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SÉRIE ANTROPOLOGIA

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**INDIGENOUS AUTONOMIES AND RIGHTS ON
THE BRAZIL-GUYANA BORDER:
MAKUSHI AND WAPISHANA ON AN
INTERNATIONAL BORDER**

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**Indigenous autonomies and rights on the Brazil-Guyana border:
Makushi and Wapishana on an international border.**

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Based on a research project on nationality and ethnicity on international borders in which I have been working since 2001, this paper examines the recent changes in the relationship between indigenous peoples, the State, and civil society on part of the international border which separates Brazil and Guyana. In this region, the transnational, the national and the local coexist and are constantly revised in the struggle of indigenous peoples to have their rights recognised. My research focuses part of this international border which is home to the Makushi and Wapishana indigenous peoples. Commenting about government indigenist policy, Adolfo de Oliveira affirms that:

What draws attention in Brazil is the dialogical character, one may say, of the practice of government indigenist policy. Indigenous peoples in Brazil have positioned themselves in relation to the State insistently as *subjects* in a process of dialogue with the State, in opposition to the (government) indigenist policy which, even more insistently tries to position itself as the only, unilateral interlocutor of the Amerindians, taken as *objects* of its action, defined exclusively from its own position² (2002, p.112).

De Oliveira adds: "... the field of traditional discussion of Brazilian indigenist policy is following the tendency in other parts of the world (Coates, 1998), in the direction of including indigenous peoples as legitimate participants". De Oliveira defines autonomy as "the utilisation of strategies to establish a *dialogia* with agencies of the State" (2002, p.118). With the increasing role played by NGOs in the field of indigenist policy, the monopoly of inter-locution exercised by government indigenist organs over indigenous peoples has been broken.

Miguel Bartolomé proposes that ethnography itself can be,

... a resource for intercultural dialogue in the present-day world where the processes of globalization and homogenization are parallel to those of differentiation. Beginning with the recognition that today the consumers of this type of information are not only members of academic communities but also the very people who have been considered objects of study and who now resist being represented by others, the paper explores perspectives of more egalitarian relationships (2004, p.60).

Indigenous peoples who live on international borders experience a reality of two or more national States at the same time that their ethnic groups overlap the

¹ I would like to thank Professor Mercedes Gayosso y Navarrete, Director of the Symposium "Derechos y autonomías de los pueblos" and president of the Scientific Committee and the organisers for the invitation and financing which enabled me to participate in this event in Xalapa, Mexico on 9, 10, 11 November 2005. My thanks also to the Brazilian National Research Institute (CNPq) for financing my research on the Brazil-Guyana border in January 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, and July 2005.

² The translations are mine.

international borders imposed on their territories, in kinship networks which spread across the savannah grasslands of north-east Roraima and Regions 8 “Potaro-Siparuni” and 9 “Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo” (ex-Rupununi) in Guyana and beyond. The Makushi and Wapishana peoples live intensely the interface between the local, the regional and the global, being subjected ever more by pressures from the national States which try to impose policies of nationalisation of the borders, such as the military *Projeto Calha Norte* in Brazil with a Border Platoon installed in Uiramutã Amerindian village without previously consulting the indigenous leaders, by international pressures resulting from World Bank policies and through NGOs, at the same time that they are living a strong process of ethnic revitalisation, expressed especially through indigenous political movements. It can be affirmed that they are experiencing processes of globalisation and homogenisation at the same time that they organising themselves politically to demand from the national States land rights and differentiated education and public health services as Amerindians, a complex process which takes its form within the contradictions of interethnic contact (CARDOSO DE OLIVEIRA, 1978; 1981).

People who define themselves as Makushi and Wapishana with whom I am carrying out field research at the local level since January 2001, live along part of this international border between Brazil and Guyana, talk about the border in ways which reflect their ethnic particularities, localised between the largest country of South America and a small country devastated by ethnic conflicts between its majority ethnic groups of Afro and East Indian Guyanese. Referring to border spaces, Cardoso de Oliveira stresses that “it is worth considering, in relation to identity processes, that we are dealing with a space characterised by an ambiguity of identities – a space which by its very nature, is open to manipulation by ethnic groups and nationalities together” (2000, p.17). Cardoso de Oliveira adds, looking at the case of indigenous ethnic groups situated on borders:

As for nationality, as a second identity, it is clear that it will be used according to the concrete situations in which the individuals or groups are inserted, such a need for health assistance, education of children or an eventual protection by the armed forces on the border: these would be typical cases of manipulation of identity with representatives of respective national (Ibid.).

Both Brazil and Guyana, despite the fact that the latter is 39 times smaller than Brazil in territorial extension (BAINES, 2004, p.78) share the fact that the non-Amerindian majority population is concentrated along the distant coastlands and the indigenous population is a small minority of the total national populations concentrated in regions distant from the large urban centres and along the international borders.

In the dialogue between indigenous peoples, the State and civil society, characterised by the mediation of a language of indigenous rights, with a “juridification” of conflicts, deep divergences occur between indigenous leaders and indigenous political organisations which often take the form of the national political party scene. With an increasing reduction of resources allocated for indigenous policies by national States, indigenous, indigenist, and environmentalist Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), both national and transnational have taken a predominant role with frequent overlapping of interests. Examining only that part of the Brazil-Guyana border inhabited by the Makushi and Wapishana indigenous peoples, who had their territories historically divided by the international border line made between Brazil and

Guyana in 1904, I take a brief look at public policies for indigenous peoples in this region.

It is important to remember that in both these countries the non-indigenous majority national populations are concentrated along the coast. Looking at the present-day territorial division adopted by the Guyanese government, in Region 8 and Region 9, in southwest Guyana, there are respectively 24.95% and 8.63% of the total indigenous population, making up around 48,859 individuals. In Guyana the indigenous population makes up 6.81% of the national population (GUYANA, 1996) while in Brazil it is around 0.2%. However, in this border region the indigenous population is majority in rural areas. In Roraima the indigenous population is around 75% of the rural population and, for example, in the municipality of Normandia, border enclave in the Raposa Serra do Sol Indian area, the Makushi make up 92.71% of the rural population. In Bonfim they make up 22.96% and in the state capital, Boa Vista, around 16.18% (OLIVEIRA, 1999, p.60) of a total population of around 350 thousand inhabitants.

In Guyana, a Dutch colony from the XVII to the early XIX centuries, which became a British colony from 1814 until its independence in 1966, the history of relations between indigenous peoples and the colonial powers was characterised by commercial treaties with the indigenous peoples, despite a parallel trade in Indian slaves (FARAGE, 1991). The 1784 Decree of the Dutch Company of the West Indies gave full and free ownership of lands to the indigenous peoples. Despite several legislations which controlled the occupation of Guyana, in 1820, 1838, 1902, and 1922, the government of Guyana did not extinguish indigenous land rights, based on the recognition of traditional rights, a legacy of the British legal system imposed in colonial times.

To understand the context of this international border it is necessary to examine the history of both countries policies in relation to it. The Brazilian anthropologist Paulo Santilli affirms that after the border between Brazil and British Guiana was delimited in 1904, the official plan for the Rio Branco region underwent a radical change, the concept of border was no longer seen as a military question but above all an economic one (1994, p.39).

Santilli adds that in 1927 the migration of Indians from Brazil to British Guiana provoked by violence perpetrated by Brazilian ranchers, continued to be a concern for military strategists:

the high command of the (Brazilian) army alerted the head of the Commission of Inspection of Borders of the problem of migration of Indians to the Guianese side of the River Tacutu and although any British military action in the area was improbable, attention was drawn to the 'living borders' represented by the indigenous population in the eventuality of a dispute (Cândido Mariano Rondon, 7/06/1927, pp7-10) (1994, p.40).

Santilli cites sources, including reports of the Commission for Demarcating Limits, that

they record a migratory movement which seems to have been continuous, since the mid XIX century ... This exodus had been provoked by the colonisation process: the forced recruitment of labour for vegetable extractivism, and, later, for placer mining, together with the occupation of grasslands for cattle raising, which had motivated the migration of the indigenous population to the Guianese side of the rivers Maú and Tacutu, in British territory" (1994, p.68-69).

Santilli comments that “migration perhaps in not the best term to define this process” which may be characterised by population movements within a same traditional territory, over which the international border had been imposed.

It is beyond the aim of this article to discuss in detail current government legislation concerning indigenous peoples, however, a brief summary helps put things in context. In Guyana, the 1976 Amerindian Act, based on previous laws relating to Amerindians dating back to the colonial period in the early 20th century (APA NEWSLETTER #2) is the main law covering Amerindian affairs. The first law in Guyana to deal with Amerindians was the protectionist legislation in the Aboriginal Indians Protection Ordinance of 1902 which allowed the governor to make Amerindian reservations, repealed in 1910 and replaced by the Aboriginal Indians Ordinance. Between 1911 and 1951 several Amerindian reservations were declared by the government. In 1951, it was replaced by the Amerindian Ordinance which introduced a limited amount of self-government, amended by the 1976 Amerindian Act which deals with transfer of land titles to Amerindian villages but which also provides ways by which the government can take away Amerindian lands without compensation. Emended in 1990 by the Miscellaneous Enactment (Amendment) Act. In 1993 in a motion in the Guyanese parliament the need to revise the Amerindian Act was recognised and a Special Parliamentary Select Committee was set up to oversee its revision. The Amerindian Peoples Association (APA) has been reminding the Guyanese government of the urgency for a revision of the Amerindian Act with Amerindian participation at all levels and in accordance with international standards concerning the rights of indigenous peoples. APA has produced a document on “Indigenous Rights in the Constitutions of Countries in the Americas”³ to provide background information for Amerindian communities concerning the reform of Guyana’s 1980 Constitution to include the recognition of Amerindian rights and support Amerindian participation in the needed reform. The decision to reform the Constitution was formalised in the Hermandston Accord, which was negotiated with the help of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in 1998.

In Brazil the constitutional rights of indigenous peoples are expressed in a specific chapter of the Constitution of 1988 (title VIII, "Of the Social Order ", chapter VIII, "of the indigenous peoples"), in addition to other regulations throughout the text and an article of the Acts of the Transitory Constitutional Regulations. This deals with the Rights marked by at least two innovative and important concepts in relation to prior Constitutions and the so-called The Indian Statute. The first innovation is the abandonment of the assimilationist point of view, which considered the indigenous peoples as a transitory social category, destined to disappear. The second innovation is that the rights of the indigenous peoples over their lands are defined in the concept of original rights that are prior to the creation of the State itself. This is a result of the de facto historical recognition that the indigenous peoples were the first occupants of Brazil. The new Constitution establishes, in this manner, a new outlook for the relations between the State, Brazilian society and the indigenous peoples. However, Law 6001 of 1973, known as The Indian Statute, continues to be in force, despite efforts by the Indian political movement at the national level to approve revisions. Since 1991, several Law Projects have been presented to dictate directions for the execution of the 1988 Constitution and to revise the previous legislation. A new Statute of Indigenous Societies was approved in 1994 by a special commission of the Chamber of Deputies but has been prevented from being put into force. In 2000 the government presented an

³ <http://www.sdn.org.gy/apa/topic4.htm>

alternative proposal which also revokes the Civil Code of 1916 which subjected indigenous peoples to a guardianship regime, made obsolete by the 1988 Constitution. However, by late 2005 a new legislation had still not been approved.

In both Brazil and Guyana, indigenous organisations are demanding that their governments revise legislation to be compatible with international standards concerning the rights of indigenous peoples. On 6th December 2000, after nine years of debate in the Brazilian Congress, the Senate Commission on Justice, Constitution and Citizenship ratified Brazil's adherence to Convention 169 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) which recognises the rights of indigenous peoples to all lands they occupy and use, as well as participation in the management, use, conservation of natural resources in their territories. The Guyanese government has not yet ratified Convention 169.

Declarations of Makushi and Wapishana who live on the Guyanese side of the border stress the flow of people from Brazil to British Guiana before its independence in 1966, many having Portuguese names and ancestors born in Brazil. They attribute this crossing the border to the invasion of Indian lands on the Brazilian side by cattle ranchers and sporadic invasions by placer miners from the 1920 and 1930s. They stress that before Guyana's independence and the Rupununi Uprising in 1969, educational and health services offered by the colonial government were better in Guiana than in Brazil, a situation which changed in the following years.

Guyana's independence was followed by many political conflicts especially between the majority ethnic groups of Afro-Guyanese and East Indian Guyanese in the densely populated coastlands. In the Rupununi Uprising, the Wapishana, supporting the White and Mestizo ranchers of the border region rose up against the central government (FARAGE, 1997, p.26). After accusations of fraud in the elections, Forbes Burnham was elected after US and British interference, and very soon he appealed for support to the Soviet block.

It is important to remember that after the division of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) in 1955, party politics in Guyana became defined more in ethnic terms than in ideological terms. The strong ethnic conflicts in the densely populated coastlands of Guyana found expression in the configuration of the two largest parties – the Peoples Progressive Party (PPP) (founded in 1950, with 53.1% of votes in the 2001 elections), came to be seen as representing above all the East Indian Guyanese, and the People's National Congress (PNC) (founded in 1955, with 41.7% of votes in the 2001 elections) came to be associated with the Afro-Guyanese. Between 1964 and 1992 the People's National Congress dominated the political scenario of Guyana.

The White and Mestizo cattle ranchers of the Rupununi savannahs supported The United Force (TUF), a right-wing party founded in 1960, and refused to accept Burnham's regime. These ranchers revolted, including the Melville family, "whose historical ties to the Wapishana weighed heavily in getting their support in the Uprising" (FARAGE, 1997, p.55). The Rupununi Uprising was suffocated by the Guyanese army and many ranchers exiled themselves in Venezuela, country which welcomed them because of its border dispute with Guyana, and in Brazil. Many Wapishana sought refuge in the Amerindian villages on the Brazilian side of the border, leading to a flow of people. During the decades after the Rupununi Uprising there was a sharp reduction in the access to manufactured goods and government assistance. On the Brazilian side of this border a large part of the population in the Amerindian villages was born and grew up in Guyana. The Brazilian anthropologist Nádia Farage points out that they "quickly changed their names to Portuguese to avoid being accused of being 'Guyanese', or undesirable foreigners, by the regional population" (1997, p.56). On the

one hand, the support given to the ranchers and the TUF Party by the majority of Wapishana reflects their insertion in asymmetrical interethnic relations, subordinated to their Mestizo and White employers. On the other hand, it reflects a strategy of supporting their employers against what was seen as a greater threat of the Forbes Burnham government which implemented the settlement of Afro-Guyanese from the coastal region within lands claimed as Amerindian at the foot of the Kanuku mountains.

There is a unanimity among the inhabitants of Rupununi in their deception with the political situation in post-independent Guyana. In the words of Clarindo Rudolph, vice-chairman of the Peoples Democratic Council in Lethem, border town beside the River Tacutu opposite Bonfim in Brazil, who identifies himself as Wapishana from Aishalton, with a clear deception with all political parties: “The PPP and the PNC both believe in socialist ideologies. All preach Marxism and Leninism, especially the PNC. Why do they fight? I can’t see any sense in it”. I suggested that the fights correspond with ethnic divisions and Mr. Rudolph added “That’s it. And this will exist forever”.

An ex-chairman of Lethem, Muacir Baretto, who identifies himself as Amerindian, son of a Wapishana mother and Makushi father, descendent of Brazilians but of Guyanese nationality, referred to the Guyanese State as weak and made inviable by the conflicts between the two ethnic majority groups. He also identifies himself as ex-socialist, in his youth, who had spent one year as a student in Moscow during the Soviet period, and became disappointed by socialism after seeing attempts to implant it in Guyana lead the country to economic collapse. A man of British origin who had lived for 7 years in the Rupununi in the 1960s, currently living in Brazil, stated that the stirring up of political party conflicts in Guiana occurred, above all, as a consequence of US government intervention to try to stop the growth of socialism.

Muacir Baretto, in an interview in January 2004, affirmed that he knew President Forbes Burnham personally and had worked as a “co-op officer” in his government. He admitted, however, that he had cultivated a resistance, even before going to the ex-Soviet Union in 1977-78 for ten months. With a Catholic upbringing which clashed with Marxist ideology, he related that he knew at that time a lady who was a youth leader of the Catholic Church and that she had warned him of the “danger” of going to Moscow. In Muacir Barreto’s own words:

The Marxist philosophy was very heavy ... in the meeting of the PNC they hammered us with Marxism. I had to renounce. ... My upbringing was different. We believed in God and in the spirit ... It was at the time of the Cold War, of anti-Americanism. When I returned I had already decided to renounce as soon as I finished my contract. I still faced problems with the PNC fellows here.

Muacir Barreto told me that he joined the only capitalist political party in Guyana, The United Force (0.7% of votes in the 2001 elections), the same party which the Rupununi ranchers and most of their Wapishana workers had adhered to at the time of the Rupununi Uprising in 1969. Muacir Barreto added:

Moscow opened my eyes, but the events of the 1990s only confirmed my deception ... When we were in Moscow Forbes Burnham visited us. The first thing that he told me was that “Your people are demanding more lands”. The PNC government gave land titles through the Parliament. About 25% of the lands which the last Lands Commissioner had recommended. The Lands Commissioner after independence had recommended 24 to 25 thousand square miles in the late 1960s early 1970s. The PNC approved

only 6 thousand square miles. That was in about 1975. Nothing has changed in this country since then.

At the same time, this deception with the Guyanese government is accompanied, in the perspective of many inhabitants of this border region, with an admiration for Brazil. Many people interviewed in Lethem and the neighbouring Amerindian village of St. Ignatius, expressed the opinion that the indigenous peoples of this border region have no future with the government in Georgetown and that they look towards Brazil as a great economic success and as an example to be followed to escape the accentuated poverty and political and ethnic conflicts which plague the densely populated Atlantic coast of Guyana. Muacir Barreto sees the economic development of Roraima State in Brazil as a great success when compared with what he described as the economic disaster of Guyana. When I commented that Brazil, despite its economic growth which he so admires, presents immense social inequalities, a small class of extremely rich and a great majority living in extreme poverty and exploitation, the 5% richest having 1/3 of the total national income, Mr. Barreto affirmed that he does not defend development at the cost of the people. Muacir Barreto's discourse incorporates contradictions, supporting *The United Force (TUF)*, capitalist political party which defends the interests of the rural elites. At the same time, a self-declared ex-socialist, he affirms that he defends Amerindian rights.

The positions defended by the inhabitants of this border region must be considered in the light of immense international inequalities. An admiration for Brazil as a country which is a "success story" when compared to the critical economic situation of Guyana, does not mean that these people defend the great inequalities in relation to access to justice and a capitalist order which is sustained in systematically asymmetrical power relations. At the same time the majority criticise socialism in the form that resulted from attempts to apply it in Guyana.

Mr. Barreto added: "We are frightened by the sharp increase in violence that is occurring in Brazil". He referred to the recent murder of an East Indian Guyanese businessman from Lethem, Mohamed Khan, who was kidnapped from the coach he was travelling on from Boa Vista to Manaus by a gang disguised as policemen and his body burnt at the side of the BR-174 highway.

Despite a deep admiration for Brazil, the majority of the population in the Rupununi, independent of their ethnic origins and deceptions with the recent political history of Guyana, identify themselves as Guyanese and express a certain patriotism. Muacir Barreto told me that when he was Regional Chairman of Lethem, he always tried to cultivate a nationalist sentiment during his visits to Amerindian villages. Despite vehement criticisms of the post-colonial history of Guyana, with frequent references to the colonial period as being a time of much better economic conditions, the great majority of people on this border do not defend British colonialism. They refer to the colonial period as part of a distant history and contextualise the political turbulence of the post-colonial period as a consequence of colonial history. An interesting comparison can be made with the Amerindian people of French Guiana, an overseas *Département* of France. The majority express fear of a possible independence from France, seeing the examples of post-colonial turbulence which swept through neighbouring Guyana, and Surinam which became independent from Holland in 1975.

A businessman in Lethem, Don Melville, who describes himself as Mestizo, revealed a widely-shared view in the south-western border of Guyana, that the national State is in a continuous process of formation and still incomplete: "There isn't much patriotism in Guyana. We still need to find our identity".

The coalition GAP-WPA - Guyana Action Party (GAP, founded in 1996) – Working People’s Alliance (WPA founded in 1979) - defines itself as “an autonomous organisation of Amerindian peoples”. The GAP founder, businessman Paul Hardy, Member of Parliament, is referred to as mestizo. Mrs. Shirley Melville, MP for the GAP Party, presents herself as an Arawak Indian from the northwest coast of Guyana. The Amerindian wife of an ex-Chairman of Lethem told me that Shirley Melville used to express prejudices that Indians are lazy before she candidated herself as an MP. Despite the fact that these politicians say they are Amerindians in certain contexts, they are seen by the local people as successful businesspeople. Some Amerindian and non-Amerindian informants identified them as people who exploit Amerindian labour. Shirley Melville’s husband, Don, grandson of a Scottish rancher and his Atoraid Amerindian wife, seeing Amerindian land claims which are currently being articulated by a survey that is being made by the Amerindian Peoples Association (APA), as a possible threat to his own ranch lands, affirmed that

Tony James (the current president of APA, Wapishana from Aishalton in South Rupununi) says that he isn’t going to drive out the colonists, as it is they who give us jobs ... There is a lot of history behind all this here. The Amerindians aren’t going to drive out the colonists. They just want to know where the limits of their lands are.

In Guyana, the non-government organisation, APA⁴, created in 1991 and constituted in 1992, is gaining political force in relation to land rights. Among the four main Amerindian organisations in Guyana at the national level, APA has gained more visibility in this border region with Brazil, and is currently making a survey of Amerindian Land Claims which has created conflicts not only with non-Amerindian ranchers but also NGOs such as Conservation International which defends the creation of the Kanuku National Park as an exclusively environmental conservation area in which Amerindians do not have the right to hunt.

As an advocacy organisation, the APA engages in activities at various levels, with community level activities such as training workshops, conferences and field visits that focus mainly on increasing the capacity of communities to deal with issues affecting them. At the national level, the APA operates as a watchdog body on the government and other agencies in the formulation of policies and other legislation that affects Amerindians. It seeks to lobby for the inclusion of the policies and legislation that promote and recognise Amerindian right in Guyana.

The situation on this international border reveals how ideologies of the State permeate the thinking of Amerindian populations, even when located on their periphery. At the same time these populations are closely involved with international processes. In addition to Muacir Barreto having spent 10 months in Moscow, recently a son of the ex-village headman (touchoa) Ernesto Farias, took a course in China on mini-hydroelectric schemes to work at a mini-hydroelectric dam at Moko Moko a few kilometres from Lethem, donated by the Chinese government. Jason Johnny, one of the grandsons of Osmond Joseph at St. Ignatius, is in Cuba, studying medicine at the University of Cienfuegos since 2003, with a 5-year scholarship from the Cuban government. On the Brazilian side of the border, where the Amerindian land-rights movement has a long history dating from the 1970s, many political leaders travel frequently around the world participating in international indigenous meetings.

An important distinction stressed by Amerindian people both on the Brazilian and Guyanese sides of the international border, is that made between the urban

⁴ <http://www.sdn.org.gy/apa/>

Amerindian population and the village dwellers. Many Amerindian people stressed that the majority of Amerindians who live in towns and non-Amerindian settlements identify with the dominant ideology and tend to think like White people, most being against the demarcation of Amerindian lands in continuous areas, such as in the recent case of Raposa Serra do Sol in Roraima, Brazil, where a continuous area of 1.67 million hectares were approved by presidential homologation on 15 April 2005. While in the neighbouring regions of Serra da Lua and Valley of the River Uraricoera, Amerindian lands were demarcated in small islands surrounded by ranches and settlements resulting in a situation of constant conflicts over land, the Amerindian Council of Roraima (Conselho Indígena de Roraima - CIR) with support from pro-Amerindian national and international non-government organisations and part of the Catholic Church, pressured the government to demarcate this area despite very strong opposition from the local state government of Roraima.

On both sides of the border people express different opinions as to who is Amerindian or not. Florany Mota, prefect of Uiramutã, a municipality created by the state of Roraima within the Raposa Serra do Sol Amerindian area ignoring Amerindian rights as prescribed in the 1988 Brazilian Constitution, started to identify herself as Makushi in her political campaign to try to gain the support of Amerindian people. She has not been recognised as Amerindian by the Amerindian Council of Roraima (CIR) since she is not recognised by the majority of the Amerindian leaders in this Amerindian area. In re-electing herself, Florany Mota, who was married to a relative of the ex-governor of the state of Roraima, Neudo Campos, continued to struggle against the recognition of Amerindian rights. In addition to buying votes from Guyanese Amerindians along the border in exchange for Brazilian identity cards, which created tension between Brazilian and Guyanese Amerindians, she consistently defended local government interests and large-scale development projects within the Amerindian area, including the Brazilian Army Frontier Platoon in the middle of Uiramutã Amerindian village, part of the *Projeto Calha Norte*, and was against the demarcation in a continuous Amerindian area, accusing the Amerindian Council of Roraima of discriminating her as not being Amerindian. (FOLHA DE SÃO PAULO, 23/05/2004).

The Brazilian government National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), however, does recognise Florany Mota as Amerindian since she does have some support from a minority group within the Amerindian community. Luíza Maria, wife of the Amerindian leader Orlando Pereira da Silva at Uiramutã Amerindian village, identified this prefect as being grand-daughter of one of the first Whitemen who invaded these Amerindian lands, and explained that although her grandmother was Makushi, she is Mestizo, granddaughter of her mother's aunt who lived with this White invader. Despite a majority of support for the Amerindian Council of Roraima (CIR) there is a minority of Amerindian people who support the Society for the Defence of United Indians of the North of Roraima (SODIUR), made up of Amerindian leaders who defend the demarcation of small islands of Amerindian territory amid ranches, dry rice producers and large-scale hydroelectric and mining development projects. The Amerindian leader Orlando Pereira da Silva explained that Florany Mota, brought up as a White lady in Boa Vista, state capital, learned a few words in Makushi as part of her election campaign.

In the towns of the region, many urban Amerindians positioned themselves against the demarcation of the Raposa Serra do Sol Amerindian lands in a continuous area and against the CIR, and in Guyana against the claims that are being made by the APA for the demarcation of large areas of Amerindian lands, assuming negative

hegemonic prejudices about Amerindians as being lazy, without initiative and obstacles to modernisation and development. At the same time many of the leaders based in Amerindian villages defend the demarcation of large Amerindian areas as a pathway leading to the guarantee of differentiated indigenous rights and Amerindian autonomy within the structure of the national States.

Statements of people who live along this international border reveal a very complex situation that is permeated by political party interests that are often in open conflict. Different ways of identifying as Amerindian, Mestizo, White, Makushi, Wapishana, Brazilian or Guyanese are emerging which often overlap, appearing at first contradictory from an outsider's perspective, but not from the perspectives of the Amerindian peoples who live along this border, since they see no problem in identifying according to the contexts in which they are immersed and which appear natural to them. The concept of territory is moulded within highly politicised contexts which reflect political divisions in this region.

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