

GUYANA JUNCTION

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GLOBALISATION, LOCALISATION, AND
THE PRODUCTION OF EAST INDIANNESS

Kruispunt Guyana

MONDIALISERING, LOKALISERING,
EN DE PRODUCTIE VAN 'HINDOESTANITEIT'

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

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to Naleane,
and Life Life Life

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Acknowledgements

It must have been February last year. I was shooting a short ethnographic film about one of the most jovial East Indian seniors of entire Guyana. I wanted to portray him as an extraordinary relic of a past that most of my informants had already seen vanish beyond their horizons. They called him Mice, I am not sure why. He was an 85-year old who realised happiness was not to be found in the false promises of contemporary consumerism. The film was meant to become a tribute to simplicity, a confrontation with the illusions of progress, and a document of something that would not much longer be. Mice generously allowed me to capture his ancient routine.

We were on our way to his plot of land in the back of the village. Mice had to ‘cut grass’ to feed his two cows. It probably was around five in the morning, as it was pitch-dark. I struggled to follow the bare-foot senior, to keep pace while not stumbling on the bumpy clay road that we took. We talked, discussed life in his place and mine. The old man asked me about my remote homeland. He had heard it was even further away than neighbouring Suriname. Mice himself had only been as far as Georgetown, a mere sixty kilometres down South, across the Essequibo.

“Hans,” he said, “do you people have night and day over there?” “Huh?” I replied, “what do you mean Mice?” “ Well, just like here, do you have light and dark?”

I guess I laughed, and assured him Holland was not all that different from Guyana. I probably even thought it was a slightly silly question to ask. Although, in fact and retrospect, it really wasn’t. Rather, it might have been an elegant attempt to be nice and courteously show some interest in the background of a stranger. It was no evidence of a desire to learn about the alien, let alone proof of the need to know. While I had devoted precious time and resources to the endeavour of studying the exotic, Mice had lived his entire life in deliberate ignorance. Mice knew all he needed to know, even claimed to have found happiness, and had managed to survive in his bounded world.

This book is the outcome of my desire to know, perhaps an indication of my pursuit of something Mice already knows is illusory; attaining satisfaction through intellectual self-realisation. It is an account of a project that has helped only me, yet required the cooperation of countless others. I owe tremendous gratitude to all these

persons. I would never have been able to get anything done without their kind assistance. Hence, I would like to dedicate the first few pages of this dissertation to all the people who have allowed me to study East Indianness, who were willing to facilitate me, although (I realise) most of them had better things to do. Unfortunately, I cannot mention all. Yet, even if left unmentioned here, their words and deeds are engraved in my memory and will form a lasting source of inspiration.

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Away from Guyana, under the grey skies of the low lands, numerous others have encouraged and inspired me. Highly influential was my mentor and promotor, Professor Ton Robben. Thank you Ton, for your patience and confidence, I would not have reached

this point without your support. Also important was my co-promotor Fabiola Jara Gómez. Thank you Fabiola, our perspectives are quite similar. Furthermore, my thanks go out to my colleagues and staff at the University of Utrecht's Department of Cultural Anthropology, and the CERES Research school. I realise that I will not be elected the department's most passionately involved anthropologist ever. Nevertheless, I have enjoyed our discussions, and appreciate your camaraderie, forbearance and interest. Thank you roommates, other juniors and seniors. And thank you Kootje Willemse, for releasing me from worries about those awkward financial matters.

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Furthermore, I must thank all those who have been willing to read my writings, and provide me with indispensable feedback on my, sometimes peculiarly impenetrable, literary style and intellectual trajectory. Thank you OLA colleagues, even though I have only shared little of my produce with you. Thank you Professor Van Bruinessen, Professor Kruijt, Professor Oostindie, and Professor Ouweneel. Thank you for your time, the fiat, and some highly useful last minute comments. And thank you Doctor Anthony Davies, *nbad*. I really appreciate your continuous and attentive curiosity. I hope you agree with my analyses, although I realise this format might not be your cup of tea.

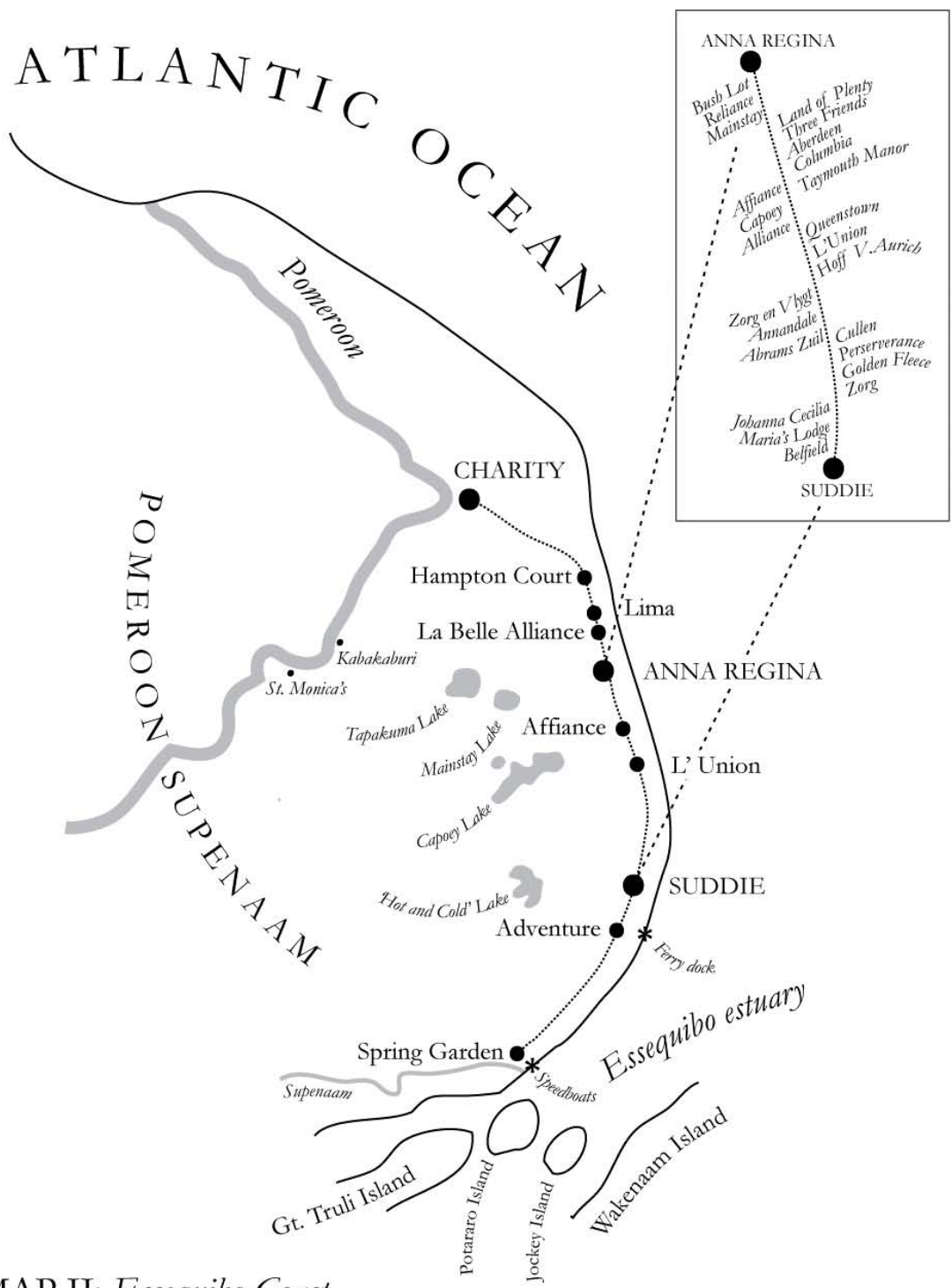
I owe a sincere and profound debt of gratitude to friends and family who, in some way or another, have contributed to this project. To Pascal Ooms and Rene van Dongen, who both were there when I first 'landed' on Guyanese soil. To Stacey-Michelle Stachnik, whose great friendship I gained the last time I was in Essequibo. To my dear mother-in-law, Susalla Davies, who will undoubtedly remain a key informant for many years to come. And, of course, to my parents, Gerrit and Truus de Kruijf, who will not be able to read this book because they barely read English. Pa en ma bedankt. Zonder jullie steun en hulp was er van mijn wedergeboorte als antropoloog geen sprake geweest. Ik hoop dat ik als pappa zo oneindig veel geduld en vertrouwen kan opbrengen als jullie. En ik hoop dat de wegen van mijn kind, voor mij, minder ondoorgrondelijk zullen zijn.

Finally, to Naleane, my wife, I can only say that I lack the vocabulary to express adequately the love and thankfulness I feel for the endless support, understanding, and patience you have shown me over the years. Your continuous self-sacrifice testifies of an immense strength, wisdom, selflessness, and love, and is a gift beyond imagination. I feel extremely blessed to have married such a grand and beautiful person. To you, and to who will soon be, I dedicate this book.

Wezep, 6 July 2006

MAPS

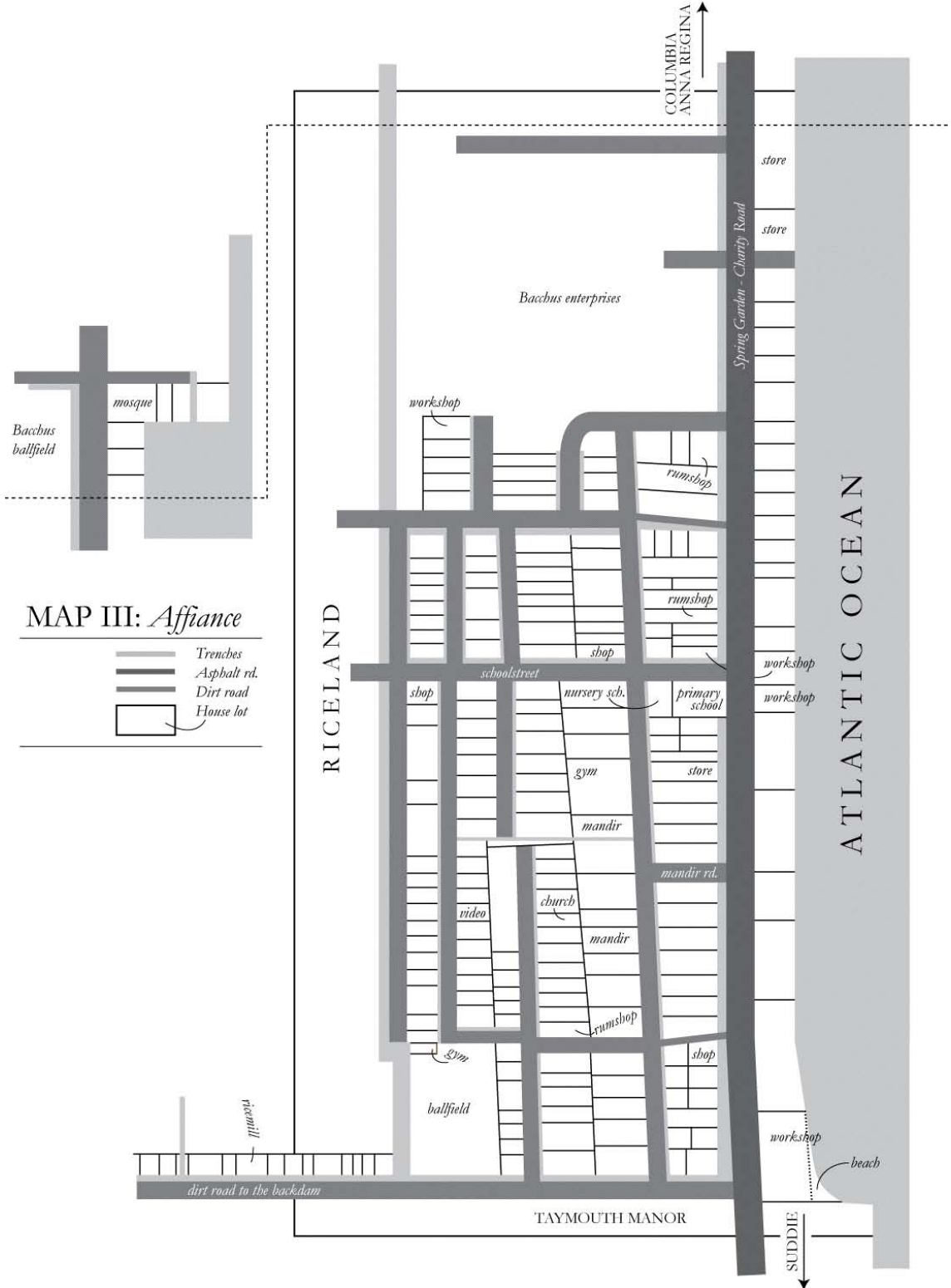








Villages (former estates) between Anna Regina and Suddie

MAP II: *Essequibo Coast*

	Rivers
	Roads
	Villages/Towns



MAP III: *Affiance*

-  Trenches
-  Asphalt rd.
-  Dirt road
-  House lot

INTRODUCTION

Investigating the Production of East Indianness in Guyana

They had warned me not to go there, assured me it was too dangerous to interfere with the people of that obscure temple. “They kill beasts and will do things that can make you go mad,” a befriended university graduate told me after she had found out I wanted to attend the Devi (Kali) mandir’s Sunday service. According to her, my research definitely was not worth risking my life, or at the least my sanity. As far as she was concerned, I could easily focus on other things instead, just for the sake of well-being. And she was not the only one with doubts. Even my generally reasonable East Indian wife was far from confident I would return home intact. “Fine, do whatever you want to,” is what she sighed before she made me promise I would not accept any of the foodstuffs the worshippers would inevitably offer me. And I agreed, I had to do whatever I wanted to, could not let those tales dictate my course.

Mukesh, my friend and frequent companion, brought me there on his brand new Chinese motorbike. While he remained outside, I entered the house of worship, introduced myself to the presiding *pujari* (priest), and took a floor seat amidst two dozen flabbergasted devotees. Now, about forty minutes of hymns and rituals later, I am watching a small number of hardcore believers go around the gloomy and steaming sanctuary in an odd procession en route to please and glorify each and every one of the many members of this sect’s peculiar pantheon. While the congregation sings the appropriate bhajans, they perform *puja* (homage) at all of the many statues and portraits of gods and other divinities there. In front, dressed in orange dhoti and white t-shirt, is Suraj, the *pujari* and leader of the pack. He guides. Behind him, there are a couple of similarly clad male assistants carrying the rum, cigarettes, a pan with smouldering coals and some other items required for sacrificial activity.

At the back of the parade, two ladies and a girl are dancing or ‘playing’ as it is called in this place. I recognise one of them as Suraj’s unofficial other half. She and the other two are possessed. According to the talkative woman sitting next to me, their frenziedly shaking bodies are momentarily occupied by godheads eager to interact with the highly devout mortals of this temple on the outskirts of the inhabited world. The three ladies are

accompanied by several men with buckets of water. Whenever the possessed are overheated, and lose control of their wobbly bodies, the bucket-men grab them and make sure they cool down.

The 'divinities' follow the parade, soaked to the skin, and move from icon to icon. As they reach an indiscernible tiny picture in a far corner of the dim building, the



'Playing' (Kali Mai service in Essequibo)

procession and the singing suddenly stop. I notice Suraj's 'wife' – possessed by Shiva's fearsome form, here known as Bhairo Baba – has raised her stick and summons the pujari. With her eyes half open, long wet hair dripping, and a translucent sodden pink sari revealing too much of her copious middle aged body, she addresses him and the crowd in strangely voiced tongues. Suraj translates: "Baba [Bhairo Baba] says he is unsatisfied...this is not the right kind of worship he says...you all have to sing louder...we can't worship the Lord if you all not sing good...we must do it correct." I witness Suraj's wife shake her head. Only a brief message from 'above' this time. The solemn looking musicians lift their instruments and restart their performance. And while the pujari and his assistants stoop down in front of the framed image, the remorseful congregation picks up its song, much louder: "Oh Lord Jesus come, thank God he is here again..."

Thousands of miles away from India, somewhere in the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, I thus witnessed the son of the Christian god being adored by Hindu descendants of Indian indentured labourers who first arrived in the area more than one and a half century ago. It was a beautiful performance of localised Indianness¹, an illustration of distinctively Indian thoughts and practices that are – and could only have been – established in a joint venture between (the offspring of) migrants and their multireligious surroundings. Jesus puja is incorporated in a belief system that has managed to remain a marker of cultural difference in the New World. An alien element integrated into a dynamic interpretive complex that guides the perceptions and actions of the people about whom I have written this dissertation.

Actually, this is a book about the construction of East Indian ethnic and religious distinction in Guyana in which I endeavour to analyse the manner in which Indian

¹ I prefer to use the term Indianness instead of a limited concept like Indian identity. Indianness is omnipresent and multiform. It comprises thoughts, actions, and institutions, and is both dynamic and contextual. It perfectly relates to notions like habitus and cultural understandings, notions employed throughout this dissertation.

ethnic/religious culture as well as Indian tainted personal meaning and practice are produced and reproduced. As such, this book is an attempt to analyse the productive interplay between the creative individual and his or her delimiting surroundings in a way that is inspired by Bourdieu's theory of practice but seeks to develop a more sophisticated model to account for the processes of transformation and the complexity that characterise my subjects' contemporary world. Hence, the following chapters elaborate an alternative approach to cultural change in increasingly globalised environs: an approach which allows me to investigate ethnic and religious distinction in a postcolonial diasporic community on the move.

It is an investigation of a process rather than of a people. This intricate process is dissected by focusing on East Indian ways, motivations, and explanations, some of its externalisations, plus the historical and contemporary context in which these 'marks of East Indianness' have arisen and continue to evolve. Through a comparison of the notions and actions of East Indian Hindus and East Indian Muslims I will seek to illuminate the nature of the division of power between the creative individual on one side and forceful structures on the other. The parallels and dissimilarities in the ethnic and religious heritage, and the position and identification of Indian Hindus and Indian Muslims provide rich sources of information about the relationship between these two parties. Additionally, their temporal and situation-dependant relevance and shifting appearance enable us to perceive the transformative and flexible qualities of Indianness, Hinduness, and Muslimness in Guyana. These equalities, and the dynamics of the relationship between local Hindus and Muslims, beautifully manifest where cultural diffusion and the globalisation of religion (e.g. Arabisation of Islam) have caused existing identities and associations to become contested and new ones to emerge. As such, an exploration of the development of non-indigenous ethnic and religious systems in the small, multifarious and wide-open Guyanese society offers a superb opportunity to enhance general understanding of cultural processes in present-day diasporic settings.



In this opening chapter, I will first position the subjects of this research project: the East Indian residents of little known Guyana. I will situate them in their plural environs and briefly touch upon ‘ethnicity’ and ‘religion’, the prime markers of their distinction. Next, I will introduce the theoretical notions that are employed to behold and make sense of the manner in which this Indian individuality is continuously constructed and reconstructed. Also, the broader scientific significance of the project will be concisely mentioned. The third section deals with the particular locale in which the fieldwork was conducted. It includes a description of the, to some extent archetypical, East Indian village where my wife and I have spent most of our days in the field. Furthermore, the latter part of the section involves a discussion of some methodological matters and choices regarding my quest for knowledge. Subsequently, I have written a segment on my social position and my identity at the site. It entails a piece on consequences and considerations regarding my peculiar twofold role as both the familiar husband of a local female and an intrusive and inquisitive researcher, as well as a part on the effects of Muslim mistrust. The penultimate section of this chapter concerns the structure of this book. And in its very last piece I will devote a few lines to my style of writing and presentation.

1.1 East Indians in a multifarious society

Indians have been part of Guyanese society ever since the nineteenth century. They arrived as indentured labourers from the Indian subcontinent to work Guyana’s sugar estates after the abolition of slavery caused African labour sources to dry out. Between 1838 and 1917, nearly 240,000 Indian emigrants were brought to Guyana. Some eighty-five percent of them were Hindu, fifteen percent Muslim. Today, their descendants form the country’s largest ethnic group. From marginal cane cutters they have become an influential people well-represented in most sections of Guyanese society. East Indians, who now constitute forty-eight percent of the total population, are the mainstay of the significant plantation economy. Many are independent farmers and landowners. In addition, as a group they are now fairly well educated, have been relatively successful in business, dominate Guyana’s politics, and maintain commercial, religious and cultural ties with large diaspora communities in North America (and to a lesser extent Europe) and numerous regional and global nuclei.

Little do these contemporary Guyanese East Indians resemble the virtually voiceless pseudo-slaves that were recruited among India’s deprived, sent to British Guiana on a harsh and lengthy journey in overcrowded ships, and came to inhabit the estate barracks after the Africans had left. Instead of displaced Asians in alien environs, they are basically a Caribbean people with few direct linkages to the somewhat mythicised motherland. However, those Caribbean people of Indian origin have remained connected to the ways and beliefs that once travelled aboard the ships with indentured from Calcutta

and Madras to the New World. Indian recipes, feasts, and modes of dressing, convictions, taboos and etiquette all survived the test of time. Usually in an altered form, these and other Asian elements are still widely present in Guyana today. Up until now, they enable the Indians – who came to be known as ‘East Indians’ in the West Indies – to remain a distinct group: a people which holds on to its Indianness. Yet, this East Indian distinction is not just the heritage of an Indian subcontinental past. It is the outcome of their existence in a unique Guyanese setting.

The current ways and beliefs of the Indo-Guyanese, or as Strauss and Quinn (1994:285) would say, their cultural understandings², constitute a localised Indianness within the multiethnic Guyanese reality. This localised complex of typical Indian forms of behaviour and culture would not have evolved anywhere else. It is the product of the interplay between a collective of culturally charged individuals and the continuously transforming circumstances in surroundings marked by a distinct history and particular formative forces.³ Descent, often associated with unique phenotypical traits and behavioural features, plays an important part. It provides the East Indians with a solid foundation upon which peculiarity can be based. Yet, religion is at least an equally opulent reservoir of distinction. Whereas a common origin unites the East Indians, faith divides them into Hindus and Muslims⁴: two separate and potentially opposing groups, each with their own practices and ideologies. Like ethnicity, religion serves as a strategic tool that can be applied to mark the boundaries between the ingroup and the outgroup, but (again, as ethnicity) it also provides the group members with a cultural dye with which practice and perception are coloured.

1.1.1 Ethnicity

Indian distinction, constituting ethnic as well as religious elements, thus serves various purposes in the lives of the East Indians in their heterogeneous habitat. It is both an instrument that can be employed in a strategic manner and a source of self-definition that steers interpretations and actions in conscious and subliminal ways. As will be further described in Part I, these functions guarantee the survival of distinction in combination with certain traits of the Guyanese social reality. For instance, the exploitation or marketing of ethnicity by certain people and groups as a strategic tool in the quest for power, facilitated by social and economic ethnic division and wide-spread insecurity, contributes to the durability of Indianness.⁵ In other words, as is happening in many multiethnic environs, there are social entities that utilise ethnicity to gain or retain control over a people

² A term which derives from an approach which according to Strauss and Quinn might be considered an enhanced version of Pierre Bourdieu’s practice theory. As will be shown later, notions related to these will form the theoretical framework connected to the conceptual heart of this study.

³ See chapter two (on history) and chapter three (on those formative forces).

⁴ See also Eriksen (1993:84).

⁵ See 3.1

susceptible to ethnic mobilisation.⁶ And, perhaps even more than in many other multiethnic environs, these entities are assisted by a number of factors that work to enhance the potential of ethnicity. First of all, Guyana's colonial history has caused society to grow into an arena in which there are two opponents with sufficient muscle to endure but not enough strength to 'crush' the other. Both the descendants of African slaves (33%) and the East Indians (48%) do not constitute absolute majorities, yet they comprise groups large enough not to be helpless. Besides, there is a comprehensive segregation of these ethnic groups which encompasses the social, economic, and religious spheres. Africans and Indians generally do not live in the same areas, do not work at the same places, and often do not believe in the same god(s).

In addition to these demographic factors, several authors regard the contemporary inclination to employ ethnicity strategically – or rather the divisive power of ethnicity as such – to be part of Guyana's colonial heritage. According to Van der Veer and Vertovec (1991:161), it was the process of decolonisation that made the issues of race and ethnicity increasingly come to the fore in Guyana. As far as they are concerned, the society was divided into Creole or African and Indian segments as colonial authorities gradually handed over power to the Guyanese. Premdas (1996:46) argues that the "rivalry" between East Indians and Africans originates in the divide-and-rule policy of the colonial days.

One way or another, it is evident that ever since independence⁷ political power has been almost exclusively in the hands of either the party dominated by the East Indians (formerly PPP, now PPP/C) or the 'African-Guyanese party' (formerly PNC, now PNC/R).⁸ This situation has resulted in a polarised political realm in which the rule by one group leads to the (relative) deprivation – and subsequently almost bellicose opposition – of the other. In this political atmosphere, governments have become vehicles for ethnic interests. Partially due to such partisan politics, almost everything on the national stage is ethnically coloured and Muslims and Hindus are herded in an 'East Indian union' through which their common interests are supposedly safeguarded. By playing the 'race card', as it is often referred to in Guyana, division is nourished and has managed to become omnipresent. Especially on a macro-level, interethnic rivalry characterises virtually every sphere of influence. And even daily social practice – as far as inter-ethnic dealings are concerned – is affected by a deep-rooted division. Prejudices steer interaction between Africans and East Indians away from 'interracial' friendships and marriages. In fact, the intensity of social contacts between the two groups is largely restricted to unavoidable encounters, such as those in school or at work. Apparently, "one nation, one people, one destiny" – the country's official credo – is a dream far beyond reach.

⁶ Mahabir (1996:285) mentions the "racial elite" in this regard. According to him, the development and accentuation of antagonism between and among disparate groups in culturally heterogeneous societies like Guyana are "often aided and abetted by the small racial elite in power."

⁷ On May 26th 1966, British colonial authorities handed over the constitutional instruments to the Guyanese.

⁸ E.g. Colchester (1997:30).

Disunity is always present, often below the surface and seemingly insignificant but sometimes immense and all-encompassing, as during and after the tense and riot-plagued March 2001 elections. In such situations, people's behaviour, and the meanings attributed to their practices and circumstances, are strongly connected to ethnic origins. Here it is Indians versus Africans. This national emphasis on common descent vanishes within the ethnically homogeneous local community. There, a refocusing takes place and another label or source of collective positioning comes to the fore.⁹ To be more precise, 'creed' takes over in the everyday interaction within the predominantly Indian villages. In the case of local competition and relationships, religious differences are emphasised and the East Indian unity is replaced by interreligious separateness and an intrareligious division in various Hindu and Muslim factions. Religious identity and community play themselves out so strongly in the local economy and social life because in those micro cosmoses of (rural) Guyana power and scarce resources have to be distributed among the members of a virtually all-Indian community.

1.1.2 Religion

Religious differences produce the most significant ingroup outgroup dichotomy within the East Indian circle. Especially the three separate belief complexes endow the East Indian believer with an inclusive supply of dissimilarity. Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, roughly with demographic shares of respectively seventy-five, fifteen and ten percent, are prime markers of distinction inside Indian areas. In this book, I will primarily focus on Hindus and Muslims due to limitations of time and space. Christianity, to which mainly Hindus have converted, will be analysed only when it functions as an influence affecting the development of Hinduism and the Guyanese Hindu community. Islam and Hinduism, instead, are examined as systems that provide cultural universes through which the social life of the East Indians takes shape. Like ethnicity, both serve practical, emotional, and symbolic goals. They are labels that help set boundaries and establish social and economic networks. But, as religion, both should also be regarded as the "system[s] of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive [...] moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence" (Geertz 1973:4).

Religion is thus intertwined with meaning and practice in the sense that it is related to the social actor as a multifaced decision maker whose choices are characterised by various levels of pragmatism and rationality. It bestows on its followers certain explanatory narratives and specific 'how-to-live-righteous' manuals that work on both conscious and unconscious levels. Formally, the lives of Hindu and Muslim East Indians in Guyana are quests for different kinds of salvation with each their own path to follow. Strictly taken, the Hindu search for liberation (*moksha* or *mukti*) from the transmigration of souls (*samsara*) is fundamentally different from a life devoted to the submission to and worship of Allah. And although few lives are actually lived in exemplary ways, a life history written in either

⁹ Kakar (1996, 2000) has described these processes in the context of contemporary India.

Hindu or Muslim surroundings undoubtedly colours the individual's approach to the encounters on the road of life. Dealings with crisis, death, illness and life itself, but also ambitions and perceptions of 'the self in the world', all carry the fragrance of faith. Gender relations differ, and so do diets, taboos, sanctions, and practices and beliefs surrounding major life events and the supernatural. In sum, one can state that Hinduism and Islam – just like East Indianness – form *always* part of the intrinsic knowledge that structures, yet does not determine, the actions of my subjects. Indianness, as the provisional outcome of the processing of group-specific experiences related to ethnicity, culture and religion, just cannot be separated from any reasoning and acting of Indian subjects.

However, again like ethnicity, also religion itself is shaped and reshaped by the specific actions of East Indians in Guyanese society. Local Hinduism evolved differently from Asian Hinduism because it was influenced by internal cultural processes particular to the Guyanese (or, in various ways Caribbean) multiethnic and multireligious arena. As many authors note, one of the most remarkable results of this development in the Hindu communities in the Caribbean and comparable postcolonial settings elsewhere, is the disintegration of the caste system and practically all that it entailed.¹⁰ According to Van der Veer and Vertovec (1991:154), the decomposition of this once elementary component of Hinduism included "the salience of corporately ranked identities, ascribed ritual duties, political and economic power-relations, and proscriptions and prescriptions on individual behaviour, social interaction, and types of exchange." Instead, a more homogeneous Hindu community emerged to face the peculiarities of the plural Guyanese society. As Bisnauth states (1989:163), Hinduism as such – and the same goes for Islam – became an important criterion by which one's claim to an identity would be strengthened in the face of other groups in the host society. These Hindu and Muslim identities became expressed, taught, and reinforced through religious organisations. Because of their involvement in religious happenings (such as ceremonies and festivals), doctrinal and language training, and social or charitable work, these associations promote the establishment of networks and help make seclusion more tangible. In fact, religious groups do not only promote feelings of interreligious separateness, they also contribute to intrareligious division by nurturing sectarianism. Especially, the country's Muslim community and subsequently the development of Islamic practice in Guyana, are strongly affected by the activities and contradictory notions advocated by rivalling religious bodies. Consequently, the relationship between Muslim traditionalists and purists (or Hindu Sanatanists and Arya Samaj) on a local level can be at least as competitive and conflictive – and thus action-and/or mind-setting – as any other intergroup bond.

All in all, both East Indian religious and ethnic culture comprise systems of interpretations and practices that are produced and reproduced in the specific Guyanese surroundings. They are the outcome of people with a past living their lives under certain

¹⁰ See, for example, Clarke (1967) on Trinidad, Hollup (1994) and Benedict (1961 and 1967) on Mauritius, Jayawardena (1971) on Fiji, and Vertovec (1992 and 1996) on the Caribbean.

conditions in anticipation of an uncertain future. They are fashioned in social interaction and shape that interaction as they form shared understandings that structure the actions of both Hindus and Muslims. In the next section I will propose a theoretical approach that can be used to explain the functioning of this intricate process in the context of Indo-Guyana. I will sketch the outlines of a framework that has helped me gain a better understanding of culture, meaning, and practice: obtain insights in the intertwinement of individual and structure in processes of cultural production and reproduction.

1.2 Towards a better understanding of culture, meaning and practice

Religion and ethnicity in Guyana provide the ethnographic content to examine the complex intertwinement of meaning, practice and culture as enacted by Hindu and Muslim East Indians. Although much has been written about ethnicity (e.g. Barth 1968; Cohen 1978; Ryan 1990; and Jenkins 1997) and religion (e.g. Durkheim 1915; Malinowski 1948; Lévi-Strauss 1963; Wallace 1966; Geertz 1973; Horton 1994; Bowie 2000) their fundamental debates will not be reproduced here. Their academic insights will be referred to throughout this book because they are not the theoretical beacons that have guided me through this endeavour. In this introductory chapter I shall concentrate on the conceptual heart of this research: the linkages between the individual and his or her socio-cultural environment by way of thought and practice. In order to understand these linkages, or rather the braided coexistence of East Indians in their increasingly complex social world, one needs a theoretical approach that accounts for its intricate and process-like nature.

1.2.1 Practice Theory

Pierre Bourdieu's *theory of practice* (1977, 1990, 1998) provides such approach. By means of this theory, he attempts to bridge the gap between approaches that regard action merely a product of the forces of structure and approaches that award the individual ultimate freedom, and portray man as an actor unhindered by social conditioning. Rather than being either simply subjects to structure or autonomous actors, Bourdieu claims that people are entangled in a mutually dependent relationship with delimiting surroundings. Pivotal to this relationship is a body of internalised (embodied) knowledge – “systems of durable and transposable dispositions” – which he calls *habitus* (1990:53). According to Bourdieu people are always constrained by dispositions shaped by and shaping their experiences. These dispositions are largely learned in the form of “apprenticeship through simple familiarisation” (Bourdieu 1977:88) with regular patterns of associations enacted in daily life. Rather than incorporating rigid rules, people tend to assimilate general patterns. More specifically, habitus is shaped by encounters with items and ways in one's public surroundings. Experiences related to living the life of an East Indian Hindu or Muslim in contemporary Guyana thus should help produce forms of implicit knowledge which

Bourdieu calls habitus. At the same time, this habitus also produces and structures East Indianness and Hindu- and Muslimness, as creative individuals act, and create or reproduce objects and practices.

Practice, according to this approach, is thus neither a mechanical enactment of learned rules, nor can it solely be understood in terms of individual decision making. Exemplary is what Van der Veer and Vertovec (1991:149) state in regard to Caribbean Hindu identity: “to be a Hindu is neither an unchanging, primordial identity nor an infinitely flexible one which one can adopt or shed at will, depending on circumstances. It is an identity acquired through social practice and, as such, constantly negotiated in changing contexts.” Likewise, to be a Muslim and to be an East Indian in Guyana provides one with a series of dispositions that affect perception and action – without dictating them. It has been my task to detect and analyse these dispositions, this body of implicit knowledge that defines Indianness today. By examining the ways and views of Muslim and Hindu East Indians pertaining to particular religious as well as mundane matters, I aim to uncover underlying conceptions – something Bourdieu refers to as habitus – and thereby to delineate the joint venture between individual and surroundings through which distinction is fabricated.

The investigation of process, the aim of this study, will revolve around the construction of social relationships. In the fashion in which relationships between the East Indians and their environs and/or the other players within those environs are shaped, the interweavement of cultural and religious heritage, contemporary local and transnational forces, and the idiosyncrasies of the individual is revealed. In other words, equipped with theoretical notions inspired by Bourdieu’s theory, the investigation of the connections between that individual and his or her world (chapter five), significant others (chapter six), the opposite sex (chapter seven), and the incorporeal (chapter eight), will enable us to move beyond the artificial opposition between ‘objectivism’ and ‘subjectivism.’¹¹ As such, it provides a focus to see the practice of East Indians as always informed by a sense of agency of which the possibilities are defined in terms of its relation to the objective structures of a culture.

These objective structures, according to Bourdieu, must generally be regarded as *cultural fields* (Webb et al. 2002:36). They are clusters of institutions, rules, rituals, conventions, categories, and designations which “constitute an objective hierarchy, and which produce and authorise certain discourses and activities” (Webb et al. 2002:36). As far as Bourdieu is concerned, cultural fields, namely the dynamic and fluid sites of cultural practice, are actually the interactions between institutions, rules and practices rather than the institutions and rules itself. They are domains loaded with value (*capital*¹²) which are

¹¹ According to Bourdieu, the most fundamental and ruinous of those oppositions that artificially divide social science (1977:4 and 1990:25).

¹² Harker, Mahar and Wilkes (1990:1) state that “the definition of capital is very wide for Bourdieu and includes material things (which can have symbolic value), as well as ‘untouchable’ but culturally significant attributes such as prestige, status and authority (referred to as *symbolic capital*), along with *cultural capital*

“constituted by, or out of, the conflict which is involved when groups or individuals attempt to determine what constitutes capital within that field, and how capital is to be distributed” (Webb et al. 2002:22).

In the case of East Indians in Guyana, structures, arisen out of the struggle for scarce and desired items (capital) on various levels must then delimit the autonomy of the thinking and acting individual and, thereby, affect the production of Indian, Muslim and/or Hindu distinction. I will describe these structures and their efforts in chapter three. The first part of *Present-day Contexts* involves an analysis of Guyana’s realms of power: interconnected areas in which individuals and organisations utilise and nourish ethnic sentiments to secure their access to various sorts of ‘capital’. By means of the ‘cultural fields’ they establish, those in quest for control attempt to structure the thoughts and practices of others by articulating certain discourses and core values as inherently true and necessary fundamentals. In line with Bourdieu’s argument, those in control of ‘capital’ thus aim to reproduce the existing social order, which serves their interests, through “the naturalisation of its own arbitrariness”.¹³

As will become clear in the first part of this book, interethnic antagonism and mistrust are cultivated in Guyana through favouritism and the fabrication of fear as well as a sense of crisis. However, as will become clear in this dissertation’s second part, the success of this manipulation of East Indians’ thoughts and practices is limited. The reproduction of existing (hegemonic) structures is not as straightforward and comprehensive as Bourdieu’s theory seems to suggest. In fact, his strong focus on reproduction is problematic in the context of this particular investigation of transformation, and – because of similar reasons – has become widely challenged in recent years. People now, more than ever, are seen by post-practice theorists as composers of culture, creative beings with room to roam, a faculty to innovate and a freedom of choice – albeit within certain boundaries.

According to various critics, a theory of practice in contemporary complex and globalised communities has thus to account for forces that lead to variation and change just as much as for the tendencies toward sharing and reproduction. Appadurai (1997) argues that the flow of people and ‘texts’ confronts individuals with information and perspectives “from all corners of the globe that don’t equate with the received ideas of their habitus” (Webb et al. 2002:43). Now, although I do not believe increasing social intricacy and rapid transformation – as is also visible in contemporary East Indian’s Guyana – have totally invalidated Bourdieu’s concepts, I do think the case of the Hindus and Muslims presented here shows that certain modifications are desired. Hence, notwithstanding the important

(defined as culturally-valued taste and consumption patterns).” They stress that, for Bourdieu, “capital acts as a social relation within a system of exchange.” In his definition, Harker, Mahar and Wilkes say, the concept is extended “to all the goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation.” [italics added]

¹³ Bourdieu (1977:164-165). The experience that the arbitrary systems of classification and structuring – designed to serve the interests of society’s dominant groups – appear self-evident is what Bourdieu calls *doxa*.

advantage of Pierre Bourdieu's practice theory over other approaches, we need to develop his notions further, especially his concept of habitus, in the light of more recent theoretical developments. If we truly want to comprehend the nature of the intertwining of structure and agent or agency, and approximate as good as possible the connections between thought, practice and culture to produce and reproduce distinction, an approach is needed that is more open to processes of transformation and does not suggest that social relations in this modern world are opaque.

1.2.2 Cultural models and Connectionism

Perspectives from cognitive anthropology offer such an approach. Notions of cultural models – also defined as schemata or cultural understandings¹⁴ – can explain both processes of reproduction and change. According to Hinton (2005:25), these models are to be seen as “processually generated and recursively enacted local knowledge structures that are variably distributed and internalised by the members of a social group and that mediate their interpretation of experience in given contexts, albeit in potentially disparate ways.” These models are conceptual frameworks integral to perceiving, interpreting, organising, representing, remembering, making inferences about, and acting in the world (Garro 2000:283). They are labelled ‘cultural’ as they are the product of social experiences characteristic of groups among which the frameworks are shared. As such, they are instruments that allow me to clarify how (a) local structures influence thoughts and actions, (b) how these are also connected to and affected by global currents, (c) how individual freedom and structural force coexist, and (d) how concepts can be shared yet trigger a variety of behavioural strategies at the same time.

A substantial body of literature concerning the ‘modelling approach’ has been published over the years (e.g. D’Andrade 1992a; Casson 1983; Johnson-Laird 1983; and Shore 1996). One of the most valuable and well defined interpretations of cultural models theory is offered by Strauss and Quinn (1994, 1997). Their connectionist based perspective emphasises the interconnected nature of schemata that has been so apparent in my investigations of East Indianness. According to them, information is processed by collections of schemata (or models) which inherently cannot operate in isolation but have to work in network formation.

In line with the connectionists, Strauss and Quinn regard knowledge “as links among a widely distributed network of many little processing units that work like neurons” (Strauss and Quinn 1994:286). As far as they are concerned, these processing units fulfil various tasks: some are receiving inputs from the world, others send outputs, and still others mediate between input and output units. The advantages of this account, Strauss

¹⁴ I will use the terms schemata (or schemas) and understandings interchangeably. The adjective ‘cultural’ designates those schemata or understandings which are shared and product of the interaction of cultural agents and structures.

and Quinn state, “are that learning can occur without explicit teaching and that such learning is compatible with flexible responses to new situations” (1994:286).

As such, an approach inspired by connectionist views can be regarded as an updated version of Bourdieu’s practice theory. Strauss and Quinn’s concept of acquisition is “much as Bourdieu describes it for learning the dispositions of the habitus” (Strauss and Quinn 1997:53). Using the concept of *cultural understandings* to describe “schemas that have come to be shared to a greater or lesser extent without being human universals”, the authors draw from both connectionism and cultural models or schema theory¹⁵ to develop an approach in which the advantages of Bourdieu’s practice theory are acknowledged and its weaknesses are circumvented (Strauss and Quinn 1994:285).

Hence, like Bourdieu, Strauss and Quinn focus on the loose, associative and flexible way in which social practices and collective representations are internalised and recreated. And like Bourdieu, they view social life as a process of interaction between “imprecise private understandings and the public objects and events which are both their source and product” (Strauss and Quinn 1997:45-46). They also recognise that a close examination of internalisation is the key to explaining the forces of culture as well as advancing beyond the traditional dichotomies of structure and agency. Likewise, Strauss and Quinn support Bourdieu’s view that “internalised cultural knowledge typically consists of flexibly adaptive understandings rather than unvarying rules” (Strauss and Quinn 1997:45). Finally, they also agree with him on the incessant impact of experience based dispositions on action and their relatively durable nature.

Yet, in their version of practice theory, they deny Bourdieu’s “overly simplistic distinction [...] between accessible knowledge in the head and inaccessible knowledge that is embodied” (Strauss and Quinn 1994:285). Although, Strauss and Quinn say, knowledge embodied in habitus indeed tends to remain backgrounded in consciousness, “it is entirely possible to foreground it and describe it” (Strauss and Quinn 1997:46). In addition, a focus on cultural understandings implies extending Bourdieu’s emphasis on the centripetal effects of cultural processes to its centrifugal effects. Or rather, connectionism rejects the overemphasis on the unchanging mutual reflection of mental structures and cultural production – and thus the prominence of centripetal effects – and claims that the same concept of cognition also explains cultural transformation. In line with the ever deepening interconnectedness of societies and collectivities and in accordance with the accelerating pace of change, it is stated that sometimes internalised schemas (cultural understandings) lead to a reproduction of existing power structures, and sometimes they can inspire action

¹⁵ Strauss and Quinn (1994:285) write that “[T]he essence of the schema theory is that our thoughts and actions are not directly determined by features of the external world but are mediated by learned prototypes” or schemas (see also Casson 1983). A number of ethnographies have been written on cultural models, Strauss and Quinn (1997:49) mention the account of Trobrianders’ models of land tenure rights (Hutchins 1980); U.S. American’s models of romance (Holland and Skinner 1987), marriage Quinn 1982, 1987, 1996), and the environmental movement (Kempton, Boster, and Hartley 1995); and Mexican men’s and women’s expectations about the gendered life course (Mathews 1992)

that leads to change (Strauss and Quinn 1997:38). East Indian understandings can thus be quite durable in individuals; they can have emotional and motivational force; they may be historically stable; they might be applied in a wide variety of contexts; and they can be widely shared. At the same time, “understandings can be changeable in persons and across generations; they can be unmotivating; they can be contextually limited; and they can be shared by relatively few in a society” (Strauss and Quinn 1997:85). Centripetal and centrifugal tendencies coexist.

According to Strauss and Quinn, it is important to recognise the significance of motivation and emotion as catalysts of these opposing processes of reproduction and change. Schemas, including cultural understandings, have the potential of instigating action. Unlike Bourdieu’s habitus, they don’t just cultivate a sense of what is natural. Instead, internalisation of schemas also provides the social actor with highly motivating senses of what is desirable (Strauss and Quinn 1994:285). Hence, schemas can function as goals. These ‘goal-schemas’, as far as Roy D’Andrade is concerned, are hierarchically organised. They are models arranged according to forcefulness with “at the highest level...schemas [e.g. for love or success] whose goals are easily triggered by a wide range of inputs; and at lower levels...schemas [e.g. for becoming a fair skinned East Indian¹⁶] that direct action only if “recruited” by higher level goals.”¹⁷ Strauss (1992:3) states that “this hierarchy of linkages among schemas helps explain the situational variety of action and gives us an understanding of cognitive correlates of dominant cultural values.”

The motivation to enact certain cultural understandings more than others thus depends on the feelings that people associate with those cultural understandings. Furthermore, feelings, which are connected to understandings as a result of particular previous life experiences, cause parallel experiences encountered by people sharing specific cultural understandings to produce different motivational structures. Emotions and motivations, linked to personal experiences, clearly make a difference in how events are cognised and steer people’s responses. For instance, two young Indian women know the marry-young-and-have-children-right-away schema as a norm for the East Indian way, but they have very different feelings about it. For one woman, this schema might be associated with positive feelings because she is blessed with relatively young, devoted and loving parents. For the next, this schema can very well be linked to strong negative feelings because her father is an abusive alcoholic and her youthful mother a dependent woman without a solid education.¹⁸

In addition to experience, action is also steered by deliberate effort or intention. According to Strauss and Quinn (1997:47), the individual’s objectives are not the virtually

¹⁶ See chapter four and seven.

¹⁷ Strauss (1992:3). See also D’Andrade (1992 and 1995) He states that to understand people’s actions, one need to know their goals, and to understand these goals one needs to know their overall interpretive system, and to understand that interpretive system “one must understand the hierarchical relations among these schemas (1992:31)

¹⁸ After Strauss (1992:14)

epiphenomenal forces Bourdieu claims them to be.¹⁹ Rather, intentions can “give rise to deliberate problem-solving thought that builds upon but may transcend the workings of habitus” (Strauss and Quinn 1997:47). The authors stress that it is this kind of problem solving that can lead to “radical cultural innovation”, as well as “to new ways of reproducing existing social structures” (1997:47) As such, it accounts for the traits of contemporary complex and dynamic societies in ways Bourdieu’s theory of practice was not able to. Together with the focus on motivation, the recognition of the force of intention provides us with an enhanced view of centrifugal tendencies in particular, and processes of cultural production and reproduction as a whole.

Such de-simplified and extended version of practice theory is required in the quest for fathoming cultural processes in multifaceted arenas. Also with regard to this project, the inclusion of the modifications as proposed by scholars like Strauss and Quinn in a Bourdieu-an inspired theoretical perspective is critical, especially when it comes to analysing the different and shifting focuses of meaning and practice among the Hindu and Muslim East Indians. A theoretical framework in which the notion of cultural understandings is enclosed enables us to comprehend the intricacies of intra- and interethnic relations in Guyana. By focussing on such shared schemas, the intertwined relations between East Indians and their surroundings, thoughts and social practices, will become visible.

To emphasise the importance of the interconnectedness of schemata, including cultural understandings, I will add the notion of *constellations* to the conceptual framework offered by the cultural models theorists. In the effort of analysing an Indianness that is omnipresent yet appears in a multitude of forms characterised by variable relevance and durability, this notion allows me to focus on the illuminating functioning of networks and connections even more than done by the existing concepts. Cultural constellations – as shared complexes of related emotions, tendencies, associations, and *understandings* of varying hierarchical levels, centring around a dominant element or theme, and governing people’s perceptions and actions concerning that particular element or theme – will help further explain the flexible applicability of cultural understandings, their ability to adapt to and survive in altered circumstances, and my people’s position as cultural composer.

By opting for an approach influenced by both practice theory and connectionism, complemented with the concept of (cultural) constellations, the analysis of the manufacturing of East Indian ethnic and religious distinction offers an innovative and unique perspective on the working of ongoing cultural, social and religious formation and reformation in complex multiethnic societies. Hence, in addition to new vistas on the construction of meaning and practice among a specific group, a description of the complexity that shapes the social position, practices and perceptions of East Indian Muslims and East Indian Hindus in Guyana will advance general understanding of the

¹⁹ Bourdieu (1977:76-77 and 1984:474)

connections between the individual and his or her surroundings while enriching the extensive fields of both ethnic and globalisation studies.

1.3 Reaping grains of knowledge in the fields of distinction: setting and methodology

1.3.1 In the fields of distinction: the setting

The research that formed the basis of this dissertation was carried out during two trips. The first of these stays in the field, in 2003, comprised a period of twelve months. The second was in 2005 and lasted a brief two months. I resided most of my time on both occasions on the beautiful Essequibo Coast.²⁰ And, although I generally crossed the majestic Essequibo delta several times a month to investigate Indianness elsewhere in the country,



the bulk of my fieldwork was conducted in the villages in this area. There, in the rural heart of Guyana's 'little India', the goal of illuminating the nature of the intertwinement of structure and subject was pursued.

²⁰ See map 2. Essentially, what is commonly known as 'Essequibo' or the 'Essequibo Coast' comprises narrow stretch of cultivated and inhabited land between Charity in the North and Good Hope in the South. This area is part of the administrative region number 2: Pomeroun/Supenaam. The population of region 2 comprises 48,411 people, 6.5 percent of Guyana's population of 749,190 (Bureau of Statistics 2004).

Surely, I could have chosen an urban residency. Region 4 alone, the Georgetown area, is home to well over one hundred thousand East Indians. One third of all East Indians live in the city and its surrounding environs. It would have made sense to investigate distinction and transition in surroundings that are more heterogeneous and seemingly more complex than rural Essequibo. However, the choice for the Guyanese countryside as a hub for my investigations was deliberate. Coastal rural zones form the heartlands of Indianness. Villages further away from the city are the real strongholds of South Asian culture, the places where most of the followers of Indian ethnic institutions live, where interethnic segregation is most apparent and religious traditions are most well founded. In the city, networks are not as well established and collectiveness is less visible and functional. It is in the countryside where the influence of change is really felt. In those areas, transition has a more revolutionary character, contrasts are greatest, and the impact of the collision between tradition and alternatives is severest. It is there we thus had to live.

My wife and I lived in a medium size village²¹ of about 730 souls somewhere halfway down the thirty-eight mile long coastal road that connects the small town of Charity on the Pomeroon bank with a settlement known as Good Hope on the junction of the Essequibo river and one of its modest tributaries called the Supenaam. From this village, founded on the remains of the ancient Dutch estate 'Onverwacht'²², I traversed the coast visiting masjids, mandirs, feasts, and funerals. Little was the search for Indian distinction restricted to the Onverwacht area. Rather, it was my intention to trace productive and reproductive (particularly Indian religious) networks and investigate them irrespective of locality (see Marcus 1995). However, the village's average Essequibeian – or, to a large extent, even rural Indo-Guyanese – social, economic and physical makeup makes it possible to use its image to portray the contemporary habitat of the bulk of East Indians.



Rice land in Essequibo

²¹ See map 3.

²² 'Unexpected'. The sugar plantation was later acquired by a British national who changed the name, transformed it into a coconut estate and sold it to a wealthy East Indian. This East Indian, or his family, then sold part of it to a group of sixteen villagers in 1951. Children of this wealthy East Indian and these villagers now own most of the land in and around the village.

As the majority of the communities in Guyana's coastal rice-producing areas²³, the place comprises, and is named after, a former sugar plantation. Additionally, also like most other rural Indian villages, it is strung along the asphalt coastal road. The locality's most expensive houses, as well as the best stocked stores, are generally built on the pricey plots of land alongside that road. Most of the villagers live at the back of that road. They occupy small concrete and wooden houses or sometimes shack-like structures on poles lined up on the sides of dusty dirt-roads ('back-streets') and drainage canals with lotus and an occasional alligator. These houses usually consist of two to three bedrooms, a small kitchen, sometimes an indoor bathroom (either with or without the novelty of bright orange 'pipe-water'), one large living room, and a breezy veranda. The interior tends to be pretty standard: simply beds and closets in the bedrooms, nothing much in the kitchen, and two rather uncomfortable settees, a couple of chairs, an opulently decorated cabinet with framed pictures and dazzlingly coloured artificial flowers, a Chinese clock, and a Sharp TV in the main room. Besides, most Hindus will set up a small altar with some images of deities, a mala and an incense holder in a corner of the living room. Muslims, by contrast, will often beautify their house with framed names and attributes of Allah in golden Arabic script, and a picture of the Ka'bah encircled by many thousands of Muslim pilgrims. Around the houses, you'll find pit-latrines, often mud or concrete firesides for cooking, a few coconut and fruit trees, pots with bougainvillea or other flowering plants, and – around Hindu homes – some sacred trees, an altar, and jhandi-flags.²⁴

The village lay-out as a whole is rather typical. Of course, there is the indispensable rumshop where (usually) men meet and discuss the issues that intrigue.²⁵ Furthermore, it has the usual 'ball-field' – or actually two – where boys and sometimes men gather to play and watch another of Guyana's favourite pastimes: cricket. Then, there are a handful of tiny shops underneath a handful of houses where thrifty villagers sell small assortments of things such as sweets, snacks, soft drinks, toilet paper, detergent and some vegetables. Also, the village is home to a nursery and primary school and some vehicle and furniture workshops. Finally, the community accommodates several places of worship: there is a masjid on the coastal road; there are two mandirs on one of the back-streets; and there are the remnants of a miniscule Baptist church which, according to the pastor, has ceased to exist as the result of sabotage by fanatic Hindus.

Also the surroundings of the village are characteristic for many of the coastal settlements in Guyana. To the East, less than forty yards from the main road, the muddy waves of the Atlantic lash the old and cracked colonial seawall that protects much of

²³ As a matter of fact, the vast majority of Guyana's settlements is built on the foundations of colonial plantations and is therefore often blessed with peculiar exotic names such as: Huis 't Dieren; Try Best; Burnt Bush Profit; Vreed en Hoop; and Maria's Delight.

²⁴ These are trees like *madar*, *neem*, and *tulsi*. A jhandi flag is planted after an elaborate puja to honour a specific deity. More affluent and perhaps devote Sanatanists might also have a small shrine, often referred to as Shiva mandir, in their yard.

²⁵ Sidnell (2000) wrote an interesting article on the construction of social relationships among men in rumshops.

Guyana's subaquatic coastal belt from frequent flooding. West of the village, stretching all the way to the borders of the immense jungle, are the rice fields, the dams, and the irrigation and drainage trenches and canals where the villagers fish for 'hassa' and 'huree'. Going up or down the road, heading North or South, are more places like this one. All of them are connected. Only separated by dams, they essentially form one lengthy string of habitation on the edge of the South American continent.

Around my temporary abode, as well as in the many other East Indian villages on the coast, Muslims, Hindus, and even a few Christian East Indians live side by side. Africans are barely around, they tend to reside in the relatively few 'black' villages spread along the coast, have established themselves in the mining centres in the vast Guyanese interior, or belong to Georgetown. In Affiance, as Onverwacht was christened after a British planter took over, only nine out of about two hundred households consist of Africans. Except for three Amerindian or mixed families, all the others are Indian. These East Indian households, nowadays, are relatively small units basically comprising a three- to five-head nuclear family with perhaps a resident grandparent.²⁶ Large nuclear families or big co-residing extended families are virtually non-existent and often not considered to be a mark of civilisation.

The majority of those households is not able to maintain itself from one source of income. Rather, they usually supplement income from jobs such as labourer, teacher, carpenter or joiner, clerk, and watchman, or earnings from self-employed labour as independent taxi- or minibus-driver, mechanic, and restaurant or shop owner, with money generated in different ways. Some Indians would grow tomatoes, cucumber, or *bora* (string-beans) in their little gardens in the back of the village and have their children vend it after school. Others will herd a few cows, mind chicken, or prepare and sell snacks like *channah*, pine-tart, chicken-foot (not the real!), and fried and dyed small dough-balls called *pulaubri*. Besides, many families depend on the additional earnings brought in by the sales of rice cultivated on the few acres of land they own or hire. Approximately forty percent of the households in Affiance is involved in rice-farming. Only few of them are able to concentrate on that alone. As in many of Guyana's other rice-growing communities, too little land is available for too many people. Sandwiched between the Atlantic on one side and the un-suitable sandy soil of the jungle on the other, the bulk of villagers have to do with sections not larger than about five acres.²⁷ These five acres yield around one hundred and fifty bags of paddy twice a year. With market prices ranging from circa thirteen

²⁶ In Affiance, 10.4 percent of the households consists of a nuclear family with (a) resident paternal grandparent(s) and only 1.3 percent of the households consists of a nuclear family with (a) resident maternal grandparent(s). The most likely reason for this is the fact that after marriage, up until today, the boy is far more likely to stay with his parents than the girl with hers. Generally, one of the daughter-in-laws moves in with her husband and his family, and remains there as the respective son 'takes over' the care of the premises from his aging parents.

²⁷ The width of the cultivatable belt in Essequibo varies from a meagre two to three miles on the Southside to seven or more miles in the North. This wideness seems to correlate with the relative prosperity of the village: villages with broad stretches of backland are generally more affluent than those with smaller stretches.

hundred till less than a thousand Guyana dollars per bag, and high production costs, these one hundred and fifty bags can never sustain a family.²⁸

Nonetheless, rice production is the backbone of the Essequibeian economy. The little profitable and pest-plagued crop not only provides the necessary additional income to thousands of part-time farmers, it directly or indirectly offers the only job opportunities to numerous labourers, the employees of rice mills, those selling agricultural necessities and many others too. Also in Affiance, most of the dollars spend are rice-riches. This practical mono-cultural dependence causes resources and (future) chances to be limited in Affiance, Essequibo, and in (rural) Guyana as a whole. Unemployment rates, especially among young females and the college trained, are high and not likely to drop any time soon. In fact, gloomy prospects in the agricultural sector heavily contribute to the exodus of East Indians from the rural communities. Outlooks are grim, especially as the necessary economic diversification remains problematic due to the lack of adequate physical infrastructure, skills and investments. Hence, few youngsters return to Cinderella county²⁹ after they have completed their studies at the University of Guyana or abroad³⁰, and virtually none of the lesser educated adolescents claim to aspire a future on the coast. Even many settled adults leave the area for greener meadows across the Essequibo or outside the country. Everywhere you turn, East Indian fathers, mothers, sons and daughters have abandoned their homes to work ‘outside’.

In Affiance members of at least sixty percent of the households have next of kin working overseas. Over thirty percent of all villagers is closely related to migrant Guyanese in North America.³¹ No less than thirty-seven percent has family members working (and residing) as labourers, mechanics and housekeepers in the eastern parts of Venezuela or somewhere in the Caribbean.³² As will be shown in later chapters, this mass departure definitely influences Indian distinction. Migration has affected the composition of many households. It is responsible for increased numbers of single parents and the rising importance of grandparenthood. In accordance, it contributes to the modification of family values. Additionally, remittances send over by emigrants form a welcome supplement to the income of many East Indians. Foreign currency is used to organise bigger and better

²⁸ One U.S. dollar was worth about hundred-ninety Guyana dollars in 2003. Production costs – including pesticides, insecticides, and the costs of hiring combines etc. – might be as much as 600 (Guyana) dollar per bag (Fieldnotes, 29 August 2003).

²⁹ The nickname of Essequibo.

³⁰ Quite a few attend the University of the West-Indies in Trinidad. Also, you have sizeable batches of scholarship students going to Cuba annually. Wealthy, extremely bright, or athletic kids might end up at universities in North America. Ambitious believers are offered the opportunity to spend time at institutions of religious education elsewhere in the Caribbean, or in Asia, the Middle-East and Africa.

³¹ The siblings of, children of, and parents of. Also some would have a spouse working abroad.

³² Guyanese who work elsewhere in the Caribbean are usually (self-)employed as mechanics, nurses, carpenters, housekeepers, teachers. A number also depends on the informal economy. The majority of Guyanese in North America, even those who are educated, perform low-skilled labour in factories, are involved in construction work, or find underpaid jobs as illegal alien in branches like retail etc. East Indian women from Guyana frequently marry Guyanese Americans and become housewives in the United States. Most of the migrant workers abroad send remittances (see chapter three).

religious happenings, finance more elaborate weddings, and refurbish the homes of the recipients. With remittances and barrels packed with clothing, electronics, letters, and personal photo books ‘proving’ the fulfilment of numerous American dreams, also U.S-style is further exported to Guyana. Together with the celebration of foreign (mainly North-American) ways in music and on screen, the accounts of émigrés help to construct and maintain a widely shared desire to leave instead of stay and invest one’s time and efforts in the construction of a brighter home community.

As said, in Affiance and most other East Indian villages in rice-producing areas, many find opportunities too scarce to be able to stay and strive for betterment. Inside the village, subsistence often continues to be a struggle and chances for upward social mobility are and will remain few. Limited resources of various kinds thus have to be divided among a relatively large number of people. In Affiance this has facilitated the formation of power structures which in many ways are similar to those discernible on the national stage.³³ Yet, whereas on the macro-level the community is divided along ethnic lines, in an ethnically homogenous village like the one where I have dwelled, religious affiliation provides the grounds for distinction, segregation, and competition over the various types of Bourdieu-like capital. Interestingly enough, in Affiance the most conspicuous of these religion-based power conflicts is not fought between the Muslim, or even Christian minority and the Hindu majority, but between the followers of two different branches of Guyanese Hinduism.³⁴

So called Sanatanists and Aryans, respectively adhering to mainstream Sanatan Dharma and a nineteenth century reformative movement known as the Arya Samaj, not only passionately disagree on certain doctrinal matters, they allow ‘religious’ discord to interfere with daily social interaction. Some Aryans would not invite Sanatanists for their feasts and functions, and I have heard of a Sanatanist who refused to come to the cremation of an ancient Arya friend. Besides, as said, religious affiliation in Affiance is connected to the allocation of scarce resources. The Sanatan elite dominates a mandir as well as local governance, the village’s rice production and processing, and has a say in retail and secular education. Undoubtedly, those not favoured by the members of that elite are restricted in their access to the community’s resources.

1.3.2 Reaping grains: methodology

In order to comprehend the process in which Indian distinction takes shape, observe the anatomy, function and impact of structuring structures and, in turn, perceive the structuring of these structuring structures themselves, I was required to spend a prolonged period in the field and employ a variety of methods. Consequently, the material on which the analyses are based derives from several types of sources. First, it comes from extensive

³³ See the analysis of Guyana’s anatomy of control in chapter three.

³⁴ About eighty-five percent of the Indians in Affiance is considered Hindu, approximately one in every ten villagers is Muslim, and less than five percent of the East Indian population is Christian.

verbal inquiry. During my stay in Guyana, I have conducted, and often recorded, dozens of semi-structured interviews on a whole range of themes with ordinary people, as well as with local and national religious leaders, politicians, and cultural activists. In addition, I have carried out structured interviews with common believers and/or East Indians to examine readily accessible knowledge and the interviewee's understanding of certain theological concepts and cultural heritage. Also, a number of focus groups were organised to discuss topics such as childhood, parenting, sexuality, conjugal and gender relations, and love.³⁵ These discussions, depending on the gender composition of the group directed by either my wife or me, proved a valuable supplement to data on the same (often somewhat sensitive) issues accumulated through personal interviews. Finally, impromptu conversations as a result of more or lesser coincidental encounters with ordinary East Indians and occasionally non-Indian Guyanese, form the last important supply of verbal data. Chitchat, sometimes in the shape of drawn out and highly appreciated informal debates consequently referred to as 'gaffs' throughout Guyana, provided me with directive clues as well as auxiliary background information.³⁶

My informants comprised a wide range of laymen and experts from diverse backgrounds. During my fourteen months in the field I have met and interviewed a couple of foreign trained sheikhs; highly respected maulanās; a whole set of local imams; the leaders of virtually all the country's major Muslim bodies; an Indian trained Guyanese swami and Hindu fundamentalist; visiting Hindu and Muslim missionaries from places like Qatar, Florida, Pakistan, New York city and Zanzibar; pundits from Essequibo and beyond; rice magnates; sorcerers known as obeah (wo)men; the headmen of the major regional and national Hindu religious organisations; government ministers and opposition leaders; representatives from the national media; the Indian High Commissioner; and Indian cultural activists. The visions of all these religious, cultural, and political professionals were very illuminating and are all included in this book. However, in the end, in importance they are overshadowed by the insights offered to me by (the stories of) ordinary Essequibeans and other Guyanese. It was by the grace of East Indian housewives, craftsmen, maids, drunkards, peasants, shop owners and vendors, retirees, taxi-drivers, youths, 'church'-goers, widows, and many other specialists on daily living, that I have been able to investigate the intertwinement of people's thought and practice, and religious/ethnic culture.

By means of something that resembles a person-centred approach as the one advocated by Hollan (2000, 2001) and LeVine (1982), I attempted to detect how the individual – and his or her psychology and subjective experience – shapes and is shaped by social and cultural processes. In line with these advocates of person-centred ethnography, I

³⁵ See, for instance, Bernard (1994:224-36) on the use of focus groups.

³⁶ 'Gaffing' is one of the prime social activities in Guyana. It generally involves males with an abundance of time and (although not necessarily) thirst. The men involved will sit down at any time of the day and discuss anything disputable or perturbing – for instance politics, the crop, crime and religion. If judged positively, one will often – more than once – refer to a previous discussion as 'a good gaff'.

focussed on the individual as a locus of (psycho-)cultural processes rather than merely a person. To explore and describe these particular processes, I relied on what people say, and say about their subjective experience, as well as on the actual behaviour people display. Information on both was necessary to get the clearest multidimensional image of them. As Hollan (2001:55) states, observing and recording the subject's multiple enactments in and involvements with the world is an excellent way of capturing those salient thoughts, feelings and intentions that might not be uttered in interviews.³⁷

However, despite its drawbacks, also verbal accounts and reports of perceptions, experiences and interpretations are indispensable if the identification and analysis of mental schemas is pursued. The deformation of intrapersonal data in the process of verbalisation, however, has to be battled as much as possible. To improve the quality of the (spoken) information my informants gave on their personal experiences and views, I have tried to establish durable consultative relationships with some of them. In other words, I have aimed to gain a deeper insight in the mental constructs of several patient and accommodating East Indian Hindus and Muslims, and decipher their cultural understandings, by meeting them frequently over a prolonged period of time, and conducting a series of lengthy interviews with each of them. The rapport built and confidence grown as the result of the construction of a relationship with a history, together with the large quantity of data on a specific individual, have contributed to the accuracy of information and interpretation.

As said, in addition to insights gained from the verbal accounts of numerous informants, also a focus on actual practice is required to grasp the nature of cultural processes that take place within the individual – as well as within society as a whole. Hence, besides my part as an interviewer, I have assumed the characteristically ethnographic role of participant observer. During my stay in Guyana, I attempted to capture and document East Indian Hindus' and Muslims' ways in their worlds. In order to do so, I have collected data as (a) an observer witnessing religious festivals and events, Hindu and Muslim life cycle rites, Indian cultural celebrations, political debate, the impact of a bad crop, and the effects of the particularly violent 2003 crime wave, and (b) as a participant engaged in various edifying activities. For example, I took part in a weekly imam-training course, where aspirant Muslim leaders were told everything about ways and means of cleansing, performing weddings and funerals, leading prayers, preaching, fasting and so on. Besides, I have participated in Hindu ritual and performed fire oblation; played *jhanjhan* (cymbals) in the Sanatan temple's *chontal* (music) group; joined activities of an Islamic missionary movement called Tablighi Jama'at; partook in wakes, birthday parties and the organisation of Hindu weddings; drank cheap Guyanese 'vodka' with increasingly talkative men in rumshops;

³⁷ As Hollan (2001:54) argues, the relationship between that what is said and real subjective experience is "a extremely complicated one, affected by conventions of narrating and telling, by the social context of who is telling what to whom and under what circumstances, by the difficulty of expressing certain types of experiences [...] in the relatively linear and discursive structure of verbal language, and so on."

functioned as a part-time shop assistant in a modest general store; and was taught the basics of witchcraft by a befriended obeah-lady.

The hundreds of pages of descriptive and analytic notes, which form the produce of all these experiences and observations, have been the raw material for this book. Another source is written information. Although predominantly used as supplementary data, documents and articles from archives and other places have provided me with valuable facts, figures and opinions on a wide range of topics. Material from the British Public Record Office, the library of the Indian Cultural Centre in Georgetown, and the country's National Archives was used to reconstruct the history of East Indians in Guyana. Furthermore, figures from censuses available at the Guyana Bureau of Statistics provided me some knowledge of things such as the ethnic composition and religious affiliation of the population, the means of subsistence, and migration.³⁸ Additionally, religious newsletters, articles from magazines and daily papers, political pamphlets, books, instructive publications from Hindu and Muslim bodies, and data from websites and online documents of and/or on religious movements, the Guyanese diaspora, and the political, social and economical state of the nation, were gathered to complete the picture.

The use of data from distinct sources not only enabled me to get a more complete image of Indian distinction and the contexts in which it evolves. It was also indispensable to check the validity of the accumulated material. As documents are produced by authors with agendas and mindsets, and verbal accounts might be coloured with pigments the listener doesn't know of, it was crucial to verify inferences drawn from one set of data sources by collecting data from others.³⁹ Hence, I have tried not to take data at face value but, whenever possible, triangulate the various grains of information I had reaped by cross-checking documents with interviews, interviews with other interviews, etcetera.

The aggregate period spent in the field comprised three different phases. During the initial months, from January until May 2003, I devoted much time to exploratory endeavours. Although I had been in the country a couple of times before and was already more or less familiar with the course of things and acquainted with many Muslim and Hindu East Indians, a comparatively large part of that first stage was invested in the establishment of solid and productive network of informants. Also, I spent some effort mapping the social, religious and ethno-political infrastructure of the country as a whole, and the area where I resided in particular. By listing and positioning collectives and individuals, as accurately as possible, it became easier to build an inclusive informative network. Finally, in preliminary encounters and conversations with ordinary East Indians,

³⁸ In addition to statistics from the 'Bureau' and other written sources, statistical information in this book derives from a full-mapping exercise conducted in Affiance by my assistant and me. This endeavour proved very informative where the portraying of a typically small East Indian community is concerned. The social map of the village included information on religious background, family composition, ethnic origin, migration, sources of income, and the (estimated) occurrence of deemed characteristic East Indian problems such as alcoholism, suicide, abuse and adultery.

³⁹ See Hammersley and Atkinson 1995:230.

as well as in the many interviews I have conducted in that opening stage with political and religious foremen, I aimed to discover what was at stake.

Throughout the second phase of my stay on the fringes of South America, from June till Old Year's Day 2003, my quest for understanding was guided by insights gained from those early explorations. Information and clues offered by observations and conversations in the first months helped me narrow my focus and steer my efforts during the following ones. The broad search for Indian distinction thus became a more clearly directed investigation of my East Indian (perspectives on) relationships with their world and with the others operating within that world. Semi-structured and focus group interviews, of course in combination with participant observation, were the most effective and extensively employed means of inquiry at that stage. They endowed me with much of the data necessary to start the inscriptive exercise of which this book is the product. Their relative richness – or rather, the affluent output of my network in that period – proved a solid basis especially for writing the chapters of Part II.

The last episode in the series of field phases was merely meant to fill the gaps and record the relevant developments that occurred since I had concluded phase two. I returned to Guyana after a full year of absence. From the first week of January until early March 2005, I tried to find answers to questions that were either left unanswered in 2003, or popped up during my twelve months intermezzo in the Netherlands. A number of semi-structured, structured, and focus group interviews were conducted to do so.

1.4 Spawn of the village, spy of the West: fieldwork and multiple identities

1.4.1 Spawn of the village

The first time I travelled to Guyana, from November 1999 until April 2000, a good friend and I went there to investigate the effects of marginalisation on the evolution of the identity and culture of Guyana's native Arawak population. The second and third time, I had to return because in the process of this investigation I had lost my heart to a breathtaking East Indian girl. It was due to my relationship with this girl – my wife now – that I got intrigued by the Indo-Guyanese community and the unique localised Indianness. Through her, I learned about a virtually casteless Hinduism, witnessed distinctively East Indian values and ways of social organisation, and was confronted with the impact of interethnic antagonism on a grass-root level. It was also due to my relationship with Naleane, my wife, that bonds of friendship and in some cases even forms of 'kinship' were established with people that would later become research participants. Because of 'Nally' I met numerous Indians at weddings, cremations, around the village, and in temples and the homes of East Indian Hindu and Muslim friends and relatives long before I finished the proposal for a project that would eventually bring me back for professional purposes.

The existence of such a ‘pre-history’ undeniably influenced my ventures as a fieldworker and the eventual outcomes of my endeavours. It posed certain dangers and offered me opportunities that would probably never have arisen if I was solely Hans the researcher. Essentially, it could restrict my access to data as well as be the key to depots of information that would have remained locked if I was not already known as ‘the husband of’. The decision to actually choose the quarters of some of my in-laws for my research base was risky since I could not be sure that people would take me serious as a researcher. Being married to a girl whose family was from the village – and who, customarily, was therefore regarded a daughter, an aunty, or a sister of the villagers – I was incessantly referred to as uncle, son(-in-law) or brother(-in-law) by the people of Affiance.⁴⁰ And I have been treated as such. I was expected to help out at village happenings, to attend services in the mandir or the mosque, to play cricket on the ball field, and I was bossed around by overripe wrinkled Indian ladies who repeatedly ordered me to fulfil my duty as a husband and finally produce some offspring.

Surely, this pre-existing identity as pseudo-kin might clash with my new identity as an inquisitive researcher. Furthermore, even if they did accept my new status, acquaintance might prevent them from opening up in ways they would to a person with whom they never had and never would have any further dealings. Verbalising certain feelings often happens to be easier in front of a perfect stranger than in front of someone you know and who knows you. In addition, another potentially undesirable consequence of electing Affiance was negative association due to local factionalism. My in-laws undeniably belong to particular groups, have friends, reputations and most likely a couple of foes here and there. For instance, they are Hindus and not Muslims and Arya Samaji rather than Sanatanists. It was not unlikely that living there and being married to one of them would cause people, also possible informants, to label me as despicably Hindu minded or an opponent of the Sanatan way. In turn, also my actions could reflect upon my in-laws. My interest for Islam and the Muslim community could be questioned by the Hindu associates of the aunt and uncle where we stayed. And visits to obeah people, the Devi mandir, and other dubious personas and/or places were not likely to be appreciated. On the contrary, things like that would be – and eventually indeed were – considered to be both hazardous and a bit shameful. Hence, my moves (and therefore my accomplishments) could not only be obstructed by pre-history and family ties, because of the existing connections they might also create conflict or at least put people that I care about in an awkward position.

In spite of these considerations, I decided to settle in Affiance. As said, although certain risks were involved, living there among my in-laws, old friends and acquaintances also offered unsurpassed chances. In fact, I was pretty sure the dangers could be successfully battled and the benefits would be significant. And, in retrospect, I think this

⁴⁰ The inclination to regard co-residents in particular East Indian villages as (symbolic) kin, was expressed in for instance the tendency to ‘marry outside’ the village. Still, it is not common practice to wed a person from the village you belong to.

indeed proved to be the case. Fieldwork at ‘home’ was highly effective for various reasons. First of all, my wife and I moved into the family compound where talkative subjects of different backgrounds were available for consultation at least for sixteen hours a day. Consisting of domiciles as well as a tiny hardware store, hair salon, and modest general store with a snack outlet, it was a place where villagers and passers-by came to spend some of their money and time. Every night, until after ten, regular customers would come over, sit down on the counter or some plastic chairs in front of the store and discuss the issues of the day while sipping sugary home-made fruit juice. All these were well qualified specialists in daily living, usually eager to share their knowledge just like those who manned the shop and kitchen. The latter, staff and residents, also comprised a diverse set of people representing various perspectives: Naleane’s resident *nana*, *mamoo* and aunty, for example, are Arya Samaj, her other uncle is a Baha’i, the maid is a convinced Sanatanist, and the shop assistant is an outspoken Muslima.⁴¹ Consequently, just being in the shop, or walking around the house alone was already part of the investigative exercise.

A next advantage of doing fieldwork in familiar environs had to do with the very fact that I played another role besides the part of researcher. Although, as said, a clash of identities could theoretically have delimited my access to information, in practice it proved an asset. The careful cultivation of my original identity of exotic yet more or less accepted appendix of a known and respected family caused me to be included in the locality’s social system as something else than just a visitor with peculiar interests. It allowed me admission to a level of participation that would probably not have been open to Hans the researcher. Furthermore, having in-laws, friends and acquaintances among my informants, meant that mistrust was not really an issue. Those who already knew me reckoned I was reliable, and were often willing to provide me – also via my wife⁴² – with some insights on rather intimate themes. Finally, being already known probably discouraged people to be over-economical with the ‘truth’. And even if they were, there was often the possibility of verifying their statements and my observations by asking my dearest informant and expert on local affairs: my wife. It was she with whom I have discussed many of my findings, and it were her feedback and remarks that have inspired me numerous times. If anthropology was a religion and the accumulation of first class data our divine goal, marrying such a perceptive member of the research population certainly would have been one of the commands.

⁴¹ *Nana* is the (Indian) term used for one’s mother’s father. *Mamoo* refers to the mother’s brother. Aunty is commonly used for aunt – or in fact while addressing mature females in general – but also *mausee* (mother’s sister) and *phuva* (father’s sister) are sometimes heard. Other East Indian kinship terms still in use are: *chacha* (father’s brother); *chabee* (father’s brother’s wife); *mamee* (mother’s brother’s wife); *nanee* (mother’s mother); *aaja* (father’s father); *aajee* (father’s mother); and *banjee* or *barkee* (big brother’s wife). Less widely used kinship terms I came across are: *bhai* (big brother); *chotabhai* (little brother); *petab(ji)* or *baap* (father); *mata(ji)* (mother); *didi* (big sister); *bhayta* (son); *bhaytee* (daughter); *chutkee* (small brother’s wife); *barkea* (big brother(in-law) etc. In practice, many terms – like *chacha*, *bauji*, *aaja* – are used to address various relations.

⁴² Personal interviews and focus groups she had with local women and girls were sometimes feats of ingenuousness – I would like to think because of their pre-existing bands.

Few of the potential downsides of conducting fieldwork in Affiance, or Essequibo, thus turned out to be an actual impediment. Although some people just never truly grasped the concept of professional curiosity (“Wha wok you really do mon?”), they generally accepted my multiple identities. Moreover, informants were usually not scared or too embarrassed to talk to a familiar face. Neither did the image or (religious) belonging of my relatives interfere with the person’s judgement of me. Despite some of my relatives’ shunned Arya status, the village’s Sanatanists were extremely obliging. As a matter of fact, it seemed as if my frequent appearance in their mandir helped Sanatan clientele to find their way to the ‘Arya’ shop of my wife’s uncle. Also, none of the dubious activities I engaged in for the sake of research caused any problems within my immediate surroundings. Although my in-laws made me hide garlic in my pants before I got on my way to a next sorcerer, and in spite of the fact that they immediately disposed the offerings I brought from the Devi mandir, no real issues ever arose. As long as I was diplomatic, presented myself as being friendly but slightly naïve, and strategically divided my attention between Muslims and Hindus, and Aryans and Sanatanists, everything at the base and in the village was alright.

1.4.2 Spy of the West

The only thing that really caused some worry among my in-laws, wife and even my relatives back home was my concern with Islam. My regular visits to masjids, lunches and dinners at the homes of Muslims, and attendance at events and nightly gatherings in Essequibo and Georgetown, were regarded unsafe undertakings by virtually all non-Muslims in my surroundings. Frequently, I was told to be careful and briefed on the ferocious nature of *all* Muslims. My wife, herself neither crazy about my particular interest, was even actively dissuaded to conduct some of the planned sessions with Muslimas. It seemed as if Islam and its adherents, even in Guyana’s conflict forsaken religious sphere, were distrusted and feared. Apparently, televised images of cruelties committed by confessed Muslims and the American advocacy of some war against (predominantly Muslim) terrorism, in combination with the obviously changing face of Islam in Guyana, had cultivated seemingly irrational anti-Islamic sentiments.

Interestingly enough, a similar strong anti-un-Islamic attitude exists within sections of Guyana’s Muslim realm. Just like the anti-Islamic stance of many Hindus, to me this was an analytically noteworthy phenomenon rather than a real constraint. However, it was a phenomenon I was confronted with repeatedly, and something which has undeniably affected my relationship with a significant number *mu’min*, men of faith. The reason why it was influential is that in the eyes of some of them I embodied the American assailant. Being of European origin, with my blond hair, blue eyes and tall stature, I resembled the western (read U.S.) prototype. Additionally, I was investigating their Islam in a time and a world where Islam was under siege. Of course that was suspicious. Especially because apparently I was not only interested in doctrinal questions but also finding out about actual practices and the make-up of the local Muslim community. That peculiar curiosity even led

them to believe I was a CIA recruit sent to South America to report on extremism in the Islamic periphery. Throughout my stay in Guyana, from members of small jama'ats in Essequibo to chairmen of national Islamic bodies in Georgetown, I heard about the rumours and speculations concerning my status as an American secret agent. These persistent rumours have affected my access to information until the day I conducted my last interview. Neither ignoring them nor openly discussing their trueness and also even the relevance of knowing my intentions from an Islamic point of view⁴³, proved sufficient to stop certain individuals from doubting my story. Irrespective of my strategy, a few sceptical Muslims continued to avoid me as much as possible, habitually questioned the facilitative role of the leadership of their jama'ats, and warned some of my Muslim informants not to be blinded by my apparent innocence but keep away from me instead.

Whether or not this attitude causes my data to be of a lesser quality is important to know. I am inclined to believe that in the end it proved to be revealing rather than concealing. It taught me something about Islam in Guyana instead of preventing me from learning about Muslim thoughts and ways. Of course, the voice of the most ardent among the incredulous could only be indirectly included in the analysis. However, their behaviour – which occasionally was very overtly negative and sometimes even provocative – is illustrative of certain crucial developments within Guyanese Islam. Besides, the responses of those who never doubted my integrity, or the accounts of Muslims who came to trust me, form valuable sources of information on relationships within the local Muslim community. All in all this information, together with data provided by the numerous kind and cooperative East Indian Muslims in interviews and through observations made thanks to their hospitality, seems sufficient to make the examination of Muslimism in Guyana a viable exercise. Like the acceptance of the impact of the researcher's presence on the course of things and the presentation of reality in general⁴⁴, the effect of my appearance and background on my relationship with the Muslim community just had to be taken into consideration throughout my period in the field as well as in the analysis of which this book is the product.

1.5 Design of the book

This book consists of two parts and a conclusion: first a few chapters about the *(Interconnecting) Conditions*: the context and contextual processes that define and redefine the

⁴³ Not only is it irrelevant what my true intentions are if there is nothing to conceal, also a discussion on the issue of my status and actions seems inappropriate considering the Islamic doctrine of *taqdir*, the regulation of everything by divine decree.

⁴⁴ The colour of my skin, for instance, and my foreignness granted me a relatively high status in the Guyanese (Indian) society. As many colleagues, this provided me with access to certain events, places and people. However, the rarity of Europeans or North Americans also caused me to be very noticeable and thus my appearance to be potentially rather disruptive.

conditions under which contemporary East Indians engage in processes of cultural production and reproduction. Then four chapters devoted to the analysis of (*Conditioning Interconnections*) between individuals and others or their environs through which I believe that (re)creative process becomes clear; and finally the conclusions.

In what follows I thus aim to provide a comprehensive analysis of a process of cultural production and reproduction among descendants of migrants in a globalised post-colonial society. Part I will start with *The past*, a chapter in which I describe the historical context in which contemporary East Indianness is formed. It traces the pre-history of Indo-Guyanese distinction in the Northern regions of nineteenth century British India. It tells its genesis under the harsh conditions on the sugar estates about a hundred-and-fifty years ago, and describes its development in the New World after the abolishment of indentureship until (and beyond) the colony's independence. The chapter reveals how Indian ethnic and religious culture have always been subject to modification and adaptation. The specific composition and the variegated background of the migrant population fostered processes of homogenisation within the Indian community. Circumstances on the plantations, and the organisation of the colony, facilitated simplification, creolisation and Christianisation. Interethnic struggles for power, finally, have severely influenced the formation of East Indianness ever since the process of decolonialisation commenced. Since it became clear the British would leave, politics of ethnic favouritism and antagonism have contaminated social practice and identification in Guyana.

Chapter three, *Present-day Contexts*, comprises a further analysis of the effects of wide-ranging interethnic rivalry on the formation of notions of self and other. It entails an examination of the local anatomy of control: the distribution and execution of power in Guyana. I will argue that pervasive interethnic struggle is one of two forces that helps shape contemporary East Indianness in a very compelling way. I discuss the ethnicised character of national politics, the exploitation of ethnicity's potential by those in quest of power, the collaborative and intertwined nature of power pursuits, and the preconditions that have facilitated the emergence of fierce and omnipresent interethnic competition. The latter half of *Present-day Contexts* is devoted to the effects of the increasingly interconnected and globalised reality on processes of cultural (re-)production: the impact of the second formative force. Subsequently, I will examine the relationship between locals and the substantial and active East Indian diaspora in North America, the effect of the importation of goods and notions from regional and global centres of cultural production (e.g. Trinidad, United States), and the consequences of bonding with entities from Christian, Islamic, and Hindu nuclei across the world. Before moving on to chapter four, it will be argued that the strength of the formative forces stems from their connection to senses of crisis. Feelings of uncertainty and insufficiency – aroused and sometimes nourished by both power struggles and transformation – affect East Indian understandings of themselves as well as the notion

of their position in the world, and motivate action or the choice of certain coping strategies.

In chapter four, the dissertation moves on to processes of transformation in the realm of Indian religion. *Religious Transformations*, the final segment of 'Interconnecting Conditions', deals with the localisation of Hinduism and the globalisation of Guyanese Islam in plural and well-connected Guyana. The investigation of both tendencies exemplifies the relationship between religious evolution and the surroundings in which this evolution occurs. First, I describe how the formation of a local edition of Hinduism was/is produced by modifications in power structures, alterations in (re)creative capacities of the actors, and the emergence of appealing alternatives. Second, the globalisation of Islam is analysed. I will consider the influence of the foreign instigated Arabisation of the faith on local Islamic thought and practice, as well as on the socio-religious climate. Additionally, I will examine neotraditionalist initiatives that have emerged as a counterforce in response to the deculturalising efforts of the 'Arab-style' purifiers. The chapter concludes with a brief section in which the parallels between localisation and globalisation as catalysts of change are discussed.

East Indian Subjectivities, chapter five, is the opening chapter of Part II of this book. It is the first of four chapters on 'Conditioning Interconnections': a series of East Indian relationships in which shared ethnic and religious understandings are expressed, incorporated, and negotiated. Chapter five consists of three sections in which three realms of collective conceptions are analysed that form the heart of a much larger network of shared conceptions which together produce an East Indian *subjectivity*, or image of the self in the world. The trio covers the attitude towards the past, the future, and the here and now. By investigating East Indian notions of, and relationships with: India and Indian culture; North America and western culture; and the entities within their home society, the positioning of the self in time and space will be dealt with. The congruencies in my informants' conceptualisation of the three subjects in the form of their general association with respectively classicality, modernity and hostility – and variations in valuation and motivational structure of these associations – prove highly illuminative manifestations of internalised East Indianness. In the latter part of the third and final section, I will then examine how these impressions situate the East Indian 'we' and 'I' in a globalised environment. By regarding concepts like identity, and self or subjectivity it will be explained in what way altering perceptions of reality are connected to personal meaning and practice in myriad ways.

The second chapter of Part II is *Foci of Friendship, Principles of Parenting*. This sixth chapter involves an analysis of changing East Indian relationships between caregivers and those who are looked after. It is an illustration of the functioning of collective understandings, their arrangement in networks of interlinked schemas that influence each other's content and evolution. In the first half I will look at the operation and development of conceptions and practices concerning people's ties with non-related yet proximate

others such as friends, acquaintances and neighbours. By investigating the vitality of what I have designated as the *family metaphor* in shaping social relations with non-kin, processes of cultural reproduction and innovation will be illuminated, and connections between understandings of friendship and family are revealed. A similar quest inspired the composition of the second half of the chapter, a section which revolves around notions and practices in the realms of family ties in general and parenting in specific. As in the first half, also here the contested relevance of traditional Indian family ideology, and its linkage with perceived societal change at a very general level, show how the image of the Indian self in the world moulds particular schemata, and steers action and interpretation of interaction in East Indian Hindu and Muslim circles. And as in the first half, it exemplifies the interlinked configuration of schemata. In fact, the analysis of changing visions on parenthood suggests the balance of power between understandings of family and friendship is shifting. Whilst the importance of fictive kinship is on the decline, contemporary notions of friendship have come to influence family ideals.

Chapter seven continues with the investigation of the interconnectedness of collective understandings. In *Constellations of Affection* I will argue that the only way to comprehend the relationships between thought and practice and between individual and setting, is by considering all loci of thought and practice structured by particular schematic systems, organised in specific ways. These partially shared systems or complexes, which I name *constellations*, serve mundane as well as inner goals, and encompass conceptions of varying hierarchical levels. The chapter involves the elucidation of this systemic argument, and the conclusion of my plea for a focus on interconnections. It is an examination of the system of understandings that forms the East Indian concept of partnership. In the first part of this chapter, the fabrication of matrimonial and non-matrimonial partner relationships will be examined. It considers continuity and change in everyday practice and perceptions regarding a range of rather 'mundane' understandings and goals in this realm of life partnership. Through the analysis of issues such as sexuality, hierarchy, and gender rights and responsibilities, processes of fragmentation as well as conservation and revivification, taking place in what I have labelled the surface layer, are elucidated. In the second part of this chapter, the connection between that surface layer and a deeper layer is explained. It aims to show how changing East Indian understandings about partnership and sex stir transformation in the underlying concepts of love and security. Additionally, it attempts to detect the influence of these underlying concepts on East Indian interpretations of partnership and sex.

Customised Cosmologies is the eighth and final chapter of Part II. This chapter encompasses an investigation of one of the most elementary and influential constellations that constitute East Indianness: the system of shared understandings that form the East Indians' notion of super reality. By analysing four of the principal understandings upon

which these notions are based⁴⁵, and describing the application of these notions, the self-ascribed cosmological position of the people shall be determined and their creative freedom shall be examined. At the same time, this endeavour provides me with an opportunity to complete the core section of this book with a comprehensive illustration of the nature of constellations. The manner in which the people explain the inexplicable, localise themselves and their world in the perplexingly immense creation, and seem inspired to act according to these convictions, prove an excellent instance to conclude with an empirically grounded overview of what this dissertation has been about. Hence, *Customised Cosmologies* can be regarded as a tribute to intertwinement and complexity, to multi layeredness and cultural blending. It involves a series of sections in which the production of East Indianness is summarised: the relationship between the individual and his or her surroundings; the effects of processes of localisation and globalisation; the historical entrenchment; the joint incorporation; motivational force and the linkage between thought and practice.

The concluding chapter nine, *Reflections*, is meant to recapitulate some of the most interesting and significant features of the production process of local Indianness. It also includes some additional remarks and observations, and some words on issues that are raised or were left unanswered. It largely revolves around the idea of collective constellations. That key notion, which has emerged as a concept with great explanatory value in the previous chapters, is employed to capture the multifaceted and complex character of the process in a structured and comprehensible fashion. Its elaborate definition allows me to review all the findings that I would like the reader to remember. I will begin with a depiction of the constellations and try to position the concept as a personal articulation of a line of thinking within a much larger realm of poststructuralist reasoning. After that, both the question of formation and functioning will be dealt with. The question of power is reviewed in a following section. The final words, will then be devoted to some ultimate reflections and a brief look ahead: what can be learned from all of this, which 'old' matters need further investigation, and what are the new problems that have loomed on the horizon.

1.6 Writing style and presentation

The shape in which I present my findings is the result of both my limitations and preferences as a writer, the purpose of a particular text or chapter, and the sort of data I have managed to gather over the past few years. Given the objectives, and the information my research yielded, Part I has become largely a section focussed on context and external forces. The perceptions and practices of the individual subject, although present, play a

⁴⁵ Respectively these are the notions of: afterlife; of God and the divine; laws of supernature; and the earthly unseen.

secondary role. Hence, personal stories and accounts of subjective experiences and behaviour do not hold a prominent position in the first four chapters. Rather than ethnographic pictures of East Indian society on a micro-level, I have chosen to use images of the surroundings, development and position of East Indians in Guyanese society at large. By viewing these general conditions from such an elevated level, the dynamic temporal and situational nature, as well as the complex interconnectedness, of the East Indian ethnic and religious culture is first exposed and emphasised. The functioning and reorganisation of East Indian distinction will only in Part II be analysed at the level of Muslims and Hindus as individuals. From chapter five on, therefore, the informants' voices can be heard and their faces will appear more frequently.

Throughout the whole book, analysis and empirical examples and/or other information are intertwined as much as possible. Sometimes this is done in a relatively explicit manner in which fractions of story and scrutiny together form a line of reasoning. Often, however, points are made in more implicit manners. Analysis in that case, is embedded in the presentation and the sequence of the material. Theoretical contemplations, inspired by various versions of the 'practice theory' and connectionism, will appear in basically every chapter. Such a choice to award theory a relatively important status in the book stems from the fact that the insights propagated by the different advocates of practice theory have coloured my interpretations from early on in the project. Unlike many of my colleagues, I thus do not suggest that theoretical issues are distilled from empirical information. Nonetheless, I hope and believe that this baggage has not put constraints on my intellectual creativity and openness but has served as valuable beacons that guided me to a position as close to comprehension as possible instead.

This dissertation portrays East Indian cultural and religious distinction as the temporary and uniquely Indo-Guyanese outcome of cultural processes which essentially can be regarded characteristic to any setting in which social collectivities interact with each other and their surroundings. The last chapter of this book is an attempt to summarise the interweavement of culture, and personal meaning and practice in Guyana's East Indian community and capture the essence of fundamental processes of cultural (re)-production.

Undoubtedly, the account of such processes is as much a product of a creative and interpretive mind as it is a reflection of East Indian 'reality'. Few will believe that the results of virtually any form of social research are untainted by the researcher's personal characteristics. Also my particular biography has definitely affected my work and helped shape the answers I have found. In addition, communicative issues have influenced the ultimate message. My ability to comprehend, translate and transcribe as well as the informant's gift and willingness to verbalise – especially where his or her thoughts and perceptions are concerned – all affect the quality of the material and its presentation. As is acknowledged throughout the realm of anthropology (e.g. Hammersley and Atkinson 1997; Gregory 1970; Schuman 1982), abilities, inclinations, incidents, relations and reactions all challenge the validity and authenticity of fieldwork findings. And the sole thing that can be

done is accept it, recognise reflexivity and relativity without abandoning our commitment to realism. By trying to understand the effects of ourselves, comprehend it by comparing “data in which the level and direction of reactivity vary, it is still possible “to make the reasonable assumption that we are trying to describe phenomena as they are, and not how we perceive them or how we would like them to be.”⁴⁶ And that is what I would like to do, assume that the following story is not just an interpretation of the ontical sphere I have examined, but rather the account of an interpretative enterprise that was undertaken to acquire a position from which a particular process could be seen and explained as lucid and as accurate as possible.

⁴⁶ As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995:17) summarise the words of Hammersley (1992:ch.3).

PART I

INTERCONNECTING CONDITIONS

THE PAST

On the Origins of Ethnic and Religious Difference

January 1838 – In the port of colonial Calcutta (Kolkata) two vessels make final preparations to sail off for a long and harsh journey across the ‘dreaded’ *kala pani*⁴⁷, the black waters that part Eurasia from the Americas. On board are 414 Indian labourers who signed contracts that will bring them to the alien grounds of the Western Hemisphere. Their destination is British Guiana, their goal a better life and an escape from the everlasting insecurity of lives lived in a country plagued by chronic famines and economic downfall. Labelled coolie⁴⁸, they are the novel means of production for the ‘post-abolition’ planters of the New World. Together they form the matter subject to a debatable experiment of colonial minds set on material gain. All are figures in the dawn of a system that would change the character of Guyana forever.

Four months later, around May 5, 1838, the ships arrive in British Guianese waters. 396 of the pioneers disembark, 18 have died along the way. The Indians are apportioned to the plantations of the experiment’s initiators. 174 go to the Highbury and Waterloo plantations of Davidsons, Barkly and Company in Berbice; 82 head for the Bellevue plantation of Andrew Colville in Demerara; John Gladstone’s Vreedenhoop en Vreedenstein estates, also in Demerara, receive 101 labourers; and 49 are contracted by John and Henri Moss of the Anna Regina plantation in Essequibo (Hollett 1999:65-66). Shackled by little humane indenture contracts, them awaits a prolonged period of what some will describe as neo-enslavement. For five long years the Indians will have to work the sweltering cane fields. Sixty bitter months devoted to Caribbean sweetness with little more choice but to endure or die. The days East Indianness was born.

⁴⁷ Hinduism enjoined a prohibition of overseas travel. The prohibition to cross this *kala pani* applied with greatest force to the higher castes. According to them, the act of crossing those waters would result in the loss of caste. Yet, also the members of lower castes would be reluctant to undergo any major maritime experience.

⁴⁸ A word of insecure origin. Tinker (1974:41-42), mentions several possibilities: perhaps it derives from the Chinese characters *k’u* (bitter) and *li* (strength); or maybe the term stems from the name of a west Indian hill tribe, the *Koli*; it might also originate from the word *culé*, meaning load-bearer or docker in Ceylon; or finally, it could come from the Tamil term *kuli*, signifying ‘wages’.

“Thus commenced the coolie immigration which was destined to revolutionize the whole colony and become a most important factor in progress.” (Rodway 1891:93)

1843, at the end of the five year contract, 236 Indians decided to go home. 98 had died, 2 ran off and only 60 of the initial ‘load’ wished to stay (Nath 1970:21). The first experiment had ended in disillusion.

Not only do death toll and mass return narrate of torment and discontent among the labourers, also the imperial authorities displayed their reluctance. As a matter of fact, already on July 11, 1838⁴⁹, less than half a year after the first ships left the port of Calcutta, an embargo was imposed on immigration from British India. Indications of woes in the West Indies (and the Mascarenes) made Lord Auckland, the contemporary Governor General of India, “strongly recommend a committee to investigate the matter before the policy of immigration continued to further feed British Colonies” (Rauf 1974:27). In the meantime, the Council of India decided, further permits for the West Indies would be suspended (Cumpston 1953:22). For the next six and a half years, no worker would trade the wombs of Mother India for the barracks of the unknown. Only after a period of investigations and severe lobbying by persistent planters, the Indian government removed the ban.

On 16 November, Act XXI of 1844 was passed and emigration to most of the West Indian territories became legal once again. Two months later, on the 26th day of 1845, the first freight of labour cleared out of Calcutta en route for British Guiana (Tinker 1974:81). Aboard the ship, the *Lord Hungerford*, were 360 migrants. They were the first of a steady stream of Indians that would flow into Guyana for the next seven decades until heavy criticism from the Indian influential, including Mohandas Ghandi, forced the Government of India to pass legislation abolishing the condemned system in 1917.

By then an estimated 239,756⁵⁰ Indians had crossed the black waters and were dropped off in British Guiana. Only around 70,000 of them ever returned to India. The rest embraced their new home. Who were these people, where did they come from, and what drove them into vending their freedom?

This chapter deals with the origins and early days of East Indianness. It can be seen as a further introduction to and historical contextualisation of contemporary East Indianness, the body of culture, meaning and practice that is dissected in the rest of this book. Hence, it comprises concise descriptions of: (2.1) the world where my subjects’ ancestors came from; (2.2) the reality which they entered after they had crossed the ocean; (2.3) the settling processes that occurred once the Indians completed their period of

⁴⁹ Says Rauf (1974: 26). Other sources like Saha (1970:19) and Mangru (2000:22) mention 1839 as the year of suspension. Cumpston’s extensive description of the matter however reveals July 11 as indeed the exact date on which emigration from India was prohibited for an indefinite period (Cumpston 1953:22).

⁵⁰ See appendix (table I). Estimates vary from 238,979 (Mangru 2000) and 238,909 (Roberts & Byrne 1967) to 256,564 (Rauf 1974). The number used here is mentioned by Nath (1970).

indentureship; and (2.4) the maturation of interethnic competition as a formative force in the era of decolonialisation.

Obviously, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a comprehensive account of East Indian history. Its objective is to show how present-day manifestations of distinctiveness are rooted in the past, and to emphasise the fact that this distinctiveness has been subject to processes of transformation ever since its advent and will always remain subject to change. East Indianness today still reveals its North Indian heritage in language, beliefs, and cultural practices. It also continues to narrate of the homogenising atmosphere that facilitated the rise of religious and ethnic unity in the ‘nigger yard’ and in the Indian villages during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. And finally, modern-day East Indian perceptions and practices of the ethnic self and other – perhaps more than anything else – are shaped by the pervasive interethnic power struggles that have essentially become institutionalised after images of self-governance loomed on British Guiana’s horizon.

2.1 Bharatvarsha: the motherland

2.1.1 Origin

Guyana’s Indianness is rooted in the motherland. The migrant ancestors of today’s East Indians carried cultural baggage from the areas and social strata to which they belonged. In *Bharatvarsha*, the motherland, lies the foundation of East Indian distinction.

The first group to be recruited systematically for indentured labour overseas was a people known as *Dhangar* (Vertovec 1992:6). They were the Oraons, Santals, and Mundas, tribe members who originally dwelt in the rolling hills edging the Ganges Plains at the point where the states of Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal touch. Labelled ‘hill-coolies’ by the British, they had left their homelands and came down to the plains in search of a subsistence. Worsening economic conditions challenged *jboom*, their slash-and-burn type of shifting hill cultivation, and had thus forced them out of *Maha Kantara*⁵¹, eventually to enter into an (often ill-comprehended) contract that would bring them to the New World.

During the 1840s and 1850s, an estimated two-fifths to one-half of the emigrants originated from the Dhangar district Chota Nagpur. The rest comprised an amalgam of washouts, beggars and vagrants from Calcutta and its neighbouring districts (mainly ‘Twenty Four Parganas’). From the late 1850s on, the proportion of both ‘hill-coolies’ and urban marginals decreased. The utilisation of emerging local employment opportunities by the Dhangar,⁵² together with the planters growing discontent with indentured labourers

⁵¹ The lands of the Dhangars were known as Chhotanagpur (or Chota Nagpur/Chutia Nagpur). It formed part of the Great Wilderness, Maha Kantara, of east-central India, a region into which invaders, from Indo-Aryans to Mughals, “never effectively penetrated” (Tinker 1974:47).

⁵² In, for instance, Assam’s expanding tea industry and (later) the coal mines in the Manbhum district.

from the Calcutta conglomeration, forced recruiters (*arkatis*) to seek for new sources of indentured potential elsewhere.

They extended their realm towards the west and moved further upstream the Ganges, into western Bengal and the North-West Provinces (NWP). There, the recruiters found in the deemed compliant Biharis the suitable successors of the hill people; individuals “steady and patient, accustomed to hard toil,” and predominantly speakers of some form of what had become “the lingua franca of the emigration traffic,” Hindi (Tinker 1974:52-53).

Throughout the late 1850s and 1860s, the border-zone of Bihar and NWP formed the thriving heart of recruitment. Districts like Baneras, Azamgarh, Gorakhpur and Jaunpur in the North-West Provinces, and Ghazipur, Muzaffarpur, Champaran, Shahabad, Patna and Gaya in Bihar then provided the West with large quantities of émigrés.

During the concluding decades of the nineteenth century, recruiters’ focus moved east. After the 1860s, the input from Bihar slightly dwindled and the Oudh-flow increased. By 1904, Bihar’s share in gross Guyana-recruit export numbers, had dropped from the initial thirty percent to a modest six percent (Tinker 1974:58). This happened because the Biharis were the ones who benefited most from the limited growth of Eastern India’s industries. En masse, they elected the Bengal jute-fields as a more desirable destination than the plantations of far-off *Doomra*.⁵³ British Guiana became second choice, preferably left for those further west, people from the Punjab and the Central Provinces, but most of all those from Oudh and the NWP.⁵⁴

By the 1910s, in what came to be the twilight years of indentured migration, nearly ninety percent of British Guiana’s Indian emigrants claimed either the North West Provinces or Oudh as their homelands (Laurence 1994:106). Most of them were members of the region’s bulky and new landless labouring class who lacked the alternatives available to their Bihari peers. Just like their predecessors, they were forced into indentureship because of the increasingly unfavourable conditions in contemporary British India. Both global and local developments proved effective push and pull factors that inspired many North Indians to board ships bound Guyana.

2.1.2 Conditions

According to Mangru (2000:14), altogether Bihar, the North-West Provinces, and Oudh supplied approximately eighty-six percent of all recruits to Guyana. Most of them were impoverished, propelled into adventurism by social deprivation and poor economic conditions in the recruiting areas. Some were *kamia*⁵⁵ who tried to escape their existence as semi slaves, most were peasants facing destitution due to a devastating blend of debts and disasters. No longer could they bear the oppression of *zamindars* (landlords), moneylenders

⁵³ In India, British Guiana (Demerara) was called *Damra*, *Damraila* or *Doomra* and believed to be an island.

⁵⁴ See appendix (table II) for the origin of Indian migrants between 1881 and 1917.

⁵⁵ Slave-like servants of creditors who executed prolonged – often lifelong or even multigenerational – formal bonds (*saunknana*) for a loan (Saha 1970:36-42).

and middlemen, or the heavy rents demanded by the British imperial government.⁵⁶ Peasant life had become austere and peasantry a class of virtually voiceless people subject to draining land revenue systems and its greedy personifications. In such a reality, the lack of surplus – because of the excessive rent and the “uneconomic holding of land”⁵⁷ (Saha 1970:53) – made that seasonal fluctuations and small misfortune had severe consequences. Many were forced off their grounds or lost property to satisfy rack-renters’ demands.

Additionally, in nineteenth century globalised environs, the income opportunities offered by the ‘cottage industries’ had rigorously declined as the Industrial Revolution transformed British wants and needs. From an established manufacturing power, India was suddenly downgraded to a mere supplier of raw materials.⁵⁸ Its task became to feed the British mass producing industries on the rise. Affordable imported products and crafts from India were no longer required. On the contrary, after the introduction of railways, cheap British machine-made goods penetrated the Indian outskirts instead. Even the more remote villages felt the fateful effects of Europe’s upsurge. Industries that once gave employment to a wide array of people, irrespective of religion and caste considerations, suddenly collapsed (Kondapi 1951:2). Millions of commoners lost their job and earnings. Weavers, spinners, tanners, smelters, smiths, ceramists and many other village artisans were pauperised or forced into the already overcrowded and little profitable fields of agriculture where the work was seasonal and wages at or even below subsistence level.

In no way could the plagued lands provide all these needy with their daily dose of *dhali* (chickpeas) and rice. Insufficiency became endemic. Major famines hit the colony in 1804, 1837, 1861 and 1908. Localised famines occurred at least twenty times between 1860 and 1908 (Vertovec 1992:6). Practically entire villages were deserted as the frequent shortages drove many to leave their homes in search for less dire conditions (Mangru 2000:16). Large collections of ill-fated marched across India away from starvation’s tentacles towards the lands of prospect. From the south they sailed off to the tea and rubber plantations of Ceylon. From the west and north they headed eastwards to Bengal and Assam. All aimed to find employment in one of India’s few expanding industries. Yet, neither the growing railways and plantations, nor the coal mines or jute and cotton industry “could substantially absorb the surplus of pauperised labour” (Saha 1970:64). The number

⁵⁶ The obligation to pay rents in set amounts of cash instead of the traditional share of crop, brought about by the imposition of British revenue collection policies, caused peasants to change their patterns of cultivation, sell their produce at cut-prices and go deep into debt or quit (Vertovec 1992:8).

⁵⁷ Saha says that contemporary agriculture was totally dependent on the mercy of nature. This was due to the absence of proper irrigation and the climate’s unpredictability causing occasional floods as well as drought (Saha 1970:52-53). Furthermore, the relatively infertile soil became overworked due to the influx of workers from other sectors and the high population densities.

⁵⁸ Both Saha (1970) and Kondapi (1951) mention discriminatory policies of the Imperial Government on Indian manufacturing industries. Already in 1677 did ‘London’ impose heavy customs duties on Indian cotton. From 1720 on, both the importation and consumption of Indian cloth was absolutely prohibited (for half a century). “The intention and effect of this policy on India was to change the whole face of that industrial country in order to render it a field of the produce of crude materials subservient to the manufacturers of Great Britain” and to avoid fruitless competition with the colony on the home market (quotation in Kondapi 1951:3).

of unemployed was simply too large. Economic disruption elsewhere, in combination with an increasing population growth, made labour so overabundant that emigration almost became an economic necessity to countless employment seekers.⁵⁹

2.1.3 Heterogeneity

Already in the 1860s, indentured emigration had become a widespread and pan-regional phenomenon. Thousands of migrants per year, workers from a broad range of localities, were enlisted by recruiters, brought to subagents, registered, and transported to the main depots in Calcutta and Madras (Chennai). From there they were shipped to the unknown shores of the Mascarenes, Fiji, East Africa, Natal, and the West Indies.⁶⁰

By the 1920s, after the last batches of Indians departed, nearly one and a half million Indians had left India on a contract base (Clarke et al. 1990). Between fifteen and twenty percent of the labourers landed in Guyana. The large majority of them passed through Calcutta.⁶¹ As indicated, these were often people from the interior, drawn from an area that stretched from Dacca in the east to Saharanpur in the west. The West Indian Immigration Registers even record the arrival of Afghanis and people from Nepal and Baluchistan.

Together, the mix of different backgrounds mirrored the complex nature of Indian society. Migrants did not just come from a range of areas, they also occupied various niches in the rigidly stratified local society, belonged to distinct sects or faiths, and even spoke different languages. In fact, the entire Indian faction of Guyana's indentured population was made up of a variety of people either praying to different gods or stowed in one of the many castes. As such, North Indian emigration represented an average sample of the rural population. This heterogeneous makeup, as will be shown in chapter four, has severely affected the (re)establishment of religious and social structures among the East Indians of Guyana.

⁵⁹ Besides economic severity and climatologic challenges, also the Indian Mutiny of 1857 is mentioned as a motivation for migration (Mangru 2000:16). "Some of the *sepoys* (Indian soldiers in the army of the British East India Company) who rebelled against British rule, emigrated overseas rather than face [sanction, the] imprisonment at Port Blair in the Andamans" (Mangru 2000:16). According to Mangru, in general emigration thus resulted from 'push' rather than 'pull' factors. The unknown Caribbean plantations themselves were not considered to be an exceptionally attractive destination.

⁶⁰ Migration to Southeast Asia concerns another kind of contract labour with distinct systems of recruitment. The *kangani* system gained workforces to tap rubber in Malaysia, and the *maistry* system was used to recruit labourers for Burma's plantations. Both "used a network of middlemen and debt relation" (Clarke et al. 1990:8).

⁶¹ By far most of them embarked in the North. Southerners comprised only a fraction of the total influx. The south (Madras) was – at least by the West Indian planters – seen only as an additional source of recruits. Its people were regarded as "better than nothing but definitely inferior to the northern Indian" (Laurence 1994:105). Coastal Madrasis were deemed fragile and troublesome, poor options extremely prone to sickness, excessive drinking and disobedience. Besides, including them in one's workforce presented a greater problem of language and adaptation than an all-north selection of workers would. Hence, Madrassi migration (to the West-Indies) never really blossomed. Between 1855 and 1914, only about 6346 individuals boarded Guyana-bound ships in the port of Madras.

Between 1874/5 and 1917, an estimated fifteen percent of the Indians who emigrated to British Guiana were Muslims. Virtually all the others lived their religious lives somewhere within the broad boundaries of North Indian Hinduism (Laurence 1994:110). Depending on social origin and geographical background, they occupied one of the many positions possible within the religion's orbit.

Various factors attributed to this intrareligious diversity. First of all, there was regional variation in dominance of the different Hindu traditions. *Siva*, *Vishnu* and the Mother Goddess (*Devī*), each found their followers in one of the different recruiting fields. While *Saktism*⁶² dominated Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, the inhabitants of present-day's eastern and western Uttar Pradesh were mainly devotees of Lord Vishnu, and *Saivism* was restricted to certain bases (like Benares) randomly spread throughout the area. Consequently, each region would undergo the influence of its particular pilgrimage centres and, often associated, religious orders (*sampradayas*) advocating their own blend of beliefs and practices.

Besides, diversity within the Hindu segment was fostered by the locale-variable popularity of lesser deities and the existence of (tribal) "godlings, saints, spirits and other supernaturals" that were exclusive to certain districts and villages (Vertovec 1992:107). A diverse geographical background alone, therefore already shaped the Hindu migrants into a variegated collection of believers representing a cacophony of beliefs and customs.

Yet, religious heterodoxy was not just an interregional affair. It even proliferated within settings themselves, where practices and preferences varied between the various kin groups and caste groups. Also within communities, lives were lived in (intertwined) sectionalised environs. Kin, but especially caste, prescribed distinction. As a system, it coloured meanings and relationships in both the social, economic, political and ritual spheres (Vertovec 1992:34). Caste was always and everywhere, both usefully tying and rigorously dividing. Hence, a multitude of caste backgrounds in migrant stock would inevitably further generate habitual incongruence overseas.

Although complete and precise statistics on the representation of the various castes among the Indian emigrants are not available, it is clear that a broad range of castes was represented on plantation grounds. Raymond Smith (1959) counted the four *varnas* and eleven caste groups – comprising ninety-six castes and sub-castes – in a random sample survey of the Indians who arrived in British Guiana between 1865 and 1917. Other sources also relate of this relatively poised quadri-varna plantation population.⁶³ All indicate the

⁶² One of the three main Hindu traditions. In Saktism, the Mother Goddess (e.g. *Devī*, *Durga*) assumes the role of supreme being. The other two traditions award different entities the role of the Supreme One: in Saivism, *Siva* is worshipped as the One God and Lord and in Vaisnavism this is *Visnu* (Klostermaier 1994).

⁶³ For instance, G. A. Grierson's analysis of the social position of some 1200 emigrants from northern Bihar. Of these, he says 962 (78.5%) were Hindus: "with 231 (24%) coming from the higher castes, 454 (47.2%) from a middle social position, and 277 (28.2%) from the lowest strata of society" (Tinker 1974:56). Those figures are more or less corroborated by information gathered by the Protector of Emigrants at Calcutta. According to his statistics, 11.8% of the people dispatched from Calcutta in the period 1874-1917 were 'High

same picture, namely that of a migrant folk consisting of more than just low or no-caste individuals. Also *Vaisyas* and *Ksatriyas*, and even a number of Brahmins signed up for Guyana. Together with *Sudras*, *Pariabs* and Muslims, they came to share, space, food, as well as the misery and happiness of indentured life. People occupying completely distinct positions, mutually ‘sentenced’ to five years of companionship of the closest kind – starting in Garden Reach.

2.1.4 *Amalgamation*

Starting at Garden Reach, Calcutta’s Demerara Depot, the Indian migrants had to face an existence separate from virtually all they had known before. As Tinker (1974:137) stated, “On arrival at the depot, the labourer was ready to begin the process of becoming an indentured coolie; henceforth he was just one of the many human parts in a vast assembly process.” From the depot on, the labourers were people whose entire past was closed and stored in memories. Before would only remain in thoughts and ways. Possessions and privacy, if ever there, were sacrificed. Community and fusion ruled. The eclectic collective was forced to merge. The familiar had vanished behind the lofty walls that surrounded the depository. Inside, the air of incarceration and jam-packed barracks already hailed of plantation life. The migrant-to-be was left surrounded by a shipload of strangers, soaking in estranging experiences while enduring several confusing weeks of depot-detainment⁶⁴ – until the day the transients boarded.

Once aboard, even the most persistent residues of familiarity evaporated. Virtually every sensation was pristine. Sea travel doubtlessly was an experience that triggered senses of fear and alienation far more grotesque than anything in Garden Reach. For three to four months, the migrants base was drifting and their movements constrained to on deck and down below. Nautical life was barren, lived in little more than seventy-two cubic feet of space per head⁶⁵, and brightened with only three meagre meals a day and the prescribed outdoor work out. Individuality did almost not exist, uniformity bloomed as the dominance of caste and custom was necessarily left behind in the Motherland. On board, every Indian ate the same, experienced the same, and wore the very same standard outfit. Without exception, they were merely voiceless serfs subject to a shared regime of waves and weather and the authority of the Surgeon-Superintendent.⁶⁶ Together they faced the fatality of cholera and fevers and the ferocity of seas and storms.

None could see beyond the horizon, yet all knew that like their present, their future was alike. Partially out of this awareness strong feelings of camaraderie arose and close knit

Caste’, 31.4% were ‘Agriculturalists’, 7.6% Artisans and 33.8% ‘Low Caste’. The remaining ones, as said, were either Christians (0.1%) or Muslims (15.2%) (Laurence 1994:111).

⁶⁴ According to Tinker (1974:137), the period spend in the depots was normally between one and three weeks. However, if there were no coolie ships going, the waiting might take as long as three months.

⁶⁵ The amount of space allowed to Indians aboard the ships in the mid-1850s.

⁶⁶ The Surgeon Superintendent was the person responsible for delivering the migrants alive. For the long West Indian voyages, British doctors were appointed to look after the Indians’ health and well-being. They got paid per head ‘landed alive’ (Tinker 1974:152).

‘shipbrother’ relationships, *jihaji bhai*, *jahaji* or *jehaji*, came into being. As will be further discussed in chapter six, such bands of friendship traversed caste and conviction and endured ashore where comrades “sought to serve their indenture contracts on the same estates, and settle near each other afterwards on newly purchased [...] lands” (Vertovec 1992:92-93). They often even assumed the character of family ties as ship brothers and their families and descendants came to see and treat each other as *nata*, fictive kin (Vertovec 1992:92-93). Shipbrotherhood so became the shoot out of which new and durable networks of relationships grew. It was the outcome of harshness, the result of mutual loss cultivated on the fertile grounds of fear and insecurity. The sickening air on board made jihaji bonds sprout and ironically enabled an early reestablishment of social structures in the New World. For generations to come, ship-originated affiliations would be part of West Indian society. Until the increasingly globalised environs triggered the rise of rivalling networks and identifications, this form of fictive kinship influenced interaction and inspired the formation of joint social and cultural institutions in Indo-Guyana.

2.2 Plantation life: the première of East Indianness

With any luck, the indentured would be able to leave the vessel around a hundred days beyond Calcutta. Carrying nothing but a small *dhholak* (drum) stuffed with all the little they could take, the Indians disembarked. They had finally arrived in the ‘land of many waters’ and touched the soil that was about to claim their sweat in order to lubricate the process of making white lives sweet.

As soon as they got off they were allocated to a plantation and directed to their accommodation: former slave barracks known as the *Nigger Yard*. From now on, the recruits figured as residents of a near autonomous territory under the strict reign of overseers, managers and proprietors. Their new home and world was the Caribbean ‘canedom’, a virtual state of its own in a colony that fetched the bulky weight of poor economic performance and its fresh slavery inheritance.

This second section involves a brief descriptive analysis of the juvenile state of East Indianness. It deals with the temporal and spatial context in which it first materialised: a context that outlined an ever evolving distinctiveness that continues to develop today. It was in the Nigger Yard that the seed of ethnic unity – already sowed in the depots and aboard the ships – germinated and Creole as well as European manners and concepts entered Indian realms. The plantation encompassed the habitat in which East Indian ethnic and religious culture first was to be re-established: its rules and regulations defined the limits within which culture specific meaning and practice and institutions could be (re)defined; its emerging East Indianness reveals the creative freedom people possess even in delimiting surroundings.

2.2.1 *Circumstances*

Indians were imported as commodities during the days the plantation economy had decayed. “Its labour force was declining, its technology was archaic, and its markets were losing the protection from foreign competition which [before] had partially masked its inefficiencies” (Adamson 1972:32). An affordable alternative workforce was desperately needed to invigorate the labour intensive sugar industry that dominated British Guiana since the collapse of coffee and cotton in the 1820s. And so, with slavery abolished (1834) and apprenticeship terminated (1838), the indentured labourer became the means to ensure continuation of the economic plan called colonial plantation agriculture.⁶⁷

Within two decades after the introduction of the indentured, ‘sugar’ was back on its feet. And Indians were the prime responsible (Jayawardena 1963:16).⁶⁸ They had proven the most adequate slave substitutes and thus became the principal inhabitants of the Nigger Yard.

Life in the Yard and its surroundings was an experience in the vein of slave existence. Conditions on the estates continued to be gloomy, and movement was still restricted by law. Entrance by choice instead of force now justified a system of organisation that bore the same austere and authoritarian atmosphere as the abolished one. The workers’ lot was to live and relive the monotonous cycle of toil and recovery. Their base was the barrack, a long one- or sometimes two-storey wooden structure containing five to thirty ‘living units’, each consisting out of a room with one door, one window, “and a *chula* (or *chulja*, an earthen cooking frame)” out on the veranda (Vertovec 1992:69). Space inside was limited. Three to four souls – either a family or a bunch of single men – on average, shared a scanty three by four and a half meter room. Here, the Indian ate, lounged, and retired (Speckmann 1965:30).

The bulk of their time, however, was spent outside, dedicated to the proprietor’s cause. For at least five years and six days a week, they were at the planter’s disposal and partook in a compulsory workforce whose days were “determined by the custom of the slave times” (Tinker 1974:189). Workers on the estates remained subject to a gruelling combination of working long hours and heavy duties. Earnings were meagre. The average worker laboured for some rations, shelter, and a salary of approximately twenty-five cents per day.

Besides, poor sanitation, unsuitable diets, overcrowding, bad water and endemic disease, all jeopardised the indentured’s health and livelihood, and weakened the plantation population (Brereton 1985:25). The chief scourge was ‘intermittent fever’ (malaria). In 1874

⁶⁷ An institution officially created to prepare the slaves for freedom. It meant that the ex-slaves were not immediately freed but had to serve as unpaid – at least for three quarters of the working day – apprentices instead. This status was to continue for six years for praedial and four years for nonpraedial apprentices. The system was early terminated on 1 August 1838, two years before its term (Adamson 1972:31).

⁶⁸ Besides Indians, many others came to British Guiana between 1835 and 1928. Among the immigrants were, for example, people from Madeira (30,685); the Azores (164); West Indies (42,512); Africa (13,355); China (14,189); Cape de Verde (208); and Malta (208) (Nath 1970:220).

alone, there were 51,434 cases of malaria treated in the estates' hospitals.⁶⁹ Also other ailments were widespread. Many suffered from complaints like ulcers, hookworm, dysentery or anaemia (Laurence 1994:222). In 1886, out of an indentured population of 69,290, 17,144 cases of illness were reported by the Medical Officer (Laurence 1994:222). All these occurred in surroundings where absence was punished with financial and material repercussions. Non-attendance was a wrong, wasteful misdeed that had to be battled with ration cuts and wage deductions. Just like 'unfinished tasks', illness-due-absence was an intolerable incident at the expense of the worker because sanctioned by the omnipotent plantocracy in quest of control.

The system of stoppages was part of a larger undertaking aimed at the establishment of a "context of control" (Haraksingh 1981:3). Within three decades after the arrival of the first Indians, "the planters had enacted [...] a corpus of laws designed to keep Indians on the estates a captive labour force" (Ramnarine 1987:120). Besides financial ties, also the legal framework held the indentured captive and (subsequently) affected the constitution of Indian institutions and practices on South American shores. Breach of indenture, a cluster of wrongdoings dealt with under the Consolidated Immigration Ordinance, meant that any indentured Indian who did not obey the rules and restrictions or meet the indenture requirements could be prosecuted (Jayawardena 1963:15). Mal-performance and unauthorised absence were profusely punished. Even absence from the estate was an offence sanctioned by the colonial powers.

In 1875 alone, 30.3 percent of the indentured population was prosecuted for labour offences, the majority of them was convicted and many were actually sentenced (Laurence 1994:143). On average, at any rate between 1875 and 1890, well over a thousand labourers per year were sent to prison due to their unlawful absence from the plantations.

2.2.2 Sex imbalance

In the overcrowded colonial prisons, the convicts shared bunks with another odd yet more vile exponent of indentured crime: the wife-assaulter. In fact, the oddest – and thus often mentioned – crime frequently committed by the indentured Indians was wife-related assault and/or murder. The majority of the Indian homicides in Guyana involved either wives or reputed wives. A root cause of this peculiar preponderance was the relative paucity of Indian women: the ratio of females to males, resident on the estates in the early years, barely exceeded 1:2. Many more men arrived than women. Consequently, scarce Indian ladies grew to be the subject of men's covetousness and a reason for *mêlée*. Estate wives became important symbols of status and masculinity, a source of self esteem and a sign of standing. "Her departure for another man was a source of fundamental shame, indicative of failure to keep his wife in appropriate subjection according to the ancestral culture" and reason for an explosion of violent aggression and destructive behaviour (Laurence 1994:241).

⁶⁹ On a total estate population of 58,038.

Apart from such incitation of male ignitability, the scarcity of women also affected Indian life in more fundamental ways. For instance, their eminence as rare necessities enabled the women to enjoy a greater independence and more freedom than their counterparts in India (Barrow 1996:343). Not only received Indian women in Guyana their own wages, they gained more control over conjugal life as well. Women could shift their allegiance from one male to another. There are even accounts of the existence of polyandry among the immigrants. Also, the ideals and system of dowry lost ground in the plantation society. Some in fact mention the replacement of “the institution of dowry with one of bridewealth” (Vertovec 1992:103).

All in all, one could state that the sex imbalance resulted in a female empowerment. This, together with the plantations’ alien social makeup, cultivated gender roles unknown of in the migrants’ motherland. Paradoxically, the manacles of indentureship had liberated East Indian womanhood from certain conservative tendencies governing the lives of many Hindu and Muslim contemporaries in the East. Although still far from equals, Indian men and women in Guyana were – and have been ever since – actors in a play that forced them to reevaluate their (hierarchical) position. The implications of this disparity went beyond the narrow boundaries of gender status alone. Women dearth also has further complicated the restoration of Indian family life in the New World. In other words, it obstructed the reestablishment of what is often regarded the institution that defines being Indian (Uberoi 1999). Extended family ties were ruptured. And without a sufficient reserve of potential mothers, even the formation of a nuclear family often became impossible. Hence, many men spent their indentured days as part of one of the numerous bachelor ensembles that colonised the barrack’s living units. Somehow, they seemed to prefer the solitary existence of indentured single above the alternative of a joining in matrimony with an African female.

2.2.3 Early antipathies

One of the reasons for this incipient Afro-reluctance might have been some kind of premature aversion which is said to have been apparent between Indians and Africans from the days the first Indians landed on British Guianese shores. The (forecast of a) massive influx of cheap oriental labour made the ex-slaves in search of upturn welcome their co-workers with little more than boos. As many African workers still made their living on the estates, the emergence of such ‘a new system of slavery’ was regarded as a serious economic threat that would hinder their struggle for better payment and blur their prospects of success. Consequently, migrant Indians, as the externalisations of that threat, were loathed.

This early animosity, in turn, furthered Indian suspicion of the dark skinned, adroit and allegedly more affluent other. According to nineteenth century missionary Bronkurst (1888:22), there existed “an uncalled-for, bitter feeling between the native Creole [African] and the Indian Immigrant towards each other. The [converted] native looks upon the heathen Indian as an intruder or interloper, whilst the Indian looks down upon the native

black as being inferior to him in a social aspect.” Indians saw the Africans as a less civilised species whose manners and appearance reflected images of low caste life. Existing collective understandings of hierarchy and the ascription of statuses were employed to classify those alien others. Allegedly, ex-slaves represented “a coarse woolly headed race more like monkeys than human beings” (cited in Laurence 1994:279).

Ironically, this species bore the scent of impurity with an air of authority. Although, ideologically, dark was supposed inferior, reality displayed the less fair as the often bossy and better. Africans ruled the shovel gang and reigned as drivers. They were stronger and experienced, performed as superiors in the estate environs, and treated the ‘more civilised’ as merely trespassers on black grounds: *dhobi* wearing oddities with inferior physiques and funny ways. It proved that in such a reality of mutual disregard (connubial) fusion between the Africans and the Indians was a rarity. Rather, already then, both were opponents in their struggle for subsistence. They had instantly become contestants in a game hosted by planters, subject to people who allegedly deliberately fostered animosity – and depressed united opposition – “for the stability of the planting interest” (Cross 1996:28). Whether or not this animosity resulted in frequent overt conflict remains unclear. Sure is that the fierce competition of the early days eased slightly towards the end of the nineteenth century as Africans withdrew from the plantations and found accommodation and employment elsewhere.⁷⁰

Nonetheless, never did Indians and ex-slaves really come to travel harmoniously on their voyage down the path of Guyanese history. They arrived as distinct peoples and persisted as such. Yet, what in Guyana they were, are and will be, is the (interim) outcome of a being in coexistence. Ever since the Indians entered the Nigger Yard, their distinctiveness has been defined in plural contexts coloured by interethnic competition. In other words, contemporary antagonism, although only able to bloom due to present day’s prolific climate, has grown from a shoot which popped up in the indenture period and matured during its aftermath. This shoot owes its successful rooting to a growth enhancing mixture of mass importation, “residential separation”, white manipulation and lack of economic diversification (Rodney 1981:189). Additionally, a “mutual unintelligibility of some aspects of nonmaterial culture” is said to have hampered merging (Rodney 1981:189).

Indian heritage, although challenged and moulded, never ceased to be a major reservoir of distinction. Yet, despite this, both profane and religious expressions of oriental culture were rather diffuse during the early years of indentureship. At the time, largely thanks to the estate regimes and population makeup, displayed Indianness was nothing more than an eclectic collection of uncoordinated and fragmented rites and practices.

⁷⁰ In 1834, there were 84,915 slaves living on Guyana’s estates. In 1891 the number of Africans (the ex-slaves) had dropped to 32,665. At that time, 51,354 ‘Asian immigrants’ occupied the barracks. In 1911, the Indian population comprised 60,707 souls, while there were only 10,215 ‘others’ (Mandle 1973:21).

2.2.4 Religion

On the plantations, religious life was confined to one's domicile, and festivals and congregations rarely took place. Linguistic and convictional diversity among the migrants showed major obstacles for rapid re-establishment of religious systems. Only as a common creolised Indian tongue (based on Bhojpuri and Avadhi, and blended with other (non-Indian) languages) took form, the contours of more organised and streamlined traditional religions gradually appeared (Vertovec 1996:115). This development was further facilitated by plantation managements who – determined to tackle Indian's urges to return home – allowed, controlled and even initiated religious activities and association. Festival days were recognised as holidays, shrines, masjids and mandirs⁷¹ were built on estate grounds and 'celebrants' were welcomed with free quarters and stipends (Jayawardena 1963:22).

In the meantime, in any case as far as Hinduism is concerned, a West Indian mode of belief was negotiated. Deviant activities were forced into the periphery (fire-walking, *firepass*, and animal sacrifice) or banned (the hook-swinging festival, *Charak-Puja*⁷²), and more durable and shared forms of worship were unveiled (Vertovec 1996:116-118). Believers in diverse and rivalling truths fused under the flag of a juvenile and standardised Hinduism.

This emerging uniformity – at least in the case of formal religious expressions – became evident in practice and level of organisation. For instance, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana* further developed into the writings of guidance for the pious mass and came to form the basis of knowledge and discussion, and to function as a reference in the process of (re)definition of cultural ideals (Mangru 2000:34).

Also, temples were erected as certified places of communal worship. Whereas in 1870 there were only two Hindu temples (and no mosques) in British Guiana, by 1891 their number had increased to thirty-three (accompanied by twenty-nine mosques).

Furthermore, slowly but surely a West Indian edition of the religious calendar was filled out. Festivals like *Durgba Puja*, *Holi* and *Mohurram* or *Tadjah*⁷³ were resurrected to colour the greyness of estate life. Other fêtes, some very popular in the motherland, were hardly celebrated. At least down to about 1917, "*Chauti*, which commemorated the birthday of Ganesha, was not publicly observed neither was *Rama Naumi* which commemorated the wedding anniversary of Rama, nor *Krishna Astami*, which marked the birthday of Krishna"

⁷¹ Or hut-temples – known as *shivalas*, and *kitis* (or *kutiya*s) – which resembled the accommodation of the divine found in the villages of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (Vertovec 1996:117).

⁷² A Bengali penitential rite directed to Lord Shiva, in South India known as *soodaloo* or *chedul*, a self-sacrificial rite to Mother Durga (Vertovec 1996:118). During the rite, devotees "were swung from poles 30 feet above the ground by means of hooks impaled in the fleshy portions of their backs" (Mangru 2000:35).

⁷³ *Durgba Puja*, the greatest festival of Bengal, commemorating Durgba's triumph over the unbeatable demon buffalo *Mahisasura* was celebrated in British Guiana already in 1866. *Tadjah*, or *Hossay*, the Shiite festival marking the "culmination of ten days' lamentation for Hassan and Hossein, grandsons of the prophet Muhammad, who were killed in the seventh century struggle over succession to the Islamic Caliphate", also gained broad (*interethnic*) popularity at an early stage (Bisnauth 2000:129-131). And *Holi*, or *Phagnab*, New Year's day for many Hindus and the demonstration of the victory of good over evil, was witnessed soon after the arrival of Indians as well.

(Bisnauth 2000:128). In some cases, such lost traditions were found in later days. As the frameworks of orchestrated religion were recomposed certain dormant celebrations revived. Divali (*Dipavali*) for instance, the Hindu festival of lights only became very popular after the advent of the Rama and Krishna cults in the post-indenture era.

Celebrations were both a demonstration of difference, icons of Indianness, and binding agents. Yet, even then, they were West Indian mutations rather than carbon copies of the Indian happenings. *Phagwah*, for instance, once denoting the return of spring, was ideologically disconnected from the seasonal cycle as well as bereft of certain 'authentic' practices. It turned into a religious celebration lacking its traditional framing of dance – involving an equal number of men and women – and 'mock martial affairs'. Novel circumstances terminated certain ritualistic features. Women shortage had sabotaged the performance of Phagwah dance. And sham fights, play tussles with *lathis* (sticks) and other weaponry, might have been no longer fought due to their link with Indian hierarchical arrangements. The wielding of sticks was stratum restricted, a higher caste activity considered to be out of place in a society where caste structures had tumbled down (Bisnauth 2000:129).

2.2.5 Caste

As will be further examined in chapter four, this so called attenuation of caste is the most obvious among the cultural transformations in the 'nigger yard'. Like in many other Indian tinted indentured societies, the system lost much of its significance soon after the Indians set foot on Guianese ground (e.g. Hoeft 1998; Hollup 1994; Schwartz 1967). Estate conditions made caste structures difficult to maintain. "Not only were [the inherent] ritual purity and occupational specialisation dealt mortal blows by the circumstances of immigration and early settlement, but [...also did the immigrants come] from many different localities of India and were thus unable to reform the small-scale organisation on which caste-group and subcaste-group behaviour had been based" (Mayer 1967:3).

Destruction of caste structure's demographic base and the drastically altered array of expectations, rights and duties in the New World initiated a rapid decline of the system. Restrictions on commensality, intercaste partnership and professional aspirations were lifted. The plantation allowed (or forced) the labourer to abandon the cocoon of caste, discard at least many of its practical constraints. Only certain traces have persisted in the Indians' thought and practice (Lowenthal 1972:149). While *jati*, caste group, as a corporate identity with strong proscriptive and prescriptive powers, virtually ceased to exist, some general principles remained and were adapted to life in alien surroundings. Concepts of purity survived in a standardised and more flexible form. And also specific notions of hierarchy lingered on in some way or another (Singer 1967:104). Caste categories came to correspond with class. And caste-based classifications with reference to colour (and subsequently purity) dyed interethnic dealings. As such, the system endured as "an aspect of prejudice, a matter of style, [and] an ingredient of personality" (Singer 1967:150).

Caste became a relatively pliable and free-floating organising principle, a vague reminiscence of a once ubiquitous system predominantly apparent in idiom (Smith and Jayawardena 1967:88) and the oblivious. The notion itself no longer kept Indian social life in custody. It, if anything, was granted only the supporting role in the definition of status and the orchestration of marriage, ritual and occupation. Only in the case of priesthood a functional form of caste maintained its relevance.

Brahmins remained the Hindus' religious experts and – as will be discussed in 'Religious Transformations' – eventually even managed to gain exclusive dominance over ritual activity by means of a process known as *brahmanisation*.⁷⁴ Inspired by the fragmented makeup of the indentured population and jeopardy posed by missionary efforts, they thus initiated the trend towards religious homogenisation and helped design today's characteristic standardised local Hinduism. Already in the 'nigger yard', dynamic new shapes were crystallising. Feasts, doctrine and caste, religion and social structure, East Indianness was there and on the move ever since the dawn of indentureship.⁷⁵

2.3 Beyond bondage: postindenture East Indianness before independence

On the estates, in the barracks and on the fields, East Indianness first materialised. Recollections and remnants of a past, obstacles and limited possibilities that characterised the harsh indenture reality, and the exposure to European and African ways and institutions, all contributed to the formation of a cultural corpus that was distinctively Indo-Guyanese. What came into being was a localised Indianness, an interesting blend of old Subcontinental ethnic and religious culture and innovations inspired by encounters with the colonial others.

Beyond bondage, after the Indians completed their years of indentureship, the construction of East Indianness continued. Off-estate, in the coastal areas where virtually all of them settled, their collective self matured. Enhanced autonomy, the extended liberty to be and to believe, and to enact their difference allowed the Indians a far greater (re)creative freedom than they had ever enjoyed on the plantations, and facilitated the further development of communities, institutions and collective understandings. It was their route beyond bondage that brought the East Indians in places, positions, and economic niches isolated from their African counterparts. The road they took after they left the estates led to the countryside, the realms of agriculture, and domains of re-established oriental religions, further away from interethnic unity.

⁷⁴ Also known as *sanskritisation* (Van der Burg and Van der Veer 1986:517). See also 4.1.3.

⁷⁵ Besides the religious manifestations of an Indian legacy, also the non-religious expressions of oriental culture showed both perseverance and an innate flexibility. The indentured migrants imported a wide array of Subcontinental savours that flavoured the lives of Indians and others from the early days on. With the Indians did South Asian cuisine, forms of entertainment, modes of dress and beautification, and other senses of style enter the western hemisphere.

2.3.1 Village People

'Time-expired' Indians formed the bulky residue of the indenture system. They were people who endured their tour of duty and were now freed from contractual bondages that had confined them for such a long time. By thousands a year, the workers were spit out in a still colonial world where the needy were numerous and the chances were few.

In fact, the society they entered could hardly be called 'world' at all. Beyond the estate gates lied the proof of the colonial endeavour's poorness, the underdeveloped leftover lands of a society of extraction where local development and diversification were bound to be crushed by the heavy pressure of weighty "metropolitan interests" (Mandle 1973:13).⁷⁶ British Guiana was a "saccharine society", a place which contemporary image was determined by its devotion to faraway demands (Glasgow 1970). Virtually all existence and enterprise were in one way or another interwoven with the imperial ambition to keep its sweet machinery



East Indian tailor in Affiance

running. For the time-expired who fancied a career change, there was initially little more to be but peasant or petty trader. Only as rural communities developed and the number of free Indians grew, some sort of diversification of Indian economic activity became apparent. Slowly but surely, the number of Indian off-the-land professionals increased. By the 1890s, ex-indentured had entered the transport business, sold booze and *ganja* (marihuana), lend money, and resuscitated old-time 'all-Indian' occupations like gold- and

⁷⁶ The archaic structure of the contemporary Guyanese economy – the focus on the export of mostly unprocessed natural resources and unprofitable crops, as well as the lack of diversification (further described in the following chapter) – can be seen as part of the colonial economic legacy. The resulting economic fragility and insecurities severely influence Guyana's social reality.

silversmith, potter, tailor, barber and carpenter. Every niche in the (rural) non-agricultural sphere was explored and, if possible, taken by Indian opportunists.

Yet, subsistence continued to be a challenge and socio-economic mobility problematic. Not only did the barren economic environs depress Indians' aspirations, also their own personal shortcomings obstructed achievement. Indians long remained the least educated of British Guiana's peoples. Few nineteenth and early twentieth century East Indian children ever attended school. Unconstructive attitudes of both policymakers and parents made that the path of enhancement through formal learning was off beaten track.⁷⁷ To many, the Indians were merely passers-by, people whose stay in the West Indies was temporary and whose schooling would be an ill-investment. Besides, educating Indian offspring allegedly "did not fit into the realities of life in a colony where their principle function was to develop into agricultural labourers" (Laurence 1994:270). The children's destiny was manual labour. Their earnings were very much needed to supplement the meagre family income. To gain exploitable erudition was long term speculation with an uncertain reward.

Some parents also feared the consequences of education in alien surroundings. English instruction out of Christian or even African mouths was, besides deemed irrelevant, also considered to be a jeopardy to the Indian cultural and religious idiosyncrasy. Education was thought to be a potentially destructive instrument that could and would eradicate Indianness and promote adaptation to other man's ways and convictions. Consequently, as late as 1923 about seventy percent of all the Indian children did not attend school (as opposed to twenty percent of the Africans or 'Coloureds'). Only the progeny of the urban prosperous enjoyed the fruits of extended tuition. The colossal rest was destined to "grow up in ignorance" into a non or poorly educated (predominantly rural) mass (Mangru 2000:53). Their contribution would not be to the white-collar world, but to the diverse image of a budding grassroots society for which they co-designed the character of local craft, business, and wage labour, and almost single-handedly sculpted the appearance of British Guiana's agriculture.

Rice farming became the chief refuge of the redundant. Fertile lands, abundant rainfall and an ever growing collection of rice aficionados made cultivation of the grass into a promising undertaking for the ex-indentured. This attraction grew even stronger when – in the 1880s and 1890s – fierce competition from the emerging European (predominantly German) beet sugar industry caused a cane crisis (Beachey 1957:142). As estates were abandoned, wages dropped and immigration continued, the rice industry flourished. The grain became an alternative destination for the fallow lands and its workers on the move.

⁷⁷ The Swettenham Circular, issued in 1902, was an example of the colonial attitude towards the education of the Indians. It instructed that during the first decade after arrival, Indian parents would not be punished for ignoring the education act. After that period they were still allowed to disobey the law whenever they objected to an English education on religious grounds. Moreover, parents who refused to send their daughters to school could be exempt from reprimands (Mangru 2000:53).

The influx of Indians in the agricultural sector was not only encouraged by the contemporary economic climate and lack of alternatives, it was also facilitated by the colonial willingness to share out some territory. This peculiar zeal stemmed from the authority's unwillingness to fulfil their obligation of providing the numerous ex-indentured (who had completed their ten years of industrial residence) with a free return passage to India.⁷⁸ Instead of costly repatriation, Indians were offered property through land settlement schemes and by easing the terms of purchase of government-owned lands, the so-called Crown Lands.⁷⁹

Reductions in price and size of the lots and homesteads induced many to swap their transitory state for one of permanence (Mandle 1973:36). Rural communities were established and increasingly did tokens of the orient titivate British Guiana's vacant countryside. The time-expired took possession of the bucolic sphere. By 1881, an estimated 24,923 (31.2%) of the migrants already dwelled in the villages, settlements, and farms dotted along the entire coastal strip. Most of them settled along the public roads in the vicinity of estates. There, in the presence of (wage) labour and land, small collections of "crude houses with walls of wattle and mud and roofs of troolie leaves" developed into the Indian villages in which the bulk of East Indians reside until this very day (Adamson 1972:94).

By 1910, the rays of Hindustan illuminated a multitude of places from Coriverton in the east to Charity in the west. Indians had become a genuine village people⁸⁰, country dwellers in charge of agriculture whose rural base grew to be the enduring strongholds of East Indianness.⁸¹ Their coastal hamlets were the plants where East Indianness was further assembled, shaped and reshaped out of realities and recollections into something that had never been before.

2.3.2 Further reconstruction

Guyana's postindenture social makeup continued to foster the processes of Indian homogenisation to which indentureship had given birth. Internal fragmentation and external (interethnic) competition then had initiated the formation of a pan-Indian kind. Far more than the old-time estate barracks, the rural surroundings provided the Indians with space to let their uniqueness mature. No longer was its development subject to the

⁷⁸ By 1880, an estimated 60,000 immigrants were eligible for gratis repatriation (Moore 1987:177). The costs of them actually exercising this contractual right would be just too high. Besides, a sizeable number of potential wage labourers was needed to let the offer exceed demand and so preserve the downward pressure on wage rates.

⁷⁹ Between 1871 and 1902, the government bought six plantations (Nooten Zuil, Huist 't Dieren, Helena, Whim, Bush Lot and Maria's Pleasure) to transform them into such schemes. None of them ever really became successful. Poor drainage, inadequate land and the small size of the grants made the output too meagre to attract and maintain substantial numbers of migrants.

⁸⁰ In 1911, no less than ninety-four percent of the East Indians lived in rural areas outside Georgetown and New Amsterdam (Roberts 1948:186).

⁸¹ In 1931, more than seventy percent of the nearly 65,000 people employed in agriculture – by far the country's largest employer – were of Indian descent.

command of the Anglo-centric plantocracy. East Indianness was released, although it was the freedom in a land where the non-Indian elite maintained ultimate authority.

Matters of national consideration remained beyond the villager's reach. The educational system, marriage laws, citizenship and other legislative or constitutional output were still designed by, and for the sake of, others. Undoubtedly, this affected Indian practice and the development of Indian distinctiveness. Illiteracy and limited career opportunities, unmarried co-residence, and even the enforced (temporary) replacement of Hindu cremation by burial⁸² were all palpable by-products of an alien administration that, albeit in a diluted fashion, continued to steer Indian movement way beyond bondages.

It is nevertheless clear that the Indians' constructive powers in the extra-political realms had increased drastically. Not only were the Indians the prime architects of the important rural economy, also the country's social ambience was increasingly set by South Asian influences. Extended sovereignty had fuelled processes of cultural (re)production: meanings, practices and forms were constructed and reconstructed, deformed and disposed, espoused, or embedded in the contemporary society.

In this accelerated process of (re)construction, Indianness was inevitably pollinated with alien 'dust'. Western and Creole elements entered modes of dress, speech, entertainment, celebration and congregation, completed the menu, and altered senses of the supernatural.⁸³ The outer thus infiltrated East Indian forms and manners. Multifaceted British Guiana became an intrinsic and vital part of the conceptualisation and externalisation of the 'East Indian'.

Additionally, the development of East Indianness was subject to intra-ethnic forces. Hindu religious reformation, for instance, was facilitated by developments within the Indian realm itself. The organisation of a unitary and standardised Hinduism, directed by local Brahmins, was encouraged by the importation of the reformist *Arya Samaj* movement from India (Smith and Jayawardena 1959:331).

Indian missionary propagators of this monotheistic and caste-less faith variety forced people to re-evaluate their beliefs and practices (Van der Veer and Vertovec 1991:159).⁸⁴ Their plea for doctrinal rectification and social reform enclosed a menace for conventional Brahmin supremacy and, consequently, resulted in the mobilisation of 'conservationists' to fight the reformist threat. In fact, it was the Arya crusade for purification which eventually inspired the formation of a board of doctrinal and ritual experts, the (British Guiana) Pundits' Council (1927), and the establishment of the leading representative body of British Guiana's Hindus, the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha (1934).

⁸² It was only in 1956 that permission was granted to cremate Indians by the pyre system (Mangru 2000:68).

⁸³ E.g. congregational worship was introduced, Creole dishes like 'conkee' and 'cook-up' were cooked in Indian homes, Obeah people were consulted.

⁸⁴ In 1910, the first Arya Samaj missionary came from India Caribbean to British Guiana (Vertovec 1996:121).

Together these internationally linked⁸⁵ and strongly centralised associations upgraded movement toward a standardised and routinised corpus of belief and practice. Furthermore, it were such bodies who starred in the victorious attempt to ensure coronation of ‘Sanatan style’ as Guyana’s Hindu sovereign. Their efforts in the fields of schooling, congregation, publication and celebration facilitated the establishment of the eternal order as the country’s best selling set of oriental canons.

Beyond bondage, Brahmanic Hinduism truly became the official religious system of the East Indian masses. In the villages, mainstream Brahmanic practices and recalcitrant Arya reformism controlled the front stage of collective devotional life. Backstage, more variegated beliefs and practices were displayed. As will be shown in chapter eight, localities and domestic settings were both the main laboratories of multi-religious blending and the chief sanctuaries of once imported curiosities. Especially those forms that were “directed toward therapeutic or protective ends” came to be performed in more private surroundings⁸⁶ (Vertovec 1996:127). But also alternative official movements, like the *Kali Mai*, (and later) *Satya Sai Baba*, and the *ISKCO* operated outside Sanatanist auspices.⁸⁷ All were part of the extensive palette of spiritual tints in which the East Indian religious world was portrayed.

Islamic hues occupied, of course, a very distinct corner on that palette. They represented a faith that did not seem to crave for doctrinal homogenisation. Rather, the Muslims had always possessed a quite clear-cut and standardised set of religious principles. Their uniformity was ancient and reckoned essentially global, something firmly buttressed up *shabada*, the five pillars of Islam. Whereas the very definition of a monolithic Hinduism was in certain ways the product of later foreign intrusion (e.g. Thapar 1989; Vertovec 2000:7-13), Islam – notwithstanding its internal variation – had always been relatively well defined. Yet, this apparent lucid stringency did not put a stop to the absorbent abilities of the doctrine’s materialisations.

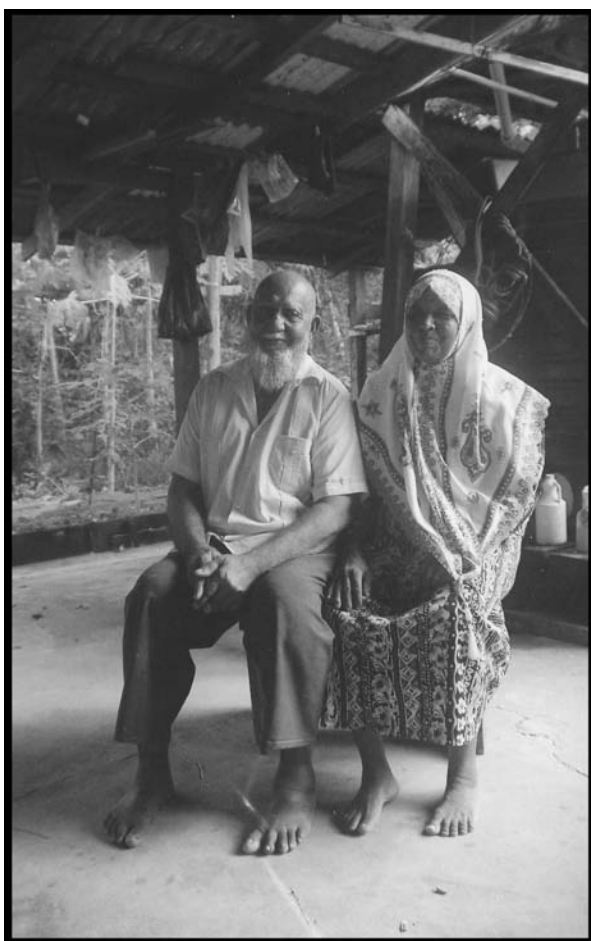
The north Indian Islam that came to British Guiana differed in many ways from the Arab mother faith from which it had sprouted. It already was a localised version of the originally Middle Eastern system. East Indian Muslims practiced a religion that had incorporated a number of concepts and practices from the non-Muslim world. Additionally, Islam was not practiced by any of the other ethnic groups in the New World. Traces of British Guiana’s pre-Indian Islamism, brought to the Caribbean by the Mandingo

⁸⁵ “Most of these Caribbean Hindu organisations forged links with kindred associations in India, thereby declaring further justification for the ‘official’ forms of Hinduism which they propagated” (Vertovec 1996: 122).

⁸⁶ The often mentioned system of magic called *ojha/obeah* (e.g. Bisnauth 1989) was and still is an example of such an unendorsed yet widely practiced mutant form. Other examples are “beliefs and precautions regarding the evil eye (*najar* or *malja*), *jharay* and *phukay* (the use of mantras and motions to cure various afflictions), *tabij* (talismans) and *totka* (specific acts to undo the work of malevolent forces or omens), [...] exorcism of ill-meaning spirits, and offerings to minor deities” (Vertovec 1996:127).

⁸⁷ The ISKCON is the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, the *Hare Krishnas*. Other non-Sanatanists include the Arya Samajis, *Kabir Panthis* and *Siennarimis* (Swaminarayanis).

and Fulani Muslims⁸⁸ from Western Africa, were long gone, carefully wiped out by the cleansing powers of slavery. Consequently, Islam in those days was as much an aspect of Indian distinction to Muslims as its native Indian counterpart was to Hindus. Like Hinduness, Muslimness was produced and existed in concordance with East Indianness. As labels and sources of difference, they all evolved in an ethnic environment that was increasingly homogeneous yet was always characterised by the presence of outside formative forces.



Muslim couple in Middlesex

explores how interethnic rivalry became institutionalised: the elites' strategy of choice as the crimson tide coloured politics in a society on its way to independence. As such, the following is an attempt to outline the background of the ethnicised power struggles that – as will be shown in chapter three – characterise proceedings in virtually all of contemporary Guyana's realms of control.

2.4 Cooperativism and conflict: East Indianness in postcolonial Guyana

The days beyond bondage, prior to independence, comprise the more or less adolescent phase in the life history of East Indianness. It was the time in which a certain amount of autonomy and productive freedom was gained and the contours of contemporary East Indian religious and ethnic culture slowly materialised. Religious structures were erected, Indian communities formed, ties with the Subcontinent were established, and ethnic others further developed into both sources of culture creative inspiration as well as hereditary opponents in the competition over preferential access to limited goods.

The final section of this chapter on the historical context of Indianness deals with the most recent stages in the development of distinctiveness. It

⁸⁸ Still, Muslims in Guyana, Africans and Indians alike, are referred to as *Fula*.

2.4.1 The rise of institutionalised rivalry

Although relations between Africans and Indians in Guyana have never been overly amicable, and there has been mistrust, segregation, and antipathies ever since the arrival of the first indentured labourers, it is only since the era of decolonisation that actual ignitability characterises interaction between Guyana's major ethnic camps. Resentment boosted as the silhouette of self-determination appeared on the colony's horizon. Nationalist politics, advocated by representatives of the opposing factions, are a major catalysts of domestic strife. Some even stress 'modern' party politics alone is the true motor of the enmity that has stained social and political interaction throughout the country's last five decades (Premdas 1996:40-1). In any case, such exploitation of ethnic differences "for communalistic and personal political ends" would not have been feasible in less fertile environments.

As will be further stressed in the following chapter, only because of its emergence in a setting with a certain demographic structure that, additionally, is marked with a past and present of economic dearth, residential ethnic separation, and cultural divergence, could these differences be exploited. In other words, just because of Guyana's wonderful 'acoustics' did (and still does) the ethnic appeal reach its audience. Hence, it is only by focussing on the interplay of the stimulus and its surroundings that the country's tempestuous conception, birth and post-independence development can be fully perceived.

One of the first moves on the path toward channelled animosity seems to have been the rise of ethnic voluntary associations in the first half of the twentieth century. In particular, it was the formation of trade unions that delineates the embryonic stage of organised interethnic competition. The establishment of those economic bodies was prompted by the industrial unrest in a period of economic strains. More specifically, the founding of British Guiana's first union (the BGLU) by an Afro-Guyanese waterfront worker on 11 January 1919 was the upshot of a phase of unguided collective protest that had started with a violent rebellion of workers in 1905 (St. Pierre 1999:46-47). In the following decade, decreasing wages, escalating unemployment, and skyrocketing prices due to World War I had aggravated subsistence, triggered disarray, and finally legitimised the regulation of disgruntlement by means of labour organisations. Large numbers of dissatisfied workers from all quarters of the professional world joined the union.

However, it was only as depression hit the world in the 1930s that Guyanese trade unionism really grew to be a significant force. The global crisis caused a further corroding of the local workers' economic state, and made a next crop of unionising efforts sprout. Many labourers from all over the professional ambit joined the banners of their respective branch. Dockworkers, postmasters, seamen, teachers, civil servants and pan boilers on sugar estates all came to enjoy the fruits of union membership. By 1959, no less than thirty eight registered labour organisations served a working population of the colony. Each

significant segment of the colony's economy accommodated at least one union voicing the specific needs and wishes of its population or sub-population.

In practice, these specific desires were often verbalised with an ethnic accent. East Indians and Africans had their own organisations safeguarding the good of the ethno-professional ingroup. This ethnic exclusivity was originally largely organic. It was the consequence of “the differential involvement of Africans and East Indians in the urban and rural sectors of the economy” (Despres 1967:152) – a near unavoidable happening that, unfortunately, reinforced ‘racial’ purism and aggravated interethnic rift and fears (Premdas 1996:44). It allowed membership and leadership of the civic-unions to evolve into a fundamentally African affair, aided East Indian control over the agricultural organisations, and provided a solid foundation for ‘organised inter-communal competition’.

Eventually, the impact of these ethnically homogeneous bodies surpassed the confines of the pure economic domain. Egged on by leaders with political aspirations, most trade unions “extended their activities to include the collective interests of those sections of the population from which [...] their membership [was drawn]” (Despres 1967:152). Unions developed into the mouthpieces of entire communities, platforms on which the discord and antipathy of ethnic collectives were expressed and propagated. Hence, they became vehicles of rivalry, early exponents of organised ethnic competition and, later, the associates of fierce dualistic nationalist movements which surfaced in the late 1950s.⁸⁹

Another cluster of voluntary associations that displayed an early animosity regulating potential was formed by the cultural organisations. These were groups which sprung up during the first few decades of the twentieth century to cater to the ethno-specific needs of their supposed ill-positioned backing. Together with religious organisations like the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, the Hindu society, the Islamic organisation and Sad'r Anjuman-E-Islam, they strove to further the broad range of interests of some particular cultural section in the highly competitive Guyanese environs. The League of Coloured People (LCP) and the British Guiana East Indian Association (BGEIA) were the most influential among these groups. Both operated as some sort of quasi-political collective which served to defend the cause of respectively the African and East Indian part of the populace prior to the naissance of modern political parties.

The BGEIA was the oldest of the two. It was formed in 1916 by Joseph Ruhoman, an East Indian journalist who accused his people of intellectual backwardness, denounced their lack of representation in government, and incited them to join forces in the battle for social, economic, political and educational upliftment (Mangru 2000:64). The yoke of marginality needed to be thrown off. Indians had to get acquainted with choice, prospects

⁸⁹ Non-agricultural unions, such as the British Guiana Mine Workers Union, the Teachers' Association, the Government Employees' Union and the Printers' Industrial Union, were all completely dominated and controlled by African leaders affiliated with the *de facto* African mass party. The agricultural unions, like the British Guiana Headmen's Union and the influential Man Power Citizens' Association and Guiana Industrial Workers' Union, consisted almost exclusively of East Indian members and leaders. Cheddi Jagan, Guyana's later president, was treasurer and leader of (respectively) the MPCA and the GIWU (Despres 1967:154-157).

and prosperity. Their mission was the pursuit of collective growth by transforming their selves and their habitat. By means of BGEIA strategies, the people of the orient had to become an educated, united and well-represented people, a group firmly rooted in land that was to be tilled just for them. The Association even mused on the future foundation of a fantastic “New India”, a promised land build on the pending vestiges of what was still the colony.

The shores between the Orinoco and Corentyne basin were no longer regarded alien property. Instead, the land was often promulgated as rightfully theirs. Guyana was claimed for Indian progress. African interests did not seem to be a matter of contemplation. In fact, BGEIA’s whole enterprise of Indian enhancement “had proceeded as though the Afro-Guianese were expected to disappear from the landscape (Despres 1967:168). This overt strategy of omission was bound to incite counter initiatives among the ethnic others. In other words, the hostile organisation of Indians asked for the African voices to be raised unequivocally in order to provide an answer to the threatening calls of the ethnically other. Hence, an originally ‘multiracial’ group, the League of Coloured People, was reorganised during the 1930s to conduct the opposing chorus. The LPC’s aim was to promote the wide array of concerns of the country’s African masses. Jointly with the powerful ‘black’ trade unions, it defended the African colours on the early interethnic battlegrounds, and helped further establish a reality in which ‘race’ became a means of mobilisation.

Both the unions and cultural organisations, African as well as Indian, thus succeeded in lightning the flame of ethnic nationalism. The preliminary phase of the association of ethnicities was completed and had paved the way for party politics.

2.4.2 The (first) PPP age

While signs of political awakening already appeared after the First World War, it was not until after the second that the initial attempts to establish some kind of pure political organisation were undertaken. Only in November 1946 did acute dissatisfaction with the colony’s post-war condition and guidance, and the undeniable approach of increased autonomy encourage the American trained East Indian (and Marxist) dentist Cheddi Jagan, and some collaborators, to enter the immaculate political stage with a faction called the Political Affairs Committee (PAC).

This committee, the product of urban discussion groups, was meant to be the forerunner of a political party. It aimed at educating and mobilising the masses “in a progressive direction” (St. Pierre 1999:75). According to the PAC, the populace had to be marshalled on the road towards independence. They had to be pushed into the movement that would lead to the establishment of “a strong disciplined and enlightened Party equipped with the theory of Scientific Socialism” (St. Pierre 1999:75.). Ethnic slivers needed to be glued, pasted to each other to form the cooperative body of commoners. “The struggle for independence was to be conducted on class lines” (Despres 1967:183).

Instead of ethnic blocs, the working classes were assembled to counter the planters and their “sugar coated” government.

It appeared to work. As the years went by, the PAC transformed into a collective with a nationwide appeal. Meetings, bulletins, and the visitation of so called ecological concentrations (markets, estates etc.) enabled the committee to grow from an elitist think tank into the beacon of aspiration for many. Especially after the movement strategically absorbed the highly influential and gifted African barrister Forbes Burnham in 1950, did the age of interethnic harmony seem forthcoming. Headed by both an African and an Indian face, the group developed into a bipolar magnetising body. The Political Affairs Committee had (temporarily) indeed become the ambassador of all the working people.

Renamed People’s Progressive Party (PPP), and restructured to meet the requirements of the emerging political arena⁹⁰, the Jagan/Burnham alliance achieved a sweeping victory in the 1953 elections. The gospel of Marx, Engels, and Ulyanov, prophesising the empowerment of a suppressed mass, proved an apposite text to address the non-ruling of a colony in the era of decolonisation. Constituents had collectively moved to the left and granted the PPP eighteen out of the twenty-four seats in the unicameral Legislature. Jagan, Burnham and their comrades could ascend the podium of power. And so they did. As ministers of a one-party government they assumed office. Very noticeable. Very short. For just 133 days.

On the morning of 8 October 1953 a battalion of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers landed in British Guiana. The colonial authorities had decided to pull the plug on the reigning reds. A fear of anti-capitalist tendencies, supposedly unfavourable economic developments, and the increasing threat of Soviet expansionism in the Americas, ‘forced’ the British to opt for drastic measures.⁹¹ The governor dismissed the PPP ministers and suspended the Constitution under the pretext of preventing a totalitarian regime. “Communist subversion of the Government and a dangerous crisis both on public order and economic affairs” had been enough to justify the elimination of the administration and the subsequent execution of interim rule. Until after the 1957 elections, executive power was back in the hands of Her Majesty’s Government.

This rapid and brutal eviction from the nucleus of clout triggered (or accelerated) a colossal crisis within the PPP. Factionalism surfaced and in February 1955, eventually, the coalition collapsed. The conflicting visions and ambitions of Jagan and Burnham could no longer be captured in the structure of a single movement. Instead, the leaders each claimed their own stance and following. While Jagan patented his familiar ardent socialism, Burnham shifted to a more moderate shade of red.

Initially, both parties looked for a national appeal. Either one of the new PPP’s hoped to end the upcoming run for parliamentary pluck with the massive fiat from a diverse multiethnic and bulky sample of the body of voters. It proved false hope.

⁹⁰ Universal adult suffrage was introduced, as well as a limited cabinet ministerial system.

⁹¹ The PPP’s 1953 campaign was allegedly financed by the Soviet Union.

Happenings during the 1957 elections indicated that both parties' true popularity was of a coloured sectional, rather than a neutral national kind (Despres 1967:211). Separatist proclivities at the grassroots, and 'racial' voting showed that ethnicity was the true determinant of political support. Instead of the professed separation into radicals and moderates, the PPP split had created an ebony and a caramel coloured faction. The appearance of the party's head, and not its tone of voice, had determined the tint of its backing.

Jagan won, the still immature, ill-structured and poorly organised Burnhamites lost. Yet, what both acquired was an awareness that for either one of them cultural sections represented the only bases of mass power accessible (Despres 1967:221). It was this awareness that would come to taint Guyanese politics – and thereby, the formation of East Indianness – from those days on.

Satisfaction of sectional interests now became a mainspring of those in power. A general sense of policy-based contentment among their chunk of the electorate would guarantee the ruling party people a certain share of ballots. For Jagan, as the new premier representing nearly half of the country's population, this sure support basically meant an assurance of consolidation. Reality had proven that ethnic voting was the key to an enduring Indian parliamentary majority. Hence, a trade agreement – votes for sectional maintenance – appeared strategically lucrative enough to enthuse the rulers to systemise favouritism.

It appears as if the East Indians thus became the focus of governmental action and attention. "Between 1957 and 1961 (when the next elections were held) a disproportionate amount of governmental attention [seems to have been] paid to the East Indian population" (St. Pierre 1999:140). Economic policies, organisational activities and legislative developments all showed signs of administrative partiality (Despres 1967:228-51). Especially the authority's disproportional investment in agriculture, or rather the Indian dominated rice industry, was a major tool to mobilise the support of the Indian masses (Despres 1967:245). According to Despres, such substantially escalated spending on specific items like drainage, irrigation and land development was part of a much broader attempt to favour the oriental constituent above its ethnic-other counterparts.

This wilfully implemented whole of targeted measures and more or lesser explicitly pronounced appeals came to be known as *apanjaht* politics. By voting *apanjaht*, 'your own kind', a definite care for Indian interests would remain secured. The term alone contained the promise of prosperity for all the Indian. It assured markets for Indian businessmen, jobs for Indian teachers, access to the civil service for the Indian educated, land for Indian peasants, and financial improvement for the Indian sugar workers (Despres 1967:250). *Apanjaht* would help the Indians to help the Indians. It became the unofficial credo and election cry of Jagan's People's Progressive Party.

As a persuasive policy and articulated (semi-)injunction the concept grew to be a vital factor during the 1961 elections. The party's multiple reference to race allowed the

PPP to win, and inspired Burnham's faction, meanwhile renamed the People's National Congress (PNC), to change course in (what eventually turned out as) a fertile direction.

With a new mandate, Jagan had to govern an increasingly unstable colony on the verge of independence. More and more did serious social and economic perils threaten to frustrate the People's Progress. Guyana's population had become divided in highly politicised and insecure fragments. All figured that the actuality of sectionalist politics in a near liberated land enclosed a prospect of future supremacy as well as the threat of imminent submissiveness. In other words, whoever could lead the colony to statehood would probably be able to redefine "the rules of the game" to remain in power – and thus curb the other – indefinitely (Premdas 1996:50). Neither the East Indians nor the Africans fancied the thought of a prolonged existence under 'alien' government. The fear of enduring compliance, intensified by the approaching British withdrawal, forced both contestants into frequent duel. Relations between the groups became stained with the experience of (even bloody) clashes.

From 1962 on, Guyana turned the scene of vehement anti-PPP demonstrations and strikes. Abhorred budget proposals – including tax increases⁹² – of an administration facing capital flight and mounting expenses, ignited a series of opposition stirred riots supposedly intended to delay independence and possibly topple the government (Glasgow 1970:120). Economic predicament in combination with the PPP's communist way of problem solving had provided the PNC with both an alibi to implement its strategy of reverse racialism and anticommunism and the necessary allies to turn this implementation into a success.

In a joint venture with the coloured middle class⁹³ and African-controlled unions, and backed by U.S. labour organisations (and intelligence?) (Choenni 1982:74), the Burnhamites had organised discontent to the point that protesters and authorities were on the brink of war. 'Labour conflicts' had detonated society. "Life on a daily basis was characterised by arson, bombings, and interracial violence" (St. Pierre 1999:184). People, East Indians, were beaten, raped and killed. Violence seemed omnipresent and the government unable to find a solution.

Additionally, Burnham manoeuvred himself into the position of "favourite son of the Anglo-American alliance seeking to bring Guyana into the fold of the free world" (Lewis 1971:270). Still fearing the possible spread of the scarlet virus in western hemisphere, Britain and the United States estimated PNC rule a safer option than a continuation of PPP's pro-Moscow policies. If feasible, they wanted Burnham to be elected

⁹² Rising consumer prices, and the captains of commerce and industry's apparent lack of confidence in PPP's socialist policies, had caused a flight of capital from the careworn nation-to-be. Faced with this shortage of monetary resources, and confronted by pressing financial obligations, the PPP decided to "ask the population to assume the burden of higher taxes" (St. Pierre 1999:146). These specific increases, proposed by the British economist Nicholas Kalder (also) in an effort to dismantle the colonially-bequeathed tax framework, were thought to affect African professionals (civil servants, teachers etc.) more than the predominantly East Indian independent entrepreneurs.

⁹³ The adherents of Peter D'Aguiar's anti-socialist party, United Force (UF).

as the first president of an independent Guyana. Consequently, he might have been facilitated to execute his plans for PPP elimination.

Burnham's request for a modification of the electoral system to Jagan's disadvantage, backed by British Guiana's major captain of industry (Bookers' Director, Anthony Tasker⁹⁴), was granted unconditionally by the Colonial Office. A new method of proportional representation replaced the old method of first-past-the-post.⁹⁵ From the next elections on, plain ethnic voting could therefore no longer provide the East Indians – who comprised less than half of the electorate – with an absolute majority. Coalition was required to form a government. A conspiracy of a united opposition would be, and eventually proved to be, sufficient to end PPP supremacy.

On 7 December 1964, day of the colony's last pre-independence elections, the People's Progressive Party lost the parliamentary upper hand. A broad alliance of foes had smothered the ambitions of the anti-capitalist politicians. Under a thin guise of constitutionalism had Indian rule been overthrown and was power transferred to a coalition of the People's National Congress and the coloured middle class United Force of Portuguese businessman and anti-communist Peter D'Aguiar. Forbes Burnham became British Guiana's new prime minister. His leadership and vision had to navigate the colony through the storms of repeated turmoil to the hopefully tranquil waters of self-determination.

2.4.3 The PNC era

With the PNC-UF combination acceded to power, another regime of sectional domination was born. Burnham's deeds, although initially relatively moderate and instigating a certain stabilisation of at least the colony's economy, attested latent extremist inclinations. Early efforts to restore domestic calmness already indicated the leader's determination to cling on to command. It seems as if, from the onset, PNC strove for consolidation of administration by fortifying its bastion and sabotaging oppositional practices. According to East Indian author Ralph Premdas (1996:54), PPP activists were seized and jailed, a

⁹⁴ The Booker Group was, by far, Guyana's most influential company. This (according to Jagan) symbol of British imperialism controlled 'sugar' and had interests in retail, transport, liquor, bauxite and ranching. In 1946, about one in ten of *all* people in Guyana were directly employed by Bookers. The company's impact on economic and social life in contemporary Guyana was so wide-ranging that the colony was "sometimes colloquially referred to as Bookers Guyana" (Hollett 1999:261).

⁹⁵ Unlike before, under this system the entire country is treated as one constituency, and each voter casts a single ballot for a party list. Every party is given a number of seats in proportion of the total number of voters it represents. Thus, in order for a political party form a government without a coalition, it must aggravate a vote in excess of fifty percent of the total votes cast. To compensate for the expected loss this new system would entail for the PPP, Jagan plead to lower the voting age from 21 to 18. As the East Indian population is relatively young, and thus contains proportionally fewer individuals of voting age, such lowering would be in the advantage of the PPP. However, the Colonial Office rejected Jagan's demands and decided in favour of the opposition. In effect, Jagan accused the opposition of having used revolutionary tactics and argued that he had no alternative but to adopt a similar strategy. Again, a wave of terror and racial violence – now primarily directed against the Africans – swept the country. More than 200 persons died. (Despres 1967:265-266).

predominantly African defence force (GDF) was formed to inflate the regime's coercive potential, and East Indians were appointed to bond with the country's main ethnic group and be linked to the crucial agricultural sector.

It appears as if everything possible was done to establish a firm base for a lengthy maintenance of an African controlled government. In the meantime, relationships with the outside world continued to be cultivated. Colonial authorities and other guardians of the 'free world' seemed confirmed in their support of the ruling bunch.⁹⁶ In this context, the process of disconnection proceeded, and "on 26 May 1966, the Duke of Kent, who had been sent by the Queen, handed over to Mr. Burnham in the House of Assembly the constitutional instruments which gave the people of Guyana their independence" (Daly 1974:194). The colony was no longer. British Guiana had become Guyana, an autonomous part of the monarchy under the supervision of barrister Burnham.

During the following two decades, the president and his cohort designed and executed an all-encompassing plan to establish a lasting African dynasty on South American shores. Parliamentary manipulation and modification of the electoral machinery ensured the maintenance of political power.⁹⁷ And the introduction of a Tanzania inspired ideology of teamwork, cooperativism, in combination with self-reliance, allowed the rulers to gain control of other realms as well.⁹⁸ Guyana declared itself a 'Cooperative Republic' and cut all ties with the British monarchy.⁹⁹ "From private enterprise, the economy was to be founded on cooperatives as the main instrument of production, distribution and consumption" (Premdas 1996:56). Under the pretext of 'achieving economic independence' drastic changes in the ownership structure of the economy took place (Baber and Jeffrey 1986:129). A pattern of nationalisation eventually brought over eighty percent of the economy under government control.

Burnham and the Burnhamites' power grew to be all-encompassing. The urban Afro-Guyanese leadership dictated business, dominated education, directed the judiciary, ran police, security and armed forces, and – after the dubious 1973 elections – had gained a two-third parliamentary majority with constitution alterative abilities. More and more did the country's rulers demonstrate their excessive authoritarian propensities.

Guyana became PNC playground. The country was controlled by a happy few who were selected because of proven party loyalty and phenotypic correctness. Indians and

⁹⁶ At the time, Britain and the United States poured millions of dollars in aid into the colony, allegedly for the purpose of "bolstering Burnham's government" (Premdas 1996:54).

⁹⁷ According to Premdas (1996:56) "the PNC induced a number of parliamentary defections from the PPP, gaining a majority in the National Assembly and sole control over the government." Additionally, he states that the one in power reconstituted the electoral commission with cronies and allegedly, "tampered with the electoral machinery" in order to warrant overall triumph and gain the (non-logical) absolute majority."

⁹⁸ According to Cross (1972:15), "the Co-operative Republic owes much in conception to [Tanzanian] President Nyerere's Ujamaa." He states that much of Burnham's "new politics" were borrowed from his example; "the co-operative is seen as being implicit to the social and economic organisation [...] in the early African villages just as the African form of socialism is seen as stemming from the traditional village community" (Cross 1972:15).

⁹⁹ See www.countryreports.org

others were often omitted, subject, or second-rate participants. Jagan and the PPP, although not silenced, were outmanoeuvred and compelled to adopt fruitless yet disruptive strategies of non-cooperation (embargo) and civil resistance (strikes). Indians were out. Rice growers lost their state subsidies, land was redistributed to African peasants, and public service was virtually purified from oriental contamination.

By the end of the 1970s, economic predicament due to surreal government policies, agricultural boycotts, and international isolation, had crippled the country and nurtured a broad interethnic opposition. The administration's rigid emphasis on self-reliance – loosely defined as Guyana's population feeding, clothing, and housing itself without outside help¹⁰⁰ – exhausted small men, drained buffers, and created oppressive shortages. Basic food, and even drinking water, became scarce. People had to stand in long lines for hours at the government-controlled food distribution centres in order to get their bit of dhal, rice!, sugar!, flour or cooking oil. Malnutrition and hunger entered daily life. Productivity went down, the infant mortality rate up. Minimum wages were too low to buy anything substantial in a world where “the cost of living skyrocketed and inflation was way out of control” (Mangru 2000:81).

Guyana and its people impoverished, executive eccentricity had turned the country into a land where the only thing abundant was paucity. As a result, opposition, still tolerated, grew. Especially a relatively new multiethnic combination of politicians and intellectuals called the Working People's Alliance (WPA), developed into a potential threat to the regime's hegemony. This party (est. 1979), advocating racial harmony, free elections and democratic socialism, seemed the only one able to “organise and mobilize the entire spectrum of opposition voices [...] and unleash a fierce assault on the government” (Premdas 1996:59). Burnham, however, stayed put. His muscular response to mounting resistance was adequate to continue the reign. A new constitution, the leader's installation as Guyana's first executive president, and the escalation of – PNC associated – intimidation and aggression allowed the powerful to preserve their status.¹⁰¹

People faced increasing lawlessness. “Rape, burglary and arbitrary arrest” allegedly grew to be part of the routine repertoire of security forces and suspected paramilitary action men (Premdas 1996:61). Cross-communal wrongdoings in urban areas and assumed brutal racism in the rural Indian areas made Guyana into what some, perhaps somewhat rhetorically, described as “a land of horrors”.¹⁰² The world's first Cooperative Republic had moved miles away from its teachings. Equality, progress and collaboration were replaced by

¹⁰⁰ Apparently many (Indian) rice farmers had to stop growing rice after arrangements for duty free concession and easy credit had been withdrawn. At the same time, rice was increasingly exported to obtain the indispensable foreign exchange. The result was a shortage of (adequate quality) rice in the local market (Mangru 2000:81).

¹⁰¹ At least two dissidents, among whom WPA head and historian Walter Rodney, died a violent and mysterious death.

¹⁰² Guyana: fraudulent revolution. London: Latin America Bureau.

inequity, decay and opposition. Hardship seemed perpetual, the epoch of autocracy everlasting. Until He, the strongman, passed away.

On August 6 1985, while in the care of Cuban doctors because of a throat ailment, Burnham died. Marginal matters killed the untouchable and abruptly ended an era. He was succeeded by Desmond Hoyte, PNC prominent and the former Vice President. For another seven years, and one extra term, Guyana would be under the reign of the house of Burnhamites. Yet, things changed. Hoyte initiated economic and governmental reforms that facilitated significant economic growth, improved the country's social situation, and eventually led to a change of power.

In 1992, after what appear to have been the first fair elections in the history of the republic, the PPP resumed power. Cheddi Jagan became president, and government an essentially East Indian affair. People had voted 'race' and the Africans had lost. Roles had swapped but resentment remained. As Kean Gibson – clearly voicing the Afro-Guyanese opinion – states: “Thus from the onset of their tenure in political office, the agenda of the PPP has been one of domination and destruction of African people” (Gibson 2003:39). Rightfully or not, the Africans came to feel suppressed. No gaps were bridged, never, not even up until this very day.

2.4.3 As it lingers on

Today, fourteen years, two elections, and four presidents after October 1992 mistrust and interethnic tension still prevail. Upon the foundations laid in the past, a solid structure of disunity has been erected that is visible in virtually all realms of society and is utilised in quests for hegemony and social definition.

The present is only a point on the trajectory of East Indianness in time. It is an important explanation and significant cause of the future, just as ‘The past’ helps to illuminate and helped to instigate East Indianness today. The previous four sections are meant as a contextualisation of the matters that will be discussed in the rest of this book. I have devoted a rather lengthy chapter to this because it has to be emphasised that the past is part and parcel of every aspect of the East Indian here and now. Only if we understand and recognise the importance of relations through time, and include them in the analysis of Indian distinctiveness, we can begin to grasp its fundamentals.

In accordance with scholars like Wolf, Schneider and Rapp, and later Kalb and Tak, I believe the doctrine of interconnectedness – to which I obviously adhere – involves temporal connections as much as it involves dynamic and dialectical “relations in space, relations of power and dependency, and the interstitial relations between nominally distinct domains such as economics, politics, law, the family, etc” (Kalb and Tak 2005:3-4). Current processes of cultural production, both in the realm of ethnicity and religion, are clearly historically entrenched. The heterogeneous character of the migrant population, North Indian modes of relating and believing, the plantation's context of control and competition, rural post-indenture existence, and the bumpy road towards and through independence are

all discernable in manifestations of difference today. Contemporary ethnic and gender relations, dealings with scarcity, and concepts of hierarchy and purity are prime examples.

The East Indianness I have witnessed, nevertheless, was an Indianness produced and reproduced at a highly interesting stage in time, one in which the appearance of its formative forces is greatly modified. Relations of power and connections in space, although always influential and of a transnational kind¹⁰³, have been severely reshaped in less than a few decades. Mass emigration, advanced information technology, and increased mobility have affected the pace of transformation and allowed highly intensified interconnectedness as well as a (subsequent) reorganisation of power structures. In the next chapter, Present-day Contexts, the outlines of the contemporary context that helps produce this stage will be analysed. Issues of control and transnational linkage – shaped by people with a history and shaped in a particular setting, but not fundamentally different from processes that take place elsewhere in this world – are discussed in order to further position East Indianness in a multidimensional way.

¹⁰³ It is obviously wrong to believe that globalisation (or, to an extent, even complexity) is a contemporary phenomenon. As shown earlier in this chapter, Indianness was always influenced by developments elsewhere. British imperialism and the industrial revolution affected the lives of my subjects ancestors, missionaries from the Indian subcontinent brought change to religious change to colonial Guyana, and the Cold War affected the independence process and subsequently interethnic relationships.

PRESENT-DAY CONTEXTS

East Indianness, Interethnic Struggle and Globalisation

They came aboard ships from the Indian subcontinent, and brought with them a vast corpus of religious and cultural baggage. Within new contexts and subjected to new rules and mechanisms, they used this baggage to design a distinctiveness that enabled them to coop with life in the New World in the most appropriate manners. Generations of Indo-Guyanese have already functioned as architects of Indianness. The previous chapter provided a brief historical overview of the ongoing construction process in which they have been engaged. It has illustrated how a localised East Indian religion and culture evolved, first in the ‘Nigger Yard’, and later in the coastal villages of colonial and postcolonial Guyana.

The transformation of caste is a good example. Principles and practices concerning caste – and accordingly hierarchy and purity – changed as traditional interpretations no longer suited the social, political, and economic reality the Indians were part of. The bulk of my informants, now, do not even know their own caste background. Yet, the label Brahmin persisted. In fact, the multireligious Guyanese context allowed the members of the priestly caste to direct the localisation of official Hinduism and monopolise Hindu ritual activity. More than others, they have shaped the Indo-Caribbean belief system.

Cultural transformation processes, like the localisation of Indian faith, continue today. Contemporary Indianness in Guyana is merely the temporary outcome of an ongoing process in which an indefinite number of intra-, inter- and extrapersonal forces form systems of dispositions which instigate ‘Indian’ thought and practice. To an extent, these systems producing Indianness are shared because they are fed by parallel encounters. In other words, living the life of an East Indian in Guyana causes Indians to undergo particular experiences that come with such an existence. As I have argued in chapter one, those experiences, because of their influence on people’s dispositions, are in turn connected to similarities in thoughts and actions. The causes of this correspondence in experiences are manifold. As described in chapter two, it might be the outcome of a shared

history. This chapter describes another major cause of experiential analogies: their social context.

Closely linked with the past, one's social environment hosts powers which have a great effect on the (re)creation of Indianness. In the following sections, these powers are discussed. By focussing on what I consider the two primary formative forces, an image is drawn of the context in which contemporary Indianness takes shape. These formative forces are (a) the all-encompassing interethnic political struggle in which East Indians and Africans in Guyana are entangled, and (b) the accelerated process of social transformation linked to globalisation and/or the rapidly increasing interconnection of the country and the Indians with the rest of the world.¹⁰⁴ I will argue that, in similar ways, these forces change the face of Indian, Muslim, and Hindu 'we-ness' and alter thought and action of a people in a specific but not atypical modern-day setting. Their mutual connection to widespread senses of crisis – to notions of insecurity concerning the satisfaction of personal needs and the survival of the collective – explains their grave influence and motivational force. Both pervasive competition and transformation thus colour contemporary East Indianness and affect the perceptions and behaviour described in part II of this book.

The first half of this chapter will be devoted to the analysis of the distribution and execution of power in the East Indian environs. I will subsequently discuss the ethnicised character of politics, the strategies of those in quest of might, the collaborative and intertwined nature of power pursuits, and the conditions that have facilitated the emergence of fierce and omnipresent interethnic competition. In the following section, the impact of latter-day transformation is described. I will briefly examine the influence of the substantial East Indian diaspora in North America, as well as the effect of the importation of goods and notions from regional and global secular and religious nuclei. At the end of this chapter, these external forces are linked with personal meaning and practice. Before we move on to chapter four, it is argued that the collective feelings of crisis – aroused by both power struggles and change – affect East Indian understandings of themselves as well as their position in the world, and motivate action or the choice of certain coping strategies.

First, the makeup of sway, the anatomy of control.

3.1 The anatomy of control

I have spent almost two years of my life in Guyana. Approximately twenty-three months I have resided among people in a society of which one out of every three individuals is of African descent. About 240,000 Africans live in a country which has virtually become my second home. Yet, in all those months, not one of them I have managed to befriend.

¹⁰⁴ Of course, it would be wrong to consider the less rigorously interconnected past 'local' to be the authentic and natural opposite of the present globalised local. (see also Gupta and Ferguson 1997:7)

Of course I have interacted with them, Africans and I occasionally shared our thoughts or even a drink or a supper. And certainly, there were some interviews with Afro-Guyanese to arrive at a multisided image of East Indian reality. Yet, despite those encounters and in the face of my personal interest in more than only one people and their story, actual connections with the African section of society were never established. Apparently, it was possible to be so absorbed in an all-Indian realm that ties with ethnically others did not spontaneously materialise. I had married (into) an East Indian family, lived in an essentially all-Indian village, and mingled with the adherents of Indian doctrines and professionals earning their bread and butter in Indian industries. For almost two years I had thus been part of an East Indian biotope (or ethnotope) separated from the African biotope by means of natural borders – comprehensive physical and social segregation – and a quite compelling border patrol. Not only were bonds with Afro-Guyanese not effortlessly established, I was habitually discouraged to enter African spheres by the Indians around me. “Dem blacks” are a crazy and aggressive bunch of people that can better be avoided. Hence, I was urged not to pass through the neighbouring African village of Queenstown after dark, to carry a cutlass to the ‘backdam’¹⁰⁵, and never to travel by minibus or take an Afro-Guyanese taxi driver in Georgetown. Don’t interact, don’t interfere, it is better that way, no one does.

Ethnic issues, labelled ‘race’-matters, are pervasive in Guyana. They are significant determinants of people’s thoughts and actions. As the above description of my residence in the East Indian domain shows, these issues even assure the formation and maintenance of an ethnic divide that can hardly be overcome. East Indians inhabit a part of the social sphere located almost opposite of the position of Africans. Contact is largely restricted to contexts of competition.

A shared belief in common origin and descent provides a highly important basis for community formation and identification in the former colony. Beliefs in shared backgrounds and, subsequently, shared features and ways affect these processes especially in realms where scarce power and resources are to be distributed. As Weber (1968:389) once stated, “ethnic membership [...] facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere. On the other hand it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organised, that inspires the belief in common ethnicity.” Hence, although these collective identities are contextually defined in local places in relation to past events and the broader social space (Verkuyten 2005), they are based upon ideas of difference that are gathered to be at least partially innate or racial (e.g. Govers & Vermeulen 1997; and Banton 1983, 1988, 1998).¹⁰⁶ These allegedly primordial and static, yet in fact dynamic and socially constructed, notions of belonging are inevitably connected to questions of

¹⁰⁵ The narrow cultivatable strip of land back of the seaside villages, between the ocean and the jungle.

¹⁰⁶ Indianness, as used in the context of this writing, is not to be regarded merely an ethnic identity. The more precise position of Indianness will be dealt with in chapter five when the concepts of identity, self and subjectivity will be briefly touched.

power.¹⁰⁷ They can be utilised and manipulated by the individual as well as those with or in quest of authority or control over resources.

This section deals with the exploitation of ethnicity by entities in search of power in Guyana. It entails a brief analysis of its mobilising capacity. This includes the potential of ethnicity as political resource in ways similar to those mentioned by scholars like Cohen (1969, 1974) and Nagel (1986). What I would like to display is the impact and nature of the battle over ascendance the East Indians fight with those of African descent. As indicated in the latter part of the previous chapter, ethnicity related issues have become omnipresent in the Guyanese society due to circumstances and strategies. A historically grown segregation of both groups in the realms of state, economy, and religion, as well as socio-cultural differences, emphasised matters of ethnic otherness. The clever utilisation of these ethnic divides by the elites, allowed the importance of descent to mount. Thanks to Guyana's past and present, 'race matters' have influenced the development of Indianness in a distinct way. Ethnopolitics, the management of collective understandings of the ethnic self and other for the sake of accumulating and/or maintaining control of people, property, and production, severely affects this process.

The following pages elucidate how local networks of aspiring authorities aim to establish a social reality in which the existing order appears natural and remains uncontested. These networks are alliances consisting of members of the ethnic elite. Their capacity to exercise discursive control, influence processes of incorporation and identity making, handle the flow of the various capitals, and even structure fields of action (see Bourdieu 1977, 1990, 1998; Foucault 1972¹⁰⁸, 1983; and Wolf 1999, 2001) is among the prime causes for Indianness today.

3.1.1 Ethnopolitics: the cultivation of antagonism

As indicated in the previous chapter, postcolonial party politics in Guyana have fuelled the opposition between the Afro-Guyanese and those of South-Asian origins. According to a World Bank Report on governance and growth, progress is seriously hampered by a time and energy devouring "focus on ethnic security and survival by political parties that count their constituency as primarily peoples of African descent (PNC/R) or Indian descent (PPP/C)" (World Bank 2003: ii).¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ This popular view of ethnicity is generally referred to as the social constructionist model (e.g. Cornell and Hartmann 1998; and Jenkins 1997). Govers and Vermeulen (1997) regard this view to have dominated ethnic studies since the early eighties. According to them, it followed respectively the *functionalist* stance (Shils 1957; and Geertz 1963) in which ethnic bonds were conceived as primordial and the *situationalist* approach (Barth, 1969). Govers and Vermeulen stress the work of Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) as well as Anderson (1983) played a significant role in the paradigm shift in those eighties.

¹⁰⁸ Referred to by Lommarsh Roopnaraine (2004) in a paper on identity formation under Indo-Caribbean indenture.

¹⁰⁹ According to the World Bank, national surveys conducted by the University of the West Indies "indicate that most of Guyana's political and state institutions lack cross ethnic legitimacy" (2003:3). It is said that whilst the instruments of policy initiation (government) are in the hands of the Indians, the apparatuses of implementation (police, army, judiciary, and civil service) are controlled by the Africans. These imbalances

Guyana's most influential political parties – the People's National Congress and People's Progressive Party – are accused of cultivating interethnic antagonism to ensure the support of a big chunk of one of the country's two largest ethnic groups. And, although harmony is publicly promulgated, politics in Guyana is a battle between ethnicities. It is a competition fought by those who (rightly) believe the ethnic appeal provides them with a means to gain and maintain control.

Indications of the effectiveness of ethnopolitics are manifold. Political reasoning of virtually all my informants is dominated by ethnic considerations and usually verbalised in racist terms. People acknowledge they vote 'race', and are taught it pays off to do so. The East Indian collective is profiting from the rule of East Indian parties and persons. I do not doubt those who state political patronage and a special interest for the Indian economic strongholds are among the benefits enjoyed by my research subjects in the case of East Indian political hegemony. I have even seen how advantageous (PPP/C) party membership can be for Indians with economic and/or social aspirations now that the People's Progressive Party is in government. It can help the rice farmer gain early access to irrigation water, the villager to get a permit to build a house for his son, and the contractor to be contracted to maintain regional roads, even though his bid was not the most competitive.

Favouritism is embedded in the Guyanese political tradition. Belonging to the (ethnic) ingroup is rewarded to bind the members to those who – because of these members' support – have distributive power.¹¹⁰ Those who are naturally excluded are (or feel) deprived as they experience restricted opportunities and a limited access to scarce resources. Inevitably, such a situation triggers feelings of privilege and protection among the dominant as well as resentment among the underprivileged.

Interethnic enmity in Guyana is thus rooted in and fuelled by favouritism. The strength and pervasiveness of antagonism, and the viability of ethnopolitics, however, depend on the combination of such strategic partiality with another tactic. More specifically, it is said that both discord and loyalty are not only fostered by 'racial' favouritism. Also the *fabrication of fear*¹¹¹ is mentioned as a strategy employed by 'the other' to steer the voter into a desired direction. People are taught to fear dominance of the

nurture ethnic fears. Both groups are convinced that dominance of the other deprives them of the share of safety and/or welfare they are entitled to. According to the Association of Young Africans, electoral victory of the Indians leads to "racial triumphalism, unfair distribution of the country's resources and corruption." Afro-Guyanese Dr. Gibson airs a similar view. She says that "from the outset of their tenure in political office, the agenda of the PPP/C has been one of domination of African people" (Gibson 2003:39). Gibson accuses the rulers of denying employment to Africans, refusing them equal access to fresh water and electricity, manipulating the distribution of land, and allocating investments only to those sectors managed by Indians (2003:46, 62).

¹¹⁰ Despres (1975:88) already noted that "the persistence, organisation, and differential incorporation of ethnic groups in Guyanese society is very much determined by competition for material resources."

¹¹¹ Also Doudou Die'ne – the UN's Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination and Xenophobia – found Guyanese society to be permeated by "fear" and "very deep human and emotional insecurity because of polarisation." (Stabroek News, 22 July 2003). He visited Guyana in July 2003, according to a UN press release, in order to "seek to understand the origins of ethnic tensions that have recently affected the political and social fabric" of Guyana.

opposite side so that they will seek shelter behind the back of their own ethnic political body.

This fright-fostering approach is allegedly taken by all contestants in the political arena. The ruling Indian PPP/C is blamed by Africans and recalcitrant Indians for adopting such strategies. According to the locally well-known swami Aksharananda, “the mind of the Indian electorate is conditioned [by the PPP/C] to [oppose] any attempt that they might see, or they project as dividing or as being divisive.”¹¹² He believes that in the heads of the Indian voters is instilled the idea that a ‘split of the vote’ will prove detrimental to the group’s well-being. The religious leader, an advocate of fierce resistance against Christian missionary work among Hindus, told me PPP/C government ministers personally urged him to stop his anti-conversion efforts in order not to fracture the “solid Indian bloc”.

Guyana’s major Indian opposition leader, Ravi Dev, also verbalises allegations concerning governmental fear tactics. He assured me that the PPP/C would not hesitate to employ shady scare tactics to manipulate the crowd.¹¹³ In turn, mister Dev himself is also accused of exploiting ethnicity for political gain. PPP/C’s Prem Misir mentions that “he [Ravi Dev] uses the race card and the cultural aspects to assist him to get whatever political ammunition he can get, to further or pursue the ends, the political ends he is after.”¹¹⁴ As a matter of fact, Misir thinks that in general “people [those who are non-PPP/C of course] use race as a subterfuge to gain political advantage.”

And Misir is partially right. Rather than denouncing ethnicised politics as such, contemporary Indian political opposition merely accuses the PPP/C of not fulfilling the (implicit) promise of guardianship customarily made before the elections. Apparently ethnopolitics have cultivated such a firm belief in favouritism and deep senses of interethnic mistrust that the race card is played by virtually all the political players. Because of that belief, antagonism between Africans and Indians is neither simply accidental or natural nor inevitable. It is a beneficial condition influenced by the strategies of politicians.

Mistrust and fear of the other are habitually manipulated in quests for power and have contaminated interethnic relations in Guyana. In various ways, the message is spread that there is no solution to ethnic competition, no reason for trusts, no grounds for compromise. People are taught the only road to the satisfaction of collective needs is the one of intra-ethnic alliance. And they seem to have learned that lesson. Virtually none of my East Indian informants believes ethnic issues can be banned from the political arena.

¹¹² Author’s interview with Swami Aksharananda, leader of the Guyanese H.S.S. (Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh) branch, on 20 August 2003.

¹¹³ These tactics would predominantly be used just before and during the elections. He stated that prior to the 2001 elections, the PPP/C circulated thousands of suggestive photographs – showing him together with PNC/R-leader (and African) Desmond Hoyte – among the Indians in Berbice just so that the hesitant elector there might catch a glimpse of what according to the party would be the consequence of disloyalty. (Interview with Ravi Dev, head of the Rise, Organise And Rebuild Guyana Movement (ROAR), on 21 July 2003).

¹¹⁴ Interview with Dr. Prem Misir, on 6 May 2003. Dr. Misir is the head of the Guyana Information Agency (GINA), formerly known as the Ministry of Information.

Both politicians or administrators and commoners cannot envision a de-ethnicised government.¹¹⁵

Ethnic gaps are considered innate and too vast to be bridged in the political arena. Informants assume local circumstances and human or ethnic cultures and natures guarantee the survival of division. In fact, all realise questions of ethnicity need to be answered in almost every context of control in Guyana. Suspicion and favouritism are included in the strategies of power aspirants, and govern people's choices, in areas way outside the field of party politics. In other words, ethnopolitics have penetrated the everyday life of the East Indians and severely influence the production of Indianness.

3.1.2 Power structures

Power and ethnicity are inseparable in contemporary Guyana. Ethnopolitics, in practice, concern far more than the realm of government. Actually, it is the tremendous potential of 'race' as a subterfuge to gain control that provides the country's profile of power with an extraordinary interconnected shape. It has facilitated the emergence of multifaceted power structures that *cannot* operate in isolation, and that make sure confrontations with matters of allegiance and disloyalty colour East Indian existence in many ways. Local critics usually picture these structures as products of party paramountcy. According to them, the country's leading political parties have developed networks of subsidiaries in many sections of society. These allow them to exercise the strictest possible control over the lives of their (potential) supporters.

The distinction between party, state and civil society blurred already during the 'reign' of Burnham's PNC in the 1970s and 1980s. According to opposition leader Dev, by that time the "regime had not only atrophied all civil institutions, but had corrupted them and taken them over."¹¹⁶ Non-political entities like religious organisations and trade unions developed into instruments of power preservation. Something similar happened on the other side. Dev states that also the PPP/C, already before they took over in 1992, extended its sway to areas beyond the political domain. And, as far as he is concerned, they are still trying to do so.

Few people would deny the importance of civil institutions in Guyana's power play. Their existence is intertwined with the existence of political parties. Even certain individuals from within the party acknowledge this phenomenon. In an interview, a retired shadow minister of agriculture, long-time MP and member of the influential Central Committee, mentions the creation of PPP/C "subsidiaries" out of political considerations.¹¹⁷ According to him, you should regard these "as the wheels of the PPP car, [vital parts on which] the party, the engine, depends." The blunt retiree says he does "not have any problem with those things." On the contrary, he thinks that, in this respect, "a

¹¹⁵ Ravi Dev even calls for the 'institutionalisation' of ethnic representation by changing the electoral system in a way that it ensures shared governance (e.g. interview 21 July 2003; and *Kaieteur News*, 8 June 2003).

¹¹⁶ Interview, 21 July 2003.

¹¹⁷ Interview, 22 May 2003.

political party has the right to do whatever they want for political power.” And, so he assumes, it is because of this ‘right’ that his PPP/C as well the main opposition parties have assembled variegated sets of relations.

These relations operate in all realms of power and maintain more or lesser explicit relations with political bodies. In the case of the PPP/C, they include official associates such as the *Progressive Youth Organisation* (PYO) and the *Women’s Progressive Organisation* (WPO). Furthermore, there are connections between the party and religious groups.

The *Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha* is most frequently mentioned in this respect. On the website of *Hinduism Today*¹¹⁸, a pundit states that “the Dharmic Sabha is an arm of the Marxist People’s Progressive Party, of which Reepu Daman Persaud [the Sabha’s founder and leader] is a minister.”¹¹⁹ And also the previously mentioned ex-PPP/C-shadow minister is convinced of that organisation’s political purpose. He even affirms that the “Dharmic Sabha was created because of political reasons.” Purportedly this group, which happens to be Guyana’s largest religious body, lends its infrastructure to the party so that the latter can easily reach its Hindu backing. According to some, the PPP/C would use Hindu events as weekly services, yajnas and festivals to explicitly ‘talk politics’ or at the least inexplicitly cultivate a positive attitude towards the party through sponsoring and attendance. Furthermore, party affiliation is required to be heard in individual mandirs or in the Hindu community at large. And Dharmic Sabha membership is highly recommendable if useful networks are to be constructed.

Similar relationships exist between the party and other religious entities. The head of the Guyana Central Arya Samaj, the representative body of the country’s second largest Hindu ‘denomination’, was a government minister.¹²⁰ And the leaders of Guyana’s main Muslim association, the CIOG, are also prominent members of the ruling party.¹²¹

Hegemony clearly depends on association. History shows that the rise and fall of political and religious representative bodies correlate. Information reveals that the rule of the PPP, Dharmic Sabha, and CIOG was preceded by the reign of the PNC, the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, and the Guyana United Sadr Islamic Anjumaan (GUSIA). And, if Ravi Dev ever manages to win the hearts and support of the Indian electorate, it will undoubtedly be followed by the joint ascent of a ROAR family to the podia of power. Some already link the emerging party with certain religious currents and with leaders such as the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh¹²² (HSS) and Swami Aksharananda.

¹¹⁸ See the article ‘Guyana’s Hindu Reality,’ www.hinduismtoday.com.

¹¹⁹ Reepu Daman Persaud is currently (2006) the minister of Parliamentary Affairs.

¹²⁰ Satyadeow Sawh was minister of Agriculture until he was killed in his home on April 22, 2006.

¹²¹ This linkage is particularly important as it will help prevent the Muslims from separating themselves from the undeniably rather Hindu faced PPP/C and establishing their own (potentially highly influential) party.

¹²² ROAR’s leader, Ravi Dev, was present – as an affiliate – at the Sangh Shikshaa Varsh in 2002. This is an annual event, organised by Guyanese branch of an international (India based) Hindu organisation which calls itself: “the vanguard of the Hindu Renaissance, the global movement dedicated to experiencing, preserving, and protecting Sanatana Dharma and Hindu Civilisation. (www.hssworld.org)

Reciprocal connections can also be discerned between political and economic groups. As religious bodies, institutions such as workers and branch organisations are known for their political preferences and can function as instruments in the broad battle for dominance. An example mentioned by many is the Rice Producers Association. This association is obviously an effective strategic tool in the hands of elites eager to secure Indian support.¹²³ It was even designed to “promote, protect and advance the interests of [Indian] rice producers,” According to a former RPA vice-president, the institution (est.1946) was actually used in the PPP/C’s “very aggressive agricultural policy”. He claims this policy was launched after the PPP/C broke up into an Indian and an African labelled faction in 1955, and “coincided with Indian interests.” As far as the man is concerned, “they are an invisible arm of the PPP” that is used to lash the opponent in the duel for power in such a true ethnically divided environment.¹²⁴

Another offspring of PPP/C’s long-standing and strong bond with agriculture is the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU). The GAWU is the representative body of workers in Guyana’s sizable sugar industry. The head of this “PPP sister union” is a PPP/C executive and parliamentarian.¹²⁵ This, together with the fact that GUYSUOCO, by far Guyana’s largest sugar corporation, is state owned, makes people regard the sugar industry as PPP/C territory.¹²⁶ But PPP/C’s cane claim is contested. And so are their other claims in the realms of crop growing. ROAR is eager to break the hegemony of the PPP/C in the Indian agricultural strongholds. By rendering assistance to locally emerging Paddy Producers Associations¹²⁷ and through their alleged involvement in the formation of the recalcitrant Guyana Sugar Workers Union, ROAR competes PPP/C for Indian affection in the sphere of economy. As in the field of religion, this competition includes the PNC/R too. Yet, whereas agriculture is Indian battleground, trade unions representing the interests of workers in African dominated areas are associated with the People’s National Congress (PNC/R).¹²⁸ The PNC/R’s focus is thus on fields as mining, teaching and civil service.

3.1.3 Collaborative quests

All in all, it must be obvious that the possibilities of the ethnic appeal in this highly segregated society have enabled the establishment of a variety of ethnic institutions that compete for authority over interconnected fields of power. More precisely, the potential of ‘race’ has inspired the formation of clusters of entities that *jointly* operate to gain control

¹²³ National Development Strategy, (draft) Chapter 26, 1996.

¹²⁴ Interview with a previous RPA vice-president, on 22 May 2003.

¹²⁵ Quoted from *Jaguar*, newsletter of the ROAR movement, Vol. 13 No. 6, August 2003.

¹²⁶ Interestingly enough, before 1992, there were plans for eventual privatisation of GUYSUOCO. According to a World Bank report (1997), the so called ‘IDA Sugar Industry Restructuring and Privatisation Project’ was intended to pave the way for that. However, after the PPP took over in 1992, the government decided to abandon the plan to pursue privatisation, but to contract-out management instead.

¹²⁷ *Jaguar*, Vol. 1.2 June 2003.

¹²⁸ See chapter two

over the allocation of resources in Guyana. In other words, power struggles are collaborative quests in which entities cooperate and use similar strategies to ensure the loyalty of Guyanese wherever control can be gained and desired goods are distributed. Favouritism is employed throughout society to tie people to ethnic institutions. Also the careful cultivation of fear of the other, most apparent in the spheres of culture and politics, is part of loyalty ensuring initiatives. People are taught ethnic loyalty is beneficial while disloyalty has catastrophic consequences.

The vast potential of the ethnic appeal helped shape Guyana's specific profile of power. It has facilitated the rise of ethnic power blocs comprising of collaborating cells covering those fields in which ethnic separation is visible. These power blocs, in turn, nourish ethnicity and make sure the gap between Africans and Indians is not bridged. Informants usually blame the establishment and preservation of these blocs on political parties. According to them, religious bodies, unions, cultural organisations, and other non-political entities should be seen as party marionettes. I, however, believe they are more than just that. Rather than as merely party tentacles, they should be considered equal partners in coalitions that operate as directive axes. As full components of these alliances, they help assure the general triumph of ethnic power play and sustain one of the foremost formative forces in the production process of Indianness: interethnic competition.

In such a reality, one's success in the battle for supremacy in a particular field depends on the productivity of its connection with other fields. The current dominance of the 'PPP/C family' in Guyana is a good illustration. All the members of that family assume hegemonic positions in their respective interest sphere. Collaboration – the utilisation of each other's channels and resources, and mobilisation or manipulation of each other's following – facilitates each and every one of them on their road to reign.

By definition, local quests for power are undertakings of ethnic clusters or alliances that consist of individuals or collectives with influence and agendas that are not confined to conventional realms like the economy, the state or government, and religion. Rather, these groups are hybrid networks which utilise society's structures and materialise in the form of cultural groups, religious organisations, trade unions, and political parties. As limbs of a single body, the manifestations of one cluster all draw their support from the same section of society. More precisely, the African and East-Indian communities are the primary bases of their power in Guyana. Ethnic identification is the key that gives access to control. Hence, the marketing of 'racial' segregation is employed to assure that access is acquired and maintained. This strategy has caused ethnic clusters to be the major contributors to the pervasive interethnic antagonism. It severely affects the way people look at themselves and others, how they interpret and act, and how Indianness is defined and redefined.

My informants generally have a strong mistrust of Africans and African institutions. Their explanations narrate understandings in which hubs of power are interconnected and alien rulership in one realm will negatively affect the East Indian position in other realms as well. As a well known Hindu assured me:

“What has happened with our Maha Sabha is that the leaders were bought over by the PNC government, by the black government, and that government, the intention was to sabotage Hinduism, as a matter of fact it was to reduce it to nothingness, Burnham wanted to dissolve a Hindu identity and our priests, our main pandits, supported that.” – *Interview, 13 August 2003.*

Such visions of fear are the outcome of collaborative ethnopolitics and impinge on East Indian practice. As another scholarly (Hindu) informant verbalised:

“If you look at the officials, the people who make up the governing bodies in mandirs, the same person, or group of persons might be in the local party and...or the union, and all sort of things. So it becomes some kind of incestuous kind of relationship where that goes on. [...] You see and that is where the attempt is made to control people now. You see, one sometimes looks at these politicians and feel they look like very ordinary people, but I think it is a very powerful strategy. And I think it has, it is, because you see for people remain in their enclaves, Indians and blacks, I don't think we will ever, ever get out of the state in which we are, and it is because some people are seeking to break this they have been demonised tremendously all around.” – *Interview, 20 August 2003.*

The ethnicised character of Guyana's public sphere has not only encouraged East Indians to withdraw in their ethnic 'enclaves'. It shapes thought and practice in a more comprehensive way. It cannot be separated from any expression or interpretation of East Indianness.

As will become clear in the following chapters, collaborating ethnic institutions and their methods are so influential because of their impact on the processual production of collective understandings. They shape the setting in which these understandings are produced and attempt to manipulate people's sentiments. None of the expressions of East Indianness described in this book is produced outside the context of interethnic struggle – a context of which ethnicised institutions are the prime composers. However, as indicated, they owe their relative success for an important part to certain more or less coincidental characteristics of local reality. In fact, as much as they mould Guyanese reality, they are its child.

3.1.4 *Conducive Conditions*

Economic bodies, political groups, and religious organisations all provide those in search of power with a chance to increase their ability to mobilise, bind and influence or even control their support. Yet, these entities can only do this effectively because of Guyana's favourable 'climatic' conditions. In other words, the configuration of society facilitates the success of an ethnic appeal.

Broadly, three types of conducive conditions can be recognised: (a) the inclusive ethnic segregation that allows East Indians and Africans to live their lives in different competitive circuits, (b) the fragility that characterises Guyana's social and economic present, and affects (c) feelings of uncertainty that colour perceptions and strategies of many people.

(Segregation) – It is the separation of Indians and Africans that enabled descent to be employed in such a profitable manner. Especially division in Guyana's economy is linked to the success of ethnopolitics. Comprehensive ethnic segregation in an economic field characterised by difficulties and standstill heavily contributes to the potential of the ethnic appeal. Interethnic competition is fuelled by the professional division between Africans and Indians in an unfavourable economic climate that suffers from poor management, infrastructural inadequacies, and lack of innovation. Senses of shortage due to a lack of chances and prospects, in an interplay with ethnicised quests for power, allow interethnic competition to be a highly formative force.

The specific structure of resource allocation makes that professional and financial interests correspond with ethnic interests. Africans make their living in different ways from Indians. Certain processes in the past have awarded the upper hand in agriculture and business to the Indians.¹²⁹ Africans, in turn, are dominant in education, civil service, mining, the security forces and the judiciary. This division coincides with the historically grown geographical segregation of both groups. Whereas the majority of Africans resides in urban settings, most Indians live on rural grounds. Additionally, social factors and cultural inclinations contribute to the disproportionate presence of ethnic groups in certain sectors. The perception of wage labour and work in the interior, for instance, appears to be culture dependant.

These ethnic disparities facilitate the use of economic institutions for power politics. Perceived conflicting economic interests and power imbalances offer ethnically based power clusters opportunities to strengthen their position because of the lack of fusion concerning income generating activities. However, segregation, disagreeing interests and senses of inequity would not be of such good use in the pursuit of power if it was not for certain catalysing conditions. A grounds for competition is required to make differences work. Absorption of the economic sphere in ethnic rivalry, and the escalation of competition, is only possible if there is a general impression of insufficiency. To be more

¹²⁹ See chapter two.

precise, interethnic rivalry in Guyana owes its imperative social position largely to the country's frail economic condition.

(Fragility) – Guyana's economy faces many challenges and insecurities. Many of these are related to the limited size of the domestic market. Growth in Guyana largely depends on exports. And up until now, the country has not been able to stimulate durable export. Hence, the country's performance – even compared to its neighbours – has not been impressive. Also Guyana's prospects remain bleak. Various issues, if left unsolved, will prove obstacles on the way to economic progress.

First of all, there is the 'crisis of governance'. Political scimmages are so time and energy consuming that, according to the World Bank, "little [is] left to undertake the many policies necessary to facilitate growth and development" (2003:iii). Also the IMF (PRSP 2001) acknowledges "poor governance" as a major obstacle on the road to poverty reduction. As far as they are concerned, 'poor governance' not only hampers the efficiency of the national government, it stains the record of regional (RDC's) and local bodies (NDC's) as well. Consequently, it affects citizens in their daily lives. People see, are victim of, or use corrupt authorities. They experience discrimination and unreliability, and know that justice is not necessarily upheld. The awarding of gun and driver's licenses, or the allocation of land, distribution of irrigation water among rice-farmers, payment of taxes, and even the settlement of court cases are all frequently proven to be fraudulent. Such pervasive ill-governance stirs frustration and mistrust, and results in a worsening of the investment climate and the growth of the country's shadow economy.¹³⁰ More exactly, the ill-governance undermines constructive economic enterprises and encourages shady activities including organised crime. This results in a reduction of tax income¹³¹, and a deterioration of the government's spending power and ability to fight poverty, and adds to a further sense of apprehension among the people.

A second factor obstructing economic development, and in some ways even social inclusion, is the country's inadequate infrastructure and relative isolation. Despite improvements, the movement of persons and goods remains problematic. Domestic and transnational connections are insufficient: the limited road network is in poor condition; air transport is expensive and confined in coverage and capacity; and there is neither a deep-water harbour nor a container port. It costs ordinary travellers, as well as entrepreneurs, lots of time and money to reach their destinations. Furthermore, also other aspects of the general infrastructure should be improved to facilitate growth. Telecommunication services are expensive and connection and access, especially to landlines, are problematic. Moreover, utilities are lacking or costly and unreliable. Tap water is contaminated; sewage an amenity; and electricity has become so expensive that many prefer to buy batteries

¹³⁰ Dr. Clive Thomas, Stabroek News, 30 March, 6 and 13 April 2003.

¹³¹ "It is estimated that in the fiscal year 2000, [...] the underground economy was generating some G\$ 32.3 billion or 35 per cent of the gross domestic product." (Guyana Chronicle, 9 February 2003) According to this article, an IMF study by Ebrima Faal warns for the impact of this on Guyana's financial well-being.

nowadays.¹³² In addition to the personal deprivation caused by these flaws in services and facilities, those imperfections negatively affect the investment climate and the long term availability of jobs and prospects.¹³³ Upgrading infrastructures offers definite economic and social benefits. Yet, given the size of the country combined with its low population density, the grand projects necessary to improve those infrastructures are practically unaffordable.

In spite of these massive infrastructural challenges, an even more exigent mission facing Guyana is the indispensable transformation of its economic structure. Its archaic, in some way still colonialist, makeup is one of the least passable hurdles en route to future growth. Especially the composition of agriculture, a sector which is by far Guyana's largest 'employer' and an area of incredible importance to the Indians, is in dire need of reform. Internal weaknesses and external threats make that crop growing can no longer persist unchanged. Weak support services, deterioration of the drainage and irrigation facilities, high cost farm-to-market infrastructure and insecure land tenure are amongst the trials many of the farmers face. Additionally, the country's major crops heavily depend on preferential market access in the European Union.¹³⁴ Both the uncompetitive sugar and rice sectors endure largely because of preferential exports to the EU at prices more than triple the world market prices – exports of which the end is nearing.¹³⁵ The future of rice and sugar cultivation, beyond the days of preferential access is quite uncertain.¹³⁶ "Diversification into crops that can be produced more competitively for export is warranted," or the subsistence of farmers will be jeopardised (World Bank 2003:iv).

Already, rice farmers see their situation worsen. They claim that "things are going down." Unfortunately few alternatives are available. Diversification calls for an investment of time and money few can afford. Besides, this would only succeed if accompanied by a careful refurbishment of Guyana's general economic structure. If such a refurbishment cannot be completed, and political policies and culture basically remain unchanged, the World Bank foresees a series of events that will result in the decrease of per capita incomes and an "increasing proportion of the population below the poverty line" (World Bank 2003:52).

¹³² The price of electricity, despite Guyana's huge power potential, is said to be second highest in the Caribbean.

¹³³ According to a letter in the *Kaieteur News* (2 December 2003) Guyana's ability to attract foreign direct investment declined from \$67 million in 2000 to \$44 million in 2002 – the smallest amount since 1997.

¹³⁴ According to the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB), 57.9 percent of the rice exported from Guyana between January and August 2003, was exported to the European Union. (*Stabroek News*, 8 September). Three-quarters of Guyana's sugar production is exported to the EU (World Bank 2003).

¹³⁵ Australia, Brazil and Thailand have requested an immediate end to EU's preferential sugar quotas at the WTO in September 2002. The rice sector will lose preferential entry into the EU in 2007.

¹³⁶ According to the World Bank, "given that rice production is highly labour intensive and wages in Guyana are four to five times that in the low-cost Asian states, the long-term competitiveness of this industry is questionable" (2003:48).

(*Uncertainty*) – Whether economic hardship is what really lies ahead is impossible to foresee. Yet, the economic situation is challenging and has deteriorated.¹³⁷ And people increasingly consider their pecuniary future to be uncertain. The belief in gloomy forecasts is shared by many. The country's frail economic position is felt by many Indians, irrespective of training and standing. The limited availability of jobs, favouritism and corruption, low paddy prices and rising costs of living stir widespread pessimism. Goods are perceived to be dear and earnings are often small.¹³⁸ While “shop ting ah raise, duh money you mek nah raise.”¹³⁹

Absolute poverty, the lack of income sufficient to provide a minimum standard of living, is more common in Guyana than in most other Latin American and Caribbean states. Many lack the finances for adequate medical treatment and the (prolonged) schooling of their children. Also the money spend on housing and foodstuffs is rationed.

Insufficiency characterises the existence of many. Especially in the rural Indian strongholds people struggle to make ends meet. There, the economy is the least diversified, work is rare and incomes depend on unpredictable agricultural success and world market prices. This continuous struggle for subsistence and the fear not to be able to provide oneself and one's family with the necessary means, contributes to the overall sense of crisis displayed by many informants in their analyses of prospects. Or better, such harsh reality, in combination with the strategic communication of scarcity and competition in the context of ethnopolitics, cultivates a sense of shortage which is expressed in a *discourse of crisis*. People believe their livelihood and social welfare are not secure and behave accordingly.

The impression of uncertainty reflects in the ills that afflict the contemporary Indian community. High levels of alcoholism and domestic aggression, and relatively impressive suicide rates narrate the impact of a destructive blend of culture and context.¹⁴⁰ Hardship and meagre prospects on the countryside, possibly assisted by culturally embedded notions of hierarchy (e.g. Barrow 1996:341, Peake and Trotz 1999:120, Smith and Jayawardena 1959:337) and shame, seem to inspire East Indians to indulge in detrimental coping practices.¹⁴¹ Together, these ills and challenges help produce a highly

¹³⁷ See article ‘Economy flatlines’ (Stabroek News/Business, on 1 October 2003). According to the IMF's Guyana Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2001), and measured by household expenditures per capita, thirty-five percent of the country's population was living below the poverty line in 1999. Guyana's per capita income is around US\$ 800 (Stabroek News, 14 December 2003).

¹³⁸ The cumulative inflation rate for 2003 at the end of October 2003 was a reasonable 5.7 per cent, according to the Guyanese Bureau of Statistics (Stabroek News, 19 November 2003).

¹³⁹ Focus group interview with the women of the Airy Hall Women Development group, on 18 September 2003.

¹⁴⁰ Studies of suicide in Guyana (e.g. ‘The Shadow of Death’ by clinical and forensic psychiatrist Dr. Frank Beckles, see www.caribvoice.org) and writings on domestic violence (See the National Development Strategy, chapter 21) link the various social ills that afflict Indo-Guyana.

¹⁴¹ A complex of factors cause local harshness and make prospects meagre. Healthcare, free of charge in public hospitals, is inadequate. Infant mortality is relatively high: 37.22 per 1000 live births (est. 2004) is the conservative estimate mentioned in the CIA's World Fact Book. And, according to the same book, life expectancy at birth is 62.43 years. Pensions are low, less than US\$ 10 per month, and so is public assistance. Utilities are expensive, or not available, and the infrastructure is very limited. And, finally, the educational

motivating collective sense of crisis that has great impact on the trajectory of East Indianness.

Several crisis instigating factors related to interethnic competition were examined in the first half of this chapter. I have argued that these factors helped create an environment in which ethnopolitics could grow into such a successful political strategy. My East Indian informants are susceptible to the ethnic appeal because they live in a setting in which survival is a challenge and socio-economic prospects look meagre. They live in a highly segregated and instable society. They belong to a country with an inadequate infrastructure, a ramshackle education system, an archaic economic makeup, impressive migration rates, and neither the finances nor the internal unity to address these issues. People lack confidence, the faith that Guyana can satisfy the needs of all the Guyanese. This sense of scarcity is both the product of collective experiences and the efforts of local ethnic elites. The previous sections showed how rivalry between Afro-Guyanese and East Indians is fostered by collaborative clusters of entities in search of control. Alliances consisting of political, economic, cultural, and religious bodies employ strategies of favouritism and the fabrication of fear to gain and maintain the support of ethnic groups. Shared understandings of uncertainty and insufficiency played an important role in this process. The success of ethnopolitics depends on the vigour of these understandings. Already confronted with shortage and instability, people are given the impression that ethnic alliance is needed to secure sustenance as well as the survival of the (cultural, social, political, economic, and religious) self. As such, perceptions and strategies of the East Indians, and the production East Indianness itself, are severely influenced by these highly motivating and manipulated impressions of the local reality.

In the second part of this chapter, another and relatively new source of uncertainties will be analysed. The following half of Present-day Contexts is devoted to transnational processes of transformation. It deals with the formative power of globalisation, with the other force that shapes motivating notions of reality and affects people's understandings and practices. Like interethnic struggle and the lack of prospects, also the high pace and magnitude of globalisation has contributed to feelings of insecurity and uncertainty. In fact, globalisation, and the increasingly cluttered appearance of reality, hamper security and certainty to the extent that existing power structures are to be reorganised and – as will become clear in later chapters – many cultural understandings must be redefined.

system – although ensuring free schooling at primary and secondary level – is flawed. More than anything, this seems due to the lack of qualified teachers. In 1998/99, only fifty-one percent of the primary school teachers and sixty percent of the secondary school teachers were trained (Ministry of Education 1999).

3.2 The omnipresence of transnationality: Indians in an interconnected society

As far as many of my informants are concerned, the recent influx of foreign commodities and information deteriorated local values. Changes have brought about new types of behaviour and given rise to frustrations. These become manifest in people's attitudes towards their parents and seniors, spouses and children, peers and the bottle etc. Now, whereas the exact nature of these attitudes and their relation to societal changes is discussed in later chapters, it is important to mention them here because they reveal the importance of transnationality or globalisation as a formative force.¹⁴²

After analysing the anatomy of control in the first part of this chapter, I will examine the appearance of the advanced globalised reality in this second section of chapter three. As is extensively discussed in the social science literature, increased transnational interconnectedness severely affects the environment, opportunities, knowledge, and perceptions of contemporary earthlings. Globalising tendencies involve the fragmentation of existing structures resulting in a 'crisis of identity' (Friedman 1994), and the surfacing of what Appadurai (1996, 2001) has labelled 'disjunctive flows'. Interconnectedness causes old identities to weaken and new ones to emerge (e.g. Hannerz 1996, Lewellen 2002). Novel ideas and aspirations have come to oppose existing ones or cannot be executed or satisfied due to a constraining local reality. In addition, globalisation of ethnic and religious culture in Guyana is characterised by the kind of battles over hegemony that are part and parcel of similar processes worldwide (e.g. Ferguson and Gupta 1997). Like elsewhere, the demise and rise of configurations in Indo-Guyana encompass renegotiation of the distribution of control between structures themselves and between structures and people.

The primary foci of the following subsections are the engines of interconnectedness: (a) the East-Indian diaspora, (b) secular foreign centres of cultural production, and (c) religious foreign centres of cultural production.¹⁴³ Together, they constitute the second major formative force. The influx of ideas and items from these sources affects East Indian perception and action not only by altering their physical and social environs but also by reshaping people's images of reality. Both surroundings and perspectives are changing.

Actually, the significance of 'real change' is, more than anything, embedded in the East Indian mindset. The fact that notions of change continuously arise in conversations indicates that there is a shared sense of transition: East-Indians feel that things are changing faster than before and that those changes are eroding traditional values and ideals.

¹⁴² Transnationalism, according to Vertovec (1999a), "broadly refers to multiple ties and interactions lining people or institutions across the borders of nation-states." As such it must be seen as a product of globalisation, the *process* of universalisation of particularism and particularisation of universalism (Robertson 1992).

¹⁴³ Like many others (e.g. Hannerz 1989; Larkin 1997) I emphasise the variety of cultural flows and their origins that characterise contemporary interconnectedness. It is not merely a movement 'from the West to the rest'.

Some spot that “things are disappearing”, and observe there used to be “more cooperation”. They say “morality is going down” and notice their neighbours “are jumping over into immoral behaviour.”¹⁴⁴ Others think “nowadays family nah live nice” and that “the majority of girls now [...] really get bad.”¹⁴⁵ Then, there are the ones who claim there used to be “more religious people than today.”¹⁴⁶ And finally, it is stated that presently one finds a general lack of respect that stems from “television [...] society and lack of knowledge of the scripture.”¹⁴⁷

It is this *sense* of transition, and the vagueness that comes with it, that largely decides the impact of globalisation on Indian distinctiveness. I will thus devote the second half of this chapter to the analysis of this force. In the following pages the omnipresence of transnationality will be examined respectively as it manifests in the influence of the large East Indian diaspora and in certain nuclei of (secular and religious) cultural production.

3.2.1 *The diaspora*

Whereas domestically the ongoing interethnic struggle has always shaped Indianness, the strength of this second formative force is rapidly increasing. The number and intensity of relations between East-Indians and people and collectives abroad have grown significantly over the past decades. Mass migration of East-Indians in search of betterment, a further development of pan-Islamic and Hindu movements, and the state’s departure from general isolationism, have all helped the impact of the outside increase dramatically since the early 1980s.¹⁴⁸

Today, large clusters of East Indian settlers in North America nourish the traffic of people, goods, and ideas from the U.S. and Canada to Guyana and vice versa. To a greater or lesser extent, these ‘diasporic populations’¹⁴⁹ deliberately challenge the course of things in the social, economic, political and religious spheres back home. Their influence is considerable. The émigrés prompt a redefinition of Indianness that is more extensive and occurring at a higher pace than ever before. Partially because of their contribution to the increased availability of alternative ways of doing things such as consuming, communicating, contemplating, and conducting, everything ‘old’ has become contested. Largely because of the massive scale of emigration, the financial and logistical possibility of transnational connecting, and the emigrants’ active involvement in community matters back home has we-ness now become defined in an international context.

¹⁴⁴ Interviews with pundit Chowbay, on 11 September and 19 November 2003.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with joiner Hassa and his mother, on 27 November 2003.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with a Indian retiree, on 19 December 2003.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with pundit Sharma, on 10 December 2003.

¹⁴⁸ Of course related to perceptions of the local, as the impact of the outside depends on the inside.

¹⁴⁹ Term used by Lavie and Swedenburg (1996:14). After Rouse (1991), they regard these as groups which are ‘enmeshed in circuits of social, economic, and cultural ties encompassing both the mother country and the country of settlement.’ In the particular case of East Indians, Guyana is both the country of settlement and the motherland (for contemporary emigrants).

According to the UNDP, Guyana has one of the highest emigration rates in the world.¹⁵⁰ In 1992, already an estimated 23,554 persons left the country.¹⁵¹ A senior immigration official believes this number has increased to at least 50,000 today.¹⁵² In other words, approximately one out of every fifteen citizens annually turns his or her back on Guyana. Now, although I think this is a liberal estimate, the number of emigrants is extremely high. There are presently just as many, or even more, Guyanese residing abroad as there are inside the country. These migrants continue to influence local matters in an extensive fashion.

People from all strata and groups move out: the rich and the poor; the Africans and the Indians; the educated and untrained; and those who are young as well as the retirees. They go to various places: choose a destination often because of sympathetic visa requirements, the accessibility 'backtrack trails', or the availability of helpful contacts there. Many remain in the region. Especially the islands of the Eastern Caribbean and the neighbouring countries on the continent are popular migrant destinations. Hence, you will find Guyanese working as construction workers in Barbados, teachers in St. Maarten, guards in Trinidad, nurses in St. Lucia, maids in Eastern Venezuela, and mechanics in Suriname or French Guiana.

The impact of these proximate émigrés on the homeland, however, is fairly limited compared to the influence of the Guyanese diaspora in the United Kingdom and – even more so – in the United States and Canada. Due to the more impermanent character of regional labour migration and the widely scattered distribution of migrants, do patterns of diasporic organisation similar to those in predominantly North America not materialise. To be more precise, my data suggest that Guyanese are often only temporarily residing on the islands or in the neighbouring countries. Usually these are individuals who left kith and kin to work outside to provide the family back home with an (additional) source of income. In many cases, these migrants eventually return home to Guyana, move from one place to a next, or even use the place as a steppingstone to a final destination further up north. Consequently, there is less need and less time to form bonds. Additionally, as said, such bonding is obstructed by the limited size of these Guyanese diaspora communities.

In North America, such large clusters of Guyanese do exist. According to the US Census Bureau, out of the 209,533¹⁵³ Guyanese living in the United States, 131,909 reside in the state of New York alone. A further 18,610 are counted in neighbouring New Jersey.¹⁵⁴ Nearly seventy-two percent of the registered U.S-Guyanese thus live within a hundred miles radius. Obviously, these people have formed ties and organised themselves.

¹⁵⁰ *World Population Prospects: the 2000 Revision, Volume III: Analytical Report.*

¹⁵¹ See Elizabeth Thomas-Hope, 2001.

¹⁵² See Manuel Orozco, 2002.

¹⁵³ Considering the usually significant undercount of migrant groups, Orozco (2002:3) assumes "the number of Guyanese in the U.S. conservatively may be as high as 300,000."

¹⁵⁴ CPS 2000. According to the US Census Bureau, another 13,738 Guyanese stay in Florida. My data indicates this state's popularity among Guyanese is growing. Also a number of Guyanese from New York, or even Toronto, decide to move to the southern peninsula. Climate might be one of the considerations here.

Based on common heritage, they have joined in Guyanese social, cultural, religious and political associations.¹⁵⁵ Besides to neutralise feelings of displacement and provide the newcomers with a readymade network, these associations work to manipulate the course of things back home.

The most evident examples are the Hometown Associations (HTAs). These are groups designed to “retain cultural ties and improve [...] home country communities” (Orozco 2002b). According to the site of ‘Land of Six Peoples’ about sixty-five of such Guyanese Associations exist in the state of New York. Another seventy-four are based in the Canadian Guyanese strongholds in Ontario.¹⁵⁶ Many of these HTAs focus on charitable work in Guyana. They generally spend their (limited) resources on things such as school and medical supplies, relief for the poor and elderly, and community development. Yet, some of these associations provide a less tangible kind of aid. They position themselves as hometown interest lobby groups or even morality’s watchdogs.¹⁵⁷ According to a pamphlet distributed on a local market, the American ‘Essequibo Alliance’ for example, demands “more government resources for [Guyana’s] Essequibo region” and discontinuation of the structural drainage of wealth from the area.¹⁵⁸ And a body called ‘Buxtonians Overseas’ is concerned with the state of affairs in a particular village. In an open letter to a national paper the Buxtonians Overseas summon the people of Buxton to “wake up” and courageously fight, instead of cowardly participate in, the crime that has become so widespread in their native community.¹⁵⁹

The exact effects of such non-material contributions are hard to tell. Most likely they are still limited. In any case, the impact of joint efforts is not as palpable as the influence of certain individuals who went abroad. Both in business and politics, as well as in the field of religion, migrants help alter the scenery. The owner of Guyana Stores Ltd, one of the country’s biggest department stores, is a Guyanese resident of New York. And Ravi Dev, the leader of the ROAR party, has spent years in the States. So did the previously mentioned Hindu leader Swami Aksharananda, and the head of the Guyana Information Agency, Prem Misir. Even Ryhaan Shah, president of the GIHA and Indian rights activist, has lived ‘outside’ for nearly two decades.¹⁶⁰ Hence, some of the most outspoken voices heard in contemporary Guyana are those of (re)migrants. They are the voices of people who matured in foreign academia or professional milieus and decide to distribute the fruits of their experiences in their fatherland.

¹⁵⁵ According to www.landofsixpeoples.com, North America counts a total of 192 Guyanese associations. The most are to be found in New York and Ontario. Furthermore, Maryland allegedly accommodates fifteen groups, Washington D.C. another nine and New Jersey eight.

¹⁵⁶ The second largest concentration of Guyanese outside Guyana is to be found in the Toronto/Scarborough area in Ontario, Canada.

¹⁵⁷ According to a letter in the *Stabroek News* (30 July 2003) some of these are “ethnically exclusive”.

¹⁵⁸ Says a pamphlet distributed on the market in Anna Regina (Essequibo). The organisation is allegedly funded by Guyanese who migrated from the Essequibo Coast, Wakenaam and Leguan.

¹⁵⁹ *Sunday Stabroek*, 13 April 2003.

¹⁶⁰ See section 3.3

Often, these migrants ventilate notions of change: innovative or conservative and critical views on issues like governing or Indian culture. Also modifications in religious thought and practice, whether regressive or progressive, are frequently brought about by those who were taught abroad. Guyana's most influential religious leaders are ones who are or have been elsewhere. Many of the country's emerging Muslims authorities, have received years of Qur'anic training in institutes in India or the Middle East. And Guyana's most famous and influential Hindu priest, Prakash Gossai from Mahaica Creek, only became an eminent priest after he moved to New York in 1983.¹⁶¹

Especially his impact in Guyana is apparent. Prakash' readings and recitals invariably draw large crowds. His yajnas¹⁶², without exception, are grand celebrations of Hinduism attended by hundreds and sometimes even a few thousand enthusiastic aficionados. Transcriptions of his songs I have spotted jotted down in little notebooks of women at Hindu gatherings. And the peculiarities of his service echo in assemblies long after he is gone. Gossai's words and style are copied, by pundits and peasants. He is a TV-personality and an authority beyond religion. His mission, he says, is to stop people from taking their religion for granted and to return the knowledge they have lost.

Whether or not Gossai will be able to accomplish this, he remains a highly important figure. This influential status he owes to a great extent to the efforts of many 'lesser souls': ordinary emigrants usually sponsor or even organise the Hindu events on which he appears. Guyanese individuals or families from North America or the U.K. will come over and finance occasions the community themselves would never have been able to afford. Such religious sponsoring by migrants is quite common in Indo-Guyana. Also the local Muslim community clearly enjoys the benefits of pecuniary fertiliser from elsewhere. Masjids are constructed with funds from the Guyanese community abroad. And the weekly imam training course that I took with fifty others was paid for by a wealthy Guyanese Muslim from the United States.

The financial contribution of migrants is significant. It affects the East Indian community at the level of the individual as well as the collective. Even more important than the incidental financing of events and projects, in this respect, is structural aid. In Muslim circles this can be in the (institutionalised) form of charity. Through a range of more or less compulsory types of financial and material aid – like *zakat*, *iftaar*, *fidya* and *sadaqah fitr* – a transnational redistribution of income thus takes place: money is collected among Guyanese Muslim migrants outside the country and shared among their 'brothers'

¹⁶¹ The West Indian Hindu community is deemed "even more diehard and staunch in its [...] beliefs than Indians from the motherland." According to an article from 1995, Guyanese (at the time) had set up over forty temples in New York. The Indian-American community, while larger, established far fewer temples. Also, there are said to be around fifty Guyanese pundits in New York. (www.hinduism-today.com) Prakash Gossai, the prominent priest from South Ozone Park NY, estimates the number of Guyanese temples has grown to about sixty now. According to him, most of these were established during the last two decades. (interview, 13 August 2003)

¹⁶² Lit. 'sacrifice', in the Caribbean the term refers to a series of rites and readings spread over a number of days.

back home. At a broader scale and more personal level, however, the transfer of resources occurs in the form of remittances. Nearly every one in Guyana receives money from friends or family overseas. The Inter-American Development Bank estimates remittances to Guyana amounted to 16.6 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product in 2002.¹⁶³ And Manuel Orozco states that, according to Guyana's Central Bank, registered remittances and transfers added up to almost 92 million dollars – approximately thirteen percent of Guyana's GDP – in 2001.



Adventure's new mosque (financed with 'diaspora'-money)

According to my informants, the effects of financial assistance from people abroad are clearly visible. Assistance shows in the increased construction of luxurious houses, even by those we aren't supposed to be able to afford those houses.¹⁶⁴ It shows in consumption patterns, the spread of electronics, cell phones, and brand name goods. And it also shows in the increased frequency and magnitude of December weddings – ceremonies paid for with Christmas contributions wired from Europe and North America.

The long term effect of large scale emigration will be harder to tell. As far as the country's economic vitality is concerned, the negative effects will probably eventually

¹⁶³ Stabroek News, 22 March 2003. According to the same article, in (at least) the western hemisphere only Nicaragua and Haiti show higher percentages.

¹⁶⁴ Orozco states "the New Building Society claims that many immigrants send money for payment of mortgages and obligations acquired by relatives in Guyana." (2002:17)

outweigh the positive ones. Orozco thinks that the altruistic nature of remitting by Guyanese will turn out to be less constructive and durable than remitting out of economic or strategic considerations.¹⁶⁵ Sending barrels filled with clothes and electronics or some cash in envelopes is not going to help Guyana in the long run, investment will. Besides, as a result of the migration of many professionals, the country's economic progress is threatened. Carrington and Detragiache (1999), call Guyana "in South America, the country with by far the biggest brain drain". They estimate that "more than seventy percent of the individuals with tertiary education have moved to the United States." According to the World Bank (2003), retention of qualified personnel, mainly due to emigration is already a problem in sectors like health and education. High vacancy rates in both fields are battled with untrained substitutes and the import of specialists from abroad.¹⁶⁶ The impact of these shortages is felt by many and adds to feelings of crisis and confinement among those left behind.

Guyana, again, has become a nation coloured by migration. The exodus of citizens, set off about two decades ago, affects the state of the country and its people. Economy-wise, the consequences of mass departure are far-reaching. Yet, its socio-cultural influence should neither be underestimated. Not only does departure rupture or harm bonds between community members, friends, and relatives¹⁶⁷, or do migrants and HTAs influence society, migration also affects the community in a more indiscernible manner. As I will discuss in chapter five, the prominence of migration as a survival strategy has drastically altered the desires and focuses of especially young East Indians. Furthermore, also the increased traffic of Indians between the homeland and the migrant destinations shapes the thoughts and behaviour of those who are left behind.

According to Dale Bisnauth, author and minister in the current PPP government, emigration has affected social relations among people even in the country itself. He mentions changes in gender relations as an example, and states that the advanced level of female independence abroad is imported by visiting migrants. As far as he is concerned "it affects Guyana in a sense that [...] they come here on a fairly regular basis – they come for weddings, and they come for funerals – and that notion of the freedom which they enjoy is [subsequently] spread here."¹⁶⁸ The migrants are said to return to Guyana as missionaries of westernisation. Also East Indians, sometimes only after a stay of less than a few months, come back completely Americanised. With a new accent, cosmopolitan hairstyle and wardrobe, some hard currency, plus a revolutionary view on just about everything, they sell their American dream back home. I have witnessed some of them at work. And although

¹⁶⁵ He refers to a survey by Agrawal and Horowitz (1999). The outcome of this survey indicates that in the case of Guyanese, "the altruistic motivation in remitting prevailed." (2002:18)

¹⁶⁶ According to the World Bank (2003:38), more than 70 percent of the specialist medical personal are non-Guyanese, mainly people from Cuba, India and China who came through technical cooperation programs.

¹⁶⁷ The departure of people for example leads to the disintegration of religious groups such as happened to the HSS group as well as the Brahma Kumaris in Essequibo.

¹⁶⁸ Interviews with Dr. Bisnauth, minister of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, on 13/14 March 2003.

not all migrated Indians become such perfect ambassadors or missionaries, migration does change them, and inevitably those migrants do bring change to Indo-Guyana. Few things nowadays are what they used to be, and the migrants have definitely contributed to that change. Yet, they are certainly not the only ones responsible.

3.2.2 *Secular nuclei*

Many of the tokens of the 'outside' that are visible in contemporary Guyana, even those that loom within the Indian bastion, did not travel with any migrants. The activities of transnational corporations or institutions, the messages spread through the internet and traditional mass media, as well as the agendas of regional or global political powers all influence the course of things in the country.

Since the magnitude of alien influence generally increases as the size of a nation's population is smaller, Guyana is likely to face tough foreign forces.¹⁶⁹ First of all, the liberty of policymaking is constrained by the country's expected obedience to supranational bodies and its dependence on the goodwill of global political centres. Guyana's status as a small and – until recently – heavily indebted poor country forced economic decisions to be made in accordance with the IMF's Economic Recovery Program. Second, the country's great dependence on multilateral and bilateral sources of assistance encourage it to meet the requirements of donors.¹⁷⁰ Hence, also things such as grants, debt relief, loans and access to export markets undermine Guyana's autonomy and add to the impact from the outside.

Although the exact impact of governmental dependency relations is immeasurable, it is certain that political policies and strategies are subject to powerful foreign forces. A similar relationship exists in non-governmental spheres. Also here, forces from 'outside' have a significant influence on the course of things inside the country. And again, it is Guyana's limited wealth and population size that magnify the impact of these forces. Industries are generally controlled by foreign players. The big investors and employers in mining, logging, and telecommunications are from North America or Asia. In addition, financial affairs are predominantly handled by branches of Canadian or Indian banks. And sales, retail or business-to-business, predominantly comprise imported goods from North America, Europe, the Caribbean, and Asia. As mentioned, with a population of about 750,000 the domestic market is too small to support the existence of certain industries and manufacturers.

An interesting example of the country's restricted 'industrial' autonomy, and subsequently the grave impact of foreign forces, is the entertainment industry. By the far the bulk of entertainment is brought in from elsewhere. The lion's share of recorded music

¹⁶⁹ The relation between size of the local market and impact of the outside is also mentioned by Hannerz (1989)

¹⁷⁰ According to the World Bank (2003) Official Development Assistance in Guyana amounted 14.6 percent of the country's GDP in 2001. With annual disbursements of assistance averaging US\$ 40-50 million, the Inter-American Development Bank is Guyana's largest donor. Other major donors are the USA, the EU and the UK.

and other types of transmittable entertainment is imported from various regional and global entertainment producing centres. Tunes are picked up all over the globe: (African) Soca and (Indian) Chutney¹⁷¹ from Trinidad and elsewhere in the Caribbean; Rap, Hip Hop and R&B from North America; and Bollywood melodies, Hindu bhajans and Muslim qasidas from the Indian subcontinent.¹⁷² Despite the limited availability of radio stations, music is everywhere. Thanks to the authority's lack of concern with international copyright laws¹⁷³, people can feed their boom boxes easily obtainable home-burned CDs with the latest greatest from elsewhere.

A similar legislative lethargy among policy-makers assures the influx of audiovisual produce. Practically unhindered by international agreements, and thus costless, cinemas beam DVD-copies of the latest blockbusters from Mumbai and Hollywood. Likewise, unsanctioned 'cosmic piracy' enables about a dozen privately owned TV-stations to air the hottest foreign series and popular motion pictures.¹⁷⁴ Virtually all you need is a satellite TV-guide, some space in your backyard, and enough money to go to Miami and acquire a satellite dish and other broadcast paraphernalia. According to a 'daily programme guide' used at one of the stations, almost eighty-five percent of their slots is filled with non-Guyanese content. This situation appears to be little different at the other stations.¹⁷⁵ Only GTV, Guyana's state broadcaster, airs more domestic and Caribbean made programs.

As in many other places, the impact of this bombardment of foreign and supposedly non-elevating material in the country is feared. Moses Nagamootoo, at the time Guyana's Minister of Information, told me in an interview back in 1999 that non-local television "gives you a foreign mind, a foreign taste, and it gives you this kind foreign dependence." According to him, whatever is heedlessly conveyed "comes down with a risk, like AIDS, sexually transmitted. If they are transmitting and you are pulling down [a satellite signal] and you don't protect yourself, you infect your population."¹⁷⁶ 'Kit' Nascimento, a journalist and former PNC minister, shares Nagamootoo's anxieties. He

¹⁷¹ According to Ingram (1998) nowadays a genre in which East Indian folk music, movie tunes and even Hindu hymns (bhajans) are used over a fast calypso or soca based beat. It is said that, originally, chutney songs made reference to deities and were mainly performed by women and with the use of folk acoustic instruments. Nowadays, both men and women sing, electronic instruments are used and chutney is played at 'wedding-houses'. Much of the chutney played in Guyana is imported from Trinidad, the world's major chutney hub. One of Guyana's most popular songs in 2003 was Trinidadian Adesh Samaroo's 'Rum till I die.'

¹⁷² The religious songs also enter Guyana from North America. Members of the Guyanese diaspora are involved in the production and distribution of new material. Hymns from migrated pundits and musicians, like Prakash Gossai, Bhaskar Sharma and Roop Sukhram, are sung in mandirs and at functions throughout the country.

¹⁷³ "Guyana is a signatory the Bern Convention and the Universal Copyright Convention. And in addition, other copyright provisions are enacted in the copyright law of 1956 of the United Kingdom to which Guyana acceded in 1966. The problem, however, is that these copyright provisions are not enforced." (www.gina.gov.gy)

¹⁷⁴ Also TV stations (and some other media) have an ethnic identity, are know to be 'African' or 'Indian'.

¹⁷⁵ Nearly all the locally produced content is religion-related. Often these are programs sponsored by particular religious groups or organisations.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Moses V. Nagamootoo, (then) Minister of Information, on 19 November 1999.

equates the inflow of foreign programs in Guyana with a “cultural invasion.”¹⁷⁷ Kit believes that information designed for the North American audiences has become the “source of culture,” “source of standards of living” and “source of what should and should not be the priorities” to many Guyanese. According to him, after less than two decades of exposure to unrestricted content, the heads of Guyanese have become infested with ideas that were not meant for them.¹⁷⁸

I disagree. Or rather, I think both Nascimento’s and Nagamootoo’s vision wrongfully portray people as powerless subjects to the force of mediated messages. No matter what, man always has the faculty to decode, read, and value. Yet, bearing in mind television’s position as a prime source of information on certain topics, the practically all-foreign program-menu will affect people’s understanding of those topics. An understanding based on predominantly mediated experience is just as likely to yield new interpretations, expectations and aspirations as any other form of understanding.¹⁷⁹ In other words, mediated images can come to function as a motivational force. And that is what both politicians claim: the desire of Guyanese kids to go to school Nike-booted, and the Hindu bridegroom preference for a maharaja-style turban rather than the traditional *maur*¹⁸⁰, are linked to the appearance of these items in American series and Indian pictures.

According to Nascimento, televised American role models have become examples for many young Guyanese. And he is right. The shows in which they star, often celebrations of consumerism, provide the viewer in the periphery with a recipe for advanced living. Together, the programs offer a detailed picture of lives lived by those whom one is supposed to want to look and be like. And apparently with success. Informants claimed on various occasions that people, especially the youngsters, more and more start to behave like the persons on screen. Not only do they desire to adopt the aired ‘American’ looks, they are also said to embrace certain ‘American’ ways. More specifically, it is thought that the unrestricted access to knowledge that the media offers, enables the children to get acquainted with views and deeds they would not have found out about otherwise. As the result, they have become – what is often ironically called – “more civilised”.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Christopher Nascimento, former Minister of Mechanical Equipment, on 31 January 2000.

¹⁷⁸ It was only after the PNC-era that television in Guyana ‘matured’. Nagamootoo claims he liberalised television in Guyana after 1992. TV was virtually non-existent up until the late 1980 or even the early 1990s.

¹⁷⁹ A lot of literature is available concerning the effects of mass and new media on the conceptions and behaviour of the consumer of mediated information. Especially psychologists (e.g. Harris, 1994; Zillmann and Bryant, 1988) and scholars working within the orbit of cultural studies (e.g. Hall 1977, 1980; Fiske 1978, 1987) have been interested in the impact of media. Nevertheless, there is also a substantial body of anthropological produce on the matter (e.g. Abu-Lughod 1995; Kottak 1990; Mankekar 1993; Salamandra 1998; and Spitulnik 1993)

¹⁸⁰ In Guyana also known as *kbalkbat*, a groom’s crown made of cloth and wire. It can be adorned with flowers, small mirrors, beads, lights, and for example toy birds.

According to many East-Indian parents, their children have “too much sense now.”¹⁸¹ Thanks to mediated information, they have acquired adult and/or non-traditional knowledge. This knowledge has supposedly led to modifications in the behaviour of young people. And, as said, I agree. More than ever is the authority of tradition and the value of culture contested. At a level far deeper than just appearance, beyond tight or baggy jeans and Nike boots, imported television accelerates change in the East Indian community. Or rather, I would say that the heap of alternative behavioural models and ideologies that have come within sight of Guyanese after the advent of television have altered their aspirations and expectations. Although known to be fictional or deformed through mediation, notions of love, success and status, advertised on screen, contribute to the viewers’ understanding of love, success, and status. In fact, televised (indirect) experiences are incorporated in the reservoir of past experiences and thus become part of one’s baggage with which future experiences are encountered. Hence perceptions and responses, even if practically indiscernibly, contain traces of ‘televisionation’.¹⁸²

Together with experiences brought in from secular centres on other vehicles, the media prove the increasing interconnectedness changes life in profound ways. These changes are clearly felt by the Indian part of the population. Developments in media, global trade, communications and politics have given them new entrances to the old and alien. Linkages with India have been re-established¹⁸³ and connections with North America and Europe are made. All of this affects the people and their culture, and alters concepts of permanency and security. There is an common awareness of change. As will be discussed in Part II, there is a shared vision that things, relationships, are not like they were before. Gender relations and parent-child relations, discussed in chapter six, are good examples. But also other things have changed, and other connections were made that changed the way of things.

3.2.3 Religious nuclei

There are other connections which relate East Indians to the outside world and influence the production of Indianness, besides linkages with the East Indian diaspora and ties with secular nuclei. These ties with religious centres abroad are the outcome of the most premeditated foreign attempt to influence matters inside Guyana. The desire of keepers of various ultimate Truths to publicise their knowledge and enlighten others has changed and

¹⁸¹ Focus group interview with the women of the Airy Hall Women Development group, on 18 September 2003.

¹⁸² See, for instance, the impact of pornography as described in chapter seven.

¹⁸³ India actively tries to cultivate and utilise bands with the Indian diaspora. The Indian government has launched a number of initiatives to reconnect the Indians overseas with their motherland. Examples are: the establishment of a Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (2004); the introduction of dual citizenship; the facilitation of transnational networks (e.g. through websites and conferences). Obviously, also the Indian entertainment industry has contributed to the ‘reconnection’ with the motherland. More than any other force, Indian movies have shaped contemporary East Indian images of India. Through storylines, and music and dance, the movies also help to sanctify Indian life. Some suggest, Bollywood produce even teaches ‘Authentic Indianness’: not just what Indians should look like, but what Indians should do and be like as well.

continues to change the religious landscape. It has brought conflict as well as brotherhood, and created opportunities for the pious and formerly chanceless. Yet, most of all, the deterritorialisation of religion has allowed it to grow as a marker of distinction. More than ever are the East-Indians in Guyana forced to define and defend their religious standpoint. The presence of persuasive alternatives, outside and inside one's religion, has undone the taken-for-granted nature of the faith of many.

People now find their conviction contested by foreign trained missionaries and teachers, and their adherents. Proponents of emerging branches and sects within Islam and Hinduism seek for expansion regardless of the fragmentation their efforts bring about. Yet, unity within the East-Indian community – as well as the conservation of Indian customs and traditions – are said to suffer most from aggressive marketing of Christianity in East Indian territories. Christian TV-shows hail eternal salvation and finances sent in from Christian zones allow churches to bloom. Besides, every year dozens of devoted and generally 'born again' Christians from the American Bible Belt and some western states¹⁸⁴ enter Guyana to preach their gospel. Also in Indian villages do they, together with local Christians, organise crusades and approach Hindus and Muslims with their conversion pleas. More than the predominantly Presbyterian, Anglican and Roman Catholic missionary endeavours in the past, these contemporary, often evangelical, undertakings (are said to) disregard Indian heritage.

Swami Aksharananda, the earlier mentioned Hindu conservationist, attributes this attitude to the source of current Christianising forces. According to him, conversion initiatives reflect the American ideology of "triumphalism."¹⁸⁵ He thinks that, while "in the early attempts there must have been some recognition of cultural autonomy," this recognition is now gone. "Today's brand of Christianity coming from America, [...] shares the American sense of dominance, the overall American sense of mission."¹⁸⁶ The swami compares it to "pushing Pepsi". He says there is little difference between exporting the drink and the doctrine. Both are considered unparalleled by the vendor and are expected to defeat competition.

Many Hindus believe Christianisation is too successful. The conclusion of an anti-conversion conference organised in Guyana in 1996 utters that "the Hindu society is in a state of emergency". As far as the document is concerned, internal weaknesses – such as lack of knowledge, concord and leadership – have made Hinduism and Hindus vulnerable to "external forces of which Christian missionary work is one."¹⁸⁷

A factor that is said to contribute to the magnetism of Christianity is its association with 'aid'. Many believe charity is used by the foreign or foreign financed Christians to

¹⁸⁴ For instance, considerable numbers of Mormon youths from Utah and other states travel to Guyana to serve the recommended time as missionary workers.

¹⁸⁵ Sunday Stabroek guest column, on 7 July 1996.

¹⁸⁶ Interview, 20 August 2003

¹⁸⁷ As stated in the conclusion of the Conference on Christian Conversion Activities Among Hindus ('Hinduism in Aapaat Kaal'), held at the Cove and John Ashram, on 28 April 1996.

induce Christian conversion. According to the author of a letter in the *Stabroek News*, missionaries from the Bible Belt and Utah “can be seen in traditional strongholds of Hindu-Muslim communities [...] targeting and converting potential converts, including poor civilians who are often most willing to accept foreign charity and gifts.”¹⁸⁸ He claims the “new believers are indoctrinated along a commercial basis.” Allegedly, free spectacles and injections are payments offered for a needy man’s soul. And indeed, Christian conversion involves commercial cajoling. Doctors and goods often travel with the missionaries and their message. And, although I have not come across cases of discrimination in the allocation of assistance, expected economic gain might encourage a Christian ‘rebirth’.¹⁸⁹

The promise of aid is compelling, just as the relatively high level of social cohesion that characterises the Christian community. Especially the Hindus, who have to do without institutionalised charity and closeness, are said to be susceptible of Christian lures. Hence, their attitude towards Christians and Hindu converts is relatively hostile. The threat conversion is thought to pose to Hindu survival has spoilt Hindu-Christian relations. Yet, conversion might not be the greatest religious challenge Guyanese Hinduism faces. As will be shown in the following chapter, the omnipresence of Christian concepts advertised on television, in public schools and through missionary activities, has caused many Hindus to incorporate these in their own belief systems. More specifically, both religious practice and notions of many Hindus in Guyana show traces of Christian influence. Hindu leaders blame this on the absence of even basic scriptural and conceptual knowledge among many devotees and even pundits. Consequently, to stop a further decay of ‘authentic’ Hinduism, training is needed and ties with religious experts or nuclei outside must be established and strengthened.

An example of a systematic and transnational attempt to do so, and thus protect Sanatan(a) Dharma from the impact of contaminating forces, is the previously mentioned Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS). This Indian based volunteer society with a branch and some Indian or Indian trained teachers in Guyana, considers the defence of Hindu tradition and civilisation its core business. Another example is the Vishva Hindu Parishad, the World Hindu Council.¹⁹⁰ The VHP, with 2.5 million members in India alone, is “the vanguard of an assertive, Hindu movement” (Malik 2003). According to its website, their object is “to consolidate, strengthen and make invincible the global Hindu fraternity.”¹⁹¹ By inculcating a carefully constructed common ‘Hindu spirit’, they are said to pursue the establishment of a resurgent Hinduism able to resist the enticing calls of Islam and Christianity.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ On 27 August 2003.

¹⁸⁹ Converts themselves, in testimonies at crusades or ordinary chit-chat, often even refer to material benefits when selling their new faith.

¹⁹⁰ See also Vertovec (1999b).

¹⁹¹ www.vhp.org

¹⁹² In India, the VHP is especially concerned about the conversion of ‘dalits’, lower-caste Hindus, into Islam.

Especially outside India are the efforts of the VHP focussed on the battle against the conversion of Hindus to Christianity. At their World Hindu Conference in Trinidad – where minister Persaud spoke and Swami Aksharananda appeared as keynote speaker – several resolutions emerged aimed at bulwarking Hinduism and handle the “Christian obsession to convert members of other faith communities.”¹⁹³ And, although the Parishad does not have a branch in Guyana as yet, their ideology has been disseminated among Guyanese Hindus. An undefined number of VHP allies and associate groups have sensitised many local Hindus to the awkward effects of Christian missionary activities.¹⁹⁴ Also visits of Hindu nationalist icons from India have contributed to this awareness. Ashok Singal, VHP president, an acquaintance of swami, and deemed “right-wing Hindutva fascist” has stayed in the country some years ago.¹⁹⁵ And Kuppahali Seetharamiah Sudharsan travelled to Guyana as well. The latter is the leader (*sarsanghchalak*) of the Rasthreeya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), another Hindu regenerative group from which the VHP and the Indian People’s Party (BJP) sprouted.¹⁹⁶

Contemporary Hindu architecture in Affiance



¹⁹³ Swami Aksharananda at the World Hindu Conference, 17-20 August 2000, Trinidad (AP).

¹⁹⁴ According a Guyanese delegate, the Guyanese delegation one of the biggest in Trinidad. Allegedly, they came with a group of eighty-three, including a government minister and the swami.

¹⁹⁵ A classification used by a migrant (East Indian) historian of Guyanese descent. (Interview, on 16 July 2003.) Hindutva, refers to a controversial Indian movement propagating the establishment of a Hindu state, the protection of Hindu rights, and – according to some – the battle against Christians, Muslims and Communists.

¹⁹⁶ At the time (2003) the ruling party in India, was defeated in the 2004 elections. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the BJP’s prime minister, and Ashok Singal both matured in the RSS.

Contacts between Indian Hindu activists and the Indian community in Guyana have been established to great effect. Predominantly through the mediation of local Hindu leaders, Indian revivalist philosophies reach and influence the masses. Yet, for now, their impact is limited. Overt conflict between local Hindus and non-Hindus is virtually non-existent. It seems as if the importance of ethnicity as a source of distinction in the national arena, and the position of Hinduism as majority faith, still tempers the weight of religious belonging. However, informants recognise an increase in religious assurance and commitment – especially among some youths – that is nourished by these forces from outside.

Next to the linkages with global Hindu conservationist movements, also other ties connect the local Hindu community with fellow faithful abroad. Holy men and messengers from India or of Indian descent have come to Guyana for decades to spread their message. And they have made a significant contribution. Not only did they help cultivate or uphold a fabled image of India as the mythical religious womb, they also changed the face of Hinduism in Guyana by introducing new philosophies and sects. Arya Samaj – Guyana's second largest Hindu 'denomination' – was brought to the country by an Indian missionary in 1910. And Raja Yoga, the Brahma Kumaris' road to spiritual liberation, was first advocated in Guyana by an Indian woman from London in 1975. Other groups have people coming in as well. The mainstream Sanatan community sees Indian swamis landing virtually every year.¹⁹⁷ And the International Society for Krishna Consciousness is visited by high ranked devotees from Europe, America and India on a frequent basis as well.

Furthermore, foreign knowledge reaches Guyana through the media. Indian Hindu programs are aired on local stations, and various native Indian stations are available to the 'cable-connected' Georgetown viewers. Particularly the TV-versions of great Hindu epics, such as the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyana, are widely watched and contribute to the expansion of Hindus' Hindu knowledge. This expansion of knowledge is also ensured by small but growing numbers of Indian trained Guyanese Hindus. Thanks to the availability of scholarships, young and ambitious Hindus can now pursue their religious advancement in South Asia. Indian government schemes, for instance, offer bright students a chance to study Hindi in Agra. But some also go by themselves. As a matter of fact, the two prominent Hindu leaders mentioned above have both spent prolonged periods of time in India: Prakash Gossai in Chandigarh and Swami Aksharananda in Varanasi.

Apparently, 'pure' religious knowledge is only obtainable at the source. Knowledge distant from the origin is tainted. Due to emerging transnational linkages, an awareness of local religious idiosyncrasy has arisen. This consciousness of localisation and dissimilarity contradicts the belief in an eternal and completed doctrine held by many faithful. More specifically, it is thought that a disconnection from the source, as happened in Guyana, has

¹⁹⁷ In 2003, ninety-nine year old Swami Akshyananda visited the Cove and John Ashram, on the Demerara East Coast. And also Swami Chakradhari, an Indian resident of New Jersey, set foot on Guyanese soil. The latter was said to be able to perform miracles such as 'mind-reading,' healing and 'materialising'. He appeared on television and in papers, and visited several mandirs where he displayed his powers to intrigued crowds.

caused perfect principles and practices to be contaminated and become substandard. A reconnection is needed to guide believers back to the proper path.

The Muslim community is affected even more by such purifying urges than the Hindu community. The nature of their doctrine, together with their minority status in East Indian Guyana and the relative abundance of available scholarships, has facilitated the emergence of an active and powerful decontaminating movement. Especially the latter, the return of foreign trained Guyanese Muslims, is mentioned as the cause of the so called 'Arabisation' of Islam in Guyana (Chickrie 1999). Informants from all religious backgrounds feel Islam has become less 'Indian' nowadays. They claim this process was initiated after the first batch returned from universities in the Middle East in the late 1970s. Over the years, homecoming students from places like Saudi-Arabia (Medina), Syria and Egypt have made Guyanese Muslims look and behave more Islamic. Or, as an old imam told me – and as will be extensively discussed in the following chapters – “since you have brothers coming back from outside [...] people ‘changed up’ their lifestyle.”¹⁹⁸

Together with foreign Muslim missionaries or missionary movements, scholarship students have severely altered the face of both local Islamic practice and the Muslim masses. Their message of a deculturalised Islam has brought rift within the East Indian community as a whole and within Indo-Guyanese Muslim circles in specific. More precisely, efforts to revitalise *imaan*, the faith, in combination with an ideology of universal brotherhood has prompted the rise of new forms of identification and has caused existing ones to be challenged like they were never before.¹⁹⁹ As will be analysed in chapter four, a division between fundamentalists and traditionalists has come to characterise Muslim Guyana. Whereas on one hand you find an internationally well-connected group of purifiers which pursues purification, emphasises Muslimhood, and condemns contamination of practices and principles or even rejects the Indian identity. On the other hand, an increasingly well-connected counterforce of preservationists has materialised that – in response – embraces cultural peculiarities or a localised Islam, and ‘celebrates’ East Indianness.

Fundamentalism as well as neotraditionalism should thus be appreciated in the light of globalised religion. They are both the cause and product of an environment that is typified by complexity and confusion. The movements largely owe their existence to the support from religious nuclei in the region (Suriname and Trinidad), in the New World

¹⁹⁸ Interview with mister Aleem, imam of the Huis 't Dieren Jama'at, on 18 December 2003.

¹⁹⁹ A sense of brotherhood is demonstrated in the concern of local Muslims with Muslim matters abroad. Congregational prayers on Fridays are usually concluded with a supplication in which Allah is asked to grant victory to brethren threatened by unbelievers, in places like Afghanistan, Chechnya, Palestine, and the Philippines. The frequency and intensity of such expressions of camaraderie, often combined with the articulation of strong feelings of non-Muslim antipathy, significantly increased after the attack of Iraq by U.S and British military forces (March 2003). In press releases, the CIOG announced activities meant to display the solidarity of Guyana's Muslims with the people of Iraq, and criticised Western “aggression” (Kaieteur News, 26 March 2003). A similar form of solidarity was exhibited when a Kosovarian speaker at a local GIT conference collected donations among the attendants to help finance the Muslim cause on the Balkan.

(New York and Toronto), and the lands of tradition (the Arab world and Indian subcontinent).²⁰⁰ Their appeal can be explained by looking at the needs of the disaffected individual in search of strong and recognisable labels in a world full of insecurities and uncertainties (to which these same movements have actually contributed).

Although I will discuss the exact nature and effects of developments within Muslim orbits later, it is important to note here that both cleansing and preservative efforts advertise an Islam which claims an increasingly prominent position in the lives of the believers. Whether ‘traditionalist’ or ‘reformist’, deterritorialisation has pushed religious conviction, or better ‘Muslimness’, to the forefront. The religious information revolution has stimulated inquisitiveness, brought options, and led belief to become the outcome of a choice rather than an ascribed status. Paradoxically, both the local internal tensions and the increased level of inclusion in the worldwide *ummah* (the single Brotherhood²⁰¹) that resulted from this ‘revolution’, have contributed to the rising importance of Muslimness. In some cases, as will be described later, this process causes alterations in the meaning of Indianness. These alterations are further stimulated as certain Hindu factions, again inspired by developments outside, attempt to monopolise Indianness and equate it with Hinduness.

The increased interconnectedness of religious groups has significant consequences for the development of Indianness. Like mass emigration and the expansion of interconnectivity in secular realms such as commerce and entertainment, it influences the way Hindu and Muslim East-Indians look at themselves, others, and the world. It even affects the way they behave. Hence, the collection of powers that can be labelled transnational is among the prime formative forces affecting the present day East-Indian community. Just as the pervasive inter-ethnic struggle, however, the strength of these forces is only revealed when analysing notions and practices of those who are – at the same time – the subject to and the engine behind them.

3.3 Stagnation with change: the paradox of contemporary uncertainty

The East Indians I lived amongst for an extensive period, their ways and accounts, have caused me to label transnationality or globalisation and interethnic struggle as primary formative forces. More than other factors, these shape contemporary East Indianness. Their imprint is clearly visible in the interpretations and strategies of local Indians today.

²⁰⁰ The local Muslim community is positioned on the receiving end of global Muslim money flows. Although there is little openness when it comes to foreign financing, many of the Muslim organisations get material or financial assistance from Islamic communities and institutions elsewhere. The CIOG collaborates with the Jeddah based Islamic Development Bank, the International Islamic Charitable Organisation (IICO) and the Zakat House of Kuwait. With the money and items they get, Muslim hungry are fed, students get educated in Guyana and abroad, and Islamic structures are build.

²⁰¹ In the Qur’an there are several references to this ‘Single Brotherhood’, for example in surah *Al Baqarah* (143), surah *Al Anbiya* (92), and surah *Al Hujurah* (10).

00What binds interethnic rivalry and globalisation-related complexity is their connection to motivating senses of crisis. Problematic interethnic relations, subject to ethnopolitics, as well as changes brought about by migration, and the impact of foreign cultural nuclei, trigger and nourish feelings of insufficiency and indistinctness, and arouse relatively intense and stimulating notions of insecurity concerning the satisfaction of personal needs and the survival of existing collectives. As will be discussed in chapter five, these sentiments provoke various types of responses. They can stir innovation and conservation. Some informants, often those blessed with the faculty to innovate, welcome change and passionately blend the old with the new. The attitude of many others, although never immune to innovation, is more negative. According to them, a downward trend can be discerned when poring over society today. Deemed ethical gems from the past, such as social cohesion, decency and regard, have vanished and to a great extent the outside is 0held responsible. Allegedly, they are replaced by new forms of boundless behaviour which are said to jeopardise the survival of the group. As such, these perceptions add to a sense of crisis which feeds the urge to isolate or distinguish oneself and, hence, triggers efforts to further demarcate the boundaries.

The emergence of such efforts, in an organised fashion, becomes visible in the fields of ethnicity and religion. In the case of the latter, it means the influence of revitalisation or reformation movements is growing. A group like the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, as well as Salafi associated Muslims are typical examples.²⁰² Regarding Indian ethnicity, there are other examples of preservationism. The Guyana Indian Heritage Association (GIHA), for instance, is overtly concerned about the state of Indian culture and Guyanese Indians. Their so called ‘GIHA pledge’ narrates of victimisation and hails self-sacrifice:

*“Powerful Indian I am. I am awakened by the painful cry of my people.
Their blood spilled, their body battered, it is of mine too, it is my own.
I see myself in all and all in me. I shall serve my people without thought for myself.
I arise now to defend the legacy of the Indian glory. It is my bounden duty.
I fear no death, for I was never born and I will never die.”*
Dignity/Izzat, Vol. 1 No 3 – March 2003

So far, this is an interesting example of ethno-rhetoric rather than the articulation of some real intention to revolt. Yet, the association’s populist approach is successful in the sense that their activities draw large amounts of people. Especially their annual Guyana *Mela* (festival), staging a cocktail of genuine Indian entertainment and ethno-pep-talk, has grown into a mass event. Its fifth edition in May 2003 was visited by an estimated 25,000 *jabajis*.²⁰³

²⁰² Both will be discussed in the following chapter.

²⁰³ ‘Shipbrothers,’ a term previously use to describe the kin-like relationship between Indians who arrived on the same ships. The term is adopted by the GIHA and consequently used when addressing the Indians. 0

But also other GIHA events contribute to the dissemination of GIHA ideology. An Indian art exhibition, Indian movie nights, a commemoration of the Indian victims of ethnic violence, an all-Indian cricket competition, and Mai Aur Pai Ka Din, a day with and out of respect for the Indian elderly, all help to fortify the besieged Indian identity. In fact, rather than being plain cultural events, these activities all serve as means to a higher end.

According to the association's president Ryhaan Shah, the GIHA is "really a lobbying group" that paradoxically arose to fight for "Indian rights in a country where Indians are the majority."²⁰⁴ The GIHA claims this was necessary because the "marginalisation of Indian culture, and the assimilation of Indians into the Black Creole culture."²⁰⁵ As far as miss Shah is concerned, the PPP/C allows this to happen and even "backs the idea of assimilation."²⁰⁶ She claims the government was never interested in Indian culture:

"The PPP/C and its administration felt that they [already] had all the bases covered: the sugar workers through GAWU, the Hindu community through the Dharmic Sabha, the rice producers through the RPA, youth and women through party arms, and enough influence in the Muslim organisations to keep them in line. [Yet t]hey now find that they had overlooked the importance of the common culture shared by their Indian supporters." – *Kaieteur News*, 9/10 May 2003.

In fact, according to many, the association's growing popularity is feared and therefore obstructed by the PPP/C. The ruling party's concern of having their Indian support base influenced by such an incontrollable group is even said to have pushed them into founding a counter organisation. This officially autonomous Indian Arrival Committee (IAC) is regarded a PPP/C "front group [...] seeking to undermine the success and credibility of the GIHA" by means of slander and the organisation of competitive events.²⁰⁷

The success of the GIHA derives from their ability to utilise the same anxieties of the Indian population the PPP/C previously monopolised. References to harmful de-Indianisation, as the result of westernisation and creolisation, allow them gain support of the fearful. But also images of ethnic victimhood are successfully marketed. Particularly the explosive rise in crime rates, and the increasingly brutal character of robberies, slayings, and kidnappings, prove excellent vehicles to boost ethnic awareness. The GIHA cleverly drags crime into the ethnic sphere.²⁰⁸ Crime has become "heinous ethnic violence" and its victims "our fallen Jahajis."

²⁰⁴ Interview with Ryhaan Shah, the president of the GIHA, on 17 May 2003.

²⁰⁵ 'GIHA perspective,' the GIHA's weekly column in the *Kaieteur News*, on 9/10 May 2003.

²⁰⁶ Interview with Ryhaan Shah, the president of the GIHA on 17 May 2003.

²⁰⁷ 'Peeping Tom' and Frederick Kissoon, *Kaieteur News*, 4, 6 and 9/10 May 2003.

²⁰⁸ A crime report, published by the Guyana Indian Heritage Association (GIHA), allegedly shows that eighty-four percent of the cash and jewellery stolen between February 23, 2002 and February 28, 2003 was

A sense of victimhood has arisen among the Indians thanks to the passionately conveyed image of ethnic targeting. A letter, published in a national newspaper, compares the East Indian situation with one of “purging,” or “ethnic cleansing.” According to the author, “criminals, with the aid of known [African] political forces, are making the Indo-Guyanese lives a living hell”. Of course such a view is at least inflated. Yet, it is shared. And despite its questionable rationale, it guides people into the arms of Indian rights activists. Again, this is an example of the fright-fostering approach which is habitually employed in local power quests. Clearly, the nation’s makeup allows such strategies to succeed and helps the all-encompassing ethnic power struggle to become one of the most formative forces in Guyanese society, influencing the lives of the Indians and moulding the shape of Indianness.

Important linkages between the two formative forces exist. Even though, at first glance, they appear to work in opposite directions – towards degeneration and progress – ethnicity based struggles and globalisation-fuelled transformation both coexist and even operate in a synergetic manner. Stagnation and change are both related to a reality saturated with uncertainties, connected to strategies chosen by different people or at different times. As will become clear in following chapters, focuses that determine perception and action can vary as they derive from mental structures of which the activation depends on their appropriateness in a given situation. One never plays just one part. In fact, East Indians can manifest themselves as agents of innovation in certain contexts and as guardians of ethnic tradition in other circumstances. Highly trained ethnic and religious leaders are a great example. But also ‘ordinary’ East Indians display ambiguous relationships with ethnicity or ethnic institutions and their increasingly postmodern environs.

The forces I have described in this chapter are obviously not the only ones determining the context in which East Indians produce and reproduce their distinctiveness. Yet, as indicated, I believe they are the most significant ones. Their impact on the formation of what throughout this book will be designated as collective understandings is considerable. Both help shape a physical actuality and a social reality in which my informants’ concepts of self and subjectivity as well as their position in their world materialise. Grassroots evidence of the formative working of struggle and change is not hard to find.

The material presented in the chapters in Part II proves the importance of the forces on the practices and perceptions of ‘real’ East Indian individuals. It is their behaviour and the explanations they have offered me which revealed the manipulative powers of ethno-politicians and the re-creative faculty of globalisation with regard to people’s attitudes towards faith (chapter four), friendship (chapter six), and sexuality

robbed from Indians and that ninety-eight percent of the bandits, wanted men, suspects and thieves killed during these twelve months were Africans. The GIHA further states that “reports from the victims bear out that many of the crimes are committed to words of race hate, and have clear political motives.” (Dignity/Izzat, Vol. 1 No. 4 and No. 5 – May and June 2003).

(chapter seven). Never can people escape their shaping force. East Indianness, even its exponents in the realms of family, gender, and belief, is always a distinctiveness established in the context of interethnic struggles, and in the context of postmodern globalism, and in the context of a specific East Indian past, and in the context of...

Conclusion

The accelerated development of distinctiveness due to the impact of the two highly formative forces makes one wonder what, in the long run, will happen to East Indianness. Put differently, what will be the impact of globalisation on the distribution of power or the anatomy of control in Guyana? How does further deterritorialisation affect the balance of power between the structuring structure and the creative individual?²⁰⁹ And, how does transnationalism influence the character of the clusters of ethnic institutions and entities in their quests for power?

First the balance of power. Obviously, the influx of alien concepts and commodities has provided the East Indians with previously unavailable alternatives. Yet, this does not mean the individual can now easily escape from the impact of (reformed) structures. In fact, as will be shown in later chapters, in certain ways structures have become more visible today. Postmodern heterogeneity might 'structuralise' the definition of the self and the other: make it into a composition of aspects of various structures rather than an idiosyncratic construct, assembled within a relatively homogenous environment.

Second, the character of power clusters. It is clear that deterritorialisation affects the appearance of hegemonic struggles. Migration and the increased mobility of capital, people, and information allow the power hungry to seek foreign assistance to satisfy their appetite. Diasporic communities offer exponents of power clusters an opportunity to receive moral and financial support. They are also talent pools: environments in which leaders mature. Nowadays, political parties and cultural groups have their branches in North America, collect funding among migrants, and often are headed by persons who have been trained outside Guyana.

Besides, deterritorialisation has added new senses of uncertainty and insecurity which are open to manipulation by entities who already utilised similar existing senses to guarantee the loyalty of their backing. Disjunctive flows – like novel images of wellbeing that cannot be satisfied by local standards of living and consumer capabilities (Appadurai 1996:6) – have confronted people with the limitations and shortcomings of their environment and existence.

All in all, globalisation has prompted a profound redefinition of East Indianness. This redefinition brings about fragmentation. As will become clear in chapter four and five, it has instigated both processes of reculturalisation and deculturalisation. These processes,

²⁰⁹ Questions of power are complex and topic of a massive body of academic produce. As the focus of this investigation is interconnectivity, and my theoretical explorations concern the formation of shared schemata, my examination of issues of power is limited. Matters of control are embedded in my analysis of cultural understandings. I will thus not elaborate various types of power and concepts such as structure and agency.

however, do not severely undermine the potential of the label (East Indian) as a tool in struggles for power. I believe the ideological separation of matters of culture and 'race' are the cause of this. Whereas globalisation has created a widespread awareness that culture is not unquestioned but can be challenged and (nowadays) must be either opposed or preserved, the collective and firm belief in race – the unchangeable and unquestionable nature that binds the Indian collective – allows the label to remain an effective instrument in the hands of the power seekers, despite the uncertain future of traditions and customs. It seems as if, just like globalisation, ethnically based quests for control are not yet to lose their formative force.

RELIGIOUS TRANSFORMATIONS

*The Localisation and Globalisation of
Indian religion in Guyana*

Socio-cultural change, by definition, is contextual. Differences in time and space stem from variances in the conditions under which individuals – with an invariably great creative and adaptive capacity – produce and reproduce culture. Modifications in attitudes and practices, as well as transformations of institutions and structures, can only be explained by taking the circumstances of change into account.

I have used the first two chapters of Part I to outline these circumstances of change. In chapter two, I have sketched the historical process of transplantation: the radical change in productive conditions brought about by the migration from India to Guyana, the establishment on South American soil, and decolonialisation. In the previous chapter, I described two forces that strongly shape the contemporary context in which East Indianness is defined: the ethnicisation of distributive struggles, and the intensification of global interconnectedness.²¹⁰

This chapter comprises the analysis of two strands of cultural transformation that result from such circumstantial change. It is a case study in which the development of East Indian systems of belief is linked to the character of the society in which development occurs. ‘Religious Transformations’ involves an examination of important tendencies instigated by the collision of a formative past and present: cultural developments occurring in the contexts described in the previous two chapters. More precisely, the twin processes of religious localisation and globalisation are examined.

Both tendencies of globalisation and localisation direct processes of modification and reproduction in all the realms of social behaviour that will be analysed in the second part of this dissertation. Additionally, also in those other realms of behaviour, these tendencies are the product of the contextual changes that fuel cultural adaptation in the field of Indian religion in Guyana. Religious Transformations, thus bridges both parts, and adds to the focus of the rest of this book.

²¹⁰ The characteristic of contemporary globalisation according to India and Rosaldo (2002:2).

I have organised the core of this chapter in two sections. First, I will discuss the localisation of Hinduism. In half a chapter, I will describe how the formation of a Guyanese version of the Indian faith was triggered by alterations in (re)creative possibilities and power structures, and the emergence of attractive alternatives. Second, I will analyse the globalisation of local Islam. In a few sections, the impact of the rapidly growing transnational interconnectedness on both social structures and religious thought and practice is investigated. In the a brief concluding section I will then connect the forces of localisation and globalisation, argue that they encompass quite similar catalysts of change, and stress the fact that – rather than being mutually exclusive – they are universal forces that coexist and are even interrelated. As Friedman (2002:233) has said about fragmentation and homogenisation: “[they] are not two arguments, two opposing views of what is happening in the world today, but two constitutive trends of global reality.”

4.1 The localisation of Hinduism

“Undisguised hatred of Untouchables incites members of a private army in a Bihar village. Outraged by the wage and land-reform demands of Untouchables, the Ranvir Sena, a militia led by landowners, has been implicated in the massacres of more than 500 Untouchables. The attackers have gone largely unpunished. Activists fear that the recent surge in violent incidents across India will only intensify as more Untouchables try to break the chains of caste.” – *National Geographic*, June 2003, pp. 30.

A Muslim friend from a nearby village had sent me a photocopied piece taken from an issue of the *National Geographic* magazine. ‘India’s Untouchables’. He had promised me a copy after we had discussed it in the masjid a week earlier. The author vividly described Indian inequities and presented Society members and other readers with some dramatic cases of the monstrosities that are still taking place in the name of karmic stratification. Torment and torture, justified as the consequence of birth at the bottom.

I had made some extra copies and shared them with some Hindu neighbours and relatives. They had asked for it, seemed eager to know. One Tuesday afternoon, a few of us sat down and discussed the article.

“Dem people ah sick man,” uttered Ramdeo, my wife’s *nana* (MMB). “I am ashamed to be a Hindu,” responded the barber from the house next door. My uncle-in-law shook his head: “these wicked men nah know no’ting about religion.” All hummed in agreement, India’s Indians obviously had completely misunderstood the whole thing. Prakesh from the backstreet looked at me: “they nah realise all of we ah duh same?” I raised my shoulders. “What yuh really t’ink Hans, you and Nally been deh, wha mek dem nah understand duh system?”

Indologists like Dumont (1970) once positioned the caste system at the heart of Hinduism.²¹¹ According to them, caste stratification was both a core aspect of the belief system and an essential part of its grand design. The informants above, all convinced Hindus, prove them wrong. Rather than part of its essence, the structuring structure appears to be largely a contextual feature, the product of a doctrine's development in a certain locale. Indian diaspora communities provide the evidence. The relocation of the system to other surroundings has never jeopardised the survival of the belief, yet severely fractured beliefs in caste.

As throughout the Indian transnational community, Hinduism in Guyana is not just a part of the Indian religious heritage. Rather than a relic from the past, it is the dynamic outcome of its development in a unique Guyanese setting. Current practices and beliefs constitute a localised Hinduism within a multi-religious and globally connected Guyanese reality. This localised Hinduism, thanks to the creative powers of its believers, has developed into a vibrant religious system in which the value of aspects once deemed fundamental has deteriorated and new practices and visions have been absorbed.

'The past' and contemporary 'Present-day Contexts' – in a joint venture with the devotees themselves – thus produce a distinctively Guyanese Hinduism. This Caribbean variety of the ancient Indian religious complex is a kind in which the importance of caste as a structuring structure has diminished and subsequently the role of its key concepts – e.g. hierarchy and purity – has changed. The particular demographic makeup of the indentured population and organisation of the Guyanese society did not allow the system to be reproduced in the New World. Instead of the incredibly variegated Indian Subcontinental Hinduism, in which local and hierarchical differences gave the system a multitude of faces, a relatively unitary collection of localised doctrines and doings developed. This mainstream Hinduism in Guyana, generally referred to as *Sanatan Dharma*, is a Vaishnavite bhakti-centred religion that bears marks of a north Indian past. It is also a fundamentally brahmanical religion, in which the successful marketing of their supposedly superior approach has erased or marginalised 'low practices'. Furthermore, it is a somewhat anglicised religion that is modified since it is often only understood in English and because it has rooted in the soil where Christianity is grown. And finally, it is a religion which has become challenged by the ever growing influence of the Anglo-American style and a handful of Hindu alternatives imported from religious nuclei outside.

4.1.1 New base, new borders: the effect of altered margins on the establishment of religious systems

Religious localisation concerns the process in which a system of thoughts and practices is modified to meet the requirements of a particular (new) locale and thus to ensure its

²¹¹ Others, like Dirks (2001) state the concept of caste is a rather recent invention, the outcome of a historical encounter between India and Western colonial rule. According to him caste has become a symbol of India, but essentially is something flexible and variable instead of static and universal.

relevance and survival. More than anything, it involves a divergence from the developmental trajectory of the 'original' system which is prompted by alterations in people's (re)creative possibilities, by shifted boundaries of the productive field.

Hinduism, as practiced by many of the East Indians in the rural region where I have spent most of my days in Guyana, is a perfect illustration of a localised religious system. Because Guyanese reality is fundamentally different from north Indian reality, it was impossible to reconstruct the religious complex as it had existed in the motherland. Constraints inherent to plantation life, and later existence in a plural society, forced the people to refine the corpus of beliefs and acts. These new constraints, or altered (re)creative possibilities, broadly comprise three formative lines that will be discussed under 4.1. First, localisation occurs because productive conditions change. Alterations in practical circumstances that facilitate or even instigate the production or reproduction of a system make adaptation inevitable. A deteriorated general financial situation of the believers, for instance, will negatively affect the magnitude of celebration or worship and the investments in religious structures and artefacts. Furthermore, limited access to 'authentic' knowledge and information encourages departure from pre-localised ways and manners. Also, the legislative system of the host society can stir processes of localisation. Colonial marriage and funeral laws in British Guiana have strongly influenced practices and even preferences surrounding weddings and 'departure' in the local Hindu community. And, finally, differences in social makeup of the transplanted body of believers bring about transformation. As will be discussed in a following section, the reduction of the caste system in Hindu Guyana (and comparable diasporic communities) is an illuminating example.

Second, processes of localisation are related to modifications in power structures. Relocation of a people and/or a cultural system unavoidably means shifts in power balances. The emigration of Indians to Guyana caused internal hierarchical relations to be challenged and placed them as *one* group in an ethnically stratified society. This, eventually, helped the establishment of a localised religion that was relatively unitary, an important source of ethnic distinctiveness, and inseparable from politics and interethnic competition over scarce resources.

A third and last instigator of place based change is the whole of alternatives available in a particular (new) environment. Encounters with a range of previously unknown and unpractised systems, especially if these seem well suited for life in the new alien habitat, are likely to enthuse reformative efforts among a migrant people. The effects of alternatives will even be stronger if, like the Hindu Indians, a group and their cultural corpus travel from a rather homogenous setting to a particularly heterogeneous one. The ancestors of the East Indians came from a land where they were surrounded by oriental beliefs to a place where other truths prevailed. Undoubtedly, this accelerated the process of localisation, particularly because the alternatives were associated with those segments of society that possessed an abundance of power and status.

Such interplay between catalysts of localisation is quite typical. In fact, their vigour depends on mutual levels of change. The more exotic a host society – that is, concerning the total of reconstructive preconditions – the more profound modifications are likely to be.

Yet, localisation is not merely the partial recreation of cultural systems in environments in which the rules differ (from the society from which the system originates). It also involves the transformation of ‘the existing’ in order to make it serve new purposes that arise in the new setting in which it becomes produced. As suggested throughout this dissertation, in a plural and highly competitive place like Guyana, the matter of ‘belonging’ has developed into one of the prime functions of Indian religion. Guyanese Hinduism, rather unlike its Asian equivalent, is a significant marker of difference, the grounds of networks and notions that help my subjects survive in more than solely spiritual ways. It is a means to be, belong, and be known in a complex and quite unfriendly new world.²¹²

In the following few sections, the process of localisation will be illustrated by briefly discussing several key characteristics of Guyanese Hinduism. I will address the question of circumstances, the question of power, and the answers of alternatives. These analyses of the decline of caste, the establishment of a standardised and brahmanical body of practices, and the Anglicisation of ways and conceptions will illuminate the development of a transplanted religion in a society that is unique but far from atypical.

4.1.2 Localisation I: the question of circumstances

Localisation happens as productive conditions change. Also Guyanese Hinduism owes its distinctive appearance to a large extent to factors that constitute a reality in which Hinduism in its Subcontinental form could not be resurrected. Legislative constraints and the inability to celebrate and organise affected religious practice during the Indians’ early days in Guyana. And the community’s relative isolation from Hindustan and its sources of knowledge stirred creativity among devotees after most of them settled in coastal villages. One of the most influential alterations in circumstances, was the heterogeneous makeup of the indentured population in particular and the colonial society as a whole.

The fact that a wide variety of people from different places and with different positions, experiences, and beliefs, arrived as one group in an already plural community triggered processes of amalgamative change that – more than anything – manifested in the deterioration of a structure and/or ideology that once was considered to be a Hindu fundamental: the caste system.²¹³

²¹² The importance of religion as label and marker of difference has even grown since mass migration, increased mobility and interconnectedness have caused realities to become more and more complex and confusing. Developments in Guyana’s Islamic realm, as will be discussed under 4.2, are an illustration of this.

²¹³ Such a conception of caste’s indispensability, apparent in the famous work of Dumont (e.g. 1970), has become contested among contemporary Indologists. Its tendency to binary thinking is said to oversimplify the complexity of historical processes and its ideas of structure allegedly admit of virtually no creative power of the Hindus who belong to castes. (Inden 1990; Searle-Chatterjee and Sharma 1994; and Quigley 1994).

(*Caste*) – As a matter of fact, the deterioration of caste structures in (post-)indentured societies is one of the most widely recognised and well described examples of religious localisation. As Steven Vertovec (1992:25) states, “nearly every anthropologist who has conducted ethnography among post-indenture populations of Indians concludes that the caste system no longer plays any considerable part in organising social structure or determining social relationships among Indian communities.”²¹⁴ In other words, caste as a means of contextually relevant classification “so as to ascertain and gain [...] the behaviour, claims, exchanges and general relationship deemed appropriate”, cannot be maintained in those alien environs (Vertovec 1992:26). As described in chapter two, also in Guyana this is the case. Like in Mauritius (Benedict 1967; Hollup 1994) and Fiji (Jayawardena 1971), Guyana’s colonial Indian community lacked crucial features that nourished the system in India.

Especially the diverse geographical origin of the indentured workers proved an impassable obstacle for the reconstruction of caste structures overseas. The great variety of backgrounds made it impossible to import the “small-scale organisation on which caste-group and subcaste-group behaviour had been based” (Mayer 1967b:3). Local configurations of meanings and relationships that shaped day-to-day caste related praxis in Indian villages, had to be left behind. Additionally, the traits of plantation life frustrated the establishment of social ties required for the implementation of a rebuild caste system.

Jayawardena (1971:116) states that in particular “the system’s disconnection from the sources of power in the host society” was detrimental for the relevance of caste as a structuring structure. In Guyana, as well as in the other plantation based societies, the indentured labourers did not have the power to organise themselves and/or control others. Considering the fact that the constant manipulation of power relations is regarded vital to the functioning of the system, a “caste divorced from indigenous conceptions of polity, sovereignty, dominance, and kingship would surely occupy [...] a marginal space.”²¹⁵

This dwindled status of caste was further ensured by the absence of several of its prerequisites. The position of individuals, based on ascribed group membership, was impossible to determine with certainty. Migrants could claim any caste position they wanted to. Hence, ascription of statuses became problematic and of lesser value. Besides, a narrow definition of endogamy, essential to the system in India, could not be maintained. Not only did the eclectic composition of the indentured population stand in the way of marital exclusivity, also the mentioned shortage of female immigrants effectively

²¹⁴ As Vertovec, I think what needs to be recognised is that even in India, castes are not the readily identifiable social groups or ascribed statuses 19th and even many 20th century Western scholars thought them to be. Instead “caste in India involves [...] a range of] varied and complex phenomena.” Following Marriot (1968:103), he says it should be seen as a system of contextually relevant classification which involves “a series of successively wider zones of reference for the units in a local system, the several zones being classified by distinctive values.” These zones range from intimate kinship-based subdivisions of caste, via for instance caste and caste clusters, all the way to “the classical all-India varna scheme” (Vertovec 1992:27).

²¹⁵ Raheja (1988) quoted in Vertovec’s *Hindu Trinidad* (1992:34).

undermined “the demographic basis of the caste system” (Jayawardena 1968:442). On top of that, migration had severed the economic foundation of the complex. Or rather, “the type of occupational specialisation which was the economic basis of the Indian caste system was not found in the plantation” (Smith and Jayawardena 1967:51). Except for some ritual activities, on the estate, and in later years, anybody could basically do anything.²¹⁶

Without an adequate economic, social, and ‘political’ basis, caste as an organisational mechanism turned out to be relatively useless. As a mere product and expression of a particular reality, it was unfit to serve old purposes in new surroundings. However, as an ideology which naturalness and legitimacy derives from a transcendental connection – *varnasramadharm*a as a divinely ordained social system – it could not simply be disregarded. The concept of caste, although dysfunctional in its original role, remained part of the Hindu religious complex and thus endured as both a classificatory device and power tool.

Up until today, remnants of the system survive at the level of “submerged consciousness” (Reddock 1994:41) and in the form of beliefs and practices concerning a cluster of collective understandings. More precisely, contemporary Hindu East Indian ways and conceptions indicate that certain traces of caste ideology linger on in the form of group specific notions regarding ‘hierarchy’ and, accordingly, ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’.

(*Hierarchy*) – Actions and explanations of my Hindu informants, indicate that matters of hierarchy still have an impact on the reasoning and behaviour of many. Relatively elaborate concepts of ‘high’ and ‘low’ continue to function as instruments to explain and enact difference. These concepts, because of the way they are expressed, seem remainders of stratifications that once formed the heart of the caste complex.

Such remainders of the caste system are recognised by various researchers of post-indentured societies (e.g. Mayer 1967a:9). Singer (1967), for instance, considers class to have come to correspond with the concept of *varna* in Guyana.²¹⁷ According to him, certain practices and explanations of local Hindus suggest that remnants of caste ideology provide East Indian class stratification with a cultural tint. And I agree. Conceptions by

²¹⁶ Although still without a great rigidity, ritual activities are to some extent deemed restricted certain varna (the Brahmin) and groups (the Nao).

²¹⁷ According to Klostermaier (1994:317), the division of varnas is based upon the purusa-sukta of the RgVeda which explains “the origin of mankind out of the sacrifice of the primeval purusa and his dismemberment: out of his mouth originated the Brahmins, from his chest came the ksatriyas, from his belly issued the vaisyas, and from his feet the sudras.” He states the division was occupational as well: the Brahmins are teachers and advisors; the Ksatriyas defenders and warriors; the Vaisyas are the farmers and merchants; and the Sudras servants and menials. Besides, varna is also related to phenotypic classification. In fact, “the very name varna, colour, suggests a differentiation between fairer- and darker skinned people” (Klostermaier 1994:317). It is suggested that Brahmins in India deemed to have a lighter skin-colour than Sudras. Finally, the system embodied a religious hierarchy; combined with the concept of karma, “it implied merit.” A ‘high birth’ is regarded the reward for good actions performed in a previous life and comes with certain benefits such as the right to be initiated, through the upanayana samskaras.

respondents reveal the impact of a Subcontinental heritage. People's perception of those positioned at different hierarchical levels indicate the existence of relatively rigid classificatory schemes based upon a strong belief in ascribed statuses and a linkage between rank and purity.

Within East Indian circles, a comparatively rigorously enforced class based endogamy can be recognised, along with a rather thorough segregation of classes. (Intra-ethnic) relations between members of different classes are restricted in certain ways. East Indian squatters and other underprivileged are widely considered bad company because of their deemed filthiness and natural inclination to misbehave and fail. In fact, the poor are often explicitly referred to as *chamar*²¹⁸ and people of a "low nation"²¹⁹: individuals who rear hogs and consume cheap bush-rum in excessive amounts. In the act of class stratification, an implicit reference to varna is thus made, as Hindus regard physical and moral impurity an intrinsic feature of those belonging to low social classes.

Another such reference to varna is made in the East Indian's disproportionate concern with skin colour. As in the India of their ancestors, the Guyanese Hindus consider a person's body tone to correlate with one's position. Fair-skinned Indians, preferably with straight hair, are therefore more likely to be respected and judged positively than their dark-skinned compatriots. A dark appearance, in practice, can prove a serious obstacle when looking for things such as the approval of peers, a job, a spouse, and even the affection of close relatives. This social and even economic significance of fairness inspires numerous females *and* males to employ a range of techniques varying from prolonged confinement to taking hot baths, turning up the air-conditioning in offices, and the application of skin-bleaching creams to 'Jacksonise' their skin.

The relevance of complexion, and its caste-based association with inclinations and innate features, manifests even more vividly in the context of interethnic interaction. Practice and discourse of the East Indians here reveal a categorisation of mankind in three different strata: the upper one is occupied by Europeans; the central one is taken by the Indians; and the lower one belongs to the Africans. Again, skin colour determines one's status and is believed to be the indication of a certain 'basic personality'.

Critics link such racist reasoning to the Hindu's historical ways of structuring society. According to the Afro-Guyanese Kean Gibson, "the important implication in the application of caste in Guyana lies in the definitions and restrictions placed on the Shudra caste who are black, and for purposes of power, the definitions and restrictions can justifiably be applied to all non-Hindus who are objectively black in colour, or for whatever reason, can be perceived as being outside the pale of humanity" (2003:26). Although I believe Gibson's argument overstates the impact of caste, some connection between varna and the judgment of Africans by their East Indian fellow citizens does exist.

²¹⁸ According to Smith (1962:140), the term refers to "the leather working Chamar caste, representing the lowest untouchable groups."

²¹⁹ A low caste status is called a "low nation" in Guyana. Likewise, upper caste people are of a "high nation".

Explicit references to the “low born” characteristics of Africans are frequently made. They are referred to as descendants of apes²²⁰, the progeny of the *raksasas* – the goblin citizens of Ravana’s Lanka²²¹ – or just as “sub-humans”. As an inherently lower breed, the Africans are thought to have a fundamentally different physique and psyche. According to some, they are *tamasik* people, a species with characters controlled by *tamas*²²², darkness, and thus predisposed to indulge in sinful deeds. Their inferiority is regarded natural, as natural as the superiority of the white Europeans and Americans, and legitimises the discriminatory behaviour against ‘racially’ other (that is cultivated in interethnic battles for hegemony).

The legacy of caste thus allows for a validation of ethnic discrimination, a concept of inequity as something meant to be. In other words, racism is so well articulated and regarded valid partially because it is in accordance with the oriental doctrine of intrinsic hierarchical difference: the principles of caste. Hindu believe that individuals are born with baggage, carrying the weight of doings in previous lives enables the moral valuation of others based on incontrollable features such as place of birth and skin colour. As such, white supremacy is acknowledged and black inferiority okayed.

Similarly, the hierarchical makeup of the ingroup can be regarded a reference to the varna complex. Like ethnic stratification, also colour-based classification and the association of poverty with (im)purity, narrate of a once highly influential system that has managed to survive in a diluted form reshaped to endure new circumstances and to serve new purposes. Both are examples of localised Indian ways to structure relationships between the members of groups with different statuses. They are novel concepts of high and low employed to explain and enact difference in a world where, thanks to its specific social, political, and economic constitution, the ‘old’ system had become irrelevant. In an environment characterised by heterogeneity and instability due to transformation and competition, these concepts facilitate both the sense making Hindu commoner and the Hindu elite in quest of power and, as Bourdieu would state, the naturalisation of its arbitrariness (1977:164-165).

²²⁰ A Hindu assured me that Africans are descendants of a child born out of the relationship between the fugitive Biblical Cain and a female ape he met on the run after killing his only brother. Allegedly, the apish behaviour of Africans reveals the existence of such an animalistic origin. (Fieldnotes, 24 September 2003)

²²¹ According to the story (as known in Guyana), these were dark-skinned, broad-nosed creatures with frizzy hair. They were the hideous subjects of demon-king Ravana, who – according to the Ramayana – had stolen Sita, the wife of Lord Rama. (Fieldnotes, 14, 28 March, and 25 June 2003)

²²² According to the philosophy of Samkhya, one of the three *gunas*, qualities defining the character of man. The relationship of these qualities varies from person to person: in divine beings and saintly people, *sattva* (goodness) dominates, in ordinary people *rajas* (passion), and in animals *tamas*. In the Mahabharata it is stated that men ruled by *tamas* are, or will become “immobile entities, or animals, or beasts of burden; or carnivorous creatures, or snakes or worms, insects and birds; or creatures of the oviparous order, or quadrupeds of diverse species; or lunatics, or deaf or dumb human beings, or men that are afflicted by dreadful maladies and are regarded as unclean.” (Aswamedha Parva, Sections XXXVI to XXXIX).

4.1.3 Localisation II: the question of power

The survival of the caste system in a localised and weakened form is related to its entrenchment in Hindu cosmology. Even though its practical basis was undermined in the New World, as part of a transcendental truth it could not simply be disposed of.

Additionally (and because of the above), certain aspects of the system remained valuable instruments in the process of explaining and structuring power relations in the plural and alien Guyanese society. Its lasting connection to questions of power is the primary reason for the durability of caste-related hierarchical reasoning. Not only did and do traces of caste ideology help East Indians to interpret and digest colonial hegemonic structures and postcolonial ethno-politics, they also shaped the process of religious redefinition. In this section, I seek to answer the question of power. I will first discuss localised Hinduism as a product of certain power structures. Next, I will briefly analyse the use of belief as an instrument to read and manage power positions.

(Local Forms) – Guyanese Hinduism is the outcome of an interplay between old conceptions of power and a new reality of control. It is a localised version of the Indian complex of religious belief and practice because the novel setting challenged existing internal hierarchies and proved an arena of unprecedented interethnic competition. Matters of authority have thus triggered the establishment of a diasporic religion that is comparatively standardised, a source of ethnic distinctiveness, and intertwined with politics and rivalry.

Key players in the formation of this local Hinduism were those who were identified as Brahmins, members of the priestly (and highest) caste category. Even though caste as an operational system never existed in Guyana, these ritual experts claimed a superior level of purity based on birth in a superior nest and thus managed to gain what is described as “exclusive dominance over ritual activity” (Van der Veer and Vertovec 1991:158).

This control allowed them to shape mainstream Hindu practice in Guyana (and the rest of the Indo-Caribbean). Through a process referred to as *Brahmanisation*, the well organised, well connected, and relatively knowledgeable Brahmins were able to ensure a “gradual adoption by virtually all Hindus of a single repertoire of brahmanic rites for all ritual occasions” (Van de Veer and Vertovec 1991:159). Van der Veer and Vertovec state that nearly all the institutionalised aspects of Hinduism in the Caribbean involve Brahmin dominated practices. And indeed, also in Guyana this is the case. Up until today, a priest – if possible a Brahmin²²³ – is required to manage ritual in the majority of religious happenings common to Sanatan (mainstream) Hinduism in the country.

The success of the process of Brahmanisation is grounded in the ability of the religious experts to utilise local power structures. Although the experts could claim divinely ordained authority, the anatomy of control helped brahmanic Hinduism to be established and survive as the official religion of the East Indian masses. In colonial Guyana, the

²²³ A chronic shortage of pundits allows non-Brahmins to work and be accepted as priests. However for certain top Hindu functions – especially as *vijas*, chief pundit, at yajnas – a Brahmin is normally contracted.

Indian's marginal position encouraged the formation of a standardised belief system. In postcolonial Guyana, interethnic rivalry and the interwovenness of realms of power, secured its endurance.

As discussed in the previous chapter, participation of Hindu religious leadership in collaborative quests for power allowed and allows them to extend their control to domains beyond the boundaries of religion, strengthen their grip on the body of believers, and thus secure their hegemonic position in the religious realm. Devotees are tied to priests, not simply out of ideological considerations, but also because the Hindu elite controls access to resources of various kind. Examples of the latter can be witnessed on both a national and local level. Two of Guyana's current government ministers, for instance, also serve their community as leaders of the country's two most influential Hindu representative bodies: the Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha and the Guyana Central Arya Samaj.

Similarly, many small-town pundits or regional Hindu leaders often attempt to expand their realm of influence in directions that have little to do with the divine. One aged priest I have met was, next to a pundit of several different mandirs and the former leader of a *praant*²²⁴, also the president of a local Parents-Teachers Association, the chairman of the Neighbourhood Democratic Council²²⁵, the area's biggest rice farmer, as well as the owner of a rice mill. Additionally, he was in possession of the 'hire' tractors, ploughs, and combines indispensable to many of the surrounding smaller farmers. Of course only few locals deny that such an immense cluster of power is more than just the reward for gifted entrepreneurship and/or honest toil. Instead, this and other cases of priestly imperialism are blamed on the ritual monopoly of the pundit. Few dare to oppose the pundit and any of his efforts, whether in the field of religion or secular realms. Devotees need him and his skills to practice their Hinduism.

(Local Functions) – In a joint venture between Brahmins and the Guyanese social reality, a localised official religion has thus been established that revolves around assistance and guidance of religious experts. Within this authorised system, Hindu laymen are quite dependent believers who are comparatively disengaged from the religious institutionalisation processes. Primarily pundits manage a system that is custom designed to fit the East Indian reality. This Guyanese orthodoxy is a modified (e.g. localised and standardised) version of the Hinduism practiced in South Asia by the East Indians' ancestors. As such, the system is clearly influenced by ancestral North Indian *Vaishnavism*²²⁶, and can be regarded essentially bhakti-centred and highly ritualistic.²²⁷ In

²²⁴ One of the regions (referred to as *praants*) in which the Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha has divided Hindu Guyana. Praant leaders meet with the Dharmic Sabha's national leaders frequently. They provide feedback from Hindu grass-roots and locally execute general policies.

²²⁵ A position that can be compared to that of a mayor.

²²⁶ Vaishnavism is one of the three main schools of Vedanta. It involves the worship of the Lord as Vishnu or one of his *avatars*, incarnations or embodiments (such as Krishna or Rama). The other two are Saivism and Shaktism. Followers of the former regard Shiva as the Supreme Lord, followers of the latter adore Devi, or the Mother aspect of the Lord.

other words, it is characterised by the traditional dominance of Vishnu-worship and the prominence of *bhakti marga*²²⁸ – the path of loving devotion – as route to eternal salvation.

More than anything, this localised version of *bhakti marga* survived because it was marketable in the New World. The path's feasibility, and its relatively simple and egalitarian fundamentals, appealed to believers in such heterogeneous surroundings (Vertovec 1992:55). Additionally, Brahmin pundits could successfully promote these ritualistic and collective manifestations of Hinduism as those manifestations function as instruments of self expression and identification in a world where Indian collectivities are constantly under siege.

Besides a redefinition of religion, matters of power thus also helped to modify the objectives of religion. In competitive and plural contexts, standardised Hinduism provided the social cement to bind a collective consciousness, and a foundation for the constitution of difference as well as the safeguarding of collective interests.²²⁹ The highly public and visible Hinduism as propagated by religious professionals in Guyana perfectly suited that purpose. Local Hindu religious practice mainly comprises a small number of life cycle rites and public as well as semi-private formal sacrificial and devotional gatherings that are invariably wonderful displays of (localised) Hinduness and Indianness.

Perhaps the best illustration of these localised displays of an Indian religious heritage is Hindu Guyana's most common ritual: the *jhandi*. This *jhandi* in Guyana includes an elaborate series of ritual acts at the end of which a *jhandi* (coloured flag atop a bamboo pole) in honour of a divinity is anointed and erected in front of a house or temple. According to Vertovec (1992), a similar ritual is found in a number of post-indentured Hindu communities but not – at least in this particular shape – in India.²³⁰ Hence, it is suggested that the flags and associated sanctums predominantly served and serve to create sacred places and signpost of Hinduism in non-Indian landscapes. Or, as Jain (1988:139) remarks with regard to flag-planting in Trinidad: "The raising and periodic renewal of the flags is a visible mark of 'distinction' (as Bourdieu would have it), a sign of the Indian in Trinidad having arrived, the symbolic embodiment of his position in the social space."

Also in Guyana, flags and other expressions of Hinduism function to claim and demarcate Indian religious and socio-cultural (and indirectly political and economic) space – a purpose never served in the motherland. Encounters with indications of Hinduism are unavoidable if traversing the populated areas of Guyana. Thousands of flags on poles in front of houses and temples, ohm-signs that titivate balconies and entrance gates, a recently constructed giant Hanuman statue somewhere alongside the west coast road, richly decorated wedding houses, and increasingly beautiful *mandirs* (temples), reveal the presence

²²⁷ As Dale Bisnauth told me, "the Hinduism practiced here [in Guyana...] is primarily focussed on rites and rituals and ceremonies." (Interview, 14 March 2003)

²²⁸ Also known as *bhakti yoga*, as opposed to the other paths leading to liberation: *karma* and *jnana* yoga.

²²⁹ See, Vertovec 2002.

²³⁰ Regarding aspects of *jhandi* practice in South Africa, see Kuper 1960:200; in Fiji, Mayer 1961:85; in Guyana, Singer 1967:99-100; and in Trinidad, Vertovec 1992:200-202.

and success of Sanatan Dharma on the northern shores of South America. Hinduism is proudly there and to be noticed in a world where positions have to be battled for. And ritual, strategically sold by high caste pundits in quest of control, works to make that happen.

Additionally, the Brahmin advertisement of a clear-cut set of brahmanical rituals satisfies a common desire to get hold of reality in a place where autonomy was and is restricted and control has to be shared. As will be further discussed in chapter eight, a wide variety of ‘works’ (formal religious occasions) is organised to manipulate the divine causes of (earthly) things. Ritualised adoration of a number of godheads is carried out to make the desirable happen and block or undo the undesirable. Saraswati is called upon for help before exams, a work devoted to Lakshmi guides the believer on the way to material well-being, and a Ganga puja or jhandi is said to bring relief to the sick.



Jhandi flags in the Atlantic illustrate localised Ganga worship

Although I will not further analyse these ‘plea-pujas’ in this chapter, their ability to fulfil personal needs in contexts of limited control should be recognised, as they testify of a belief in the malleability of fate that can be explained as an answer provided by the diasporic Hindu community to local questions of power. By means of ritualistic practice this belief allows the devotee to acquire a necessary sense of autarchy in the confusing Guyanese surroundings. Yet, trust in the possibility of divine intervention is also linked to localisation in another way. It can be regarded evidence of the modifying impact of the

third and final of, what I have labelled, three formative lines that trigger localisation: contamination. A belief in the kind-hearted god or godhead implies the existence of a concept of transcendental mercy that is closer connected to the doctrines of the West than to ancient Hindu philosophies. Guyanese Hinduism evidently is not just a victim of circumstances and product of power play, it is also the outcome of cross-fertilisation that inevitably takes place in multifarious environs. I will dedicate the following section to this last aspect of place-based change.

4.1.4 Localisation III: the answers of alternatives

Guyanese Hinduism, as noted, is the product of the interplay between old conceptions of power and a new reality of control. Notions of innate hierarchical difference, expressed in ideologies of interethnic stratification and the success of Brahmanism, indicate the impact of a legacy of caste. At the same time, notions and practices reveal the reformative force of local power structures. Brahmin dominance and their great recreative capacity could only materialise because there was a need for a unified or standardised emblematic Hinduism, and a possibility – for the religious elite – to reinforce their position by extending their influence beyond the boundaries of religion. brahmanical bhakti-centred Hinduism, characterised by simplicity and a focus on ritualistic devotional practice, perfectly suits the believers in indentured and post-indentured societies. It provides its practitioners with a means of self expression and identification in complex and rather unfriendly surroundings. Additionally, in the form of ritual, it offers a means to manipulate reality in a place where the individual's control is limited and the present and future are full of threats and uncertainties.

In the increasingly complex and confusing Guyanese society, jhandi and other rituals are more popular than ever. According to pundits and people, many more flags are erected today than there were a decade or two ago. Shared senses of crisis are partially responsible. Deities are called upon because of sickness; upcoming exams; the purchase of a taxi to operate on the dangerous Guyanese roads; pervasive crime and senses of injustice; and many more matters with uncertain outcomes.

As noted in the final paragraph of the previous section, besides an indication of change related to altered power structures, the popularity of ritual also exposes another aspect of localisation. The implicit belief in divine intervention suggests that concepts deriving from Guyana's dominant system of belief, Christianity, have been incorporated in a transformed Hinduism. In fact, I believe grassroots religious understanding is one of most localised aspects of Guyanese Hinduism. Although not easily traceable and difficult to prove, more than a hundred years of Anglo-Christian input – by means of formal education, colonial legislation, missionary efforts, and nowadays the North American media – has resulted in the establishment of a severely Christianised and anglicised religion.

The effects of this transformation process are clearly visible in the realm of Hindu religious practice. The institutionalisation of Christian-like congregational worship in

Guyana's Hindu temples is evidence of such localisation. And also the inclusion of Jesus in the Hindu pantheon proves the effectiveness of Christianisation. However, modifications in the realm of thought are at least as significant. Whereas Anglicisation/Christianisation occurred largely in the periphery of religious practice, it has affected layman theology in a more profound way. In fact, Anglo-Christian concepts seem to battle Hindu ones for hegemony over Hindu cosmology.

(Internal deficiencies & external threats) – Much more than East Indian Muslims, mainstream Hindu informants display a syncretic philosophical understanding of their faith. Contemporary concepts of afterlife, spirituality, divinity, and prayer are all shaped by western notions. This peculiar Hindu susceptibility to syncretism is the result of the working of a number of internal deficiencies and external threats.

According to local Hindu intellectuals and teachers, who recognise this phenomenon, the root cause of the Hindu vulnerability to alien ideas is its internal weakness.²³¹ Numerous devotees have absorbed Christian concepts because both personal and collective defence is inadequate. Allegedly, a combination of the lack of social coherence and basic knowledge enables the intrusion of alien understandings in Indian faith.

And, to some extent, they are right: the Hindu collective, although very much a community, is characterised by relatively low levels of cooperativeness and organisation, and a system of religious education which is not particularly advanced. Membership of the Hindu community does not offer the material incentives presented by Muslims and Christians. There are no adequate institutionalised redistributive systems, foreign aid is virtually nonexistent, and benevolence is insufficient. Additionally, relatively little effort is invested in assuring the future survival of the Hindu religious community. Despite the presence of a few Hindu schools and educational facilities, schooling of both the ordinary devotee and the leaders or teachers in Guyana is poor.²³² Formal pundit training is rare and/or restricted to Brahmins.²³³ And informal training, through apprenticeship, is primarily focussed on the acquisition of knowledge of ritual practice rather than the philosophical and conceptual foundations of dharma. Unsurprisingly, the majority of local Hindu 'experts' thus lacks even some of the more elementary religious expertise.

²³¹ E.g. interview Swami Aksharananda, 20 August 2003, and interview 'Sir' Frank, 16 January 2005.

²³² Guyana's most famous centre of Hindu instruction is the Cove and John Ashram, established by the Indian Swami Purnanandaji several decades ago. Another well-known Hindu institution in Guyana is Saraswati Vidya Niketan in Cornelia Ida. Course at this secondary school started in 2002.

²³³ The Pandits' Council of Guyana – the representative body of pundits – neither allows non-Brahmins to be members of the council nor to be trained at their courses. According to a letter in the Kaieteur News (30 April 2003), the Pandits' Council was incorporated under the Laws of Guyana Act No. 13 of 1967. Allegedly, section 2, Paragraph 3 of this Act states: "Pandit means a *Brahman* who is learned in the teachings of Sanatan Dharma and who is qualified to perform the functions of a Pundit under the provisions of section 14 of this Act."

This deficiency evidently affects the ordinary believer, as little is to be learned from one who does not know. The average regular visitor of mandir services and other Hindu happenings thus displays a religious understanding based on a high level of unfamiliarity with its fundamentals combined with a comparatively detailed insight in the shape of its externalisations (rituals). Even core concepts of Hindu philosophy are widely misunderstood or just unknown.²³⁴

This limited acquaintance with ‘the teachings’, resulting from the tutorial incapacities, is further sustained thanks to the masses’ inability to read and comprehend the languages of the scriptures. Virtually none of my Hindu informants speaks, reads, writes, or understands Sanskrit, the language in which mantras are composed and many of the epics and sacred texts were originally written. Additionally, knowledge of Hindi, the tongue in which the most popular scriptures were translated, is extremely limited. Although many are familiar with certain words and phrases, most lack the knowledge to be able to converse in Hindi or read and grasp extensive texts. The harmful consequences of such lingual inability are experienced in various ways. First of all, direct access to Hinduism’s elaborate and intricate body of scriptures or revelations is often impossible.²³⁵ Second, the average Hindu is forced to grasp the essential notions using an idiom ill-suited to reproduce the conceptual finesses that can be found in the original texts. In other words, English (a language which evolved in the Christian world) is often ineffectively employed by many to interpret and explain ideas and terms based on an Indian tradition.

As will be further analysed in chapter eight, this greatly influenced peoples’ interpretation of their belief and therefore the shape of Hinduism in Guyana. In fact, the adaptation of an alien language seems to have affected Hindu religious thought in an almost Whorfian manner.²³⁶ Although my examination of this aspect of East Indianness does not allow for highly sophisticated claims concerning the impact of language, a certain amount of linguistic determinism cannot be denied. The introduction of English, in combination with the loss of knowledge of Subcontinental languages, has clearly altered people’s understandings.

This shift of tongue in which ‘cognitive repertoires’ are articulated and conveyed is particularly influential as it involves a realm of conceptualisations of aspects of the non-

²³⁴ See chapter eight.

²³⁵ I have been told that an organisation called the Guyana Hindu Prachaar Sabha is concerned with the propagation of Hindi. According to a man who introduced himself as a representative of that grouping, they intent to establish a Hindi University in Guyana in the future. In addition, the organisation calls for Hindi to become part of the curriculum at the teacher’s training college (“just like they offer Spanish”) and, eventually, the country’s secondary schools. Together with people from other Hindu groupings, persons from the Prachaar Sabha represented Guyana at the seventh World Hindi Conference in Suriname (Paramaribo, 5-9 June 2003).

²³⁶ Benjamin Lee Whorf stated that “the background linguistic system of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself a shaper of ideas” (1940:231). According to Salzman (1993:154) Whorf – building on notions propagated by people like Boas (1911), Sapir (1921) and Wittgenstein (1921) – has set forth the idea that thinking is determined by language (*linguistic determinism*) and the principle that differences among languages are reflected in differences in worldview of their speakers (*linguistic relativity*). Both notions are controversial (see e.g. Schlesinger 1991 and Lucy 1985).

physical world. More precisely, communication and incorporation of concepts which belong to the imperceptible realms of the Hindu cosmology are severely affected by language change because of the unusual intertwinement of language and cognition that characterises this realm. More than the development of Hindu notions of, for instance, family and ethnicity, the development of mental schemas concerning transcendental matters is guided by linguistic labels.²³⁷ Acquisition of Hindu philosophical knowledge is mainly a verbal/textual affair.

Additionally, visualisations of (a comprehensible) alternative Christian theology are part of the average Guyanese Hindu's info diet. Images of heaven, soul, and god the Father and merciful are frequently televised – as well as part of graphic bible stories told in schools and elsewhere – and help further establish a contaminated cosmology.

Mainstream Hinduism in Guyana has thus developed into some sort of English translation of Sanatan Dharma. Besides a standardised system of practices, arisen as a result of the need to unify, and the opportunity to modify in a new reality of control, it is a localised complex of belief in which traditional understandings are altered or have been replaced by new understandings inspired by the alternatives offered in Anglo-Christian surroundings. As such, it is a combination of (interdependent) forces and opportunities that fuel processes of Hindu religious localisation.

(Globalisation) – The place bounded transformative forces responsible for processes of localisation coexist with and are influenced by transformative forces that work in the exact opposite direction. Like localisation, also processes of globalisation trigger changes in both Hindu religious thought and practice – and have even helped Guyanese Hinduism to move further away from its Indian roots.

In certain ways, the introduction of unconventional Hindu sects and reformative factions from abroad has had an impact on the religious landscape for many decades already. The first example of an influential reformative group is the Arya Samaj.²³⁸ Foreign Arya missionaries' pleas for doctrinal change and the (re)introduction of a Vedic system of belief have appealed to many for almost a century now. The threat posed by their popularity even “acted as a kind of catalyst for leaders of the Sanatan Dharma community

²³⁷ See, for instance, Bloom (1981) and Nuyts & Pederson (1997) on the relationship between language and conceptualisation.

²³⁸ 'Bhai' Parmanand was, in 1910, the first Arya Samaj missionary who arrived in Guyana. As a result of his lecturing, a rather substantial following developed. A few Arya Samajes were established in various Guyanese towns such as Demerara, Berbice, and Triumph Village (Vedalankar 1975:157). Other missionaries followed. In 1929, Pandit Mehta Jaimini was the second such missionary to arrive. An impact of his presence in Guyana was the development of a central structure and organisation of the Arya Samaj. The Arya Sarvadeshik Pratinidhi Sabha, an organisation concerned with the expansion of the Arya Samaj abroad, sent several more missionaries to Guyana in subsequent years. One of them was Pandit Bhaskarananda, who arrived in the Caribbean in 1936 and who is said to have been one of the most influential “architects of the Arya Samaj movement in Guyana” (Vedalankar 1975:159). During his decade-long stay in Guyana he helped establish the American Aryan League, which has been the central unit of all Arya Samaj activities in Guyana

to make greater strides toward effective organisation” (Vertovec 1992:119).²³⁹ Furthermore, the efforts of the Vedic mission brought about innovation of Sanatan practice. Changes such as the emergence of new temple forms, the establishment of a weekly Sunday service, and the spread of daytime weddings are attributed to Arya influences (Vertovec 1992:121).

Up until today, Arya Samaj is the largest and most visible example of unconventional Hinduism.²⁴⁰ Over the past few decades, other exotic interpretations have come to supplement Guyana’s body of Hindu alternatives. Most of them have arrived in the country with missionaries travelling through or from North America and Europe. Their establishment is usually sponsored by foreign institutions, wealthy emigrants, or deviant members of the internationally well-connected local elite. The International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), the Sathya Sai Baba Organisation, and Guyana’s Brahma Kumaris (Raja Yoga), are the most prominent exponents of this emerging multifarious ‘east-western’ transnational Hinduism. All promise superior guidance to salvation and advocate departure from the polluted old ways. However, so far, their impact on the masses and mainstream Hinduism is limited. Although people possess Sai Baba paraphernalia and dance along with the “Haribole” (ISKCON members), newly imported alternatives remain movements in the margins.

The impact of imported alternatives in Guyana’s Muslim community is more profound. With the recent growth of interconnectedness, the shape of local Islam has become determined by processes of globalisation. The development of Islamic thought and practice, as well as the structure of the Muslim community, is severely affected by both the desire of alien Islamic entities to interfere in local Muslim affairs and the ability of Guyanese organisations and individuals to connect with innovative sources ‘outside’. Because of this critical effect, and because of the impact of a transnational Islam on the formation of East Indianness, I will devote the second half of this chapter to (Muslim) religious globalisation.

4.2 The globalisation of Islam

“We must tell people how great Allah is, if we keep talking it is a training [...] Allah is on show all the time, look at the leaf, look at the car, look at the sky, look at the sun, look at the masjid, look at the water-tank, look at everything! And everything is spreading the message. So my dear brothers we are going on *jama’at* [mission] and four things we will try to do all the time, the four things we try to do all the time is *da’wab* [invitation] and *du’a*

²³⁹ See also, Smith & Jayawardena, 1959, Van der Veer & Vertovec, 1991, and Vertovec, 1996.

²⁴⁰ Transformation of mainstream Hinduism and the inaccessibility of Vedic texts, however, have undermined the Arya Samaj’s vigour. One of these few surviving differences between many Arya and Sanatanists is their opinion about Brahmins and their interpretation of priesthood. Numerous Arya read from the epics and worship a god with a form.

[supplication], *taleem* and *taloom* [teaching and learning], *zīkr* [remembrance], *ibadah* [worship], and *ikhlas* [sincerity]... So my dear brothers let we resolve, number one the da'wah with du'a, number two teaching and learning, the taleem. What is the taleem about? To correct. Correct what? Correct our thinking, motivate us, to do *amaals* [actions]. So the taleem, the taleem is to revive *amaal* in the masjid, to bring back people in the masjid ...so when they go back to their home, insha'allah, taleem will start in every home, and to educate one woman is to educate a whole nation, and our children when they grow bigger now, they will leave our homes and they will go other places and they will take the taleem and the *amaal* and it will go on until the end of time..."

It was the third and final day of the big Tablighi²⁴¹ revivalist gathering in a masjid about a half an hour drive from my 'field station'. The building's main hall and foyer were jam-packed. I had managed to find a seat on the floor somewhere right in front of the speaker. I was surrounded by boys in gowns and men with long beards and turbans. Most of them were from right there, Essequibo, the county where I lived. Others had travelled far just to be there for this occasion. I had met a man from Gujarat, a few brothers from Bangladesh, Trinidadians, a group from Florida, and some Surinamese. Together we sat down and absorbed the inspiring words of the *amir* (leader or commander), mister Khan: my generous informant and member of Guyana's Tablighi elite.

The amir delivered a universal message of Muslim awakening. A combination of proper teachings and pious actions would have to be employed to return into the fold of Islam. The audience agreed. None appeared to doubt the fact that the ummah had gone astray, had turned into a collection of uncommitted or even nominal believers displaying all kinds of ways except those of the Prophet. The listeners themselves had already changed. Their transformation was apparent, all of them looked alike, irrespective of their origin. "Taliban". My driver had asked me this morning why on earth I was going to see "these Taliban". And I guess that is what they looked like. It almost seemed as if some secret dress code had made them show up as impersonations of the televised icons of extremism that have personified Islamic evil since the commence of the 'war on terror'. Some of my neighbours even complemented their outfit with opaque shades, as if a CNN crew was about to enter the Lima masjid, shoot their images, and uncover their true identities to the unbelieving masses.

...We can die anytime, that is why we have to prepare all the time...we are going on the path of Allah Sub'hanahu wa Ta'ala to build a

²⁴¹ An originally Indian movement founded by Maulana Ilyas to bring spiritual awakening to the world's Muslims. It asks every Muslim to undertake frequent proselytizing or missionary journeys known as *jama'ats*. The movement claims to be apolitical and non-sectarian. They, however, do have specific principles (e.g. a list of desired qualities known as *Che Baath*) and their own literature (e.g. *Fadaa'il-e-A'maal*).

character...Allhamdulillah, we go out on jama'at and the foremost thing we do is da'wah, we don't have people who are talking enough about Allah." - *Bhayan, 27 July 2003.*

After the final supplication, the amir calls the names of a number of the attendants. A handful of older brothers gets up and walks towards the *minbar* (pulpit). They shake the amir's hand and are embraced by the Bangladeshi delegates.

These married men are virtual heroes. Soon, they will leave for what the amir calls the "final frontier", the stronghold of sin in an almost "lost continent". All are experienced Guyanese Tablighi volunteers, about to travel to Venezuela. They will move from mosque to mosque and visit the houses of local Muslims. It is their job to guide the diverted back to the proper path of Islam, it is their job to remind the Syrian and Lebanese Venezuelan Muslims of their daily duties and Allah's magnitude.

Islam in Guyana has become a truly international affair. Transnational missionary efforts have helped establish a sense of global brotherhood. Tablighi Jama'at and other pan-Islamic movements have facilitated the incorporation of Guyanese Muslims in larger communities of believers. Significant numbers of foreign faithful visit the country, and dozens of locals travel abroad to gain knowledge, acquire resources, or because of their responsibility for the spiritual wellbeing of the astray, like the Middle Eastern migrants in neighbouring Venezuela.

In this section, the process of globalisation of Islam in postcolonial Guyana will be examined. I will explain how growing interconnectedness of the local community of believers with brothers and sisters elsewhere can be linked to opposing tendencies towards the deculturalisation and reculturalisation of Islam. Whereas growing contacts with neofundamentalists from the Arab world, North America, and the Indian subcontinent have given rise to efforts of purification and homogenisation, ties with proponents of a cultural Islam in the Caribbean and East Indian diaspora communities invigorate the particularising traditionalist counterforce.

This particular process is an exponent of universal globalising tendencies in a sense that it involves the disintegration of old structures resulting in identity 'crises', and a growing tension between needs/desires and possibilities (Appadurai 2001; Friedman 1994). Additionally, globalisation of Islam in Guyana has fuelled the hegemonic struggle that characterises comparable processes throughout the world (e.g. Ferguson and Gupta 1997). As in many other places, the reorganisation of socio-religious structures in Muslim Guyana involves a renegotiation of the division of power between formative forces themselves and between restricting structures and creative social actors.

The following pages encompass an analysis of the nature of globalisation of a faith, its catalysts, and of its consequences for the development of local Islam as well as the appearance of the Muslim community. First, the appearance of Indian Islam and the initial phase of transnationalism – the impact of the outside before the advent of Arabisation –

will be briefly dealt with. After that, I will explain the emergence of Middle Eastern guidance and the anatomy of deculturalisation. This includes an account of Arab style and Subcontinental neofundamentalism and an inventory of the proponents of purification in Guyana. Following this description, I will examine the (neo)traditionalist counterforce: the materialisation of a regional movement to restore cultural Islam and counter the alleged disruptive force of purification. The last paragraphs will then be devoted to respectively dynamics of change and the question of power – both related to globalisation and scrimmages between fundamentalists and traditionalists – and some final reflections.

4.2.1 *Subcontinental Muslimism: early localisation*

The Islam that arrived with the Indian indentured labourers was a Subcontinental version of the Arab mother faith from which it had once sprouted. Although the fundamentals of the *Din*²⁴² had not changed, secondary notions and practices of the faith were customised to fit the body of believers in northern India. These notions and practices were products of centuries of existence in regions like Oudh, Bihar, Punjab, and the North West Provinces. The Indian Islam displayed distinct manners and beliefs, was composed in its own language (Urdu), and had incorporated fragments of Hinduism (Mujeeb 1967:9-25).²⁴³ It was a Sunni religious complex based upon explanations of Islamic law as provided by the Hanafi *madhhab* (school of thought) but coloured by Sufism and Shiite practices.

Because this local Islam was part of an Indianised system of belief only accepted by the South Asian contract labourers and their offspring, the religion grew to be as much a marker of Indianness to them as Hinduism was to others. For many decades, it was part of the Indian heritage and continued its development solely within the Indian community and in response to constraints and opportunities that characterised the Indians' new surroundings.

Despite the existence of factions, the occurrence of some theological differences, and even the emergence of reformist movements (e.g. *Abmadiyyat*), local Muslims formed a cohesive community. Intra-religious disagreement did not hinder social interaction. Neither did interreligious divergence. Of course, religious practices differed and forms of restricted social interaction existed. But in everyday social contact, Hindu-Muslim antipathies were “virtually non-existent” (Jayawardena 1980:436). Their shared origins and history of contract labour, shipbrotherhood, the isolation from communal clashes in mother India, and the blessing of a mutual foe – the Afro-Guyanese – had immunised the Indian ‘species’ against an outbreak of such separatist aversion. At least until the genesis of Arabisation.

²⁴² The Arabic word for religion. According to Maulana Muhammad Ali, the root-meaning of the word is obedience and requital. (1990:3) The term refers to a comprehensive system available to Muslims to guide her or him along Islamic trails through *every* facet of life.

²⁴³ For instance, it is said that the Muslim social order in Mughal India resembled the Hindu caste system in many ways (Titus 1959:175). Some even state that the contemporary Muslim elite and Hindu populace did not even see each other as religious others, “but more in terms of distinct and separate castes and sects along a social continuum” (Thapar 1989:225).

4.2.2 *The deculturalisation of a faith: processes of homogenisation*

(The Arabisation of Indian Islam) – Up until independence, there was no sign of any serious religious rift that divided Guyana's Hindu and Muslim community. Religious thought and practice, although undeniably distinct and sometimes opposing, belonged to realms that could not really affect intra-ethnic relationships. Solidarity only weakened after Middle Eastern religious notions were exported to Guyana. As the first generation of post-independence Muslims eagerly established bonds with the Arab world, identification with India and its exponents became less obvious. Half a century ago, India lost its status as sole provider of religious produce. The influx of Islamic ideas from the motherland became contested by a flow of impulses from a rich and new source. Within a limited time span, a network of Arab-Guyanese connections was formed to facilitate a, by some, desired Arabisation of the faith.

According to the Indo-Guyanese (and Muslim) historian Raymond Chickrie (1999), religious ties with the cradle of Islam materialised after the colony gained self control in the 1960s and diplomatic relations between Guyana and various Middle Eastern and North African countries took shape. Foreign Islamic institutions and their visions entered the Guyanese Islamic domain after the establishment of these bonds and the subsequent opening of Iraqi, Egyptian, and Libyan embassies in Guyana's capital. By means of scholarship-programs, and the export of Islamic foreign aid and teachers to Guyana, these groups and their approaches came to colour religious thought and practice of many of the most ambitious East Indian (and African) Muslims in Guyana and thus managed to breed an Arabised Islam on the northern shores of South America.

Religious education has played a crucial part in the strategies of these purifiers. By means of instruction of locals in 'authentic' Islam, training them to be leaders, the ideals of decontamination were and are spread among the masses. Schools were established and courses developed with the support of foreign expertise and finances. The purist Guyana Islamic Trust (GIT), founded by a Libyan diplomat²⁴⁴, owns a primary and a secondary school, and an institute of Islamic training and has initiated Islamic Educational Programs (IEP's), study-circles, seminars, and gatherings called *usrabs*, *oijams*, and *liqa'ats* throughout the country. The Central Islamic Organisation of Guyana (CIOG) provides training for imams and executives of masjids, runs an IDB²⁴⁵ sponsored Islamic nursery and primary school on Guyana's Essequibo Coast, and a playschool, nursery and day-care in the country's first city. And members of the local Tablighi Jama'at have established three so called *Darul Uloom*s, or Islamic seminaries, in the Demerara and Berbice area.

Furthermore, thanks to the availability of many foreign scholarships, significant numbers of young Muslim Guyanese study at Islamic institutions abroad. Local brothers pursued and are pursuing studies at the *Al-Azhar University* in Egypt, the *Abu Noor Institute*

²⁴⁴ In 1978, by a Libyan Charge d'Affaire called Ahmad Ibrahim Ehwass

²⁴⁵ The Jeddah-based Islamic Development Bank. According to their website, an institution established "to foster the economic development and social progress of member countries and Muslim communities individual as well as jointly in accordance with the principles of Shai'ah i.e., Islamic Law" (www.isdb.org).

in Syria, and the *Islamic University of Al-Madinah Al-Munawwarah* in Saudi Arabia. Scholarship students from these institutions, after their return to Guyana, are among Guyana's most passionate advocates of Arabisation.²⁴⁶ To a great extent because of their efforts has the traditional Indian Islam become branded a system polluted with *bida*²⁴⁷, innovations, that have degraded the religion to a cultural Islam and require a thorough purge and originalisation or Sunnification of the faith. In their eyes, only a de-Indianised Islam, stripped of local peculiarities and spotlessly 'Sunnified', is a proper formula for salvation.

Indianness, as such, is regarded an obstacle on the road to Arabness, a matter to be denied in order to avoid the turn to the perilous lands of adulterated practices. Pure visions on purification do not leave any room for regional variances or culture specific interpretation of rules and regulations. As a non-traditionalist imam said in his *khutbah* (sermon) in Guyana's Anna Regina masjid: genuine Muslims will have to "shed away all the culture and moralities of all the other civilizations...if I can even use that word."²⁴⁸

Ideally, the full cleansing of the Muslim community should effectively wash away every anti-Islamic aspect from the lives of its members. Legislation, the educational and the financial system, and entertainment and the media, should all become lawful. In plural Guyana, where Al-Islam is only the faith of a small minority, this is obviously an impossible ambition. Instead, purifiers have adopted some sort of philosophy of withdrawal. The existence of such a philosophy is suggested in the narrative of teachers and imams. The message prophesied in their sermons and lessons is to become aware of the dangers attached to living in a "*kafir*-world," the world of unbelievers.

In addition, I have heard Muslim leaders publicly state that Muslims should be cautious in the company of non-believers, avoid inter-religious friendships, and definitely not even consider to marry anyone but a Muslim. Furthermore, the members of many *jama'ats* are urged not to participate in non-Muslim festivities such as *Holi* or *Phagwah* and Christmas. The fact that until now there are still many Muslim children who indulge in the joyful celebration of Phagwah and who expect Santa to bring presents on Boxing Day is very upsetting to some among the purifiers' leadership. The latter even caused the principal of the Al Madinah Muslim primary school in Essequibo to open his institution during the Christmas holidays. He told me that, instead of humming Christmas carols, 'his' children ought to recite "la ilaha illa lla" – there is no god but Allah – during the last weeks of the heathen year.

Perhaps the strategy behind measures like this is best verbalised by one of Al Madinah's young teachers in a *khutbah* he delivered as a substitute imam in the masjid I visited most. After he finished his lengthy plea against western media, looks and attitudes,

²⁴⁶ Although many foreign trained Muslims have migrated and migrate to North America.

²⁴⁷ According to Chickrie (1999), sometimes a distinction is made between good innovations (*bida'-e-basanah*) and evil innovations (*bida'-e-sayyah*). This distinction, however, is not recognised by any of my 'Arabised' informants.

²⁴⁸ Sermon on Friday 9 May 2003.

he said: “may Allah help us fight the kufr society we are living in, [and] may Allah help us fight the kufr ideology that they have put in our head.”

Kufr, unbelief, is deemed everywhere, and the only thing the believer can do to escape is to seek shelter in the secure surroundings of the masjid and the good company of fellow faithful. Hence, Muslim schools are being build, sisters’ groups are established, nursery homes were founded, Islamic butchers and grocery stores are opened, fieldtrips are organised, and the formation of Muslim sports teams is propagated. Slowly but surely a rather inclusive *halal* (lawful) Islamic parallel society to matures with the purifiers as its primary architects. The actual long-term viability of this parallel society, however, is uncertain. Despite the increasing availability of Islamic alternatives to the unlawful elements of the society at large, the majority of Guyana’s Muslims does not seem eager to withdraw from the inter-religious platform. Although they might belong to a religious community that is more close knit and self-sufficient than the other religious communities, Muslims rarely isolate themselves from the rest of society. As such, the impact of the purifying forces is restricted to certain groups and/or certain areas of (religious) practice and belief.

As far as these specific areas of practice are concerned, the widespread impact of Arabisation can easily be witnessed. First of all, Arab has substituted Urdu as the language of Muslim rites and writings. Second, a new Muslim dress code was successfully introduced in many Islamic homes throughout the country. Increasingly more people adopt Middle Eastern looks: the *hijab* (headscarf) for women and long shirts (*jilbab*) and beards for men. Third, Arab style greeting is imitated by local Muslims, and Arab kinship terms (e.g. *akhi* for brother) have been incorporated in the people’s vocabularies. And finally, some obvious modifications in religious practice are recognisable. Certain deemed un-Islamic practices are marginalised or have completely vanished, and that praying *salat* has become part of the daily routine of a growing number of believers. Whilst before, mosques were not open for daytime prayers, nowadays collective *salat* is prayed five times a day at every sizeable Muslim house of worship in the country.

As far as specific beliefs are concerned, Arabisation is most apparent in modifications in Muslim perceptions of the religious other. Partially to guarantee the success of purification, purifiers’ philosophy of withdrawal includes the cultivation of collective senses of suspicion, a grave mistrust against the non-Muslim other. Their interpretation of the unbelieving world, sermonised to the Muslim masses through a narrative of ‘satanic besiegement’, has thus helped produce a widely expressed negative attitude towards the other. Particularly hostile perceptions of non-believers were frequently expressed in conversations I overheard or had with Muslims. And their attitude towards me often testified of caution or even plain antipathy. I was ignored, under moderate surveillance, topic of debate, and source of disagreement. I have encountered raised middle fingers in masjids and verbal aggression, and frequently heard from (the many) obliging informants they were told to avoid my company or be careful in my presence.

The feelings of mistrust and dislike, especially concerning the North American and European 'Christian' breed – and fuelled by televised images of the global war against terror (or Islam) – are utilised by purifiers in their attempts to further guide the community away from mainstream society. Again, it is uncertain how successful this will eventually be. Demographics, ethno-politics, and other factors ensure that inter-religious conflicts remain of a small scale and will definitely not grow into the disruptive scrimmages you would find elsewhere on this globe. Yet, it is undeniable that the gap between Muslims and their non-Muslim fellow countrymen is widening.

East Indian Muslims and Hindus, in certain ways, are not as close as they used to be. Especially the relationships between ardent purifiers or their following and non-Muslims have changed. Ancient ties between Muslim and Hindu families, sometimes Jahajibands already established on the ships between Calcutta and the New World, deteriorate or are even cut because of shifting attitudes particularly among the younger generations. Some neighbours I know, 'neo-Muslims' and non-Muslim Indians, no longer attend each other's religious functions and refuse to be present at the ritual observation of major life events next door. Small things have changed. But these tiny modifications in inter-religious relationships, in villages, streets and families, make people know things are a little different now.

(The Anatomy of Islamic Purification) – As indicated, especially the return of scholarship students from abroad fuels purificatory tendencies. There are two different – and to some degree rivalling – philosophies or movements that can be discerned. These philosophies or movements, with each their own (geographic) origin and approach, are related to the *Salafi Da'wah (Salafiyah)*, often labelled *Wahhabism* in Guyana, and the system of the *Tablighi Jama'at*. Whereas the latter, which will be discussed below, is fundamentally an Indian sub-continental reformative approach, representatives of the former can be literally seen as the propagators of Arabisation.

In Guyana the so called *Salafies* comprise a group of individuals who have either studied at Islamic institutions in the Arab world or who are instructed by those who have been there. These purifiers have adopted concepts of those who regard the Islam of the *kalaf*, the latter-day Muslims, to be polluted with innovation and interpretation and aim to revive the Islam of the Pious Forefathers, the *Al-Salaf al-Salih* (or briefly: the *Salaf*). Hence, like these revivalists they will ideally attach themselves only to what they consider to be the actual guidance of prophet Muhammad and those early generations of Muslims. This subscription to the way of the Salaf includes full acceptance of the principles of *tawheed* (unity and oneness of Allah) and the concept of *Ittiba'a* (traveling in the footsteps of Muhammad). More precisely, to become as perfectly submissive to Allah as those early Muslims, one will have to accept His uniqueness and learn to think and act like the people who left their progeny the *Sahih* (authentic) Hadiths or Sunnah.

In order to do so, the respective believer must erase the flaws that characterise contemporary Muslimism. It is this *tazkiyah*, purification, that is required to accomplish such a flawless Islam, which causes the Guyanese Salafi to oppose many of the local traditions and reject all religious alternatives. Their rigorous notion of *tazkiyah* even causes them to profess the desirability of the replacement of kuffar laws with the shari'ah, and decry *taqlid*, the following of a particular school of Islamic law (*madhhab*). Especially the latter, the denial of the authority of the locally dominant madhhab, is something that causes them to be a controversial group, even among the non-traditionalist Guyanese Muslims. Rather than just discarding the most obviously non-Islamic pollution and the practices of debatable origin – as all the non-traditionalists would do – the Salafi also deny the ancient practical system of guidance known as the Hanafi school of thought. This system, prevalent in Guyana (and India) is not considered to be fully compliant with the ways of the prophet. Hence, they desire a departure from the Hanafi practices and, subsequently, the modification of a vast amount of Islamic routines. This modification, which practically is an exchange of moderate Hanafi teachings with the more fundamentalist or puritanical and Saudi-based Hanbali complex of theology and law, is what makes the Salafi the only real proponents of the most radical and potentially most disruptive kind of purification: the Arabisation.

The Guyanese Tablighi Jama'at, the other of the country's two major cleansing forces, proposes a less drastic reform. Their aim to resuscitate the Islamic zeal does not include the renunciation of the Hanafi madhhab. Although the Tablighi also consider contemporary Islamic thoughts and ways to be of a degraded kind, they believe a return to the pure Islam of the past is possible without the disposal of all Hanafi laws and practices. What Maulana Mohammed Ilyas, the architect (or, as they would say, reviver) of the Tablighi Jama'at, suggested instead was the execution of a six point program to mould the lives of believers into a pure Islamic shape. This program – consisting of things like prayer (*namaḥ*), knowledge of Islamic texts (*ilm*), and respect for Muslims (*ikram-e-Muslim*) – is regarded the externalisation of Ilyas' divine mission to inculcate the spirit of Islam and revitalize a belief that has become superficial and habitual. It is supplemented with rules regarding things such as the seclusion of women, the adoption of Islamic dress and appearance, and the rejection of all non-Islamic beliefs and ceremonies. As within Tablighi elsewhere, in Guyana this mission is hoped to be accomplished through the execution of a series of Muslim re-conversion activities which are prescribed to the Tablighi adherents.

Hence, what Tablighi really is about is going out on tours, moving from masjid to masjid or house to house to persuade brothers to realise their status as men of faith, or *mu'min*. Each brother is recommended to go on such a missionary tour, the so called jama'at, for three days a month, forty days a year, and four months in a lifetime. This means that in Guyana, 'Tablighi' frequently leave kith, kin and community to travel to masjids elsewhere in the country or even abroad so as to reside in those alien masjids for a number of days and – through exemplary behaviour and particular activities – strengthen

the *iman* of both themselves and the respective local brothers. Additionally, certain masjids known as Tablighi strongholds, have included specific Tablighi activities in their weekly schedule.

Essequibo's Anna Regina masjid for instance, headed by one of the country's Tablighi icons, organises Fadaa'il classes for brothers (daily) and sisters (each Saturday) to educate the believers in the movement's ideology as described in the Urdu volume *Fadaa'il-e-Amaal*. Furthermore, the masjid's leadership has instigated a weekly *inghast* and *outghast*²⁴⁹, and a meeting of (elder) brothers on Saturdays. This frequent assembly of men belonging to one masjid, the so called *mashura*, is part of a series of similar assemblies of varying size that function to organise and tune all Tablighi activities, make decisions, and cultivate bonds between 'men of faith' from different parts of the country, region and globe. Especially the larger among these gatherings, Guyana's three annual *jors*, or three-day assemblies, and the international *ijtemas*, have grown into grand celebrations of Tablighi-ism in which the peculiar character of movement, as well as its hybrid origins, become apparent. The mode of organisation and leadership, and the rituals performed at these events, suggest the influence of other approaches than merely the purificatory one.

It is this hybrid origin that makes the relationship between Tablighi and other purifiers in Guyana relatively conflictive. According to 'Salafi' informants, Tablighi methodology and ideology are rooted in Sufism and thus are linked to despicable un-Islamic mysticism and practices like grave- and saint worshipping. And, as far as Tablighi's roots are concerned, they are right. Besides being a purificatory proselytising movement inspired by the Wahhabi-connected Deobandi tradition of Northern India, it is also a group that is influenced by Sufi-related practices and concepts.²⁵⁰ According to Reetz (2003:8) an expert on Tablighi Jama'at, in addition to certain organisational traits, the spiritual nature of Tablighi rituals – such as the concluding supplication (*du'a*) at gatherings – betrays these traces of Sufism. However, despite the differences, Tablighi in Guyana are accepted as compatriots by their Salafi brothers. The rigorousness of their decontaminative efforts is apparently sufficient to consider their attempts legitimate.

A little different is the 'Arabs' perception of the deemed partially purified Islam as propagated by the country's largest Muslim organisation, the CIOG. As one purifier told me, "they are feeding the people with things that are un-Islamic." The CIOG's support for things such as *Qasida* (Islamic poem) singing, and the observation of *Youman Nabi*

²⁴⁹ In Guyana, this means that on set days – between the Asr and Isha prayers – a group of brothers will gather, listen to a motivational talk (*bhayan*), make *du'a* (supplication) and go out to visit the homes of (often secularized) Muslims in their own locale (*inghast*) or in a proximate Muslim community (*outghast*). These are local hybrid concepts which originate from the Urdu term *gash* (tour) – one of the Tablighi core notions.

²⁵⁰ Maulana Ilyas, the movement's founder, was educated in Deoband and under the influence of the Deobandi school of Islam. This northern Indian school seeks to purge Islam of Western and modernist influences and institutions and to establish the Qur'an and Hadith as the exclusive guiding lights. They hold fundamentalist views that inspire Muslims worldwide (e.g. the 'Taliban'). According to some, the Deobandi tradition is influenced by an Arab puritanical sect founded by Muhammad Abd-ul Wahhab in the eighteenth century (the Wahhabi school). Also this school regards a return to the era of the prophet as the answer to contain the decline of Muslim rule in various parts of the world.

(Muhammad's birthday), is considered to be a sign of the blasphemy opportunism of the organisation's far from poorly educated leadership. Purportedly, the CIOG aims to give the masses what they want. According to a next purifier, CIOG members 'assured him' they will provide the people with the Muslimism they ask for – even if that is contrary to their own beliefs – just for the sake of dominion in Guyana's Muslim ambit.

Members of the Central Islamic Organisation of Guyana themselves, however, regard their approach to be valid and one that perfectly suits the local situation. As far as sheikh Moeenul Hack (the group's CEO and religious advisor) is concerned, "Islam is unity in diversity". Therefore, local practices and variances should not per se be disposed. On the contrary, wherever possible and lawful they should be part of religious instruction so that domestic unity is ensured. What the CIOG thus advocates is some sort of decontaminated traditionalism, a localised version of an undisputed and unchangeable universal truth. This pure yet local Islam, according to the organisation, is first of all the complete and detailed system of prescriptions, proscriptions and restrictions as described in Hanafi literature. Additionally, certain practices marked un-Islamic by the purifiers are accepted as lawful activities by the Moeenul Hack and his compatriots. The observation of Youman Nabi and qasida singing are supported by them. And also the organisation of collective Qur'an shareefs, considered to be undesirable by other purifiers, is not discouraged by the CIOG.

However, the organisation regards other exponents of East Indian Muslimism to be objectionable elements of Muslim religious practice in Guyana. Hack regards the Guyanese-style wake at the house of a dead brother or sister "totally un-Islamic". Also the blessing of golden rings at a wedding ceremony, a sign of the impact of the Christian traditions from the north and contradicting the *haram* (unlawful) status of golden jewellery (for men), is believed to be "absurd". Furthermore, the sheikh says that the clean-shaven faces of many traditionalist Muslim men are a sign of theological ignorance and should thus be covered with full beards. Similarly, marriages between Muslims and unbelievers, common in traditionalist circles, reveal a lack of religious fervour and should thus no longer be tolerated.

Like the Salafi and the Tablighi, also the more moderate and mainstream CIOG thus proposes a cleansing of Islamic thought and practice in Guyana. Despite their approval of certain contested customs, they advocate an Islam untainted by the extra-religious elements which have stained it ever since its arrival in the country. Just as the most rigorous purifiers, this untainted Islam is not only an Islam disengaged from touches of Hinduism and Christianity/westernisation, but also a solely Sunni Islam in which there is no room for non-Sunni Muslim others and their visions. Other believers and ways, such as the Shi'ite and Shi'ite practice, are not seen as truly Islamic.

The observance of Muharram for example, a Shi'ite festival commemorating the martyrdom of imam Husayn, disappeared from the local religious calendar years ago

(partially) because the Sunni thought it was un-Islamic.²⁵¹ And the handful of foreign Shiite missionaries sent from Iran are openly disrespected and not tolerated as members of the Islamic community. Likewise, also the Ahmadiyyat reformist movement, is not included the Islamic realm as the purifiers see it. In fact, Ahmadiyyas are openly called *kuffar*, unbelievers, by Sunni Muslim leaders. According to them, their faith in the unusual teachings of the late Mirza Ghulam Ahmad makes them into misguided pseudo-Muslims who deny the finality of Muhammad's revelations and thereby reject the completeness and perfection of the din.

4.2.3 The reculturalisation of a faith: neotraditionalist counterforce

In response to the corrosion of the cultural aspects of East Indian Islam through the attempts of purifiers and the rapidly changing environment, a section of the Muslim East Indian community presently tries to cultivate or even reinstall Indian Muslimism.²⁵²

An interesting indication of this effort is the growing attention for Urdu, the code in which Indian Islam was written. As cultural relic, the language seems to evolve into a symbol of opposition against the de-Indianisation of Islam by the Muslim purifiers. The increasing availability of Islamic literature in English, and the rising popularity of Arabic as religious lingua, have caused Urdu to become practically irrelevant. However, interest for it is recently on the rise. Urdu language classes are now offered at various locations. And certain Muslim leaders openly utter the importance of "reviving Urdu as a language of the Muslims" and "a way to reunite families and generations."

Hence, although not the original and sacred language of Islam, Urdu is being promoted for the sake of the East Indian Muslims and the East Indian community as a whole. According to the advocates of revival, purification and the subsequent disposal of Indian Muslim ways, have ruptured the Indo-Guyanese Islamic community and even brought conflict and dissension into the homes of believers. According to them also, the Arabian appearance of Islam, widely associated with intolerance and brutality since the morning of September 11, 2001, inspires the emergence of interreligious segregation and disruptive social tension.

A deliberate attempt to transform cultural aspects of Indian Islam from manifestations of ignorance into a valuable legacy of a distinct group should be undertaken to neutralise these harmful forces and restore peace and cohesion in (East Indian) Muslim Guyana. This celebration of the Indian way, however, involves more than just the effort to reanimate a language. In fact, even more important is the active preservation of a number of traditions which, because of their alleged non-authentic origin, are labelled unlawful by the purifiers. Despite their not necessarily Indian basis, these are customs which formed

²⁵¹ See, Chickrie 2003. Kandasammy (2004:3) however, considers its disappearance an example of the success of the "European's hostile attitude to alien [Indian] culture."

²⁵² Pierret (2005) mentions the efforts of the Lebanon-based al-Ahbash movement as another example of a neotraditionalist campaign against neofundamentalist (Salafist) purification.

part of religious life as lived by East Muslims a couple of generations ago.²⁵³ As such, they are embraced as exponents of the Indian style by those who can be called traditionalists.

Consequently, in response to deculturalisation, not only Urdu is advocated, also some disputed activities can be witnessed in the homes and masjids of traditionalist Muslims and their leaders. According to the critics, these activities have a debatable origin and fail to make the Muslim do the one and only thing he is supposed to do, and completely surrender to Allah. Instead, they distract the believer and could even lead to something that resembles *shirk*: the glorification of something other than God.

The customary ritual welcoming of Muhammad at traditionalist religious functions (*Tazeem-o-tawqif*²⁵⁴), for instance, is said to cultivate the idolisation of the prophet. It is therefore banned as an improper practice from many of the approximately 120 mosques in Guyana. A similar thing happened to Youman Nabi and Meraj. Also these commemorations of respectively the prophet's birthday and his ascension are discouraged by non-traditionalist and no longer take place in certain jama'ats because of their condemned prophet-focus.

Traditionalists regard any accusation of 'Muhammedanism' as unjust. According to them, these institutionalised references to the perfect believer are not only part of the Indian heritage, they also make religious sense. By collectively remembering the prophet's deeds, listening to the narration of his life-history, and participating in the other activities related to these occasions, a sense of brotherhood is cultivated and a pious mindset is created. These same benefits are ascribed to another disputed 'Indian' activity: the performance of religious *qasidas*, Muslim songs of praise. Just as the observance of tazeem, Meraj and Youman Nabi, the recital of these (Urdu) songs is considered to be a valuable asset to religious practice by the traditionalist and Indian contamination by the purifiers.

Hence, whereas purifiers oppose such extravaganzas, the representative bodies of the former – organisations such as the Muslim Youth League and the Guyana United Sadr Islamic Anjumaan – promote them. They try to resurrect this old tradition through competitions. Whether or not this will indeed be accomplished is hard to tell. Some expect that "the lack of enthusiasm from the younger generation [...] compounded with its questionable Islamic legitimacy, will soon make these traditions extinct" (Chickrie 1999).

Yet, local and international *qasidas*-contests are becoming increasingly popular. In fact, these competitions have come to function as vehicles for the internationalisation of the preservation of the Indo-Islamic inheritance. More specifically, over the past few years, the annual regional and international editions evolved into truly multinational happenings. Their organisation has become a joint effort of Muslim bodies from Guyana, Surinam and

²⁵³ According to Chickrie (1999), traditions similar to the Subcontinental ones were prevalent in for instance Central Asia, the Caucasus region, Turkey, and Iran.

²⁵⁴ It is a simple procedure in which the gathering stands up and recites a standard phrase of welcome: *ya nabi salaam alaykum, ya rasul salaam alaykum*, etc.

Trinidad.²⁵⁵ The events are now true celebrations of East Indian Islam with programs consisting of performances by lecturers and recitalists from the Caribbean region, Europe, the Indian subcontinent, and North America. As such, their success inspired further international cooperation. Following the organisation of pan-Caribbean qasida-contests, traditionalist associations from the Caribbean – as well as an East Indian Muslim body from New York – also gathered for a joint commemoration of the Al-Isra Wal Meraj. In addition, an agreement has been reached (2003) in which close cooperation between these organisations from Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad is guaranteed and formalised.

When it comes to certain practices, the future of traditionalism thus might be secured. International links have provided the movement with a solid network and guarantee the influx of knowledge from abroad. Yet, despite all of this, cultural or Indian Islam will remain under siege. The purifiers have a foreign network at least as extensive as the traditionalists. Besides, from what I have witnessed, anti-purifying organisations like the Muslim Youth League (MYL), the Guyana Islamic Forum (GIF), and the Guyana United Sadr Islamic Anjumaan (GUSIA), lack a firm domestic basis. Their support is confined to certain areas and jama'ats. On the Essequibo coast, the rural area where I have spent the bulk of my fieldwork period, you would hardly find any backing for these groupings and their agendas. Traditionalism there would be virtually non-organised. Although definitely existent, it is a polluted Muslimism of deemed “ignorant” believers and imams rather than a coordinated force to counter the de-Indianisation of religious practice by the various purifiers. Often, the concepts and ideas connected to this Islam of the ill-informed are regarded those of some dogged old brothers. According to some of the non-traditionalists, they are thoughts and ways of sometimes pious aged Muslims who have just become too near-sighted to be able to perceive trueness of the decontaminated Islam. Hence, instead of actively fighting these notorious customs, it will be sufficient to discourage them and wait patiently until they die out with the departure of the older generation.

4.2.4 The dynamics of change

Rather than the result of merely theological considerations, the upsurge of traditionalism is explained by its proponents as a reaction against the disruptive social consequences of purification and, to a lesser extent, modernity – both consequences of globalisation. Restoration of Muslim cohesion and even the safeguarding of East Indian unity are said to be the priorities. The emphasis of the main traditionalist organisations on collective expressions of Indian Islam can be seen as an indication. Especially the organisation of festivals or programs commemorating important Muslim events is considered core business in preservationist circles. As the secretary of the traditionalist Muslim Youth League explicated: “we saw that these occasions, they allow you the opportunity of meeting with your people, having social gatherings. [...] We feel that if we can bring back these

²⁵⁵ From Suriname that is: Khalifat Anjumaan (plus Hedayatul Islam and Djamia Aleemiyya Fareediya). And from Trinidad the Anjumaan Sunnatul Jamaat Association.

programs, we will bring back the orthodox Islam and we will bring back a more united Islam.”

Whilst purifiers oppose the festive observance of happenings such as *Asbura* (e.g. commemoration of Moses deliverance), *Shab-e-Barrat* (the night of absolution), and *Youman Nabi*, organisations like the MYL, GUSIA and Anjumaan Hifazat-ul-Islam, thus employ them as vehicles to market their cultural Islam. Traditionalist happenings are grand celebrations of pan-East Indian Islamic culture. They are occasions where representatives of so called “orthodox” Muslim bodies from Caribbean East Indian communities, and the East Indian diaspora in Europe and North America, gather to keep traditions alive. Virtually all these activities, especially in their current form of large and explicit collective statements of adherence to something that is under severe attack, were not celebrated a

decade ago. They are obviously the most visible part of a response to change brought about by the recently established Arabian connection.

“Orthodox” Islamic idiosyncrasies, however, comprise more than a number of occasions of mass commemoration and entertainment. As indicated, a wide array of notions and practices apparent in Muslim Guyana are contested and regarded part of Indian Islam. Certain ‘*Fatiha* functions’ – joint prayers and recitation on behalf of a deceased – and the performance of collective supplication or *du’a* are also source of disagreement. And other thoughts and ways are disputed as well. For example, the shape of *salat*: the gestures of daily prayer and the amount of *rak‘ah* (bows) that has to be performed. Or the execution of the *nikah* (marriage) and the appropriateness of *talqin*, a reaffirming of the partners-to-be’s faith, before the union.



Sacrifice, Eid-ul-Adha (2005)

Even the perceptions and habits concerning many daily practices outside the narrow realm of religion are topics of debate and cause of disagreement. Gender relations are an interesting illustration. Whereas ardent purifiers advocate a rigid separation of males and females, traditionalists reject such segregation. The latter believe it is unnecessary and

practically unwise or even impossible to pursue such a thing in a modern-day world from which they cannot escape. Encounters between men and women are unavoidable in the largely un-Islamic Guyanese society. Intra-religious segregation of the sexes, without complete withdrawal from mainstream society, would therefore only hinder preferred contacts between Muslims and not really obstruct interaction between males and females in general. As a traditionalist told me: “Who are we protecting the women from? It seems like what you [the purifiers] are protecting the women from are the Muslims [...] you are protecting the Muslim women from the Muslim men, but they are free to go out on the road.”

According to this particular informant, it is better to allow mingling in a “controlled atmosphere”, in places like the Muslim home, the mosque, or on Islamic festival grounds than to prevent fellow believers from interacting, and thus encourage them to satisfy their natural urge for this kind of interaction elsewhere in the big bad world. Interestingly enough, this motivation strongly resembles the purifiers’ reason to do exactly the opposite. Quite comprehensive segregation of the sexes, especially as propagated in Tablighi circles, are claimed to be the most effective means to guard the believers from (or counter) the detrimental influences of the ungodly environs in which they unfortunately reside. As a matter of fact, purification in general can be explained as a sprout of the fear of change and loss. The earlier noted surfacing of some sort of philosophy of withdrawal, and accordingly the desire to establish an Islamic ‘pillar’ or parallel society, is exemplary. Deliberately or unconsciously purifiers utilise and nourish widespread senses of uncertainty and anxiety concerning the effects of post-modernity and the durability of life as we know it and are equipped to live it. References habitually made by anti-traditionalists to crises of morality, the increased individuality and the upsurge of sinfulness or contemporary hedonism, as well as the prevalence of social tension, deprivation and local challenges ranging from the spread of HIV/AIDS to mass emigration, narrate of the existence of a linkage between present-day concerns and the attraction of cleansing strategies.

Similarly, there is a definite connection between certain fears and the appeal of the traditionalist counterforce. As purifiers validate their goal of the de-Indianisation of Islam by pointing at the disruptive force of contaminating Indian thoughts and practices and their ability to undermine and weaken the individual’s faith, their opponents claim other rationales. They justify their revivalism by mentioning the detrimental consequences of divisive purification for both East Indian and Indo-Muslim unity at a time in which their unifying and soothing legacy is already beleaguered by innovation and the introduction of alternatives. Traditionalists argue their efforts will help restore the cohesion damaged by the attempts to purify Islam. They aim to bring back intra-ethnic unity and cooperation, and stress their activities are designed to reunite the (Indo-)Guyanese Muslim community. Furthermore, they state that they want to repair family ties that have been ruptured by the force of cleansing.

Essentially, traditionalists try to undo what they regard as individualistic – and thus a socially disruptive – approach to religion, spread and fostered by purifiers. Their strong emphasis on collective religious practices and experiences indicates this concept of and longing for some sort of ‘communal belief’. An imagined global ummah, the answer to the complex and alienating present as formulated by the purifiers, obviously does not appeal to them. In fact, traditionalists regard the new configurations of the Muslim community as frightening. The notion of an a-cultural universal Islamic community is intangible and harmful to existing and familiar arrangements at home. The impression of the African intruder in an originally mono-ethnic religion, and traditionalist displeasure with missionary inclinations of the purifiers, is an interesting demonstration of the fear of change.

Unlike purifiers, traditionalists are reluctant to accept converted Afro-Guyanese as full members of the Muslim community.²⁵⁶ The Anna Catherina Islamic Complex, for instance, one of the main centres of cultural or “orthodox” Islam, allegedly “has little or none involvement with African Muslims.” According to the deputy imam and a jama’at member, the reasons for that are quite simple:

The Africans that have been reverting to Islam, they are basically doing so with the Wahhabies and the Salafies, almost ninety percent of the Africans are Salafi or Wahhabies. So therefore they would not find accommodation here. We have had one or two, who had come here but they had to leave because they don’t want to practice...and with all due respect to them, ninety percent of those that are converted are not the intellectuals, or persons who have been converting because they love Islam, in Guyana. They are converting because of some reason they see, something they might be getting out of Islam. Some of it are using it as a front too, I have no fear in saying these things. [...] They come with also a bully-ism. [...] Sometime you will go somewhere and they will tell you Anna Catherina is anti-black people, but we are not, it is just that their ideology is different...” – *Interview*, 15 February 2005.

²⁵⁶ Islam arrived in Guyana long before the East Indian Muslims. According to Abdullah Hakim Quick (1990), believers belonging to the Mandinka (Mandingo), Susu, Ashanti, Hausa, Fula(ani) and other African tribal societies brought the *din* to the western hemisphere aboard the slave ships in the sixteenth century. Yet, that Islam was “carefully whipped out by the cleansing powers of slavery.” Only after indentured labourers came to Guyana the religion made a comeback. Islam was monopolised by those of Indian descent. For over a century, virtually none of the Muslims was African. The progeny of the slaves had become Christians. Only recently, this has changed. With the advent of purification and the growing opposition against the Indianised Islam, increasingly Africans are drawn by the Islamic teachings. They are now among the congregation in nearly every masjid, ‘reverted’ (converted) African imams preach before East Indian gatherings, Guyanese African boys are among the top students at Islamic institutions, and new masjids are established in African villages. In fact, reverted Christians of African origin are amongst the most fundamentalist and passionate Muslims. Nevertheless, East Indian dominance at the level of the jama’at and in the country’s Islamic bodies still prevents them from exercising significant influence on the development of the doctrine and doings.

Rather than a Muslim brotherhood, traditionalists favour the ethnic family and advocate Indian family ties. The reasons for doing so, nevertheless, are not so different from the motives that drive others to seek association with the global ummah. Both traditionalism and purification should be seen as adaptive strategies chosen to face the rapidly changing and highly insecure Guyanese reality. The reckoned viability of these strategies, and their deemed necessity, is based upon certain conceptualisations of the world in which contemporary Muslims live as well as on specific understandings of the nature of the people subject to the forces of that world.

While understandings of increased complexity and confusion are shared, responses vary. The reason is the ‘freedom’ of choice. Shared conceptions can trigger different reactions because of variances in people’s emotions and motivations, and because of the personal histories and idiosyncrasies that influence appreciation. In part II of this dissertation, I will further discuss the working of this phenomenon, and its relation to processes of cultural innovation and reproduction. For now, it is enough to note that traditionalists and purifiers share a notion of the daunting era, the current age in which innovations imported from abroad fuel immorality and division in Guyana, in which labour migration robs Guyana from its skilled and gifted citizens, and in which no resolution will be found for the pervasive instability caused by interethnic competition.

Traditionalists and purifiers also share the notion of ‘the weak believer’, and of his or her feeble faith. The assumption that manifestations of unbelief will prove so detrimental to both the coherence of the flock and the piety of the Muslim or Muslima, is entrenched in the Islamic image of man as created weak (e.g. Surah 4:28). Because of the inherent weakness of the human species, the wrong and unlawful that are marketed quite efficiently in the believer’s globalised environs are so incredibly appetising. And that is exactly what religious leadership communicates...

(Globalisation and Power) – The plea for either purification or reunification under the banners of a cultural Islam includes the message of individual inability. Muslims are told they cannot make it on their own, one needs a complex of rules and regulations and/or the benefits of the membership of a cohesive community not to fall prey to the sinful lures of the outside world. Furthermore, the weak believer needs a clear belonging, an unambiguous framework of identification, so as to see and be seen in an increasingly complex and confusing reality.

Muslim Guyana, as far as its organisational landscape is concerned, is characterised by fierce competition and overt conflict. An excessive number of institutions represent or claim to represent the relatively limited group of believers. In an extensive article on the history and politicking of Islamic organisations in Guyana, twelve of these bodies are mentioned. According to the author, “tension exists between at least six of them” (Chickrie 2004:1). Evidence of such friction is not hard to find: institutions and their leadership fight

each other in court, publish accusations in their respective journals and newsletters, and discredit their rivals in the media as well as in quite a few interviews I had with them. Survival in that conflictive realm depends on an organisation's ability to mobilise a significant share of the Muslim masses. I believe images of the weak believer, together with depictions of a hostile globalised and un-Islamic world, are employed to assure the support of the people.

Fabrication of fear, of concern about personal failure and the negative impact of external forces, is a tactic amply used in the battle over hegemony in Muslim Guyana. In masjids on Fridays and at other religious gatherings, believers are taught to fear and mistrust so that they will seek shelter behind the back of the respective Islamic body. Alleged detrimental effects of globalisation are a perfect focus of that fear and thus highly facilitative to both purifiers and traditionalists.

Globalisation proves also in other ways helpful to the parties and people who desire control over the Muslim mind and manners. In fact, globalisation fuels local competition and has positioned that rivalry in a much larger context. It has enabled identification with brothers and sisters in far-flung places and provided locals with a source of indirect experiences or information that are quite formative in the process of establishing understandings of the self, the world, and the other. In addition, globalisation has also empowered the well-connected by means of practical assistance. To gain and maintain sway as a religious institution in contemporary Guyana is virtually impossible without outside help. The availability of an international Islamic network means access to knowledge and resources that cannot be found at home. Both traditionalists and purifiers depend on their networks for the ammunition required in their combats for control. The former have established and maintained ties with: East Indian Muslims in neighbouring countries such as Suriname and Trinidad; Muslim Guyanese or East Indian immigrants in North America and, to a lesser extent, the U.K. as well as the Netherlands; and fellow Muslims or Islamic institutions on the subcontinent.²⁵⁷ The availability of financial support and scholarships, the inflow of literature and audiovisual produce, visits of and lectures by learned foreign missionaries, and joint mass commemorations, are all fruits the traditionalists taste because of their emerging outward orientation.

The purifiers obviously enjoy similar benefits. In fact, they owe their existence to efforts of outsiders. They have also access to foreign finances, scholarships for studies at institutions in the centres of authentic Islam, and an abundance of freely distributed books and footage. And also they have their foreign missionaries. Especially the effort of the Tablighi Jama'at has brought numerous believers from all over the world to the (Tablighi) masjids in Guyana. Their specific concept of *da'wah* (proselytism), including the noted recommendation for every member to spend specific amounts of time in alien mosques –

²⁵⁷ There are even linkages with (Shiite) Iran. Qum trained Shiite missionaries are active in Guyana. They have established the 'international Islamic Academy for Advanced Studies' in Georgetown, Guyana's capital. Mohammed Hassan Ebrahimi, one of my informants and an Iranian cleric attached to the school, was kidnapped and murdered in 2004.

often outside one's home country – as missionaries and members of Jama'ats, encourages them more than anyone else to bring into practice the notion of the universal ummah. In Guyana, during the year 2003 alone, I have encountered Jama'ats visiting from Bangladesh, Barbados, Florida, Pakistan, Qatar, and Trinidad, and met Tablighi individuals from Canada, Egypt, India, South Africa, and Surinam. In addition, I came across East Indian Muslims who had followed the path of Islam to Bangladesh, Barbados, Brazil, India, Pakistan, Panama, Surinam, South Africa, Trinidad, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Venezuela.

(Expressions of a Globalised Islam) – The development of Islamic thought and practice in Guyana is clearly influenced by the connections between the local (East Indian) Muslim community and centres of Islam elsewhere. Already before the country's independence, certain ties with believers overseas were established. Especially linkages with the Indian subcontinent were of some importance. Over the past two or three decades, however, the face of the transnational network of the Muslims has changed dramatically. After independence, with the establishment of diplomatic ties with the Arab world, the formation of a sizeable and relatively well-organised and supportive diaspora in North America, the (very late) introduction of subsequently mass and new media, and the great improvements in mobility/accessibility as well as telecommunications, networks have expanded – and the intensity of contacts has increased – in an almost revolutionary way.

The recent expansion of religious networks can be linked to both tendencies towards homogenisation/purification and particularisation/conservation. Islam in Guyana, a realm of thought and practice that has always been dominated by descendants of migrants from India and their culture specific interpretations, has transmuted from an essentially uncontested system of belief into a faith that is explained in various opposing ways. The process of deculturalisation of the local Islam can be regarded the primary responsible. Novel conceptions of a universal religious complex, imported from Islamic nuclei in the Arab world as well as on the Indian subcontinent, have inspired efforts of de-Indianisation and subsequently attempts to preserve and even revive a cultural Islam.

Oliver Roy (2004), in his book on contemporary religious revival in Islam, labels these conceptions neofundamentalism. According to him, the neofundamentalist objective of re-Islamisation involves the construction of a deculturalised Islam in which religious identity is no longer linked to a particular society or territory and thus could be defined beyond the very concept of culture. As such, neofundamentalism is to be seen as “both a product and an agent of globalisation, because it acknowledges without nostalgia the loss of pristine cultures, and sees as positive the opportunity to build a universal religious identity, delinked from any specific culture” (Roy 2004:25) Also in Islamic Guyana – in the words of Roy – the purifiers seem to valorise “the uprootedness of uprooted people” (2004:270). Senses of alienation and their possible connections with globalisation are cultivated and exploited by those who pursue the establishment of an uncontaminated Islam. In

collaboration with rapid societal change have purifiers made new identifications and alliances materialise and caused the existing ones to become challenged.

Similarly, traditionalists have also exploited anxieties in Muslim Guyana. Whilst neofundamentalists or purifiers attempt to solve the estrangement caused by growing complexity and high-pace transformation through the construction of a decontextualised ummah, the preservationist solution comprises the fortification of traditional ways and connections. Both are the outcome of the existence of a minority Muslim community in a certain time and place. Not only do uncertainties related to the instability that characterises the Guyanese reality ensure success of both appeals, contemporary interconnectedness also allows both purifiers and traditionalists to consume resources previously nonexistent. Islamic movements in Guyana are able to fight such a fierce battle for ideological and institutional hegemony primarily because of the influx of finances and information or knowledge from abroad.

The upshot of this battle is hard to predict. Recent information from Guyana suggests neofundamentalism, in its most ardent form, is becoming less visible. Change of religious leadership and undeniably the global war on terror have caused organisations to mellow and – so I have been assured – the very radical among the purifiers to execute their plans in a less public way. Undoubtedly, complete purification will never attract the Muslim masses. Only a limited percentage of believers is drawn to a meticulously de-Indianised Islam. However, as has been shown, the impact of their efforts is felt throughout the religious community and even beyond its boundaries. Purification, a product and tool of globalisation, has enforced a redefinition of belief and practice, and the reformation of the way in which interethnic, intra-ethnic and intra-religious relationships are structured. Trained, inspired, and facilitated by individuals and institutions from distant Islamic nuclei, and assisted by imported images of Muslim belligerence, local purifiers have initiated a schism in Muslim Guyana, and undermined longtime Indian ethnic unity. Their attempts to market a global and homogeneous ummah helped to destabilise local social configurations, and arouse fervent defensive reactions among both non-fundamentalist (traditionalist) Muslims and non-Muslims.

It owes its relative success, however, to a number of favourable conditions. As elsewhere on this planet, especially in societies in which Islam is a minority religion, neofundamentalism in Guyana would not have been able to root and be influential if it was not for people's susceptibility. Philosophies of withdrawal, segregative efforts manifested in the implementation of a comprehensive Islamic doctrine, are only appealing because of collective senses of crisis caused by a complex of insecurities and uncertainties that characterise the life of contemporary believers. Because of alienation, because of marginality, because of deprivation, and because of 'disjunctive flows' in our interconnected world, the seeds of fundamentalism germinate. Just like the seeds of neotraditionalism, and just like the seeds of many of the other –isms today.

4.3 Neverlasting truths: the inevitability of flux

Islamic globalisation is both the outcome and the catalyst of change in Muslim Guyana. The increased interconnectedness of believers worldwide is inspired by the transformation of world systems and has encouraged processes of doctrinal and social-religious reorganisation within Guyanese Muslim realms. Contextual change lies at the basis of these developments. Like in the case of a localised Hinduism, reorganisation was triggered by the modification of people's (re)creative possibilities. The appearance of Islam has changed and is changing because the boundaries of the field in which religious culture is produced have shifted. Newly established ties with Muslims in the Caribbean, North America, South Asia and the Arab world have provided local believers with an extended range of means and models that can be used to compose their religious complex.

Because globalisation involves a contextual change that, in certain ways, resembles the contextual change that prompted processes of localisation after the transplantation of Hinduism, similar transformative powers can be discerned. The same 'three formative lines' I recognised as catalysts of Hindu localisation under 4.1, influence the globalisation of East Indian Islam. Like the establishment of a local Hinduism, also the recent development of Islamic thought and practice, and in Muslim social structures, can be attributed to (a) modified practical conditions, (b) redefinitions in the sphere of power, and (c) the emergence of alternative ways of executing one's belief. The advancement of information technology and the increased mobility of people, goods, and finances have caused the formation of a global community of believers to be a more feasible endeavour. Additionally, these altered conditions have facilitated the further importation of alternative systems of belief and practice. Neofundamentalist and certain traditionalist views have become optional visions in the eyes of the Guyanese Muslim thanks to the increase of transnational interconnectedness.

Together, both globalised conditions and alternatives, have enabled a reconfiguration of existing power structures. As new appeals are made, old identities and loyalties become challenged. East Indianness, and even Guyanese Muslimness, are no longer the relatively uncontested labels they once were. New labels have come to claim the status of collective safe haven, and stress their superiority as refuge for the alienated and pool of promise for the ambitious. Increasingly more informants now declare Islam and its principles – and no longer ethnicity and Indian culture – their primary sources of guidance and frame of reference.

Of course, the defeat of old identities and existing frames of reference and power structures is far from final. Local reality demonstrates advanced globalisation does not imply East Indian political unity is severely undermined. The unchanged vigour of ethnopolitics, together with the (increasingly) fragmented character of the Muslim community, still prevent religious leadership to realise their political aspirations. None of the prominent Muslims I have asked thinks the establishment of a Muslim party is feasible in the current climate of control. All realise the masses will ultimately still vote 'race'. The

awareness of ethnopolitics motivates even the ardent fundamentalists not to sacrifice their East Indian vote. Clearly, the denial of, or resistance against, the existing order is partial. However, complexity has definitely grown. Identification and association are not nearly as straightforward as before.

This influence of globalisation on the development of faith and practice is less noticeable in Guyana's Hindu community than in local Muslim circles. Although certainly affected by globalisation, it has neither fractured local Hindu unity nor greatly accelerated the process of religious change.

The cause of this limited impact is not the absence of initiatives. Hindu fundamentalism does exist in Guyana. Linkages between Indian *Hindutva* proponents and Guyanese Hindus have been established.²⁵⁸ Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) leaders have visited Guyana, and there is a local Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) branch.²⁵⁹ Besides, like their Muslim counterparts, these bodies' representatives market their neofundamentalism as the resolution to jeopardy posed by the ever growing strength of destructive alien alternatives. Also they hold a belief in disruption caused by internal vulnerability and external threats. Both VHP and HSS representatives stress revival is needed to arm the weakened believer against the destructive force of Christian conversion.

Their call for the establishment and fortification of a global Hinduism, however, proves to be little appealing. Unlike Islamic fundamentalism, Hindu fundamentalism remains a peripheral movement in Guyana. And the reason appears to be twofold. First of all, the typical advertisement of isolationism and resistance does not seem to fit local Hindu philosophy the way it suits the Islamic doctrine. Distinct concepts of superiority and hierarchy, or particular notions of lawfulness and cause and effect, help prevent religious radicalism to set foot in Hindu Guyana. Many Hindus, for instance, accept foreign supremacy and even stress the admirable dominance of Western ways and ideas.

Secondly, the hegemonic status of Hindus in (Indo-)Guyana does not work to encourage people to embrace a merely religious identity. Their position as adherents of the principal East Indian religious system allows them to dominate processes of definition and exploitation of East Indianness as such. In fact, East Indianness is often equated with Hinduness. Hence, the Hindu's concern is cultural survival and ethnic unity (at least) as much as the reinforcement of religious structures.

All in all, Guyanese Hinduism and Islam are systems of belief and social structures that have been (and still are) negotiated in similar contexts. Although to a different extent and in various ways, both are contemporary outcomes of the modification of ancient

²⁵⁸ *Hindutva* (often translated as 'Hinduness') is a concept that is used to describe movements advocating Hindu nationalism. In popular usage the term has come to be identified with the ideology of the Hindu nationalist RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh). One of the central beliefs of this *Hindutva* philosophy is that a Hindu state must be erected to protect the rights of the (weakened) Hindus in their homeland and bring about a general cultural revival.

²⁵⁹ See also chapter three.

complexes by collectives and individuals for the sake of the survival of these complexes, and to meet the ever changing demands of the adherents. Variances in the current trajectories of local Hinduism and Islam must be seen as forms of adaptation based on historical and ideological differences but prompted by the dissimilar power position both religions occupy in local and global contexts. Surely, a localised Hinduism cannot escape the effects of globalisation. And a globalised Islam certainly remains subject to localising tendencies. Yet, the relative impact of these forces varies. The affects of both depend on the specific relevance of change and the ability of the collective to either bring about change or realise preservation. Questions of power, lie at the basis of differences in the appearance and effects of globalisation and localisation in the East Indian religious realms. Who holds transformative power and what is in their interest?

Similar questions play an important part in the following chapters of this book. Insights in the ability to define and redefine, the distribution of control over being and becoming in the present and in the future, and the benefit of change, help explain the (evolving) impact of East Indianness on the appearance of a number of relationships in changing surroundings. More than so far, however, the focus will be the East Indian individual. In fact, in ‘Conditioning Interconnections’, the second part of this dissertation, the balance of power between the (re)creative individual and the constitutive structure will be dissected. In four chapters I will analyse four types of relationships in which East Indianness takes shape. Subsequently I will examine the bond between my subjects and their world, their dealings with proximate others and kin, partner relationships, and the connection between them and the extracorporeal realm. All of these reveal how East Indianness, as a complex of more or less collective thought and practice, is the result of negotiation between persons and structures in social circumstances. All indicate how Indian distinctiveness is a product of group specific experiences that guides people’s perception and action and is stored in shared and relatively durable – yet inherently dynamic and flexible – (cultural) mental schemas or understandings.

PART II

CONDITIONING INTERCONNECTIONS

EAST INDIAN SUBJECTIVITIES

*Locating the Ethnic and
Religious Self in the World*

The previous chapter has shown the impact of context on the development of Hinduism and Islam. It indicated the neverlastingness of these deemed eternal truths. East Indian belief systems in Guyana, collective verbalisations of a super reality, are constantly shaped and reshaped to fit the changing circumstances in which they are practiced and in which sense is made. Processes of localisation and globalisation have clearly changed and change both local Hindu and Muslim religious meaning and practice. Yet, context and contextual change alone cannot explain the character of cultural production and reproduction. Cultural processes occur in joint-venture between subjects and settings. Or better, meaning and practice are the outcome of a process in which individuals and their surroundings together manufacture so called mental schemata which give birth to interpretations of experiences and motivate action. The responses of individuals to circumstances – and the way those individuals make sense of their world, structure it or deal with it, and are affected by the configuration of society – as such, are inspired by fairly stable networks of schemata erected from an ever-growing body of previously internalised experiences. On one hand, interpersonal parallels in these networks, obviously based on common experiences, reveals the impact of culture, ethnicity and religion on mental processes and behavioural strategies. On the other hand, individual peculiarities, generated from idiosyncrasies and personal experiences, expose the individual's power.

In this chapter, I will zoom in on East Indian individuals and their relations with their multidimensional surroundings. After several chapters of contextualising East Indianness, it is necessary to focus on interconnections. In order to understand both cultural innovation and replication, it is important to move on to the analysis of the personal relations in which East Indianness manifests itself. In 'East Indian Subjectivities?', three realms of collective understandings will be described that form the heart of a much larger network of shared understandings which together produce an East Indian *subjectivity*, or image of the self in the world. The trio covers the East Indian attitude towards the past,

the future, and the here and now. Or rather, by examining East Indian notions of, and relationships with: (5.1) India and Indian culture; (5.2) North America and western culture; and (5.3) the entities within their home-society, the localisation of the self in time and space will be dealt with.

The choice of these themes is motivated by impressions gained from numerous observations and many conversations I had throughout my stay in Guyana. The manner in which local Indians consistently explained their ancestral lands, America and westernisation, and relationships with local others, and the fashion in which those people employ their understandings of these matters to model expressive behaviour in certain contexts were beautiful illustrations of cultural production. Especially, common association of the three themes with respectively classicality, modernity and hostility – and variances in valuation and motivational structure of these associations – transpired as highly illuminating. Hence, the following three sections have to be devoted to a brief analysis of the nature, the execution, and the internalisation of impressions of the East, West, and near-sited. In the latter part of the third and final section, I will then examine how these impressions situate the East Indian ‘we’ and ‘I’ in a globalised environment. By regarding concepts like identity, and self or subjectivity it will be explained in what way novel perceptions of reality are connected to personal meaning and practice in myriad ways.

5.1 Impressions of ‘the East’: notions of India and Indian culture

Sometimes, on sultry evenings in the shop underneath my headquarters, I sat down in front of the counter, took pen, an ice-cold Icee[®], and a sheet of paper, and questioned the Indian clientele. As people dropped by for a loaf of bread, some homemade snacks, or a drink, I would ask them about India: the land of their forefathers and setting of the Bollywood drama daily aired on the local TV-stations. Generally, I used a simple questionnaire with just a handful of open questions about the physical and social makeup of the motherland. And usually, the answers did not suggest a particularly detailed and accurate image of ‘the East’.

None of the respondents displayed precise knowledge of the relative size of India. When asked to estimate the country’s surface compared to Guyana’s territory, they either approximate it quite small or way too big. Furthermore, according to a good number of customers, Bombay (Mumbai) is India’s capital. As a matter of fact, the showbiz hub of South Asia is far more frequently voted for capital than the actual national centre: New Delhi. A similar lack of acquaintance with their ancestral soil is exhibited by the people with regard to things such as demographics and politics.²⁶⁰ Also the number of residents or, for instance, the Hindutva movement and interreligious antagonism, are not part of most

²⁶⁰ For instance, a lady told me she thought India was home to a mere three or four million Indians. And none, but one, knew the name of the Indian prime-minister.

commoners' understanding of the subcontinent. Actually, East Indians on the whole just seem to be somewhat ill-informed where all those matters are concerned. This does not imply that my informants are not interested in or are disconnected from India. Certainly not. Perhaps even more than a few decades ago, they look at India as the font of genuine Indianness. Yet, the sources and sorts of 'India-info' available are limited and knowledge rarely reaches the Guyanese Indian unmediated. What most locals learn about India stems from images conveyed by the great Hindu epics²⁶¹, the few rich or ambitious Indo-Guyanese who have been there, Indians who visited Guyana, the programs organised by the Indian Cultural Centre and the Guyana Indian Heritage Association, a little oral history, and of course the Indian film- and television-industry and its local spin-offs.

Especially in the old days, the Ramayana seems to have played an important role in shaping the (Hindu) East Indian concepts of India and Indianness. As ROAR's Ravi Dev told me, the story of the prince of Ayodhya was a prime reservoir of 'original' Indian ideals and impressions less than half a century ago. According to him, at the time, people would return from the cane fields, bathe, gather and jointly listen to stories from the book narrated by one of the few literate Hindu labourers. Dev says, "the text and the whole value system, the ideals of the Ramayana, played a great part not only in my development, [...] but in the development of most of my contemporaries – which would be in their fifties."²⁶²

The centrality of this epic in the lives of the indentured labourers and their descendants is obviously related to its importance as a sacred text in the northern parts of India, the areas where the bulk of migrants came from. However, as Parekh (1994) argues, it probably has something to do with the story's particular thematic as well. According to the author, the lasting popularity of the Ramayana in Hindu diasporic (or actually indentured) communities is related to the specific images, subjects and messages it conveyed: its references to themes like torment, struggle, exile, and eventual return which resonated especially with the contract workers in places like Fiji, Mauritius, and the Caribbean.

Nowadays, the popular religious scriptures still form a significant body of reference to models of superlative (Hindu) Indian thoughts and behaviour. Nonetheless, other sources of information on Indianness have become available and influential: notions of 'genuine' Indian dance (*kathak*, *bhangra*, etc.) and music (e.g. *tabla*) are transmitted through classes and shows; accounts of advanced Hinduism are communicated by visiting Indian swamis or holy men as well as Guyanese scholarship students who have spent some time in the motherland; and picture-perfect Indian life is marketed through Indian cultural groups, pageants and of course the movies and related music videos.²⁶³

²⁶¹ As mentioned in chapter four, the most influential works in Guyana are the *Mahabharata* including the *Bhagavadgita*, and the *Ramayana*.

²⁶² Interview with Ravi Dev, on 21 July 2003

²⁶³ The sociocultural importance of export cinema in the Indian diaspora communities is one of the most interesting examples of the impact of transnational media flows on subjectivities in migrant surroundings (e.g.

All these sources, plus most other vehicles for passing on the impressions of India, advertise a remarkably consistent image of the East Indians' ancestral country. And, although interpreted in different ways by my subjects, I believe this image facilitates the establishment and cultivation of a common understanding of India and its exponents. Because Guyanese Indians depend on the same (mediated or indirect) information, they develop parallel records of experiences related to Indian authenticity. These shared experiences help produce an association that forms the more or less universal basis of the people's conceptualisation of 'the Indian': the correspondence between India and classicality.

5.1.1 India and classicality

For most Guyanese of South Asian descent, India signifies a colossal well of Indian authenticity. Although they are definitely not blind to processes of transformation, my informants generally regard the Indian subcontinent the sanctuary of their heritage. In fact, despite the awareness of change, East Indian discourse about India exposes a belief in perpetuity concerning certain realms of Indianness. Subcontinental religion, for instance, is deemed of a purer, more original, kind. As one Hindu noted, "tradition-wise, India is much higher than Guyana." Furthermore, I have heard East Indians state certain 'typically Indian' values apparent in India and pre-modern Guyana do not exist within the contemporary East Indian community. Things such as respect for authorities and elders and far-reaching cooperation within extended families are not part of present East Indian routine.

In addition to particular lost Hindu practices, also some kind of elusive true Hindu atmosphere is thought to be found across the dark waters. Informants frequently mentioned a special ambience that affects existence in India. One eminent pundit assured me that in India, "the air is full of Hinduism." Another devotee was convinced that "India is spiritually very high, very elevated." According to him and many others, especially in the Himalayas awesome spirituality can be witnessed. More than once, I have been told of the

Cheesman and Gillespie 2002; and Ray 2000). Mostly Hindi motion pictures help produce diasporic Indianness all over the globe. According to various scholars (Desai 2004; Mishra 2002), overseas Indian communities have become "an integral part of the cultural imaginary of Hindi cinema" (Punathambekar 2005:153). It is said that, in contemporary Indian film, a novel concept of Indianness is articulated. Using the term 'Bollywoodisation', Rajadhyaksha recognises the establishment of a genre that narrates "a freer form of civilizational belonging explicitly delinked from the political rights of citizenship" (2003:32), "of cultural nationalism in a global arena" (2003:25). Transnational contexts, intercultural themes, and the portrayal of an almost universal Hindu way of life – one which is family-centric patriarchal, actually essentially North Indian and often overlooks class, regional and religious difference – allow these movies to create senses of deterritorialised belonging and encourage processes of identification. Yet, says Punathambekar (2005: 162), whereas earlier Bollywood productions merely "sought to bring the homeland into the diaspora," recent pictures render the diaspora more as an acceptable variant and full member of a larger Indian family. The result of these modifications in the representation of non-resident Indians might be increased levels of inclusion and identification. As such, Bollywood – together with the new media and, for instance the Indian government – will (further) facilitate the establishment of a global Indianness that binds Indian residents and generations of migrants worldwide.

marvellous personifications of Hindu excellence that wander the mountainous regions of Northern India. Giants, centuries old naked holy men, cave-ridden hermits who never eat, and many other fabulous individuals are said to live on the roof of the world. Such stories add to 'Hindustan's' mystical and sometimes mythical status.²⁶⁴ Further nourished by things such as the carefully promoted wonders of Sai Baba and the presentation of visiting Indian miracle men, and not hindered by sobering first hand experiences of the believers themselves, the vision of an enchanted motherland remains in the heads of many East Indians. Accordingly, the desire to travel there and 'undergo' India is broadly articulated in Hindu circles. Many have told me they dream of going to India. And a small number of Guyanese have actually been there. The East Indian minister of Labour, Human Services and Social Security has visited India and quenched his thirst for understanding of the Asian connection. Although a Baptist, minister Bisnauth supposedly kissed the ground after his feet touched Indian soil for the first time. After that, he states, "I went by the Ganges river and took off my shoes, rolled up my pants, stepped in the water, and made peace with India."²⁶⁵

The legendary standing of the country thus surpasses the realm of religion. Particularly the advent of Indian audiovisual productions has contributed. Ever since Hindi movies were released in Guyana, mythical India has not only accommodated Hindu heroes and heroines but housed Bombay's movies stars as well. Their appearance and manners intrigue many East Indians. Even Muslim girls regard the icons of Hindi cinema the perfect models of genuine Asian aesthetics and their backdrop the home of Indian originality. A Muslim teenager from an affluent Tablighi family once confessed she longed to see Bombay as much as the Ka'bah. According to the girl, a committed believer, at least in Bombay they sell the nicest saris and shalwars at very reasonable prices, and you might bump into movie stars such Aishwarya Rai or Shah Rukh Khan there too.

Such an example of Muslim approval of Subcontinental taste is not uncommon. As a matter of fact, there are numerous illustrations of Muslim fondness for these un-Islamic ways. Three of the six delegates running for the 'Miss India Guyana 2003' title were from Muslim homes.²⁶⁶ And, Ryhaan Shah, the president of the GIHA and one of Guyana's most ardent Indian cultural activists, is of Muslim origin. I have even met a Muslim brother who loved the harmonium so much that he played it every Sunday in both a Sanatan and an Arya mandir somewhere near the village of Charity in Essequeibo.

According to the purist among Islamic leadership, this interest in exhibitions of unbelief is unacceptable. They regard it harmful contamination of a perfect system and

²⁶⁴ Many accounts of mythical India are existent in Guyana. An old lady told me she had heard that in India you have giant mangos, big enough to eat them with a friend from two sides at the same time (and still you would not be able to finish it). She also said that, before, some would say that people in India enter the belly of an elephant to clean it.

²⁶⁵ Interview with Dale Bisnauth, 13 and 14 March 2003.

²⁶⁶ Their appearance in the media in revealing outfits and adorned with jewellery was not appreciated by the Islamic purifiers. Their candidacy was condemned, and used as an example of Muslim degeneration.

consider South Asian customs remnants of the inferior Muslimism that was/is practiced in India. As one fundamentalist informant explained, they mark a juvenile state of Islamic development (“phase one”) from which the Indian Muslims have to depart and travel towards ultimate Muslimism (“phase two”). Polluted with even principles of caste and other condemnable traditions, ‘phase one’ Muslimism belongs to the same India manifest in the stories of East Indian Hindus, and Muslims that cling on to their cultural heritage. Like these East Indian counterparts, although from a different perspective, Muslim purifiers see India as a stagnant reservoir from which beliefs and ways of their ancestors were extracted. All deem the motherland still to be a reflection of the way things were in Guyana before, and from which East Indians have moved on, or of the truest kind of Indianness that has never materialised outside India.

5.1.2 The provocative power of classicality

The shared East Indian association of India with tradition, continuity, and authenticity or originality of practices and values, is connected to East Indian subjectivity and Indianness in Guyana. The potency of the image of timeless Hindustan is invigorated by a common belief in the absence of timelessness at home. In other words, one of the things that gives weight to Indian classicality is the conception that things within the local East Indian community have changed or are changing, and that signs of classicality and its attributes are increasingly hard to unearth in Indo-Guyana. I believe this opposition – the contrast between continuity and originality on one side, and transformation and amalgamation on the other – generates the provocative power of classicality.

According to several of my Hindu informants, Hinduism in Guyana has become diluted. It has evolved into a modified version of the ancient religious complex blended with chunks of other traditions apparent in the local religious ambit. And they are right. Hindu ‘philosophy’ and religious practice are touched by other beliefs and ways. In fact, virtually all aspects of Indian culture and religion are touched by alien influences in Guyana. The form of congregational worship, Indian food and dress, family makeup and relationships, social organisation, and entertainment, are all illustrations of processes of localisation (and globalisation). Consequently, Indian classicality is assessed with the present East Indian hybridity in mind. The judgement of India and all that what is Indian, and subsequently the specific motivational structure produced by the general understanding of India(n), depends on people’s experiences with cultural and religious transformation in the past.

What I have called the impression of classicality can thus trigger totally different responses. It engenders both senses of personal *inferiority* and *superiority*. The image of the Indian subcontinent as the conservatory of one’s legacy causes those who struggle with innovation and adaptation to point at India with pride and admiration, and lament the state of Indianness in the West. People who consider Christianity to be a threat, fear the deterioration of the Brahmin status, disagree with televised North American notions, and

feel Indian interests in multi-ethnic Guyana have to be safeguarded, tend to long for a return to the elevated cultural and religious ways of the ancestral land. Not surprisingly, a high percentage among these *classicists* are Brahmin priests and other religious leaders. Especially they glorify the ancient and unadulterated Hinduism of India and the old days. Frequently you hear them preach the restoration of vanished values.

Their sentimentalist pleas can be heard at functions and festivals all over Guyana. During the mass ‘Ram Naumi 2003’ celebration at the Anna Regina stadium, for instance, the Hindu audience was urged to reaccept the eternal and original Dharma. Passionate speakers commanded the people not to “throw away what the ancestors brought”, and tried to convince the spectators of the fact that they “are connected to a larger, older civilization.”

As happens more often, the organisers’ appeal for ‘re-Indianisation’ was explicitly linked to senses of insecurity and besiegement apparent in the Hindu/East Indian community. Not only did the event commence with prayers meant to “invoke peace” – thereby conveying the message that Hinduism is the instrument with which anxiety can be battled – the gathering was also repeatedly assured that “nobody has the right to rape a people from their heritage.” Neither corrupt Indian politicians²⁶⁷, nor African criminals, or anyone else, must be given a chance to emasculate the great tradition. Hence, the people should fortify their Indianness.

A comparable message is delivered by the Guyana Indian Heritage Association. Although focussing on Indian culture (labelled Cultural Hinduism by some²⁶⁸) rather than Indian religion alone, also this group blends the business of promoting Indianness with the fight against threats and uncertainties.²⁶⁹ And with success. Their events draw large numbers of East Indians. And the Association’s ideas echo throughout the community. Especially the older generation is sensitive to GIHA-like classicist notions. Like elsewhere, they often are the ones who express the desire to return to a source from which modernity has taken them.

Youthful East Indians are less alienated. Many below the age of thirty employ Indian elements simply as ingredients with which their eclectic contemporary selves are brewed. Except for some of the more pious kids, they often merely utilise the classicist impression of India as an device for stylistic expression. According to my informants, Indian wear and jewellery, for instance, are increasingly popular among Indian youths.²⁷⁰

However, what I have called ‘the image of the Indian subcontinent as the conservatory of one’s legacy’ – an image that is shared among the Indian masses – does not invariably cause them to point at India with the same pride and admiration as the more

²⁶⁷ Some of the Hindu religious leaders present are overt critics of the PPP government, and deemed associates of ROAR’s Ravi Dev. It seemed as if prominent PPP-allied pundits boycotted this happening.

²⁶⁸ For instance by the Indian High Commissioner, mister Gupta. (Interview, 28 November 2003)

²⁶⁹ See also chapter three.

²⁷⁰ Even non-Indian Guyanese appreciate Indian wear. Amerindian and African girls were among the contestants at the regional sari-pageant in Anna Regina.

alienated do. In fact, in the case of the ‘well-adapted’, that particular image of the motherland often instigates feelings of *East Indian* superiority and advancement rather than senses of local inferiority and degeneration. Many of those who welcome innovation and choice, the *anti-classicists*, regard their ways the next and higher stage in the ‘evolution’ of Indianness.

Indian manners and notions are thought to be archaic. Particularly, traditional conceptions of family or gender relations are regularly brought up as illustrations of ‘pre-civilised’ Subcontinental practices. Informants have assured me Indian females are far from emancipated. In fact, Indian wives allegedly are abused and baby girls commonly killed. Also certain religion-related issues are mentioned to exemplify local Indian progress. The caste system and its inequities are an example. Many locals denounce caste, regard it to be a “repulsive thing” or “a system of exploitation and ignorance.” Some said they were “glad to be born in Guyana”. And one female even told me caste makes “it a disgrace to be Indian.”

According to all these informants, migration to Guyana has allowed Indian religion to evolve into a system more fit for contemporary believers in a world where ascribed statuses and other exponents of Indian antiquity become less and less important and viable. As said, the anti-classicists believe localised ideas and practices concerning family and gender-relations to be superior to the original ones. But also things like consumption patterns, taste and sense of style, and professional ambitions as well as preferred leisure activities, are thought to be of a more sophisticated kind in Indo-Guyana.

This anti-classicist verdict of timeless India, just as the classicist judgment of Indian stagnancy, motivates certain behavioural strategies. Whereas admiration for the old ways feeds reproductive or regressive activities²⁷¹, fondness for novelty prompts modification. A special example of East Indians with innovative drives are Muslim purifiers. These are more fervently engrossed in the deconstruction of the South Asian inheritance than anyone else in Indo-Guyana. As noted, imams actually urge their following to “shed away all the culture” which is not indisputably Islamic. According to some, usually Salafi, East Indian Muslims must erase all traces of Indianness from their homes, hearts and habits. And some indeed attempt to.

Various neofundamentalist believers have banned Indian elements from their lives. They would wear Arabic attire, grow beards²⁷², prevent their wives from covering the head with the Indian *orni* instead of a *‘khimar’*, discard Indo-Islamic religious practices, do not participate in Hindu feasts and festivals, and outlaw Indian music, dance and film. A few of them guaranteed me that nothing ‘cultural’ remained in their world. And a spirited purifier named Hussein (“just like Saddam!”) underscored his non-Indianness by telling me that his name and ancestors really came from the Arab peninsula, and not the Indian subcontinent. As far as he is concerned, his forefathers moved from Arabia to India several generations

²⁷¹ The GIHA activists are examples, and so are the members of certain Hindu organisations and Muslim collectives (see chapter four, the Muslim Youth league, for instance)

²⁷² Something that was not common practice in East Indian Muslim community a few decades ago.

before embarking a ship to the New World. His caramel Indian complexion is, according to Hussein, merely a tan. Nothing truly ties him to India, nothing in the present and nothing in the past. Hussein's concept of India, together with his fundamentalist valuation of that concept, has motivated action directed at freeing or distancing himself from it. Yet, by altering personal appearance and manners and denouncing what is Indian, Hussein as well as other purifiers, acknowledge the understanding of the motherland as the time capsule of Indianness. They associate India with days long gone by, just like traditionalist Muslims or any classicist and anti-classicist East Indians. Whether stirred to depart from them, or enthused to return to the ways of that place, all hold similar concepts of the East. Comparable impressions form their understanding of origin, impressions that are virtually invariably based upon representations offered by mediating others, representations that therefore must be distorted.

5.1.3 The India experience: developing shared conceptions of the Motherland

According to practice theorists in the line of Bourdieu, action instigating schemas originate from previous experiences. Accumulated encounters with a particular issue or item help construct a mental composite which structures responses to new experiences pertaining to that or to linked issues or items. The more those experiences are shared among people, the more likely that analogies in their mental composites will arise.

The East Indians' schema of India is learned in an environment where real life contact between them and India is largely non-existent. Hence, the internalised impressions, and the subsequent externalisations of authentic Indianness, derive from various indirect sources. People's concept of India and Indianness – not East Indianness! – is distilled from information provided by various individuals and entities with certain agendas. The inevitable desire of these image conveyors to 'sell' India and Indianness in a specific wrapping affects the local concept of Subcontinental authenticity. The proponents of popular Bombay cinematography are often accused of spreading deceitful reflections of India and the Indian. As an East Indian academic told me, "it creates in my estimation really a false image of India and what it is to be an Indian." According to him, the effect of such deception is considerable. He states, "we [now] are really a society of mimicking people."

Allegedly, not only do the East Indians imitate American lifestyles, listen to American music, wear American outfits and eat American fast food, due to Indian film they have also come to replicate showbiz' Indian chic. As an example, the academic mentions the novel East Indian belief that 'traditional' female dress includes pants and revealing varieties of the all-Indian saris. Although "now everyone wears them," he says, "once upon a time that really was a no-no." And he is right. The increasingly popular South Asian fashion that is sold at local markets, in boutiques in Georgetown and worn in mandirs, at jhandi and weddings resembles film costumes rather than the clothes worn by ordinary Indians. Models from those films are indeed adopted by the Guyanese.

Dale Bisnauth, historian and government minister, regards this only to be part of a broader movement towards embracing a fictional motherland by many of his fellow East Indians. He believes this is not just the consequence of televised information. Rather, information from various sources contributes to something he labels “re-Indianisation”. According to Bisnauth, movies as well as cultural programs and courses promulgate a culture that “is not necessarily Guyanese in a sense that those are cultural things that were in the community that was developing over the years.”²⁷³ In fact, they might not even belong to a forgotten Indian heritage or reflect that country’s contemporary reality. Instead, each in their own way, they market the mythical motherland mentioned earlier this chapter.²⁷⁴

Also the (Christian) minister himself has swallowed the mythical motherland message. He admits he was very disappointed to see men in “jacket and shirt” the first time he attended service at a Baptist church in India. He told me: “I was so upset about it that I said to my host: for god sake, put on a service here that is Indian!” Apparently, Bisnauth expected to see something more exotic, something that probably matched his understanding of what was Indian and not “a service that could have been done in Jamaica” as well. Such disappointment with actual India is not uncommon among those few who have travelled there.

Even Prakash Gossai, one of Guyana’s most respected Hindu teachers, does not think too highly of the Hindustan he found across the oceans on his quest for pure religious knowledge. As far he is concerned, Indian Hinduism is a habitual belief which is “taken for granted” by the masses. Gossai says, “the people [in India] are going to work, there is this mandir here, they come, take off their shoes quickly, bow, and they are gone again. Is that practice of Hinduism? I don’t think so, that is just, it is a habit, it is a tradition.”²⁷⁵ Most likely, Gossai too had another image of Indian religious practice in mind before he ever landed on his ancestral grounds. A blatant lack of religiosity, or perhaps a pragmatic rather than spiritual attitude of devotees towards their conviction, was not part of his preconception of the place and its people, and thus generated a sense of disillusion.

Similar feelings of disenchantment were expressed by my East Indian wife as we travelled India in the autumn of 2002. The commercial exploitation of faith in and around sacred places, people’s dishonesty, the incomprehensibility and callousness of the social hierarchy, and the disregard or explicit rejection of my wife’s Indianness²⁷⁶, all dented her

²⁷³ All, interviews on 13 and 14 March 2003.

²⁷⁴ The East Indian conception of India is thus highly stereotypical and clearly influenced by images of classicality conveyed through the media and cultivated by the other available sources of information on the motherland. Evidently, ‘actual India’ is place characterised by similar dynamic cultural processes as can be discerned in Guyana. Also in Mother India, practice and meaning are negotiated, prone to change triggered by for instance globalisation, and subject to manipulation as the result of power struggles.

²⁷⁵ Interview with Prakash Gossai, on 13 August 2003.

²⁷⁶ For example, she was refused entrance to a temple because of her foreignness, and called a fake-Hindu by a ‘Brahmin’ who charged her a hundred U.S-dollars for unwanted guidance on the shores of a sacred lake.

esteem of the motherland and its inhabitants, and boosted her appreciation of the fortunately less imperfect Guyanese Hindu community.

Such an effect of real Indian encounters – the depreciation of ‘them’ together with the upgrading of ‘us’ – is also displayed by some who deal with the Indian migrant community in North America. Many Guyanese Indians who live or have been in the North criticise the manners and stance of the immigrants from India. The latter are said to be so eager to fulfil the American dream that they overlook their native religion, language, and values. In addition, they are considered arrogant and are accused by the Guyanese Indians of treating their non-Indian counterparts as second-rate Indians. Hindus have assured me Indian believers will not associate with them and even refuse to attend their celebrations in joint mandirs. And a Muslim Guyanese father and Canadian resident, said some of his Pakistani brethren will not bother to give him “a salam,” or Islamic greeting, in a Toronto masjid.

Those who never have had firsthand experience with Indian reality, however, continue to assemble their understanding solely from the limited information available in Guyana. Their experiences with India are the experiences as an audience, listener and attendant, not as a subject or participant. The East Indian masses cannot do anything but to work with the images provided by others. These images, captured in movies, courses, oral history, scriptures, accounts of those who ‘know’, and television programs, but also in exhibitions celebrating Indian greatness²⁷⁷, and in the public commemoration of India’s independence and mahatma Ghandi’s birthday, structure the collective’s conception of the motherland. Together they convey the meta-narrative of timeless India: the ultimate and unchangeable source of the purest and most classical hereditary culture and religion. This meta-narrative, experienced as a consistent pattern by my informants, has given birth to the impression of Indian classicality. Such impression, which more or less summarises the local collective understanding of India, is intertwined with other understandings and currents apparent within the contemporary Guyanese society.

More specifically, the India understanding is connected to schemas concerning transformation, and local social organisation, through their mutual role in the construction of the East Indians’ self-image. Hence, people’s notion of classical India and their utilisation of that notion cannot be understood in isolation. The way they employ it to define themselves depends on their perception and appraisal of the position of Indianness within the multifarious Guyanese society and of its relevance in this age of choice and change.

Depending on individual experiences, ambitions, and position, the home of Indianness can thus be seen as a safe haven, a conservatory of ancient aesthetic and moral excellence whereto one can turn in a world and a time in which such excellence is deemed under siege. Or, it can be regarded the origin of something that has to be repositioned to fit

²⁷⁷ An exhibition of posters narrating the greatest Indian achievements was compiled as part of a grand mela (festival) organized by the Hindu religious *Ghandi Youth Organization* of Guyana.

modernity, a conservatory of antiquated visions on aesthetics and morality whose importance as a beacon of exemplary existence diminished due to the development of a distinct localised East Indianness and the magnetism of the non-Indianness of the North.

5.2 Witnessing ‘the West’: notions of North America and its culture

It is a hot dry season morning, 7 am on a market-day, all went out except me, I am looking after the shop for a little while when the telephone rings, I answer, it is Karan, one of my wife’s friends and old classmate. “Hi Karan,” I say when I recognise his voice, “how is everything, haven’t seen you all week, what are you up to?” The guy on the other side of the line grins and only replies with a brief instruction before he abruptly disconnects. “Tell Nal I have made it, tell her I am in New York, say I am staying with a friend and will give her a call to tell her my address, I am not coming back.” – *Fieldnotes, 18 July 2003.*

The magnetism of the Western ways of the North is one of the most striking features of the relationship between contemporary East Indians and what they consider to be their world. People are drawn in many different ways to the pole of non-Indian culture: the northern part of the Americas. Both the Hindu and Muslim community have become strongly affected by manifestations of Americanness. Rhythm & Blues and Rap, fashion, evangelism, fast-food, Christmas, and even values and ambitions concerning one’s professional and social life, have all entered the homes and hearts of numerous community members. Apparently, the pull of ‘the West’ is so strong that numerous not just adopt models of Western- or Americanness, but even strive to reach what they regard as their source.

In other words, mass migration to the United States and Canada, although definitely nurtured by a general lack of prospects and lingering instability at home, is partially driven by a widespread understanding of North America as the cradle of something extremely desirable. Many Guyanese, East Indians, I have talked to, are so captivated by the American dream that they would do just about anything to travel to the Guyanese strongholds way up North to make that dream come true, even if this goes against apparent economic and social logics.

Karan, my wife’s friend, is the eldest son of a wealthy rice farmer who would have been happy to see his son inherit his enterprise. Karan did not have any financial worries, and appeared to be a beloved member of a close-knit and stable family. Yet, he habitually expressed his fondness of New York and the American way in conversations. He explained that to be happy he had to move to the vibrant site of the sky-scrappers, bustling avenues, and massive malls he repeatedly saw on television. And so he did. After he called on that July morning in 2003, we found out Karan had left kith and kin to settle as an illegal,

unemployed and solo migrant in the Big Apple. Without a notice or goodbye to his friends, he had packed his bags and managed to reach his promised land.

The story of Karan is far from exceptional. Although his case is peculiar since he does not seem to be pushed into migration by any kind of hardship at home, a conception of the destination and of what it represents, similar to Karan's vision of Americanness, normally is a part of the (intended) migrants' motives to leave. East Indians, often irrespective of their religious background, award 'America' and 'Americanness' certain qualities which for some are attractive enough to pursue a relocation to the United States or Canada, and/or – as will be discussed later – reason to indulge in personal Americanisation.

Especially many among the younger generations value the attributes of America(ness) quite positively. As their peers elsewhere on this planet, more than other age-groups, East Indian youngsters employ (restyled) American ways and consumption patterns to position themselves in certain ways and distance themselves from those who do not speak the language of modernity.²⁷⁸ If judged by looking at consumption, teens are undoubtedly the group which is drawn most towards (commoditised) Americanness. Although, as Lukose (2005) stresses, exponents of American modernity are reconfigured to fit the local, historical, and sociocultural contexts, their styles and preferences, when it comes to things such as beauty, diet, and pleasure, are obviously globally inflected.

Not surprisingly, East Indians below thirty-five make up a large part of Guyana's annual emigrant flow. Assisted by migrated relatives, allowed entrance through fake or arranged marriages with North American nationals, on tourist visas, or with the help of criminal 'migration specialists'²⁷⁹, thousands of locals in their thirties, twenties and even in their teens yearly move out of the country. Undoubtedly, most of them are encouraged by Guyana's political, social and economic difficulties. Yet, few would have elected the North as their destination if it was not for a dream they share, a vision of America that was and is inspired by a picture of this promised land jointly painted by a squad of image makers.

In ways similar to the India-impression, a range of consistent messages, conveyed through a number of channels, ensures the experience of a coherent general pattern by the majority of East Indians. The bulk of expressions of Americanness people are confronted with, and undergo, presents a similar meta-narrative. The undercurrent story spread by television series, movies, accounts of migrants, foreign commercials, the local marketing of U.S. fast-food restaurants and brands (like Nike, Coca Cola and Fubu), music or music

²⁷⁸ A number of authors, especially in the field of cultural studies, have focussed on cultural practices among youths across the world, and have linked processes of Americanisation/globalisation – often revealed through consumption patterns – with the (re)formation of so called 'youth cultures' (e.g. Amit-Talai and Wulff 1995; Liechty 2002; Lukose 2005; Maira and Soep 2005; and Skelton and Valentine 1998)

²⁷⁹ A significant number of Guyanese ask assistance of professionals to enter the U.S. (and Canada) without the necessary permits. I have been told that smugglers would even go around villages to convince people to 'book' one of these so called *backtrack* trips. The costs of such a journey is considerable. In 2003 the price seems to have been approximately U.S.\$ 12,000. According to one informant, a U.S.\$ 1,000 discount per head can be earned by recruiting others. Often, relatives abroad help finance the endeavour.

videos, and the generous and affluent visiting North American missionaries and development workers, is almost the complete opposite of the story of timeless and classical India. Like in many other present-day societies – especially those which are comparably peripheral, (economically) dependent, and small-scale – in Guyana occidental ideology and its manifestations are successfully marketed as the epitome of modernity.

5.2.1 North America and modernity

Whereas India and authentic Indianness thus are offered virtually wholesale as embodiments of the old, America and Americanness are portrayed as the laboratory and distillate of novelty and aberration. And, like images of India, I am convinced that also this broadly communicated image of America fuels the rise and sustenance of parallels in people's conceptualisation of the place and its exponents. As, again, people depend on similar sources of information, and their encounters with Americanness are often restricted to encounters with locally available products of American commercialism and with Guyanese migrants and American visitors, they develop parallel records of experiences connected to American advancement. In the case of Americanness, these 'shared experiences' facilitate the establishment of the association which lies at the heart of the America understanding: the linkage between modernity and those lands up North.

In the eyes of the bulk of my informants, the U.S. (with in its slipstream western Europe and Canada) are the ultimate founts of aesthetic, technical and even social innovation and transformation. Virtually anything truly modern and different – whether judged positively or disapprovingly – is thought to originate in the United States. American notions of business, engineering, fashion, education, as well as the American conceptions of health, happiness, and achievement are considered to be of a more recent and, according to some, a higher kind. Compared with North America and Europe, Guyana is often labelled a "backward" nation or a place where modernity's victory is not definite yet. This perception of the West/America versus Indo-Guyana is often expressed in my informants' judgement of the "White man". 'White' people are regarded the embodiments of modernity. They are referred to as the living proof of its success and, by some, as the evidence of the inevitable (social and moral) degradation that is said to be firmly connected to western-style advancement.

Especially Hindus and less ardent Muslims, award a high status to fair skinned peoples. According to them, whites are not just excessively affluent, they are also more honest, ingenious, and generous, as well as better managers than both Afro-Guyanese and the East Indians. More than once, I have been told the country would be better off under a white regime. Through the internet, I have even learned about the effort of Guyanese migrants to make their native land the third non-contiguous state to join the United States of America.²⁸⁰

²⁸⁰ See www.guyanausa.org, a site "dedicated to an American Guyana".

The cause of this yearning for the American way, is rarely considered to be solely external. In fact, few of the local ‘analysts’ I have asked figured America would be attractive if it was not for some forceful push-factors available in Guyana itself. Whether adherents to the negative or the positive explanation of American modernity, and irrespective of their religious background, they believe that the importance of America and the American image are tied to perceived internal weaknesses. Although many of the changes that are believed to alter the face of the East Indian community and the ways and attitudes of its members at an increasingly high pace are said to be initiated by images, issues, and items imported from North America, informants generally reckon that Western concepts are adopted predominantly because Indian culture and religion can no longer bind the crowds.

5.2.2 Modernity’s motivational muscle

The urge to connect North America with concepts such as modernity, advancement, and transformation or evolution of practices and values is linked to people’s subjectivity in ways similar to those perceptions and the understanding of India. The strength of the image of up-to-date and vibrant America derives from a rife acknowledgement of transformation processes that take place at home. It is the general awareness of these changes that increases the importance of the embodiment of change: American modernity. Recognition of local transformation allows North America and its exponents to assume either the role of example of advancement or illustration of breakdown, and thus spawns the motivational muscle of modernity.

Informants state that the improved access to foreign ‘change instigators’ has caused the enlightenment of the East Indian masses. Increased mobility, and the exposure to alternative behavioural models, are mentioned as reasons for a transformation galvanising growth of individuals’ knowledge. Like an East Indian told me, “people are more socialising, moving from one area to the next, [hence] they are picking up different lifestyles.” Additionally, the East Indians are said to be inspired to depart from the old ways by what they see on television. As indicated in the previous section, TV is identified as the chief instrument in the process of producing heightened levels of awareness of variety and familiarity with otherness. Hence, the medium is charged with accelerating social transformation within a formerly ignorant and comparatively inert East Indian community. On various occasions, informants claimed that, since the relatively recent advent of television, Indians – especially children – have become ‘more civilised’.

East Indians, irrespective of sex, age and education, have gained access to a previously unobtainable body of conceptions because of the increased availability of uncensored televised knowledge. The encounter with this information has brought about new patterns of behaviour. According to both advocates of change and innovation sceptics, the influx of tempting illustrations of American advancement has already triggered the ‘conversion’ of many Hindu and Muslim East Indians to Americanism. Altered modes of dress, modified tastes concerning things such as food and music, the upsurge of

individualism and hedonism, as well as the emancipation of Indian (female) youths cause many to acknowledge the existence of American modernity and its ongoing infiltration in the East Indian realm. However, the appreciation of America, its local impact, and the actions generated by the collective conceptualisation of America(n), vary from person to person.

Like other shared schemas that structure people's interpretative exercises, a similar perception of modernity not necessarily instigates similar reactions among different people. On the contrary, responses to modernity-linked America and Americanisation vary from extremely positive to exceptionally negative. Impressions of Americanisation prompt action-initiating feelings of *gain* as well as *loss*. The vision of North America as the laboratory and source of transformation causes those who welcome innovation, and desire choice, to regard the U.S.A. an exemplary nation. The same vision will make those who experience alienation and have difficulty with adjusting – e.g. classicists – to look at America with disapproval and apprehension, and bewail its conquest of Indo-Guyana.

Such anti-modernists condemn the ways of the West, regret the present, and exalt the past. According to them, imported American notions undermine the unawareness that used to protect people from misbehaving and kept them within the fold of their native religion and culture. In a way, they regard people helpless victims of info flows that characterise life in the post-ignorance era. Particularly concepts of gender roles and relations, and sexuality, are considered to be negatively affected by unconventional examples set on TV, and disseminated through other channels. It is said that, due to the American-style glorification of physical beauty, East Indian girls have become “wild” and bold enough to “wear dem short kind ah ting” that only Africans, or foreigners, used to sport. Besides, anti-modernists feel it has made them “more outgoing” and unwilling to “be kept in the house”. Some even state imported modernity has allowed teenagers to “get out of control,” and “really get bad.”

More than anything, critique on, admiration for, and analysis of, the impact of American modernity revolves around their influence on local aesthetics and values. I believe the ever-growing interconnectedness with North America is an important factor where the modifications in East Indian style and specific conceptions are concerned. Appearance and attitudes of especially East Indian adolescents have changed dramatically over the past two decades. In various ways they now express a kind of non-Indianness that closely resembles an ‘export-Americanness’. Specifically the African-American type of this ‘export-Americanness’ is popular among young East Indians.²⁸¹ The emblematic provocative and hedonistic style of a number of African artists from the United States – advertised in music videos – is reflected in the behaviour of local teenage boys and girls. Public drinking, revealing outfits for girls and sportswear and gold for males, the altered

²⁸¹ Also young Guyanese Africans are very much inspired by Afro-American coolness. Even more than their East Indian counterparts they appear to style themselves according to music video standards. This shared source of inspiration, and accordingly the emerging interethnic resemblance in style, causes many critics to remark East Indian youths become like ‘dem African’.

role of sexuality, and the status of titivated cars and minibuses, all show the impact of impressions of Afro-American coolness.

Images of this particular category of American modernity, and the judgement or appreciation of these images, thus motivate action among these youths directed at the reproduction of its aura at home. East Indian school girls and students, minibus-conductors and taxi-drivers drivers, and welders and joiners, replicate elements of such coolness because they feel it will help them assemble their (Americanised) ideal self-image. Likewise, East Indian youths borrow parts from other branches of American modernity. The 'Latin-hype', for instance, might have been responsible for the increased popularity of short dresses and lacy lingerie in stores and stalls. Also, that trend might be connected to the novel ideal-image of full and firm female buttocks which, I have been assured, causes usually flat reared East Indian girls to indulge in deemed reconstructive muscular exercises (contract/relax etc.).

East Indian youths make use of their understanding of America and Americanness in many different ways, thereby *relying* on the understanding's sharedness. As their contemporaries in numerous places throughout the world, the youths employ iconic American style and manners to label themselves and prove their exposure and sophistication. They adopt American looks and manners, fake American accents, and aspire American aspirations largely because of their association with modernity and its attributes. Contrary to the anti-modernists, they are inspired by innovation and gather the increase of knowledge and options to be a gain rather than the catalyst of loss. And they are not the only ones. Although youths are the prime innovators, America-aficionados, or *modernists*, can be found among all age-groups within the East Indian community. Looks and visions of both young and old show inspiration from abroad. Ideal self-images of a remarkable amount of East Indians of all ages reveals unambiguous traces of a 'Western' ego-ideology. Principles of personal conservation, intrinsic part of the mediated American interpretation of good living, are adopted by many of them. Hence, you find middle-aged East Indian men, perhaps stirred by the massive wrestlers starring in the weekly broadcasted WWF (wrestling) shows, struggle in blistering gyms and spend small fortunes on 'Animal Packs' and body build magazines; married women and mothers, maybe convinced of the importance of durable beauty by well-conserved mature soap-stars, jog along the coastal road in the early morning hours before preparing breakfast; and an occasional widow, probably enthused by the same soap stars, treating herself on a modish short hairdo and a juvenile lover. In addition, there is a growing number of disciples of U.S. doctrines of health consciousness. More than once, these informed me about the benefits of vitamin supplements, fish oil capsules, steamed vegetables, or the Atkins diet, and the dangers of saturated fat, a lack of calcium and the excessive intake of carbohydrates. I bet none of such information and advices were ever given to Chandra Jayawardena and Raymond Smith who conducted anthropological fieldwork among the East Indians in Berbice and

Demerara roughly half a century ago. Neither would they have bumped into Slim-Fast ‘addicts’ and ladies in ‘tights’ on their way to aerobic class.

Evidently, new ways have entered. As a befriended pundit analysed, unlike before, the people in Guyana nowadays no longer want to submit to the process of aging. According to him, whereas the old Indians knew the body changed to suit the respective *asbrama* (phase of life) the person is in, contemporary Indians “don’t want to accept that change.”²⁸² And observations suggest he is right. Aging is considered to be a problem, at least by those who are susceptible to ‘American’ models. In fact, the above indicates that the modernists’ general attitudes towards the body, and towards the exhibition of the body, are connected to their understanding and appreciation of American modernity. In other words, the modernist America-disposition manifests itself in terms of what Bourdieu labels the production of a ‘modernist’ body.²⁸³ Produced as the result of a joint venture between the interconnected yet peripheral locality and the modernists’ understanding of his or her position in the world, this ‘modernist’ complex of physical attitudes and dispositions exposes a certain conceptualisation of America.²⁸⁴ Likewise, the stylistic stance of East Indian Hindu traditionalists or Muslim purifiers indicates an anti-modernists conceptualisation of America. The inclination of Muslims to wear Arabic attire not only reveals a certain understanding of India and Indianness, it also narrates of a particular conception of the West.

Personal style can thus be a manifestation of East Indian understandings of American modernity – and modernist or anti-modernist dispositions – just like the attitudes, approaches and values of East Indians. All are demonstrations of schemas ‘learned’ by individuals through continuous interaction with their environs. However, although the rather thoroughly described literal embodiments of this structure (personal styles) prove wonderful examples of the way the East Indians witness the West, the social impact of evolving attitudes, approaches and values is much greater. Transformation processes regarding many of the relationships discussed in the latter part of this chapter and the following chapters of this book, as well as people’s conception of themselves and of success and purposes in this world, cannot be separated from their ideas about this American modernity. Accounts of informants habitually confirm its influence. Whether discussing partnership, parenthood, friendship, or sexuality, East Indian interpretations – perceptions that also guide action – often reveal they are established in contexts in which America is clearly present.

5.2.3 *The America experience: developing shared conceptions of the ‘land of promises’*

As mentioned with regard to the understanding of India and Indianness, the internalisation of schemas is an ongoing process of experience accumulation. Also the East Indians’

²⁸² Interview with pundit Chowbay, on 21 May 2003.

²⁸³ See, Webb et al 2002:37.

²⁸⁴ Bourdieu calls this *body hexis* (1977).

America-schema is a system of understandings moulded from an aggregate of experiences. Although durable in nature, this system is shaped by new occurrences just as it shapes the perception of and dealings with such occurrences. Since, within the East Indian community, people assemble their understanding of America and Americanness from experiences deriving from the same sources, corresponding schemas of the 'land of promises' will materialise.

In Guyana, understandings or schemas of America develop from a limited range of America-experiences. Only a small minority of the East Indians have actually eye-witnessed the place. The rest of them gets to know about it through locally present exponents of America or via indirect information provided by the media and the witnesses. As indicated, they learn 'American' from the advertising and presentation of locally available American products – whether movies, fast-food, beverages, television news and programs, music, fashion, evangelism, or aid – and from the accounts of migrants and travellers. None of these images and accounts is unadulterated. The examples of American mercantilism that reach South American shores are not produced as unbiased heralds of a foreign reality. And also the impressions given by Guyanese emigrants, and those who have visited North America, often are not attempts to inform the inexperienced about real life up North.

In fact, the self portrayal of those who went there generally confirms the broadly existing perspective on America. Returning East Indians operate as true agents of its modernity. They almost blatantly model the admired images of Americanness with which they once travelled to North America and which they know are persistent in Guyana. Especially many of the visiting emigrants reveal a remarkable transformative capacity. As thoroughly Americanised Guyanese, they present themselves to the public at home. No longer do many of them seem to remember their South American past. They act surprised when confronted with Guyana's lame infrastructure, express their disgust about the nasty tropical heat and humidity, say how much they detest the pore-blocking dust, and utter incomprehension when discussing the 'third world' lack of punctuality and reliability.

Even if gone for just a few months, returning migrants are often severely cosmopolitanised. I have witnessed East Indian women arrive from New York after a stay of less than half a year with manicured hands and nails, a new style and makeup, wearing pants instead of a dress, and blessed with a brand new American accent. And they were expected to. Those who leave are supposed to return as new and improved versions of their previous selves. Residents and staff of the house where my wife and I have resided usually judged visiting migrant villagers (and their success) by measuring stylistic or bodily modification. Especially a brightened complexion is highly appreciated. However, also emancipated outfits or haircuts, and of course the peculiar Indo-Guyanese interpretation of New York-English are valued as signs of a successful makeover.²⁸⁵ A lack of change is

²⁸⁵ Many visiting East Indian migrants from North-America have discarded Creole English and now speak English with a striking America accent. Even children emphasize their foreignness by using a U.S.-English accent and typical vocabulary. I remember noticing a migrant-boy in a local masjid who addressed his

frowned upon. My emigrated Guyanese wife's reappearance in her old Guyanese wardrobe, therefore, was regarded rather unusual and slightly incomprehensible by her former neighbours and old friends.

Locals with real-America expertise, mostly migrants, thus validate the impression of American modernity cultivated through the media and in advertising or product presentation, rather than provide the home community with alternative images of the less picture-perfect America they undoubtedly have become familiar with. They fashion their messages aimed at the ones back home according to concepts of glorious American advancement which they possess and know are understood in Guyana. As one East Indian remigrant told me:

“And then when the people, the families go to the States, they would say, well look I bought a car in six months, I have a house, but the people in Guyana don't know you have a mortgage system, in Guyana to build a nice house you have got to save up your money [...] So people would be fascinated with the stuff or the things people can do. [...] and I am telling you, from the time you get in the States, two, three years, you crave to come back for a holiday here [...] and when you are old now, you want to come back and retire. But there is this pride, you have got to come back with a whole set of money, because people would think, I was wasting my time. They portray a false image of America, and that is a shock to every new immigrant, when you go...this is not what they used to tell me, you know what I mean? You are left with your mouth open, but you are ashamed to come back, you rather stay there and just prove yourself. There was a time when we wanted to come back, I mean there wasn't any work for anybody, you had to get next to nothing job and so on, but then you hold out.” – *Interview, 16 February 2005.*

Shame to admit one's inability to realise the American dream, together with the eagerness to experience the admiration of those who remain, inspires numerous migrants to play proof of an illusion they once believed in. Only rarely did I come across stories about the harshness of the existence as illegal or uneducated alien: stories about the little humane labour regime, the high rents and dark basement apartments, and about the risks of being there uninsured.

Hence, conflicting or even variegated information on America and Americanness is hardly available in Guyana. All sources, including those managed by anti-modernists, depict America's North and its exponents as equivalents of novelty, and, accordingly, cause the masses to experience and internalise those America images as forcefully consistent patterns.

Guyanese friends in U.S.-English. He belittled them, showed them his middle finger, and told them in thick U.S.-English “suck my dick pussycat”. He was called a “show-off” by the local boys in the mosque.

As noted above, the bulk of informants believe the net-effect of the experience of such patterns to be enlightenment of the formerly unknowing crowds. According to them, media and the envoys of American modernity have guided and guide innovation eager commoners on the path of transformation by disclosing formerly inaccessible corpuses of knowledge. And they are correct. Increased availability and accessibility of alternative knowledge alone have triggered change and brought about modifications in the East Indian worldview. However, as shown, the effectiveness of that knowledge as an instrument of change was significantly amplified by its origin, purpose, and shape.

Overall, the America experience of the people I have talked to and lived among is the experience of a general pattern which is far from neutral. Television, the internet, and other sources of Americanness do not just offer a new range of images, they skilfully sell those images too. Whether presented in the form of the *Young And The Restless*, a Wesley Snipes movie, 50cent videos, the CNN newscast, Nike boots, a Clench cap, the KFC experience, Coca Cola ads, generally youthful and trendy Peace Corps volunteers²⁸⁶, or in the form of Americanised emigrated friends and family, most of the impressions of America available in Guyana are directed and edited clips that contribute to the image of the 'land of promises'. The East Indians who are subject to these clips are subject to messages meant to cultivate appreciation for American modernity rather than to messages merely intended to neutrally inform the receivers. Undoubtedly, these messages are productive. The modernists' fondness for American appearances is not intrinsic but nourished, largely by subjective messages. And also a number of less tangible 'world-view' related stances of many of my informants shows traces of Americanisation which are surely connected to the clever marketing of U.S.' attitudes, approaches and values in Guyana.

Anti-modernists regard these stances proof of a deterioration of morality. They hold imported images responsible for decreases in social cohesion and cooperation, the spread of selfishness and disrespect, and the contemporary exaltation of decadence. According to some, modernity undermines the foundations of society. Certain Muslims state that people nowadays do not care much about each other, that the faith of many is weakened, that "traditional practices [which] really kept the people together" no longer exist, and that people's love for life has come to exceed their love for Allah. And many Hindu critics of modernity feel the same.

Of course, such analyses are not much different from those uttered by members of often older generations elsewhere and else-when in this world. But the observations on which their conclusions are based support a belief in the existence of a globalisation-fuelled social transformation which can be labelled Americanisation. Noted decreasing numbers of attending villagers at local funerals and the declined importance of the extended family's supportive role (in case of marriage, birth etc.), can be linked to the rise of Western

²⁸⁶ I the aftermath of '911', these volunteers have become ambassadors of a cool and caring America. In fact, president Bush (in his January 2002 State of the Union Address) announced plans to double the number of volunteers to emphasize and advertise the U.S.A's humane character. According to the Peace Corps website (www.peacecorps.gov), there are currently (June 2006) fifty-nine Peace Corps volunteers working in Guyana.

individualism. And the popularity of eloping as well as the growing number of divorces, or the emancipation of East Indian female adolescents, could be regarded indications of American-like modifications in people's conceptions of hierarchy and respect.

All in all, many features of contemporary social life suggest the impact of images of American modernity is considerable. The consistent meta-narrative they form, the story of a land as the cradle of change and chance, facilitates the establishment of a widely shared understanding of North America and North American. Additionally, the images of American modernity have altered East Indian subjectivity. Mushroomed local availability of clear impressions of alternative life-styles and environs have triggered alterations in self-definition and self-localisation of the East Indian individual. Informants frequently display a sense of 'global citizenship' when verbalising their perspectives.

In interviews or group discussions they mention the changing world we are all living in, and refer to universal tendencies and issues such as the growing responsibility of men as fathers and householders; the importance of communication between partners; and increasing openness and equality in parent-child relationships. Or, informants include foreign information in their analysis of the state of affairs in their world, and present it as personal experience. In response to questions about changed local perspectives on the responsibilities of adult children, several seniors complained about the tendency to "neglect" aged parents and "dump" them in old people's homes. It did not seem to occur to them that old people's homes are extremely scarce in Guyana and absolutely non-existent in their region. Most likely, none of them knew anyone in any old people's home anywhere. Yet, perceptions of contemporary East Indian parent-care were coloured by foreign 'realities' which they had heard of from others. This indicates that alien images not only affect people's perception of the foreign or locally adopted traits, but also reflect in preconceptions pertaining to the locals belonging to strata parallel to the depicted alien ones.

In other words, indirect experiences with (or information about) a particular foreign group can be included in the judgement of that group's local equivalent. Foreign images are employed in the formation of understandings of local others such as younger generations and religious others. Hindus' understanding of Guyanese Muslims is unmistakably influenced by the portrayal of Muslims and Islam in the locally available foreign media. Their mistrust and even fear of Guyanese Muslims cannot be based upon real life experiences with them.

The altered perception of Muslims neighbours, however, can be further reinforced by perceived modifications in local Muslim self-portrayal. This self-portrayal, motivated by purificatory tendencies, is also inspired by the Western depiction of Islam. In response to American modernity as they understand it, some East Indian Muslims deliberately assume a stereotypical Muslim role. I have heard them state they want to "look like Taliban", witnessed the popularity of turbans, come across young girls opting for a "burqa", and

heard Muslim men passionately express their hatred of a people (the Jews) they had never seen.²⁸⁷

All things considered, the understanding of American modernity is interwoven with Hindu and Muslim East Indian concepts of their selves, the others, their position, and the relationships between them and those others. As said, it is linked to Indian heritage and notions of Indianness. But in addition, it is connected with the Guyanese present. The conceptualisation of American modernity affects people's valuation and interpretation of social relations and opportunities at home. In turn, it is also shaped by the experienced local reality. In fact, the East Indian image of American modernity could not have been established – and cannot be reproduced – without the aid of a complementary East Indian image of their actual Hindu or Muslim East Indian Guyana. Hence, completing the trilogy on East Indian understandings of the relationship between the self and the world, the last third of this chapter will be devoted to the impressions of the self in Guyana.

5.3 Images of the near-sited: notions of ethnic and religious selves and neighbours

“We are caught between what the West is convincing us to do, and what the East has taught us to do.” According to a speaker at a nightly Arya fire-oblation, a Sanatanist nicknamed ‘Sugar Cake’, the contemporary East Indians of Guyana are trapped. They have grown into a people whose thoughts and practices are severely contaminated with non-Indian elements as the result of predominantly the magnetism of the West. The expectations, desires, interpretations, and strategies of many are tainted by influential understandings of American modernity. Mass migration and the local marketing of a sexy foreign innovation-ism have conspicuously altered the face of Guyanese Indianness. However, the speaker suggests, the transformation is incomplete. A full takeover of modernity has not taken place, and the conversion is bound to remain half-baked. Hence, the fruits of transformation cannot be fully enjoyed. Both a hindering Indian heritage and the constraining Guyanese reality disable their ripening. The obstacles raised by the country's economic weakness, its political instability, and the lingering social disunity cannot easily be overcome. In addition, the Indian ways and values of the past are relatively durable and thus continue to hinder the passage of change. Yet, as I understand from Sugar Cake's homily, this hindrance has proved not to be effective enough to protect the valuable East Indian legacy from processes of decay. Whilst triggering only partial and little fruitful progress, the exposition of the legacy's guardians to modernity has minimised the benefits of tradition. Hence, present-day East Indians are caught in their here and now. Allegedly,

²⁸⁷ Muslims in Guyana have, for instance, assured me Jews are greedy and after the “destruction of Islam”, want to and control American politics, business and media, and consider all non-Jews to be “human cattle or slaves” (Interview, 3 July 2003).

they have proceeded too far down novelty-road to return to their pleasant past. Yet, at the same time, they are not equipped to make it to the finish.

Of course, I do not share such a negative interpretation of the Indo-Guyanese present. This book is filled with evidence against individual entrapment and helplessness. *Sugar Cake* is wrong, or should at least be slightly more optimistic. Yet, gloomy analyses of contemporary East Indian reality are offered wholesale by both Hindu and Muslim informants. Both the 'collective self-reflective Indian academics and the less educated Indians consider the position of East Indians and Indianness to be very weak. On one hand, this feeble standing is thought to be caused by inadequate adaptation to inescapable and powerful foreign forces. As Swami Aksharananda told me: "we [the East Indians] are still in the old mould, but living in a Western environment, and therefore, we are not able to cope with many of the challenges of the West."²⁸⁸ On the other hand, powers from within the Guyanese realm are regarded to be detrimental where the good and sustenance of East Indians and Indianness are concerned. Guyanese reality is believed to be a hostile reality, a place in a time and space in which people have to battle for their survival.

This complex of adverse conditions endures because of internal as well as external reasons. Internal weaknesses make the people plus their religion and culture vulnerable. The often mentioned lack of social cohesion, the absence of deep traditional cultural and religious-philosophical knowledge, the wide-spread inability to speak the 'old' languages, and the partial triumph of modernisation, all have affected the resistance of people and damaged the walls of their ethnic and spiritual hideouts.

External threats can be seen as the explanation for the detrimental consequences of internal weakness. Ubiquitous scarcity or senses of insufficiency, already mentioned in chapter three, helped and help produce a competitive society in which strong collectives or cooperatives have the upper hand and ineffective groups are dominated. The country's frail economic situation facilitates the rivalry fuelling deprivation. In such a situation, access to scarce 'good', whether in the form of resources or power, is most successfully claimed by those who possess the skill of collaboration. Only by cooperating with allies, members of an ingroup, competition can be 'eliminated'.

In Guyana, thanks to a specific dualistic social makeup, this notion has inspired the formation of what I have previously called directive axes or ethnic power clusters. These multifaceted structures, with tentacles in the realms of politics, economy, religion and culture, utilise comprehensive ethnic segregation to gain and maintain directive authority. The directive axes and their exponents attempt to ensure the unconditional support of either Africans or East Indians through the suggestion of partiality and communication of mistrust and anxiety. Or actually, by manipulating their target group's understanding of society and of the (other) ethnicities do ethnic elites seek to establish lasting rule. And they succeed, at least in the case of the East Indians. Due to the common conceptualisation of Guyana as unfavourable battlegrounds and of Africans as intrinsically different opponents,

²⁸⁸ Interview with the Hindu leader, on 20 August 2003.

my informants generally back what I would designate the exponents of East Indian directive axes.

5.3.1 The hostile home

Hindu and Muslim East Indians almost unanimously associate the Guyanese society with harshness. As indicated in chapter three, collective senses of crisis severely colour people's interpretations of their here and now. Although most informants recognise the country's merits – often as opposed to the downsides of either the Indian or the North American societies – they tend to highlight shortcomings and menaces in the description of their home society. The poor economic performance and position of Guyana and its people are prominent aspects of many East Indians' interpretation of their homeland. Especially in rice-dependent Essequibo, many people express feelings of economic uncertainty in their accounts of personal encounters with daily living. They mention the ever rising prices of utilities, the meagre profitability of agricultural activities, the lack of jobs and viable business opportunities, and the relatively high costs of groceries and transportation. And they are right. Things in rural Guyana are far from easy, and the question how to make ends meet is frequently asked by a relatively high number of East Indians.

However, current impressions of uncertainty and insufficiency are also connected to feelings of relative deprivation. Dreams, ambitions and expectations do not always fit the wishful informant's reality.²⁸⁹ Experience has taught and still teaches most of the average East Indians that certain wants cannot be aspired after on the northern shores of South America. Such unfulfilled desires nurture negative valuations of the individual conditions despite the absence of absolute poverty, and regardless of the actually slowly rising standards of living. In many cases do they, as well as some fulfil-able but slightly extravagant desires, reveal the impact of foreign images. The internalisation of a common need to complete one's school uniform with foreign brand-name boots (worth an average month's wages) is likely to be linked to imported representations.²⁹⁰ And so might be the wish of a young female Essequibeian informant to become a psychologist, or the hope of local secondary school graduates to enter the world of party- and club-going, self-ruling, and peer-focussed students in Georgetown. Nevertheless, these non-traditional and originally alien expectations and desires contribute to a sense of deprivation which – entwined with other influences – is responsible for the dark shades in the East Indian portraiture of their physical environs.

Yet, even more than the deemed economic hardship, perceived social difficulties colour my informants conceptualisation of Guyana and the Guyanese. East Indians almost

²⁸⁹ The same phenomenon is mentioned by Appadurai (1999, 2001). As noted in chapter three, he uses the term disjunctures to describe problems of things such as livelihood, suffering and equity that materialise in a contemporary world characterised by objects in motion.

²⁹⁰ Narmala Halstead (2002) has analysed notions of fake and real vis-à-vis East Indians' interactions with American brand names. In the article, she analyses how a claiming of the foreign allows for a notion of personhood which relies on outward migration or how people imagine themselves as being somewhere else.

collectively declare the current social situation to be worse than before and not as good as elsewhere on this planet. Both society at large and local social interaction are judged negatively. According to many, interpersonal relations are spoiled. Envy, a growing lack of solidarity, carelessness, deceit, and the upsurge of immorality, exacerbate the already challenging task to make existence enjoyable in tough “third world” surroundings.²⁹¹ In fact, more than anything else, fellow countrymen are the ones sabotaging ‘easy living’. Ethnic and religious others, but also corrupted or even typical equals, are thought to complicate and blemish life in the here and now. As such, the shared understanding of the East Indian vicinity is intertwined with people’s understandings of people. In other words, the East Indian conceptualisation of mankind will structure, and be structured by, the experience of the unsympathetic habitat. This has facilitated the rise of negative impressions of the hostile home, and equally pessimistic conceptualisations of its inhabitants.

5.3.2 *Imagining its inhabitants*

The negative spirit which surrounds the cluster of shared understandings about the co-inhabitants of the hostile home, the fellow Guyanese, narrates both a belief in human degeneration and common intrinsic (in)capacities or flaws. Human failure or misbehaviour is usually regarded a sign of eroding morality and discipline, or of disobedience if performed by people with whom there is some sort of identification. As indicated in this chapter’s first two sections, wickedness demonstrated by other East Indians might be related to personal limitations and the irresistible lure of external powers. The widely perceived, and extensively discussed, impact of televised images on the behaviour of East Indian youths is a prime example. According to anti-modernists, foreign notions have contaminated the minds and ways of many youthful and have caused and cause them to behave in an un-Indian fashion. Another illustration of supposed internalised errors concerns the Hindu explanations of purificatory tendencies in Islamic Indo-Guyana. Like Americanised East Indian youths, also Arabised Muslim East Indians are considered to be diverted from the Indian way because foreign forces convinced them to. Hence, Hindu ‘analysts’ of Islamic purification will state that, whereas the local Muslims “used do their own thing,” they now let people from the outside tell them what to do.

(The (ethnic) self and other) – A different way to explain human imperfection and societal ills is by referring to certain alleged phylogenetic traits or defects. In that case, characteristics inherent to the attributed ethnic identity²⁹² are considered to be the (inevitable) reason for unappreciated behaviour displayed by the members of an ethnic group. This ethnic group,

²⁹¹ “Abedies [we] are a third world country.” (Interview with Hindu lady, on 27 November 2003) Like the interviewee, many Guyanese refer to their homeland as an inferior third world country.

²⁹² Jenkins recognizes two (mutually interdependent) social processes which are at work in the practical accomplishment of identity: the “internal definition and external [attributed] definition”. (1997:53 and 72)

a collective sharing physical or innate qualities and inferiorities, is usually labelled a 'race' by my East Indian informants.

Contrary to some theories of racial categorisation²⁹³, the label race can be employed by the East Indians both to describe and clarify the (mis)behaviour of those belonging to the in-group and the performance of racially different others. As far as most of my informants are concerned, Guyana's indigenous people, the Portuguese, Chinese, whites, Africans, and East Indians, all possess particular physical features and display distinct forms of race-typical behaviour. These characteristics have important explanatory value. Racial allusions are used by East Indians to explain, justify, and even sustain the low status of the Amerindians.²⁹⁴ Likewise, innate features allow "the whites" to be "accepted as a superior race."

They also help my informants to make sense of everlasting competition. In the eyes of certain East Indians, the insolvable lack of development, and conflictive relations at both interethnic and intra-ethnic levels, are connected to race-related incapacities and vices. To some extent, Guyana's society is spoiled because of the rotten attitudes and inclinations that many East Indians, but even more so, many Africans, are born with.²⁹⁵

This view is most clearly expressed in various variants of something which I have come to know as the *crab-dog theory*.²⁹⁶ As far as this theory and its East Indian advocates are concerned, the crabbish nature of fellow East Indians, and the doggish nature of the Africans, together prevent Guyana and the Guyanese from utilising the country's assets and its tremendous potential. Like one of my informants told me, "dis crab-dog ting is duh reason fuh backwardness in dis country." According to him and many others, the East Indians are like the crabs stuffed in bags or buckets and sold alive at local markets during crab season: "when one ah try fuh come up, nex one ah pull em down..." He explained me that typical and innate greed and envy cause the East Indians to waste their time spreading nasty rumours about each other ("talk name") and contemplating or regretting their neighbour's fortune or ambition ("think bad") – that is, pull them down, back into misery – instead of using it constructively to figure out ways to uplift and save themselves.

According to crab-dog theorists, the effects of the unconstructive East Indian nature are aggravated by an unhelpful East Indian culture. Inherited vices are said to be further cultivated in typical East Indian milieus. There, they are taught together with subjects like secretiveness, stupidity, and shame in an incomprehensible effort to mould the dark side of

²⁹³ According to Banton (1983, 1988), for example, racial identifications are fundamentally imposed identifications. Banton believes that, whereas ethnicity is the identification of the self and the alike, race is a category which denotes the other.

²⁹⁴ Sanders states Amerindians in Guyana are on the bottom steps of the social ladder (1972:32). According to him, "all other 'racial' groups in the society assign to Amerindians the lowest racial status." (Sanders, 1976:119)

²⁹⁵ As suggested in chapter three, these racial stereotypes are exploited and nurtured by those in (quest of) power.

²⁹⁶ The term 'crabdog' is also the local term for a crab-eating raccoon (*Procyon cancrivorus*) which can be spotted on Guyana's beaches, as well as a insulting term used to designate those who are stupid and ignorant.

East Indianness and guarantee the survival of privation. Together, all these negative attributes of East Indianness account for much of the internal causes for collective and individual suffering. They inspire Guyanese Indians to be “generally racists” and adherents of ideologies of inequity, and explain the conflictive character of Indian relationships as well as internal fragmentation. They also clarify the high suicide and abuse rates among the East Indians, shed a light on the motivation of the masses to remain loyal to corrupt and misleading leadership, and elucidate the Indian inability to deal with the challenges of modernity. They even explain the stupidity of the ancestors to sign up for slave-like indentured labour.

This does not mean Indian suffering and the country’s social ills are caused by East Indians and their inclinations alone. According to the crab-dog theory, lingering social friction and pervasive lack of progress are at least as much the result of the doggish attitude of Guyana’s Africans. Because the nature of the African is comparable with the nature of a dog – even when you nourish them, love them, and lodge them, you can never ever trust them or stop watching them – collaboration and true progress are unattainable. As one informant, mister Ramdeo, told me, “yuh got no’ting to get from dem,” they are unreliable and will not hesitate to kill you after “deh done drink yuh milk.” As far as old Ramdeo is concerned, Africans are the “destructive element in the entire universe.” And many others agree. Stereotypical qualifications of the African include terms like promiscuous, rowdy, lazy, and animalistic, or refer to the African urges to party, squander, bully, and use violence. Like a pundit said, “they are a different breed of people.” Africans, he narrated, display fundamentally different attitudes “that come from creation, [...] because we have been finding that no matter how you train them, how you talk to them, they still have some kind of...some kind of feeling.”

Ways and thoughts of Africans are thus not only regarded almost the exact opposite of the East Indian ways and thoughts, they are also regarded racially determined, part of the ‘black’ genetic imprint, and therefore ‘incurable’. Hence, joining forces to construct a better society and brighter future is practically impossible. Instead, Indians and Africans each remain in their own enclaves. As was stated by an East Indian television host, “Guyana is now two entirely different worlds, and the one you inhabit is determined by the colour of your skin.” In his elucidation he mentioned “seven strains of division” which separate the two ambits: historical; economic; geographic; occupational; political; cultural; and religious. The existence of these strains, the host preached, is crucial in the process of establishment and reproduction of disruptive stereotypes or prejudices. In other words, the Guyanese reality in which ethnic segregation is nearly complete, facilitates the cultivation and survival of negative understandings of the other. And I agree.

Ethnic segregation prevents preconceptions from being tested and falsified. However, for segregation to reproduce itself – that is, to continue fuelling the wish for isolation – it needs help of other forces. As suggested in chapter three, the persistence of

segregation, and therefore the (re)production of durable negative concepts of the other, is interwoven with battles for hegemony and understandings of insufficiency and shortage.

(The religious self and other) – The relevance of power struggles and senses of scarcity in the process of fabrication of subjectivity and otherness becomes clear when examining conceptions of the ingroups and outgroups which exist at the intra-ethnic level. East Indian conceptions of the religious other, for example, are not affected by an inclusive separation of the in- and outgroups. Nonetheless, often also these relations are characterised by friction and negativeness. Apparently, just like interethnic relations, intra-ethnic dealings are shaped by understandings influenced by fear of deprivation or impairment, and manipulated by those aspiring authority.

This section comprises an analysis of people's understandings of the religious other. It is an examination of my informants' image of the adherents of Guyana's main belief systems. In three subsections, I will demonstrate the senses of suspicion and disapproval that characterise relationships in the realm of religion – senses which are connected to understandings of the hostile home and the valuation of one's position within that home. In the second and third subsection, East Indian images of respectively Muslims and Hindus will be described. The first subsection, however, is about Christians.

(About Christians) One of the clearest examples of interreligious antipathies is the attitude of Hindus towards Christians. Anti-Christian notions spread in mandirs and at Hindu happenings throughout Guyana by predominantly Sanatanist leaders who fear mass conversion and its economic consequences have clearly coloured Hindu understandings of Christians. At least partially as a result of anti-Christian propaganda, many zealous Hindus behold the Christian community with both a sense of apprehensive admiration and dislike. Hence, they would express their respect for the atmosphere in Christian churches, their unity, the professional approach to priesthood, and financial strength of many denominations. Additionally, they would condemn the Christians' judgmental or condemnatory attitude towards other faiths ("me nah able wih dem people, deh seh we worship stone and idol"), denounce their aggressive conversion tactics ("dem people jump at you too much"), and criticise the unrealistic Christian doctrine and divine promises ("Christians are being fooled by their preachers [...] how come dis big pardon tek place [...] a man has to pay for his deeds.").

The attitude of Muslim East Indians towards Christians is at least equally critical. However, their negative understanding of Christians is not fed by local threats. Instead, the Muslim variant of the concept of the vicious Christian reveals a universal nature. Their Christian enemy is not the Indian convert next door, but the anti-Muslim (Western) Christian world as such. Therefore, Muslim critics speak of a Christian endeavour "to make Islam die out," and tell me they "know that the white race would like to see Islam being wiped out of the face of this earth." Especially since the start of the U.S.-led 'war against

terror' in the aftermath of the happenings on September 11, 2001, Guyanese Muslims consider the global umaah – which includes themselves – to be under lethal and unfair attack of a coalition of power and capital driven Christian westerners and Jews.²⁹⁷ Consequently, you will now find Muslim East Indians applaud every American casualty in Iraq and Afghanistan, and express their hope that “all Americans over there will die.”²⁹⁸

Relationships between Hindus and Muslims are characterised by similar – although less hostile – antipathies. Subject to the influence of foreign portrayals of Muslims and Islam, members of both groups express highly negative understandings of the religious other.

(About Muslims) Hindus consider Muslims to be blessed with an inherently violent temperament. They are also believed to be dishonest and untrustworthy, disobedient to their own rules and regulations, quarrelsome, and increasingly rigid and fanatical. Like Christians, they pose a threat to wellbeing and add to the image of the hostile home. Non-Muslim informants told me Muslims tend to be armed, “teach their children hatred against other religions”, have “secret basements” underneath masjids in which they do secret things, and have come up with shocking “plans to rule the world.” Particularly the heightened Muslim fanaticism is noted (and feared) by many Hindu informants. Most consider it to be a characteristic that has only recently come to the fore. As the Sanatanist vice-president of the GIHA told me, “through their masjids they [the Muslims] now listen to these fanatic teachers, have become fanatic, and start to behave like mosquitoes, to suck the bloods of others...”

According to a number of Hindus, a “new Islamic consciousness” has boosted the Muslim aversion to everything un-Islamic – inspired them “to strip Islam more and more of non-Arabic influences” – and increased the distance between them and religiously others, including their fellow East Indians.²⁹⁹ And, as indicated, they are right. Observations indicate the gap between Muslim and Hindu East Indians is growing. Certain Muslims nowadays no longer will attend religious functions in the homes of their Hindu neighbours or relatives, ancient ship-brother ties are broken, and the Muslim purifiers' intention to establish some sort of parallel society becomes more and more apparent. The East Indian alliance is under siege.

This threat is also recognised by moderate Muslim informants. One traditionalist imam told me Arab-style Muslims “scare” him. According to him, the purifiers' strategies of withdrawal and anti-traditionalist indoctrination will result in the fabrication of a new generation of Muslim “mutants”. These transformed Indians will ‘fight’ old allies and their ways, or “forget their roots”, and eventually destroy the indispensable Indian unity with

²⁹⁷ Some mention a “Zionist-complot” of Christians and Jews, meant to destroy Islam.

²⁹⁸ The particular Muslim teenager quoted here also expressed a desire to move to the States. In fact, a year later (September 2004) she actually migrated there.

²⁹⁹ Interview, with Swami Aksharananda, on 20 August 2003.

which a favourable balance of power was and is assured. Moreover, activities and visions of purifiers (“Wahhabies”) are believed to harm cohesion within the Muslim community itself.

In an interview with the leadership of the “non-sectarian” Guyana Islamic Forum (GIF), the organisation’s vice-president mentioned the ill effects of Wahhabism on the condition of the *umaah*. According to him, “they are extremists who came by claiming to purify Islam, as reformists, but actually they destroy Islam more than anybody else.”³⁰⁰ In his opinion, these detrimental reformists ask believers to discard healthy adaptation, stop using their intellect, and condemn all those who do not think and do exactly alike. As such, in the eyes of the vice-president and other traditionalists, the purifiers do not act in the spirit of their religion and can thus even be regarded practitioners of an untrue Islam (“they are the biggest kafirs!”).

Evidently, the purifiers themselves could not agree less. Although they acknowledge their aim for a de-Indianisation of Islam, and a further dissociation from non-Muslim East Indians, they are convinced of the superior stature of the purist approach, and reject the traditionalist accusation of creating internal friction and fragmentation. In fact, purification is a necessary defence against the impact of unbelievers. The fundamentalist system is not an alternative, but the only possible way. Branches and fragmentation do not exist: only purity, contamination, and utter unbelief. Consequently, purifiers classify Muslims according to the level of contamination of their beliefs and practices. The further the respective movement is thought to have moved away from ‘original’ *doxy* and *praxis*, the closer it gets to being qualified as dangerous and existent outside the fold of Islam.

Shiites, for instance, are regarded a “dangerous grouping” positioned on a “side-track” of true Islam because of their despicable concepts and ways. According to CIOG’s Sheikh Moeen, the Shiite practice certain principals “which are completely un-Islamic.”³⁰¹ Therefore, they should be avoided, not allowed to preach in Sunni *masjids* or be given any kind of platform, and even battled. Similarly, also the Ahmadiyya are not welcomed as fellow believers by the purifying Muslims. In fact, most of Guyana’s Sunni community regards the followers of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad to be *kafirs*. Like the ideas of the Shiite, also a number of the Ahmadiyya beliefs are said to be “un-Islamic”.

Members of other groups, such as the Tablighi Jama’at and the various strands of traditional Muslimism, however, are labelled believers by the purifiers. Unlike the Shiite and Ahmadiyya, their ways and thoughts are held to be contaminated but purify-able rather than damaged beyond repair. Traditionalism, in fact, is called “a limited and concocted old Islam:” an Islam of the ignorant who can be educated. And Tablighi methods are thought to be slightly corrupted because of the use of inferior scriptures (*Fadaa’il-e-Amaal*), and tainted by improper Sufi-related spiritualist interpretations of worship. Nevertheless, also

³⁰⁰ Interview, on 11 March 2003.

³⁰¹ Interview, on 12 March 2003. In turn, also the Shiite missionaries were critical of the Sunni community and its leadership. A (later mysteriously kidnapped and murdered) Iranian Shiite missionary in Guyana told me Sunni look like the Taliban and do not know what real Islam is about.

these forms of contamination have not de-Islamised Tablighi beliefs, and do not completely block one's route to eventual eternal enjoyment in the gardens of Paradise.

(About Hindus) A group who, according to virtually all Muslims, will undoubtedly not be allowed to enter the gates of *Jannah* (paradise) is the Hindu collective. As a Muslim informant stated: "they are all messed up, there is no hope for Hindus, I am telling you that. The only hope I can see is when they come out of Hinduism and become a Christian, then they will come closer and understand, and from there they can come to Islam."³⁰² As far as this man and many other Muslims are concerned, Hindus are travelling down a Satanic path straight to the eternal condemnation of *Jahannam*, the great depth. Their faith in reincarnation and human godliness, together with their confidence in a multitude of imperfect divinities, testifies of the incomprehensible and unforgivable practice of paganism.

In addition, the average Hindu is believed to be undisciplined, impious, and immoral. As a 'reverted' Muslim told me, Hindus prefer "the free way of living [...] they take it not too serious."³⁰³ According to him, most Hindu males would go to the home of booze, the rum-shop, rather than any house of God. It is as if they do not care. Apparently, doctrinal ignorance and errors along with an ineffective divine sanction-complex have allowed typical Hindu believers to evolve into little respectable social beings, and have made them a factor that has caused or explains social ills and local instabilities. In the eyes of the Muslims, a chronic lack of true guidance causes these fellow East Indians to operate as an unreliable, sexually unrestrained, opportunistic, and fragmented bunch of people.

Strangely enough, this highly negative image of the average Hindu is shared by many other Hindus. Especially the religiousness of those belonging to other sects and groups is rarely praised by my Hindu informants. Devotees of Sai Baba call Sanatanists "corrupt." And Sanatanists label the practices of the people in the Kali church to be "demonic and commercial forms of worship." Aryans state the Sanatanists are ignorant, believe in superstition, and are controlled by uneducated hypocritical pundits. And Sanatanists regard the Baba-devotees' image of Sathya Sai false and their worship "an easy way out for people who haven't been going too good." Krishna conscious Hindus consider Sanatan practices to be manifestations of a "lower kind of worship." And Aryans mock the practically inexecutable Raja Yoga instructions. Brahma Kumaris say all the other Hindus do not practice what they preach. And Sanatanists, finally, compare Aryans (as well as the 'Krishna conscious') with self-satisfied and judgmental Muslims.

Little sympathy, and therefore, little cooperation exists between the adherents of the various (competitive) Hindu interpretations. In the area where I have spent most of my time, representatives of the different sects rarely attend each other's happenings. Events organised in 'enemy' mandirs would not be visited. Some Hindu leaders would actually

³⁰² Interview, on 31 July 2003.

³⁰³ Interview with Sidney Ally, a former pseudo-Sanatanist and reverted Muslim, on 22 December 2003.

urge their congregations not to go. And if they do go, for example to private occasions, they might refuse to participate. I have thus seen an Arya Samaj who ostentatiously refused to pray in front of the altar at a Sanatanist's pre-nuptial jhandi, and a bunch of Krishna conscious (ISKCON) musicians rejecting food at a mainstream Hindu function.

Besides plain competition, matters of impurity and unrighteousness inspire such behaviour. Polluted ways and improper dietary principles and practices further complicate intrareligious relationships within the Hindu East Indian realm. A Sanatanist friend, for instance, habitually declined all foodstuffs offered to him by devotees at a local Kali Mai mandir we used to visit on Sundays. Although he never admitted it, the only reason for doing so was alleged contamination. And the same way my friend refused to eat anything prepared by worshippers of Kali Mai, certain (Brahmin) pundits would be hesitant to eat at the homes of specific fellow Sanatanists. More specifically, comparable notions of impurity and spiritual contamination – remnants of ancient Indian concepts³⁰⁴ – are reason for high born Hindus to be reluctant of low born (Chamar) cookery. The supposed inclination of those belonging to a so called 'low nation' to butcher and eat pork and drink liquor, and do low things, therefore, can obstruct amiable relationships even between members of the same religious branch.

An interesting example is marriage. Many Sanatanists despise the idea of intermarriage between their kind and those who indulge in 'low practices'. In fact, lots of passionate devotees consider the bulk of their fellow believers not to be marriageable material because of their typically Hindu substandard behaviour. According to many of my informants, even their own religious circle is spoiled, and nothing more than a weak collective build from a little admirable assortment of mainly faint believers. As far as some Sanatanists are concerned, Chamar-like practices have spread throughout the mainstream Hindu community. The extant prevalence of alcoholism, promiscuity, abuse, and suicide, and even the (diet related) high incidence of hypertension and diabetes in Sanatanist Guyana, are generally mentioned as evidence of this. It is stated that these immoral inclinations and physical deficiencies are consequences of shortcomings that, somewhere along the line, have become part of the Hindu's behavioural repertoire. Mainstream Hindus are even greedier than the already avaricious other East Indians. They are "greedy and jealous." In addition, they are "stupid," and thus "not equipped to defend themselves" against external threats and sinful temptations. Many are lazy as well, they are "not searching for spiritual satisfaction," and have never mastered the language of the scriptures, lack the adequate doctrinal knowledge, and are deficient in moral navigation. As one concerned informant stated:

"In Guyana they are hardly aware what it really is like to be a Hindu. To be a Hindu probably is to have a Hindu name, to be in a Hindu home, and go to the mandir on Sunday, and that is it. But to be a Hindu is a different thing.

³⁰⁴ See chapter four.

You have got to understand what are you, are you taking bhakti *marga*, which on of the pathways? The biggest problem here is that they are not philosophically educated and they don't have the language background and so on." – *Interview, 29 December 2003*.

Similar views are expressed by some of the Arya Samaj. Like the Sanatanists, also they consider the bulk of fellow faithful to be habitual believers who lack the religious understanding necessary to resist evil lures and urges. They too believe the agony and deprivation that is felt in many Hindu homes is caused by religious corruption and ignorance.

In essence, both the Arya and Sanatanists tend to regard the problematic existence of (Hindu) East Indians in Guyana to be the karmic effect of destructive behavioural patterns that can be witnessed all over Indo-Guyana.³⁰⁵ And also Muslims recognise a deterioration caused by human flaws. They observe a rise of egocentricity as well, and state disunity and ignorance are becoming more and more commonplace within their religious community. As one troubled Muslim told me, "the umaah is sick."³⁰⁶ Yet, whereas the Hindus – despite their recognition of certain 'pull-factors' – see downfall mainly as the consequence of personal and Hindu-typical failure, the Muslims primarily blame external forces for perceived declines in piety. Maybe that is the one of the reasons why ultimately the collective self-image of those on the path of Islam is more positive than the communal self-valuation of the believers in the law of karma. And maybe that also explains why I, as a representative of one of the strongest of external forces (westernisation), sometimes felt pathologically admired in Hindu environs, and continued to be passionately despised by certain hard-headed Muslim brothers.

All in all, this section on religious identifications, as well as the one on ethnic identifications, show East Indian images of groups who inhabit their hostile home reflect tendencies described in earlier chapters. People's pessimistic interpretation of their position is linked to invariably negative perceptions of the attitudes and practices of those upon whom one depends and those with whom one competes. East Indians fear and dislike Africans; Muslims and Hindus are not fond of Christians; Hindus mistrust Muslims and vice versa; Muslims traditionalists condemn the ways of the purifiers, and purifiers scorn the practices of the adherents to impure forms of Islam; and Hindus, finally, also display passionate internal disagreements. Informants thus consider themselves to be surrounded by others who undermine their struggles for collective and individual betterment. Their wellbeing is jeopardised by the quests of competitors and, in some cases, by a weakened ingroup as well. This cynical stance is affected by, and influences the working of, the formative forces that were described in chapter three. Power struggles at various levels feed

³⁰⁵ This understanding, I believe, will reflect in Hindu coping strategies, the way they deal with agony of others.

³⁰⁶ Of course, negative valuations of the present are and (always) have been expressed by sentimental individuals all over this globe.

suspicion and frustrate optimism. Theories of insolvable racial and religious difference – grounded in ‘undeniable’ ideologies of ascription and purity – preach and naturalise current stereotypical reasoning. Also globalisation feeds insecurity and stirs the erosion of existing attachments. Processes of interconnection that show in the increased intensity and heightened impact of formative dialogues with diasporic communities and foreign centres of religious and popular culture have problematised the localisation of the self and other. The emergence of alternative interpretations have created new oppositions in the religious realm. The U.S. inspired modification of consumption patterns widened exiting gaps (e.g. between generations and social classes) and further shattered illusions of stability, clarity, finiteness, and homogeneity. More than ever, East Indians are confronted with the issue of defining the self. As contexts vary, and frequency and force of encounters with the alien increase, the practice of identification – already of great importance in Guyana’s competitive plural society – manifests more and more prominently at the centre stage of daily life.

5.4 Shifting boundaries: multiple identifications and situational variance

More than before, images of the ‘I’ and understandings of the other vary. As situations change and moments differ, focuses of self-identification and association shift. In layered and interconnected contemporary societies, like Guyana’s, a selection of classificatory schemas will come to the fore depending on context, as well as on idiosyncrasies and past history.

To comprehend processes of identity manipulation and self construction it is important to recognise various aspects of the ‘I-image’. A distinction can be made between *identity*, *self*, and *subjectivity*. All three concepts are related but not quite the same. Identities are manageable structures of identification. They are notions of sameness and otherness (Eriksen 1993) that can “simultaneously and/or subsequently be embraced and enacted by the same person” (Sökefeld 1999:424). The self should be regarded as something that more or less “remains the ‘same’, in spite of the various differences entailed by different identities” (Sökefeld 1999:424). Hence, whereas “identities can be experienced as a plurality, the self is experienced as one because it is the frame that guarantees the continuity on which the multiplicity of identities is inscribed” (Sökefeld 1999:424).

Just as identity, the self is not static. Rather, it is always in flux and subject to processes of transformation.³⁰⁷ It shapes experiences and is shaped by them. Sökefeld defines the self as “the reflective sense that enables the person to distinguish self-

³⁰⁷ Sökefeld states the self as well as identity are subjected to *différance*. Following scholars such as Brah (1996), Hall (1990), Radhakrishan (1987), and Rattansi (1994), he uses Derrida’s (1982, 2001) notion to conceptualize identity processes in our contemporary world. As far as Sökefeld is concerned, both are subject to the play of differences, tokens of difference that operate in networks of interrelated signs or significations that are continuously being produced and reproduced.

consciously between himself or herself and everything else” (1999:424). Others like Carver and Scheier (1981), Epstein (1973), and Greenwald (1982), describe the self as a collection of “internalised images, schemas, conceptions, prototypes, theories, goals, or tasks” (Fiske and Taylor 1994; Holland and Quinn 1987) or as set of “domain specific individual interpretive structures that are repositories of knowledge and general sources of guidance, direction and action” (Markus, Mullally and Kitayama, 1997). I regard the self as something that is all of the above.

Being established in an interplay between the individual and his or her environs, these perception and practice steering structures comprise a collective component. The general recognition of cross cultural variation in notions of self (Cohen 1994; Barth 1994; Miller 1994; Roland 1988) is an indication. Markus, Mullally and Kitayama (1997:16) refer to this as *selfways*. According to them, these are group-typical ways of being a person in the world which are to be distinguished from individual selves. They compare the concept of selfways with other concepts such as Charles Quinn’s *lifeway*³⁰⁸ (1994) and Bourdieu’s *habitus*.

Also the East Indian self can be regarded an exponent of these selfways. Nevertheless, I personally do not believe simple distinctions can be made between individual selves and sociocultural or collective selves. I would rather think of the self as the comprehensive understanding of the ego, something that is evolving and is characterised by shifts in foci (because of multiple and manageable identifications) but can never be isolated from the ambience in which it is created and recreated.

To emphasise the mutually constitutive relationship between the self and the world I have chosen to use the term *subjectivity* instead of self. As far as I am concerned, this term designates a self that only exists in relation to its surroundings. In line with Mama (1995), I use it to accentuate the condition of being (creative) subject. More specifically, as Weedon (1987) states, “subjectivity’ is used to refer to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world.” It is the severely altered nature of this relation to the increasingly globalised world that gives rise to a specific East Indianness today, a concept of self that forms the basis of interpretations and actions. These contemporary Indian subjectivities, or selves in the world, are characterised by high levels of complexity. More than their predecessors, my informants have to manage a multitude of identities. This final section of chapter five deals with the functioning of these identities. It briefly examines how an evolving yet comprehensive concept of East Indianness comprises a range of identities that both can be manipulated and imposed, and whose importance fluctuates.

East Indian self-definition consists of an intertwined collection of personal and collective aspects. Or, as Appiah (2000:613) states, individual identity comprises a personal dimension – entailing “socially or morally important features of the person” – and a collective dimension, which can be regarded “the intersection of her collective identities”.

³⁰⁸ “A socially learned way of construing, approaching, and moving through one’s world” (1994:39).

In the case of the East Indians, the collective dimension encompasses the body of self-understandings described in the previous sections of this chapter. It entails one's localisation in time (tradition, modernity) and space (centre, periphery). Without exception these subjectivities emerge in relation to the other, and are fashioned by people's understanding of the respective environment. To be more precise, the East Indian interpretation or concept of the self, and accordingly, context appropriate behaviour, depends upon one's interpretation or concept of the other and the relationship between the self and that other at a particular moment and in a particular setting (subjectivity).

Guyanese individuals of East Indian descent can regard themselves, and subsequently act as: members of a certain ethnic group or race-group; adherents to a certain religion or a specific religious sect; inhabitants of a particular locale; citizens of a country in this world; advocates and embodiments of modernism or traditionalism; and members of some age-, sex- or occupational-group. All these identifications or focuses shape and are shaped by the experiences of East Indians in East Indian surroundings in Guyana. Their particular prominence depends on their value as markers of distinction in the Guyanese social ambit as a whole, and in encounters of East Indian individuals in specific.

The more the societal relevance of a focus, the more it will claim a prominent position as a marker of distinction and reservoir of self-reference. To some extent, this societal relevance correlates with the focus' level of sharedness. For a focus to be maximally useful, it has to be understood by many, and it has to be both shared by a significant amount of equals and (at the same time) not be shared with a number of unequals in a given context.

The fluctuating importance of ethnicity is a good example of such a correlation. A strong focus on 'race' as a source of attribution and self-designation, in Indo-Guyana, materialises at certain times and in certain arenas. Especially in the period surrounding parliamentary elections, racial or ethnic awareness grows stronger and smouldering senses of intra-ethnic unity and interethnic antagonism ignite. Whereas undercurrent, stored in East Indian's understandings and occasionally revealed in discourse, ethnic sentiments are always there, with the onset of new elections they brazenly surface and give rise to collective delineating, preservative, and offensive action. As Bisnauth told me, "running up to an election and following an election [...] one has got to admit that there are anti other people feelings there [...] on both sides."³⁰⁹ Before, during and shortly after the 2001 elections, society was severely destabilised because of a sudden wave of overt interethnic conflicts and even violence including the destruction of infrastructure and private property.

A similar process of awakening of dormant ethnic identifications, feelings of interethnic mistrust, and ethnic self-protection, became apparent in the latter half of 2002 and in the first few months of 2003. As a series of extremely brutal crimes – violent robberies, murders, hijacking of cars and mini-busses, 'shoot-outs', kidnappings of

³⁰⁹ Interviews, on 13 and 14 March 2003.

businessmen and even children – was committed in the Georgetown-area and up the so-called East-Coast, the relevance of ethnicity grew significantly. Due to the supposed ethnic basis of these crimes, the opposition between Africans and Indians moved to the core of social discourse and interpretation once again. Rumours about the Afro-Guyanese origin of the villains, the victimisation of East Indians, and the coordinating and facilitating role of African politicians in the orchestration of Indian-directed felonies, stirred both East Indian fear and abhorrence of the African other. Throughout that period, at least for the time that I was there, East Indians habitually expressed ethnic self-pity and pride, and voiced their disgust with Africans and African ways. Additionally, many East Indians consciously restricted their (already limited) contact with African fellow citizens. East Indian informants from rural Essequibo, for example, would avoid greater Georgetown and the East Coast as much as possible. And also the African villages on the Essequibo Coast itself were regarded off limits by many, especially between dusk and dawn.

East Indians were scared, almost irrationally afraid of an enemy that was allegedly after them just because of the enemy's presumed hatred of the ethnically other. I remember this fear even caused my East Indian in-laws to prevent me from traversing the capital with public transport and without an armed escort. It also made my wife's Georgetown-based uncle decide to quit his dried shark export business, somewhere down the East Coast. He just considered the necessary daily commuting through notorious African areas too dangerous.

These and similar defensive action-instigating phobias rarely seem to be produced by understandings based upon real life occurrences. None of my apprehensive in-laws could give me one example of any personal violent encounter with the racist Africans they are so frightened of. Instead, in many cases the fears are fostered by 'indirect experiences'. Especially images conveyed through the (Indian) media, and by certain oppositional East Indian representative entities, contributed to the sudden outbreak of anti-African feelings. The portrayal of 'black' villages like Buxton and Agricola as nests of hideous crime and illegitimacy, in the papers and on TV, undoubtedly has helped the formation of senses of national instability and immediate threat.³¹⁰ And so did the anti-African messages spread by the Guyana Indian Heritage Organisation. Their widely advertised report on the ethnic anatomy of crime – or "race crime" or "hate crime"³¹¹ – and activities such as the mass commemoration of East Indian victims of ethnic crime at the Lusignan Community Centre Ground (on February 23, 2003)³¹², added to the construction of the Afro-fear and dislike that many of my informants displayed during the early months of 2003.

The surfacing of that hatred and dislike, and the prominence of ethnic identification, is mostly confined to a particular moment in time and a specific context.

³¹⁰ It has to be noted that also the response of certain Afro-Guyanese politicians – some of which spoke about 'African freedom fighters' – and African ethnic groupings contributed to interethnic antipathy and mistrust.

³¹¹ According to GIHA! president Ryhaan Shah in an interview (Interview, 17 June 2003).

³¹² Kaieteur News, 6 March 2003.

Within the rural East Indian territories itself, in particular after the perturbing crime rates slightly went down, the understanding of the subjectivity and the other is characterised by a different focuses. There, in daily life in the virtually mono-ethnic villages, ethnic identification is often practically irrelevant and new forms of identification take over.

Of these alternative ways of conceptualising one's subjectivity and other, religious identification is possibly the most evident. Understandings of individuality, and of social inequality, in all-Indian settings, are frequently fabricated out of faith-related elements. The tendency to classify the fellow East Indian as religious – and subsequently as an inherently different – other, is clearly visible in village life. In discourse, neighbours and other locals are habitually referred to as 'dem Muslim people deh,' 'dem Christian people deh,' or 'dem Hindu people deh'. Consequently, East Indians from within the community are often suspected to possess the stereotypical behavioural characteristics that match their religious background. Sometimes irrespective of their actual behaviour, Muslims can thus be regarded (and treated as being) dishonest, and Hindus can be seen (and approached) as being unreliable. I found Hindus locking their doors with giant Chinese padlocks because of the naturally untrustworthy Muslims next door, and a Muslim who refused to hire Hindus because of their deemed typical unpunctuality and inclination to drink excessively.

On the whole, stereotypical concepts of the religious other severely affect the interreligious dealings within the predominantly Indian rural areas. Concerning the interaction between the adherents to distinct faiths, religious differences are often the focus of identification, and people's judgment and approach are generally guided by shared understandings of the theologically different. It is because of those governing understandings that many Hindus are convinced of Muslim deceitfulness and authoritarian nature, and are hesitant in their interference with them. Or thanks to those understandings, Christian East Indians criticise the ways and beliefs of the Hindus, denounce the dangerous Hindu servitude to a "wicked, filthy, and rotten spiritual" world, and reprove their habit to block the trenches with sacrificial flowers and other exponents of heathen worship.³¹³ And, finally, due to such understandings, many Muslims openly express their dislike of Hindus and Christians, prefer to do business with fellow believers, buy at Muslim stores if possible, and rather hire brothers than pagans to work their lands.

Common understandings of the religious other affect social relations between East Indian followers of similar trails as well. Also the processes of self-designation and attribution linked to intrareligious interaction between the inhabitants of East Indian areas, frequently display a strong focus on religious differences. In fact, sectarian differences become extremely palpable if manoeuvring through all-Muslim and all-Hindu East Indian realms. Within Muslim environs, interaction between Sunnis, Shiite, and Ahmadiyya can be structured by understandings of dissimilarity in ways similar to the manner in which, in other contexts, interethnic contacts are structured by systems of dispositions concerning racial variation. As in many other instances manipulated by certain groupings or individuals

³¹³ Interview with Mr. Robin, ex-Hindu Pentecostal Christian, on 19 September 2003.

involved in power struggles, these focuses can prove particularly dominant, colouring dealings between fellow Muslims in non-religious contexts too.

Observations of the relationship between the Arya and Sanatanist Hindus reveal the existence of a similar impact of the emphasis on religious identifications. Like bonds between the various Muslim branches, also the general Arya attitude towards Sanatanists (and vice versa) can be severely influenced by a pessimistic focus on religious differences. Mistrust, aversion, obstruction, rejection and avoidance, on both the Arya and Sanatanist side, characterise communal relations on a regular base. In my 'home-village', a number of Aryas and Sanatanists have met in court, refuse to attend each other's (non-religious) celebrations and commemorations, and routinely condemn the other in public.

Individuals who consider each other intrinsically equal in one specific situation or at one moment in time, can and will thus regard one another as fundamentally different in other contexts. Ethnic allies can become religious foes, and religious allies can transform into factional foes. The transformative potential of classificatory focus, and classification related actions, is almost boundless. Someone from the Essequibeian countryside may be an Indian (or backward peasant) at the Georgetown market in the early morning, a Muslim on the boat to Essequibo around noon, a Sunni on the backseat in the Ahmadiyya's taxi back home, and a stubborn traditionalist in the masjid at night. In fact, a multitude of identifications are available at any given time and place. Which one of these is dominant depends on the situation and the people involved. Generally, the identification of (physically or contextually) present others, belonging to the – in a particular setting – most contrasting oppositional group guarantees the supremacy of certain understandings of the self, the other, and of the relationship between the self and the other. In other words, for an assemblage of understandings to come to the fore, it has to be regarded the one most relevant in a context.

An interesting illustration of this context related relevance concerns the perception of the growing number of 'reverted' African Muslims in the originally East Indian masjids in Guyana. Whereas all Muslims, Africans and Indians alike, might operate as brothers in an effort to spread and cultivate Islam in Guyana, brotherhood often ceases to exist behind the masjid walls. According to several candid Muslim informants, there is barely any evidence of actual familial bonds between African and East Indian believers in their respective jama'ats. One East Indian informant called the attitude of East Indian Muslims towards African reverts "not nice, really not nice." He told me that in the eyes of the East Indian, African fellow faithful "are not considered to be marriageable material." Another informant assured me that, despite their membership of the same congregation, hardly any ties between ethnically different Muslims exist. And a last East Indian Muslim, an imam, admitted that "the racist attitude" of Indian Muslims in his masjid had brought him to advise a group of African reverts to establish their own place of congregation instead of joining the predominantly East Indian.

Within the scope of ethnic and religious loyalties and identifications alone, similar examples of multiple and shifting understandings of the self and other are manifold. The mentioned impact of parliamentary elections, certain interpretations of criminality, intrareligious competition inside the villages, the spread of Islam in Guyana's African community, but also the unspecified situation dependant inconsistencies in the labelling of ethnically mixed individuals, and many other things expose the fluid character and relativity of notions about the self and/or subjectivities. Additionally, the examples illustrate that the construction of these notions or conceptions is an ongoing process in which the individual certainly does not simply function as an autonomous architect of ego and image, but is definitely constrained by parameters set by his or her respective surroundings.

People are far from helpless. Individuals are more than inhabitants of particular environs, and – as Cohen (1994:133) stated – they “are more than their membership of and participation in collectivities.” The East Indians are actively involved in designing their personal and collective selves and its signifiers. Contemporary complexity has altered the face of this process but not necessarily its nature. Construction of subjectivity, and especially management of identities, has become a far more creative and demanding enterprise than it was ever before. A multitude of new building materials is available to construct identities, virtually unlimited sources can be used in quests to find the self, and bonding is increasingly liberated from the shackles of immobility. (Post-)modernity allows, or forces, the East Indian to be more concerned with, and actively involved in, image building. It provides the actor the possibility to satisfy the desire to be either more themselves than they ever were or oppose that self and adopt alternative identities to execute an alternative self.

Transformation prompted by the introduction of information and technology thus has not simply undermined Indianness. However, it has brought about fragmentation of collective aspects of the self. Within the group or even the individual, East Indian identities now coexist with North American ones as well as with re-Indianised identities that owe their existence largely to the availability of Bollywood productions and perhaps – like in Trinidadian Indian circles (Miller and Slater 2000:178) – the emergence of internet. Together, they constitute understandings about the self, notions of the we in the world, that are fundamentally no less East Indian than those from before the era of fragmentation. In fact, they form the heart of the Indianness upon which the rest of this dissertation will elaborate.

The manifestations of East Indianness described in the rest of this dissertation – e.g. family, friend- and partnership – cannot be disconnected from East Indian subjectivities. Visions of the self in the world colour practice and reasoning far beyond the narrow realms analysed above. What this chapter has provided is a broad outline of collective understandings that define a social reality in which all East Indian relationships are produced and reproduced. Furthermore, ‘East Indian Subjectivities’ reveals two important features of internalised or schematic Indianness. Firstly, it indicates the

importance of emotion and motivation as catalysts of processes of reproduction and transformation. Similar contexts can stir the activation of different understandings. And the activation of shared conceptions in specific contexts can trigger a variety of responses, depending on people's idiosyncrasies: their makeup, personal history, and agenda. Valuations of American modernity and Indian classicality are examples. Secondly, this chapter clearly shows the interdependence of understandings. Notions of India, North America, and the hostile home are not composed in isolation but are mutually constitutive. Classicality only exists in retrospect, and progress can only be understood (and valued) if one knows the lack of it.

In the following chapter, I will further explore these features of Indianness. Through the analysis of Indian foci of friendship and principles of parenting, tendencies of conceptual innovation and replication will be more extensively examined, and the functioning of interconnections will be closer looked at. With in our minds 'where is the here they are...'

FOCI OF FRIENDSHIP, PRINCIPLES OF PARENTING

*Tradition and Modification in
Understandings of Camaraderie and Care*

Images of Indian classicality, American modernity, and Guyanese hostility are intertwined. The understanding and appreciation of novelty is defined opposed to tradition. Contemporary Guyana is where these two intersect, the spatial and temporal crossroads of old and new. It is a setting which is understood and judged with the help of understandings and judgements of modernity and classicality. The hostile home can be both a home beyond virtuous classicality and out of reach of the ultimate benefits of modernity.

Collective mental schemata, whether labelled habitus or cultural understandings, never operate in isolation. As the previous chapter suggested, schemata form intricate networks that together define the socio-cultural actor. I believe the functioning of these understandings or schemata can only be grasped if they are analysed as interconnected systems, as part of something I will designate ‘constellations’ in the following chapter. It is this relationship between different schemata, the way in which they are arranged, that helps to explain the manner in which cognitive structures are linked to action. More precise, goals and interpretations related to general understandings affect the perception of and response to specific experiences because shared mental schemata are organised in a hierarchical fashion. Like D’Andrade (1992:30), I believe general understandings or “interpretations of what is going on will function as important goals” for individuals. Deep-seated schemas about social reality, and one’s position within that reality, might thus enclose the end goals for other schemas further down the hierarchy. Meaning and practice concerning many every day issues will be influenced by concepts of what is ultimately desirable and satisfactory, and of interpretations of the functioning of social mechanisms that can either help or hinder people on their way to satisfaction of ultimate desires.

I will use this sixth chapter to analyse a specific system of relationships. The next few sections will describe certain assistive bonds between my subjects and significant others. These will be examined to deconstruct the relation between structure and subject and expose the interconnectedness of various schemata, both of those with different as

well as similar hierarchical positions. Two groups of interpersonal care-connections shall be dealt with in this respect. The first half of this chapter (6.1) will be devoted to *kin creations*. This part consists of the account of understandings and practices concerning the dyadic ties with non-related yet proximate others such as friends, acquaintances, and neighbours. The working of processes of cultural reproduction and innovation will be illuminated by investigating the vitality of the *family metaphor* in shaping social relations with non-kin.³¹⁴ In fact, the development of fictive kinship – its redefinition and decline – is one of the best examples of the effects of multifaceted transformation (Part I) on thoughts and practices of actual individuals.

A similar quest inspires the composition of the second half of this chapter (6.2), a section which revolves around notions and practices in the realm of family ties and parenthood – another illuminating realm of caring. Also here, the contested relevance of traditional Indian family ideology, and its linkage with perceived societal change at a general level, show how the image of the Indian self in the world (described in chapter five) moulds certain schemata, and steers action and interpretation of interaction in East Indian Hindu and Muslim circles. Consistencies and variations in people's concepts and expressions of child- and parenthood, intra-family cooperation, and hierarchy will be discussed as evidence. Additionally, the latter half exemplifies the interlinked configuration of schemata. Actually, the analysis of changing visions on parenthood suggests the balance of power between understandings of family and friendship is shifting. Whilst the importance of fictive kinship is on the decline, contemporary notions of friendship have come to influence family ideals.

6.1 Kin creations: friends, fellows, foes and the family metaphor

I got my sisters, all four of them, on a glorious Tuesday morning somewhere halfway down the sweltering August month of 2003. It was completely unexpected. Before I really knew, in less than half an hour, I had turned from a sisterless man into the responsible older brother of a handful of East Indian girls. The whole thing occurred at the house of 'Sir George', a secondary school teacher and Hindu missionary from a place called Huis 't Dieren. George was the Master of Ceremony at a huge Rāmāyana yajna that took place in a nearby mandir that very same week. The girls, George's friends, performed at the event. I had come to know them as members of the yajna's *kirtan*-group.³¹⁵ They were part of the entourage of Prakash Gossai, the famous Hindu lecturer and singer who starred as the *vyas*

³¹⁴ Academic literature provides many examples of fictive kinship, dyadic relations between non-related individuals that are defined in terms of (symbolic) family ties. Gulliver (1971) describes fictive kinship among the Ndendeuli of Tanzania and Herman (1987) mentions ritualized friendship in ancient Greece. One of the most famous anthropological examples, however, is the Latin American institution of *compadrazgo*, godparenthood (e.g. Foster 1988; Mintz and Wolf 1950; Bell and Nutini 1980).

³¹⁵ A group consisting of singers and musicians that performs devotional hymns.

(presiding pundit) for the occasion. George had invited the girls and me to come over for a home-cooked lunch between the event's morning and evening programme. We ate curry, vegetarian of course, together with white rice. After we had finished, as I was about to 'rest myself' on the red-velvet sofa in the MC's living room, the girls came up to me with a *thari* (*thali*, or brass plate) with a lighted diya, some vermicelli cake and each a short yet opulently decorated thread.

It was the full moon day in the Hindu month of *Shravan*, the day of the festival of *Raksha Bandan*³¹⁶ when sisters tie 'rakhi' around the wrists of their brothers and girls can adopt someone as their brother by offering 'rakhi' to non-related males. It turned out all four had 'elected' me to be their rakhi-brother. One at a time, each tied a thread around my right-hand wrist, circumvented me with the brass plate, fed me the sweet vermicelli, hugged and kissed me, and thus established what is ideally regarded a lifelong connection as siblings. Officially I then became their rakhi-brother, a fictive kin with theoretically all the responsibilities that Indian family ideology awards to the position of *barka*, a girl's elder brother. By accepting their thread, I pledged to protect and help each and every one of them for as long as we lived. As was stated in that day's Kaieteur News, "once a woman ties that sacred thread on the wrist of a man, that thread cannot be untied, and that brotherly and sisterly love must be kept until death." Hmmm.

The establishment of rakhi ties during the festival of *Raksha Bandan* is one of the most obvious examples of institutionalised forms of fictive kinship in Hinduism. It exemplifies the importance of family ideology and principles in the process of establishment of *durable* relationships in circumstances in which social and economic survival is a *collective* endeavour. The development of this and other exponents of ritual and symbolic kinship within the Guyanese Indian community in this age of rapid transformation reveal the dynamism of East Indianness. Whereas some rakhi-siblings continue to perform their role as virtual brothers and sisters, others have downgraded it to just a manifestation of tradition, a ritual detached from responsibilities and connections. Two of my sisters keep in touch, two of them do not, none of them really expects me to be a brother...

6.1.1 Social relations and the family metaphor

The concept of family is one of the key concepts in the East Indian understanding of social relations. Not only do many East Indians declare the family unit as the focus of social life, they also adopt a *family ideology* to explain and value dealings with non-related others.

³¹⁶ Translated as 'Bond of Protection' (Kaieteur News, 12 August 2003). In the article is said that the source of this practice lies in the Vedic period when the Brahmins conferred love and affection to their disciples by tying a sacred thread. However, there is another story which gives the origin to the present form. In Rajasthan, once a widow queen named Padmini was attacked by her enemies. In order to protect herself and her kingdom, she sent a 'rakhi' (sacred thread) through her messenger to the mogul emperor Humayoon, requesting him to be her 'brother' and calling on him for help and protection. In response, the emperor gladly accepted her as sister through the 'rakhi' and saved her and her kingdom.

Throughout my stay in Guyana, especially in rural areas and among older generations, people showed a tendency to employ principles and practices regarding family life when assessing various types of non-familial relationships.

Highly illustrative is the East Indian inclination to label (and treat) significant others as kin. Residents of the same village, members of one religious community, and descendants of so called ship-brothers can all be branded symbolic or fictive kin at certain moments and in certain situations. Especially in the discourse of the 'classicists', and in the speech of cultural and religious activists, a particular fondness of the family metaphor becomes apparent. In fact, whereas 'modernity' has caused the relevance of symbolic family ties in everyday interaction to decline, the anti-modernist have now come to employ references to common descent, symbolic brother- or sisterhood, and virtual kinship in their struggles for cultural preservation or religious revitalisation. These gradual alterations in the practical usage of the family metaphor will materialise in the following section. First, it is important to examine the nature of the cross-application of conceptions of family: the role of what can be designated as East Indian family ideology in shaping and appreciating all sorts of social relationships.

Up until today, the cluster of cultural understandings about family steers interpretation and influences action in the entire East Indian social orbit. Even though its impact is waning, I have found this collection to be of vital importance to analyse and comprehend collective readings of friendship. It comprises a few interrelated concepts that together form an idea of how Indian families live and, more importantly, how Indian families should live. These concepts are imported into alien realms of social interaction. Family ideology originated ideals such as mutual assistance, sharing, cohesion, protection, and even something like exogamy have all been incorporated in the collective Indian clusters of understandings of various types of ingroups such as neighbours or villagers, friends, Muslims and Hindus. As such, at least in the eyes of certain people, real friendship, true religious sincerity, ethnic harmony, or commendable village life are characterised by high levels of cooperation and unity, a tendency to display altruistic or unselfish behaviour, and quite an amount of self-regulation. Good friends or nice neighbours are people who stick together, help each other in times of need, and keep an eye on each other and their belongings.

In addition to these ideals, also other family-linked notions can be discerned when examining the East Indians' understanding of (non-familial) social relationships. Concepts of confidentiality and secrecy, or respect and hierarchy are interesting examples. Notions like these are borrowed from the realm of collective understandings concerning the family. Sometimes in very explicit ways, informants propagate such notions by making reference to the family metaphor. Numerous children in villages, up and until now, are instructed in the application of kinship terminology and related concepts to label and approach other non-

related community members.³¹⁷ And many, especially among those belonging to the ‘older’ generations (thirty-five plus), still tend not to call others by their given name. Rather, they would often address them as kin.

This use of kinship terms is more than merely an empty lingual habit. The symbolic family labels are charged with meaning and come with distinct repertoires of thought and practice. More specifically, the terms are verbal hints of the existence of a system of characteristically East Indian social practices which are imported from the dominion of the family. A good example of the influence of family ideology in ‘non-familial’ social realms is the practice of village exogamy. Although certain authors on Caribbean Indian family patterns state village endogamy has increased in recent years (Barrow 1996:350 and Nevadomsky 1980:47-48), I believe the ideal of marrying a person from beyond village boundaries is still very much alive. Although local East Indians sometimes do marry fellow villagers, it is frowned upon and not common practice. My informants generally do not consider a union between two persons from the same area desirable. In fact, it is often regarded as the choice of people and families who lack the amount of civilisation, the contacts, means, or the status, required to find a more appropriate or even classy candidate from somewhere else – from places increasingly far away from the home village. The announcement of such weddings, therefore, often generates negative responses among invitees and others.

The rationale for this practice is a vigorous concept of symbolic kinship. A beautiful illustration is the account of a middle-aged East Indian woman from my residential village Affiance. Reflecting upon her mother-in-law’s view on village endogamy, she stated:

“Me mother-in-law tell me pickney [children] dem never deh day, leh me hear none ah you all [her grandchildren that is] like a boy in Affiance. She say everybody ah name brother and sister and cousin – hi and hello, morning and good afternoon! Don’t go long talking, and nah because you tell somebody hello deh means you done marry det boy. And you know how me glad she talk det piece ah ting? Because when me deh here, me tell you from me heart, me nah want none of me children to get married right in Affiance, none...” - *Focus group interview, 13 November 2003.*

Another example of the extensive influence of notions of family on the way my subjects interpret and approach social reality within a small community is the way the community responded to the friendship between me, a son-in-law of the village, and a resident young

³¹⁷ East Indians nowadays use terms such as *uncle* and *auntie* to address senior Indians, use *buddy* and *banji* (brother’s wife) for non-related peers, and occasionally call those who are significantly younger *son* or *daughter*. The importance of the more precise Hindi kinship jargon as a means of categorising symbolic kin has decreased. Except for the use of the mentioned *bauji* and less frequently some other terms like *chachee* (FB) or *nana* (MF), less specific English terms have come to replace the ancient all-Indian ones.

and unmarried volunteer female teacher from North America. My friendly association with her, together with my wife's absence during that second period of fieldwork, aroused remarkably strong corrective reactions among a large amount of my wife's protective and apparently wary symbolic kin. On numerous occasions, fellow villagers and acquaintances from neighbouring places – generally older women – indirectly questioned me about my intentions, warned me for the hypnotising power of women, and provided me with updates on the responsibilities of the faithful husband. And more than once, these lectures in marital morality started with explicit references to my position as the respective 'lecturer's' junior symbolic relative. In fact, as soon as one of my many meddlesome fictive aunties or *baujis* addressed me as her son-in-law or as buddy, I had a clue of what was going to be the purpose of the upcoming informal chat: as a married pseudo-Indian, I am not supposed to be spotted in the lone presence of (marriageable) girls. It was as if by explicitly referring to my status as fictive relative, and thus to their symbolic relationship with me, these people legitimised their intrusion of an area which would otherwise have certainly been off limits to them. Only because they deliberately identified or pronounced that connection, they could draw on the authority that is officially reserved for those occupying senior positions within my or my wife's actual family.

One of the main reasons my symbolic kin exhibited these peculiar corrective urges was another exponent of Indian family ideology: façade or concealment. According to some of my bluntest surrogate relatives, it were not so much my intentions they were concerned about but rather the impression others (the outgroup) might get from my behaviour. You do not have to mean harm to do harm. More important than what is actually happening, is what the outside world thinks is happening. Even though I might have been a perfectly faithful husband, I could still be charged with not keeping up appearances. Such incapacity or indisposition to make-belief respectability, an admirable front, is considered to be a serious offence in the eyes of many informants. And the very fact that symbolic relatives were driven to correct me largely because of this perceived error shows ingroup/outgroup concepts similar to those which belong to the understandings of the Indian family are applied where symbolic family relations are concerned. More specifically, the impression I gave was believed to reflect upon the whole rather than to affect me alone. Because of us being part of one fictive extended family in a predominantly Indian environment would outsiders employ the impression of me as a corrupt spouse, not just to judge me and my behaviour, but to judge my fictive relatives and the fictive family standards as well.

The sense of collective responsibility – or the concept of reflecting shame – that my informants displayed obviously would not have been an issue if it was not for the application of Indian understandings of the family to explain and assess social relations within the village. Like the emphasis put on cooperation, unity, and other aspects of family ideology, it shows an elaborate concept of fictive kin still works to govern thought and social practice in certain contexts. Similar senses, indicating comparable forms of symbolic

kinship, are apparent in other spheres. Also in the realm of religion do the members of fictive kin groups express a desire to cultivate or maintain a flawless façade and can appeals to familial collaboration and cohesion be heard. And even beyond village relations and outside the field of religion, informants employ the cluster of collective understandings about the family to structure, shape and make sense of a wide range of social relations.

This widespread visibility of fictive family ties, whether exposed in the form of ideals like cooperation and unity or in the form of notions such as respect and secrecy, indicates that the conception of the Indian family still comprises a rather influential set of understandings. Apparently, the family metaphor has not yet lost its motivational value. Its conditioning – manipulated by those who hold positions of power – and strategic use are regarded beneficial enough not to discard it. The Guyanese competitive reality and economic fragility, especially on the East Indian countryside, encourage those who need it to preserve existing forms of symbolic kinship or even transform them to meet new demands.

Inspired by their cultural heritage, certain East Indian villagers continue to structure local social relations according to family ideology. Just like being part of a cohesive and collaborating group was of great importance in the India of my informants' ancestors, some believe life in rural Guyana is most liveable when you struggle together. Similarly, on a larger scale, the wellbeing of ethnic and religious collectives is connected to the family ideals. Notions of self-regulation and concealment are clearly visible and promoted in the Muslim community. And a concept of mutual fostering, in both Hindu and Muslim circles, is usually sold with reference to religious brother- and sisterhood.

However, rapidly changing circumstances, especially during the past one or two decades, have severely affected the cross-application of collective understandings of family and family life. Whereas the metaphor itself and its content have changed little – fictive family ideology remains based upon classic notions of kinship – its status is modified. As indicated, the relevance of symbolic ties in daily life has become contested. 'Modernists' are rarely guided by the principles of make-belief family relationships. At the same time, symbolic ties are increasingly employed as strategic tools to counter the negative effects of the contemporary forces of transformation. Similar (counteracting) energies as the ones that were discerned in the previous chapters thus determine the trajectory of the family metaphor and colour the development of these types of East Indian relationships.

6.1.2 Reproduction and modification

Despite that remnants of the family metaphor still help govern the perceptions and actions of numerous East Indians in their dealings with proximate others, the face of fictive kinship has changed dramatically. Expressions of such relationships are challenged, have been reformed, or have vanished. Younger generations, and those who do not depend on old time collaboration, are little susceptible to appeals to make-belief siblinghood. Besides, novel claims based on new identifications have come to compete with existing ones.

Additionally, changed circumstances undermine the relevance of certain types of institutionalised cooperation and care. The old time practice of ‘buying children’, for instance, is virtually extinct. No longer do parents seek to share (economic) responsibility for their children with non-related others by selling their children for symbolic prices.³¹⁸ Remittances, slightly improved financial circumstances, and attitudinal changes have affected the economic relevance of fictive family ties.

The social basis of fictive kinship has also changed. A complex of developments has transformed the appearance of the social arena in which symbolic connections are produced. These developments either work to transform or disrupt those ties. This section describes and analyse these processes. First, I will examine two sorts of transformation: change prompted by the recycling of old identifications for new purposes; and change triggered by the emergence of new identifications. The former is expressed in the form of neotraditionalism and cultural activism. The latter is manifested in religious (Muslim) fundamentalism. Second, I will discuss the process of disruption. I will describe how modifications in the basis of friendship are translated in a tendency to dispose of the family metaphor. And I will describe the emergence of a concept of friendship Pitt-Rivers (1973: 90) defined as “an invention of soi-distant “civilized society” which has abandoned kinship as an organising principle,” a notion of friendship that materialised with the diminish of kinship structures. Especially the marketing of pleasure and the emancipation (female) youths are important factors in these developments.

(Transformation) – One of the most interesting examples of a reorganisation of fictive kin structures is the transformative impact of both Islamic purification and Indian cultural activism on a type of symbolic kinship known as *jahaji*, or shipbrotherhood. Whereas the upsurge of neofundamentalism has severely harmed this category of cross-religious fictive ties, the emerging Indian cultural activist movement has embraced it and employs it in their quest for preservation of the oriental legacy.

‘Traditional’ shipbrotherhood has virtually ceased to exist. ‘Modernity’ has brought this ancient East Indian institution to an end, with little respect for its precious significance. For many decades, families and descendants of shipbrothers (*jahaji*), had formed important and fruitful social networks. People, regardless of religious background, would consider *jahaji* or *jibaji* (*bhai*) as relatives. As Vertovec (1992: 93) notes with regard to the East Indians in Trinidad, “[ship brothers, and their descendants] came to treat each others’ families as *nata* or fictive kin.” An analysis of *jahaji*-based networks, especially those that existed a few decades ago, would show they possess many of the features you would find in

³¹⁸ Some of my aged informants parent children they have bought for small sums of money. Usually these children were sold because they were sickly or in need. The fictive parent would act as a patron, someone who provides the child with economic assistance but who would not become the main caretaker. The relationship between fictive parent and child is lasting, and dyadic, it includes certain responsibilities of the child as well. Terms like ‘daughter’, ‘son’, ‘father’ and ‘mother’ are/were commonly used to address fictive relatives in this context.

‘real’ Indian extended families. Between jahaji high levels of cooperation, collective responsibility, care and cohesion can be discerned. And also principles of exogamy were imported from the realm of family. Jahajies work together, visit each other’s houses in times of sorrow or celebration, help out in case of need, and do not aspire conjugal relationships with their fictive kin.

Until recently, many Indians knew exactly who their shipbrothers and sisters were. Their interaction was governed by rules and regulations pertaining fictive kinship. This, however, has changed dramatically. Children of jahaji do no longer acknowledge the ties that once existed between genetically distinct families. Especially to younger generations, shipbrotherhood is a rather empty concept from the past. According to some, it has lost its value because of the increasing levels of individuation apparent within Indo-Guyanese society. And I agree: modified (latter-day or de-Indianised) principles and self-images have had a negative impact on the relevance of such networks. Nevertheless, the accounts of former shipbrothers suggest the process of Islamic purification has contributed as least as much. In fact, I believe that, more than anything else, it was the attempt of certain East Indian Muslims and Muslim groups to cleanse local Islam from Indian contamination which stirred a drastic disconnection of fictive ties between jahaji lineages. As a recalcitrant and befriended imam from a sizeable jama’at in Essequibo explained:

“There were one time in this country where the, what you call jahaji, the shipbrothers, a Hindu and a Muslim...I have great-aunts who are Hindu, right, from my grandmother’s side, not biological but great-aunts. And those people still hold on, some of the generations still hold on to that relationship right. Hindus and Muslims used to live very close together, eat together, sleep together, right, of course there had a lot of intermarriages and what have you, but they had no problem, right?. [Now,] the so called idiots that we have around today tell people that these people are subclass and these people are not worthy of even mentioning let alone socialise with them or have anything to do with them, and so forth you know...” – *Interview, 26 December 2003.*

According to the imam, foreign trained Guyanese Muslims explicitly discourage anything that goes beyond the necessary and superficial interaction between Muslims and Hindus. And, although he articulates his views in a slightly tactless fashion, he is right. As mentioned before, certain religious leaders and imams do advise their following to be cautious and to refrain from unnecessary and overly intimate dealings with unbelievers.

This has undoubtedly affected the attitudes and practices of some, also with regard to the bands with their Hindu jahaji. I know of shipbrother ties between a Hindu and a Muslim family – both originally from the Anna Regina estate – that were cut after the Muslim traditionalist paterfamilias died and his fundamentalist eldest son came to head the family. The families have ever since stopped acknowledging each other as (fictive) kin and

the intensity of interaction has severely decreased. Now, they no longer stick together, mingle, and help one another if assistance is required.

New and narrowed (religious) identifications have successfully battled notions of shipbrotherhood. Inclusion in the universal Muslim family required disposal of structures that belong to the realm of cultural practices and connect believers with unbelievers. Islamic siblinghood, an important aspect of a globalised Islam, does not leave any room for different types of symbolic kinship. In fact, neofundamentalist ideology – not necessarily practice – even challenges actual family relations between those who believe and those who deny.

Quite different is the stance taken by Indian cultural activists. Whilst the Islamic brothers deliberately erode and weaken the old structure of this fictive kinship, they have embraced it and try to restore it for the sake of preserving or revitalising old traditions and intra-ethnic unity. The marketing of the concept of jahaji by the Guyana Indian Heritage Association³¹⁹ (GIHA) shows how such a decayed institution is given new content and meaning, and can thus be employed as lexical tool in a battle for ethnic self-preservation and even cultural ascendancy in the increasingly diverse and unrestricted socio-cultural arena.

(Traditionalist) cultural activists of the GIHA consequently use the term in an attempt to mobilise the East Indian masses, and create a sense of ethnic siblinghood that will arouse feelings of shared responsibility and victimisation.³²⁰ Constant reference to the addressee's status of jahaji, the agony of fellow jahaji, and the potency of a cohesive jahaji collective, in broadcasted or published GIHA communication and at GIHA events, must ensure the social and cultural survival of Guyana's East Indian community (and probably help the association to strengthen their position as East Indian representative body).

Irrespective of the uncertain outcome of this relatively recent attempt³²¹, the heritage association's effort to use a practically expired exponent of fictive kinship in their quest for social and cultural conservation is an interesting example of a strategic approach or response to cultural developments. What the GIHA tries to do is to activate certain powerful shared schemata, cultural understandings, to safeguard Indian rights and legacy. Explicit reference to the concept of jahaji is thought to trigger an array of emotions, experiences, tendencies, ideas, interpretations and associations within the individual mind. This mental cluster stems from the realm of 'family' and is rightfully considered to possess certain action generative qualities that – because of the interconnectivity of understandings within constellations – help trigger conduct in seemingly separate realms. Its utilisation in this context is supposed to arouse behaviour one would normally find in the context of the family.

³¹⁹ See chapter three.

³²⁰ For instance, there is a GIHA Jahaji Fund to which sympathetic East Indians can contribute in order to "help the widows and children of murdered victims (fallen jihajis) receive counselling, medication and financial aid." (Dignity/Izzat, Vol. 1 No 2 – February 2003)

³²¹ The GIHA was officially established in 2002.

As such, the utilisation of a remodelled understanding of shipbrotherhood illustrates the capacity of existing structures and institutions to survive if new purposes are found to replace objectives that no longer need to be pursued. The transformation of jahaji from a specific concept regarding specific relations into a general term regarding relations between all East Indians was required because the character of social relationships had changed. As indicated, innovative forces have undermined both the economic and social basis of fictive kinship at a local level.

Within villages, in dealings between neighbours or acquaintances, the future of fictive ties is at the least highly uncertain. Despite the fact that many still regard the local community a symbolic family, perspectives on the roles and responsibilities that come with the status of locality member are severely modified. In fact, on grassroots level, the very nature of social relationships is in a state of flux. Innovations have inspired alterations in the foundations of friendship and so contributed to the deconstruction of the family metaphor.

(Deconstruction) – Various important innovations that affect East Indian views on social life are related to globalisation. As already mentioned in previous chapters, the increased accessibility of knowledge of all kind, together with the growing interconnectedness of local individuals or groups and the outside world, have brought about a wide range of options that was not available before. In line with Giddens (1999), I believe a highly important consequence of globalisation is its impact on the way we look at ourselves and how we form ties and connections with others. According to him, also in the realm of friendship new forms of intimacy are replacing existing bonds.

Media, merchandise, migrants and missionaries of various faiths have introduced and market alternative concepts of good-living and recipes to do so for many years already. Yet, the intensity and the level of ingenuity with which these unconventional models of behaviour are marketed in Guyana have radically increased over the past decade. TV only became a significant source of information in the 1990s, and few of the many internet cafés you find all over the densely populated Guyanese coast have been around for more than five years. Also, improved telecommunication and physical mobility contribute to the successful spread of alien ideas and ways.

A result of the introduction of alternatives is an alteration of the fundamentals of relationships with non-kin. A kind of friendship is materialising that – as described in certain anthropological works (e.g. Abrahams 1999; Allan 1996) – increasingly contrasts with kinship “along lines of achievement/voluntarism versus ascription/constraint in the establishment and maintenance of social relations” (Bell and Coleman 1999: 6). Whereas traditional friendships were characterised by relatively high levels of ascription and constraint (fictive kinship is a good example), contemporary friendships are achieved and voluntary, and often have a more temporal appearance. With regard to modifications in the nature of social relations triggered by these new circumstances, and related to these altered

fundamentals, two practically inseparable phenomena ought to be mentioned. First of all, informants recognise a shift in the dominant East Indian focus of social existence. And secondly, I believe people's notions about comradeship are changing.



Picnic ('cook') with friends in the 'backdam'

The focus shift is usually explained as the increase of selfishness. It involves the alleged transformation of the 'collective man' into a person that is merely concerned with his own wellbeing and, perhaps, the wellbeing of a very small group of significant others. Informants generally regard East Indians nowadays less eager to cooperate and share than their ancestors were many years ago. This lack of unity and such a focus on the self and possibly the nuclear family, rather than a focus on extended family and fictive kin, is blamed on westernisation and the poisoning power of wealth. According to quite some Essequibeans, individualism is principally the doctrine of the townsfolk and the well-to-do. Poor rural people, like themselves, fortunately live relatively far from the spoiled urban society and lack the riches to finance contemporary egocentricity. As several interviewees stated, each in their own words: social life on the countryside has not (yet) fallen prey to some of the detrimental manifestations of modernity. Read:

"I know in Georgetown, I have some family there and I go about seeing people, is like, I don't know how to put it but you see what I am saying. You see people, its not like they will go out and help somebody. Its on an individual. If someone need help, if someone taking in some sick. So its like,

if someone is sick in the village, if you compare to here, if somebody sick here, quick time you gonna see neighbours come together. Quick find vehicle, take this person quick to the hospital, make sure they're alright. Now when we finish here, how much it cost, we say, no, no, we serving humanity, that is what we say. We are supposed to do that. We glad for that kind thing. That is the main reason for living. But in Georgetown, you see the man collect the money before he left. Yes, he gonna make sure before he left. I would say, they don't have the spiritual knowledge in Georgetown." – *Interview with a Hindu truck-driver, 8 February 2005.*

"And you know Georgetown, town nah like Essequibo, people go call and give you something, Georgetown everybody, all thing for money, nothing, nobody nah give you nothing jus so in town. [...] If you are walking, you is a stranger right, if you are walking, this is a street here, you could go into any of them house and say you need a little cold water, right, not in town, they go show you the pipe, you got to go drink from the pipe, you understand, that is Georgetown, they don't give things so easy." – *Interview with a Hindu carpenter, 24 February 2005.*

"People in Essequibo got more hospitality, they treat you better. If you go to Georgetown with relatives and so they never got so much time to spend with you, they always have to work, work, work. [...] They got that kind of mentality you know, living by themselves. I am talking about neighbours and so like, everybody minding their own business, looking after you own self." – *Interview with a Muslim clerk, 23 February 2005.*

However, also things in Essequibo have changed. As one twenty-nine year old male stated:

"The attitude of children for the last five years, right, let's say about four to five years. They lose a lot of, they lose certain respect and dem ting, they lose a lot of respect. [...] For example, let we say this is 2005, in 2000, way back in 2000, 1999, 98, 97, you could have been passing kids on the road and you would hear like they respond to you, morning, good afternoon or what the case maybe, now you don't even get dem response. I mean you does walk the street and you know what it is about, people try to run over your foot and don't even tell you excuse." – *Interview with a Hindu secondary school teacher, 7 February 2005.*

As far as this secondary school teacher is concerned, "a lot of people get carried away with this kind of quick life, this kind of high-tech life what is going on." He believes that well-

advertised new products and things such as music videos “from New York and them ting” have caused his fellow Indians to become materialistic and more egocentric.

Of course it is not that simple. However, I do think that there is a correlation between the accessibility of exponents of (Western) consumerism and the level of individuation. People and places with easy access to models and means propagating the ego-cult are less likely to be dependant – and thus focussed – on the collective than those with a more problematic access. Collectivism is definitely more beneficial if you are a poor peasant in the agricultural heartlands of Guyana than when you are an affluent businessman in the country’s commercial centre. In that sense, egoism could thus even be seen as a luxury that cannot be afforded by all Guyanese.

Really, neither the individual nor the nuclear family can be the sole objective of one’s gratifying efforts. Objectives shift, and so do the foci of social existence. However, in rural Essequibo, those who are a little less well off depend on larger cooperative structures than those who can afford to buy assistance. Sometimes their cooperation with fictive kin or, as will be discussed in the latter half of this chapter, extended family is required to keep things going. The successful organisation of weddings and funerals within lower-class rural circles depends on the generosity and assistance of neighbours, friends, acquaintances, rakhi-siblings and other symbolic relatives. Things such as ingredients for the huge amounts of curries, a small workforce to erect the traditional nuptial structures, and a helping hand in the ‘outside kitchen’, are provided without charge to those who are part of symbolic kin networks.

Still, even few of the non riches in rural Essequibo would state that interaction within the communities has not changed at all over the past few decades. Altered circumstances can be held responsible. The fact that East Indians today experience different things than East Indians fifty or a hundred years ago has certainly affected the cognitive structures which are shaped by those experiences. Processes like westernisation and creolisation on one hand, and Arabisation and re-Indianisation on the other hand, have altered the face of (Indo-)Guyanese society and thus changed the nature of social experience and conditioning.

An example is the transformed body of perceptions and practices regarding social relations with non-related others. As said, the value of fictive family notions has changed or even diminished. From virtual kin-relations, friendships have developed into relationships that are defined in terms that contrast with the traditional conceptions of family. Besides – as will be further discussed in the second half of this chapter – peoples’ attention has partially shifted from the extended family group to the nuclear family and the individual.

Another trend that is related to these ‘shifting foci’ is the transformation of East Indian notions about comradeship. These transformations essentially concern two areas: pre-marital segregation of the sexes, and subsequently the emancipation of female youths; and the successful introduction of what can be labelled notions of ‘peer pleasure’. While in the heydays of fictive kinship, social relations were characterised by a rather strict

segregation of the sexes and a generally strong emphasis on reciprocity of favours (an economic basis), current social relations can thus be characterised by quite different traits.

Especially the concept and externalisation of friendship among younger generations is dissimilar from the friendships as described by witnesses of the past. First of all, present-day East Indians have the opportunity to seek their friends among a wider array of people. Interaction between teenage boys and girls is far more common and unrestricted than it was a few decades ago. Prolonged periods of schooling³²², liberalised ideas about the upbringing of children, and the growth of Guyana's leisure industry are the developments that are primarily responsible. East Indian children nowadays spend more years in school than ever before. Not only does the vast majority of them complete secondary education, many also pursue further training at the country's various technical institutes and teacher training colleges. Besides, a significant number of kids wants to go to the University of Guyana near Georgetown. According to some of these UG aspirants from Essequibo, this will not just allow them to acquire academic skills but provide them with the opportunity to experience the non-academic aspects of student life as well. Several of them told me they want to be independent, away from 'the coast', able to make their own decisions and mistakes, and free to go to clubs, parties, and friends whenever and wherever they want.

This extended student life enabled the prolongation of inevitable and little regulated interaction between young males and females.³²³ As will be further discussed under 6.2, such interaction is further facilitated by liberalised ideas about parenting and the expansion of Guyana's once little developed entertainment scene, even in more rural coastal areas. From a place with about two cinemas and an impressive number of rumshops, inaccessible Essequibo has become the home of pool-halls, a modest resort, a few night clubs, bars, youth centres and restaurants. All these are locations where women are welcome and bound to meet men.

The increased availability of enjoyment opportunities, together with a heightened interest in advanced schooling, has affected the nature of friendships in various ways. First of all, novel or expanded arenas of social interaction have helped to draw female social interaction from largely the domestic and religious realms into a more public and secular sphere. Whereas females, years ago, would often mainly socialise indoors or at religious functions and major lifecycle events, they can nowadays be spotted 'sporting'³²⁴ in a number of public places such as bars and nightclubs, and at concerts and fairs. A series of male and (aged or pious) female informants indirectly acknowledge this development by labelling the average modern East Indian girl as "wild" and de-Indianised, individuals that do no longer display Indian feminine virtues like shame, shyness and modesty.

³²² East Indians also tend to get married at a later age than before. This, most likely, is also connected to the changing attitudes about education and altered ambitions.

³²³ Statistics provide evidence of the educational emancipation of girls. Whereas before, the education of boys would have priority, nowadays girls comprise the majority of Guyana's student population. (see Appendix)

³²⁴ Term Guyanese use to refer to the act of enjoying, having fun while consuming (fair amounts of) alcohol.

A second alteration in the appearance of friendships that can be connected to changing concepts of education and recreation involves the objective of comradeship. It seems as if the marketing of 'peer pleasure' in the media, together with the constitution of an environment that is increasingly facilitative when it comes to satisfaction of this peer-pleasure urge, has weakened the position of assistance-based friendship. In other words, 'enjoyment' has replaced 'help' as the most commonly desired output of friendship. Probably inspired by televised drama and comedy ('Friends' reruns for instance) from the United States, many contemporary East Indians value fun higher than economic profitability.³²⁵

The things many young people do and want to do with friends nowadays are quite different than the things their parents and especially their grandparents tended to do with their mates. This modified agenda of friends, the alterations in the practice or execution of these particular relations, suggests important changes in both the recipe for self-gratification, and the conceptualisation of the social self. It indicates that the East Indian individual has gained some independence, that she or he acknowledges and exploits the possibility to disconnect from social structures that once seemed to be completely intertwined with the self.

Furthermore, it tells that the emphasis lies on the satisfaction of different needs now, and that methods employed to fulfil these (undoubtedly pre-existing) desires are new. East Indians today regard fun or pleasure that is linked with friendship to be a commodity. They seem to think of enjoyment as an article that can be purchased for money and, in turn, to regard money more and more as an item that could and should be traded for pleasure.

Whilst, according to oral tradition, Indians used to be focussed on accumulation, progress, and saving alone, the Guyanese Indians nowadays have embraced notions of consumerism and short-term thinking. Many of the locals I know rather spend their cash on a one-day ferryboat cruise on the Essequibo river, or a lavish Sunday afternoon at Lake Mainstay resort, than a few new sheets of zinc to repair the leaking roof on top of their little house. Going out – or "go fuh walk" as they call it – is popular: fairs, exhibitions and shows at 'centre grounds' or cricket fields are common and well attended; barbeques and parties are frequently organised; nightclubs and pool halls flourish; and organised day and weekend trips are no longer considered to be an extravagant waste of money.

According to several of my informants this proves that East Indians have departed from their traditional principles and have become like the wasteful and careless Africans. Instead of remaining thrifty and constructive, they have allegedly turned into a people who likes to spend on fat golden jewellery and brand name nonsense, loves to party, and does not care about tomorrow. According to a thirty-one year old moderate Muslim Indian, East Indians now "adopt det [African] kinda style." He believes that "they trow [sic] away their

³²⁵ Also some of the latest Indian movies, especially the remakes of U.S. blockbusters, propagate the fun-culture.

tradition and adapt to other people one.” I do not think he is right. Although the East Indian understanding of social interaction has indeed severely changed, and is always subject to individual creativity and the evolution of structures, I rather believe it remains a time-framed aspect of the ever developing complex I have labelled East Indianness.

6.2 On family ties and parenting: ideology, reality, and the art of negotiation

The East Indians continue to structure social relationships in a distinctively East Indian way, despite processes of transformation and inevitably the diffusion that comes with growing interconnectedness. The concept of fictive kin is an interesting example. An oriental family ideology remains part of the cognitive repertoire that many of my subjects employ to assess and steer dealings with non-related others. Kin terminology is part of the jargon of association. And notions of cooperation, altruism, self-regulation, cohesion, hierarchy, respect, confidentiality, and secrecy – all borrowed from the realm of family – are incorporated in people’s understanding of friendship and acquaintance.

Shared schemata, concerning family and family life and based upon experiences in familial contexts, are connected with the schemata regarding social interaction at large. Remnants of village exogamy and the corrective behaviour displayed by co-villagers in response to my friendship with an unmarried young lady, show these alien and interrelated schemata can still come to govern perceptions and practices of social subjects (especially of the ‘traditionalists’). Additionally, the family metaphor is embraced by certain movements who expect to be able to utilise its appeal to mobilise people and guarantee their support in quests for cultural conservation or religious purification.

Such strategic use of the family metaphor by anti-modernists illustrates the development of cross-applications of family ideology within a system or network of schemas that (as will be further argued in chapter seven) should be seen as a cultural constellation. It reveals the ability of ‘cognitive culture’ to adapt to altered circumstances. As the original social and economic basis of fictive kinship is undermined, new meanings are found. Survival of the collective instead of personal subsistence. In an increasingly complex world full of alternatives, family ideology serves the purpose of perseverance. Friendship and acquaintance, once the heartlands of symbolic kinship, are increasingly based on new objectives. There, peer pleasure has succeeded assistance as the prime goal of association.

This section comprises a next step in the analysis of East Indian codes of care. It entails an examination of principles and practices of parenting, a complex of notions and ways based on shared understandings that have been produced in encounters between ideology and reality. In the following pages, I will describe these notions and practices and discuss how ‘traditional’ interpretations of Indian parenthood and a rapidly changing social reality help produce an eclectic body of parenting patterns and manners (that should be

taken as one of the chief manifestations of East Indianness). As such, I will subsequently focus on the changing appearance of roles and relations within East Indian households, and on contemporary East Indian (grassroots) pedagogy. By means of the former, the multifarious and ambiguous character of family understandings is portrayed. The latter is analysed to shed a light on processes of innovation and replication described in the first part of this chapter.

First, however, I must devote a few more lines to the East Indian family doctrine: an alleged authentic corpus of thoughts that has been subject to change ever since its emergence, and forms the basis upon which conceptions of parenthood have been erected.

6.2.1 The family doctrine

According to Uberoi (1999:163-64), “it is the Indian family system that is recognised as the social institution that quintessentially defines being Indian”. And many agree. Also investigators of East Indian culture generally consider family patterns to be among the richest reservoirs of Indian social artefacts.³²⁶ This, however, does not imply they are (or ever were) left untouched by the forces of change.

In fact, the East Indian family system has been affected by circumstances and external powers ever since the arrival of the first indentured labourers in the Caribbean. As indicated in chapter two, gender roles already had to be modified in the early days on the estates. A severe shortage of Indian women in the New World, together with the dominance of relatively female-friendly “Eurocentric family norms and values,” enabled the status of females to rise, impaired the authority of the male, and influenced the makeup of the family (Barrow 1996:343). Like Chandra Jayawardena (1962:20-21) noted:

In regulating the lives of their labourers, managers acted in terms of their own cultural norms. They house one nuclear family in each dwelling and provided new accommodation for the children when they got married, usually in another part of the plantation. This was deliberate policy, for they wished to eliminate tensions arising from the difficult position of the resident daughter-in-law. As a rule, no married couple was allowed to reside in the parental home for longer than a few years.

The power of the father was circumscribed to the extent that he was no longer the sole trustee of the economic resources of the domestic group. Adult sons and wives could evade his control in that they had access to economic resources and accommodation that were beyond his control.

The manager was the arbitrator in all inter-personal disputes, and his solutions tended to be in terms of the norms of his own culture. He paid

³²⁶ See Barrow (1996:340).

attention to the complaints of wives, sons, and daughters-in-laws against the husband/father and, if he felt the man was behaving ‘unreasonably’, reprimanded him and so limited his authority. Thus, the manager’s intervention tended to rearrange the domestic relations of the Indians in accordance with Guianese (‘European’) patterns.

East Indian social reality in the second half of the nineteenth century has instigated an alteration of traditional ideals of family. Not only did the exotic and un-Indian circumstances of the colonial ‘canedoms’ undermine the father’s authority and changed the sex balance, it also inflicted the introduction and acceptance of nuclear family based households and brought about modifications in marriage patterns.

Nevertheless, even after more than fifteen decades of existence in transformative alien social, cultural and economic surroundings, a shared and inherently Indian understanding of family life endures and continues to colour thought and practice of the Guyanese Indians. People of South-Asian descent are still able to give you a rather detailed explanation of traditional family ideology. And customs and practices within East Indian families – despite being contaminated with an increasing number of foreign ways – are undeniably different from those within the African, Amerindian, Chinese and Portuguese families in Guyana.

In the words of Barrow (1996:341) “on the face of it, Indian kinship traditions appear in many respects to be the mirror opposite of family and conjugal union patterns among Afro-Caribbean people.” According to her, great dissimilarities in family ideology between “the East Indian patriarchal and Creole female-centred families are reflected in marriage, sexuality, parenthood, illegitimacy and child-rearing.” While in African circles (single) mothers and grandmothers form the heart of the family, marriage might be regarded a little less sacred and permanent, sexual loyalty seems not an important principle, and illegitimate children are common and accepted, both the (rather similar) East Indian Hindu and Muslim theories on respectable and just family life are quite different.³²⁷ As Barrow (1996:341) explains in her description of the traditions and ideals of Indian kinship:

The family as an institution and the close and enduring family bonds are at the centre of East Indian culture. The conjugal union is the focal point of the family and marriage is the norm for all East Indians. It is generally the first relationship entered into and is arranged by the parents of the bride and groom. Important to these arrangements are caste endogamy, that is marrying within one’s caste, and the dowry system whereby a payment is made by the parents of the bride to those of the groom. Marriage takes place at a relatively young age and is expected to last for the rest of one’s lifetime.

³²⁷ See for instance the differences in marriage and family patterns as revealed through statistical comparisons of ‘Negro’ and East Indian women in Trinidad by Bell (1996).

Divorce is prohibited and visiting unions are negatively sanctioned and relatively rare.

Kinship relations are characterised by male dominance to the extent that gender parallels age and generation in the determination of family authority and responsibility. Mothers, for example, dominate relationships with their daughters and daughters-in-law, but may play a subordinate role in relation to their sons especially in cases where the sons assume responsibilities as household heads in the absence of their own father (Jayawardena 1962:48,51). Elders, however, both male and female, are respected by the younger generation. Along with the conjugal bond, the tie between the father and the son constitutes the core of family relations that extend to encompass a 'joint' family, a corporate structure which includes the wives and children of the sons, all living under the same roof (Angrosino 1976:45). Money and property are held in common and religious rituals commemorating the ancestors confirm and reinforce family solidarity. Even marriage is perceived as an alliance between two kin groups rather than the relationship between two individuals. Individualism and choice in family affairs, as in all other matters, are submerged and subordinated to the interests and demands of kinship.

Indian family ideology narrates of a large and cohesive group of collaborating relatives. It also advocates strong notions of intergenerational and gender-related hierarchy. Elders outrank juniors, and men dominate women. Furthermore, it suggests a focus on the collective rather than the individual: property is shared, and marriage is an agreement between two families instead of a pact between a man and a woman.

Of course, none of these ideals are unchallenged in contemporary Indo-Guyana. Co-residence of extended family, for instance, is quite uncommon. Although grandparents often live with one of their children, sizeable collectives consisting of several brothers, their wives and children, and elderly parents are rare. Out of the hundred-and-eighty-four East Indian households which I have counted in Affiance, just one was made up of relatives other than children, parents, and grandparents. Despite often articulated ideologies of cohabitation, cooperation, shared responsibility, and cohesion, fifty-one percent (ninety-four units) of the Indian properties in the village were inhabited by nuclear families alone.³²⁸

Similar disparities between practice and ideal can be witnessed when observing other aspects of family life. Also surviving concepts of hierarchy and respect, and ideas about gender relations, do not always coincide with social realities within East Indian

³²⁸ The second most popular family makeup in Affiance is that of the nuclear family with resident (paternal) grandparents, 10.3% of the households are shaped like that. Other forms are: childless couples (8.15%); grandparent(s) with grandchildren (6.52%); single parents (5.98%); nuclear family plus daughter-in-law (5.43%); and nuclear family with resident (maternal) grandparents (1.09%). 10.87% is undefined.

families. Especially when it comes to conjugal relationships – which will be discussed in the following chapter – religious and cultural ideals and practices can be rather dissimilar. But views on culturally appropriate interaction between members of extended and nuclear families and on something like child-rearing frequently oppose the actual behaviour of the East Indians as well.

Relatives, parents, and children often fail to act according to the Indian standards they often propagate. Despite the fact that they might very well believe in these principles, circumstances or more appealing and appropriate alternatives frequently cause people to choose not to act upon them. In the line of reasoning advocated in this book, this indicates that the motivational value of certain schemata is overruled by the motivational value of other schemata. In other words, specific internalised Indian understandings about particular aspects of family life remain dormant and fail to govern action if the actor regards other understandings more beneficial. Hence, strict adherents of the old Indian ways can very well actually raise their children in a relatively un-Indian and maybe Western way and yet do not experience any sense of inconsistency.

In chapter eight I will further analyse this process of incorporating conflicting schemata. After Strauss (1997), the concept of compartmentalisation is then employed to explain the peculiarly unproblematic opposition between notions of karma and clemency. In the following section, however, I shall focus on the principles of parenting that underlie the reasoning and strategies of contemporary East Indian parents. As such, it comprises of the examination of an aspect of the state of affairs of family ideology (and practice) that can be regarded a great indicator of the development of East Indianness. It involves an expression of distinction that is thoroughly founded in Indian ideology, yet has been profoundly affected by today's most formative forces.

6.2.2 Principles of parenting

I have emphasised that collective practice is the product of collections of shared understandings which are constructed from an ever growing body of experiences. People breathe both past and present, are initiated in their cultural and religious heritage and, at the same time, are offered a wide range of alternative models of thought and behaviour. Also, the complex of contemporary kinship patterns and practice has thus become an eclectic externalisation of the Indian interpretation of the self and the world. It is a manifestation of the Indian legacy remodelled to suit the conditions in respectively the (post-)colonial Americas and people's globalised contemporary world.

According to Barrow (1996:345), post-indenture Caribbean reality has facilitated the reconstruction of traditional family configurations as well as “the creolisation of Indian culture, including patterns of family life.” Ever since the Indians came to British Guiana, processes of reconstruction and preservation have coexisted with transformative tendencies. Especially younger generations have led and lead the way towards creolisation. Traditional kinship patterns are accommodated to Caribbean ‘mainstream culture’

(creolisation), and to transnational cultural and religious structures, largely because of their innovatory stance. This amalgamation has affected various aspects of East Indian family life. It has helped the nuclear family to become the operational core of family life, despite the survival of extended family as an ideology and corporate structure. It has also caused gender relations to be ambiguous, a blend of ideologies of inequity and pragmatic manifestations of female emancipation.

One of the most interesting illustrations of the eclectic understandings of East Indian kinship, however, concerns child- and parenthood.³²⁹ Even more than other aspects of kinship, relationships between East Indian parents and their offspring are the product of constant negotiation of ideologies and actualities. They are established in a world where alternative behavioural models are advertised in the media, where the balance of power between generations is shifting, and where ambitions and aspirations are no longer as straightforward as they once might have been. New concepts of pleasure, friendship, and gender roles have enforced modifications in East Indian grassroots pedagogy. In fact, as understandings of family and family life helped design social relationships with non-related others (fictive kinship), remodelled understandings of those social relationships help redesign understandings of intra-family relationships. Contemporary concepts of 'fictive friendship' have even entered the discourse on dealings between siblings or between parents and children.

An important example of the effect of innovation on East Indian conceptions of family life is the prolongation of youth, the introduction of what has been called the psychosocial moratorium (e.g. Erikson 1968; Arnett 2000; Kerpelman and Pittman 2001). Altered perceptions of education and childrearing have caused the transition between childhood and adulthood to become less abrupt by enabling the establishment of a western-like adolescence. While East Indians kids, particularly the girls, used to marry at a very early age, they are now often well in their twenties or even thirties when they tie the knot. The extra time gained by this postponement of marriage is utilised to develop and experience an unprecedented independence. Teenagers and people in their early twenties nowadays take courses, enjoy advanced education, feel bored to death in their parental homes, work for wages they can spend on themselves, and hang out or seek entertainment with peers. All these things weren't quite normal before, yet are considered not extraordinary but desirable now.

For such a change to happen, an altered vision of parenthood was required, possibly at least as much as the reconsideration of aspirations and obligations by the youths themselves. The traditional authoritarian and directive interpretation of parenthood had to be modified and changed into a more lenient and interactive understanding. This indeed happened. Present-day parents are virtually unanimously considered to be liberalised

³²⁹ In fact, Anthony Giddens (in his 1999 Reith Lectures) argues the realm of parent-child relationships is one of the three key areas in which new forms of intimacy are replacing older connections. This, he states, is the result of a global revolution that affects the way we think of ourselves and how we form ties and connections with others. The other key areas are sex and love and friendship, coincidentally also part of my analysis.

versions of the old East Indian fathers and mothers. Whether judged negatively or positively, the development of a more relaxed East Indian notion of childrearing is detected by modernist as well as anti-modernist, and Muslim as well as Hindu informants. Young and old, pious and less reverent, all agree things have changed:

“Parents are more slack now. I don’t know about, I am talking as a Muslim woman, I would think, would not feel it is the same way.” - *Focus group interview with female (Muslim) teachers, on 24 December 2003.*

“...like 30 years ago, parents had more control over their children than... You see in society nowadays you find it harder to control your children.” - *Focus group interview with Hindu girls, on 16 November 2003*

“Because everything starts from the home, everything starts from the home, and it is not Hindu people, Indian people on the whole, the upbringing of their children, you pet and pamper them too much. [...] But then the girls of nowadays, the parents don’t have any protection over them, any restrictions over them.” - *Interview with a middle aged Hindu, on 30 September 2003.*

“Parents used to be like kind of, used to control these children, and they never used to want them to go out and so, but now parents they understand them. They understand them and don’t really try to stop them. They would actually send them and so on.” - *Interview with a middle aged Hindu head mistress, on 14 November 2003.*

“Me feel to me self that nowadays parents ah not so serious about their children. To me, me feel that parents should get more serious because what you ah watch in nowadays environment, the mother and the daughter you don’t even know the difference, that is one that should not be...parents have to be more strict with children.” - *Interview with a middle aged Muslim housewife, on 5 December 2003.*

This altered interpretation of childrearing is both the product of and reason for significant changes in the status and power positions of parents and children. It has allowed the East Indian sons and daughters to enjoy either a perilous or gratifying – depends on who you ask – freedom and relate to their fathers and mothers in ways that were previously unheard of. If what many (positively minded) informants claim is right, East Indian nuclear families have transformed from hierarchical structures into far more egalitarian clusters of communicatively skilled and compromising individuals. Kids and moms and dads have allegedly grown closer and are on speaking terms now. As a Muslim girl with khimar

(headscarf) – interestingly employing more appropriate ethnic rather than religious identifications – clearly marked with regard to her cultural background:

“In *my culture* I am seeing it that thirty years back you did not have this kind of communication between children and parents. And now that, there is you know a, there is, that has been lost for like, not to the extent, I mean certain people do carry on that culture, but most of them now, find it that it I very important that, to start you know, to communicate with their children.” - *Interview, on 16 December 2003.*

According to the explanation of many, adequate communication between the members of a household has become a prerequisite of successful relating. Parent-child relations will not function properly, or at least not be ultimately satisfactory, if a non-indigenously Indian Oprah Winfrey bred kind of interaction is not established. In fact, many informants believe that, in this confusing era, a descent to the level of the child, and subsequently the sacrifice of parental authority, is the only way to cope with the new breeds of ‘civilised’ East Indian children. According to a mature Indian mother and housewife from Affiance, contemporary parents almost literally have to make themselves small like their children. In a focus group session she explains the things a mother will have to do with her (female) children:

“...laugh, gaff [chat], mek joke, show them out. You gaffa befriend you own children them. Me jus mek me self as small as me two daughter, and you sit down and gaff with them and tell them... You show them right from wrong like. Like if they got one boyfriend, first thing they go deh with you and they go lef you. [...] Me does tell me one, the fis they want deh with you and then they don’t want see you no more. [...] And sometimes when they get their menstruation [sic], you tell em whe it come from, and wha you have to do. [INAUD] when mother dead like, they nah know wha for do. When me [INAUD], me tell them, and me tells she, me say when you got [INAUD] come from the vagina and it come, like red blood like and you go tell the auntie, and she go tell you what for use and how for put them.” - *Focus group interview, 13 November 2003.*

Circumstances in the world today require new approaches to parenting. Children have gained coercive power, they have the ability to be literally out of control, and use that ability to claim a freedom they never had before. If nowadays you are not careful, and refuse to give in as a parent, you might end up losing your child. Modern-day children that feel misunderstood will not just comply with the household’s rules and regulations but, according to some worried informants, respond in very destructive ways instead. They will

rather run away than obey, or might even kill themselves because of some disagreement. As one mother once explained, “if you can’t beat them you will have to join them, because nowadays you can’t talk to [argue with] them...if you talk to them dem ah go drink poison.” And she is not all that wrong. East Indian youths have enforced change by utilising fear and uncertainty caused by the threat of eloping or suicide. Each and everyone in Essequibo knows a number of cases in which children, often together with their boy- or girlfriend, ran off because of conflicts with their parents. Besides, suicide rates among East Indians and Indian youths are disproportionally high. In Guyana’s newspapers, these tragedies are often blamed on domestic discord:

A source close to the family told Kaieteur News that from all appearances, the [fourteen-year old East Indian] teenager took the fatal step after she was scolded by her parents, reportedly over a boyfriend. (*From: Kaieteur News, 23 July 2003*)

20-year old man and his 11-year old lover of Crane Village, West Coast Demerara, hanged themselves early yesterday morning in a jamoon tree ending their star-crossed four-month love affair. [...] in one of the letters, which was found at the scene, H. complained to W. that she was constantly verbally abused by her mother for her relationship with him... (*From: Stabroek News, 8 November 2003*)

Just six days ago, B.K., a 13-year old schoolgirl, poisoned herself over a soured relationship. She died last Sunday at West Demerara Regional Hospital [...] On Thursday last, medical staff at the same hospital failed to save the life of another schoolgirl [T.R] who had swallowed a poisonous substance after being rebuked about her relationship with a boy. [...] T.R. was the second student from West Demerara Secondary to take her own life in the past three years. The first was a 12-year old who reportedly hanged herself because she did not like the pair of boots her parents had bought her. (*From: Kaieteur News, 2 February 2003*)

A 12-year old student of the Aurora Secondary School died at the Suddie Hospital last Saturday, after ingesting a dose of poison. Sources in Essequibo told Kaieteur News, that R.S. drank the poison after he was sent to buy kerosene by his mother [...] the youth apparently got angry. (*From: Kaieteur News, 16 September 2003*)

Caution and a departure from the culture of command are thus part of a rational strategy as much as a sign of parental paranoia. But, it is also in accordance with the images of a

Western super society as spread through televised series and talk-shows, or by messengers of the West that visit the South American shores. Ideals of intra-family equity and verbal advancement are not the inventions of creative members of an isolated society. Rather, they are part of broader understanding of perfect parenthood that is born out of a relationship between East Indian selves and today's formative forces, especially the one labelled westernisation.

Foreign or new elements have effectively infiltrated thoughts and practices about parenting, for instance those pertaining to the involvement of the father in the upbringing of children. Mothers, nowadays, expect their husbands to spend quality time with their children, and many young fathers agree. All the dads in their late twenties and early thirties I have asked state they frequently sit down and play with the children. One stated he would "play games with them, like Nintendo". Another said he would try to be like his children and "throw ball with them." He believed that, to be a good father, "you have got to come down and got to know when you were five and six, how you used to be thinking." And a next one explained me that, for the sake of fatherhood and his children, he would "hug up dem and kiss dem up and dem kinda ting...sometimes carry dem out to walk and buy ice-cream."³³⁰

Contemporary interpretations of fatherhood are different from older interpretations of fatherhood. My relatively young male informants with children, claim that their job description is totally unlike their fathers' job description. The things they would do with their kids are things their fathers would rarely have done because of an alleged lack of time and because the older generations did neither consider playing with their children their responsibility nor a (pedagogically) highly constructive activity. Whereas play and interaction are important features of ideal fatherhood now, ideal fatherhood in the past was characterised by higher levels of aloofness and a strong emphasis on the father's role as provider of material necessities. Men taking their sons and daughters out to buy them snacks and soda in the afternoon, and macho boys with their newborns in their arms walking on the roadside in the cool early hours of the tropical day, are the visible indication of the existence of an attitude on parenting that, according to my informants, has only arrived with 'modernity'.

Increased attention to the fatherly role of playmate and for 'play' as such – together with modifications in parents' concepts of hierarchy and the inflated value of education, liberty, and intra-family communication – do obviously not imply that foreign understandings have simply conquered the East Indian cluster of understandings concerning family. As stressed throughout this book, cultural development involves both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies. As always and everywhere, yet nicely displayed in the highly interconnected and peripheral society of which East Indians are part, processes of reproduction and modification coexist. The East Indian understanding of upbringing, the

³³⁰ Interviews (respectively) on 23, 7, and 24 February 2005.

art of instruction, is a good example. Conceptions concerning methods of learning and unlearning form a wonderful blend of egalitarian and authoritarian approaches.

6.2.3 Perspectives on pedagogy

East Indian concepts of parental instruction are individual art works painted with tints set on a colourful palette available to Indians alone. No painting is alike. The artist's School and class, however, are identifiable. The creations of those who share ethnic or religious backgrounds and belong to the same generations and classes will reveal similarities that allow me to mark them collective understandings. This final section of 6.2 focuses on the shared conceptions of pedagogy. It involves the analysis of a part of the interpretive complex that offers a valuable opportunity to detect how the replication of traditional ways and values occurs in a joint venture with innovation and the introduction of new lines of thought and new forms of practice.

With regard to people's notions of upbringing, there are two questions that need to be answered. First of all, it is essential to find out what is regarded as important to teach: what do parents want their children to know, why do they want them to know it, and for what reason do they regard it their responsibility to teach them this. In addition, one needs to grasp which educational methods are considered to be most effective in the process of instruction, providing the East Indian youths with the skills required for what is 'right' living.

The answer to the first question obviously reflects the values of parents and other educators. These values seem to be rather stable, they only show little variation across the different age groups and religious communities. Hindus and Muslims from various generations tend to exhibit quite similar conceptions of what information ought to be instilled in the youngsters' heads and hearts. Some informants say it is important to teach morality, cultivate a notion of good and bad and the inclination to choose the righteous above the tempting and corrupt. Yet the bulk of fathers, mothers, and teachers mention things like obedience, respect, and piety as the core themes of childrearing. According to them, most of all a model child has to recognise the authority of his 'teachers', and abide by the rules and regulations these authorities provide her or him with.

Traits such as lovingness and thoughtfulness, or even honesty, are thus considered secondary to compliance and dutifulness. In fact, they are hardly ever mentioned as objects of instruction by the interviewees. The collective ideal of submission outweighs other ideals and strangely appears to oppose tendencies towards liberalisation of parenthood that were detected earlier in this chapter. Rather than being a sign of the impact of foreign forces, it narrates of the persistence of the past. Appreciation of hierarchical thinking and stringent interpretations of respect and honour are reproductions of traditional concepts, not prescriptions professed by U.S. TV-doctor Phil McGraw or any other exponent of foreign visions. Contradictory to novel relaxed ideas on intra-family interaction, these principal aims of East Indian upbringing facilitate the rise of ambivalences in the reasoning and

behaviour of parents. Principles of equality and inequality, or flexibility and inflexibility, are incorporated in the exact same collection of family understandings. Hence, whereas certain claims and actions in one situation could be based upon innovative and imported views, claims and actions in another situation will reveal an opposing archaic inspiration. I have met an Indian teenager who was never allowed to visit the local market without a chaperone but moved to New York without her parents to further her education. And, I know about another Indian female in her late teens who works as a full and influential partner in her family's business but is not permitted to court or even answer phone calls by potentially interested males.

Pragmatism often motivates the pedagogical stance taken by parents and educators in a particular situation. A relaxation of rules, and the increase of personal freedom, are possible especially if inflexibility and confinement will either harm the interests of the operational kin group (nuclear family generally) or prove an obstacle on the road to fulfilment of the supreme goals of upbringing. Parents tolerate if tolerance is bound to be beneficial: if the economic potential of a child has to be utilised, if a daughter's admirer is an extremely good catch, or if education elsewhere will boost the social and professional prospects of one's offspring. When this toleration involves a clash of conflicting notions, for instance between old Indian ideals and new alien practices, the inconsistencies are disregarded or – when I ask for clarification – rationalised as necessary acts of compromise. Consequently, something such as the novel widespread urge to create independent and educated girls or self-reliant and emancipated boys is explained as a concession that has to be made to modernity. In this era, there is little you can do but teach your kids things that do not exactly suit traditional gender roles and ideas about discipline and restriction. Contemporary girls might separate as women and thus once be forced to look after themselves (financially), and today's boys could end up at the university in Georgetown or at some institution for advanced academic or religious education abroad, they all have to be equipped to deal with these circumstances.

The curriculum of the East Indian upbringing already is based upon a complex and volatile blend of interpretations of different origins and contrasting nature. What is regarded important to teach, and what is actually taught, depends on a number of factors of which circumstances are a very influential one. Cultivation of old values and the instruction in novel ways are both part of typical modern-day East Indian notions of childrearing, the choice between them will vary from situation to situation and person to person. This sometimes leads to pedagogical inconsistency and conflictive behaviour of parents. The answer to the second question posed early in this section reveals the existence of similar ambiguities in thought and practice. Just like people's conception of 'what', also the East Indian interpretations of the 'how' of nurturing are inspired by experiences of various kinds. As content itself, its method of implementation forms a field of both reproductive and innovative thought and action. Strategies of how to teach and unlearn sometimes

narrate traditional ideas and preconceptions and sometimes expose that the abundantly sowed seeds of innovation have indeed sprouted.

East Indian views and practices relating to the mode of child instruction are generally not profoundly influenced by religious background. Whereas Hindus and Muslims obviously teach their progeny about different religious duties and doctrines, the approach to instruction as such is largely the same. Most parents, irrespective of their socio-economic status, their age, and conviction, strongly believe in the power of exemplary behaviour. According to my informants, “you have got to be a role model” and “you teach your child by living as an example.”³³¹ If you live the virtuous life of model spouse, parent, relative, and villager, your children will be guided towards righteousness. Yet, when you misbehave and act irresponsible and unrespectable your children will mimic those wrongdoings and grow up to be members of society’s emergent corps of wicked ones. Pervasive drunkenness, the high incidence of domestic violence, drug abuse, and ever-growing indolence are thus often attributed to parental misguidance rather than societal ills and individual’s weaknesses.

As a strategy nonetheless, modelling is limited. It primarily entails little focussed efforts of implementing relatively general attitudes and forms of behaviour. Different methods are required for more direct and directed ways of tutoring. East Indian perceptions of these methods, often based on assumptions about the effects of reward and punishment, appear to be as ambivalent as certain interpretations of the content and character of the upbringing. As far as a significant number of informants is concerned, the most effective and commendable type of direct instruction is verbal communication. Many fathers and mothers, especially those who are fairly young, claim their children will learn rapidly if you just talk to them and address them as sensible little human beings. Like one young father said, “I believe in talking to children first, explain to them, because remember all ah we deh young one time.” And according to another one, “the best way foh teach you children dem is to tell dem the fact, and everything, tell dem what right from wrong.” At the same time however, these and many other parents would also praise the benefits of spanking. If kids don’t listen, the first young father explained, you would have to tap them. When I asked him if you could hit your children when they refuse to obey, he answered: “don’t you must man, tek out a buckle and dig two lash ’pon them, you not beating them for...I mean you parents never beat you for injure you, so you got to school the children dem accordingly.”

Despite the generally articulated ideal of verbal problem solving and reprimanding, an undercurrent belief in physical penalising as effective disciplinary measure is common in the East Indian community. Even those interviewees who initially reject the idea of beating would later often admit to use non-verbal corrective methods in the form of “a little bit of spanking.” The fact that it is rarely spontaneously mentioned as preferable type of sentence might have something to do with their impression of Western pedagogical principles and

³³¹ Focus group on 3 December 2003, and an interview on 9 December 2003.

my image as their probable advocate. Besides, parents hold ambiguous concepts of punishment. Conflicting messages on the appropriateness of physical intervention, deriving from various disagreeing sources, cause visions of right and wrong to be blurred. Whereas Indian tradition and latter-day religious revivalism propagate the forceful instalment of virtues, certain voices of modernity encourage more pacifistic approaches. Just like this causes contradictory notions of flexibility and inflexibility and equality and inequality to coexist, this can make people oppose against the very thing they do: hitting their brood.

Such inconsistencies in East Indian understandings of child-rearing, nevertheless, exist predominantly in relation to specific well-defined aspects of grassroots pedagogy. It concerns interpretations of practices – beating or talking for instance – that are tangible and whose valuation can easily be distilled from messages in the media or which can straightforwardly be addressed by the promoters of different moralities. The basic philosophy or fundamental assumptions that underlie and structure the actions of parents and educators show higher levels of immunity against contamination with anti-traditional perceptions. As far as I can tell, these subterranean principles include a strong belief in the power of negative stimulation and the motivational value of fear, beliefs that can be regarded indigenous rather than pollution. In other words, most informants are convinced that threatening and frightening are extremely effective tools to make children do things or to prevent them from doing things.

The effect of my appearance on East Indian toddlers is an odd but interesting indication of the existence and effects of scare tactics. Far too often to be coincidental did encounters with me, a tall blond and very friendly looking white male, cause young Indian children to burst out in tears. Unlike their European peers and even unlike their Afro-Guyanese counterparts, these youngsters seemed irrationally horrified, sometimes so scared of me that they already panicked if they saw me from an absolutely safe distance. Greatly disturbed by such blunt and recurring rejection, I asked my Indian friends to explain these reactions. They laughed and answered it was all because of things parents and grandparents make the children believe. According to them, misbehaviour is prevented or combated by telling little people that disobedience or repetition will cause ‘white man’ to come and either abduct she or he from her or his safe environs or brutally end the bad habit.³³²

Besides being rather amusing, this example reveals an inclination of parents to cultivate and utilise fears to make sure their guidance is understood and completely absorbed. Another example of this inclination is the account of a thirty-one year old Muslim rice farmer and father of a young boy. He explained me how he teaches his child:

“People sometime, they can learn stuff, but they need forcing to do it, because you normally...especially with things that are not exciting, and I am

³³² My (East Indian) wife actually told me a similar thing happened to her in her early years. She was usually told that nail-biting, for instance, would cause white man to come and chop off fingers, and that overeating would make the man appear and stitch her mouth.

not a trained teacher, a trained teacher would make a boring topic exciting, and that is why I said in the States they have a better education system, you don't need that kind of force. [...] I had to teach this guy [his son] about electricity, he was four years old and pushing plugs in the points, right. I know I could not beat this man, he is too young, so I took the plug and pushed it in the point and faked a death, flat on the ground. And he mother said: you father dead. And then he become very, very afraid, so we had somebody to test him when he was playing again with the fan [ventilator], and they said come push it in here, and man he did not go, you know what I mean?" – *Interview, 16 February 2005.*

Mukesh, bachelor and key informant, once told me that these strategies are characteristic of the Indian way. He said: "they believe in deh kinda training, dem ah tink dis is the onliest way you can stop a child, touch dem up, frighten dem and holler 'pon dem." As far as he is concerned, parents will thus tell their kids to "be careful or do dis and det 'cause otherwise ol' man or *jumbee* [ghost] gone get you, or ting go knock you down on the street." According to him, people depend on these tactics because "they grow up det way"³³³. Mukesh himself thinks that children, instead of being scared, "mus believe in you" as a parent. That is why he prefers the white, Western, style of childrearing. He tells me: "in you country dey [the parents] will teach logic and then the truth come in dem."

Where exactly this East Indian fondness of scare tactics originates from is not clear. The country's educational system might have something to do with it but would affect children from all ethnic backgrounds rather than East Indians more than others. The inclination proves to be not very susceptible to the forces that have had great impact on the shape of other aspects of the cluster of understandings concerning the Indian family. The contrasting contemporary theories on the importance of reward and encouragement as motivators are acknowledged by my informants but cannot replace the 'dread-methods'.³³⁴ This shows that processes of modification are selective. It proves that subjects as well as their understandings are not simply subjected to reformative structures. In addition, it is an indication that the centrifugal effects of cultural processes affect certain areas of culture more than, or before, others. Cultural understandings, or collections of understandings, therefore must be seen as systems of dispositions that are characterised by internally variable levels of durability. In other words, what I read from my data is that some ideas and ways structurally show greater immunity against change than others. Surely, none of them is static but their innate dynamism varies. Differences in durability are not random or accidental but logical, an elementary part of the nature and evolutionary process of mental schemata in general.

³³³ Fieldnotes, 5 October 2003.

³³⁴ These methods are also successfully employed in the realm of politics in the form of fabrication of fear (see chapter 3).

Perhaps the best way to explain these logics is by returning to the themes of this chapter: friends, relatives and the notion of family.

A reason for differences in durability is hierarchy. A hierarchical organisation of schemas, related to needs or desires and – as will be further explained in chapter seven – linked to time of incorporation, allows certain notions and practices to be more stable than others. The East Indian series of understandings of family is a good example. It roughly comprises both a top layer and a deeper layer. The deeper layer consists of relatively durable basic principles that underlie interpretation of, and (re)action in, situations of social interaction. These principles, related to elementary desires, form a fundamental doctrine that inspires people's assessment of relationships and the way in which they fashion them. As discussed throughout this chapter, values such as cooperation, cohesion, and collectiveness are important parts of this particular deeper layer. Besides, also certain concepts of hierarchy, happiness, and – as we have seen in the previous section – pedagogical principles belong to this subsurface level.

The more flexible top layer of the East Indian understandings of family is founded upon these values, concepts and principles. It is a realm of conscious and often strategic reading and acting, an area where exponents of cultural understandings materialise. The urge to consider and treat non-related significant others as fictive kin is an example of a collection of well-defined thoughts and practices that germinated from deeper levels that are less vulnerable to processes of transformation. Another example is the widespread East Indian preference for scare tactics as a pedagogical method. The inclination to frighten children with stories, often make-believe, and to motivate them with the promise of punishment rather than reward, is founded upon ethnically typical principles and premises that have been incorporated in the individual's early childhood.

These relatively stable deep-seated principles – formed at an early age and slowly evolving ever since – cannot prevent thought and action on the surface from being affected by models from the wide range of cultural complexes of contemporary East Indian daily life. Relatively rapid innovation (first) takes place at this surface.³³⁵ In fact, on that more cognisant level, alternative perceptions and forms of behaviour are offered wholesale. From an extensive assortment of usually ardently advertised options, called superior because of their higher levels of piety, authenticity, or modernity, the actor 'selects' the ones that he thinks suit him and his purposes best. These more or less consciously made choices are motivated by the urge to fulfil particular desires. East Indians choose to adopt Arabic or North American modes of dress partially because it helps them to express an image they have selected for themselves, as a tool for social positioning. And they display

³³⁵ Interaction between external cultural complexes and internalised understandings largely takes place via the flexible top layer. Deeper and more stable aspects of cultural complexes manifest in the top layer but do not necessarily have direct impact on individual understandings. Deep-level transformation often occurs in interaction with top layers. Exchange between particular philosophies can thus be slow and not straightforward.

unconventional ideas on child- and parenthood not only for pragmatic reasons but also because it is assumed that these altered visions belong to the civilised and modern world they want to be part of.

All in all, it can be said that the strategically operating East Indian individual now has gained access to more modes and instruments to define her- or himself than she or he had ever before. Alien forces, pushing processes of purification, westernisation, re-Indianisation and creolisation, have caused the whole of East Indian practices to become increasingly multifarious and fragmented. The way East Indians shape their friendships and structure their family life is seriously affected by transformations that take place in their environment. Yet, conceptual changes are only partial. The realm of parenthood is an interesting illustration. Matters of hierarchy explain contemporary cognitive and behavioural ambiguities in this realm. It is because of hierarchical differences that, whilst the social definition and execution of East Indian parenthood is increasingly equivocal and becomes more and more an expression of social stance, East Indian grass roots pedagogy remains remarkable constant and uniform. In other words, parenthood as a role, or as an instrument of social positioning, is relatively transformative because it belongs to superficial hierarchical levels where thought and action are more conscious and strategic and aimed at the satisfaction of lesser needs. Pedagogy, instead, concerns the implementation of parenting fundamentals; values that are directly linked to early internalised principles positioned at deeper hierarchical levels, and thus show far more resilient to change.

I will further explore and explain these matters of hierarchy and durability in chapter seven. Before I move on, however, it is important to recapitulate the essences of the sections above in a final few paragraphs. What can really be learned from the Indian foci of friendship and principles of parenting?

6.3 Schemas as networks of exchange

In various ways do East Indian Foci of Friendship and Principles of Parenting, the whole of understandings about the various types of supportive social relationships, comprise a field of meaning and practice in which different aspects of the configuration of these cognitive structures become clear. As indicated in the introduction, this chapter's aim was to expose the interconnectedness and layeredness that characterises form and functioning of understandings in the realm of kinship.

Two important features of this interconnectedness were highlighted. In the last section, I have introduced the issue of hierarchy, and have linked it with stability and change. In the early parts of this chapter, I have examined connections between schemata concerning apparently separate fields of perception and practice. By means of the analysis of dealings with non-related others and of the connections between family members, I

have tried to reveal the importance of the cross-application of certain collective conceptualisations.

In the first section of *Foci of Friendship, Principles of Parenting*, cultural aspects of extra-familial association were examined. Discourse and behaviour of East Indians, in the context of the village and the religious sphere, indicate that kinship ideals still play part in the way East Indians shape and value relations with proximate others such as neighbours and fellow believers. Especially members of the older generations, and those who – in the previous chapter – I have labelled classicists still frequently employ concepts of fictive kinship in social interaction. Overall, however, the relevance of these symbolic ties is on the decline. New interpretations of companionship gradually come to substitute the existing ones, particularly in the case of every day interaction. Processes of transformation have undermined both the economic and social basis of old-time conceptions. Altered interpretations of the East Indian self in the world (see chapter five) have triggered transformation of the family metaphor. Ethnic and religious activists have embraced notions of symbolic siblinghood and utilise them in their quests for cultural preservation and religious revitalisation.

In face-to-face contact, the significance of traditional family ideals has dwindled. New objectives, often connected to concepts of pleasure, have challenged the old values of collaboration and cohesion, and fostered the deterioration or even complete breakdown of longtime institutions of fictive kinship. In fact, interpretations of actual family relations suggest prominent Indian family ideals are even under siege in the realm of family life itself. As described under 6.2, especially contemporary understandings of parenthood and pedagogy show high levels of eclecticism and inconsistency. Principles of unity and cooperation within the extended kin group, as well as gender and intergenerational hierarchy, coexist with focuses on the nuclear family and notions of equality. Concepts and practices are the products of a constant negotiation of ideologies and actualities. The field of child rearing demonstrates this in a very informative way. As the balance of power between parents and their offspring is shifting, and the children's influence is growing, East Indian fathers and mothers hover between traditional authoritarianism and modern-day egalitarianism. Modelling, training through exemplary behaviour, and the utilisation of anxieties, are both considered effective means of upbringing. And ideals of verbal problem solving or reprimanding, and confidence in physical penalising, exist side by side.

Internalisation of compliance and dutifulness are often said to be the prime objectives of parental instruction. Yet, the establishment of affectionate and almost friendship-like open relationships with their kids is pursued by many of today's East Indian parents. Actually, whereas family ideology and fictive kinship used to be employed to structure relationships with non-related others, friendship ideology and symbolic comradery have now also been incorporated in practices and principles regarding family-life and parenthood. As such, there is an exchange of understandings between two interrelated fields of thought or meaning and practice. In the next chapter, I will continue

my investigation of exchange and the systemic and interconnected manner in which understandings or schemata are arranged and function. To be precise, I shall further examine the anatomy of systems of understandings, argue the analytical need to define them as *cultural constellations*, and explore the relationship between hierarchically different parts of those systems. I will thus analyse different expressions of life partnership with various levels of durability and various levels of importance.

CONSTELLATIONS OF AFFECTION

*Love, Sexuality, Life Partnership, and
the Configuration of Cultural Understandings*

“You are not having sex because it is deh fuh you to do, you have to have it with your, okay you do dis ting with love, you nah go do it like one puppy, you do it with love. The two ah you, okay, well okay, we go to bed, we gaff, we talk and so, and then eventually...” – (Woman 1)

“I tink det the two party have to have det kind of understanding, and it is not something well okay me gaffa do it to please him, you go do it from yuh heart. It is a duty, you marry him for that, you not marry him fuh look at he face, right, you do it with love, right...” – (Woman 2) *Focus group interview, 13 November 2003.*

Sexuality, according to my informants, is far more than merely an act of reproduction. In many ways, sexuality as a complex of notions and practices indicates the state of Indianness in Guyana today. It is the concept of an act connected to contested ideas about love and affection, it is an expression of changing cultural notions of gender roles and obligations in the context of partnership, and a token of a turn to hedonism triggered by (post-)modernity. It can even be an expression of spirituality and the execution of a divine ordinance.

Understandings about sexuality, as all understandings related to life partnership, are part of larger networks of understandings that operate in a cooperative fashion. Already in the introduction of the previous chapter, I mentioned the intricate way in which such systems of understandings are organised. As D’Andrade (1992:30), I believe these understandings – or schemas as he calls them – are arranged in a hierarchical way. Interpretations of and reactions to relatively ‘small’ experiences can be motivated by goals which belong to influential *deep-rooted schemas*.³³⁶ Thought and practice in the realm of

³³⁶ Roy D’Andrade (1992:30) refers to these as ‘top-level’ schemas.

marital sexuality are guided by conceptualisations of love. And the way friendship and family life are fashioned is inspired by more general ideas and ideals concerning social interaction.

In practice, elements of those deep-rooted understandings form an intrinsic part of the individual's understandings on the surface. Without underlying notions of cohesion and cooperation, East Indian friendships and kin relations would not have been assessed and shaped the way they are right now. As such, besides regarding schemas or understandings as separate entities that function in network formations – as described in the previous chapter – you can also see them as network configurations themselves. Collective understandings about friendship are not only tied to shared understandings about family, they consist of a range of interlinked notions of varying importance as well. Hence, to comprehend the relationship between thought and practice and between the actors and settings in which they operate, I cannot do anything but to focus on ideational networks and consider all loci of thought and practice to be structured by particular schematic systems organised in specific ways.

From here on, I will label these systems *constellations*.³³⁷ Like individual schemas or understandings, these complexes of conceptions of varying hierarchical levels, serving mundane as well as inner goals, reveal a degree of collectiveness. The existence of a body of shared experiences that people accumulate living their lives in comparable circumstances guarantees the establishment of congruencies in the constellations of different people: the cultural air in the East Indian mind and practices that is the subject of this book.

The introduction of the term constellations as a concept that supplements the notions of understandings and schemata within this research's theoretical framework is desirable as it helps to recognise and emphasise a feature of internalised culture that, so far in this dissertation, has proven pivotal if contemporary cultural processes in Indo-Guyana are to be explained: *conditioning interconnectedness*. As chapter five and six have revealed, and as this chapter will show, interconnectedness is an existential characteristic of the various manifestations of East Indianness. Understandings are never established in isolation. They are mutually constitutive, can exist as complimentary mental structures (chapter five), and are mutually inspirational, they can form cross-fertilising systems of exchange (chapter six).

It is the way in which understandings are collectively reproduced and modified that caused me, at the end of the last chapter, to differentiate between the top (surface) and the deeper layer of joint forms of human perception and expression. Interconnections, I argued, are not necessarily balanced. Cultural constellations – as shared directive complexes of thematically related emotions, tendencies, associations, and *understandings* – comprise various hierarchical levels. These various levels, the hierarchical differences, and imbalanced interconnections, are crucial in processes of cultural production today. It is a trait of constellations that further helps to explain the coexistence of reproductive and

³³⁷ In psychology, a collection of related emotions, tendencies, ideas, associations, etcetera, centring around a dominant element or theme.

innovative tendencies, the flexible applicability of cultural understandings, their ability to adapt to and survive in altered circumstances, and the East Indian's position as cultural composer.

Innovation is most apparent at the constellation's surface, in the realm of action and more superficial goals. This realm is characterised by high levels of interpersonal fragmentation and intrapersonal variation. The growing abundance in available models of thought and behaviour in this layer causes the ways of the East Indian collective to be less coherent – not less East Indian – than ever and allows the individual to browse for concepts that suit her or him best at a given place and moment in time.

Deep-rooted goals that underlie mundane reasoning and acting, and are situated in the subsurface layer, are less susceptible to change. These concern principles, desires, and basic values that touch the more elementary needs of mankind, have required satisfaction from the beginning, and are thus firmly rooted in people's early experiences. Naomi Quinn (1997:189), in a chapter on the basics of marital love, designates this a specific order of shared experiences. Whilst some collective understandings derive from frequent performance of similar every day tasks, she states that others are acquired very early through infantile experiences.³³⁸ According to her, these understandings are relatively "indelible and unusually motivating because [they are] learned so early and in the context of the exceptionally strong feelings, related to their survival and security, aroused in infants" (Quinn 1997:189). In her assessment of the psychodynamic foundation of conjugal love, Quinn argues that married love "is a 'refinding' in just the sense that Freud (1962:88) viewed adult love as the refinding of the early love relationship" (Quinn 1997:190). She explains that the expectations her (American) subjects have that:

[...]marriage is to be shared, lasting, and fulfilling match their understandings that people who love each other should be together, stay with each other always, and fill each other's needs. These ideas about love, in turn, revert to the infant's earliest anxieties about being one with the caretaker, not being abandoned and being cared for. It is from this psychodynamic complex that these expectations gain their motivational force as well as their durability for individuals. And it is because the early experience resulting in this psychodynamic complex has been substantially shared, as are later experiences about adult love and linking it to marriage that Americans share an understanding about marriage in terms of love (1997:190).

In this seventh chapter, the progressive investigation of processes of cultural production in Indo-Guyana will continue with an analysis of the system of understandings that forms the East Indian concept of partnership. Like Quinn, I believe that concepts of sexual and/or

³³⁸ Naomi Quinn (1997) supplements cognitive anthropological insights with notions from psychodynamic theory in her analysis of understandings about marriage.

spousal relationships are linked to ideas about love and security that are learned at a very young age. Understandings about these concepts, linked to premature urges to survive, are thus extraordinarily motivating and persistent and will cause notions and practices concerning marriage and companionship to be relatively stable despite them being constantly challenged by the forces of change.

In the first part of this chapter, the fabrication of matrimonial and non-matrimonial partner relationships will be examined. This segment comprises descriptions and interpretations of the East Indian impressions of sexuality and of the way my informants talk about and shape their partner relations and roles. It entails an investigation of continuity and change in everyday practice and perceptions regarding a specific range of understandings and goals in middle and surface layers. Through the analysis of issues like hierarchy, and masculine and feminine rights and responsibilities, processes of fragmentation or differentiation as well as conservation and revitalisation that take place in the surface layer will be elucidated.

In the second part of this chapter, the connection between that surface layer and the layer below that surface will be explained. This will be done by exploring (a) what is the impact of the development of dynamic surface and middle level understandings on the formation of elementary underlying principles and goals, and (b) what is the effect of these comparatively durable principles on the individual's motivation and action in surroundings that are in a state of flux. In other words, the latter half of this chapter is used to show how changing East Indian understandings about partnership and sex slowly but surely stir transformation in the underlying concepts of love and security. In addition, it will include an attempt to detect the influence of these robust concepts on the interpretation of partnership and sex by East Indians who live in a world where these concepts not always seem to be the most appropriate or sensible ones.

7.1 Dissecting partnership: expressions of companionship and sexuality

I guess it was somewhere in February 2003. It must have been lunchtime, since I remember my friends and I were on the porch of the house in front of the furniture workshop. We always used to sit there and chat during lunch hour. I loved the porch and its people. It was clean, shady, and cool all day thanks to the constant Atlantic breeze. Besides, a fortunate twist of fate had caused there to be a king-size double bunk bed. It was a workshop product left there because the ambitious sleepers who once ordered it had found out their home was just too small to house such a royal bed. Now, the bed was at the disposal of residents and visitors. It had become a divan of dialogue on which every day one or two of us would lie down and talk about the matters that matter while the others would sit on the floor, listen and butt in.

I laid down on the divan that day, we debated love and marriage. The joiner with whom I shared the bed had just told me he could not go through with it. ‘The project’, as he habitually called it, was unfeasible, something that he could no longer agree with. I teased him, reminded him of the consequences for my research and of the promise he had made. Less than two months ago, the joiner had told me that he would soon find himself a wife and marry her Indian-style for the sake of my investigation of his culture. At first I thought he was kidding. But when a delegation of four came to his parental home to investigate the possibilities of marriage between him and a seventeen year-old girl, I realised it was serious business. Even more so after the joiner later called me with the message that he and the girl had met and that he had agreed to marry her. Then, I had been pretty sure he indeed would marry, and I, friend and investigator of Indian culture, would get front row seats to witness every event and ritual on the joiner’s road to nuptial bliss.

What really had made him call off the entire thing was not sure. Everything went according to plan: The day after the first meeting between the relatives of the girl and the joiner’s family, the groom-to-be went to the opposition’s house to meet and greet his prospective bride. He had asked her parents permission to speak to the girl and – so he assured me – questioned her thoroughly on topics such as marriage, wifehood, and family life. Content with the girl’s answers, he had then told her father to schedule a next get-together with his family, finalise the negotiations, and start preparations for the *vivaha samskara*, the Hindu wedding. He obviously wanted to marry this young lady. Nevertheless, things seem to have gone a little awry from then on. At their next meeting, the bride’s relatives asked the joiner to sign the papers that would officially unite the partners-to-be and thus secure the pact that would not be executed until the religious marriage planned for August of that year. Only after the performance of such a little valued but binding legal wedding could he and his future wife court and get to learn more about each other. Decide first, bond later. I guess this demand caused the joiner to reconsider the whole project. He postponed the signing and probably spent the next few nights contemplating the sensibility of this endeavour.

Laying on the divan that February day, the joiner said he went to the girl’s parents the afternoon before and told them he will not marry their daughter. He did not speak to his ex-bride. I asked him what really made him cancel the wedding. The joiner answered with a sigh, shook his sawdust-covered head, and explained his motivations. “Man, duh whole ting nah look right, it cyan’t wok. Dem people ah wan fuh push you into dis ting. Me nah able wih det.” According to him, the basis of the ‘project’ was not right. And if the basis is wrong, it can never be a success. Besides, the joiner explained, he does not know how to handle a massive venture like this. In furniture business you only deal with short term projects, marriage is something of an entirely different and unfamiliar magnitude. How do you approach this? How do you approach the incalculability of the outcome of such an endeavour, and how do you deal with the loss of freedom that inevitably comes with gain of the companionship? “Man, me nah wan fuh tink about it no more...” The

joiner turned on his right side and took a bite from a slice of the overripe and juicy papaya that his mother had just shared out. “What you go do dis affenoon Hansee?”

April 2005, in my electronic mailbox I find a letter from the joiner. In the de-creolised English that tells me he urged a friend to type his words, he asks me to explain what I meant when we discussed love and marriage during my stay in the field a couple of weeks earlier. “How can you say marriage is great but seldom perfect, what do you mean you will have to learn to be a good and understanding husband?” I remember the conversation we had a night just before I left Guyana. The joiner agreed to talk about anything as long as he could be both the interviewee and interviewer. We sat down on old chairs in the workshop and debated life and love. As promised I shared my views, and told him about the rewards of partnership, trial and error, and about the requirement of determination and acceptance of each other’s imperfection. It seems as if he had thought about it and wanted to reply. Perhaps, despite his opinion, the joiner’s romanticised idea of married life is not all that different from mine:

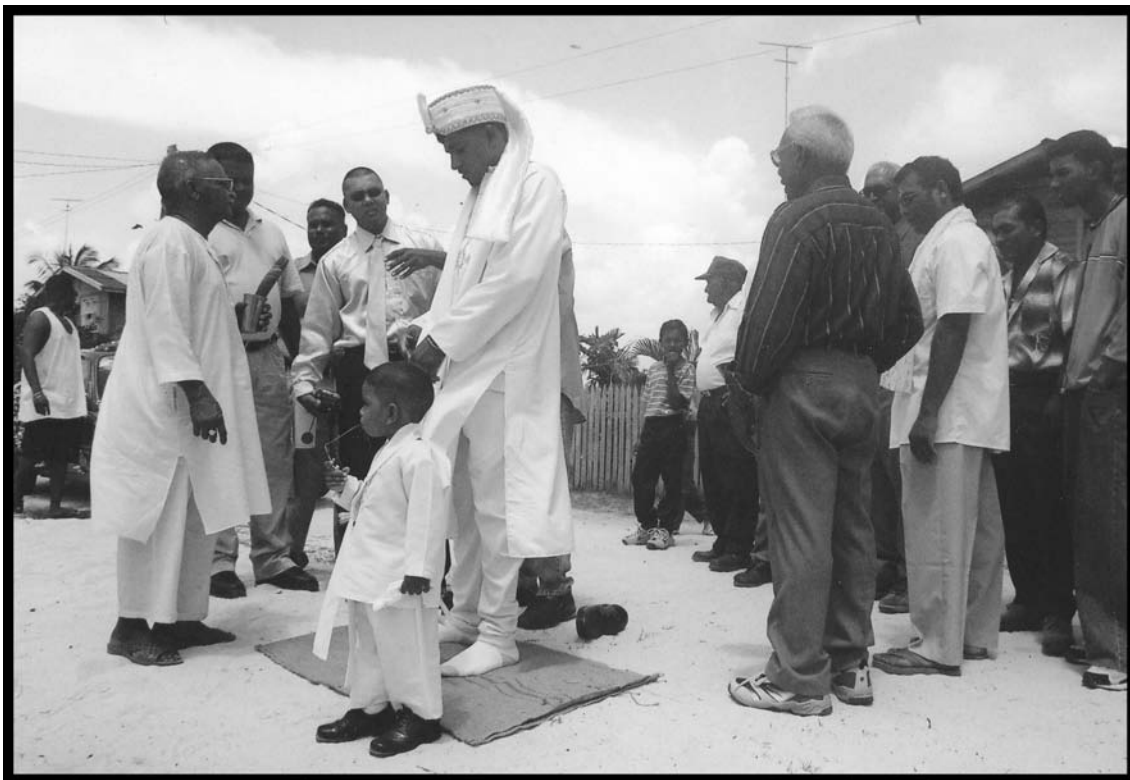
“Those words that you mention about marriage and relationship is not what I think about how a person should live. I think when a person marries they should never have a problem in their relationship. I think when two person reach out to each other they must understand each other to the highest extent that each person should be their natural identity or self. When one should think about a person and think they love his or her, they should accept all the different behaviour and all the different styles within their whole life. If a person think that they love another person they should never saw a mistake on that person. You told me nobody is perfect but I think that if you love someone that person is perfect.” – *Email, 10 April 2005*

Love allows you to overlook flaws, maybe he is right, but I am inclined to believe not all partners – even those in Guyana – let love inspire them to pardon all of each other’s shortcomings. Only in an ideal world, I guess the one of a romantic bachelor joiner, love is unconditional and marriage is without problems. I click on the ‘reply’ button and start my answer. I explain my friend what I really meant the night I told him about love in practice, and wish him all the luck and wisdom required on the quest he forgot to mention in his mail but that I was briefed about by a mutual friend: “...I hope you will find someone that will love you and care for you the way you plan to love and care for her.” Although our visions of the nature of love somewhat resembled, his strategy of how to find the love of his life was not something I had ever tried. The mutual friend had told me the joiner had revived his project and is out there right now analysing candidates and perhaps, if ‘some’ting ah look right’, negotiating with her and her parents to make his love happen.

After my reply I store the joiner's mail in the file devoted to chapter seven. I might use it in my book. It is a wonderful illustration of the functioning of cultural understandings in a sphere of partnership I had long decided to devote a section to: the art of selection.

7.1.1 Processes of partner choice

I think an investigation of ways and ideas about the selection of life partners is the best way to start the analysis of the cultural content of East Indian partner relations. Like the example above indicates, people's strategies, explanations, and choices provide important clues about their desires, notions, and expectations. My friend's romantic concept of marital love together with his faith in the strength of logic and reason as selective devices, suggests a belief in the manufacturability of that romantic love. The joiner is convinced that choice should not just depend on the existence of an intangible and unexplainable spiritual connection between two individuals but should be based upon careful examination of candidates. True love, expressed in complete acceptance and ultimate adoration, will naturally follow an adequate rational decision to give it a try.



Wedding party on arrival at the bride's parental home

Despite the joiner's 'untraditional' desire to establish a superior and lasting kind of romantic love, his perception of partner choice is influenced by conceptions of selection that – in Guyana – are regarded typically Indian. Perhaps the exemplary marriage between

his parents has cultivated the joiner's confidence in the viability of choice founded on reasoning and negotiation. His conservative mother told me that she and her husband got married almost forty-two years ago and 'never' had problems despite the fact that she only got to know him after the wedding day. "When me been marry he daddy, me nah been know he," she said. The wife of the village's wealthiest man and biggest employer had set it up, a reasonable choice not affected by the interference of irrational attraction.

A belief in the desirability of arranged marriages is indisputably part of the Indian nuptial tradition. Fixed partnership is uncommon among Guyana's other ethnic groups. The concept especially opposes African notions of life partnership, notions which award a lower status to formalised union, and narrate of quite different interpretations of gender roles and responsibilities.³³⁹ It is an imported South-Asian perspective that was challenged ever since its arrival with the indentured labourers in the nineteenth century. According to Barrow (1996:346), "the Indian tradition of [arranged] child marriages [even] was one of the first to be compromised and changed as marital patterns were accommodated to Caribbean mainstream culture." She quotes Rauf's investigation of cultural change and ethnic identity in an Indo-Guyanese village as evidence of a transition to a freer choice of marriage partner:

[...] whereas the members of the older generations still see merit in the old practice of arranged marriage and support it on the grounds that arranged marriage is part of the East Indian tradition and that it also provides more security, the younger generation tends to emphasize that love is the main principle on which the life partnership should rest and the family should be developed. In the absence of love the life between the husband and wife is absolutely meaningless and vulnerable. Such a life leads to domestic strains, tensions, divorce, and occasionally to suicide (Rauf, 1974:81).

A similar trend is noted by Nevadomsky (1982/3) in an article on changing conceptions of family regulation among Hindu East Indians in a Trinidadian village called Amity:

Arranged marriages used to be the norm. Today, most marriages are based on free personal choice. In the village, 66% of the married women under 35 years of age chose their own spouses in contrast to only 17% of the married women over 35. Personal choice is to be expected where emphasis is placed

³³⁹ As many other aspects in the field of kinship and gender, notions and practices concerning partner choice are highly cultural. And so is the concept of marriage. Bell (1996:362) suggests that marriage (in Trinidad) is more important to East Indian women than to African women. Within African circles, there is a higher percentage of unmarried women and single mothers. Marriage is less of a social obligation in the Afro-Guyanese community, illicit children are far less a source of shame, and the role of the husband and father is not well defined.

on the affective bond between spouses, and young people have considerable freedom of movement in and out of the community. (1982/3:192)

The movement towards increased control of the partners-to-be over the process of selection, already mentioned by these authors several decades ago, should not be regarded an indication of the complete departure from an ancient tradition. As Barrow (1996:347) also states, “in practice, young partners [continue to] seek the consent of their parents.” And she is right. Even contemporary adolescent and educated informants acknowledge they need (want) their parent’s approval and blessings before they will ever tie the knot. In fact, despite existent cravings for romance, numerous eligible East Indians do not only desire the involvement of non-eligible others in the process of partner selection, they are willing to enter a relationship fixed because of deemed matching relevant criteria as well.



Hindu bride and groom in the nuptial tent ('maro')

Contemporary forms of arranged partnerships – ‘match weddings’ as they are generally characterised in Guyana – are particularly common in certain segments of the East Indian society. Many of them involve partners from lower social strata. Especially in rural Essequibo, it continues to be fairly normal for a poorly educated teenage girl from comparatively chanceless environs to be hooked up with an (often much older) bachelor labourer with a similar meagre background. As a middle-aged woman noted during a focus group session, in Indo-Guyana “rich ah go fuh rich, and poh (poor) ah go fuh poh.” The

economic burden of providing for an adolescent child, but even more so a fear of eventual unmarriageability of a poor girl, fuel the practice of arranged and early marriage in these circles. It seems as if it is believed that untainted youthfulness is one of the few attractions these female children have to offer: marry young or marry none.

Quite a different motivation to abstain from romance guided decision making is apparent in middle class surroundings among families with specific religious orientations. Despite the decline of the caste system, Brahmins continue to propagate varna-endogamy and arrange life partnerships to ensure the continuation of Brahminhood. Most self-proclaimed Brahmin pundits I have asked claim to have Brahmin spouses and assure me they will at least try to make their sons marry a female from similar echelons. As a priest explained:

“A Brahmin is supposed to marry a Brahmin, a Chatree is supposed to marry a Chatree, a Vaish is supposed to marry a Vaish, a Sudra is supposed to marry a Sudra, right? Because you will find the way a Brahmin will think of things or will look at things, another nation will not look at it that way, they will have a different perspective over it. The feelings of a Brahmin will be different to a Chatree, there are differences. But when that Brahmin marry a Brahmin, the feelings will actually be direct there, it is only as the date is correct.³⁴⁰ But actually you will have a closer something than a person who marry a next caste.” – *Interview, 10 December 2003.*

Such arranged and endogamous partnerships are pursued and established by people of all ages. Besides aged believers, I have met teenagers who also stressed the importance of intra-caste marriage, and know young pundits with carefully selected Brahmin wives.

In essence, the views of these Hindus resemble the notions advocated by many of the East Indian Muslims. They too prefer (their children) to marry people of comparable religious milieus and believe in strategy and negotiation to make that happen. According to them, the help of parents is required to make the right choice. As one imam told me, ideally “good children wait on their parents to see partner for them [...] because parents have experience in life and they will naturally select good people as partners for their children.”

Fixed partnerships are especially common in revitalised Islamic circles. Numerous Muslim informants consider it evident that their spouse, or the spouse of their children and grandchildren, is selected through a rational process in which the parents, the imam, and the broader religious community play an important or even decisive part. In those instances, the first step towards matrimony is often taken by the (boy’s) father or imam

³⁴⁰ A Hindu wedding in Guyana is usually planned after consulting the *patra* (almanac) for the right date. It is important to perform the actual ceremony on an auspicious day known as *lagan*. Every month there are several lagan. If a wedding is not performed on a lagan day, misfortune is bound to occur.

who carries a wedding proposal (*ejaab*) to the opposition's parental residence. Successful negotiations between mutual parents, followed by the brief introduction of both marriage candidates to one another, then will have to lead to the decision to carry out a nikaah³⁴¹ and thus wed the two individuals. Many Muslim fathers and children assured me this is the way they have done it or will eventually do it. Even those who are less conventional and consider selection and choice their own responsibility – and merely seek parental acceptance afterwards – often regard consensual union to be the desired kind. Yussuf, a twenty year-old Muslim bachelor with turban and gown, explained me how he would like to choose for himself:

“If I am working at a place and I see this girl, if I am working and I see this girl that looks like this, alright? I would investigate some outside, yes, in secret, inquire about her. Also I would look she is not the girl, that no boys come to her home and she does not go out and so. Of course when I see these thing, that she is the girl that I am looking for then I will develop that love for her. [...] You look at her character, her behavioural style, and of course then I will develop, well say alright this is what I am looking for, develop that love for her, and you will go and meet the parents, alright, and say Salamu Alaikum or good afternoon, um, I have seen your daughter and I am interested in her, and you know, she seems to be a good girl, so...and you make your proposal there.” – *Interview, 29 January 2005.*

According to Yussuf, courting is unlawful. He and many other Muslims feel that the bride and groom should not be together without the supervision of senior relatives before the actual wedding. Even during the period of engagement (*Al-Khitbah*), after the acceptance and before An-Nikaah, neither physical contact nor privacy is lawful. In rural Guyana, this prohibition is taken rather seriously. Especially in the case of an intended wedding – which, in practice, requires an approach ideologically disconnected from the one towards casual (sexual) affairs – partners-to-be have to abide by religious rules and customs. Ibrahim, a particularly liberal Muslim, told me he could not be alone with his fiancé even though he really desired to. He, nevertheless, thinks a complex of cultural reasons rather than only doctrinal ones cause the East Indians to disdain the concept of courting. According to Ibrahim, “it is not normal for people to date in Guyana, it is like a criminal thing.” He believes this has prevented him from really getting to know the woman he was about to marry:

³⁴¹ Acceptance of the *ejaab*, known as *qabool*. According to CIOG's Moeenul Hack, the Hanafi school of thought allows either party to propose and accept. Officially, the proposal and acceptance have to be done in one single gathering: you cannot let time pass before answering. The *qabool* should be based upon agreement. It is unlawful to marry without the approval of the parents or the candidates themselves.

“I mean sometimes I wish I had that chance, or that sense to probably meet this girl away from the home. In other words, when you marry like that, most people, they have this term, you marry a pig in the bag, you marry somebody you don’t really know.” – *Interview, 16 February 2005.*

It appears as if he reckons both forced adherence to social rules and some sort of mental cultural entrapment caused him to opt for a strategy he now considers to be inferior. Lack of both chance and sense made him marry a girl he “did not know a lot of stuff about.”

Ibrahim wished it would have been different, that he would have had the opportunity to value the wife-to-be before closing the agreement. As an exposed and affluent Muslim East Indian, he regards dating an essential phase in the contemporary process of partner selection. And many East Indians agree with him. Except for those who support arranged unions because of pragmatic or religious and ideological reasons, and despite the survival of ‘match weddings’, the majority of eligible East Indians prefers nonnegotiable romantic love as the superior basis of nuptials.³⁴² Particularly within families who have risen above the lower social strata, who value higher education of boys *and* girls, and who have close relatives in North America, are affection-focussed concepts of life partnership frequently expressed.

Interestingly enough, however, it is in these circles that the last and latest form of arranged marriage has emerged: the migration pacts. These pacts are silent agreements between first and second generation Guyanese East Indian (often male) residents of North America and ambitious and unmarried middle class locals in their twenties. Normally, they are settled after mediation of mutual relatives and acquaintances, or during a pick-a-partner visit undertaken by a bachelor migrant. Informants often judge these unions as manifestations of modern-day opportunism: little admirable and non-sacred bonds between girls that do just about anything to leave their seemingly futureless motherland and boys that somehow favour the attitude of partners moulded in non-western environs. Many parents and children, nonetheless, would consider such a pact. Despite its dubious image and widely recognised risky nature – “you are going into situations that you are not having any experience about” – it is a great opportunity to acquire ‘permanent residence’ in the North and possibly provide your close ones with virtually unobtainable U.S. or Canadian visas.

The popularity of migration pacts among the least traditional East Indians indicates that the ideal of romance based companionship is not deeply rooted. Images of economic betterment, or American dreams cultivated by media and migrants, blur visions of true and everlasting love. Undoubtedly, romantic cravings are, were, and will continue to be experienced by East Indians as much as by me and my fellow Europeans. Yet traces of an ancient rationality enable pragmatism to triumph over passion. It is as if these cravings and

³⁴² As one Hindu girl stated: I don’t believe in matched things, I believe you must know this person, you must love them and not like somebody is going and find someone for you, I don’t believe in that.”

their satisfaction belong to a sphere that can be disconnected from the realm of marriage. As if holy matrimony is not necessarily the domicile of romance. Or better, passionate life partnership appears to be a luxury, a delicacy that can be tasted if conditions are right, and one that is not hard to sacrifice if economic and social advancement are at stake. Romance and passion are part of a play performed by unmarried adolescents or can – if wanted, affordable and absent in marriage – be found in the form of extra-marital affairs.

7.1.2 Gender roles, relations and hierarchy

Uncertainties cause existential considerations to overrule love as a motive for marriage. The fear not to find any spouse, the protectionist principle of religious endogamy, and the desire to escape from delimiting or detrimental surroundings, all serve as reasons to let reason instead of love rule. Certainly, romance and passion have become more important drives in the process of partner choice than they were ever before. Courting or dating, although regarded impermissible by some, is no longer an uncommon phenomenon in East Indian circles. And love is indisputably most frequently mentioned by my informants as the basis of life partnership. Nonetheless, in practice, love, or romance and passion, can be outweighed by East Indian tradition and fuelled by people's feelings of marginality.

A similar inclination towards pragmatism is apparent in conjugal relations between certain East Indians. As the decision whether or not to marry someone, also the decision whether or not to stay married to someone is often motivated by social and economic concerns rather than affection. Shame or the fear of disgrace and a lack of practical escapes are very powerful justifications of continuation of a union, even if that union is a source of dissatisfaction and unhappiness. Numerous East Indian women choose to stick with their husband despite his unfaithfulness or recurrent abusive behaviour. Insecurity about the response of others, the unfavourable social position of divorced females, and uncertain economic prospects of single and little educated women are explicitly mentioned as grounds to bear with marital misery.

I remember how a lady in her thirties told me how much she hates her drunken and abusive husband, had even threatened to kill him, but could never ever leave him. She did not have any place to go: the house and house lot were gifts of her husband's family and could thus not be claimed by her³⁴³, and the money (U.S.\$ 60 per month) she made as a housekeeper was insufficient to provide for herself and her two student children. Lack of income and assets together with maternal responsibilities had shackled her, tied her to an unlovable husband and unlikable life in ways that are remarkably common in rural Indo-Guyana. Bear the unbearable is the motto of many, bear it for the sake of the children and because the world outside is more daunting than the thought of a pitiful future in matrimony. As a middle aged Hindu woman explained in a focus group interview:

³⁴³ In a sense, the Indian tradition to marry into a boy's family (and, subsequently, patrilocality) thus works to tie women to their husbands and leaves them practically possession-less, relatively dependent and subordinate.

“Ravi used to tek me tings and sell it, used to drink rum, do all sorts of things, put me out ah me own house with me little son. And me tell meself that I made the choice and I have to bear, and it is not nice det you lef this one here and that you go tek a next one, lef and tek, bear and one day God is going to hear you and God will mek he own decision. Thank God I bear, and I bear for me son sake. Now today I can reap the benefit, because he is a bit changed and he is more attached to me son more than me.” – *Focus group, 13 November 2003.*

The woman endured because of her son and because she had chosen to marry Ravi and bear his children. And she is one of many. In every village you come across young girls with small children and violent spouses. I remember how, on a day in 2003, a young woman came to our house with only her five-year old son and a plastic bag with a few dresses and some underwear. She told us she had been beaten, was the subject of her husband’s aggression ever since they got married, and could no longer deal with it. The woman said she wanted to leave, secretly flee to Trinidad where the man would not be able to find her. She asked for our assistance. After we had given her and the child a meal and some time to contemplate her plans, she and her little boy took a taxi, straight back home. Without money, documents and connections, there was nowhere she could go but there, hoping her husband would not find out about her and her plastic bag.

Although cases like these concern anomalies, the high incidence of abusive conjugal relationships indicates the existence of common inclinations and conceptualisations. These problematic bonds are like societal caricatures, exaggerated images of a normality that exists and is embedded in collective understandings rather than merely a logical consequence of a life in infertile habitats. Job scarcity, financial difficulties, and negative perceptions of the future alone do not explain why twenty-five percent of the East Indian households in Affiance is typified ‘abusive’ by local informants.³⁴⁴ They neither explain why nearly all Guyanese are – like me – convinced that abuse and violence are more widespread in the East Indian community than in the country’s African or Portuguese circles. Certain traits of the typical Indo-Guyanese family and typical Indo-Guyanese life must produce both an inclination to be violent and to accept being abused.

The most obvious example of such harmful characteristics of the East Indian society is alcoholism. According to victims and witnesses of domestic aggression, liquor and the classic East Indian inability to control its intake are main causes of problems in contemporary households. As one influential pundit stated:

³⁴⁴ Survey, 2003.

“Man ah still beat wife and one of the predominant factors is alcohol. People consume too much alcohol. If you look at other nations³⁴⁵ for instance, a Negro would go and drink a beer or two and go home. But an Indian would drink two bottle of vodka, and when they can’t drink anymore, then they go walk home.” – *Interview, 17 July 2003*.

And I agree. Heavy drinkers are among the principal perpetrators of verbal and physical violence within homes. And East Indians, more than other ‘nations’, are known to be far from moderate users of hard stuff like rum, vodka, and an ignitable substance called high-wine. Many East Indians drink a lot of alcohol. Residents of Affiance classify one or more members of at least thirty-one percent of the village’s households as excessive drinkers, people who are publicly drunk on a regular base. Many of them are abusive, and would curse their spouse, sometimes beat them, or even chase them through the Affiance backstreets.³⁴⁶

A next East Indian specific that induces the inclination to be violent and to accept being violated is the asymmetrical view on gender relations, the whole of hierarchical inequities that characterise the cultural construction of male and female characteristics in East Indian environs.³⁴⁷ Far more than gender relations between Afro-Guyanese, relationships between East-Indian males and females, irrespective of religion, show high levels of stratification. Economic dependence of East Indian women is greater, domestic and public spheres are relatively sharply separated in Indo-Guyana, and traditional post marital residence patterns (patrilocal) among the Indians weaken their hierarchical position.³⁴⁸

Few East Indians I have asked denied the existence of hierarchical differences between husbands and wives. The majority of Hindus and Muslims, men and women, consider males decisive authorities and females their subordinates. As a number of informants stated:

³⁴⁵ A word generally used to refer to varna, the caste background of people, and thus implies hierarchical difference. Here, interestingly enough, it is used to designate people of a different ethnic origin.

³⁴⁶ In the social map of Affiance, developed with the help of residents in 2003, 57 out of the 184 East Indian households are classified as units in which one or more of the members is a known alcoholic. Physical abuse is said to be prevalent in 18 households (9.8%), and informants classify 29 (15.8%) of the households units in which verbal abuse is common. Numbers indicate a definite correlation between alcoholism and abuse.

³⁴⁷ Definition of gender is based on Rosaldo (1980). A number of authors regard sexual asymmetry and inequality universal phenomena (e.g. Rosaldo 1974; Ortner 1974; Chodorow 1974). In literature on gender, this imbalance is explained by means of the introduction of analytical dichotomies (Yanagisako & Collier 1987). Ortner and Whitehead (1981:7-8) propose that these dichotomies – like nature/culture and domestic/public – derive from the insight that spheres of male social activity encompass spheres associated with females and is thus culturally accorded higher value. The (universality and applicability of the) dichotomies have come under considerable criticism. In the context of this section, nevertheless, the existence of a certain opposition between the East Indian female domestic realm and male public realm has to be acknowledged.

³⁴⁸ Gender status is linked to rules of post-marital residence and descent (Friedl 1975; Martin and Voorhies 1975).

“The man is supposed to be the head for the home.” - *Hindu woman*, 3 December 2003

“My husband is the head, I have no responsibility.” - *Hindu woman*, 22 November 2003

“Your husband, he would be the boss for you, and whatever you have to do I mean you should discuss with him.” - *Female Hindu teenager*, 23 November 2003

“A Hindu boy should always stay above the girl, because he must be the head of the home.” - *Hindu male*, 19 November 2003

“A boy or a husband planet is always supposed to be higher than his wife planet or a girl planet, because he is supposed to be the higher person.” - *Hindu male (on pre-marital horoscope reading)*, 10 December 2003

“The husband is always the head of the home to make vital decisions.” – *Muslim male*, 18 December 2003.

“Islam says the man is the head of the family, sometimes they would consult their wife, you know about certain things. They would normally ask their opinion, but they have the last say.” – *Muslim female*, 24 December 2003.

“Allah says man and wife are equal, equal rights, but man got little more, a degree more and that degree me, you can’t measure it, you know me can’t tell you how much that degree is, it can be little, it can be much, you know, but it is in the Qur’an.” – *Muslim male*, 30 July 2003.

These hierarchical imbalances are accepted and persistent because they are regarded both natural and lawful, a reality caused and justified by innate sex-related differences and divine orders laid down in the Hindu *and* Islamic scriptures.³⁴⁹ God has deliberately created man and woman physically and emotionally different because they had different purposes to serve. Whereas women were put in charge of the home and the bulk of domestic affairs, men dominate the public realms – areas that are valued higher and allow men supremacy over the other sex.³⁵⁰ In line with such natural order, there is no option but to grant man authority:

³⁴⁹ Exemplary is the following quote from the Hindu *Manusmṛiti*: “In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons. She is not to separate from her husband. Though destitute of virtue, seeking pleasure or devoid of good qualities, a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife.” (*V* 150)

³⁵⁰ In their analyses of Brazilian gender relations, also Scott (1996) and Rebhun (1999) describe the opposition between the femininity of the home and masculinity of the street. Robben (1989:575) argues that “a similar opposition can be found in ancient Greek and Hebrew and contemporary Islamic and Mediterranean cultures, with their progressions of parallel social categories such as public and private, inside and outside, modesty and display, honour and shame, loyalty and betrayal. He mentions the work of Abu-Lughod (1986); Antoun (1968); Arendt (1958); Benn and Gaus (1983); Moore (1984); Nelson (1974) and Peristiany (1965).

“I think god made us different. When you read the Ramayana it tells you, women are different from men. God made us different, emotionally, you know god gives man more control. Women, no matter what education she has according to our believe, she can be quickly persuaded to do wrong things. (Q: And you believe that?) Yes, because we have been seeing instances, you don’t know why, what is this woman short of to do this wrong thing, you know, but the tongue and words easily persuade them, although they may have knowledge. The Ramayana says if a lady just done pray and by chance she sees a man naked all her quality gone, she feels that she is overboard already, it shows you that ladies do not have much spiritual control [...] I think that in some way they are less able to control their spiritual emotions, their mental emotions, I think men are more effective in doing that.” – *Interview with a Hindu male, 19 November 2003.*

Whereas women are naturally “soft”, “gentle”, “emotional”, and “weak” (as well as opportunists, envious, and prone to gossip), men are natural born leaders. Males are strong, focussed and rational, and thus equipped to be leaders and heads of household. With such divinely ordained authority come specific responsibilities, tasks, and rights. According to a number of informants, the superior hierarchical position of the husband gives him the right, or even the duty, to exercise his power for disciplinary purposes. The possibly harmful effects of women’s weaknesses should be prevented by ensuring their obedience to the husbands. As an old Muslim friend explained me:

“If the wife is disobedient, the first thing that the husband has to do is to speak to her, show her out and so on, and remind her of her disobedience and so on. And if she persists, well then you might have to be a bit more aggressive by administering a few lashes on her. First you have to talk to her, and if she does not want to hear you can separate yourself from her to show your displeasure and if that does not work, you can give her a few strokes, not to injure her though, to let her realise that after all you are the head of the home and you are the superior person in the home, and she must be obedient to you.” – *Interview with a Muslim male, 18 December 2003.*

Something similar was stated by a Hindu pundit. As far as he was concerned, it can be acceptable to hit your wife, “not to hurt her, just to tap her and direct her.” Most informants, however, consider the directive use of physical force by husbands something archaic, a practice of the past that does not befit the updated civilised conception of gender relations. Although they might not reject the notion of male superiority, they label the pervasiveness of abuse in East Indian homes evidence of the illness of society rather than expressions of legitimate power relations. Their belief seems to be that specific traits of

men and women are qualities that are complementary and not grounds for dictatorial domestic relationships. Transnational connections established through migration and media, together with generally foreign instigated and financed local awareness programs³⁵¹, helped to cultivate an attitude towards marital aggression that is less tolerant than the one that is said to have prevailed a few generations ago.³⁵² Women especially, albeit sometimes caught in an abusive relationship because of practical constraints, have redefined their notions of what is tolerable. As the earlier quoted pundit slightly regretfully remarked:

“Years ago things that a wife would look and accept from a husband, it is not like today. If you say hi, she will say back hi to you, that is different. Years ago, no you can’t bark at your husband, no, whether your husband hit you, before you go to bed, you bow to your husband feet, today, according to Hinduism, today she will vex up for days, or even just jump in the car and go away for a few days, you know. And they are trying to actually be equal, which is different.” - *Interview, 10 December 2003*

Yet, despite a possible tendency towards greater gender symmetry triggered by the forces of modernity, East Indian understandings of gender roles and responsibilities within the context of marriage are comparatively conventional. Or rather, the forces of change have caused gender conceptions to become at least as ambiguous as the earlier described conceptions of friendship and family.³⁵³ Increased emphasis on their education, extended freedom and sway, and rising levels of economic participation, have not liberated the women from the weight of their traditional duties. As in many ‘emancipated’ western societies, East Indian wives continue to be ultimately responsible for child-rearing and domestic activities. According to one Hindu labourer:

³⁵¹ Like the mentioned Essequibean seminars on domestic violence funded by the U.S.-based Carter Center.

³⁵² Many informants claim their father used to beat their mother (e.g. interview 14 November 2003).

³⁵³ As noted, in East Indian circles, the male is still widely considered to be the primary or even sole provider. The lure of consumerism or the expansion of the monetary economy, combined with the poor economic conditions, nevertheless, have undermined the practical applicability of this ideal. Many men have partners with jobs. According to Rauf (1974:77), however, “the participation of women in the economic activity [however] has [merely] resulted in *de facto* modification of their status in society.” And I agree. Changes in practice have been “accompanied by the persistence of some basic cultural contents of the Indian system such as the continuity of basic status values (Rauf 1974:77).” The believe in inequity, nevertheless, is more controversial among certain groups. Revised ideas on intra-family hierarchy and responsibilities have inspired some to embrace alternative models of partner relationships, especially those who can be labelled Muslim neofundamentalists and modernists (Ch.5). Both groups attack the Indian approach to women, condemn the unfavourable status of the Indian female, and plea for female emancipation. Their strategies to realise such liberation, however, are quite different. Whereas neofundamentalists advertise pure Islam as the path leading away from undesirable inequity, and link emancipation with de-sexualising, the westernised critics of old Indian ways believe the exploitation of sexuality by females will bring them the autonomy and freedom of choice.

“She [the wife] got to see the home, you know clean the home, prepare the meal, see the clothes, everything that need in the house and dem kind ah thing. When somebody come deh and see a little sand, or a little food or all dem wears deh one place and dem kind ah thing, she got to be a good housewife.” – *Interview, 24 February 2005.*

The labourer told me that household skills and diligence, more than anything else, define a good wife. In fact, in front of his ‘wife’, he revealed that cleaning, cooking, and caring were the purposes for which he had decided to get a partner. After his divorce and two years of untamed bachelorhood in Georgetown, he realised he could not adequately look after himself:

“I came back and I tek [take] somebody now, because how long me gon get so? I need somebody to cook, wash and dem kind ah ting. Me nah able wih det, who go clean dis house and dem ting?” – *Interview, 24 February 2005.*

Hence, the labourer selected a suitable partner:

“I see dis girl there, I don’t care about niceness and dem kind ah ting, niceness nah all, beauty in fact nah all, deh where, deh whereabouts, you understand, she manners then and dem kind ah ting, denk kind ah ting you does got to look at. Nah go watch a woman beauty, deh nah the one. – *Interview, 24 February 2005.*

And approached her at her workplace:

“She deh working at the health centre, and I go in there and reach her, and she say man she can’t talk to me now, det this is not a private place, det she cannot explain everything to me. She say if you wanna reach she, go by she house. [...] So, I go deh, she invite me by she house, and I go there and I tell her what is me problem and dem kind ah ting. I told her everything, det I need somebody to just cook, wash and tek care of the house and dem kind ah ting, you understand? And she decide...cause how long she gon deh so? As a widow, she needs somebody. (Q: How come she needs somebody?) I mean she is a young girl...she need a partner, everybody need a partner in life...I tell she that I like she fuh be my wife, I can’t say man jus come home and live with me, deh nah go sound nice, you understand? Jus how she go say man, look I just want to use her get at her and leave her. So I explained and said, man I want you be me wife and bring along you kids wha you got, I gon tek care ah dem, and she did. I bring she in the house and meet she in

deh family then and all. [...] Well everybody say, me family dem say, it is the right move I mek, because how long me go be deh so?" – *Interview*, 24 February 2005.

Blatant and unquestioned practical motives inspired the informant to select and approach this relatively young widow for the purpose of union. And similarly blatant and unquestioned motives caused the young widow to agree. A form of perfect and unconcealed reciprocity. She would care for him and his house, and he, in return, offered her companionship and the welcome extra social and financial security.

Although seldom this obviously strategic and pragmatic, the example of the labourer and the widow outlines a broadly verbalised interpretation of (ideal) gender roles. As indicated, the usual job description of a wife comprises activities that revolve around cooking, caring, and cleaning. Both Hindus and Muslims regard it the wife's duty to prepare the daily meals, do the family's laundry, tidy up the house, and look after the needs of her children, her husband, and possibly resident aged parents. Likewise, it is believed to be the responsibility of the husband to provide financial and physical security. "The role of the man is to make sure he protects the family, he is actually the bread earner and the protector," "it is his duty to see that his family is well-protected, cared for, and he should get them the things that are so needed in the home." Hindus and Muslims of all ages consider it ultimately the responsibility of the male "to bring in the necessary finances and run the home." A husband has the moral obligation to give his spouse whatever she requires.

This obligation does not necessarily just concern the satisfaction of material and bodily needs. Most informants also acknowledge the existence of (feminine) emotional needs that should be fulfilled by males in the context of wedlock. The general East Indian understanding of conjugal relations – an understanding (still) connected to concepts of reciprocity³⁵⁴ – includes ideas about spousal responsibilities pertaining to the mutual satisfaction of 'higher' needs. Not only shelter and material security are the currencies with which care and catering is bought, also attention and affection have trading value. Love and cherishment are mentioned by informants as things a husband should offer his dutiful wife in exchange for her contributions. Furthermore, a husband has to be "very kind and polite, treat she [his wife] with respect, and don't cheat." He has got to make sure his wife feels appreciated, wanted, valuable, and adored. In rather sophisticated ways, based upon notions that do not derive from ancient texts, contemporary civilised men have to reward their wives for dutifulness – and vice versa of course. According to various women, a good man shows his affection and appreciation by doing something surprising or unexpected: buy a little present on his way home from work, or secretly prepare a nice dinner for two.

³⁵⁴ Obviously sex is also part of the package of marital duties. As Rebhun (1999) and Robben (1989) mention in their accounts of conjugal relations in Brazil, also in Indo-Guyana the sharing of the conjugal bed is an important obligation of the partners. I further discuss the (changing) role of sexuality in the following section.

As one Muslim girl stated, a husband has to find things he can do to make his wife “feel special”.

Certain males recognise the meaning of such efforts and the role of these in the establishment and maintenance of modified forms of conjugal relations, forms in which the value of affective and emotional aspects has significantly increased. I have heard men stress the importance of trying to understand one’s wife and her desires, and remember they have told me that showing interest or gratitude and the will to assist a wife with her chores will be lead to more ‘closeness’. Especially the former, the need to understand the fundamentally different other, is more and more part of the modern-day East Indian male’s narrative on marriage. They claim to realise women are very different, have specific needs that men might not really grasp but should accept and comply with. An example is the remark an apparently rather erudite young East Indian Muslim father made:

“And you got this book, forget who wrote this book: Men are from Mars and Women from Venus, I did not read out the book, but I read piece, piece, and that should be like the textbook, right, I think that is a good book. (Q: What does the book say?) Well it, a few things that I read, how, what a woman would like for you to say, never mind you would think it is total nonsense, but I never find time to read out the book.” - *Interview, 16 February 2005.*

According to him, the book – which he thinks should be the textbook for all brides and grooms – perfectly explains the unbridgeable mental gap that separates men from women: we will never be able to figure out each other because we figuratively come from different planets. All we can do is detect the differences, deal with them and give the opposite side what she or he seems to be in need of. Or, as the young Muslim father told me:

“Don’t do anything that would annoy her, right. [...] whatever she is doing, whatever is important to her, treat that with respect too. If you are working and she is not working, don’t make her feel inadequate where finances...say okay you don’t, you are not supposed to spend because you are not earning a dollar, because she is cleaning your house, right, you are getting sex for free, right? So, you are supposed to be fair with her, if she wants something and you could afford it, just give it to her. Because, okay, let’s say she is a housewife, it is boring to be in a house all the time. Okay what most people don’t understand is, okay she needs an outing, she needs to go out, so you do it together like [...] don’t entrap that person, because both of you are human beings, you don’t want to feel entrapped, from the time you feel entrapped, the person who is being entrapped would react, or rebel then and oh god you got problems...” - *Interview, 16 February 2005.*

In order not to get in trouble as a latter-day husband you thus have got to avoid irritating your wife, respect the things and people she thinks deserve to be respected, help construct her sense of worth, and give her what it is she wants (as she will give you what it is you need).

Responses like the one given by this young husband indicate that understandings about life partnership or marital reality nowadays are complex and multifarious. They are mixtures between the old Indian and the alien new. Altered yet vibrant traditional concepts concerning reciprocity and views on marriage as a strategic alliance now coexist in different blends with new, transformed, or invigorated notions of gender related urges, statuses, roles, and responsibilities. To what extent these current understandings precisely differ

from previously existing ones is practically impossible to tell. However, it is certain that the emphasis has shifted from marriage as primarily the institution for the realisation of material and basic human needs towards union as a way to attain more sophisticated forms of happiness, one that is based upon the simultaneous achievement of a range of goals at various levels.

In accordance, attention has slightly moved from the group and collective objectives towards the individual and personal needs. Gratification of one's own desires has become as much a gauge of nuptial success as the appraisal of family functioning. Increased divorce rates do not only prove the gradual establishment of improved opportunities for single women but also suggest transformations in expectations and the valuation of life partnerships. All these changes are



Cooking on a 'fire-site' ('chula')

brought about through interplay between creative individuals and their changing surroundings. Together they produce typical and localised understandings of durable relationships that could not have been the outcome of (cultural) processes in any other place or time. Migration, the importation of culturally infused goods and audiovisual produce, foreign attempts to bring economic, social, and moral 'development' to the underdeveloped world, and ongoing technological advancement have reshaped the East Indian's social environment and extended the world of models at their disposal.

The altered position of the (house)wife is an interesting example of the effects of intertwined forces of change (and complementary tendencies to continuation). As described, interpretations of the role and responsibilities of women reveal the existence of eclectic and ambivalent understandings based upon a mixture of conventional and unconventional beliefs. Expectations, explanations, and ambitions are coloured by efforts to enlighten the unenlightened and by the unfocussed marketing of modernity.

Televised drama, talk shows, and seminars on domestic violence have an impact on the discourse about marital aggression and affect people's definition of intolerable behaviour as well as their perception of conjugal relations.³⁵⁵ Likewise, missionaries of a purified Islam or an American-style emancipation in the form of scholarship students and returning migrants have brought about transformations in women's self-image and their position within families. As Dale Bisnauth told me, "emigration, out of the country, at the present time, is the greatest, has the greatest single influence, negative influence, on Indian family."³⁵⁶ According to him, the unprecedented and value-changing liberty East Indian females enjoy today is largely a side-effect of the Guyanese exodus. And to some extent he is right. Irrespective of the effects of the introduction of foreign ideas by travellers, migration has changed people's notions by changing family structures and the task of women. Labour migration caused single-parent homes to become far more common and boosted women's economic value. As nurses, housekeepers, teachers, or even prostitutes in the Caribbean and North America they can easily make more money than their ill-educated husbands back home.³⁵⁷



Preparing sacrificial food

Another development that has facilitated modifications in the domestic role of women is the spread of 'novel' technology, utilities, and products. Like a few decades ago in places such as Western Europe and North America, housekeeping in contemporary

³⁵⁵ In 2003, the U.S. based Carter Center together with the Airy Hall Women's Development Group, have organised three seminars and two community meetings on domestic violence. In addition, the Center trained and instructed local women to carry out a survey on domestic violence. According to the women of Airy Hall they have 'printed out' 250 questionnaires for this purpose. Themes of the seminars were: an introduction to domestic violence; understanding the gender-base of domestic violence; the web of abuse; and the domestic violence act. Local women formed the target audience of these attempts.

³⁵⁶ Interview, 14 March 2003.

³⁵⁷ The relation between economic developments and gender roles is noted by various authors. Rebhun (1999) describes the relationship between conceptualisations of love and economic change in Northeast Brazil, and Margolis (1984, 2000) links American economic needs to variations in gendered work, attitudes, and beliefs.

Guyana is becoming less and less time consuming. The recent establishment of a functioning running water system on the Essequibo coast has caused a sharp increase in washing machine sales. Although members of the older generations still openly doubt the machine's ability to wash spotlessly clean, I have visited quite a few upper and middle class homes where time consuming washboards were replaced by timesaving Whirlpools. Similarly, also culinary changes have enabled women to focus on more than just domestic chores. The introduction of new appliances and altered diets have caused a decrease in 'kitchen-time'. First of all, heating or preparing rice, curry and other dishes on the new gas stoves and in microwave ovens is faster and more convenient than cooking on the (still popular) earthen 'fire-site'. Besides, few people nowadays expect or demand the traditional breakfast. Rather than insisting on freshly baked roti, many prefer a slice of moist factory bread. No longer do mothers and wives of these bread-eaters have to wake up well before sunrise to prepare the day's first meal.

Adaptation to non-traditional consumption patterns, like the tendency to eat bread for breakfast but also the trend to buy snacks instead of preparing them, contributes to transforming traditional gender positions by making wife-work less demanding and creating time that can be invested in non-traditional activities. New tastes, however, have not had a great effect on the interpretation of gender roles or their responsibilities. Neither did the introduction of Laundromats and other apparatuses. In general, both East Indian men and women continue to hold relatively conservative views on the division of tasks within the household. Neither technological developments nor the introduction of novel notions through media and incoming messengers has instigated radical shifts in conjugal job descriptions. In fact, gender relations, in quite a number of ways, reveal how innovation often supplements rather than replaces traditional customs and concepts. The lasting strong and often conscious focus on the reciprocal basis of matrimony is a good example. Although my informants' conceptualisation of conjugally satisfy-able needs – which are the basis of reciprocity – has become more complex, it forms an essential part of an understanding of marriage that is not fundamentally different from that of my informants' parents and grandparents.

7.1.3. The actuality of sexuality

One area of gender relations that, at least according to many East Indians, has undergone profound changes is the area of sexuality. From a realm of thought and practice characterised by constraints, high levels of secrecy, and male centeredness, it has evolved into a realm in which openness is advocated and liberalisation has allowed the attitude of women to change. Especially changes in pre-marital sexual behaviour are often mentioned. A male informant even spoke of a genuine sexual revolution:

“Right now, I think right now Guyanese are going through a *sexual revolution*, like they had in the States in the sixties, Guyana is stepping up the pace to

that. (Q: Why do you think so?) Okay, when I was in school, if you hear about a boy and a girl having sex, that is like top of the line news, and right now about fifty percent of the girls already had sex, right now in high school³⁵⁸, right? They would try cocaine and marihuana, I mean right now a lot of them drink rum. To find a girl drinking, when I was in school, that was, I left school 1990, I was fifteen years old, girls don't want to drink, and fifteen years later alcohol is the stuff." – *Interview, 16 February 2005.*

Whereas allegedly sex used to be restricted to the marital phase, now it is explored and enjoyed by unmarried adolescents and even children. Critics state parental failure and moral degradation – which they often link to the impact of music and media – have stirred promiscuity among contemporary kids, and encouraged them to indulge in unsanctified and almost consumptive sexual relationships. Awakened cravings, together with demolished moral barriers, are said to have produced sexually active youths driven by lust instead of higher motives. According to a concerned teacher, "young people think far different from old people where sex is concerned." He mentions a system he calls hit-and-run:

"The young ones now, it is like, we got a system whereby dem boy hustling wih a ting called hit-and-run, since you hit you run, it is like a stage you are going through now, if they catch you [as a girl] lapsing they hit you and they lef you and deh gone deh way. If you dealing wit a group of people, you might find one out ah det group deh, let me say you got a group of twenty and you got five boys and fifteen girls, you might find one out ah det five hit duh whole fifteen duh whole group at fifteen he hit. Hit and run we does call it, because he nah hooked to nothing, you know, so he jus hitting and he is running." – *Interview, 7 February 2005.*

And, although the teacher's interpretation is somewhat inflated and moralistic, local boys and girls are sexually active at an early age. An increasing number of kids lose their virginity in cheap hotels, shabby sheds in the 'backdam', bushes, mini-buses, and school toilets way before they ever get married. Virtually all the male informants I have asked admit they had sex during their bachelor years. And also many unmarried Indian females are experienced.

An illustration of changing realities can even be found in Hindu ritual. The exclusion or alteration of *kanya daan*, the ritualistic presentation of the untainted bride by her parents at the Hindu wedding ceremony, indicates pre-marital intercourse has become more common or at least has become an undesired but accepted actuality. Several pundits told me reality nowadays frequently forced them to modify the Hindu wedding. The giving

³⁵⁸ Interestingly, there are no 'high schools' in Guyana, only secondary schools. Usage of the term suggests Americanisation of the vocabulary.

of a girl illicitly labelled kanya or pure namely is a “sin” with serious consequences for both the bride and her parents and thus should be avoided if possible. It is wrong, even blasphemous, to portray an impure girl as a virgin. As one pundit explained to me:

“Our girls are looked upon as beings who are sacred in marriage and if we can have our girls, according to our dharma, to do the right marriage, they say that is a great blessing to give kanya daan. But what happens now is that the parents sit down to do kanya daan and the girl already had intercourses many times, you know. So they are actually saying they don’t respect the dharma, morality is low, because you know this thing happened and it should not be done. (Q: What if you know about it?) If I know about it, I don’t do it. But then, I can only do that when it is a public, you know, when it is in the public. But I faced for instance, when a friend would tell me [INAUD] she had people before, but maybe people didn’t know and the parents are not yet ready to say that is so, what should I do. (Q: But it ever happened that you did not do kanya daan?) Yeah, many times we don’t do it now, as long as we are aware of it, we cut it out, we discuss it with the parents and tell them we have to leave out that, because you should not know that this thing is so and then go and do it too, that will be hypocrisy, that should not be.” – *Interview, 19 November 2003.*

Or, as a second pundit said when I asked him what the consequence would be of illegitimately performing kanya daan:

“You face up a lot of problems in your life, the marriage could not work out, that is one, two you would not have a happy life. (Q: So, you would skip it?) No, I would still go through the same process but the mantra would be changed, so nobody else can suspect, because it would look bad you know, if you just skip it like that. But there are some very truthful parents, that when I go to the wedding the morning, the Sunday morning, they say pandit you know, my daughter is not that much pure. I say okay fine. How you gonna do it pandit? I say when me done do it nobody nah know no’ting, it is just two words, kanya or *larki*, when you are doing it, you would do the same process, when you are doing it the girl would be sitting...(Q: Larki is girl?) Now a kanya refers to a young girl one and to a virgin, whereas a larki is just a girl. [...] The girl will sit on her father’s and mother’s lap on the pirha, the mother will put her hand, the father will put his hand, the boy will put his hand at the bottom, but the sankalpa now, if it is a kanya daan, you read it like this [...SANSKRIT] the word jajman means the person who is doing the service, pita, you call the father’s name, mata you call the mother’s name or

sri, you call that means the man's wife name, then you call you call the girl who is getting married, now in the case of a kanya you go say kanya ka nam, let's say Shanta and then you call the dullaha [groom] name, then you say kanya daan and maha daan, but in the event that it is not a kanya you say larki daan, barka nam, so, so, so she is being handed over as a larki not as a kanya. But what is just normally do is read that part so fast, I mean you have got to be really keen. So but you have some other priests who would not do that at all, they would skip that completely out, because I did a service which a priest from Adventure said that, the girl was a month pregnant and he had the wedding to do and the girl's side, the grandmother was from Sparta, and when he learned that the girl is pregnant, he said that wedding cannot be done if that wedding is being done, the girl will face problem and blah, blah, and they came to me and I did that wedding and they girl has three four children, the girl is going good with her family, it is just you have to know how to do it..." – *Interview, 10 December 2003.*

The issue of kanya daan reveals the tension between ideology and reality that characterises many aspects of contemporary East Indianness. It shows that practical modifications occur in a context in which traditional gender inequities largely remain unsolved. In other words, the sexual emancipation of women takes place in an environment in which women and men are judged by different standards. The importance of female virginity is embedded in Hindu religious conceptions. Male chastity on the contrary is not doctrinally enforced. The second pundit explicitly told me that purity is something "that does not matter for him", the groom.

Hence, whereas sexual proficiency is a tolerated and sometimes even admired trait of eligible males, experienced girls are disrespected and the subject of gossip and backbiting. The latter are regarded opportunists and less attractive potential life partners. Even bachelors who claim sexual experience and do not denounce pre-marital intercourse state they prefer a virgin wife. One of my informants assured me that, because of his desire to marry a pure girl, he would not have casual sex with virgins:

I never like had dee opportunity to run into no virgin, because I say at dis age I don't want to destroy one because in me, in later days fuh come I am glad fuh get one. So I never ever destroy one, I had the opportunity to destroy like about three, I say I cyan't do det, wha you sow you gaha reap... - *Interview, 7 February 2005.*

Virgin brides are more reputable and deemed more loyal. Besides, and this is often marketed as an incentive to abstain from non-marital sex, chastely brides are more loveable. Various informants say husbands will "show a little bit more love for you" if you

have saved yourself for him. An African member of a focus group labelled this typically Indian behaviour. In response to linkages laid between love and virginity by East Indian debaters, she said:

That refers to Indian people, nah black people. It don't goes to black people. That is an Indian thing so that is why you go fuh that. – *Focus group, 22 November 2003.*

According to her as well as some East Indian informants, the overall attitude of Indo-Guyanese towards sex is 'highly cultural'. Whereas (female) Afro-Guyanese would display and exploit their sexuality, and can playfully use and manipulate it in social interaction, the East Indians traditionally would be secretive about it, hide it, and avoid it being a topic of discussion.³⁵⁹ As an East Indian male explained:

Indians are highly reserved because they consider sex kind of taboo. And another thing with Indians, they don't express emotions much, especial sexual emotion, right? Not towards their own partner and other people. – *Interview, 16 February 2005.*

Anti-traditional forces, however, increasingly undermine such conventional stances. Although the attitude remains comparatively restrictive, a tendency towards greater openness can be discerned. Both a liberalisation of practice and discourse is taking place. The occurrence of pre-marital sex, albeit generally considered morally wrong, is no longer the source of shame it used to be. Furthermore, East Indians are not reluctant to talk to me about sex, many are eager to discuss the matter. My investigations even brought people to come to me with questions and requests. I remember young men inquiring about the permissibility of oral and anal sex, and a seventy-five year-old happily married yet immobile arthritis patient who asked me to get him some of the sildenafil citrate (Viagra) he had heard about.

A significant contributor to these transformations is a rarely examined but quite influential cinematographic genre, and one of the most peculiar catalysts of westernisation: pornography. With the spread of VCR's and DVD-players, the emergence of the internet, and the broadcasting of spicy late-night content on some of Guyana's commercial TV-stations, impressive reservoirs of information on a once barely examinable topic have become available. These reservoirs are amply used by East Indians of all ages. Video-shop owners have assured me pornography is among the most popular genres and is rented by

³⁵⁹ In an article on marriage and family differences between lower class African and East Indian women in Trinidad, Bell (1996:362) argues that – contrary to African notions – Indian patriarchal tradition places relatively little importance on the sexual needs of the women. "Negro women", according to Bell also hold a "much less monogamous view of sexual expression than the Indian women."

numerous adults as well as many boys and girls.³⁶⁰ Furthermore, pornographic magazines are widely distributed, and series of pornographic ‘favourites’ are listed on virtually all the publicly accessible computers in internet cafes and schools I used in Guyana. Inevitably, the use of such sources affects the understandings of its users. One of the clearest examples is the slightly disturbed and sexually charged image many East Indians have of the westerner. More than once, I have been told white people are considered ‘nasty’ and sex prone. As one male told me:

“Because of the sex, the pornographic movies, most actors and actresses are white people, so Guyanese have this preconceived notion that all white people like to fuck. Because I know about people who went to New York and at the bus station grab a white woman at bottom, and she beat the hell out of that man, but he just...she nah in movies you know.” – *Interview, February 2005.*

Whites are thought to be wild and willing. Accounts of the attitude of local males towards female white volunteers and other visitors indicate such a notion exists and is acted upon.

A less tangible and hardly investigable effect of the spread of pornography is the transformation of the nature of East Indian sexuality. Expectations towards, and valuation or application of sex and sexuality are said to have changed. Informants believe the increased interest in videos and other forms of pornography are linked to these modifications. According to them, sex has become something different now than it was a few decades ago, its function has been altered and the impression of the female as a sexual being has changed:

“Right now I think they would be more open, right, ten years ago people would not want to discuss sex. They would think their wife is sleazy or sluttish to want to explore sex, they would think that only whores would want to really enjoy sex. [...] Sex is, I mean for great sex you need to have good foreplay, especially woman, because she don’t work like lightning, biologically right. And the man, on the other hand, he works like that, he just get excited visually. Now, the younger people today, the younger people who are getting married now, would more tend to indulge in it, like they would go and rend a porno video and sit down and look at it.” – *Interview, February 2005.*

³⁶⁰ During my first period of fieldwork, parents in Affiance found their teenage daughter watching rented pornography videos. They, and a number of other concerned parents, went to the video shop and threatened the owner and his wife.

Some of my informants admit they watch porn, either with friends or with their spouses. One of them told me it inspires him and his wife, that it induces experimenting and prevents their sexual relationship from becoming ‘stale’. I doubt whether East Indians would have narrated similar visions a few decades ago. It seems as if the importance of pleasure and emotional satisfaction has increased and come to outweigh notions of reproduction and (especially for women) obligation. Although both Hindus and Muslims still acknowledge procreation as a divine purpose of marital sexuality, and frequently mention a spouse’s duty to ensure the gratification of the sexual needs of their other half, personal enjoyment and emotional connection are widely recognised as essentials of satisfactory sex.

This upgraded position of pleasure and love makes contemporary understandings of sexuality different from the ones that were prevalent before. Each in their own way they indicate East Indian sexual morality has grown closer to that of non-Indians, either to that of westerners or fellow Guyanese of African descent. Present-day hedonistic and strategic approaches to sex can be linked to western pornographic meta-narratives as well as to the allegedly promiscuous exemplary behaviour of the local Africans. Again, it is predominantly the modified role of women that suggests the existence of such linkages. Not only do ‘civilised’ female informants claim a right to a fulfilment of personal sexual needs – “sometime if he nah ready self he gaffa try to get ready, because I mek he ready” – they also exploit their sexuality in ways that suit certain western and Creolese conceptions better than the conventional Indian ones. Sexuality is an instrument in manipulative efforts, it is currency that can be invested in upward mobility. Facilitated by the availability and affordability of various methods of anti-conception, the phenomenon of *sweet-womanhood* has thus become more common in Indo-Guyana. Ambitious unmarried girls, bored housewives, and an occasional widow, offer affection, attention and physical services to married (sweet)men in exchange for pleasure and products. Or as a female participant stressed at a focus group session:

“Dey [sweet women] jus go fuh three ting, it is either money, gold or romance. Sometime, some women might see a nice looking guy, right, and he got dis so much money, and dis big [Land]cruiser and dis and det, and he nah even know fug tak to one girl properly. And sometime you might see one little ugly man and he got no’ting, but he got the lash wha deh women dem want.” – 22 November 2003

Whatever it is a sweet-woman is after, her motives do not tend to have sprouted on the acres of selflessness. They are demanding and costly to keep. According a man who stopped having girlfriends, relationships with sweet-women are not the most profitable endeavours:

“I deh livin’ a sweet-man life, go out wih dis woman, go out wih det woman and dem kind ah thing, geeh money and dem kind ah ting. If I draw seventeen thousand dollar a week, by the time, if I draw it Saturday, by the time it Sunday I pocket empty, nah got no’ting, all duh money, gaffa geeh dis woman det, carry out dis woman and det kind ah ting. [...] Well deh same money now, if I wok for dem money, all dis money can come in dis house, me nah got sweet-woman and dem kind ah ting no more, I forget about dem kind ah life. Because remember you got to go and buy dis for deh woman, all kind of tings. (Q: Dem ah go aks fuh ting?) Yes, deh go tell you what deh need, now you go out wih dem in the afternoon or a day or dem kind ah ting and dem seh man look deh need a pants, with duh pants deh go say deh need a top, and deh want duh shoes and dem wristwatch and dem kind ah ting, you got to geeh dem... (Q: Whayuh get in return?) Well you gettin’ sex and dem, det kind ah ting, det is all you gittin’.” – *Interview, February 2005*.

Although not considered to be a respectable strategy, sweet womanhood is accepted as a fact of contemporary life, almost like a natural and inevitable threat to marriage, a conflict instigating force to which both wife and the (helpless) husband are subject. Exemplary is the answer of a pundit to my question what a woman should do if ever she finds out her husband is having an extramarital affair:

“Okay, if she find out that she husband has a sweet-woman, if it is not too, if it hasn’t gone too far, because most sweet-women would try to do obeah-tism [witchcraft] to caught him, if she wants him for a long time, there are certain things that she can do to capture that person. What the wife will have to do is try to sit, remedy her faults, see where she is lacking and work upon that. She will now have to develop the art of science to be better than that sweet-woman. If she used to kiss her husband 25 times a day, the sweet woman maybe going 50, she got to go 75.” – *Interview, 10 December 2003*.

The task of neutralising the sweet-women and protecting male monogamy is regarded the joint responsibility of wife and husband. Men cannot help themselves, it is often believed that the only thing that keeps the Indian husbands from having extramarital affairs is their inability to finance such relationships. They are more or less deemed naturally inclined to be sexually disloyal and are rarely blamed for their unfaithfulness. A man’s incontrollable sexual desire is a sign of masculinity and thus regarded not particularly despicable and harmful, at least by far not as despicable and harmful as manifestations of lust displayed by modern women. As a female informant stated quite clearly, the East Indian community judges male promiscuity quite different than female promiscuity:

“When a man has an affair, he is just being a typical man, in Indian families especially, he is being a typical man, and it is not nice but you as a wife are supposed to do the things and abide with whatever your husband wants and satisfy him in every way, whether it is, sexually or whatever needs he has. [...] If a wife has an affair she is a whore, there is no other explanation, you are just a whore, you are a bad woman, you don’t have needs, you are not supposed to have needs, you are not supposed to have wants, or whatever, you can’t, you are not supposed to, it is not acceptable.” - *Interview, January 2005*.

According to this young woman, when it comes to female sexuality or liberty, East Indian society is definitely in a state of transition. Whereas traditional values are still advocated by conventionalists, their implementation in the hearts and minds of youngsters is increasingly problematic. She believes advanced education, increased mobility, and examples set by foreign visitors and western media allow girls to acquire knowledge of alternative ways of thinking about sex and indirectly stir them to claim a higher level of autonomy. It lured them away from the suffocating control of relatives and seniors that they were once subject to:

“Until I was about fifteen, about sixteen then I started realising that sex wasn’t as bad as I believed in the back of my head, because I thought sex was something forbidden, something bad and not acceptable, and you are not supposed to have sex and there is nothing enjoyable about sex. And as a teenager of course you have sexual feelings, and you have feelings, but I always thought, if ever you have sex before you get married that would be a bad, bad thing. (Q: In what way would it be bad?) Because that would make you a bad person, that would make you a little whore, that would make you not a nice and decent sweet girl, that is how you were taught to believe, and I think girls in that time were already changing their beliefs but it has to with home and your environment and society, and the way sex was looked upon and being talked about. I mean growing up as a girl you would not think sex could be enjoyable, or to have sex and enjoy it is not acceptable. (Q: Even after marriage?) No, you are going to have sex to make babies and you are going to have sex if your husband wants to have sex, and that is what married people do, but it is not something you are going to enjoy or say what you want. Because even when you are married and you do that, that makes you into a whore.” – *Interview, January 2005*.

Now, she says, things have changed. Although raised in an environment in which females were taught sex was mainly a marital obligation and not a source of physical and emotional

satisfaction, the girl – as well as many others – asserts she had sex before her marriage and states she regards sexuality more than just a duty and act of procreation.

Considering the statements of this young woman and other (essentially youthful) informants, it seems as if it is the general East Indian perception that modernisation has awakened latent but certainly existent urges. Allegedly, wrongful and suppressed sexual feelings, yearnings confined by a culturally dictated ideology of restraint, have been unleashed by recent developments. Present-day hedonism and immoral sexual behaviour (or sexual emancipation) of both married and unmarried East Indian males and females are seen as examples. The unprecedented prevalence of fornication and adultery is usually linked to the changed environs in which my subjects operate.

Another example is the noted decrease in cases of incest. Whereas sexual relationships between juvenile cousins and siblings – bonds which were not really subject to the strict customary Indian rules of interaction – were common in the past, they have lost some of their purpose in today's liberalised world. Initial sexual explorations that once occurred within the confines of family currently take place in new contexts. Similarly, the explorative behaviour that, according to several informants, was common among young friends and neighbours of the same sex is an oddity nowadays.³⁶¹ A female, who claimed to have witnessed and experienced these tabooed practices, explained the procedure after being guaranteed anonymity by the interviewer:

“Being in a group, being in a peer group, you would talk about it, you would sit down and play certain games. Like playing ‘dolly house’ where there is a mother, it will be all girls, and, a mother and a father and the kids will go to bed and that would be the smaller children, and little girls and little boys there is little brothers and sisters. And the bigger friends, when you are mother and father, you know about sex, you know that sex exists, you know what you feel, you know how you feel... So what they do, they kiss each other and they touch each other because that is what mummy and daddy are supposed to do. And whatever you do, it is not about...and boys, little boys, you would go play and you would go hide and you would go some place and they would have intercourse with each other. (Q: Boys and boys?) Boys and boys and likewise girls and girls. (Q: Do you think that was a thing that was common?) Yes, it was quite common, you would even... and that is something that people don't want to accept or think about but it happened a lot.” – *Interview with East Indian female.*

According to this particular informant, practices like these were “way more common in Indian families” and circles than among the Afro-Guyanese children. A typical Indian lack

³⁶¹ Also these bands were not subject to the strict rules and regulations that applied to interaction between unrelated East Indian boys and girls.

of openness, she says, motivated this kind of unlawful but understandable behaviour. Trends towards increased liberalisation have now forced these forms of incest and same-sex contacts to the conservative fringes of the East Indian society. Today, its remnants are somewhat prejudicially said to survive mainly within insular Islamic surroundings. In fact, even some Muslims themselves would acknowledge this. An imam told me: “there are cases of incest among Muslims, more than among the Hindus.” As far as he and others are concerned, seclusion and segregation of the sexes provoke illicit sexual behaviour and have led to a considerable number of marriages among Muslim relatives. These incestuous inclinations are supposedly fuelled by the Muslim’s peculiar but frequently mentioned extraordinary sex-vigour. Muslims are said to be ‘high-nature’, sex-prone people thought to be charged by diets including lots of powerful red meat. As one slightly envious Hindu male stated:

“Muslims is ‘high-nature’, majority of Muslims is ‘high-nature’, sometimes when you might go to bed you might, you got two sex, two time you might got sex, or four, but that [Muslim] man fighting with six and eight.” – *Interview, 7 February 2005.*

‘Muslims love sex, and everyone knows it.’ That is why they are attracted to their cousins, that is why some of them have big families, and that is why they are allowed to have more than just one wife each.³⁶² Whether nourished by particular food patterns or even the product of innate differences, Muslims are suspected to have stronger urges than their Hindu brothers.

In a sense, like ethnicity, also religion can therefore be regarded a marker of sexual identity: being a Muslim or Hindu is thought to influence your sexuality in ways comparable to being an Indian or African. As such, sexual identity has become part of a number of stereotypes. Accordingly, perceived changes in sexual morality and practice are linked with movements towards and away from iconic religious and especially ethnic thoughts and ways.

Modern-day liberalisation and promiscuity are thus labelled trajectories towards westernisation and creolisation. And in a way, the informants are right. As shown, a number of new practices and conceptions were and still are introduced, and many of them originate from non-Indian environs. The altered forms of partner selection, renovated understandings about gender-relations, and modified conceptions of sexuality are all proof of that.

On the other hand, data also indicates that transformations are limited, situational or partial. Notions of reciprocity still form the basis of the reasoning about life companionship of many. Even thoughts and practices on the surface – which I have earlier

³⁶² Polygyny, although not lawful is propagated and practiced by some Muslims in Guyana. Also in Essequibo I know of (affluent) men that married – according to Islamic rites (*mikaali*) – more than one woman.

called surface and middle level understandings – seem severely affected by the winds of change, the underlying principles sometimes prove to be remarkably intact. The remaining part of this chapter will explore this matter and excavate the foundations of partner relations and sexuality. What happened to East Indian notions of love, and what about the reciprocity that was mentioned? How do they relate to the every day reality of East Indian partnerships, to the interpretations and expressions described above? Let's see what lies underneath togetherness.

7.2 Excavating the foundations of companionship and sexuality

“...it's easy...All you need is love, all you need is love, all you need is love, love, love is all you need.” Some strange coincidence or perhaps divine intervention has caused the deejay on my radio to play the ancient Beatles' tune as I am typing the first few lines of the section on the basis of life partnership. Its message is luring: “Hans, get your shoes on, go outside and enjoy the gentle May sun, forget about typing Underneath Togetherness, there is no need to struggle with your complex formulations...it's easy...don't waste more than five words: all you need is love...”

I am not sure what Lennon and McCartney were thinking, but we all know it is not that simple, not in my country and certainly not in the Indian environs of Guyana. Plain love generally just won't do. As shown under 7.1, local reality dictates that relationships have to be practicable and profitable or beneficial in more than just spiritual ways. One's spouse has to offer opportunities and guarantee satisfaction of a number of needs that ultimately outweigh the yearning for affection. In addition, a relationship will be very hard to maintain without the support of one's relatives. Numerous East Indian families shall do anything to make sure intolerable bonds will not survive. Homosexuals are thus forced into unions with partners of the opposite sex³⁶³, Muslims or Hindus might be passionately discouraged to aspire marriage with someone who is doctrinally different, and Indians from ethnically conscious homes (and virtually all are) will be forbidden to even contemplate a wedding with an African. Social acceptance, although product of a system that not all agree with, is imperative if a nuptial road full of obstacles is to be avoided. I am sure that my East Indian wife's family would not have been so eager to invite the boyfriend of their niece into the family residence if I was a University of Guyana trained anthropologist of African descent. As a befriended pundit once told me: “if your wife would have married a black,

³⁶³ The Hindu conception of homosexuality is ambiguous. Although homosexuals often marry women, in every village there are stories about practicing homosexuals. It is not unusual for these men to exhibit their sexual preference publicly: known gays would walk the road together and can display provocative behaviour. I have also heard stories about the prevalence of bi-sexuality among (married) men and boys. According to one informant this even is considered to be a macho practice (Interview, 16 February 2005). Although I have never seen any, informants also mentioned the practices of *hidras* (*bijras*), traditional Indian 'dual gender' figures.

that would have been war in the house.” The fact that I am white, and probably the fact that I am from a desirable migration destination, assured full support of all the significant others, and encouraged them to grant us the unusual liberty to get to know each other and be together in unsupervised settings.

“Johannes Gerrit de Kruijf, neem je aan als je wettige echtgenote Naleane Pearce, en beloof je alle plichten te zullen vervullen die de wet aan het huwelijk heeft gesteld? Wat is daarop jouw antwoord...?” [...*do you accept as your lawful wife Naleane Pearce, and do you promise to fulfil all the obligations the law has attributed to marriage? What is your answer...?*]

Last night I watched my wife and myself dressed up in front of the retired army-man who married us. Thank god for DVD's, my memory often fails me. Can't help but wonder whether we would have stood there that day if instead of my suit, my face would have been black. It is definitely more than only love you need.

7.2.1 Motivational foundations: on drives of partners and partner-seekers

The notion that more than love is necessary to make togetherness lasting and worthwhile is shared by most Indians. Many are convinced that something else than true love not only is necessary to acquire the support of others, but also to establish a family and a life that is fulfilling and successful. As said, concepts of reciprocity often come to the fore when informants conceptualise and value companionship. These concepts of exchange are inclusive and generally form the basis of action and assessment of many partners and partner-seekers.

More than anything else, a balance between two partners is required to make a bond work. At the end of the day, each partner must get and give an amount of 'good' of more less equal worth. These packages of good that are offered and demanded are gender dependant: as often, male emphasis is on providing, and females' barter 'care' more than anything. In East Indian circles, this gender role distribution is relatively rigid, especially compared to interpretations of gender displayed by the other ethnic groups in Guyana and apparent in the locally available Americanised media. Despite the emancipation of females – which is indicated in discourse, increased participation of girls in advanced education and of women in the labour force, and in growing divorce rates and numbers of female headed households – few men and women would ultimately hold anti-traditional views.

Gender relations might have become more symmetrical but are still characterised by a conventional male dominance. In addition, little has changed in the territorial division. The East Indian home continues to be the territory of women, and the streets of Indo-Guyana, as well as the fields and the bush nearly belong as much to the male as a few decades ago. Working women generally make their money in apt areas, in places like markets, schools, banks, and shops. Only pragmatism, tolerance stirred by economic

considerations, tends to motivate a (temporary) further opening of gender-territorial borders. The position of certain Indian women during the period of indentureship, under Burnham's autocratic rule, and in this era of labour migration, are examples.

The endurance of long-standing conceptions does not imply that constellations of understandings are static, that certain aspects are not subject to personal creativity and external forces of change that are and always have been around. Rather, it means that particular ways and thoughts are more deeply rooted than others. The reason for this relative durability is related to the process of their incorporation. As mentioned early in this chapter, Quinn (1997:189) states that understandings can be resilient because they are first acquired at a very early age and in the context of primary feelings connected with physical and emotional survival. Following psychoanalytic theory, she suggests that some understandings about love and marriage and their motivational strength "relate to matching infantile concerns about not being abandoned by the caretaker, being one with the caretaker, and being cared for by that person (Quinn 1997:201)." Avoiding the reproduction of complex and ongoing theoretical debates, Quinn (1997:202) offers a Freudian interpretation of the nature of this relationship:

The mother cares for the infant exclusively and meets all of the infant's needs. However blissful is this stage, the course of normal development requires it to end, for, in order to become individuated, the infant must separate from the mother. This separation is experienced as loss. As one psychoanalyst concludes his story: "Depending on the solidity of this achievement, the search for love more or less seeks to undo this state of separateness. It also seeks to restore to the self the sense of perfection believed to have been enjoyed in the original mother-infant unit." (Ireland 1988:25)

Marriage according to Quinn, at least in the United States, is the institutional realisation of love (Quinn 1997:193). American concepts of nuptial union and its social status are supposedly aligned with the emotional state of love. In addition, "ideas about love fill in the motivational structure we attribute to marriage". Americans marry because Americans love, without love there is no reason to get or even stay married. As my attempt to dissect partnership above indicates, this is different for the East Indians in Guyana. Love, as far as a number of my informants is concerned, is not a necessary condition for marriage. The concept of 'taking a wife', beautifully verbalised by the labourer mentioned under 7.1.2, is a perfect example. Reasoning made him approach a female he considered a suitable life partner. And his appreciation of the relationship depends on the mutual fulfilment of a series of marital manual duties and not so much on the successful ongoing transaction of emotional good.

In the eyes of a many East Indians, love can follow union, be its product, just as good as be its prerequisite, the motive for marriage. If you wed someone who will not forsake his or her conjugal obligations and whose ideology or conviction is matching with yours then love will eventually develop. As female Muslim teacher explained:

“If you are a person of *din* [religion], and you are practicing Islam, and if that person is practicing Islam, I don’t see why your love would not grow, why you would not like that person. ‘Cause if that Muslim person continues to do good things, eventually you will grow to love that person unless that person is not that, and they like drinking and going out on the road with friends.” – *Focus group interview, 24 December 2003.*

So, it is not that people would consider a loveless marriage satisfactory but rather that they believe that love will naturally materialise as long as the conditions are right. In fact, many informants regard this love cultivated in a marital climate to be a superior and the most robust form of love between a man and a woman. Contemporary love, according to critics, is a fragile product of compulsions that are largely irrational and tend not to last. The latter-day phenomenon of divorce is mentioned as evidence of the failure pre-marital romance: Indians in the old days used to stay together. Even young people are not always convinced of the ideal of love-driven partner choice. As two Hindu girls remarked during a focus group session:

“These days you find that people they know each other, they love them so much and then they get into this life, real life, marriage life, you find they are encountering problems and those kind of things. So I, sometimes I wonder to know what really happened there, I mean they love each other, that is happening in our society these days. You find that young people they love each other so much, they communicate so often and then when you know they are supposed to live properly, I mean they have single parents and so.” – (Girl 1).

“You find that most young people these days, because if you look at long ago, when people used to get married, they never knew their partner until like the wedding day or the wedding night, then they get to know their partner and you find relations very good, if you look at our, long ago couples, they are living very good now. And you know our young people these days, I mean you left few mornings and you hear they are separated and stuff.” – (Girl 2) *Focus group interview, 23 November 2003.*

Romance is certainly also appreciated among the East Indians and, more than before, longed for and enjoyed. Yet, it is not valued in the same way it is valued by the Americans described in the writings of Naomi Quinn. Whereas love in the eyes of Quinn's North Americans is uncontested as the prime motive for marriage, East Indian reality shows that other motivators are at least of equally decisive importance. More precisely, data suggest that two different motivational structures inspire the bulk of East Indian thought and practices connected to the process of establishing and maintaining a life partner relationship. These two coexist and are mutually responsible for triggering action and interpretation. Yet, in certain situations, or in the accounts and explanations of certain informants, specific emphases become manifest. As such, the structures comprise a flexible system characterised by two inclinations whose dominance depends on personal preference and the situation.

In essence, the inclinations involve either an emphasis on (a) rational motives or on (b) emotional motives. The inclination to let reasoning and calculative thinking steer behaviour is primarily the outcome of processes of incorporation of traditional ideas and values. It reflects notions that formed the basis of certain cultural institutions such as arranged marriage, and coincides with interpretations of life partnership as narrated in the scriptures or philosophies of the 'original' East Indian religions. Both Hindu and Islamic doctrines portray the union between a male and female as spiritual alliances, principal purposes of life and sources of divine blessing: for both, piety is being a spouse according to the divine book of books.

According to the Rgveda, "the goal of marriage is to enable a man to sacrifice to the *devas* [godheads] and beget a son who will ensure the continuity of the sacrifice" (Klostermaier 1994:188). And, so I have heard from local Muslim scholars, also Islamic doctrine regards marriage a religious obligation. Wedlock should be entered at the earliest age possible to provide the feeble believer an opportunity to satisfy his (or her) urges in an Islamic manner and prevent him (or her) from indulging in sinful acts. It is not the institutional realisation of love, but – as seems to be the opinion of my informants – rather the institutional realisation of sexuality. As far as Muslim leaders are concerned, natural sexual cravings cannot be ignored and, thus, should be channelled by providing a lawful context in which they can be satisfied. One sheikh told me "satisfaction of a natural urge is the main reason to get married." And an imam assured me that the purpose of marriage is:

"...to procreate, to get children, to raise a family of your own and that in brief or in essence is the purpose of marriage because man has a natural urge within him for other things besides food and drink. (Q: They have a sexual desire?) Yes, and naturally to satisfy that desire, well then the only way is through marriage and then by getting married you're able, you be at more ease and comfort rather than if [...] you can't get to marry, you will be in

trouble, frustration and disappointment and so on.” – *Interview, 18 December 2003.*

Love is rarely mentioned by informants when discussing the religious and cultural basis of marriage. Procreation, sustenance, and the execution of traditional or even divinely ordained gender roles and cohabitation forms, are regarded the main reasons for the pious and conventional to aspire life partnership. Images portrayed by cultural conservationists aim at marketing the rational emphasis or inclination as ideal. The effect of the advocacy of this rational inclination – which is fundamentally the ideology of reciprocity – is not easy to estimate but certainly significant considering the explanations of my informants. Already at an early stage in the life of the East Indian, most likely before contrasting notions are internalised, understandings become moulded by such images. People acquire knowledge of life partnership as an alliance of exchange before they are informed about union as a manifestation of romantic love. Especially those informants who grew up in the pre-televised era initially have been subject to imbalanced information resulting in a frequently surfacing inclination to stress the non-emotional aspects of partner relationships.

Considering the linkage between the durability of understandings and their moment of incorporation, suggested by Quinn and others, the resilience of specific notions can thus be explained. I think it is not hard to imagine infantile experiences which are culturally coloured to cultivate lasting conceptions and yearnings. Because the bulk of East Indians is born in surroundings in which reciprocity is strongly emphasised, a focus on reciprocity will develop early and will be hard to unlearn. This focus, however, does not imply major distinctions in life partnership thinking exist between my informants and those interviewed by Quinn. Although I would neither want nor dare to move too deeply into the territories of psychoanalysis and matters of Oedipus or Electra complexes, Indian visions of marriage, in fundamental ways, resemble American visions of marriage. Like the Americans according to Quinn (1997:190-191), also East Indians hold the ideals of marital sharedness, lastingness, and benefit or fulfilment. Few would deny that matrimony is a joint venture that is supposed to last and be a source and cause of physical and mental well-being. As such, principals underlying local understandings about marriage could as well be references to notions of parental or motherly love and expressions of a Freudian quest to restore a sense of rightness believed to have been experienced in the earliest relationship with the caretaker.

In the context of my endeavour, nonetheless, it is enough to note that understandings are the product of construction processes that started with experiences during childhood of which the understandings can never be freed. Irrespective of their exact psychoanalytic background, these juvenile experiences continue to influence and motivate thought and action throughout people's life. Their vigour derives from their early constitution, yet, in the case of the East Indians, is facilitated by consistency in experiences undergone subsequently in the course of (adult) life. In other words, initial understandings

of life partnership can rather easily be reproduced because – or, as long as – they are neither battled by a conflicting reality nor by completely opposing models offered by alternative sources.

Although the world of the East Indians has changed quite dramatically over the past few decades, it did not turn into a place totally inhospitable to existing ideals and visions concerning partnership and partner choice. As indicated, ‘match weddings’ continue to take place.³⁶⁴ This might not have been the case if mass migration and meagre economic prospects in especially rural areas did not help the survival of strategic selection. Similarly, the perceived prevalence of uncertainty in Guyana supports the reconstruction of existing gender roles. The lack of jobs and opportunities for women condemns them to housewifery and creates an economic dependency on husbands that negatively affects their hierarchical position. The fact that many women cannot leave their abusive husbands is illustrative.

The survival or resilience of the rational inclination is possible because of both their early incorporation and because Guyanese circumstances allow economic or strategic considerations to have such great motivational force. Besides, certain foundations of these ‘traditional’ considerations are not as different from the foundations of contemporary considerations as they appear to be. Gender roles are an interesting illustration. If we take the American media as one of the East Indian’s main sources of information on non-traditional gender relations, it becomes obvious that the alternative models offered to the audience are generally and essentially just as pre-emancipated as the typically East Indian notions that have been available in Guyana for many generations. Also in televised North American fiction females are often portrayed as emotion-driven, the caring kind, and as those who still need masculine protection to be healthy and happy. Men, in accordance with that, are presented as pragmatic people, those who provide and protect and appreciate the adoration and dependency of women. Rarely do leading actors and actresses play roles that conflict with the conventional gender positions. Series or movies, and even reality TV, do not reflect reality. Or better, the multifarious character of western societies is underemphasised in the western media because makers (perhaps rightfully) believe that the unconventional is less appealing and therefore less marketable. Existing understandings of masculinity and femininity are thus confirmed by the images of modernity with which the East Indians are confronted.

The strength of imported images of modernity as forces of change does not lie in its ability to contribute to the renovation of gender roles. Surely, despite their traditionalist basis, they communicate a greater level of equality that has affected my informants’ conceptions, valuations, and expectations concerning partner relations. Yet, the power of old notions of hierarchy and the obstructive character of the local actuality have prevented more egalitarian partner relations from materialising. Perhaps a greater contribution imported images have made when it comes to companionship is the introduction of

³⁶⁴ In fact, a new type of arranged marriages even emerged in the form of migration matrimonies.

compelling impressions of romantic love and emotional partnership. These impressions have caused the importance of emotional motives in the context of gender relations to grow.

Although in many cases the rational inclination prevails, the motivational value of non-tangible aspects of relations has increased. As said, notions of relational reciprocity – well articulated by many East Indians – have come to include the exchange of feelings other than senses of material and physical security and care. Successful and beneficial bonds in the eyes of many comprise a bartering of pleasure, and affection or adoration as well. Life partners should ensure the fulfilment of each other's needs for enjoyment and entertainment. East Indian girls have told me that a good husband should “carry his wife out”, make sure she does not get bored, and surprise her with nice gifts every now and then. In addition, he will have to make sure her increasingly widely recognised sexual desires are satisfied.

Similar obligations are mentioned while discussing the duties of contemporary wives. Also they should not just look after the physical well-being of their spouses but figure out the husbands' ulterior and idiosyncratic desires as well. “Mental telepathy”, is what one of my informants called it. According to him, husbands and wives should develop the skill to understand each other's wants and needs without being told about them. These wants and needs do not just entail the pursuit of enjoyment and entertainment. On the contrary, next to pleasure or hedonistic wants and needs, the required understanding encompasses knowledge of the other's emotional desires too. As a partner you should know what your other half needs to hear and experience to feel appreciated, precious and loved. Furthermore, it is your spousal duty to do the things you know will make your partner such emotional satisfaction.

As indicated, the East Indian constellation of collective understandings pertaining to life partnership has not been subject to revolutionary transformation but is slowly modified and extended. New things now complement previously existing conceptions of relating. The advertisement of modernity, visible in Indo-Guyana in various ways, has provided the people with alternative aspirations or new behavioural models, and has marketed hedonism and romanticism as aspects of the motivational structure of partner relations. Especially love is mentioned as an important driving force. For those who do not just seek a partner to care for or be looked after by, the quest for durable companionship is a quest for a higher kind of love. To them, just as perhaps to me and many other contemporaries, partner relations are foremost manifestations of durable emotional and physical attraction. The last piece of this chapter will briefly deal with this attraction, with love. Or more specifically, it comprises a short analysis of East Indian concepts of love and other ‘deep-rooted’ motives on which thoughts and practices regarding those partner relations are based.

7.2.2 Love: deeper understandings and compelling motivators

Never have I come across an individual who claimed not to consider love to be part of the ideal exclusive relationship. Even those who back arranged unions and strongly oppose courting or love-based partner selection believe love is indispensable if the establishment of a successful and durable bond is pursued. These ‘match-wedding’ advocates usually state love will and has to develop once the spouse-to-be is chosen. This emergence of adoration is held to be the inevitable consequence of the mutual fulfilment of marital duties by matching partners: “if that person treat you nice you will love that person very much and that is because how the person treat you.” However, arranged or fixed love can also be seen as product of conscious decision making. Not only can you choose to enter an arranged union, you can decide to love the chosen one as well. Like an East Indian woman explained at a focus group session:

“During the...okay, like if I fix the wedding for January, between this day, at least I know I will have to marry ‘Dick’ and I have to marry ‘Dick’ so then I will try to love ‘Dick’, even if I don’t love him...” - *Focus group interview, 22 November 2003.*

(Partner) love, according to her and other proponents of orchestrated relations, is something that can be enforced, a feeling or state of mind that is far from fortuitous.³⁶⁵ It is an intentional form of affection that can and should only surface within the context of marriage or engagement. In a sense this intentional love, whether the outcome of choice or the certain consequence of living righteous nuptial lives, is something profoundly different than accidental love, the result of a state people tend to just ‘fall in’. Those who believe in arrangement and choice strive for immediate institution of what has been labelled ‘mature love’ and skip the phase of ecstatic and irrational longing and adoring that is sometimes referred to as ‘romantic love’ (Collins 1985:98). To them, as well as to some adherents of romance, departure from rapturous romantic love is inescapable. For a bond to survive, romantic love eventually has to be (partially) replaced by something that is less overwhelming yet riper, more durable, and even more rewarding. Hence, the exclusion of romance does not imply the exclusion of strong affection. What it is meant to do instead is assure partner choice is based upon reason and deemed pivotal social compatibility, thereby minimising the changes of failure and – very importantly – avoiding the risk of social or economic degradation of the individual and of the group to which the individual belongs.

Fixed love is not necessarily love between people who intellectually or emotionally match but rather love between people of similar or complementary standing. Assumed is that social and economic compatibility, together with the correct execution of gender roles,

³⁶⁵ Following Rebhun (1999:33), I regard love/emotion a phenomenon comprising a complexity of political, moral, biological, and psychological aspects. Its expression is a demonstration of context as well as the manifestation of biologically based excitations. The expressional modifications I investigate, however, are solely the result of a socio-cultural evolution – something I will thus focus on.

is sufficient for lasting love to materialise. As such, this notion of intentional or mature love perfectly suits the reciprocal ideology that is prevalent in the traditionalist and pious circles in the East Indian community. It regards adoration the product of mutual care, the outcome of the fulfilment of one's desires by one's other half.³⁶⁶ Romantic love, on the other hand, does not necessarily depend on advantageous exchange rates. It is a state in which calculation is less relevant and strong emotions are in control. An irrational state as far as the opponents of love selection are concerned. Essentially just a natural high, according to some, produced by amphetamine-like chemicals that are released when one falls in love (Collins 1985:100).

Sometimes irrespective of trust in the art of matching, most informants articulate a desire to experience romantic love. Some even state that rather than letting love be the product of reciprocal success, they want to find a love that exists for the sake of love alone. As a fifty-one year-old widow explained while discussing her semi-secret affair with a much younger married man:

“I was looking for love and comfort, because everyone was gone and it was me alone. I was looking for love and comfort and I told him that. I said, you see me, if I should go into a relationship, well I have everything, I have money, I have clothes, I have everything that you can think about but it is just that I don't have a husband and I don't have any companionship, this love and comfort I don't have with anybody. The children will call and that kind of things but no one does be there with me. So, that was what and to me at that time I was a drowning rat, trying to get some, anything, and that he came along and I held on to him.” – *Interview, 14 November 2003.*

Loneliness apparently drove this woman into a relationship with a man she claims was in love with her. Yet, her notion of the companionship she lacked and needed consisted of quite something else than ideas about bonds tied because of a need of physical and material security. Later during the interview she elaborated upon the greatness of their sexual connection, and emphasised the importance of passion in her relationship, the inexplicable need to be together despite the illegitimacy of their actions. Certainly no ‘mature love’...

As said, romance is on the rise, attention for love as something that grows from mutual attraction, and does not depend on calculated care-capacity, is increasing. An example is the (further) inclusion of concepts like ‘being in love’ and ‘having a crush’ in the contemporary East Indian discourse on love. Especially the latter is said to describe an emotional state that previously was not defined in the Indian realms. Like an informant called Jagdeo stated:

³⁶⁶ Kemper (1978, 1982) might have referred to this as liking rather than loving. According to him we love an individual we are strongly emotionally attached to and like the people who do rewarding things for us. As such, marriage perhaps should be based on grounds of liking rather than romantically loving.

“You hardly heard the word *crush* over here you know, you don’t...like the only time I heard it when Canadian and American ah use the word, me nah hear it elsewhere...” – *Interview, 21 February 2005.*

According to him, crushes are concepts imported from elsewhere, “false ting jus fuh satisfy deh eye, [...] a quick ting” that is characteristic for life and thinking in this era. Jagdeo has learned about crushes in Guyana but admits he neither understands the concept nor considers it to be functional. Being in love, however, is something he does regard purposeful. In fact, in the interview the unmarried informant provided me with an account that narrates a belief in lasting romantic love that seems quite alien to orthodox East Indian understandings:

“When you, when you try to get in love you actually tink most about dem, you know wha I mean? You whole idea, you jus tink about dem all duh time and det wah come register in you mind, right? And den you create dis kinda feel fuh dem. And when you create dis feel, deh emotion start rise within you, you know wha I mean? And when det happen, like a, is like every single minute ah duh day you jus tink about dis kind, you don’t se no fault in dis kind a person, you don’t see no mistake, you tink ah duh bes person you ever find, right? And den you start create dis kinda ting within you, right? And when you create dis kind ah ting within you, det is duh way how it goes, det is for me. Now, you nah gah...in det way, wha me tell you, det me way in doing tings right? If a person really love a person deh would never ever find a mistake on det person, deh would never see a fault on det person. Deh will find det dis person will be duh most nicest person deh ever met, you know wha I mean? So det is duh way...” – *Interview, 21 February 2005.*

Jagdeo assured me you have to be “strongly” in love with the person you decide to marry. This truly being-in-love, so he thinks, is something that allows partnership to be perfect and that is not necessarily temporary. As a matter of fact, Jagdeo regards being-in-love the ideal (and not an impossible) state of mind of spouses at any stage of their entire marriage. The evolution of passionate romantic love into a feeling of affection that is more mature and balanced is not a thing he considers to be natural and necessary. As such, he can be labelled a student of a school of romance that was not founded in traditional environs.

Jagdeo’s notion of love, an understanding that underlies his conceptualisation of marriage, is unconventional. Untainted by images of nuptial reality bachelors like him do not have access to, it is influenced by accounts of the – often fictional – romantic experiences of others. The most complete and forcefully communicated of these are undoubtedly the love stories narrated in locally televised films and programs from the

United States and India. Their impact on Jagdeo's understanding, and the understanding of numerous others, is bound to be significant. At least, discourse on love on the screen lacks the same sense of realism that is suggested in the explanation of my informant. Romantic love is also in American series and Bollywood movies the ideal as well as something that can be enduring. Jagdeo is convinced of the same. I remember the two of us discussing the reality of love more than once and I remember his passionate disagreement with and objections against my down-to-earth interpretations of love and life partnership. The bachelor looked absolutely persuaded of the viability of lasting and mutual wholehearted adoration.

Ann Swidler, the author of a book on the culture of love, refers to this as the 'mythic view on love'. She says it is the myth that love is "a clear, all-or-nothing choice of a unique other, made in defiance of social forces, and resolving the individual's destiny (Swidler 2001:113-4)."³⁶⁷ According to her, the origins of this widespread perception can be traced in European cultural history and can even be dated back to the late eleventh century when the emergence of courtly love poetry drastically altered contemporary visions of love, the self, and of society.³⁶⁸ This ancient courtly ideal of love has, as far as Swidler is concerned, been incorporated in modern-day Western conceptualisations of love in a form altered by the bourgeois culture of early English capitalism (Swidler 2001:112).

To put it in different terms, the mythic filmic vision of love is inspired by poetic interpretations of love sung by the troubadours of feudal France and reinterpretations of that love by eighteenth century British novelists. Although opposed by reality and therefore often coexisting with more prosaic views of love in the heads of people, the attraction of this idyllic love is significant. Swidler tries to demonstrate this by pointing at the institution of matrimony. She stresses that the mythic view of love is grounded in a structural reality known as marriage: wedding entails a decisive choice and presumes the possibility of a unique and everlasting connection. Jagdeo's analysis of love and marriage supports this view. He appears to be certain that marriage is a unique union between two individuals who, together, can overcome all obstacles and, guided by utter love, will find a way to enjoy marital bliss from the wedding day until the moment death do the partners part.

Evidently, the understanding narrated by Jagdeo is not completely representative of the understanding of East Indians. Total conversion to the doctrine of romance is quite uncommon and probably even in the case of Jagdeo not something that is actually realised. Yet, it is clear this non-indigenous idea of love has become incorporated in many people's constellation of understandings concerning partner relations. The interpretations of my

³⁶⁷ Swidler stresses also others offer similar descriptions of the romantic love ideology. She mentions Sprecher who has stated that: "believes associated with the ideology of romanticism include love at first sight, there is only one true love, true love lasts forever, idealization of the partner and the relationship, and true love can overcome any obstacles (Sprecher et al. 1994:352-353)."

³⁶⁸ Also other authors discuss the historical development of love. In fact, historians explain the emergence of romantic love in various ways. Some take a psychodynamic approach (Behar and Fyre 1988), many others employ economic theories (Ariès 1962; Shorter 1975; Stone 1977). Also historical relationships between religion and emotionality are examined (MacFarlane 1987; Gillis 1988; Goody 1983).

informants presented above prove sufficient evidence. Like numerous other understandings, their and other contemporary East Indians' notion of love is more ambiguous than previously existing notions of love. Observations and data prove that ideals often do not correspond with actions and that neither one of them show great consistency. Both perceptions and practices pertaining to love differ from time to time and place to place. Essentially this shifting involves a lurching back and forth between what I have labelled emotional and rational inclinations, or basically between what Swidler has called a mythic love and something that can be regarded a strategic love. Both of these inclinations or notions are cultural, shared, and acquired as a result of existence in specific surroundings. However, whereas the latter can be seen as reproductions of old ways of thinking and acting, the former are innovations.

The upsurge of the emotional as motivator signifies that even in the subsurface layer of the partner-relationship constellation modifications are taking place. These ideas about love and the gratification of other deeper needs that underlie 'superficial' concepts of sexual and/or spousal relationships are altered in a process of interaction between the surface and subsurface layer. Change-prone schemas, situated on the surface of the constellation, trigger transformation of the deep-rooted schemas located below the surface. Although, in turn, these altered deep-rooted schemas will influence the schemas at middle and higher levels, their development predominantly occurs as the result of the trickling down of innovations from the more flexible, fragmented, and variegated realms of the relatively superficial schemas. In other words, transformed shared understandings of sexual practices and the domestic responsibilities and economic value of (house)wives gradually come to colour the shared understanding of the foundations upon which superficial daily practices and thoughts in the context of partner relationships rest.

Definite changes occurred in all three properties of relationships discussed under 7.1. Partner selection, albeit still an activity quite strongly influenced by traditional concepts, is an example. Partners-to-be have gained more control over the process of decision making and are led by renovated and extended complexes of ideas and expectations concerning the reality of marriage and companionship. Additionally, also notions of, and practices related to, gender roles and sexuality have clearly been subject to forces of change. In each and every one of these properties similar trends with common origins are discernable. The most noteworthy of these trends are emotionalism and hedonism: the tendencies to increasingly emphasise the emotional aspects of life partnership and to think of it as source of individual pleasure and self-gratification. As such, contemporary East Indians have incorporated elements of an individualism in their understandings that few consider authentic Indian. Introduction of these elements, whether of Creolese, European, North American, or of any other origin, has given rise to new notions and ways and has ultimately sparked innovation in the subsurface sphere.

In this section (7.2), I have discussed these innovations, analysed how an alternative conception of love – the romantic kind – has come to complement the existing one,

following transformations that took place lower down the hierarchy of understandings or schemas. This conception, and accordingly the notion of relationships based on a form of affection that is unique and ultimate, now coexists with the strain of ideas in which the importance of relationships as strategic alliances is emphasised. In fact, to some extent, the two have merged: accounts of informants reveal adherence to idyllic visions of love do not necessarily lead people to discard conventional views on reciprocity and the designable nature of love and conjugal connections...good instance of the importance of agency, nice illustration of the function of structures, and exemplary of the intricateness and interconnect character of processes of cultural production and reproduction.

CUSTOMISED COSMOLOGIES

*Religious Pathways, and the Issue of
Reality Management*

Cultural understandings are interpretive instruments and instigators of action. As I have tried to show in chapter five, they are shared and – despite similar content – can arouse various valuations and behavioural strategies among those who have incorporated them. These understandings are always temporary outcomes of ongoing processes of construction and reproduction, products of perpetual negotiation between people and the structure in which people operate. In chapter six and seven I have attempted to expose some essential features of cultural understandings and of the ways they are functioning. Most important of these are their interdependence and the hierarchical way in which they are structured. Literature as well as data from the field indicate that understandings operate formation wise in configurations which I have labelled constellations. These constellations consist of understandings and goals of various importance or level which are arranged in a hierarchical fashion, and which vary in durability. Furthermore, they are characterised by thematicity. Quinn and Strauss (1997:118) have described this as the tendency of some schemas to be evoked in a variety of contexts. According to their analysis, it is one of the aspects of culture which “depends upon the complex interplay between properties of the culturally constructed world and properties of the mind.” The application of the family metaphor and the establishment of fictive kinship ties, mentioned in the chapter on family and friendship, are examples of the spread of understandings across – as Quinn and Strauss would say – different domains of experience.

In the final chapter before the conclusion, one of the most elementary and influential collective constellations will be examined. This constellation comprises a number of shared understandings that together form the East Indian’s vision of all that exists beyond the boundaries of the material world. More specifically, by analysing four of the primary understandings upon which notions of super reality are based (8.1), and describing the application of these notions (8.2), the self-ascribed cosmological position of my subjects shall be determined – a position that is constantly negotiated and is clearly

shaped by the specific Indo-Guyanese history and the formative force of power struggles and processes of internationalisation.

The reason I have chosen the relationship between East Indians and the extracorporeal as the focus of this particular chapter is twofold. First, I believe especially this relationship beautifully illustrates something that needs to be emphasised before concluding this book: the importance of individual creativity and choice. My informants' images of afterlife, god and divinities, laws of super nature, and Guyana's spirit world, clearly illustrate the role of East Indians as culture composers. Their understandings expose them as managers of change, people with the faculty to initiate transformation and the ability to assure preservation. Insights in the unsighted show how, rather than being simply governed by cultural understandings, individuals employ – and, to an extent, can even manipulate – the content of constellations in efforts to make sense of, and deal with, complex social realities. Conceptions and practices concerning the spiritual help my informants to explain and even gain (a sense of) control of an actuality that is increasingly incomprehensible and saturated with insecurities and injustice. Eternity roads thus confirm the image of the East Indian as cultural producer with a significant amount of autonomy, despite the formative force of structures.

Second, and because of the above, a focus on East Indian 'Eternity roads' provides me with an opportunity to complete the core section of this book with a comprehensive illustration of the nature of constellations: the analytic core notion in this dissertation. The manner in which the people explain the unexplainable, localise themselves and their increasingly intricate and confusing world in the perplexingly immense creation, and are inspired to act according to these convictions, proves an excellent instance to conclude with an empirically grounded overview of what this dissertation has been about. Especially, similarities and dissimilarities in evolving Hindu and Muslim conceptualisations of the extracorporeal – and the imprint of different notions of a super reality discernible in people's practices – are revealing. Therefore, this final chapter of part two will be a tribute to intertwinement and complexity, a series of sections in which the production of Indianness in highly dynamic surroundings is summarised: the relationship between the individual and his or her environs; the effects of growing interconnectedness or processes of localisation and globalisation; the historical entrenchment; collective incorporation; freedom of choice; motivational force and the linkage between thought and practice.

8.1 Insights in the unsighted: East Indian understandings of the extracorporeal

Baad is dead. Less than a week after we shared a jug of lukewarm fresh cow milk underneath the giant silk cotton tree in his backyard, he died a dehydrated aged man. We had seen it coming, the end of my eldest informant. Already three days ago Sabu, my East Indian bike repairman and Baad's best friend, rushed into my room with the message of

Baad's rapid deterioration. The two of us went to his house right away. We found him in the anteroom of death, a powerless shadow of a man in nothing but old oversized briefs, displayed on what literally transpired to be his deathbed. He didn't drink or eat. His weakened body even protested against tiny sips of water. "I am about to die," is what dear old Baad told us. "It is time to go." He belched, it smelled, perhaps a little like death. He was right.

Two days later he did what he had said, and departed. We have cremated him today, Sabu, I, and about a hundred others, on a nice big pyre down in L'Union at the Atlantic beach. Now, after we have shared a taxi home, the two of us sit on the seawall in front of my house and speculate about the destination of Baad's post-mortem journey.

"Do you think he'll come back?" I ask my (Hindu) bike repairman. "I am sure about that," answers Sabu, "he'll probably get a proper good birth, after all he was a fine man." "You know, he might even end up on the other side," elaborates the repairman while he stretches his arm and points his index finger towards the ocean. "The other side?" I ask. "Yes," continues Sabu, "maybe he will become a white man, just like you. I myself would like that too, being white, that would be a fine rebirth." With a big smile on his unshaved face, the seventy-two year old explains me that he is sick and tired of life in Guyana. "I also want to go 'home' Hans," says Sabu. "I want to die, go 'home' and return as a White. I want to be there where you are from. I don't like it here. The Indians lie, cheat and drink, and the Blacks steal and fight. Besides, with my best friend dead I don't really have anyone to hang out with. Man, let me pass away and return smart and sweet. Let me be like the Whites, the ones that live there across the water."

Slightly melancholic but also filled with some strange sort of content, my bike repairman gazes at the horizon, towards his 'promised land'. He knows he can leave the here and now in order to 'be' somewhere else some other time. I guess I should not tell him about my doubts concerning reincarnation, and my fear for a sad and everlasting nothingness, or about imam Jalill, my Sunni friend, who recently assured me that I – and therefore also good old Baad and Sabu – are destined to burn in hell for ever and ever.³⁶⁹

Foremost, understandings of the extracorporeal are explanatory devices and instruments to cope with the unpleasant or unexplainable. Death is a good example. (Personalised) belief systems helped Baad to approach death with confidence, caused Sabu to regard his departure as a liberation, and allowed imam Jalill to assume Muslims are better off in afterlife. Each of them employed their understandings for the sake of reality management. Rather than being simply governed by mental schemas, they operate the schemas and – to an extent – can use them as coping tools. As said, one of the main objectives of this

³⁶⁹ This story of Baad and Sabu was published in 2003 as 'Baad is dood' in an issue of the Dutch anthropological magazine *Mensenstreken*. Sturdy Sabu died a few months later, most of all because he was tired...

chapter is to demonstrate this faculty to manage and choose, the (restricted) autonomy of culture makers.

In this opening section I will further portray East Indian understandings of death, afterlife and other aspects of the ethereal realms. I will provide some insights in the unsighted, describe a series of understandings which cover the core of East Indian conceptualisations of that what is real but exists in the borderlands or outside the boundaries of the reasonable and perceptible: the metaphysical. It is an attempt to capture the essence of local Hindu and Muslim cosmologies. In order to do so, I will subsequently analyse people's notions of afterlife (8.1.1), their ideas about the transcendental (8.1.2), the explanatory value of certain comprehensive meta laws (8.1.3), and people's attitudes towards the supernatural (8.1.4).

The choice for these properties is a logical one. Although it concerns a classification rarely used by informants, observations and explanations from the field expose these as being both highly illuminative and fundamental to the constellation I portray. Together they summarise primary features of contemporary cultural processes analysed with the help of the theoretical framework that has materialised in the previous chapters. The various conceptions and ways concerning the 'unsighted' illustrate the intertwinement of culture, meaning and practice, as well as the coexistence of the centripetal and centrifugal tendencies that characterise cultural developments in an increasingly interconnected diasporic community. But most of all, they help solve the issue of autonomy: people's freedom of choice from a rapidly growing range of conceptual and behavioural options.

8.1.1 Beyond mortality: notions of afterlife

The content of East Indian understandings of the hereafter reveals the impact of context on processes of innovation, and the relationship between personal relevance or applicability and the durability of existing models/understandings. Contemporary Hindu notions of afterlife are highly unconventional: they are assembled from concepts of various origin chosen because of their potential to satisfy the spiritual needs of the believer. The local Hindu version of the realms beyond mortality is thus a composition of both some traditional doctrine and a number of non-traditional Christianised ideas. Existing Muslim understandings show more resilience. They have been reproduced in a relatively unaffected manner due to their comprehensibility, usefulness, and compatibility with locally dominant Christian notions. *Creative liberty* thus allowed East Indians either to embrace conventional understandings or to remodel them in a dialogue with the altered contexts. And that is what the following description shows.

(Similarities) – To believe is generally harder than to disbelieve. Or rather, in certain ways it is easier to be freed from the bonds with the transcendental than to be subject to the complex of restrictive divine laws and sanctions that regulate mankind's relationship with

it. Personal sacrifice is required to (re)establish the necessary and ultimate relationship with the unseen. Religious systems, however, invariably include a ‘Grand Promise’ that makes devotion and submission worth their price: the sacrifice of the tempting yet deemed superficial and even illusionary freedom the unbelievers enjoy. It is that Promise that makes the connection with the transcendental reciprocal and thus worthwhile.

The essence of the Grand Promise is remarkably similar across the world’s various major religions. In one way or another it assures you that eventually no evil or wrongdoings will be left unpunished, and that all good or righteousness will ultimately be rewarded.³⁷⁰ Also the East Indians’ Hinduism and Islam promise divine fairness or justice. They argue that exclusive faith in their respective pathway, and accordingly submission to their specific super reality and meta laws, will be generously rewarded, possibly during our existence on the mortal planes but certainly in the hereafter. This post-mortem payment can be considered the quintessence of their Grand Promise. It denotes a beneficial – as well as often a complementary unbeneficial – condition after that what is labelled death. This beneficial condition is the great reward for pious living. The acquisition of that state is theoretically the end goal, the so called *telos*, of the believers, and something that will remain beyond reach of the disobedient.

Virtually all my informants, irrespective of their religious belonging, share a belief in the existence of such a condition or a place beyond death. This collective belief is founded upon both certain commonalities in doctrinal fundamentals as well as paralleling subjectivities, or images of the self.³⁷¹ Acceptance of eternal existence, despite the transitory nature of organic life, implies the embracing of an understanding of the true self either being not the body or being not just the body. Neither Hindu nor Muslim East Indians hold purely materialistic self-images, my informants consider themselves to be more than merely bodies with brains. In fact, it is believed that the real person is the soul, the atman, or whatever: an entity that can and will continue to exist in a disembodied form after death makes self and body part. It is this true self which is accountable for all deeds. Beyond the verge of death, this ethereal self awaits a valuation of earthly accomplishments. This valuation determines one’s post-mortem destination, offers compulsory directions for the voyage of an afterlifetime.

(*Variances*) – None of the religions thus preaches finality. All stress that successful completion of the arduous process of perfecting our relationship with the transcendental will be rewarded with interminable delight. However, in what exact shape this delight will be offered, and what exactly is required to gain access, is not something my Hindu and Muslim informants agree upon. In fact, even among the members of religious groups themselves, notions of afterlife are subject to debate and processes of transformation.

³⁷⁰ Local interpretations of divine justice will be further discussed in 8.1.3.

³⁷¹ In this chapter, I will employ the neutral term ‘(true) self’ instead of soul and for instance atman, terms with doctrinal connotations. The concept denotes a non-material real ‘I’ that is temporarily embodied.

Many people award themselves a considerable amount of interpretative freedom. Consequently, data reveal the existence of a great and growing variety of visions within religious communities. Processes of globalisation and localisation, decomposition and incorporation, have obviously encouraged the inventive believer to embrace unconventional images of the world beyond.

This amazing variety, and people's ability to choose or compose, are particularly palpable within Guyana's Hindu realm. Hindu understandings of afterlife are a great example of the functioning of schemata of people living in complex environments. My informants' explanations of the hereafter are assembled from notions of various origin, partially constructed of traditional doctrinal notions, and partially of unconventional understandings of non-Indian origin. They involve the rejection of classical notions of the immortal self and its ultimate destiny (*moksha*), and the acceptance of classical notions of cyclical nature of existence (reincarnation). Only for the sake of suitability in the here and now.

Few East Indians sketched an image of afterlife that resembles its picture according to Sanatan Dharma, the official doctrine. As indicated, the concept of moksha or mukti, meaning liberation from the cycle birth and death³⁷², is often rejected, and sometimes unknown or misinterpreted. Rarely did somebody provide me with a doctrinally accurate explanation of the Grand Promise of Hinduism. Even many among the Hindu religious teachers and pundits hold alternative understandings of ultimate liberation. The loss of individuality and the ungraspable benefit that lies in the incomprehensible merge between the Self and the Absolute just do not seem to fit people's understanding of personal bliss. As the chairman of an influential regional Sanatanist organisation explained me:

“One opinion says that when you get *mukti*, you go back to Krishna, or go back to God, you merge within the atman of the Lord. The other opinion says that when you get mukti, you live side by side with the Lord without merging, you attain all the transcendental happiness and such. Now, I support the last one, because what is the purpose of working so hard to attain this thing, and when you have attained it, you no longer exist.” – *Interview, 19 November 2003*.

Absorption in the absolute is not regarded a particularly desirable Grand Promise. It is not thought to be that great to cease to 'be'. Besides, it is an unintelligible concept that requires more than superficial scrutiny of the teachings in order to be fully understood, and involves a state which is virtually unattainable. Moksha is both intellectually and practically considered to be out of reach of layman devotees. In fourteen months of field research in Guyana, I have never come across any Hindu who dared to assure me that she or he was

³⁷² *Samsara*, the cycle of birth and death, can be regarded the abode of suffering. Only when we attain moksha and escape that cycle – that is, when the Self (*atman*) has gone into the Absolute (*brahman*) – we can be truly free from sorrow and illusionary happiness.

on track to eternal salvation from the burden of *samsara*, the painful sequence of births and deaths.

Because of the complications that surround the Grand Promise of Hinduism, and because of the accessibility of attractive and more attainable alternatives in Guyana's typical multi-religious environs, many of Hindu East Indians compose altered concepts of afterlife. Rather than an advantageous state or a condition, numerous Hindus opt for a joyful place to be their post-mortem destination. The Hindu leader quoted above is an example. After I asked him to explain to me his visualisation of *mukti*, he said:

“Well, as it is the spirit world, you are not material there anymore, you are enjoying just the spirit world, roaming around enjoying the blessings of all the enjoyments the spirit can. (Q: What kind of blessings?) Having good health, no sickness, no tiredness, no torment...complete happiness then [...] joy, complete existence together in harmony that will be lasting.” – *Interview*, 19 November 2003.

Many devotees simply desire a perfected here and now. As one of my Hindu in-laws stated:

“I think it is a place where all these un-perverted things are there. It is really a reflection of what we have here on earth [...] it is a reflection of a tree in the water, it is exactly that. The spiritual realm is a reflection of the material realm, whatever we see here is exactly there, but un-perverted, that is the difference. There is no crime, there is no lust, greed, anger, you are totally free of that.” – *Interview*, 7 December 2003.

Rather than *moksha* being the ultimate goal, virtually everyone seems to strive for a spot in heaven. Such ambition is unconventional and testifies of the capacity of understandings to absorb or incorporate new elements and adapt to new circumstances. Although notions of the existence of a heavenly realm are not alien to the vast body of Hindu philosophy³⁷³, its belief in Indo-Guyana is not rooted in these impenetrable old Indian conceptions. The way in which informants verbalise their visions of afterlife, together with the endemic absence of knowledge of even elementary philosophical concepts, indicates prospects of paradise are shaped by the faith of the West (and Afro-Guyanese).

Prolonged existence on alien soil has facilitated the establishment of a Christianised Hinduism. People prefer the graphic above the abstract. Besides, circumstances facilitated people's intellectual detachment from old notions. The ongoing process of Anglicisation of the Indo-Guyanese realm – the dominance of English in schools, public life, and the

³⁷³ The universe as described in Hindu cosmology – in the form of a world egg (*brahmanda*) consisting of a number of different sheaths, with the earth at its centre – includes regions of enjoyment and even immortality above earth, as well as eight netherworlds and a series of twenty-eight *narakas* or hells below our world.

media, and accordingly the loss of knowledge of the Indian languages – has hindered access to the sacred texts, and forced the Hindu masses to grasp the essential notions using an idiom which is ill-suited to reproduce the conceptual finesses that can be found in the original texts.

Less than ten percent of the respondents could provide me with an even remotely accurate description of moksha and mukti when they filled out a questionnaire as part of a modest Hindu language survey which I conducted in 2005. Neither could they explain the related concept of Atman: the immortal and spiritual self and temporarily disengaged part the Absolute. Although many claim to be familiar with the term, only few ever use it to designate the disembodied self and are able to explain the difference between the atman and the soul.

Instead of adopting a concept of afterlife founded upon the moksha/atman structure, East Indian Hindus in Guyana have rebuilt their understanding using aspects from the alien heaven/soul combination. As far as many are concerned, we are souls on our way to heaven rather than disengaged particles of a Supreme seeking for our reunification with it. This does not imply Hindu East Indian understandings of afterlife have been completely stripped of traditional elements. Other aspects of previously existing schemas show more resilience to change, thereby supporting the argument that schemas or understandings are characterised by varying levels of durability.

Despite an untraditional belief in heaven and souls, those who exhibit a strong belief in a place called heaven tend to include a notion of reincarnation in their views on the hereafter. Few believers regard themselves eligible for permanent residence in the Place of Pleasure. Lack of strength, as well as attachment to mundane issues and objects, are thought to be obstacles too big to take right here and now. Instead, a favourable rebirth is desired, something like that what was mentioned by Sabu in the introduction to this section. People have told me they want to be born elsewhere, or wealthier, or in the same body, they have also told me they fear the possibility of rebirth as an African or as a lower form of life.

The comparatively strong and unanimous faith in reincarnation within the Christianised Hindu circles is nourished by stories and ‘signs’ of previous existence. Prenatal remembrance and birth marks are used to support re-cyclical notions of life. One man explained his fondness of expensive shoes, fancy knives and big houses by referring to a former life as wealthy Indian prince. Another informant said his father was born with pierced ears that showed he had worn earrings during his last birth. And a last informant assured me he is the reincarnation of the grandfather who died just before his birth. Similarities in ways and manners – love for cows, way of walking, looks – caused the man and his family to believe he was born in order for the deceased grandfather to keep his promise of looking after his daughter (the informant’s mother) and her crippled brother. His extraordinary devotion in doing so – he even refused to get married because of

obligations towards his resident mother and uncle – indicate the motivational force of this believe.

While certain enigmatic parts of Hindu post-mortem philosophy have been seriously modified or have actually been replaced by more attainable alternatives, people's concept of reincarnation has thus survived the test of time and transplantation relatively unharmed. Clarity, applicability, and explanatory relevance – especially in the context of crisis management – have secured the survival of cyclical notions of life. Beliefs in a paradisiacal destination coexist with faith in gradual progress, in the multi-life evolution of a perfect soul, as together they form an understanding apt to approach life in Guyana's instable environs. As I will further discuss in 'Beyond injustice', this typical East Indian understanding of afterlife is connected to understandings of metaphysical principles or laws of super nature. People await an honest reward in the hereafter because all-encompassing principles guarantee the universal distribution of justice.

Comparable understandings of transcendental regulative laws can be found in Islamic environs. Also Muslims are convinced of ultimate fairness. However, their concept of afterlife – the Islamic interpretation of the Grand Promise – is different from the understanding of the Hindus. Dissimilarities in official doctrines are especially significant. Whereas Hindu teachings consider the hereafter a condition, Islamic scriptures provide very detailed and clear-cut images of the localities of *al-akbira*, the future life. Muslims teachings explicitly state that following death, already in the grave and before *yaum al-qiyamah* (the day of the great rising), we will either experience torment or bliss.³⁷⁴ After general destruction, resurrection, and judgment, man will either be awarded a place in *Jabannam* or hell, or will be granted access to one of the seven firmaments of *Jannah* or paradise.

Sound knowledge of, and strong faith in, the official design of these realms of future existence is widespread in Islamic Guyana. Unlike many Hindus, Muslim East Indians generally articulate images of afterlife that are not severely affected by localisation processes. Undoubtedly, the imaginable, homogeneous and comparatively uncomplicated nature of the 'official' Islamic understandings of the hereafter are a reason. Durability of understandings strongly depends on relevance and comprehensibility.

Another reason is the centrality of concepts of death, and post-mortem reward and punishment in Muslim religious discourse. By far, the favourite topic of *khutbahs* (sermons) in Guyana is death, and how our lives in the here and now are nothing but massive *Jannah*

³⁷⁴ This is called the state of *barzakh*. According to Layla Mabrouk (1987) this is the third in four stages of human existence. The first is the domain of the mother's womb, the second is the domain of this world ("in which we are familiar with and from which we acquire good and evil and the means to happiness or misery"), and the last one is "the Everlasting Domain which comprises the Garden and the Fire." During *barzakh*, the wrongdoers will suffer and the righteous will already enjoy some of the blessings of paradise. As Mabrouk (1987:17) explains, "the door onto the Garden is opened and he [the righteous] sees his place there. This door will remain open until the Day of Rising. Some of the sweetness and fragrance of the Garden [paradise] reaches him and his grave is made spacious. He sleeps in peace just as if he were in one of the meadows of the Garden."

entrance exams. Attendants of meetings and events in masjids and in the homes of the faithful are constantly confronted with illustrations of the Grand Promise and have adopted visions quite similar to the ones marketed by local and visiting Muslim lecturers. According to many, paradise is almost like a super earth, a place where the inconceivably magnificent equivalents of all the inferior mundane sources of sense gratification will be freely and unrestrictedly available to all inhabitants. As old uncle Haniff, one of my informants, depicted, it is a site where all our desires will be fulfilled:

“You only gaffa desire what you want, whether it’s chicken curry or frie rice. You know, jus name what you want, you get it right away. You only aspire fuh it, you only tink about it, and there it is, you know, it come to you. Fruits, there you go see the trees dem, and since you aspire fuh these fruits so the branch ah come to you, and you just pick and eat, you know. And the you got youths, the dwellers of Paradise³⁷⁵, you know whoever they are, whatever kind of creation, whether they are angels or not...they will be servants of us.” – *Interview, 9 July 2003.*

Jannah, just like Jahannam, is a place of which the architecture and atmosphere can easily be captured in images of earth. Understandings of worldly satisfaction and pleasure, the taste of fried rice or the sight of beautiful people, are activated to make the Garden utterly appealing, and are used by believers to imagine and explain the bliss and blessings of afterlife. In fact, the picture painted by uncle Haniff is an example of how non-transcendental concepts of life are not only employed to envisage the paradisiacal enjoyment but also to establish a general understanding of a reality that is beyond personal knowledge and experience. His answer to my request for explication of the heavenly firmaments is illustrative:

“You know the first one [firmament] you nah go get the same amount of happiness like the second one, and you know the second one you nah go get the same amount of happiness like the tird one. You...just like you live in one place, one village and this country. This village is poor you know, agricultural production, and the means of life. You gaffa live in thatch houses and so on. Right, but still you live nice because you are enjoying the bounties of Allah subhanahu wa ta’ala, right? You don’t have any worries because you are not in hell, you plant your little garden and something and you get something. I mean we are comparing this earth life with deh...right, so you know you live in thatch houses and so on, but you are not in torment, you know, you still deh happy because you are in shelter, you know how, no sun heat, no nothing of this earth. You got another village now, where you

³⁷⁵ This might be a reference to *ghilman* or *wildan*, the children of Paradise mentioned in the Qur’an.

got people living in better houses, better accommodation, better running water and so on, the third one will got better than that, the fourth one got better than that, and this is how we can picture it, you know. We don't know because Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala say no matter how much you imagine, your brain cannot comprehend what it will meet. They say the food that you eat here and the drinks that you drink here, you got better than that, you see. You got rivers of milk, rivers of honey clarified." – *Interview, 9 July 2003.*

Images of the Guyanese reality that uncle Haniff experiences on a daily base are used by him to portray the layout of Jannah. As if the hereafter is a reflection of the here, a realm in which the untainted and glorious essences of earth can be found.

The actual understanding of afterlife, displayed by mister Haniff and many of his fellow-Muslims, is ultimately not all that different from the unofficial understandings held by numerous Hindus. The account of my earlier quoted in-law is an example. Also he regards the world beyond a place quite like ours, accept without the typically mundane misery and agony, a place that is longed for by those confronted with the frustrations and unfulfilled promises of contemporary earthly existence. However, whereas the Hindus generally do not consider themselves likely graduates of college earth, the Muslim majority is convinced their seats in Jannah are reserved. Although informants believe that eternal happiness might be preceded by a purificatory period in hellfire, bliss is usually thought to await all those who acknowledge the *shahada* (the creed). As one of my informants formulated:

"We as Muslims, all Muslims, regardless how strong your piety, or how weak your piety, every Muslim, anyone who testifies *la ilaha illa Allah, Muhammadon rasul Allah* will enter Paradise. He might go to Jahannam, which is hellfire, for a while, because Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala...the purpose of that is to purify him." – *Interview, 3 July 2003.*

According to some, faith alone will grant access to Jannah. Irrespective of their deeds, the unfaithful will be denied the right of entry at the gates of the heavenly firmaments. Proclaiming the shadada, regardless of the speaker's sincerity, is often already considered to be a giant leap towards everlasting excitement. I was habitually ordered by imams and ardent believers to utter those few words, and was explicitly told to do so even if I did not accept its implications: recognising the oneness of God and the finality of prophethood. As far as they were concerned it would allow me a jumpstart on my way to the ultimate destination and of course to *liqa Allah*, the fulfilment of greatest part of the Grand Promise.

All residents of Paradise, namely, will be granted an audience to Allah. As also advertised by other religions, the prospect of proximity to the Lord, the Father, or the

Absolute, is one of the supreme attractions of afterlife. A sheikh explained me how, in Jannah, a screen will open and Allah will finally make his appearance known to those who have been submissive throughout their earthly lives. He told me this encounter should be seen as a natural or logical episode in the evolving relationship between entities, and a rightful privilege of those who have devoted their lives to something or someone they have not been able to create even a mental image of.

8.1.2 *Beyond earth: images of God and the divine*

Islamic portrayal of the Supreme is highly restricted. Any attempt to visualise Allah is regarded sinful and a move towards the unforgivable and severely punishable practice of idolatry. To imagine god, Muslims are sentenced to the non-figurative. Their knowledge of and respect for the creator must derive from the interpretation (or absorption) of a series of ninety-nine attributes of Allah which are mentioned in the Qur'an. These absolute qualities – ranging from 'most merciful' (*Al Rahim*) to 'quick in punishment' (*Sari' al 'Iqab*) – are the only lawful building blocks of the believer's Allah-image. Hence, rarely have Muslim informants been able or courageous enough to provide me with graphic descriptions of their Absolute. Like a Muslim male told me after I asked him to portray Allah:

“Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala, wah he is, it is, me nah know...me cyan't describe em. Me cyan't describe em at all. Me too insignificant fuh describe Allah. Wha me know about Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala...he is all wise, all great, he is superior, he is the creator, he is the fashioner...” – *Interview, 11 November 2003.*

Man is too little to know more than the attributes of the master of his universe. Even the attempt to contemplate on Allah in any different way, to ask questions concerning his nature to which the revelations have not already given an answer, is discouraged or even forbidden. A Muslim explained me how careful one should be when thinking about god:

“Me ah tink yes, but Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala says, what you head, you brain cannot comprehend, lef em easy, you know, lef em easy. Who created Allah for instance, if you go to that, you know how, how he come into existence, nah go so far, lef em down easy. (Q: So, you are not supposed to think about that?) Nah, you are not supposed to. You know, he warn us, he say you might commit shirk³⁷⁶ there, when you start thinking about how he came into being, you understand? So we got a limitation brother Hans, we got a limitation, and we mus stand to our limitation.” – *Interview, 30 July 2003.*

³⁷⁶ The gravest of all sins, shirk (partnership) signifies the act of associating gods with God.

Contemplation and interpretation are regarded dangerous, activities that destabilise the faith of feeble-minded who are always under siege of Shaitan and innate destructive tendencies. One should thus quote instead of query, and let the revealed concept of Allah be an inspiration to follow that path of Islam and fear going astray.

This fear of failure is characteristic of the Islamic doctrine as pronounced in Guyana. The concept of *taqwa*³⁷⁷ (roughly, fear) forms an essential part of people's understanding of Allah and of the relationship between mankind and god. A combination of fear and love for the one who has created us, sustains us, and will judge us, is said to be the great motivator of Islamic piety. Ideally, Muslims should do whatever they do because of infinite affection for the Supreme and out of great concern with the repercussions attached to sin:

“It is that you want to please Allah subhanahu wa ta’ala all the time, anything you do has to be for the love for Allah. If you love Allah, follow me, that is Muhammad, and Allah will love you and Allah will give you sustenance [...] and the love always has to come with a fear, the concept that some people or who knows a little about Islam, they would tell you, Muslim brothers have to be in a fear, in reality...the concept of taqwa, there has to be love for Allah with a fear, because you know why, Allah’s one can move you out of haqq, out of Islam any time, two and you can be misguided and two is that fear for Allah, is the tantamount fear that you don’t want to wind up with the book of deeds in the left hand, but in the right hand.” – *Interview, 31 July 2003.*

Accordinging of my informants, the mixture of fear and love experienced by the devout illustrates the dependency relationship between man and god. Although autonomous in certain ways and – as adults – responsible for our own deeds, I have been assured we cannot do anything without the help of *al-Muqīt*, the Controller of all. Man is like a child, and Allah the strict but just father who should be both passionately loved, and feared with greatest fear.

This notion of heavenly fatherhood is fundamental to Muslim understandings of the Supreme. Although often employed in a rhetorical way, or as a metaphorical manner of explaining our relationship with the transcendental, notions of paternity (borrowed from the realm of family) invigorate the bond and can trigger feelings and motivate actions. Allusions to Allah’s guardianship or references to our shortcomings thus cause some to experience strong feelings of guilt or other intense emotions. Ahmad, a seventy year-old I used to visit almost weekly during my stays in Essequibo, often displayed his ‘childish’ adoration of Allah the Father by crying virtually every time he mentioned Allah’s grandeur, his fatherly love for humanity and his mercifulness. An interesting example of the

³⁷⁷ According to the – in Guyana most popular – Yusuf Ali translation of the Qur’an, the term signifies (1) fear of Allah; (2) restraint from evil; (3) and righteousness or good conduct.

intertwinement of meaning and practice and the affect of the *cross-application* of powerful understandings.

Like Indian ideals concerning one's relationship with one's worldly father, ties with Allah should be maintained and perfected by means of complete acceptance and obedience to his rules. Believers must display submission by acknowledging the doctrine in general, and through the performance of prescribed or recommended acts of worship and forms of communication in particular. Muslim teachings offer detailed manifestos of Islamically correct existence. These make virtually every action into an opportunity to prove a deep love for the almighty, worship him, and work towards the establishment of a perfect relationship with the transcendental.³⁷⁸

Another means in the process of divine relationship building is voluntary prayer. This is the most direct and personal way of relating with the transcendental. According to my informants, immediate communication with god is possible at any time, and can be realised in two ways: by making du'a, or reciting an appropriate given formula; and by verbalising one's desires or worries in a personal plea. The latter represents a common manner of verbal interacting with the unseen rather than a well-defined part of the Islamic institution of prayer. It is another indication of the tendency to humanise god, and the desire to establish a personal and 'real' relationship with the transcendental.

A similar desire can be discerned in the Guyanese Hindu community. In fact, Hindu understandings reveal that the wish to have such a personal bond inspires the incorporation of alien models in the existing notions of the divine, irrespective even of the official doctrine. Especially among the younger generations, (Christian-like) 'free-style' prayer has become preferred over the use of the incomprehensible and pre-cooked mantras.

Although senior and philosophically trained Hindus still recite ancient Sanskrit passages to alter the course of things, to acquire strength or knowledge, and to ward off ill-fate, the bulk of believers claims to pray in English and aims to manipulate reality by presenting god or the gods with some sort of petition. Strangely enough contrary to their steadfast belief in karma, many thus assume the inevitable effects of a cause can be terminated by begging for divine intervention. This inconsistency is a typical feature of cultural constellations. It not only shows that contextual change affects the content of the people's understandings, it also indicates that conflicting schemas can be internalised and are able to coexist. Under 8.2, I will further analyse this phenomenon. For now, it is enough to note that this dominant concept of communication with the inhabitants of the celestial realm is connected with the images of devotas held by my East-Indian subjects.

More specifically, the popularity of conversational prayer in Hindu circles presupposes the existence of humanised images of deities that are similar to the Islamic

³⁷⁸ Hence, activities such as sleeping and going to the toilet could be regarded religious exercises. Accurate execution of those acts – Islamised through the addition of ritual – will be rewarded with blessings which can be cashed in on judgment day

ones. Despite the fact that Hinduism allows the Supreme to be recognised as a disembodied reality with neither a form nor attributes (*nirguna*), the average Guyanese pictures it as an entity (entities) with both an appearance and qualities (*saguna*). Except for some Arya Samaj³⁷⁹, people prefer tangible images of god and godheads, concepts in which the transcendental world is depicted as a parallel realm in which a collection of higher beings reside.

These beings, known as devotas, possess both godly qualities and human traits. According to my informants, they are employed by the Absolute to help govern the universe. The devotas are transmigrated elevated but imperfect souls that have yet failed to attain final liberation but are rewarded for their advancement with a seat in divine territories. They have faces and families, and display virtues and the ability to misbehave. They are the recipients of prayers as well as the subject of Hindu devotional practice. In fact, many of the rituals performed in Sanatanist circles involve sacrifice to and the adoration of these entities. The correct execution of specific pujas and the offering of special prasad have to convince the respective deity to utilise her or his particular influence in favour of the yajman, the performer or organiser of the ritual, and his family. According to many, this influence comprises consultative power rather than the actual authority to intervene. As several informants have told me, they should be seen as mediators, senior siblings who can be convinced or begged to represent our case in the transcendental court of justice, in front of the ultimate parent:

“We don’t have to pray to them but we can channel certain desires through them, but the ultimate prayer is to the supreme. But for instance if you need rain, there are certain deities the Lord says to pray to, Indra for wind you got the wind god and such...”

It is possible to ask the many deities to fight for us, perhaps even help us escape the negative consequences of our misconduct. Hindus can turn to the appropriate godhead for assistance or they can make an appeal to their *ishite* (*ista*) devota, their personal and favourite godly entity. Most Hindus I know have an ‘isht’. In some cases it is more or less a family deity, a divinity object of preferential fondness within a home or lineage. In other cases it is an entity someone feels particularly drawn to and maintains the closest and most personal relationship with. The account of Sita, a Hindu lady somewhere in her fifties, is illustrative:

“A rice farmer do Hanuman puja. (Q: Dem nah do Suraj?) Some people does do Suraj but me like do, me does do Suraj work with the sun, me does do Shiva work, me does do Durga work, me does do Ganga work, yes. And all in all me love Krishna. (Q: How come yuh love he?) Well me love he because, anything, anything, what me feel like pray morning time, and you

³⁷⁹ Guyana’s largest non-mainstream Hindu sect, see also chapter four.

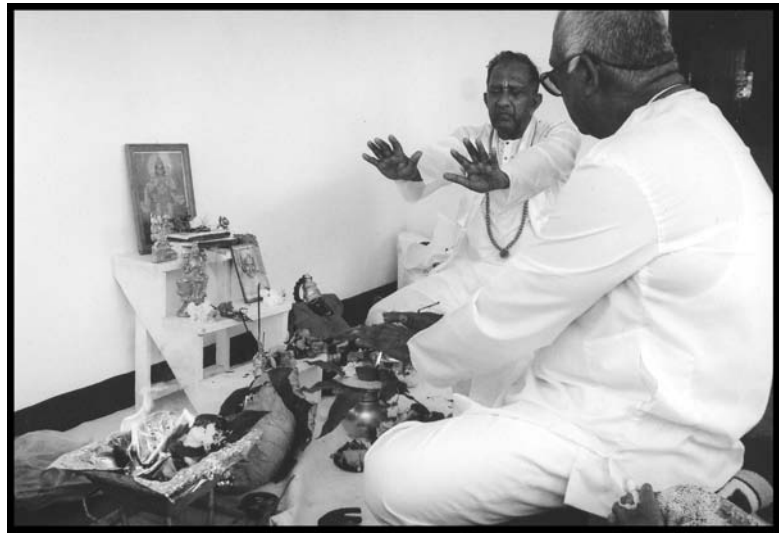
know, and me does get through with it. And if something fuh happen too, me does get sign. Sometime me eye jump, yes this left eye does jump and when it jump nah worry with that. (Q: If your eye jumps you should not do something?) Well if this left eye jump something wrong. That same morning when that boy fuh dead, me left eye jump, me said something wrong, so me said Krishna I wonder what go wrong. Me does study me children then, or me does tell them to be careful with their motorbike on the road, you know how, so me love Krishna. (Q: Some people say Shiva the Supreme lord though?) Well, me nah got too much dealing with Shiva. Me nah say me nah like him, but me nah got too much dealing, me like Krishna. (Q: How you decide Krishna is...) Well you see since me grow me know me like Krishna. You see, since me grow up then me grow with Krishna and Rama. Krishna and Rama ah one.” – *Interview, 17 December 2003.*

The relationship with an ishte devota like Lord Krishna can be experienced as intimate and even interactive. Sita does not only regard Krishna her favourite deity and the ideal target of her loving devotion, she also believes that he is her guardian. Lord Krishna notifies Sita, by making her eyelid ‘jump’, whenever something unusual is about to happen.



Pundit and devotee (r) in front of a private altar, performing puja

The ishte devota is not necessarily the entity that is the highest and most powerful of all. As indicated, if not the Supreme, one's personal deity can be employed as a mediator between the devotee and the one in whose hands lies the absolute and decisive power. The exact identity of this all-powerful Supreme is contested.



As far as some informants are concerned, Lord Shiva is the master of the universe. Others, especially those associated with Kali Mai worship, believe in the supremacy of Devī, the divine mother. The majority, however, can be labelled *Vaisnavas*. Most Guyanese Hindus see in Lord Vishnu, or in one of his bodily descents (*avatars*³⁸⁰), the Pervasive One. The bulk of mainstream Sanatanists, members of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, and devotees of Sathya Sai Baba, are all convinced that He is the Magnificent Metaphysical Coordinator.

Unlike His or Her true identity, the characteristics of the Supreme are virtually uncontested. Vaisnavas, *Saivas*, and *Saktas* agree the ruler of all is omnipotent and omnipresent. He or She is everywhere and in everything. While Islamic teachings explain creation as a collection of expressions or demonstrations of God's greatness, the common Hindu philosophy tends to define creation as materialisations or embodiments of God. Like a well known and aged guru told me:

“Everything *is* God, everything up to that shoe is God. He is in everything, so once he is in everything, everything is he, everything you see. He is in the toilet, he is in the septic tank, he is everywhere. Nowhere nah exist where he is not present. Nobody can point and tell me god nah deh there.” – *Interview*, 29 October 2003.

The implications of this omnipresence are extensive. First of all, it complicates the formation of a saguna concept of God. How can the one who we can capture in thoughts, words, and images be here, there and everywhere? Furthermore, it implies divinity within

³⁸⁰ Krishna and Rama are the most popular Vishnu avatars. But also Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu (ISKCON) and Sathya Sai Baba are thought to be embodiments of Vishnu by their adherents.

us. If God is ubiquitous and everything, then we are God as well. In the words of the (late) Guyanese guru:

“So God is everywhere, one soul occupies everything, me, you and everybody, one should, one God. But we can’t say ‘one God’, because no matter how this God is big, it got a limitation. So, we can’t say ‘one God’, one is numeral, no matter how it big, it is one, it got space around it.” – *Interview, 29 October 2003.*

And logics seem to be on this (Arya) guru’s side. If God is everything and limitless, God cannot be one, because one is bounded and not infinite. And if we are God, or sparks of the Supreme, it might be our task to seek reunification with that Supreme instead of strive towards individual paradisiacal comfort. For that is what can follow from the understanding of all-pervasiveness: we are temporarily disengaged particles of something Absolute. As said, despite an often claimed faith in the Supreme’s omnipresence, the general understanding of our relationship with the transcendental includes the somewhat conflicting notion of human individuality. Explanations of that connection reveal a belief in the durable separation of man and God. We are not temporarily disengaged and looking for re-absorption, we have temporarily distanced ourselves and are seeking for a return to proximity.

Once again, this indicates the forces of change. It narrates the modifying effects of processes of localisation and Anglicisation on the content of understandings that have also encouraged the replacement of the moksha/atman structure with the heaven/soul combination. In fact, both the description of the understandings of the afterlife (8.1.1) and the divine realm (8.1.2) illustrate transformative tendencies as well as processes of reproduction and thus variances in durability. Notions of a particular post-mortem destination have come to supplement relatively resilient Hindu beliefs in reincarnation.

Similarities and differences in conceptions and practices of Muslim and Hindu informants reveal the existence and functioning of understandings of the transcendental. Actions and sentiments invoked by images of the beyond are evidence of the motivational power of this range of understandings, and exemplify the intertwinement of (cultural) meaning and practice. Interesting examples are the emotions triggered by imaginations of God the Father among some of my informants. These emotions also demonstrate the existence of linkages between ‘separate’ constellations. Understandings of earthly bliss and agony clearly inspire the design of my informants’ concepts of afterlife. Likewise, the elaborate idea of divine paternity held by many draws from understandings borrowed from the body of (Indian) family practice and ideology.

The (Hindu) humanisation of divinities, the inclination to establish some sort of virtual kinship with higher entities, actually indicates the individual’s ability to chose and recreate in ways similar to the East Indian notions of afterlife discussed under 8.1.1.

Personal and/or context-related needs, emotions, and desires motivate the formation and application of understandings that emphasise images of god and godheads that are not necessarily doctrinal or conventional. In the following section, the investigation of individual choice, and the linkage between motivation and transformation, continues with the analysis of people's conceptualisations of ultimate justice. Also Hindu and Muslim interpretations of the rules of super nature are produced and reproduced to suit the believers' wishes. Dominance of certain notions of all-governing transcendental laws results from individual interpretive and strategic exercises, motivated by perceptions of the self in the world as described in chapter five.

'Beyond justice' comprises a brief comparative analysis of these exercises and their consequences for the definition of regulative meta-laws. It examines Hindu perceptions of the law of karma and the Muslim belief in a theory of challenge. Both are reproductions of traditional religious understandings that owe their survival to their relevance as instruments to structure and explain contemporary complexities and inequities. Their foundation and assumptions of ultimate fairness, and their – problematic, but functional – linkage with ideas of predestination, have enabled the Hindu and Muslim understandings of transcendental laws to grow into important tools in 'battles' with senses of crisis that prevail within segments of the East Indian community. In fact, their high relevance (together with their comprehensibility) has allowed these to be amongst the primary and most durable of all cultural understandings, and is one of the reasons interest in religious systems in the East Indian's world today is not only secured but, in certain circles, is even growing. Just like innovation, conservation or reproduction of existing cultural understandings is also a choice, an act motivated by a sensed necessity to do so, a more or lesser conscious positive appraisal of its worth in the here and now. Beyond Injustice is an example.

8.1.3 Beyond injustice: investigating the laws of super nature

The Hindu East Indian quest for a return to spheres close to the Almighty, mentioned at the end of 'Beyond earth', resembles the strategy of Muslims. Both include attempts to perfect the relationship with the transcendental by improving personal conduct or social behaviour on earth and performing acts of worship to please God. However, there is a significant difference. Whereas Muslims regard a correct conviction to be essential³⁸¹, Hindus believe that righteous action alone can bring elevation. In fact, many state that different paths to the Divine can be travelled. As swami Aksharananda assured me, various trails must lead to God consciousness:

“[...]because, once you bring God in as responsible for religion, there are a lot of questions that we have to answer. Like, apparently God did not know

³⁸¹ As one informant said, you can kind as Mother Theresa, if you are *kafir* you will wind up in Jahannam.

what he was doing and so gave human beings all these different religions...”
 – *Interview, 20 August 2003.*

Most Hindus agree that, if God is everything and everywhere, the controller of all, God also must have provided mankind with religious diversity. The bulk of these god-given doctrines cannot be worthless or even detrimental. Sanatan Dharma just offers superior guidance, the clearest insights in metaphysical reality and the uncorrupted Grand Promise.

Because of their doctrine, Hindus have access to advanced knowledge of humanity’s purpose, position, and weakness, as well as to information on the implications of misbehaviour and the neutralisation of harmful inclinations. Mankind’s actual objective, for instance, is not only to “serve God”, “to make God happy”, “to get perfection” and “to do the righteous thing”, it is also thought to be “to enjoy his creation.” Whereas Muslim teachers teach Earth is a hell to the pious, Hindu leaders consider bliss to be attainable right here and now. The ‘Hindu world’ is not the sphere of merely test and trial the Muslims are taught about. It is a playground for the fortunate. The acquisition of human life on our planet means the realisation of a form with the rare faculty to choose right from wrong and thus take the final steps on an atman’s road to the fulfilment of its existential destiny. These steps will take the (embodied) atman down a road of pre-mortem pleasure, through valleys of earthly delight that are unmentioned on the Islamic roadmap. As an Essequibean pundit assured me: “it [the Hindu doctrine] does not deprive mankind of the fulfilment of our earthly desires,” including the enjoyment of material aspects of life. We should just be careful not to be blinded by the apparent glittering beauty of mundane satisfactions.

An informant told me that we have to control our senses and not let the senses control us. And as far as I am concerned, that summarises the remarkably consistent Hindu understanding of the fundamental cause of human misery and failure. It is enslavement to sense gratification and (accordingly) negative emotions that prevents many of us to advance and escape pain and depression for ever. The *Bhagavadgīta* says something quite similar:

Delusion, anger, and greed [*moha*, *lobha*, and *krrodha*] – this triple gate of hell brings about the ruination of the soul. Therefore, one should avoid all these three.

Freed from these three gates of hell, man works his own salvation and thereby attains the supreme goal, i.e., God. – *Bhagavadgīta*, XVI, 21, 22.

Delusion is the root of all vices. The masses pursue an illusionary or false happiness because they rely on contaminated sensory information. *Maya* (illusion), as it is sometimes a little imprecisely labelled in Guyana, arouses misperception, heedlessness, wrath, jealousy, confusion, insatiability, and many more destructive tendencies. It is the result of common

imperfections that will have to be overcome and can only truly be defeated after complete acceptance of, and compliance to, one of the Hindu paths to liberation.³⁸²

What is required, at least according to several of my informants, is a major change of focus which is occasionally referred to as a shift from 'body consciousness' to 'soul consciousness'.³⁸³ As a well-known Arya Sanskrit and yoga teacher explained me:

“Consciousness is, you will, we call it consciousness is when you loose body consciousness, then you are conscious. Consciousness is conscious of the atman and the parmatman, soul and god, that is consciousness. (Q: And what is body consciousness?) Body conscious is egoism, self centred, you call that body conscious, you have got to loose that. (Q: Is the concept of maya is related to that?) Yeah, maya is egoism. (Q: I thought it was illusion?) Yeah, well that is illusion, that is illusion, you know that will... aspirants should not totally eliminate maya, because it is part of our life, we should recognise maya. But the point is, the point is you must not allow maya to rule you, you know, like the lotus leaf, the lotus leaf born in water, has been living in water, has been flourishing by water, but if you throw water on it, it won't take it, so that way you must treat maya, don't allow it and it is part of our life because you cannot do without maya.”

According to him this transformation from body to soul conscious beings has to be completed right here. Only if we learn to perceive the ultimate truth in this life, rebirth can be prevented:

“It is childish to say that reality cannot be achieved here. If, reality cannot be achieved here, it cannot be achieved nowhere, learn this one philosophy; if reality cannot be achieved here, nowhere it can be achieved, because here is the base. Now, do you know moksha must be had before you die, not after you die, that is a wrong concept. [...] Moksha must be had while you are living, then it will go with you. But if you are building for get moksha after you die, you will never get it. You will need a next life. But, it can be had here, but mankind is not working towards it. If you go and ask people, they are not interested in moksha, because when you look what they are doing, then you will see they are far from moksha. – *Interview, 27 May 2003.*”

If you look at the world today, the teacher says, body consciousness prevails. People everywhere are driven by physical cravings, and material gain is our primary motivator. It is

³⁸² These are the paths of works (*karmamarga*), knowledge (*jnanamarga*) and devotion (*bhaktimarga*). As indicated in chapter four, the bhaktimarga is the most popular and most widely preached path in Guyana.

³⁸³ This particular terminology seems to derive from Raja Yoga philosophy, but is used by those who do not belong to this sect as well.

a characteristic of human existence in this Age of Strife, the Kali Yuga: the era in which righteousness has given place to unrighteousness, and mankind proceeds towards inevitable doom. The omnipresence of misery in our world is only a logical consequence of the inclination of this age's people to seek virtually nothing but the satisfaction of bodily desires. As a matter of fact, absolutely all we go through, both good and bad, is simply the result of our previous actions, either performed here or during a previous life.

As said, the utmost popular explanatory phrase in Guyana's Hindu community is "what you sow is what you reap." The great majority of believers is convinced of the absence of coincidence. Collective religious understandings concerning the super natural law of karma facilitate believers in the process of dealing with life in today's instable surroundings, to make sense of the unfair, the uncertain, and incomprehensible. Our birthplace, our genetic makeup, our talents, our stupidities and weaknesses, and our apparent luck are all the result of what we ourselves have done before. Although contradicted by often articulated understandings of divine mercy, a belief in the mechanism of cause and effect is claimed by virtually all Hindus. All we have got, will get, and have ever gotten is what we deserve, that is law, and there is nothing anyone can do about it. As a Sanatanist once told me:

"Now, people gets help from their own karma, this is what they got to understand. It is not God that helps them, Gods hands are not going to help you unless you do the right things. He is the dispenser actually, he is just giving you what you deserve and he is fair, if you deserve bad you get bad, if you deserve good, you get good and that deserving comes from your karma, so it pays to do good, if you do good, there would not be sickness, there would not be poverty, there would not be wrongdoings, and remember he is the guide, that is the purpose of praying. If you pray to him, he shows you the way to overcome these difficulties, you pray for guidance, you don't pray for money and sickness and health and such." – *Interview, 19 November 2003.*

Hence, the concept of godly forgiveness is deemed false and – so is suggested – can perhaps even be considered a fraudulent marketing trick pulled by followers of imperialistic creeds:

"Christians are being fooled by their preachers and people are not realistic to know that a man has to pay for his deeds, that is why the ten commandments are there: thou shall not steal; thou shall this...because it is going to suffer you. If Christ would have forgiven you for everything, he done would have tell you thou shall not steal? Because if you steal he is going to pardon you. So Hinduism is more realistic in that if you do somebody wrong you got to suffer, you must realise that and God cannot pardon you

for your wrongdoings. You got to do certain extra work to pardon yourself. For instance, we go to pray, most body go to pray and say “oh God help me.” God does not help, it is you who help yourself. God makes sure that the conditions are there for you to be rewarded according to your Karma that is what the Hindus believe.” – *Interview, 21 May 2003.*

Karma is the term with which existence is explained. Sickness or handicaps, misfortune, self-destructiveness, deprivation, and unhappiness, are all considered to be fair rewards for misconduct. Especially the agony of others is often labelled the product of ‘bad karma’. But also personal misery can be regarded a result of metaphysical justice. Informants have told me their unhappy marriage, demanding jobs, their tumour, and their malformed polio-affected body allow them to pay for sins of the past with the appropriate amount of suffering.

Hindu understandings of transgression and compensation, or compliance and reward, thus function both as explanatory devices and coping mechanisms. Karma enables my Hindu informants to explain the unexplainable and helps them to deal with things that might otherwise have been unacceptable. In Guyana’s contemporary reality, permeated with inexplicabilities and uncertainties due to domestic instability and the impact of foreign forces, the ancient Hindu law of super nature serves as a valuable interpretative instrument. There is little need for modification, karma adequately justifies the unreasonable. All is deserved, nothing unfair. None of us is a victim, although subject to forces which we cannot control or escape from, we owe our vulnerability to them to our own decisions. We are completely responsible because we are completely free. A rice farmer explained this as divine democracy after I asked him whether today’s problems are meant to be or an unfortunate accident:

“Man is not tied, mankind, he say you are not tied to these instructions, he say you are free. There is nothing more democratic than God. You are free to do whatever you want in this world, free to listen to whatever you want to listen to in this world, to see whatever you want to see in this world. He [God] says all of these things you are free to do, I give, I am just giving and I shall continue to give instructions because of peace and happiness.” – *Interview, 3 July 2003.*

We have got our instructions and it is up to us to decide whether to follow these guidelines or to discard them and find our own way. All we should remember is that there is a price attached to everything: the execution of transcendental justice is inevitable.

This understanding of ultimate autonomy, absolute decisive freedom, coexists with notions that possess a certain explanatory value. Although we, as atmans, know freedom of choice, as embodied souls – a position that is the result of our previous decisions – we

cannot escape human nature and our inclination to go astray. In fact, a large number of devotees believes we traverse spaces and times according to a script written in advance. As men and women of the dark age we are almost bound to suffer and experience the hardship and pain transcendental authorities have known about ever since the day we arrived on these planes.

Such a concept of predestination (in combination with personal accountability) is part of the religious understanding of many, irrespective of their doctrinal preference. Like karma, it is embraced because of its relevance to make sense of the world's complexities. Islamic teachings mention the Arabic terms *taqdir* and *qadr* in their explanations of the nature of reality. According to Ali (1990:235), the Qur'anic meaning of these often misunderstood notions is "the ordinance or the measure which is working out throughout the creation."³⁸⁴ However, *taqdir* and *qadr* have come to signify the absolute decree of good and evil by God. Also in Guyana, Muslims are convinced of predestination and the foreknowledge of Allah. As Haseeb Yussuf, then the leader (*Murshid*) of the influential Islamic Trust, believes:

"Even before creation, before inception of a creation, He [Allah] already had the full knowledge of us and what we do and what we will end up doing and all of that. So that *qadr* really, what happens, it happens by the decree and will of God, because of God's knowledge of the functions of the human being. [...] So everything is by His knowledge and by His will and by His divine plan and by His...the Hadith says, the first thing Allah created was the pen, is that He created the pen and He told the pen to write and the pen write everything, everything is by decree. So *qadr*, for the believer, is very, very easy, and this is why the believer does not lose hope, the believer never becomes discontent, the believer never becomes frustrated. The believer becomes tired, it is natural human behaviour to feel a bit down and out, but the believer never becomes frustrated and discontent, and say well look, you know I am finished with and I am going to do so and so and so. The believer is conscious that everything happens by the decree of Allah, and if this is Allah's decree, then he accepts Allah's decree without any, without any argument, without any doubt, without any..." – *Interview, 6 October 2003*.

Allegedly, it is because of *qadr* or *taqdir* that the believer can accept his fate, and digest the seemingly unfair challenges he or she encounters in contemporary life. Allah is the controller and knower of everything and, although His all-governing decrees might not be understood, they are part of a perfect transcendental strategy that should never be questioned or doubted.

³⁸⁴ He (1990:235) mentions "the *taqdir* of the sperm of man, out of which grows man only, not any other animal."

Nevertheless, the doctrine of predestination remains difficult, especially in Islam. Fatalism clashes with Islamic understandings of free will and liability. Despite Allah's absolute information, and the fact that humanity walks down foreknown paths, my informants regard man to be independent and responsible for choices between the good and the bad:

“We are free to choose what we want, to do right or wrong. Because Allah says he has created us and he has given us the free will to choose whatever we want.” – *Interview, 6 October 2003.*

We might be deliberately created weak and subject to temptations and evil forces that we are not responsible for, as mature individuals we are to blame for all forms of disobedience. The palpable tension between this idea of accountability on one hand and the generally expressed views on predestination on the other hand is hard to overcome. Whereas Hindus at least have their cyclic notion of time, the sins of the pre-natal past, and the concept of atman to release some of the tension, the Muslims have no such tools available. Hence, the way my Muslim informants explain birth in extremely unfavourable conditions is by referring to a theory of ‘challenge’. According to them, being born without sins, and not accountable for errors during our childhood years, we are blessed by Allah with certain amounts of challenges, opportunities to show the Almighty our love for and devotion to Him and His law.

Torment and hardship can be both expiation and trial. In any case, the logics of suffering and sorrow are to be found in realms of super reasoning that we cannot and should not try to enter. A theory of challenge thus perfectly complements notions of predestination, and helps to form a highly versatile explanatory device that (unmodified) is able to satisfy the wishes of many Muslims in Guyana today. All we can do is realise the greatness of Allah and swallow our encounters with misery with confidence and even a sense of gratitude:

“Allah subhanahu wa ta’ala is trying us that you know. [...] Now, we will be tried and we have got to be grateful to Allah subhanahu wa ta’ala for try us here, me beg Allah subhanahu wa ta’ala every morning, moon and night inshallah that give me patience with me sickness, nah make me feel that you spite me and you know, feel vex and what not and so on.” – *Interview, 30 July 2003.*

Like Hinduism, also the Islamic doctrine preached in Guyana portrays existence as ultimately fair. No good is left unrewarded and all wrongdoers will eventually pay exactly the market price for their misbehaviour. A detailed Muslim notion of sin provides people with rather precise information about the costs of wrongs and the worth of obedience or

submission. This notion concerns a concept of eventual balance (*mizān*), the weighing of accumulated good and bad on the day of resurrection. As revealed in Sūrah Al A'raf:

(8) The balance that day will be true (to a nicety): Those whose scale (of good) will be heavy, will prosper: (9) Those whose scale will be light, will find their souls in perdition, for that they have wrongfully treated Our Signs. – *Al A'raf*:8,9 (Abdullah Yusuf Ali translation)

Such an understanding of deed measurement is displayed by most of the Muslim informants I interviewed. They express understandings of recompense and the hierarchy of sin that are tightly connected to ideas of judgment that come with the principle of balance. In discourse, transgressions are often labelled according to seriousness and the possibility of penitence. The alleged Hindu practice of idolatry, for instance, is frequently mentioned as unforgivable act of blasphemy and main cause of deemed typically Hindu societal ills like suicide, abuse, and alcoholism. In fact, Muslims are taught that he who dies a Hindu has flunked the test of tests, failed life, and will thus eternally reside in extremely unfavourable circumstances.

As indicated, strict believers in Al-Islam regard conviction alone to be sufficient reason for a ticket to Jahannam as well as a seat in Paradise. Those who correctly believe will enter the Garden and those who do not believe or misbelieve will not ever. However, even the practices of the correct believer are recorded, will be weighed, judged, and – if necessary – penalised. All of us have got a book of deeds in which everything we do is jotted down:

“Well it is from that moment [maturity] all of us got two angels ah weh right side and left side, they are writing our book of deeds, we cannot see it, we cannot see them, we don't remember their presence, that is why we do wrong things. If we can remember that we got two angels write ah we deeds, we can't do wrong thing. [...] One go write the good deeds, as soon as you do it, as soon as you do a good deed, this one go write it. But since you do a bad deed so, det one cyan't write em. He go gaffa ghee det one permission to write the good deeds, right away and he go write em, but when you do a bad act, he cyan't write because det one go stop em, you understand? He would say why, why you stop me? Not until the Asr time meet, if the person prays Asr [...] as Allah for forgive in sincere repentance, you know, if deh happen, you can't write the bad deeds. After Asr pass and you nah do that, well then the ... say you can write now...” – *Interview, 9 July 2003*.

The tendency to do bad is intrinsic, part of our moral constitution and a premeditated weakness in the design of mankind. As far as my informants are concerned, Allah has

granted us the faculty to fail so we would be able to prove our adoration for Him. Determination and courage in the battle with our 'inner demons' expose eligibility for eternal bliss, just like fierce and continuous resistance against Shaitan and his transcendental knights of evil do.

8.1.4 *Beyond perception: the earthly unseen*

Human weakness is the only reason for Shaitanic success. Because we are free to choose, and often prefer the immediate rewards of wrong above the future and everlasting benefits of right, Shaitan is considered able to execute his wicked plans and lure us further and further away from the path of piety.

The origin of Shaitan, in this context also referred to as *Iblis*, is contested. Although his existence is accepted and his position as supernatural emperor of evil is unchallenged, his transcendental belonging is a matter of debate. Some of my informants consider him to be a fallen angel³⁸⁵, one that refused to bow down to Adam after his creation, when the Almighty told him to do so. The majority, however, believes Shaitan is one of the Jinn, member of a hidden species of living beings, just like man, but created out of fire (*nar*) instead of dust.

Whatever segment of the unseen he belongs to, the concept of Shaitan is part of the specific Muslim understanding of the multidimensional earthly realm. This understanding comprises the idea that not all of Allah's creations on this planet are perceptible. As a matter of fact, an influential part of 'high' creation is invisible. That concealed part, which is home to angels and jinn, is the abode of catalysts of both good and bad. It accommodates forces that will guide man towards paradise as well as powers that work to lead man astray. Whereas angels are there to render help in man's spiritual advancement, function as intercessors, pray for men, and prompt him to noble deeds, those who habitually invite man to evil are jinn.

This section, about that what surrounds us but cannot be seen, involves the last of four illustrations of the issue of individual autonomy. After the examination of the East Indians' innovative power (8.1.1), the practice of cross-application (8.1.2), and deliberate reproduction (8.1.3), I will investigate the matter of transgression. Images beyond perception perfectly illustrate the flexible use of understandings. They are eclectic products of the mixing of ideas, practices (and people) in Guyana, further evidence of the coexistence of multiple understandings and the faculty to choose. Below, two expressions of such eclecticism are examined. I will analyse highly localised trans- or extrareligious concepts of the supernatural in the second part of this section. First, however, I will

³⁸⁵ Angels (*Mala'ikal*) are intangible and immortal beings created by Allah for the implementation and execution of His decrees. They are part of an extensive aristocratic hierarchy presided by the Archangel Jibreel (Gabriel). Each and every one of the angels has a specific task. A great number of them is employed to accurately record the words, thoughts, and deeds of all human beings. All of us are thus constantly accompanied by angels. It is their presence that allows Allah to judge everything we do and it is the awareness of their presence that should prevent us from going astray.

continue with local understandings of Jinn, and show how Islamic notions serve to decipher and absorb accounts of super nature.

According to my informants, the negative impact of jinn on our lives is considerable. Despite that Islamic literature portrays them as accountable personalised beings exactly like us – and are thus sometimes inspired to do good and sometimes enthused to perform bad – in Muslim Guyana, jinn are commonly associated with nothing but supernatural threat. As such, the concept practically functions as the Islamic translation of general East Indian (or even Guyanese) notions of transcendental low life.

Although the official doctrine and its representatives in Guyana discard localised conceptions of jinn, numerous Muslims use the term in their explanations of perceived or personal mishap. They employ it as an interpretive notion, remodelled for the sake of control and comprehension. Illness, economic hardship or challenges, failure, misfortune, accidents, and social difficulties, can all be regarded possible effects of spiritual interference. Autonomously operating evil jinn as well as jinn employed by humans for magical purposes are widely thought to manipulate reality and one's circumstances in unjust ways. It is believed that it is because of them individuals can suffer hardship and difficulties that are neither deserved nor serve any higher goal. The activities of Jinn are thus regarded the cause of cases of spiritual possession and the many tribulations linked to evil or 'bad' eye. Also the appearance of ghosts, so called jumbie or Dutch in Guyana, are usually explained as manifestations of Jinn. The Islamic versions of the numerous stories of spiritual encounters narrate of usually nocturnal sightings of and harassment by man-like yet mass-less beings. This spiritual harassment or these tribulations, in whatever form they come, are both combated with Islamic arms and with the eclectic pseudo-religious weaponry of local magic.

Traditionalist Muslim leadership, and most others who cannot be considered ardent purifiers, propagate the use of the Qur'an to ward off supernatural evil that is not part of any divine master plan. Sheikh Moeenul Hack claims there are Qur'anic verses that can be used to solve any kind of problem, including the jinn-related ones. He labels this "the medicinal use of the Qur'an." According to him, as well as other imams and teachers, recital of the very last two chapters of the holy book is recommended for remedial or protective purposes. In addition, it is said that there are also various supplications (*du'a*) available to those who need God's assistance to settle supernatural issues. Curative performance of these, as well as recitation of *sūrah Al Falaq* and *sūrah Al Nas*, generally are accompanied by certain rituals. One informant mentioned the covering of a victim of disruptive supernatural forces with a sheet and sulphur. As far as he is concerned, no method of evil chasing is as effective as that ancient technique. A far more common manner to boost the efficacy of Islamic formulas, however, is the act of blowing. Traditionalist experts make a *du'a* or read from the Qur'an in the presence of a 'client' and attempt to transfer the boon of their words, and cleanse the sufferer, by blowing gulps of air in streaks on the head and body of the respective person.

Although habitually explained by its practitioners as a legitimate and old Islamic procedure, it is something that is peculiarly similar to methods of folk healing employed by Hindus in Guyana. Also they fight supernatural threats and ills with a blend of utterances and gestures. And also Hindus believe the impact of formulas is enhanced by what they refer to as *jharay*³⁸⁶, the act of blowing on and stroking of the patient. Apparently, practices and beliefs of uncertain (obviously un-Islamic) origin are Islamised to resolve the tension between the official religious system and specific demands of a local spiritual reality.

Such Islamisation is not always required in the process of dealing with that what is beyond perception. As indicated, next to Islamic ways of managing the local super real, also non-Islamic methods of magical manipulation are popular among the Muslim masses. The understandings upon which alien methods are based, and their reliance on those means of creative problem solving, are to be regarded East Indian or even Guyanese rather than typically Islamic. The application of magic and superstitious practices is transreligious, shared among the adherents of different East Indian sects and creeds. In fact, the realm of magic can be considered the most eclectic or absorbent, and least inflexible and bounded, section of the constellation of understandings concerning the extracorporeal. It involves a range of concepts and acts that originate in Indian, African, and even Chinese traditions. Essentially, these relate to supernatural hazards (and subsequently therapeutic and protective practices), as well as to non-defensive manipulation of reality with the help of domestic or professional magic.

An impressive variety of unnatural threats are neutralised with an equally impressive variety of techniques. Many of these threats are connected to cases of “bad” or evil eye: ill feelings, spiritual blockages, and adversity experienced by man or his livestock and usually caused by the envy of others. Home style everyday magic is used to undo the negative effects of this form of spiritual suffering on a fairly frequent base. *Jharay* and *owtshe*³⁸⁷ are perhaps the most commonly used therapeutic methods in this respect. Even I underwent these forms of alternative treatment on a fairly regular base. According to those who cared, my enviable position as a white man and my large and colourful social network were as much the reason for my occasional headaches and fatigue as migraine and a chronic lack of time to sleep.

Home-style everyday magic is also amply used to protect the vulnerable from contamination with bad eye. Especially babies and toddlers are considered susceptible. They are often shielded from the harmful effects of jealousy by means of black dots (*tika*) on their foreheads. Besides, they – as well as fearful adults – can be safeguarded by black bracelets, blue wristbands, garlic, quicksilver, and various so called *tabeej*, or talismans. The

³⁸⁶ Vertovec (1992:217) mentions the practice of healing by *jharay-phukay*, stroking and blowing, among the Hindu East Indians in Trinidad. In Guyana, the term the blowing itself is known and referred to as *jharay*.

³⁸⁷ In the case of the latter, the ills produced by feelings of envy or admiration of other people are subsequently ‘caught’ by waving a parcel (filled with onion, garlic skin, seven pinches of salt, seven pieces of pepper, seven pinches of earth, a piece of broom broken into seven equal pieces, and a piece of paper) seven times around the victim, neutralised by spitting on it, and disposed by burning the bundle.

use of all these, although usually not considered an extremely civilised practice and thus not frequently discussed and publicly displayed, is widespread. Numerous East Indian Christians, Muslims, and Hindus, consider the defensive assistance from certain materials and items ('guards') indispensable. In particular talismans are thought to possess great protective powers. Rings containing quicksilver, or hollow rings and locket holding carefully folded pieces of paper with carefully written sacred Sanskrit formulas (sometimes labelled *jantra*), not only protect you from relatively limited effects of bad eye, they also counteract the destructive force of a source of greater supernatural threats: the realm of the evil and often employable spirits.³⁸⁸

Various actions can be undertaken against the threat or effects of these creatures, particularly against the effects of the troublesome wandering ghosts of suicidal nineteenth century colonists from the low lands (*Dutch*) and other disembodied spirits. Jenever, cheese, and cigarettes, are offered as settling nourishment to residential Dutch by those who live close to silk cotton trees or other places of spiritual presence. Furthermore, the earlier mentioned tabeej can help out in case of supernatural hazard. Talismans or written formulas, energised by Hindu priests during prayer sessions, are used as precautionary devices, most of all by individuals who believe they are under attack of spirits commissioned to do them wrong by certain (human) enemies.

Several other techniques are employed as part of therapeutic procedures in case of ghostly interference. One of the most common is ritual bathing. Another method, applicable to battle persistent possession, is exorcism. East Indians controlled by stubborn spirits, and suffering from unnatural irrationality or illness, are liberated from their disruptive guests with the help of professionals.

The practitioners of various shades of magic known as *obeah* people are often visited by those who are allegedly possessed. With the divine help of super powerful from all corners of the multi religious universe, they attempt to cast out the unwanted.³⁸⁹ Also,

³⁸⁸ The Guyanese supernatural habitat is home to a multifarious collection of entities. During my stays in the country, I have heard countless accounts of encounters with representatives of the African spirit world (vampires known as *ol'higue*), the indigenous spirit world (beast-men or *kanaima*), the European spirit world (*Dutch*), the nautical spirit world ('*femaid*' or mermaid), the Afro-Surinamese spirit world (*bakku* or little men), and ghosts or *jumbee* with Indian and Chinese appearances. Few of these meetings ever are pleasant. Sometimes they are merely sightings that cause unease and anxiety. Often, however, supernatural beings are said to deliberately harass or even attack people. Kanaimas kill, ol'higues bite, the bakku can set your house afire, and the common Dutch tend to trouble young and fair East Indian females or enter the bodies of the vulnerable.

³⁸⁹ Obeah is a highly eclectic system of magic which originally stems from the West African *obayifo* (witchcraft) tradition (Bisnauth 1989:89-91; Vertovec 1992:217). Today, it is practiced by Guyanese from all religious and ethnic backgrounds and blend with Indian, Christian and even Chinese elements. Also practitioners from Hindu homes freely employ powers from various traditions to manipulate the spirit world. In fact, the majority of the Hindu supernatural trouble-shooters I know, has become inspired by contemporary North American notions of witchcraft. Many of their spells cast, potions brewed, or oils and powders marketed originate from books or samples sent over by migrated relatives and ex-clients. North American books a befriended 'witch' borrowed me included: 'The Golden secrets of mystic oils'; 'The new revised sixth and seventh books of Moses and the magical uses of Psalms'; and 'New revised helping yourself with selected prayers'.

certain pundits and imams are specialised in exorcism. And so are Christian pastors. In fact, the latter are asked by East Indians of all religious backgrounds to remove parasitizing spirits. I have thus been told about a Baptist exorcist prayer session that literally took place around the sickbed of a Hindu man I personally had heard being diagnosed sufferer of black magic by a Sanatan pundit. The eyewitness of that event told me how an invited pastor and his following gathered around the male and repeatedly sang “get out you devil” while making grabbing gestures.

Obviously, East Indian dealings with the earthly unseen are highly flexible. Muslims do not hesitate to consult Hindu specialists in super nature, and Hindus easily shift from doctors to pundits to pastors in their quest for healing from a wide range of ails. Understandings of the supernatural, this particular mundane part of the extracorporeal, thus seem to be isolated from conceptions of afterlife and the heavenly spheres. Whereas those conceptions are recognised as distinctively religious – Islamic or Hindu, or even sect specific – ideas of parallel earthly realities are shared among many East Indians of various backgrounds. They stem from a common belief in the strength of religion and ritual as such, and are collective because they are separated from ‘High Religion’ as trust in them is based upon something else than faith. More precisely, bad eye, ghosts, and all other manifestations of that what is here but cannot be seen, belong to the field of experience rather than the field of religious doctrine. You may believe there is an Allah or another particular Almighty, but you don’t believe there are Dutch and ol’higue, you *know* they are here.

Images of the earthly realms ‘beyond perception’, like the earlier mentioned insights in the unseen, clearly illustrate the nature of cultural constellations. An examination of the body of Hindu and Muslim notions and practices concerning magic and the spirit world demonstrates certain key aspects of the production process of East Indianness. The highly eclectic shape and great prominence of magic and non- or pseudo-religious spirituality in daily practice and discourse indicate the existence of a productive alliance between people and their surroundings that has resulted in the materialisation of localised (Creolised) and partially flexible understandings. The unproblematic use of Baptist formulas to fight Creole evil (bad eye) diagnosed by a Hindu priest is a highly illuminative empirical example.

The shape of understandings of and practices concerning the earthly unseen further shows a certain historical entrenchment, as well as the effect of transformative forces. Perhaps the development of Muslim understandings is most enlightening. The Islamic concept of Jinn is employed to explain local supernatural phenomena such as the interference of ‘Dutch’ and ‘jumbee’ and ‘bad eye’. Qur’anic, as well as non-Islamic methods, are used by Muslims to ward off the effects of evil. The application of safeguarding black dots (tika) on the forehead of infants by Muslim parents, for instance, is an Indian custom rather than an Islamic practice, a clear marker of Indianness.

In globalised environs, practices like these have become matters of dispute. Muslim purifiers who present it as a form of illicit innovation and token of religious ignorance

discourage the application of tika. Neotraditionalists, in response, consider it an acceptable custom and sometimes even a valuable part of the rich Indo-Islamic tradition that binds the believers in Guyana. Understandings and subsequent practices have thus not only been modified due to circumstantial transformation, they are also subject to manipulation of those with certain agendas. In fact, more than anything, it is relevance that guarantees the survival or importance of certain understandings. The following section of this chapter focuses on this applicability of understandings of the extracorporeal. It touches their economic/political and socio-cultural function, and examines the personal relevance of existing notions of the extracorporeal for people who face a multitude of uncertainties in a world in flux.

8.2 Serving the servants: exploiting understandings of the extracorporeal

Religions serve a wide array of goals. As discussed in chapter three, those in quest of profit and power can utilise them in the form of labels and networks. Hindus and Muslims, in both a local and national setting, can exploit collective understandings of the extracorporeal to safeguard their economic and political interests in highly competitive environs. Additionally, religious belonging obviously serves important social goals. As shown, the local *mandir* and the *jama'at*, as well as the larger Hindu or Muslim institutions, provide the believer with a ready-made social network. Religious happenings – such as Qur'an *sharifs* (readings) and *jhandi* – and festivals are important social events through which affective and cooperative ties within the community are established and strengthened.

The use of religious systems to satisfy social, economic, and political desires, nonetheless, strongly depends on the private applicability of the doctrine. The particular philosophy has to be regarded a true, or at least the truest, explanation of the metaphysical reality. Furthermore, its accompanying principles have to be considered valid, appropriate guidelines en route to something that is thought to be extremely beneficial and worth the required sacrifices. And finally, as we have seen under 8.1, the specific understandings must help the believer to deal with the incomprehensible, alienating, and seemingly unjust world they reside in. Only if certain similar notions of super reality are collectively accepted can they be employed for non-spiritual causes.

In the first section of this chapter, I have described several of the core understandings upon which the East Indian notions of super reality are based. A rather extensive, yet inevitably incomplete, analysis was offered of both parallels and differences in Hindu and Muslim conceptions of the divine realm, afterlife, governing transcendental laws, and incorporeal aspects of earthly existence. In this second part of Customised Cosmologies, an attempt is made to capture the interpretive and action instigating force of the constellation of understandings pertaining to the extracorporeal. Also, the incorporation of conflicting schemas will be discussed: how can opposing notions be part

of a collective constellation without that causing friction or tension, and resulting in the expectable feelings of inconsistency? The coexistence of a steadfast Hindu East Indian belief in karma and the obvious trust in the effectiveness of plea-prayer will be examined as an important illustration of this phenomenon (one that is of growing importance considering the increasing plurality of available understandings and practices). First, however, I will devote a few pages to a summary of what appear to be the East Indians' grand notions of the Ultimate Truth, a brief comparison of what the Hindus think and what the Muslims believe. 'As it is' involves a short account of interreligious similarities and differences. It is a brief recap of the examination so far, and an implicit reminder of the relativity of the individual's autonomy to which this chapter is largely devoted. As 8.1 demonstrated, and as 8.2 will show, there is free will and (re)creative liberty. But, there is no escape from the influence of experiences that have shaped one's understandings.

8.2.1 Hindu and Muslim notions of Super Reality

East Indians, in the effort of what I have labelled reality managing, rely on religion-specific notions of super reality. Explanations of such reality's key aspects indicate the vigour of these collective understandings. Interpretations of ultimate fairness, and concepts of time, are shared among members of one religious community. The same goes for interpretations of the Grand Promise, of the guarantee that the strenuous effort to establish and maintain a good relationship with the transcendent will be rewarded with bliss greater than anything ever experienced in the here and now. According to Muslims this Promise comprises an everlasting existence which is unimaginably blissful for the obedient and indescribably torturous for the disobedient. As far as many contemporary Guyanese Hindus are concerned, a similar paradisiacal post-mortem life is attainable for the immaculate. However, most Hindus discard notions of eternal agony in hell. They believe justice prevails though a system of reincarnation. Unfavourable births are thus regarded the product of the execution of a just and impartial transcendental verdict exactly like the admission to hell in Muslim philosophy.

Both the understandings of Hindu and Muslim informants include a fairness principle. This principle – *positioned in the deeper layers of the constellation, and thus indicating its hierarchical make-up* – underlies the Grand Promise and validates piety, even if submission to religious rules and regulations seems disadvantageous. Such a premise helps the devotee to endure reality. It enables her or him to justify the unjustifiable. Consequently, you find that references to the fairness principle are especially made in situations of seemingly non-causal agony. Suffering caused by illness, economic misfortune, or maltreatment by others, arouse Muslims as well as Hindus to express their belief in ultimate and transcendental justice. Either one of these beliefs is linked to certain concepts of earthly life, existence as such, our relationship with the Supreme, destiny, and time, and is captured in an all encompassing law.

Whereas my Hindu informants habitually employ their famous law of karma as limitless explanatory device, Muslims believe an unlabelled law of valuation is used to implement their fairness principle. Imams and others state that all actions are actually quantifiable manifestations of submission or sin. Virtually everything man does, even the acts directly concerning mundane matters, is part of a grand challenge called life, Jannah's entrance exam. Virtually every deed and – some say – thought is registered, weighed, and put on each and everyone's individual account. Life in this perspective is a trial. It is man's only chance to convince the Absolute Authority that he can think long term and that he is able to postpone the consumption of hedonistic happiness until *al-akhirah*, the future life.

Hindus are more fortunate. They are convinced that them, or all the atmans, awaits an almost endless amount of opportunities to complete the road to eternal delight. Whereas Muslims think death demarcates the end of an unrepeatable period in which a relatively simple creed has to be retained or regained, Hindus consider death the conclusion of just another episode in a series of lives that have to be lived to gain the understanding of an intricate reality necessary to accomplish our divine goal.

The two different notions of life and departure are connected to two different concepts of time. Hindu understandings of individual and collective existence obviously are based upon cyclical and repetitive concepts of time. Man is born, lives, dies, and is reborn. Creation is fashioned, exists, deteriorates, is destructed, non-existent, and refashioned.³⁹⁰ Nothing is final or definite. According to some, even ultimate liberation is non-durable.

Muslim understandings of our personal trajectories and of the path of creation, on the contrary, are founded upon a belief in the linear proceeding of time. Existence is brought into being once, survives a limited number of millennia, and will eventually be destroyed for good. Also personally we are deemed to have only got one shot. We arrive in this world, enjoy unaccountability during our childhood years, are probably granted an indefinite number of years of maturity to remain or become faithful and accumulate blessings and sin, depart, reside in the grave until judgement day, and then enter the eternal afterworld. Failure during the here and now is irreparable in the now- and hereafter.

Knowledge of this one-shot theory, and awareness of its consequences, arouse insecurity among some of my informants. A sure belief in their own insignificance and weakness even causes some fearful to exhibit peculiarly strong sentiments. I remember the emotionality of several informants when discussing sin and punishment, and I have witnessed begging and crying Tablighi performing communal du'a at the third and final day of the annual Essequibo *jor*³⁹¹ in the Lima masjid. Nonetheless, practices of the bulk of Muslims reveal the concept of life-as-a-trial is not always regarded that impressive. Actual abstinence of many earthly enjoyments, the implication of living scriptural lives, remains a difficult matter. Lots of Guyanese Muslims do not fast, eat haram food, prefer to be at

³⁹⁰ In the Manusmrti the idea of periodical creation and destruction is already described. The Manusmrti as well as the Puranas state the so called *mamvantaras* (creations and destructions of the world) are numberless.

³⁹¹ A large Islamic revivalist events organised by members of the Tablighi Jama'at.

work instead of praying their salat, have extramarital or premarital affairs, and enjoy the taste of Ivanoff and 'El Dorado' (local vodka and rum). I have even danced with a jolly tipsy Muslim shortly after we had discussed the serious religious implications of alcohol consumption. He had laughed, opened both of us an imported bottle of Venezuelan beer, and told me not to worry but to enjoy the music our mutual Cuban friends had just brought from Havana.

The flexible Muslim interpretations of the transcendental judiciary system testify of the individual freedom of choice. Even 'genuine' believers, those who hold seemingly unambiguous religious schemata, can be motivated to act impiously and let other understandings prevail. To an extent, Islamic philosophy also accounts for these acts of transgression. Certain religious understandings prevent most sinful practices from being regarded catastrophic. Although all know misbehaviour and disobedience will be punished, it is accepted that most forms of illicit conduct are not sanctioned with the Ultimate Sentence. In line with other examples of orthodoxic believe systems, Islamic texts and their narrators have assured the believer that the proper faith alone will eventually set them free. As indicated, practically all my Muslim informants claim acceptance of the shahada alone virtually guarantees eventual access to Jannah, the Gardens of pleasure. Nothing else does.

Hindu informants generally award conviction a far less prominent position. According to them, it is really the act that counts. Their orthopraxy has taught them that good conduct is always rewarded, irrespective of the religiosity of the actor. In fact, the historically grown Hindu focus on practice has even undermined the distribution of elementary knowledge.³⁹² Usually standardised in the form of elaborate rituals, does just action form the heart and soul of mainstream East Indian Hinduism. Practice is all-powerful, it can make one rise and fall, and endows the actor with some of the control necessary in the attempt to reshape reality according to his or her own wishes and desires.

8.2.2 The interpretation and manipulation of reality

Both Hinduism and Islam provide the East Indians with quite effective instruments to interpret and manipulate reality. They possess great explanatory value, and allow the adherent to gain supposedly superior answers to a range of existential questions that reasoning alone cannot offer. In addition, they promise the believer a certain amount of sway. Either one of the doctrines assures the individual we are not merely helpless subjects, victims of misfortune or fate. Rather, we are responsible entities. We are beings with the faculty to discern right from wrong and therefore the opportunity to deserve betterment and punishment. Religion, in whatever form, grants us the driver's seat in our own vehicle on the way to advancement or degeneration. It helps to manipulate the seemingly non-manipulative. The question is how.

The interpretive and manipulative aspects of East Indians' understanding of Hinduism and Islam invigorate its motivational force. This capacity derives from the

³⁹² See chapter four.

linkage of these aspects with collective insecurities. Transcendental answers, and transcendental techniques to gain control of an actuality that would otherwise seem utterly uncontrollable, help Hindus and Muslims deal with the uncertainties that come with living a life on planet earth – especially those faced by them who live in an era of transformation and unstable environs.

A wide array of rituals and other religious practices displayed by the Indians in Guyana illustrate the belief in the neutralising, reassuring, and controlling value of faith. Muslims plan communal Qur'anic readings or choose to make an appropriate du'a to avert unwanted incidents and accidents. And Hindus organise pujas for protective reasons – or, more general, in order to bend the course of reality in more favourable directions – rather than merely as a selfless tribute to a deity. Pujas are thus performed to shield taxis and their chauffeurs from the mishap that is so common on the dangerous Guyanese roads; ensure material well-being; arrange comfort and relief to the sick; secure success at exams and tests; undo the ill-feelings caused by a bad dream; guarantee ease and fortune for the deceased on their journey through the hereafter; and manage many other events and unwieldy situations with indefinite outcomes.

These rituals provide the performers, their kin, and even the audience, with a sense of influence, the feeling that uncertainties are settled, and that only that will be what was meant to be. Non- or ill-performance, on the other hand, fosters insecurity. Although usually opposed by priests and Hindu teachers, numerous East Indians are convinced of the fact that non-performance of certain pujas will arouse divine rage and inspire the respective deity to use his authority to guide people's fate unto miserable trails. I have thus heard stories of grave difficulties caused by someone's inability to organise the expensive yearly Durga function, and by a family's decision no longer to conduct the regular Bhairo puja.

Similarly, informants have told me about the disastrous consequences of not executing ritual according to divinely ordained standards. I have learned about a jhandi that had to be organised all over again because some of the guests were fed too early. I have also learned about several people that died after, and allegedly as the result of, mal-performance of ritual duties. A series of readings planned in a private residence within a year after departure of one its residents – before completion of the last in the series of *shraddha*, final rites – is said to be the reason of the untimely death of the pater familias. And, the mishandling of an ancient lingam found in a tree trunk in Essequibo (in 2004) is believed to be related to the stroke of which the finder's father died in North America shortly after the discovery.

A special category of insecurities that can be defused or dealt with through ritual is the collection of possible effects of unfavourable astrological conditions during the occurrence of major life events. In rural Essequibo, the Hindu masses still make ample use of the ability of local pundits to interpret the influence of heavenly bodies on the destiny of newborns, newly weds, and departed souls. Auspicious names for babies are chosen after

consultation of the almanac (*patra*); weddings are planned on astrologically right dates (*lagan*); and the planetary circumstances at the moment of birth and death are checked. If either birth or death occurs under these negative circumstances, special rites have to be performed to prevent the subsequent inherent disasters from taking place. As one pundit explained:

“You [the pundit] have to check the date, when the child born, you have to know if it is a girl, a male or female, you have to know their precise timing, the timing is very important. And then you check the *patra*, the *patra* show you the planet that was reigning at the time and then it shows the first letter that which the name supposed to come out with, if it is a, if it is ah, nah, bah, dah, cha, and then it shows if the father can see the child, you supposed to get the father date of birth too, to check to see if it is, it is all meshed. If not, some will have to wait until 21 day, nine days, depending to what planet, then you have to do a *mool* puja, and you will get a tharee, in most cases of the *mool* puja with mustard oil and the father would go at the back when the mother hold the child over and see just the reflection, then it is fine. Some you must use a penknife and mark a certain symbol on the child with a coin and you throw the knife behind the back, you cut the *mool* there, there are different *mools*. So it depends to which one.” – *Interview, 6 November 2003*.

Births ‘in *mool*’ require the execution of a special ritual. If not performed, or if the father sees the child before the performance of this *mool* puja, catastrophes are bound to happen:

“We believe that whenever a child comes to the world, and especially born under the *mool* natshatra, the *mool* planets, comes with all the negatives or the positives, and in some cases, if a father should ‘sees’, all the negatives can be transformed to the father. It can affect the father, it can affect the family, it can bring a lot of problems and so on, even to the child’s welfare and so on. But if a father observes the correct procedure, goes to the priest and then consults and so on, no problem, because of the special puja. The latest research done in New York would have shown a lot of problems encountered by certain homes, if have a whole handout about it. And a special *mool* puja had to be done because a priest was called and then he recognised that dead and so on happened, that is why...” – *Interview with pundit Devenand, 27 March 2003*.

Similarly, death ‘under *panchak*’ is considered to be detrimental for both the departed soul and the next of kin. Like *mool*, also this unfortunate astrological situation calls for the urgent completion of a settling puja. As a female Hindu informant once told me:

“...you gaffa do that [panchak] puja, say well no more dead nah follow that. (Q: otherwise more people would die?) Yes, in the family, if you work nah do good. (Q: Yuh tink det true?) Me nah know if det ah true, but it look like it true, because when me brother been dead, plenty family dead behind that. Me brother been die in panchak. (Q: And they nah do proper work?) Nah, the work nah been done good, he son been ah do em.” – *Interview*, 17 December 2003.

All of these measures taken to gain control over the disorderly, illustrate the motivational muscle of understandings of the extracorporeal. Magic and precautionary or curative techniques to tackle supernatural challenges serve a comparable goal. Although tabooed or discreditable, it is common to seek the assistance of obeah people or therapeutic Christian and Hindu practitioners to get things done or prevent and stop things from happening.³⁹³ As such, I have witnessed an obeah woman trying to bind a boy with a female client who was in love with him, met women trying to boost their fertility at a Kali mandir, and talked to a mother performing ritualistic tasks in order to get her daughter a visa for the United States.

Throughout my periods of fieldwork in Guyana, I have come across numerous examples of the battles Hindus and Muslims fight with their uncertainties, examples of Indian crisis management. Notions of god, afterlife, transcendental laws, and the earthly unseen, prove excellent instruments in the process of explaining and interpreting reality and to develop strategies to face that increasingly complex reality and even take hold of it.

Being such efficient explanatory and manipulative devices, understandings of the ultimate truth are particularly valuable to those individuals who suffer from insecurities and need clarification most. Hence, you find the motivational power of notions of the extracorporeal to be most apparent among those who display senses of alienation, the people who reveal an inability to keep up with the pace at which society seems to develop. The ‘traditionalists’ I have mentioned in chapter five, thus tend to be relatively actively engaged in religious and magical practice. They are often the people from the countryside, the ones without abundant financial resources or higher education, and with more uncertainties than their educated and well-to-do fellow East Indians elsewhere. Also East Indian migrants in multifarious and estranging North American environs are said to become more active and concerned members of Guyanese or Caribbean mandirs and masjids, and might accordingly reveal an augmented motivational power of religious conceptions.

In a way, even the success of Islamic purificatory movements among Muslims in Guyana (and elsewhere) can be linked to collective senses of estrangement or insecurity. Olivier Roy mentions this phenomenon in his book on the globalisation of Islam. As said,

³⁹³ For example from those attached to the Kali Mai mandirs or the emerging evangelistic Christian churches.

he is convinced Muslim purifiers valorise “the uprootedness of uprooted people”, and cultivate and/or exploit senses of alienation for the sake of support (2004:270). And he is right, in Guyana, purification is marketed as the answer to the wickedness of the world today. Time after time, I have heard Muslim leaders in Guyana sell neofundamentalist approaches as the apt response to an increasingly hostile and alienating environment. Only a return to the Prophet’s truth can restore the unity and piety that have been lost thanks to the lures of life.

Within the context of my general argument, Hindu and Muslim religious thought and practice in Indo-Guyana can both be regarded aspects of methods to cope with the increasingly complex and unclear contemporary world and products of this intricate world of options. As products of the East Indian’s space of existence they illustrate certain aspects of cultural complexity that become more apparent with the ongoing advance of exchange of forms and ideas in more and more intensively interconnected societies. First of all, dissimilar motivational effects of schemas or understandings that are learned and internalised in different ways can be discerned. As also shown in the previous chapters on family and conjugal relations, people hold discrepant beliefs that cannot all be acted on at the same time. Specific actions sometimes contradict the expressed conceptions.

With regard to religious understandings, an example is the Muslim understanding of relations with their non-Muslim neighbours in their largely un-Islamic physical surroundings in specific and in multi-religious Guyana as a whole. While most of the Muslims say they consider ties between fellow believers of any ethnic or social background to be stronger and more valuable than the bonds between them and their un-Islamic fellow East Indians, and even between them and their non-Muslim relatives, this notion is rarely put into practice. Apparently, some factors are lacking for this collective understanding to have sufficient motivational force. Or rather, the motivational force of other understandings often exceeds the power of the notion of ummah.

Claudia Strauss (1997:232) pinpointed seven conditions that, according to her, are relevant when it comes to explaining these differences in sway:

On the extrapersonal side, these are (1) positive social discourses about the action; (2) teaching that attempts to link the ideas being taught to strong emotions in the learner; (3) repeated representation of the action; (4) social institutions, practices, and people that facilitate or demand the behaviour more than opposing behaviours. [...] Correspondingly, on the intrapersonal side, the relevant conditions are (5) attention directed toward repeated presentation of the action, so a schema of how to do the action can develop; (6) association of positive feelings with the action (or of negative feelings with the nonfulfillment of the action) that are stronger than the feelings associated with opposing behaviors; and (7) a cognitive connection the schema for this action and a person’s self image or identity.

As far as Strauss is concerned, if all these conditions are met, “they reinforce each other and no problem arises about the differing effects of each” (1997:232). However, if not all seven are satisfied, Strauss states people sometimes merely pay lip-service to certain values.

In the instance of East Indian Muslims in Guyana, this is the case for the implementation of concepts of superior Muslim unity. Both on the extrapersonal and the intrapersonal side not all requirements are fulfilled. Some of the more vigorous among the social institutions, practices, and entities, often facilitate the activation of networks and related practices other than religious ones. The importance of ethnicity – in certain places and times overriding all other labels – is a good example. The positive valuation of feelings of intra-ethnic unity, as the result of locality-specific learning processes, can be stronger than the positive valuation of senses of intra-religious unity, and thus help instigate action that contradicts understandings of brotherhood between African and East Indian Muslims.

Claudia Strauss (1997:233) labels this tendency – which she recognises in some aspects of American’s ideas about economic individualism – *lip-service* motivation³⁹⁴: “we endorse the value but do not act on it.” She states that in lip-service motivation there tends to be social pressure to strive for the goal. This is certainly true in the case of Muslim unity. Although my Muslim informants have internalised positive social discourses about intrareligious cooperation and togetherness, they sometimes fail to connect these to feelings, self-images, or schemas of how to perform these social values. Powerful motivations deriving from other understandings thus supersede the spur to enact behaviour related to comprehensive religious unity. The problematic relationship between Indian and African Muslims is a great illustration. Despite ideologies of universal brotherhood, the practical integration of African believers in Indian dominated religious circles is severely obstructed by influential understandings about local ethnic roles and relations.

Besides dissimilar motivational effects, another aspect of cultural complexity that is illustrated in the East Indian constellation of religious understandings is the internalisation of conflicting discourses. In the multifaceted contemporary environs in which the East Indian Muslims and Hindus live and learn, one is constantly confronted with conflicting images and notions. According to Strauss (1997:213), various social and cognitive mechanisms are available for handling discrepant ideas. Often, these ideas can be dealt with at a societal level, for instance by marginalisation of certain ideas or developing a broadly accepted way of selectively synthesising the incompatible notions. If this happens, systems of incompatible notions will not cause psychological inconsistency because – as Strauss remarks – “(in the first case) the marginal ideas are either ruled out or can be chosen while rejecting the dominant view or (in the second case) a way of resolving the potential conflict is readily available”. If, however, conflicting discourses are not dealt with at societal level

³⁹⁴ As opposed to the motivation to enact routine behaviours and the motivation to perform non-routine actions. (Strauss 1997:233)

people are left to internalise them in one way or another. Strauss (1997:213-214) mentions five different ways in which internalisation can take place:

First, a person could *choose one* and reject the rest. Or they could (unconsciously) select parts of the competing public discourses and *integrate* them into a single schema. Another possibility is an *unconscious compromise*. In this case the competing ideas are internalised in separate but dynamically linked schemas so that acting on one creates some anxiety or need to compensate by later acting on the others, but the person is not explicitly aware of this psychic conflict most of the time. Still another possibility is *ambivalence*, which is unconscious compromise except that no workable compromise has emerged and the person feels torn. A final possibility is *compartmentalisation* (Singer 1972; Weiss 1990). In this case competing ideas are internalised in separate, unconnected schemas, so that expressions of one are unrelated to expressions of the other. These schemas are activated in different contexts and the person feels neither conscious nor unconscious conflict between them in the ordinary course of events. [*Italics in original text*]

Evidence of the latter, compartmentalisation, is provided in my research by the verbalised interpretations of particular aspects of understandings of religious systematics. An example of this is the dominant Hindu concept of prayer.³⁹⁵ As indicated in 'Beyond earth' (8.1.2), the schema of *what-you-sow-is-what-you-reap* coexists with the *clemency-can-be-prayed-for* schema. Whereas virtually all Hindu informants reveal a strong belief in karma, almost just as many combine this trust in divine neutrality and transcendental justice with a faith in the manipulative power of certain religious acts such as ritual and prayer.

Somehow, the internalisation of these discordant understandings does not result in noticeable mental inconsistency. My efforts to confront informants with the tension between the concepts of *what-you-sow-is-what-you-reap* and *clemency-can-be-prayed-for* were always in vain. Hindus simply rejected the friction I saw between visions of divinities as solely dispersers of earnings, and divinities as entities with a faculty to forgive. I believe the ease with which they were able to do that stems from something Strauss labels compartmentalisation. In other words, the two competing ideas are incorporated in distinct and unrelated schemas. Hence, expressions of the *what-you-sow-is-what-you-reap* schema are not considered to be connected to expressions of the *clemency-can-be-prayed-for* schema.

³⁹⁵ Another example is the ambiguous Muslim neofundamentalist understanding of the West. Whereas in religious contexts, certain informants display strong western antipathies, in personal secular contexts they express a desire to migrate to North America and enjoy existence in the lands of opportunities. I have met individuals who preach 'withdrawal' from secular circles, yet travel to the U.S. frequently.

The former, the local interpretation of the law of karma, serves as an explanatory and action instigating device in especially a non-personal context. Society as a whole, and the state of people other than the self and the significant others (particularly their state of agony), are often assessed with notions of what-you-sow-is-what-you-reap. The prevalence of hypertension and diabetes among East Indians in Guyana, for instance, has been explained to me as the direct consequence of the pervasive lack of piety: people suffer and die young because of the execution of transcendental justice. East Indians get sick because they deserve to get sick and will thus have to accept and undergo their sentence and alter their behaviours to prevent any further chastisement.

Personal uncertainties or misery, and the uncertainties and miseries of those who are close – even if considered to be related to individual failure or the consequence of ill behaviour – however, are usually battled plea-prayers and pujas. Whereas thought and action concerning grand destitution, the afflictions of earth, and the difficulties of those one does not feel responsible for are usually inspired by karmic analysis, suffering of the self and the significant trigger the activation of the *clemency-can-be-prayed-for* schema. Illness, hardship, situations with unknown outcomes, and other difficulties that allegedly can be solved through divine intervention, have thus all become subjects of supplication. Only if prayer (or ritual) does not trigger the desired effects, the law of karma can and will be employed to rationalise failure and circumvent devotional doubts and questioning.

Apparently, the coexistence of the *what-you-sow-is-what-you-reap* schema with the *clemency-can-be-prayed-for* schema is relatively unproblematic. Internalisation of the competing ideas of mercilessness and mercifulness in separate schemas, activated in different situations and for different purposes, allows the East Indian Hindus to avoid senses of psychological inconsistency that otherwise would have been experienced. This strategy or mechanism – the technique of mastering and utilising understandings from various disagreeing sources – is increasingly important for the inhabitants of more and more complex and diverse societies. Confronted with discrepant truths and multiple realities on a daily base, it is necessary for the contemporary Hindus and Muslims in Guyana to be able to digest this variety in the least arduous fashion. The compartmentalised way in which karma and supplication are internalised is a good example.

Although the attempted manipulation of fate by performing acts of worship is not totally strange to Hinduism, the shape it has taken in Hindu Guyana suggests fertilisation of Christianity is taking place. Notions of mercy and forgiveness advocated by missionaries of Christ ever since the nineteenth century have entered the religious understandings of my informants. The impact of these notions and many other conflicting ideas have only grown stronger with the ongoing increase of interconnectedness that characterises modern-day Guyanese society. U.S. southern state evangelism – currently propagated by well-off resident and visiting missionaries during crusades, activities, and on television – has definitely contributed to some sort of Christianisation of Hindu thought and practice from which the current prayer practices seem to stem. In the following and final section I will

briefly discuss such matters and address the impact of alien influences on the constellation of understandings concerning the extra-corporeal. I will show the relativity of ultimate truths: not their situational relevance, but their inclusion in global processes, localised nature, and continuous historical evolution.

8.3 Towards closure

The analysis of matters of cultural production and reproduction within the East Indian community (a diaspora with a diaspora) in Guyana (a plural post-colonial society facing a multitude of challenges and uncertainties) could not have been undertaken without the help of a theoretical framework that accounts for the intricacies of contemporary social life. *Customised Cosmologies* illustrates the relevance of the concept of cultural constellations and schema theory in my endeavours. The East Indian constellation of understandings of the extracorporeal, once more, reveals how culture, meaning and practice are intertwined.

On one of the first pages of this chapter, I have argued that an analysis of these Indian interpretations of the extracorporeal allows me to (a) stress the importance of individual creativity and freedom of choice in processes of cultural production and reproduction, and (b) conclude the core of this dissertation with a comprehensive illustration of the nature of constellations. First, the impact of creativity and choice is demonstrated throughout *Customised Cosmologies* 'Insights in the unsighted' expose innovation, incorporation and replication as products of decision making, the outcome of the urge to (constantly) customise understandings and make them fit changing contexts. 'Serving the servants' explains the role of motivation and emotion in decision making. In 8.2, strategies of my informants are linked to desires to interpret and gain control of the increasingly complex and confusing East Indian reality, and to collective senses of insecurity and crisis that I have described in chapter three. Current day development of people's understandings of the metaphysical is thus largely inspired by control wishes and anxieties concerning survival in the competitive and puzzling world of today and tomorrow.

Second, this chapter comprises a practical summery of some of this book's main arguments. The various sections outline the core aspects of the constellation. East Indian notions of afterlife, images of god and divine realms, concepts of certain transcendental laws, and visions of the spirit world, show how collective understandings both shape and are shaped by the believers' realities. Descriptions of life beyond death reveal the variable durability of different understandings, and narrate of the transformative impact of context. They indicate the working of globalisation and localisation. The Anglicisation of Hindu images is a good example, and so is the practice of obeah. Furthermore, depictions of godly parenthood, by means of their connection with earthly codes of care, indicate the interrelatedness of understandings. Their hierarchical character, as well as the impact of the

Subcontinental heritage, are revealed in the far reaching influence of accepted transcendental laws on people's thought and practice.

Muslim and Hindu interpretations of the supernatural prove another example of the immense flexibility of understandings: their capacity to adapt to changing circumstances and serve as the instrument people require to face life in a certain time and place. The effect of emotion and motivation on centripetal and centrifugal tendencies within cultural processes, as indicated above, is addressed in 8.2. 'As it helps' explains the importance of the constellation as a system to neutralise the East Indian senses of crisis. The strong focus on manipulative ritual in local Hinduism, and the increasing frequency with which rites are performed, for instance, illustrate people's growing desire to gain some sort of control of the increasingly uncontrollable realities. Similarly, also the rise of Islamic fundamentalism suggests religion functions as a refuge for the alienated and the uncertain.

Finally, the matter of internal inconsistencies is looked into in the final pages of 'As it helps'. The concept of compartmentalisation, introduced in 8.2.2, explains the coexistence of conflicting understandings that is revealed in the words and deeds of numerous informants, and is characteristic of the cultural arsenal of people in plural and interconnected environs. Illustrations of this phenomenon are Hindu understandings of prayer or divine justice, and Muslim understandings of the U.S. as both the land of promise and abode of evil.

All in all, this chapter's analyses exemplify the essences of East Indian constellations. People's images of the unseen reveal how the historical, global, and local context in which they live and breathe are linked to the development of shared understandings. As such, the Eternity Roads the East Indians travel are not any different from their other lanes of life. All themes touched in the previous chapters narrate a similar complexity and intertwinement of the outer and inner and of meaning and practice. In fact, from the heart of this dissertation, a number of regularities can be distilled that together explain what I believe is the nature of East Indianness; a field of distinction that overrides boundaries between individual and structure, thought and action, and cultural preservation and innovation.

The following (and final) chapter will be a summery of these regularities. It consists of a more or less schematic overview of that what has materialised as the subject of my investigations, and what I have labelled constellations of cultural (East Indian) understandings. It reflects what can be learned, what is important to remember, and what should be build upon.

REFLECTIONS

*East Indianness as a Dynamic
Complex of Cultural Constellations*

(Ms. Affiance) – It was Thursday, 25 November 1999. With only a few pages left on the calendar of our previous millennium, I crossed the mighty Essequibo estuary and took a taxi to Affiance. It was my first time ever. I remember how I told the driver the place reminded me of South Asia: palm trees surrounding flooded land on which paddy had sprouted in the most perfect shade of green. I saw unusual birds and Asians on Hero-bikes. I felt the suffocating tropical humidity, wiped my face, and thought I smelled spices, just like in the Orient.

In Affiance, after I had left the rusty ‘hire-car’ and brought my gear into the house that would be my temporary abode, I met the person who, more than anyone else, inspired and guided my explorations of Guyanese Indianness. I have footage of that first encounter, a split second of video in which that person passes in a flash while I am registering the interior of our home on lot 13. Little did I know, that was not just a passerby.

A few weeks later I mentioned her in an email home. I wrote my family about this intriguing individual who seemed completely out of place in a reality I described as a play in which further only actors performed whose roles appeared absolutely unfathomable. I told them how I wondered what makes people come to be, as I had come to know someone who miraculously had managed not to fall prey to the formative forces of an actuality she could impossibly hide from. How did she not become like others? Why did she aspire what she aspired, and question what she questioned? How come she did not share people’s dreams when her experiences, upon which most dreams are build, were unique but far from unusual?

She never disappeared and remained intriguing, although time has generously given me a chance to unravel some of her mystery. I turned out to be both utterly right and completely wrong. The person who I thought had been able to escape her cultural straightjacket like a true Harry Houdini is indeed blessed with the faculties necessary to manage her understandings in an unusually creative way. Reflective capacities, intellectual

abilities, passion, opportunities, accidents, and many other things, cause the collective (or cultural) aspects of her strategies to be less evident than those in the thoughts and interpretations of many others. Yet, irrespective of this sovereignty, the one I once naively mistook for being almost contextually unshackled displays her Indianness in perceptions and manners every single day. Even as an wonderful icon of the unconventional, her being is saturated with Indianness.

25/11/99 is nearly six years and five months ago. The girl from Affiance no longer lives beyond the Essequibo estuary. In fact, she has left the country and is now a citizen of the Netherlands. An impressive example of adaptation: she mastered a new language, is about to complete her Dutch education, and asks for split pea soup with smoked sausage if the nights turn cold. Neither transplantation nor adaptation, however, have erased her past.

The girl – a woman now – being herself includes being born and raised in a modest rural village on the northern fringes of South America. It includes being brought up in a Hindu East Indian home, among members of her extended family. It includes years of residence in a society sharply divided along ethnic lines, and coloured by mistrust and fear cultivated in contexts of ethno-politics. And, it includes growing up in a place with a strong focus across its national borders, where virtually every family is a transnational social network, and both the imagery of ethnic or religious authenticity and socio-cultural advancement are imported from elsewhere.

She is that past. Her head is full of understandings that narrate her Indo-Guyanese story. I can tell by the way she longs for squash and rice on rainy days. I observe it in her embarrassment when confronted with manifestations of eroticism in front of seniors. And it is obvious by the incense she burns in front of her Ganesha after she has cleaned the house. There is no escape from the formative force of one's environs. You should see her jewellery collection and hear the music that makes her feet move. You will sense India in Guyana. Even her untraditional strategies are opted for with notions of the customary in the back of her mind. The choice to move in with a man first and marry him later, the choices to wed 'outside her religion', not to have children right after marriage, and to become a working mother, are all outcomes of internal struggles between cultural conventions and eccentric desires.

In a way, she is the embodiment of what my account has been about. The girl I first met in Affiance perfectly reveals what I have described as the productive interplay between the creative individual and her formative surroundings. Her deeds and notions, the schematic configurations she possesses, demonstrate in a remarkably comprehensive way the impact of cultural heritage, contextual change, and cosmopolitanism. They display variances in the durability of understandings, the importance of early internalisation, freedom of choice. And, they exhibit the functioning of mental systems: their temporal and situational relevance, their emotional and motivational dependence, and their interconnectedness.

Boy, she would have been some illuminative object of analysis. Could have written at least a key chapter about her. I would have liked to, I am a professional investigator. But she said I was not allowed to study her...Ms. Affiance is Mrs. DeKruif.

Many pages ago this book's core question was introduced, a subject that has come to intrigue me some years ago, and an issue that I have fortunately been able to investigate quite thoroughly. Early in chapter one, it was explained that this project intended to examine and describe the "manner in which Indian specific ethnic-religious culture as well as Indian tainted personal meaning and practice are produced and reproduced." The interior of this dissertation comprises a lengthy analysis of the (re)production process. In seven chapters, I have tried to demonstrate how the Indian distinctiveness I have witnessed is produced in an interplay between a collective of culturally charged individuals and incessantly changing circumstances in surroundings shaped by a distinct history and particular formative forces. The production of this Indianness can be considered illustrative for processes of cultural construction and reconstruction that take place in countless settings all over the world, especially in the increasingly interconnected plural environments in what was once regarded the periphery of social (and economical) transformation.

What makes the case of East Indians in Guyana an illuminating illustration of cultural processes in this era of globalisation is the community's extraordinary density of interconnections in time and space. In fact, the Indian collective in Guyana is a diaspora with its own diaspora: a community with an obvious Indian past and a future in which North America (as migration destination and source of inspiration) plays an increasingly important role. It is a people on the crossroads of tradition and postmodernity, a group of individuals whose social reality and subjectivity are shaped by globalisation in unusually profound ways. Because of their Indian heritage, because of the 'transplantation', because of inclusive ethnic polarisation in Guyana, because of multifaceted domestic instability and uncertainties, or just because of a heightened susceptibility to the influences from cultural nuclei throughout the world, Guyanese Indianness is uniquely moulded by the forces of globalisation.

The investigation of such a vibrant assemblage of thoughts, ways, and creations of specific people in a specific time and place can contribute one piece to the 'resolution' of one of social science's great conundrums: the relationship between the individual and his or her surroundings. As such, this book must be understood as an attempt to unravel the nature of control and distribution of power between individuals on one side, and structures on the other.

'Reflections' is meant to recapitulate some of the most interesting and significant features found to be part of the process of production of Indianness. However, it is not merely a summary. Instead of an arrangement in 'Interconnecting Conditions' and 'Conditioning Interconnections', this last chapter largely revolves around the idea of cultural or collective constellations. This key notion is employed to capture the

multifaceted and complex character of their construction processes in this particular diasporic community.

I have argued, in the effort of analysing an Indianness that is omnipresent yet appears in many forms with variable relevance and durability, the concept of constellations allows me to focus on the actual functioning of networks and connections even more than the existing concepts do. I believe inclusion of this concept has helped me further explain the flexible applicability of cultural understandings, their ability to adapt to and survive in altered circumstances, and the East Indian's position as cultural composer. It emphasises the fact that understandings are not established in isolation but are mutually constitutive, can exist as complimentary mental structures, and can form cross-fertilising systems of exchange.

The lengthy definition of East Indian constellations that follows this introductory part allows me to go over all the findings that I would like the reader to remember. I will begin with a depiction of the constellations and try to position the concept as a personal articulation of a line of thinking within a much larger realm of poststructuralist reasoning. Next, both the question of formation and functioning will be dealt with. The answers to these questions can be regarded an enumeration of the essences of all but one of the dissertation's core chapters. The question of power – the actual focus of chapter three, but an issue that played a role throughout the book – is reviewed in a separate section following the parts on formation and functioning. The final words of this chapter, those written after the piece on power, will then be devoted to some ultimate reflections and a brief look ahead: what can be learned from all of this, which 'old' matters need further investigation, and what are the new problems that are looming on the horizon.

9.1 Constellations I: delineating the loci of cultural production and reproduction

Indianness or East Indianness in contemporary Guyana is a concept that is impossible to describe in an all-inclusive way. It is a flexible and dynamic complex of internalisations of externalisations and externalisations of internalisations that sprouts from characteristic circumstances and the mind of distinct subjects and collectivities, and influences East Indian thought and practice. Indianness can be found in just about anything and almost anywhere. It is part of people's professional interests and ambitions; it is part of their diet and aesthetics; it is part of desires and emotions; and part of interpretations and expressions of friendship and faith. Indianness is expressed in agriculture and materialism; it displays in dhal as well as decorative opulence; it shows in senses of respect and concepts of shame; and it manifests in fictive kinships, arranged marriages, and the Hindus' understanding of rebirth. A comprehensive account of this phenomenon is unfeasible. Instead, this project comprises an examination of aspects of Indianness I consider to be most appropriate in the analysis of the production process of East Indianness.

I have focussed in this book on a limited number of relationships in which Indianness is exposed or 'happens'. By looking at people's dealings with their surroundings, the ethnic or religious other, the other sex, and the transcendental world, insights in cultural processes and linkages between the actor and the set were gained. A theoretical stance based on notions deriving from the work of Pierre Bourdieu, and those who have been inspired by him, has guided this endeavour. Such a framework proved a highly valuable approach to the analysis of globalisation. Its person-centred or bottom-up perspective – in contrast to popular 'aerial views' on contemporary transnational processes (e.g. Appadurai 1990, 1991; Hannerz 1989, 1996; Kearney 1995, 2004) – accounts for the complexity, connectiveness, and ambiguity of cultural processes in this particular plural and interlinked post-colonial diasporic environment. This first section of 'Reflections' will be used to précis this stance and define the notions which have helped me to assess and explain the formation of this particular kind of (diasporic) distinction in a globalised setting. Let me start with a short review of a few conceptual essentials that together can be considered this study's theoretical foundations.

In order to understand the braided and interdependent coexistence of the East Indians in their social world one needs an approach that accounts for its intricate and process-like nature. Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (1977, 1990, 1998) offers such an approach. Especially the theory's key concept of *habitus* proved helpful in the attempt to understand the Indian's individual freedom as well as the delimitations set by the structuring force of structures. According to Bourdieu, habitus consists of "systems of durable and transposable dispositions" (1990:53). These dispositions are always shaped by and shaping people's experiences. Throughout this book I have aimed at detecting such dispositions and reveal their functioning. I have tried to uncover how experiences related to the existence of East Indian Hindus and Muslims in Guyana during the first lustrum of the twenty-first century help produce certain shared parcels of implicit knowledge. And I have endeavoured to demonstrate in what way these parcels of knowledge, which Bourdieu labelled habitus, produce and structure East Indianness and Muslimness or Hinduness themselves, as people act, create and reproduce objects and practices.

Following Strauss and Quinn (1994, 1997), and thus unlike Bourdieu, I have employed the concept of cultural understandings to depict and explain these mutual parcels of implicit knowledge. Although of continued conceptual importance, the notion of habitus proves to be somewhat ill suited to capture and gauge the complexity of contemporary realities. My focus on cultural understandings should be seen as a renovated focus on habitus in which Bourdieu's emphasis on the centripetal effects of cultural processes is supplemented with an interest in their centrifugal effects. This so called schema theory and connectionism recognises the unchanging mutual reflection of mental structures and cultural production *as well as* tendencies towards cultural transformation. Concentrating on cultural understandings – that is, on shared schemas or learned prototypes that mediate thought and action – thus allowed me to theorise why and how

internalised understandings sometimes lead to a reproduction of existing structures, and stir action that leads to change at other moments. In the case of an examination of Indianness in Guyana, such ability is indispensable. On various occasions in several chapters was shown that similar understandings could trigger different responses at different times or among different people. The shared concepts of American modernity and Indian classicism described in chapter five, for instance, encourage some to passionately embrace novelty and shun conventional ways or ideology, and impel others to fortify traditional culture, or cling to it because they fear the increasing speed with which the vehicles of change are moving ahead. As elsewhere in this world, intergenerational conflicts within families are an interesting example. Whereas some of my aged informants refer to traditional Indian family ideology with nostalgia, their children or grandchildren regard the very same thing archaic and suffocating.

Relationships between middle-aged women and young adult daughters(-in-law) are frequently shaped by highly conflicting valuations of similar notions of tradition and modernity. The celebration of individualism, locally often labelled hallmark of our age, is an important source of tension in many of the homes I have visited. I have met a recently married girl who was on the brink of war with her husband's mother, as the old lady did not share her positive valuation of contemporary egocentrism. Although the girl had moved in with her spouse and his family, she refused to barter her independence for a low ranked role in the family collective. The young female continued to work as a teacher, did her makeup instead of the early morning chores, had postponed parenthood, and managed to maintain her personal social network of both male and female friends and acquaintances. The middle-aged mother-in-law furiously condemned the girl's manners and (ineffectively) demanded a return to the old ways, the exact old ways her daughter-in-law wholeheartedly detested. Both thus shared conceptual understandings of tradition and modernity – held similar notions of collectivism and hierarchy versus individualism and equality – but were inspired to employ totally different behavioural strategies largely because of certain positional variances.

Emotion and motivation obviously are important determinants of action. As such, both can elucidate this issue of variety that was largely left untouched by the Theory of Practice. The example shows cultural understandings have the potential of instigating a range of actions. Unlike Bourdieu's habitus, they do not only teach their holder a sense of what is natural, they are also connected to highly motivating senses of what is desirable. In other words, shared understandings of the East Indians in Guyana can function as goals. As we have seen in the instance of fictive kinship, and as will be further discussed in section 9.3, these goal-schemas or –understandings are interconnected and arranged in particular ways.

The attitudes and actions of certain villagers in response to my friendship with an unmarried and foreign female teacher, as mentioned in chapter six, reveal the application of family understandings in contexts of social interaction beyond the realms of actual kinship.

Neighbours who sensed they had the right and/or obligation to execute their family-like responsibilities delivered corrective admonitions, sometimes accompanied by explicit references to symbolic family ties, to me. As make-believe aunts and mothers they attempted to guide me away from directions that might cause personal harm, and arouse tension within, or bring shame upon, the fictive kin group (the village). Linkages between understandings of the familial and non-familial obviously triggered interpretations and actions that – without these linkages – could be considered intrusive and inappropriate.

Cultural understandings do not exist in isolation. Rather, their vigour and relevance to specific people in some situations and at certain times are determined in relation to other understandings. The importance of such schematic interconnections has brought me to regard and investigate them in a holistic way, as inseparable networks and not as detachable entities. Already in the first two chapters of Part II, the explanatory importance of interconnections became clear. At the end of chapter five, I mentioned the interdependence of understandings. Notions of American modernity, Indian classicality, and Guyana's hostility are mutually constitutive, they are established and valued in relation to each other. The classical only exists in retrospect, and advancement can only be understood (and appreciated) if one knows the lack of it. In chapter six, interconnections between cultural understandings of friendship and kinship materialised. I analysed how concepts of kinship influenced interaction between non-related individuals, and how notions of friendship seem to have entered family life. In chapter seven, finally, I labelled these networks *cultural constellations*. I illustrated their construction, reconstruction, and working by describing the system of schemas that constitutes the East Indian concept of partnership. In *Constellations of Affection* it was demonstrated that understandings of things such as sexuality, partner-choice, and marriage are linked to powerful and early internalised conceptions of love and reciprocity. Activation of the ideal partner schema, for instance, will inevitably involve a contribution being made by understandings about love or reciprocity. A great illustration is the joiner's spouse search described at the beginning of section 7.1. Although my friend's quest narrated an untraditional notion of romance, it was obviously based upon a firm and deep-rooted belief in the manufacturability of functional and even affectionate life partnerships.

In general, thought and/or practices concerning gender relations are often motivated by what I have labelled deep-rooted schemas, understandings about what is ultimately desirable and satisfactory. Hence, a husband will play his part as a spouse and interpret or value the conjugal relationship with influential conceptions of underlying principles of affection and exchange in the back of his mind. An example is the labourer who told me, in front of his 'wife', about the reciprocal nature of their relationship. As portrayed in chapter seven, he claimed he "took" the lady because of diligence and certainly not beauty. His proposal was like a business deal; she would get a partner, and he "somebody to just cook, wash, and tek care of the house and dem kind ah ting." The man's choice for, and valuation of, his partner clearly depended on her ability to satisfy his needs

for (physical) care. Likewise, his other half agreed to satisfy his needs as she expects him to do the very same thing. Neither one of them denied love was the basis of their partnership. However, their definition of that love – the principle that underlies union – is highly strategic or calculative and governed by unconcealed notions of reciprocity that are undoubtedly ‘cultural’.

In the next two sections the anatomy of cultural constellations – and, accordingly, the nature of the understandings of which they are constituted – will be examined in the context of my investigations in Guyana. I will portray modern-day Indian constellations as temporary outcomes of an ongoing process, snapshots of a moment in the lifecycle of Indianness. And I will recapitulate how these temporary outcomes comprise a localised West Indian version of the old South Asian Indianness and have become more and more absorbed in and shaped by global mechanisms and forces. Furthermore, references to East Indian practice and reality will be employed to delineate the character of constellations and their content.

Impressions and actions concerning social relations with (fictive) kin and partners can be used to expose the internally variable durability as well as the hierarchical configuration of these complexes of conceptions. Accounts of East Indian images of the self in the world – attitudes towards Asian heritage, American modernity, and Guyanese marginality, or actually change and standstill – will help illustrate the shifting priorities and unstable prominence of available understandings. These perceptions of transformation and preservation and the preferred coping strategies display temporal and situational variance of manifestations of Indianness and allow me to demonstrate the importance of motivation and emotion. Finally, the network of shared understandings that together define a more or less shared East Indian vision of the transcendental truth shall exemplify the faculty of one’s constellations to harbour conflicting discourses without that instigating conflict, tension, or even senses of inconsistency. In other words, contradictions in people’s notions of the extracorporeal – I have mentioned Hindu concepts of prayer in chapter eight – show the possibility of internalising seemingly incompatible understandings: an important feature that allows constellations to deal with contemporary complexity.

9.2 Constellations II: The question of formation

Constellations and their content are characterised by their constant state of flux. Their contemporary appearances are reflections of a past temporarily visible as they pass by on their way to an unknown future. East Indianness today, a structure assembled from ethnically and religiously dyed constellations, is an edifice engaged in the process of negotiating the past, dealing with the present, and preparing for that what might be yet to come. This section is devoted to its formation, and reformation.

9.2.1 *The Past*

East Indianness was conceived more than fifteen decades ago as the first Indian indentured labourers disembarked the ships that took them from British India. Their mental luggage, their thought and action governing systems of schemata, together with the socio-economic circumstances they encountered in the New World, helped outline a (cultural) uniqueness upon which the ever evolving East Indian uniqueness is and will remain founded.

Both ethnic and religious culture displayed in contemporary Indian circles in Guyana reveal definite traces of the East Indian Subcontinental history. The appearance of local Hinduism is a good example. The dominance of Vaishnavism³⁹⁶, the prominence of certain scriptures like the Ramayana, and the popularity of the path of loving devotion (*Bhaktimarga*) as a route towards salvation all narrate of a North Indian legacy. People worship the deities, which are popular in their ancestral regions, they know the stories of the experiences of gods and holy men there, and perform a complex of rituals with definite 'northern' roots.

Spiritual as well as secular practice and thought of East Indians today are undoubtedly coloured by this Hindu heritage. Likewise, the modest and variegated background of the average Indian migrant has also affected the formation of still surviving East Indian social structures. It facilitated the development of an overseas Indian community in which the role of caste as a structuring structure severely diminished and new structuring structures evolved. The importance of old internal differences declined and new categorisations materialised. Matters of ethnic belonging and classification gained overwhelming importance. Largely because of the makeup of the Indian migrant population, Guyana's social reality could outline configurations in which little room was left for those that had defined social (and economic, political, and religious) life in India. Whereas a Subcontinental past has provided the East Indians with certain belief systems, the experience of transplantation thus detached one of those systems from its hallmark institution: the caste system. Colonial power structures, as well as the impossibility of labour differentiation, the heterogeneous makeup of the indentured population, and altered gender relations, inspired a redefinition of Indian principles of stratification.

The Indian inheritance is also in less tangible ways still part and parcel of East Indian perceptions and classifications. Interesting examples of this more elusive impact of the ancient past on contemporary ways are culture-specific ideas about notions such as purity and hierarchy. For instance, as suggested in chapter four, there is a connection between concepts of ascribed or inborn statuses as taught by varna-ideology and 'race'-categorisations displayed by many East Indians I have consulted. Whereas innate 'low' characteristics are thought to dictate the behaviour of Africans, whites are deemed to be born with a set of superior traits that perfectly explain their universal success and

³⁹⁶ The school of Hinduism that awards Lord Vishnu and his *avatars* (embodiments) the most prominent position: as the ultimate saviour.

supremacy. Such hereditary categorisations are significant because of their explanatory value and their influence on perception: they can both motivate and justify thought and action of my research participants, especially in interethnic contexts. In fact, the legacy of caste allows for a validation of racism, a concept of inequity as something meant to be. Often articulated beliefs in innate African otherness, fundamentally different African physiques and psyches that are thought to explain their moral and intellectual inferiority, legitimise common discriminatory behaviour against the ‘racially’ other (nurtured, I have stressed, in battles for power). I have thus heard East Indians defend ethnic partiality with the argument of Afro-animalism: a sub-human nature of the other that justifies and even naturalises East Indian suspicion and carefulness.

In addition to East Indian history, also the social, political, and economic reality of plantation Guiana, from the colonial years to the first few decades after independence, have noticeably shaped East Indianness. First of all, circumstances on the estates and the social makeup of the Indian estate population fuelled the further breakdown of the caste system and – due to female shortage – triggered durable alterations in gender relations and family life. Second, conditions in colonial Guiana, after the abolishment of contract labour, proved influential in the process of production of East Indian distinctiveness. Laws, policies, the education system, and other attributes of colonialism, explain things such as the dwindling prominence of Subcontinental languages and especially the Anglicisation of thought, as well as the tendency of many East Indian Hindus to fear cremation flames and prefer to be unorthodoxly buried.³⁹⁷

Although not a general anxiety, the latter illustrates the impact of contextual change on collective understandings, even at the deeper level of sentiments. Quite a few informants have told me the very thought of burning flesh seemed horrifying and struck them as slightly barbaric. Some actually refuse to attend cremations. Others simply declare it an un-Hindu practice. I remember how a prominent pundit was highly upset with the cremation of his deceased brother-in-law. According to him, the dead were supposed to be buried, for the body had not belonged to a Brahmin and thus was not eligible for consumption by fire.

On a national scale, colonial reality has also played an important part in the construction of a segregated Guyanese society. Policies and peculiarities have allowed or even encouraged the uneven distribution of East Indians among professional sectors, the physical separation of the major ethnic communities, and the formation of a resilient sense of intra-ethnic unity among the Indians – for instance, by means of an unprecedented standardised Hinduism. Largely thanks to colonialist policies, East Indians are Guyana’s villagers and agriculturalists, and (most of them) the adherents of an unusually uniform Hinduism.

In fact, the result of the imperialistic endeavour named British Guiana was the establishment of an environment in which ethnicity gained huge potential as source of

³⁹⁷ Cremation was prohibited in British Guiana until 1956.

identification and means of mobilisation. Imported traditions from India, together with a 'racial' separateness or East Indian uniqueness cultivated by a number of external and internal processes, had made ethnic otherness – and subsequently feelings of unfamiliarity and prejudice – omnipresent. In such a reality, it almost seems to have been inevitable for the race-card to be played as competition over scarce resources became fierce.

One of the first examples of the conscious utilisation of ethnicity's mobilising potential was trade unionism. In the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s dozens of mono-ethnic labour organisations materialised whose impact surpassed the confines of the economic sphere. In fact, facilitated by wide-ranging ethnic segregation in the economic realm, the unions developed into mouthpieces of ethnic communities and platforms on which discord and antipathy of African and Indian collectives were propagated. They were early vehicles of rivalry, one of the first sets of institutions that structurally nourished collective identifications and fears³⁹⁸. In the days before independence, these unions even developed into associates of dualistic nationalist movements and proved to be the breeding grounds for leadership that would be among the architects of a political system that, until now, helps to cultivate powerful images of the (ethnic) self and the other.

The question of the distribution of power, that rose as became clear the colonial authorities would return to Britain, eventually enthused the establishment of what would become a tradition of ethnopolitics. Assisted by the Cold War's capitalist contestants and their geopolitical tactics in the effort of preventing the 'red stain' from spreading further across the globe, a socially highly formative political reality came into being. The People's Progressive Party (PPP) and the People's National Congress (PNC), the East Indian and African party, were and still are the key players in this reality. As described in chapter two and three, they have manifested themselves as protectors of sectional interests ever since the turn towards independence was taken. They have tainted the recent history of Guyana through their strategies of partiality and the fabrication of fear, and heavily contributed to the construction of an Indianness inseparable from African otherness and the exceedingly competitive home environment.

9.2.2 Localisation

The history and origin of the East Indians in Guyana obviously have had a significant impact on their distinctiveness today. In a number of ways, the Indian legacy, together with novel Guyanese contexts, enforced the transformation and development of shared constellations. Traditions and actualities inspired the (re)formation of schemata that were considered appropriate renditions of reality and apt guides of thought and practice of a specific people in a specific place and situation. Although sometimes presented as such, Indianness in Guyana is obviously far from a reflection of Indianness in the motherland. It

³⁹⁸ As said in chapter two, also cultural organisations displayed an animosity regulating potential during the first half of the twentieth century.

is a localised complex of ethnic and religious culture that has evolved in a climate that is very different from India.

Two different tendencies can be discerned in the process of localisation. On one hand, conditions and trends in Guyana have stirred the establishment of a severely ethnicised subjectivity. On the other hand, locally available ways and perceptions have triggered modification or adaptation which can be labelled Creolisation and Anglicisation. The first tendency, ethnicisation, is related to the power struggles mentioned earlier. Battles for sway in the political realm as well as other realms in which the ethnic appeal will be heard have inspired the development of a vibrant collective sense of otherness which is a fundamental part of the contemporary East Indian self-image. In fact, Indianness as a label was practically non-existent in the India where the ancestors of the East Indians came from. It only materialised in the New World, on the plantations, in encounters with non-Indians and in eras beyond the estates when East Indians became involved in interethnic struggles for supremacy. Under 9.4, I will further reflect on the ethnicisation, or the pervasive competition that influences the formation, and functioning of the constellations of understandings that define East Indianness.

Whereas the Indo-Guyanese urge to emphasise ethnic otherness can be explained as the particularisation instigated by a certain local actuality, Anglicisation/Christianisation and creolisation can be considered adaptations produced by that same plural reality. Both are expressions of localisation. The latter have helped manufacture East Indianness as they brought about modifications in practices and perceptions concerning social relations and religion. As explained in chapters four and eight, Anglo-Christian structures and institutions in the colony have caused Hinduism to become anglicised and Hindus to embrace customs and concepts belonging to a West European tradition rather than a South Asian one. Hindu religious practice is clearly effected by alien ways and notions. The institutionalisation of Christian-like congregational worship in local temples, as well as the (partial) inclusion of Jesus in the Hindu pantheon and changing concepts of prayer, are unmistakable evidence of transformation. But also Hindu concepts of afterlife reveal the impact of religious localisation. Facilitated by the general loss of knowledge of Sanskrit and Hindi – the languages in which the scriptures were written – the bulk of my Hindu informants have bartered, what I labelled, the traditional moksha/atman structure for understandings based upon images of heaven and soul. Because the masses are forced to grasp essential notions using an idiom that is ill-suited to reproduce the conceptual finesses that can be found in the original texts, understandings of liberation and the immortal self are modified. Hence, instead of inherently divine yet temporarily disengaged fragments of the Absolute, most regard mankind as children of a Holy Father working towards a post-mortem residence in His abode and presence.

Creolisation is apparent in several other spheres. Empirical data presented in several previous chapters have indicated Creolisation is visible in East Indian notions and ways regarding various things such as family life, conjugal relationships, and witchcraft or

creative coping and problem solving. The incidence of grandparenthood – predominantly grandmothers assuming the role of a child’s caretaker and primary mentor – can be presumed an example of this process. Mainly due to labour migration, it is increasingly common for East Indian elderly to look after the offspring of their absent children.

The rising importance of ‘pleasure’, discernable in changed attitudes towards sexuality and friendship, also narrates of the success of Creole exemplariness. Although severely affected by the forces of Westernisation, the liberalised position of young unmarried East Indian females and their increased ability and propensity to utilise sexuality³⁹⁹ suggest people are inspired or at least encouraged by what they see is displayed by their ethnically different neighbours in Guyana. And so does the popularity of unorthodox syncretistic methods and beliefs concerning the earthly supernatural. My favourite East Indian witch relied on East Indian, African, Dutch, and Chinese ethereal entities and techniques to neutralise the harmful effects of a wide range of supernatural threads imposed on her clients by powers or beings of primarily non-Indian origin. Her altar comprised an indiscriminate collection of images and figurines of Mother Mary, black Madonnas, Jesus, Guru Nanak, and Hindu deities representing all possible sects and branches. The Hindu lady assured me that a Ganga puja effectively counteracts the evil work of mermaids⁴⁰⁰, and has taught me how to predict future happenings by using the book of Psalms instead of the usual Hindu almanacs. Such and similar eclectic ways and ideas, common throughout Indo-Guyana, indicate Indian conceptions of Guyana’s supernatural sphere are a reflection of local history and the country’s physical and social reality, a set of understandings infused with Creole elements as are discernable in many of the constellations that constitute East Indianness.

9.2.3 Globalisation

Urges to adopt or adapt, and trends towards ethnicisation or particularisation, are not confined to the process of localisation. As a matter of fact, globalisation is at least as much a catalyst of these opposing tendencies. Transnationality, as I have described in the latter half of chapter three, is an influential process in the establishment of contemporary Indianness. Mass migration of Guyanese Indians to North America – and subsequently the formation of active and powerful transnational communities – the further development of pan-Islamic and pan-Hindu movements, and the growing impact of secular nuclei, all help prompt a redefinition of we-ness that is more extensive and higher paced than ever before.

Various issues thus contribute to the creation of the ever more globalised context in which Indianness, as a multifaceted complex of constellations, is (re)articulated. The

³⁹⁹ See chapter six.

⁴⁰⁰ These are water spirits who, according to Guyanese of both African and Indian descent, roam the local waters. They are not part of the traditional North Indian spiritual realm but, most likely, are an Afro-Guyanese ‘translation’ of the originally West African *Mami Wata*. Furthermore, I have learned from coastal Amerindians about the *Watamuma*, a water spirit who ‘steals’ menstruating girls if they enter jungle creeks to bathe.

increased availability of alternative ways of doing things such as consuming, communicating, contemplating, and conducting has undermined taken-for-grantedness and caused the 'old' to become contested. Diet, dress, music and dance, but also embodied knowledge such as aspirations, beliefs and morality – all exponents of Indian distinctiveness – are touched by the powers of internationalisation. Examples of these processes are described throughout this dissertation and indicate that global citizenship and transnational models are adopted by East Indians from all segments of society. My favourite illustration is the rise of 'body consciousness' in East Indian circles. Men's growing interest in body toning, girls' recent desire to shape their buttocks Latina style, and housewives battling the aging process with exercise and with products from the Avon catalogue, all narrate the success of a foreign doctrine of beauty. And so do images of well-off East Indians following the low-carb prophesies of the late Dr. Robert Atkins, or the poorer consuming one five dollars (U.S\$ 0.025) imported cod liver oil capsule a day. There is nothing Indian about that. At least, I do not know of locally available Hindu scriptures that advocate the intake of animal parts and products for the sake of longevity.

The entertainment industry seems to be one of the primary vehicles responsible for these innovations. Especially the U.S.-centric mass (and new) media are important suppliers of strong alternative behavioural models. Facilitated by local legislative lethargy and audiovisual unproductivity, they provide their relatively inexperienced audience with little objective information about virtually all aspects of life. The effect of such mediated information is revealed by émigrés who return from North America for a holiday or family visit. Their tendency to manifest themselves as icons of televised American modernity rather than disciples of a personally experienced truth that is undoubtedly less fantastic, shows the huge significance of mediated information in the construction process of contemporary understandings. Guyanese with unmediated America experience rarely express alternative visions of the world up North. Rather, they passionately demonstrate (and often fake) their realisation of the American dream that, they know, is known and dreamt throughout Guyana. Hence, visiting migrants enter the country with manicured hands, new hair styles and makeup, wearing pants instead of a dress, blessed with a brand new American accent and pockets full of American or Canadian dollars. As said in chapter five, by fashioning their messages aimed at the home community according to shared understandings of American advancement, they thus validate impressions cultivated through the media and in product presentation, and exhibit the power of the contemporary imagination economy.

A substantial share of the aggregate of information from which my subjects constantly construe and reinterpret their readings of the world and its people – including their own relative position – is indirect. Much of what East Indians know about the alien and meta-matters is based on messages coded by a sender with an agenda, and received (not perceived!) in exactly the same format by all recipients. Paradoxically, it almost seems as if these subjective truths, largely conveyed through the media and supporting

commodities, can outweigh personal encounters and truths based on real life experience. Besides returning migrants, another interesting example is the recent understanding of the 'Muslim self' and the 'Muslim other' held by East Indian Muslims and Hindus. The consumption of images of Islamic aggression nourished by what is rhetorically called the global war on terror has noticeably affected inter-religious relations and valuations in trouble free Guyana.

Partially because of the media, non-Muslim East-Indians have come to associate local Muslims with intolerance and aggression. According to my Hindu informants, East Indians who worship Allah are heartless thieves and aggressors who strive for material gain and power in the name of religion. And partially because of the media, local Muslims have become more distrustful and suspicious and, in certain situations or places, have even dissociated themselves from those who are doctrinally different. In line with most expressions of globalisation, this development is facilitated by other contemporary phenomena. The establishment and tightening of ties between the local Muslim community and Islamic nuclei abroad have resulted in structural efforts to purify Islam from cultural contamination and thus have led the appearance of certain Muslims and Islam in general to become Arabised.

The movement to purify Islam is a definite exponent of the globalised age. Labelled neofundamentalism, Roy (2004:25) calls it "both a product and agent of globalisation, because it acknowledges, without nostalgia the loss of pristine cultures, and sees as positive the opportunity to build a universal religious identity, delinked from any specific culture." Also the urge to revive a cultural (Indian) Islam, which I have identified as a response to de-Indianisation, is nourished by globalisation. Like neofundamentalism, this neotraditionalism owes its existence and success to a facilitating internationalised climate in which connections enable the influx of necessary means to address and manipulate the alienated, and therefore susceptible, among the body of believers.

Globalisation stirs adaptation and absorption or particularisation and denunciation. Trends like those visible in Indian Muslim religious spheres can be detected in many other spheres as well. The impact of forces of globalisation, deriving from an array of religious and secular nuclei – that is, regional and global religious, economic, political, and information centres – is one of the most characteristic of the formative forces that determine the development of East Indianness today. The incursion of information of all kind, combined with other features of globalisation such as improved mobility, increased availability of goods and communication technology, have forced the East Indians to reassess their ways and perceptions and erect new understandings upon the foundations of previous ones.

This reassessment of manners and visions is relatively drastic in Indo-Guyana. Although the effects of globalisation are felt throughout our contemporary world, a combination of factors cause the impact of the outside to be extraordinarily severe in the unstable postcolonial diasporic environs of my informants. A blend of mass emigration, the

reinforcement of ties with a distant motherland, the late and overwhelming introduction of foreign media, religious satellitism, and dependency due to a limited domestic economic and socio-cultural production capacity, has boosted the formative force of globalisation in Indo-Guyana. The fact that these phenomena occur in a society characterised by polarisation and competition, and multifaceted instability, has facilitated the emergence of mutual senses of crisis that are connected to both the strong (and opposing) anti-modernist and anti-traditionalist tendencies that are apparent within today's East Indian community. Indians in Guyana share a negative valuation of their here and now, a valuation that narrates the local inability to either keep pace with global transformation or preserve valuable traditions in these times of change. This vision stirs escapism or the urge to take control of developments by trying to return to deemed unadulterated ways or advocating a comprehensive makeover. Illustrations mentioned throughout this dissertation include assertive cultural activism (e.g. GIHA), religious fundamentalism, and the common idolisation of America and the American.

As such, local concepts of modernity and the obsolete, ideas about friendship, marriage, sexuality and gender relations, notions of health and beauty, or interpretations of the transcendental and the self in the world – extensively analysed in chapter five, six, seven, and eight – all reveal the huge influence of multifaceted globalisation on the thinking and acting creative individual and thus help analyse the relationship between the individual and his or her surroundings.

9.2.4 Variable durability

So, besides being the temporary outcome of historical processes experienced and manipulated by certain people in certain places, and being subject to processes of localisation, today's cultural constellations are shaped and reshaped by forces of globalisation. East Indian understandings have never been challenged in ways they are challenged right now, not even during the East Indians' first days in the New World. Never has change occurred at such a high pace. This analytical description of East Indian distinctiveness in the early twenty-first century is a wonderful illustration of the way centrifugal effects of cultural processes transpire from the same source as centripetal effects. The theory of cultural production proposed in this book accounts for cultural transformation as well as the reproduction of existing structures. As Quinn and Strauss (1997:38) remarked, while sometimes internalised schemas (or cultural understandings) lead to a reproduction of existing power structures, at other moments they inspire action that leads to change.

In chapter six and chapter seven, I have argued that the receptiveness to innovation is not the same throughout entire constellations. Different understandings or schemas within networks of understandings show different levels of durability. Whereas some aspects of thought and practice that – by means of the perceptions and motivations or goals upon which they are based – can be related to a particular constellation are relatively

constant, other aspects connected to the very same constellation are highly unstable. In order to demonstrate this feature of constellations, I have discussed the network of understandings that revolve around the East Indian understanding of ‘partnership’ – the ‘partnership-constellation’ – and analysed the layered composition of this cluster of understandings.

As will be reviewed in the following section, complexes of understandings or schemata are organised in a hierarchical fashion. Together, they form configurations comprising schemas of various levels of significance. The value and sway of these depends on the importance of their goal. Deep-rooted schemas, as I have called them, will thus involve ideas on what is ultimately desirable and satisfactory and function as end-goals for other (superficial-goal) schemas further down the hierarchy. On the basis of observations made about understandings of family and family life, I have distinguished between the upper or surface layer of constellations and its deeper or subsurface layer. More specifically, I have argued that people’s notions and practices in the realm of friendly and family relationships consist of (a) clusters of basic principles and (b) interconnected understandings that relate to thought and action in a more direct and often more conscious fashion. Values such as cohesion, cooperation and collectiveness, as well as concepts of hierarchy and happiness, and certain pedagogical principles thus govern more mundane readings and actions in amicable and familial contexts. For instance, the belief in the pedagogic power of anxiety that inspired an informant to fake his death in order to teach his son about the dangers of electricity. The Muslim father told me he simulated his accidental electrocution to make sure the dangerously inquisitive kid experienced the kind of horror that would inspire him to stay away from sockets for years to come. The man’s choice of strategy was neither accidental nor idiosyncratic. His manner, I have argued, is a manifestation of a deep-rooted collective understanding: the belief in ‘functional fear’ that motivates Indian parents to cultivate and utilise angst to make sure guidance is understood and completely absorbed.

In the chapter on partnership, the differences and connections between different layers was further analysed. It has been explained that the primary understandings residing in subsurface layers should be seen as basic principals that underlie goals expressed in daily life concerning more trivial mundane matters on the surface.

Data suggest that the durability of understandings correlates with their hierarchical position in a respective constellation. More precisely, understandings in the upper layer generally seem more prone to change than understandings in deeper layers. Innovation is most apparent in the realm of superficial goals. This realm, I have stressed, is characterised by relatively high levels of interpersonal fragmentation and intrapersonal variation. East Indian understandings about the practice of sexuality, for instance, as schemata located in the upper regions of the partnership-constellation, underwent a far more revolutionary transformation than the underlying principles of love and reciprocity. Altered attitudes and practices about pre-marital sexual behaviour and virginity or pleasure and satisfaction, and

the departure from male-centeredness, coexist with persistent and sometimes conflicting traditional ideas about the transactional nature of relationships and the manufacturability of love.

An interesting illustration is provided by the female widow who told my assistant she had an affair with a married man, solely to satisfy her affective and sexual desires. According to her, their relationship was merely a balanced exchange of non-material 'services'. All she did was acknowledge a modern-day woman's needs, and satisfy them in a way that testified of the existence of a rather traditional underlying understanding of balanced relational reciprocity. Her lover provided her with the one thing a single well-off lady like her needed a man for. And she provided him with something he allegedly could no longer obtain in the context of marriage. The woman assured the interviewer she did not ever ask for any other form of support or loyalty, as she reckoned such exchanges belonged to marital realms. In a creative manner, the widow thus managed to adopt a modified concept of female sexuality (in the upper layer) while not disposing more durable principles of relating (in the deeper layer).

Post-modernity, predominantly by altering the interpretations of femininity and adolescence, has resulted in the breakdown of certain moral barriers, the rising importance of the satisfaction of specific secondary needs, and increased levels of individualisation. As such it was able to affect a wide range of practices in, for example, the sphere of partnership. Changing realities due to labour migration, technological development, and the start of the information age, are the cause. Their impact on deep-rooted goals or understandings, nevertheless, is fairly limited. The reason might have something to do with the way these particular understandings were first acquired. According to Quinn and Strauss (1997:189), some cultural understandings are relatively indelible because they are internalised early through infantile experiences in the context of exceptionally strong feelings of survival and security. Because the East Indians have learned about the cultural basis of love ever since they were young, their understanding is quite stable as well as highly motivating and powerful. This concept of love, with its psychodynamic basis and as an understanding positioned in the deeper layer of the partnership constellation, influences thought and behaviours relating to sexuality, partner choice, and gender role distribution, aspects of the upper layer.

At the same time, however, external forces trigger change in the upper layer that occurs almost irrespective of underlying principals. As we have seen in earlier chapters, the growing abundance of opportunities and available models of thought and behaviour allow the individual to browse for concepts that suit him or her at a given time or place, partially liberate themselves from the impact of tradition, and compose their own eclectic understandings. These change-prone eclectic understandings then instigate (gradual) transformation of deep-rooted schemas. In other words, as the consequence of the trickling down of innovations from the more fluid, fragmented, and variegated realms of the relatively superficial schemas, development of deep-rooted schemas takes place. Trends

characteristic of the superficial layer such as ‘emotionalisation’ and the increase of hedonism have thus given rise to new notions and ways, and have ultimately sparked change in the subsurface sphere. Notwithstanding the continuing dominance of ‘old’ conceptions, alternative notions of love are increasingly ventilated and executed in Indo-Guyana.

9.3 Constellations III: The Question of Functioning

Constellations are assembled in a variety of contexts. They evolve, sometimes rapidly and sometimes barely noticeable. Constellations and their content never fail to change and adjust to new eras and new circumstances. They are complex networks of interpretative devices that vary in importance and durability. Little about their formation is straightforward and unidirectional. And the same can be said about their functioning. Just like the construction and reproduction of schemas and systems, also their performance is typified by ambiguity and complexity.

9.3.1 *Multiple flexibility*

Besides constantly being in a state of flux, East Indianness (as a collection of constellations) is inherently flexible. Understandings of the self and impressions of the other vary.⁴⁰¹ As remarked in chapter five, just as situations change and moments differ, do foci of self-identification and association shift. This temporal and situational relevance of the incessantly shifting foci is a good example of the functioning of mental schemata and is an indication of the creative capacity or the limited freedom of the subject.

Definitions and interpretations of the East Indian self consist of an interwoven collection of personal and collective aspects. These self-understandings always emerge in relation to the apparent other, and are shaped by people’s understanding of the environment in which the self is expressed. More precisely, I have argued that the East Indian’s interpretation of the self and, accordingly, appropriate behaviour in a social context, depends on their interpretation of the other, and the connection between the self and that other in a particular setting and time. Guyanese of Indian origin can regard themselves, and subsequently behave as (and be regarded and treated as): members of an ethnic group; adherents to a certain religion or particular religious sect; inhabitants of some locale; citizens of a state; advocates and embodiments of modernism, conservatism or conservationism; and members of some age-, sex-, or occupational group. All these foci can shift rapidly. Whilst an East Indian can be a Guyanese when he checks in for a homebound flight at JFK just after midnight, he will be Muslim on arrival in Guyana, when

⁴⁰¹ Sudhir Kakar (1996), in his analysis of the psychological roots of Indian communalism, also describes shifting identities. Besides, he argues that there is a causal relation between contemporary ethnic-religious conflicts and processes of globalisation and modernisation (that undermine traditional identities).

he enters the Muslim prayer room at Cheddi Jagan international airport. As he travels through Georgetown and the notorious African villages on the East Coast on his way to his house in Berbice, he is most likely to be an East Indian. And back in his village, that very same day, he might identify himself and be identified as the successful dentist who travels to the States frequently or he will be and behave like the recalcitrant Ahmadiyyah before his Sunni friends.

The status of the focus hinges on its value as marker of distinction, and its worth as interpretive and action-generating instrument. The more relevance a focus has, the more it will claim a prominent position as sign of distinction and reservoir of self-reference. To an extent, this relevance correlates with its level of sharedness. For a focus to be maximally functional, it has to be understood by many, and it also has to be both shared by a significant amount of equals, and (at the very same time) not be shared with a considerable numbers of unequals in a given context. I have mentioned the fluctuating importance of ethnicity as a good example of such correlation.

Another example is the oscillating weight of religious labels. A primary focus on religious belonging as a source of attribution and self-designation only materialises at certain times and in certain arenas. Especially in ethnically homogenous villages, in case of shortage or moments of heightened competition, religious awareness grows stronger and dormant senses of intra-religious unity or interreligious and –factional friction awaken. Observations indicate that battles for local hegemony are often fought along the lines of doctrinal affiliation. In the village where my wife and I lived, a rigid division has split the Hindu majority into camps of mainstreamers and Arya. Committed members of the opposing factions refuse to participate in rivalling religious functions, avoid unnecessary social interaction, and prefer to do their business with likeminded. Questions of power and the allocation of resources (mostly the distribution of land) rather than unbridgeable fundamental doctrinal differences, are to blame. Local politics, economic considerations, and other non-religious issues, fuel feuds within our and many other village communities. In fact, throughout Indo-Guyana, Hindus are competing with Muslims, the Arya Samaj with Sanatanists, and purifiers with traditionalists. Inspired by a complex whole of factors, including global politics, undercurrent sentiments stored in East Indian understandings and discourse, can thus give rise to conviction-centric thought and action.

9.3.2 Motivational dependence

Activation of an understanding, including the prioritising of focuses, clearly vary with time and space. Certain moments at certain places require specific understandings to come to the fore, and enter the centre stage of interpretive exercises. Data presented in the previous chapters nonetheless suggest that activation of particular constellations or even understandings is not a predictor of sure action. In fact, the utilisation of similar understandings by different interpreters/subjects often leads them to display quite dissimilar behaviour. It is motivation that helps to explain these differences.

According to Claudia Strauss (1992:1), “human motivation has to be understood as the product of interaction between events and things in the social world and interpretations of those events and things in people’s psyches.” Neither psychobiological nor sociocultural models suffice when the origin of action is to be explained. While motivation cannot solely be explained in terms of fundamental needs and drives, you cannot regard action as a direct precipitate of cultural constructs either. Like Strauss, I therefore propose for us to travel down the middle road and consider action the product of a complex of factors of which cultural understandings are very significant, but not all-decisive.

In accordance with Strauss’ research, my findings show that, albeit motivation “depends on cultural messages and is realised in social interaction [...it is] not automatically acquired when cultural messages have been imparted” (Strauss 1992:1). An interesting illustration is people’s attitude towards both tradition and innovation. Shared understandings of Indian classicality and American modernity, guiding perception and strategy in particular situations at particular times, trigger quite opposing responses among various informants. Fundamentally, it seems to engender both the urge to preserve and to renew. Whereas conceptions of transformation and westernisation cause some in certain circumstances to embrace tradition, these same notions can make others in similar circumstances to celebrate innovation. Emotion, connected to one’s societal position and prospects, is an important reason for this dissimilarity. Perception of the changes that undoubtedly occur at an increasing pace in contemporary Guyana can arouse feelings of *gain* as well as *loss*. It is the appreciation of alteration that thus decides the actions that follow the activation of understandings. Confrontations with modernity or classicality bring about the conservationist in some of my informants and the anti-traditionalist in others. In general, the image of the Indian subcontinent as the conservatory of one’s legacy causes those who struggle with innovation and adaptation – or those who want to mobilise these ‘strugglers’⁴⁰² – to point at India with pride and admiration, and lament the state of Indianness in the West. Those who feel less alienated – often the relatively young, educated, urban, and more well-off – and those who have no particular strategic interest in conservationism, will often consider the manners and notions of India slightly archaic or even backward and use depictions of the West and westerners as images of desired progress.

To an extent, these motivations sprout from pragmatic and conscious considerations. The most ardent Hindu conservationists are Brahmin priests who fear innovation implies a liberalisation of ritual performance that will undermine their hegemonic position. Influential highborn pundits – those who oppose de-Brahmanisation of Hinduism and fight Christian conversion – venerate and advocate traditional family ideology, social structures, and gender relations. ‘Caste-less’ priests generally hold far more

⁴⁰² The appeal for re-Indianisation voiced by (Hindu) religious leadership and certain cultural organisations (the GIHA for instance) is often explicitly linked to senses of insecurity and besiegement apparent in the contemporary East Indian community.

favourable views of modernisation. They tend to preach updated ideologies in which, of course, old rigid concepts of ascription, hierarchy, and morality are modified and eased. Undoubtedly, they realise that the breakdown of existing structures is in their interest. Some non-Brahmin pundits actually told me they had adopted new foci, joined alternative innovative sects, because of their religious ambitions. Apparently, reasoning, personal interests, and questions of power strongly correlate with one's stance towards transformation. The realm of politics, clearly, is another example.

9.3.3 Hierarchy and layeredness

The impact of understandings, however, also depends on the way in which they are emotionally charged. They are connected to concepts of security and jeopardy and, as such, will be activated – and influence valuation and strategy – in a number of different situations and settings. Action instigating feelings of alienation or advancement can be detected in the realm of (ethnic) culture, in the (re)formation of bonds with the transcendental, and in the design or redesign of social and partner relationships. Questions of how to cope with transformation are imposed upon East Indians in basically all the realms of relating I have discussed so far. The introduction of alternative perspectives on friendship and pleasure⁴⁰³, or sexuality and emotional satisfaction, and the emergence of new labels and social or religious networks, force people to make choices and decide whether to depart or remain.

These choices are neither fully conscious nor exclusively cognitive. One's motivation to act cannot solely be explained in terms of cognisant rational decision-making. As Strauss stressed (Strauss 1992:2), cognition, motivation, and emotion should not be taken as separate faculties. After Wikan (1989), she employs the term 'thought-feeling' to emphasise the interdependence of different aspects of the psyche. Head and heart together motivate practice and inspire formation and reformation of understandings.

Similar fundamental urges and/or thought-feelings tend to colour interpretation and arouse behaviour in a wide array of circumstances. The individual's quest to satisfy elementary needs encourages him or her to do a number of things that, at first glance, seem to revolve around totally different matters. The same reciprocity principles motivate perceptions and actions of my informants in completely different relationships. An example is one of my Muslim East Indian acquaintances from a nearby village. His social behaviour in various contexts is inspired by similar notions of balanced exchange. The valuation of his second wife's sexuality, his efforts to please an influential Hindu pundit with whom he does business, and the donation of a bull to his local jama'at for Eid-ul-Adha, are all influenced by prominent principles of give and take, despite their different value and character. He expects physical affection in return for his material contributions to the wife's separate household; he knows his loyalty to the politically active Hindu priest will provide his construction business with lucrative government contracts; and he realises his bull will buy him goodwill and say in within the local Muslim community.

⁴⁰³ See the commodification of pleasure mentioned in chapter six.

In the context of constellations and understandings, these motivational parallels can be explained by analysing the way in which understandings within constellations are arranged. Under 9.2, I have mentioned the hierarchical configuration of collective understandings and argued how this makeup accounts for the distinct character of formation and transformation, including the variable durability of different interrelated schemata. These same insights in configuration help elucidate the functioning of constellations.

The concepts of layeredness and hierarchy were highlighted in chapter six and seven. Especially the impact of notions of reciprocity on people's definition of love, and subsequently their valuation of partner relationships and behaviour in conjugal contexts, reveal these patterns of arrangement. As remarked at the end of 7.1 and in 7.2.1, exchange forms the basis of reasoning about companionship. Action and assessment of numerous partners and partner seekers in various situations are determined by the understanding that satisfactory relations are typified by the existence of a particular balance. Bliss is the outcome of benefit, at least a fair exchange of culturally charged and gender dependent parcels of good between two partners. The explicit and strong focus on this process, and the specific understanding of the parcels, give rise to – what in Guyana can be regarded – a characteristically East Indian rational motivational structure: a deep-rooted and persistent doctrine of reasonable partnership that (sometimes) affects thoughts and acts in what I have labelled the surface layer.

Information provided by various informants exposed the hierarchical structure of understandings and the influence of this particular 'doctrine' on behaviour. The way in which these specific relationships are shaped is frequently decided by concepts of reciprocity. The decision to "take" a certain wife or bear with a misbehaving husband, for instance, is often guided by respective deep-rooted (goal) schemas. The subsurface is incorporated in the surface, fundamental desires affect secondary or tertiary ones.

In chapter six, another strand of connections between different understandings is mentioned. Perceptions and practices regarding social relations show the transferability of understandings located at similar hierarchical positions. The usage of the family metaphor and its respective ideology by certain groups of people in certain contexts was presented as an illustration. Predominantly classicist and religious or cultural activists employ family conceptions to explain, value, and manage dealings with various types of fictive kin. Inhabitants of the same village, jahaji, and members of religious or even ethnic communities can thus all be regarded and treated as some sort of pseudo-relatives. Understandings that were formed and belong to the sphere of family are considered useful in the efforts of structuring a series of social relationships with non-kin.

9.3.4 Internal inconsistencies

Despite the survival of the family metaphor, its value is definitely decreasing. Alternative interpretations of family ideals and the introduction of new and little straightforward social

structures have caused fictive kin relations to become less widely implemented. Although a significant number of East Indians still practices fictive kinship, increasingly more people reject it or have demoted it to merely realms of thought and discourse while having adopted alternative (and sometimes opposing) forms of practice.

This last piece of the section on the functioning of constellations concerns a capacity that is increasingly visible and useful in a world characterised by growing ambiguity and accelerated change. As I have remarked in the previous chapter, Indo-Guyanese reality indicates that contrasting notions can be part of collective constellations without them causing frictions, tensions, or inconsistencies. Somehow, informants can say one thing and do something completely different without considering this problematic and hopelessly contradictory. I have mentioned the Hindu concept of prayer as an illustration of this phenomenon. In 8.2, I have argued that the schema of what-you-sow-is-what-you-reap coexists with the clemency-can-be-prayed-for schema. Whereas virtually all my Hindu informants reveal a strong belief in the law of karma, almost just as many appear to combine this thrust in divine neutrality and transcendental justice with a faith in the manipulative power of certain religious practices such as prayer and puja.

Another example of internalised conflicting understandings or discourses revolves around the concept of America held by certain neofundamentalist Muslims. Like the Hindus and prayer, also here two opposing understandings coexist unproblematically. Whereas on one hand, some Muslims regard North America to be the despicable scenery of some of the worst manifestations of unbelief, these very same Muslims apply for American visas and aspire migration to those satanic grounds. In fact, many of the scholarship students who have spent a few years in the Islamic world have already moved to the United States and Canada. Additionally, virtually all of the founders of the (then) neofundamentalist Guyana Islamic Trust no longer live in Guyana⁴⁰⁴. Most of these, students and GIT founders, were/are ardent purifiers who ventilate very anti-American views of which – I believe – they are regularly genuinely convinced. Plain hypocrisy is not a sufficient explanation for these ambiguities. Rather than merely storytellers, narrators of conflicting discourses such as these Muslims but also the ‘praying Hindus’ should be seen as people who have managed to incorporate competing ideas in distinct and unrelated schemas.

Following Strauss (1997) I have labelled this process compartmentalisation: competing ideas are internalised in separate schemata, which are activated in different contexts, so that expressions of one are unrelated to expressions of the other and therefore no inconsistencies are experienced. In the case of the Hindus, I have stated that, while karma generally serves as explanatory device in a non-personal context, plea-prayer and -pujas are thought to be helpful in battles with personal uncertainties and misery. In the case of Muslims, the American nightmare usually concerns religious identifications and connections and the American dream includes the answer to questions of economic and

⁴⁰⁴ Interview with GIT leaders, 6 October 2003.

social betterment. I remember how a Canadian Guyanese imam told me, during an interview in his office, that (North) America is a demonic and dangerous place where most people are worthless in the eyes of the Almighty. In the role of an ardent and concerned believer, he explained then that the western world is characterised by extreme levels of ungodliness against which “corrective” action should be undertaken and where acts of terror in the name of Islam thus “can be legitimate.” After the interview and an (Americanised) steamed lunch, when we were having herbal tea in his Guyanese living room, the imam became a property-owner and father, and proudly showed me pictures of his new house in Toronto and his daughters’ graduation. He then assured me that Canada is a wonderful country with unimaginable facilities and great universities, an amazing place to live. Apparently without experiencing the slightest sense of inconsistency, the man – in a different context, playing a different part, and therefore being able to employ different schemata – showed how he had successfully managed to internalise conflicting discourses in his understandings about the West and North America.

9.4 Constellations IV: the ultimate question of power

In polarised Guyana, discrepant ideas are not solely handled at a personal level. In addition to compartmentalisation and other ways in which individuals can internalise competing notions, also social mechanisms work to neutralise disagreements. The strongly ethnicised character of the local media reveals the functioning of these mechanisms. Private and state media voice the interests of ethnic factions. Especially during elections, the media aim to mould the mind of the collective. Notions of reconciliation or oppositional discourse are then rather effectively banned from the state papers, radio, and television. As said in a post-election statement by the American Carter Center in March 2001:

“[...] the Center wishes to echo the views of the MMU [Media Monitoring Unit] and other international observers by noting the unbalanced and biased coverage in the state-owned media, and the irresponsible and inflammatory broadcasts of various TV talk shows, including open partisanship under the guise of news, even on election day.”

State media are, and have long been, a powerful tool in the hands of the government. In fact, according to an essay by David Granger⁴⁰⁵, colonial institutions – established out of fear for the spread of communist ideology in the western hemisphere – already “set a precedent for active state participation in the media and the deliberate insertion of a ‘gate’ to regulate the flow of information to the populace”. The author argues that Guyana’s state centred media communications policies over the past forty years by PNC and PPP

⁴⁰⁵ Published in the *Stabroek News* (18 June 2001)

administrators find their origins in the British decision to build a structure for the mass manipulation, and owe their survival to the character of national politics:

“One major reason for the retention of control over the media in Guyana is the cyclical electoral contest mainly between the PPP and PNC, and the incumbent party's reliance on the state media for sheer propaganda. This became evident in the PPP's employment of the state's three media corporations in the December 1997 elections. More than two weeks before the December elections, the Electoral Assistance Bureau (EAB) declared that, rather than being passive purveyors of information to the electorate, media houses had become 'propaganda' instruments of the respective political campaigns. The EAB's report claimed that the three state-owned media houses - GNNL (newspaper), GTV (television) and GBC (radio) - were displaying varying levels of bias (88, 60 and 78 per cent, respectively) towards the People's Progressive Party-Civic (PPP-C) administration in its coverage of news. [...] The political rivalry between the two major parties and the need to employ the state's resources to support their elections campaigns seem to be the main reasons why state ownership of the media in Guyana still persists.”

Authorities in Guyana obviously choose to propagate certain ideas: interethnic opposition and mistrust. By using their power to manipulate the flow of notions, including discourse and to a certain extent thought and even practice, they thus contribute to the rise (or reign) of certain ideas and the fall (or suppression) of others.

The impact of external 'masters of definition' can be quite significant, both in terms of the formation and functioning of constellations and understandings. Entities, at various levels in society, have the power to influence the process of production and reproduction of understandings and trigger their activation at times and in situations in which they consider the prominence of specific collective identifications and interpretations to be beneficial. The cultivation and exploitation of understandings of ethnic distinctiveness in Guyana at large and East Indian circles in specific are a highly illuminative example. As discussed primarily in the first half of chapter three, a number of individuals and institutions undertake collaborative attempts to utilise 'race' as a subterfuge to gain and maintain control over resources and within the various spheres of influence. Assisted by a more or less organic ethnic segregation in the realms of (physical) community, state, economy and religion, as well as by the obvious socio-cultural differences, they ensure the replication of certain ideas.

The potency of ethnicity has provided Guyana's profile of power with a distinct and extraordinary interconnected shape. As Despres (1975:100) noted, “the structure of inequality among ethnic populations in Guyana has promoted the organisation of a variety of special interest groups and associations which, in turn, impart to ethnic group relations

much of their political interface.” Or rather, it has facilitated the emergence of ethnic power blocs comprised of cooperating cells covering those fields in which ethnic separation is visible and exploitable. These blocs, in turn, foster division and make certain that the gap between Africans and Indians is not bridged. Only broad ethnic alliances stand a chance in local battles for backing. The recent emergence of the ‘ROAR-family’ is an illustration. Ravi Dev’s oppositional Rise, Organise, And Rebuild movement seeks the support of the East Indian electorate in a semi-official joint venture with a cultural association (GIHA). Besides, ROAR is associated with Swami Aksharananda’s Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), and is involved in (trade) unionism. Mister Dev’s party contributed to the formation of the Guyana Sugar Workers Union (GSWU) and renders assistance to local paddy producers associations. A truly cooperative quest for control.

As some sort of directive axis, or alliances of entities which jointly try to acquire or retain multifaceted directive authority and enjoy the fruits of might, ethnic clusters thus assure the triumph of ethnic power play and sustain one of the foremost formative forces in the production process of East Indianness: interethnic competition.

The manoeuvres of power blocs help define Indian distinctiveness. They are hybrid networks fed by, and consisting of, individuals and collectives with various levels of sway and different agendas but with their own dynamics, practically proceeding beyond anyone’s control. They are not confined to conventional realms like economy, politics and religion, yet utilise society’s existing structures and materialise in the form of cultural groupings, religious organisations, trade unions, and political parties. As such, the territory of blocs can be linked to something Bourdieu called *cultural fields*: clusters of institutions, rules, rituals, conventions, categories, and designations which “constitute an objective hierarchy, and which produce and authorise certain discourses and activities (Webb et al. 2002:43).” Indian political parties (PPP/C, ROAR) and their subsidiaries (PYO, WPO), religious organisations (e.g. Dharmic Sabha, Central Arya Samaj), cultural associations (GIHA, IAC), economic bodies (RPA, GAWU), and the manifestations of their quests, all operate within a site of cultural practice and attempt to generate and legitimise specific discourses on ‘race’ as well as specific practices concerning interethnic interaction.

In accordance with Bourdieu’s reasoning, it can be stated that the East Indian (as well as African) directive axis battles to control various types of cultural capital. Their efforts are aimed at gaining and maintaining both the authority to determine what constitutes capital and the power to distribute it. Those in control try to reproduce the existing social order, which serves their interest, though the naturalisation of the structure’s own arbitrariness (Bourdieu 1977:164-165). Favouritism and, what I have labelled the ‘fabrication of fear’, are important strategies to make this happen in Guyana. Association with the hegemonic bloc is required to ‘get things done’. I remember East Indian informants who, because of their involvement with the PNC/R, lost their prominent position within the Dharmic Sabha or enjoyed severely limited access to irrigation water for their rice fields. Favouritism, in combination with fear, is employed to bind the individual

to a wide range of institutions – comprising virtually all the spheres of influence – at the same time. Joint tactics executed by members of directive axis are meant to create dependency among the masses, the feeling that backing of or attachment to respective (ethnic) institutions is required for social and economic survival. Voters, workers, and believers should experience their social reality as self-evident. The debatable but widespread convictions that shortage in Guyana is all around, that prospects are meagre, that segregation is logical, and that struggles for power along ethnic lines are inevitable and unsolvable, can thus be seen as the product of endeavours of those in control to establish a ‘universe of the undisputed’ (*doxa*) in which the arbitrary is supposed to be mistaken for that what is natural.

Until now this endeavour has been quite successful. At least, those who were in power are still in power largely because the collective understandings they have helped create and nourish often remain unquestioned and are employed in struggles for hegemony. East Indian interpretations and explanations of their home society, prospects, and ethnicity, suggest that certain aspects of an established order are perceived as self-evident and natural. The linkage between social status and ethnicity is an illustration. As described in chapter five, inequity is regarded acceptable, and even the inevitable result of innate race-based differences between Indians and Africans (and the indigenous, the Chinese, and the ‘white’). Almost without exception, informants are convinced of the existence of basic racial personalities that explain and justify the current social stratification.

At the same time, however, people’s actions and perceptions prove that the structures structuring of East Indian thought and practice is far from unlimited. The (partial) autonomy of the people has been revealed in data presented throughout this book. East Indians enjoy the freedom to be creative and deviant. They choose unusual professions, marry Africans instead of Indians, decide to revere the Lion of Judah, and change their Indian attire for Arab garb or even ‘gangsta’ wear. Although they cannot escape from contexts and the formative force of external powers, people can make their own decisions and opt for unconventional perceptions and ways instead of the dominant one. This competence, or even the necessity, to decide has become more noticeable as the supply of structuring structures has become more variegated. Augmented mobility and the influx of ideas from elsewhere ensures the availability of an unparalleled wide array of alternative understandings that increasingly challenges the dominance of old conceptions of East Indianness. The young, the urban, the rich, the modern, the pious, the classical, and the athletic, have gained access to an unprecedented range of objects and images to express their difference. Looks and manners are vehicles at the disposal of the contemporary East Indian who finds him- or herself increasingly forced to (consciously) indulge in image building. As such, the unquestioned is now questioned. Ethnic classifications, and also interpretations of gender roles, ritual, and family patterns expressed by the East Indians are less uniform than they were ever before. Some Hindus thus worship Jesus. And, although anomalies, I have met female East Indian truck drivers and intentionally childless couples.

Undoubtedly, though, the ethnic appeal will continue to be heard and remain a focus or source of reference that surfaces in certain situations at certain times. Images of Indian unity, for example, will probably maintain their mass mobilising potential in the context of national politics – especially during the elections – even in the hopelessly fragmented and variable future of Guyanese society. And definitely, the values and practices of the past will linger in the form of neotraditionalism, as a strategy employed by emigrants and the locally alienated to cope with the abundance of uncertainties that accompany life in evermore complex and instable environs.

Postmodernity both imposes choice and confronts people with their limitations. It defies self-evidence and exposes the manacles that shackle one to the customary. The freedom to reject the established order and innovate is relative and depends on more things than merely cognitive ability. As shown in ‘Conditioning Interconnections,’ there is a correlation between social status or class and the enactment of certain understandings. Those who are well-off have both advanced access to alternative models and possess the means to execute deviance. In addition, motivations, responses and tactics are also related to age, education, and residential proximity to local hubs of transformation (urbanised areas). Current, and expected future, accessibility of alternatives largely decide people’s valuation of change and their performance of Indianness. Urges to survive and belong, to manifest oneself as a full and competent member of society, and the perceived personal ability and available options to realise this, are important determinants of practice, including the actions aimed at either the reproduction of existing structures or the production of modified ones.

9.5 The answer to everything?

Of course there is no definite answer to the ultimate question of power. As stated very early in this book, the subject is both constructed by his or her environment as well its designer. The balance of power between these two shifts from time to time, place to place, and person to person. All that can be guaranteed is that processes of cultural production and reproduction always occur as the result of interaction between subjects and their world, including its other inhabitants. The aim of this study is therefore not to provide the reader with a clear-cut recipe for making shared meaning and practice in latter-day interconnected settings. Rather, it is meant to shed light on the dynamics of this constructive relationship by analysing the evolution of specific collective understandings in surroundings which, despite their obvious idiosyncrasies, can be gathered representative of many others in especially the relative margins of our world.

More precisely, the approach taken – using a framework based on the theories of Bourdieu and Quinn and Strauss – has allowed me to compose a multifaceted analysis of cultural processes that take place among a people in an environment characterised by great

complexity. More than other approaches to globalisation and cultural transformation, the notion of cultural understandings (or constellations) helps explain the mutually constitutive relationship between subjects and their surroundings. It enabled me to examine complementary forces of reproduction and innovation, shifting balances of power between certain formative forces (and between those forces and my subjects), and the typical behavioural ambiguities of cultural beings on the crossroads of conservation and disposal, that are all so apparent in the development of East Indianness in contemporary Guyana.

The assemblage of local Indian distinctiveness is unique since it concerns the assemblage of collective constellations within a specific historical context and locality. It is an important and highly valuable example of cultural change in this age of advanced globalisation thanks to the community's exceptional density of interconnections in time and space. Because East Indians in Guyana are so much part of (historical, revived, and new) transnational networks, and because their specific local social, political, and economic situation amplify confrontations with the dilemmas and impacts of transformation, the case of Indo-Guyana is so special.

This particular context and locality, however, confront my subjects with matters of identification, association, and alienation that are not atypical and will affect thought, practice, and cultural change among other people at numerous sites all over the world. Like the understandings of East Indians in Guyana, the understandings of many others are shaped by power struggles and deliberate attempts to manipulate perceptions and practices of the masses for the sake of sway. And like the understandings of East Indians in Guyana, the forces of globalisation have also challenged the understandings of many others. The impact of growing interconnectedness – producing increased levels of fragmentation, senses of liberation or estrangement, and accelerating transformation – is not only felt in Indo-Guyana. Especially experiences of peoples in other places that can be considered net recipients of (rather than contributors to) free-floating meaning will resemble those of the East Indians and will have led to parallels in the development of understandings. Labour migration, a relatively unrestricted import of foreign commodities and conceptions, as well as domestic improductivity and supposed lack of prospects, are formative characteristics of societies elsewhere in the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, and probably Asia and Africa as well.

The case of the East Indians in Guyana is thus unique yet in some ways exemplary of cultural processes that are now taking place in various contexts all over the globe. The analysis of the Indo-Guyanese community constitutes a cultural test case that can reveal some fundamentals of these processes within diasporic communities in post-colonial societies, and can possibly even contribute to the investigation of diasporas in the West. In this book, I have tried to portray some of the essential features of such contemporary cultural processes. More than anything, it is an attempt to capture today's typical intertwinement and the multifaceted nature of matters. The choice to take a rather extensive range of aspects into consideration, and the motivation to communicate the findings in a specific format, are inspired by a desire to avoid (false) suggestions of

simplicity, and convey the sense of complexity and perhaps even confusion that inevitably is experienced by the beholder of culture in this age.

Such a holistic approach clearly has some disadvantages as well. Panoramic depictions of the whole tend not to offer great in-depth insight. Because of limitations of time and space, detail and/or peculiarities might have to be compromised. I am sure every single sphere of production, each field of thought and practice or culture mentioned in the previous few hundred pages, is worth to devote to months of inquiry and many scholarly writings. Undoubtedly, books can be written on all the chapters. And I believe none of them would be a waste of ink and paper. Rather than an answer to everything, this dissertation, therefore, should be understood as an effort to analyse linkages between people and their environment in a comprehensive and systematic fashion: an endeavour to show how updated (Bourdieuian) theories of practice can be employed to examine and explain continuity and change, as well as freedom and constraints. I am convinced it is a valuable example of how contemporary complexity can be assessed. The idea of cultural constellations, introduced in this book, combined with borrowed concepts from Bourdieu and the realm of cognitive anthropology, form a powerful analytical instrument, especially since it appreciates contributions made by both the subject and the structure, the input of (what has been called) internalisations of externalisations and externalisations of internalisations.

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SAMENVATTING

Summary in Dutch

Tussen 1838 en 1917 zijn er bijna 240.000 mensen als contractarbeider vanuit India naar Guyana gebracht. Ze kwamen als opvolgers van de slaven die, na afschaffing van de slavernij, niet langer als meest voordelige krachten golden. Het was de taak van deze migranten de koloniale suikerindustrie in leven te houden. 85 procent van de migranten was Hindoe, een kleine 15 procent was Moslim. Vandaag de dag vormen de afstammelingen van deze arbeiders de grootste etnische groep in postkoloniaal Guyana. Van marginale plantagewerkers hebben ze zich ontwikkeld tot een invloedrijke groep die sterk vertegenwoordigd is in de meeste segmenten van de samenleving. Deze zogenaamde 'East Indians' – die circa 48 procent van de totale bevolking uitmaken – beheersen de omvangrijke agrarische sector, zijn succesvolle ondernemers, domineren de politiek, en onderhouden commerciële, culturele, en religieuze banden met een omvangrijke diaspora in Noord Amerika, en verschillende regionale en mondiale centra.

De hedendaagse Hindoestanen lijken, op velerlei vlakken, nauwelijks nog op de pseudo-slaven die ooit vanuit India migreerden. Een decennia-lang verblijf in de plurale (post)koloniale context, en een scala aan (bijv. mondialiserings) tendensen, hebben hun weerslag gehad op de Hindoestaanse etnische en religieuze cultuur. Hun eigenheid hebben de Hindoestanen echter nooit verloren. Tradities, overtuigingen, en eigenaardigheden maken de Hindoestanen tot op vandaag de dag een buitengewoon karakteristieke groep: een groep die vasthoudt aan de Hindoestaniteit. Echter, deze Hindoestaniteit is niet simpelweg een overblijfsel van een grijs verleden, het is de uitkomst van hun verblijf in de unieke Guyanese setting.

Contemporaine manieren en overtuigingen van de Hindoestanen, hun culturele noties, vormen een gemodificeerde Hindoestaniteit binnen de multi-etnische en gemonialiseerde Guyanese samenleving. Dit, op maat gesneden, complex van typisch Hindoestaanse vormen van gedrag en cultuur is het product van een samenspel van een collectief van cultureel geladen individuen en de voortdurend veranderende omstandigheden in een omgeving met een bepaalde geschiedenis en onderhevig aan specifieke krachten. Dit samenspel is het thema van dit boek, de analyse van deze coproductie van Hindoestaniteit stond centraal in het promotieonderzoek waarvan dit boek het verslag is.

Het boek bestaat uit twee delen en een conclusie. De dissertatie begint met een aantal hoofdstukken over de context en tendensen die de condities bepalen waaronder

Guyanese Hindoestanen deelnemen aan processen van culturele productie en reproductie. Omdat deze condities per definitie samenhangen heb ik dit eerste deel (*Verbonden*) *Conditie*s genoemd. Daarna volgen er vier hoofdstukken die gewijd zijn aan de analyse van de zogenaamde (*Conditionerende*) *Verbanden* tussen individuen en hun omgeving waaruit dit (re)productieve proces duidelijk wordt. Het laatste hoofdstuk omvat de conclusie.

Het is mijn bedoeling de lezer in de twee delen een uitgebreide studie te bieden van de culturele processen die zich voltrekken onder de nazaten van migranten in een sterk gemondialiseerde postkoloniale samenleving. Deel één begint met *The Past*, Het Verleden, een hoofdstuk waarin ik een beschrijving geef van de historische context waarin hedendaagse Hindoestaniteit wordt gevormd. In het hoofdstuk traceer ik de ‘prehistorie’ van Indo-Guyanese eigenheid in de noordelijke regio’s van negentiende-eeuws Brits India. Daarnaast behandel ik de ‘geboorte’ van Guyanese Hindoestaniteit op de suikerrietplantages ongeveer 150 jaar geleden, en beschrijf ik de ontwikkeling ervan na de afschaffing van contractarbeid tot aan (en zelfs voorbij) Guyana’s onafhankelijkheid in 1966. Deze geschiedenis van Hindoestaniteit, in zowel India als het Guyana van voorbije dagen, toont hoe Indiase etnische en religieuze cultuur voortdurend is veranderd en aangepast. De specifieke samenstelling en de gemêleerde achtergrond van de migranten populatie voedden homogeniseringsprocessen binnen de lokale Indiase gemeenschap. Omstandigheden op de plantages, en de organisatie van de kolonie, faciliteerden simplificatie, creolisering, en christianisatie. Interetnische machtsstrijd, tenslotte, heeft de ontwikkeling van Hindoestaniteit vooral sterk bepaald sinds het proces van dekolonisatie in gang werd gezet. Etno-politiek, bevoordeling, en interetnisch antagonisme hebben sociale interactie en identificatie besmeurd vanaf het moment dat duidelijk werd dat de Britten het gezag over de kolonie zouden overdragen aan de lokale bevolking.

In hoofdstuk drie, *Present-day Contexts* (Hedendaagse Contexten), ga ik verder in op de effecten van wijdverbreide interetnische rivaliteit op de vorming van noties van ‘zelf’ en ‘de ander’. Het hoofdstuk behelst een analyse van de lokale machtsanatomie: van de aard van machtsverdeling en machtsuitvoering in Guyana. Ik beargumenteer dat interetnische competitie één van de twee krachten is die een zeer belangrijke bijdrage leveren aan de ontwikkeling van hedendaagse Hindoestaniteit. Verder beschouw ik in hoofdstuk drie het ‘geëtniseerde’ karakter van de nationale politiek, de exploitatie van het potentieel van etniciteit door degenen met machtsambities, de collaboratieve en verstrengelde aard van machtsstreven in Guyana, en de precondities die het ontstaan en voortbestaan van de alomtegenwoordige interetnische strijd garanderen. De tweede helft van *Present-day Contexts* besteed ik aan de effecten van de meer en meer complexe en gemondialiseerde realiteit op processen van culturele (re)productie: de invloed van die andere invloedrijke formerende kracht. Achtereenvolgens behandel ik de relatie tussen Guyanese Hindoestanen en de omvangrijke en actieve Indo-Guyanese diaspora in Noord-Amerika, de gevolgen van grootschalige import van goederen en gedachtegoed vanuit de regionale en mondiale centra van culturele productie (bijv. Trinidad en de Verenigde Staten), en de

consequenties van de opname van lokale religieuze organisaties en personen in transnationale Christelijke, Islamitische, en Hindoe netwerken. Tenslotte beschouw ik de buitengewone impact van interetnische competitie en mondialisering. Ik verklaar deze door te verwijzen naar de relatie van de twee met gevoelens en/of noties van crisis. Besef van onzekerheid en gebrek – gevoed door machtsstrijd en transformatie – beïnvloedt de Hindoestaanse conceptualisering van hun ‘zelf’ en van hun positie in de wereld, en motiveert het handelen van mensen en de keuze voor bepaalde copingstrategieën.

In hoofdstuk vier wordt verder ingegaan op de transformatieprocessen die zich afspelen op het gebied van de Indiase religie. *Religious Transformations* (Religieuze Transformaties), het laatste hoofdstuk van deel één, handelt om de lokalisering van Hindoeïsme en de mondialisering van Islam in Guyana. Een bestudering van deze twee tendensen illustreert de relatie tussen religieuze ontwikkelingen en de omgeving waarin deze ontwikkelingen plaatsvinden. Allereerst beschrijf hoe de opkomst van een Guyanese versie van het Hindoeïsme veroorzaakt is door lokale aanpassingen in machtsstructuren, veranderingen in de (her)scheppende mogelijkheden van de gelovigen, en de aanwezigheid van alternatieve religieuze systemen in de Nieuwe Wereld. Daarnaast analyseer ik de mondialisering van Islam. Ik sta stil bij de invloed van de (geïmporteerde) Arabisering van het geloof op het doen en denken van lokale Moslims, en op het sociaal-religieuze klimaat. Ook bespreek ik de zogenaamde neotraditionalistische initiatieven die ondernomen worden als reactie op de pogingen tot deculturalisatie van de gearabiseerde fundamentalisten. In de laatste sectie van hoofdstuk vier worden de parallellen tussen lokalisering en mondialisering, met betrekking tot hun bijdrage aan veranderingsprocessen, beschreven.

East Indian Subjectivities? (Hindoestaanse Subjectiviteiten), hoofdstuk vijf, is de opening van deel twee. Het is het eerste van vier hoofdstukken over *(Conditionerende) Verbanden*: een serie verhandelingen over Guyanees Hindoestaanse relaties waarin gedeelde etnische en religieuze conceptualiseringën worden geuit, geïncorporeerd, en onderhandeld. Hoofdstuk vijf is verdeeld in drie secties waarin collectieve noties worden geanalyseerd die het hart vormen van een veel groter netwerk van gedeelde conceptualiseringën die verantwoordelijk zijn voor de productie van een Indo-Guyanese subjectiviteit, ofwel van het idee van de ‘zelf’ in de wereld. Het trio beslaat de (collectieve) houding ten opzichte van het verleden, de toekomst, en het hier en nu. Aan de hand van een beschrijving van Indo-Guyanese noties van, en relaties met: India en Indiase cultuur; Noord-Amerika en Westerse cultuur; en de entiteiten binnen de thuisgemeenschap, zal ik de positionering van de ‘zelf’ in tijd en ruimte behandelen. De overeenkomsten in de wijze waarop mijn informanten de drie thema’s conceptualiseren – hun collectieve associatie met respectievelijk klassiekheid, moderniteit, en vijandigheid, en variaties in de waardering en motivatiestructuur van deze associaties – zijn belangrijke en verhelderende illustraties van geïnternaliseerde Guyanese Hindoestaniteit. In de laatste paragraaf van het hoofdstuk bespreek ik hoe de besproken conceptualiseringën de Indo-Guyanese ‘wij’ en ‘ik’ situeren in een gemondialiseerde omgeving. Met behulp van een conceptuele beschouwing van identiteit, zelf, en

subjectiviteit zal ik uitleggen hoe veranderende percepties van de werkelijkheid verbonden zijn aan zingevingsprocessen en persoonlijk handelen.

Het tweede hoofdstuk van deel twee is *Foci of Friendship, Principles of Parenting*, Focusen van Vriendschap, Ouderschaps Principes. Dit zesde hoofdstuk betreft een analyse van de veranderende Indo-Guyanese zorgrelaties. Het is een demonstratie van het functioneren van collectieve conceptualiseringen, de organisatie van deze in netwerken van gekoppelde schemata die elkaar's inhoud en evolutie beïnvloeden. In de eerste helft van hoofdstuk zes bekijk ik het functioneren en de ontwikkeling van het denken en handelen over de relaties met vrienden, kennissen, en burens. Aan de hand van een analyse van de vitaliteit van de zogenaamde familie metafoor in lokale expressies van sociale relaties met niet-verwanten verhelder ik processen van culturele reproductie en innovatie en laat ik de verwevenheid van conceptualiseringen van vriendschap en familie zien. Een soortgelijk doel inspireerde de samenstelling van de tweede helft van het hoofdstuk. Deze helft focust op denken en handelen met betrekking tot familie relaties in het algemeen, en het ouderschap in het bijzonder. Evenals in de eerste helft, zal ook hier de betwiste relevantie van traditionele Indiase familie-ideologie, en de relatie hiervan met sociale verandering op een meer algemeen niveau, aantonen hoe het idee van de Hindoestaanse zelf in de wereld bepaalde schemata vormt en vormgeeft aan actie en interpretatie van interactie in Hindoestaanse Hindoe en Moslim kringen. En evenals in de eerste helft, demonstreert dit de gekoppelde configuratie van schemata/conceptualiseringen. In feite suggereert de analyse van veranderende visies op het ouderschap zelfs een verschuiving in de machtsbalans tussen concepten van familie en vriendschap. Terwijl het belang van fictieve verwantschap afneemt, zijn noties van vriendschap familie idealen gaan beïnvloeden.

In hoofdstuk zeven wordt de bestuderingen van de verwevenheid van collectieve conceptualisaties vervolgd. In *Constellations of Affection* (Affectie Constellaties) zal ik uiteenzetten waarom het vrijwel onmogelijk is de relatie tussen denken en handelen en tussen mens en omgeving te begrijpen zonder ervan uit te gaan dat denken en handelen altijd gestructureerd is door bepaalde schematische (mentale) systemen die op specifieke wijzen georganiseerd zijn. Deze deels gedeelde systemen of complexen, die ik *constellaties* noem, dienen alledaagse en hogere doelen, en beslaan conceptualiseringen op verschillende hiërarchische niveaus. Het hoofdstuk omvat een uitleg van dit 'systemische argument', en vormt de conclusie van mijn pleidooi voor een focus op interconnecties. Het is tevens een studie naar het systeem van collectieve conceptualiseringen die bepalend zijn voor de Indo-Guyanese notie van partnerschap. In het eerste deel van dit hoofdstuk staan echtelijke en niet echtelijke partnerrelaties centraal. Het stuk gaat in op continuïteit in en verandering van alledaags handelen en percepties met betrekking tot een serie relatief expliciete concepten en doelen op het gebied van levenspartnerschap. Aan de hand van de analyse van zaken als seksualiteit, hiërarchie, en sekse gerelateerde rechten en verantwoordelijkheden zullen zowel processen van fragmentering als van preserving en revitalisering verhelderd worden. De beschreven processen spelen zich af in, wat ik noem,

de oppervlakte laag van de hiërarchisch georganiseerde constellatie. In het tweede deel van het hoofdstuk wordt de connectie tussen deze oppervlakte laag en diepere lagen benoemd. Het doel van dit deel is te laten zien hoe veranderende Indo-Guyanese ideeën over partnerschap en seksualiteit transformatie teweeg brengen van onderliggende noties van liefde en geborgenheid. Daarnaast toont de beschrijving in dit deel hoe onderliggende (meer impliciete) schemata Indo-Guyanese interpretaties van partnerschap en seks beïnvloeden.

Customised Cosmologies (Kosmologien op Maat) is het achtste hoofdstuk, en het laatste hoofdstuk van deel twee. Dit hoofdstuk is een verhandeling over één van de meest elementaire en invloedrijke constellaties waaruit Guyanese Hindoestaniteit is opgebouwd: het systeem van gedeelde conceptualisaties die de Indo-Guyanese noties van het bovennatuurlijke vormen. Door middels van een analyse van de vier voornaamste conceptualisaties waarop deze noties zijn gebaseerd, en door de beschrijving van de toepassing van deze noties, wordt de kosmologische zelfpositionering van mijn informanten bepaald en wordt hun creatieve vrijheid onderzocht. Tegelijkertijd biedt een beschrijving van deze constellatie me de mogelijkheid mijn datapresentatie af te sluiten met een uitgebreide illustratie van de aard van culturele constellaties. Een beschrijving van de wijze waarop mensen het onbegrijpelijke uitleggen, zichzelf en hun wereld plaatsen in de onvoorstelbaar immense creatie, en geïnspireerd lijken te handelen naar deze convicties, geeft me de gelegenheid te concluderen met een empirisch gefundeerd overzicht van de essenties van deze dissertatie. ‘Eindeloze wegen’ kan zodoende gezien worden als een ode aan verwevenheid en complexiteit, aan gelaagdheid en culturele variatie. Het omvat een aantal secties waarin de productie van Guyanese Hindoestaniteit wordt samengevat: de relatie tussen de individu en zijn/haar omgeving; de effecten van lokalisering en mondialisering; de historische worteling; collectieve incorporatie; motivatiekracht en de link tussen denken en handelen...

Het afsluitende hoofdstuk negen, *Reflections* (Reflecties), is bedoeld om nog eens stil te staan bij de meest interessante en belangrijke kenmerken van het productieproces van Guyanese Hindoestaniteit. Daarnaast biedt het ruimte voor wat aanvullende opmerkingen en observaties, en worden er enkele woorden gewijd aan vragen die zich aandienen of die onbeantwoord bleven. Het hoofdstuk handelt voornamelijk om het idee van collectieve constellaties. Dit sleutelbegrip, dat zich in de voorgaande hoofdstukken heeft bewezen als een concept met een buitengewone verklarende waarde, wordt toegepast om het veelvormige en complexe karakter van culturele processen op een gestructureerde en inzichtvolle manier te vatten. Een uitgebreide definiëring van de term stelt me in staat nogmaals terug te komen op die bevindingen van welke ik hoop dat de lezer ze zal onthouden. ‘Dit is het einde niet’ begint met een uiteenzetting van de constellaties waarin ik poog het concept te positioneren als een persoonlijke vertaling van een gedachtelijk die behoort tot het veel grotere domein van poststructuralistische redenering. Daarna wordt er ingegaan op zowel het vraagstuk van formering als van functioneren. Het machtsvraagstuk

komt in de sectie daarna aan de orde. De allerlaatste alinea's van deze dissertatie besteed ik aan enige afsluitende reflecties en een korte blik vooruit: wat kan er geleerd worden van dit alles, welke zaken zullen er verder onderzocht moeten worden, en wat zien de nieuwe problemen die aan de horizon opdoemen.

APPENDICES

Table I
INDIAN IMMIGRATION

“The following figures relate to persons introduced under contracts of service through the Immigration Department. They do not include persons arriving by ordinary passenger ships.

Immigration from India under the indenture system ceased in 1917, but batches of Indians who had returned to India were brought back at the expense of this Government in 1921, 1922 and 1926 as free settlers” (Nath, 1970: 219-20).

YEAR	AMOUNT	YEAR	AMOUNT	YEAR	AMOUNT
1838	396	1871	2,706	1895-96	1,882
1845	816	1872	3,556	1896-97	2,408
1846	4,019	1-01 to 30-6	3,656	1897-98	1,202
1847	3,461	1873	8,301	1898-99	2,399
1848	3,545	1873-74	3,887	1899-1900	4,961
1851	517	1874-75	3,834	1900-01	3,801
1852	2,805	1875-76	3,982	1901-02	4,245
1853	2,021	1876-77	8,118	1902-03	1,947
1854	1,562	1877-78	6,426	1903-04	2,967
1855	2,342	1878-79	4,506	1904-05	1,314
1856	1,258	1879-80	4,355	1905-06	2,704
1857	2,596	1880-81	3,166	1906-07	2,257
1858	1,404	1881-82	3,016	1907-08	1,855
1859	3,426	1882-83	2,731	1908-09	1,799
1860	5,450	1883-84	6,209	1909-10	2,508
1861	3,737	1884-85	4,796	1910-11	2,173
1862	5,625	1885-86	3,928	1911-12	1,768
1863	2,354	1886-87	2,771	1912-13	2,206
1864	2,709	1887-88	3,573	1913-14	1,346
1865	3,216	1888-89	3,432	1914-15	819
1866	2,526	1889-90	5,229	1915-16	2,253
1867	3,909	1890-91	5,072	1916-17	824
1868	2,528	1891-92	4,693	1921	274
1869	7,168	1892-93	5,932	1922	160
1870	4,943	1893-94	7,114	1926	173
		1894-95			
				Total	239,756

Source: Nath 1970: 219-20

Table II**PRINCIPAL DISTRICTS OF REGISTRATION**

The table lists the districts where more than 1 percent of the total registrations (of emigrants to Guyana) for the period 1 April 1881 to 1917 were effected.

North West Prov.	Apr. 1881-89	1890-99	1900-09	1910-17	Total
Agra	901	1,476	1,863	291	4,531
Allahabad	4,412	4,064	2,403	1,598	12,477
Azamgarh	293	3,241	320	25	3,879
Bareilly	766	965	376	304	2,411
Basti	610	3,941	5,343	1,084	10,978
Benares	4,218	4,606	2,390	122	11,336
Kanpur	2,057	8,040	3,609	2,814	16,520
Ghazipur	1,895	4,552	1,284	70	7,801
Gorakhpur	773	3,215	1,591	1,022	6,601
Jaunpur	441	1,490	689	89	2,709
Mathura	585	337	784	457	2,163
Others	1,484	1,989	1,084	122	4,679
Total	18,435	37,916	21,736	7,998	86,085
Oudh					
Bahraich	40	200	1,101	253	1,594
Fyzabad	2,132	4,853	3,402	751	11,138
Gonda	313	3,326	2,977	1,389	8,005
Lucknow	1,483	3,822	830	1,595	7,730
Others	193	1,239	1,019	309	2,760
Total	4,161	13,440	9,329	4,297	31,227
Bengal & Bihar					
Burdwan	1,280	349	0	40	1,759
Calcutta	16	1,439	166	275	1,896
Patna	4,053	3,350	1,266	409	9,078
Saran	430	1,039	424	21	1,914
Shahabad	4,121	3,685	2,004	140	9,950
24 Parganas	4,434	2,912	2,226	324	9,896
Others	3,365	1,086	411	201	5,063
Total	17,699	13,869	6,587	1,410	39,556
Others					
Delhi	424	0	969	743	2,136
Others	51	0	0	0	51
Total	475	0	969	743	2,187
Overall	40,770	65,216	38,621	14,448	159,055

Source: Laurence, 1994: 108-109.

Table III
GUYANA'S POPULATION ACCORDING TO ETHNICITY (1841-1961)

Year	Total	Indian	African	Portuguese	Other Eu	Chinese	Amerindian	Mixed	Other
1841	91,845	315							
1851	127,695	7,682							
1861	148,026	23,196							
1871	193,491	50,661							
1881	254,717	87,988							
1891	278,328	105,463	115,588	12,166	4,558	3,714	7,463	29,029	347
1911	296,041	126,517	115,486	10,084	3,737	2,622	6,901	30,251	243
1921	297,691	124,938	117,169	9,175	3,291	2,722	9,150	30,587	659
1931	310,933	130,540	124,203	8,612	2,127	2,951	8,348	33,800	352
1941	354,219	152,460							
1951	437,019	197,696	158,940	8,712	3,865	3,527	17,424	46,855	
1961	588,180	286,140	188,390	8,020	2,830	4,170	26,670	71,960	

N.B. the figures for 1891, 1911, 1921 and 1931 include only such Amerindians as were enumerated. Those for later years include those enumerated as well as an estimated number residing in remote areas.

(Percentages)

Year	Total	Indian	African	Portuguese	Other Eu.	Chinese	Amerindian	Mixed	N. stated
1841	100	.32							
1851	100	6.00							
1861	100	15.68							
1871	100	26.18							
1881	100	34.54							
1891	100	37.85	41.05	4.37	1.52	1.33	2.68	10.43	
1911	100	42.74	39.01	3.41	1.26	.95	2.02	10.22	
1921	100	41.96	39.36	3.08	1.11	.91	3.07	10.27	
1931	100	41.98	39.94	2.77	.68	.95	2.68	10.87	
1941	100	43.04							
1951	100	45.24	34.04	1.99	.89	.81	4.99	10.72	
1961	100	49.10	32.65	1.25	.83	.59	3.99	11.59	

Source: Nath, 1970: 231, 235; Guyana Bureau of Statistics.

Table III
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1891	278,328	105,463	115,588	12,166	4,558	3,714	7,463	29,029	347
1911	296,041	126,517	115,486	10,084	3,737	2,622	6,901	30,251	243
1921	297,691	124,938	117,169	9,175	3,291	2,722	9,150	30,587	659
1931	310,933	130,540	124,203	8,612	2,127	2,951	8,348	33,800	352
1941	354,219	152,460							
1951	437,019	197,696	158,940	8,712	3,865	3,527	17,424	46,855	
1961	588,180	286,140	188,390	8,020	2,830	4,170	26,670	71,960	

N.B. the figures for 1891, 1911, 1921 and 1931 include only such Amerindians as were enumerated. Those for later years include those enumerated as well as an estimated number residing in remote areas.

(Percentages)

Year	Total	Indian	African	Portuguese	Other Eur.	Chinese	Amerindian	Mixed	Not stated
1841	100	.32							
1851	100	6.00							
1861	100	15.68							
1871	100	26.18							
1881	100	34.54							
1891	100	37.85	41.05	4.37	1.52	1.33	2.68	10.43	
1911	100	42.74	39.01	3.41	1.26	.95	2.02	10.22	
1921	100	41.96	39.36	3.08	1.11	.91	3.07	10.27	
1931	100	41.98	39.94	2.77	.68	.95	2.68	10.87	
1941	100	43.04							
1951	100	45.24	34.04	1.99	.89	.81	4.99	10.72	
1961	100	49.10	32.65	1.25	.83	.59	3.99	11.59	

Source: Nath, 1970: 231, 235; Guyana Bureau of Statistics.

Table IV-VII
POPULATION FIGURES

Population Essequibo Coast		
	1991	2002
Total	43,139	48,411
Male	21,080	24,271
Female	22,059	24,140

Population Guyana*		
	1980 (12/05)	1991 (12/05)
Total	758,619	718,406
Male	375,841	353,013
Female	382,778	365,393

Population Guyana*				
	1960	1970	1980	1991*
Total	560,330	701,718	759,567	723,673
Male	279,128	349,143	376,381	356,540
Female	281,202	352,575	383,186	367,133

Ethnic composition 1991 (Guyana, region 2 and 4 (urban**))			
	Guyana	Region 2	Region 4
African/Negro/Back	234,765	7,682	131,738
Amerindian/Carib	45,379	5,098	2,173
East Indian	347,110	22,857	119,180
Chinese	1,338	12	956
Portuguese	1,964	135	1,524
White	318	15	218
Mixed	87,402	7,340	38,656
Syrian/Lebanese	19	-	18
Other	90	-	25
Not stated	21	-	6

* According to the book (see resources) the decrease is due to the declining birth rate. A bigger contribution however would be "net-international migration". (est. 1970-80: 12,000)

**Georgetown area

Table VIII-IX
RELIGION

Religious affiliation 1991 (Guyana, region 2 and 4)			
	Guyana	Region 2	Region 4
Christian	305,681	17,041	146,758
Hindu	251,211	18,320	82,806
Muslim	57,246	3,185	20,517
None	23,488	1,220	12,416
Not stated	5,000	382	2,720
Other	75,780	2,991	29,277
TOTAL	718,406	43,139	294,494

Religious affiliation 1980 (Guyana, region 2)		
	Guyana	Region 2
Christian	317,009	20,994
Hindu	281,119	28,326
Muslim	66,122	5,203
None	28,006	1,190
Not stated	14,080	1,158
Other*	52,283	1,715
TOTAL	758,619	58,586

Sources (all available at the Guyana Bureau of Statistics):

- 1980-1981 Population census of the Commonwealth Caribbean: Guyana, Vol. 1 and 2
- 1990-1991 Population and housing census of the Commonwealth Caribbean: National Census Report Guyana.
- Draft Report on housing and Population Census 1991-92

* e.g. A.M.E. (Zion)