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Introduction of a Wapishana-English bilingual education programme: an evaluation of the early stages

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Chapter 2

Introducing the Wapishana people

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1, I looked at the motivational factors that led to this study together with the research questions, the significance and limitations, the methods, and an overview of the thesis. In this chapter, I introduce the context of the study, that is, the Wapichan (Wapishana) People, their location, their population, a brief history, and the impact of colonization on their lives.

Based on the current and accepted orthography, Wapishana language activists feel strongly that the correct pronunciation is *Wapichan*. That this name should be correctly rendered is promulgated by its almost exclusive use throughout the two studies undertaken by teams of Wapishana researchers (see David et al. 2006 and South Central and South Rupununi Districts Toshaos Council 2012). However, the term Wapishana has been widely used by non-Wapishana and even Wapishana themselves and is seen in most English-written literature and school texts today. While being mindful of the sentiments of Wapishana language activists who are particular about the use of *Wapichan* and Wapishana names of villages and places, I will use the anglicized names. However, wherever necessary, I shall use the Wapishana names.

Even though the Wapishana are located in both Brazil and Guyana, this chapter focuses on the Guyanese Wapishana, since this study concerns their children. More specifically, this study concerns a mother tongue based-education programme being piloted in three Wapishana villages, Maruranau, Karaudarnau, and Sawariwau (See Section 2.2, Figure 4 for locations). Whereas each village has its own history, all villages have one common history, which will be briefly described in this chapter. As a result of historical contacts with other cultures over the years, Wapishana cultural practices have disappeared and are disappearing. At the same time, new cultural practices have been adopted in the midst of some common issues that continue to affect the people.

In addition to the location and population and a brief history of the Wapishana, the cultural aspects and social issues are highlighted here because they are not usually explicitly stated in the curriculum. Even if the

cultural aspects are stated, students may rarely have the opportunity to discuss or write about the topics in more detail. As such, I provide examples under the three broad areas of Wapishana cultural aspects here to illustrate the potential curriculum content matter that does exist. As stated above, the first set of examples concerns cultural aspects that have disappeared. The other two concern those cultural aspects that are in the process of disappearing and those that have been adapted. Other potential curriculum content matter concerns some current social issues that affect the lives of the people. The importance of education giving value to the children's heritage is underscored by several researchers. Smith (2012: 8), for instance, writes that in this age of globalization it becomes more important for people to have solid foundations deeply rooted in their heritage language and culture since young people need to be able to leave their communities with the strength of knowing who they are, while holding on to the wisdom of previous generations. Education should thus value the children's rich heritage passed down from their elders. Complementing the above, Jiménez (2015: 7) has argued, for the case of the Mixtec in Mexico, that the school system should give a dignified place to the Indigenous history, language, and other topics pertinent to their way of life: "Our literature, social organization, history, and traditional knowledge (e.g. of geology, flora and fauna, and their medical properties), should not be seen as anthropological curiosities but as integral parts of the national, cultural and educative environments." Similarly, given that Wapishana elders advised that their histories and aspects of their culture be part of the new programme, I fully support the importance of education giving value to the children's heritage. To begin with, the children's histories, aspects of their culture can be included in the curriculum as bases for thematic teaching (see Subsection 4.8.2.3.5). In the case of Quechua in Tatamayo (Peru), Howard (2004: 113) observes that a wealth of cultural knowledge is inextricably bound up with language. It can be said that other Indigenous languages in similar situations are likewise richly embedded in their own vast amounts of cultural knowledge but may be at risk of being forgotten. It can therefore be argued that bilingual education has to also be intercultural education since the teaching of language will have cultural contents as well.

Because the programme being piloted will more likely be extended to the other surrounding Wapishana villages, I first describe their locations and population in Section 2.2. I then provide an overview of the origin of the Wapishana and their contacts with other peoples in Section 2.3. I sketch the impact of colonization on the Wapishana in Section 2.4. Finally, I provide my conclusion in Section 2.5.

2.2 Location and population

The Wapishana live in Guyana, a country located in the northeast of South America, bounded to the east by Suriname, to the south by Brazil, to the north-west by Venezuela, and flanked to the north by the Atlantic Ocean. With a population of approximately 800,000, Guyana is commonly referred to the “land of six peoples”, a familiar line from the country’s national anthem, grouping the country’s complex population into six broad categories: Indigenous peoples, Europeans, Africans, Portuguese, East Indians, and Chinese. The notion of “six peoples” is largely based on the origin of each “ethnic group”. Except for the Indigenous Peoples whose ancestors were said to inhabit the land, the ancestors of the Europeans, Africans, Portuguese, East Indians, and Chinese originated from Europe, Africa, Madeira, India, and China, respectively. During the colonial period, the Portuguese were considered a separate group from other Europeans (mainly British) because of their origin as indentured immigrants from Madeira (Daly 1975: 174). Today, Guyana has a largely mixed population descended from these early inhabitants.

The official language is English, and as such, Guyana is part of the English-speaking Caribbean. Guyanese Creole or Guyanese Creole English, also known as Creolese, is widely spoken and can be considered the lingua franca of all six peoples. Hindi/Urdu and Arabic are used mainly for religious purposes. Nowadays, one also can hear Portuguese, Spanish, and Chinese, due to the large influx of Brazilians, Venezuelans, and Chinese. The Indigenous peoples also have their own distinct languages. They are Lokono (Arawak), Kari’na (Carib), Warao, Arekuna, Akawaio, Patamona, Makushi, Wapishana, and WaiWai. See Figure 1 for the distribution of the nine indigenous ethnic groups in Guyana. The Indigenous Peoples comprise about ten per cent of the total population, meaning that altogether they comprise about 80,000 of the country’s population.

Figure 1. Distribution of the dominant indigenous groups of the Guianas (reproduced with permission from Carlin and Mans 2015: 82).

A closer view of the location of the Wapishana settlements is shown in Figure 2.

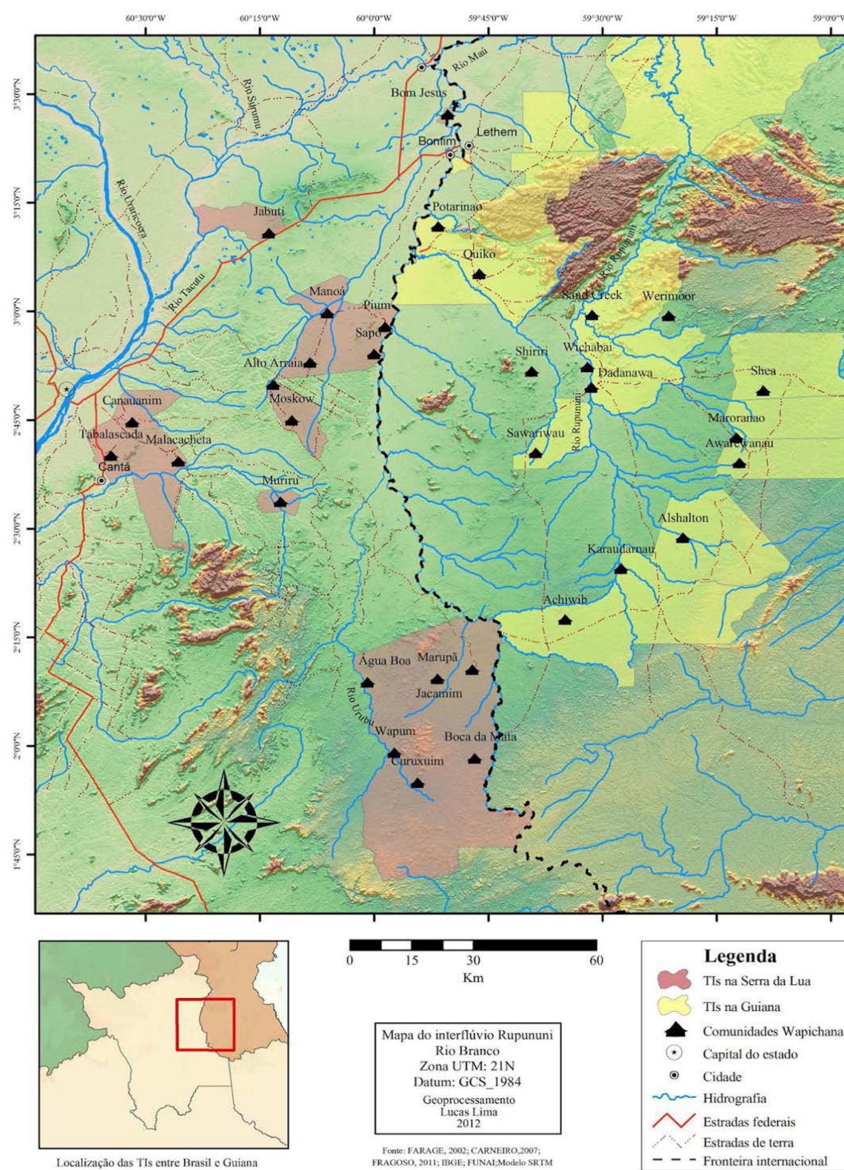

Figure 2. Location of the Wapishana settlements (reproduced from Lima 2012).

As can be seen from the map above, the Wapishana settlements are located in both Brazil and Guyana. Specifically, the Wapishana "traditional lands

span the Rio Branco-Rupununi Savannah and adjacent forests and mountains over a region that is today sub-divided by the Brazilian State of Roraima in the West and the Southern Rupununi District of Guyana Region 9 in the East" (David et al. 2006: 9). Thus, Figure 2 shows the distribution of Wapishana settlements on both sides of the border between Brazil and Guyana.

In Guyana, the Wapishana people are known to have relatives living on the Brazilian side of the border, contributing to a continual cross-border movement of peoples. Even though people on both sides of the border can speak the Wapishana language, there is a difference in the orthographies used. The spelling rules of the Portuguese language are used for Wapishana writing by the Brazilian Wapishana, while the alphabet of the English language is generally used by the Guyanese Wapishana. Therefore, the literacy materials are not easily read interchangeably by Wapishana on either side of the border.

However, as shown in Figure 2, on the Guyanese side, the South Rupununi District encompasses most but not all the settlements of the Wapishana. In addition, the map includes *Quiko*, a small Makushi settlement and *Wichabai* and *Dadanawa*, ranches owned by non-Wapishana. In fact, the names on this map are anglicized and are so used by Wapishana and non-Wapishana alike when referring to the settlements. The names also largely reflect their orthography in most publications about the Wapishana and in most textbooks used in the education system in Guyana.

Since this study concerns the Wapishana living in Guyana, Figure 3 is presented below to show that Guyana has ten administrative regions. The shaded area in Region 9 locates the area known as the South Rupununi, where the Wapishana live. As can be seen, the Wapishana are located a great distance away from the coastal area. Travelling over land is tedious, taking approximately 16 hours via vehicular transport from Georgetown in Region 4, to Lethem in Region 9. By air, it is faster but costlier, taking approximately one hour via small aircraft from Georgetown to Lethem. To reach the Wapishana villages further south of Lethem, one has to travel further over land for as long as five to six hours by vehicle to reach the farthest Wapishana village in the South Rupununi.

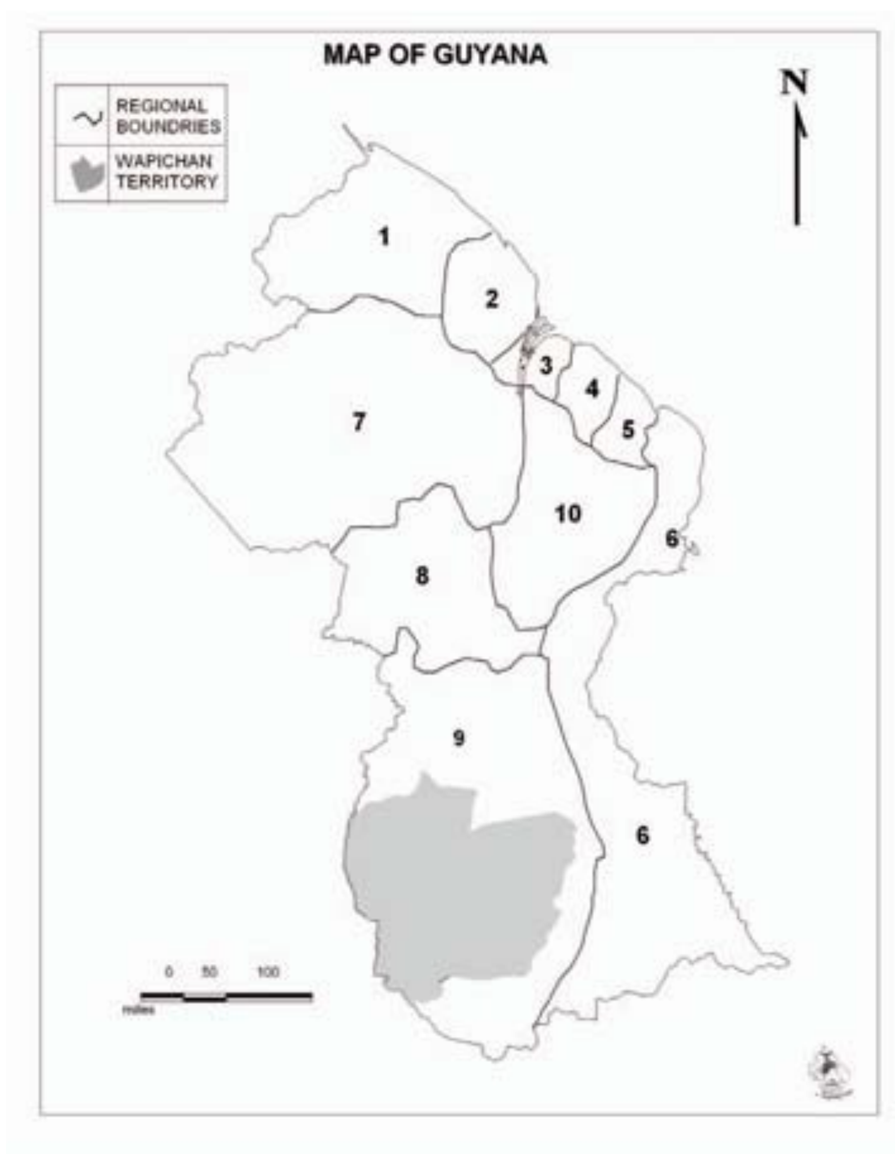

Figure 3. The South Rupununi in Region 9, Guyana, showing the location of Wapishana communities (reproduced from David et al. 2006: 10).

The Wapishana are not the only Indigenous People living in Region 9. Others living close by are the Makushi and the Wai Wai. It is worthy to note that among the Wapishana, there are some people who claim Atorad and Taruma ancestry. Atorad is an extinct language, but some people can distinguish between some Wapishana and Atorad words. Taruma is an

almost extinct language. There are at least three people in Maruranau who can speak Taruma, although their main language is Wapishana.

In terms of the topography of the Wapishana territory, there is mainly savannah (the lighter colour) and jungle (the darker colour) as shown in Figure 4 below.

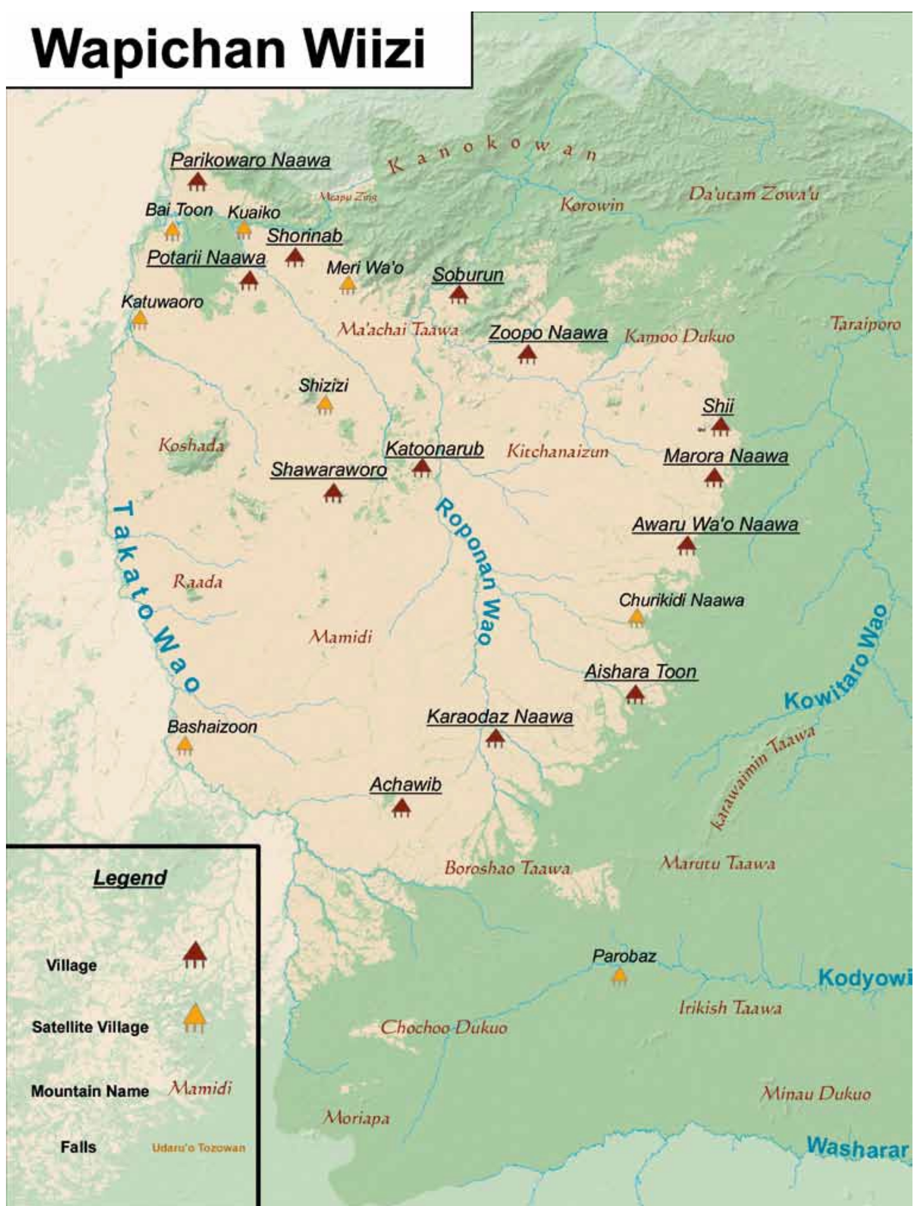

Figure 4. Map of the Wapishana traditional lands (Wapichan Wizi) (reproduced from South Central and South Rupununi Districts Toshaos Councils 2012: 4).

Figure 4 further shows the location of all Wapishana settlements in Guyana. This more inclusive map, with names in the Wapishana language, shows the

Wapishana and Makushi settlements of *Shorinab* and *Meri Wa'o* in the north that are not included in Figure 2. As can be seen in Figure 4, the village of *Shorinab* with its satellite villages of *Kuaiko* and *Meri Wa'o* in the north and *Parobaz* in the south, are located in the traditional lands of the Wapishana and are considered parts of the whole territory. The first village mentioned, Shorinab, is predominantly occupied by Makushi, while Parobaz is home to a mixture of Wapishana and WaiWai. As observed from my own visit to *Parobaz*, there are some Wapishana families living there, while most of the WaiWai living there are a result of some WaiWai men marrying Wapishana women. Some Wapishana elders point out that, based on their choices of settlement, the Wapishana people living on the western part of the South Rupununi are additionally referred to as *Wakadap sannao* [west NOM.PL] 'people of the west', while those living on the eastern part, along the forest edge are *Taawudaz sannao* [forest edge NOM.PL] 'people of the forest edge'.

I shall now briefly describe the location of villages, beginning with the district commonly called South Central Rupununi in Subsection 2.2.1 and then South Rupununi in Subsection 2.2.2. Following this, I will provide data on the population on these two districts in Subsection 2.2.3. Finally, I highlight the mixed population of the Wapishana and the effect it has had on language use in Subsection 2.2.4.

2.2.1 South Central Rupununi

Alongside the foothills of the *Kanokowan* 'Kanuku Mountain Range', *Parikwaro Naawa* is the northernmost village. *Potarii Naawa*, located further south, is a larger village which is sometimes referred to as Ambrose, after the one-time chief of the Wapishana (Bridges 1985: 23). *Potarii Naawa* is located on the left bank of the *Shawaraworo* creek and has the following satellite settlements: *Bai Toon* to the northwest, *Katuwaoro* to the south, and *Shizizi* to the southeast. *Shizizi* lies a few miles to the south of the three-peaked towering mountain from which the village derived its name. Further south of *Shizizi* is *Shawaraworo* village, which is also on the left bank of the *Shawaraworo* creek. This village lies west outside the border of its titled land, while *Katoonarib* lies east within the borders of the titled land of *Shawaaraworo* (Henfrey 2017: 73; South Central and South Rupununi Districts Toshaos Councils 2012: 8). This discrepancy is part of a controversial issue involving the Government's land titling for some villages. As mentioned by David et al. (2006: 13): "Since 1977, eleven of our twenty-two principle communities have received limited land title to a small portion of their lands, which does not cover the full extent of our

territory and leaves many of our families living on and farming lands without title." While this discrepancy concerning the borders of these two villages is still to be sorted out by the government and the villages, these two villages operate autonomously; that is, each has its own village council to administer its affairs. The largest village in this district without any satellite is *Soburun*, which is located at the confluence of the *Katu Wa'o* 'Sand Creek' and *Roponan Wa'o* 'Rupununi' rivers. To the east lies the smaller village of *Zoopo Naawa*. These villages together with their satellites and other places comprise the South Central Rupununi.

Figure 5. Shizizi 'Shiriri' (the majestic three-peaked mountain) in South Central Rupununi.

2.2.2 South Rupununi

Further east of *Zoopa Naawa* is *Shii* which lies on the eastern edge of the savannah or the edge of the forest which forms a basin on the western bank of the *Kowitaro Wa'o* 'Kwitaro River'. To the south is *Maroro Naawa*, and even further south is *Awaru Wa'o Naawa*, all situated along the edge of the forest. These three villages form a contiguous block of titled village lands

(Henfrey 2017: 74). However, immediately south of *Awaru Wa'o Naawa*, Wapishana land contiguity is broken due to an area of state land. Immediately south of the state land, another contiguous expanse of titled village lands continues in an arc along the southern edge of the forest. First of these is a satellite village called *Churikidi Naawa*, with the main village of *Aishara Toon*, even further south. *Karaodaz Naawa* is located further to the west, along the right bank of the Rupununi River. Somewhat between *Aishara Toon* and *Karaodaz*, going further south into the jungle on the right bank of the *Kodyowin Wa'o* 'Kuyuwini River', is *Parobaz*. To the west of *Karaodaz* is *Achawib* with its satellite *Bashaizon*, on the right bank of the *Takoto Wa'o* Takutu River. These villages complete the arc or what the schoolteachers of the South Rupununi District used to refer to as the "Crescent" villages. Otherwise, teachers refer to the three eastern villages of *Shii*, *Maroro Naawa*, and *Awaru Wa'o Naawa* as the "East End", and the other three main western ones as the "West End." These villages together with *Masekenari*, the WaiWai village further to the southern jungle on the upper left bank of the *Chiipi Wa'o* 'Essequibo River', comprise the South Rupununi.

On the Guyana side, the Wapishana villages thus stretch south-eastwards from *Parikwaro Naawa* to *Zoopo Naawa* of the South Central Rupununi District and then in an arc to "East End" villages through *Shii*, thence south-westwards to the "West End" villages up to *Bashaizon* of the South Rupununi villages. Generally, the Wapishana occupy the entire Rupununi Savannah along with the forests of the Kwitaro River basin on the east, the forests of the Kuyuwini River system on the south and along the right bank of the Takutu River on the West.

2.2.3 Population

According to the records of 2017 provided to me by the Office of the Regional Administration, Region 9, there are approximately 8,401 people living in the Wapishana communities. Table 2.1 shows the population of twelve main Wapishana villages, which are numbered. Other villages are not numbered because they are considered smaller and part of the main villages under which they are mentioned. Accordingly, a smaller village is indicated as a satellite in round parentheses ( ).

Table 1. Data on the population sizes in Wapishana villages in 2017 (from records provided by the Office of the Regional Democratic Council, Region 9).

No.	South Central Rupununi Villages	Population Size	Total
1.	Parikowaro Naawa [Parikwarunau]	221	221
2.	Potarii Naawa [Potarinau]]	613	1,125
	Bai Toon (satellite) [Baitoon]	290	
	Katuwaoro (satellite) [Small Sand Creek]	131	
	Shizizi (satellite) [Shiriri]	91	
3.	Soburun [Sand Creek]	896	896
4.	Zoopo Naawa [Rupunau]	332	332
5.	Katoonarub [Katoonarib]	416	416
6.	Shawaraworo [Sawariwau]	541	541
	South Rupununi villages		
7.	Shii [Shea]	443	443
8.	Maroro Naawa [Maruranau]	727	727
9.	Awaru Wa'o Naawa [Awarewaunau]	690	690
10.	Aishara Toon [Aishalton]	1,213	1,314
	Churikidi Naawa (satellite) [Churikidnau]	101	
11.	Karaodaz Naawa [Karaudarnau]	998	998
12.	Achawib [Achawib]	577	698
	Bashaizon (satellite)[Bashaizon]	121	
	Total		**8,401**

The general practice in the English-speaking Caribbean, including Guyana, is to use anglicized names of villages. However, wherever possible in this thesis, the Wapishana names will be applied. In Table 1 above, the Wapishana village names are given and followed by the anglicized version in square brackets.

2.2.4 Mixed population

The villages mentioned do not include *Shorinab*, the predominantly Makushi village, and *Parobaz*, with a mixed population of Wapishana and WaiWai. It is fair to say that most, if not, all Wapishana villages have people of mixed descent. In historic times, some Wapishana people mixed with Atorad and the Taruma. For example, there is an extended family of Wapishana-Taruma living in *Maroro Naawa*. Examples of villages that have more pronounced mixtures include *Shii* which has a mixture of Wapishana and people of African descent dating back to the time of the early European settlers in the area. Similarly, *Achawib* has people of mixed descent, resulting from a man of African descent coming to live there in a later period (see also Amerindian Research Unit of Guyana 1992: 38). However, the other villages also have people of mixed descent to a lesser extent as a result of non-Wapishana males who came to work in the area as settlers, teachers, policemen, and malaria workers. These workers married into the community or shared relationships with Wapishana women. Moreover, the mixture came about as a result of Wapishana women leaving their villages to work and forming relationships there. Therefore, today there are some people in the villages who are mixed with other Indigenous Peoples, such as the Makushi and Lokono (Arawak) or other ethnicities such as the European, Portuguese (Brazilian), African, East Indian, and Chinese.

Importantly, in such mixed families and some Wapishana families, parents speak to their children in English. English is mainly the language of meetings with visiting non-Wapishana in the villages and village assemblies with officials of the government. Additionally, English is the language of the school and of formal, official, and written use, but Wapishana is still the widely used language of the home and of informal, intimate, and oral use in most villages. In the next section, I turn to the origin of the Wapishana and their contacts with other peoples.

2.3 Origin of the Wapishana and contact with other peoples

This section gives an overview the origin of the Wapishana and their contact with other peoples from pre-colonial times. This information has implications for the understanding of the history of the Wapishana, especially by Wapishana children, who should know their historical background and culture. An overview of the origin of the people is provided from the perspective of the Wapishana and Western research, respectively (Subsections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2). Some researchers identify the North Arawak or Northern Arawakan area to classify or locate the Wapishana (Aikhenvald 1999: 69). What recent research says about this area may serve as a lead into the possible origin of the Wapishana. I then focus on the early migration of the Wapishana in Subsection 2.3.3, followed by the identification of the different peoples they encountered on their way to their present-day settlement locations in Subsection 2.3.4.

2.3.1 The Wapishana perspective

Some of the Wapishana elders interviewed said that they had no information as to the origin of their ancestors. One elderly woman offered a cosmological explanation told by her grandfather. According to oral tradition, all people spoke one language and lived as one on *amazada* 'earth'. As time went by, they questioned why *Tominkaru* 'God' put them on this *amazada* and not in *aokaz* 'heaven', where he lived. Determined to see God's place, they built a ladder with a platform to take them to see *aokaz,* but as they were about to touch the place, the ladder broke with everyone falling. When they awoke, different peoples spoke different languages. The Wapishana people fell on this side of the earth (where they are today) with their own language**.** However, this story was not easily verifiable, as others thought differently. For example**,** as noted by another Wapishana elder, it is likely that this story had a Christian influence as a result of the early missionary work by the Catholic Church (see Section 2.3.1). Testimonies, from some present-day Rupununi/Essequibo Wapishana, point to migration of their ancestors as **"**coming from the west**"**. For example, some felt that *Wapichan (Wapishana)* could be interpreted as *wakadapu sannao* 'people of the west', a combination of *wakadapu* 'west' and *sannao* 'people (plural)'. Based on a comprehensive literature research by Rivière (1963: 123), it appears that there was consensus among the Wapishana on the Rupununi/Essequibo that the Wapishana lived originally west of the Takatu, which is on the Brazilian side of the border. Based on the accounts of the Wapishana interviewed, it can be concluded that the Wapishana people can trace the direction of their

ancestors' migration but not their place of origin. This brings us to the meaning of the word *Wapichan*.

The Wapishana interviewed offered different meanings for the term *Wapichan.* For example, as mentioned above, some felt that *Wapichan* could be interpreted as 'people of the west'. Another Wapishana interviewed shared what her father told her: *Wapichan* were nicknamed *Matauzi Pidiannao* 'beetle people', a comparison made to a special beetle that cut the bark of trees with its mouth parts. As such, *Wapichan* were *barobainao* 'people who are masters at felling trees'. While this characteristic is indeed attributable to traditional Wapishana men, *Matauzi Pidiannao* should not be mistaken for *Mapidian,* whom the Wapihana describe as another group of people. The name *Mapidian* is the "calqued Wapishana name for Mawayana, *mawa* = *mao* 'frog' and *pidan (pichan)* 'person' corresponding to *-yana* 'ethnic group'" (Carlin and Mans 2015: 84). The Mawayana 'Frog People' and the Wapishana are both Arawakan Peoples and therefore speak Arawakan languages "that share no more than half of their basic vocabulary" (Carlin 2011: 225). Other Wapishana reasoned that *Wapichan* could be interpreted as *Wapidannao* 'our people' (Wapishana Language Project 2000, pp. 91, 71), a combination of *wa* 'our' and *pidannao* 'people (plural)'. The shortened name became *Wapidan* or *Wapichan*, a combination of *wa* 'our' and *pidan (pichan)* 'people'.

Thus far, we have seen that according to Guyanese Wapishana testimonies, their ancestors generally came from the west of the Takutu River, on the Brazilian side of the border. They also offered some meanings of *Wapichan,* the most plausible of which seems *'our people'*. In the next section I focus on what research says about Wapishana origin, migration and the different peoples they encountered on their way to their present-day settlements.

2.3.2 The Western perspective

Some researchers locate the Wapishana in the North Arawakan or Northern Arawakan area, inclusive of Rio Branco in Brazil and the Rupununi in Guyana (Aikhenvald 1999: 69). Figure 6 below presents a simplified version of the classification of this language family as proposed by Aikhenvald (1999: 67–71).

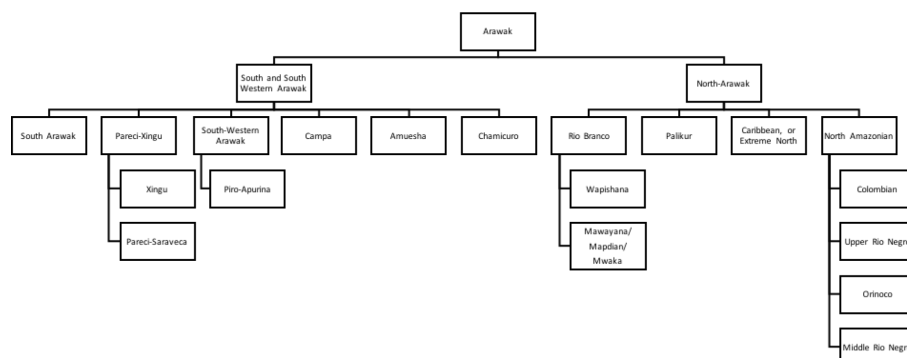

Figure 6. The Arawak language family classification as proposed by Aikhenvald (1999: 67–71).

This family was first known as Maipuran, after the language Maipure, formely spoken in Venezuela (Aikhenvald 2012: 33). After Maipure became extinct as early as 1783, it was renamed Arawak, after Arawak (or Lokono), which is spoken in the Guianas (Aikhenvald 2006: 447). According to Hornborg (2005: 592), linguists have speculated probable areas of origin for the Arawakan Peoples as somewhere in the north-western Amazon. Aikhenvald (2012: 33) contends that there is strong linguistic evidence in support of the Arawak proto-home being located between the Rio Negro and the Orinoco, which is in line with the area which could be described as north-western Amazon.

North-western Amazonas, Brazil, is also thought to be the origin of the Wapishana. In fact, some sources indicate that one can trace the origin of the Wapishana through other names by which they were known in earlier times. Peter Rivière, the eminent anthropologist, (1963: 115) pointed out that Major John Scott's reference to the Swanes (Shahones, Shawhauns) was assumed to be the Wapishana, living near the source of the Rio Branco, Brazil, around the 1760s. According to Rivière (1963: 115), the Shawhauns or "Guaypes (and Uaupes*)*" referred to by Harris and de Villiers, was also identified with the Wapishana, who lived in the Rio Negro area, in the region of its tributary called "Uaupes." The "*Uaupes*" referred to is the River Vaupes, a tributary of the Rio Negro, in the north-western part of Amazonas, Brazil. According to more recent research, the River Vaupes–Rio Negro is the area from which the Wapishana seems to have originated (Henfrey 2017: 64 and Carlin 2011: 227). Oral tradition of the Guyanese Wapishana also points to Brazil as the country of their ancestors' origin (see Subsection 2.3.1). With this in mind, we now trace the direction of the Wapishana migration from Brazil to Guyana.

2.3.3 Early migration

Based on their places of origin, the River Vaupes-Rio Negro area, it is assumed that a group of Wapishana emigrated in a generally eastward direction, from the River Vaupes to the Rio Negro, then up the Rio Branco and eventually toward the Essequibo and Rupununi (Rivière 1963: 13; Henfrey 2017: 64; Carlin 2011: 227). Given that the Wapishana did traverse and occupy the Rio Branco area, David et al. (2006: 9) concurred that Wapishana traditional lands spanned the Rio-Branco-Rupununi savannah. The majority of present-day Wapishana living in Guyana have attested to this initial eastward migration of our ancestors. The main reason for this group of people coming from the West, according to Rivière quoted in Henfrey (2017: 65), may have been some unsuccessful attempts on part of the Portuguese to force Indigenous Peoples of the Rio Negro basin to stay in settlements known as "descimentos".

Similar accounts of the oppressive situations faced by Indigenous Peoples during the time of the Portuguese colonial powers have been documented. Hill (2008: 709) notes, for example, that although indigenous slavery was officially abolished in 1767, the Portuguese government in Brazil implemented a system of forced relocations called descimentos, using military force to capture Indigenous Peoples and transport them to Manaus. In other instances, Brazilian slave traders went to extreme positions to raid sites such as Pirara in British Guiana despite protests from British missionaries, removing indigenous inhabitants to sites on the Rio Branco for forced agriculture and other labour (ibid. 2008: 737). Furthermore, according to Hill, "Protestant missionaries also became agents of colonial contact with Macusi, Akawaio, WaiWai and Wapisiana and other Indigenous peoples of the remote forested interior" (ibid. 2008: 737). As a result of this imposition and early contact which no doubt had threatened their way of life, a number of these early Wapishana appeared to have emigrated from Brazil to the Essequibo-Rupununi area. Other groups remained in Brazil. We now turn to the groups of people the early Wapishana encountered on their way to their places of settlements.

2.3.4 Early encounters with other peoples

As the group of early Wapishana emigrated and arrived in the South Rupununi savannah around mid-18th century, they encountered other Indigenous Peoples such as the Atorais (Farabe 1918: 13) and the Amaripa and Paravilhana (Rivière 1963: 60–61). At least two of these Indigenous Peoples, which were smaller in number, were mentioned as *Atoradnao* for

Atorais and *Parauyannao* for Paravilhana by David et al. (2006: 9). They also mentioned other smaller but important groups of Indigenous Peoples whom the Wapishana encountered: the *Daozai*, *Tarabainao*, *Chiibizai diinao*, *Arokonnao*, *Paowishiyannao*, *Maoyannao*, *Karapunnao*, *Taromnao*, *Nikanikarunao*, *Burokotonao*, and *Makushi*. However, it is possible that some of these mentioned smaller groups were not necessarily distinct from the Wapishana. A Wapishana elder indicated to me that some of these Indigenous Peoples were probably so named because of their physical attributes or peculiarities. Accordingly, they were *Tarabainao* 'enemies'; *Paawishiyannao* 'curly-haired'; *Karapunnao* 'loud or vociferous'; *Nikanikarunao* 'those who ate to finish food, not keeping any for the next meal'; or *Burokotonao* 'those who lived around a particular place'.

From among these early Indigenous Peoples, the best known are the Atorai or Atorad (Henfrey 2017: 66). Daozai and Atoradnao are equivalents of Atorai according to Rivière (1963: 114). One of the common names from these smaller groups that emerged during the interviews I conducted with several Wapishana was *Dawuuzai*, which also appears to be an equivalent of *Daozai*. The *Dawuzaai* group and possibly others came before the *Atoradnao* and the *Taromnao (*also called *Taruma).* In fact, Sir Robert Schomburgk, a famous explorer-geographer, was among the first Europeans to visit the Taruma in the upper Essequibo between December 1837 and January 1838 (Butt Colson and Morton 1982: 207). Schomburgk also indicated that the Taruma appeared to be formerly located at the tributaries of the Rio Negro, but it is not certain if these people were related to the Taruma in Essequibo (ibid. 1992: 208). Based on this indication, it is possible that the Wapishana had already met the Taruma in Brazil. Nonetheless, most of these groups, except the Makushi, were smaller, and they have been absorbed or assimilated by the Wapishana (Farabee 1918: 14; Rivière 1963: 128; Henfrey 2017: 66; Carlin 2011: 227).

At least two of the smaller groups of Indigenous Peoples—the Atorad and the Taruma—seemed to have had an indelible influence on the language and the place names of the Wapishana. For example, according to Carlin (2011: 226), the Atorai were the closest relatives of the Wapishana such that their two languages share about fifty per cent of their basic vocabulary. Another example is that many of the toponyms and hydronyms in the territory of the Wapishana (Central Rupununi and South Rupununi) are of Taruma origin (ibid. 2011: 225).

Worth mentioning is the fact that some of the longstanding *Toshaos* 'Indigenous leaders' were part-Atorad. This highlights the claim made by a number of Wapishana people that they have Atorad or Taruma ancestry of which they are proud. In addition, some earlier Atorad men seemed to have

had natural leadership attributes. A case in point can be made to the Atorad chief whose two daughters married one of the earliest European settlers among the Wapishana (Henfrey 2002: 65). Such leadership positions seemed to have been upheld by some successive Wapishana leaders who had Arorad ancestry. According to one of the interviewees, Toshao Ritchie from *Maroro Naawa*, Toshao Winter from *Aishara Toon*, and Toshao Kinchino from *Potarii Naawa* were all part-Atorad. Such people never spoke of their "Atoradness" openly; they were somewhat elusive, secretive about it. As such, they were less-known as Atorads. Atorad names were lost in history as the people took on English or Portuguese names. Contemporaneous examples are "Mamai *Mary*" (Bridges 1985: xiv) and Toshao *Kinchino*, which are English and Portuguese names respectively. There are still some families who claim Atorad and Taruma relatedness.

However, the Wapishana were the dominant group and appeared to be deeply averse to the intrusion of other groups of people into their area. For example, a written record of 1765, by the Director-General of the Dutch colony, mentioned that the Wapishana were fighting against the Makushi (Rivière 1963: 116). This recorded information coincides with the short report provided by one resident from *Shorinab* (the Makushi village in South Rupununi) that according to oral history of the village, "[t]his was the furthest the Makushi could have gone because they were stopped by the Wapishana." This may have explained why there is a territory overlap between the Wapishana and Makushi, with the Makushi village of *Shorinab* and its satellites, *Kuaiko* and *Meri Wao* in the South Rupununi (see Figure 4).

The first non-Indigenous people the Wapishana came into contact with in the Essequibo-Rupununi area were the Dutch. The Wapishana communities were already living there in the 18th century when the first Dutchmen entered the area (David et al. 2006: 10). This added intrusion seemed to be the main reason for the hostility of the Wapishana towards the Dutch at that time. According to the records, the Director-General of the Dutch colony reported that three Dutch traders who had gone up the upper Rupununi River to try to establish commercial contact with the Portuguese in the Amazon were killed by the Wapishana in 1753 (Whitehead 1998: 156; Rivière 1963: 116; Henfrey 2017: 65; Carlin 2011: 227).

In this section, we looked at the origin of the Wapishana and the meaning of the word Wapichan (Wapishana). Having looked at their early migration, we see that the present-day Wapishana are the descendants of those early Wapishana migrating eastward from Brazil. From the time of their early encounters and conflicts with other indigenous and non-indigenous groups in the Takatu-Rupununi-Essequibo area, a large group of

the Wapishana have since settled in the area where they were seen by Barrington Brown in the 19th century (1877: 305–315). This area is commonly referred to as the Rupununi. Thus far, historical migration of the Wapishana has been mentioned. In the next section, I now turn to the main impacts made on the lives of the Wapishana from the time of early colonization to modern migration.

2.4 Impact of colonization on the Wapishana

Like other Indigenous Peoples in Guyana and elsewhere in the world, the Wapishana people have experienced loss of aspects of their language and culture as a result of our connections with the wider world. From the time of early colonization, these connections with the outside world were not devoid of conflicts between the Wapishana and the European colonists. As observed by Forte (1996: 54), the historical evidence suggests that Indigenous Peoples were deeply averse to the new European presence which generally disrupted their lives**.** In retaliation, as mentioned in the preceding section, the Wapishana clashed with the early Dutch colonists, with fatal consequences on one occasion. The Wapishana therefore resisted Dutch expeditions to the Rupununi, though such resistance was later suppressed by the colonial power and culture (David et al. 2006: 11). Over time, with the imposition of colonial power and culture, changes in the lives of the Wapishana inevitably occurred. These changes in turn have had an impact on the people institutionally, economically, and culturally (David et al. 2006: 17). These authors go on to document that in response to the institutional, economic, and cultural influences, "some aspects of Wapishana customs show remarkable resilience whilst others were highly flexible and adaptable" (ibid. 2006: 19). This resilience can be attributed to several factors which have enabled the maintenance and preservation of Wapishana language and culture, but there are other factors that have resulted in certain aspects being displaced or lost. I shall now attempt to identify some of these factors, beginning first with factors of maintenance of their cultural values.

Firstly, the fact that the villages continue to be isolated geographically from the heavily populated coastal areas of Guyana has enabled us the Wapishana people to maintain our language and culture to a large extent. This was mainly because access to their villages by road, water, or air was generally difficult. Whereas the roads have been improved to date, access to facilities in the settlements are far below that of urban and coastal areas. As a result, the majority of the Wapishana still speak their language and continue at least some of their cultural traditions today.

Secondly, although scattered over a wide geographical area, most of the villages are contiguous to one other, creating a continuous expanse of Wapishana territory to which the people are strongly attached (see Figure 4). For instance, the landscapes and the natural resources that are found therein have Wapishana names known by most of the inhabitants. In this sense, the language and the land are still strongly interwoven.

Thirdly, family members such as parents and mainly grandparents, who lived permanently over the years in their villages and who have not migrated, have largely been the ones who kept the language and culture alive. In the absence of other family members, they spoke the language to members of the younger generation and taught them aspects of the culture such as cotton-spinning and arrow-making, to name a few.

However, in spite of the factors mentioned above, which can partly account for the maintenance of the Wapishana language and culture, Wapishana have realized that their language use and some main cultural practices are disappearing, especially among the younger generation.

The maintenance of their cultural values together with the revitalization of those disappearing and a recovery of those lost are important for inclusion in a culturally relevant or student-centred curriculum. By starting with a linguistically and culturally relevant curriculum, children will more likely to eventually find it easier to deal with who they are or be accepted for what they are. At the same time, children will not only be educated in Western learning, but also be steeped in the knowledge, skills, and culture of their people. Overall, the use of the children's first language and culture "at any level of education builds not only cognitive skills but also a positive affect—self-confidence, self-esteem and strong identity—all of which contribute to successful learning" (Benson and Young 2016: 2). In this respect, the children's first language and culture may be seen as supportive environments, positively contributing to the development of the affective as well as the cognitive domains of their learning.

In the following section, I identify several of these factors that contributed to the present situation of the Wapishana and cite some specific cases based on my own experience as a Wapishana, the views of several Wapishana interviewed and of published documents. As mentioned above, three major influences—institutional, economic, and cultural—impacted the lives of the Wapishana since colonial times; these influences serve as starting points in discussing the impact of colonization on the Wapishana.

In the following subsections, I discuss the institutional influence (Subsection 2.4.1), the economic influence (Subsection 2.4.2), influence of cultural contact (Subsection 2.4.3), practices that have disappeared

(Subsection 2.4.4), practices that are in the process of disappearing (Subsection 2.4.5), and other factors contributing to changing circumstances (Subsection 2.4.6). Finally, I provide a summary (Subsection 2.4.6.6).

2.4.1 Institutional influence

In discussing the implications of European dominance over other worlds, Jack Goody (2006: 130) pointed to the fact that the process of displacement is rooted in the other worlds' immersion into the culture of the West. Goody provided a contemporary example of the patterns of control on the organization of spaces, the direction of worship and lives of the people which eventually resulted in our yielding to the pre-eminence of the European tradition:

> … positioning of holy cities […] has also controlled not only organization of spaces and direction of worship but also the lives of the people. […] The initial religious motivation may disappear, but the internal geography it generates, remains "naturalized" and may be imposed on others as being somehow part of the material order of things (pp. 19–20).

The order of things as a consequence of these patterns of control is reflected in smaller communities today. In the case of Indigenous Peoples in Guyana, David et al. (2006: 180) pointed to similar realities for the Wapishana: "since the early 20th century our people have adapted to new institutions like the churches and schools in our communities." As such, in the following, I discuss the influence of the church in Subsection 2.4.1.1 and that of school in Subsection 2.4.1.2, from the times of the early colonial period.

2.4.1.1 The Church

With respect to what led to the introduction of Christianity to the Rupununi area in what was then British Guiana, Bridges (1985: 1) notes the following about Fr. Cuthbert Cary-Elwes, who pioneered the establishment of the Catholic Church among the Wapishana, which in turn led to their acceptance of Christianity and other influences on their lives:

> In British Guiana, he worked first in Georgetown and then in Northwest District. There Michael McTurk—the then (unofficial) "Protector of Indians" spoke to him of the Takas—"a glorious opening for a Mission." He told the Bishop who himself consulted McTurk.

> On 19th November, 1909, Bishop Galton—"Vicar Apostolic" of British Guiana—accompanied by Fr. Cary Elwes, started up the Demerara in a river-steamer, then, the same evening, from Wismar on the River Essequibo.

The "glorious opening for a Mission" assumes a preconception that the Takutu area was inhabited by people whose spiritual practices were alien to Christianity; therefore, they should be conquered through evangelization. Such colonial preconception is in alignment with what Jansen and Jiménez (2017: 28) refer to as the "Eurocentric representation of the Indigenous world by conquerors and missionaries". It can be said that such a perspective of the Indigenous world became the colonizers' justification to not only introduce their own religion but also their own civilization to the colonized.

Butt Colson and Morton (1982: 206) note that Fr. Cary-Elwes was attached to his missionary base in the Takatu, better known as the Rupununi area, for 13 years (January 1910–May 1923), working among the Indigenous Peoples including the Wapishana**.** Before Elwes' arrival, many Wapishana families lived in proximity to their farmlands, which were mostly along the edge of the forest. A case in point was the village of *Shawariminiz Naawa*, located on a long, flat hill in the savannah but in the vicinity of the forest. According to diary accounts of Fr. Cuthbert Cary-Elwes, because the water supply was limited at *Shawariminiz Naawa*, he and the chief chose a new site for the village about three miles away in a north-western direction (Bridges 1985: 46). Cary-Elwes went on to record that at this new site, the people first constructed a new church building before they eventually relocated to form the new village called *Maroro Naawa*. Such movement of people influenced by the church building parallels those of others such as *Shawaraworo* (ibid. 1985: 157), which was the largest village during the time of this earliest Catholic missionary. In other cases, persons moved to the villages first and then built churches as in the case of *Potarii Naawa* or Ambrose (ibid. 1985: 158).

Prior to the pioneering evangelical work of Cary-Elwes, the Wapishana had had a concept of a supreme spiritual being whom they called *Tominkaru* 'Creation' or 'Creator' of all things. Thus, when the priest preached to them about the overall supernatural being called 'God', it greatly influenced them, according to one Wapishana elder. However, their other ancestral beliefs that are connected to "a richly populated world of unseen spirits" (Henfrey 2017: 141) were not entirely displaced by their Christian beliefs and practices. For example, in Wapishana cosmology, there are overarching spirits of certain animals, plants, and landscape called *Tominkiz* 'origin' (e.g. *Kanawada tominkiz* 'cayman's origin'). Other authors refer to the same overarching spirits as *Dokozu* 'Grandfather' or *Tapiki* 'Keeper'

(David et al. 2006: 37). An elderly local Catholic leader offered a perspective on the difference between Tominkaru and other spirits that the Wapishana believe in. Tominkaru is perceived as the overall supernatural being whereas the spirits of certain animals, plants, and landscape are also supernatural, but smaller, less powerful, and put in charge there by Tominkaru. The difference is that worship is rendered to Tominkaru, while the smaller spirits are only given respect. In this sense, the overall modern Wapishana belief system is syncretic (Henfrey 2017: 137).

Further on the Wapishana traditional belief system, there is the realm of spiritual healing associated with the knowledge of esoteric techniques (Henfrey 2002: 133). A key example is that someone knowledgeable can invoke the desired overarching spirits through specialized rituals: prayers accompanied by blowing the breath of the mouth. The Wapishana also believe that these specialized rituals can be enhanced by the parts of special plants, animals, fish, insects, and amphibians found in on the land for use as *pasãnka* ‘spirit charms’ in activities such as hunting (David et al. 2006: 33). However, not many Wapishana are knowledgeable about these spirit charms. Perhaps, the more commonly known is the *panakaru* ‘plant charms’ for initiation rituals and hunting. It is also the belief among many Wapishana that certain ritual prayers and the use of certain plant charms can be used for evil purposes to cause harm on others. Perhaps the most feared of these practices is that of the *kanaumuu* ‘an evil being’ that has the ability to change from one form to another (e.g. from a human form to an animal form) and vice versa. These interchangeable forms are reportedly accomplished by the control and wishes of a knowledgeable man by the application of special *panakaru.* Activities of the *kanaumuu* are believed to cause severe illness and at times death, resulting in considerable social tension among people (Henfrey 2017: 140).

It is accepted by many that the *marunao*[5] is the main individual who knows specialized knowledge for guidance and healing, although there may be less prominent individuals who are also specialized healers. One *marunao*, whom I interviewed, shared that a *marunao* can perform both in the night and daylight, depending on his preference. Naturally, the *marunao* is respected and at the same time feared because he can also use the specialized knowledge to cause one’s life to be off balance, causing sickness. From this perspective, one elderly woman indicated to me that people may be less inclined to consult a *marunao* who is heard to indulge in malevolent

5A *marunao*, as explained by one elder, is a gifted ritual specialist/spiritual healer who first fasts in order to enter into a visionary state that provides him with insights needed for the guidance and healing of others. *Marunao* is the male, and *marunaoaba* is the female.

practices. Sometimes, however, whenever one is befallen by calamity or sickness that is believed to be connected with evil, one can go to a “good” *marunao* to ask for cures and healings. One of the roles of the *marunao* then, is to have balance restored in one’s life through prayers, dietary restrictions, and other prohibitions, depending in the type of illness. Nowadays, this role complements the use of modern medicine, such as tablets provided by the Community Health Worker who is available at the village health posts. The other role of the *marunao* is controlling the opening and (in some cases, the closing) of previously inaccessible areas to human activity (Henfrey 2017: 150).All the traditional practices and beliefs mentioned above were not without opposition from the established religious bodies. The missionaries were known to discourage and, in some cases, openly denounce such practices or beliefs. For example, during my childhood days in my village, I remembered a preacher saying during his sermon that there was no such thing as a *kanaumuu*. Such denunciation has taken on an influential effect on quite a number of Wapishana Christians in that they in turn frown on certain “prohibited” practices engaged in by their fellow men. Such actions may create social tension among the people. This seems to have raised the issue as to how far or whether such practices should be allowed as an intercultural component in the Wapishana–English bilingual education programme. For example, while interviewing parents of the Year 1 class of the *Quality Bilingual Education Programme for Wapichan Children*, I noted that a few who are attached to a certain Christian denomination hinted that teachers should not mention “blowing” to their children, which in Wapishana culture is a practice of praying and using one’s breath to invoke overarching spirits. This is fair enough, but as far as I know this aspect of the culture is not in the curriculum**.** This suggests that the programme leaders considered the sensitivities of individual parents towards such cultural practices and chose to exclude them from the programme. Nonetheless, some Wapishana still believe that their connection with plant and animal spirits is a way of life and still practise it.

The church as an institution then, influenced the early Wapishana immensely in that many of them were converted to Catholicism. Others, in later years, converted to other Christian denominations such as Christian Brethren and Assemblies of God. None of these churches differed much from the others in its influence levels of the tolerance of Wapishana culture. All the churches, for example, preached that there was only one supreme spiritual being. In effect, the church contributed somewhat to the diminishing of the public role of the *marunao*, who used to give healing and spiritual guidance to the people (South Central and South Rupununi Districts Toshaos Councils 2012: 10). Some churches who forbade their followers from using traditional healing services have undermined the public role of

the *marunao* in some communities (David et al. 2006: 18). Some people openly use stigmatizing terms such as “ungodly” or “evil” to refer to aspects of the spiritual work of the *marunao*. Partly for this reason, people would prefer to seek the services of the health centre or hospital. Only when they or their relatives have not fully recovered from the treatment received from the health personnel would they seek to see the *marunao*. In this way, the service of the *marunao* is seen as secondary or diminished, a last resort for treatment. Other sick people opt to see the *marunao* first. However, because of the stigma attached to their work by some people, a limited number of these spiritual healers are operating covertly.

The church further contributed to the devaluation of the language through the use of mainly English prayers and hymns. According to some elderly persons interviewed, Latin or English prayers were translated into Wapishana since the time of the first Catholic missionary priest, Fr. Cary-Elwes, who spoke Wapishana, a “with a fluency and correctness that astonished and delighted them” (Bridges 185: 169). These Wapishana prayers were encouraged and kept alive by successor priests including the popular educationist priest, Fr. Bernard McKenna (Greene-Roesel 1998: 60). However, while Wapishana prayers were said during Sunday services through the work of Parish Lay Assistants (PLAs), I can recall as a school boy that whenever the priest came, the mass and hymns were in English. It was only in the mid-70s that several Christian songs were introduced in Wapishana by other Christian missionaries who had also learned the language. In 2014, I was present at *Karaodaz Naawa* village where the New Testament in Wapishana was dedicated to the people by the Jesuit Missions, the Wycliffe Bible Translators, and the Bible Society of Guyana. Since then, there has been an increase of the scripture readings in Wapishana. Within the past five years, one Catholic priest from India has also gone as far as saying the Mass in Wapishana. In terms of use, however, the Wapishana people have access to more Christian hymns and prayers in English than in Wapishana. These were the main ways by which the church as an institution changed the lives of the Wapishana. While the church had much influence over Wapishana through religious education meetings and instruction within the confines of the church building, it had less influence outside. By being able to partake in their traditional spiritual customs at places of use such as the home, the savannah, the rivers, the mountains, and the forest, the Wapishana are still able to create a sense of continuity with the spiritual past. Other profound changes resulted as an indirect influence of the church, which established primary schools. I now discuss the major ways these changes impacted the Wapishana people.

2.4.1.2 The school

With the construction of the church buildings came the eventual construction of school buildings, which were also run by the missionaries. Some of the primary schools were officially opened for the first time in the 1940s and early 1950s. According to the records kept in some primary schools in South Rupununi, for example, Aishalton Primary School was first opened on 1 April 1943; Karaudarnau Primary School on 2 September 1946; Maruranau Primary School on 15 October 1947; Awarewaunau Primary School on 1 September 1949; Achawib Primary School on 6 January 1953; and Shea Primary School on 14 September 1953. As people realized the need to send their children to school, more people came to live in the villages permanently. This was the case with Shea village, where in 1954 most of the people first lived in the forest along the Kwitaro River, according to Basil Rodrigues' autobiography, presented by Greene-Roesel (1998: 62).

This historical pattern of movement was not confined to the Wapishana. Research concerning other Indigenous Peoples revealed similar patterns. As expressed by Forte (1996: 73), such movement brought about a huge change in their lifestyles:

> The very transmission of Amerindian-ness was affected by the necessity of school. What an Amerindian child needed to know in order to be an Amerindian adult was, in all the thousands of years up to the middle of the last century, passed to the child directly from its parents and elders in constant interaction over shared daily activities. What it took to be an Amerindian was a vast range of knowledge of the natural environment, which came from the elders over the long periods of direct contact in connection with hunting, gathering, food preparation and farming itself. When Amerindian children began to spend most of their day in school, and travelling to and from school, their traditional way of learning what it took to be an Amerindian was replaced by a process which imperfectly taught them what colonials thought it took to be a servant of the Crown.

This process—in which the use of English as a medium of instruction for learning English as a second language was also seen as a replacement of the child's native language—was embedded in the British model of education, a reflection of what Jansen and Jiménez (2017: 27) see as a the "continuation of colonial structures, mentalities…" With time, such structures added to the Wapishana villages a political dimension. For example, the teaching in English only, with no Indigenous language permitted, had a political motivation and repercussions: to show that the area belonged to Britain, not Brazil. Thus, an English-speaking area meant it was British**.** Accordingly, the education system prioritized English while devaluing Wapishana to such

an extent that it had a "conditioning" effect on the school children. Forte (1996: 112) gave her perspective on this:

> After some 6 to 8 years of this kind of conditioning, Amerindian children also feel alienated from the life that surrounds them. Many grow dissatisfied with the natural and social environment of their villages and regions and think that they properly belong to the world from which their education derived.

In practice, this implied that children were influenced by the English language and culture insofar as they began to perceive their own language and culture as inferior. Such a marginal effect on the situation of the Indigenous population is reflective of the wider interplay of power stemming from what Ma Rhea (2015: 91) aptly captures as the "colonial mindset that established the system of education for Indigenous peoples globally". Partly, it is the colonial mindset that influences school leaders' and teachers' thinking "that they unwittingly reinscribe the contemporary school experience" contends Ma Rhea (ibid. 2015: 92). Following Ma Rhea's line of thought, it can also be said that such a colonial mindset also influences the students' thinking and actions. Though their actions or preferences have shifted towards the lifestyle of the western world, most Indigenous Peoples still experience marginal effects on their lives. In the case of the majority of Latin American states, the structures imposed by colonialism are replicated. As put by Aman and Ireland 2015: 4), "Newly born republics replicated the colonial structures in new terms where the very discourse of nationalist unity used for imperial decolonization continued to push the indigenous populations to the margins of society with the continuous enhancement of the colonial difference between modern European idioms (languages of science and knowledge) and those of indigenous populations (languages of religion and culture)". Where the education of indigenous children is concerned, indigenous languages continue to be marginalized in the school systems which perpetuate the dominance of the colonial language as the language of instruction. In Guyana, when a Wapishana-based bilingual educational programme was advocated for, some Wapishana parents and even teachers opposed the idea. However, much of this opposition is due to a lack of understanding with these stakeholders on the academic, cognitive, and social benefits their children could have as a result of being literate both in their native and majority languages (details of these are discussed in Chapter 4). All this and other matters cause most Indigenous Peoples to de-emphasize their traditional knowledge and skills. Similar attitudes towards their traditional knowledge and skills have been observed in other Indigenous Peoples. In the case of the Mixtec in Mexico, for example, Jiménez (2015: 4) has argued that the root cause of such attitudes is the

colonial mindset of the peoples: "Colonialism has been internalized: the dominant groups in society but also the indigenous peoples themselves still produce colonial ideas… The result is an attitude that glorifies western culture and modernization." Indeed, instances of this glorification are manifested in peoples' interactions with one another and the wider society.

In some Wapishana villages in Guyana, some younger parents, even though they can speak Wapishana, prefer to speak to their children in English. The preference given to English rather than Wapishana as the language of conversation in this case is reflective of its overwhelming dominance in the spoken and written realms, as expressed by Cenoz and Gorter (2012: 301): English is the most widely spread language of international communication and the most common language in education. As a result, there are scores of school children who speak English and not Wapishana as their first language. Such children, even though they understand the Wapishana being spoken, feel less confident in speaking it. Others have learned Wapishana and even when spoken to in the language, opt to answer in English. A contemporary example of such an attitude is in the remark of a young school-leaver: "We want to learn English, not Wapishana," in commenting on my work as the coordinator of the Wapishana Adult Literacy Programme. Similarly, some Wapishana secondary school children, even though they know their mother tongue, have been heard to remark to non-Wapishana teachers that they could not speak their native language. In commenting on similar actions by other Indigenous Peoples elsewhere, Cantoni (1997; 4) observes that such overt put-downs of their language come from older children who are ashamed of their own ethnicity (Cantoni 1997: 4). Cantoni further documents, that by seeing themselves as different, in language, appearance, and behaviour, people eventually regard these differences as undesirable because they impede their easy participation in the dominant society around them (Cantoni 1997: 3). In the case of the Wapishana, some people prefer speaking in English because it is not only the language of formal education, power, and prestige, but it is also widely used by people in the country and elsewhere in the world.

A similar negative attitude by other Indigenous Peoples towards their own language as a possible medium of instruction in a formal bilingual education programme has been observed. As noted by Hornberger (1999: 161), bilingual education has been resisted at times by the Quechua-speaking communities in Peru because of their firm belief that the most obvious way their children would be able to improve their lot is to be able to speak Spanish and to receive their education in Spanish. In Ecuador, the attitudes of the Indigenous peoples were no different. More recently, Novo (2014: 110), in an ethnographic study of elementary intercultural education in

Kichwa, found that the Indigenous peoples claimed that they already knew the language and so preferred their children to learn foreign languages that are perceived to be useful in a globalized economy. In the above cases, the negative attitudes appear to be based on fear that the native language is inadequate for educational instruction or a lack of understanding of how such instruction will benefit the children. More recently however, there is a positive attitude in the Andean region, particularly in Peru. In this context, Escobar (2013: 730) notes that there are positive attitudes towards bilingual education by parents of the Indigenous language-speaking children because of the perception that by acquiring Spanish, they will "better integrate themselves into the national community, while maintaining their cultural identity". If more indigenous parents as well as the teachers and other key stakeholders can develop such positive attitudes towards mother tongue-based bilingual education, the children's first or native language will more likely be maintained alongside the second language throughout the primary school.

Returning to the Wapishana, a retired teacher informally shared how a particular element within the school system had a conditioning effect on the parents. When he was a young primary schoolteacher between the late 1960s and the early 1970s, teachers enforced the rule that children were not to speak their "dialect" in school. An interviewee offered a possible reason for this: historically, the teaching in English in the Rupununi was practised because Indigenous teachers were supplied from the highly educated Santa Rosa, Moruca area, inhabited by the Indigenous people called the Arawak (Lokono), which had had the advantage of good schooling already (see Amerindian Research Unit 1992: 67). Additionally, based on my own experience of being a pupil in one of these primary schools, non-Indigenous teachers were recruited from the coastal region of Guyana, signalling that this was the policy for recruiting teachers then. Eventually, as the years passed, more and more Wapishana people became qualified to teach in the schools. The Arawak teachers and non-Indigenous teachers from the coastal areas spoke neither Wapishana nor Makushi. Another reason is that they, together with structural system they were part of, did not consider it important to learn the languages as teachers, in the first place. From the standpoint of a retired resident teacher from the coastal area, another reason was that when the tests were designed they were written not in Wapishana but in English. Nevertheless, these examples illustrate the practices that were part of a structural system, whereby Indigenous languages are constantly undervalued and underrepresented.

The above-mentioned reasons seem to inadequately conform to the original sense of the term "dialect" which is defined as "a variety of a

language, spoken in one part of a country (regional dialect), or by people belonging to a particular social class (social dialect or SOCIOLECT), which is different in some words, grammar, and/or pronunciation from other forms of the same language" (Richards and Schmidt 2002: 155). Based on the above definition, a dialect may be described as relational to another language, that is, one of the other. This implies two or more varieties of a language may be used by individuals or societies. Further, a useful description that elucidates the difference between varieties that are dialect and non-dialect is offered by Sallabank (2012: 105), who points out that many linguists, use the criterion of mutual comprehensibility: "if users of two varieties cannot understand each other, the varieties are considered to be different languages. If they understand each other, the varieties are considered mutually comprehensible dialects of the same language." The reasons for the choice of one dialect over another involve social considerations such as the participants, the social setting, or the purpose of the interaction (Holmes 2013: 5). However, the reasons for one choice or the other also involve complex issues, as stated by Errington (2008: 10): "Issues of linguistic identity and background can easily and oversimply thought of as matters of 'dialect' and 'accent' but these are terms which disguise and straddle complex, overlapping social categories: region, race, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, age and so on." Errington further points out that during the colonial era "such linguistic differences were encountered by colonialists as challenges which they dealt with by selecting some ways of speaking as their objects of description, while ignoring others" (ibid. 2008: 10).

While people in a community may use one dialect over another, this pattern of variety choice has a slightly different dimension. Such a dimension may be described in the narrow and original sense as "diglossia", by which "two distinct varieties of the same language are used in a community, with one regarded as a high (or H) variety and the latter (a low or L) variety" (Holmes 2013: 27). Each variety has a distinct function: the former, for example, is generally used for literature whereas the latter for informal communication. Holmes goes on to note that the H and L varieties of a language function in very similar ways by which distinct languages operate in other communities, such as the Guaraní and Spanish in Paraguay (ibid. 2013: 31). Accordingly, because of this similarity it was suggested that bilingual communities such as those in Paraguay and elsewhere be considered examples of diglossia. Therefore, the term diglossia can be generalized to cover any situation where two distinct languages are used for different functions in a speech community, especially where one language is used for H functions and the other for L functions.

Based on the generalized explanation, diglossia could be usefully extended to Indigenous communities in which an Indigenous language and an international language (e.g. Spanish or English) operate. The Indigenous language may be considered the L variety which is generally learned at home whereas the international one is the H variety, learned in school. In this respect, it is not surprising what the wider community in Mexico, for example, thought of the intercultural university, which is for both non-Indigenous and Indigenous students alike. According to Schmelkes (2014: 136) such a university was "considered poor, inadequate and of low quality because its instructors taught 'dialects', which is a derogatory way of referring to Indigenous languages because the implication is that they are not languages." That Indigenous languages are "dialects" is a perception that is reflective of the situation in Guyana, where many people, including Indigenous Peoples, perceive English as prestigious and Indigenous languages as less important or valueless, only "dialects" and not real languages.

Since Wapishana is not in any way related to English, to call Wapishana a dialect is a misconception. Rather Wapishana and English are distinct languages, each with its own word structure, sentence structure, and sound system. Furthermore, the Wapishana–English situation is diglossic. Nevertheless, one of the resulting effects is that some parents, educators, and officials perpetuate the use of the term "dialect" when referring to any one of the Indigenous languages today. This had caused some older folks to believe that their children must learn the second language as first and foremost. As a consequence, one can observe today that scores of younger parents prioritize the use of English by speaking to their children at home in English rather than Wapishana. These practices were largely influenced by the school structure, which facilitated the process of assimilating culturally diverse children to the dominant culture. As expressed by Cummins (1996: 147), while the well-intentioned educators saw "their role as helping students to add a second language and cultural affiliation", they were, by contrast, not helping to maintain their students' primary language and culture.

In addition to the negative effects noted above, the imposition of the British monolingual model of education led to the majority of Wapishana children experiencing a "language barrier" at the beginning of their formal schooling, because they were and still are instructed in the dominant language, English, which was once the elite colonial language, English (see Subsection 1.1). This situation typifies a school system that promotes the national language (Wright 2012: 71). However, for the Wapishana children, they entered a classroom finding the promoted or endorsed national language unfamiliar. This contributed greatly to the majority of children

underachieving or underperforming on school assessments. According to the head teacher of one primary school I interviewed, part of the problems teachers faced was children's underachievement in school assessments. The head teacher shared that the pupils who wrote the National Grade Two Assessment (NGSA) over the last ten-year period have not been achieving the national learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy. A similar trend is evident in nearby schools. I conducted an independent survey of the National Grade Six Assessment of children from three Wapishana villages over a six-year period (2007 to 2012). The findings revealed that on average only 30% of the children were awarded places in secondary schools, while the remaining 70% were awarded places in the same primary schools. Consequently, those children who remained continued in the upper classes of the primary schools with most of them being eventually phased out, thereby limiting their options for job opportunities and social and academic advancement. Those who dropped out prematurely experienced the same fate. This is often the situation faced by a number of Wapishana children who have taken the NGSA and obtained lower scores than the others. Such same-school placement parallels other examples of educational structures that have disadvantaged culturally diverse children. Cummings (1996: 140), for example, documents how ability grouping and tracking practices might systematically discriminate against average and low-ability students, leading to a retardation of their academic progress. Indeed, if children are made to learn in a language they are less familiar with, then there are consequences, as Baker (2006: 170) pointed out:

> …if children are made to operate in an insufficiently developed second language… the system will not function at its best. If children are made to operate in the classroom in a poorly developed language, the quality and quantity of what they learn from complex curriculum materials and produce in oral and written form may be relatively weak and impoverished.

A similar perspective was made by Benson (2004: 2), who pointed out that the learning difficulties experienced by children may be rooted in the "submersion" approach to teaching which is defined as instruction in a language that the learners do not speak when they start school. As Lam (2001: 96) further pointed out, in the submersion approach the children's first language is neither valued nor used as a medium of instruction. This implies that the submersion approach assumes the life, culture, and language of the mainstream culture to be the norm in a country, no matter what the culture or identity of the children, where they live or what they speak. English as a language of instruction can be likened to a "barrier" to their learning if children do not know English or just know a little of it. An

alternative formal approach is learning first in the L1 with its associated culture and then proceeding in a similar way in the L2, but at the same time not replacing the L1. Further discussion on approaches to schooling children who are bilingual or who will become bilingual is done in Chapter 4.

In spite of this barrier however, there are several Wapishana children who have performed exceptionally well at the National Grade Six Assessment and were offered places at senior secondary schools in the capital city. This has contributed to another type of displacement. This displacement may be termed an educational "brain drain" whereby the highest achieving children leave their villages at 11 years old for secondary schooling, truncating the development of their language and knowledge of their traditional ways of life at a crucial stage. Furthermore, some of the most successful students who obtain acceptable grades in a minimum of five subjects at the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate examination prolong their years in the city to pursue tertiary education. The certificate is awarded to students who write an examination at the end of the five-year period of their secondary education. Those who gain higher education qualifications often cannot return to work in their villages even if they feel compelled to, because of the lack of job/entrepreneurial opportunities for their educational level. Other young people leave the communities in search of employment elsewhere. A prime driver of this migration is a lack of opportunities to earn a steady income in the villages, "where the younger people measure status by the possession of consumer goods and the gradual de-emphasising of subsistence agriculture" (Forte 1996: 14).

As we have seen in this section, public infrastructure, beginning with the church buildings, has immensely influenced the organization of most Wapishana villages. Among the public buildings, the church building became the centre of convergence of most people when they came to worship on Sundays**.** One of the reasons for the dominance of the Christian activities is the fact that over the years the church discouraged the traditional spiritual practices of the Wapishana including those of the *marunao*. All this, along with the discouragement of the use of the Indigenous language in schools, caused many Wapishana to be seen as Christians and English-speaking. However, the total integration of the Wapishana into the mainstream culture appeared to have been resisted to some extent by a considerable number of men and women still spending their time in subsistence activities of farming, hunting, fishing, and gathering of fruits and nuts. These activities entailed constant connection with their landscape, which also lends itself to the ongoing practices of their spiritual beliefs. By practising such spiritual beliefs covertly, and not overtly as they did with their Christian beliefs, they maintained their ancestral spiritual

independence. In so doing, quite a number of families retained their identity and traditional lifestyle to a large extent.

In the next section, I discuss the economic influences on the Wapishana, beginning from the colonial-influenced cattle and balata industries to modern-day income generating activities.

2.4.2 Economic influence

When the Europeans first arrived in the Rupununi, an established trading system was in place between the Wapishana people and other Indigenous Peoples such as the Taruma and the WaiWai. As noted by Butt Colson and Morton (1982: 208), the famous explorer-geographer Robert Schomburk remarked that the Tarumas, who were trainers of fine hunting dogs and manufacturers of cassava graters, bartered these with their neighbours, particularly the Wapishana. This system continued during the early colonial period, as the Wapishana bartered cutlasses, axes, and other useful objects for bows and cassava graters from the WaiWai (Rivière 1969: 152). Due to the introduction of the cash-oriented system by the colonial presence, the barter system of the Wapishana became less robust. In this section, I first describe the economic influences of two main activities—the cattle industry (Subsection 2.4.2.1) and the balata industry (Subsection 2.4.2.2.). I then focus on their modern-day income-generating activities after the cattle industry reduced its work force and the balata trade ceased (Subsection 2.4.2.3).

2.4.2.1 Cattle industry

The influence of the cash economy on the Wapishana has its origins in the cattle industry. This can be traced to the last decade of the 19th century after De Rooy, a Dutchman, sold his herd to H. P. C. Melville, a Scotsman, who in turn sold his lot by the 1920s to the Rupununi Development Company (RDC) (Henfrey 2017: 69). The RDC employed some people as *vaqueros* “cowboys” and cooks at their main ranch of Dadanawa and other outstations. When there is a major round-up of cattle, the RDC would temporarily employ extra Wapishana men for as long as the round-up lasted. Through their employment, the men as well as some women learned the skills of cattle rearing. This included the skills of how to handle and care for horses and cattle with the related skills in the tanning of leather and producing of leather craft items such as horse and cow hobbles, horse and cow belly bands, horse bit reins, saddles, leggings, knife shields, hats, belts, bags, and

wallets. The leather was tanned using mainly the bark of special trees. The process generally included the following steps: (1) overnight soaking of dried cow hides in the creek; (2) three- to four-day soaking of the hides in a solution of water and "caustic soda" in a trough made from dried cow hide; (3) scraping off the hair and extra skin on the underside of the hides; (3) extracting and pounding the bark of special trees; (4) submerging the scraped hides with the pounded bark in a water-filled trough made of dry cow hide; (5) alternatingly upturning the submerged hides in the trough for a period of six to eight weeks; and (6) extracting the tanned hides to air-dry; and (7) beating the dried tanned hides with sticks to make them pliable for use. A useful tool is the rasp to smoothen the underside of the finished leather pieces. A few men can still produce some leather to sell as an added source of income. The knowledge and skills to produce leather are dying, however. One of the best ways to ensure that these knowledge and skills needed are passed on to the younger generation is to incorporate the leather craft as a topic in the school's curriculum.

While employing a considerable number of cowboys and cooks, the RDC also engaged the Wapishana in the barter of manufactured goods and *tasso* 'dried beef' for their cassava by-products such as cassava bread, *farine* 'a traditional meal-like staple', *casareep* 'a type of sauce', and edible tubers that grow in the ground. Such barter continues today to a lesser extent. The RDC was a major employer of the Wapishana. However, due to the closure of most of its outstations over the years, the work force has dwindled.

Figure 7. Vaqueros brand a calf in Maruranau.

The RDC activities altered the landscape by increasing the number of cattle and erecting infrastructure such as fences, corrals, and paddocks at smaller ranches or outstations. One prominent example is the fencing-off of the savannah to mark lands that belonged to the Wapishana and the company. However, some Wapishana saw the fences as an intrusion of their traditional lands. The fence became known as the "Wapishana Fence", but others refer to it as the "Company Fence" because it was sponsored by the RDC. According to elders, the RDC employed mostly Wapishana men to cut the needed materials and erect the fence. The fence, however, brought eventual conflicts between the Wapishana and the RDC. Whenever, the Wapishana used *oko*, which are special plants used for their traditional way of fishing in pools beyond the "Wapishana Fence", the RDC saw it as trespassing. The *oko* is pounded, put in baskets, and then submerged and shaken in a pool of water so that sap from the pounded *oko* dissolves in the water. After several minutes or even longer, fish may become suffocated and float to the surface of the water. The fish may then be shot with arrows, chopped with a cutlass, or caught with hand nets. While this is a way of fishing is advantageous to one party, it may be to the detriment to the other. Workers with the RDC, for example, usually claimed that some of the company's animals, especially the horses, were negatively affected by drinking the "polluted" water. Some experienced Wapishana vaqueros who once worked with the RDC claimed that if the horses drink the water of a stagnant pool in which certain *oko* was used, they may become blind. Other kinds of *oko,* when used, may result in dead fish poisoning a stagnant pool. Consequently, the horses that drink such water may become sick and eventually die. Yet, other vaqueros claimed that the water in which certain kinds of *oko* were used do not affect animals when they drink the water**.** Others claimed that the monitored use of *oko* in fast-flowing creeks/rivers works best because the *oko* becomes less effective as most of it washes way with the downward flow. The use of *oko* within the Wapishana lands is also an issue because horses owned by villagers may be affected as described above.

After years of being involved in cattle industry directly or indirectly, the Wapishana people have come to adopt this economic activity to such an extent that it is fair to say that in most villages there are families who own their own cattle and horses. Most village councils today have their own herds. One or two cattle are slaughtered sometimes when a family needs cash or food. The cattle industry was an important source of income for the Wapishana people, but it could not provide employment for all who needed it. While some remained on the ranches as employees, other men turned to the balata industry for employment. I now briefly describe the involvement of the Wapishana in this industry, which many families relied on for years.

2.4.2.2 Balata industry

According to Forte (1996: 55), balata is the trade name for the coagulated latex of the bulletwood tree (*Mimusops globosa*) which was primarily used in the manufacture of belting and boot soles before the production of synthetic substitutes. Since the balata industry was active in British Guiana during the 20th century and the fact that bullet-wood trees were abundant in the forest east of the Wapishana villages, a small trade in Rupununi started (ibid. 2006: 55). Many Wapishana males became “balata bleeders”, tapping the trees for latex in order to sell to middlemen or agents who were involved in the trade. For many Wapishana, the balata trade was their first experience at being involved in an economic activity that was run by people from outside their communities.

According to former balata bleeders, the work cycle sometimes took as long six months, beginning with the long rainy season in May. In this way, the work had been “reconcilable with the maintenance of subsistence activities, particularly agriculture, partly because of its seasonal nature” (ibid. 2017: 70). The work cycle also had an impact on the physical geography of the region where “Certain villages and river crossings gained prominence through trade, moving populations and commodities in alternating directions according to the seasons” (Greene-Roesel 1998: 127). Indeed, in recounting their canoe journeys as they transported their products, former balata bleeders can refer to popular locations as “falls” or “landings”. As David et al. (2006: 17) also added, “From the early 1920s until the 1970s many families were involved in bleeding balata from the bulletwood tree which they traded for manufactured foods and cash.” Being employed in the industry, they used the extra material to manufacture their own prized balata goblet, that is, a container for beverages. Nowadays, these are still seen in Wapishana homes, though they are now substituted by plastic containers. In sum, the balata industry was another major supplier of wage labour for the Wapishana, the men as bleeders and others as captains and handymen of the boats which transported the balata. With the closure of the balata industry, the Wapishana men had no other alternative but to diversify into other activities. In the next section, I discuss the modern-day income generating activities including village-based activities and employment migration.

Figure 8. Bulletwood tree that has been tapped for balata.

2.4.2.3 Modern-day income-generating activities

Since the closure of the balata trade, families with access to better soils have turned to commercial peanut farming, which they have managed to integrate with traditional system of shifting cultivation and rotational crop farming (David et al. 2016: 17). Others than those above turned to planting peanuts, selling their produce mainly to businessmen from Lethem, the town nearest to the villages. Some young men went into the gold mining areas to make "fast" money. These sources of income allowed people to save enough money to invest in businesses such as grocery and utility shops. Others approached the local banks in Lethem or the Institute of Private Enterprise for Development, a national institute that provides small loans to start private businesses. Others used their profits or savings to buy motorcycles for private use and for renting to others who need faster transportation. A few people have been successful enough to be able to own vehicles, which are used for transportation of people to and from Lethem. Most times, the

vehicles are hired by the local business people who transport goods from Lethem to their villages. This has been an ongoing activity.

Other cash-oriented systems have functioned within the villages. Thus, also contributing to local cash flow in the villages are government-paid employees such as the schoolteachers and health workers, as well as other technical and ancillary personnel at the Aishalton District Hospital. Some of these workers, who do not own a farm, turn to those who have to buy edible tubers that grow in the ground (e.g. yams, eddoes, and sweet potatoes) and cassava by-products (e.g. farine and cassava bread). Hunters and fishermen also sell meat to the government workers and business people. To assist others who may not have the time and skills to set up a farm or construct a house, some men offer their relevant skills. In this way, they obtain cash to buy the necessities for the home, such as clothes and manufactured goods. Others sell fruits from home-grown fruit trees or fruits from the forest. Most villages have a weekly or biweekly market where people sell their local produce including food, local beverages, and handicrafts. All in all, the major impact has been the Wapishana's increased dependency on the cash-oriented system over the barter system which they were accustomed to.

Others, in seeking better economic opportunities outside, leave their communities. People travel to other areas of the country, neighbouring parts of Brazil, or in a few cases, countries overseas. Some leave their villages temporarily, staying away for months in search of jobs to provide for themselves and their families. Even young people who have attained higher education are not inclined to return to their homeland due to a lack of economic enterprises that provide jobs within the district. The lack of employment serves as a "push factor" in compelling youngsters to seek work (Guyana Human Rights Association Report 2016: 4; Forte 1996: 28). Due to their long absences from the villages, some parents are unable to interact with their children adequately enough to help them in deeper development of their first language skills and the various aspects of their culture. Even if these roles are partly taken over by other family members, they may not be enough to keep the language and culture robust among youngsters in some villages. The inability to pass on Wapishana knowledge becomes even more pronounced when parents, because of job security and economic opportunity found at their new places of abode, opt to live there permanently and move with their entire families. In short, employment migration has partly contributed to the loss of certain aspects of Wapishana culture.

In this section, we have looked at the economic influence ranging from the cattle industry to employment migration. Nowadays, cattle ownership and the related husbandry skills are indirect consequences of the

Wapishana having worked with the company that controlled the cattle industry. Employment, whether within or outside the villages, contributes not only to the upkeep of families but also to increasing their possessions of imported foodstuff and desirable commodities. Other Wapishana secured bank loans for businesses to enhance their way of life. In this sense, access to purchasing power means enhancing one's status or prestige in the Wapishana communities. However, the transition to the cash-oriented lifestyle has placed some strains on the Wapishana traditional lifestyle. For example, husbands seeking employment outside the villages often create lengthy periods of separation from their families, leaving the added burden on the wives to fend for the families. The cash-oriented culture has also cultivated the "cash and carry" attitude, contributing to the dearth of the cultural values of generosity and sharing. If they can be reintegrated into the Wapishana communities, the cultural values of sharing and giving will help alleviate the economic strains experienced by families, thereby promoting greater interrelationships among the villagers.

In the following section, I further discuss the main ways by which the life of the Wapishana changed by the adoption of the languages and certain habits of the colonizing cultures. I then discuss certain traditional practices that have disappeared as well as those that are in decline.

2.4.3 Influence of intercultural contacts

The continuous contact of the Wapishana with other ethnic populations through schooling and migration, including those from other indigenous groups, resulted in many Wapishana people learning English or Creolese as the lingua franca, "a means to communicate across linguistic boundaries" (De Vries 1997: 19). Consequently, certain Wapishana words are now replaced with English or Creolese equivalents. In this section, I highlight some instances of loss of language that some Wapishana are uneasy about. Specifically, I highlight a shift from Wapishana to English regarding kinship terms and counting and their effects in Subsection 2.4.3.1. I then point out the importance of the uniqueness of language as a key to identity in Subsection 2.4.3.2 and some changes in the Wapishana lifestyle in Subsection 2.4.3.3. In Subsection 2.4.3.4, I summarize and briefly discuss the section.

2.4.3.1 Attrition of some language aspects and counting system

One noticeable aspect of language that has been strongly influenced by English is Wapishana kinship terms used when greeting the elderly. For instance, the terms *taatai* 'mother's brother', *paapai* 'father's brother', and *imadokuz* 'father-in-law' are most times used interchangeably with "uncle". Other terms such as, *maamai* 'mother's sister', *w'anuu* 'father's sister', and *imauzo* 'mother-in-law' are used interchangeably with "aunty". Likewise, *maamaa* is replaced with "mum", and *paapaa* with "daddy". Thus, one can commonly hear a young man greeting his mother's brother as *Kaiman Uncle* 'Good morning, uncle' rather than *Kaiman taatai* 'Good morning, my mother's brother'. Others commonly say *Kaiman mum* instead of *Kaiman maamaa* for 'Good morning, mum'. The terms "uncle", "aunty", and "mum" are borrowings, with different meaning and reference. The fact is that the use of Wapishana kinship terms gives specificity. Otherwise, according to an elder of the Sawariwau village, the replacement of such Wapishana words would contribute to the erasure of not only important Wapishana words, but also what they represent—respect and ties that bind members of nuclear and extended families. She hoped that something could be done about it before more loss of the language is experienced**.** Thus, there is unease among the elders that the non-use of the specific kinship terms and the intermixing of Wapishana and English terms will lead to language attrition, the misunderstanding of proper relationships, and the erosion of respect within or between families.

Another aspect of the language partly lost is counting. The Wapishana Language Project (2000: 166) in presenting a particularly clear description of the terms, origin, and meaning of the Wapishana numbering system gave a brief background:

> Old Wapishana counting started with fingers and toes until they reached twenty, which made up one body. Then counting stared over by counting bodies until there were twenty bodies counted, that is 400. It was possible to keep counting beyond 400 but people almost never needed to count over 100.

With the introduction of schools, people were taught to count in English. This had a debilitating effect on the usage of the Wapishana counting system. For example, a considerable number of Wapishana speakers can count only up to ten in Wapishana as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Wapishana number terms and meaning (adapted from the Wapishana language Project 2000: 166).

	Wapishana number terms	**Meaning**
1.	*bauda'apa*	– (one finger)
2.	*dya'utam*	– (two fingers)
3.	*idikinauda'au*	– (three fingers)
4.	*pamina'utam kida*	– (four fingers)
5.	*baka'iau da'u*	'one hand' (five fingers)
6.	*bauda'apa bakaunu'iti*	'one to its hand' (five fingers plus one other finger)
7.	*dya'utam bakaunu'iti*	'two to its hand' (five fingers plus two other fingers)
8.	*idikinauda'au bakaunu'iti*	'three to its hand' (five fingers plus three other fingers)
9.	*pamina'utam kida bakaunu'iti*	'four to its hand' (five fingers plus four other fingers)
10.	*baokooka'au*	'all (both) hands' (ten fingers)
11.	*bauda'apa wakidiba'iti*	'one toe to our foot' (ten fingers and one toe)
12.	*dya'utam wakidiba'iti*	'two toes to our foot' (ten fingers and two toes)
13.	*idikinauda'au wakidiba'iti*	'three toes to our foot' (ten fingers and three toes)
14.	*pamina'utam kida wakidiba'iti*	'four toes to our foot' (ten fingers and four toes)
15.	*badaarapa wakidiba'iti*	'one side of our foot' (ten fingers, five toes)
16.	*bauda'apa wakidiba bakaunu'iti*	'one toe to the other foot' (ten fingers, five toes on one foot and one on the other)
17.	*dya'utam wakidiba bakaunu'iti*	'two toes to the other foot' (ten fingers, five toes on one foot and two on the other)
18.	*idikinauda'au wakidiba bakaunu'iti*	'three toes to the other foot' (ten fingers, five toes on one foot and three on the other)
19.	*pamina'utam kida wakidiba bakaunu'iti*	'four toes to the other foot' (ten fingers, five toes on one foot and four on the other)
20.	*bauda'apa pidan nana/banupapa pidan*	'one person's body' (all twenty fingers and toes on one person)

The Wapishana way of counting is based on a quinary system that combines to twenty. For example, the number *bauda'apa pidan nanaa dy'atum powa'a* (literally: 'one person's body and two fingers') expresses 'twenty-two'. Using the above table, we can figure out that *bauda'apa* 'one', *pidan* 'person', *nanaa* 'body' are used for 'twenty' and *dy'atum* for 'two'. The word '*powa'a* 'more' is an addition marker that is usually used beyond 'twenty'.

Admirably, there are people who can still count beyond forty but most Wapishana people prefer to count in English for practical reasons. One is that the English terms for counting are shorter. The other is that there are more uses for English counting as in counting of money and doing accounts. For example, *six* in English as opposed to *bauda'ap bakaunau'iti* in Wapishana would make it easier for writing. The economical borrowing of English counting terms is likewise evident in the New Testament written in Wapishana (See *Kamaina'o Tominkaru Paradan* (2012: 117).

Meanwhile, efforts are made to introduce Wapishana numeracy in schools involved in the *Quality Bilingual Education for Wapichan Children.* It is important that the children grasp the Wapishana counting system based on a pattern linked to the origin of terms used and their meanings. The idea is that these concepts of numeracy would transfer in the minds of the children as they go on to learn the English terms.

Even though some important Wapishana words are currently replaced with English words, these changes indicate that the language is dynamic and ever evolving. As Baker (1995: 219) puts it: "Language change is a sign of an alive, adapting language**.** However, the fortunes of any one language necessarily hinge on those other languages in context (Hornberger 2009: 201). In a bilingual community, a language may be perceived as less dominant when it declines in its functions and use. In this sense, there is concern in the some communities that people should still be able to maintain the use of their native languages (less dominant languages) at least orally or informally to keep it alive. In the case of the Wapishana, besides speaking the language, there are now attempts by younger people to use it in writing, at least informally, following the informal uses of chatting or texting messages by mobile phones (see Subsection 2.4.6.5).

2.4.3.2 Uniqueness of language as key to identity

The progressive loss of the language has caused great concern among Wapishana leaders insofar as some Toshaos believed that if nothing was done soon, their collective identity would be lost. As one Toshao asserted,

"Language can reveal identity; it is the main part of the culture of a people." How this identity of a people may be revealed was vividly illustrated by a former Toshao and "Chief of Chiefs" of the Wapishana at a village meeting I attended. His illustration commences with the idea that if we should put in front of us several indigenous men—one WaiWai, one Wapishana, one Makushi, one Patamona, and one Carib—we would not know their differences at a first glance because their complexion and other outward features are similar. One major way of knowing their differences is if each of them spoke to us in his own language. Expressed differently, it is the uniqueness of the different languages that give them an identity despite their similarities. This notion of identity is consistent with the point articulated by Cummins (1996: 10): when children use their mother tongue it is "the key to their identity". However, children's use of their mother tongue may be dependent on how robustly the language is used within the family. As one researcher puts it, a key factor is whether or not the language is used and transmitted to children in the family (Sallabank 2012: 101). In addition, it may well be in the children's best interest to point out to them instances of how the identity of people may be revealed as mentioned above. Used in the broader sense, identity covers more than speaking a language. In other words, the relationship between language and identity is more complex as pointed out by Joseph (2013: 39):

> Identities are manifested in language as, first, the categories and labels that people attach themselves and others to signal their belonging; secondly, as the indexed ways of speaking and behaving through which they perform their belonging; and thirdly, as the interpretations that others make of those identities.

These labels or acts of identity may be a matter of free choice, viewed on the individual or societal levels or scales. On the societal level, the social structures enable the labels and acts of identity to be more visible than on the individual level (ibid. 2013: 38) but "identities have to be forged—created, transmitted, reproduced, performed—textually and semiotically, that is through signs" (p. 41). Indeed, if identities are to be forged, all the above should not only be enacted through texts and signs, but also through symbolic considerations connected with place names of landscape (e.g. deep pools, lakes, rivers, caves, mountains). Such place names are relevant to the histories of individuals or the communities.

In the case of the Wapishana, one of the messages to be internalized from the Toshaos is that if the native language is not used frequently then more people may forget the language. Younger Wapishana, for example, know little of the stories behind certain place names—hydronyms and

toponyms. A few examples of condensed stories will illustrate how striking the connections are to some of these place names. In the case of toponyms, there are differences in the use of *naawa* 'hill', *dukuo* 'mountain', or *taawu* 'steep rise'. When used in the broad sense, mountains may be called *naawa* or *dukuo*. In some specific cases, mountains may be called *taawu.* Two examples are *Aukuowii Taawu* 'brains steep rise' and *Wiiwii Taawu* 'sister's steep rise'. In relation to the former, the Wapishana oral tradition is that a group of people in attempting to escape from their enemies used a ladder-like structure to climb to the summit of the steep mountain. On realizing that their enemies were right on their track, they waited until the enemies were almost on the upper parts of the ladder to cut it loose. The enemies fell to their deaths, with their brains splattering on the rocky incline. The white spots on the rocky incline are said to be traces of the splattered brains.

Figure 9. Aukuowii Taawu 'brains' steep rise'.

With regard to the latter, a sister of a group of people, while fishing in the nearby creek, said she needed to visit the nearby mountain as someone was beckoning her. On her return, she described a beautiful farm which she mysteriously entered, bringing back plant parts such as banana and plantain suckers. Her brothers marvelled at her mysterious story and have since named the mountain after her.

Figure 10. Wiiwii Taawu 'sister's steep rise'.

The other example is *Kopau Saba* 'fine fish'. According to the Wapishana oral tradition, a mother fish of the Kwitaro River saw people continually using *oko* there to catch fish. So, she advised the rest that they should relocate to another river, further west in the savannah. In leading the move, the *Daobara* 'a type of fine fish' gave a huge leap towards the Achimaruwa'o River in the west. However, airborne and gliding as it went, the *Daobara* missed the river to land instead, head in and tail out, on top of a mountain located some distance before the river. Today, there is a fish tail-like outcrop of rock that gives the mountain its name.

Figure 11. Kopau Saba 'fine fish'.

These mountains referred to are between the villages of *Shii* (Shea) and *Zoopo Naawa* (Rupunau). The importance of these legends behind these mountain names is that they have some historical, territorial, and linguistic continuity with the original inhabitants—the ancestors of the Wapishana. Many of these place names are taken for granted today in that many younger people may know the names, but not the related historical knowledge. Nonetheless, the lack of knowledge in the Wapishana traditional past and its connection to the present has become part of the people's awareness that a notable direction to address it has been taken by some leaders. For example, the Wapichan Waddauniinao Ati'o (Wapishana Literacy Association) has supported and promoted the recording of short stories, songs, and legends throughout the district since 2011.The stories that are still known can be kept alive by the spoken and written language. A further suggestion to highlight the Wapishana way of life is to follow the example of Godfrey Pauline of Aishalton, who as a composer of his own Wapishana songs and poems, allowed a researcher to record his compositions on CDs, which he shared with his fellowmen, much to their delight and Wapishana pride. The

Wapishana people need to encourage more of our cultural activists to be positive role models for championing their cultural heritage through different expressions. On the formal side, one Toshao suggested that the Wapishana should have a formal educational system in place to develop the language. Such a system can reawaken awareness that the language provides access to the affiliated culture, enabling a security of self-identity, a sharing of the inheritance of the past, and giving some security and status within the "small and known" rather than "the large and unknown" (Baker 1995: 207).

However, as Baker also pointed out, non-dominant groups who speak their own languages require competence in the dominant language for economic, informational, and sometimes national needs. This point implies that it is commendable that Indigenous language activists promote their languages and cultures, but they must also do so for multilingual repertoires and additive bilingualism (see Section 4.2.1.1). In other words, Indigenous children should learn about Western knowledge, skills and culture but steeped in their own ways of learning. Broadly speaking, most Wapishana have embraced acculturation. It is based on their increased reliance on the cash-oriented system over the barter system that many of our young Wapishana people look for change and so go out seeking jobs. In the following, I discuss some of the cultural changes in the Wapishana lifestyle.

2.4.3.3 Some changes in the Wapishana lifestyle

According to one Toshao, as a result of living and working outside the communities, people have returned to their villages with changes in their behaviour and living styles. For example, several men and women who go to work in Brazil have been heard to return speaking Portuguese in the villages. Others learned a Brazilian dance and introduced it with recordings of the accompanying music to their fellow villagers. Over the years, this has become entrenched in Wapishana celebrations and parties. As aptly put by a young man interviewed, "If you want to see a full dance floor during a party in the village, play Brazilian music called *forro*." In many cases, the women decided to live permanently outside of the village, in urban areas with their non-Wapishana husbands. One of the reasons, based on the Toshao's observation, is that most of these men could not fit into the way of life of the village. He further observed that some of these men who came to live in the villages, first showed good signs of cooperating with the villagers, but after some years or even several months, showed their true colours. For example, given their nature of honesty and humbleness, some women were known to be exploited or mistreated by their non-Wapishana partners, according to one Toshao. Some women who became separated from their partners faced

pressure to fend for themselves and children. As a result, some women returned to work outside of the community, leaving their little ones behind with their parents or grandparents, who in turn felt added pressure to raise their grandchildren. It is for these reasons that the village councils felt that they should place conditions on how non-Wapishana men should live in the villages before they are accepted on a permanent basis as villagers. This type of monitoring system should still be followed, although there are some mixed unions that have thrived in the villages.

Some Wapishana who ventured into the gold-mining areas manifested cultural behaviours that were typical of mining workers elsewhere. In the words of Forte, such cultural behaviours tend to be influenced by the mining and concomitant activities (1996: 65):

> Mining workers are more often than not associated with the use of hard drugs and alcohol and with much of the physical violence and lawlessness reported from interior locations. Many Amerindian communities are fearful of the examples of the mining culture on their own young people, who increasingly join the ranks of the miners….

Both small and large-scale gold mining have also subtly yet profoundly influenced the way of life and cultures of the Wapishana and their Indigenous neighbours elsewhere in South America. In the southeast of Peru, the Arakmbut's reliance on the gold economy for their subsistence, for example, has not only changed their family sociocultural composition through intermarriage with migrants, but also their collective practices of sharing and reciprocity that are now less common (Aikman 2017: 104). Aikman goes on to point out that in their daily communication in relation to gold mining, the Arakmbut people have also increasingly used Spanish-language resources; though functionally useful, these resources contribute to language endangerment of the Arakmbut language. In the wider context, the worry about language endangerment by language activists is reflective of Evans' (2010: 22) observation that the transmission of one's linguistic heritage such as the ecological links between particular plant and animal species is at risk of being cut off because of a shift to another language. Similarly, the very words in one's heritage language tied to historical stories —linking the landscape or habitats in particular places to their corresponding place names—are also at risk of being forgotten (see Subsection 2.4.3.2). Whereas language endangerment is a cause of concern among those who wish to maintain their language, there are also other pressing concerns that need to be addressed by the leadership of Indigenous communities. Returning to the Wapishana, while some people have gained socially (increased use of English-language resources) and materially from gold

mining activities, others have experienced negative consequences. As one Toshao related, gold mining has negatively affected some villages in social issues such as human trafficking, drug trafficking, unpaid labour of young people, and alcohol-related violence.

Located deep in the jungle, to the south of the Wapishana communities, there is the Marudi gold-mining area. For some Wapishana people and others from urban areas of Guyana and Brazil, it is an area which is quite alluring for making "fast" money. In order to reach the Marudi area, however, people from the outside must pass through Wapishana villages such as Aishalton. A former Toshao pointed out that because of this, a lot of strangers pass through Wapishana villages unchecked. In order to mitigate the likelihood of criminal elements entering the Wapishana area, he proposed that a checkpoint before entering the South Rupununi be established in cooperation with the police. His proposal is that some villagers be posted along with the police to search persons and vehicles as they enter. For the checking of women a female member of the Community Policing Groups would be needed. This kind of vigilance that is proposed is to safeguard the Wapishana territory, for it is not known if illegal weapons or drugs are being transported. Reference was made to a few recent cases whereby the police arrested some young Wapishana men who were involved in drug trafficking. This example illustrates one of the breaches of law that has polluted the Wapishana culture.

Another example of transgression as a result of some Wapishana people coming into contact with individuals out of the village is cattle rustling. According to some leaders, a new method of rustling has emerged. They claimed that it is done by some Brazilians or some Wapishana who work in ranches across the border. It was reported that the people would come across to the Guyana side to graze their animals. As their animals intermingle with those from the Guyana side, all are then driven back to the Brazilian side. This is not to say that rustling is non-existent in the villages. Rustling does occur, but it is done less frequently on a small scale mainly for food, partly because of lack of fish or other wild animals such as the *aro* 'savannah deer' (*Odocoileus*) Whenever it arises, the issue of rustling is usually dealt with at the level of the village council, but in general there is a deep concern for the security of the people among villagers.

It should be mentioned, too, that the adoption of manufactured food items seems to have impacted the Wapishana dietary habits. While manufactured food items have not totally displaced the traditional diet, quite a number of them, such as cooking salt, sugar, rice, flour, and cooking oil are among the basic necessities. In earlier times of the colonial period, access to these necessities was made sparingly possible through the balata and cattle

industries and the opening of a few shops. As people increased their dependency on a cash-based lifestyle, more grocery shops appeared in the villages. More grocery shops meant more foodstuffs available. Some interviewees are of the view that an increased availability and a regular consumption of the processed food items (e.g. rice, sugar, chicken, canned sardines, and bottled carbonated soft drinks) may have contributed to the rise of certain ailments in the communities. While I have not seen any document to substantiate such claims, both the interviewee and I agreed that it would be worthwhile to have a competent authority to do a research on this and other health issues.

2.4.3.4 Summary and discussion

Thus far, we have seen that the contact of the Wapishana with other cultures has resulted in quite some cultural and social additions that the Wapishana have adapted in their own way, such as language use, *forro* music, gold mining, ranching, and food items. However, such additions to their culture are also unfortunately accompanied by sickness or other miseries. For example, miseries are ushered in by an increase of fragmentation of families, introduction and abuse of drugs, new but undesirable habits and the decrease in practice of aspects of the culture. Thus, considerable ambivalence is revealed by the leaders' responses about the effects of Western cultural penetration of much of the Wapishana culture. In addition, the misuse or non-use of kinship terms has caused unease that this may lead to misunderstanding of relationships and disrespect within the extended families, thereby impeding preservation of family unity or social cohesion within the villages**.** The displacement of many of the Wapishana counting terms and the legends behind important place names has further led to language attrition.

A counterbalance to these prevailing circumstances is awareness-raising through Wapishana lessons pertinent to the topics. Guidance can be given in Wapishana customary laws, long kept orally, but now existing in written Wapishana (see South Central and South Rupununi Districts Toshaos Councils 2012). Attention was also drawn to the importance of the active use of the language in ensuring not only the preservation of the histories and sacred stories, but also to instil a deep sense of belonging to a homeland. Therefore, the widespread use of the Wapishana language in most villages is still perceived an important source of identification. According to González (2017: 158) an indigenous language is a key element in shaping the identity of contemporary communities, but it is also an instrument of knowledge that allows for an understanding of another world view.

2.4.4 Practices that have disappeared

The changes the Wapishana experienced as a result of contact with mainstream cultures were not necessarily all disruptive. Other changes were inevitably adaptive as individual needs and personal motivations changed with the times. While we may not be able to pinpoint the initial results of contact during the period of early colonization, based on earlier writings of explorers and anthropologists, we can ascertain which former practices have disappeared.

In this section, I provide several examples that illustrate the disappearance of Wapishana traditional practices. Among the aspects of the culture that were affected are adornment customs (Subsection 2.4.4.1) and music, dance, and wrestling activities (Subsection 2.4.4.2).

2.4.4.1 Adornment customs

Piercing of the skin for adornment, specifically the nose and the lips, is a practice that has faded. Some men wore two feathers horizontally and diametrically through a pierced hole in the nose. As for the women, they pierced the lower lip, through which a short cord of colourful beads was passed and fastened, with the lower end adorned with small, delicate colourful feathers. While the men wore loin cloths, the women wore aprons. However, no mention was made of the specific head dresses both for men and women. The traditional dress that is donned nowadays is based on cultural memory of the people's great grandparents, a proud connection to the past. For example, for the adopted *Parichara* dance (see Section 2.3.3), a specially made outfit is crafted from the young leaves of a palm tree called *pokoridi* (*Attalea maripa)* and the purpose is to invoke the *dokozu* 'spirit' of the *bichi* (*Tayassu pecari*) to send the game to the village for food. Other types of beautiful adornment pieces are crafted out of imagination and for exhibition. Whatever the purposes, one should not think only about a display, but also about the knowledge and skills involved in the process of the craftsmanship. Usually, the process is educational and occurs in social spaces between the older and the younger people who must carry on the tradition.

The other practice that was characteristic of the Wapishana was the shaving of body parts, except for the hair on the head. As one interviewee noted, some men wore plaited long hair or hair tubes to keep loose hair out of their faces in the event that they saw a bird or an animal to shoot. The hair tube, which was made out of either bamboo or palm wood, was mainly an adornment piece of the Wai Wai (Rivière 1969: 155). The hair tube may

have been adopted by the Wapishana, since the material for the hair tube was also found in the forests within the Wapishana territory. Facial hair or eyebrows were shaved using a split piece of bamboo. The bits of hair on the eyebrow were carefully placed between the split bamboo and once clamped, the bamboo was then turned in a revolving fashion, removing bits of hair with it. A similar tube-like structure called the blowgun was used by the Wapishana for hunting purposes but became obsolete and replaced by introduced firearms (ibid. 1969: 152). Indeed, the ancestors of the Wapishana used a *kobin* 'blow-pipe' and poisoned darts to hunt small game (David et al. 2006: 27).

Youngsters had the sides of their upper front teeth filed and shaped with appropriate tools so that the tips were pointed appearing like that of the *perain* 'piranha'. When the file that is used to sharpen cutlasses and knives was introduced, it was later adopted for the same purpose. The main reason for the shaping of teeth this way was to have spaces between the teeth to minimize the formation of cavities, although others said it was to enhance the person's smile.

The Wapishana men's tattoos were part of the rituals for hunting purposes (Farabee 1918: 50), but no mention was made about tattoos for the women. However, as far as one elderly interviewee can remember, his grandmother, who was an Atorad, had two dots tattooed on both the left and right sides of the lips. Other women had a thin-lined tattoo moving upwards and ending in a sort of spiral shape in similar positions. As pointed out by one elderly woman, one of the purposes of the tattoo, besides enhancing beauty, is to enable the women to be skilful at making local drinks.

The Wapishana painted certain parts of their outer bodies using the *powizibai* 'red dye from annatto' and sometimes the black dye from the *saonoro* 'genipap tree' for ceremonial and ritual purposes. The red dye is made into *pisho*, a ready-made mix of the red dye, to paint parts of the body such as the face and arms. The girls or women would first *sarwun* 'body-paint' the young girls who had their first menstruation. Afterwards, the young women would themselves handle the *pisho* for their *sarwun* whenever needed**.** The red dye is more used today for cultural displays and people try to adapt these customs as they believed their ancestors performed them way back then. Some of these adapted traditions are based on cultural memory: practices younger people actually experienced with the elders or what was orally passed on to them by the elders.

2.4.4.2 Music, dance, and wrestling

According to one Toshao, there is no original Wapishana dance that he knows of. The *Parichara* dance, which is at times performed by a group in his village, had been adopted from other ethnic groups (Bridges 1985: 132). Ian Melville, a one-time prominent resident of the Rupununi, recalled seeing the bone flute being played by his Atorad father. Not only has the bone flute disappeared but also a number of songs and stories. Some of these stories are also about friendly wrestling competitions between men from different villages. As shared by one interviewee, staged wrestling became obsolete during the mid-20th century.

2.4.5 Practices that are disappearing

While some cultural practices have disappeared, some are in the process of disappearing. In the past, Wapishana children would usually accompany their parents into the fields, rivers, mountains, and savannah where important acts of transmitting knowledge and skills are performed by parents for their children. While many parents applaud the opportunity for their children to attend mainstream schooling, some parents lament the limited time they now have to transmit the various aspects of their cultural knowledge and skills to their children. The resulting effect, for example, is that many children miss valuable opportunities to learn those aspects of their culture that must take place in the deep forest, mountains, rivers, and savannah. Those children who miss such opportunities are usually not knowledgeable or skillful at hunting, fishing, and farming.

One solution to the disappeared or disappearing cultural practices is for those knowledgeable and skilful people to be encouraged to maintain certain traditional activities, for example, doing handicrafts. The different pieces of handicraft can be for personal use as well as didactic resources, part of teaching skills to those who want to learn how to produce such crafts. Nowadays, although some people sell a limited number of traditionally made items on order from others, this unsteady market is still a means of a small income for families. In all these uses described above and other different activities, there is the cohesive connection to the knowledge and skills of Wapishana traditional customs.

Another solution is by formal means: incorporating the teaching of Wapishana knowledge and culture into the school's curriculum. This could be achieved in two ways: through the invitation of knowledgeable and skilful Wapishana into the classroom as resource people and the recording of the most important aspects of the Wapishana culture as a learning resource. In

the absence of the resource people, teachers can always turn to the written or audio/video recorded aspects of the Wapishana culture as resource units for teaching. It is for this reason that I will describe in detail some aspects of the Wapishana culture that are disappearing.

In the following, I look at several practices that are disappearing: rituals (Subsection 2.4.5.1), hammock and baby-sling making (Subsection 2.4.5.2), use of bow and arrows (Subsection 2.4.5.3), use of special plants for fishing (Subsection 2.4.5.4), and use of farm and other household items (Subsection 2.4.5.5). Finally, I provide a summary and brief discussion (Subsection 2.4.5.6).

2.4.5.1 Rituals

In decline are mainly the initiation rituals for both girls and boys who have reached the stage of puberty, leading into adulthood. For boys to become skilled hunters, *diwi'i* 'a special ritual' is performed. This involves the use of a thin cord of plant fibre which is about one metre in length. The fibre is twisted, tapering from the thinness of a thread at one end, to the thickness of a pencil at the other. The thinner end is passed through one nostril at a time and pulled out with a quick force through the mouth. The friction of the cord as it is pulled through the upper parts of the nostrils causes some bleeding. Another type of ritual is the treating of the young men's arms and shoulders with the bites of *matauzi* 'a type of beetle'. This is for the strength and skill to fell large trees. Felling trees is one of the tasks of men as they prepare plots of land for farming.

For girls who have their first menstruation, their bodies are painted red to keep away evil spirits. In addition, these young girls are isolated and given dietary restrictions such as a prohibition on the eating of sweet and salty food. Furthermore, these young girls are forbidden to walk outdoors and to see men for several days. At the end of initiation, their hair is cut to shoulder length or even shorter as a mark of reaching this stage of womanhood in their lives. Today, one hardly sees this marker among young Wapishana girls.

Young mothers allowed the elderly or the knowledgeable individuals to treat their babies with *shanarabai* 'incense' in the evenings or whenever appropriate to keep evil spirits away. A mother who has recently given birth is subjected to abstention from work for about a month or when fully recovered. The fathers are also restricted from doing any strenuous work or any activity that might cause harm to the newly born baby. Useful prayers are pronounced upon babies or mothers before they go out for long walks or

before the mother or father eat hunted meat or fish. All this, is to safeguard their well-being.

Both boys and girls are encouraged to bathe early at the pools of creeks or rivers before sunrise to stay strong, alert, and willing to perform their chores at home and on the farm and other places of work. However, youth who are sickly and girls who have their menstruation are forbidden to bathe in pools lest they disturb the spirits therein. Upon returning from their early bath, they warm the soles of their feet against red hot coals to guard against snake and stingray attacks. In addition, the Wapishana treat themselves with the stings of the *wiko* 'black ant' whenever necessary, but the ritual was commonly practised during the celebration part of a *manoru* 'a cooperative work'. For the boys, the *wiko* ritual makes them willing, sharp shooters when hunting; for the girls, it makes them willing and able to make sweet *parakari* 'a type of cassava beverage'. Nowadays, these rituals are still practised occasionally by some families. The stinging by the *wiko* has been incorporated into the annual display of cultural activities of the Wapishana during the month of September. All of these rituals are performed with special spiritual invocation on part of the man or woman who performs them. Because the rituals are no longer practised widely among the various families, many Wapishana girls and boys grow up without experiencing and understanding these initiation rituals.

2.4.5.2 Hammock and baby sling-making

In the case of *zamaka* 'hammock', there is a scarcity of slung Wapishana-made hammocks in homes, giving way to Brazilian-made or Chinese-made ones, which are massed-produced. Persons who lack Wapishana-made hammocks opt to buy ready-made ones that are readily sold at shops throughout the Rupununi. It is quicker to buy a ready-made hammock than wait for a Wapishana-made one, which can take weeks to weave if one works on it periodically. People who can afford them also buy mattresses for beds in addition to owning hammocks. The same may be said for the *didimai* 'baby sling'. Some young mothers opt to buy the double strap adjustable front pack infant baby carrier. However, this does not mean that everyone can afford to purchase such items from shops. People without money can barter with one of the women who can weave a hammock or a baby sling. There are a small number of women who still possess the skills in weaving hammocks or baby slings and the related skill in cotton-spinning. An interviewee shared that there are at least four styles of hammock-making. The skills include selecting, making, and setting up the materials to make the cotton spindles and the hammock frames. Usually, cotton-spinning is taught

to girls at a very young age. When these girls become teenagers and have the strength to manoeuvre the tools used, they are taught mostly hammock-weaving. However, mothers who lack cotton-spinning skills are less likely to engage in activities of weaving hammocks or baby slings in their homes. In this sense, mothers have no knowledge of skills in cotton-spinning to impart to their daughters or younger female relatives. On the other hand, although the mothers may have the skills, the other reason could be that their daughters may lack the patience or interest to learn the skills, giving preference to other modern-day leisure activities, such as listening to music or playing contemporary games. Owing to these circumstances, there are now more women without these skills. Also, the decline of these skills seems to have contributed to the decline of the use of the prized *suburid* 'brown cotton', which is usually one of the materials used to beautify the hammocks. The *suburidi* is at the cusp of disappearing in some villages because it is not as widely grown as before. Despite the scarcity of Wapishana-made items from cotton, one can still find several girls who can spin cotton, an indication that some mothers still possess the skill and have passed it on.

Figure 12. The prized suburidi *'brown cotton'.*

2.4.5.3 Use of the bow and arrows

There are people who still use the *somara nai'ik bairii* 'bow and arrow' partly because most of the users find it easier and cheaper to own a set of bow and arrows than owning a firearm. A set of bow and arrows can be made or ordered within the community whereas the firearm must be applied for and, if approved, must be purchased from outside the community, usually in the capital city. As such, the bow and arrows are traditional tools used not only for hunting, but also for any eventuality such as the sudden emergence of a group of bush-hogs or the scampering of a deer in the village. In other situations, for example, where the man's livestock or the well-being of his family is threatened by a hovering chicken hawk or a prowling jaguar respectively, the use of the arrow and bow is called for. Very few men, whether young and older, can be seen on a long trip garbed with the arrow and bow in one hand, all at the ready. According to Austin Isaacs, one scarcely sees boys or men early in the mornings using the bow and arrow to shoot fish for food, a way of maintaining marksmanship by men.

Another interviewee pointed out that being able to hit a target with the bow and arrow is not all the knowledge and skill needed. One also needs to know how to string a bow and to use the variety of arrows, each of which has a different point suited for a different purpose, depending on the intended target. In addition to this, one needs the skill of selecting the right arrow based on the shape of the feathers on the arrow itself. For example, to shoot upwards at birds on trees, an arrow with specially shaped feathers needs to be used as opposed to an arrow to shoot downwards for fish in pools. The practice of using the bow and arrows was seen as crucial to the Wapishana method of fishing that it was depicted on a British Guiana stamp, decades ago. According to interviewee, Ian Melville, that stamp was sourced from a photograph of his Atorad uncle shooting fish at the Rupununi River. Today, it is still a very important method of traditional hunting among the Wapishana and should not be forgotten.

2.4.5.4 Use of special plants for fishing

One interviewee shared that her father advised that each Wapichan should know the different types of plants for various purposes. There are different types used for house construction, treatment of illnesses and for survival techniques in the jungle. Some, but not all, people are knowledgeable in the use of *panakaruu* 'plant charms' used in fishing and hunting and even to treat dogs that assist the Wapishana in hunting. Details of these plants and wood were not shared with me, but these are usually passed on to the

children when they accompany their parents or elders on forest or savannah trips. In the following, I explain the process of fishing using special plants.

There are various different types of special plants called *oko*,[6] which are traditionally used for catching fish. The commonly used ones include types of liana such as *aishara*, *kokizai*, and *katabaro;* types of shrub-like plants, such as *aia*, *konan*, and *komarao;* and a type of a large tree called *kawazi*. The lianas such as the *aishara* are cut and fetched in bundles to the flat top of a rock on which they are pounded into shreds with a stick-pounder. The *aia* shrubs are uprooted and only the stem, branches, and roots are pounded, whereas the *konan* leaves are pounded for use. The *komarao* branches with the leaves are broken off from the stem and pounded, whereas the *kawazi* fruits are crushed in shallow holes in the ground. Each type of *oko* is usually used separately, depending on its availability at the time of fishing. The pounded or ground *oko* are placed in baskets and taken to the chosen pool by a party of people. After a prayer is said to the spirits of the pool, some people with the baskets wade or swim in the pool. Next, they simultaneously submerge and shake their baskets of *oko*, covering the entire pool in the process. This exercise is done with chants and the effect on the fish is that they become suffocated and swim or float to the water's surface. This is the time when the fish are caught using the bow and arrow, cutlasses, or hand nets. As a help, fish are also caught by the use of the *daroka* 'cone-shaped fish trap', which is woven from palm fronds and vines. With or without the use of the *oko*, one or several *daroka* may be set at the narrowest and shallowest end of a flowing pool. A type of traditional fishing that does not entail the use of *oko* is the *sowaika* 'a large type of fish trap', which may be described as a huge stockade built across major creeks over several weeks and often left in place for months. The *daroko* trap is individually made, whereas the *sowaika* requires teamwork for its construction.

There are families who still use the *oko*, but it can be over-used. For example, some use the *oko* in a length of a small river or stream, killing out all the fish. In some cases, the fish are wasted. As advised by a Toshao, what should be done is to traditionally catch fish in selected pools in such a way that not all the fish would be affected.

All of the *oko* grow naturally, although some such as the *aia* and *konan* can be cultivated. Although the *oko* and traditional fishing traps are still at the disposal of Wapishana, more have turned to the modern methods of fishing, thereby foreclosing their children's opportunity to learn all about materials used and about the construction, setting, and care for the implements.

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6 The known identifications according to Western botanists are aishara [Lonchocarpas sp.] and konan [Clibadium sp.].

Most of the interviewees are of the view that a scarcity of fish in the nearby rivers is a result of overfishing by people using the adopted modern methods of fishing. For example, the tendency among the men is to buy long seine nets, which they easily stretch across deep pools to catch large amounts of fish. Additionally, Wapishana people commonly use the *kobao zunaa* 'hook and line' or the *kobawuzii* 'fishing rod'. People have also improvised the fishing rod with hook and line to set traps such as spring rods along the banks of creeks or rivers, but more people have turned to use of the seine net and 'diving'. This diving entails the use of wire arrows and wire-stringed bows to shoot fish under water. Other fishermen block sections of pools using seine nets and clear the weeds, fallen leaves, and branches therein before casting nets to catch fish. In this way, most fishes are caught and their habitats destroyed. As a consequence, a Toshao said, "We chase the spirits that keep the fish." Therefore, some pools which were once the natural habitat of a lot of big fish are almost without. There was the example of one man attempting to sell the fish he caught from nearby pools, but scarcely got quick sales because the fish were too small. During the start of the rainy season too, as fishes swim upstream to spawn, some people set seine nets and catch most of the fish so that there are now fewer to be caught. What the Wapishana need is selective fishing so that fish may multiply.

Figure 13. The semicircular-shaped kokizai
'a type of liana used for traditional fishing'.

Figure 14. The largest tree in the middle is kawazi
'plant used for traditional fishing'.

With access to the seine net and firearm, more Wapishana own these as a means of providing food for their families. With access to modern fishing and hunting implements comes the expectation that people buy the fish or meat if they need food. Very few of the people who have the intention to sell meat would share some with their relatives because the Wapishana are now increasingly influenced by the cash-oriented culture. The decrease in the traditional way of fishing and hunting has also led to the

decline in the practice of sharing the catch or kill with relatives or neighbor's. According to male interviewees, whenever a Wapishana makes a catch or kill, he ought to share some, such as part of the heart of the animal, with the wind and the sun before sharing the meat with his relatives or neighbours (see also David et al. 2006: 26). Having looked at the decline in the use of special plants for fishing, I now turn to the use of the farm and some household items.

2.4.5.5 Use of the farm items and some household items

The different activities performed by men and women pertaining to the farm should not be seen as unusual. The processing of cassava to bake cassava bread by the women, for example, should not be stereotyped as imposed labour by the men. In reality there is the division of labour among women and men in the Wapishana society. While the teacher, of course, needs to be aware of gender issues as a whole in the society, she or he also needs to understand that for most people in the Wapishana community, all works are traditionally and equally respected. With this in mind, I now describe the use of farm items and some household items of the Wapishana.

An expected possession in a typical Wapishana family is the *zakapu* 'farming plots'. The preparation of a farming plot is work generally undertaken by the men. This work includes choosing the site, cutting the trees, burning the cut trees, and clearing and planting the plot. The principal crop is bitter cassava (manioc), from which two staple products are made: farine and cassava bread. The processing of the cassava is a task undertaken mainly by women. These are the main steps of processing: reaping, scraping, grating, squeezing, sifting, and baking. Since harvesting the cassava crop can be a weekly activity, the concomitant activities involved in the processing of the products require a set of related tools be in place. Each of these steps requires that specially crafted household items be used. These include the following: the *dopaawai* 'backpack or 'back quake', the *chimara* 'cassava grater', the *nizo* 'cassava squeezer', the *chakoro* 'small trough for the grated cassava', the *manaru* 'cassava sifter' or 'farine sifter', the *awarubai* 'fan to fan the fire', the *sombara* 'a large weaved mat to place the baked cassava', and the *parakari tanaa* 'a cassava beverage strainer'. It is mainly the men who are responsible for the weaving of these items.

However, with the availability of commodities such as rice and flour that can substitute for cassava bread and farine, there seems to be less dependency on subsistence farming by a growing number of young people. Wapishana who do not have farming plots are usually attached full-time to

governmental or non-governmental organizations or reside outside of the community on a long-term basis seeking a cash-earning way of life to provide for their families. As a result, it is highly likely that these parents will be unable to transmit the farming knowledge and skills to the younger generation. For example, it is useful to distinguish between the sifters and strainers. At a first glance they look similar, but they are weaved differently to suit the purposes they serve. Without this knowledge, the younger generation tends to increasingly depend on the polythene bag as a substitute for the *parakari* strainer. However, this makeshift replacement is not as durable as the *parakari* strainer. Similarly, the traditional cassava grater is increasingly being substituted by mechanized cassava graters, a trend adopted from the Brazilians. Here, the skill of manual cassava grating with its concomitant chant (nowadays used by fewer women) may be eventually lost. Moreover, the processing of cassava provides a social space for women meeting and relating to each other and for teaching their children the skills of cassava-processing. As such, cassava is a "cultural keystone" (Platten and Henfrey 2009: 493) of the Wapishana.

Figure 15. Parakari tanaa 'parakari *strainer'*.

Figure 16. Badi tanaa *'cassava sifter'*.

Figure 17. O'i tanna *'farine sifter'*.

Other items are disappearing, in addition to the decrease in household items related to farming and cassava processing. Among these household items are the *kubaiyao* 'clay pot', *wun kin* 'water vessel', *dazowan* 'basket', and the *dowada* 'goblet'. It has been observed that many Wapishana women do not make clay pots or drinking goblets. This is because most people have lost the art of making these household items. This is a common lament expressed by all interviewees. In most homes, one would mainly see aluminium pots and plastic buckets, which are commonly sold in shops. However, there is the belief that there are still some elderly ladies who are skilled in the making of clay pots and goblets; therefore, it was suggested that they be approached to teach others before the skill is completely lost. On the women's side, it is now the case that more women carry polythene-made bags rather than the *dopawai* in which they pack their load of cassava or other local products. Others no longer carry the *dazowan* 'basket' on fishing trips but carry haversacks instead. One of the reasons for this is that fewer people can plait *dopaawai* and the *dazowan*. Another reason is that haversacks are fashionable. According to one elder interviewed, if a Wapishana girl needs a *dopaawai or* a *dazowan*, the chances are that her father may not be able to provide her with these because he cannot weave any. Long ago, the Wapishana used wooden troughs or clay goblets to store their local drink. When balata-bleeding was in style, most opted to make large balata goblets. Today, some families still keep the goblets, but their use is almost non-existent. Most people use plastic containers or pails, which are more readily acquired and are portable. As a consequence, it may be difficult to find people who are still skilful in making the balata goblets.

Figure 18. Dowada *'balata-made goblet'.*

While it may be more economical to utilize these makeshifts and mechanized replacements, the negative effect on the associated traditional tools is that there will be a dearth of local skills in their manufacture and use. If this happens, such cultural elements may be rendered invisible in years to come. This in turn would make it difficult to incorporate them into the cultural consciousness of the younger generation who wish to make a historical connection with their traditional or cultural roots. As noted by Baker (1995: 82), as "teenagers move further into adulthood, there is often a desire to find out about the heritage, the rootedness of the family." Sharing such a view concerning Quichua language vitality in Ecuador, Haboud (2004: 75) writes that there is an overtly expressed tendency for parents to reidentify with their roots and take pride in their past, signalling a change in their linguistic attitude from favouring Spanish language to a preference for Quichua maintenance. In the case of the Wapishana, there is indication of young people being interested in becoming acquainted with cultural aspects of their tradition and learning to read and write their heritage language. Examples are the village "cultural groups" formed by some elderly and young people to perform traditional rituals, songs, and dances for special occasions. Additionally, for the Wapishana literacy classes intended for

Wapishana adults that were offered by the Wapishana Literacy Association, over 350 children attended (see Appendix A).

2.4.5.6 Summary and discussion

From the examples given above, the extent of the loss (Section 2.4.4) or decline (Section 2.4.5) of Wapishana traditional practices is clear. For example, cultural memory among present-day Wapishana of how their ancestors dressed is scant. Thus, much of the traditional dress worn on special occasions is an improvisation of what was the original custom. Cultural memory is stronger regarding the readiness of a Wapishana to be accepted into manhood or womanhood. Such readiness was marked by official rites of initiation that are now scarcely practised. As it relates to spiritual healing, the practice is still strong among several families.

Throughout their histories, hunting, fishing, gathering of resources, and farming have been the essential pillars of Wapishana livelihood. The practice of this traditional lifestyle by the Wapishana people has been an important basis for their identification. However, many young people who have adopted modern social and cultural lifestyles have a tendency to shun certain aspects of their own traditional lifestyle. For example, many Wapishana love the farine or cassava bread as part of their meals, yet some are inclined to shy away from an invitation to go to the farm. In Guyanese parlance, some Wapishana have developed ‘sweet skin’, preferring not to soil it as would likely occur in the farming activities. In this respect, the adoption of modern items or tools has threatened to overpower the use of traditional ones. The modern additions the Wapishana have made to their lives socially and culturally need not be at the cost of the traditional ones. Preservation of one’s heritage is possible whilst adopting modern mainstream values. This is not to de-emphasize the importance of Wapishana-adopted mainstream values or to emphasize a return to the times when the Wapishana ancestral ways reigned supreme. Rather, gaining knowledge in one’s cultural heritage and taking pride in it may prevent one’s “loss of identity, even rootlessness (anomie), a lack of clear purpose and disruption in the family” (Baker 1995: 54). As an additional point, once knowledgeable in their cultural heritage, the Wapishana will be in a better position to talk to their own people about it and at the same time, educate the non-Wapishana about our own social and cultural values**.** If the Toshaos and other leaders must emphasize or exhort a need for Wapishana cultural and historical continuity, there is need to create and organize avenues of cultural expressions for a common bond or heritage among the Wapishana**.** Knowing how their ancestors lived, and a fuller and deeper understanding of

Wapishana culture would greatly contribute to a more grounded and sound sense of Wapishana identity and self-esteem.

2.4.6. Other factors contributing to changing circumstances

Children, particularly in Indigenous communities, face problems or issues, given that they are part of the society in which they live. However, they are not isolated in these circumstances: they have allies in children and parents who face very similar problems. As such, they all need to have the same important element of consciousness so that they become aware of factors or issues that affect the development of Indigenous Peoples.

It is particularly important for students to know about topics in the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. These topics, clearly expressed in articles (see Section 1.1 for examples), are an integral part of education, locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. On the issue of language, rights are defined but sometimes are not respected, which may be a form of discrimination or marginalization. In writing on "The Indigenous Condition: An Introductory Note", Jansen and Jiménez (2017: 27) argue that the discrimination or marginalization of Indigenous Peoples is the result of colonial structures and mentalities, which in practical terms, for example, implies that "the language, literature, art and cultural heritage of the Indigenous (i.e. internally colonized) Peoples do not have official status and are not typically taught in schools." On a similar issue, another researcher points out conversely that it is the language that is socially and educationally dominant and highly desirable for academic and social advancement (Hornberger 2006: 288) that is taught in schools. Indeed, this is the case in the context of independent countries (once colonies) such as Guyana and other Latin American countries. As an Indigenous researcher, I agree with Jansen and Jiménez, but I would also add that societal issues that result from intercultural contacts should be part of Indigenous children's educative environment. This point parallels that of Aragón (2014: 164), who noted that attention needs to be paid to "current Indigenous languages and culture and how they relate to broader society". Therefore, Indigenous leadership can follow this lead. This is not to say that the teaching of the dominant language and culture should be replaced by the Indigenous language, but rather the latter should be recognized and respected as well. Likewise, other relevant issues such as those associated with the development of land and its resources are addressed in article 25 of the UNDRIP are relevant topics. Since language functions in social reality, it becomes pertinent to establish communication on these issues not only in the wider society but also in the school to look for solutions. One way to effect

communication on these societal issues is to incorporate them as resource units, leading further to lesson topics in the school's curriculum.

In the case of the Wapishana, some issues came to light at a public village meeting I attended on 3 February 2018, at Maruranau. At this meeting, a former Toshao of Aishalton and the Toshao of Maruranau led a discussion on specific issues such as environmental degradation, changing weather patterns, land use, the effects of some village-based social organizations, and some influences of globalization that affected the lives of the people. These issues remain important aspects of the Wapishana people's everyday reality. Young people and even children may not explicitly realize what they already know of these issues. It is therefore important that the young people's and children's prior knowledge of these issues be brought to their consciousness. In this way they might be encouraged to critically reflect on the issues and appreciate the reasons behind their leaders' concerns or activism. Most of the issues may be similar to the Indigenous neighbours of the Wapishana elsewhere in the country; however, other issues are specific to the Wapishana situation. The issue of the land claims, for example, is not only based on the given titles to their land by the government but also on their historical connections with the land. Therefore, if the younger generation is not made aware of such sensitive issues, the chances are that they will lose awareness of the linguistic, cultural heritage, and their history.

In the next section, I look at several of the factors that continue to contribute to the changing circumstances of the Wapishana lifestyle. In the following, I discuss environmental alterations in Subsection 2.4.6.1, changing weather patterns in Subsection 2.4.6.2, land claims in Subsection 2.4.6.3, some village organizations and the effects on social cohesiveness in Subsection 2.4.6.4, and some influences of globalization in Subsection 2.4.6.5. Finally, I provide a summary and discussion in Subsection 2.4.6.6.

2.4.6.1 Environmental alterations

In immersing themselves in the culture and economic system of the mainstream population, the Wapishana have adopted some modern ways of living. For instance, several people have adopted the making of baked bricks for housing. The Wapishana built houses with thatched roofs and walls of wooden, lattice framework or walls of mud bricks prior to the adaptation of baked bricks. This type of wall proved to be less durable than those made of baked bricks. For this reason, more and more people have built homes of baked clay brick walls. The clay material for baked brick-making is often

found on the banks of the rivers or creeks. As large amounts of clay are extracted, large pits are left. Eventually, the banks with pits become eroded. Moreover, in the rainy season, much of the erosion in the form of slush seeps into the river, causing deep pools to become discoloured and shallow. This disrupts the habitats of the fish and causes the spirits that keep them to move away. According to the Wapishana belief, the spirits that keep the water should not be disturbed so that the habitats of fish stay intact. Because of this, people have to traverse extra miles away to fish. Similarly, as a result of small- and medium-scale gold-mining excavations in the Marudi area made by several non-Wapishana, much of the landscape along with the headwater area of Kwitaro River and its tributaries are negatively affected in terms of direction of water flow, turbidity, and the destruction of trees. This type of environmental destruction has further driven away animals and fish, thus drastically diminishing meat supply which the people depend on for protein in their diet. The other river people can turn to for fishing and hunting grounds is the neighbouring Rewa River, but it is distantly located in the jungle east of the villages.

However, such negative effects on the environment are not always attributable to the modern-based activities as mentioned above. Some culture-based activities of the Wapishana have also partly affected the environment in which they live. People usually set grass alight for the following reasons: hunting deer; keeping the house environs free of harmful creatures; ridding a small area of a dangerous snake that might have gotten away, hunting missed game that might have been partly injured and hidden away; and signaling companionship with one another, especially when travelling far apart and going to a common destination. Nowadays, it is common to burn grass for the grazing of cattle, since cows tend to prefer the young, green grass to the older grass. Besides, people believe that the young green grass is more nutritious. If the old grass is not burnt, the cows usually go further in search of greener grass. Many people practice "slash and burn" agriculture in the forest to establish farms. Sometimes, the fire is controlled by people making fire breakers. For all these reasons, the burning of savannah and bush is a cultural practice, but not all burning is based on such traditional reasons. Sometimes, some people set grass or a bush alight for no real purpose. If left unchecked, the fire can spread rapidly for hours and even days, destroying a large portion of landscape. With such destructive practices, the fires usually get out of control and can destroy valued vegetation such as the *etai* trees (*Mauritia flexuosa*) and trees valued as timber. Valued animals such as the tortoise (*Geocheleone spp*.) and the labba (*Agouti paca*), together with their habitats, usually perish as a result of wide-spread fire. As part of a measure to mitigate these destructive practices, the Toshaos have recommended that villagers follow their documented

customary laws, including a fire calendar for controlled burning of savannah (see South Central and South Rupununi Districts Toshaos Councils 2012: 162). However, the fire calendar may not have taken into account the prolonged dry season, in which an increase of burning has been observed. With this in mind, I now discuss some of the major impacts of a changing weather pattern.

Figure 19. Controlled burning in the forest.

2.4.6.2 Changing weather pattern

In recent times, representatives of both governmental and non-governmental organizations have held meetings in the region to raise the people's awareness of the changing weather patterns and their effects. In spite of the

warnings that they should be prepared for either a prolonged dry season or rainy season, many of the people seemed to be unfazed. One Toshao is of the view that this attitude stems from the people's faith in knowing that the usual long rainy season from May to August and the dry season from September to April will return to normal as it had been for years.

However, in recent years, the Wapishana have experienced abnormal weather patterns that have changed the nature of things. For example, there were shorter rainy seasons with excessive flooding that has not been seen in years. As a consequence, the main crops such as cassava that were typically planted on low lands were destroyed. Due to becoming submerged for longer periods than usual, the cassava, tubers which are the parts used, rotted before they could be utilized. At other times, during the dry season, caterpillars infest a crop of cassava, devouring the leaves and destroying the plants totally. These kinds of adverse effects meant shortages in the Wapishana's staple diet, such as farine and cassava bread. On the other hand, prolonged dry weather has led to a severe shortage of water in some villages. Moreover, it was observed from the wells dug in the villages that the ground water level has sunk and keeps sinking. Some years ago, the ground water level in some places was at about five metres below ground level; today in the same places the ground water level is about ten metres below ground level, according to one Toshao. In addition, the prolonged dry season has caused both domestic and wild animals to frequent non-habitual feeding grounds, partly as an effect of scarcity of feed. For example, cows, horses, and sheep go farther out in search of better grazing grounds, causing much longer round-up time for owners. As for the wild animals, some are now more of a threat to the people. For example, the *bakuru* 'a type of bush hog' (*Tayassu tajacu* and *T. pecari*) are increasingly feeding on farm crops that people depend on for food. Also observed was more frequent evidence of jaguars on the move in villages. Jaguars were known to have killed domestic animals and, in a few instances, to have attacked people. It is not uncommon then for the men to kill the jaguar when they have the opportunity, but this has brought in some Wapishana hunters in conflict with protectors of animal rights in Guyana. The government's rule is that jaguars should not be killed, as they are an endangered species.

Another negative consequence of the changing weather patterns is related to fishing. Prolonged drought has caused the traditionally frequented pools to rapidly dry up, driving people farther away in search of fish to eat or to sell. The main river the Wapishana depend on for fishing is the Rupununi River. According to one Toshao, there are fewer fish resulting from overfishing both by Indigenous Peoples and by non-Indigenous visitors.

In order to mitigate these challenges, some leaders have held village meetings to make people aware of the complex issues of the negative effects of climate change and to discuss ways to mitigate them. The local leaders have also undertaken the initiative to fence off the edge of the forest in the villages of Maruranau, Awarewauna, Rupunuau, Sand Creek, and Shulinab, a project which began in 2003. Benefits derived from the project include farming closer to the savannah and preventing livestock such as cows from destroying the farms. As a further step, a few villages have decided to accept external aid to pilot experimental projects such as savannah farming. Such farming hinges on a drip-type irrigation method, sourced from a nearby deep well. Another proposed project to combat climate change in Maruranau is the building of a road from the edge of the forest to the eastern river of Kwitaro, in the jungle. People reasoned that the road will increase access to cooler farming areas because they are located deeper in the pristine forest. The change from the hotter farming areas along the edge of the forest to cooler farming areas in the deep forest may produce better farming yields, a way of combatting climate change. As recent as February 2019, the road was completed, and it was reported that at least motorcycles can now reach the Kwitaro River. Other expected advantages of the road that goes deeper into the forest are greater hunting, fishing, and logging prospects. In view of these initiatives, people are gradually adapting to the realities of climate change. Notwithstanding the new projects in the villages, a preoccupying concern by the Wapishana leadership remains the biggest issue: unresolved land claims. This has political implications for the Wapishana. I now focus on the ongoing issue of the land claims made by the Wapishana leaders and some of their justifications.

2.4.6.3 Land claims

According to one Toshao, when the Europeans first arrived in the Rupununi, the Wapishana lived in one contiguous block of land space, without known boundaries between villages. Although they had experienced disruptions to their lives by the European visits, expeditions, and settlement, little did the Wapishana know at the time that these disruptions would later include the demarcation of their lands. As Forte (1996: 12) puts it:

> Disruption of course would include the official fiat by which Amerindian lands would magically become crown lands. European dependency on Amerindian goodwill would somehow translate in the colonial scheme of things into Amerindian acceptance of European sovereignty over the land.

In a similar vein, David et al. (2006: 12) documented that the colonial powers asserted that all lands not held under grant from the state were crown lands.

Attempts to resolve the issue of land related to the indigenous peoples date back to just over fifty years ago, before Guyana gained political independence. According to David et al. (2006: 2), one of the conditions for gaining political independence from Great Britain, was that the successor government of Guyana was to legally recognize the ownership of lands by the Indigenous Peoples. The authors (ibid. 2006: 2) go on to document an ensuing consequence: the Amerindian Lands Commission that was established in 1966, consulted with the various Indigenous Peoples and looked into land claims presented to them. According to one Toshao, the government wanted to separate villages by demarcating each one rather than recognizing the unbroken Wapishana boundaries. In the Amerindian Lands Commission 1969 Report, it was recommended that each village be granted a selected section of land. As a result, the government demarcated these sections of lands, granting individual land titles to the people.

However, the leaders contended that each demarcated village land is insufficient for its related population, largely because of the Wapishana pattern of living. This perceived insufficiency of land becomes apparent in light of the increase of population, changing weather patterns, and change in the people's lifestyle. For example, years ago there was an abundance of fish, game, and fruits. Nowadays, fishing, hunting, and gathering fruits require people to go beyond the boundaries of the given lands. According to a former Toshao, Wapishana people cannot survive solely on the resources that fall within demarcated lands. For this reason, they are asking the government for extended lands in one contiguous block of Wapishana territory rather than individual villages with gaps in between. To ensure sufficient resources for all, the Toshaos reiterated that all Wapishana should live together in one single block, as promulgated by of the South Rupununi Development Council (SRDC), whose aim is to "support the long-standing struggle of the Wapichan people to obtain legal title over the full extent of their traditional lands in the South Rupununi" (David et al. 2006: 4). The SRDC Toshaos are also part of the National Toshaos Council (NTC). Nowadays, the NTC represents all Toshaos of the nine Indigenous Peoples of Guyana and holds a yearly national conference of Toshaos where they engage the government of the day on issues and topics related to their development.

Another reason why the Wapishana are so concerned about their land is because their notion of landscape, habitat, and territory is connected to the toponyms and hydronyms, many of which are not only in Wapishana, but

also in Atorad and Taruma. For example, the word *Roponan* "Rupununi River" is not Wapishana but Atorad, according to interviewee, Ian Melville. It is an Atorad word for a type of sour berry shrub that was plentiful along the river. There is also the bottle-shaped mountain that we used to call "bottle mountain", *Taraiporo* 'Ataraiporo', located in the jungle to the east of *Shii* village. *Taraiporo* is a Taruma name for one of the brothers who was turned into huge mountain-like rocks, according to Wapishana oral tradition (see also Carlin 2011: 230). The name *Shii* itself is a Wapishana word that means; swelling', and it refers to the mountain-sized rock from which the village "Shea" derived its name. Thus, the toponyms and hydronyms richly connect the Wapishana to their landscape. For this reason, during the verification of maps of our villages, the people proposed to the government that they include these toponyms and hydronyms as written in Wapishana alongside the current official names, which have been largely anglicized. Therefore, the dominance and historicity of Atorad, Taruma, and Wapishana toponyms and hydronyms that describe the Rupununi landscape is another justification for the Wapishana peoples' claim to land extensions beyond their boundaries.

A related reason for the Wapishana's preoccupation with the land issue is that it is connected to their notions of self-identification and self-determination. From this perspective, insufficient land space is regarded as diminishing their strength or means for self-identification and self-determination. Since one of the major sources of self-identification is the traditional lands people are accustomed to, one can therefore point to these "cultural and language differences as markers of the group's collective identity" (Cummins: 1996: 30). A similar notion regarding markers of a group's collective identity is eloquently expressed by Jansen and Jiménez (2017: 27).

> Shared language, territory, cultural memory and/or social condition are generally the main elements that lead to a people's self-identification and/or its identification by others, creating a bond of group-solidarity and a common orientation toward future development.

In this sense, the shared land or territory, through understanding the histories and meanings behind the toponyms and hydronyms, plays a huge part as a marker of self-identification. Through a sense of securing a sufficient land base to maintain their way of living, the people can have the confidence to exercise their right to "freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development" (UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [UNDRIP] 2007, art.3).

Other reasons concern potentially enormous future projects that could transform the Indigenous Peoples' landscape. In the case of Indigenous Peoples in Guyana, they feel that certain conditions should be met before they agree to such projects. Concerning large projects such as the development of protected areas, Colchester (1997: 149) suggests that such projects would initially have to help clarify the boundaries of Indigenous areas and demarcate them effectively and that the people would need clear rights to be able to continue non-commercial hunting within the reserved area. More recently and specific to the Wapishana, such rights may be extended to lands that include not only the forest but also the savannah. For economic ventures that entail pasture lands, David et al. (2006: 18) assert that the allocation of grazing rights in no way limits traditional access rights to hunting, fishing, and gathering by other members of the community. Economic ventures should be open to people from both outside and within the community. Whatever the case may be, either party should still respect the rights of the people to continue their traditional ways of life.

As one Wapishana leader added, there can be no economic ventures without land**.** In trying to live out self-determination in practical terms, the people have conceptualized their own projects and activities, which they designed, implemented, and monitored themselves. For example, the Wapishana leaders continue to lobby for land extension by organizing themselves as the South Central and South Rupununi Districts Toshaos Council, later modified as the South Rupununi District Council (SRDC). This body, which has recently been recognized by the Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, has published a book entitled *Baokopa'o Wa Di'itinpan Waduaniinao Ati'o nii* 'Thinking together for those coming behind us'. The publication concerns "a general framework for land management and self-determined development based on concerns among communities on land issues and measures needed to protect our rights and continue our way of life" (South Central and South Rupununi Districts Toshaos Councils 2012: iv). Among important topics covered are "Important places", "How to use the land", and "How to put plans to work". The document, which represents a collective mechanism for instilling traditional values in the mindset of the people, must not only be recognized, but be actively applied by more Wapishana**.** This document has been presented to the government as part of the Wapishana's input so that it may be incorporated as part of the developmental plans for the district. To date, the government has at least verbally acknowledged the plan, but has not officially incorporated it. However, it is fair to say that at least the government should issue a written statement of support or acknowledgement. Just as the government would like the support of the people for its ideas concerning development, so too they should accept the

people's ideas and desires for development connected to their land. I now discuss some ways certain organizations within the villages have affected Wapishana traditional practices.

2.4.6.4 Some village organizations and effects

The SRDC is made up of elected representatives of all the village councils in the South Rupununi district. Each village council, comprising an elected Toshao and councillors, is another institution that had been developed in concert with the government. After the new councils are installed by the government, they are democratically elected every three years. Prior to this, some villages such as Maruranau followed their traditional practices in choosing their leaders. The leader who was chosen based on his or her good reputation and popularity was recognized as the true representative and would not be changed until a successor was acknowledged by the community. Nowadays, with the oversight of the government, voting for a new Toshao and councillors is done by consensus. Voting by consensus for leaders has been accepted as another order of political life of democratically organized institutions, of which the village councils are a part.

However, the principle of voting by consensus has been extended into village life in relation to decision-making involving large-scale projects for the village. Some community leaders felt that when consensus is used to arrive at crucial decisions on projects that would have long-term implications and consequences, the people who do not agree with the decision could subvert the project or programme and that this could affect its viability. In effect, non-cooperation by a number of people creates factions within a village. Along the same lines, as groups decide to move "beyond subsistence activities into new social formations, these stresses and strains can cause disruption within the fabric of village life" (Forte 1996: 14). Related somewhat to the stresses and strains created by conflict of interests regarding projects or new social formations is the formation of "new" churches in villages that are traditionally Catholic. One elder mentioned that in his village, members of the new churches are criticizing ways of worship of the members who belong to the older church. This leads to ill will and disunity among affected villagers, affecting cohesion in village day work or meetings. Another elder noted that the affiliation to political party groups by individuals or families within some villages is another cause for disharmony or social division to cordial working relationships. Thus, different church and political affiliations have contributed somewhat to the erosion of social cohesiveness, sometimes manifested by poor turnout at self-help activities or meetings in some villages. One way of restoring good will and unity in

affected villages could be through additional inter-party meetings. Such meetings chaired by the village councils could assist in ending disagreements, assuaging fears, or easing criticisms between parties or groups affected. If a form of agreement on being tolerant and respectful of each other's opinions or affiliations could be made, this would take much of the tension out of the situations.

A further cause for friction is the transition of some people to "individualism" as opposed to "cooperativism", which is one of the hallmarks of most villages. In "individualism", people pursue the possession of consumer goods, the goal of which is to make a profit. They pursue property or business ownership, which may dictate that less time on their part be spent on voluntary village activities. In this sense, "cooperativism" in which people share and unite is under threat, and, as one elder puts it, "We are not coming together as before." By contrast, in "cooperativism", the majority of individuals have sustained a cooperative way of living and sharing, largely without much money or commodities. It seems difficult to reconcile these two ways of living in a village without creating a feeling of class division. However, one of the people's strengths is still in their cooperative way of living and producing as in their subsistence farming. This is best illustrated by *manoru, "*cooperative work among a group of people*"*.

A *manoru* entails the invitation of relatives, neighbours, and friends by a host to assist in a manual task that otherwise could not have been easily accomplished by one or two individuals. The nature of the task could be related to the farm, the house, or domestic animals, concluding with a happy celebration of a shared meal along with an alcoholic beverage and sometimes music. The strong social obligation to assist each other in a *manoru* is manifest in the number of people participating, but participation need not be reciprocal. However, one facet of the *manoru* that sometimes leads to social breakdown is the overindulgence in the drinks by a few. In successfully counteracting this negativity, some hosts have been known to put limits on their offer of the beverages, while fewer hosts offered only non-alcoholic beverages. A less-practised form of cooperative work because it involves fewer people is called *kaminka'uakaru* 'self-help'. This has the same characteristics of the *manoru* except that no beverage or meal is obligatory on part of the host, while reciprocity of participation is obligatory. Depending on the number of individuals, this self-help is complete after a number of days, when each person will have had his or her turn of receiving assistance**.** Apart from the *manoru* and *kaminka'uakaru* there is still the "village work" in most villages, where councils choose a day in a week for a

number of hours of cooperative work to be done for the benefit of the village.

As factions and tensions continue to present challenges in the villages, there is the phenomenon of globalization, which brings in yet more challenges. I now focus on two examples of the effects of globalization. First, I mention how externally influenced policies have triggered the imposition of large-scale projects in some instances. Second, I touch on how people have adapted to the changing circumstances brought about by the introduction of a form of information technology.

2.4.6.5 Some influences of globalization

As argued by Baker (1995: 205), because globalization has caused the spread of information, telecommunications, and mass media to break down national frontiers, there is the pressure to belong to the global village, a pressure to be international, to become part of a bigger whole. From this perspective, it is the perception of some Toshaos that as the government signs on to internationally influenced policies, the government is obligated to pursue related developmental projects. The villages, in turn, are pressured by the government into accepting some planned large-scale projects for the development of their communities. A case in point is The Hinterland Sustainable Agricultural Development Programme, funded by the International Development Bank. At a specially convened meeting of residents and local leaders of the Rupununi, government officials spoke about the advantages of a huge reservoir project to be based in the North Rupununi. According to one interviewee, as the Vice President spoke, there was frequent applause, mostly from the government side. In view of the negative effects the project might have on the ecosystems upon which the people depend for a living, one Toshao asserted that the local leaders needed to take a more questioning stance before agreeing on such large-scale developmental projects. The interviewee further contended that the government should wait for at least a year, giving the people ample time for consideration and input before a final decision on the project is made. Clearly, such projects will require massive infrastructural works in the traditional land of the Indigenous people. There is, therefore, a need for the Indigenous leadership to engage in critical reflection on the pros and cons of such projects that have the potential to completely transform their landscape and to demand an independent report showing any detrimental effects. One suggestion for clearer information on projects and programmes is to have relevant documents or speeches translated from English to Wapishana and vice versa. This would call for the need of trained translators from within the

communities. In this way, internalization and interpretation of the information by all people concerned is more likely to be achieved before crucial decisions are made**.** This is one example of how globalization seems to indirectly threaten the Indigenous Peoples' maintenance of their traditional way of life.

The other example regarding a globalization-influenced development is the telecommunications brought about by the introduction of mobile phones to the Wapishana area. Since the digital network reached Wapishana villages over five years ago, the use of mobile phones ushered in easier and faster communication. However, the communication advantages of having mobile phones came at a price, as manifested in the increase of the people's movement and their expenditure. For instance, on a daily basis, there is noticeable movement of people from within some villages to a main point several miles away, where they access the telecommunication network signal. This new trend of movement also means the additional expense of having to buy phone credit for use. As one pensioner remarked, her mobile phone is "eating away" her money each time she talks to her relatives. On the part of some the younger people who are literate in their language, there is a disposition to enjoy communication by chatting or texting messages in Wapishana on their mobile phones. Conversing in Wapishana by this means is particularly representative of McCarty's (2012: 569) observation that the choice of youths to speak their heritage languages is an act of identity and belonging. All this reveals that Indigenous Wapishana youths are willing to adapt to a changing world despite the advantages and disadvantages experienced by the technological development. How this adaptation will be put to further advantage in terms of their education will be of interest. There is much benefit to be derived in the educational use of more digital tools if there is training to use these and the related programmes.

2.4.6.6 Summary and discussion

In this section, we have seen that the advantages ushered in by elements of change are acknowledged by the Wapishana communities. Amid all this, pedagogical, health, environmental, political, social, and economic issues remain important aspects of the Wapishana people's everyday reality. However, there is optimism in the following highlighted positive directions. In supporting the switch from a monolingual to a bilingual model of education for their children, the Wapishana may expect a more motivating learning environment, more engagement in academic effort, reformed minds, attitudes, and self-esteem. The awareness that a regular consumption of certain modern foods may lead to detrimental health effects can trigger the

local leaders to have educational programmes for the people on the use and the proper preparation of these foods. Consequences of environmental alteration are the result of both natural forces and human activities from within and outside the villages. The good news is that Wapishana communities are counteracting these challenges partly through the reinforcement of their customary laws. The controversial issue of land claims and extensions for one contiguous block of Wapishana territory remains unresolved, but the Toshaos' collective resolve to pursue the matter with the government of the day seems not to have waned. The existence of factions within the villages for various reasons has threatened the common bond of cooperation much needed to maintain the villages' social cohesion. Still, the continued practice of the *manoru* 'cooperative work among people' or *kaminka'uakaru* 'self-help' and the weekly village work has shown that the social value of the cooperative 'spirit' upholds a sense of community. The messages about maintaining traditional values whilst pursuing economic advancement the people receive may seem contradictory. However, the emphasis is that with a mindset anchored in traditional values, Wapishana cultural continuity is more likely. With a culturally relevant curriculum that provides a knowledge base in traditional values, intercultural experience may be more meaningful, leading to further knowledge of both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds.

It is must be further highlighted that the convening of the special meetings is indicative of the necessary vision and political will demonstrated by some leaders and Toshaos to address their problems. As they deliberate on issues that complicate the lives of the peoples, this "will encourage focused and strategic responses to the specific issues which they merit" (Guyana Human Rights Association 2016: 3). As one of the strategic responses to the troubling issues, the suggested frameworks such as their documented customary laws can be shared and discussed. Clearly, rather than a one-off meeting, there should be a series of meetings to discuss the issues in greater detail and with more specialized assistance than the peoples' own, if necessary. Hopefully, in this way, more strategic responses will be generated. Underlying all this is the peoples' persistence for self-sufficiency, self-identification, and self-respect for their livelihood.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided data regarding the location, population, and origins of the Wapishana, as well as their contact with other peoples and the experienced impact of colonization, as context for the rest of the thesis. In addition, elements of change contributing to either the growth of their

culture or the demise of aspects of it have been identified. Embedded in all these elements or activities are values, as outlined in Figure 20. These values, discerned as material and immaterial, are further characterized as the following: (1) Traditional: disappeared; (2) Traditional: in decline; and (3) Modern: adopted.

The categorization and characterization of these values are important for understanding both the historical and current status of the Wapishana people. Attempts have been made to resurrect the disappeared aspects of the culture, representing concrete examples of a connection to a common heritage. Nowadays, the creation of traditional dress or costume is mainly for glamourous exhibition on special occasions, but at least the display of these aspects of culture creates a cultural space for self-identification and a sense of pride. The cultural practices of farming, hunting, fishing, and gathering (food or materials) are still essential pillars of the Wapishana traditional lifestyle. Thus, the exhortation by elders for the younger generation to revisit and revalue these practices is a result of fewer people engaging in them. Conversely, more people tend to have an overwhelmingly growing dependence on products from urban centres but at a cost to the traditional practices. While the younger generation's embracing of modern Wapishana societal values is normal so as to keep abreast with current developments, they also need to take advantage of the opportunities for economic and social advancement. Some hold the view that the decision to uphold traditional values to create a sense of well-being, rests with individuals or groups. It is fair to say that people ultimately have the choice to pursue modernity, tradition, or both. Said differently, being part of the wider world while still upholding beliefs and values of the Wapishana culture is a choice partly open to Wapishana. However, if the Wapishana people can also appreciate and accept that there is much value in the use of their traditional immaterial knowledge to gain material values, then the goal for us as educators is to create a formal space for a future based on the foundation of their cultural heritage.

Such an envisioned goal for the children's education that is founded on their cultural heritage fits well in Hornberger's (2004: 159) continua model of biliteracy which encompasses contexts ranging from micro to macro, oral to literate, and bilingual/multilingual to monolingual levels. Moreover, considering educational policy and practice regarding biliteracy, one end of each continuum appears to hold privileged power over the other (e.g. written development over oral development); hence "there is need to contest the traditional power weighting by paying attention to, and granting agency to and making space for actors and practices at what have been traditionally been the less powerful ends of the continua" (Hornberger & Skilton-

Sylvester 2000: 99). In the context of Indigenous Mesoamerica, especially the Mixtec people, Jiménez (2015: 7) argues that with the end of Spanish colonization no social and mental decolonization has taken place and suggests that decolonization "should not lead to ethnic conflicts, but to a new society and mentality in which all cultural, historical and linguistic components are appreciated positively, shared, and cared for." Such decolonization can begin by creating space for a bilingual and intercultural education which in turn "could greatly reinforce self-esteem" of the children (Howard 2004: 115). A stronger self-esteem has a positive effect on the affective domain of the children's learning which in turn contributes to their overall successful learning, including the building of cognitive skills (see Section 2.4). It is with this space in mind that the efficacy of a mother tongue and culture-based education for Wapishana children is investigated in this thesis (see Section 1.3 for the research questions). The findings will be discussed later (see Chapter 6).

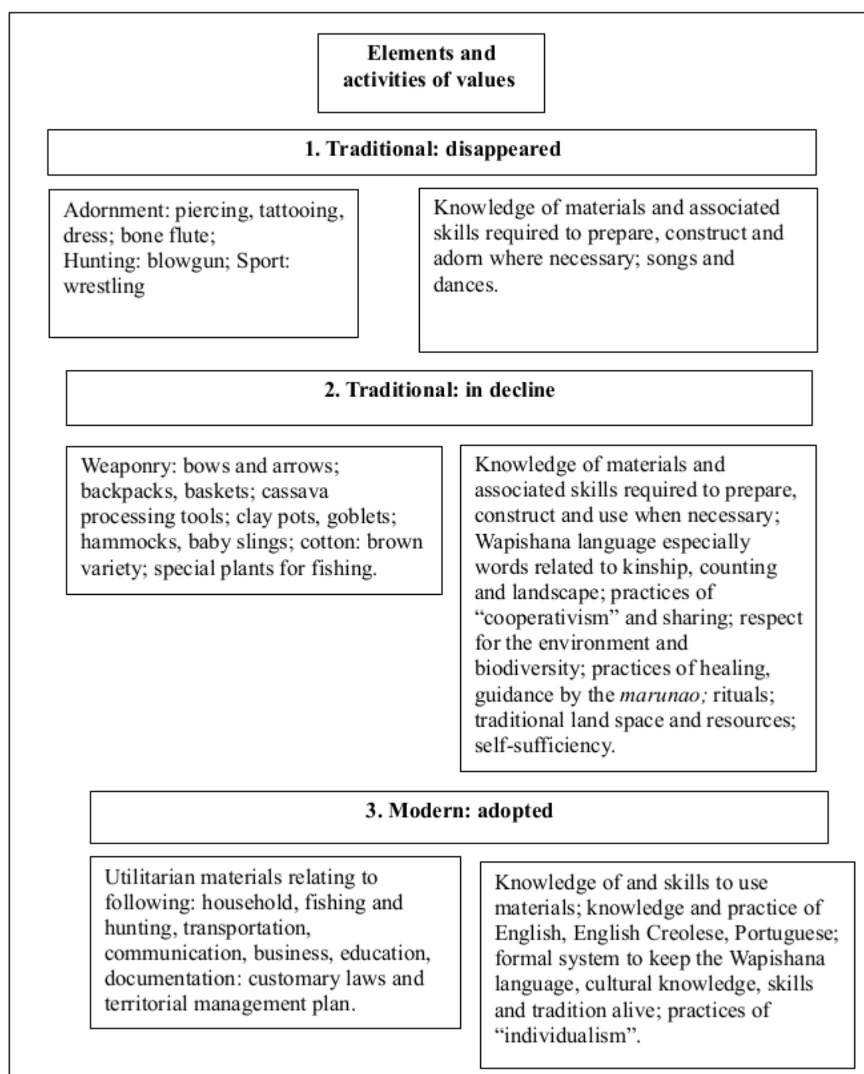

Figure 20. Elements/activities of Wapishana values.

Figure 20 outlines a menu of Wapishana values from which Wapishana decision-makers can choose as their core values. However, these core values should include the traditional ones the Wapishana are proud of. Perhaps, the best way of honouring these traditional values is by incorporating them into thematic units that inform what knowledge and skills children should have as a basis to begin their formal schooling. These traditional values should also provide cultural content or topics to continue development of their heritage

language and culture whilst they go on learn the second language and its affiliated culture. Such thematic units will contribute to the reformation of the conventional curriculum that is largely based on values of the mainstream or dominant culture. Thus, the construction and the following of a culturally and educationally relevant curriculum are of utmost importance because as a foundation, the future of our Wapishana children will be shaped by it.