Published in final edited form as:

J Lat Am Caribb Anthropol. 2013 March ; 18(1): 14–30. doi:10.1111/jlca.12001.

The Wealth of the Body: Trade Relations, Objects, and Personhood in Northeastern Amazonia

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Abstract

This article is an analysis of trade among the Trio (Suriname), and their relationship with objects and persons in their quest for manufactured goods. Based on data mostly collected in the Trio village of Tëpu in southern Suriname, it discusses trade from the point of view of Amerindian sociality, with regard to the nature of the interpersonal relations involved. I examine trade through the prism of an Amerindian understanding of personhood, the body and materiality, and show how these relationships tend to be fabricated over a lifetime, eventually becoming an integral and material part of the actors involved. This is manifested in the way Trio social space is constructed and inhabited as an extension of the body, and how objects acquired through trade come to elicit narratives of past exploits and travels to distant spheres of alterity. [Brazil, Guyana, indigenous people, social anthropology, Surinam]

They found a Nation of Indians, which never had seene white men, or Christians before, and could not be drawne to any familiar commerce, or conversation, not so much as with our Indians, because they were strangers to them, and of another Nation (Harris 1928:111).¹

WHEN EXPLORER AND COLONIZER Robert Harcourt reports the first inland journey that his brother Michael organized with Captain Harvey, a few of their own men, and sixty Amerindian helpers, he dwells on this surprising encounter with a group of indigenous inhabitants who refuse to trade with them. It is the first time since their landing on the northeastern shores of the Guiana region in the early 17th century that the party of English adventurers have come across Amerindians who refuse to engage with them in any form of social interaction; the incident is so remarkable that it is deemed worthy of a detailed description. Elsewhere, Harcourt recounts with satisfaction the ease with which the “friendly” nations of Indians have engaged in commerce since the English landed by the mouth of the river *Wiapoco* in May 1609.² In his dry prose he repeatedly emphasizes that the riches of this new land are to be found in its commercial exploitation and the extraction of its natural resources such as timber rather than in the deluded search for gold mines. These attainable riches are readily provided by the local inhabitants in exchange for “toies, and such like trifeling things” (1928:106). Laden with the long lists that became a regular feature of early explorers’ accounts (see Stedman 1806:(I) 417–9, (II) 197; Williamson 1923:27), Harcourt’s *Relation of a Voyage to Guiana* is one of the earliest texts documenting

¹This was said to take place on the river Arrawary, which is probably the Araguari River of the State of Amapá, Brazil.

²Today known as the River Oyapoque.

the extent to which social relations between explorers and colonizers, on the one hand, and local populations in Guianese Amazonia, on the other, were enacted through objects. Goods circulated, together with foods and information, in a process of mutual familiarization, which led to alliances and treaties. This historical trade was particularly important in the Guianas where the difficult geographical conditions worked against the development of early plantations and rendered colonies mere “trading factories” (Williamson 1923:46). But the phenomenon was not unique to the Guiana region. Trading objects under various regimes was soon to become the most prominent form of interethnic transaction across Lowland South America, as well as the rest of the American continent.³

From the point of view of the native population, the exchange of goods was not uniquely turned outwards to the foreign colonizers. Colonial powers established on the coast gradually came to constitute additional poles of attraction in an existing trade network that cut across the region. Archaeological data and oral narratives support the evidence provided by primary historical sources for the long-term existence of extensive regional networks involving Guianese indigenous populations trading objects and people among themselves, as well as with a wide array of non-Amerindians (Butt-Colson 1973, 1985; Dreyfus 1992; Farage 1991; Gassón 2000; Mansutti 1986; Thomas 1972; Versteeg 2003; Whitehead 1990). Some anthropologists writing on native Guiana have made a point of bringing forward the resilience and permanence of this regional interconnectedness,⁴ but few have tried to examine what it meant from the point of view of Amerindian sociality, and in particular the nature of the interpersonal relations involved. In fact, trade in Guiana stands in a category of its own, because, from an indigenous perspective, it represents a matter of personal processual bonds, rather than collective action. As various authors have observed, it tends to involve unrelated persons (that is, lacking consanguineal or affinal ties) who often come from spatially and socially distant residential units (Brightman 2008; Howard 2000; Rivière 1969; Van Velthem 2000). It thus follows the pattern emphasized by Santos-Granero (2007) and Killick (2009), according to which trading partnerships in native Amazonia represent forms of relationality that bypass the quotidian conventions required from the process of kinship-making.

My purpose in this article is to present a native Amazonian perspective on trade and trading partnerships. While taking trade to refer broadly to the transaction and circulation of objects between unrelated people, I will not rely on theoretical distinctions between categories such as gift and commodity (Gregory 1982; Humphrey and Hugh-Jones 1992), community and market (Gudeman 2008), or heterosubstitution and homosubstitution (Descola 2001). Instead, I aim to contribute toward an “amerindianization” of the idea of trade following Peter Rivière’s call for the amerindianization of anthropological concepts freed from the theoretical baggage of other regions (Rivière 1993). Informants, historical sources, and

³For Western Amazonia, see Gow (1991, 1993), Killick (2008), Taussig (1986) on the *habilitación*, also discussed by Bonilla (2007) for Brazilian Central Amazonia. See also Hugh-Jones (1992) for an analysis of barter in the Colombian Vaupès. Beyond Amazonia, see Brown and Vibert (2003) and Peers (2002) for historical studies of trading networks involving settlers and First Nations in North America.

⁴See authors in Gallois 2005 who refer to “networks of sociability” as including all forms of regional social interaction, including shamanic attacks, drinking ceremonies, ritual exchange, and trade.

previous anthropological work on the region have adopted the term to refer to an exchange of goods coming from the outside, including both handcrafted and manufactured objects.

However, I am concerned here with contemporary forms of trade, and therefore with manufactured objects. Among these objects, the most important include guns and ammunition, outboard motors, corrugated zinc roofs, everyday items such as flip-flops, nails, and clothes, and consumer items such as televisions and stereos. The historical and classificatory associations of this kind of trade with the older tradition of trade with maroons, in which the Trio gave hunting dogs and basketry in exchange for metal tools and glass beads, will also be included. But, in order to maintain the focus of the argument on trade with non-Amerindian outsiders, I do not include a discussion of older forms of trade of locally specialized artifacts (manioc graters, pottery, etc.) (Howard 2001). I also exclude a discussion of money, which is a complex subject that should be addressed separately (Brightman 2011). I will focus on dyadic trading partnerships, which will lead to a discussion of kinship and personhood, moving toward work on a concept of bodily wealth, resonating with Strathern's "magnified person" (Strathern 1991; Fausto in press; Grotti 2007).⁵ This article takes as its starting point the Trio as they describe themselves today: sedentary, Christian, and living rooted lives in close physical proximity with former enemies in "white people's villages" (*pananakiri ipata* in Trio).

The Trio are a Carib-speaking population numbering about 2,500 people who since the late 1960s have lived aggregated around health and education providers across the triple border area of Suriname, French Guiana, and Brazil. My data were mostly collected in the village of Tëpu (a former mission station), in Suriname, but I will also refer to comparative material from French Guiana and Brazil. Trade will be considered through the prism of an Amerindian understanding of personhood, the body, and materiality, which will show how these relationships tend to be fabricated over a lifetime, eventually becoming an integral and material part of the actors involved. This is manifested in the way Trio social space, and the domestic house in particular, is constructed and inhabited as an extension of the body (Guss 1989; Hugh-Jones 1979; Karadimas 2005). Much has been written about the role of body ornaments in the construction of personhood in Amazonia (e.g., Erikson 1996; Ewart 2007; Miller 2009; Turner 1980). This article will look at the ways in which objects acquired through trade, and deliberately displayed in a domestic space imagined as a magnified outer bodily layer, come to elicit narratives of their owner's past exploits and travels to distant spheres of alterity.

The End of War, the Beginning of Trade: Pacification among the Trio

To the Trio, the sedentarization process initiated in the early 1960s by a consortium of north-American Protestant missions represents a turning point in their history (Grotti 2007, 2009). During the early years of the station of Arapadu (founded by Door-to-Life Mission), some

⁵Discussion of the nature of wealth in Amazonia has been dominated by the model of the "political economy of control," developed by Terence Turner and Peter Rivière (Viveiros de Castro 1996), according to which individuals, especially women, as reproductive persons, constitute the scarce resource characterized as wealth. Here, my development of the notion adds to this by taking into account recent theoretical developments demonstrating that objects and persons tend to be mutually constitutive (Hugh-Jones 2009), and that relations of mastery and ownership pervade Amazonian cosmologies (Fausto 2012).

prominent Trio shamans formally converted to Christianity; they broke their kinship bonds with the spirit world and thus declared that they had brought an end to the tides of nightly shamanic battles. Until then, as the Trio recount, endemic cycles of warfare had kept distinct cognatic groups at a distance from one another. They lived a life akin to that of “wild people” (*wajiarikure*), settling in the shade of the forest rather than open clearings, and migrating at regular intervals between creeks to avoid large rivers. For the Trio, the arrival of the missionaries marks the beginning of peaceful interaction with unrelated others. The Trio return to this moment when recounting their life-histories, and they frequently mention it during public events involving unrelated affines, such as drinking feasts, leaders’ harangues, and church services. In these discourses they represent themselves as living harmoniously in large permanent villages in physical proximity to former enemies; in doing so, they contrast their present state of peace with their past state of isolation, endemic shamanic battles, and bodily fierceness.

The associations that the Trio make between pacification and long-term sedentarism on the one hand, and warfare and fierceness on the other, seem to operate on two levels. At first, they appear to coincide with the missionary discourse of salvation and civilization, which was dominant at the time of contact, and which is still to be found in mission circles, particularly in written reports and accounts (Conley 2000; Dowdy 1997). The convergence of missionary and Amerindian discourses is particularly noticeable in situations of translation, when young Trio (especially those living on the Brazilian side of the border, who have had the opportunity to attend school) express themselves in a national language such as Portuguese or Dutch. Under these circumstances, one is likely to hear a phrase such as the following, said to me by a Brazilian Trio teenager on a short visit to Tëpu from Missão Tiriyo in Brazil, who insisted on talking to me in Portuguese in front of his friends:

Before, in the past, we were bad, we were always at war, killing each other, but now we have Jesus in our hearts and we live in peace with one another.

However, there is a second discursive level, which touches upon Trio ontological perspectives on mythical transformations and ethnogenesis. In their mythical genesis as a people, the Trio underwent various stages of humanizing transformations that led to the stabilization of their current, socially extended state, which is marked by increased interaction with affines. This is experienced concurrently at the social and bodily levels. Being peaceful is something that can be produced through action on one’s own body, for instance, by eating and drinking specific foodstuffs such as salt, chilli peppers, and manioc beer: a warrior intent on hardening his body would avoid these. Living peacefully also involves the mediation of specific social networks that extend out of the domestic setting to more distant spheres of relatedness, to foster a feeling of communal contentment known in Trio as *sasame wehto* (which means a state of happiness felt not simply with kin but also with affines). More fundamentally, “being happy” (*sasame*) and “being fierce” (*ëire*) represent two social and bodily states that are equally significant from a Trio perspective: they represent alternative ideal modes of being. Both can be cultivated in an individual, especially a leader, but can also be nurtured at the collective level. In contrast to missionary accounts, there is no linear moral progress expressed in Trio narratives about the passage from a state of warfare to a state of peace. Rather than stressing individual conversion, these

narratives tell of communal desire: a desire for things not allowed in their past state of isolation; more precisely, it is expressed as a desire for things they could obtain by increased social interaction with other people, through marriage and trade.

The equation between isolation and lack of trading objects also permeates everyday domestic conversations. My host in Tëpu, a great-grandfather who lived in the center of the village, had lived through the contact, displacements, epidemics, and finally the sedentarization process of the 1960s. He enjoyed spinning yarns about Trio life inspired by particular objects that happened to lie about the unkempt corners of his house. Excitedly grabbing a cooking pot or a bag of salt, he excelled at listing all the manufactured objects, obtained through trade, that the Trio did not have in the past, but which they have now. This kind of conversation was frequent: my host and his relatives never tired of listing the name of each manufactured object they owned, and from whom it was obtained; if possible, they quickly extracted one from somewhere, holding and naming it with a pleasure that related at once to the materiality of the object, to its aesthetic virtues, and to its biography, connecting it to non-Trio names and places. In these conversations, the reference to linear time usually collapsed; “before” and “now” became ways of contrasting two states of being. Whereas “before” was defined by wildness, isolation, and lack of objects, “now” was made of its opposite. Manufactured goods such as knives, cloth, and glass beads were at first gradually obtained from trade with the maroons, and may have reached the ancestors of the present-day Trio from the 18th century, soon after the first descendants of African slaves who had escaped the colonial plantations of the coast established free societies in the interior (Rivière 1969:53–54). The compression of time operating in the “before” narratives relates to the listener a mythical state that preceded the beginning of trade with the maroons. But this is not simply stored as a past moment, for as a social condition, it can be lived today. The most concrete illustration of this is a group of former hunter-gatherers known today as the Akuriyo, who live alongside the Trio in the village of Tëpu and who, for the Trio, represent the embodiment of poverty and isolation; they act as a discursive reminder of their own past existence deprived of access to extensive trade networks. As will be seen, the nature of poverty and lack of access to trade resides in the body and is expressed in their bodily characteristics.

Short-Armed Bodies: Wildness and Poverty

In May 1968, a series of expeditions were mounted by American Protestant missionaries, resident in Wayana and Trio villages at the time, to contact the “wild people” (*wajarikure*) in the interfluvial uplands between the Tapanahoni and Maroni rivers who had been sighted on a number of recent occasions (Grotti 2007). Over the following years, several groups of nomadic hunter-gatherers were contacted and displaced, to be relocated alongside the Trio in Tëpu, in a process of incorporation into sedentary life under the close watch of the Trio expedition members. Not only to the missionaries, but also to the Trio and Wayana of the late 1960s, the Akuriyo appeared strikingly exotic: all of their possessions and body ornaments were entirely made of forest-gathered products. Contrary to similar cases of contact expeditions, which resulted in the gradual domestication and absorption of “unseen peoples” into their predators’ social networks (Howard 2001), the Akuriyo today seem to have permanently settled into the marginal state of unmarried “people in the making”

who work as perpetual helpers to their self-appointed Trio “protectors” in Tëpu.⁶ Three decades after their relocation into sedentary life under the supervision of the Trio, the Akuriyo are still considered by their masters to be “wild,” and thus highly transformable beings who become powerful predators in the forest, but lead an isolated existence outside of the quotidian conventions of village life. Most significantly, they are visibly poor in relation to material things, and socially awkward in their relations with Trio village co-residents, so that it does not take long for an outsider to spot an Akuriyo in Tëpu.

The material possessions of the former nomadic hunter-gatherers attest, according to the Trio, to their failure to settle as “true people”; their houses are huts made of rough planks and thatched roofs, their gardens are poorly tended, some Akuriyo men still have to hunt with bows and arrows because they do not own a gun, such clothes as they wear are old and ragged, and they are illiterate. The few objects or the little money they may have been given by visitors as payment for help are almost invariably demanded and reappropriated by their Trio masters. In short, at the time of contact, the Akuriyo were poor. Two generations into their sedentary life alongside the Trio in Tëpu, their poverty remains clearly visible, and their lack of material possessions directly attests to their lack of social wealth.

The link between material poverty and social poverty is clearly stated by the Trio. The following quotation is the opening of a Trio myth, which recounts the beginning of trade with the maroons and tells of a time that preceded the arrival of the first manufactured goods into their lives:

It was in the time when the Trio did not have loincloths. They only had *kuura* (thongs)⁷ for their clothing. The Trio were very poor indeed, they only had their penises wrapped in *kuura*. Yes, our forefathers were really very, very poor. (Koelewijn and Rivière 1987:267)

The Trio word for poor is *apëkëma*, which literally means being short-armed. When describing their past life in smaller villages along creeks in the forest, elderly men often say that they were “*apëkëma kutu-u-u-ma*,” that is, that they were “very, very (lit. painfully) short-armed.” It is as if lacking objects implied a reduced bodily capacity: a shrunken body that stems from a social incapacity to reach out to attract foreign goods to oneself, and the impossibility of redistributing these goods to relatives. Poor Trio have poor relatives, as few objects come to be transferred between them. On the other hand, wealthy Trio live in a state of abundance in which goods visibly travel between kin. A wealth of social relations is directly manifested on the body and in the social structure of the household, as objects come to evoke past skilful creations, and well-mastered interactions with a wide array of people. The Trio house, and even more so the sedentary house, represents an inhabited social space, which is purposefully constructed of a display of material goods that are not only manufactured but also hand-crafted, and that carry a specific connection to the head of household. A wealthy Trio lives surrounded by his kin in a house that contains objects

⁶The Trio–Akuriyo relationship is a fascinating contemporary example of the “master–servant” relationship (known as *peito* in Trio), which emerged in a context of missionary contact expeditions. I have analyzed at length elsewhere the peculiarities of this relationship based on predation and nurture [omitted for review]. For a discussion of this relationship across Amazonia, see Fausto (in press), Santos-Granero (2009).

⁷Such thongs made of woven palm were also worn by the Akuriyo at the time of contact.

originating in remote locations; as this accumulation of objects is redistributed among close relatives in a cluster of houses, it is easy to distinguish “socially prosperous” cognatic clusters from less wealthy ones.

The association between poverty, lack of trade relations and wildness can also be found elsewhere in Lowland South America. Gow, for instance, comments on how among the Piro the categories of “rich” and “poor” have become closely intertwined with local perceptions of “civilization” and the origins of manufactured goods that circulate along trading routes (1991:114). Similarly, the Paumari remember the time of their subjugation to the rubber barons as an era of abundance and prosperity (Bonilla 2005:46).

The particular value attributed to traded manufactured objects does not in any way imply that they have come to engulf all domains of Trio material culture. One need only consider the contempt the Trio feel toward the awkwardness of other people, such as white people, who are considered devoid of skills and beauty, to grasp that material wealth is not solely attributed to trade objects, but to a balance between different object regimes. Although trading partnerships do not represent the only way to come to possess objects for a Trio (for instance, the skill of fabricating beautiful artifacts is highly valued by them as the mark of a true adult human being), there is something about obtaining things from nonrelated affines that is extremely appealing to both men and women. Obtaining such objects is a feat that few are skilled enough to achieve, because it means crossing the boundaries of known territory to seduce nonhumans. While the Trio have a clear sense of the expertise and knowledge of neighboring Amerindian groups with whom in the past they traded artifacts, hunting dogs, and manufactured objects, my interlocutors were adamant that the ideal trading partner, the — *ipawana* in the true sense of the term, had to be a maroon, although today white people (*pananakiri*) have started to represent a satisfactory alternative—although it is one which bears some fundamental differences that relate to bodily nurturing techniques and daily social conventions.

The Forms of Friendship: Nurture and Asymmetry among the Trio

When you say “*yepé* [friend in Wayana], *yepé*,” you must be very careful; the ancient Wayana said that you should never say “*yepé*” to someone. Be careful when you say “*yepé*.” If you have a friend, then there is a risk that he might betray you and hurt you, my grandfather told me. Wayana son-in-law married into Trio household, Tëpu, 2004.

I am the *kapitein* [village leader], I have many, many friends, in Paramaribo, in America, everywhere.

One of Tëpu’s village leaders, 2004.

So far, this article has described how the Trio associate their present condition as sedentary people living in peace with their former enemies, within a development of networks of exchange that enable connections between bodies. I will now focus on the nature of the relationship itself, bearing in mind existing anthropological literature on kinship and affinity in Amazonia. How do the Trio define a trading partnership? As a consanguineal tie, as pertaining to the realm of affinity, or as a form of potential or actual affinity (Viveiros de

Castro 2001)? As we shall see, bodily practices, terms of address, and nurturing techniques provide a key.

As Rivière remarks, the Trio use the generic term *pito* to refer to a trading partner: “A *pito* is neither kin nor affine nor stranger, although he is also a bit of each” (1969:227). *Pito* can be used by a man to establish a relationship with a male stranger, and here affinity is expressed: a Trio neighbor once addressed my partner in the field as *pito*, adding, “I give you my sister and you give me yours.” The equation is that of friendship established as symmetric affinity between two wife-givers. However, out of this bond are nurtured processual kinship bonds. The reference to the sister exchange offer seems to have sprung from a wish to strengthen existing bonds, forged by sharing time, eating together, trekking to the forest and gardens, and drinking together at communal feasts—all activities that actively contribute to the creation of kinship bonds between affines. I seldom heard it used in relation to other trading partners in Tëpu, such as the retired missionary schoolteacher, the governmental employees, or the maroon traders coming occasionally to the Trio village, referred to as *jipawana* (my trading partner). The latter were addressed either by their first name (the “public” name or nickname that all Trio now have), or a generic term of address for unrelated people: *jahko* among men (translated as “friend” or “brother” in Portuguese, Dutch, and French) and *khori* among women.⁸

Whether starting from a position of affinity or consanguinity, trading partnerships, once established, become gradually enmeshed in a processual relationship that progressively shifts from symmetry to asymmetry as intimacy grows between subjects: the Trio I knew well in Tëpu, all demonstrated the intense desire to domesticate their partners, who were acknowledged to be “like family” (*jimoiti apo*), but more precisely “like a son/daughter” (*jimuku-/jeemi apo*). Trading partners are thus first addressed with a neutral reciprocal term of address, and then gradually adopted as children, as they are nurtured and fed. This gradual familiarization posited the Trio as hosts and caregiver, and therefore as controllers.⁹

The combination of an emphasis on a shift from symmetry to asymmetry, with an ambivalence as to relations of consanguinity and affinity, should be understood in the context of the ideal of endogamy (unattainable in practice) characteristic of the region (Rivière 2009). Although distant others may show a desire to develop what appear to be long-term amicable bonds, the true nature of their intentions can never be fully apprehended, or may be subject to change as temptation and desire take hold of them. The ideal trading partner is a maroon, for, as a category of other people who are not fully realized as humans, they cannot constitute potential marriage partners.

My host often told me stories about the times he spent with Joseph, his Ndjuka maroon trading partner. With him, my Trio grandfather was able to travel to and learn from distant places such as Ndjuka villages and the city. My interlocutor commented to me that during the life-long trading partnership that they nurtured with one another, he taught his *-ipawana* how to live properly, as the Trio do. He stressed how much he missed his partner, that he was

⁸Senior unrelated but more familiar persons are addressed using generic kinship terms: *tamu* (grandfather) and *mankho* (mother).

⁹This is precisely the perspectival shift described by Lima in her description of the Yudjá uses of the term “friend,” and her coining of “symmetric” and “asymmetric friendships” (2005:88–90).

like a son to him, and how much he cared for the objects he had obtained from him. The reference to Joseph being “like a son” (*jimuku apo*) reveals that the trading partner was domesticated in a similar way to pets and children. Hunting dogs, for instance, become socialized members of the household and are addressed as *jimuku* (my son), just as I was addressed as “my daughter” (*jeemi*). However, the list of long-term trading partners that I managed to collect across three generations in Tëpu clearly shows that these are not innocuous, benevolent outsiders; they are often powerful or influential people with whom bonds must be developed tactically over a long time. Among the Trio, long-term relationships are based on a discourse and a practice of commensality, nurture, and trust, but also involve the deployment of tactical skills such as wit, cunning, and control.

The individual and long-term kin-making process involved in the trading partnerships that used to tie the Trio and Wayana to their maroon neighbors is similar to other forms of interethnic trading relations performed in other parts of Amazonia (Killick 2008; Santos-Granero 2007). By being associated repeatedly with bodily intimacy and process, without the potential for affinity, the maroon trading partner has come to represent an ideal in which trust was truly lived, against which other forms of trading partnership are compared. Partners such as Joseph encapsulate a figure of a past that preceded the long-term establishment of the American missionaries and the gradual development of visits of businessmen and entrepreneurs from the city.

Strangers from the capital now represent the main type of trading partner in Tëpu. Although very different from the American and Dutch missionaries who come to spend time with the Trio, they share with them a certain form of social distance in the treatment of their body and conventional behavior in daily social life. Neither missionaries nor entrepreneurs hang their hammock on the post of their partner’s house. Nor do they indiscriminately share all meals and daily activities with Trio villagers. The processual nature of the mutual domestication that takes place between the Trio and their *pananakiri* (white people) trading partners remains confined to the domain of verbal interaction and exchange; it often bypasses commensality and the intimate bond created by prolonged closeness and physical contact. These interactions are nevertheless enacted in the realm of consanguinity, playing on the level of the expression of feelings of affection and trust, which also imply duties and long-term contractual obligations, without becoming fully realized in the practice of everyday commensality. This referential discourse is counterbalanced by a practical social engagement with a wide array of unrelated others, mostly *pananakiri*, with specific characteristics and potentialities that directly relate to bodily appearance and social countenance.

Extended Bodies

If people are progressively built up and socialized as assemblages of objects, so may objects socialize people (Hugh-Jones 2009:48).

In the amerindian case, the possession of objects must be seen as a particular case of the ownership relation between subjects, and the thing-artefact as a particular case of the person-artefact. (Fausto 2012:33)

The term *-ipawana* and the symbolic discourse of potential kinship are now used by the Trio in an increasing number of contexts to mediate a growing set of relations with different types of nonhumans. For instance, powerful governmental employees who come to do occasional business carrying guns and wearing conspicuous golden jewelry are clearly perceived differently by the Trio than missionary nurses who sing hymns as they tend ailments and wounds in the village health post. As the capacity to clearly determine foreign visitors' intentions becomes increasingly complex, so does the value of this knowledge of the *pananakiri* world and its multiple perspectives; such knowledge and techniques for seducing the other are key capacities that today's Trio trading experts learn to master in order to attract the objects they covet into their extended social sphere. One may also fruitfully turn this statement on its head and argue that to live in a house surrounded by objects obtained from a wide array of distant, powerful others is a visible sign of Trio wealth, if wealth is measured as skill, worldly knowledge, strength, and seductive capacities.

The Trio highly value other types of relations that allow them to attract goods: first, the relation of mastery, or nurturing control, which they enjoy over their Akuriyo *peito*, or helpers, and, second, their capacity to be in constant demand toward their sons-in-law. In these two asymmetric relationships, demands expressed by heads of households (such as my host in Tëpu) for services and goods have to be met. It is worth comparing these to cases such as that of the Paumari who, in their social relationships with outsiders, present themselves as living in a historical condition of victims, and adopt the position of seductive prey. By doing so, they demand and guarantee attention, services, and goods from powerful other people (Bonilla 2005:43).

Indeed, trading partnerships among the Trio demonstrate this cunning interplay of seduction and control in the forms taken in the requests for goods. No demand is expressed in clear terms, but instead is voiced as a complaint of lack, of want, which posits the person voicing the request as being needy and harmless. This applies to various potential givers/traders: my host would complain about how little food there was to feed the children, in order to convey the message to the son-in-law that it was high time he went fishing; or he might pick gloomily at the loose threads of the daytime hammock and sigh about the lack of cotton, to urge me to bring rolls of cotton from my next trip to the city. The technique was very effective. My Trio grandfather often proudly showed me objects (an outboard motor, or good-quality fishhooks, for example) he obtained from his son-in-law, especially through the latter's kinship network, which extended into French Guiana. His house was similarly laden with goods and handcrafted objects he had managed to obtain from his Akuriyo helper. Ultimately, my host's entire household had come to represent a carefully crafted display attesting to his extensive networks of relations, which stretched into highly valued spheres of alterity such as the forest, maroon villages, Wayana villages, and urban centers. As mentioned above, the analogy between body and house adornment is clearly visible: glass beads coming from the Czech republic are used to make necklaces that adorn and beautify bodies, and metal pots made in China are hung on the central beam of the house to decorate and magnify the owner's house.

At the level of Tëpu, all sets of extended households have come to materially testify to the extent of the web of social relations their members have become involved in, and

unsurprisingly, the most “affluent-looking” houses belong to the village leaders. It is not difficult to spot their houses: strategically located far from one another, they gather around them the dwellings of their extended families. Like all other cognatic aggregates in this ex-mission station, the cluster of relatives’ houses nested close together function daily as smaller autonomous settlements bounded within the larger sedentary village structure. The leaders belong to different generations and accordingly occupy different roles: the mature leader has come to settle as a figure of gentle reserve, leaving behind him a past of reckless deals with gold miners. The younger leader has now acceded to the limelight; he openly deals with foreign visitors, and channels the redistribution of favors and opportunities that come from the city. Their houses somehow mirror their distinctive physical traits and personalities. The older leader lives in the more ancient part of the village, close to the airstrip and the church; his house is larger than average, but its imposing structure has known better days. During the course of my fieldwork, the younger leader’s house seemed to be in constant regeneration, undergoing some rebuilding at each of my successive visits. The roof sported some shiny new sheets of corrugated iron; new planks and nails were being fitted to replace old parts. The heavy building equipment and materials were being airlifted on a regular basis to Tëpu and benefited the younger leader greatly, although he constantly complained of being poor, and suffering from incessant demands for generosity from his kin and in-laws, and from other villagers. Briskly walking along village paths and cooking houses as he did almost daily, displaying crisp new clothes and a wide smile, the young leader seemed always on the move. Responding with a grin to each individual demand for goods, he was constantly managing the delicate balance between the actual and potential circulation of objects and the conflicting influence of the Amerindian and outside demands. As Inglez de Souza argued for the contemporary Kayapó Gorotire’s increasing sedentarization and reliance on outside goods, in various parts of Amazonia, native leaders have grown to become a “trading elite” (2000, in Gordon 2006:50). The same can be said of their younger relatives: among the Trio, the young people who have been given the most exposure to city life, and thus urban knowledge, belong to the leaders’ families. They are the chosen few who will learn most by being sent to school in Paramaribo and familiarized with the world of the *pananakiri*. Further knowledge allows potential further transformation and a mastering of other people’s perspectives; yet this one-sided strategy has not necessarily proven to be the most successful in gaining access to a wider range of important trading partners, as it does not allow them to play across several fields. Young people who are sent to town lose familiarity with the forest and with village life, and thus with forms of knowledge that constitute valuable resources for outsiders who come to villages such as Tëpu— to conduct business, or to trade game or plant knowledge, hand-crafted objects, and liana potions. Today’s most successful Trio traders are those who manage to strike a balance, alternating seasonal work on the gold mines or in town, with returning to their relatives to tend their gardens, provide for their families through hunting and fishing, and eat “real food” (*ërepa*) surrounded by a web of close relatives.

Conclusion: Objects, Trade, and the Constancy of Nurture

On my first visit to Tëpu, I heard a governmental employee complain about the lack of consistency of Trio men, who would readily agree to take up a paid job only to abandon it

after a short while and return to their hammock. Such criticisms stressed the inertia and short-termism that appeared to plague the Trio attitude toward waged labor; as soon as an employee accumulated enough money to buy what he wanted he dropped any further commitment and returned to his daily activities of tending his garden and going hunting for his family. Such “inconstancy” (Viveiros de Castro 2002) has tended to disconcert governmental and nongovernmental workers alike who have tried to implement long-term “sustainable development” projects across Amazonia.

Yet the Trio remain constant in their continued involvement with particular trading partners over the years. It appears that the attraction of traveling to new places to visit relatives and trading partners outweighs material gain in terms of remuneration from a remote, collective, and disembodied source such as an NGO or a ministerial office. Trio often express a preference for relationships with individual missionaries who return to the same village over several decades, rather than with employees of an environmental NGO who often travel as a rotating group, stay for a short time, and address the village as a community (Brightman 2008). Extended villages such as Tëpu are aggregates of cognatic groups, and it is through kinship networks that goods and money circulate, thus reinforcing pre-existing distinctions between households, nurturing a hierarchy of accumulation that stretches from the prosperous leaders to the Akuriyo. With the increasing reliance on external interventions and the growing presence of the State, trading partners have become agents of a wider, more intricate system that village leaders have learned to manipulate. As such, the “magnified persons” of village leaders epitomize those Trio who, in the whole construction of their person, and in the extension of their bodies through their lived and built environment, express a concentration of trading partners, and a channeling of influences. Their accumulation of relations is expressed through an accumulation of things, displayed on their bodies and houses, and those of their kin. This explains the confusion that arises with the recent establishment of “development” initiatives aimed at benefiting the village community as a whole: the green NGO has thus had to contend with funding and goods being channeled by some influential families, rather than being distributed equally to all village members as the NGO workers would have wished. Even though the range of potential trading partners has grown over time, and there are steadily increasing contacts with city life and wage labor, the exchange of goods and services remains perceived by the Trio as a matter of unrelated persons engaging in long-term relationships to the benefit of their cognatic group. Just as Robert Harcourt enthusiastically reported four centuries ago, the desire for exotic goods and for domesticating powerful others through trading partnerships remains of fundamental importance to the native populations of the Guianas, and constitutes for them a primary means of peaceful interaction and social reproduction.

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