ANGER IN THE FOREST, DEATH BY DOCUMENTATION: CULTURAL IMAGININGS OF THE TARUMA

GEORGE MENTORE

Introduction

THIS article aims to contribute to the celebration of Peter Rivière's lifelong work on lowland Amerindian societies by focusing on the comparisons that are drawn between different cultural interpretations of human presence and absence in the forests of southern Guyana. Behind the paper's ambling structure lies an attempt to draw attention to the intellectual style of Rivière's research, which, for some years now, has been intuitively turning upon itself in a cumulative and creative fashion. The article acknowledges his early scholarly interest in the historical distribution of 'tribal' communities, and it implicitly pays tribute to his scholarly work on the specific character of indigenous forms of kinship, marriage, and residence in the Guianas. Thus, regardless of the inferences obtained from the different kinds of interpretations provided here of Amerindian Being in the Guianas, it should be quite obvious that some of these interpretations owe their existence to the anthropology of Peter Rivière.

In this article, I shall be using three types of sources for the interpretation of Amerindian death, namely the oral discourse of the Waiwai, the state documents of Guyana, and the scholarly literature on the region. In the first instance, I shall be

relying on what the Waiwai have told me and, of course, upon the academic authority which currently supports what I have come to know about their culture and society.[1] In the second case, I shall endeavour to present the official documents as representing a modern Guyana emerging from its colonial history. In the third case, I shall present the scholarly literature as sharing with the state very similar notions about identity, which tend to provide them both with their coherence on the subject of death. The topic on which these sources apparently intersect is the demise of the Taruma people, a point of intersection where oral and textual discourses meet in an effort to determine and convey, in some independence of one another, the very meaning of human mortality. It will be my task here to demonstrate how each source produces its own interpretations of human death.

In a country of 84,000 square miles and a population of less than a million people, about 90% of whom live within the narrow coastal plain that covers an area of 1,750 square miles, most of Guyana's Amerindians live in the country's interior. Whenever the state projects an image of the Amerindian in its discursive forms of national being, it does so with the received wisdom that Guyana has nine distinct 'tribes' as its constitutive Amerindian presence. However, given the limitations of the epistemology that projects itself into the Western-influenced documents and scholarly literature on the region, the Taruma Amerindians do not have a presence in Guyana today. Officially, to all intents and purposes the Taruma are socially and physically dead. Yet, from the point of view of their neighbours, the Waiwai, these people remain very much alive, for according to Waiwai forms of knowledge, the Taruma currently wander about the southern forests, carefully avoiding the consuming violence of hostile strangers.

Theoretical Preamble

My implied assumption throughout will be that the ideologically induced nature of each interpretative source affects the different meanings given to death and the way death is represented. My reference to difference does not mean that the interpretations of death with which I am dealing are ideologically spurious.[2] I am suggesting instead that, although there are conflictual social forces at work, and the interpretations of death could be an epiphenomenon of these forces, the veracity of

[1] The Waiwai are Carib-speaking Amerindians who live in the remote forests on the borders of Guyana and Brazil. Their estimated population is between 1,200 to 2,000 people. I have been carrying out anthropological research with and among them since 1979.

[2] I would like to think that in this regard I am close to Althusser's insistence (1969) on not considering the imaginary lived relation between humankind and their conditions of existence as being somehow false consciousness.

the ideological beliefs involved are not necessarily invalidated by this fact.[3] Granted that, for me to instil some form of credibility into my own explanations for these particular interpretations, a certain amount of scepticism must be present, any critique of society must possess some degree of cynicism in order to constitute useful commentary. Yet none of this ought to detract from the fact that what should be paramount should be explanations of how ideological beliefs become believable as truths in the first place.

Theoretically the very presence of different meanings, that is, the conscious recognition of comparative differences between meanings, suggests an actual tension between interpretative forms. My understanding is that, in order to produce coherent significations, particular elements in the total framework of signifying systems must be shaded, darkened, or altogether blocked out. It seems that, in order to make the signifying elements function in the production of meaning, that is, to come into the foreground with their self-regulatory balances and contrasts, they must first be set off by or staged from elements that are made to remain in the background. And herein lies the tension, for in producing meaning each system contains not only the elements of its own precarious vulnerability—in other words, its own source of contradiction—but also the very elements of difference with which to challenge each other. An insecure consensus exists between the foreground and its unobtrusive background, but between different projected meanings no such consensus exists precisely because, to be meaningful, each meaning relies upon obscuring different background elements. The tension between different meanings stems, therefore, not merely from the projected differences of each significance, but equally from the lack of open competition over the different obscured elements that each meaning relies on for its signification. I should add that the very elements obscured by one system of meaning may well be the source of projected significance in another; of course, when projected as signifying elements in the same system, they cannot simultaneously serve as elements in obscurity.

I will be presenting the different interpretations of the death of the Taruma as the believable products in each case of systemic and signifying processes. The ways in which these processes caused each interpretation of the death of the Taruma to appear in the foreground in order to make it work as a meaningful explanation show up the existing tension and provide clues to the hidden background. It will be my claim, for example, that when the Guyanese state professes its ideas about the racial and ethnic constitution of its nation, and the scholarly literature its views on Amerindian ethnicity in the region, both project similar naturalistic no-

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[3] Being the result of antagonistic social categories competing for access to productive means, ideological beliefs about such relations could be, and have indeed been, identified as the by-product of infra-structural economic forces. As such, they have often been denied causal determinism, and consequently any 'true' force in the formation of societies.

tions about life and death.[4] Both foreground the biomedical emphasis on physiology, so that death, when interpreted, means the cessation of the body's physiological functions. In contrast, when Waiwai society takes cultural hold of ideas about death (even though it may use structures similar to those of the literate tradition of the state and of scholars), it does so by projecting a personalistic notion of human existence. In this view, the dead are always perceived as victims, that is, as the consumptive target of an active and intervening agent which does not necessarily cause a 'physical lesion' to, or 'breakdown' of, bodily functions, but rather effects a permanent separation between the body's material and spiritual vitalities.[5] By virtue of the very investments they make in maintaining the veracity of their ideas, these distinctive ideologies of death both suggest that they are sustaining a precarious vulnerability and a tension. This, of course, is what allows the cynical critic to observe and compare the differences between ideological statements.

Anger and Death: The Constraint of Affection and the Denial of Violence

The official documents and academic literature on southern Guyana record a period when the upper reaches of the Essequibo river were occupied simultaneously by both the Waiwai and the Taruma (Bridges 1985; Evans and Meggers 1960: 269; Farabee 1967 [1924]: 176; Roth 1929: v-xi; Schomburgk 1970 [1840]: 50–1). The Waiwai themselves remember such a period and, indeed, whenever they resettle or visit an area on the Essequibo once occupied by people of the recent past, they often confirm a departed sedentary presence. On occasion they give this presence the title of 'Taruma'. Indeed, given the current hegemonic relations between the state, scholars, and Amerindians, it should come as no surprise to find that the effects of the literary discourse about tribal-ness have forcefully encouraged the use of official tribal rubrics even within and between the different Amerindian communities.

The people currently living on the upper Essequibo river certainly do not have any objections to being referred to as 'Waiwai'. They have adopted the title and use it themselves in broad political terms to speak about an interrelatedness experienced both within their village and between their village and three others in

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[4] I am being prompted here by Foster's 1976 article, where he draws on two distinct systems to explain the cause of disease, which he refers to as 'naturalistic' and 'personalistic'. While agreeing with Butt Colson and De Armellada (1983: 1239) that so rigid a distinction may not be applied generally to the 'diseased body', I am willing to extend such distinctions to the 'deceased body', the dead body.

[5] In my own explanations of Waiwai mortality, I have been much influenced by Basso's interpretation of the Kalapalo process of death. I am particularly persuaded by her ideas about the Kalapalo 'Interactive Self' (Basso 1987: 95), which in description appears so like the Waiwai idea of *ekatï*.

Brazil. When asked to talk about other similar kinds of interrelatedness, they can and do use other names that have the same classifying capabilities as 'Waiwai'. In 1978, for example, from among the 131 people of Shepariymo village on the upper Essequibo (who all considered themselves to be living in a Waiwai village), I was given eleven different names that particular clusters of villager members claimed as an identity (Aramayena, Chikena, Hishkaryena, Katawina, Marakayena, Mawayena, Parukoto, Shereo, Tunayena, Waiwai, and Wapishana). In 1994, in the village of Akotopono (the only Waiwai village on the upper Essequibo and the one to which most of the Shepariymo villagers have moved), I found that the clusters had retained much of their previous emphasis, but with a greater number of people in each claiming Mawayena, Parukoto, and Wapishana identities. Akotopono was thought of, by all who lived there, to be a Waiwai village with a language and culture that was distinctly Waiwai. For them, however, the community of the village and those imagined to be aligned to it in other villages were not 'tribal' in the way the official records understood them to be. There was, for example, no theory of biogenetic racial identity that could help to produce a style of imagining a horizontal comradeship of community among them. If a common limit existed for a community, it was not one that could be imagined as tribal, ethnic, or national, but rather as the extent and density of moral obligations to *ewtoto*, that is, to relatives living primarily in the village.

In Waiwai interpretations, no form of supreme political jurisdiction can be given to an imagined dominion other than to the *ewto* (village) or, more correctly, the *ewtopono* ('place-where-people-live'). In the village, it is the extent and density of relationships with *epeka* (non-marriageable relatives) and *wošin* (marriageable persons and persons related by marriage) which sustain the actuality of the *ewtopono*. However, apparently like the central pole of a traditional Waiwai communal house, it is the *kayaritomo* (village leader) who holds these combined and overlapping relationships in place and arguably sets the very capacity by which they may optimally be played out as *ewtopono*. It is the village leader who first initiates movement to the site of a new village, and it is his primary kinsmen who follow him there. It is the relatives of these primary kinsmen who attract additional members. Given time and the greater concentration of relations, the village site itself even becomes intellectually and emotionally associated with the village leader's name, sometimes long after the village has been abandoned. Hence the political integrity of a village ultimately depends upon its leader's focal position in a network of familiar relatives who can avail themselves of the opportunity to live with their leader and kinsman at the same site. Here residential proximity certainly assists the influences of kinship obligations that in turn activate and produce the kind of political order necessary for the existence of the *ewtopono*. It could be argued that the very logic of political leadership crystallizes around maintaining the amicable residential proximity of kinsmen, for in doing so it sustains itself and the village polity. This works because, in the Waiwai schema of proper human interac-

tions, kinship morality binds individuals together as highly valued social persons and, through the observed credibility of regular exchanges between kinsmen, the amity of kinship objectifies and thus confirms persons as individuals committed to wider village relationships.

The extent to which the moral amity of kinship can be seen to flow in order to bind or to maintain firm ties does have its limits.[6] Often determined by the favourable network of exchange relations with and surrounding the village leader, the capacity of village solidarity relies a great deal on the strength of amicable relations expressed in the reciprocity between the centrally and marginally positioned members of the local kinship community. It is, in the long run, the susceptibility of the weaker relations on the margins—often caused by the pressures of greater moral obligations to closer kin in directions away from the village leader's focal centre—that allows for the incursion of frayed relations, the lack of congenial reciprocity, and the transformation of amicability into hostility. Each ultimately contributes to the dissipation of the village as a political entity. As such, the intimate on-going prestations and counter-prestations of displayed amity, funnelled as they are through relations with and surrounding the village leader, all help to produce and maintain, as *ewtopono*, the sentient experience of the legitimate political community.[7]

In the strict Waiwai sense of not having solidified the crucial principles of amicable relations to the *ewtopono*, the Taruma cannot be included in the same category of peoples as the 'Waiwai'. In the cultural imagination of the Waiwai, the Taruma disappeared from this class of being when, like roaming peccaries, their anger kept them and their village constantly on the move.

Waiwai culture places the Taruma in a special social category called Niriwana ('Angry People'). Taken from the verb *rïwo* ('to be angry'), the word *niriwana* seeks to convey all the Waiwai understand about the Taruma's preference for wandering the forest rather than settling in villages on the banks of forested rivers. When referring to the Taruma presence, the word *maya* ('to be wild') is never used, not because notions of wildness and pacification do not adequately convey

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[6] In the Waiwai case, this has a good deal to do with the structural rule and practice of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage and the preference for uxorilocal residence, both of which facilitate and set limits to village exchanges (Turner 1979; Rivière 1984).

[7] Rivière has recently published a very fine article on Lowland South American 'House Societies' (1995), where, at least for the Guianas, a useful model has been presented for thinking anthropologically about residence and community. My only comment here would be to say that, for the Waiwai, they do not 'use the terms "house" and "village" interchangeably' (ibid.: 190): for them, *mïïmo* ('house') and *ewto* ('village') are separate terms referring to empirically different referents. Yet, an additional cognitive meaning can be determined which does give both terms a similar point of reference. House and village can indeed be interchangeable, but only at the point where they reference the concept of community, for whether the Waiwai talk about house or village, they understand these to be logically occupiable by kinsfolk living together.

the contrast between sedentary village life and nomadic forest existence, but rather because the logic of wildness does not carry the full implications of what it means to wander as a people. In the Waiwai scheme of being, to be angry is to be fighting off fear, to be embattled against the cold feeling of dread collecting in the cavity of one's chest—a sure sign of the imminent departure of breath and perhaps of life itself. Hence whenever the Waiwai come across the tracks of the Niriwana, hear their dogs, or gain a distant glimpse of them from the river, their cultural knowledge allows them to interpret such evidence as the result of a people exhibiting anger against the fear of *wahi* ('death').

Wahi has the primary meaning of death by a stranger who is an enemy. In Waiwai, the identity of stranger and enemy can be erased or suppressed considerably through intimate and regular exchanges (particularly of food and sex) between individuals who decide to live with or near each other. It could even be argued, albeit tenuously, that exchanges that work to extradite the stranger and the enemy are actually engaged in to avoid death itself. However, in the first instance, groups of individuals who regard themselves as being on familiar and friendly terms with each other gain security in these relationships from an understanding that their exchanges coincide and indeed encourage a sharing in actual parts of their physical and spiritual bodies. It is clearly understood, for example, that precisely because they share in each other's bodily being, such intimate partners would not seek to harm each other, for to do so would be to harm themselves. This crucial understanding of a shared being, which functions to perpetuate the theory of village polity, is the very pulse of the principle of political organization. Given such a criterion and, by definition, not being bound by the same obligations of exchange as amicable partners and, ipso facto, not sharing in the same degree of vital being, strangers have no moral commitment of amity; they always possess the potential and perhaps even the intention to kill.[8] What they kill is certainly an individual's physical body, but of course, with this act of destruction, they also place in jeopardy all those who shared in the dead individual's life. To understand this fully, we have to recognize that, in the Waiwai experience, killing the body takes its complete meaning from the eating of meat.

The complicated logic of their ideas about the human body being meat subject to the predatory actions of hostile agents gains much of its credibility from their

[8] The link between affine and stranger has long been a problematic topic for the anthropology of Lowland South America (Kensinger 1984; Overing Kaplan 1975; Rivière 1969). The literature often highlights the need to maintain a difference between the strangeness of affinity and the familiarity of consanguinity, if for no other reason than to demonstrate how the latter defeats the former, with its greater tendency towards social harmony. Like affinity, interestingly, the natural dangers of meat-eating frequently appear as necessary evils which only culture can control.

own empirical knowledge of what takes place when other carnivores kill.[9] The rationale here is that one kills only to eat. In Waiwai practice, merely to lay an aggressive hand upon another can be interpreted as an intent to kill and to eat. Death, however, is not just the result of a body consumed, but rather, and more emphatically, the result of a permanently dislodged vital essence called *ekati*.

For the Waiwai, all death results from the intentional implementation of a hostile human will. In their ideas, the corporeal body of the victim dies because its vital life-giving essence (*ekati*) has been permanently removed by mystical forces deliberately set in motion by the enmity of human intent. The victim's body suffers its loss of life from the actions of a killer, whose identity initially presents itself as being difficult to ascertain. This is because, in Waiwai society, anyone can claim access to the death-dealing force of mystical violence. Constantly available, violence, in this regard, directly contributes to the killer's anonymity. As with every death, therefore, access to, and the availability of, violence produces the inevitable question of 'Who done it?'

Whenever someone dies, the immediate response is for the relatives of the deceased to interrogate the innocence of every village member. Traditionally this was done through the ritual dialogue of *oho*, in which each villager would be given the opportunity to deny formally any accusations of personal guilt. The ideological Waiwai focus is less here, it seems to me, on a concern for the qualitative nature of human mortality than on knowing the human character and capacity for violence. It is knowledge about the emotional disposition of those with whom one mainly lives that prevails. Locating where bad intentions reside, and making sure when they erupt to deter them from accessing violence, become the required aspects of social harmony. When this fails, however, and even without knowing the murderer's identity, a knowledge of hostile intentions remains the guiding fact toward exposing the killer.

As already mentioned, the Waiwai configure violence in the same intellectual frame as eating. In their view, the ultimate rational conclusion of killing has to be for food. This has social, albeit ambivalent approval when the object of violence carefully confines itself to vegetable and animal life. In the case of homicide, however, although the interpretation of killing in order to eat the victim does not alter significantly, the question of legitimacy makes the victim's death more problematic. To kill another human being illegitimately is likened to the actions of the solitary anti-social jaguar devouring its prey: the murderer kills and eats the body of the victim without either cooking or sharing it, the decomposing body disappearing into the carnivore's mouth like food. Conversely, to kill legitimately—that is, to hunt or feud in honourable vengeance—is to behave like a proper social being

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[9] This, of course, is a not uncommon view for lowland South American cultures, but see Hugh-Jones (1996) for a much more detailed and provocative discussion about Amerindian sensitivity on this matter.

governed by the moral obligations of society, in which the cooking and sharing of the victim's body locate the hunter and the warrior firmly in the community. A successful hunter will not only make sure the animal he has killed is transformed into cooked meat before it is consumed, he will also go to some lengths (even after collective hunts and communal meals) to make sure he never eats the meat of an animal he himself has killed. Also, after the cremation or burial of the deceased, the avenger of a dead relative will take the remaining bones and place them in a hollow bamboo in order to 're-cook' them. If the bamboo bursts in the heat of the fire, the murderer will die. While an illegitimate act of violence therefore tends to expel the murderer from society and make him or her the target of a legitimate use of violence, legitimate violence itself succeeds in reaffirming the hunter and the warrior inside society as beings of esteem and prestige. Nevertheless, in both cases, it is hostile human intentionality that remains the initial source of violence, while the mystical force it stimulates is the actual cause of death.

The cannibalism of illegitimate violence expresses itself in what the Waiwai call *tono* ('fatal blowing'). The instrumental cause of the ejection of *ekatï* ('vital essence') from its corporeal host are the strong persuasive words of *tono*, select words obtained from the mystical vocabulary of the speaker's helping spirits. The prospective murderer sings the song softly, punctuating its lyrics with a blowing or puffing sound from the lips, which send the words to their target like arrows. The deadly words either directly force the *ekatï* of the intended victim out of its corporeal host or influence some other means of achieving the expulsion. *Ekatï* is thought of as a vigorous substance whose ability to influence material life stems from being, in origin, the source of all living things. Being ejected and unable to return to the corporeal body of its host, the vital substance of individual life rejoins its original collective base in the stratified mystical realms of the cosmos. Ideally, it is here that the distinctive parts of an individual's vitalities roam after death. The *ekatï* of the human eye, for example, occupies the area between the earth and the first stratum (Maratu-yena, 'Guan people') of the celestial realm (*kapu*). The *ekatï* of the human chest, if it is not placated by the vengeance of kinsmen, will angrily roam the earthly stratum in solitary phantom form. Temporary separation of the victim's *ekatï* causes illness; permanent separation results in death. Because the deadly words of *tono*, working from a distance, precipitate the separation, they help to ensure the killer's anonymity. Lethal mystical words, like projectiles from the mouth, bring about the death of another human, and death, in Waiwai ideas, can only be initiated by ill will for the explicit purpose of illicit consumption.

Only those people who are motivated by their own ill will actually make use of deadly mystical force. In such cases, public knowledge and recall about the existing nature of relations between community members provide the resident community of the deceased with the identities of possible suspects. In addition, public perceptions of past events and bodies capable of igniting emotions leading to violence also helps to establish the identity of the guilty. The shared and unofficial

obligations of the living to the recently murdered victim begin with having to lo-
cate and assemble the evidence of the active presence of individual human ill will.
Such evidence can be achieved with relative ease, because the range of expectant
emotions assumed to be felt by people with ill intent are generally known to result
from specific observable actions. The actions producing the felt emotions, which
tend to lead to and govern a matching set of responses, actually expose the pres-
ence of the bad intent that activates and uses violence. For example, recalling and
perceiving that so-and-so had been on the losing side of a dispute allows observers
to assume that the losing individual had felt some anger or emotional turbulence
and became possessed of sufficient ill will to seek retribution against his or her
opponent. The subsequent sickness or death of the offending disputant who caused
the anger confirms both the bad intentions of the shamed person and the actual
effect of the angry person's violent retribution. Taken together, felt emotions of
human ill will and mystical violence cause sickness and death, but they also pro-
vide the very clues to determine the identity of the individual contributing to the
ailment and/or fatality.

In Waiwai moral philosophy, everyone should exercise the social responsibil-
ity to guard against wrongly arousing his or her own destructive desires. The gen-
eral availability of violence as a weapon, and the link between ill will and the
actual use of violence, apparently compel collective social harmony to depend
upon the individual's emotional calm and bodily discipline. Here, where violence
can only be accessed through human intention and practice, in an analytical sense
it results from an articulation between the attribute of individual human will and
the resources of mystical energy. In this sense, violence is inalienable to the indi-
vidual, because only the individual can transform its force into the product of de-
struction. Yet, in being irreducible to the individual, violence is potentially the
culminating sum of a culturally built identity. In becoming a full social person, the
individual consciously ascribes to the body and the self an acquired knowledge of
ownership over the potential use of violence—a knowledge that actually consti-
tutes the full development of personhood.

Graphically expressed on the adorned body with traditional signs of adulthood
and gender, but also more substantively in the achievement of marriage and the
making of children, the emotional base for the will to violence becomes a known
property, subject to customary displays of control by the individual. Being able to
exhibit constraint over the emotional base of violence expresses both an individ-
ual's commitment to society and the effective means of achieving collective social
harmony. It could be said that society has, in such cases, indirectly persuaded the
individual to perform, on its behalf, the fundamental task of managing social tur-
moil. Here the onus for control does not rest in any centralized institution of gov-
erning, but on the overlapping multifaceted realms of complete personhood. In
these social domains, that is, actually through personhood, the individual retains
legitimate access to the use of violence. In other words, the individual uses the

moral constraints in kinship and marriage to police human intentionality and se-
cure harmonious residential fellowship. However, it is precisely because morality
becomes meaningful only within these domains that the constant availability of
violence keeps individual control and collective harmony vigilant.

The social and cultural requirement to live together offers an opportunity to
express, monitor, and manage the amicable relations of collective social life.
Without the fact of residence with others, the need for emotional calm, the poten-
tial for violence and the ideal of community fellowship could not find their current
form and meaning. For the effect of residence to perform its task best, however,
the patterned ties of kinship and the institution of marriage must also be active, for
they are the very means through which affection can be shared and violence de-
nied. The dominant moral obligations to love rather than hate and to be kind rather
than hurtful towards those who are related to you and those with whom you live
have to be constantly practised. Yet each individual's capacity for affection is
counterpoised by his or her known potential for violence. Indeed, as already men-
tioned, the very occurrences of sickness and death confirm the deliberate imple-
mentation of violence. Whenever sickness and/or death occur, the veracity of
violence acknowledges itself from within the collective substance of social knowl-
edge and, at the same time, reaffirms the open character of its accessibility. While
it is, on the one hand, access to and the availability of violence that directly con-
tribute to the murderer's anonymity and indirectly produce the inevitable demand
for suspects, it is, on the other hand, the murderous ill will of somatic emotions
which exposes itself to the community of the deceased as the incriminating evi-
dence of guilt and as the definitive means of confirming the murderer's identity.

Among the Waiwai, it is said that anger in the face of death keeps the body
hot. It presumably keeps the individual conscious of the fact that life still exists in
his or her body and that the *ekatï* or vital essence remains intact in its corporal
hearth. Fear is kept at bay because fear turns the body cold. A cold body signals to
observers an absence of the heat-generating substance of *ekatï*. The *ekatï* can leave
its corporal host and wander around. Too long an absence, however, lowers the
temperature of the body, indicating death or a state of near death. When sick, the
body can be subject to uncontrollable pain precisely because its absent *ekatï* can-
not protect it against the malignancy of its assailant. The strength and vigour asso-
ciated with the sentient body under self-control are believed to be produced by the
heat of *ekatï* in its proper place. Hence no movement of an *ekatï* outside its origi-
nal host is ever accidental: it occurs during either the voluntary process of dream-
ing and shamanic journeying, or the involuntary processes of sickness and death.
In the latter cases, it is the hostile actions of an unfriendly assailant that provide
the impetus for the ejection and absence of the *ekatï*. Regardless of whether the
attack on the body was made using an arrow or an axe, or magical 'blowing', the

mechanics of death remain the same.[10] The dead are always the victims of the intentional actions of other humans using either spiritual and/or material means to achieve the permanent separation of the *ekatï* from its original host.

In Waiwai explanations, therefore, the Taruma wander the forest as a real physical presence because they have turned their anger against the fear of death. The pragmatism of such anger functions as part of an intellectual apparatus which gives meaning to moral obligations and social identity. Possessed in concentrated form by its single owner, but shared in minute particles through sustained reciprocal prestations with members of the residential group, an *ekatï*, and hence the reticular community of *ekatï*, can be placed in danger if anger is quelled and dies. While anger simmers, death is kept at bay. Meta-pragmatically, at least in Waiwai interpretations, anger has functioned to allow the Taruma to avoid being consumed by strangers from outside their roaming presence.

The Patron State: Textuality and Death

To expose my own implicit assumptions about the constructive character of ideas, I am going to offer a rather truncated historical description and critical discussion of the Guyanese state. My aim is not to privilege the relativity of ideas over the absolutism or universalism of truth, but rather to emphasis how culture and society play their part in producing meaning in an ever-changing world.

Let me immediately remark on the potency of the state as an ideological fantasy. It has been suggested that because only individuals, not the state, possess power the state cannot exist—that it is, in other words, a cultural fiction (Radcliffe-Brown 1970 [1940]: xxiii). In this view, the empirical individual, a unit of political society, is, at least in part, a biological organism of energy, and as such, a source of reactive sanctions (Radcliffe-Brown 1971 [1952]; Fried 1967).[11] Hence the control and regulation of energized sanctions, here construed as physical force, become the special concerns of political organization (Radcliffe-Brown 1970 [1940]: xxiii). By being the origin and constitutive form of physical power, it is therefore the individual and not the state that is deemed to be real. According to this rationale, the state cannot truly exist because it is in reality nothing more than

[10] I think it is because of this Waiwai reasoning (which I have found confirmed in the anthropology on other lowland South American societies) that I have always been intrigued by the refusal to give as much credibility to Amerindian ideas on death by witchcraft as to their ideas on death by ballistic warfare (Chagnon 1968; Asch and Chagnon 1975).

[11] Radcliffe-Brown was of course seeking to make the perfectly respectable point that social beings were both individuals and persons, and that the legitimate object of social anthropology was the person. Nevertheless (and possibly because of his disdain for culture), he never considered the possibility that even the biology of the individual was subject to cultural interpretation.

the totality of the power of individuals. But why would society maintain this illusion to the point where it is no longer perceived as such, where the fiction appears, in fact, to be more palpable than the reality?[12]

Certainly with many modern societies the state has been imbued with the identity of a tangible phantom: the visible political apparition of abstracted human force. It has indeed been argued that it is this quality of phantasm, lodged in the state, which makes it appear so potent (Durkheim 1950; Taussig 1992). Totalized in society and transferred to the state as an almost sacred force, the energized power of the individual has been allowed to rise up above all else to serve as representative polity (that is, not that the state represents the individual but that the individual represents the state, the state being the 'real' body). The principal tactic of the state in this regard is to appropriate the 'real' power of the individual and make it work for society. Being more than the individual, and being reified in the fiction of its singular presence, the state must constantly verify and represent itself as an autonomous entity. Beyond the reality of the sentient human body, in the collectivity of the social the state appears as a potent ideological fantasy capable of securing and serving society as its limit.

As it rises, turning its phantasmagorical bulk to engage the material presence of its source—individuals—the modern state perceives its subjects as primarily corporeal. When it deals with its citizens, it is mainly from the perspective of managing a biogenetically determined physical body. From this viewpoint (certainly if we follow the controversial argument that the state is but an epiphenomenon of the individual in society), the state's form mimics its parent organism. Ideally indivisible, centric, and autonomous, it sees itself—the body politic—as a real physical entity with an anatomy of circulatory and respiratory systems maintaining the supply and flow of social life. It can possess a sovereign 'head', a ministerial 'head', an administrative 'head', it can have 'arms' pertaining to the police and the military, party 'cells', and legal 'chambers'. And one can often hear it being said that the state has 'atrophied' or that government has 'decayed'. After a while, discerning who mimics whom becomes unimportant: in the end, it matters little where we locate the original. What does remain of consequence, however, is the thorough belief in the way the mutual bodies work to maintain their respective lives. Reinforcement from various quarters about how social life should proceed in order to avoid the irreparable cessation of functioning systems carefully adds veracity to the prescribed image of the state. It certainly helps to verify, using all kinds of pre-

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[12] I do not consider it to be an overstatement to say that, when we in our own society think and speak about the state, it is often as if it were a living thing. This is not just a case of collapsing the idea of the state into its representative agents or officials, and then confusing the latter for the former. Indeed, when frustrated by attempts to bring legal proceedings against the state, many civil litigants frequently direct themselves instead against individual government representatives to achieve a successful lawsuit.

sumed independent sources, that the modern state operates in ways seemingly similar to biogenetic natural life.

What this has meant for the ways in which the state has operated and still operates in places like the Antilles has been the sustained presence of a politics of phantasmagorical physical difference. Articulated historically in terms of race and ethnicity, physical difference has been the primary constituent factor in the political configuring of Caribbean societies. The very character of power relations between 'imperial' Europe and Caribbean 'dominions' found expression through the bodily traits of their participants. Quantitatively construed and highly valued for its assumed ability to produce effects, particularly those of maintaining order (Balandier 1972 [1967]), political power concentrated itself in the cosmopolitan heartlands of 'white' states. It was made to flow through the administrative arteries of governance out to the colonies, where 'dark' subjects toiled to sustain the rhythmical beat of a transoceanic capitalism (Mintz 1974; Lewis 1983). In this way—that is, by continually reasserting a natural tie between power and the systemic process of colonial governments—white masters assumed possession of more power than their dark subjects, thus endowing the relationship with its appearance of asymmetry. With an accumulation and exercise of power, white states sought to discipline dark bodies into working more efficiently toward sustaining and replicating the life-force and structure of their existing polities. The differences in the dissymmetry of power between Europe and the colonies were made to reflect the physical differences between the racial and ethnic bodies of states and subjects. Conquest, slavery, indentured servitude, manumission, franchise, and dependency all called forth strategies of engagement which privileged those with more power concentrated at the pulsing heart of European states (Césaire 1972; Patterson 1982; Todorov 1987).[13] Carefully and systematically, the commoditization or objectification of work, liberty, civil rights, and independent statehood consolidated rather than reduced the differences between white states and dark subjects.[14]

[13] In case it has not been made clear in the text, let me say here that this idea of quantified power (which looks so much like productive labour) derives historically from a system that objectifies force in such a way that it appears that it can be physically possessed.

[14] This rather tight argumentation can be loosened up somewhat by explicitly stating that my view of the historical relations of power between Europe and its colonies has been influenced by an application of Foucault's proposition that 'truth' is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements. 'Truth' is linked in a circular relation with systems of power that produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extends it—a 'regime' of truth (1984: 74). My overview, therefore, sees the sixteenth-century European conquest of 'dog-headed cannibals' (Leach 1977: 35; Todorov 1987: 15), the New World enslavement of 'socially dead person[s]' (Patterson 1982: 5), and the dehumanization of the 'traitorous creole' (Césaire 1972) or 'self-mutilated black' (Lamming 1983) as being stated

Even in those historical moments when colonies sought for political independence from Europe, the effects of their long-term exposure to imperial power were such that many of them actually demanded polities similar to those to which they had previously been subjected. In countries like Guyana, where British rule had inculcated a deep history of English political culture, refusal to give at least the impression of adopting the Westminster model of government brought about violent struggles between local aspirants, surely delaying for many years the process to full independence (Latin America Bureau 1984). For so long a part of the motherland's contorted body, and certainly after many painful contractions, this infant state finally gained its political autonomy on 26 May 1966. Even in denial, it was a legitimate child of Britain: dark in complexion, 'underdeveloped' economically, but still a rightful heir of British colonial culture. Although the argument has since been made many times and in many places that it never really achieved 'true' democracy, and that it grew into unrecognizable forms of its infant self (e.g., into the Co-operative Republic in 1970 with, from 1980, a constituted executive presidency), Guyana nevertheless directly inherited the governing genes of its parent. Possibly the most revealing evidence of this is its almost immediate attempts to build what was considered to be a new nation, separate and distinct from its mother.

It was never just a question of acquiring sovereign legislatures, independent executives, and autonomous judiciaries, but rather a highly ingrained subliminal recognition that any such governing could not be made operative—indeed, could not even be legitimately suggested—without a national community to serve. In one unbroken motion of historical continuity, the fundamental principles of being governed were transmitted from parental Britain to filial Guyana; the concept of the state made itself indispensable to the offspring by claiming to act on behalf of the nation, that is, to bring Guyanese-ness into actual reality.[15] Already thoroughly conditioned by the effects of imperialism and therefore highly conscious of 'simultaneity',[16] the infant state took hold of nationalism not only to legitimize its very existence, but also to surmount the continual prospect of social death. Simultaneity had worked for the Empire to draw together, both across space and time, the 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991) of British-ness. To appreciate fully the

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products or extensions of power induced by an attached 'ensemble of rules' (Foucault ibid.) given high social and cultural status.

[15] I anticipate receiving many criticisms for my suggestion that the political independence of postcolonial countries is not historically discontinuous. My supporting argument here would be that I am not necessarily talking about formal observable structures, but rather the conceptual apparatus which produces the various forms of government. In this regard, I do not consider postcolonial states to be manifestations of changed polities.

[16] Here I am following Benedict Anderson, who talks about the modern concept of 'temporal coincidence...measured by clock and calendar' (1991: 24), which enables an imagining of national community.

dramatic ways in which this occurred, one only has to consider the various interlocking cultural strategies of empire, like, for example, annual celebrations of monarchy, seasonal·sporting rituals, the design and use of a distinct currency, and the printing and broadcasting of the English language. In the same ways that British homogeneity was imagined in order to avoid the death of the idea of the imperial state, so too was Guyanese-ness made to live in its independent filial polity. In doing so, however, it continued to imagine itself principally in terms of its recessive racial and ethnic genes.

When the Guyanese state evokes nation-ness ('One People, One Nation, One Destiny'), it summons up among a limited and sovereign community of six distinct racial and ethnic groups an image of 'a deep, horizontal comradeship' (Anderson 1991: 7). The temporal and spatial coincidence of Guyanese-ness simultaneously brings together an ideologically understood population of divided species. A discourse borrowed from biology that speaks in terms of populations united and divided by heredity, differences of race and ethnicity are not necessarily targeted for nation-ness in order to eradicate the 'natural' boundaries between constituent groups: in fact, such differences serve specifically to make the agenda of nation-building the principal prerogative of the state. When viewing its community as African/Black, East Indian/Coolie, English/White, Portuguese/Potugee, Chinese/Chinee, and Amerindian/Buck, the Guyanese state envisages individual subject bodies biogenetically joined together in these separate natural groupings (Despres 1975; Drummond 1980; Sanders 1987; Smith 1962). Presumably unable by themselves to act beyond the boundaries of their own individual and group interests, these entities must be made to experience a tangible communion of themselves above their separateness for the independent survival and freedom of the state. Locating itself in the position of being the only legitimate force capable of organizing and managing the collective communing, the state evokes Guyanese-ness as the political panacea against the so-called 'natural' disease of civil conflict—a social illness so debilitating that it can not only clog the pulmonary arteries of the body politic leading to a breakdown of its vital functions, but also reduce the protective properties of the state, making it vulnerable to predation from outside hostile forces. Racial and ethnic differences ironically function to help maintain the power of the state and its particular evocation of Guyanese nationalism.[17]

Few, I think, would dispute the point that language is possibly the most effective medium for evoking the simultaneity of national imaginings (Anderson 1991; Hobsbawm 1990). In Guyana, as in other ex-British colonial states, the English language has enabled the different so-called natural exclusivities to visualize the national community. Operating in dominant opposition to the vibrant vernacular of

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[17] Needless to say, when one or the other racial or ethnic group is perceived to have taken exclusive command of the state apparatus, the essential aspects of their identity and interests will be said, rightly or wrongly, to override the legitimate concerns of the state. To all other groups in such a scenario, the state will of course appear to be acting illegitimately.

the different groups, English ably serves as the 'standard' voice and text of Guyanese statehood. It is the language of law, art, news, and commerce; it is indeed the language of literacy. Yet we cannot forget that, by being literate in English, the filial polity perpetuates within itself the compromising evidence of its colonial heritage. In a rather 'Calibanesque' way, although the once silent histories and alienated identities of its representative citizens can now be heard and redeemed, the only legitimate way of doing so is in the language of the colonizer (Brathwaite 1984; Glissant 1989; Nixon 1987). Made to release in voice and text the consciousness of its historically oppressed peoples, the language of the decolonizing state speaks and writes in a vocabulary and grammar that bear witness to its racial and ethnic diversities, yet in doing so links each in the common agenda of their joint nation-ness. Here, very much through language, Guyanese identity, unity, and destiny have been manipulated so that they depend upon the constant textual vigilance of the state. In this regard, the state has paid particular attention to the recognition and conservation of the boundaries of internal group differences. Thus, for example, the national census and state registers tenaciously insist on knowing the Guyanese population by recording its numbers and percentages principally in terms of race and ethnicity. In this vigilant meticulousness of counting and classifying itself, the state not only attributes a specific existence and identity to each individual subject, but also conveniently confers upon itself the credibility and power to document such presence. In taking account of the national community, the state's textual documentation brings forth the conceptual knowledge of an imagined Guyanese solidarity as an objectified reality.[18] The content and edge of its maximal community can at last be known in its presumed non-colonial distinctiveness. In being known as Guyanese in this way, that is, in the tangible textuality of official state documents, a particular kind of modern omnipotence has successfully been bestowed.

Whenever the Guyanese nation-state officially takes account of the Amerindian side of its identity, it invariably seeks to do so in terms of a rather benevolent patronage. Indeed, it often considers itself to be involved in a patron-client relationship with all of its less-developed 'children'. In almost all its official discourses with its least 'civilized', least 'sophisticated' child, however, it explicitly takes the position of guardian sponsor, in which role it sees itself as the authorized spokesperson responsible for the correct upbringing of its juvenile charge. In the past (as revealed from such legal documents as the 1902 Amerindian Protection Ordinance and the 1910 Aboriginal Indian Protection Ordinance), it concerned itself with protecting its ward from the debilitating effects of contact from its other constituent subjects. But from around 1948 to the present, the overall tenor of the

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[18] Indeed much is made of the fact that Guyana is the only English-speaking country in South America. Clearly for this reason, which, of course, is related directly to British colonial history, I think it is fair to say that Guyana has many more political and cultural ties with the Antilles.

relationship has changed from one of protection to one of integration (Ministry of Information and Culture 1970; Sanders 1987).[19]

Caring more about the monopolization of its sugar industry on the coast than it did about mineral and rubber extractions from the interior, the colonial government emphasized 'protection' as an effective political tactic to discourage its precious labour force from permanently migrating into the interior from the coastal estates (Rodney 1981). Designated interior zones were legally off-limits to members of non-Amerindian groups, who required special written permission from government to enter Amerindian villages and districts. In particular, non-Amerindian visitors were ordered not to sell or provide Amerindians with intoxicating drinks. The colonial government had no desire to promote drunken stupors in an already tenuously responsive subject. As its least sophisticated child—or perhaps more accurately, the group least affected by the disciplinary techniques of Western culture—an intoxicated Amerindian community might expose the state's inability to govern. Being unresponsive to civil obedience, the Amerindian could not only undermine state authority, but also indirectly curtail the government's ability to influence a coastal work-force that had been rendered docile to produce sugar.

An independent post-colonial Guyana has more than just the central concern of coastal sugar to contend with. Because of the politics it inherited from Britain, Guyana cannot, for example, ignore the fact it shares and disputes borders with Venezuela, Brazil, and Surinam. Amerindians and the vast interior they occupy have become crucial factors in maintaining the territorial integrity of the nation-state. In 1966, official figures claimed that Amerindians numbered 31,460 individuals, with an estimated annual rate of increase of 3.2% (Ministry of Information and Culture 1970). In 1982, when the national population was recorded to be 803,000 people with an average growth rate of 1%, Amerindians were said to constitute 5% of the total population (Latin America Bureau 1984), that is, 40,150 people. One more recent estimate gives the Amerindian population as 43,000 (Forte 1990:1). Given that 90% of its less than one million population live on the coastal plain, the Guyanese government is sometimes accused of being disproportionately preoccupied with the Amerindians, most of whom live in the interior.

The 'savage' child who was once protected from the capitalist economy of the coast is now vehemently encouraged to take an active part in the collective national community. For the very same reason that the other racial and ethnic groups were mandated to subject themselves to English culture under British rule, Amerindians are now being persuaded to do the same for the Guyanese national agenda. To be more literate in the national language, more commercial in the national

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[19] Having been protected in the past by the agents and agencies of the colonial state, such as the commissioner, district officers, and the Department of Lands and Mines, on 28 March 1969 Amerindians were declared to be the direct responsibility of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Economic Development (Interior Development Department 1969).

economy, and more participatory in national politics offers obvious examples of an exposure to ways of thinking and behaving which make governing by the state more effective. While any modern-day state finds it difficult if not impossible to police every single one of its citizens and every inch of its territory, the most rational means it adopts to accomplish these ends are those where each citizen polices his or her own self and his or her own land, prospectively on behalf of the state. To this end, the most effective strategy available to the state is the integration of its subjects into the national community, where the inculcated common principles of culture mould a self-reflexive moral consciousness. The rhetoric of self-reliance, ownership, and civil rights only make sense in this context, when, having achieved the rhetorical goals, the subject can now imagine sacrificing them all for the sake of the nation. It is therefore unremarkable to find that the Amerindian, the so-called least developed of the nation-state's subjects, is the principal target for the political discourse on integration (Ministry of Information and Culture 1970; Interior Development Department 1969). From the point of view of the state they are, after all, children in possession of forces they do not know they possess and consequently do not know how to use. Thus we find, for example, the law and its legal text taking it upon themselves to objectify and represent the 'rights' of the Amerindian more than they do any other group (Amerindian Lands Commission 1969; Interior Development Department 1969; Sanders 1987). Needless to say, apart from the state's theoretical concern to constitute itself and to keep on doing so for the sake of its own existence, it assumes that it has to instil an obligation of patriotism in Amerindians in order for them to assist it in the difficult task of securing its vulnerable national borders and managing its sparsely populated interior. Thus, it seems that, until Guyanese patriotism simmers in the breast of each Amerindian, the government cannot afford not to continue its legal patronage of its 'undeveloped' child.

Amerindians remain fundamentally 'at risk' and thus 'risky' for the state because they are perceived as being tribal rather than national. This notion of tribal-ness is at the centre of the state's understanding of the Amerindian's lack of integration. It even determines governmental knowledge about what is an Amerindian. For example, Section 2, Chapter 58, Laws of Guyana, informs us that 'Amerindian means (a) any Indian of a tribe indigenous to the Colony or to neighbouring countries; (b) any descendant of an Amerindian within the meaning of paragraph (a) of this definition....' Here we see the state holding to the theory of heredity and the principles of biogenetic descent. What is supposedly transferred when the replicated and mutated racial genes of one Amerindian pass to another is an inherent bond with an original 'native' collective—an autochthonous Guyanese polity, less evolved, romantically closer to nature, and of course more primitive. What the statutes additionally objectify by actually having it written into the legal documents is that indigenous Amerindian tribal-ness contains an almost physical ingredient of restrictive moral relations. For the state, tribal-ness remains an obstacle in

the Amerindian's further development towards the higher, more modern morality of nation-ness. This unnecessarily keeps the Amerindian at the risky stage of juvenile development, and in this sense succours a flawed citizen, one susceptible to the corrupting influences of untrustworthy agents. Delinquent subjects cannot be tolerated in the nation-state. Citizens must be diligent in their duty of maintaining the greater comradeship of nationhood. Treachery, voluntary or involuntary, cuts into the body politic. Tribal-ness identifies Amerindians as being vulnerable to this weakness and as such justifies the kind of relationship of patronage that the state has with its child-like client. Of all the ways in which the state's textual deployment of Amerindian identity serves to legitimate and authenticate its national form, it is this particular one of tribal-ness that allows it entry into the topic of Taruma death.

As noted in the introduction, whenever the state projects the image of the Amerindian in its discursive forms of national presence, it does so with the acquired knowledge that Guyana possesses nine distinct tribes. In its official texts, the state invariably presents the Akawaio, Arawak, Arecuna, Carib, Makushi, Patamona, Waiwai, Wapishana, and Warrau tribes as its constitutive Amerindian presence. There exists, in other words, no recognition by the state of the current Taruma presence. Depending on one's point of view, of course, this absence might mean many things, from a serious lack of constitutional representation to actual freedom from the surveillance techniques of the state. Indeed, with respect to the Amerindian presence as a whole, limiting the state's knowledge of it does have the pragmatic function of concisely framing the totality of this group for the equable or democratic rendering of state services. On the other hand, the meta-pragmatic utility of the limiting not only allows the state to know the boundaries of its Amerindian citizenry, but also, through this knowledge, permits it to instil the mechanisms of its control into the community.

To reiterate, therefore, for the Guyanese state the known 'Amerindian' amounts to an anatomically determined individual belonging to a biologically fixed racial, ethnic, and tribal totality. Only such Amerindians can be recognized and thus be eligible for legitimate access to the state's modern services in respect of medical treatment, education, and jobs. Under the restrictions of the country's national imaginings, therefore, the Taruma cannot represent a Guyanese presence today, and officially to all intents and purposes they are socially and physically dead.

Southern Text: The Scholarly Literature on the Taruma Presence and Absence

The published reports and academic texts of travellers and scholars regarding southern Guyana have reinforced and given credibility to the state's exclusion of the Taruma. These documents have been accepted as functioning in such capaci-

ties because they rely on technical procedures similar to those adopted by the state. Their text may perform different roles from the text produced by the state, but each depends upon very similar literary acts. In addition, in attempting to interpret the Amerindian presence or absence in the south, the documents of both scholars and the state have mainly been informed by the predominant biomedical theory of the body. The southern texts have captured and fixed tribal origins, geographic locations, and population figures as empirical data, all held together intellectually in the form of an anatomically differentiated and biomedically determined body. These relations between documents and literary acts, texts and bodies have remained constant in the production of statements on the Taruma Amerindian.

Perhaps more than any other means, literacy and the printed word have had the most to do with promulgating what we claim to know about the Amerindian presence in southern Guyana. Textual authority (initiated by the rituals and customs of formal schooling, and sustained by the supportive enterprises of a literate tradition) has always be able to generate a link between itself and knowledge (Bourdieu 1977). The basis of literate power derives from this bond between authority and knowledge. Presumably because of the high value placed on 'objective' knowledge, the quality of 'neutrality' texts are endowed with has provided some genres of writing with greater authority than others. Like legal writing, academic writing has been identified with seeking the maximum distance and the most impersonal style of communication between addresser and addressee (Street 1984: 75). This distancing and de-personalizing have, at least in our culture, long been associated with the representation of objectivity. For us, it seems, objectivity has acquired the mien of a justice of the peace and the bearing of a truth-sayer. Avoiding the subjective bias of the author and ensuring the empirical truth of knowledge appear to be serious concerns of the objectiveness sought after in legal and academic texts. Certainly, in much of the literature on the southern Amerindians of Guyana, the agenda has been to provide some honesty and truth to the represented statements about the Amerindian presence. However, the problem has been that in doing so—that is, in gaining 'objectivity' for itself—the literature has also thoroughly objectified Amerindians. Furthermore, as the very object of this literary knowledge—that is, in being reduced to the known object of a text— Amerindians have provided the producers of the literary act with substantiating credentials for the knowledge of these authors themselves, who then become subjects in the process. In other words, it has never been a matter of rendering truth and honesty to Amerindian knowledge, but rather of verifying the power of reading and writing, and confirming the authority of those producing the literary act.

The Taruma first acquired a known literary existence only after Portuguese slavers and missionaries contacted a group of Amerindians living at the mouth of the Rio Negro, Brazil, in 1657 (de Barros 1746: 250–2; Reis 1931: 44–8). Between 1657 and 1771 the European literature registers and re-registers the presence of a people named Taruma living in the vicinity of the Rio Negro (see Butt Colson and

Morton 1982; Rivière 1966–67 for an overview of this material). Presumably because of their proximity to Manao and the Amerindian practice of forming political alliances with neighbouring communities that had already been studied, it has been suggested that the registered Rio Negro Taruma were related to the Manaos of El Dorado fame (Butt Colson and Morton 1982: 214; Whitehead 1990: 25–6). Any confirmation of this relationship would of course throw the Taruma further back into the initial history of European contact with Amerindians. It is an appealing prospect, if for no other reason than it would extend our knowledge about a people from the past, a knowledge, I should quickly add, that would not only confirm our all-encompassing literary powers, but also reassert the superiority of our all-knowing subjectivity. Interestingly enough, informed by theories of evolutionary time and transferable genetic products, such literary knowledge also helps us satisfy our cultural propensity to invent and establish origins. There is for us, I think, a tremendous sense of satisfaction in being able to trace a line of evidence back into the past and to fix it to a point of origin. Knowing when and where someone or something begins, and for that matter comes to an end, seems to provide an almost omnipotent sense of control for the knower. Hence, in this particular case, being able to document the Taruma's physical presence and absence, their actual life and death, endows the literate knower with an immense sense of empowerment.[20]

Consider, then, the literary imagining and knowing about a Manao tribal presence in southern Guyana around 1722, a 'presence' which presumably did not settle but returned to Brazil (Butt Colson and Morton 1982: 211; Harris and de Villiers 1911). Consider also the recordings of a subsequent Taruma tribal presence in the same zone around 1764 that did stay (Evans and Meggers 1960; Rivière 1966–67). In doing so, ponder how the literary act exposed the Amerindian tribal presence to comments in the correspondences between state officials and traders, scholars, and missionaries, and to the 'totalizing classification' (Anderson 1991: 173) of national cartographers concerned with mapping state territories. As the content of these comments, interchanges, and maps, the tribal presence served the purposes of the literary actors far more than it could ever have done directly as a literary object. In the literary imagination, the colonial ownership of forested lands and colonial relationships with indigenous peoples were codified and given ways of operating which made sure that they were subjected to the control of the literary actor. For example, when the Europeans established, fought for, and took possession of the territorial zones, it only needed an extension of logical argument and the tracing of evidence to establish that 'tribes' like the

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[20] I have always been fascinated by written accounts of the 'first white man' or 'first European' to make contact with indigenous peoples, principally because such records invariably carry the anxious assumption of occidental superiority. Also they often imply that all other contacts, particularly those with non-occidentals, are somehow less authentic and less legitimate.

Manao and Taruma were at some time in the past 'migrants' (Rivière 1966–67) or 'intruders' (Evans and Meggers 1960) into the cartographic zone. Hence, it could even be claimed that the latter-day academic debate as to whether the southern Guyana Taruma originally came out of Manao from Brazil or, in fact, were from Surinam and named instead the 'Saluma' (Roth 1929: x; Rivière 1966–67: 303–4; Butt Colson and Morton 1982: 208–15) both stimulates a worthy desire for truth and knowledge, and provides substantive evidence of a continuing literary omnipotence aligned to state objectives.

Here, by applying relatively similar theories about ethnic difference, and working with moderately similar aspirations of objective truth and empirical knowledge, an intricate and complicated literary alliance converges upon the distinct tribal-ness of the Taruma Amerindian. In this project, the Taruma presence must either possess tribal distinctiveness already or be given it. Revealingly, an auto-denomination does come into affect. The information in the literature offers 'Kuase' rather than Taruma as the self-classification for the Amerindian presence on the upper Essequibo river in southern Guyana (see Butt Colson and Morton 1982: 214–15, 246 n. 39). However, this so-called self-attached ethnic nomenclature becomes yet another means of locating and classifying, and thus knowing, the physical Amerindian presence. Such a presence must migrate and intrude into the cartographic zones with its known nomenclatures in order to confirm the traces of the existence of the tribe and to reinforce the method that authors use to determine what is a distinct group. In this way, the Taruma presence helps to forge an intellectual bond between the abstracts of ethnicity and corporeality that the various scholars are using. In fact, so closely have they become related that recordings of the body's clinical death (that is, the demise of the Taruma) also claim to document the accumulative 'extinction' of its actual ethnicity.[21] Thus when Walter Roth in 1923 and Father Cary-Elwes in 1922 met those whom they said were the remnants of the Taruma dying, as they claimed, from repeated bouts of influenza and the detrimental effects of incestuous relations, they saw before them both the social and physical death of a tribal presence.[22] Interestingly enough, the good fa-

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[21] So strong is the correlation between biology and identity that even the aesthetics of the body and the portrayal of divinity cannot avoid the interpretative consequences. Consider the following: 'As we were approaching Wakokoada we caught sight of some Waiwais in a canoe, among whom was a boy of about 17. He had long flowing hair, as our girls used to have before they took to bobbing their hair. It was jet-black, as is always the case with pure-blooded Indians. He had such an exceedingly beautiful face that at first I could not believe my eyes: but as we drew nearer I saw that I was not deceived. Never before or since have I seen a face of boy or girl so exquisitely beautiful. What a perfect model that Indian would have made for an artist who wished to paint a picture of Our Lord!' (from the journals of Fr Cary-Elwes, cited in Bridges 1985: 138–9).

[22] However, consider the irony in this statement: 'There are only five pure-blood Waiwais remaining; the chief and one of his wives on the British side of the Acarai Mountains and the chief and two boys on the Brazilian side. The village on the British side has three men,

ther's suggested remedy, which he felt might slow down the death rate, was to persuade the Taruma to marry into the neighbouring tribes of Waiwai and Wapishana (Butt Colson and Morton 1982: 216). It seems that ethnicity and corporeality could be revived and brought back from extinction by similar means, presumably because they were locked together by the same theories of existence. None of this apparently worked, however, for as part of our current knowledge, no official recognition of a Taruma presence exists in southern Guyana today: the authoritative documents of the state and of scholars record the Taruma 'extinction' as occurring sometime in the mid-1920s.

Conclusion

For our own culture and those like it—influenced as they are by an imagining of nation-ness, literacy, and biomedical theories—to battle ethnic and clinical death with the emotions of fear and anger (and the principles of what could be called a 'thermo-medical' theory of the body) would seem like relying on the ineffective forces of sentiment and magic. In other words, cultures like the Waiwai and the Taruma foolishly appear to depend on an irrational knowledge and an unreal power. Yet, in the latter case, the practical logic driving the intellectual interpretations of fear and anger does seem to move social behaviour beyond the reaches of what may appear to us to be their effete strategy. After all, for the Waiwai, community existence can be independently confirmed by the methods of their own cultural evidence: they certainly do not have to depend upon the Guyanese state for such confirmation. The policy of confirming itself through knowing its subjects as citizens has given the state an almost omnipotent power of verification. Birth certificates, identification cards, postal addresses, deeds of ownership, etc., the originals of which are mostly held by the state, can confirm the existence of the biogenetic individual and, through the possession of these documents, the very existence of the state. Knowing itself and confirming such knowledge in this way legitimizes the grounds for the state to imagine the deep horizontal comradeship of its nation-ness. The fact that it can reach into a deep historical knowledge of itself provides the nation-state with a distinct kind of existence. On the other hand, the shallow memory of Waiwai residential existence does not produce a community with such centralized monolithic powers. Here the way in which society targets the individual to create social persons for the resident community is to satiate the malignant appetite of the body with prestations of amity, many gifts and signs of friendship. Knowing itself as relative rather than as citizen has empowered Waiwai

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one boy and four women. The chief has taken a wife from the Tarumas and he will soon become the chief' (Farabee 1967: 176).

society with a remarkably different kind of authority. As such it lives and dies under the auspices of its own intellectual logic.

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