how many persons are needed to make a quorum and the procedures to be used in the conduct of business by the District, Area or Village Councils[62].

The Amerindian Act may also be considered as one of the main entities within Guyanese law, which links, as well as disconnects, the Amerindian people to the rest of Guyanese Society. It is meant to put them within the scope of the Guyanese context, while at the same time defining them as an independent group: one in need of laws that do not coincide with those of other Guyanese people. This is one of the key aspects of politics within the village, which will not only be mentioned further on in this section, but will fully be analysed in Chapter 7, as previously mentioned.

In order to be elected as a member of the village council, general village nominations and elections are held. Candidates for the captain, or *toshao*, are also chosen by the village, based on a number of factors which the Wapichannao deem relevant characteristics for a leader. However, as section 14 of the Amerindian Act states, the Chief Officer has the power, "with the approval of the Minister[63], [to] appoint any Amerindian to be a Captain. He or she may also remove a Captain from office."[64] As a result, the natural order of politics within a village can be disrupted if the Chief Officer decides to overthrow a decision made by the village. This had occurred once during my time in Bush Rope. In this case, the Chief Officer, or Regional Chairperson, came to Bush Rope during the resignation of one *toshao*—Riso—upon his request. Generally, if a

[61] The Chief officer is put in place to protect and manage the property of Amerindians. See Appendix # Part III on the duties of the Chief Officer.

[62] Taken from *A Plain English Guide to the Amerindian Act*: http://www.sdnp.org.gy/apa/topic7.htm

[63] Minister of Amerindian Affairs.

[64] Taken from *A Plain English Guide to the Amerindian Act*: http://www.sdnp.org.gy/apa/topic7.htm

toshao steps down, the village can decide whether they wish to appoint the deputy toshao as the new toshao, or whether they wish to elect a new toshao. However, in January 2007, Riso, due to rivalry with the deputy toshao, called in the Regional Chairperson to preempt the need for elections for a new toshao. The following is an excerpt from my fieldnotes at nomination day for a new toshao. The rivalry between the two brothers extended even after their reigns as toshao.

> Today is nomination day for new Toshao as Riso has resigned…Ronnie has just nominated his mother—Aunty Dora—and as soon as this happened Riso nominated Derek Winter, with a quick seconding by Aunty Pet. [She later tells me that we just want to get rid of Aunty Dora]. Aunty [I do not know her name so call her Aunty] next to me asks Aunty Dora if she is prepared to be Toshao…Riso gets up to tell the village why he is resigning. "Those people who supported me: Thank you!" He then proceeds to advise the people to elect someone who is not business oriented, which seemed like a direct reference to Aunty Dora who was the only business person nominated and who just happened to be his biggest rival. The regional chairman, whom Riso asked to come and preside over the meetings, shared Riso's political agenda, and supported Riso's recommendation that the toshao should not be business-oriented. Chief retaliates by stating that most of the word's leaders have had their origins in business: Bush, Kofi Anan, Tony Blair, and our own President(PPP/C). "We should elect someone who can speak to outside people and not just say 'yes' because we are afraid or confused."
> The Regional Chairman announced that he supported Riso as he was "easy to work with…and would visit" him. Kirtdy stands up and expresses his concern at the abrupt meeting, as most of the village were not informed that it was a nomination meeting. Kirt then advises the people that when electing a new toshao the people should not think in regards to political affiliations, but who would be the best candidate for the people.[65]

When I first arrived to the village in March, it was buzzing with discussions as to the upcoming elections. Chief had been the toshao for 12 years, but decided not to run for the position during the upcoming elections, as he wanted to focus on his shop and his non-government organisation known as the Amerindian Peoples Association (APA). Running in his place was his younger brother Riso, who also owned a shop, which rivalled that of Chief's (See Chapter 6). From then on, the key players within the political arena were Chief, his wife, and his second son—Ronnie—as well as Chief's brother Riso.

[65] Fieldnotes: 30th January 2007

Even though elections are not based on kinship ties, so in principle allowing any member of the village to run for candidacy, the toshao of Bush Rope for the past five toshaos had all been kin. Members of the village tend to acknowledge their ties to the most famous toshao—Henry Winter—who was also the father of Mrs. Lizzie with whom I lived, and who was also toshao for two years. The following diagram shows the past and present toshaos of the village and how they relate to Henry Winter.

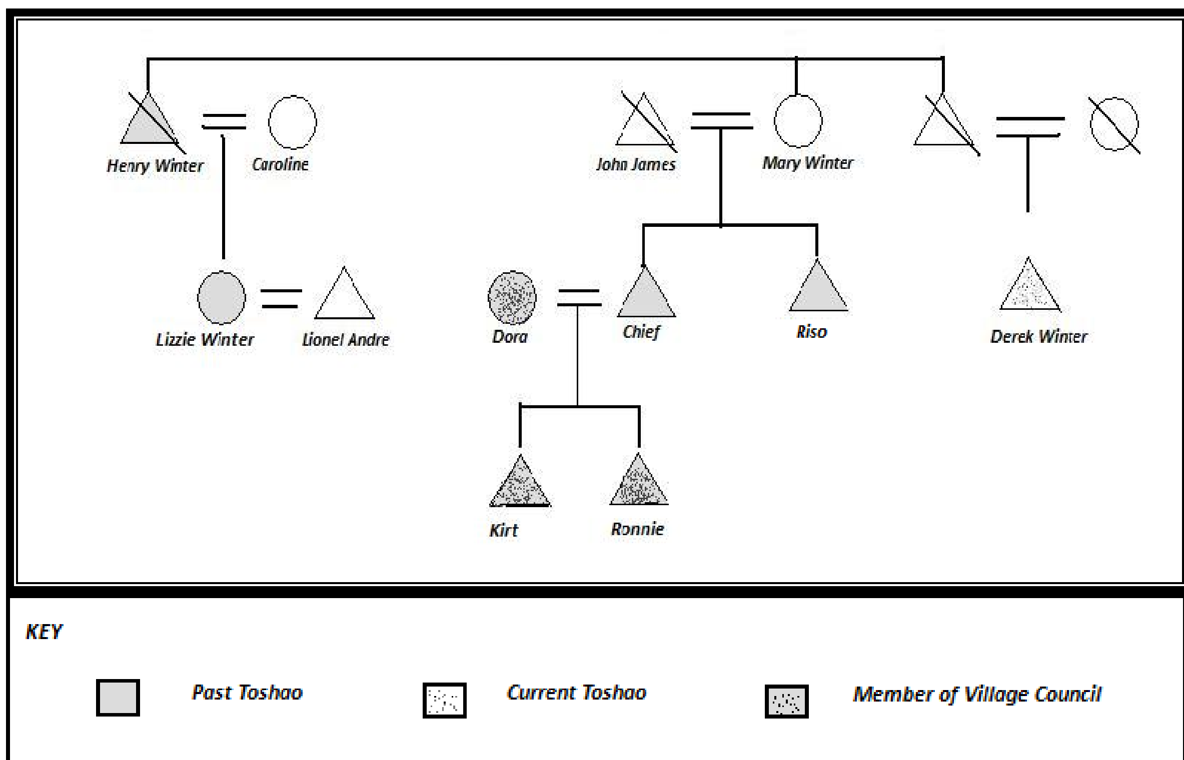

Figure 5: Showing Political Kin Relationships

As previously mentioned, both brothers had opposing political views, as they both supported opposing national political parties—PPP/C and PNC—and both rivalled each other with their perspectives on how the village should be governed. On the one hand, Chief was seen as a traditionalist, who wanted to restore traditional practices and notions of Wapichannao identity. He had long supported the People's National Congress

party, which is heavily supported by the Afro-Guyanese population of Guyana, until he decided to vote for the newly founded Alliance For Change party, whose goal is to break down the race related schismatic national politics of the country. This was not Chief's only political involvement, as he was the President of the Amerindian's People's Association—a non-government organisation—which opposed many of the current government's policies relating to Amerindian peoples' rights, and proposed amendments to them. On the other hand, Riso was an advocate for modern/foreign ideas of development and governance. He frequently boasted of his times in Georgetown, and how he admired city life, as opposed to the primitiveness of the village. He supported the country's leading, and current, party—The People's Progressive Party/Civic—which is mostly supported by the Indo-Guyanese population. In talking to Kara she told me that in Bush Rope people would vote depending on race, which I did not know. She said "they would prefer to vote for an Indian president than a black one".[66] This was the same day that the PPP/C had organised a 'feed-up' where they would feed the village. At the same time representatives in the village were taking down names, which intimidated some of the people who were there. I was offered to come and eat, but I could not as I didn't want to be associated 'openly' with any particular party.

As 'big men', Riso and Chief were not only seen as key political advisors for intra-village politics. Even though Chief was no longer a member of the village council, his influence still lingered. Chief's notions and ideals were heavily embedded within the perceptions

[66] Fieldnotes 20th August 2006

of his son, Ronnie—who was briefly Deputy Toshao under Riso's reign, until he "got fed-up of the nonsense" within the council—and his wife, Dora, who took the position of Deputy once her son had resigned. It seemed that once there was one member of a household, who was a key member of the council, others within the household became very much involved. This would explain the kinship-like formation of the political structure of Bush Rope, as demonstrated above.

Village politics extended beyond the borders of intravillage politics and onto national politics. At this time, the village was divided into two groups, led by brother, Riso and Chief. Each brother supported opposing political parties: a schism within Guyanese society, which is the root of the racial divisions in the country, as is detailed in the Introduction of this thesis. To add to these differences in perspectives, they both had opposing ideals of how the village should be run, which took its toll on the sociopolitical dynamics of the village itself. This not only affected village dynamics but also kinship ties. Their sister—Aunty Claudine—expressed her concerns and disappointment during a slaughter in which I participated.

> At the corral after the first slaughter, Aunty Claudine came for 5kg of beef. She told me about the plane that arrived yesterday. It was filled with PPP/C representatives who came to convince people to vote for Derek Winter and not Aunty Dora. The Community Development Officer (CDO) was also involved: stopping a council meeting because there was no toshao. Aunty Claudine is disappointed in her brother Riso. She said that he encouraged politics to get in the way of fair elections. Apparently, they were going around trying to convince people to vote. They went to their [Aunty Claudine, Chief and Riso's] mother and she told them that she did not have time to listen to their politics and if they were preaching about God she would listen. Aunty Claudine said that "Riso was only vexed because Dora exposed him to [Bush Rope]" and "everybody knows about him[67]". She told me that she found the Regional Chairman rude, especially when he told

[67] Aunty Claudine was referring to the rumours of Riso having homosexual relations with another member of the village.

> Aunty Dora to be quiet when she began to speak. She feels that "this will divide our small community".[68]

During this time, Riso had been accused of practicing homosexuality, despite his marriage. This was developed into full blown rumours, orchestrated mostly by Chief's wife—Aunty Dora—and his sister-in-law. As a result, he was pressured into resigning, and his male partner was asked to return to his kin village in Sawariwau.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although the Wapichannao display an individualistic approach to food through commoditisation and consumption, agents such as manores, and traditional practices and myths keep them from fully immersing themselves to a "reduction in dependence on others for survival necessities and to an increasing autonomy of action and decision-making" (Counihan 1984: 47). As manores and traditional subsistence practices promote communalism through shared labour and maxims of the world, commoditisation is not left to overpower the group dynamics of Bush Rope. Community ties and group identity still play an important role and such institutions like the shop (as will be explored in Chapter 6), which would otherwise play a key role in promoting individualism, bring villagers together through shared perspectives of sentiments towards commodities. The Wapichannao are closely "interdependent in behaviour and ideology" (Counihan 1984: 47), unlike Geertz's (1975: 59) Western conception of the person, which he defines

> …as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic centre of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive

[68] Fieldnotes 03rd February 2007

> whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background, is, however, incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures.

However, the manore not only stimulated the relationships between each other, as many everyday exchanges proved integral to how exchange occurred amongst individuals in Bush Rope, which will not only be covered within this chapter, but throughout the entire thesis. I would, however, like to move onto another aspect of Wapichannao discourse which played a key role in how people communicated with each other: laughter. Laughter produced semiotic codes filled with social meanings that would take more than a few years of living with the Wapichannao to understand. I am still in the process of understanding these integral aspects of what ties individuals to each other (hence the use of the progressive tense in the title). Within a conversation the ability to produce laughter amongst the group or with the other was a valued aspect of communication between individuals. Not only does the manore function as an enclosure for gossip and work, but it is here that people can produce laughter so as to reduce the stress and magnitude of seriousness of the work. Not only is laughter associated with work, but it is also associated with the way in which people of sameness interact with each other, as opposed to alterity. Laughter is what, therefore, connects everyone on all levels. In this case, different types of laughter emerged, which specified different relationships individuals had with each other. The following chapter looks at the role laughter played amongst the Wapichannao, particularly in the building and defining of relationships. An entire branch of Philosophy—Philosophy of Humour/Laughter—has been dedicated to understanding why people use humour to

communicate ideas, as well as why do people laugh or try to arouse the action of laughter amongst their peers. These historical approaches to laughter will be considered in my analysis of Wapichannao laughter and humour.

Chapter 4
Volume Control: Laughter and Gossip

We've moved years away from the Radcliffe-Brownian functionalist approach to understanding "joking" relationships within anthropology (1940), where analysis was based on

> ….the necessity for maintaining stability between "conjunctive and disjunctive components" (1940: 200), in which a close, even causal, correlation is posited between the presence of a joking relationship and the potential for conflict, has been assumed as given by the majority of writers on the subject (Stevens 1978: 48).

Rather, we must consider joking activity within the social context in which they occur. Not only must we take into account the relationship between the individuals, but also the setting in which they occur. Unlike Overing (2000: 65), who found place amongst the Piaroa through the use of hilarity, I felt very much isolated and distant from the humour utilised by the Wapichannao. It was not until I found myself applying their techniques of humour did I find some common grounds in which to share their banter. In other words, play, in the form of jokes and laughter, may be conceived as a "tool for social living," which is considered to be an integral aspect of the Amerindian discourse (Overing 2000: 67; Bremmer & Roodenburgh 1997).

In considering how the Wapichannao express relationships vis-à-vis emotions and ideas of personhood, I wish to develop this chapter in relation to laughter, joking activity, and gossip. The chapter starts off with gossip activity, and the use of gossip as a device in which to disambiguate an individual's status in the village. This is the act of reversing

ambiguity, so as to create some balance in the village. Following my analysis on gossip, I will then look at joking activity and how laughter and the ability to make jokes between individuals define certain types of emotional bonds they may share. Yet, at the same time, these rules within joking and laughing are regulated through a variety of devices—such as culture shows and lies—which play a fundamental role in how people conceptualise these relations. One such example is seen in skits about the *maranao* (shaman), who, although is caricatured on stage, can only be laughed at within this forum, and under certain guidelines.

I

Gossip Culture

Where you are going and Where you are coming from

According to Gluckman (1963: 308), gossip and scandal "maintain the unity, morals and values of social groups…they enable these groups to control the competing cliques and aspiring individuals of which all groups are composed." Unlike Gluckman (1963; 1968), Paine (1967: 282) believes one can construct a notion of gossip, not as a force in which to place dominance over another, but rather a "cultural device used by an individual to further his own interests" (cf. Szwed 1966; Cox 1970). However, applying a theory about gossip amongst the Wapichannao requires one to understand how Wapichannao relations work. For instance, in Bush Rope, it seemed to be *modus operandi* to ask a person "*Na'itim pumakon*?" ("Where are you going to?"), regardless of whether the person asking knew the answer already or not. I found this to be the case on many occasions, especially when I was on my way to Aunty Bibi, where I learnt to make my hammocks. En route to Aunty Bibi, I would pass the shop and a family, who would, upon seeing me, ask me where I was going, when I walked in that direction. Those in the shop always asked the question: "Ms. Stacy, where you going? How come you're going over to that side?" On returning from Aunty Bibi they would follow up their previous question by asking: "*Na'ikim puwa'atin*?" ("Where are you coming from?"). At first I perceived it to be their way of testing my Wapichan, but upon receiving the question from many others, and when I started following these procedures, it became more a form of everyday etiquette. This was noted amongst the WaiWais further south by Mentore (2005: 238):

> Indeed, it is common practice if not the protocol always to ask someone leaving the village… ("Where are you going?"). Even when the person asking the question knows what the answer will be, the inquiry will still be made.

Every time the family saw me they would ask these questions, over and over again, until they became a part of our everyday interaction. In doing this, one is meant to be engaged with the other constantly, as one cannot consider it to be just an intrusion, but, rather, part of social decorum. Again Mentore's work amongst the WaiWais to the south describes a similar meaning one can gather from such behaviour (2005: 238):

> It is not prying, nor is it an invasion of what we may call personal privacy. It is the WaiWai etiquette—both a kind of formal greeting and a request for voiced confirmation of departure. In this way everyone knows more or less what everyone else is doing when not in the village…

Mentore's account speaks specifically of those who are leaving the village. However, amongst the Wapichannao, the inquiry into movement revolves around direction rather than proximity. When walking in the direction of Burning Hills, even if they knew that I was heading towards Burning Hills, a few meters away from their home, the family would still enquire as to where I was going. And despite asking me where I am going when heading to Aunty Bibi, they still asked from where I was coming. The greeting maintained a sort of stability to village life, as each person can account for the location of another, threading the village into networks of who knows where who is.

However, knowledge of where an individual is even if s/he did not inform anyone else seemed to travel back into the shop. 'Everyone knew everyone's business' (as many villagers put it), and everyone's business seemed to be public property, as the lives of one had moral effects on others. This is further expressed in the ethnographic material below.

The Priest and I: Gossip

As described in Chapter 3, the Wapichannao relationships break down the unknowable to make it known. Ambiguity is a far cry from the everydayness, although it is within their framework of constructing identity. I have stated elsewhere, that ambiguity works in a continuum along with disjuncture and resignification, so that in the end one can arrive at a suitable definition of who one is at that point of time. However, the Wapichannao do not state or accept “ambiguity” as a truth, or as a state of permanence at any given point of time. Instead, it is part of a process by which one creates a truth and a state of explicitness. Thus, gossip is a device used both to create and eradicate ambiguity of a person, whereby a ‘truth’ (perspectival truth: i.e. a truth from one’s point-of-view) is established through lying. Anyone can assume the role of the gossiper, as it is essential for each individual to share information in order to fit into Wapichannao discourse.

However, those who are considered powerful within the village use gossip.

If we were, therefore, to consider Wapichannao gossip in such a light, one may find it less beneficial to focus solely on their use of gossip as either a form of control (Gluckman 1963; 1968, Hannerz 1967) or a device in which to further an individual’s interests (Szwed 1966; Paine 1967; 1968; Cox 1970). Rather, we may consider it a way in which to make some sense of the world; a means of mediating ambiguity which threatens the balance within society, and a means in which to transmit information. At the same time, we do see evidence of gossip as a form of social control, as well as a way

in which to further one's own interests, as will be identified below. However, gossip is the primary means in which individuals learn about each other when they are out of sight (Szwed 1966: 435). Although gossip occurs between party A & B about party C, where party A is the gossiper, and B the listener, and C the one who is being gossiped about, party B may choose to use the information given in similar manner to party A or can disclose the information to party C. This relationship amongst all three parties, is not left to the individual's own interests, but reflects the role gossip plays within society. Gossip, or what I refer to as gossip, reveals truths (according to party A) about party C, as well as the underlying community attitudes, which may further be used to understand community morale and ethics.

Such imbalance was constantly threatening society, especially when it came to my relationship status. As I was 'single' at the time of my fieldwork, most of the women and men were perplexed by this. The women who had sons close to my age offered them to me, and the men who had enough courage or drunk enough to have the courage offered themselves to me. However, it was my friendship with the male Jesuit priest-in-training that caused gossip to spread.

The 27 year-old priest-in-training from Brazil came to Bush Rope as a missionary with the Catholic Church for the region. As part of his training, he was required to do missionary work and was stationed throughout the southern Rupununi with the majority of his stay in Bush Rope. During his stay we became good friends, with frequent trips to the other side of the village—the less developed side—together to meet with some of my informants, as well as general sight-seeing. Having interacted with only the

Sunday School and Catechism children, he was isolated from much of the village with only brief interactions with the rest of the villagers—mostly the women from the female dominated church groups and women groups—and long periods outside of the village. Seeing us in frequent company, many people came to the conclusion that we were a 'couple,' regardless of his status as a "young Catholic priest". While working in the shop, gossip was solidified when a few of my high school students came up to me and said "Ms. Stacy, we saw you with father. He's your boyfriend? We know he is!" As much as I told them how foolish they were to think that, especially since he was a priest they refused to believe me. This was taken further within the Andres household: "*we* think you two have something going on…how come he came to visit you and you visit him? You are young and single; you need to have a boyfriend." This came from many of the adults in the village who felt comfortable enough to express their suspicion to Kara. The questions and accusations evolved from a discomfort of the relationship. This discomfort was rectified by labelling us as something they understood: boyfriend and girlfriend. In labelling us as boyfriend and girlfriend, a sort of social control had been placed upon us. If we were not boyfriend and girlfriend, then we were meant to refrain from how we communicated with each other. If we were, then this had already been established for us. Many times, children were the ones who were sent to gain information about others. Almost undetected by adults, children would stand in the shops—most times while waiting for the items their parents sent them to get—while gossip occurs. Children from as young as 5, play a crucial role in the diffusion of gossip from the forum of the shop into the household, hence, aiding in the communication of

information about individuals (cf. Goffman 1955). Goffman's (1955) concept of the child's ability to conduct "face-work," whereby children are given access to conversations from which their parents might have been restricted. In doing so, the child gathers this information on behalf of the adults without anyone suffering any embarrassment from walking in on the gossip.

Within this assertion of disambiguation, gossip plays a large role within the egalitarian nature of the community, which places importance on one's own reputation, and that of others. The Wapichannao rarely deny their involvement in participating in a rumour. They stick by any assertions or gossip that they might have started as it is only on few occasions that an individual approaches another if false gossip occurs. This may also have to do with the nature of the gossip told by the gossiper, as gossip amongst the Wapichan rarely destroys one's reputation (cf. Wilk 1995; Brenneis 1984). As Brenneis (1984: 495) suggests when looking at verbal interaction amongst members of a Fiji Indian Village:

> Perhaps the central concern of gossipers about their subjects is that their comments do not lead to irreparable damage; one gossips as frequently about friends as about enemies.

This may indicate why gossip is socially acceptable, as well as pivotal to understanding the Wapichannao relation through verbal interaction. The possibility of the arousal of anger is minimized by the social shield that leaves the gossiper far from culpable for their stories. However, the gossiper is left with the responsibility of not taking the gossip too far, which may explain why gossip of the priest-to-be and I were not taken further. Those involved in the gossip left room for a multitude of interpretation, which not only enabled for the gossip not to ruin the reputation of both myself and the priest-in-

training, but it has also disambiguated our status at the same time. This differs from Brenneis's assertion that gossip "maintains the autonomy of participants: they are not forced to accept a straightforward and unambiguous account" (Brenneis 1984: 495).

Gossip is, then, rarely used as a means for irreversible damage to one's reputation. However, on occasion it does happen, but occurs when an enemy sees an opportunity to malign an individual's or a family's prestige (Paine 1980: 281), as was suffered by Riso. During this period, his sister-in-law, and long time rival—Aunty Dora—endorsed gossip that tarnished his "name" or his reputation. The 'scandal' that tore Bush Rope apart was related to beliefs that Riso was having an extra-marital affair with a man who also had his own family. Not only was he accused of having an extramarital affair, he was also accused of homosexuality, which was believed not to be practised in the village, and seemed to be intolerable. Unlike others who spoke of these rumours within the privacy of their households, his main "name-talker" or gossiper spoke about it constantly in Burning Hills, and very loudly. As a result, Riso's alleged lover was asked to return to his paternal village along with his family, while Riso willingly resigned as toshao. By using Burning Hills as a catapult for large-scale gossip, Aunty Dora and those who visited the shop frequently were able to spread rumours quickly and more effectively.

> Saw Ronnie [Aunty Dora's son] who told me [Riso's] behaviour is tearing the people apart: "Toshao bisexual!" announced Ronnie. "The people are afraid of him because of this and he likes this feeling." Apparently, Toshao wanted to hang himself and went to Chief's house and cursed him. [69]

[69] Fieldnotes Aunty Shirley's Shop, Lethem: 12th November 2006

The rumours had spread all the way through, from Bush Rope to Lethem. Yet, the nature of the gossip was considered not only to be a symbol of control on the part of Riso (according to Ronnie), but also a way to understand the personhood of an individual. This, however, can be examined in terms of the transition of the shop to a rum-shop and "liming" or hanging out in the late afternoons to late evenings (depending on what day it is, and what social activities are occurring).

Ultimately, the question posed is: what does gossip do to relations within the village? It has been evident that two things have been occurring from the ethnographic accounts above. We may consider gossip as the 'cleavage of society' in this regards , as gossip functions as a tool in which to disambiguate individuals and society by reducing these complexities, as well as creating ambiguity and tension through the making and breaking of reputations vis-à-vis falsified truths. Gossip also acts as a political device in which to stain reputations, as was seen in Riso's case. Here, we see evidence of Paine's notions of gossip, as Aunty Dora used gossip as a way in which she could promote her own political interests.

II

Knowing How to Laugh

Laughter: an act of releasing an emotion, which calls for one to engage in its forceful nature. When I laughed amongst the Wapichannao for the first time, I could hear the discomfort in my own dissonance. It was a foreign sort of laughter, as it expressed an emotion of Western ideological perspectives; happiness and absurdity. The Wapichan discourse of laughter I had heard in retrospect to myself involved the presence and absence of knowledge. Before entering into the analysis of the type of laughter in which the Wapichan people engage, I would like to explore the act of laughter and the use of it as a form of language, whereby what is known is communicated.

Amerindians further from the coast have been described as “soft” spoken people (Mentore 2005). Their voices as soft as (or sometimes softer than) a whisper, forcing the listener to strain one’s ear, and draw oneself closer to the subject. Wapichan language entails a lot of inhalations, as opposed to exhalations, which is also utilized when the Wapichannao speak English. The use of inhalations subdues the sounds of the word, reducing it to the sound of someone gasping for air. Many people, excluding the discombobulated noise of children, do not raise their voices above this volume, unless they are of high ranking in the village. The role status played in language was very unique (as described in Chapter 1), and the role laughter played on language an even larger one.

There is a clear division of people in Bush Rope, especially when it comes down to the "this side of the airstrip" versus "that side of the airstrip" severance. Aside from this, other dichotomies in the village are made between old and young, Winter/Casimero/James and the others, Catholic and other denominations, among many. These divisions reflected who held what types of knowledge: e.g. traditional and modern (or *farrin*). Those who are more knowledgeable of the modern tended to speak boldly and with more volume, as those with less knowledge of the modern, or *farrin*, tended to speak meekly and with less volume. This is particularly true for the Padatch Crew, who are a group of mostly men, who are seen as erudite in both Wapichannao and farrin knowledge. This group may be found laughing loudly or in heavy debate over a political issue, which will be further discussed in Chapter 6. However, one may say that the level of volume found in rhetoric one displayed was inversely proportional to the volume of laughter one displayed in both the public and private forum.

Vocality through laughter exposed a different way of revealing one's knowledge. In a sense those who were seen as the least educated in the modern and up-to-date, possessed their knowledge in secret, which could only be depicted through their ability to laugh. Those living on the northern part of the village, known as the "other side of the airstrip," are considered to be less knowledgeable as a collective group. "You going 'till that side Miss Stacy?...You are going to experience 'real' Amerindian life, nuh Miss Stacy?" was one remark which indicated a recognition of the traditional knowledge.

I had been referred to the older people on many occasions when I enquired about any subject that had "traditional" value. "De ol' people know Miss Stacy." On the other

hand, this does not indicate a lack of knowledge on behalf of the person who refers you, but rather it indicates that that person is not of age or authority to advise on the matter. Many of the elders claimed that younger people were "[a]shamed" of accepting their ancestral knowledge as they viewed it as a rejection of modern maxims. The "old" is therefore a symbol of the possession and rejection of different types of knowledge. In Bush Rope we find three distinct theses and antitheses: 1) Knowledge is communally shared through the power of culture; 2) Traditional knowledge is superior to other knowledges but is not shared in its entirety; 3) Knowledge of the other (outside) is a superior knowledge to any other type, and is reserved for a few who are allowed access to this type of knowledge.

These types of knowledge are shared partially through the use of laughter. Whether these are conscious or unconscious, corporeal or imaginative, meanings have yet to be explored, but the corporeal—bodily—act of laughing and conscious differentiation between what is modern knowledge and what is traditional knowledge.

Traditional knowledge, therefore, calls upon those attributes which were first recorded by early explorers as gentle and soft spoken, whereas the modern/Creole knowledge calls for a more outspoken, loud disposition. Now how does laughter fit into the idea of experiencing the Self and the Other? This "joking relationship" allows for:

> …'free talk' between certain members of a clan, and the mockery, bantering, and humour that resulted created a counterweight to the tendency to seriousness…(Gil 1998: 170)

For the Wapichannao, as for others, it is clear that laughing at someone is to laugh at the expense of another. However, in such a case, the dimensions of those relationships are determined by the ability for an individual to become the subject of a joke. The

personhood of the individual who is the subject of laughter is contextualised within everyday meanings of society. In this sense, the need to laugh at the Other is to express the familiarity between the individuals, as well as the need to indicate types of knowledge known. The different types of laughter experienced amongst Wapichannao may be expressed through certain joking activities and how much “license to joke” one has (Handelman & Kapferer 1972).

The Philosophical Past

I would like to begin this analysis by taking a look at previous philosophical approaches to laughter, before constructively analyzing those anthropological perspectives or theories on the act of laughter and jokes. This will then be used throughout my analysis of Wapichannao use of laughter, not a guide, but as a means for comparative analysis.

In early philosophical thought we see the psychological conflict of deciphering the experience of laughter and humour in the individual. The exploitation of Plato’s and Aristotle’s philosophical perspectives—which are one-and-the-same for some—illustrates laughter as an expression of the Other’s ignorance. This type of laughter is seen as a reaction (however unsympathetic it may be) by the Self and the Other’s lack of knowledge, but most importantly it is seen as a response to pleasure, whether it be the pleasure of someone’s pain or ignorance or happiness (See Philebus and The Republic). The selfish self reflects on its own knowledge, disregarding the Other’s knowledge, and

deciphers an ignorance which is then made into a humorous or comical sort of ignorance which disables the Other's capacity for understanding one's own existence and/or maxims of the world. The self becomes a superior model of humanity, whereas laughter at the Other reflects the ignorance of those who do not share the same knowledge.

This is illustrated in Aristotle's *Philebus* (48-50b), where 'Socrates'—Aristotle—argues that the laughable Other is characterised by ignorance of the form of weakness (Philebus: 48c). This resonates further, in Plato's Republic, where he bans the comic performance from his ideal state, as he sees the laughable and the 'fool' as disruptive (Republic: 606c). In both Plato's 'The Republic' and Aristotle's 'Nicomachean Ethics' laughter is said to induce a change, which is unfitting for a utopian society. However, Aristotle sees this as a measure for social correction in the imperfect human condition (Rhetoric Bk II: 13). Even though we see a mirror-image of Plato's ideology in Aristotle's work, Aristotle goes further as he states that pleasure is not entirely good or bad, as laughter can be used as a tool for correction. Plato, on the other hand, saw laughter as a mechanism by which man becomes irrational and weak (cf. Plato's Laws). It is from these ancient thinkers that a superiority theory of laughter can be established. Here, one is made into the inferior, irrational being through the act of the comic, which Aristotle defines as a "kind of abuse" (Nicomachean Ethics IV: 8). The Other is the comic who is left as the superior and more rational being. This theory that laughter creates a superiority/inferiority dichotomy does not give room for one laughing at oneself, as it becomes a contradiction or paradox of sort to be superior and inferior in oneself.

Classical theories of laughter offer a good base for the development of modern-day perceptions on the idea of laughter and humour.

Indeed, within Wapichannao discourse, laughter is created as an aesthetic experience whereby one highlights the ignorance of the Other. However, instead of achieving this solely through telling a joke, they also ‘lie’. The lie is a very important aspect of Wapichannao discourse which will be further highlighted in the latter section of this chapter.

The superiority theory of laughter is also evident within the works of Nietzsche, namely in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, where he categorises laughter into two forms: “laughter of the height” and “laughter of the herd.” “Laughter of the height” describes laughter which affirms life, whereas “laughter of the herd” is that laughter which appeals to the superiority theory, and refers to laughter which is a result of a “radical discourse [which] has become a threat to what society believes and wants” and what threatens those maxims that have already been established (Lippitt 1992: 40). This very “laughter of the herd” is much like Bergson’s notion that laughter acts as a “social corrective” (Picart 1999: 7). Zarathustra becomes enlightened on the possibilities of man, which he wishes to share with his fellow townspeople. When he tries to share this knowledge, the townspeople laugh at his doctrine, which conflicts with their own beliefs; hence, “laughter of the herd”.

This paradigm for analysing laughter does exist within some aspects of laughter, but cannot be used to explain hilarity in its entirety as all laughter is not aimed at pointing out a superior being and one which is merely ignorant. What about laughter that is done

to relieve oneself of anxiety? Also, we can feel superior to many things without being amused.

Laughter may also be brought upon by an incongruence/incongruity, as is conceived by Kant, Freud and Berger (amongst others). In Kant's *Critique of Judgement* the role of incongruity in humour (not laughter) is defined as being caused by the absurd or ridiculous (1951:54):

> In everything that is to excite a lively laugh there must be something absurd (in which the understanding, therefore, can find no satisfaction). Laughter is an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing.

Kant's view (1951, 1987)[70] is structural/cognitive, and presents laughter as something within the individual which occurs when the mind is forced to negotiate between the punchline and its lost expectation. This laughter—not merely the laugh itself but the laughter at something—is initiated in the free "play of thought," from which Kant sees as the origins of things beautiful (1987: 203). Hence, for this reason laughter is considered to be a sub-species of the beautiful.

The idea of laughter being derived from the beautiful is also seen in the works of Freud (1978), who makes a distinction between two types of laughter. "Innocent" laughter, which is very much like Kant's cognitive notions of this emotional layer, is perceived of as deriving from a stimuli that allows for freedom of words and expression (1978: 188). However, he also sees laughter as being "tendentious", which stems from an aggression one may have (sexual or not) (Freud 1978). Hence, for Freud, laughter is a result of a "psychic energy" which is deemed unnecessary, and is then released in the form of

[70] I used two different publications of Kant's Critique of Judgement (1951 & 1987).

laughter. His views explore submerged emotions coming to the surface through joke conjuncture, as opposed to a free "play of thought".

The absurd or ridiculous "is unexpected, illogical, or inappropriate in some other way" (Morreall 1983: 15). Therefore, laughter is a reaction to this stimulus. Incongruity theory holds laughter as a reaction to disharmony between those everyday beliefs and set rules of a society. Similar to Wapichannao laughter, as previously mentioned, the means of laughing at someone that brings absurdity to everydayness is laughed at due to the different types of knowledge. Henceforth, one may consider laughter to be a product of a shift in one's notions of society, which has come to seem absurd. Going further, is John Morreall's theory of laughter, which infuses aspects of earlier theories of laughter, stating that "laughter results from a pleasant psychological shift" as "enjoying self-glory, being amused by some incongruity, releasing pent-up energy—all these feel good, and can cause us to laugh" (1983:39). Morreall's laughter is one of the experiencing of an aesthetical ideology, which he states "is a kind of aesthetical experience, and as such is equal in value to any other kind of aesthetic experience" (1983: 89). This requires a perspectival shift which calls upon an "aesthetic frame of mind" (90). We are, therefore, called upon to perceive not only one world but another as well (i.e. a parallel which may exist in the imaginary). Morreall argues that through laughter and humour we are freed from our everyday experiences and can somehow experience an 'imaginative' human experience which does not coincide with our own. However, unlike Morreall's treatment of laughter, the Wapichannao do not see it as a means for pointing out the

"psychological shift" but as a means in which to embody it and rectify the imbalance within the society.

Mariidautan: The Lie

Lies also conjure this aesthetic experience. Forcing oneself to laugh through the act of lying is the most common form of producing the experience of laughter. The experience of the Other's ignorance to the lie, forces the "malicious" laughter of the Self. This apparent 'malice' is the forceful act of experiencing the aesthetic at the expense of the Other's ignorance to the real. Plato (cf. *The Republic*) sees this as a malicious act against humanity, but I beg to differ, as this is an integral part of experiencing laughter and the good life for the Wapichannao. This laughter may be illustrated by the works of Nietzsche (2005[1883]) and Morreall (1983). As previously mentioned, Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* identifies two types of laughter: 'laughter of the herd', which is a comical ignorance, and 'laughter of height", which represents those key insights on one's own existence. Both of these types of laughter are experienced through the 'lie'.

Laughter of the herd occurs in the Self when one laughs at the ignorance of the Other. The Other then laughs at the Self's trick as well as a self-realisation of a newfound knowledge of the world. It is through the laughter of height that allows the Other to assess the world as well as the Other's position in the world through this perspectival shift.

Much like Morreall's laughter, whereby a perspectival shift is forced upon the individual experiencing laughter, we see this occurring in the social discourse of the Wapichannao.

Laughter is an activity that is fundamental to the discourse of everydayness. It is through laughter that people exist as a social being within society, and if they do not partake in it they are viewed as unsociable and not sharing in the knowledge of that society. Laughter appears first as a quiet giggle, which may escalade into an orchestra of cackling and loud guffaws. As one experiences the sound of laughter for the first time, one's attention is quickly drawn to the stimulus or object of humour or non-humour (as in some cases laughter is just brought on through a relief mechanism). This is done in many forms such as story-telling, dance and song. But the most common, in which most people partake, is through the art of "lying."

'To lie' is to produce a reality, which is only perceived to be fake by the one telling the lie, until the joker laughs. This laughter, therefore, indicates the falsehood of the statement. This is the accompanied by "*Aka'a*!" by the Other, then laughter by both the Self and the Other. This was done to me on a number of occasions, such as the one described below.

> Janelle comes into the shop. She tells me Aunty Dora is calling me. I look at her sceptically, as she is known to lie to me on many occasions for her own personal amusement. I ask her what Aunty Dora wants, "how I supposed to know" she responds. I tell her I don't believe her, but make my way to the door. All of a sudden I hear Janelle laugh. I know right away. The other girls in the shop laugh too.

Another example of the lie used towards laughter occurred between Gerd and Elle. Gerd told Elle a story about a girl in the village who was beaten by her mother because she was found kissing a boy. Elle responded to this news "Really? Oh my goodness!" Gerd suddenly burst into laughter, and Elle realised what he had done. "Aka'a! You like to tell lies," then she started to giggle.

The Self laughs because of the Other's primitive knowledge, whereas the Other laughs of its own self awareness and the imagery of the false world created by the Self. As Schopenhauer states "the greater and more unexpected…the incongruity is, the more violent will be his laughter" (Schopenhauer 1966: 91). One may take this analysis further by describing the real world as the "mechanical encrusted upon the living" (Bergson 1980: 84). When one laughs there becomes a disruption in those mechanical functions in which everyday life is experienced. This disharmony then produces a cognitive or perspectival shift in what is truth and what can only exist through the imaginary.

The imagination is called upon so as to arouse an aesthetic experience, conducive to Wapichannao genre of joking. In the imaginary different aspects of life are experienced which would not have been experienced otherwise. It is in this realm that the forbidden behaviours and practices are explored. A good example is the act of laughing at the *Maranao* (shaman).

Laughing at the Powerful

Laughing at the *maranao* within Amerindian perspectivism represents imaginary exploration of one of the most mysterious dimensions of Wapichan social life. This laughter is produced during cultural activities, such as dance, music, and skits. A performer may mimic particular actions of the *maranao*, such as blowing or taking sniff, which are likely to evoke laughter amongst the audience, due to the absurdity of the maranao's belief and practices. However, in the presence of a maranao this act would

never occur. Instead the individual would experience a feeling of awe. In the real-world the *maranao* is feared, and respected amongst the more traditional members of the community, whereas he is ridiculed by those who define themselves as "up-to-date". For those amongst whom the *maranao* is feared, avoidance is practiced. This avoidance is only suspended during an individual's need for the healing services the *maranao* may render. Yet, it is also important to note that many people also avoid the *maranao* as they deem it a 'sin' or a moving away from the "teachings of the Lord". By no means is this role considered funny or a cause for laughter within the realm of 'real'[71]. It is only through the mimicking and exaggerations of the functions of the shaman that arouses the act of laughter. For one, it allows for a freedom (or liberation) that cannot be enjoyed within the real world. This freedom is very much desired, which may account for the frequent culture shows, highlighting such skits.

> The skit starts out with a child very ill. The mother and father decide that a maranao is needed to make the child well. Soon, an old lady, playing the maranao, comes out making gruff sounds. The crowd laughs. She walks with a cane and a strange limp, and is covered in beaded necklaces, gourdes, cups, pipes, and feathers, which make the crowd laugh even more. She has so many divining tools that she can barely move. When she gets to the child, the people around her start dancing, but in the style of the funky chicken, which makes the crowd laugh even more. The 'maranao' is then given an entire gourde of kari to drink, and something to sniff (pretending). She then pretends to be consumed by spirits, while repeating some phrases which makes the crowd applaud, while continuing the laughter. She then gets out her pipe and blows. The child is healed, then all the players start to sing, ending the skit.[72]

This laughter is produced not merely through an incongruity, as it expresses an aesthetic experience produced through a deviation of the norm. The laughter produced with respect to the *maranao* is a laughter that provides 'relief' from those aspects of

[71] The 'real' encapsulates all that is played out within the human world, as opposed to the supernatural/non-human one.
[72] Fieldnotes 19th August 2006

everyday life which we are not allowed laugh at. By laughing at the *maranao*, one is also acknowledging one's fears, respect and beliefs in the workings of the *maranao*. One laughs because one finds truth in the joke, in many cases. There are two types of reactions towards skits and jokes made at the *maranao* expense; the first being a reaction towards the absurd. Those who do not believe in the *maranao* laugh at the practices and the beliefs of those that are caricatured. They feel superior as they see those who believe in the *maranao* to possess a 'primitive' type of knowledge (Hobbes 1840: 8).

Then there are those who laugh because they recognise the true/real world in the joke which calls upon the imaginative or fake realm of perceptions. They laugh at the way in which one captures the essence of an office that is so feared and so secretive in the real world, which is now painted in a more accessible light.

The people of Bush Rope committed to the role laughter played within the everyday, which did not exclude it from those whom were seen as powerful influential beings. Caribbean anthropologists have noted the differentiation of roles amongst classes (cf. Smith; Drummond; etc), which associated certain activities with certain classes. One popular activity involved jaunts to the local rum shops, where groups of marginalized Caribbean males met to establish networks. In this case, this was within Caribbean societies where a diversity of ethnicities and classes exist. However, within the Amerindian village of Bush Rope such analysis can only be taken so far. As Amerindians are at the very bottom of the Guyanese class/ethnic hierarchy, they have been classified

as a highly marginalized group. However, within the dynamics of Bush Rope society, there has been a clear division based on wealth and knowledge of the global, as opposed to the traditional. Even more interestingly, it is amongst those considered the more knowledgeable and powerful of the village who enact the "rum-shop syndrome" (as I label).

As noted previously, laughter has been used as a device upon which to display one's knowledge, as well as the mark one's inclusion to the group. However, laughter also marked ones otherness from the group, which was the case for the drunk.

The Padatch Crew comprised of those young men who were considered the intellectuals of the village—philosophers of sorts—who spent most of their time in the leading shop—Burning Hills—where they drank, making them the centre of attention on most occasions. Many children would memorise punch lines from the Padatch Crew to recite to fellow classmates in order to arouse the same impact. This was not only practiced by children, however, as I found many adults indulging in the entertainment factor these men provided.

One such example was at the August Games in Shea, where the other villages competing found the Padatch Crew to be a very influential group, as well as a group to who attention should be paid if one wanted to be entertained. This sort of entertainment, however, was an escape from the confinement of the everydayness of village decorum. The Padatch Crew broke these boundaries, through their 'rebellious-type' attitude. However, they were not seen as rebels, but powerful to others who, nonetheless, laughed at them because they *did* breach social decorum. This was a

mechanism for dealing with this. At the August Games, they were the only ones, who displayed open drunkenness, drinking early on in the day, and impressing people with their power. This behaviour is further analysed in Chapter 6, where I focus on the role drunkenness plays within Bush Rope.

Laughter towards these men seems a sign of their intellectual deficiencies. Those who are excluded from this group are considered unable to synchronise their perspectives. Henceforth, the only escape is to laugh at the Padatch Crew. Paradoxically, in such an attempt they marked themselves others to the group, or rather the group's otherness. Their laughter was a symbol of their lack of understanding the group, as well as their own fascination with them.

Laughter has a distinctive place amongst us humans. This is particularly noted by the American sociologist, Peter Berger, in his book *Redeeming Laughter.* According to Berger (1997), laughter is universal as all humans experience incongruity. Hence, it is diverse and varied amongst humanity.

Relationships and Power

Relationships are built on mutual understandings of positions held by each individual within the society. Indeed, there was a class distinction of sorts, where wealth defined status, as well as roles played within the village. This section focuses on the role 'class' distinctions played in defining relationships individuals had with each other.

These relationships revealed themselves in public spaces, during public events where the 'big men' could exercise their authority and the less influential could acknowledge

their inferiority. In such public spaces, the 'big men' were the ones to exercise loud speech. To speak loudly, encouraged those around them to listen to their words, and absorb their knowledge. The act of loud speech was a way in which the status quo was reinforced; it was a way to "voice directives openly to the community" (Mentore 2005: 25). This is not a new phenomenon, as this has been noted throughout societies throughout the world (Mentore 2005; Clastres 1989).

Behind the comfort of one's own door, the power to speak loudly can be exercised by anyone, unless someone visits. Individual household can make fun of the powerful—the big men—as long as they are unheard. However, in the public sphere each person practices different levels of volume depending onto whom they are speaking. If they are of the same social category, then they exercise loud speech, and speak freely amongst themselves. However, if it is a conversation between two people of different social groupings, then the person who is of higher social standing tends to speak louder. This occurs amongst people who are not related, even though I have seen this occurring between people who were related (second cousins or distant relatives).

The powerful men were considered to be those who were wealthy, had powerful government positions, the heads of the village council, the articulate intellectuals and foreigners (see Chapter 6 on Padatch Crew), men of God, and the shaman.

III

Fearing Relationships

As opposed to Amerindian societies where the role of the shaman is a distinctive and integral part of society, amongst the Wapichannao of Bush Rope this role was seen as ambiguous, as s/he was not considered to be an integral part of everyday activities and village rituals. Entering into the village I expected to find a shamanic strong-hold. However, amongst most of the Wapichannao shamans, or *maranaos*, were the focus of ridicule and fear. It was amongst children, however, that fear had been embedded the most, as children were more susceptible to harm from spirits, and were less knowledgeable about the shaman which created even more fear. Yet, this institution has always been prevalent and still is, as subdued and disguised as it may appear.

This section may seem incongruous to the rest of this chapter, but it fits into the nature of the emotional layers of the village. Hence, I wish to make it clear that the *maranao* is not only ridiculed as a result of Christian ideals amongst the villagers, but he is also feared, which is an important tone in the village. Hence, this is how the villagers can emotionally relate to the *maranao*.

Although we have seen how the Wapichannao relate to the *maranao* in the above section, I wish to dedicate this section to the description of the office of the *maranao.* In doing so, its purpose is to illustrate why there is so much ambiguity within the station of the *maranao*, as well as how this ambiguity creates both fear and relief.

Meeting Uncle Leo

Perhaps my brief encounters with the *maranao* may add to previous shamanic literature. My attempts to elicit information on their traditional healing practices were not answered readily. Although I had taken up an apprenticeship with the local healer who had offered to teach me, he was often too busy to do so.

There was some reluctance from the people as I felt they thought that there was a right and a wrong answer. The first time I asked the Andres about the healer, they were a bit evasive and were quick to point out the negative aspects of the healers whom they deemed as "con-men." One such example was of a man whom they had invited into their home when Great was ill. He had a piece of string tied to his hand, which he told the Andres would move without any influence from his hand. The children laughed at this point of the story, and decided to fill in the rest of the details. It was Gerd, the second child who said "He told us to look at his hands to see that it wasn't moving, but it was moving. We could see it moving". I was slightly discouraged at this point, until Aunty Lizzie told me that there was one man who was a good maranao, and that if I came to church she would introduce me to him afterwards.

It was the first Sunday in June 2006, when I went to church with the Andres. During the service, Kara had pointed out the *maranao* to whom I was to be introduced. After the service, Aunty Lizzie had strategically placed herself close to the *maranao*, and then called me over. In Wapichan she told him that I wanted to meet and talk to him. Before introducing himself as Leo, I had to greet the other men who were conversing with him.

Cautiously and in an almost whisper, I told him that I was interested in knowing more about how he healed people, so we arranged for him to come over to the Andres' house that afternoon. The children found this particularly interesting and kept asking what was going to happen when he came over, why I wanted to meet with him, and so forth. In a way the children felt that this was their only route into a domain that was only accessible through stories told, and through gossip spread.

When Uncle Leo finally came the children stayed close, but far enough as not to draw attention to themselves.

My first meeting with Uncle Leo was when he came to the Andre's house. However, most of the conversation revolved around his fascination with American culture. He spoke of Washington DC, as his brother lived abroad, and asked questions about the capital of the US. He asked if I had seen snow and whether it was darker in the winter. I went on to mention how dark it would get in Scotland during winter, and how cold it was. He was extremely fascinated by the world outside of Bush Rope, and told me that he would like to go abroad at some point. After this, he promised that he would teach me, and scheduled a meeting for the following Monday.

During his visit, Uncle Leo pointed out that in order for one to be a *maranao* one must be able to connect with nature and all those beings of which it comprises. These beings include animals, plants and spirits. Uncle Leo told me that his aunt's father was a shaman—*maranao* in Wapichan—and it was through him that he learnt how to communicate with the spirits. During his initiation, he would go and visit his aunt's father at his farm, which was way in the bush. This initiation ritual included extensive

recitation of cures, as well as deep meditation in which he could communicate with the spirits. As part of his apprenticeship, Uncle Leo was made to learn about all the plants and connectivity between the healing powers of plants and the human anatomy. In meeting with Uncle Leo he was adamant on gardening and being aware of the plants around him. I recall his first visit to my house, when he came with bits of plants hanging out of his bag. When telling me about how he began his training as a young boy, he took out the plants that he found on his trek from the other side of the airstrip to my house. He pointed to one and said that this was good for certain pains.

When asking Uncle Leo about his healing practices, he said that he would recite verses which corresponded to certain ailments and blow the power of the words onto the client. He then went on to assure me that he used the Bible as part of his healing rituals, whereby he would extract certain passages for certain ailments—the same as with the traditional verses—and incorporate it to his healing ritual[73]. This I found to be an interesting dynamic. This sort of incorporation of the Bible was highly condemned by another elder who was a *maranao*.

After this initial meeting, I realised Uncle Leo had not left to go home, but was in the old kitchen tending to Great's bodily pains. He gave her some herbs and prescribed a remedy for her, but it was not until his diagnosis for Aunty Lizzie did I truly get to grips with the knowledge-power the maranao actually possessed.

[73] Fieldnotes 11th June 2006

According to Gav, an old maranao he had interviewed for the *Wa Wiizi Wa Kaduzu* Project said that the *maranaos* are not the same as they were before, as they were "not real." This was because they used "man-made" spirits. These man-made spirits are those which were created by modern religions.[74] According to Gav, the stories older people would tell you would start off with very traditional figures, rich with traditional myths from their ancestors. Then it would transmute into Biblical stories from the book of Genesis. Gav was very frustrated that the elders have been deconstructing these traditional emblems and reconstructing them into modern religious tales where they place Amerindians within the scope of modern ontology.

"Initiation establishes relationships, knowledges and abilities that define who shamans are and what they do" (Harvey 2003: 27). These relationships exist among different strata of beings, and are formed first during the apprenticeship stages of one becoming a shaman. This is not to say that people who are not novice shamans do not have a connection with these other beings, as Wapichan knowledge is that of ancestral relationships with all materials associated with their traditional land (plants, animals, spirits, etc.).

The Wapichan have sacred places, which are respected by both the traditionalists and modernists alike, believed to be protected by certain spirits, and should not be disturbed if can be avoided. These places can be rocks with carvings, caves, lakes, trees, etc. These spirits are known as grandfather (*dokozuu*) or keeper (*tapiki*), and are associated with every species of animals and plants. If they are disturbed then they can

[74] Fieldnotes 1st June 2006

cause sickness, which is why precautions must be taken. These precautions involve blowing (*powan*), which involve the taking in of words and then blowing them out to heal the individual.

During my brief apprenticeship with Uncle Leo; abbreviated due to his busy schedule with the church, among other things, he taught me verses for protection, stopping profuse bleeding, or bleeding of any sort, and for depression caused by a loved one. These had to be practiced a great deal, especially the verse for bleeding as that was used to heal wounds in general.

On the 19th June 2006 I went to Uncle Leo's house which was on the "other side of the airstrip"—a term used to refer to the less developed side of Bush Rope—and met with Mrs. Rosalyn, his wife. She greeted me and said that he had gone to his sister's house to cure an abscess that his nephew had on his leg. Whilst waiting she explained that she was not a very strong person in health, and was constantly weak. However, she did not mention that she thought the affliction was sent to her by someone. I remember sitting in the house used for sleeping, and thinking that nothing in there indicated that this was a *maranao's* house. I guess, I expected it to be made in traditional style, but instead it was made from brick and had a zinc roof. It was quite modern and had beds rather than hammocks. I also noticed that there was no shamanic *objet d'art*, such as rattles or anything that I could identify as being typically shamanic.

When Uncle Leo finally arrived he told me about a case where some *maranaos* were trying to stop the bleeding of a severed vein that a man had suffered when a cutlass connected with his foot. When Uncle Leo attended to the man, he recited the verse which stops bleeding. He explained to me that within this verse there is a section which refers to *mazi* (termite).

WAPICHAN	ENGLISH
Õgaru mazi min tomink'izi	I am the termite that may become a wax root
Kaina'anii wuru'u ba'izian'iizi (bisho) *kaianii na'apain da'a'a dani dapu'iki*	There will be this to beat the sore At the time a child is right here at home
Wuru'u ba'izian'iizi	This will beat the sore
Õgaru mazi min tomink'izi na'apaunii	I am a termite and may become the same
Õgaru wadaunii Dakotan õgaru	I am the descendent. Call me

Table 6: Showing Cure to stop cuts or sores from bleeding[75]

He then made a series of breaths on the wounded area. As mentioned before *powan*—the act of blowing—is integral to the shamanic ritual. This blowing is done after the recitation of verses, and must be done in order to cause balance or harmony. As ailments and death are associated with malignant forces, therefore a disproportion between the sick and the nature, a balance must be created, which is by conciliating the spirits. He also explained to me that this can be used during menstruation, to ease the

[75] This is my translation

flow of blood. In such a case, the verse, referenced above, is said followed by the ritual blowing into a drink that the patient must drink immediately afterwards.

During this verse the reference to *mazi* has been made. As explained to me by Uncle Leo *mazi*, being the termite which is so prevalent throughout the Rupununi Savannahs, are able to build their huge nests in a short period of time, and if one was to destroy a nest, within a matter of a day they are able to repair their nest.

The same analogy was made when I met with Uncle Simon Marcelo—Aunty Bibi's father—who was also known to *blow*. His explanation for using mazi to cure cuts was that "when you mash their nest, they would repair the nest in a short time".[76] The strength of this animal and the parallelism drawn between their ability to repair and the ability to stop bleeding is a common trait within healing rituals amongst the Wapichan. This relationship between non-humans and humans is integral to Amerindian epistemology. These relationships are

> …not only formed but also cemented in dramatic encounters which demonstrate or negotiate power, control, authority, and boundaries. Shamans are taught what their helpers require and offer, what etiquette will maintain and enhance the on-going relationship. Levels and modes of intimacy, reciprocity and/or hierarchy are initiated…Initiation not only forms and moulds relationships but also inculcates understandings and techniques that will mould shamanic action in future. Knowledge learnt in initiation may be continuous with knowledge gained by other people in the new shaman's community, or it may be distinct a particular to shamans (Harvey 2003: 27).

Hence, shamans are seen as mediators between the human and non-human realms, whereby he is the master of initiating relations between the two spheres. They are defined by both their "actions and engagements" with all beings (Viveiros de Castro

[76] 25th January 2007

1998: 59). The main part of this initiation is to be able to stimulate dialogue by entering into a process of mutual understanding. Yet, do we limit shamans to only the task of mediating between these two realms? In a way a shaman is not just one who acts as a "go-between from humans to spirits," but is responsible for "mediating different levels of meaning, the personal, social, and the cosmological-political" (Humphrey & Onon 2003:229).

As Uncle Leo explained, during his initiation to identify the spirits that were to aid him in the healing procedure he had to go through a ritual, which involved going into the depths of the forest, without any food. Uncle Leo then went on to explain that his aunt's[77] father taught him everything he knew about healing, but that he has his own spirit which helps him to mediate between the human and non-human realms.

In a conversation with Uncle Simon Marcelo, the technique of blowing came up. He told me that:

> People who blow would call the squirrel when you blow. No other animal can bite the kokerite but the little squirrel. No matter how hard it is, it is the small squirrel that can break it. They would call this creature when they blow, regardless of whatever they blow, because it is a strong creature. The squirrel is the master.[78]

This analogy between an animal and a divining technique is integral to Amerindian cosmology, as there cannot be one without the other. Animal spirits are associated with the healing process, due to the parallelisms drawn between their movements and characteristics on one level and the connectivity of their movements and their healing potentials. Another such case is that of cuts or wounds. As mentioned earlier, dualism

[77] Fictive kinship, or a distant aunt from which ties are hard to place
[78] Fieldnotes 26th January 2006

between the *mazi* and cuts where bleeding occurs was prevalent. However, if one suffered from a prick or puncture from a sharp object, another type of animal was called forth, and that was the *mididi* worm. According to Uncle Simon Marcelo,

> If a plimpler[79] goes into your foot, they would call this little worm, which you can find on the road. Mididi is the name of this worm. This is because they create little holes in the road and if you push a blade of grass in it, you can easily hook them to the leaf and take them out.

These animals are important to healing people, as their powers are integral to the livelihood and the well-being of the Wapichannao. These knowledge holders are seen as those able to blow. In most indigenous cosmology (Descola 1996, Gow 2001, Viveiros de Castro 1998, Mentore 2005, Taylor 1993, et al), the parallelism between human and non-human is characteristic to Amazonian animism, and has not escaped the Wapichannao transmutation of the self.

This, Viveiros de Castro (1998) defines, belongs to an Amerindian perspectivism, as those "ideas in Amazonian cosmologies concerning the way in which humans, animals and spirits see both themselves and one another" (1998: 469). In order to study indigenous cultures, nature and supernature he suggests that we should define them accordingly to points of view, or more specifically, perspective.

I draw upon this theoretical standpoint, not because I see Amerindian Perspectivism as a truth, but merely a jumping board for understanding the different sorts of inhabitants (human and non-human, etc) whose realities or approach to reality are all different, or more importantly, apprehended through their individual points of view. As Viveiros de Castro suggests, this approach may seem reminiscent to relativism, and I have been

[79] The word 'pimpler' in Guyana is used to refer to thorns.

asked why not call my approach a relativistic approach. However, Amerindian perspectivism should not be confused with relativism as the classical Western definitions do not or cannot be applied to terms such as 'Nature' and 'Culture' (1998: 469). As relativists may claim that there is 'multiculturalism', this approach claims that indigenous peoples exercise 'multinaturalism.' Here, multinaturalism suggests that there is a spiritual unity and a corporeal diversity unlike multiculturalism, where there is a unity of nature and a plurality of cultures.

In Amerindian perspectivism animals and spirits see themselves as humans and humans as animals. However, if this is the case then are they all not humans? It is established that humans perceive themselves as humans, but the other as animal or spirit. Therefore animals do not see themselves as animals, because they *are* humans, it is only when the other perceives them then can they be classified as animals. This was one hole I found in Viveiros de Castro's analysis.

Their true internal human form is hidden by clothing and can only be revealed to others of the same species or to 'trans-specific being'; that is shamans (1998: 470-71). This internal form is identical (subjectivity formally) to human consciousness, but cannot be seen by humans because it is masked or clothed in animal skin. However, there are only certain animals that fit into perspectivism. Viveiros de Castro suggests that this emphasis may lie in "those species which perform key symbolic and practical role such as the great predators and the principle species of prey for humans…" (1998:471). Århem has also noted that there seems to be a relational importance to perspectival inversions of predator and prey.

Amerindian notion holds that there is a commonality between animals and humans through humanity rather than animality. This shows, as he suggests, a distancing of nature from culture. However, he defines animals as ex-humans, which suggests that there is a recycling of identity from one world to the other. This may be an example of multinaturalism, where there is a criss-crossing of nature (1998:472). This also brings me back to this idea of animal clothing as a way of hiding the human condition. I do not see this idea of clothing as a means of hiding one's human nature, since it is in the animal's realm that this 'clothing' is what reveals that being as 'not-being' an animal. Since the clothing makes those who also wear the same clothing the same, then those who do not wear the same clothing are perceived as animals. Also mask-clothing is akin to space suits or uniforms as it is an instrument needed to take on another body (powers of another body). Clothing, therefore, covers the human essence in one form and takes it on in the form of an animal, and vice-versa (1998: 482)

Shamans play a very important role in this notion of Amerindian perspectivism, as it is the shaman who administers the relationship between the spiritual component of extra-humans and humans (1998:472).

Nature may now be conceived as a socially constructed phenomenon, which varies "according to cultural and historical determinant, and that, therefore, our own dualistic view of the universe should not be projected as an ontological paradigm onto the many cultures where it does not apply" (Descola 1996:82). It is important to accept that Western understanding of the nature-culture dichotomy does not allow for the adequate analysis of the people anthropologists study, especially since our paradigms

do not account for the way in which indigenous peoples attributes attribute human behaviours and dispositions to non-human beings, such as plants, spirits and animals (Descola 1992, 1996; Viveiros de Castro 1998). Reason being, as both Descola and Viveiros de Castro point out (among others), is that the peoples anthropologists study do not accept that there is unity in nature and multiplicity of cultures. Instead, they perceive a world with unity of culture and multiplicity of natures (Viveiros de Castro 1998, 2004). Borrowing from Descola, this component in Amerindian perspectivism shows a 'naturalistic prejudice' (1996: 82). In Western cosmologies nature is defined as "that ordered part of reality, which exists independently from human action" (Descola 1996: 86), whereas the Amerindian perspective does not hold this to be true. Whether it be 'objective correlation,' as Viveiros de Castro suggests (2004), or not, the "social objectification of non-humans…cannot be disjoined from the objection of humans" (Descola 1996: 56; taken from Descola 1992: 111). This is a result of how one species of being configures the identity of the self and the other; that is the modes of identification, as referred by Descola (1996). These modes envelop ideologies, which distinguishes the self from the other. Descola argues that this is expressed through 'totemic,' 'naturalistic,' and 'animic' systems.

Viveiros de Castro's 'perspectivism' is reminiscent of this separation, and is closely related to Descola's 'animism,' which states that "all conceptualisation of non-humans always refer to the social domain" (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 473). It is in the animic mode that animals are the focus of the objectification of nature, as well as its

socialisation (Descola 1992: 115). Animic systems, therefore, allows for non-humans to be endowed with human behaviour and disposition (Descola 1996: 87).

Animism is a way of knowing of relationships between humans and non-humans/extra-humans. In this sense what lies between nature and culture is itself social, whereas naturalism is founded on the notion that what lies between nature and culture is itself nature.

There is also the issue of an ontological dualism of nature/culture, which has revealed itself as Nature and Supernature (culture meaning spirit). Ingold (1991. 1996) showed how social modelling falls into a nature/culture dualism, which ends up facing being a "typical cosmological antinomy faced with infinite regression" (Viveiros de Castro 1998:474). One question to consider when focusing on animism is whether it "can be described as a figurative use of categories pertaining to human-social domain wherein social relations are constitutive and literal and another where they are representational and metaphorical"(1998:474)?

The shamans were not called to lead village activities where traditionally shamans would play an integral role. Activities such as hunting and fishing expeditions no longer called upon the village shaman to perpetuate his clairvoyant visions upon the group and chant words of protection for the huntsmen. However, there is comparative significance between societies, such as the Wapichannao where the shaman appears to lack a substantial role in everyday society as opposed to societies where the shaman is given an integral part in the socio-political and cosmological organisation of the society. To illustrate Wapichannao's own place within the shamanic literature I will proceed to

focus on the region of South America—with some elusions to other parts of the world—using the works of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1998) and Peter Gow (2001). These works will act as comparative cases against my own fieldwork with the *maranao* in Bush Rope, showing the shamans provide a significantly fundamental role, which is has an underlying base in every society, regardless of contrasting particularities. I identify three such underlying bases: 1) Social coherence between humans and other-than-humans; 2) Psychological reassurance and Therapeutic alterity through direct diagnosis; 3) Recognition & Respectability.

A shaman's position is dependent upon the recognition and reputation held by the public (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 71), as well as his own self-recognition of his status. Within Bush Rope, there are local men who are identified as maranaos. However, some are referred to as "fake", and are only sought after, if there are no other alternatives. Whilst I was in the village, Uncle Leo was considered to be reputable, as he was not only considered successful as a *maranao*, but in the Church, as he is the Catechism teacher. His role in the Catholic Church made him an influential 'spiritual' member in the village, which also influenced his popularity and credibility in the village. This may attribute to why he was not feared to a great extent. Even though these may seem obvious, the former and the latter 'function' differently amongst all three of these groups.

For starters the shaman acts as a diagnostician and arbiter of both spirit and human activity. Not only is his job to cure sicknesses but it is to deduce the social implications involved: who does it; and how do they do it? The answer to these questions lie within

the examination of another type of relationship: the relationship with the *doronaa.* The Wapichannao word for spirit is synonymous with the word for soul, which is *doronaa*.

IV

Amerindian Theoretical Belief of the Doronaa

Whilst I was in Bush Rope, my services as a self-acclaimed hairdresser were sought after many times, especially in the Andre household, which was where I learned that it is customary to collect one's hair and place it in a plastic bag. On one occasion, Kara had Elle collect her hair and put it in a bag. On another occasion Kara did the same but buried it as she was having her monthly flow. I asked her what was the significance of this, and she simply replied, "It is not good to leave your hair when you have your period, just like it is not good to go to the farm with your period." I asked her why, but her answer was basically "because that was what I was told"[80]. Even though Kara could not offer the reasons, I went on to speak with Aunty Mary who said that one's *doronaa* is very fragile, and in order to prevent someone from "spoiling" another all precautions must be taken. She said that "someone could just grab your hair and make you sick."

This is not particular to only the Wapichannao of Guyana, as is illustrated by Fock (1963) and Fox (1997). For the WaiWai, the soul is believed to be a fluid which extends over the entire body, even to one's nails and hair (Fock 1963: 14). In other traditions, such as

[80] Fieldnotes May 2006

the Akawaio, the soul is seen as a "little cloth that begins to flutter and becomes agitated at birth," (Fox 1997: 10). The Wapichannao believe that this is the case because it is during this life period that one has a soul, and it is with the acquisition of a soul that a being can be in danger of malignant spirits.

Fox points out that the "first component of the soul which complements it is *Kai*," which is 'the mind' (1997: 10). The cognitive is believed to be solely affected by the soul. This notion of the role the mind plays on the soul and vice versa is inherent within Amerindian beliefs throughout Guyana, and has been the case amongst the Wapichannao. The mind and soul complement each other because they embody all knowledge, reason, and experience, which is why the *maranao* is seen as the mediator between the human and other-than-human realms, as he can manipulate his mind in accordance with his soul, henceforth. Hence, the psyche or soul is responsible for our ability to think, which is the considered to be the purest activity one can do.

From birth, one's *doronaa* can be easily used maliciously, and because of this much precaution is taken in caring for it, which involves the routine riddance of previously cut hair and nails. As in regards to menstruation, some believe that the body is impure at this time, and that one is more susceptible to malicious spirits "spoiling" the self.

The act of spoiling may be defined as the act of projecting bad incantations onto an individual, whereby one's corporeality becomes weakened. The notion of one being spoilt is the causality behind one being sick, and is the focus for the following section.

Spoiling

It was after speaking to Ronnie's wife, Desiree, and Aunty Bibi that some light was shed on the precautions taken when a girl has her first period. Both women had undergone a similar ritual, as their parents were very much traditionalists and practiced traditional healing.

> When I had my first period they tied my hammock really high and cut my hair short. I had to stay in the house for one week. For three days I had to stay in my hammock, and could not leave. They would bring everything to me. I could only eat roasted meat, with no salt. The only fish I could eat was a fish called piab. I could only drink water for the week. I could only leave the hammock when I wanted to pee. I remember at midnight, my mother came to bathe me after the 3rd day. After one week the blood passes. I was not allowed to look at boys, but there was a hole in the wall so I would peep. Everything was locked and it was so dark. I was not allowed to come down after the 3rd day. They rubbed annatto at the bottom of my feet with a bina (charm) so no snake or evil could come. On the third day I was given a bitter bina to drink, which made me vomit and vomit. According to the old people you are not allowed to eat fish without scales, no pine[apple] or watermelons until after three or four months. This is because it is too sweet. The same goes for if you have a baby; you can't have things too sweet.[81]

> I was not allowed to talk to boys or smile Ms. Stacy. They had cut my hair, so that I would not get grey hairs early. I had to take pepper juice through my nose which my grandfather blowed. I could not cook or go to the farm unless someone blow me. One time I went to the farm without doing this, my head hurt because I cooked and parched without having anyone blow during my menstruation. This was why they gave me the pepper juice. When I had my period they would paint me in annatto everyday to protect me from any jumbies[82]: "When jumbie smells the blood its sweet like pine." They also say that the hunter and dog will get lazy if someone has their first menstruation and eats the meat they hunted.[83]

Both experienced some similarities, as both dialogues express the vulnerability to spirits of menstruating females. To battle such vulnerability a female must adhere to certain rules of avoidance, so as to remain safe from spirits. However, most young girls did not experience these rites of passage whilst I was in the village. Instead, many people—both young and old—spoke of spoiling in regards to malice between individuals who used this technique as a way of revenge.

[81] Fieldnotes Desiree: 23rd November 2006
[82] Jumbie is a creole term for ghost or evil spirit.
[83] Fieldnotes Aunty Bibi: 25th November 2006

One day in Aunty Dora's kitchen, Natzy and I were sitting at the table chatting. She offered me bush cow, but would not eat it, so I asked her why she would not try the meat, which was when she told me about her first encounter with being spoilt.

> When I was very young I suffered from a swollen left that would not go down. We tried everything, but nothing would work. It was painful, and it caused me great pain walk. Finally someone told me that it was because someone had spoilt me, but no one could understand why. We asked my uncle from Karaudar, who is a maranao, to help us find out who had done this to me. Apparently, someone had put a spell at the door of the church, which was meant for someone else, but as I happened to walk by at that time, I received it. My uncle had to cut my leg and then pat it with a special kind of powder into my cut. I don't know what the powder was. He told me that if I ate bush cow [tapir] and turtle it would come back. Up to this day I do not eat those things, because I am afraid of being spoilt again.[84]

Another such incident occurred to the husband of the woman who worked in Burning Hills. On my way back from Aunty Bibi's house where I was learning to make hammocks, I stopped in at Aunty Sandy, whose husband is Aunty Bibi's brother. I asked her about the notion of spoiling and if she knew of anyone who had been spoilt.

> My husband had been spoilt many years back. Now he cannot eat pineapples and he cannot eat from a pregnant woman. If he eats these he would begin to vomit blood. At one time it was so bad that they had to take him to the hospital, but it didn't help him, so his sister in Bomfim[85] had to take him to a piaiwoman[86] over there [Bomfim]. [The piaiwoman] used a glass of water to see who the people that spoilt him were. After this, he saw the people clearly and confronted them.[87]

After confronting them, he had stopped vomiting but only if he did not eat tabooed food. In both cases the repercussion for being healed was the acquiring of food taboos, to maintain their corporeal equilibrium by appeasing the spirits. Apart from this, those who have been previously spoilt refuse to eat food from people who have been known to spoil others. These relationships human and non-human reflect a notion of

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[84] Fieldnotes Natzy: 22nd September 2006

[85] Brasilian Town right across the Takatu River, which separates Guyana from Brasil on the south-south western border at Lethem.

[86] Piai-man/woman are the same as a maranao, but the Wapichannao have borrowed the term piai from other Amerindian cutures in Guyana.

[87] Fieldnotes Aunty Sandy: 22nd September 2006

community equilibrium, relationships are built on knowing who will cause harm to others and how and to whom to appeal for help.

A case in point was another incident Natzy told me about a fifth form student's grandfather, who was seen walking around a coconut tree while looking up. He remained there for a while, and then retreated inside. A few weeks later (less than a month) the tree was dead. She said that she would never eat from him because her leg would swell up again.

People who are known to spoil people are also known to blow, as in order to spoil a person, one must blow the incantations onto the person. This is very much feared, and it was not until I was miles away from Bush Rope in the village of Annai, did I realise how feared a person who can blow (*poori*) was. The incident occurred as such:

> One day during the Amerindian Heritage Celebrations in Annai, the women from the Deep South team were sitting in the district tent working on the evening costumes for the two Deep South girls of the Miss Amerindian Heritage Pageant 2006. As the women were working on sewing beads onto the cotton bodice of the costume, a woman approached one of them and offered to help. Without waiting for a response, she bent down and picked up a piece of the garment and began to sew. One of the girl's mothers looked at her with disdain, and quickly grabbed the garment telling her that there is no need for her help and that it is almost finished. The woman walked over to Aunty Dora and began conversing with her. As she did this, the girl's mother came over to me and said, "Don't let her touch our things, she is known to blow." She then proceeded to 'skin her face'[88] at the woman and then return to her position on the ground.[89]

Later her daughter came over to me conveying her nervousness about the presence of the woman who blows. The sheer anxiety caused showed the importance of the knowledge possessed with blowing, and the powers that followed it. A person, who blows but is not a maranao, is seen as a threat, as a maranao is known for healing as well as inflicting sickness. However, when I asked people what a *maranao's* main

[88] Laughing – used to refer to little girls giggling
[89] Fieldnotes Amerindian Heritage, Annai: 14th September 2006

function were, most people said to heal people, and very few mentioned his ability to cause ailments.

Audrey Butt (1956) defines blowing, or as the Akawaio call it, *tareng* as one of the most important methods of not only curing ailments as well as preventing them, but also a main cause of death sicknesses. As a result there are differentiations made between two types of blowing within every Amerindian culture that practices this: i.e. good blowing and bad blowing (Butt 1956: 52).

This ritual blowing is not done by the use of the usual breath, but a special type of breathing or blowing. To do this blowing, the breather must force their breath:

> …either through the mouth or down the nose, in short gusts. The blower also utters a charm or a specially worded wish or command, either silently or to himself or uttered at the end of the blowing or between the gusts of breath, or both…When a person blows, he does so in the direction of the person or thing he wishes to affect (Butt 1956: 49)

Blowing also requires other skills including "word formulae"—the ability to say certain phrases while blowing. Unlike, the Akawaio at the time, Uncle Leo did not incorporate tobacco smoke with blowing (1956: 50). However, this does not hinder the relationship that the breath creates between the self and the spirit. This relationship between the breath and the spirit—*poori* and *doronaa*—are integral to the somatic and spiritual reality of both the Wapichannao and the Akawaio, as the releasing of breath through blowing is seen as the method for mutually promoting harmony and disharmony within the village.

This concept of blowing has been offered by many (Butt 1956, Fock 1963, Fox 1997), but I wish to suggest that the reason why ritual blowing is so effective is the corporeal and

spiritual connectivity behind the process: 1) person x sends a malignant spirit to attack person y; 2) person y becomes sick because part of the spirit is released through one's breath, causing the client's soul to be rejuvenated by accepting a piece of the shaman's soul.

Good blowing is done to bring good luck, as a "preventative measure," to cure ailments, to protect children, and to keep the evil spirits away (Butt 1956: 52). On the other hand, bad blowing is done to attack enemy kanaima and to cause aches, pains, and ailments, even death. This is also referred to as fatal blowing or *tono*, by the WaiWai. The WaiWai have several different forms of *tono*, for different purposes. One such purpose is

> If a person x wishes to kill his enemy y as quickly as possible, x will creep over at night to y's hammock and blow tono directly over the sleeping body. This is the quickest-acting of all tono methods, but also the most dangerous, as there is the greatest risk of being caught red-handed (Fock 1963: 104).

Hence, sickness is the "suffering experienced by individuals when they become overwhelmed by the ambiguity of the social environment and thereby lose a clear sense of their identity" (Taylor 1993: 207). The anxiety produced is what is responsible for this outcome. This explains why shamanic practice is sought, as shamans deal with the clarification of the self, and are therefore a mediator between of chaos and homeostasis of the self. It is partially through the shaman's expertise that one can regain such clarification, whereas the other option is the arutam, which is a vision that only the seeker can have. The shamanic cure establishes a restored selfhood through the shamans mediation of the chaos the individual experiences. Whereas the arutam is the secret vision or hearing that only the seeker may receive and in the process intensify his selfhood. The structure of both ritual experiences is the same, because in both cases it is

not the seeker who receives the message. In the first it is the shaman, whereas in the latter it is the 'soul' (Taylor 1993: 208).

Christians amongst Us

It proved to be a slight conundrum that the healer in the village also happened to play an integral part in the Catholic Church until I spent time with him as an apprentice. The church believes in the sanctity of the, so-called, supernatural—i.e. the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit/Ghost. In a sense we see a parallelism made between the non-humans within the Catholic Church and traditional cosmology, whereby non-humans, such as spirits and animals, play an integral part to Wapichannao discourse. It would be a far stretch to say that Amerindians believe in Christianity because it is the same as their traditional beliefs. Instead, Wapichannao have negotiated between these two spheres of practice and thought.

Unlike Lewis's (2003:73) Macha Oromo people, religion *has* displaced, dislocated and refracted indigenous cosmological practices amongst the Wapichannao. However, as has been described above, these traditional practices are still very much prevalent within society. However, with the self-identification of the Wapichannao towards Christianity, in no way are both Christianity and traditional practices in a state of mutual existence, but rather in a state of constant transformation. However, this does not dispute the refraction of traditional faith by Christian elements. Yet, Christianity has

taken on a few traditional elements in a syncretised set or relations established between the two polarities.

How do we account for, on the one hand a structured organisation, such as the church, and the pre-eminence of a contradictory—if we can call it contradictory—discourse, such as the presence of shamanry amongst the Wapichannao?

In getting to the root of this question, I will suggest that it is irrelevant to focus on the functional correspondence between the two. The two— structured (e.g. church) and loosely structured (e.g. 'ancestral' practices) organisation—do not necessarily act in terms of functions they provide for each other. Rather, they each operate as social representations, which act as extremities from which ideals, notions, and perspectives can be borrowed at various intervals during the process of intermediary identity disambiguation. It is also trivial to consider the shaman as merely serving an office whereby it's main objective is to mediate between a human and other-than-human/non-human realm. Instead we must consider those social functions, and the mediations found within them that defines a shaman, whether it be apparent or hidden. As Viveiros de Castro expresses (1998: 3), there seems to be a "centrifugal dynamic" where there is a cosmic drift towards the periphery, without any change to the indigenous ideology. This cosmic drift is one which lends itself towards wider global ideals, whilst maintaining something which is truly Amerindian. Much like Viveiros de Castro's Araweté, the art of "becoming" or being is seen in the acceptance of the outside's otherness, whilst embodying the ability to negotiate identities. Contrary to traditional anthropological representation, these societies are in constant intervals of

ambiguation, disjuncture, and resignification. In no way is this invariable. Instead, those things labelled 'traditional', in retrospect, reflects constituents of everyday life which are defined as *farrin*, which are both in invariable variance. Henceforth, to construct an apposite paradigm of Bush Rope society amongst the Wapichannao, one most demonstrate the complexity of interwoven social structure that have been formed between the traditional—or ancestral—and the farrin. I do not use the term traditional in the typical western sense of the term, but rather as a category that excludes everything that is 'farrin' at a particular moment of meaning-making.

Concluding Remarks

As was examined in this chapter, gossip jokes, laughter, myths, and shamanry counter modernisation as these agents work towards communalism, reciprocity and exchange, and varied conceptualisations of "their identities not primarily as individuals, but as members of a group, a lineage, or a family" (Counihan 1997: 284). This dualism counters previous theories of the individualism formed by capitalist economies (cf. Marx 1970; Sahlins 1972). In contrast, the Wapichannao of Bush Rope have not only embraced individualism, but have also mediated the level of individualism within everyday discourse, with that of communalism. This has further been illustrated within the previous chapter on manore, which is integral in people's own understanding of communalism.

Both individuality and communalism are interchangeable (or changeable) as individuals experience the comfort of familiar commodities, as well as the intrigue towards new and unfamiliar ones. The individuality experienced from one's own acquisition of the commodities is a result of the "constant cultural contact, international media, and marketing, [and] the process of change in diets" all of which are experienced through the shop, as will be explored in Chapter 6 (Wilk 1999: 244).

Following this chapter is one which takes laughter and myths further: i.e. onto the global stage. This global stage is the Miss Amerindian Heritage Pageant, which is a smaller facet of the Amerindian Heritage Month celebrations. In this chapter, I will be analysing the social implications such shows have on the indigenous society, whereby the state becomes heavily influential in how Amerindians are perceived, on the one hand, as well as how they perceive themselves, on the other.

Chapter 5
Culture Shows and the Global Stage

Up until now, we have seen Bush Rope as a reflection of Amerindian society, as deemed by the Wapichannao as an embodiment of their *wakaduzu*. These components have been dubbed Wapichannao, and hence Amerindian, by the people of Bush Rope who participate in a discourse that they view as a representation of themselves. However, the Bush Rope "ideal" of Amerindianness is not definable solely by the members of the community, or even the wider Amerindian society. Rather, to be defined as an Amerindian is to acknowledge both an ancestral doctrine, as well as a state-enforced definition of Amerindian "identity".

In the Caribbean the notion of national identity has long been used as a tool for the acculturation and assimilation of groups of peoples (Mintz 1966:34; R.T. Smith 1962). As a result ideals for a national identity hinder and accelerate the role groups of people play within a society, along with those cultural images that are transmitted between groups.

Mintz rightly asserts that the development of a "Creole" society has allowed for the "initial emergence of a national culture and ideology in the Caribbean" (1966:34).

However, the Amerindians of Guyana's Rupununi Savannahs are far from considering themselves "Creole" or C*reolese* (as it is termed in Guyana) for that matter. As we have already seen in their relationship with the state, the Wapichannao have been further from equals with the wider Guyanese society, when it comes to communicating notions of nationalism and national identity. At the same time Smith (1962) also places Creole culture—specifically the Creole culture of British Guiana—within the spectrum of how the "Negro slaves" and "East Indian labourers" were able to work together and assimilate to form a 'national culture.'

As mentioned throughout, the political system of the Wapichannao is the tensioning and merging of both the traditional political structures and the national Guyanese political struggles that have so fervently described the Guyanese political system. The negotiations between national identity, which has been influenced by the political structure and ambiguation of the Wapichannao *kaduzu* have been placed within the category of the "native" and/or "first people".

They have been forced to stake claim to ancestral knowledge and ways of being, whereby the state implements certain guidelines as to how Amerindians should present themselves in order to be defined as one.

In this chapter my main objective is to assess how Amerindians[90] of this region 'negotiate' between ideas of the self vis-à-vis a series of cultural intrusions which act on both the local and global stages. I will argue that in order to analyse Wapichannao notions of the Self, we must understand how they negotiate between notions of what is

[90] In this case, I use the term Amerindian as both Wapichannao and Makushi women were involved in the pageant.

traditional and what is modern or in their terms *farrin*. More specifically, one must consider their place within the wider Creole society, and how definitions of both traditional and modern are in a constant flux of negotiation, disjuncture and resignification. We have already begun this analysis in Chapter 3 in relation to the dichotomy between manore and commodity which, in effect, is the dichotomy between the traditional and modern. The focus here is the moment of adjustment in which the Wapichannao of Bush Rope have to adjust to the State's understanding of Amerindianness.

To accomplish this I will use one event in particular, that of the Miss Amerindian Heritage Pageant, which is a nationwide cultural event where one Amerindian girl from each of the ten regions in Guyana goes up for the title of Miss Amerindian Heritage held in Georgetown. The girls not only compete for the title of Miss Amerindian Heritage, but also a scholarship to study nursing or computer science (par example) at a designated college in Guyana.

More specifically, I will focus on the 'Miss Amerindian Heritage Pageant Region 9'—in which I became involved—which is meant to exhibit the talents and knowledge of the female Amerindian youths. In a sense, Miss Amerindian Heritage is a stage for young female Amerindians to take the role of "the Indigenous" and to represent this identity on a national level.

Following this, I will then move onto the significance of performances, which is not only part of the talent portion of the pageant, but is also an integral part of culture shows and the Amerindian Heritage celebrations. By taking my focus towards performance, I

will further illustrate the importance of culture shows as a stage for the assimilation of people towards rethinking the way in which they view “tradition” and “culture.” These are floating terms with no definitive meanings amongst the Wapichannao.

I

Õgaru Wapichan **and Defining “Identity” through Pageantry**

In Guyana, the month of September has been dedicated to the celebration of Amerindian Heritage since the initiation of the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs[91] in 1992. Designated by the government as the month where all Guyanese would be exposed to the culture of Amerindians throughout Guyana, Amerindian Heritage Month is packed with educational events, exhibitions, sales of crafts and indigenous foods, as well as cultural events.

Amerindian Heritage Month was conceptualised by the late President of Guyana, Dr. Cheddi Jagan, who declared the month of September to be Amerindian Heritage Month on the 10th September 1995. The 10th September also marked the day the first Amerindian—Steven Campbell—joined the National Assembly in 1957.

For Region 9, the five sub-regions/districts—South Pakaraimas, North, Central, South Central, and Deep South—come together to participate in the activities.

[91] The Ministry of Amerindian Affairs was first established in 1992 during the Presidency of the late Dr. Cheddi Jagan, who saw the need to have a government body solely assessing the nature of Amerindian matters nationwide. This was in an effort to increase the influence Amerindians had within the wider Guyanese society, as well as focusing on their needs as a community. It was during this period that Amerindians appeared more within the workforce of the wider Guyanese society (See http://www.guyanaundersiege.com/Cultural/Amerindian%20Heritage%20Month.htm)

In each region, pageants are the highlight of the Amerindian Heritage Celebration, which are also staged as part of a larger culture show where songs, dances and skits in the multitude of Amerindian languages are performed. Heritage, as it was called for short, drew Amerindians and non-Amerindians alike to compete in traditional games such as archery, diving, palm climbing, cotton spinning, cassava grating, kari straining, kari drinking, mokoro cane stripping, and basket weaving (among other things). However, apart from the pageant, the largest turnouts were at the men's and women's (mostly men's) cricket, volleyball, and most importantly football matches which stirred much rivalry amongst the villages.

Each village and district holds their own Amerindian celebrations, prior to the general Amerindian Heritage in September. In the Rupununi—the Deep South in particular—each village selects their best representatives to participate in their individual August games, which is held between districts in the region. When each district finds their best representatives, they form a team who will then represent them at the general Amerindian Heritage.

My exposure to the Miss Amerindian Heritage pageant started in Shea in 2006, where the Deep South August games were being held. August Games were started by a body of *Toshaos* or Chiefs in the Deep South, who had initiated these, would gather to compete in traditional games. However, as mentioned previously, the more popular events have little to do with 'traditional' Amerindian life. In fact, the largest turnouts were at the cricket, volleyball, and most importantly the football matches. In addition, pageants

packed the most people, as it occurred in the evenings when there were no other activities taking place.

Yet, I will not focus on these games, but rather the Regional Amerindian Heritage celebrations held in Annai in September. It was here, that I not only interacted with the contestants, but with the audience of the Rupununi. This ethnographical piece which follows starts from my first night in Annai.

Intra-cultural Misunderstandings

The first night Maaba, the contestant from Bush Rope Village of the Deep South District, and I arrived to Annai, she and her other Deep South contestant were to get ready for the "casual wear" portion of the competition. Being told that this was "casual wear," Maaba chose her best blue trousers and a top her sister had sent over from Brazil, with a pair of espadrilles, whereas the other contestant from Maruranawa of Deep South—Carmen—wore jeans with a pink top, and ipanema slippers. Before they could take the stage, the organisers called for judges from each of the districts, and it seemed that everyone on the Deep South team had already signed me up, when I had surfaced from helping our contestants. So I took the seat as judge, and was then asked to be head judge for that night.

When the first contestant came out in Amerindian garb, I was very much surprised, followed the other girls from the other sub-districts in the region who were also in Amerindian clothes, ending with the girls from Deep South in their understanding of casual wear. This difference of interpretation was as much of a shock to me as it was to

them. Luckily, the organisers came over to the judges and said that we would only be judging on the delivery and content of their introductions, and not their dress. The lead organiser, Michael, explained to me that the government had implemented a new rule which stated that “everything had to be traditional,” which meant that the evening wear category was also to be “traditional” and not “modern,” something of which the Deep South girls were not aware.

Since last year’s celebrations, the Miss Amerindian Heritage Pageant and its components had transcended to a more ‘idealistic’ notion of Amerindianness. This disregarded those things that were considered “modern” or “farrin”. As explained to me by Michael, “this is Amerindian heritage, not Miss Guyana; we have to use what our ancestors used.” Michael considers himself Amerindian, even though he is of mixed race, and acts as the coordinator at the Research Institute in Annai, which invites Amerindians and foreign researchers to instigate conservation projects amongst the villages in, mostly, the North and North Central Districts of the Rupununi. Having done many projects on both conservation of Amerindian lands and people, he saw Heritage as a step up for showcasing and educating the wider Guyanese audience on what Amerindian culture was.

After the show that evening, Michael asked me to be the head judge for the rest of the competition, as he thought that since I was not from the Rupununi I would have no biases. He had proposed that I also be involved in the preparation and organisation of the pageant. So, the next morning the girls and I went up to the service centre to

practice. Accompanying me was Gail, who was the 1st runner up at the last Miss Amerindian Heritage in Georgetown, as well as Cynitha, who was the representative for Central, and who would have to give her introduction that night as she too was late. When the girls met her some confided in each other that they thought that Cynitha would win, because she was so different. One girl from Surama even said that "she is different, that is why they will like her." I found this interesting, because Cynitha was of mixed race—Amerindian and Portuguese[92]—with a different complexion and stature. This was a cultural exhibition and not a beauty pageant, yet, some of the girls were convinced that she was going to win based on *farrin* ideals and not *traditional* ones. Cynitha was a very interesting contestant, and the following events surrounding Cynitha adds to her role within the identity politics that is ever so prevalent in these contests.

Cynitha and her Cassava Bread Conundrum

When Cynitha arrived, she introduced herself to all the contestants with an air of confidence that none of the other girls displayed. Having lived in St. Ignatius (which is attached to Lethem), she had worked and met many people from all over the world, which reflected in her demeanour. However, her confidence soon dwindled as the competition went on.

As part of the introductions the girls had to introduce themselves in both their ancestral language and in English. The night Cynitha gave her introduction it was apparent that she had never spoken Makushi, or had spoken the same amount that I had. Her piece

[92] Guyanese Portuguese ancestry.

was what she learnt from her mentor, Mrs José, and she could only deliver a few words in Makushi before leaving the stage.

The following evening came time for the girls to present their indigenous costumes and cultural pieces. Cynitha's costume was one of the most elaborate and intricate ones. However, one of the judges nudged me and pointed towards, what looked like, artificial leaves and crepe paper on her costume. I said that we should judge her costume as though all the materials were from the forest, until we could confirm otherwise. The other judges heard our conversation, and started nodding, and affirming that she should be disqualified. Due to the upheaval, I called Michael to have someone confirm that all of the material was real. When the verdict came back, there was one piece of tissue paper on the costume, so we deducted marks for use of *farrin* items.

Prior to this, the coordinator had warned the contestants that the use of feathers was prohibited, due to conservationist efforts to conserve the wildlife of the region. As a result, the mothers and aunts of the contestants had frantically removed any feathers that they had incorporated into the design of the 'traditional' dresses.

The epistemological problem presented from having feathers on one's costume, was that of different points-of-views. Feathers have always been intrinsic to the indigenous culture—ceremoniously and aesthetically—and were never considered negatively. The women saw feathers as necessary when depicting the ancestral. However, it was not until the topic of 'conservation' –an idea known within indigenous techniques, but not defined within the Western sense of the word—came into being within the forum of the Amerindian Heritage Pageant.

As the Amerindian Heritage Month celebrations were organised by the government, the need to avoid contradictions throughout other regulations in different sectors—e.g. environment, conservation laws, etc—were considered. Therefore, feathers were not permitted. Along with feathers, 'non-traditional' items were also not permitted. As defined by the government, these 'non-traditional' items included thread, paper, and store-bought cloth, among others. "*How they gun' tell us not to use thread? We use thread everyday*" was an outcry from one of the women who made a costume the previous year for a contestant, and was penalised for the use of the "non-indigenous" material.

At the same time I found that there was a sense of culture being created, as ideas of the traditional were fabricated to fit the regulations set out by the government for these large scaled events. Having to work with materials with which they would not work on a day-to-day basis, people like Aunty Mary (see later on in this chapter)—the Bush Rope traditional wear designer—are forced to be creative and appeal to the imagination of what the *traditional* could be. The costume made for Maaba was made from wild peanuts, which were painted with black and red paint. The use of paint is prohibited, and these wild peanuts, which gained Maaba her points, have never been recorded as a material used by her ancestors, as Aunty Mary herself validated[93]. Yet, this was considered and accepted as *traditional* as it was from the forest. This definition of *traditional* has then come down to anything that does not belong to the category of

[93] See Eric William's archaeological work on Deep South Villages.

farrin. In reality, it had very little to do with a reflection of the present culture of these people, and more to do with an ideal of how Amerindian culture should be viewed by a foreign public. Hence, these cultural exhibitions acted as projectors for Amerindian culture into the global market, where images of Amerindianness were to be marketed to foreigners and non-Amerindian Guyanese (Wilk 1995:127).

The final evening was Cynitha's worst, as that was the day they had to answer questions about different issues they faced in the region, such as tourism, conservation, and "identity," which Michael and I had set for them earlier that day and had them draw from a basket. Many chose very difficult questions, which Michael and I felt were too difficult in the long run, but gave them credit for their attempts. During Cynitha's introduction she had stated that her favourite food was cassava bread and pepperpot, so when she received the question "what is the process of making cassava bread" both the judges and the crowd threw their hands up at the lenience of the question. Cynitha's response was this: "first you grate the cassava, then you parch it, then you… [long pause]…bake it." The correct response would have been "scrape it, grate it, sift it, form it into a circle, then bake it." She received the lowest marks in the section, and was ridiculed for not knowing how to make cassava bread. The judges, who were a mixture of Afro-Guyanese and Amerindian women and men, were appalled. The Afro-Guyanese woman said to me, "even I know how to make cassava bread. This is ridiculous," rolling her eyes at the display of lack of indigenous knowledge. Members of the audience remarked "What type of Amerindian is she," and "How she don' know how to make

cassava bread?" These remarks came from both Amerindians and non-Amerindians, as both groups equated the knowledge of making cassava bread, which exists in many other cultures such as Jamaican, with Amerindianness.

Cynitha was in tears during the long wait for the results. I went backstage to tell the girls they had all done well, and to prepare for my own speech in front of the hundreds of people who attended. As I approached Cynitha, her aunt came up to me and asked why would we give such a difficult question to her niece. Her aunt was furious and said that it was an unfair question to ask, because Cynitha did not grow up doing things that a 'typical' Amerindian girl would do. Michael had overheard this conversation, and became very angry that they felt that the question was unfair. He came to me and said "how can we send someone who doesn't know anything about Amerindian culture to represent Amerindians in this region?" He believed that she did not and could not conceptualise what it meant to be Amerindian. Yet, I found that within her dilemma there was much to learn about how 'culture' was evolving within the region. This to me *was* part of the Amerindian conundrum that tried to define a culture that was 'authentic' or 'traditional'.

Learning to Negotiate Identity

The term *farrin* has entered Wapichannao discourse as a result of cultural intrusions created by historical processes, such as colonialism, and the state. This issue is longstanding with the Amerindians from the exploration and exploitation of Amerindian lands by European explorers (See Chapter 7), and more recent political processes. As a

result, “foreign” has long been embedded into their ‘local’ culture as something which appeals to the global that has become intertwined with concepts of those aspects intrinsic to Wapichannao culture. This is clearly illustrated through the structure and components of a culture show. For one, a culture show cannot function without food, drinks and music, all of which have been made local, through the global.

In a sense, locals are forced to decipher what is inherently ‘Amerindian’ and not an influence from those they deem as ‘farrin.’ If we use the regulations for costumes at the pageant as an example, one can see the difficulties felt in making this distinction, and having to negotiate their own understanding of Amerindian ‘culture.’ The use of store bought thread and materials as contraband to the pageant itself, for example, ambiguated definitions intrinsic to everyday life.

Even Cynitha’s ignorance about the process of cassava bread-making illustrates this difficult process of negotiating and defining the *traditional* and the *farrin*. However, this negotiation between what is culture and what is not responds to state-influenced, as well as NGO, ideas of how Amerindian culture should be. Adding to this dynamic system of defining the Self is the everyday motions that Amerindians go through. As a result, it was quite frequent that distinctions between “outside” or *farrin* and “we way”, *traditional* and “Wapichan” were always on the tip of everyone’s tongue.

The act of global forces upon any indigenous society is the appropriation of global ontologies with that of “important local contextualisations and variations” (Hyllend Eriksen 2003: 2). In order for globalisation to have a place within the local environment, the global must be taken into the local perspective, power-structures, and ways of

being. In doing so, a set of negotiations must be made. These negotiations act to place the individual into the global, while retaining a sense of belonging to their individual ethnic groups.

In the case of the culture shows, those actors—the performers, the salesmen and women, and the attendees—all contribute to the way these negotiations act toward "redefining culture," by placing the Wapichannao into the global sphere. Hence, one must concede that "social and cultural worlds which are constituted from diverse materials of various origins are always expressed through meaningful relationships" (Hyllend Eriksen 2003: 15). These meaningful relationships are constructs of how a place identifies itself insignificant, even though it is seen as being one of many through its involvement in the globalisation process. In Karen Olwig's (2003: 59) article, entitled "Global places and place-identities – Lessons from Caribbean Research" she looks towards the work of Gupta and Ferguson (1992, 1997) as they argued that

> …the world has long been characterised by global connections marked by complex constellations of power and hierarchical relations which crystallise in close ties between central and peripheral areas. From this point of view, local places do not exist as autonomous economic, social, cultural or political units. Place is created when local communities appear within the broader world system and constitute themselves in particular areas.

In the case of Bush Rope, a similar paradigm for constructing and understanding culture has been illustrated in the case of culture shows. Culture shows use global mechanisms, such as the exploitation of both local and foreign commodities, ideals, and consciousness, and incorporates them into the local ontology. As the appeal towards modernity—a term which is sometimes wrongfully equated with globalisation—is ever present in Bush Rope, those who wish to 'raise funds' through culture shows, much

compromise tradition with modern forces. In this case, these modern forces reveal themselves in the forms of cold Venezuelan beer, Brazilian catuaba, modern dance styles and songs, and the forró dance party, which have become tantamount to culture shows of a different kind. Those business men and women must, therefore, take certain measures in order to ensure that these needs are met. Those who are most successful have become part of a global market, whereby, everyday business is based on relationships established with Brazilian and Guyanese retailers in Boa Vista—the capital city in the Brazilian state of Roraima—and Georgetown—the capital of Guyana. By acknowledging the need for such relations in order to be prosperous, signifies the Wapichannao understanding of their place with the global, and their dependence on those influences. Those things from "outside" or "farrin" are constantly weighed against those things that are traditional, which means, that in order to be successful, one must wisely negotiate between the two.

Through defining the Amerindian identity, one finds that the need to engage in a continuous process of ambiguation, disjuncture and resignification allows the Wapichannao to cope with the varying influences within their culture. I found that many of these rules and regulations contradicted their *traditional* ontology, and occurred at a level removed from the people's assumptions of who they are. Yet, by no means is this a limitation on their ability to negotiate between the polarities of differences created by the state; these two polarities, being *traditional* and *farrin*. Instead, they embody this multiplicity of definitions at various points in time, which chronicles the different

definitions of the self that the people here have taken on. The fundamental question here is: is it that these people are changing or is it the categories in which they are placed? I have found it evident that both are occurring amongst the people of the Rupununi. As terms change in meaning, these people change to fit qualities into the new categorical boxes.

Yet, there is also a sense of culture being created, as ideas of the traditional are fabricated to fit the regulations set out by the government for these large scaled events. Having to work with materials with which they would not work on a day-to-day basis, people like Aunty Mary are forced to be creative and appeal to the imagination of what the traditional is. This was evident from the costume she made for Maaba, with the use of the wild peanuts painted in black and red paint, which gained Maaba her points. Yet, this was considered and accepted as 'traditional' as it was from the forest. This definition of 'traditional' has then come down to anything that does not belong to the category of 'foreign.' In reality, it had very little to do with a reflection of the present culture of these people, and more to do with an ideal of how Amerindian culture should be viewed by the foreign public according to rules imposed by the state.

The terms *traditional* and *farrin*, which the Wapichannao used to negotiate their perspectives of themselves, displays cognitive duality which is disjunctive due to the fact that people have to make commitments towards who they are at different stages, which they have to ambiguate and negotiate continuously. In one moment they may frame their Amerindianness on a set of categories different from another set of categories

previously used. This ideal becomes blurred and a new one is developed and redefined. So in such a system, Cynitha can display both the embodiment and disembodiment of Amerindianness.

Hence, the *traditional* and *farrin* act as polarities within Wapichannao discourse. These poles are used to hang concepts, ideas, and notions of the world. Yet, at the same time the content within each of these poles—i.e. traditional and farrin—are in a constant state of variance, where something that was once considered *traditional* may be converted into something that is *farrin*. These are poles between which negotiations of Amerindianness, Guyaneseness, and *farrin* shift. Through a series of negotiations of cultural differentiations, between the *traditional* Amerindian perspectives and that of the wider Creole culture, one may see how a new way of transmitting ideas about *farrin* has emerged. As a tool for negotiating these differences, we find ambiguations[94] of these polarities, which are used to blur the lines of contradictions. As a result, "negotiations[95]" are done in order to appear traditional on the one hand, and modern/Guyanese on the other.

These processes of negotiation and ambiguation all act as facilitators for global or *farrin* influences. Wardle (2000: 71) states that events such as these beauty pageants create an" idea of cultural identity and uniqueness that is easily translatable into the ways in

[94] See Huon Wardle's work on ambiguities in Jamaican cultural life.
[95] The term 'negotiation' is my term, which represents their constant battle between the two perspectives or 'cultures' as they termed it

which other 'cultures' express their unique identity." These pageants can be understood as "structures of common differences," where "coherence lies in the circuits, in the connections forged not by common agreement, but by a common system for communicating difference, a shared political and moral contest, in which all…take part" (Wilk 1997: 117). Even though many have argued that globalisation points out cultural particularity, it does so on a "standardised framework of what counts as culturally unique" (Wardle 2000:71). This new system promotes disparity, but in doing so it also promotes the classification of *particular* differences, forging them into the unification of diversity. Wilk suggests that cultures are becoming different uniformly. (Wilk 1997: 118; Hannerz 1990; Appadurai 1990).

Wilk goes on to critique Featherstone's postmodernist approach to 'commoditisation of culture on the global stage' where he refutes the inauthenticity of local cultures, rendering their world as "very real and authentic differences" emerging. However, he sees these differences being "communicated in a limited and narrow range of images, channels and contests." Yet, amongst the Wapichannao and Makushi at the Miss Amerindian Heritage pageants, there seems to be no correlation between Wilk's (1997) limited channels of communicating differences and the communicating of differences that the people of the Rupununi displayed. Instead we see variations, an intersystem, which is continuously dynamic. However, although there is an ideal of conformity to a model, the practice of this model may be considered more fluid.

Let us refer to Cynitha's experience *par example*. The entire audience began to construct a set of ideals and characteristics that would constitute one as being Amerindian as opposed to non-Amerindian. This is clearly illustrated during Cynitha's fall from being an Amerindian that evening with her cassava bread-making upset.

Cynitha found that an identity had been ascribed to her, and this identity would vary depending on who defined her, and how those parameters in which her identities were placed and defined. She had been defined as "not a true Amerindian," and instead identified as mixed, another category for classification. In order for her to be in the pageant, she had to be defined Amerindian on a different set of moral values, and definition of Amerindianness. The people who delegated her to represent their district must have found her fitting for the position as Miss Amerindian Heritage Region 9. However, in another forum, she was viewed as far from suitable, and more *farrin* and less "authentic" or *traditional*.

This embodied perspective of the Self, shows that Amerindians have accepted these cultural intrusions, forces of globalisation, mammoth series of negotiations and ambiguations, as part of their culture, where culture shows and pageants not only outline the past, but put the Wapichannao within the context of the now. What these culture shows and pageants do master, is that they rightfully illustrate how global culture has become internalised and made into their own, and they illustrate how 'identity' is created through involvement with the Guyanese state: i.e. power, politics, and economy. As stated before, Miss Amerindian Heritage Pageants are meant to highlight aspects of the Wapichannao culture. However, it does more than this. Instead,

they illustrate how these people have been sucked into development processes where they have to present an 'identity'.

The need to differentiate between the authentic and the foreign is a result of the Wapichannao's own battle to find a place within the Guyanese society. During my time there, there was much talk of "I'm not Guyanese, I'm Wapichan," "*Aonaa õ Guyanese, Õgaru wapichan*." But then, one would hear "I am Guyanese," *"Õgaru Guyanese!"* which was said with much pride on both occasions. As a result, "negotiations" are done in order to appear traditional on the one hand, and modern/Guyanese on the other. The term 'negotiation' is my term, representing their constant battle between the two perspectives or 'cultures' as they termed them.

During a culture show that is put on for foreigners, one does not want to appear the same as foreigners. However, if it was outside of the culture show arena, then much effort is placed on portraying likeness to the 'foreigner.' "These white people love to see our dances," was what was told to me by Aunty Mary. It is through dance, that she has been able to define the traditional. And it was through culture shows that 'traditional' dance was mainly performed, just as it was the Brazilian forró style that was favoured at the dance parties afterwards.

II

Changing Societies and the Importance of Pageants in Performance

As mentioned throughout the previous section, pageants are part of the larger performance stage. This larger stage is an essential part of promoting “indigenous” culture through the art of performance. However, it is how this “promotion of culture” has been modelled that is the basis of this section. By looking at the form of performance—such as pageants and dance—the juxtaposition of modern and farrin are further apparent. These performative characteristics of the culture show are important when analysing how the Wapichannao not only define themselves in relation to each other, but also in relation to traditional and farrin, as was seen with the pageants. Now, I wish to take this further by using the dance performances to examine this relation between the actual production of dance performances and the meanings they portray, rooted in how Wapichannao culture is in an ever-transitional state.

However, ‘culture shows’ are also there for mere entertainment. Some of the skits are purely intended to arouse laughter from the audience by having people do funny things (such as dance like a chicken). One must not conjure an image of culture shows as a stage for purely elaborate intentional acts of identity-awareness, as this is not what is happening in Bush Rope. Rather, the images that are developed at ‘culture shows arise from the peoples’ own need—whether conscious or unconscious—to find a place, and to voice opinions. It is a way to communicate information through performance, and most importantly, a way of keeping the audience entertained.

Performance is an aesthetic, constructed as an escape from reality within the limits of space and time it establishes. For those brief moments the audience is asked to experience a separate reality, either through vernacular or movement. As Kapchan (1995: 472) states in her article entitled *Performance*,

> Performances are aesthetic practices—patterns of behavio[u]r, ways of speaking, manners of bodily comportment—whose repetitions situate actors in time and space, structuring individual and group identities. Insofar as performances are based upon repetitions, whether lines learned, gestures imitated, or discourses reiterated, they are the generic means of tradition making. Indeed, performance genres play an essential…role in the mediation and creation of social communities, whether organised around bonds of nationalism, ethnicity, class status, or gender. Yet performances provide an intricate counterpoint to the unconscious practices of everyday life…

Even though the social messages may be the same, and in some cases reflect one's own life, the audience is allowed to witness such cases as an outsider. By rendering these performances as reflections into the everyday, one may be able to establish certain trends within one's own society, which are either apparent and/or hidden. Performance, after all, is a medium used to convey messages, ideas, perspectives, views of the world.

When I first mentioned dance, the people of Bush Rope, where I conducted my fieldwork, were quick to point me towards the Kabishaka culture group, as they seemed to equate anything with movement, to this small body of performers. Whether it is movement of the body, or the movement of the world, it seemed that the culture group, who specialized in skits through song and dance, would be able to paint a picture of where they saw themselves within the larger scope of the global.

The first Sunday spent in Bush Rope, drove me past the house of Aunty Mary, who was the leader of the Kabishaka culture group, which was the only culture group identified in the village at that time. On her concrete patio were little children, and elderly men and women, singing and dancing. I was introduced to Aunty Mary by Chief, on my initial trip to Bush Rope, during my meetings with the council. She called me over to join in. I went very willingly. I was given a rattle or *shikishiki*, and soon we were making music collectively. She told me that they met every Sunday after church, and whenever they were performing they would meet on most days around 4pm or 5pm, depending on what time everyone could make it. There was a man who played the guitar, whom I later came to know as Mr. Vitus, and Mr. Clive, who played the bongos. The rest of the group comprised of 3 women between their 40s and 50s, and children whose ages ranged, 5, 7, and 10. The children were the dancers of the group, and were the big attraction at the culture shows. During a conversation with Aunty Mary, I told her that I used to dance, and teach dance in the US, and upon hearing that invited me to teach the children a dance, which they could perform. This was the beginning of my involvement with the culture group.

To be in the culture group, one must sing, dance, and/or play an instrument. Even though the dancing was left to the children, on some occasions the older people would take part in this activity as well, especially at larger culture shows. The following Sunday I arrived at Aunty Mary's doorstep, ready to teach the four children a dance. I had yet to choreograph an actual dance for them, so I fabricated one. As my style was more Latin and modern, I tried to keep a balance of the two, and incorporated what I had seen

them perform the previous Sunday. I thought it would be fun to teach the children a Latin routine, mixing salsa and merengue steps, to a traditional song that Aunty Mary and the band for the Kabishaka group sang. Two other children joined in, making it six, and it was the youngest pair who caught on to the steps immediately. While practicing, Gav and Filho—young men between the ages of 25 & 30, who were very much involved in the political life of the community—stopped in, as they were on their way home from a GECOM (Guyana Election Commission) workshop in preparation for the upcoming nation-wide general elections. As so many people do, they came in and watched the mini-performance, while commenting on how different it would be to incorporate my dance into the group's performance. With this came Gav's comment "Stacy come to teach us buck people how to dance." Maybe this was Gav's way of venting his frustration towards the fact that he could not dance, either traditionally or to the modern forró style. However, his statement also showed both the "traditionalist" approach towards the conservation and preservation of culture.

Afterwards, the entire group asked me to dance, freestyle, to a random arrangement of music Mr. Vitus put together on his guitar. In the end, Aunty Mary was quite pleased, and even asked if I could come during the week and go over the routine with them, as she wanted to show off the new routine for the cultural competition for the Deep South August Games, which was the preliminary event to decide who would represent the district in the Region 9 Amerindian Heritage Celebrations. We agreed to meet up every afternoon at 4pm, and we also agreed that I would join in on some of their dances.

Naturally, as an anthropologist, I was delighted to be asked to join into a world that is distinctively not my own.

The following days were hectic. I decided to stop in earlier than the arranged time, to speak with Aunty Mary. We talked about her crafts, as she was also one of the village's leading craftswomen, who also prepped young girls for the Miss Amerindian Heritage Pageant, in honour of Amerindian Heritage Month. We went through pictures of the previous girls she prepped, and the costumes that she made from jaguar skin, tibisiri—straw like material from the ïté palm—and her latest masterpiece for that year's Heritage, which was made from peanuts (see above). After awhile, Mr. Vitus, his wife and their two children, along with Mrs. Jean, came over with lyrics to some of the new songs written by Mr. Vitus and Aunty Mary. They sang each song, having me join in afterwards. Their songs spoke of diversity, movement, and traditions. With such a sundry of messages, it was difficult to establish the symmetry between them, until I took into perspective the multitude of influences which have shaped Bush Rope.

This 'metacommunication' of cultural ideas through performance is integral to understanding aspects of the transient stages of "identity" amongst the Wapichannao. Not only is the audience affected, but all who participate, as together they create a new construct of reality. As Ortner (1978:8) states:

> As actors participate in or employ symbolic constructs, their attitudes and actions become oriented in the directions embodied in the form and content of the construction itself; the construct—the model if you will—makes it difficult for them to "see" and respond to the situation in a different way.

Ortner (1978) is referring to the performance in healing rituals, whereas I am referring to the performance within dance, which is used as an aesthetic as well as a way of conveying understandings of the past. However, there is great relevance to using literature on performance within rituals (Bauman 1977, 1986; Ortner 1978; Kapferer 1979, 1983; Herzfeld 1985; Schieffelin 1985; et al), as performance within ritual and performance outside of ritual convey varying images.

On the other hand, we have scholars, like Schechner (1988), who believe that we should look at behaviour-as-performance, where he makes three distinct claims to performance:

> (1) there is a unifiable realm of performance that includes ritual, theatre, dance, music, sports, play, social drama, and various popular entertainments; (2) certain patterns can be detected among these examples; (3) from these patterns theorists can develop consistent broad-based models that respect the immediacy, ephemerality, peculiarity and everchangingness of individual performances, runs, and genres (Schechner 1988: 257).

Both ritual and performance may be seen as a set of actions with symbolic value. However, the presentation of 'ritual' versus 'performance' may be hidden in ideas about authenticity. Rituals, such as religious and shamanic rituals are seen as true or 'authentic' reflections and practices, whereas 'performances' are forms of entertainment that are 'put on' in order to convey images that are not real at that exact moment of time.

Performances within ritual are seen as 'authentic' reactions that have not been fabricated for the reaction of the audience, unlike performances at culture shows. However, there is still a process of negotiation that occurs within culture shows which ambiguate whether we can distinguish the performances at these indigenous culture

shows as ‘authentic’. As referred to in the former section of this chapter, Miss Amerindian Heritage contestants must follow guidelines set by the government, which empowers an ‘authentic’ identity. Yet, the nature of the pageants, and dances, for that matter, which occur at culture shows, is that of performance. Nevertheless, one may see this as the government way of making the Wapichannao ‘perform’ being ‘authentic.’ By having Wapichannao perform ‘authentically,’ they not only aspire to create an image of what they deem ‘indigenous,’ but at the same time affect the audience’s perceptions of the definition of Amerindianness.

Performance was seen as a way in which to understand ‘ritual’ and the ‘metacommunication’ that evolved due to social performances (V. Turner 1969, 1987; Bauman 1977). This metacommunication makes sense of those ambiguities within and outside of everydayness through what Turner (1990: 11) calls “public reflexivity.” “Public reflexivity” communicates the awareness of the self felt by both the performer and the audience (Bauman 1977). However, looking at the Wapichannao, it also signals the otherness felt through the introduction of ‘traditional’ images that are foreign to both the performer and the audience.

Yet, the greater metacommunicative importance behind performances in settings like Bush Rope is the constant reminder that Amerindians must be Amerindians at the end of the day; they must embody their Amerindianness, which is always in an ever-present loop of disjuncture, ambiguity and resignification. Performances, therefore, present images of the ‘indigenous’ and the Amerindian striving towards the ‘ideal’.

As mentioned previously, both actors and audience are in a process of creating a new reality. However, the question is why is there the need of such a process? Central to this thesis is the constant ambiguation between the traditional and farrin, which is always in a state of disjuncture and redefinition. As a way of recontextualising these ambiguations, performance enables action to be taken in regards to them (Schieffelin 1985: 707). Some of the actions performed may not be discursive in nature, but becomes crystallised through the act of the performance itself; as though, in order for it to be rational it must be performed or acted out (1985:708). The medium (song, dance, skit or storytelling) becomes a provocative tool used to stimulate reactions from the audience. The media offer transformations which, in effect, alter the meanings within these media. Furthermore, in order for the media to be effective it must convey that what is being performed is a reflection of reality. This is also seen in Goffman's concept of the 'theatrical metaphor' and the use of the metaphor as a method for social inquiry as analysed by Manning (1991: 75).

> Goffman defines performance as "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (1959: 26). A few pages later he adds, "I have been using the term 'performance' to refer to all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers" (1959: 32). If performances are to be successful, individuals must demonstrate their conviction that what is enacted is the "real reality" (1959: 28)…

In regards to the Kabishaka group, who perform at almost every culture show in Bush Rope, the significance of their presence is based on the fact that transitions in song and dance are observed—knowingly and/or unknowingly—as they are an integral unit within the village. Their portrayal of "traditional" dance, regardless of my influence, is seen as a reflection of the Wapichannao reality, and is therefore accepted as a truth.

This is due to the Wapichannao's own acceptance of the continuous redefinition of those components which they define as Wapichan. Therefore, we may say that performance socially constructs "a situation in which the participants experience symbolic meanings as part of the process of what they are already doing" (Schieffelin 1985: 709).

It is the interaction between the members of the audience which embodies the reality of the performance, as it is only with the response from the audience that a performance may be considered effective (Goffman 1959; Schieffelin 1985: 717). It is how individuals reflect on what they had just witnessed that makes a performance meaningful.

The agency one experiences through performance is undeniable. As a longstanding and ever present form of society, the Wapichannao are very much sentimentally attached to performances staged at culture shows and the influence they have over the senses. By enduring this outlook towards performance, performance becomes a part of their cultural identity; not only in the presentation of it, but in its definition.

> To perform is to carry something into effect—whether it is a story, an identity, an artistic artefact, a historical memory, or an ethnography. The notion of agency is implicit in performance (Kapchan 1995:479).

Dance, music and storytelling are embedded with deep meanings, and are meant to chronicle the history of the Wapichannao *kaduzu*. However, as I so amazingly discovered about one such story, this is the case but with a slightly deviating twist. The story is that of the 'Wide Mouthed Frog' as described in Chapter 1. To reiterate, the story is about a frog that goes around to different animals to find out what they feed their young. On

her last encounter she meets a crocodile, and asks him “What do you feed your young?” The crocodile responds, “I feed my children wide-mouthed frogs,” then leaps towards the frog who escapes.

The reason this story is so interesting is because it was first presented to me in Bush Rope as a traditional Wapichan story in 2006, and then again in February 2008 as a Scottish story. Although, it is very possible that Scottish missionaries and colonists who settled in this part of Guyana had left these stories behind, there is no mention of its inauthenticity as Wapichan. Rather, it is seen as something organic to Wapichan culture. Here we have the claim of ‘authenticity’ and ‘traditionalism,’ when it is apparent that this story has been a result of ‘farrin’ influences at another time. However, why is there a need to define everything as either Wapichannao or other? This may be due to the “cultural self-consciousness” that has influenced many indigenous groups (Calkowski 1991: 645). This “cultural self-consciousness” or “self-awareness” is primarily due to the constant need to find place. With varying forces—Amerindian’s Peoples Association, Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, varying political parties, and so forth—giving definition to what it means to qualify as an Amerindian, it is no surprise that there is a need to ‘keep up’ with how others are defining Amerindians.

As mentioned in the former section of this chapter, the claim of being traditional is left to those ‘creative’ minds who “invent” an aesthetic. This aesthetic is one which is meant to appeal to the traditional, rather than the farrin, but at the same time has no real place within either the everydayness of the people or the ‘actual’ aesthetic of their

ancestors. This is clearly noted when Aunty Mary used wild peanut seeds to make a traditional outfit, which she stated she 'made-up'.

The Wider Stage

After learning the words and dances to the songs the Kabishaka group taught me, it was time for them to perform at a culture show. I did not perform with them at the first culture show I attended, as I found myself occupied in another way, which was working for one of the major shops, selling food, fizzy drinks, and, most importantly, cheap Venezuelan beer and a Brazilian faux red wine called *catuaba*, both of which displayed pictures of erotic Latinas in bikinis on their containers. Aside from the performances of the culture group, culture shows mainly prosper through sales of snacks and drinks. And it is here that local businessmen and women thrive as most of the men only entertain the idea of going to culture shows in order to drink and eat. Here we have dual methods of transmission of the global. For one, the show itself conveys images of Wapichannao identity within the context of the global, as well as how they negotiate between the local and the global. Secondly, the other structural elements that are fundamental when having a culture show, are inherently Western, and have little to do with traditional Wapichannao culture, this being a profit-making endeavour. The main objective of culture shows is to "raise funds." Almost every institution, organisation, or social group held culture shows during the time I conducted my research in Bush Rope to 'raise funds'. The only time a culture show was held, with money-making far from its objective

was the show held for the President of Guyana, who came during his campaign to be re-elected into office, and another held for the Youth Challenge volunteers' departure from their brief stay in the community. Besides these rare exceptions, the nature of culture shows is to act as a stage to raise funds, i.e. a fundraising event, with the culture group's performances as the main attraction.

At the culture show, apart from the culture group's songs, the highlight is not until afterwards, when members from the community can enjoy the rest of the evening through dancing. However, it could not be further from that style displayed by the performances they had just witnessed. The style of choice is the ever popular Brazilian *forró* and on few occasions Caribbean music (soca, reggae, and dancehall) and other popular Western musical styles (before I left, Akon was a popular artiste). Dance was used as a way to conceptualize notions of the world, through integrating lyrics about everyday occurrences with traditional Wapichannao beliefs. As seen, during the culture shows the dance style is the traditional Wapichan one. However, afterwards, it is the forró style that everyone dances at the party. It is a style familiar to everyone, and members from the community from the age of four to the elderly use this dance style. I have never witnessed members of the community using any other dance style at a party, which shows how much they have internalised this Brazilian dance as their own. In doing so, they have exemplified their ability to negotiate between the local and the global, hence generating an innovative means of seeing the world. I must stress that it is not my intention to dichotomise the two (the global and the local), as it is within the

local that the global emerges through these negotiations. These negotiations bridge the two, knocking down walls that threaten to separate the Wapichannao from the world at large.

Politics as Performance

Although performance may be conceptualised within the scope of a culture show, we see performance in the way politics is played out, especially when those government officials who are considered to be of great importance, visit Bush Rope. The most important visit was that of the President of Guyana and the Minister of Amerindian Affairs, which I will refer to in this section. However, before I go into any analysis I wish to describe the setting in which their visit played out.

I first experienced a political rally when the People's Progressive Party/Civic came to Bush Rope. Their rally was held at the village centre, where everyone was welcomed. People as far as Parabara—a WaiWai village furthest south of the region—had turned up just for the rally, where freebies were given in the form of PPP/C t-shirts. By the time I had reached the centre everyone had their PPP/C t-shirts on, with the exception of myself and Chief. Even those whom, earlier, expressed their displeasure in the current government, were dressed in the party's *couture.* Initially, I assumed that this was a sign of their loyalty to the party, until the arrival of a few more parties, where the turnout consisted of the same demographic—supporters and non-supporters alike. I didn't understand why so much trouble was taken to attend so many rallies. Was it the gifts

that the candidates so diligently handed out? Or was there some deeper underlying meaning?

When I asked Kara, why she was attending so many campaigns she responded that she was curious to know who would be better candidate, as she did not know for whom she was voting that year, as well as that they gave things away. It seemed that for the past years Bush Rope was never a stronghold for the PPP/C, until this year. As it turned out, Chief was never a supporter for the PPP/C, which influenced the villagers in their electing process. But with the Riso, who was a large supporter of the PPP/C, the dynamics of the village changed entirely.

When the President of Guyana came to visit during the national campaigns on the 24th August 2006, there had been much fuss. Riso had decorated the community centre, and took particular interest in the President and the Minister of Amerindian Affair's presence. He was an adamant supporter, and hosted fellow supporters at his house. Chief was there as well, but stood in the back shaking his head. He knew that if he was still toshao the PPP/C would not have gained this much of a welcome, as they received. It was an interesting campaign, as it was my first. During their campaigning it was the Minister of Amerindian Affairs who took the forefront. She claimed that under the People's National Congress—the former leading party—"Guyana suffered, especially Amerindians." They went down the line of the other parties, warning the Amerindians against the other parties who did not have their best interest at heart. Minister Rodrigues attacked the Alliance For Change [AFC]—the newest, yet promising party—and claimed that they wanted to eradicate the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs. The

GAP—the reigning regional party for several years—they attacked for borrowing money from USAID and CIDA and not being able to account for the money they spent.

Politicians, much like performers, are meant to have stage presence, character, and choreographed movements, so as to capture the attention of the audience. At the same time, the audience play a fundamental role in how the rallies go, which is why it is not enough just to speak, but also to give away 'gifts'. Politicians come into the village to perform, as they must not only perform in hopes to grasp the attention of the audience, but they must also persuade them to vote for them. Hence, the result of a good performance is reflected in the polls. This good performance not only came in the form of giving out t-shirts, but also the discrediting of the other political parties. Although this did not come in the form of 'facts,' the idea that the Minister of Amerindian Affairs—the main member of Parliament with whom the Wapichannao of Bush Rope have had much dialogue—was saying this was convincing enough. Her performance was fiery, and passionate. She looked around at everyone, with clenched fists as she spoke of the conspiracies within all the other political parties. At the end, the entire congregation gave a standing ovation to her performance.

Here the politicians create a new reality, which places them on the side of the Amerindians; there for their benefit and in their interests. At the same time, they place other political parties as the enemies, and at odds with the individual goals of the Amerindian people. In doing so, political affiliates are reassigned, and some ambiguity is placed on the sincerity of the other political parties.

Concluding Remarks

The basic goal of this chapter has been to show how Amerindians take on the anomalous role of the “indigenous” within the wider Creole society. They have to negotiate that positioning vis-à-vis the state and its patronage system of politics. More specifically, performance has been used to challenge and conform to ideas of Amerindianness, and indigeneity, as is seen in the guidelines enforced by the government for the Miss Amerindian Heritage Pageant, as well as the inventive power of individuals, such as Aunty Mary, who are always trying to ‘create’ culture vis-à-vis dance and song. However, we also see performance through the way politics is played out.

As stated before Culture shows are meant to highlight aspects of the Wapichannao culture. However, it does more than this. Instead, culture shows illustrate how these people have been brought into development processes where they have to present an ‘identity’. The term ‘identity’ is controversial as it has a formal place in Western multiculturalist theorising (source). But with transnational flows pushing themselves within Amerindian cultures, one cannot avoid finding cultural intrusions within cultural intrusions, which force the people to conform to certain ideals of being. In this case, these culture shows are staged so as to present an ‘identity’ to the people of Bush Rope for the benefit of others. Identity, therefore, becomes important when a culture has to create one to conform to bodies of power. For example, one cannot receive certain benefits if one does not identify oneself as Amerindian to the government. In terms of travel, as an Amerindian one can, on the other hand, transcend borders without the

official documents which tie others to a country, and prevent them from freely moving across boundaries. Hence, Amerindians attempt to fit into the Guyanese state, through the construction of an identity, vis-à-vis the rest of the world, even while their sociality is characterised by movement.

The following chapter further explores this notion of identity as a continuum by looking at the socio-political and socio-economical dynamics of Bush Rope. In doing so, not only will the polarities "traditional" and farrin be further explored—primarily through separatism created by a divide in economic and political statuses, but I will also analyse the complexity within the dynamic of village discourse created by 'rum-shop' culture, which has created a dependence on sociability through drinking sessions, as well as 'liming' culture.

Besides the constant flux of ideas through this national, state inflicted stage, the shops act as a stopping off point for outsiders who bring stories of their lives and of news from the cities and other parts of the world. Also, the main shop—Burning Hills—has its own radio, in which to contact other parts of Guyana, as well as some stations in Brazil. This constant influx of information through the shop attracts the villagers to its doors. The shop is, hence, a great example of how commoditisation has managed to dominate Wapichannao subsistence, while encouraging exchange and reciprocity. To illustrate this I will, in Chapter 6, focus on the exchange of knowledge and dialogues about individuals within the shop. This is done through narratives about the self and gossip about others. Although, we have covered gossip within Chapter 4, it will further be established as a

tool used within the socioeconomic dynamics of the village. However, this is not limited to individuals within the village, as members of the community learn about outsiders through gossiping. This way, members of the community become acquainted and more familiarised with these outside individuals, as was the case with Mr. Hoc and myself as the 'rastaman' and later 'mikor'ab' as was previously mentioned in this dissertation.

Chapter 6
Patronage, Venezuelan Beer and Rum-Shop Culture

Overflowing with the illegal Venezuelan beer on which they just spent most of their monthly pay, the men here seem relics of the weight of globalisation on culture. At the same time one man asks me "How you enjoyin' the Rupununi?" I reply "I love it!" He says "This is we life, this is we culture!" And as he puts the cold tin can to his lips, I ask myself, is this really your culture?

> Frantically, I filled the kilo bags with flour after having finished parcelling the sugar. The store was packed with customers who had been lacking "rations" due to the village's inaccessibility by the shop's tractors, which were to bring the supplies weeks before. Children, adults, and the elderly were not only jammed into the tiny shop, but the queue had made its way out of the building, with the limbs and babies dangling from the windows. Moses, the twenty (20) year old shop keeper, had switched places with me so that I could have a break from parcelling. As I appeared from the back, bodies retracted upon seeing my unfamiliar face. This was my first day.
>
> *Kanom putooriazuna*? What would you like to buy? I asked the elderly woman, who then smiled and responded "Where is Moses?" I responded *Aonaa oitapan*! I do not know! (Knowing fully well that he was behind the shelves packing the left-over flour). I knew that they were not accustomed to "dealing" with me (as Moses had put it), but I was determined to develop relations in a way that they could not escape: the shop. So, I repeated to the man next to her *kanom putooriazuna*? He smiled! "2kg Suga, 2 kg *purum* (flour), 1lb milk powder, 3kg rice, 15 maggi cubes, tobacco, box of matches, 3 litres kerosene…" My first customer! I tried it again on the elderly woman "*kanom putooriazuna?*" Upon witnessing my interaction with the other customer, she reluctantly gave me her list.
>
> As I kept repeating my Wapichan phrases, I received much laughter and giggles (all a part of Wapichan interaction as seen in Chapter 2) which I found both frustrating and relieving. It was relieving, as the laughter and giggles were followed by challenging responses in Wapichan. In doing so they would ask me questions in Wapichan or say a number in Wapichan that I had yet to learn (at the time I could only count up to three; *bauda'apa…dya'utam…Idiknauda'u*). In this sense this was the beginning of how the villagers could and would interact with me.[96]

The field-note excerpt above addresses the ethnographic and theoretical issues which are covered in this chapter. It follows from the ethnographic issues addressed in

[96] Fieldnotes: 27th May 2006

Chapter 3—whereby social relations are mediated through conceptions of, in my words, "the sociable."

As Overing (1992) states, within Amazonia one cannot consider economics as the production of goods, but rather as the production of social relations, as was seen through the act of working collectively, as well as through laughter. However, this notion can also be analysed through the shop, which is a setting upon which relations are made through the dependency on 'rations' and 'commodities'. These rations are defined as those 'basic' needs of the individual upon which s/he can survive. In the case of the Wapichannao, rations are those sentimental items, which are primarily acquired through transactions between the individual and the shop. These transactions have both monetary and social/emotional value, which further promote the shop as being the main mediator for social relations which revolved around a socially and economically established agenda. Within the shop, relationships amongst individuals are promoted through the sharing of sentimental attachments to commodities as well as those dialogues and narratives in which an individual may build one's reputation. Stories of individuals are gathered based on the credit they take, the children they send into the shops, the items they buy and their frequency to this shop (as opposed to another).

This chapter will, therefore, look beyond the influence globalisation, consumption, and commoditisation have on the shop and the village, and focus on the dynamics of shop in relation to patronage (through credit), and gossip and narratives, and how loyalties to opposing shops affect the dynamics of the village as a whole. This chapter aims to engage how these narratives are created within the socioeconomic activities using the

most popular one of many shops—Burning Hills—as the forum upon which these observations were based, with some reference to the second most popular shop as a site for comparison. By comparing two shops, I wish to focus on the split endured by the village through the loyalties trusted upon these two rivalling shops as well as the dependence on 'liming' culture, which is created by a pseudo rum-shop ideal, which encompasses the development of relationships through the consumption of alcohol (not necessarily rum). In such a setting, groups or 'crews' are created.

I will first consider those roles upon which the shop—the main space within which monetary transactions take place—plays within the society. What is the role of the shop, both physically and organisationally, in the economic and social development and modernisation of Bush Rope? To do so a breakdown of the physical space of the shop is needed, as the location of the shop, is just as important as the function the shop plays within village discourse.

I

The Shop

Bush Rope consisted of many shops (of which I only knew twelve), which are scattered throughout the village (See Map 3). From these there are two main shops, which are individually operated by the James—Riso and Chief—brothers. These two competing shops—Riso's and Burning Hills—not only marked the economic rivalry in the village but also a political rivalry which divided the village more than any airstrip could.

> I went to meet with the council to debrief them on my proposed research. They were to decide whether I could do my fieldwork in Bush Rope. The meeting was in Riso's yard. He has a shop, a disco and bar, along with his house which occupied an enclosed compound. [Burning Hills is not enclosed]. We sat on the patio of the disco…They suggest that I return during the council elections on the 5th April and for the general National elections to see how it really affects the dynamics of the community.[97]

Riso's shop was 'modern' in infrastructure. The concrete buildings with zinc roofs and tiled floors were the epitome of "development". He had once told me that he didn't like the traditional roofs—which were made from ïté palms—because they attracted bats. The shop was very spacious and neatly organised with shelves and clothing racks. One could walk around and fill their baskets with goods, until they were ready to pay at the checkout counter. It reminded me of supermarkets one would find in 'town', as its organisation was very much reminiscent of them.

Burning Hills, on the other hand, was made from clay bricks, and adobe, with ïté palms as its cover against rain and shine. The shop was less than half the size of Riso's with a

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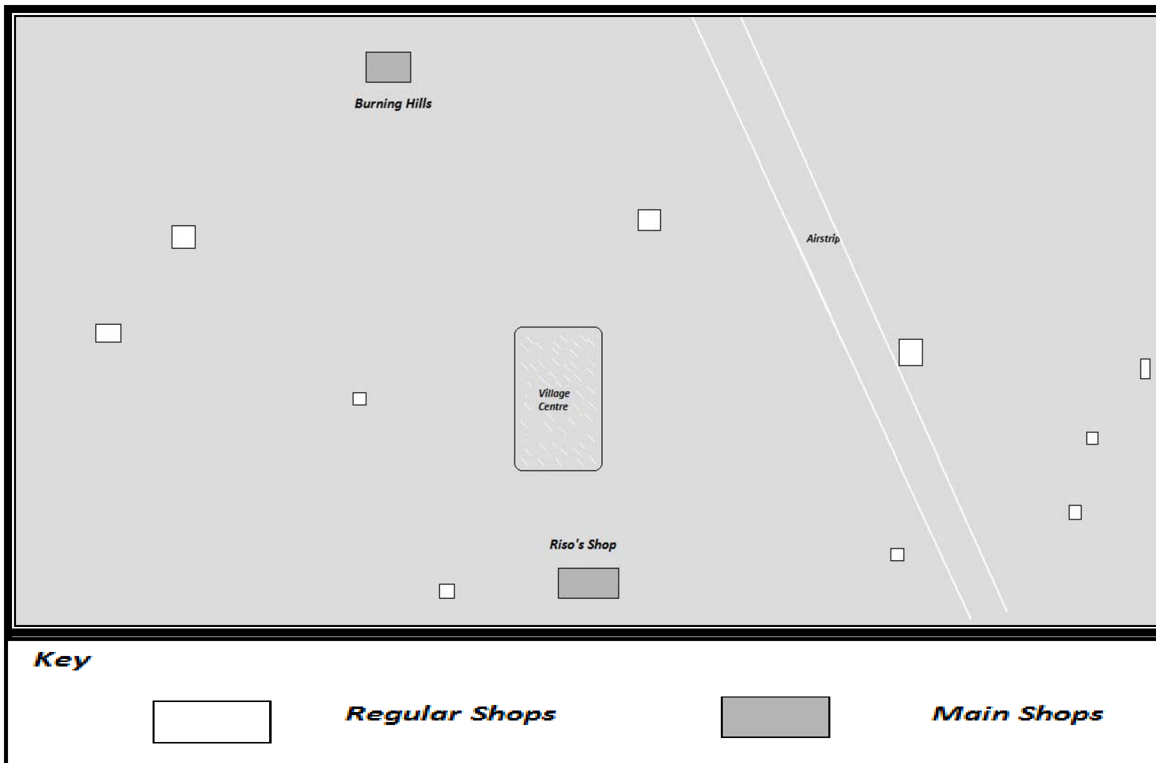
[97] (Taken from Fieldnotes 9.03.06)

counter that separated the customers from the shopkeeper as well as the items in the shop. In this case, the shopkeeper would gather whatever the customer needed. When I asked Chief about the style of his buildings as opposed to Riso's he responded that he would never use zinc roofs as they attracted heat (making noise as the metal expanded and contracted, something I learnt when I stayed in the Guesthouse) apart from the circulation of air that the ïté leaves gave to the houses, which were enclosed during the nights as the windows were made of wood, and therefore shut during the nights.

The other shops varied in structure, but functioned as secondary resources to which people went for individual items based on lack of availability in the other shops and proximity to where one lived. However, for large scale shopping (biweekly and monthly shopping primarily), most villagers went to either Bush Rope or Riso's. Even members of the village who lived in remote areas were drawn to taking the long journey across the airstrip to get their monthly rations.

These conspicuously dissimilar shops, also illustrated the difference in ontological ideals the brothers had. On the one hand, Riso was an advocate for the development of Bush Rope in relation to becoming a cosmopolitan village, with ties to the new and modern. On the other, Chief advocated the conservation of tradition, which included the infrastructural knowledge passed on by the ancestors. This was clearly reflected in how they chose to build their shops. Yet, these differences in aesthetics, also illustrated differences in political affiliations.



Map 3: Showing Distribution of some Bush Rope Shops

The shop is both a public and private space: public as anyone who wishes to carry out a transaction is entitled to enter, yet private as it restricts those who oppose the political backings associated with the shop. As mentioned previously, the two main shops in Bush Rope—Burning Hills and Riso's Shop—were not only owned by two economical heavyweights in the village, but also the main opposing political groups. Even more controversial is the relationship between the two owners as they were brothers and ex-toshaos of the village.

Having been introduced to Chief during his reign as toshao, I had formed a relationship which extended into his personal and business life. As I worked in his shop, I purchased most of my supplies there, and living a few meters away from his shop also made it an

ideal location to 'lime' or hangout. Riso, having noticed my absence from his shop, commented "Why don't you come to my shop? You only stay at Burning Hills."

Although Riso's shop was well stocked, modern in décor and carried commodities that Burning Hills did not have, I found it too pricey and somewhat unappealing. I developed an unwanted bias towards Burning Hills, as my informants mostly gathered there and I felt more 'at home.' This was due to my commitment to the shop—which unconsciously I saw as a rival—as well as my empathy towards Chief and Aunty Dora, who not only introduced me to the village, but who considered me to be "like family".

However, my initial introduction to Burning Hills as a key contributor to livelihood was through my own relationship with food through the James, as well as the Andres who directed me towards this shop for their everyday needs. "Riso is too expensive" complained Kara one day when she had to rely on Riso's shop when Burning Hills was out of stock. The discomfort she felt from shopping there was not only felt by her, but by others. Those who did not complain about Riso's prices were those who were loyal to him. "Riso and I are friends so I don't mind that the prices are high" responded one informant, who had opposed Chief's reign as toshao, and did not support Chief's business, except when it was absolutely necessary.

In regards to my own relationship with food through the James, I was constantly invited for dinner and lunch, as a reward for working in their shop, as well as the free produce from the James' farm that they often gave, which benefited me and the Andre family. For many families, such as the Andres, luxury items as peanuts (which the Andres did

not grow on their farm), tomatoes from Brazil, and various rations, were both a comfort and a benefit, in addition to the family's subsistence.

It seemed economically prudent for people to shop at Burning Hills, especially since Burning Hill's tractor made frequent trips in and out of the village to restock. However, during the evenings those who supported Riso would spend their time in his disco, socialising and gossiping. Those who supported Chief would make their way to Burning Hills, where they would do the same. One would never hear a regular at Burning Hills "bad-talking" Chief. Neither would one expect someone to do the same to Riso at his own establishment. Rather, there was much bad-talking about the other at the opposing shops.

Amerindian dependency on commodities stems from the colonial period, during the Dutch colonial stronghold in Guiana. As part of incentives to gain partnership and trust with the Amerindian population, the Dutch developed policies and treaties in which mutual reciprocity could occur. There were rewards or "presents" given to the indigenous peoples as ways to maintain their commitment to the colony, which was continued after the British took power of the Dutch colonies of Guiana's Essequibo, Demerara, and Berbice. Such rewards have been noted by Menezes (1979), under the *Policy of Presents.* Under the British rule, presents became a way to "placate the Indians" (1979: 30). This soon led to their dependence on commodities from the colonial powers, intertwining their relationships based on the economic structure of the colony. Initially, the use of "presents" functioned as rewards and incentives to promote unity in

the colony (Menezes 1973, 1979; Williams 1991). However, this translated into regular "presents" under British Guiana which may be attributed to this modern day 'patronage' and sentiment towards commodities. This may have started from the initial introduction of Posts and Postholders. Posts were set up in the interior close to Amerindian settlements, overlooked by Postholders whose duties were:

> …keeping order amongst the different tribes within their respective districts…To receive and distribute Provisions, Presents, etc. and to report all Extraordinaries (through their Protectors) to the Lieutenant Governor[98] (Menezes 1979: 61).

These duties were not always maintained as was recorded in the minutes taken at a meeting in 1825 by the Council of Government in Berbice.

> H.E. stated that it appeared the Indians had not received any presents since 1821—suggested for consideration of Council whether it would not be expedient to procure a supply of the usual articles for distribution and after mature deliberation it was resolved that the several Postholders be required to furnish Lists of the Indians in their respective Districts, classing them according to their rank as Captains, or other Titles they may possess—and Sex—as Men—Women—Boys—Girls… (1979: 43).

The 'List' referred to in the above mentioned meeting, included two barrels of gun powder, 500 lbs tobacco, 22lbs of thread, 1850 gun flints, 189 razors, 13 tradesmen jackets, 13 tradesmen hats, 422 buck knives, 695 Jews harps, 248 scissors, and a few more tools in which to lighten the work load (1979: 43).

These Posts resemble that of the present-day shop, in that it functions as a structure in which to gain access, otherwise, outside materials. Although, this was given with no monetary exchange, there was still the exchange of services against military invasion, slave uprisings, and runaways. It is through this colonial device that the sentiment towards the shop has translated, as both the shop and the colonial Post created not only

[98] The excerpt was taken from Taken from *Duties of the Postholders, 1824.* In *C.O. 116/194. Blue Books* quoted in Menezes, 1979. The Amerindians in Guyana 1803-73: A Documentary History

a dependence on commodities, but also a system of exchange which became rooted in social discourse.

Forming Alliance through Patronage

Furthering the shop's involvement in the social exchange was the use of credit based on a system of *patronage*, which further emphasized the rift between the two major shops. Tangling the Wapichannao further into the shop is the extension to credit every village member and selected non-members are given. In doing so, many are indebted to the shop, which they never pay off in full, as they repay as much as they can (sometimes all) of their existing credit list, only to start a new credit list.

As I was in charge of the shop on many occasions, I dealt with the credit book, which kept record of what everyone owed the shop. Although, Aunty Dora did not condone the crediting of alcoholic beverages, on special occasions—such as St. John's Day, large parties, and fundraisers—she allowed this. However, with splurges on these days on alcohol, many were left with little to get rations as Moses mentions:

> Upon Moses' comment "Like you rich?" another drunk man turned to us and said that the problem is that "too much buck man poor". The underlying argument was that Amerindians tend to spend their money on frivolous things, which is why they cannot afford important things. At that moment, Moses turned to me and said that tomorrow rations would be coming in the next day, making a comment that they would be back. The next day the man's wife came into the shop to purchase her 'rations' via the credit system the shop had set up for its customers.[99]

Depending on whether one was given permission to take credit on alcoholic beverages—which was infrequent but not rare—there was always a constant

[99] Fieldnotes 24th June 2006

dependence on credit. Although, there seemed to be a stigma surrounding the amount one has on their credit, as well as anxiety that someone will discover how much one is in debt, the commonality is that most people depended on the credit system, due to the inconsistent flow of stocks to the shop, especially during rainy season. Many times, rations and other supplies were needed before 'payday." However, in the excerpt above, those who do not have a constant flow of money also depend on this system.

Most people who shopped in Burning Hills on a regular basis had credit accounts. This dependence on credit highlighted the use of a 'patronage' by the shops, where the shop owners retained much power over the distribution of food in relation to the credit they gave. This patronage placed the two shops as big men in the village, and heavy-weights in terms of political clout. However, the use of patronage was more than a means in which shop owners could exercise power. Rather

> …regular patronage is not so much deliberate as a simple outcome of association and convenience, encouraged somewhat by advantageous credit arrangements which can be established (Wilson 1995[1973]: 168)

Within this framework, the shop owners acted as patrons for those who wished to gain access to these commodities (Gilmore 1977), as both patron and the people of the village were in a mutually exclusive relationship imposed by "reciprocal obligations" (Gilmore 1977: 446). In the case of the shop owner/patron, the need for political backing endorsed the need of credit to be put in place, as those who needed credit developed a relationship with that particular shop owner.

Although there was a differentiation of wealth within the village, one cannot look at patronage solely in terms of class relations, as society is divided less on class as it is on kinship and political ties. There is no separation based on wealth or access to resources, as is characterised by Gilmore's (1977) *separación* between the elite class and labourers in *Patronage and Class Conflict in Southern Spain*. Although there are those who are wealthier than others, those who play the role of the "big men" are judged both on their financial position as well as their knowledge of both the traditional and 'farrin'. And from these variables, trends in regards to kinship relations and political ties may be seen.

Due to the political rift in the village, created by the dichotomy between the Burning Hills and Riso's, patronage not only contributed to the mitigation of conflict through reciprocity, but, paradoxically, it stimulated much of the political conflicts which surpassed the local levels (Gilmore 1977: 447). On the one hand, solidarity is the foundation of the relationship people have with the shops, as most people who go there buy commodities on credit. To be in the credit book, shows commonality in wealth as well as in need. The fact that one takes credit is not a true reflection of the wealth or social status an individual has in the village, as all members of the village, shopping in Burning Hills, had taken credit out on numerous occasions. Even the Chief's sons, who lived in a few metres behind the shop, had set up credit accounts. Which leads me to interpret the use of credit and patronage as not a class related issue, but an issue related to loyalty: i.e. from whom do I prefer to take credit?

On the other hand, one found that those who frequented one shop also supported that individual in their political venture, as patronage can only occur if the patron is in need of reciprocity of some sort, which usually takes its form in political allegiance. This was more apparent with those who supported Riso's shop, as I came to witness during the general elections, and more evident during Riso's resignation and his nomination of a Derek Winter, as was described in Chapter 3. The nature of politics within Bush Rope was very much the same as it was in Georgetown (e.g.) during general elections, where there were two opposing parties supported by the two main ethnic groups. However, rather than Blacks supporting one party and the East Indians another, it seemed that the separation rested on which brother one supported, hence, which shop one spent their time in.

The shop, being a hub for people to share similar interests, proved to be also an arena for the separation of political views. Those who supported the PPP/C[100] tended to 'lime' at Riso's whereas those who did not support the PPP/C stayed with Burning Hill's aura. Strains in relations between peoples were also marked at which shop one would 'lime', making the shop a marker for relations, and who socialised with whom, as well as with whom one did not socialise. In doing so, the separation acted as a way in which opposing sides exchanged ideas between themselves. These ideas include where the other saw the direction in which the village was heading, as well as how the other planned on dealing with the rising global complexities which were already marching through Bush Rope's historically opened doors.

[100] The PPP/C—People's Progressive Party/Civic: insert more info about the party.

There is a differential access to goods, wealth and power as individuals within Bush Rope are exposed to varied levels of modernisation and political doctrine. The two political poles vary in perspectives as to the future of village life and development, yet they are connected by the functions they provide within society.

On another note, the shop mediated the village's morale, which was experienced mostly during the rainy season when there was shortage of food in the village. During this period there was a shortage of rations, which caused distress amongst the villagers and others in the region. Not only were the crops destroyed due to flooded farms, but the regular influx of commodities from Lethem, Brazil and Georgetown, could not be transported to the villages due to inaccessible roads. Villagers would come into the shop, knowing that the shelves were bare, to see if they could find something that they might have previously overlooked. People would enter the shop and stare at the shelves: "Nothing come yet? You know when the tractor coming in Ms. Stacy?" I would give them the same answer I gave them earlier that day, and the day before. It was apparent that the physical attachment to the shop reassured them that rations would be there soon, causing them to return frequently to experience the emotional relief it provided. When rations did come—in the form of government assistance—it arrived at Riso's shop on Sunday 11th June 2006, forcing those who usually shopped at Burning Hills to depend on Riso. These rations were for 'members' of the village, as was announced after services at the Catholic Church. Assuming that I was not yet a member I stayed home. However, half an hour after Kara had left the house to go and collect her rations, a note came to me saying:

Stacy,

It is okay for you to collect rations. The Toshao said to come now.

Good luck,
Kara

When I arrived at Riso's, they had placed the rations in the building next to the shop, which was used as a discothèque. Each member of a family was given rice, sugar, salt, flour, milk powder, matches and a cake of washing soap. Following this, each individual—who came for rations—had their names recorded. This, I later found out, was politically related.

Upon seeing me, those who were still waiting to receive their rations smiled at me acceptingly, not because I came to collect rations, but because I had the need to collect rations. "Miss Stacy, you come to collect rations too?" was one of the welcoming questions I received when joining the line with my plastic bag. The need to collect rations illustrated to the Wapichannao that this was our shared dilemma. Not only was I living like them, but I required the same goods and commodities that they needed in order to "live good." This mutual dependence, and perceived affection, on these rations did not go unnoticed, which brought me closer to the people I encountered. There is a psychological component to food within the village. However, it is not merely food, but commercial food that has made such an impact amongst these people. This sentiment and dependency on these types of commodities could only be acquired through the shop, linking people more to, not only the infrastructure of the shop, the relations that are present and social change. The shop not only encouraged the dependence on store

bought food, but also on other commodities, such as matches, kerosene, bicycle parts, crockery, clothes and toiletries. However, the average visitor to the store is there to purchase food related items. Yet, I want to emphasise that the issue here is less the approaches to how people eat (cf. Murcott 1988), and more about the relationships that are initiated through commodities and their place in the shop.

From this notion of sentiment towards commodities, one finds terms associated with Amerindian villages in the Rupununi to acknowledge the presence of these items. On one's way to Bush Rope, the term 'oasis' may be heard throughout the long drive from Lethem. An oasis, in its true sense, is a refuge, a place of relief. The imagery of a green patch of fertile land, with streams of clean and clear pools of water found within a vast area of desert instantly comes to mind. This very reference is also attributed to Bush Rope, but with a slightly deviated context.

The savannahs of the Rupununi are—for the most part—dry with patches of swamp, termite nests and caimbe trees. For the Rupununians, an oasis represents areas where they can seek refuge and relief. However, the term only applies to those villages with shops that can provide the traveller with 'cold' beverages; beverages including soft drinks, and Catuaba, but mostly beer. A shop that has a fridge/freezer in which to cool drinks, making a long day's journey more bearable, is referred to as an oasis. It is in these shops that much of the everyday socialising is conducted. Villages, such as, Shulinab and Dadanawa are also considered oases primarily for this attribute.

As the drive from Lethem to Bush Rope can get wearisome, many travellers stop at each of the oases, not just for a cold drink but to socialise with the individuals in the villages. During my trips between the Lethem and Bush Rope, I had stopped in at both Shulinab and Dadanawa each way. Sometimes the stop would last a few minutes, but most of the time a stop in an oasis would last for over an hour. One such trip turned a 7-hour truck ride from Bush Rope to Lethem into a twelve hour one, as stopping in Dadanawa not only led us to the shop attached to the ranch, but also to the owners who invited us up to their house for lunch and a chat. During this time we talked about the politics in Bush Rope, and gossiped about which candidate for toshao was incompetent and who wasn't.

> We stopped in Dadanawa where Jussy, Johnny, and Melke were taking three BBC1 representatives on a bird watching trip. They told me that they plan on releasing the documentary in April 2008. I went to say goodbye to Aunty Sandy—the owner of the Ranch—who invited us up for lunch. During our meal, Aunty Sandy and I discussed the events occurring in Bush Rope at the moment. She expressed that Aunty Dora was a better candidate because she could at least communicate with outsiders and would be able to "tell them a thing or two," whereas Derek was more timid and brainless. It was not until I arrived in Lethem, however, that I found out that Derek had won from Aunty Shirley in her shop. She couldn't believe the result: "I've never seen him sober."[101]

To add to the extension in time, stopping at the second oasis in Shulinab led us to Chief's daughter's—Faye—shop, where she not only encouraged me and the boys to stay and drink, but also invited us inside for her daughter's birthday cake and a "gaff" about the elections for a new toshao, which had occurred earlier that day.

Those shops which have electricity, and can be labelled an 'oasis' is not only a reflection of the wealth of the shop owner, but their political powers within the village. Shulinab, Dadanawa, Burning Hills, and Riso (seldom) were all owned by the leading village members. In the case of Shulinab, the owner, Faye, is the daughter of Chief in Bush

[101] Fieldnotes 13th February 2007

Rope, and both her and her husband are very influential members of the village, politically and socially.

Yet, it is considered asocial to drive through the village without acknowledging these shops, especially if they are familiar with the individual passing through. This is only acceptable if the vehicle has been hired by an external organisation or individual, who is not as familiar with the region. However, usually a toot of the horn signals and a wave from the driver indicates this to the shop keeper.

All shops moderate the relationships which the villagers have with themselves, but most importantly, with outsiders. This is due to the level of interaction that occurs in shops with outsiders as opposed to any other location in the village. Although the shop is secular, it is "also part of a ritual of social relations" (Gell 1982: 472). Not only does it 'map' social relations, but it also catalogues how people relate to each other, and to what extent. However, this is not to state that social relations are *only* mapped out within the shop, as is reflected in other arenas of interaction amongst the Wapichannao described in the previous chapters. Yet, an analysis of those social relations which are played out in a shop reflects patterns of intergroup relations that incorporate an outside—i.e. not of Amerindian descent—Other.

II

Drunken States and Shop Decorum

> "Ahm Ms. Stacy! You want to walk with me? I liiiiiiikkkeeee you!" If only he knew how often these lines have made their way to my ears since arriving to the village. I could smell the stench of the *kari* on his breath. Marco could barely walk. It was a full moonlit night, which made the night as bright as day. He followed me from the internet café to my house. "You don't live here, you don't live here! This is my family's house." I responded "Yes I live here, this is my family." We enter, and he is puzzled that I was walking into the Andre house. "I don't believe it. Kara goodnight! This is your family? I want to take her out for a walk." Kara giggles and says "Yes, this is my family, but you should take her out!" I tore a ferocious stare into Kara, who shook it off by giggling to herself. "Yes Stacy, Go with him!" I rolled my eyes, and walked out with Marco—Kara's father's brother's son—towards the high school headmaster's house.
>
> We arrived, to find everyone already intoxicated. Aunty Paula—the headmaster's wife—had already brought out another pitcher of *kari*, and upon seeing me, had brought two more cups for me and Marco. This was going to be interesting.

This section will focus on the socioeconomic dynamics of the village, and how the shop mediates social relations revolving around a socially and economically established agenda. I will explore fundraisers and events outside of the shop—i.e. the building—but will show how the shop—as an institution, promoting and presenting inter-subjective links—is integral to how the society defines itself. This section analyses the role of drinking played within social life, as well as the role the shop played within building relations through the use of alcohol, as well as those events outside of the shop, such as fundraisers, whose triumph laid in the presence of alcohol. However, I do not wish to focus on the meanings behind certain structures presented within the forum of drinking. Rather I am interested in the people and what they do, as I do believe that this will illustrate the interconnectivity drinking has with other aspects of village life.

It seemed trivial to have laws which prohibited alcohol in indigenous villages, as alcoholic beverages were a main part of the socioeconomic dynamics of the village, as well as fundamental to many other aspects of social life (e.g. manore). Rum[102] was not allowed in the village. Instead, rum and Guyanese beer were displaced by 'farrin' drinks as mentioned before: Venezuela Pilsen, Brazilian Catuaba, and also the Brazilian 'bush rum", Cachaça. Although the soft drinks came from both Brazil and Georgetown, but the alcohol was monopolised by the "farrin" market.

> **Section 36 - Supplying Alcohol**
> (1)No person can sell, exchange, trade or give alcohol to an Amerindian or anyone else if they will give it to an Amerindian.
> (2) Anyone who does sell, trade, give or supply alcohol to an Amerindian will be fined $100
> **Section 37 - Penalty for Possession of Alcohol**
> Any Amerindian found in possession of alcohol, unless they have a license from the District Commissioner, will be fined $50.
> **Section 38 - Exceptions**
> This Part of the Act does not apply to:
> (a) alcohol for medical uses or supplied with the permission of the District Commissioner, Officer or by a Minister of religion;
> (b) making and drinking local drinks like piwari by Amerindians.

The above excerpt is taken from Part VIII of the Amerindian Act. It stipulates that alcohol for medical use, or supplied with the permission of a government official or a Minister of religion is allowed, as well as the use of local alcoholic drinks. However, the social framework in which drinking may be found in the Amerindian village of Bush Rope raises many contradictory perspectives on the presence of alcohol within Amerindian villages throughout Guyana. However, the need to abide by the laws imposed by government, as well as by the Wapichannao, seemed to be dealt with through ambiguations of the

[102] Shop keepers defined these rums as the Guyanese El Dorado and XM rums.

role alcohol played within developing networks, and establishing and maintaining relationships.

It was the use of the main alcoholic beverages that most clearly showed links between this remote Amerindian village in the depths of the Guyana savannahs and a global environment. Contrary to the act, these main alcoholic drinks were not local, but imported: Venezuelan Pilsen beer met the Brazilian Catuaba, which mixed its way with the occasional Guyana 5 year old rum and Banks beer. All came together to add more meaning to the traditional potent drinks which were a by-product of cassava and other subsistence crops. How was it possible to expect the eradication of such multicultural entities, from which a very important social character emerged: the drunk?

> The graduation party was held at Burning Hills (maybe because it was closer to the high school as opposed to Riso's). There is much dancing and drinking of Felina Catuaba. Nuff drunk people indeed! I am in the computer room looking through the window like an armchair anthropologist. Just waiting to muster up the courage to go down and deal with all the commotion. It's for my own protection—the drunks always seem to find me.
> Came down and ended up dancing with Jeff (who calls me Aunty Stacy; what a sweetheart!) who had just graduated. We danced the Brazilian forró, which is much like lambada. Chief greeted me in 'border Brazilian' as he calls it. It is completely unintelligible as I was not familiar with the Roraima slang. Project Trust Volunteer—Ally—is drunk. He was telling me a load of nonsense, except for the insight on rumours, which he said spread like wildfire here. He was accused of having relations with a school girl because he helped her after school.
> Now I am talking to Chief, who said that a lot of girls are not serious and will always be "skinning their teeth" (giggling/laughing) which Sir Adrian—the headmaster of the secondary school—agreed with.
> By the end of the night both Chief and Adrian were completely drunk. Chief was worse. His words became slurred, so slurred that the words became unrecognisable, apart from "Another beer…"[103]

[103] Fieldnotes High School Graduation: 17th June 2006

On most occasions, Burning Hills became the host for parties. Although the village centre was designed for this particular purpose, most felt more comfortable closer to this shop, as access to the items in the shop gave the masses some sort of satisfaction and comfort. The Venezuelan Pilsen Beer proved to be the best seller for the village, which would be sold along with the cold Brazilian vinho-tinto (red-wine) called Catuaba. However, these beverages were usually provided by Burning Hills, and many times I would find myself working at such venues. These drinks were seldom consumed by women. Instead, women would enjoy soft drinks, kool-downs (kool-aid in plastic bags), or local beverages.

The beers cost $180, the drinks cost—depending on size—$100 and $160, and the kool-downs were $20[104]. The kool-downs were bought, mostly by children, and the beers were sold to the men. The fizzy drinks were not sold out as some people complained that they were too expensive, with the exception of the smaller drinks that some of the women and children bought.

Alcohol was consumed mostly by groups of men, especially men who belonged to the same kin groups, or politically affiliated group. However, most of the beers would be purchased by the same group of men on most occasions, namely the *Padatch* crew. As will be mentioned later on, part of their status in the village was based on the stronghold they had on all sectors of the village, as well as their knowledge and exposure to the global. The *Padatch* crew also demonstrated their rank in the village through their close knit social group, in which all members would decide if one could

[104] Exchange rate is £1 = 360 GYD (Guyana Dollars).

join or not. It was during my initiation (of sorts) into this all-male group that the roles of liming (a term I will define in the latter section of this paper) and drinking showed me the interconnectivity they had with other parts of Wapichannao life.

The context in which drinking occurs in Bush Rope is seen at all 'social' events—private and public. These 'social' events include parties, fundraisers, manores, culture shows, and sports activities. However, drinking, on a day-to-day basis occurs mostly in the shop, where men meet up for general conversation. In relation to special occasions, such as holidays, the consumption of alcohol is high as everyone—both men and women—are encouraged to drink. Unlike the shop setting, which is dominated by men, holidays are used to encourage the consumption of 'traditional' alcohol.

The 24th June 2006 marked my first St. John's in the village. Earlier, I had been spinning cotton at Aunty Bibi when her cousin came by in a drunken state. When he left her only response was "he was probably at Burning Hills". The celebrations had already begun. Brought to the village by a Brazilian who also introduced them to clay brick technology, and who took residence there, St. John's night was marked by the 'tradition' of walking over hot coals. It is believed that if a person is burnt by the coals, that person is a sinner. It was this night that I had to fight off Ally who was 'pissing drunk' and who felt the need to proclaim his love for my by begging me for a kiss. After I had a successful run over the coals, I went into the shop to help with the selling. It was a busy night, as most people were drinking themselves up so as to run over the coals with fewer inhibitions. The

entire shop was packed with drunken men, who spent their money frivolously on random items.

One man had spent over $4000 (£12) on beers, cigarettes and food for him and his friends. I had only sold him a few times, as Moses—the boy in charge of the shop—tended to him. He would come with whichever friend for whom he was buying, and say "whu you want? Give him what he wants [referring to me or Moses]". At one point, he gave me $1000 and told me that this is for a friend, whom he pointed out, and told me to get whatever his friend wanted. At this stage the man was completely intoxicated. Knowing everyone in the village, Moses commented to the man "Like you're rich?" This was the extent to which Moses intervened. More intoxicated men approached the shop counter: "Miss Stacy I love you!" "No Miss Stacy I love you" "You real pretty yuh know Ms. Stacy?" What a night! The shop became the epicentre for drunken bodies proclaiming their admiration for my otherness. Only in this state did I witness such acts.

There has been much work on the state of drunkenness within societies, and the role the drunk plays within its dynamics. It seemed that the altered state which we know as being drunk was one that was accepted within the village. However, it was only on certain occasions that one could be drunk: mainly those occasions which involved the shop. There was one occasion when a group of young men—the *Padatch* crew—emerged from the other side of the village very much intoxicated.

The owner of Burning Hills was outraged at their drunken state, especially since it had not been due to the shop's beneficence. Apparently they had bought bottles of kari and

sweet potato fly (alcoholic drink made from sweet potatoes) from someone on the other side of the airstrip, where they had been all day. There were no activities such as fundraisers or culture shows which called for the men to drink, nor any celebration for that matter, which annoyed Aunty Dora. She said that they needed to stop getting drunk and go home to their wives. This was definitely a contradictory tune from the many nights she and Moses had encouraged the sales of alcohol to many of the men (except her husband and children). Many times she would even show up with additional beers she had yet to bring out in hopes of stretching her stock over a longer period of time. During "drinking sessions" it was Moses and Aunty Dora's duty to make sure that people kept buying alcohol, until the protagonist drunk emerged.

The Fundraiser Phenomenon

Outside of the shops, drinking was also encouraged. However, this was done only in certain settings. The village thrived on 'fundraisers' and events whereby alcohol was a central product sold. An event would be unsuccessful if shops and independent vendors would bring items to sell. Most times, the fundraisers were solely for the people who were raising funds. Independent vendors would be asked to donate food or drinks in order to help the cause, as opposed to normal events, where everyone would sell to make their own profit. Foods such as buns, solara[105], sugar-cake, burgers, and

[105] Much like a swiss roll, except that the filling is made of dried grated coconut, mixed with cinnamon, nutmeg , sugar and red food-colouring.

pholourie[106] were sold. And even though food would be sold out most times, it was the alcoholic beverages that made the most profit for any event. And if drinks had run out in a stall, members from the community would volunteer to climb the hill in order to restock so that the 'party could continue'.

I arrived to the village centre ready to help with the fundraising. It was my first fundraiser, and the first time the people would see me in such a setting. I was slightly intrigued at their reaction to me. Earlier that morning I had helped Natzy—the Chief's daughter-in-law—to strain the *kari* into pails from which we would be serving them. This fundraiser was to keep the internet café going, as the cost to maintain it was exorbitant requiring quarterly money-raising endeavours. After returning from the high school I went to help her again, but this time with the food—curry and rice, pepperpot, and buns. The fundraiser started at 2pm, with the main form of entertainment being the football match between the North and South teams of the village. I had made gift baskets with donations from Burning Hills for the teams, which were to be distributed at the award ceremony. The *kari* went quickly at $80 per 1litre bottle (approximately £0.22). By the end of the games, most of the men were drunk, including the two British volunteers. From time-to-time men would come and propose a dance—Brazilian forró—to the girls, especially me. Instead I stuck myself behind the bar, where I was selling the last of the kari and pepperpot and rice. From my little perch it seemed that this was an "everything goes" moment, where men and men danced with each other to the close forró dance-style, and women drank in the shadows where the public eye could not judge them. I found that many men felt the freedom to profess their love for me through their poetic mumbles and uninviting dance styles, which received no reaction of disdain or lack of respectability towards the men by the girls who were assisting in the sales. They must be used to this! I hear my name, and it is Gav and Ally conspiring against me. They have found a topic for discussion: me. There, besides them, was a young man (about 27) who had previously kept touching my hand when I served him. His crooked teeth exposed the bliss he felt from the conversation that Gav and Ally were having about me. They looked up at me, upon which the young drunk man and Gav rose to their feet. Gav was grinning in my direction, with his new found specimen adjacent. "Stacy, he wants to dance with you. Go and dance with him!" I smiled politely and told Gav that I couldn't as my ankle was sore (which was from a previous injury that year and from the long period of time standing). Whew! They bought it and left me alone. At the end of the night (1am to be precise) I was one of two women left at the centre. Ally—as drunk as he was—came up to me to offer his advice from his many months living in Bush Rope. He told me that I should expect a lot of men to 'hustle' me along with men dancing with themselves. He said that it was a norm, and that drunken people were hilarious here. Little did he know, that he would be the most entertaining of them all when he would try to proclaim his love for me at a going-away party held in his and his fellow volunteers' honour.

Fundraisers also included the presence of traditional alcoholic beverages such as the sweet potato wine, rice wine, *sawarao*, and most importantly *kari*, which was a potent

[106] Indian inspired dish, made from split-pea flour and indian spiced, deepfried.

alcoholic concoction made from the poisonous bitter cassava. These were consumed by men and women and rather inexpensive, as one could purchase these drinks by the cup, for $20 GYD. However, even though beers were the most expensive of all the drinks, one could expect it to be sold out most times.

Not only is alcohol a part of the recreational arena, but it is also fundamental to other aspects of community life, especially in the way people develop bonds amongst each other. This is seen as it is an integral part of the socialisation process for both men and women. Alcohol was always present at a fundraiser, and seemed to be definitive of any fundraiser of sorts. For one, fundraisers mostly were in the form of sporting events, and more popularly, in the form of culture shows, which were designed, not only to a educate members of the village on aspects of the Wapichannao culture, but also as entertainment.

The Emergence of the Drunk

The drunk is given much leeway when it comes to breaking the rules of everyday societal decorum. In a sense there are distinctive rules for societal decorum when it comes to drunken people. They are allowed to say whatever they want, and are not chastised for it in the future.

The sharing of this drunken past-time was seen as a social endeavour, which was why it was acceptable for someone to be drunk when there were others who were also

drinking, as opposed to a lone drunken man. It commemorated the sharing of ideals and states of alterity, upon which subdued topics were brought to the surface of discussions. However, the other side to these drunken men were those of societal disorder and fear, as there was also fear of drunken men. Therefore, drunks were seen as both humorous and frightening.

As constantly repeated, a social event cannot function without alcohol and someone to play the role of the drunk, especially since the sale of alcohol also labels an event as successful (Dennis 1975: 857). Not only was the drunk a marker of sales success or even an entertainer, but many times the drunk were the ones who brought underlying issues to the forefront of everyone's minds. I recall the manore we had at the Andres which Kara had claimed was not a real manore as there was no alcohol. She had disclosed that a real manore had kari or sawarao, which made the work go faster, and put everyone in a more festive mood. An experience I later had when I went to a 6 a.m. slaughter.

> Jermaine picks me up to take me to the corral at Billy's where they are to slaughter two cows. It is 6am. Benson, Muscles, Earl, Wesley, Billy, Fada and Jermaine are to participate in the gruelling task of slaughtering the animals. After we had finished slaughtering, skinning, cleaning and having the meat examined. It was time to drink. At first there was kari, which Jermaine had organised. When that was finished Jermaine sent Benson to his house to collect the jamoon wine which he had set last week. It was sweet! However, there was only enough for one pot, so he sent Simon—the volunteer—and Benson to ride to the village centre, where a fundraiser was taking place, to buy mango fly (they went twice). We ate and drank until 6pm, when I decided to leave. By this time everyone—minus myself, of course—was drunk, with Jermaine being the most inebriated of them all, which encouraged his very muddled conversation pieces, which ranging from a sequence of saying nothing but "shhhhhhhh shhhh" to a rather confusing explanation of life in Georgetown, where he worked and resided. Then everyone had the bright idea of teaching Simon how to round up cattle as well as ride for the upcoming rodeo.[107]

[107] Fieldnotes 3rd February 2007

In such cases, the drunk becomes the target of gossip, especially if s/he is not a familiar figure to play the role. However, it is seen as acceptable, as those who came to buy beef from Billy's corral showed little surprise regarding the scene. Contrary to Goffman's (1963) notions that the drunk possesses an "out-of-role" experience, anthropologists like Dennis (1975) hold quite the opposite view. The drunk does hold a role, which is one that displays an alterity, an otherness, from that of the everyday. Yet, if drunkenness is accepted in this sense, does it not blend into the everyday? I do not agree with Dennis (1975: 860) as he states that the drunk occupies an 'anti-role' which "reverses the normal role expectations" (1975: 860). If the society accepts such behaviour, then it must be expected. Therefore, this assertion may only be considered valid if that society places the drunk outside of the normal. Or can we put this otherness as intrinsic to the Wapichannao experience: or rather, the Bush Rope experience? The idea of the anti-role as one which plays on a separate reality has its merits, as there is a clear distinction between one who is drunk and one who is not. Yet, the drunk plays on other realities otherwise hidden or tabooed. He is the fool, but the fool who can provide "barefaced facts" that would have not been permitted otherwise.

Many times the drunks that I had encountered were either overly friendly, or possessed a very philosophical quality, upon which they were ready to talk about issues that faced their society. Aside from Chief's disapproval of the present government during his intoxicated stage, there were many instances where I encountered drunken men who wanted to talk about issues that disturbed them due to the current global influences.

There were periods when drunkenness did appear as a threat in Bush Rope, especially when it came to physical violence in the form of domestic abuse. My main encounters were through Aunty Pet, whose legal husband had abused her for years under the influence of alcohol. I did hear of certain men who abused their wives, especially whilst drunk.

Even though women rarely played the role of the drunk they did play a role. I found that women, who lived in 'town' for an extended period of time, were given the liberty of drinking with the men. One such instance was when Bonnie returned to Bush Rope, after living in Georgetown. She had a Georgetownian air about her which exuded confidence that was unlike that of other women in the village. She even spoke with a Creole accent and in their dialect, which provided her with the credentials of a modern town girl. However, in general, women tend to avoid any contact with drunks, unless they are their husbands. They would move away from them, and form little groups in which to talk about other issues. Sometimes they would just stay in a little group without much of a word, but in an area upon which they could observe their surroundings. From this many women would use this for future gossip, which I found prevalent when 'youths' were involved.

However, I did notice that women drank during times of communal work: the manore. They would let the local alcohol slide down, so as to make their work easier (or more accurately, less memorable). One would see men and women's heads thrown back in unison as cups of sawarao, kari, or wine (rice or sweet potato) made it to their lips. Yet, I

never saw them in the role of the drunk, especially when it came in proximity of the shop. This distinctively was a man's domain.

The Real Padatch and Liming Culture

In the village, some men divided themselves into groups known as 'crews'.[108] Within these crews, individuals are considered equals, but not in relation to age, generation, or live situation, as Wilson (1995[1973]: 168) suggests. Rather, crews in Bush Rope may be considered as a group of men (predominantly) who share the same ideals and political endeavours. However, most crews were formed vis-à-vis kinship.

Illustration 4: Showing Some of the Padatch Crew Socialising at Sports Day

[108] The term 'crew' may have been derived from the nautical term 'crew'. However, it is not used today amongst the Wapichannao and other Guyanese in relation to boat crews, as is also the case for Wilson's Providencia (1995[1973]: 168)

We have previously encountered the Padatch crew in regards to the context in which alcohol is consumed. Many times the shop was occupied by Padatch crew: namely Gav, Anton, Bert, Fada, Kirt, Ronnie and Johnny, with room for others from time to time. They were known to set the pace for the village, as they spent most of their spare time together. Even when they attended fundraisers with their family, they were still known to abandon them to hang out with their crew. This is illustrated in Illustration 4, which shows the crew 'liming' or hanging out during the high school students' Sports Day.

The Padatch crew embodied Bush Rope's ideas of "development" and "progress," as members of the group were seen as the intellectuals of the village; those who were always in constant discussion over the good of the village over a can of Pilsen beer. With the Padatch crew, many of our conversations centred on the issue of ancestral knowledge and rights, as many were involved with ongoing projects with the Forest People Programme and Amerindian People's Association (APA), due to kinship ties with each other as well as with Chief (the President of the APA).

> I went to Burning Hills around 11:30am to meet Gav, Ronnie and Johnny drinking Polar beers (Venezuelan). Gav, the joker he is, told me that this is where I need to DJ for them.[109]

Burning Hills, for the Padatch crew, became their headquarters or hangout spot. It is at the shop that one builds his reputation, and it is here that "statuses are levelled as flamboyant fellowship, drinking, gossiping, and mutual aid prevail" (Brana-Shute 1976: 59). Unlike Brana-Shute's (1976: 59) notion that no man is isolated in this arena, amongst Bush Rope Wapichannao, there is one such character who is chosen and that is

[109] Fieldnotes 16th May 2006

the 'drunk,' whom by his altered state and perceptions that do not abide social decorum, has already been singled out.

Drinking was seen as a pseudo-initiation ritual into manhood. If you were invited to drink by the "boys" then one was being invited into the group. Such an invitation meant that you could participate in discussions about the village and life with the others. This also meant that if a favour was needed one had the right to ask any individual for such a favour, but also reciprocated if need be. Sometimes a member of the group would buy everyone from that group a drink, and if that person wanted to incorporate another individual who had not previously been included, the buyer would offer him a drink. Rarely, had I seen an 'outsider' to the group buy a round. This may be due to the appearance of one trying to force acceptance, which is always received badly.

As alcohol is both "substance and symbol," which promotes a shared altered state (state of alterity) and communication, if you refuse you are refusing to sociable and be a part of the bonding (Wilk 1999: 244). This drinking culture is the networking of men, who used the shop as a common ground in which they could meet and discuss topics they could not have within their households. It is this "engaging activity," when men who drink together engage with each other, "that acts as a boundary around the participants" (Goffman 1961: 25). The shops also did not restrict the men's tongues, as they enjoyed a freedom they did not have at home. Out of their wives' and mothers' eyes, conversations of women, politics, the environment, traditions, and so forth could

be explored in other depths. This freedom drew the men to the forum of the shop, which will be illustrated by the following fieldnote excerpts:

> I was chatting with Kirt[110] over a coconut filled with rum. He expressed how sad it was that he did not know much Wapichan. He has trouble being objective in his work, when the issues are really devastating. According to his observations there has been a loss of cultural identity, which was also the same problem Toshao Gush mentioned when he spoke about how important traditional practices were to Amerindian identity.[111]

Although the Padatch Crew drank together, it was not merely a "drinking session." Instead, this was a chance for them to chat about politics, in which they played a large role. They were, hence, considered to be political role models for some, as politics and the welfare of Amerindians was always a topic of concern. This may be attributed to Chief's role as the president of the Amerindian Peoples' Association, which has influenced many of the Padatch crew's ideas.

> Anton and few of the Padatch crew were having drinks upstairs in the verandah of the internet café. The conversation was based on foreign influences into the village. I sat down with them to hear what was going on. Anton was frustrated claiming that Amerindians tended to latch onto those things that are European or foreign. "They would latch onto the words and agree with whatever they say". According to Chief, this was to show that Amerindians shared similar knowledge, so as not to be seen as ignorant. [112]

> In the evening I sat down with Ben (volunteer), Chief, Gav and Anton. They are not drunk but they were drinking beers. They were identifying certain problems in the village. They spoke about Gav's position in the village, and the previous slander to his name made by the toshao. He said that the villagers were misled by the current toshao about his nature, and wanted to clear that up. They then went onto discuss the current toshao's capabilities, which they openly said were lacking.[113]

It seemed as though the drunken state allowed for a freedom of expression. One became free to express ideas that would otherwise have been ignored or considered

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[110] Kirt is the Chief's son, and a main contender in the APA's goals for Amerindian rights which adhere to traditionalism.
[111] Fieldnotes, August Games in Shea Village: 19th August 2006
[112] Fieldnotes 16th October 2006
[113] Fieldnotes 28th November 2006

irrelevant. One is forced to be face-to-face with the issues, especially if the drunk becomes the main focus of entertainment. One cannot help but listen to what is said. Such a state also allowed for those around the drunks to become engaged in the conversation. Most times, I was offered a beer—even though I do not drink beer—and asked to come join in, not only to the conversation but also to join into the state of being of those who were participating. Many times I had to accept the beer, in order to join into the conversation, with hopes of trading it in for a soft drink, without offending anyone. This was the main socialising process which occurred amongst men. This is reminiscent of 'rum-shop' culture in the towns, where men would gather at rum shops and talk about issues which they found of interest. They would engage in activities such as pools, cards and dominoes. Discussions in such an atmosphere were separated from those one would have in everyday conversations. One was allowed to endure a state of alterity—one which was far from reality—without judgement for the most part.

Later on, it was apparent that one waited eagerly to hear what would come out of the mouths of the drunk, especially from a drunk who emerged from the Padatch crew, with children lurking in the shadows, giggling (skinning their teeth) and memorising lengthy conversations upon which they would recite to their friends the next day. The drunk becomes the main form of entertainment from which individuals can transcend from the everyday norms. Here the societal norms are blurred to make room for a reality that allows for escape from the constraints of societal decorum.

Never have I experienced a drunk in a formal situation and never have I heard of a local drunk being jailed, as drunkenness seems to occur at 'appropriate' times. However, I have heard of a violent drunk who had attacked and set afire the home of a now-resident of Bush Rope's in the neighbouring village of Awarwanau. Apparently the man (young man) had been drinking rice-wine at the victim's house—that victim being a woman—in the neighbouring village early morning, and returned in the afternoon threatening to kill her. He had put the victim onto the bed and rummaged through the house. He had left, so she moved out of the house to call for help. When she returned he had set her house afire. The man was brought to Bush Rope, where he was imprisoned until a vehicle could take him to Lethem. [114]

We may consider the Padatch as a good example of how a non-institutionalised network is used to "build up a sense of communitas based on common values and sentiment" (Wilson 1995[1973]: 181). This male-dominated group, therefore, shares a common sense of understanding and belonging towards a cultural identity. Hence, it is through crews that men are given power and respect, which can only be removed once an individual is forced to leave the group.

Concluding Remarks

Sidney Mintz[115] notes that we are not only what we eat, but we do are also what we not eat. We belong to a community based on those things we eat, but at the same time we

[114] Fieldnotes 17th November 2006

[115] 4th October 2007 University of St. Andrews. Department of Social Anthropology: Seminar Series

define those who do not belong, as well as those groups from which we are excluded. In a sense, drinking occupied the same mechanism as drinking was solely for the men. However, what one drank, when one drank it, where you drank it, and with whom one drank, were key facets to this claim to belonging. If one drank with the Padatch crew, one was seen as sharing those similar views, and engaging in similar conversations. This also meant that one was willing to share encounters and relationships with those one drank, which became solidified in the shop setting.

In contrast to a manore, where everyone is brought together to work with promise of food and drink, a shop is less constrained and allows flexibility of movement. One can choose whether to be a part of a drinking-session, which does not depend on whether one has money or not. As anyone can open a credit account with the shop, one may feel free to put a beer or two on one's tab if money is unavailable. This was a common trend amongst men of all economical backgrounds who met friends at the local shop. In addition, the drunk, who emerges, plays a crucial role in how social networks are formed. We see the use of commercial alcohol as an agent in which gossip, political discussions, and narratives are exchanged.

This chapter is a continuation of the appropriation of knowledge and identity (knowing who we are) through a socioeconomic lens. As the global market is constantly making its mark within indigenous societies, Amerindians are forced to adapt to how they themselves negotiate and attain goods. Here, we see the polarities of difference used as an analytical device with which one may investigate how an indigenous grouping defines itself—throughout a series of points in time—through the commodities one is able to

attain. In this sense, the acquisition and possession of money, as well as the lack of it, at any given point can determine what ‘type’ of Amerindian you are. In other words, one is judged based on the possession of commodities. Furthermore, the “type” of Amerindian you are determines the access and dependency (created, imaginary, needed) one has within the global market.

In Chapter 7, identity and knowledge are further analysed from the perspectives of those outside of Bush Rope—Georgetownians—who perceive Amerindians as ‘past peoples’ who are removed from the global space. However, this chapter mainly focuses on the role history and the state play within non-Amerindian Guyanese’s’ views on Amerindians, and how this in itself has forced the Wapichannao to engage in a negotiation vis-à-vis polarity of differences.

Chapter 7
"**Buck Come to Town**"
Hegemony, Cultural Ideology and the Creole Continuum

Leaving the red dust trail filled with memories of wanderers who knew what it was like to be free. Free from the chains which would soon bind them to an identity. Foot-worn paths stamped with stories of travellers who moved between "civilization" and the "backwardness" of both sides. "The wheels of the bus go round and round!" Round and round on the paths leaving a trail of dust behind, with generations of history that are left to linger in the air for a brief moment, until they can settle again to welcome stories of travellers to come. That's if we can find their memories' trace or a root from which to generate their growth. And like oceans of memories, forgotten footmen will drift in and out of the dust like the tide washing onto the shore.

The hustle and bustle of Georgetown is more than likely to overwhelm someone coming from the country side where there are neither city roads, nor numerous vehicles, and other urban monstrosities. Added to the cacophony of noise and movement, it was the stench of metropolitan life that suffocated little Elle. She peered out the window as we approached the main part of the city. The rain had already made its commitments to the day, and was there to greet us. We had been cooped up in the *Intraserv* bus for fourteen hours, and were excited at the promise of stepping out onto the roads of the nation's capital. We were met by some school friends who picked us up from the station. As we drove down Vlissingen Road, a partially nude beggar hobbled across the street. "What is

he doing? Why is he dressed like that?" asked Elle, wide-eyed and confused. The presence of a homeless person brought her into the crude reality of life outside of an Amerindian village, where the fact of individuality seemed to surpass any form of communal obligation. In the village the sharing of food and land would not allow for poverty of this kind. I brought her into this reality. This was not her last experience with a vagabond, as they swam the streets, intertwining with the fabric of street culture. This was Elle's 'buck come to town' experience.

We have seen throughout this thesis the ambiguous ideological position of Amerindianness in Guyana; and how, in Bush Rope, people try to negotiate it through their deployment of 'traditional' and 'farrin' (amongst others) as ideals. This chapter reflects on the economic and social structure of Guyana, and the role the state plays within Amerindian discourse. It is mostly through the 'state' that notions of Amerindianness have become embedded in the fabric of everydayness (See Gupta 1995). More striking is the role (or invisibility) of class structure in terms of how Amerindians are perceived within the wider Guyanese society. The Guyanese state is built on a collective Guyanese identity, based on a hierarchy (including class hierarchy), that puts Amerindians outside of a shared *peoplehood*. Hence, this chapter is twofold in its mission. Firstly, it attempts to broaden the scope in which the construction of 'identities' or states of 'peoplehood' or 'personhood' are understood. Secondly, it considers Caribbean identity outside of class relations with respect to the Amerindian who, although s/he has contributed to the Creole continuum as will be described later, has been neglected within the analysis of present-day Creole culture. In Guyana, this

may be attributed to the fact that Amerindians have been placed not only outside of the class status and social dimensions of Guyana, but also outside of the country's capital—Georgetown.

It is imperative that we consider how Otherness is created within Guyanese discourse, especially between Amerindians and non-Amerindians. This chapter is a conceptualisation of how indigenous peoples are made to 'feel' as though they are outsiders to the wider Guyanese society, I pose certain questions on the notion of 'national identity' and its manifesto within the Guyanese context. I will, hence, refer to interviews taken with Georgetownians and Amerindians living within Guyana (not from Bush Rope). In doing so, I will focus on their conception of how Amerindians in Guyana are generally perceived. Furthermore, I will draw on both the social and economic statuses of individuals, which I argue do not reflect their perceptions on the ideological position of Amerindians, but rather through their encounters and, most importantly, their approach to global ideas.

I

Culture and Ideology: "*Is whu you doing wid dem Buck people?*"

The Anthropology of Guyana and the interconnectivity amongst its peoples would take, as Swan (1957:49) suggests of Georgetown, "half the lifetime of a social anthropologist…not to mention the results of miscegenation between all." As will be shown, the relationships between Amerindians and the wider Guyanese society demonstrate the conundrums which face any anthropological analysis of the region and its peoples. Ethnography in the Caribbean takes a separate dimension when one is forced to infuse Amazonian epistemology to the ethnographic framework.

Initially, I wanted to focus on the different perceptions of Amerindians throughout all the social class statuses, which are determined by the distribution of wealth amongst them. When referring to class structure of the West Indies, it is not enough to mention the distribution of the wealth amongst the classes, but whether one has mastered the culture of the upper class, as well as whether wealth is based on 'old money' as opposed to 'new money'—i.e. whether one has been born into that social class, or whether one has climbed the social ladder. Today, there is still a minute upper (elite) class built on generations of family inheritance and booming businesses—primarily amongst the ethnic Portuguese, who have played the same role the Chinese played in Jamaica (R.T. Smith 1988: 14).

At present, the Creole identity is, for the most part, associated with the non-Amerindian population, which consist of East Indians, Afro-Guyanese, Chinese, Portuguese and other Europeans, and 'Mixed' ethnic groups. Although all ethnic groups—including Amerindians—are considered part of this category, it is with studies of the larger East Indian and African population that an analysis of Guyana's Creole culture has been developed (R.T. Smith 1956, 1988; Williams 1991). Those who do focus on the Amerindian perspective within Anthropology have been classed within Amazonian studies—namely lowland South America—and have mostly focused on Amerindians with little regard for their place within the Creole continuum (Rivière 1984; Butt-Colson: 1960; Mentore 2005, et al). Intrinsically, I am trying to disentangle the Amerindians of Guyana from certain categories, whether these are anthropological classificatory models, or Guyanese nationalist paradigms. I refute notions that Amerindians in Guyana can 'fit' into any of these categories as a fixed state of personhood. This is a result of indigenous retreat into the interiors (also known as the Bush) and the state's national isolation of these peoples.

Before, pushing on, the term *buck* must first be addressed, as it is a key term in how Guyanese conceptualise Amerindianness. The word *buck* is believed to have derived from the Dutch word *Bok* which is translated to mean "wild and/or nimble animal" which they associated with the characteristics of these peoples (Menezes 1979: 4). From this stemmed the word *Bokken*, which became synonymous with the word 'Indians' throughout their rule. Today, it has taken a rather derogatory meaning, as it refers to 'savagery' and 'ignorance', and is used by both non-Amerindians and Amerindians alike.

In what follows, I begin to picture the ideas of city dwellers in Georgetown concerning their understandings, the results are experimental but hopefully evocative.

Verbal Encounters over Chinese food

As the capital of Guyana, Georgetown, it is the most urbanised city in the country, with approximately 28.4% of the country's total population residing there[116]. Within recent studies of Creole culture—post-colonial—in Guyana, lower-class perceptions have dominated the ethnography on the region (Williams 1991; R.T. Smith 1970). However, I wish to stress that the interviews in this section were taken from people from a range of economic and educational backgrounds who ranged in age from twenty to sixty.

By splitting my fieldwork between the two sites—with most of my time spent in Bush Rope, I hoped to canvass a view as to how the Creole continuum functioned towards incorporating the indigenous peoples. Therefore, the following interviews, I believe, illustrate more general concept and rationalisations of how indigenous peoples are perceived within the nation-state. I begin with a conversation amongst a group of friends—Navada, who is from the elite Portuguese group and Tiffy of middle-class mixed ethnic background—upon my arrival into the country. As I stayed with Navada and her family for a few weeks, until my father returned to the country, I was quite adamant about investigating what their views were on the indigenous population.

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[116] 2005 concensus

Navada: I can't believe you come to live in the bush.
Tiffy: Yeah, you sure you know what you doing? (Giggle)
Navada: (laughing) yeah, they might kill you. We might hear that they kill you or better yet, made you their queen…haha.
Tiffy: (laughing)…See Stacy don't come back, because she Queen.
Stacy: Funny guys, I plan on coming back.
Navada: See Stacy come back with a tribe of children.

The conversation from the airport to Navada's house continued with a barrage of questions as to my reasons for going into the Bush, which became a metaphor as to how the presence of Amerindians affected the Guyanese population. Within this initial conversation, a series of stereotypes emerged from the psyche of my friends. For one, associations made with "the bush" generated Western perceptions of "primitivism," where the 'native' is viewed as cannibalistic, and/or an image painted by old Western movies of cowboys and Indians. In my friends' heads they were envisioning a chief and queen of a tribe, where the female's role was specifically geared towards procreation.
My time with Navada's family illustrated that such stereotypes were not uncommon amongst their 'class,' as well as others. Staying with her family opened many questions about me, and my motives and 'needs' for going into the 'bush' and studying the 'buck' people. However, these encounters not only showed their classification of Amerindians, but also their degree of exposure to them.

One evening, on a trip back to Georgetown from Bush Rope, Navada's parents took Navada, Tiffy, her visiting relatives, and I out to New Thriving Chinese Restaurant. At the table, Navada's uncle queried as to what I was doing, so I responded that I was currently "in the field," living with the Amerindians in the interior. At that point, he looked at me with great fascination and said "but you don't look as though you are from the bush."

Being the joker that he was, he followed with "Why? Why" which phonetically sounds like "WaiWai," who are an indigenous group situated further south of Bush Rope. At this point, the entire table joined in with their banter.

> **Navada:** We are worried that when Stacy comes out, she will have nine children following behind her.
> **Navada's Uncle:** "Yeah Stacy, if they ask you to stick your hand in a hole, DON'T DO IT,"
> **Me:** What do you mean?
> **Navada's Uncle:** Don't you know about the 'wife-catcher?'

I explained to him that I did not know what this was when he described an Amerindian instrument, woven from mokoro cane, where a woman would put her finger through the opening and the man would pull it, entrapping her finger. This was a sign of consent to marriage. I laughed and said, I would remember this. Later, at a craft store in the centre, I asked if anyone had heard of it, upon which the saleswoman pointed towards them. The entire table seemed to know about this instrument, which led me to believe that Amerindian culture *has* infiltrated many aspects of Guyanese culture. Now, I had only to establish how.

It was on further interviewing Georgetownians that I was able to establish their present-day role within Guyanese society.

> **Stacy:** What is your perception of Amerindians and what do you think is the perception of the Guyanese people of Amerindians?
> **Navada:** [ummm]... ignorant, lacks knowledge, not exposed.
> **Stacy:** [In reference to a dance she showed me previously] How do you know how they dance. [Pause] What exposure do you have with Amerindian society?
> **Navada:** I've only seen them dance on TV. I don't have much exposure to Amerindians, hardly any.... maybe only like if they worked for us or when we took trips to Brazil and we stopped off at Iwokrama[117] or Rock View[118].

[117] Iwokrama International Centre promotes the conservation and sustainable and equitable use of tropical rainforests. In doing so, their projects are based on long lastings goals, in which ecological, economic and social benefits may be reached

[118] Rock View Lodge is located between the villages of Annai and Rupertee, and is a common tourist lodge for those visiting Iwokrama and the rest of the Rupununi.

> **Stacy:** What words come to mind when you hear the word BUSH?
> **Navada:** hmmm bush? No electricity, no TV, NO ICE, Stacy!!!! No running water, no toilets.

In Navada's views, she had little exposure to Amerindian culture, or Amerindian people even though she perceives them as 'not exposed'. According to Navada, she only knew one Amerindian who managed one of the supermarket branches her family owned. Yet, these perceptions were not based on her knowing him, but a more general stereotype of not only the Amerindians, but of their environment. As was previously mentioned, the idea that Amerindians or 'buck' people displayed a 'lack' that not only encompassed their being but also their locality—i.e. her reference to a lack of her modern luxuries, such as running water and ice. The 'bush' is, hence, characterised as an isolated place of primitive nature, where modern resources are not available. She was not alone as another interviewee associated the bush with the following:

> **Nirvana:** I would say the bush is a place where there is not very much civilization, in that there is not a steady and clean supply of drinking water, no electricity, no supermarkets and the main jobs are farming and hunting, where the inhabitants live in houses that have no proper beds or maybe just a hammock, no proper toilet facilities.

This, however, is not the case: we have witnessed that in Bush Rope there was internet access, electricity, ice, and satellite TV amongst other things. As expressed elsewhere in this dissertation, I was the only member in the household to sleep in a hammock, as most households used beds as opposed to hammocks in Bush Rope. This is not to say that most villages have these resources, but the general idea is that many people associate the "bush" with the lack of these things. This was a common view of 'bush' life, and 'buck' people, as is seen in another interview with Michelle, whose family—another elite Portuguese family—ran a mining company and the Intraserv bus company

that transported people between Georgetown and Lethem, both of which had a workforce of mostly blacks and Amerindians.

> **Stacy:** What are your perceptions of Amerindians and what do you think is the general perception of Amerindians in Guyana...please be brutally honest.
> **Michelle:** I think that they are an extremely hard working people that are not given the due amount of recognition and respect. I think that over the years they have been somewhat pushed aside and disregarded despite few attempts to "help" [at this time she uses a gesture which represents quotation marks] them. I think the general first idea that people have of Amerindians in that they're 'stupid' hence the word 'buck'
> **Stacy:** Interesting you put the word help in quotation marks. Why is that?
> **Michelle:** Well, I think in any community when higher authority senses that something needs to be done for a set of people to make an impression or to please them.

At this point in the conversation, Michelle referred to the government's attempt to "help" Amerindians, which she regards as reflecting the government's own interests, rather than those of the people, in hopes of securing loyalties, keeping them within the traditional slot and "pacifying" the indigenous peoples. In a conversation with Chief in Bush Rope, he stated that the government only came and offered 'relief' when they were campaigning for elections, in order to secure the votes of the Amerindians. He expressed the same concerns Michelle had, as he said that they were only doing enough to get the votes from the people. This will be further explored in the latter part of this chapter when discussing political influences on Guyanese views on Amerindian identity.

> **Stacy:** Have you had much exposure to Amerindians?
> **Michelle:** Well, my dad does.
> **Stacy:** How so?
> **Michelle:** Most of his women[119] are Amerindian...and almost all of his employees that worked in the interior, so in that respect yes.
> **Stacy:** So what word comes to mind when you hear the term 'bush', especially since your father deals with the BUSH for his livelihood.
> **Michelle:** Well malaria. [laughs out loud] I mean its more than one word really ...jungle, diamonds, theft, hard work, and greed.
> **Stacy:** Greed? What do you mean?

[119] His lovers

Michelle: Well...for instance most of the women and workers that my father has acquired over the years came from very rural parts of the interior....mostly farmers.
Stacy: Yes….
Michelle: Never really being exposed to city life and such...in our ['our' meaning her and her father perhaps] experience...once exposed...because they have lived a minimalist lifestyle...I think in some respect they all tend to get 'shine eye'. We had a big problem with them stealing and it's all because they want what they didn't have years prior…does that make sense?
Stacy: Yeah...don't worry about making sense. You're making a lot. So what would you define the bush as?
Michelle: Primitive.
Stacy: Why primitive?
Michelle: Cheap labour...poor equipment and facilities in general…I dunno... I mean so many injuries have occurred from fights involving swallowing diamonds and so on.
Stacy: Wow....you're coming from a very interesting place, since your family deals with the mining industry and hire a lot of Amerindians…is the workforce mostly Amerindian
Michelle: It's mixed mostly blacks and Amerindians and a few Indians…

Unlike Navada, Michelle had more contact with Amerindians, which placed them within a different reality, as being hard-working—unlike some stereotypes, which have placed them as lazy and unwilling to do hard labour (Menezes 1979). This may be attributed to the increasing prominence of Amerindians in Georgetown, who have taken up mostly janitorial, maintenance or low-end jobs, such as cleaners, nannies, factory workers, bondsmen, and so forth. Those who belong to the upper and middle class do not have as much contact with the Amerindians as the lower classes in Georgetown on account of this.

I found it interesting that Michelle associated greed with perceptions of Amerindians, as she saw them through the eyes of the daughter of an employer who had Amerindian employees. She labelled them as "shine eye", which is a typical Guyanese "Creolese" term, which refers to people who are materialistic, and who are "big-eyed" and want more than they need. Her explanation for calling them shine-eyed was that they came from a "primitive" environment—i.e. the bush—where they lacked certain materialistic

objects, which they "did not have in prior years". The incentive to move to Georgetown, for most Amerindians is to make money to send back to their natal village for their kins-people. It is, therefore, from this need to make money, that they are seen as driven by money or 'greed' in this case. She goes on to state that they are 'shine-eyed' because they want things to which they did not have access before.

Although, Amerindians have been singled out within the Creole society, we must not assume that they are in fact outside of the Creole continuum. I do wish to state that Amerindians' experience of the Creole continuum is quite different from those of other Caribbean peoples. They *do* have to negotiate between the multifaceted nature of Creole culture and that of their ancestral perspectives, which still play an integral part in their perceptions of being and the ways they can forge an 'identity'. Therefore, my work shows the negotiations within negotiations that Creole people in Guyana must make in order to fit themselves into ideologies of Guyaneseness.

Stereotypes of Amerindians by non-Amerindian Guyanese—in this case Georgetownians—work to disambiguate their peoplehood. However, unlike other ethnic groups in Guyana, non-Amerindian perspectives of Amerindians are not based on everyday interactions or familiarity with their personhood. Rather, they compensate for their relative absence within all facets of urban society. At the same time, these stereotypes come down to the educational systems in place, resulting from a colonial past. The following sections work towards understanding the roles these stereotypes play within the *Creole continuum*.

Educational and Linguistic influences

Growing up in Guyana, one learns about those things Amerindian within the educational system. Yet, it was the 'type' of information about Amerindian culture and society portrayed within Guyanese society that is of great interest. The story of the wife catcher—a devise previously used in order to entrap a woman for marriage—was now mainly sold in souvenir shops as a storytelling device to captivate tourists, who wanted to take away a piece of 'authentic' Amerindian culture. As 'wife catchers' were also used as "pieces of our culture to take to friends [living abroad] as gifts", it made sense that my friends knew about this device. It was a good way to get people interested in our culture, and to boast about what Guyana had to offer. And in Guyanese tradition, it also made for a great opportunity to tell a story.

> **Stacy:** …Other than Jerry and your ex, what exposure do you have with Amerindian culture?
> **Sekou:** People in school, but nothing as intimate as with Jerry and other than what I learned in School from '*The People Who Came*'[120]. Nothing much concrete: .nomads, Bering Strait, Arawaks, Caribs, Mayas. I remember those things, but I wish I knew more. I do believe that their race is, was and is continued to be taken advantaged of.
> **Stacy:** What about Amerindian Heritage or shows? Have you ever been to anything that was showcasing Amerindian culture?
> **Sekou:** The museum, Umana Ana by Pegasus [Now LeMeridien Hotel], the food, pepperpot, cassava bread and I think....metem[121]. Hey, I love to eat, and seeing the displays, and reading about the history of each [Amerindian group]
> **Stacy:** I think Metem is African.
> **Sekou:** Like pepperpot...is a thing that does not need to be refrigerated, just heated up once a day.....to preserve it. And the Umana Ana ...was built by Amerindians...so I was able see first hand how and what the buildings that they lived in looked like.

[120] The People Who Came "*is* an established and highly popular three-book history course for lower forms in Caribbean Secondary Schools." Taken from Longman Caribbean Online Catalogue: http://caribbeancatalogue.pearson.com/Product.asp?CallingPage=Catalogue&ISBN=9780582766587&SearchTerm=

[121] Metem or Metemgee is believed to be of African origin, primarily due to the ingredients and the popularity amongst modern-day Afro-Caribbeans. The recipe exist throughout the Caribbean—such as Barbados and Trinidad—and consist of yams, eddoes, cassava, dasheen, plantains, sweet potatoes, coconut milk, salt fish and sometimes dumplings.

Although, there was ambiguity as to whether metem was Amerindian or not, Amerindian knowledge for Sekou, as for others, comes down to an educational text—i.e. *The People who Came*—which gives general information about Amerindian cultures throughout the Americas, but also leaves Amerindian cultures as part of the past. For instance, the Umana Yana is a conical building, constructed by the WaiWai in the centre of Georgetown. This building was constructed in honour of the Non-Aligned Foreign Minister's Conference[122] in the country's capital held from 8-11th August 1972. The building not only served as a venue for the conference, but was a way in which to display part of Guyanese heritage. Today, it is used primarily as a cultural site, and is generally referred to as a "typical Amerindian" building.

Sekou further mentions the use of pepperpot, which, according to the Wapichannao of Bush Rope, is known as "English Pepperpot" amongst the indigenous peoples. Although, the basis of Amerindian culture is generally known amongst Guyanese—in this case Georgetownians—these are all generalisations derived from texts that are structured towards a general history of the West Indies, where there is not a large Amerindian population outside of countries such as Guyana and Belize: both of which are located in the mainland Americas. Not until recently, have efforts been made to incorporate more current studies of Amerindians within courses, such as Social Studies, at both primary and secondary schools there have there been recent changes. However, for the general population, above the age of 18, Amerindian culture is left in the past.

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[122] The Non-Aligned Ministers Conference was organised through the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), as "an international organisation states considering themselves not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc." (Taken From Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-aligned_movement) .

Looking at the Amerindian within the Creole context posed questions regarding their 'personhood'. What determined their citizenship as Wapichannao, as well as Guyanese, seemed to be the first step towards an Anthropology of Guyana vis-à-vis the Amerindians. I will mainly focus on the period I spent as research assistant to Dr. Desrey Fox—an immensely inspirational woman, being the only Guyanese Amerindian in the country to have a PhD, and it so happened to be in Anthropology—during a project she was asked to construct at Conservation International[123]. We were hired to design a Social Impact Assessment, for a previous project Conservation International had implemented in the WaiWai community of Masakenarï, which is located on the southern border to Brazil. Even though this ethnography does not have much to do with the SIA itself, certain occurrences during this time have revealed themselves to be of great anthropological significance in terms of how indigenous peoples in Guyana construct their identity within the Creole context.

Before starting the CI project, Dr, Fox asked me to attend a discussion at the Regional Formulation Workshop in Teacher Education, which was held on the 11th January 2006 (which also happened to be the Muslim holiday Eid-ul-Adha) at the University of Guyana, Turkeyn Campus. She was assigned to the group, whose task was to consider development within Guyanese education, and how effectively 'culture' could be incorporated within its development. There were a number of representatives from the different departments at the university, the Cyril Potter College for Teacher Training,

[123] Conservation International is a non-government organisation which focuses on the conservation of natural and human resources.

and the University of the West Indies, adding to a multitude of perspectives and pedagogical challenges. The nature of the discussions moved from the infiltration of Venezuelan, Surinamese and the everyday immigration of Brazilians to the coast of Guyana, to the use and teaching of Creole and indigenous languages in schools. It soon became the focus of this group discussion that there needed to be a moving away from teaching only Spanish and French, towards incorporating Dutch, Portuguese, Creolese, and Amerindian languages in the curriculum. The need to move towards the incorporation of these languages—namely that of our neighbouring allies—pertained to the movement of cultures within Guyana. With the increased migration into Georgetown of Amerindians, Surinamese, Venezuelans and Brazilians, this step is definitely inevitable as the urban Creole culture is adapting and transforming in advance of changes in the educational system.

That evening I decided to take a walk on the sea-walls[124] with some friends. This outing was a short-lived one because a rat ran across my foot, causing us to go to another popular "liming" spot, at the infamous JR Burgers. In true Guyanese style, my friends were ready to gossip about whomever and whatever, and they were prepared to stay there until JR Burgers was ready to close their doors. Trying to make conversation, I mentioned that I attended the workshop with Dr. Fox earlier that day. Upon hearing that I went to a conference with an Amerindian woman, my friend Latoya, who is quick with the tongue and not to mention profanities, was eager to stop me

[124] The seawall is a long wall, extending along the coast of Guyana, which was constructed by the Dutch, to keep the ever threatening waters from rushing in from the sea.

> …eh eh…is wuh the fuck you an' di buck lady ga goin' on? Ev'ry time I call you, yuh always busy wid docta Fox. She payin' yuh?

Throughout that conversation Latoya used the terms 'buck', 'coolie'[125] and 'pudagee'[126] profusely whilst scolding me for my absence, as well as gossiping about the people she knew. After all, these terms are used within everyday discourse here. In a Creole culture, these terms are markers, or rather qualifiers, for those aspects that constitute Guyaneseness. It has become embodied into Guyanese discourse that within the different ethnic groups these terms are used loosely, signifying one's belonging to the wider Guyanese society. This, therefore, does not stop Latoya from referring to her friend as a 'coolie bitch,' even though her own mother is half East Indian. Nor does it stop Dr. Fox from asking "wuh buck gurl know 'bout skating?" after her niece asked her to bring a pair of roller skates back from the US for her. These assumptions and stereotypes about individual identities do not act so much to separate individuals, but instead unify them through their differences and common ground of understanding. After all, Creole cultures are based on the embodiment of differences, and how these differences work together to shape the universal activities of those within that spatial parameter.

Returning to the conference, the desire for Dutch and Portuguese to be taught alongside French and Spanish, as foreign language options, were of no great surprise, as these are languages which belong to the metropolitan countries with which Guyana has much relation and historical sameness and who have well established language systems.

[125] Coolie is a colonial name for Indians…more

[126] Pudagee is the 'creolese'—Guyanese creole—form for someone of Portuguese descent.

However, unlike, Creolese, which has been research and analysed to great extent within linguistics, many of the Amerindian languages have yet to be established in written form, and in some cases are perceived as not languages, but slangs or dialects. In Rickford's (1987) *Dimensions of a Creole Continuum*, he attributes modern-day Guyanese Creolese to the extensive linguistic transformations of migrant languages—such as the languages of Africans, Portuguese, and East Indians—brought to work as slaves or indentured labourers. As a result the heterogeneity within the Creole Continuum is a result of not only the plurality of races, but also the multiplicity of origins within them (1987: 46). In his characterization of the language of the slaves he organised them in three categories: 1) new arrivals; 2) part of the European entourage already established within the West Indies; 3) slaves who had resided on the plantations for some time (Rickford 1987: 53). Through his analysis of these divisions, those newly arrived slaves had no knowledge of Dutch or English; those who came from islands, such as Barbados or Antigua, spoke a "local metropolitan, rather than creolized, variety of English that was spoken by both blacks and whites" (1987: 56; Taken from Hancock 1980: 22); and those who lived on the plantations for an extended period of time developed a Dutch Creole up until the end of the 18th Century, followed by a mixture of "broken English and Dutch" at the time of British occupation. Not only, did these forms of Creolisation and pidginisation exist, but, as Rickford suggests, there must have also been pressures for decreolisation and standardization to be used, as "Creole slaves [—those who were born in the colony—] and the free-colo[u]red sought to increase their familiarity with the customs and manners of their white masters" (1987: 59).

After emancipation, to cover the shortfall in plantation workers, over 200,000 East Indian immigrants were indentured, adding to the already heterogeneous dynamics of Creole language. These Indians mostly spoke Hindu and “Bihari related dialects from contiguous areas that represented a linguistic continuum” (Rickford 1987: 63). Rickford analyses not only how they acquired the existing Creole vernacular, but also the degree to which they influenced Creolese. Although the use of East Indian languages and/or dialects is believed to be diminishing rapidly (Bronkhurst 1888), Gambhir (1981) argues that through lexicon they have made a mark in two ways: 1) those items related to “religion, kinship, rice-planting, and food preparation, but used primarily by Indo-Guyanese,” and items that have become part of the everyday Creole speech, such as the word ‘dougla’ which means “of mixed parentage” (usually Black and Indian or Black and Portuguese) (1981: 52-53; Taken from Rickford 1987: 68). Devonish (1978) adds to Gambhir’s analysis of Indian influences to the Creole, by acknowledging other forms in which Indian language—Indic—has affected Guyanese Creole/ Creolese. He states that these may be seen in the object-verb word order and the use of “transitive verb marker” or as Rickford describes “object-agreement marker” (1987:68).

With the lack of Portuguese and Chinese impact on Creolese English, Africans and Indians are accredited with having a great impact on this relexification. There is no mention of Amerindian transformations into this Creole, which may pose two suppositions: 1) As Amerindians were segregated from slaves and labourers through colonial strategies—described later on in this chapter—any influences towards

contributing to Creolese has been muted; 2) No study has considered the possible role Amerindians have played in the development of Creole linguistics.

I assume that both premises have some validity to them, as the latter is simply a variant of the fact that little consideration has been given to how Amerindians are placed within Guyanese society. Hence, there is a lack of recognition for the influence Amerindian linguistic has had on modern-day Creolese. Also significant has been the role Amerindians played as traders, guides, police force, and so forth to colonists—statuses which placed them outside of the unfolding of a proto-nationalist project.

As a result, today, those indigenous people who remain away from urban settings consider Creolese to be unintelligible. According to Elle, "it sounds awful!" In Bush Rope, the use of Creolese was nonexistent, and was used by young children in play as a form of mockery. Those who spoke Creolese in the village were either visitors from urban environments or Amerindians who had lived in towns, such as Georgetown.

Mostly, Amerindians who went to town to live returned with a Creolese accent. This may be due to the increasing number of Amerindians, who do go to the towns, such as Georgetown, but associate with the classes, where Creolese is mostly spoken. Unlike the middle and upper-classes, who use Creolese in moderation, the lower classes use Creolese as a symbol of solidarity. As the use of standardized English and its mastery was considered a marker of advanced societal status (as in uneducated slaves, as opposed to house-slaves, or free coloured), as well as present-day solidarity amongst Guyanese, Amerindians, whom were always categorized vis-à-vis the colonists—to an

extent—were more likely to adapt the standardized model as opposed to the Creolese, which was solely practiced by ex-slaves and indentured immigrants.

Up until now, these languages have all been part of informal education, yet Amerindian languages, especially, have not been considered within the development of Guyaneseness. As these languages belong to the informal learning system, they are not standardised. For example, there may be variation of the Creolese language between Georgetown and Linden, and even within Georgetown there are different types of Creolese. With Amerindian languages there is also great variation, as I came to discover later during my fieldwork, when I found Bush Rope Wapichan[127] to be different from Sand Creek Wapichan, with both communities claiming that theirs represented a form that was pure. There will always be developments within language through time and space. Both imply a series of negotiations on what is retained and what is lost within that site, which is what one sees in both Amerindian and Creolese cultures: they are both in constant variation.

[127] The term Wapichan will be used to refer to the language or a single person, and Wapichannao will be used to refer to the collective group of people I lived with.

II

Distinctions Misunderstood

As previously mentioned, in school, our studies of *our* history had always begun with the Amerindians. Textbooks, such as *The People Who Came* series, were fundamental to Guyanese education, and started off with indigenous peoples from other parts of the world, such as the Eskimos, Sioux, Mayans, and Aztecs. In the sequel, *The People Who Came Bk. II*, the Amerindians were closer to home, but still remained within their historical context as "past peoples." This was the information we learnt in school, which was taken as truth. However, it was not until the launch of Amerindian Heritage that present-day Amerindianness became prominent in Guyanese society. Although, we do know how to make ('English') pepperpot—a food intrinsic to Amerindian culture—and we have seen Amerindian dances, when does Amerindianness stop being a novelty and start being a part of the national project?

The distinction of Amerindianness from Guyaneseness within Georgetown made Amerindians the unique other. However, Amerindianness was seen as an embodiment of all peoples as well. A common theme throughout this chapter and the thesis as a whole is that within a Creole system, or intersystem for that matter, notions of the self are never stable. One, who is of one phenotype, is not bound to one ethnic group. Instead, instability and variance are preferred and practiced. "Look the buck girl coming" was what my friends in Georgetown would say. This indication of my embodiment of

“buckness” showed my inevitable acceptance of not only Amerindian culture, but the wider Creole culture. Here, I found myself balancing a multiplicity of statuses—Amerindian, Georgetownian, Afro-Guyanese, European, Anthropologist, and the list goes on—as I made contact with different people at different times, as well as the same people at different times. I found that I could be talking to Navada on one level and then the next day on another. A few illustrations come to mind, but I will only use two.

I had returned to Georgetown in December for Navada’s engagement parties, which were held in both Hindu and Western style. Having brought two saris with me from the US and the UK, for those just-in-case moments, I decided to go all out in Hindustani garb. Navada was dressed in a *ghagras*, Tiffy in a salwar, and me in a *sari*. Our knowledge that Navada was of Portuguese and South African descent, that Tiffy was of Chinese and Portuguese descent, and me being mixed, was very much attuned with the fact that we had to wear Indian garb. It was not for the mere fact that we liked to play dress-up, but as part of our Guyaneseness, we embodied the Indian traditions, which meant that I would be wrapping my own sari. Uncle Mark, Navada’s father, smiled when he saw us, commenting “Yall look like real coolie girls”. Uncle Mark—of Portuguese descent—having refused to dress in Indian gear and eat vegetarian food, went on to ask if we could stop for some KFC and hide it in the car, so that he could sneak and eat his meat while we ate the “seven curry” out of a leaf.

One might say that Uncle Mark was disembodying and rejecting the Indo-Guyanese traditions, putting him outside of my initial claims. However, in his mere

acknowledgement of these traditions I found that he did embody being Indian. In order for him to reject these simple notions, as well as have the range to classify us within the "coolie" stratum, Uncle Mark had delved right into Guyanese Creole culture. This is a culture that accepts some characteristics one day, and refutes them the next. In his rejection, however, as soon as Uncle Mark arrived to the Engagement he took his place on the mat, next to the pandit/pundit, following the ceremony in true East Indian style. Not only, sitting quietly and listening to the pundit's words, but also blessing the rings and his son-in-law to be, as well as diving into other Hindu rituals.

Another example occurred the same evening, when I went to the club with my friends. On arrival my friend Steven, greeted me "aye buck girl, you come back from bush and didn't tell me?" During our brief conversation, Steven goes on to ask me if I had found a "nice buck boy as yet," and how I was coping in that part of the country. I jokingly told him that I had not found a "buck boy" and that I loved the Rupununi. A few moments later my friends and I proceeded to dance in our little group, another friend approached me and said, jokingly, that I danced as though I was a posh white girl. Not knowing that there was a variation of dance styles based on ethnicity as well as class, I playfully stuck my tongue out and continued dancing. My friend, who had overheard laughed and said that I did, but that could not be helped since I was an "oreo," black on the outside and white on the inside. I was accustomed to my nicknames changing, but it was not until I put it into the context of Creole society that I realized the significance of being "buck" one day and a posh white girl the next.

Unlike the traditional/historic ethnic conflicts, that prevailed throughout Guyana's history, between White and Black, Indo and Afro Guyanese, Amerindians remain imaginatively outside the Guyanese space, transforming them into a foreign entity for Georgetownians, at least. This is illustrated by the Amerindian Heritage Month, which has been conceptualised as a stage for, not only the celebration of Amerindian culture, but also to make the wider Guyanese people *aware* of their culture and their importance to Guyanese society. Indian Heritage and African Heritage months do not the same focus, as in these cases everyone is "aware" of the other's heritage, especially through the observance of Hindu, Muslim and Christian practices which have been tied to ethnic groups. The Indo and Afro celebration of their "heritage" is rather a commemoration and is aimed to teach that group as well as other ethnic groups about their historicity.. Amerindian Heritage is more for the Other, and is meant to bring the wider Guyanese people up-to-date with the present culture of the Amerindians. The Indo-Afro conflict, in contrast, is due to power-struggles as a result of the country's colonial history. The issue with indigenous peoples is that they are seen as powerless.

Whu Buck Girl Know 'bout Ice Apple?

The Amerindian man sees himself as 'not-knowing' when he is placed within Western discourse. This is expressed in the simple phrase "I am a buck man, whu' I know bout those things?" In retrospect, an Amerindian person only refers to him/herself as 'buck' in relation to Georgetown or the West. Never do they refer to themselves as 'buck' in

everyday situations, as the definition of buck is the recognition of the absence of knowledge. Within their own environment the only 'bucks' are foreigners, even though this is not expressed within everyday dialogue. "We may be buck when we are in town, but when we are in the bush yall are buck" was a response to the name-calling, by a woman at a workshop on Amerindian Languages[128].

Concepts of what Amerindians should know have flooded Guyanese perceptions of 'the buck.' However, these are not down to mere fictitious images of primordial beings, but also concern those things which Amerindians in fact do not know in regards to modernity. One example, was that of Elle's trip to Georgetown. The first instance appeared when entering a car. She could not figure out how to open a car door, as she had never been in one before. My friends saw this as a novelty, as although they expressed their beliefs in the stereotypes of Amerindians, they did not realise to what extent these stereotypes have some validity. However, this is not to say many Amerindians do not know how to open a car door. Rather Elle's confusion added to the stereotype, and illustrated the type of knowledge that may not be accessible to different types of peoples.

Another such example was conveyed to me by Aunty Pet—the guesthouse manager in Bush Rope—who explained that she suffered some discomfort in Lethem during Rodeo. Having been invited to go with her "husband" (although I soon came to learn that he was her boyfriend, and that they were both married to other people but separated), she left for Lethem to enjoy the annual celebrations for rodeo. As they went around to the

[128] Walter Roth Museum of Anthropology, Georgetown, Guyana. Language series

numerous food stalls, she saw a child with an apple on a stick, so she asked her "husband" if she could have one. He bought her one, and when she took a bite she received an unexpected shock, as the apple was hard, and painful to bite into. She laughed and told me that "buck girl don' know anything about 'ice apple." She ended up giving the candied apple away to a child.

The "buck" is not only a race related classification, but also an epistemological categorisation, highlighting the type of knowledge that person possesses. In this case it is seen as 'limited', 'backward' knowledge, which is out-of-date and not in tune with modern things considered knowable.

Aside from this, many Amerindians and non-Amerindians, see this lack of knowledge as detrimental as was conveyed on numerous occasions in town and in Bush Rope. One such issue is that of 'rape' and trafficking of women—especially Amerindian women—throughout Guyana. I experienced concerns during an APA meeting in Bush Rope for the villagers on mining issues, as well as within the media and an interviewee.

> **Stacy:** Do you know any Amerindians?
> **Nirvana:** yea...I do. I grew up in Essequibo, so there were a lot of them I interacted with.
> **Stacy:** What about in Georgetown?
> **Nirvana:** One of my bro's frens is an Amerindian...so I have interaction with them.
> **Stacy:** and what part of Essequibo did you grow up in?
> **Nirvana:** And I did work with Trafficking in persons…where I had a lot of interaction with them, since we had to train them...I spent half of the time in a little village called Capoey and the village next to it, Queenstown.
> **Stacy**: Is there a big trafficking problem in Guyana amongst Amerindians?
> **Nirvana:** Yeah, definitely that's where most of the people are trafficked from, since a lot of them seek to have opportunities that get them to the "civilised" parts.
> **Stacy:** There where? The bush?
> **Nirvana**: hmm...well there are 2 parts to it.
> **Stacy:** Ok.
> **Nirvana:** The Amerindians being trafficked to Georgetown and even out of the country, and there are the ones that are being trafficked within the "BUSH" to mining

communities to work under horrible conditions and people from other parts of the county seekin' work, takin' up jobs in the mining communities.
Stacy: What do Amerindians do outside of the country and in Georgetown? And who are the people being trafficked? Women, men, children?
Nirvana: Mostly prostitution, and domestic work (sometimes domestic work comes with sexual abuse), young women to a larger extent and men on a smaller scale to Georgetown, but mostly men within mining communities.
Stacy: Do you know the age-range of people being trafficked in Georgetown?
Nirvana: My figures might not be quite accurate, but from what I remember 16-25yrs.
Stacy: Have you spoken to these victims personally?
Nirvana: …I spoke to one male victim that was in Georgetown workin' at some lumber yard.
Stacy: What did he say?
Nirvana: humm....he was sent to the labour department. Dunno what happen after that...cause soon after I left traffickin. He spoke about how he was being ill treated and not given food and made to do lots of odd jobs without pay.
Stacy: Oh! So you didn't have much time with him.
Nirvana: No, he juss came in spoke to us and then we sent him to the labour dept.
Stacy: Was that the only one you dealt with? And did you deal with any prostitution ones?
Nirvana: Yea it was the only one I dealt with directly.
Stacy: But you know about some of the prostitution cases from working there right?
Nirvana: We conducted numerous workshops where there were people that relayed many stories that they had experience with.
Stacy: Interesting and what were these workshops suppose to accomplish.
Nirvana: Yea! We had one to deal with on the East Coast Demerara. Can't remember the village right now, but people complained about underage Amerindians girls working as prostitutes. No complaint was filed by any of the girls though.
Stacy: That is interesting!
Nirvana: Well it was to educate community leaders and people that were capable of going back to sensitize the community about what exactly is trafficking in persons, what are the laws concerning that and how to identify and report cases...and the necessary precautions to take when dealing with such cases, and preventative methods also.

The problems of trafficking and the prostitution of Amerindian women, have infiltrated urban Guyanese society, as well as rural mining towns. However, it seemed that many of the Wapichannao in Bush Rope were not aware of the severity of the issue, until it had been addressed at a *Free, Prior, and Informed Consent* two-day meeting. This meeting was meant to address the rising issues of mining within the region, which led the focus of the discussion to the trafficking of women into mining areas. Women who have been

taken to towns along to coast with promise of a proper job are then forced into prostitution. And those who are not, are sometimes assumed to be prostitutes.

Status within the Guyanese context is in direct relationship with locality, or rather proximity to the coast. Those on the coast consider those in the interior—especially Amerindians—to be over lower status. With lower status also comes the association with a "backwardness" that is defined as uncharacteristic amongst those living in the cities along the coast. This perception comes down to the concentration of mostly Amerindians in the "bush" who are seen as less "exposed". This observation may also be seen in the work of Williams (1991), who mentions this relation between status and locality amongst members of a small community along the coast:

> Further, in Guyana the link between status and locality is often conflated with the relationship between geography and the spatial distribution of ethnically identified persons. For example, most coastal dwellers consider the interior regions of Guyana lower status localities, not only because they are removed from coastal social life but also because they are viewed as the natural dwelling places of Amerindians, to whom they accord the lowest status in an ethnic hierarchy (Williams 1991:71).

Upon interviewing people along the coast as well as those who lived in Bush Rope, the notion that proximity and status are directly proportional with each other seemed to be a theory worth delving into. The following section focuses on the national identity through the wider Creole population, which illustrates the role Amerindians play within it.

III

Historicity and Amerindian Perspectives within the Creole Continuum

Creolisation models involving Guyanese, have, for the most part been focused on Afro- and Indo-Guyanese, with reference to the remaining ethnic populations, such as the Amerindians being left to their important role within the colonial past.

Throughout the history of colonial and post-colonial Guyana, the Amerindian population has been documented as 'past' peoples, the 'first' people, who remain left behind in history, as my interview with Sekou has illustrated. To make sense of their 'place' within society, the State comes in to define their identity, as was illustrated during Amerindian Heritage Month. Guyanese—in particular Georgetownian—see the 'people who came before' as in conflict with the 'state' and the national identity of Guyana. However, before we can approach the future of a Creole studies within which Amerindians would be included, we must acknowledge their historical importance within the Creole continuum.

Ideology and Historicity of the Native

The historical context in which Amerindians have been placed has always been rationalised within the economic structure of the colony of Guiana, and their contributions to its development and industrialisation. As described in the Introduction of this thesis, Guyana was first colonised by the Dutch. Recognising the need for

Amerindian knowledge of the dense and, many times, unmanageable terrain, the relationship between the Native and the Dutch blossomed. Although, the Dutch initially attempted to enslave the Amerindian population, they found that due to their innate knowledge of the territory and their inability towards agricultural productivity, their strengths laid elsewhere (Menezes 1979; Williams 1991: 133). As opposed to enslaving the indigenous, they found it more valuable to use their knowledge of the environment for their personal navigation of the landscape, as allies in defending the colonies against their enemies—namely the French, Spanish and British—as well as in tracking and capturing runaway slaves.

> But for the assistance given by the Indians, the brigands would, probably never have been subdued, perhaps not found! The expertness of these men in such a pursuit, is peculiar, and beyond all that could be imagined by those who live in a crowded society. They not only judge, with surprising accuracy, of the distance and direction from whence they proceed. The position of a fallen leaf, or the bending of a branch, too slight to be noticed by a European eye, conveys to them certain intelligence respecting the route taken by those whom they pursue…[129](Menezes 1979: 11)

Their invaluableness to the colonists gave them leverage as to how they wished to be rewarded. This friendship extended towards treaties of Alliance and Friendship, which documented instructions as to how indigenous peoples should be treated, as well as how they should be rewarded by Postholders (as mentioned in the previous chapter) and Protectors. These treaties also stipulated how those put in charge to protect and maintain peace amongst Amerindian should conduct their duties to both the benefit of the Amerindian and the colony (Menezes 1979: 55). These Posts were established in the interior, so as to encourage a relationship that was stimulated by mutual dependence. This type of relationship has been examined in the previous chapter, in the form of

[129] Taken from a letter from C.O. 111/24 John Daly to the Earl of Bathurst, 18 Nov. 1817

present-day client-customer relations. Both of these relationships has been determined by material possessions and those facets of commoditization—transnationalism— based on the use of Western rationality within an Amerindian ontology. As in the previously documented interview with Michelle, she notes the very problem of Greed, which she sees as having stemmed from their lack of commodities, and their yearning for it. This relationship between modern, Western, global capitalism and the 'traditional' is not only a dichotomy that exists amongst the Amerindians, but it also exists as those embodied dualities within Guyanese perceptions of the Amerindians.

In 1781 and 1796 Britain took control of the colonies of Guiana, and finally in 1814, after years of war against the Dutch and their French allies, they are given Guiana. During their rule of, then, British Guiana, they initially tried to maintain the treaties put in place by the Dutch to sustain peaceful relations with the Amerindian population. However, they found it to be a strain to maintain such rewards, and devised reasons to reduce the Amerindians remittances. As outlined by Williams (1991: 134) "the first rationalisation was to call what they gave a boon, not a right—a reward for past good conduct, not a purchase of future loyalty. Their second rationalisation was an argument that the Natives would always be more than willing to offer military assistance against Africans, a people towards whom it was believed they had a natural animosity."

Within the colonial period, these commodities came in the form of rewards that were issued within fixed payments, which were there to prevent upset and confusion

amongst the Amerindians. As previously mentioned, these payments were not only maintained for their assisting in expeditions, but mostly, against attacks and in the capture of runaway slaves. For this very reason, Amerindians and African slaves were believed to be estranged from each other. However, many accounts show that, especially due to British lack of commitment towards upholding the treaties of alliance—namely, the remittances promised—they, many times, assisted the runaway slaves. Accounts of their threats against aiding the British in the capturing of runaway slaves have been noted in a letter from Rev. John Hynes to Governor Carmichael Smyth (July 10, 1834. Taken from Menezes 1979: 47):

> Sir, I feel it a duty to communicate without delay to your Excellency what I have just learned from a person who has been recently up the River Demerara of the *feelings of the Indians* in that quarter towards the *authorities* and white population of the Colony. He describes them as being greatly incensed and expressing strong resentment on account of the *discontinuance of the annual presents* to them (1831) and had heard some of the most intelligent and influential amongst them declare, that in case the negroes revolt, that they (the Indians) will assist them. The whites, they say, have done them no service; the country is theirs, they have their own laws, and wish not the whites to govern them…

However, due to constant slave uprisings and rebellions they reluctantly had to pay the Amerindians. Although the British had labelled the Amerindians as idle and lazy—a stigma that has been left with these people today—they enlisted indigenous help on most occasions. Yet, after a period of time, the British started disregarding their promises for remittances and their requisition given to them. This posed great anger amongst the indigenous, who were not only forced to move around, had their "patterns of subsistence" (Williams 1991: 135; Taken from Menezes 1973). Not until after emancipation (1834) and with the new indentured labourship in place were Amerindians services required to pacify uprisings amongst these new groups of people.

However, for fear of the mass migration of Africans to the interior—away from coast—and the British perceived notions of inadequacy of Amerindian relations through donations, they devised a 'superintendent' system, whereby superintendents acted as interior police to regulate this unwanted migration of Africans. They were also given a key role in controlling the "relation between the coastal society and the Native population" (1991: 136).

As a result of this new system there was much opposition by Superintendents themselves, Governor Light, Hillhouse and other officials, who saw it the detrimental to the welfare of the Amerindian peoples.

Amerindian Perspectivism within the Creole Continuum

Before going any further, I wish to bring to the attention of the reader, the Amerindian Perspective, and where it fits within the Creole Continuum. This can only be seen through contradictions within their belief system. When is it appropriate or favourable to be Creolese and when is it favourable to be Amerindian, is an impossible distinction to make, because these negotiations are Creole in nature, and even though one may seem to be conducting oneself in a manner that is intrinsically Amerindian, the act of making these negotiations counteracts this claim towards purity. Creolese culture allows for an Afro-Guyanese to be considered an Indo-Guyanese one day, and Pudagee the next. Yet, I have only been taking into consideration the cultural aspect of Amerindian identity.

Aside from the form of multiculturalism found in the Creole context, we also find multinaturalism, which Viveiros de Castro (1998) and Descola (1996) argue has been ignored by most anthropologists, who perceive the world as a unity of nature and a multiplicity of cultures. I draw upon this theoretical standpoint, especially, because it accounts for the different sorts of inhabitants (human and non-human, etc) whose realities or approach to reality are all different, or more importantly, apprehended through their individual points of view. However, both Viveiros de Castro and Descola, argue that we must consider them as having unity of culture and multiplicity of natures, which I also find as an unfit model when analysing the Wapichannao of Bush Rope.

Unlike Descola's assertion that there is a naturalistic prejudice (1996: 82), in such a case there is neither cultural nor naturalistic prejudice. As both Creole and Amerindian perspectival paradigms fit into the Bush Rope experience, one finds that the Creole highlights the multiplicity of cultures, while the Amerindian perspective accounts for the multiplicity of natures, as they see animals and other non-humans as an integral part of the very definitions that define who they are. And even though all of the Wapichannao in the village are Christians, there are still certain taboos[130], with direct links to animals, plants, and spirits, which are held valuable to their livelihood and well-being. They see commonality between animal and human worlds, as they attribute human behaviours and dispositions to non-humans (Descola 1992, 1996; Viveiros de Castro 1998, 2004). Nature may now be conceived as a socially constructed phenomenon, which varies "according to cultural and historical determinant, and that, therefore, our own dualistic

[130] These taboos are also part of the cycle of negotiations, as they choose to adhere to certain traditional taboos, as well as Christian taboos.

view of the universe should not be projected as an ontological paradigm onto the many cultures where it does not apply" (Descola 1996:82).

In Western cosmologies nature is defined as "that ordered part of reality, which exists independently from human action" (Descola 1996: 86), whereas the Amerindian perspective does not hold this to be true. Whether it be 'objective correlation,' as E.V.C. suggests (2004), or not, the "social objectification of non-humans…cannot be disjoined from the objection of humans" (Descola 1996: 56; taken from Descola 1992: 111). This is a result of how one species of being configures the identity of the self and the other; that is the modes of identification, as referred by Descola (1996). These modes envelop ideologies, which distinguishes the self from the other. Descola argues that this is expressed through 'totemic,' 'naturalistic,' and 'animic' systems.

In the end, their societal construct was based on a number of variations, through the multiplicities exposed to them through their ancestral beliefs and the modern Western ones, which they are constantly being exposed to, by factors such as Mr. Houston, the Church, miners, Brazilians, volunteers and academics. Only through accepting these multiplicities and finding systems for negotiations (such as culture shows) can there be any claims towards a unification of the Self, and an establishing of a Wapichannao identity. We can only study indigenous cultures that had been exposed to colonial and Creole culture, through an amalgamation of Amerindian perspectivism and Creole continuum. One does not have to reach far to see that there are similarities between these two approaches.

The Creole Continuum Revisited

Historical processes have played a large role not only in how the nation-state has appropriated categories to the Amerindian, but also how their reduction to 'past peoples' has been in direct conflict with a system that deployed them outside of their context. Yet, these historical roles are still in place today in differing forms, and, in order to be different actors continue to have to form models with which to 'cope' the resulting conflicts.

As the Amerindians are also part of the Guyanese 'Creole' system, I wish to acknowledge that they fit into another system of configuring their identity. This system, I hypothesize, is an *intersystem* (Drummond 1980), where there are numerous variations as to how one may define oneself. If we were to consider actions such as the emphasis placed upon Christianity, education, law, honourable (i.e. good or bad) behaviour, and language, then there is evidence of an Amerindian common-will towards a Creole nation, which Smith and Jayawardena refer to as "Creolisation" (Smith 1996: 104). Creolization in this case has been defined as a specialization process which may be broken into two further processes.

For one, it expresses the "common culture corresponding to the social relations in which people of varying ethnic groups were involved," and on the other hand, "it was an integral part of the process of Creolisation to stress the differences between groups identified as "social" groups (1996: 104-105)." However, it is Bickerton (1975), Drummonds (1980), and Rickford's (1987) analyses of the Creole continuum that I wish to emphasise, in comparing Guyanese constructions of identity with Wapichannao

constructions. This approach refutes that polyethnic immigrant societies are "neither structures nor plural amalgams" (Drummond 1980: 352). This approach also asserts that in societies, such as Guyana, where there is a formulation of Creole linguistics, we must acknowledge that such complex linguistic transformations act as a metaphor for that culture. It is also important to acknowledge that in such systems, or intersystems, there are no established sets of rules, but instead, a set of transformations (1980:352). In this sense, Drummond's approach to studying how Guyanese people established their non-identities and the identity of others is through a Creole "perspectivist"-type analysis, where linguistics is the operating tool.

In a system which functions from a set of transformations, rather than rules, the emphasis cannot be on invariance, but rather on "internal variation and…change within the cultural system" (Drummond 1980: 352). Therefore, culture in Guyana may not be described as that of a plural society (M.G. Smith 1965), or an integrated one (R.T. Smith 1996), as these do not account for the "variations produced by incorporation of diverse groups in a strongly class-structured society…" (1980:353). From this, it follows that diversity and difference are necessary towards this intersystem.

Let us consider the role linguistics plays in this "nation-building," as it explains much about the Creole culture. As illustrated by Drummond, because these people came into contact with English customs at different times, each group became assimilated at varying levels, which also adds to the dynamics of this Creole system (1980: 357). We can see this in East Indian and Afro-Guyanese weddings, where Indo-Guyanese still

maintain much of their traditional marital customs, whereas Afro-Guyanese weddings are completely English (Drummond 1980: 358).

Yet, the Creole system does not only account for the degree of 'Englishness' one has, as this system is based on all groups within Guyanese society. As a result, classifications of behaviour vary from person to person, according to how the other perceives them. In this sense, a person may be assigned or take on a variation of identities through the way they act.

Williams (1991: 177-178, 234) notes the disjuncture between the perceived notions of how Amerindians are perceived by Guyanese, as opposed to their actual achievements and demeanour, such as their mastery of the English Language, as well as their dress and business acumen, which have "surpassed the achievements of many coastal dwellers" (177). Therefore, it is no wonder Elle—14—was repelled by the Creolese that was neither "proper English" nor intelligible.

Williams (1991: 178) further notes an instance when a pork-knocker (prospector) and a friend spotted a man while working in the interior. They figured he was of Portuguese, Chinese or even African or Indian descent, based on the way the man was dressed (supposition). After calling out to the man on numerous occasions, they finally got his attention. However, upon closer inspection, they realized it was an Amerindian man who greeted them *"I say, old chap, did you call me?"* They didn't respond, which left the man to bid them farewell, and carry on his journey. After they composed themselves, they proceeded to shout profanities at the man, as they were angry towards the man's

demeanour. In response the pork-knocker indicated that they were angry because an Amerindian in this context was 'out of place'.

These disjunctions, are based on the "criterion for differentiating and legitimating ethnic group status rank" (1991: 184). As disjunctions between what is expected of an ethnic group and individual achievements outside of the stereotyping of that group cause much ambiguity in the system, those things which embody Amerindianness, must be appropriated before they can be included within the Creole structure.

> That such a transformation occurs is related to the hegemonic process through which ethnic contributions are evaluated and ranked relative to one another and to the previously dominant "things English." To the extent that the cultural roots of an Amerindian object or action can be severed, those using the object or engaging in the action can avoid a decrease in status; but even then, things Amerindian are not as effective for demonstrating middle-class status as are things English/Christian (Williams 1991: 234).

As Amerindians have been labelled "dumb," "doltish" and "slow" to the Georgetownian centred society, the individual experiences a "shock" when they embody an opposed characteristic. This is not only experienced amongst Amerindians, however, as the labelling of Guyanese, of any ethnic background, as "buck," "coolie," "black," "Chinee" or "pudagee" varies based on stereotypical characteristics assigned to an ethnic groups, individuals have been in this present state of redefinition of personhood, as will be explained later on. As was conveyed in Sekou's interview with me:

> **Stacy:** What are your perceptions of Amerindians and what do you think is the general perception of Amerindians in Guyana? Please be brutally honest.
> **Sekou:** Okay....I respect Amerindians as I do all other races....I do not like referring to Amerindians as Bucks although I do use that terminology when joking with *frens*.....but I should stop....I believe that Amerindians are very important in our culture and I wish I knew more about them other than the stereotypical knowledge that I have.
> **Stacy:** Why should you stop using the term when joking with friends? What is the stereotypical knowledge that you have?

Sekou: Jerry if you remember is mixed with Amerindian and I have the utmost respect for him. My last girl friend, whom you never met, was mixed with all 6 races, but mostly look like Amerindian, with lil' Chinese and East Indian in she.
Sekou: The general perception to my knowledge is that Amerindians are slow....doltish, stupid to some part.....
Stacy: yes and I do remember Jerry.
Sekou: Like that joke: if you ask an Amerindian for directions and he/she tells. "It's just around the corner", then that means it's a long way, because they generally walk wherever they are going.

Sekou pinpoints the lack of knowledge he has—as do many Guyanese—of Amerindian culture, due to stereotypes put in place. He gives the example of "around the corner" which is a typical analogy made within the Creole system. As Amerindians are seen as primitive, they are believed to walk everywhere, and in doing so have the stamina to walk long distances without wearing them down. In opposition to Georgetownians—for example—a long distance, may be considered a short one for Amerindians, as Georgetownians do not have to walk to get to wherever they need to go, due to public and private modes of transportation.

In his book, *British Guiana*, Smith (1962 [1980]) argued that British Guiana had developed a Creole culture in which "all the constituent groups were integrated into a coercive and hegemonic social order ranked by race and purported approximation to the 'civilised' customs of the dominant—British—group" (Smith 1996: 7). The development of a socialist state that took into consideration the societal differences of race and class, then created conflict as the European powers monopolised the economic forces, which created "multiracial societies based solely on economic competition and lacking in any overall moral cohesion, or culture" (Furnivall 1910 [In Smith 1996: 8]). This 'competition' between Afro-Guyanese, who were the descendants of slaves, and East

Indians, the indentured labourers, still remains within the Guyanese experience. In an attempt to explain this phenomenon, US scholars had hypothesized that East Indians were so different from Afro-Guyanese that they could not fit into the Creole mould. However, Smith and Jayawardena (1967) argued that this was not the case. Instead they found that East Indians had opted to separate themselves from some of the more traditional Indian traditions and enter into the

> …legal, educational, and political framework of British Guiana society. At the same time the very structure of colonial society created 'racial' groups as the constituent units of the state, so that it as hardly surprising that each such group should begin to emphasize the worth of its particular historic 'culture' rediscovering and, if necessary, inventing traditions (Smith 1996: 9).

Those historical processes, such as the abolition of slavery in 1838, attempted to create new social relations by subjecting ex-slaves to a life of freedom and "equality." Yet, it was still very difficult to escape the "racial concepts, that ranked persons according to their colour, and also according to their perceived ways of thinking, behaving, and speaking in terms of their approximation to the dominant English patterns" (Smith 1996: 9-10). It was, therefore, hard to break away from the hierarchical nature of the present system, especially since one could never have an "authentic" English culture, and especially since colour and economic status were used as measuring rods, with "white" being on the positive end and black on in the negative end (Smith 1996: 13).

This soon led to racial conflict, which has not only marked Guyana's history but also her present since her independence. Yet, it is these conflicts which not only create rifts between of different racial background but also links them in an intersystem, which is argued by Drummond to be the key to understanding societies such as Guyana. However, Smith does not see Guyanese society as an "intersystem" (a term I will define

later in this section), but rather, as Schneider (1972) argues, as a cultural system with two parts – "pure" and "conglomerate."

If we were to consider actions such as the emphasis placed upon Christianity, education, law, honourable (i.e. good or bad) behaviour, and language, then this is a very good example of how common-will towards a Creole nation, which Smith and this colleague, Chandra Jayawardena refer to as "Creolisation" (Smith 1996: 104). Creolization in this case has been defined as a specialization process which may be broken into two further processes. For this I must quote at length.

> …in the first place it involved the creation of some are of common culture corresponding to the social relations in which people of varying ethnic groups were involved. Thus some form of English came to be the normal method of communication by all Guianese, to take one case, and eventually there has been an increasing spread of common educational standards through formal schooling. On the other hand *it was an integral part of the process of Creolisation to stress the differences between groups identified as "social" groups* "(1996: 104-105).

Williams' (1991) work is very much reminiscent of M.G. Smith's work as she argues that in nation-building, membership is formed through "disjunctive" and "conjunctive" historicity that:

> … (1) divide them into bounded groups, (2) ties these groups to one another, and (3) link their contemporary struggle to become Guyanese to the struggles through which they and their ancestors became British during the colonial era of conquest, slavery, and indentureship (1991: xiii).

For Williams historical processes are integral to defining identities within Guyanese context and creating a homogeneous national identity (1991: xiv). However, the problem with stating this is that Williams seems to be asserting that Guyanese identity can only take on one face at one time, which I will argue later, during my analysis of Drummond's piece, is not the case. Yet, Williams' analysis of 'nation-building' is an

important one, as people within the Creole system are constantly creating a nation to which their ever-evolving, ever-varying identities contribute.

Location is seen as a social and moral unit that binds people into a shared sense of identity (Williams 1991: 40). In the case of Williams' Cockalorum, group solidarity and reciprocity are the driving forces for the establishment of general welfare for the community. In such rural parts of Guyana this is very common, but may not be the case for urban areas. Instead, this may relate to groups of people who are associated with particular social units or status (Williams 1991: 93).

History also has formed the hierarchical relationship of class and race, faced by members of the Guyanese state, as a result of the "stains" and "scars" of slavery, indentureship and European political and economic control (Williams 1991:28). And although Guyana has gained independence from colonial powers in 1966, Guyanese have been unable to get rid of "the ghost of hegemony" created by Anglo-Europeans (1991:201). For instance, "English" or "white" customs are considered to be very prestigious (Jayawardena 1963:25; [taken from Williams 1991:201).

From this point I wish to move on to Drummond's analysis of the "cultural continuum" or "intersystems," This analysis is an adaptation of Bickerton's notion of intersystem found in his book *Dynamics of a Creole system* (1975). It is from this theory that I will use to analyse Guyanese construction of identity and compare it with Wapichannao construction if identity. This approach refutes that polyethnic immigrant societies are "neither structures nor plural amalgams" (Drummond 1980: 352).

This approach also asserts that in societies, such as Guyana, where there is a formulation of Creole linguistics, we must acknowledge that such complex linguistic transformations act as a metaphor for that culture. It is also important to acknowledge that in such systems, or intersystems, there are no established sets of rules, but instead, a set of transformations (1980:352). In this sense, Drummond's approach to studying how Guyanese people established their non-identities and the identity of others is through a Creole "perspectivist"-type analysis, where linguistics is the operating tool.

In a system that operates from a set of transformations, rather than rules, the emphasis cannot be on invariance, but rather on "internal variation and…change within the cultural system" (Drummond 1980). Therefore, culture in Guyana may not be described as that of a plural society, or an integrated one, as these do not account for the "variations produced by incorporation of diverse groups in a strongly class-structured society…" (1980:353). From this it follows that diversity and difference are necessary towards this system.

Not only is there cultural diversity, but as a result, there is also linguistic variation, which plays upon the ethnic stereotype formed by Guyanese. Drummond shows how these stereotypes have shifted up until the 1980s, where "white" and "black" were considered to be "good." However, this was created through the political powers at the time, where Prime Minister Forbes Burnham an afro-Guyanese, led the Guyanese government for sixteen years (Drummond 1980: 356). Up to this point, blacks had much control in the government and other such organisations. Today, however, it is the East Indians who

are seen as the more progressive group, since the political power has shifted towards a predominantly East Indian political party.

Let us consider the role linguistics plays in this “nation-building,” as it explains much about the Creole culture. As illustrated by Drummond, because these people came into contact with English customs at different times, each group became assimilated at varying levels, which also adds to the dynamics of this Creole system (1980: 357). We can see this in East Indian and Afro-Guyanese weddings, where Indo-Guyanese still maintain much of their traditional marital customs, whereas Afro-Guyanese weddings are completely English (Drummond 1980: 358).

Yet, the Creole system does not only account for the degree of ‘Englishness’ one has, as this system is based on all groups within Guyanese society. As a result, classifications of behaviour vary from person to person, according to how the other perceives them. In this sense, a person may be assigned or take on a variation of identities through the way they act.

Taking Guyanese weddings as an example is very insightful as it shows how identity is constantly changing. Drummond uses an instance when a woman of Amerindian and East Indian descent had organised her daughter’s wedding to an East Indian Hindu. The wedding was Christian, but the reception was very ‘coolie’. However, during the reception, the woman’s half brother reproached her for having inter-gender dancing, to which she responded “Dis an English wedding! Dis na coolie ting” (Drummond 1980: 365).

This shows the contradictory nature of the Creole intersystem, as it can alter its states in many variations, taking on different identities, when seen fit. This also illustrates how ethnic labelling is an evaluative tool employed to explain one's behaviour. I agree with Drummond when he says that we should establish how persons "define and identify X-ness and Y-ness" before we establish how members of group X feel about members of group Y—that is, before we establish fixed labels (1980: 366).

Drummond sums up the Guyanese Creole continuum with three characteristics:

1. Ethnic ascription is a spontaneous and central feature of Guyanese social life;
2. Guyanese ethnic categories form a system of inter-connected meanings;
3. The systematic nature of ethnic categories derives from their heterogeneous or multivocal meanings. Internal variation and change are methodologically and theoretically crucial to understanding how Guyanese culture operates (1980: 368).

The same thing could be said of Navada's Hindu and Christian engagements, where at her Hindu engagement, no alcohol or meat was served—her father decided not to eat, as he did not like eating with his fingers as is done at a Hindu Howan—and at her Christian engagement she served much meat and alcohol. Navada's paternal descent is Portuguese, and from one of the richest Portuguese families (businessmen) in Guyana, so they were Christian (Catholic). Her fiancé is Hindu in origin, but not practicing. However, they felt the need to incorporate both.

In countries like Guyana, one is analysing cultural processes, which are in constant variation, one is not confined to "uniform rules and invariant relationships" (Drummond 1980: 370). 'Guyaneseness' may be defined as a dynamic system of being, whereby one's identity is always changing due to the ongoing change in the rules for defining

oneself. In the Amerindians' case, a further complexity is in evidence—not only is culture multiple, so is nature.

Conclusion
If I were the Minister of Amerindian Affairs…

I

…the Polarities of Difference would NOT be my muse

This thesis has been a reaction to those areas in the Anthropology of the Caribbean, which I deem lacking. I have devised a method of analysis which addresses the flux within the cultural ideology amongst the Wapichannao of Bush Rope, due to opposing perspectives: centrally 'traditional' and 'farrin'. The model used throughout my analysis of Wapichannao discourse—*polarities of difference*—is my own, but belongs also to a collective of intellectuals, whose lead culminates in this conclusion. I have attempted to account for how Amerindians within Creole societies, who are in constant dialogue with the state, and in continuous interaction with transnational forces, have coped with the pressures of fulfilling commitments to polarised objectives.

We saw the emergence of this theme in Chapters 2 & 3, which showed how relations with the foods eaten by the Wapichannao are sentimentalised diversity through the communal strategy within the *manore*, and the individualistic approach within the shop: and how sentiments fluctuate between these polar ideals. The manore works in respect to the traditional, communal aspirations of the village, whereas the shop imitates that of the national economy, whereby the individual's objective of acquiring commodities is

emphasised. However, these fluctuations are also shown in the use of intricate local patterns, such as laughter and gossip, which act as devices to cope with opposing emotional textures within society. Laughter and gossip work to place everyone within a common state. However, they also works against this, individuals display their dominance over one another, creating separatism within their society. From this emphasis on fluctuating commitments, we moved towards the global stage through the state-implemented Amerindian Heritage Month. We were able to conceptualise the Amerindians within the context of the nation-state and see how their presence were being dealt with. Here two ubiquitous themes came out: traditional and farrin.

These two terms are definitive of the paradigm I have set up, and illustrate how the Amerindians of Guyana are constantly ambiguating the categories that surround them, only to redefine each notion so as to fit into one or the other pole. We see disjunctures opening up as to what farrin and traditional really are, and whether they *are* anything at any given state. We further see how the nation-state influences those social, political and economic relations through institutions, such as the shop.

Bush Rope's shops, especially the main two, have played significant roles in both economic and social alliances, as well as in cementing political affiliations. Those who frequent Riso's are perceived to be for the PPP/C national party and also support Riso in his own local political endeavours. This showed a compliance with the party in power and a more accepting view of world society. Those who frequented Chief's shop, supported his political endeavours and his stance behind the PNCR national party, followed by the AFC during the last elections. They also adhered to his ideas of

traditionalism, and the move away from dependence on the nation-state. This was exercised within the framework of crews, who voiced their opinions which were cultivated by those political affiliations made and sedimented through the shop. This was taken further in Chapter 7, where we saw how the national ideology was not just about the state imposing itself within the local, but also the local onto the state. Here, the reactions given to me by Georgetownians towards the indigenous shows that there was a dialogue between the two, and that both groups were having impacts (whether it be cognitive or physical) on the other. This is where we saw how both a Caribbean and an Amazonian approach to the Wapichannao must be considered in unity with each other, as they both work within the framework of the polarities of difference. On the one hand, the nation-state embodies the Caribbean as its inspiration for a national identity and which includes indigenous peoples, whereas on the other, they also consider the Amerindians to be part of a "past" that does not fit into this framework, but rather that of the Amazon, that of the primitive, and that of the Native.

There is a sense of cosmopolitanism beyond the nation-state, whereby Amerindians are now seeing themselves on the outside of a marginalising set of definitions. As we have seen many regulations placed by the government go against their ontology (e.g. feathers as contraband), yet as the Wapichannao come in contact with Brazilians, Guyanese, miners and others this no longer becomes the only concern. Rather, social relationships become based on how well individuals cope with local and global structures. Hence, we saw how intricate local patterns such as laughter were used to

accomplish this. However, we cannot consider the way in which Amerindians cope with the pressures of the global to be simple. As relationships extended outside of Bush Rope, they not only connected to the nation-state, but beyond it, through the presence of the internet café, volunteers, foreign commodities, and migration.

However, it is not enough to present the Wapichannao with a theoretical discussion on their personhood, as they see researchers as individuals who can contribute to their society "practically". In fact researchers are only allowed in the village if they adhere to the regulations set by the village council. Such rules and regulations for researchers include training some village members in research methods and the submitting of a copy of one's dissertation in "plain English" so that it can be accessible to all the village members. Not only should they be able to read the material, but understand it as well. Hence, I wish to take the idea of making anthropological research accessible to the people we study, and its relation to the polarities of difference. Yet, I wish to radicalise my conclusion, make it provocative, and keep the reader wanting to learn more about the Wapichannao: where they have been and where they are going.

II

No Nation-States for the Amerindians!

As previously mentioned, this conclusion is meant to be a radical, and maybe a utopian, statement as to how Amerindians can find a 'place' for themselves. Therefore, I wish to ask this question: is it that Amerindians need the find their place with the nation-state or is it that the nation-state influences Amerindians and other Guyanese to want to develop a national identity? I suggest that when contemplating the role of the nation-state within the lives of the indigenous, who are considered to be "different" from that of the "rest" of Guyanese, we need to consider the outcome if we were to leave Amerindians alone and disassociate them from the national identity.

This would mean proposing autonomous societies at the local/individual levels. At this level they themselves would have to cope with conflict at a local level, free from the laws of the nation-state. If we take this into consideration, when planning a plausible strategy as to how Guyanese people can deal with the presence of Amerindians and vice-versa, one may suggest that there might be a few outcomes. I have suggested three.

> *1) the Amerindians will not be perceived by non-Amerindian Guyanese within the Guyanese cultural experience;*
>
> *2) a neo-traditionalist wave may surge through these Amerindian communities;*
>
> *3) internal conflict due to previous dependence on the nation-state may force them to seek global help.*

The first is possibly the most radical of the three outcomes, as it presupposes that it is possible to rid an Amerindian of a national identity into which s/he has been born. As

we have seen from Chapters 5, 6 and 7 (in particular), the Wapichannao are already placing themselves within the context of the national. Although there is much discourse as to who is more "indigenous" than whom, the connection between agency and national identity is evident. Hart(2006)[131] points out that we automatically associate such institutions as the economy, and education (e.g.) with "national" agencies, as society is organised through the nation-state. This does not mean that citizens will not refer to global social levels, in so much as commoditisation is embedded and being resignified within the discourse of how the Wapichannao define their own subsistence and livelihood. However, all conflicts and antagonism will be at a local level, and will therefore be rectified by laws made from the locally. Wardle (2000) suggests that we should investigate individual strategies when society is in a constant state of mobility and the national, as a frame with which to negate social values and redefine society is decreasingly relevant.

One outcome of de-identification with the state may well be a form of neo-traditionalist social experience, which places emphasis on ancestral heritage and the moves away from dependency on "farrin" institutions, such as the economic, territorial, and religious, (e.g.). In this case, individuals are forced into a single set of ethical values with miniscule variations. This means that the polarities of difference would no longer be a significant tool for analysis: there would now be one ontology opposed to foreign elements.

[131] Hart, Keith 2006. Humanity between National and World Society. In Memory Bank Online.Taken from: http://www.thememorybank.co.uk/2006/03/13/humanity-between-national-and-world-society/.

However, a consequence of the move back to autonomy from dependence on the nation-state would surely by anxiety. An upheaval, far from utopian, may expose the flaws within the Wapichannao worldview and put them at the mercy of the nation-state from which they have already adopted a national identity on one level. Thus, in exposing this we have drawn attention to how Wapichannao social order currently exists only when there are two opposing forces working against and for each other. The current 'traditional' Wapichannao identity cannot function (or have impact) unless there is an opposing (conflicting) national identity, which is organised on the basis of global paradigms. In practice, this operates by ambiguating the dichotomy of traditional vs. modern, and other related distinctions.

Bush Rope epitomizes the problem of indigeneity in the Creole nation-state: that is, the capacity for individuals to 'cope' with opposing ideas of being and belonging. Through the use of ambiguation/negotiation, disjuncture and resignification, it is possible for a village organisation, which still adheres to communal work and group land ownership (e.g.), to 'fit' into the pattern of cultural flux, but also social hierarchy that is post-colonial Guyana. This comes down to the adaptability of Amerindians within the continuum, which may be deemed in many ways successful. In doing so, they are able to make the most of their geographical and social positioning within the state.

Concluding the Conclusion

As previously stated in the introduction to this thesis, we cannot approach a study of Amerindianness vis-à-vis the nation-state dialectically (cf. Hegel 1821, Leach 1964[1954], Bourdieu 1990, et al.). Rather, any attempts to understand personhood and the construction of identity amongst the Wapichannao should be considered within the context of a fluctuating paradigm. I have emphasised ambiguation/negotiation, disjuncture and resignification in order to show the relationship between the thought processes and actions of the Wapichannao, and where they stand within Guyanese society. However, if we abandon the idea of everyone belonging to a nation-state, then the polarities of difference have no place within the Anthropology of these peoples. Instead, we must take into consideration the individual, and those devices which they use in order to strategise their own well-being.

The problem of finding 'place' for the Wapichannao, is not so much a problem, as it is an embodied process. This process emphasises the constant manoeuvring that must take place in order for the Wapichannao to abide to both traditional and state-imposed definitions as to who they are. However, this is complicated by the fact that the state recognises them within the context of the "past," and not part of the present-day.

As experimental and innovative this conclusion may be, I hope that it has managed to keep the reader thinking about the Wapichannao, hearing an interpretation of their voice and gaining some insight into their personhood.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1:
Region 9 Villages According to Districts

NAME	POPULATION	VILLAGE LEADER	LOCATION
Annai	1,574	Mark George	North Rupununi
Massara	315	Nicholas Browne	North Rupununi
Yakarinta	514	Jackson Joel	North Rupununi
Aranaputa	264	Maurice Peters	North Rupununi
Yupukari	550	Isaac Rogers	North Rupununi
Crashwater	150	Elwin Benjamin	North Rupununi
Rewa	315	Daniel Haynes	North Rupununi
Apoteri	410	Edgehill Bowen	North Rupununi
Toka	299	William Andries	North Rupununi
Karasabai	1,069	Elvis Edwards	North Rupununi
Yurong Paru	301	Odelio Joe	North Rupununi
Taushida		Michael Vincent	
Tipuru	244	Harold Jonas	North Rupununi
Tiger Pond	300	Gilbert Rodrigues	North Rupununi
Moco Moco	373	James George	Central Rupununi
Nappi	385	John Alfred	Central Rupununi
Potarinau	**463**	**Austin Isaacs**	**Central Rupununi**
Sand Creek	**830**	**Eugene Andrews**	**Central Rupununi**
St. Ignatius	**550**	**Wilson Laurentino**	**Central Rupununi**
Shulinab	**600**	**Willie Clement**	**Central Rupununi**
Sawariwau	**552**	**Cletus Johnson**	**Central Rupununi**
Parikwarunau	**179**	**Abraham Griffith**	**Central Rupununi**
Rupanau	**225**	**Laurentino Herman**	**Central Rupununi**
Katoonarib	**294**	**Habert Wilson**	**Central Rupununi**
Achiwib	**585**	**Reginald Wilson**	**South Rupununi**
Bush Rope	**1,078**	**Riso James**	**South Rupununi**
Awarewaunau	**561**	**Averil Winter**	**South Rupununi**
Maruranau	**704**	**Patrick Gomes**	**South Rupununi**
Shea	**352**	**Lawrence Johnson**	**South Rupununi**
Karaudarnau	**945**	**Arnold Stephen**	**South Rupununi**
Konashen	213	James Suse	South Rupununi
Erfoimo	70	Ekufa Mewsha	South Rupununi
Fairview		Bradford Allicock	North Rupununi
TOTAL	**15,264**		

Appendix 2:
Showing Terms Associated with Cassava

ENGLISH	WAPICHAN
Cassava Farm	wauniibao
Bitter Cassava root	kanuzu
Sweet Cassava	makashiza
Cassava stick/stem	kankadu
Cassava plant	waun/waunii
Cassava (planted in the same place)	wiin'ibei
Cassava Water/Cassareep	kanuzuu
Cassava (grated)	kanuzu-bi'i
Cassava (soaked for farine)	amuru
Cassava (to scrape)	bazian[132]
Cassava (to squeeze)	niizootapan[133]
Cassava (squeezed)	shoada-karu
Cassava Squeezer/Matapi	niizo
Cassava Grater	chimaru
Cassava Sifter	manaru
TYPES OF CASSAVA	
Cassava: "with white skin like caiman's breast"	kanaodau
Cassava: "dark brown stem, white flesh"	bakuruu-zowau
Cassava: "purple skin, brown stem, white flesh"	buzowapa

The following definitions were taken from:

1. Wapishana Language Project (2000). *Scholar's Dictionary and Grammar of the Wapishana Language: Tominpainao Ati'o Wapichan Paradan Parada-karu na'iki Paradauzo-karu kaduzu*. SIL International, Porto Velho, Brasil.
2. Melville, Colette (2004). *Wapichan-English Dictionary*. Clays Ltd., St. Ives.

[132] Transitive verb
[133] Transitive verb

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