

## The domestication and indigenization of global forces through consumption

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In writing up my thesis I am concerned with the domestication of global forces through consumption. The ethnography is centered on a small Warao village in the Orinoco Delta, Venezuela. In the marshes of the delta, with its myriads of river and creeks, the Warao live a relatively sheltered existence. But the isolation which the delta offers is only partial, and there is a range of actors and forces that interact with Warao everyday life. They qualify to the term “remotely global”, being an out of way place.

The Warao have been interacting with a range of ethnic groups, like the Arawak, and Carib, but lately the most significant other is the Hotarao. The Hotarao is a rather large ethnic group that the Warao use to designate the White-Creole people, like missionaries, politicians, traders and tourists, but especially the White-Creole population that live in the urban areas around the Orinoco Delta. Hotarao means “people from the raised/hard land” which makes out a contrast to the Warao meaning “people from the river’s edge/soft (marshes) land.” (Heinen 1998-1999)

Being the significant other the Hotarao have been in regular contact with the Warao for many decades, especially in the form of the Capuchin missionaries. The Capuchin first established a mission in the 1920’s and have since been actively seeking to transform Warao society into an image of their liking. Later Venezuelan state policy makers, doctors teachers, development agencies, NGO’s and traders have made their way into the area, all seeking to transform Warao society in different ways.

Even though there have been a multitude of forces seeking to influence Warao society, they have in large part been resilient towards these actors and institutions wish to transform them in their own image. Warao identity is very much alive, and is there is pride involved in being a Warao. In my thesis I am preoccupied with how the Warao have reconfigured, reconstituted and recreated themselves through the different types of global forces manifested through material culture and consumption activities (global forces being all the above types of Hotarao that exists).

So far in the process of writing up I have 5 major chapters that in different ways touch upon the problem of consumption, material culture and globalization, tentatively as follows:

### **The Wetlands: A village as a place that gathers things**

The Orinoco delta is inhabited by the Warao Indians, numbering about 25.000, concentrating themselves in the south-eastern part. The fan like delta is divided by eight large rivers the major ones being Manamo and the Wirinoko (Rio Grande) moving into the Atlantic Ocean. The majority of the Warao live in the south eastern littoral zone of the delta where the rivers, creeks and channels carve out a range of island. Here the villages are built along the edges of the river on stilts to stay clear of the tidal waters that daily flood the landmasses. The houses are built with palm thatched roofs and bridges going out into the river. In the tidal zone the Orinoco Rivers enormous water

masses clash with the tidal waves that daily flood the landmasses creating vortexes, or disturbances in the water. One of the words that the Warao use to designate such disturbances is hobure, which is also is the name of the village where I have done fieldwork.

Hobure: The houses are built on stilts along the river's edge with the swamp forest in the background.

Hobure, translated as "crazy waters", is a community of about 250 people distributed on 35 households. The households are of varying sizes, but the majority has two major structures, the hisabanoko and hanoko. Hisabanoko is "the place for eating/food" where food is prepared and consumed, and is the house that is the furthest out into the river. The hanoko is the "the place for hammocks" which is the sleeping place where the hammocks are hanging from the roof beams, with small fireplaces in between them to hold the mosquito and the cold nights away. Behind the hanoko you also find the nahimanoko "the menstruation place" where women are during their menstruation. This is often a structure that several households share. It is located the furthest away from the river towards the forests to create distance to the nabarao – the river people that is attracted to the smell of blood and can kill menstruating women, but also children.

There is also the school, the church and a dysfunctional water tower in the village, structures that stand out in this place. While the household structures seem to have been built by things that have been gathered in the surrounding environment, these structures are made out of elements that have an origin far away from the village.

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**Hoisi:** Through the whole village is a walking bridge (hoisi) connecting all the households. Moving about in this swampy environment usually requires a canoe.

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The houses are for the most part built with Yawihi palm as roof materials, and manaca palm stems are used as floors. The house pillars, roof stems and roof skeleton is made from different types of wood, held together by its own weight, lianas and nails. Nails are used to the extent that the house owner can afford it.

The old chool: Now abandoned for a new school in the other part of the village, the concrete floor on the inside serves as a football arena for the boys playing.

Knowledge of building houses is passed between the generations and had a standard quadrant form. The school was contracted by the local government to outsiders who have the knowhow to build such school. The church on the other hand built the house with the cooperation with the villagers, partially with materials gathered from the forest. In contrast to other houses in the village it has wooden planks for walls and windows, zinc roof and floor boards. The building of the church versus the school also reflect the more cooperative relation the old capuchin missionaries have with the villagers versus the more unilateral relation that the government have with the people of Hobure. Maybe the worst working relationship is manifested in the structure left behind a water project funded by the government and the Red Cross. A large water tower stands slightly in the back of the village accompanied with a large water tank. A tube goes through the entire village offering each household a water tap. The water project failed due to bad construction and lack of funds, but the enormous structure stands in the village as a reminder of even another failed development project that has ended on the “garbage heap of development projects”.

The Warao have a subsistence economy based on gardening, fishing, gathering and hunting. The root crop ure (*Colocasia Esculenta*), originally an Asian tuber, has been introduced to the delta area in the early 20th century by Warao migrating workers coming from Guyana. This root has shown to be perfect for the delta habitat where one have been able to adopt the root without requiring much technological equipment or knowledge (Heinen 1974). The ohidu palm which used to be the major subsistence source as palm starch, is still of importance in relation to the making of hammocks, getting grubs, making fishing equipment and fruits. In the noara, or the nahanamu, ritual the fertility of the palm was celebrated, and likewise there was a gathering of people from different villages looking for potential partners. The pattern of uxorilocal marriages pulls young men out of their villages joining up in new vicinity neighborhood villages.

## The Wastelands

This chapter investigates the migration of Warao to a garbage heap and their relation to garbage. Warao Indians living in the Orinoco Delta, Venezuela, travel to a large garbage heap outside of

Ciudad Guyana. Ciudad Guyana was started as a planned community with a few thousand inhabitants in the sixties and has today grown to almost a million inhabitants. This enormous growth has been made possible due to the shifts in the world economy, with the expansion of markets for crude oil, steel and other minerals which make out the central industrial activities. But the city, situated along the Orinoco River, some hundred kilometers from the Warao home land, also produces large amount of garbage. This garbage is daily transported to Cambalache, a large wasteland, where a range of people scavenge and live of the garbage. Some poor white-Creoles live of the garbage, but for the most part it is the Warao, who is the major ethnic group in this part of Venezuela, that exploit this recourse.