

INTRODUCTION



The philosophers who have examined the foundations of society have all felt the need to go back to the state of nature, but none of them has succeeded.

—Jean-Jacques Rousseau *Discourse on Inequality*¹

When I returned to Suriname in November 2011, I learned of a scandal that was causing turmoil among the Trio. It was a case of adultery, in which one man, Luuk, had been carrying on an affair with the wife of another man, Sam.² One day Sam caught them in the act. He reacted furiously. He waited for an opportunity, then, together with some of his kinsmen, attacked Luuk and beat him up. Soon, rumours circulated that Luuk wanted to demand a cash payment as compensation for the injuries he had received. Sam's anger rose again. He went, again with some kinsmen, to Luuk's house at night, armed with guns and machetes. He seemed intent on killing him. Some men intervened, but it was clear that the matter would have to be settled by independent parties. This was complicated by the fact that Sam was the brother of Silvijn, a village leader, and Luuk was married to the daughter of Douwe, the other village leader. The dispute risked turning into a factional crisis that could tear the whole village apart. Gossip spread like wildfire, and thanks to mobile telephone and shortwave radio, this conflict was soon the talk of all the Trio villages and those living in the city of Paramaribo. The church elders held concerned discussions with their mentors in the city. At last, it was decided that this was a matter for the church to resolve, and an American missionary who had spent his life ministering to the neighbouring

Wayana, together with the Trio Granman, Vigo, flew to Tëpu in a specially chartered light aircraft. After long consultations and deliberations, it was decided that Sam should leave the village with his family, at least for a while. The last I heard, he was to go to live in Kwamalasamutu, a large Trio village nearer the Brazilian border.

This story illustrates how a petty dispute can quickly turn into a political crisis in a small-scale society. The events were underpinned by a wide array of circumstances, which hinged upon the interplay between gender relations, kinship ties and leadership roles. They took place against the historical background of the concentration of the population around mission stations, which brought distant affines (who would previously have avoided one another) into everyday contact. The coresidence of affines brings new tensions into play, and in this case these in turn called for the intervention of a hierarchy of leadership extending beyond the specific village concerned, and even beyond the Trio themselves to some non-Amerindian organizations that have played a historic role in the demographic and material changes in Trio life over the past half-century. And yet the solution that was found at the end of this episode was perhaps surprisingly traditional: the most serious disputes among Trio people have always been resolved through the physical separation of the parties concerned. This can have implications that go beyond the interventions of existing leaders. In such cases, when a man leaves his village to allow the social harmony to be restored, his exile often marks the beginning of a new political formation: as we shall see, he may found his own village and become a leader in his own right.

This recourse to longstanding solutions to what may seem to be relatively new problems raises questions about the extent to which the dramatic social and economic changes that the Trio and their neighbours have experienced in recent decades have impinged upon long-term patterns of political action. This book is concerned accordingly with the question of cultural continuity in the face of historical change, and shows how a type of political leadership deeply grounded in specific, collectively held ideals and practices of kinship and masculinity can provide a powerful form of cultural resilience. At the same time, the book addresses the ways in which political leadership itself shapes society through space and time. On another level, it is about how a cultural ideal of masculinity is played out and realized through leadership. Leadership and masculinity are intertwined in many ways, but perhaps the most important activity common to both is the manipulation (though not necessarily the accumulation) of wealth – that is, objects and persons of value. It is through the manipulation of wealth that masculine capacities are brought to bear upon the life of the community.

Political theory, gender studies and economics converge in their shared concern with equality and inequality. In classical political theory, 'primitive' societies are assumed to be egalitarian, and property is assumed to be absent. Property and inequality are understood to be in causal relationships with each other: Thomas Hobbes (1996) takes the establishment of sovereign power and monopoly over violence to be the necessary condition for the accumulation of wealth, while Rousseau (1992) understands the emergence of private-property rights to be the cause of inequality, exploitation and subjugation. Meanwhile, gender inequality and male domination of women have been associated with the treatment of women as property since Aristotle.

Arguments about inequality rely heavily upon the assumption that culture and society exist on a separate plane of existence from nature, and place them in a separate field of analysis. Certain feminist scholars have challenged the conflation and subjection of women and nature, arguing that women are 'no more "part of nature" or "closer to nature" than men are', but few political thinkers have gone a step further to 'contest the idea that real human life proceeds in a hyperseparated sphere of culture, for which nature is inessential' (Plumwood 2006: 55). In the anthropology of indigenous Amazonia, however, it is now widely agreed that nature and culture are at best mutually constituted and context-dependent, if they are valid categories at all (Descola 2005; Seeger 1981; Viveiros de Castro 1998). This has significant implications for understanding indigenous political thought.

Guianan Leadership

The Trio word for 'thumb' is *jeinja itamu*, which literally means 'leader (or grandfather) of the hand'. This illustrates the fact that leadership, masculinity and kinship are implicated in Trio ways of classifying the world, and how they are replicated on different scales, from below that of the individual (as parts of the body) through the nuclear family to the village and, perhaps, beyond.³ Three kinds of hierarchical differentiation are at play here, in the fields of gender, age and space, illustrating how symmetry and differentiation are taken for granted by Guianan Amerindians⁴ as fundamental aspects of social and cosmological order. However, asymmetrical relationships in Guiana are not usually absolute; they shift with time and are perspective and scale-dependent. This gives rise to an aggregate impression of overall equality, and it is this serendipitous result of multiple asymmetries that gives the illusion, and arguably an aggregate effect, of equality.

According to Peter Rivière, a Trio leader is expected to lead by example and to be a competent organizer, a good speaker, generous and knowledgeable (1984: 73). In a 'political economy of people not of goods', a leader 'lacks any formal means of control other than his personal influence and competence' (ibid.: 93, 94). The roles of a head of family and leader of a village are 'identical' (Rivière 1969: 234). His duty, although he can be seen as standing between or mediating the inside and the outside of the community, 'if anything ... is to strengthen the inside which he owns and symbolizes.' (ibid.: 268). As a symbol of the community, he is the social incarnation of the network of relations he represents. I would add to Rivière's characterization that the asymmetrical relationship between a man and his dependents (wife, daughters, sons-in-law) is one node in a network of such miniature hierarchical formations, composing what may be termed a 'heterarchy', which is further differentiated by the prominence of some men and their families over others.

Rivière's characterization of leadership is largely based upon a reconstruction of Trio society with the elements and effects of contact with missionaries removed. To acquire a fuller understanding of Trio leadership and Guianan society in general it is necessary to see how they function in relation to contemporary circumstances and to consider this in the light of earlier situations. For example, Rivière's distinction between people and goods may benefit from taking into account the ways in which things may represent or even 'embody' persons (Grotti 2007; Van Veltrem 2003). Missionization has also had important effects on political economy, allowing accumulation of material wealth and creating greater needs for other scarce resources – fuel, salt, metal goods, etc. Because of the ways in which these goods are obtained, that is to say, through the control of networks of people, they remain implicated in those networks through their 'biographies' (Hoskins 1998). The point to retain here is that things can take on greater importance as a result of their associations with persons. This will not surprise students of exchange theory. But the objects in question do not necessarily have the quality of gifts in what is primarily a sharing economy.

Guiana⁵

The Guiana Shield forms a continental island bordered by the Amazon, Negro and Orinoco rivers, and by the Atlantic. The urban centres (Paramaribo, Cayenne, Macapá, Belém, Manaus, Ciudad Bolívar, Ciudad Guayana, Georgetown) are to be found at the edge of the region (with the exception of Boa Vista), and the sparse Amerindian populations live

in the interior. The large population centres are all situated on the coast or riverbanks. Control of goods and state political power are concentrated on the physical periphery of the 'island', the inhabitants of which see the 'hinterland' as both the location of natural resources to be exploited, and as dangerously wild. Legal ownership of land is correspondingly more secure and less disputed in the more populous edges of the island.⁶ This view is echoed on the level of national sovereignty: the borders near the coastline between countries are generally agreed, whereas those in the interior are still disputed. These include the area between the Tapanahoni and the upper Maroni in the case of French Guiana and Suriname, and that between the Sipaliwini and the New River in the case of Guyana and Suriname; meanwhile Venezuela claims all of Guyana west of the Essequibo.

On this great scale of inter-state relations, and regarding space in these terms defined by zones or boundaries, the political geography of the region is a reversal of that of the Amerindian village. Nature is at the centre of the region, with culture at its periphery. However, this apparent reversal of the conventional view only exists from a cartographic perspective; if we look at the political geography of the region more closely from the point of view of coastal dwellers, a more complex picture emerges. In Paramaribo, for example, coastal French Guiana is often regarded as a beacon of civilization because of its greater wealth and relative lack of political corruption. Meanwhile political power follows economic lines. The most sought-after resources are concentrated in the urban centres on the region's periphery (even if, like gold, they are brought there from the interior), and those who control these resources have a monopoly on political power.

Things appear quite differently from the point of view of Amerindian people, particularly the relatively autonomous groups living in the interior. The Trio, Wayana and Akuriyo live in remote locations, far beyond any roads, where even river travel is difficult because of the shallow water and numerous dangerous rapids. Until the 1950s, when air travel became possible, access from the coast was only possible by river, and Trio continued to travel to the coast by river in the 1960s (P. Rivière pers. comm. 2008). Their villages are surrounded by forest, which they see as a rich but treacherous resource, and they regard the city in similar terms.

The Trio, Wayana and Akuriyo

The Trio, Wayana and Akuriyo are each composed of a number of previously distinct groups that amalgamated through the process of population

concentration resulting from the creation of mission stations. As the Trio and Wayana, and, to a lesser extent, the Akuriyo, have become officially recognized as 'tribes' or 'ethnic groups' by nation states, they have become increasingly real as categories of identity, and the traceability of their historical construction (see chapter 1) makes them no less significant. Those who speak Trio (*Tarëno ijomi*) call themselves *Tirio* when addressing outsiders, but further layers of identity appear under other circumstances. Bearing in mind these qualifications as to their identity, the Trio comprise about 2,300 people.⁷ In Suriname, they live on the upper Tapanahoni and the Sipaliwini rivers, and in Brazil they live on the Paru de Oeste and Cuxaré, in the Terra Indígena (TI) Parque de Tumucumaque. The Wayana are about 1,600 in number.⁸ In Suriname and French Guiana, they live on the upper Tapanahoni and on the Maroni and its tributaries the Tampok, the Marouini and the Litani. In Brazil, they live on the Paru d'Este river in TI Parque de Tumucumaque and TI Rio Paru d'Este. The Trio and Wayana alike live primarily from swidden horticulture, their principal crop being bitter manioc, and hunting and fishing. They have a Dravidianate relationship terminology (Henley 1996), an important feature of which is the practical emphasis on the distinction between kin and affines from the point of view of ego, rather than from that of a descent group.

Most of the fieldwork on which this book is based was carried out in the village of Tëpu on the upper Tapanahoni river in Suriname. I spent a further period in the village of Antecume Pata at the confluence of the Litani and Marouini rivers in French Guiana. Tëpu, like all of the officially recognized Surinamese and Brazilian Trio villages, was created as a mission station. The Protestant evangelical mission 'Door to Life', which was soon taken over by West Indies Mission (WIM),⁹ created the first missions among the Trio of Suriname from 1960 following 'Operation Grasshopper', a military operation to cut airstrips. This was initiated by the government as a step towards the 'opening up' of the 'interior' to economic exploitation, and largely seems to have been motivated by the desire to secure the southern part of the frontiers in the disputed headwater region discussed above. The missionaries' main role was in the next stage of the process: concentrating and 'civilizing' the Amerindians. The first important Trio mission station on the Tapanahoni was Palumeu, situated at the mouth of the Palumeu river, a major affluent of the Tapanahoni, and in the late 1960s a faction of Trio who were discontent with life there founded the village of Tëpu several hours upstream by motorized canoe. This move was organized by Claude Leavitt of Unevangelised Fields Mission (UFM),¹⁰ who was on loan to WIM because of his field skills (Conley 2000: 389), and who is said by some elderly residents to have been the 'real' founder of Tëpu. The foundation of the village appears to be

linked to Leavitt's leadership around the same time of the expeditions to concentrate the Akuriyo, whose eventual settlement took place in Tëpu itself.

The airstrip was cut in 1971, and a health post was created by the Christian medical mission *Medische Zending* and run by missionary nurses from the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). Education was at first also provided by volunteers from the DRC, Cees and Ineke Koelewijn, who continue to visit the village regularly and who were present some of the time while I conducted fieldwork. A state school was later created using funding from the Margreet Kauffman Foundation. Another important actor in the village is the US-based conservation NGO Amazon Conservation Team (ACT), which supports the local apprenticeship of plant medicine and has sponsored cultural mapping projects among the Trio and Wayana in Suriname and in Brazil (Brightman 2008b, 2012).

Tëpu has a population of about 330 people, comprising a slight majority of Trio, many Wayana, and most of the surviving Akuriyo. The population has remained roughly stable since the 1970s except for the period during and immediately after the civil war. President Desi Bouterse, who came to power following a coup d'état in 1980 (who returned to the presidency in 2010, this time following democratic election) violently suppressed the 1986 uprising of the Jungle Commando,¹¹ leading to the 'war of the interior', which brought fighting even to the remote Sipaliwini district where the Trio live. Government recruiting agents tried to attract Amerindians as soldiers, possibly by force, causing many Trio to flee to Brazil, especially to the Catholic mission station village of Missão Tiriós on the Paru de Oeste. This led to several marriages, as a result of which, when people began to go back to Tëpu after the war, some stayed in Missão and others returned with their local spouses. This migration to Missão followed existing paths – people had moved around and across the region for as long as memories and records can attest, and visitors still frequently make the journey (see chapter 3). Today, although people travel long distances by river (with outboard motors) and by air, it is more difficult than in the past to travel on foot because there are fewer villages along the way due to the concentration of populations around mission stations.

Antecume Pata was founded by André Cognat (known in Wayana as Antecume), a Frenchman from near Lyon who was adopted by a Wayana family in the early 1960s after they saved him from drowning in rapids during a solitary expedition up the Maroni. The village is situated on an island among the rapids at the confluence of the Litani and Marouini rivers on the border between Suriname and French Guiana. As well as Wayana from Litani, its inhabitants include families of Wayana and Apalai who fled gold miners and pelt hunters on the Jari and Paru d'Este river in

Brazil during the late 1960s and 70s. Antecume Pata is located in an area that was protected under the *arrêté préfectoral* of 1970 which covers the southern section of French Guiana until the creation of the Parc Amazonien de Guyane in 2007. Both the *arrêté préfectoral* and the park have theoretically provided protection from placer mining,¹² missionaries and disease, although the village's proximity to the Surinamese border (which the river itself constitutes) greatly reduces the regulation's effect. It is highly significant that this village was not created by missionaries, but by a local leader, and that this leader is a white Frenchman who adopted Wayana culture and married a Wayana woman.¹³

Fieldwork and its Limitations

When I arrived in Suriname, Jacob, a medical mission nurse with extensive experience of working among the Trio, encouraged me to go to Tëpu because it was not getting its fair share of 'projects' compared to the other Trio villages. He arranged for me to meet Douwe, the Hoofdkapitein ('head captain') of Tëpu, who happened to be in Paramaribo, to ask for his permission to go the village. This was a matter of courtesy and respect rather than regulation, for Amerindian villages in Suriname are not protected by official access restrictions, unlike in neighbouring countries. The only practical way to get to Tëpu is by light aircraft. While I waited for a chance to share a charter flight, I spent my time meeting visiting Trio people and conservation workers in Paramaribo. The flight was repeatedly postponed, as Adam, a man from Tëpu who has a government post as a Trio representative in Paramaribo, awaited his long overdue salary.

In Tëpu, the Kapitein, Silvijn, at first allocated a cook and a work helper, saying in broken English, 'I give you these women.' Although this gave the appearance of a manifestation of his authority, I later found it had been the product of much persuasion and negotiation on his part. It was immediately clear that the 'cook' (a teenage girl who lived next door) found this arrangement as awkward as I did, and my unusual desire to share family meals soon made her help unnecessary. However, the 'translator', Emma, gradually became my most important interlocutor and a good friend. She obviously relished her duties, which gave her a welcome escape from the daily tasks of processing cassava and childcare.

Emma's father, Gabriel, though the son of Waiãpi parents, had been adopted at a young age by Wayana people in Antecume Pata, and his wife is a Trio from Tëpu. This has led the family to migrate several times between the two villages. As a result of her upbringing and several years of school in Antecume Pata, Emma speaks fluent Wayana and good French,

as well as Trio. This was important in an extremely multilingual environment. There were a handful of Portuguese speakers, but their knowledge of Portuguese was much less extensive than Emma's knowledge of French; communication in Dutch or Sranan Tongo with those who knew either language was problematic because the level of knowledge was limited on both sides. Emma's French education also gave her a level of literacy considerably higher than most of her contemporaries in Tëpu, which aided in the translation of concepts as well as giving her unparalleled skills as a field assistant. I was fortunate to be able to benefit from her abilities: her gender would have been an obstacle to our interaction had it not been for the fact that I was accompanied by my partner, Vanessa Grotti. Due to Emma's conventional female modesty, for some time I could scarcely communicate directly with her, and had to do so through Vanessa. Even after Emma began to address Vanessa as her elder sister, this placed me in the position of affine to her and her family, and it was only the intimacy of sharing a household and food that led to my also being treated by them as kin. This brought corresponding obligations: my lack of skill in hunting and fishing meant that I had to provide for the family in other ways, by bringing objects and cash. I came to depend on Emma and her family – particularly her father, Gabriel, and her Trio grandfather, Boasz – for food as well as information, and I spent most of my days with them, although as I grew more confident and knowledgeable I gradually became able to interact with people from other households, and went about on visits of my own.

A few months after I began my fieldwork, Gabriel told me of his intention to bring his wife and his unmarried daughters to Antecume Pata, although it was some time before the move was finally organized. The main reason he gave for wanting to go there was that he missed his relatives, and this was especially acute because his sister (by adoption) was seriously ill.¹⁴ Gabriel gave less emphasis to other motivations: by returning to Antecume Pata, he hoped to get better schooling for his children. He would also secure French nationality for his next child, and try to obtain French papers for himself, in order to have access to social security and quality healthcare. Following her father's suggestion, Emma travelled separately with Vanessa and me via Paramaribo, which gave her, on what was her first visit there, the opportunity to obtain a Surinamese identity card, allowing her access to various Surinamese benefits (she was born in Tëpu). This also allowed her to take a scheduled flight to Benzdorp, next to Maripasoula, which helped to reduce the overall cost of migration.

These mundane practicalities helped to illuminate some of the themes of my research: the importance and advantages of travel in the contemporary world; the tensions between state benefits and brideservice; men's

control over their daughters; the consumerist elation of going to the city for the first time: all these things and many more became apparent through ordinary events as well as through ceremonial activities or the daily round. The way in which I conducted my research brought some disadvantages, however: working with Trio and Wayana made it more difficult to master either language; the extensive travel put a strain on my budget and personal relationships; relying on local food meant suffering cycles of abundance and scarcity to which my body never became accustomed; I was not tied to any Surinamese or French institutions, and therefore had no infrastructure to support me; even being part of a couple in the field had the disadvantage of encouraging the assumption that we were self-sufficient and thus making it seem less natural for us to eat with others, let alone be 'adopted'. But all of these problems were balanced by advantages: working in several sites enabled me to study how kinship, trade and various forms of communication link people across space, state borders and identity groups. Through my reliance on local food, I shared substance with local people and reinforced our relationships. Because of my independence from any institutions, I avoided inviting prejudice because of any associations that these institutions have for local people.

Structure and Scope of the Book

The first chapter introduces the Trio, Wayana and Akuriyo as distinct groups by juxtaposing life histories, myths and historical sources. It shows the role of leaders in creating groups and group identity in given locations, and how this underpins Guianan patterns of ethnic identity that form as a network of continual change, a network of transformations, as contingent events are transposed through political agency to fit the conventional structures of imagined social organization.

In chapter 2 I focus on housebuilding as analogous to village foundation and as a crystallization of kinship networks. The foundation of a village begins with the clearing of land and building of a house. When more houses are built in an existing village, the mobilization of people involved in housebuilding involves the exercise of male capacities to influence collective action. The house as an expression of kinship is used in this context to frame a discussion of spatial dimensions of the structural conditions for leadership.

Chapter 3 explores the relationships between male capacities and networks of influence in the realm of affinity. It focuses on speech and movement, oratory and mediation with outsiders, including trade, these being

important forms of action expected of a leader. In this chapter I make the case for the essentially mediatory role of the leader, and it is shown that the role can be played out in different ways. The exploration of the various forms of communication also shows how they create, articulate and perpetuate social difference, and thus demonstrates that the asymmetrical relationships of which leadership is the primary manifestation exist on different scales.

In chapter 4 I return to the collectivity, to show how the exchange of persons occurs ritually and symbolically on a group level, and I consider the importance of leadership in achieving this. I show that ritual and musical celebration, which are used to manipulate affinal relations, are a way of incorporating outside influence, in the form of persons, things and knowledge, recalling the discussion of communication in the first chapter: with leaders taking the role of protagonists, society is constantly renewed by the repetition of various forms of this process, whether the 'outside' is represented by the worlds of other Amerindians, Maroons, white people, animals or spirits. However, I argue that gender roles are inverted during ritual acts of incorporation, and the act of incorporation is an enactment of feminine agency.

The movement of persons and objects raises questions about the relationships between them. In chapter 5 I consider these as a form of property relations: relationships between persons can be seen in terms of property and belonging, and, following Marilyn Strathern (1996) I explore how property articulates networks of relationships. I argue that relationships of belonging between persons are more important than those between persons and objects, and that the latter are regarded in terms of the former. These questions are considered in terms of relationships with land, and territoriality and kinship are brought together in a discussion of the importance of village foundation for the establishment of leadership.

In the concluding chapter I discuss the wider implications of the argument presented throughout the book, and consider its implications for matters such as native Amazonians' relationships with the state, and native perspectives on historical change.

Notes

1. 'Les philosophes qui ont examiné les fondements de la société ont tous senti la nécessité de remonter jusqu'à l'état de nature, mais aucun d'eux n'y est arrivé.' All translations are by the author.

2. I have used pseudonyms throughout, with the exception of certain locally well-known figures whose identity, even if their names were changed, would remain clear to many readers.
3. This should not be mistaken for an organic model for society. If anything, the Guianan body is a reflection of society rather than the reverse. For a similar use of scale, see Strathern 2000 and Viveiros de Castro 2001.
4. Throughout the text (except in quotations), native Amazonian people are referred to as 'Amerindian', to distinguish them from the coastal 'Indians' or 'East Indians' who descend from indentured labourers from India.
5. When referring to the region as a whole, I have chosen to maintain the established geographical (and geological) appellation, 'Guiana', rather than 'Guayana' (the Venezuelan Spanish usage adopted by Whitehead and Aleman 2009) or 'the Guianas', a slightly ambiguous term that may be taken as referring only to Guyana, Suriname (as former Dutch Guiana) and French Guiana.
6. There are important exceptions such as coastal Kali'na and Lokono Amerindian land claims.
7. This includes 1,400 in Suriname and 939 in Brazil (<http://www.socioambiental.org/pib/epi/tiriyo/tiriyo.shtm>); the latter figure includes the Kaxuyana, who continue to identify themselves as distinct despite much intermarriage.
8. This includes 400 in Suriname, 800 in French Guiana and 415 in Brazil (<http://www.socioambiental.org/pib/epi/aparai/aparai.shtm>); these figures include the Apalai, with whom the Wayana have intermarried extensively. The Akuriyo case, which is discussed here, bears superficial resemblances, but belongs to a different order because although they coreside with the Trio, they scarcely intermarry, a fact that I attribute to the Akuriyo's former status as nomadic foragers who lacked knowledge of bitter manioc cultivation.
9. Now known as World Team.
10. Recently renamed as CrossWorld Foundation.
11. Launched from Maroon villages, led by Ronnie Brunswijk and backed by the Netherlands and France.
12. Goldmining is an important issue with political dimensions beyond the scope of this book. For Suriname, see Heemskerck 2001 and Veiga 1997; for the Wayana of French Guiana, see Meunier 2004: 71ff.; for the Amazon region as a whole see Cleary 1990 and MacMillan 1995; for general discussion of extractive industry in Amazonia, see Brightman et al. 2006/7.
13. These points are discussed in chapters 2 and 5.
14. She quickly recovered after his arrival, which appeared quite normal; for Trio and Wayana people, separation from relatives can lead to illness.