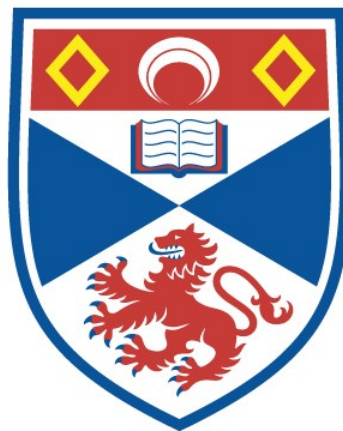


AASENÏKON!
**MAKUSHI TRAVELOGUES FROM THE BORDERLANDS
OF SOUTHERN GUYANA**

Lisa Katharina Grund

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**



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Aasenikon!

Makushi Travelogues from the Borderlands of Southern Guyana

Lisa Katharina Grund



University of
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Abstract

This ethnographic account focuses on the conceptions and practices of movement, as narrated by the Makushi people who live along the triple frontier of southern Guyana. The journeys - individual experiences, in particular of women – depict visits to other Makushi communities, to their neighbours and cities in Guyana, Brazil and Venezuela. The travelogues disclose Makushi premises on knowledge and its acquisition: gender, age, temporality and alterity. Exploring these concepts in practice, the ethnography points out the value the Makushi attribute to their encounters with others, situations in which risk and unpredictability are creatively incorporated as part of their sociality.

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Acknowledgements

The first recollection I have from the interior of Guyana was the immense soundscape of millions of frogs croaking, in different tones and songs, in a sort of techno-siren-orchestra, and so loud that one had to raise one's voice to talk. Along with that, there was this immediate dense wave of humidity. In the black sky, the countless bright stars were flickering down onto the earth and the tall dark trees of the forest in the background. Since then, I have sensed a deep connection with this place and all the people I got to know throughout the past years, who have welcomed me and made me feel at home. It has been a long journey of incredible encounters and experiences and I feel richer now, not for arriving somewhere, but for the journey in itself.

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This thesis is dedicated to the Makushi people and to Benjamin, the future generation.

Introduction

As you set out for Ithaka
hope the voyage is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.

“Ithaka”, by Konstantinos Kavafis

“You’re christened!” declared a young Makushi man giving me a celebratory slap on the back, after my jeep overturned in the Guyanese savannah. His good mood and unexpected positive words immediately helped to relieve my shock and lift my spirits. “Christened”, I thought almost proudly. Coping with the roughness of roads and getting oneself into adventures like these are part of one’s engagement with the place as a local. After catching a lift with a bypassing truck to pull the crashed jeep to the nearby town of Lethem, I stored my gasoline containers at Uncle Sydney’s daughter’s house. Mr. Sydney Allicock, a leader and nowadays an MP for the new government, was sitting inside the darkened house. He looked at me and said in his soft and wise voice “One day you will write a book about all this.” I knew then that this was the route I would follow.

Ethnography as a journey is a long-standing image in anthropological literature, which evokes genealogical links to the naturalist travellers of the late 18th century in the New World, if not to Herodotus and Xenophon as the “founding fathers” of the discipline. Based on the ethnographer’s experience of being uprooted, the image is, most of all, a working metaphor of travelling, mapping and rooting in unknown cultural territories.

This thesis is an ethnography of the Makushi people of southern Guyana and as such, it is an account of my journey into the Makushi worlds. However, the image of a journey must be seen in a double sense here: it is a journey on journeys, as the analytical focus is on Makushi conceptions and practices of movement. The central importance of movement to Makushi territoriality of groups and villages has already been pointed out in the ethnography of the area (Santilli, 1994). The present work, however, focusses on the significance of movement as experienced by travellers, which is communicated via narratives about the surrounding worlds and thus

transformed into a social experience. The way I interpret what I learned from the Makushi is that movement is a key concept of *making* their worlds (Overing, 1990) and, in this sense, it is analogous to shamanic knowledge. This is important because, as I intend to show, the Makushi do not consider their social world to be ready-made, on the contrary, they are always open to the unpredictability of ‘foreign’ encounters and indeed see them as constituent part of their own world. This is where the adjective “cosmopolitan” may apply to the Makushi, as we will see further ahead.

The Makushi form the most southern Pemon group of the Carib-speaking peoples of the Circum-Roraima region, an area surrounding Mount Roraima, a symbolic mark for the local Amerindian peoples. This area circumvents the national divisions of three countries - Guyana, Brazil and Venezuela - and shares the Western portion of the Guianese shield. A common feature, regardless of national borders, is the large patch of open savannah, where sandpaper trees offer hardly any shade from the hot sun. It interrupts the dense humid rain forests, which, in the case of Guyana, cover 80% of the land. The savannah and the Pakaraima mountain range - with its many *tepuis*, or table top mountains, the highest being Mount Roraima (roughly 2800m), and enormous waterfalls like the Salto Angel (807m, longest drop) in Venezuela and the Kaieture (a 300-metre drop of the Potaro river) in Guyana - are the home of mainly two “different ethnic unities” (Butt Colson 2009a: 1-2): the Kapon (Akawaio, Ingarikó, Patamona) and Pemon (Arekuna, Makushi, Taurepang among others)¹. They are culturally and linguistically closely related - not to forget the Arawak-speaking Wapishana, who are neighbours of the Makushi to the south of the Kanuku Mountains.

Butt Colson pointed out that many of the ethnonyms currently in use are in fact “conglomerate nicknames”, often derogative, that have come into use through inter-ethnic contact and as a result of colonialism. Further “regional group nicknames” often used for the Makushi are the Monoiko, Eliang, Asepang, Kenóloko, Teweia, Keseruma. Others have become incorporated throughout time (Butt Colson, 2009b: 80-83, see also 2009a: 77; see also Santilli, 1994 and Farage, 1991)².

¹ Kapon and Pemon are autodenominations. In the case of Pemon, “Pemonkon” means “person” in Makushi, and similarly in other Pemon languages.

² Butt Colson (2009b) distinguishes three ethnonymy systems: 1. autodesignation system that expresses ethnic unity (i.e. Pemon, Kapon, Karina etc. p. 46-50); 2. nicknaming system (like Makushi, Arekuna, Taurepang etc. pp.50-91); and 3. a naming system based on toponymy (like in the case of the ramonoko’ (people of the savannah), inkariko’ (people of the deep forest), peyako’ (people of the river landings) etc. pp. 91-94). See also Foster (1990: 69).

An intense circulation of people occurs across all three borders of the Makushi territory, and outside its limits, visiting their Amerindian neighbours and travelling along roads that lead to urban spaces. On the Guyanese side, 28 villages and a population of about 9,500 (census from 2001)³ are registered. The majority of the 24,238 (census from 2012)⁴ inhabitants of the most southern region of the country are indigenous people, - along with Makushi, there are Wapishana and Wai Wai – as well as migrants from the coast of African, East-Indian and European descent, and Brazilians. The majority of the Makushi population, however, is found in Brazil, numbering roughly 33.603 (Siasi/Sesai, 2014)⁵, scattered in about 140 villages in more mountainous regions (“serras”), as well as in the savannah (“lavrado”), in the indigenous territories of Raposa Serra do Sol and São Marcos, or in the valleys of the rivers Amajari, Cauamé and Uraricoera (Santilli, 1994). A small population of Makushi people, 83 (INEI, 2001)⁶, also live in Venezuela. Many Amerindians stay both temporarily and permanently in nearby cities, especially in Roraima’s capital Boa Vista (326.419 inhabitants)⁷.

From this brief picture, one can have a fair idea of the importance attached to mobility in Makushi social life. Indeed, the ethnological picture is one of movement of groups and whole villages which embodied, as Rivière (1984) once said, the political history of the region. From a broader scope, the category of space has proven crucial in the theoretical groundwork of the Guiana ethnographic area, and has therefore already pointed to the importance of movement, as shown long ago in the contributions of the XLII Congrès International Des Américanistes organized by Overing in 1976. The ethnological literature will be explored in the next section. For now, it is necessary to clarify that, departing from the theoretical ground established by Guianese ethnology, the present work does not focus on the political history of villages or groups; instead, the theoretical choice was to set the analytical lens on travels: collective or individual, of men and women. Methodologically, it meant looking through a lens-in-movement, by travelling with Makushi men and women,

³ This is the most recent census data available. However, the Makushi population of Guyana is considered to have grown since. <https://pib.socioambiental.org/pt/povo/macuxi>

⁴ Guyana Population and Housing Census, available on the website of the Bureau of Statistics <http://www.statisticsguyana.gov.gy/>, file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/Final_2012_Census_Count.pdf, page 2.

⁵ <https://pib.socioambiental.org/pt/povo/macuxi>

⁶ <https://pib.socioambiental.org/pt/povo/macuxi>

⁷ Estimated population number for 2016. See <http://cidades.ibge.gov.br/xtras/perfil.php?codmun=140010>

and being able to share the experience of the journey, its social premises and effects.

This ethnography then draws its narrative from journeying, as well as from the memories of being on the move, instead of in the house or community. It aims to contribute to a critical approach to a settlement-based ethnography. The final result can be defined in the words of Bruce Albert (2002: 10), as an anthropology focused on “other anthropologies”, in the double sense of an anthropology of the other on the other (referring to Augé, 1994: 10). In this sense, the Makushi discourse on the Other is a way of understanding their conceptions of their own sociality.

Mobility in the Guianas

Since Overing’s seminal ethnography on the Piaroa (1975 etc.) the value of the equation between spatial and social distance across the ethnographic region of Guiana has been highlighted. One of the most important propositions of the author, based on the analysis of Sinhalese kindred by Nur Yalman (1962), was that in the Guianas physical co-residence was a socially predominant value for the creation of community, as, conversely, social distance for the creation of difference. Consequently, co-residence was considered closer than consanguineous non-co-residence, that is, a distant consanguine may be affinzied, while the affinal co-resident becomes consanguinized. The consanguinization of affines obtained by teknonymy - which highlighted the consanguineous bond created through the children - and other means of substance exchange between close residents, such as commensality, was based on an ideology of the village as a “community of equals” in a world populated by dangerous strangers.

The description of this typical Guianese village, which also derives from Thomas’ (1982) study of the Pemon, was summarized by Rivière in 1984. According to this author, a settlement ideally consisted of one or more kindreds, under the leadership of a headman/father-in-law, whose aim was to build alliances through the sons-in-law’s uxorilocal residence, from which he derived political prestige and therefore the ability to attract greater numbers of alliances. Rivière noted as well that this model was marked by a temporal trajectory of the headman/father-in-law, as the settlement tended to fall apart with the death of the leader, opening the possibility for the return of sons-in-law, wives and children to their village of origin or for a community of siblings. Such politics, therefore, were at the heart of fission processes

in the villages, and of the formation of new villages, leading Rivière to conclude that the mobility of villages is the inscription of their political history in space. However, as Thomas argues in the case of the Pemon, the mobile and transitional quality so characteristic of settlements in the area does not rule out a strong notion of community.

Thus, the classic ethnography of the Guiana region already pointed to the socio-political value of mobility, an aspect that proved to be fundamental to studies dealing with indigenous territorial rights and the history of regional economic occupation of the area (see Santilli, 1994). The concept of an unlimited territory in which villages move clashed with the process of colonisation of the whole Circum-Roraima area, and recently, as a consequence, with official processes of territorial demarcation in the scope of national laws. Indeed, in Brazil, Venezuela and to a lesser extent in Guyana – the three countries that correspond to the Circum-Roraima region – land demarcation has certainly marked the relationship with the national states and the political history of its indigenous people. Surprisingly, however, Santilli (1994) has shown among the Makushi in Roraima that, while the demarcation was a limiting factor, it did not, however, eliminate the dynamics of traditional settlement patterns.

The mobility of Guiana's indigenous peoples in the past, including the Makushi, was definitely reflected in the large networks of warfare and exchange (Whitehead, 1988; Farage, 1991; Dreyfus, 1993; Butt Colson 1973, 1985; Thomas, 1982; Guss, 1990), through which indigenous as well as European goods circulated widely, to the south and north between the Amazon and Rio Negro areas and the coastlands of Essequibo, Demerara and Courantyne. These multi-ethnic and multi-lingual regional networks interconnected the Guianas and the Amazonian basin and, as historiography has shown, were engulfed by colonial policies and finally disrupted by the process of colonisation (Whitehead, 1988; Farage, 1991). For the linguists, the wide distribution of certain linguistic families throughout the Amazon – mostly Arawak, Carib and Tupi – also demonstrates significant movements of population in pre-colonial times (Rostain, 2008; Urban, 1992; Alexiades 2009: 7, 8).

Butt-Colson (1985) highlights, on the basis of written sources, that from the end of the 18th century onwards, not only goods were exchanged by movements and along routes but also cultural texts, prayers, songs and stories, from different regions and diverse ethnic backgrounds, establishing indeed “routes of knowledge”. Hence, the indigenous religious Hallelujah cult among Kapon and Pemon groups (whom she

termed the “Hallelujah Indians”) in the Circum-Roraima region, was spread to a large extent via the movements of knowledgeable travellers: “Thus, once enthusiasm is aroused, or even just curiosity in the first instance, the indigenous communication network is rapidly activated and knowledge may be carried as far and as fast as trade goods are, along the same routes and via the same kinds of relationships” (Butt-Colson, 1985: 126). The Circum-Roraima region as a cultural continuum, is highly connected to this circulation of people and oral networks. The journey as an acquisition of knowledge is something important I want to address in the following chapters.

Indigenous mobility, at least indirectly, is mentioned in the many publications of scientific explorers, travellers and missionaries - Schomburgk (2010 [1847 vol.1; 1848 vol.2]), Appun (1871), Barrington Brown (2010 [1876]), Waterton (1879), Im Thurn (1967 [1883]), Roth (2011 [1915]), Koch-Grünberg (1917; 1923; 1924), Farabee (1924), Waugh (1934) -, who were accompanied by numerous indigenous guides on their treks through the savannahs of the Rio Branco, Rupununi and Gran Sabana. The journeys went along parts of these ancient webs of communication systems (Butt Colson 1985: 125). The colonial travellers were highly dependent on the Amerindian population for their knowledge of these trajectories and for orientation along the “many Indian paths going in various directions” (Barrington Brown 2010 [1876]: 80), “hardly discernible to an unpractised eye” (Im Thurn 1967 [1883]: 3), their social networks, as well as on their physical strength to carry the heavy loads, their hunting, fishing and spotting abilities and simply, their willingness to go. The willingness to participate in these excursions, however, was not only a means of “employment” or out of a sense of obligation, but also just as much an excuse for visiting one’s relatives in other villages, seeing new places, listening to the latest gossip, eating and celebrating with others and creating beneficial relations. Similarly, Roller (2014: 7) referring to the Pará and Tapajos region, argues that the “colonial Indians” who embarked on the many colonial exploration journeys moved not only out of “obligation and external encouragement but in the same way, out of personal interests.” Thus, these movements were also used to expand social and trade networks and for prestige and leadership purposes, which, in return, strengthened their own settlements by bringing back material resources and people.

Several accounts, such as the travelogue of Marie Clementi (1920:153), mention how indigenous women and men merely joined the group for the sake of

enjoyment, to go for a walk, - as in the case of Clementi - the new set of Makushi carriers “appeared to regard our expedition to Roraima in the light of a pleasure trip, and a large number of women, even one baby, accompanied us on the march there and back. I think they enjoyed the idea of a pilgrimage (...).” Of course, these journeys also involved considerable physical hardship and reflected perceptions of interethnic frontiers and suspicions, fear of sacred and unknown locations that made many guides turn back. Scientific and boundary explorations, in particular Schomburgk’s survey of the Guyana hinterland, were guided along paths that led to or avoided landmarks, especially rock formations, filled with indigenous history, which, in turn, had a great impact on colonial cartography and western imagination. Burnett (2000: 189), analysing Schomburgk’s expedition survey argues, “The interior expedition turned native myths into landmarks of the colonial territory”. The way in which narratives attached to places are recalled when on the move and help to orientate oneself will be dealt with in the third chapter.

Certain routes were prevalent: those between the coastal area of British Guiana (*Iken* in Makushi, in Pemon often referred to as *Engiran/England*, see Butt Colson 1985: 112) and Mount Roraima in the interior. These also represented important poles of knowledge, indigenous and white, local and from outside, and visiting the coast was associated with the acquisition of powerful knowledge, as in the case of the Makushi Pichiwön, considered the “founder” of Hallelujah, who returned from there with new religious visions⁸.

Before introducing Makushi concepts on movement, I would like to outline the contemporary theoretical works on movement which have been important for the present ethnography.

On Movement

In a recent theoretical appraisal, Dalakoglou and Harvey (2012: 462) point out that “anthropologists did not suffer from a complete antipathy to mobility”, referring to the important ethnographic research on nomadism and the pioneering works on migrants since the 1960s. We should add that classical ethnographies - Malinowski (2014 [1922]), Firth (1936), Evans-Pritchard (1940) – took into account, if not

⁸ See Butt Colson (1960, 1971, 1998) for more a detailed study on Hallelujah among the Pemon and Kapon.

focused on, ritual and seasonal movements in Oceania and Africa. In fact, as Wardle (2010: 382) demonstrated, “cosmopolitanism-as-a-perceptual-ability” was already promoted by Malinowski, “as a methodological base from which to comprehend ‘the native’s point of view”.

However, as Clifford (1997) proposed, the tendency to emphasise roots rather than routes as the source of cultural construction has certainly influenced classical anthropology and hence, roots took precedence over routes (see also Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012: 462). As people and places are drawn further into global processes, and with the shift in the understanding that the anthropologist’s interlocutors themselves are in constant movement, diverse “traveling cultures” (Clifford 1997) have emerged, as well as new theories and fieldwork methodologies to tackle them.

Consequently, since the 1980’s increasing attention has been given to the everyday practices of movement as central to dwelling and to the forms of knowledge that are produced as travellers exchange experiences (e.g. Clifford 1988, 1996; Chambers 1994a). Thus, “an interest in mobility emerged as a central trope of anthropological cultural critique (Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012: 462, referring to Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986), questioning the idea that “culture” like “place” is rooted in a seemingly static, mappable and bounded field (Bourdieu 1977), creating a timeless discrete group of natives, “expected to remain rooted to their physical places of origin” (Bigenho 2002: 140). Since the notion of the ‘field’ has become increasingly one of “shifting locations” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 38), conventional fieldwork methodology also has to be rethought (Coleman and Collins 2006):

If we rethink culture and its science, anthropology, in terms of travel, then the organic, naturalizing bias of the term “culture” - seen as a rooted body that grows, lives, dies, and so on - is questioned.” (Clifford 1997: 25).

Thus, movement helps to function as a tool to analyse and critically approach existing conceptualizations. The geographer Tim Cresswell (2006: 2) argues that although mobility presents a way of being in the world, it has remained a “blank space”, and merely an alternative to place. However, he asks, what if place is neither an alternative nor the result of movement, what if place becomes meaningless and redundant? From a Deleuzian perspective of ‘growth’ and ‘becoming’, Cresswell (2006: 55) affirms that place is “no more (or less) than the logical outcome of unique combinations of flow and velocity”:

When seen through the lens of a nomadic metaphysics, everything is in motion, and stability is illusory.

Inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's ideas about smooth space, lines and the rhizome, Ingold's (2011: 141) ideas on lines, the meshwork, knowledge and perception, propose:

a world of incessant movement and becoming, one that is never complete but continually under construction, woven from the countless lifelines of its manifold human and non-human constituents as they thread their ways through the tangle of relationships in which they are comprehensively enmeshed.

For Ingold (2011: 12), life is a process of movement. "To be, I would now say, is not to be *in* place but to be *along* paths. The path, and not the place, is the primary condition of being, or rather of becoming."

Movement has inevitably been an issue in studies on transnationalism, international migration, complex urban settings, "creolisation" and cosmopolitanism (e.g. Appadurai, 1996; Bhaba, 1994; Hannerz, 1996; Ong, 1999; Rapport & Dawson, 1998; Wardle, 2000). This implied an epistemological shift in anthropology: Growing attention has been given to the way in which groups and individuals on the move find their way and make themselves 'at home' in the world "amid considerable dislocating forces" (Kirby 2009: 10). Exploring people's movements helps to tackle and better comprehend "the unfixed, though hardly ungrounded, character of contemporary social lives" (Kirby 2009:14). Or as Huon Wardle (2000: 26) summarises: "The real essence of Kingston, though, is perhaps not streets and houses but the bus."

In the current debate on Lowland South America, the image of human occupation of ancient Amazonia as one composed of small and closed communities has been reviewed since the last decades of the 20th century (Whitehead, 2003; Posey and Balick, 2006; Fausto and Heckenberger, 2007). The fact that Amazonia is marked by historicities of complex routes and movements of people (Hill and Santos-Granero, 2002; Alexiadis, 2009) and even large roads that connect to the plazas of great ancient settlements, as in the case of the Xingu area (Heckenberger et al. 2003; see also Sheets, 2009), has now been widely acknowledged in Amazonian anthropology. A similar review seems to be present in the recent ethnohistory of Central America, where the Mayan's famous "masonry roads" and "causeways", "unsurpassed in the preindustrial world", are at stake (Keller 2009: 133).

Ethnohistorical, linguistic and archaeological evidence suggests that spatial distribution and ethnic formation is a proof of mobility and the result of the various ebbs and flows of a complex interplay of often opposing processes of depopulation and population, centralization and dispersal, fragmentation and integration, which have taken place throughout pre-and post-conquest periods and modern times (Alexiades 2009: 23, 2, 5). Alexiades notes (2009: 25) that “mobility has served, amidst Amazonia’s turbulent past and uncertain present, as an effective vehicle for social and ecological, individual and collective (dis)articulation.”

Commonly, the everyday circulation of people, specifically of the indigenous inhabitants, has not been perceived as “mobility”. However, as has been argued in the case of Suriname (Carlin et al. 2015: 2-3), it is precisely this daily circulation that is historically interesting:

The Maroon and Amerindian mobility patterns fall outside of the historicised peopling of mainstream, or urban, Suriname. However, these movements from village to village, from *kampu* to *kampu*, have always been basic to, and constitutive of, the historical peopling of the Guianas.

I would suggest that a similar situation is true for Guyana, where the “traditional notions of bounded ethnic groups” (Carlin et al. 2015:3) has ‘fixed’ the image of the Amerindian population into specific territories in the interior of the country, where they are “encountered” by mobile Others - scientific travellers, incoming settlers and the coastal and Brazilian population. Amerindian mobility has been highlighted predominantly in the form of migration to work in Brazil and the mines, and not constitutive of indigenous communities and the historical construction of the region (e.g. Forte and Benjamin, 1993; Baines, 2005; Government of Guyana, 2010: 76-79).

Thus, indigenous mobility, predominantly depicted in the form of migration or displacement, has mostly been understood as disruptive to the stability of communities. Contrary to these expectations, M. Harris (2010) reviewing the formation of society in the Amazon river valley, pointed out the relevance of mobility not only for the extractive economy, but most of all for successful political resistance to colonial oppression. In the same vein, Roller (2014) has shown through archival research that colonial settlements in Amazonia profited from and were actually stabilised through the constant in and out movements of its Amerindian inhabitants.

Little attention has been given to ‘deliberate’ and temporary movement. There are a few examples in Amazonia that highlight its importance, one being Ellis’ thesis (1997) which describes the Tsimane’s “taste of movement”. During her fieldwork, she noticed how movement, i.e. specifically visiting, was due to “their extended sense of community” (Ellis 1997: 2) and essential for the creation of sociality. As most Tsimane families spend so much time visiting relatives, she had to make movement a part of her enquiries. Furthermore, Feather (2010; also 2009) looks at the Peruvian Nahua’s fluidity and flexibility, their experience of history through displacement and capacity to adapt to transformations in the world. Movement plays a crucial role here. Another interesting example is Stang (2009) who worked in the Xingu among the Mehinaku. Drawing on Michael Jackson’s phenomenological approach to intersubjectivity, she tries to understand a Mehinaku girl’s experience of the world “from within”, by exploring her walk to the river to fetch water. A thesis on archaeology in the Guiana region by Mans (2012: 25), on the ‘microcosmos of mobility’, focuses on tracing trajectories of people and their *mabilia*, or objects belonging to the Trio community of Amotopo in Suriname a hundred years back, by means of an archaeological analysis of the circulation of trade items and rubbish compositions.

While some scholars have incorporated modern forms of transportation in the discussion on indigenous movements in Australia and North America (e.g. Young 2001; Delorias, 2004), Amazonian ethnographies have not yet acknowledged the central significance of motorized vehicles and roads in contemporary Amerindian life (see Harvey 2010 on roads). Of particular interest is Miller’s volume on “Car cultures” in which Young (2001) describes how travelling by car for the Pitjanjatjara aborigenes in Australia is inextricably linked with traditional practices such as hunting and becomes essential for maintaining social relations and the emotional bond to the land⁹. Furthermore, Deloria (2004) stresses in his historical account that Native Americans were, contrary to popular belief, among the first people in the history of automobiles to travel extensively by vehicle. Makushi experiences of being on the road and travelling by vehicle are treated specifically in the first chapter of the thesis.

⁹ Because of the significance of ancestral ‘dream lines’ in Aboriginal cosmology, which spread across the whole continent, the aspect of movement has become significant in work on indigenous Australia (g. Hirsch and O’Hanlon 1995).

Feminine voices

It is commonly assumed that mobility is typical of men, and that 'territorial' movements of men are much more extensive than those of women; female movements on the other hand are thought to be connected with village life, the gardens and restricted to short gathering excursions (see e.g. Gregor, 1985). In Lowland South American ethnology there are many variants of the image of immobility of women, most famously depicted in the literature on Gê uxorilocal residence rule (Melatti, 1979).

Some of these assumptions are examined in the present work. Indeed, although the analytical focus is not on gender relations in the strict sense, it is necessary to point out the feminine tone of this ethnography. As most journeys were undertaken or narrated by women, due to my own gender and those of my interlocutors, it became necessary to look at the connection between gender and movement or immobility, a variable which is discussed in depth in chapter 4. For now, I shall say that women's travels - be they unmarried young girls or mature women - are significant among the Makushi today. Whether for schooling or professional reasons, present female mobility between villages and towns, albeit linked to national development policies in the frontiers, cannot be reduced to the sole explanation of a politics of interethnic relations. Lived or voiced by women, this ethnography of journeys is gender-based; nevertheless, my intention is to approach these feminine voices as a Makushi social experience of movement.

Much more than places, it is paths, trails and roads that pervade the pages ahead as chronotopical markers of the journeys and their narratives - as in Bakhtin (1990) - setting their unique and indissociable time/space. This leads to another important window opened by Bakhtin (1990), which is the inextricable link between journeying and telling. Looking for the roots of the epic narrative as a genre in Greek literature, especially the *Odyssey*, Bakhtin underlines the trail as a *chronotopos par excellence* and consequently the Greek hero or main character as a traveller. The journey, as we know since the *Odyssey*, is the adventure of life itself. From a different theoretical point of view, Vernant¹⁰ arrives at similar conclusions:

And upon reflection we see that that which already exists in the *Odyssey* and which constitutes its value is the fact that by means of the text, by means of writing, events are related, but sometimes it is the poet who sings, sometimes it is Ulysses himself

¹⁰“L’*Odyssee*”, <http://www.fabriquedesens.net/L-Odyssee-Jean-Pierre-Vernant-a>

who tells the story, or a third person, *Démonocos* [*sic*], a singer, all these times are joined together. At the end of the narrative there is not the feeling that time has been lost. It has been rediscovered. (my translation)

Despite their oral inscription, the Makushi, as I intend to demonstrate, are not so far from this reflection. Their movement is, at the same time, a quest for memory and history, which becomes shared knowledge and wisdom.

Fieldwork

The journeys described in the following five chapters might seem to be somewhat random, banal, everyday movements, like driving to the capital Georgetown following an invitation, to a hospital appointment in Brazil or simply visiting some relatives in a different village. Celia (the main narrator in chapter 4) commented one day in a matter-of-fact-way: “I don’t travel, you travel!”, as if her daily “comings and goings” did not count. But people undertake these kinds of movements for many days in the year and it is part of what is “ordinary”, as much as it is staying in the village. “At the most simple level, then, travel is about footsteps” (Letherby & Reynolds 2009: 27); it is “central to what it is to be human” (Cresswell 2006) and therefore meaningful.

My interest in this topic was not primarily aroused because the theme of movement was so obviously prevalent - as in the case of the Tsimane (Ellis, 1997) –or because people seemed to be always on the move - as in the case of the Nahua (Feather, 2010). It rather derived from the experience of travelling with the people, and the understanding that movement, to them, is an essential aspect of life. And I did, indeed, often feel frustrated about finding houses locked up because people had gone somewhere, missing lifts because people had decided to move on, not knowing where people had gone and when they would be back. Furthermore, in the two years prior to my PhD¹¹, i.e. from 2009 to 2011, I spent much time “on the move” with people throughout Guyana, observing and participating in the way people experience, navigate during and communicate about journeys. This sparked my personal

¹¹ From 2009 to 2011 I was working as a volunteer under a small rainforest conservation organization, called Eerepami, which have a cooperation with the Makushi village Surama, where I was based. I worked mainly in the area of video and audio documentation of Makushi music and cultural knowledge. Throughout the almost two years I was hosted by a large Makushi family in Surama. However, I was also highly mobile and visited many other Makushi, Wapishana and Arawak villages. These “field experiences” were intense and incredibly rewarding in becoming acquainted to and immersed in a place and people so different.

fascination with the topic. Thus, in a similar vein as Mendes da Silva (2007: 19) working on micro-mobility among the Guaraní along the three-border crossing of Brazil, Paraguay and Bolivia: “doing an ethnography of their paths” is simply another “attempt to talk about them” (my translation). I shall add that more than this, it is an attempt to talk *with* them.

As Ingold has extensively described (e.g. 2000, 2011; see also Ingold and Vergunst 2008), movement is mediated by its different technologies and topographies: the perception of the environment differs according to the experience of traversing it, whether on foot, horse, boat or vehicle. The most common mode of journeying among the Makushi today is on foot, and increasingly, by vehicle, not to forget bicycles. Furthermore, there are three communities that are predominantly dependent on canoes via the Essequibo and Rewa River. However, in comparison to other areas of Amazonia, waterways and boat travel have little importance for the Makushi, at least nowadays¹². The diverse geographical settings - sandy savanna, humid rain forest, hills and mountains, access to larger roads and rivers, inevitably influence the reality of daily movements. My initial idea of doing fieldwork in all these different locations, however, proved difficult from the very beginning because of research permission procedures and the way Amerindian lands have been demarcated in Guyana.

To do anthropological research one must obtain permission from the individual villages one plans to stay in, from the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs (now called Ministry of Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs), and from the Environmental Protection Agency of Guyana. While the procedure to obtain permission from the governmental organisations is lengthy and often not transparent, the major problem for anyone who wants to do research on movement is the fact that there are usually no continuous Amerindian lands, but everything is divided into individual little village titles (except for Karasabai District where villages, however, are also treated individually). As a result, it proved to be logistically difficult and so I decided instead to concentrate on two Makushi villages, Surama and Tipuru, as my principle fieldwork sites, for which I had received permission from all three levels. I had already worked with individuals there, as well as travelled with people from there, going on journeys between villages, forest and town. The initial frictions caused by

¹² See for instance Barrington Brown (2010 [1876]) for descriptions of several Makushi villages adjacent to rivers and creeks.

doing fieldwork on movement and “getting stuck” due to the logic of separate village lands, transformed the way I viewed the politics of access to indigenous lands and the necessity for continuous lands, as people move constantly between one and the other.

Thus, the ethnographical data derives predominantly from travelogues, collected between 2012-2014, consisting of different kinds of journeys. These are seasonal journeys, in groups and alone, planned and spontaneous, long-term and temporary, across frontiers, by vehicle and on foot, journeys for the most part experienced by women. For privacy reasons I have changed the names of my interlocutors, as well as the names in their narratives.

A world seen through the eyes of “unsituated human behaviour” (Marcus, 1995) sheds different light on people’s experience of life and how “knowledge in motion” is created (see Roddick and Stahl, 2016; M. Harris, 2016). It was on the move that I could apprehend a crucial notion of Makushi sociality, which is related not merely to the knowledge of the surrounding world, but, on the contrary, to how they make themselves at home in this world.

The terminology of travel

For Cresswell (2006: 3), movement is the dynamic equivalent of “location in abstract space” and devoid of meaning, while mobility is a social product and equivalent to place, imbued with history and power. This thesis, however, will predominantly use the term movement as it best describes the kind of mobility narrated. Maybe the reason why movement fits well is precisely because it can be used in more diverse ways, for individual, random daily activities, as well as for the non-human world. It is certainly not devoid of meaning here. Although Celia attributed travelling to me/ white/ researcher/ from far, the term is frequently used in Creole English by the Makushi to talk about short walks and longer journeys alike - I therefore utilise this terminology too.

Of course, movement must be understood the way *they* understand it and the way *they* talk about it. These are some expressions that are important in Makushi dialogues on movement: Firstly, rather than nouns such as ‘movement’, ‘travelling’, ‘mobility’, ‘migration’, the Makushi use mainly three verbs to describe the act of movement, : *wîttî*, *asaarî*, and *ataponka*. Secondly, there is no word for permanent or definitive movement, such as 'migration'.

Most commonly, in both English Creole as well as in Makushi, people use “going” or *wîttî* - going somewhere, for instance hunting, to the neighbour, farm or across the border to Brazil, for example: *Brasil pona’ uutî sîrîrî* (“I am going to Brazil”). It is often used for shorter distances and periods of time and frequently with additional information, which might highlight purpose and mode of travelling, as well as time of departure and intention of duration and return. For instance, “I am going for three days and come back”; “I am going by boat”; “I am going home”, and so forth. *Paaye uutî sîrîrî*, for instance, “I am going without a hammock”, means that one will return the same day, while *uutî sîrîrî patarî*, means the person will stay overnight and will not return any time soon. Together with the temporal marker *pena*, *wîttî* refers to a journey “long time ago”, for instance, *pena uutî’pî Lethem pona’*, “I went to Lethem long time ago”.

Secondly, *asaarî* – “take a walk” is often used for longer journeys with less specific purpose and can be used for “wandering”. Here are some examples I came across: *Asaarî sîrîrî*: walking around; *mararî pra asanîto’*: to walk a lot; *Insikiran panpe pata yapî’ aminke asarî’pî*: Insikiran went walking through far places; *asaarî mîrîrî?*: you taking a walk?; *Aasarî kanan mîrîrî?*: you going again?; *asaapai wai*: I want to take a walk.

The third expression used for travelling is *ataponka*. When I asked people to explain the meaning and use of the word, I got very different responses. Some people referred to lengthier movements, others to mythical journeys like those of the *trickster* brothers Insikiran and A’neke, without a destination.

In the trilingual Makushi dictionary, published by the Makushi Research Unit and edited by the Makushi linguist Miriam Abbott, *ataponka* is defined as “to leave, travel; break camp”. Thus, *ataponka* is commonly used when “waking up and going travelling”, indeed connected to “breaking camp” – waking up when on the move, breaking camp and continuing, typical of several days’ long journeys. It can also be used when one intends to “wake up early to visit” and “leave to travel”: *Ataaponkanpî’ wai’*.

The narratives recorded in Makushi were translated with the help of a Makushi native speaker into English, usually Maria Simon, in some cases Paulette Joseph, Jean Allcock and Regina Pereira. Throughout the time of my fieldwork, I received support from the Makushi linguist Celino Raposo, resident in Boa Vista, who helped me translate, gave me language classes and double-checked all written Makushi used in

this thesis. Sometimes figuring out the spelling of a recording from the South Pakaraima area was difficult for him, as there are regional dialects and ways of speaking. Furthermore, the Makushi spoken in the South Pakaraima uses an “h” sound instead of “p”, which has not been included in the discussion on Makushi orthography.

Most conversations and open interviews, however, were in Guyanese Creole English, as this is the language spoken in many households and chosen by most people in daily communication, especially outside one’s community and on the road. The way Makushi people speak Guyanese Creole, especially the older ones and those that are knowledgeable of Makushi, has very peculiar intonations, which I highlight in the transcriptions in brackets to allow the reader a feel for the onomatopoeic expressiveness of the spoken language. The narrations in this thesis were usually based on recordings. In addition, they were reproduced from my fieldnotes of conversations as I perceived them. They were then transcribed according to how people speak, including grammatical and lexical idiosyncrasies, intonations, pauses and so forth. As there is no standardised way of transcribing spoken Guyanese Creole, these narrative texts reflect my own perception.

Outline of chapters

Chapter 1 focuses on vehicle travel and driving, the process of the journey itself, as well as perceptions of ‘the other side’, resulting in important experiences and memories. The principle narrators are Abilene, Jill and Gordon, Winford, as well as Celia, recounting their travels to Lethem, “the coast” and across the border. The road Brazil-Guyana, as already mentioned, is the chronotopical reference which organises the narratives and allows for an image of the impact of national projects on the lives of the Makushi, with multiple and differential effects, according to gender and age.

Chapter 2 introduces the village of Tipuru and looks at the reasons why people have come to live there. It is based on the narratives of four women: Marcia, Amaris, Candace and Rita who each recount how different groups of people “came down escaping enemies” and settled in the area of Tipuru; how the place was wild and made liveable through the killing of beasts and how the notion of a savage past and a contemporary sociality are closely connected to the dimension of space.

Chapter 3 is divided into two sections and deals with a communal journey, on foot, to a place called Takutunen, leading through diverse forest landscapes. In the first, the organization, the procedures and practices related to the journey, and most of all, the significant and unique role of the *tuwama*, the leader of the expedition, will be explored. The second part will focus on Reinaldo (the *tuwama*) and his son. It will follow the actual movement through culturally significant landscapes and look at the way people orientate themselves through ‘narrative cartographies’.

Chapter 4 focuses on the issue of movement and gender. Through Celia’s narrative and those of other women, this chapter explores the roots of women’s immobility and learning in their early years. The increased mobility of young women is accompanied by concerns regarding their vulnerability and the dangers outside the home. The chapter argues that a woman’s mobility changes throughout her life and as she advances in age, it corresponds increasingly to that of men. Thus, women’s contribution to Makushi sociality through movement is indeed significant.

Chapter 5 explores a ten-day walk with Marcia to the village of Tusenen and back, partly interwoven with her narrative of an earlier journey through more distant settlements, previously unknown to her. Highlighted in the accounts of the journeys on foot are the numerous forms of social etiquette one must observe when on the move, the relationship between host and guest and the importance of communication when traversing both human and non-human worlds.

In sum, the chapters examine different modalities of journeying, which in the end, depict the journey as a form of knowledge of and communication with strange worlds. Most of all for the Makushi, it is about bringing distant places and people closer.

Chapter 1

Roads and Crossings:

Experiences of Movement

(...)

Have Ithaka always in your mind.
Your arrival there is what you are destined for.
But don't in the least hurry the journey.

“Ithaka”, by Konstantinos Kavafis

Sitting under a mango tree outside his house in Tipuru, Winford proudly said to me: “You know I am a traveller, yes, I am a traveller.” And in a somewhat muted mood he continued “Without documents, I cannot say ‘yes, I will go’. (...) Yet sometimes, I don't know how, I reach, come back safe (...)” This simple conversation on a hot Guyanese afternoon summarises the many dilemmas experienced by the Makushi as a people, who had their territory intersected by an international border.

This chapter presents the Makushi on journeys, particularly by vehicle, along roads and across borders. The complex themes are recalled from different travelogues: Jill and Gordon who decide to accompany Jill’s brother to an Amerindian village in Brazil where they stay and work for a year. Their daughter Abilene travelling with various culture group participants to the Guyanese capital and to a ceremony in Brazil. We have Winford, who spontaneously accompanies a friend to Venezuela and Celia, who recalls her experiences on her way back home from Lethem. Thus, sometimes the movements are due to an invitation to an event, sometimes it is a spontaneous decision to catch a ride, other times the journey leads to a new home, which means carrying all one’s belongings. The chapter is divided into two parts, the first dealing with the main road through Guyana, linking the border with Brazil and the capital Georgetown. When travelling along this highly significant “multiverse”, the course of the journey as such will come to the fore. The second deals with experiences and perceptions regarding crossing the border, at official and unofficial “landings”, and fears connected to documentation procedures, as well as memorable

encounters when away from home. In Dalakoglou and Harvey's (2012: 450) words, all these movements allow us "to tease out the practices and imaginaries that work across scales (...) from the politics of infrastructure development to cultural conditions of everyday life".

The Road

A line between poles

The 'Rupununi highway' is not only a transport link between the "interior" and the "coast", between Guyana and Brazil, between the capital Georgetown and the remote border town of Lethem, traversing a major part of the Makushi territory. It also connects very different, even contrasting Brazilian and Guyanese perceptions of the place and the indigenous population living 'in-between'.

Similar to the neighbouring countries of Venezuela, Suriname and French Guiana, in Guyana there is a clear dichotomy between a populated urban "coast" in the North, the centre of power, and a sparsely populated "remote interior" to the South. The flat "coast", with Georgetown built on land that lies below sea level, stands in stark contrast to the forested interior, characterised by mountains, rocks and high waterfalls. The Guyanese writer Wilson Harris (1999: 41) describes this contrasting image as

the two oceans, so to speak, that flank the narrow strip of coastland along which the greater body of the population live and sound their drums of India and Africa. One flanking ocean - with its subdued, perennial roar against sea-wall and sea defences - is the Atlantic, the other is green and tall, unlit by the surf of electricity, on rainforested wave upon wave of windblown savannahs running into Brazil and Venezuela.

From the dominant "coastlander" point of view everything beyond the urban coastal belt, where the majority (roughly 90%) of the Guyanese population (765,000) lives, is the 'hinterland', predominantly associated with gold and logging concessions, indigenous communities and nature reserves, far away and often difficult to access. Since colonial times the vision of this hinterland has been ambiguous: on the one hand a romanticizing picture of a prosperous, beautiful and untouched El Dorado, on the other a frightening one of a "wild", inhospitable, dangerous land, full of cannibals (Raleigh, 1997). Many of these colonial impressions have persisted in the perceptions of 'coastlanders'. Thus, the interior has come to be seen as unpenetrated wilderness -

analogous to the conflicting late eighteenth and nineteenth century depictions of indigenous Yukon lands between Alaska and British Columbia as once “empty spaces” and now “pristine landscapes” (Cruikshank 2005: 213). This “hinterland” is marked by contrasting pictures of, on the one hand, hardship, strangeness and unpredictability, and on the other, adventure, opportunity, natural riches and beauty¹³.

As Riley (2003: 143) notes, the Rupununi, the most southern region of the country, has interestingly come to be perceived as “the interior *par excellence*”, influenced to no small extent by the descriptions of early travellers and scientists, like Waterton (1879), Hilhouse (1978 [1825]), Schomburgk (2010 [1847/48]), Brett (1868), Appun (1871), Barrington Brown (2010 [1876]) and Im Thurn (1967 [1883]) who enthusiastically remarked on the beauty and remoteness of the Rupununi savannahs. The people living in this southern part of the country are consequently viewed as more authentic and real, with the Waiwai in the most distant forested “*deep South*” at the far end of the scale¹⁴. This perception compares to the Arawak and Carib Indians, often perceived as more acculturated, who live in closer proximity to the coast and whose life-worlds have been severely affected by long-term mining and logging activities. Similarly, the less accessible forested regions of the north, where other Kapon and Pemon groups (Akawaio, Arekuna and Patamona) live, have been looked at for centuries through the lens of resource exploitation.

The prevailing idea of the untouched El Dorado has benefitted the Rupununi’s image and its tourism industry. This region, albeit largely savannah, is the most popular tourist destination. Tourism, although still small-scale, contributes to roughly 10% of the GDP of the country, and the government, elected in May 2015, seeks to make “Guyana – ‘South America Undiscovered’, the destination of choice”¹⁵. The focus on the Rupununi region has also contributed to creating a kind of Amerindian *par excellence*. On many occasions, it is the indigenous people of this area, particularly the Makushi, who come to display what they present as their traditional way of life to outsiders, at heritage celebrations and events in the capital, reinforcing

¹³ Terry Roopnaraine in his thesis (1996) on miners from the coast working in gold and diamond mines around the Makushi-Patamona community Monkey Mountain, highlights this conflicting perception of ‘coastlanders’ about the interior of their country.

¹⁴ See also G. Mentore (2005), Alemán (2009), Schuler Zea (2009) and L. Mentore (2011) on Wai Wai identity and space in national perception.

¹⁵ In: http://www.guyana-tourism.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=frontpage&Itemid=1.

the notion of a common Amerindian identity¹⁶.

While the Rupununi and its inhabitants are, from a Guyanese perspective, remote from the country's centre of power, they are not at all far from the Brazilian border and Roraima's capital Boa Vista (120 km from Lethem on paved roads), which has grown over the past 40 years into a city the size of Georgetown. The dichotomy described above, between north and south, coast and interior, works in the Brazilian state of Roraima rather in the form of periphery and centre. The centre is formed by the white urban sprawl of Boa Vista while the periphery around it corresponds to the indigenous interior: the remoter, the "less acculturated/civilized" and more "real/naked/wild", as the Yanomami and Ye'kuana are perceived. The Makushi and Wapishana population, on the other hand, who live in close proximity to Boa Vista and who have long established contacts to the white settlers, are generally regarded as "not being Indians anymore [já não são mais índio]" and having "lost their culture [perderam a cultura]". Highlighting this, Farage (1997) mentions that like Coudreau, the ethnographer Koch-Grünberg, on passing through Wapishana territory in the first decade of the 20th century, remarked that there was nothing interesting to find among the people that would be worth collecting.

Through a line of connections

It is significant that the road is not merely from Lethem to Georgetown, but rather a continuation of the road between Manaus and Boa Vista, linking Brazil to the Atlantic Ocean on the Guyanese coast. It is thus a geopolitical route, an international link through the Amazon and from the very beginning, its significance to the outside and potential consequences for the local population were evident. "The road from Roraima State", as Forte and Benjamin (1993) have termed it, connoting the interest on the Brazilian side, has been the focus of much debate (Forte, 1990; MacDonald, 2014). MacDonald (2014: 160-61) writes, "this dusty red road is a material record of the historical circumstances which accompanied European incursion into the region, and its presence across the Rupununi acts as a reminder to the Makushi and

¹⁶ Thus, whenever there is a visit of national interest, for instance Prince Harry's trip to the Caribbean in December 2016, it is to the Rupununi the VIP's would be taken. More precisely to Surama, a Makushi village featuring in chapter 4, which is well-equipped, including a professional cultural group (see this chapter), to receive their guests. Furthermore, Surama has the exotic feature of being situated in the rainforest, but near the savannahs with distinctly different biodiversity.

Wapishana”. From its beginnings, the road can be seen as a symbol of ‘foreign’ influence, first in the form of a cattle trail and the unfolding beef industry, which led to the occupation of Amerindian lands by white settlers (Farage, 2003). Later, the road was enlarged into an all-weather laterite road, which meant growing land pressure through incoming ‘coastlanders’ and Brazilian miners, as well as the heightened impact from national politics via the centre of power in Georgetown.

According to Zozo, a retiree of the Guyana Defence Force, vehicles came through to the Rupununi in 1972, when Coronel Oric Pilgrim and his military companions drove through shortly after the Uprising in 1969, which marked the end of a period dominated by white settlers and the cattle industry. A road programme was planned under the socialist Burnham government. However, as Gordon from the Makushi village Surama recalled in a conversation one afternoon in August 2014, it was not used for travel from the coast for the following years - “it was just luck and chance, so nobody risk coming”.

In 1989/90 the Brazilian Grupo Paranapanema, a mining and engineering company that was at that time excavating gold along the northwest Barama River in Guyana, accepted the contract to convert the route between Lethem and Linden into an all-weather laterite surface road (see Forte, 1990a; Forte and Benjamin, 1993). As in the case of the Pakaraima road constructions carried out by Guyana’s former largest mining company Omai (which commenced at the time I was doing my fieldwork at Tipuru), here too it is clear that mining activities and road construction are closely interlinked. The same Paranapanema Company had previously come under public scrutiny in Brazil for their mining operations since the 1980s on demarcated lands of the Waimiri-Atoari¹⁷.

The condition of the Linden-Lethem road is rough and unpredictable, maintenance is constantly necessary and most of the year limited to 4x4 jeeps and trucks – which has impeded its significance as an international trade route so far. Whereas the initial construction by Paranapanema took place without the prior consultation of the indigenous population that would be affected by it, specifically the North Rupununi Makushi communities, there have been a variety of feasibility studies

¹⁷ <http://bd.trabalhoindigenista.org.br/documento/cap%C3%ADtulo-ind%C3%ADgena-do-relat%C3%B3rio-final-da-comiss%C3%A3o-nacional-da-verdade>; see also, <http://pib.socioambiental.org/pt/povo/waimiri-atroari/701>.

done since, mainly funded by the European Union and the World Bank¹⁸.



Figure 1. On the road, south of the Essequibo River crossing and before reaching the savannah.

The current plan to upgrade and pave the earth road to Linden to make it a viable road corridor, linking the Brazilian Amazon basin to the Guyanese sea shore permanently, is part of an initiative called IIRSA (Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America). IIRSA is responsible for infrastructural and economic large-scale projects throughout South America, mainly financed by the Brazilian bank BNDES, and is also going to fund a hydroelectric dam and a deep-water harbour on Guyana's coast, seen as key components of the national development process in Guyana, as well as the continental development.

¹⁸ In 1995, the first Environmental and Social Impact Assessment study (ESIA) was conducted, which included an Indigenous People Development Plan (IPDP), "based on World Bank policies" (Report: Appendix I, page 2). Since then, there have been several re-assessments of the ESIA and the feasibility study, completed until 2012, "with outputs including the Feasibility Study, Preliminary Designs, Indigenous People Plan, Environmental and Social Studies and an Environmental and Social Management Plan" (Appendix I – page 3). Recently, and in light of the plans to asphalt the road, the Inter-American Development Bank has put out a report on "potential environmental and social impacts on ecosystem services and biodiversity".

The e'ma kure'nan

For the Makushi people of the Rupununi region the *ema kure'nan* – the ‘big road’ - evokes notions of a point in time when forms of travel changed - many would say, “before we used to walk”, referring to the past, “now we go to and fro in one day”, referring to the present. The often-drawn association of time with paths and roads is eminent also here, and as Keller (2009: 156) writes, “By walking on a road one senses the passage of time physically. Not only linear, but multiple, interwoven cycles.” The *ema kure'nan* makes people reflect on the past, future and present.

The current road vaguely redraws the former “cattle trail”; before this trail, transportation between north and south was predominantly by canoe along the Essequibo and its tributaries. Changes in movement were also necessary due to the transition from riverine settlements to more road-centred communities. The old cattle trail followed a route along several important ranches, where animals and workers would rest on their way. Gordon observed how the road construction by the Brazilian company Paranapanema in 1989/90 shortened the usual trajectory:

The original trail to Lethem was along the mountains close to Good Hope [ranch], that is Brazil-Guyana border and then head back. Now it's through 'til the crossing. Around there was 26 miles, Paranapanema dropped it to 12 miles (Gordon, 2014).

A good time back, when Gordon's wife Jill was pregnant with their third child, they decided to accompany Jill's brother, together with their two young daughters, Abilene and Josephina, on his way back to the village of Pium, south of Lethem, on the Brazilian side of the border. Her brother had moved there a while ago and had invited them to stay with him. They left without knowing exactly when they would return, took their donkey, rations and a few belongings, two parrots of Jill's mother and several puppies and commenced the journey.

The whole house went except for the old garbage what left back. Cause we had to start afresh when we came back. There was no way we could have gone back to the place, for some reason. Like we didn't want to go back to the same spot.



Figure 2. Drawing by Laurindo John, 2017.

Gordon's final comment highlights a practice that is common when leaving one's village for an undefined period. Houses, farms and other objects are considered to contain vitality from their *iteesa* or 'owner' who attends to them daily. If these are abandoned for a long while, they are considered to rot and decay of mourning, and so returning to the same house spot would not be viable (see also Butt Colson 1985 for the Akawaio). Inhabited and frequently visited places, like houses and farms, become attached and accustomed to the people that care for them. "Remember, our place does cry!", Clemence, a villager from Surama, explained to me.

The place is crying for you; it's wondering when you'll go back there. The place rot, if you don't come back, if you don't tell what is going on. You not going back to check it, make it lively, just like a fruit.

So if one intends to come back and wants to prevent the place from rotting in the meantime, one needs to talk to it, tell it that it should await one's return:

"I going to leave this side, don't take worries!"

"My home, I am leaving you but I will be back, so and so time."

Upon arriving at a new house or farm site it is also important to talk:

"Is right here we coming, don't give me no sickness, I come to stay."

As we will learn in chapter 5, moving between places must be negotiated and communicated, not only with one's family and the beings that inhabit it, but also with the place itself¹⁹.

After roughly 10 days, the young family and their animals reached their destination, resting on several occasions on the way. "We were just walking, wherever night catch us that is where we plan to sleep". Their route along the cattle trail went past several ranches that the family stopped at to sleep or eat, and as we can see in the following excerpt from Gordon's narration of the journey, it was frequently interrupted by other spontaneous activities, unexpected situations and new experiences:

And next day we head on to Good Hope, where the first time Jill see these dolphins, or *botos* [Portuguese term for the pink sweet water dolphin]. We were trying to reach Mertezere but night caught us so we spend the night in the savannah on the road. No hammocks nothing, just spread up, and the children. Tie the donkey and one of our baggage. The dogs hunt *tatu* [armadillo] at night so my brother-in-law was behind the dogs to collect the *tatu*. He roasted it the night. From there we head straight to Pirara, we reach Pirara maybe this hour [afternoon time]. So we spend like a whole day at Pirara cause Jill was giving up. I went and fish, eat fish, catch fish. So we had a lot of fish, she was *kampuing* [smoke-roasting over a fire] them. Zeta's uncle was there, they were working on the ranch then. I think he father bring farine for us, we gave him Lokunani [a type of fish]. And the next afternoon we rest off.

¹⁹ Not only places cry, also things, when they have been used for a while by someone and are then discarded. During the time I spent in Tipuru, a young mother lent me a thin, wooden stick from a three-forked tree branch that is used to whisk Kari, particularly sweet Kari, by rubbing it between the hands. The stick is colloquially called "sweet/lazy girl". Sweet, because it is usually used for sweet Kari; lazy, because it is quicker and easier than straining (however, the lumpy result is not regarded as highly as the clean, thinly strained Kari). I had used the stick on various occasions and when I gave it back to the woman, she said it would not be good for her to take it back, as "she [the sweet girl] will be crying" for me. "She 'costume you. Take she with you!"

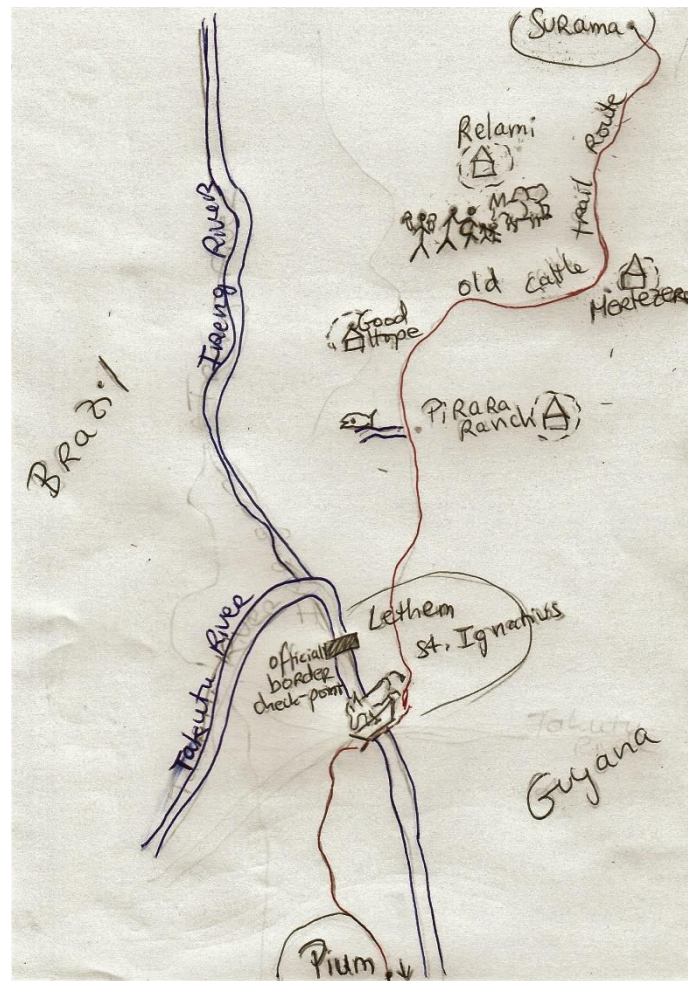


Figure 3. Map of the journey from Surama to Pium (my drawing).

Places like Relami, Good Hope, Pirara and Mertzere have lost their significance today and are no longer part of the spatial orientation along the trajectory to Lethem. A journey consisting of several days' foot march, visiting and stopping overnight until reaching the Brazilian border is a thing of the past, now that there are daily minibus services and private vehicle transportation. Shorter travel times and the faster speed of life, a consequence of the construction of the drivable all-weather laterite road, also meant a transformation to a more mechanized life-world, as Gordon observed. When they returned to their village after "one year of exile", the Paranapanema Company had begun their work:

When we gone to Brazil and come back to see this huge compound with so many equipment, it was like: What? We didn't know this was going to happen! We heard about it but we didn't really know it would have happened at that time. They were already around Annai, maybe at the checkpoint area. We get a drop right into here with the company. They just shoved the bushes, there was no laterite on this side yet. But they were shoving laterites already there going. They were working fast, they like had a 1000 piece of equipment. Yeah, they were like moving dirt like nothing, man! I

never worked with them. But a lot of villagers were employed with them. (Gordon, 2014)

The heavy machinery, removing rocks and digging red earth out of the surrounding foothills, encountered unexpected obstacles. Celia, whose husband Phelps was working for some time for the company, clearing the route with axe and cutlass, recalls that a baby was heard crying underneath a dug-out pit a tractor was excavating near the village of Rupertee.

Right where Nadia house there [Rupertee Village] it got a mountain. That is “more'kîto”. That is Insikiran children them. So now, when the same road di building up, them Brazilian people, they came [stretched] and they reaping the mountain, you see how they left it? And they reaping it now [stretched]. You hear something like child crying and whilst they digging it, it stopped. He [a worker operating the excavator] come down and he look around - no child. He gone up back, same thing happens - no child. He come down, he dig, dig, dig, dig - nothing. And he say "I wonder is what? Let me go by the lady", that is Auntie Suzette.

The cries continued and people told the workers to stop digging.

This mountain get children, lot of children. You does see chicken come out. You don't know which side the chicken come out and when you run them down, they just melt, they tell he. Yeah. So now they stopped digging right there because is not one time it happened to them, all the time they there down there crying at the bottom. Yeah, that is why they stopped digging up.

A shaman was procured, who in his “séance”, found out that the baby living in that hill was the child of Insikiran, the *trickster*, who demanded that the machinery be relocated to avoid a disastrous revenge.

One of the piaiman shake the bush and they see it. "Y'all must tell them, let them stop digging we house. Because they coming more close to us that is why we do a sign", they tell the piaiman. "If they not stopping, all the people go dead in Annai!", they say like that. That is why they stop them. That is not lie, that is true! That is what the piaiman say, ne. (Celia, 2014)

There is an interesting analogy here of a clash between the landscape transforming machines and the great landscape transformer, Insikiran, who in mythic times was responsible for the formation of mountains, riverbeds and rocks²⁰. Symbolically, the encounter between Insikiran's baby and the excavator represents a correlation of forces in dispute, different traditions and interests acting in the narrative, each side led by its own image: the machine versus ‘the creator of the Makushi world’. Even with the final construction of the road, the Makushi world was

²⁰ See also chapter 4 and Santos-Granero (1998) on clashes between modern road constructions and Yashena perception and cosmology.

traversed but not overrun: the road had to move with and give way to the place's mythscapes. Maybe it is possible to draw from this passage the way in which local people deal with an external power: if change is inevitable, it is still subject to cosmological resignification.

"Development is coming!" many people comment when comparing former times with post road construction and related events. There are two interesting aspects to this expression: first, the movement involved, i.e. the idea that "development" literally *comes in*, and that this motion is associated not with walking or going by boat, that it does not come from the bush or the river, but through the road or even air, by motorized transportation, vehicles or even planes. Second, "development" is seen as a process happening now or still to occur, not, however, completed. It is in any case something inevitable. Thus, there is the perception that "development" literally comes *through* the road, in the form of a multitude of people, industrialized goods, technologies, businesses, new forms of opportunities and connectivity. Most people are very aware of and have strong opinions about what life is like in Georgetown, as well as urban centres of Brazil, which is contained in notions about "development", from pollution, waste, resource extraction, high dependency on money, to disorder, violence and strange, distant human relations. While many view the tarring of the road positively because it brings tourists, income, job opportunities, economic integration and better access to health and education facilities, they fear for their safety due to an increase in violence, disease, exploitation and loss of control over their lands. There is also the idea that "development" and "culture" are two opposing things that do not go together, and that "development" is harmful to people's "traditional way of life". With "development", people will not want to live as they used to. The inevitability felt about the coming of "development" has something culturally apocalyptic about it - the inevitability of the loss of "culture". However, the fact that this time has not fully arrived gives space and opportunity to 'prepare' oneself. This is why in village and intra-community discussions concerning the tarring of the road, one suggestion was particularly applauded, which underlines the necessity to actively get involved in the change that will come, and not be passively changed by it: "don't let the road use us, let *us* use the road"²¹. Like the powerful redirecting cries

²¹ Slogan by Sydney Allicock, 2010. A renowned leader from Surama, he was then president of the Makushi North Rupununi Development Board (NRDDB) and since the new government elections in

of the Insikiran's baby, the road has become a symbol of negotiating change and influences from outside. The slogan "let *us* use the road" implies the act of appropriating and re-signifying the road through one's own means, imagination and power.

Shifters and switchers, encounters along the road

A person's imagination is shaped by their experiences *en route* and through the presence of the road identities become interwoven. It is shared not only by those who happen to live beside it, but also by those that just pass through: the 'native' or "buck man"²², the 'Creole' - "Coolie" and "Blackman" - the "Chinee", "Putagee", the "Brazu" and the "White". The red-earthen line is thus a "lived relational and cultural space" (Passes 2009: 135) where "diverse social and cultural groups move, meet and interact" (Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012: 461). Therefore,

roads emerge as interfaces, negotiating but also creating and consolidating boundaries and borders while at the same time transcending the limitations of prior relations in their promise of new found connectivity (Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012: 461).

Like the Pa'ikwené, who live on both sides of the border of French Guiana and Brazil, the Makushi practise "code-switching" between Makushi, Creole, English and Portuguese, depending on the situation, necessity and popularity, and what is attributed to each language that people most identify themselves with at this moment. Here, the road is an interesting location as it carries with it the characteristics of a multilingual and ethnically diverse border-space. Very similar to the Pa'ikwené, (cf. Passes 2009: 141-143) the Creole (Creole English) and "creoleness" is associated with "coolness", colloquiality, with modernity and Guyanese-ness (Georgetown 'lifestyles' and popular culture - Caribbean beats and reggae - and famous dances, like "backball"); in contrast, standard English (similar to French for the Pa'ikwené) is the official language taught at schools and used in the spheres of education, institution, church, politics and tourism; Makushi, in comparison, is indigenous, "home" and traditional. While for the Pa'ikwené, Brazil and Portuguese have, apart from associations with religious worship and authority, mainly negative connotations, connected to a history of oppression, many Guyanese Makushi identify themselves

2015 has held the position of Vice President and Minister of Indigenous Peoples Affairs (former Amerindian Affairs).

²² There are many colloquial ethnic nicknames and although these are very often pejorative, they are commonly used by the Guyanese.

with Brazil in a positive way. Although narratives of violence exist (see Ch. 4), Portuguese is spoken by many with pride and great familiarity, and associated, like Creole, with a certain “coolness”, associated with *forró* dance, beautiful women, *garimpeiro* – goldminer – life and *cachaça*, the Brazilian-style rum.

Going up or Coming down

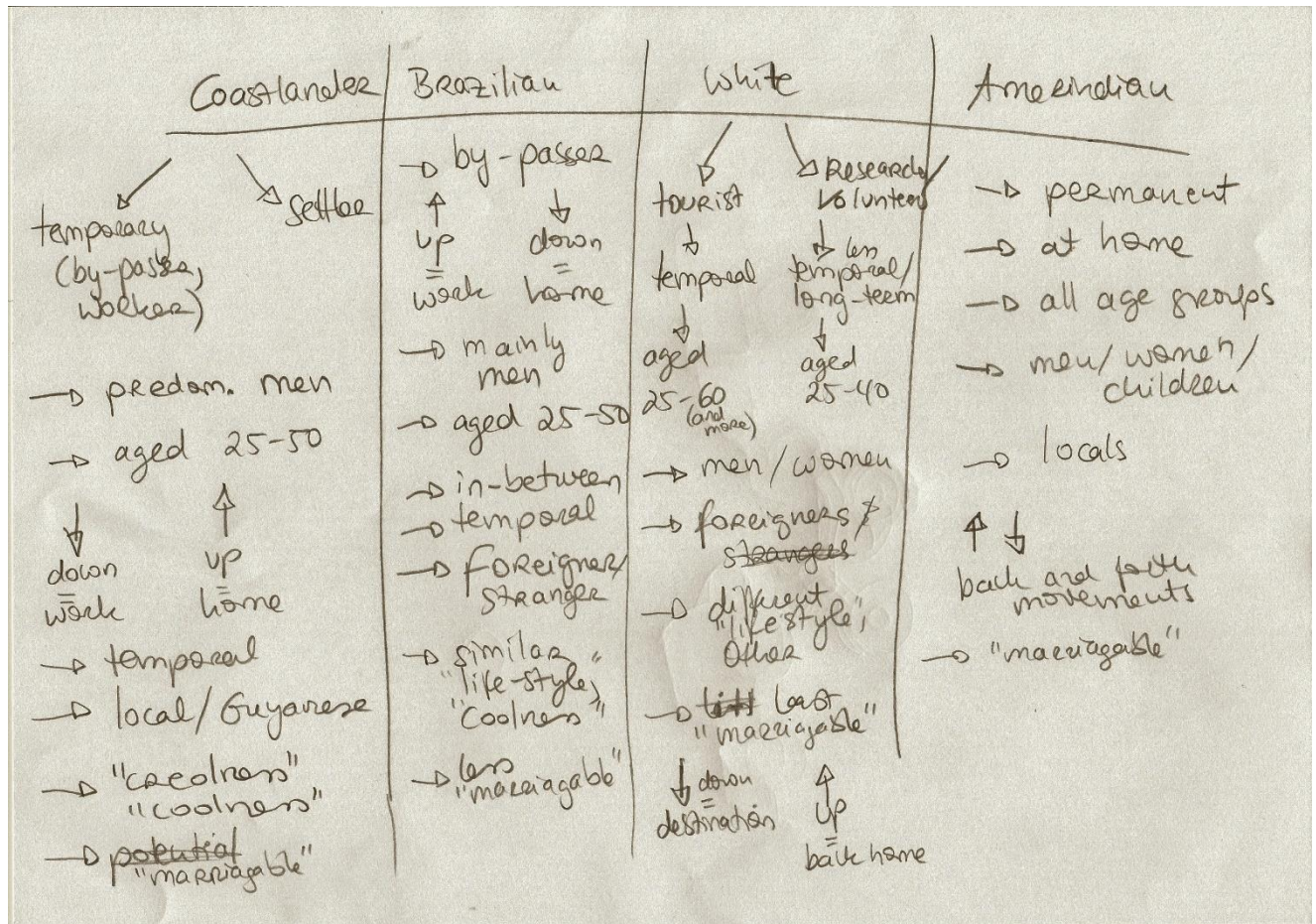


Figure 4. The sketches, maps and tables in this chapter were drawn during the writing process. They helped to visualise the trajectory of the journeys and people's movements.

For sure, the 'highway' enhanced the flow of people coming and going, and it is seen as responsible for fundamental changes in the region. It marks a spatial dimension of a growing connection between coast and interior:

Before the road construction, it was so difficult for the coastlanders to come this way, in those times. Today is not. They hassling to get out of the city. So they come for the interior, mostly Lethem area. From 1990 there was a big flock of people coming this side and they still coming, still coming, more is coming. From 1990 to maybe early 2002-2003 there was just trucks passing. Then, only recent times, maybe 2005 onwards there are buses coming, flying though. So not too long ago. (Gordon, 2014)

The perception that people are “hassling to get out of the city” is interesting, as it highlights Gordon’s negative view of life in the city with people struggling to get by, living in cramped conditions and eager to leave. Of all those people travelling up and down the Linden-Lethem road, the ‘coastlanders’ are most likely to settle permanently in interior areas, like Rupununi’s capital Lethem. Thus, the coastlanders’ movements are viewed with more concern than those of temporary visitors and by-passers – white tourists, volunteers and researchers, and even Brazilian miners heading North.

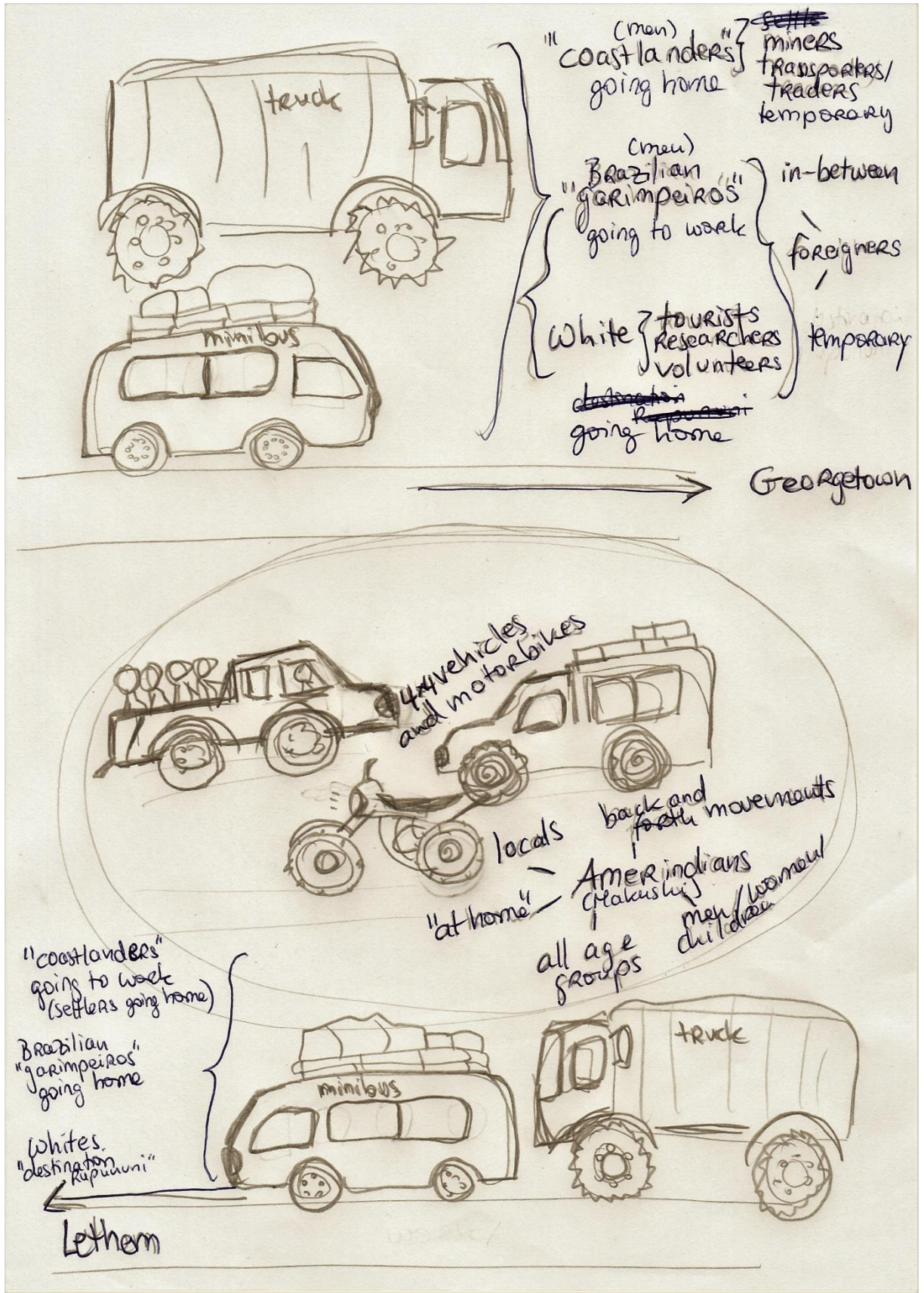


Figure 5. Incoming and outgoing travellers to the interior and the respected vehicles they use. My drawing, 2017.

Much of the transit of ‘coastlanders’ is either in form of truck drivers and their “porters” (see page 19) carrying goods to Lethem or further into mining areas in the Pakaraima and Marudi Mountains, miners who want to chance their luck there, or returnees whose home is in the Rupununi. Their destination is mainly Lethem, a town which has grown substantially over the past few years, or some of the mixed Amerindian villages, like Moco Moco and Aranaputa. Some of those coming down from Georgetown, usually in the minibuses, are Amerindians and Brazilians, returning home for good or temporarily, as well as, white tourists, mainly from wealthy English-speaking countries, who usually come by plane.

Furthermore, government officials, public servants like police officers and construction workers from the coast visit the area temporarily or live there for several months or years, depending on their contracts, often starting relationships with the local women. Many of the men decide to stay in the interior or move back to the coast, often together with their Amerindian partner. Some couples build a house in the girl’s village but also spend time at the house of the man on the coast or in Lethem and eventually move there. Vehicles play an important role in these relations, as men who own one are very popular with women. It is interesting to note that the Amerindian Act used to forbid women to bring non-Amerindian men into the village to live with them, whereas men were allowed to bring women from outside. The reason behind this, Jill once told me, was that men were considered more powerful, wanting to dominate the women’s “cultural ways” and would not easily adapt to the values and rules in the village. Women from outside were believed to be more willing to learn the local language and adapt to the culture. However, the regulations were eradicated from the Act and now both partners are allowed to ask for residency.

Coming from the border/Lethem, most minibuses are full of Brazilian *garimpeiros* (miners), usually men between 25 and 50 travelling alone or in groups. Sometimes there are women, who work as prostitutes in the mines, in bars, restaurants or as nannies - people who form part of a more recent trend of workers to cater for the increasing Brazilian population temporarily or permanently settled in Georgetown. For *garimpeiros*, the road with its many police checkpoints is much more complicated than the crossing of the official Guyanese border, where goldmining is an accepted reason for entry and corrupt procedures less fruitful. As the Brazilian *garimpeiros* are associated with gold and diamonds, the road police frequently search their bags and check their documents, which may be accompanied by acts of bribery. These issues,

together with language barriers and a certain fear of the ‘black man’, influence their perceptions of Guyana, as a ‘wild’, lawless, badly functioning country where one has to learn every “trick-of-the-trade” to get by, and indeed many miners engage in smuggling gold to avoid paying tax and revenues. Thus, most Brazilian miners work for Brazilian bosses and the well-established Brazilian infrastructure allows the *garimpeiros* to speak the language they know and stay among fellow countrymen they trust. However, in spite of the existence of a certain ‘parallel world’, they still work alongside Guyanese and share a life style that has more in common with them than, for instance, with foreign tourists²³.

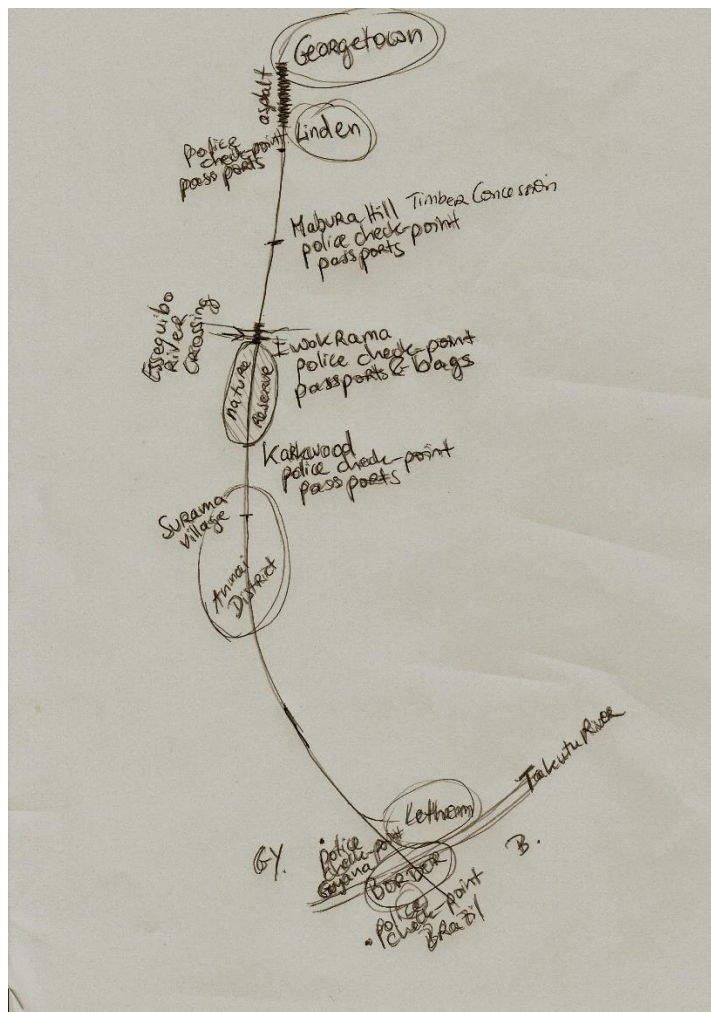


Figure 6. Passport check-points along the Linden-Lethem Road. Sometimes the amount of stops and check-point locations change.

²³ Among the Brazilian miners, over the past few years, a much wealthier type of *garimpeiro* has emerged, an owner of heavy machinery and concessions, with employees doing the manual labour. This *garimpeiro* would be dressed like a business man with sunglasses and suitcase, he would cross the border in a private or personally hired vehicle, take the light-weight aircraft from Lethem and return as clean as he went, untouched by the red tropical earth. These miners might have a residence in Georgetown from where they manage their workers and take care of the gold-exchange business, thus, only occasionally spend time in the “bush”.

Life on the road

The road inevitably leaves its mark. The state in which these people arrive after more than twelve hours of bumpy ride is very different from when they set off, clothes now stained with sweat, savannah dust and thick mud. The condition of the road is challenging and never quite predictable, especially in the rainy season. Road conditions have become characteristic for the place as a whole and analogous – in a positive sense – to ‘adventure’, ‘wildness’, where anything can happen, ‘the real thing’ and ‘freedom’, where things work according to social networks rather than imposed ‘top down rules’. Especially the young generation identifies with the ‘coolness’ of their vehicles, those that can handle the road, i.e. cross country motorbikes, military Bedford trucks and impressive 4x4s²⁴. On the other hand, the road is seen as a symbol of neglect by the government and is a recurrent reason for criticism of the government, because (in comparison to Brazil), roads are in need of repair and vehicles are constantly breaking down.

As the earth roads are rough and unpredictable, whole parts of the trail and wooden bridges sometimes become washed away, journeys are frequently interrupted by hours of ‘waiting’ after breaking down or getting stuck. Drivers would never travel alone and would always be accompanied at least by a “porter” (an actual profession) to help with monitoring and clearing obstacles from the way. Travellers rely on each other for help; the drivers on their passengers to assist by fetching tools, chopping tree trunks, pulling ropes and giving advice. A driver must be experienced; he must know the terrain, especially in the rainy season. He should be a good 'bush' mechanic and needs to make sure his vehicle reaches its destination, even under the most adverse conditions. One example being the “Toka boys”, a group of young Makushi retailers, who travel on their Bedford truck between the Pakaraima communities, and who managed to fix their burst radiator by manually twisting and squeezing the metal grid to prevent water from dripping out.

As Whitehead (2002: 4) noted, “communication between villages involves walking the asanda” (paths in Patamona), thus it is by word-to-mouth through drivers

²⁴ In comparison to vehicles on the coast, where people invest particularly in appearance (colour, interior decoration and music equipment), vehicles that travel to the interior need to have features connected to their durability and performance on off-road tracks, i.e. they must be high off the ground (including the headlights), have a strong engine and tyres with a good grip, and they must be easy to repair.

and passengers that important information is quickly spread. This circulation of rumours and gossip is locally termed ‘Caimbé news’, referring to the sandpaper tree (in Portuguese, *Caimbé*), the most common landmark dotting the savannah, connoting the great distance and speed at which this kind of news travels. The latest updates on road conditions and who got into trouble might sound like this:

“Water HIGH, high, high, I’m telling you!”

“Road BAD! You can’t cross! Trevor them went yesterday. There’s minibus stuck tiiiiil so, windows GONE, buddy!”

Apart from Caimbé news, information in the form of newspapers, such as Starbroek and Kaeteur News and Guyana Times is spread “from town” via those travellers returning. These newspapers might circulate for years, moving through various hands and are read regardless of their topicality; they are used for toilet paper or wall decoration, school exercise books or as insulation for air-leaking vehicle tires. Occasionally, the papers contain news about the government’s plans concerning the road and these will be discussed locally.

Apart from ‘physical news’ and mouth-to-mouth information, increasingly, people have access to the internet, and Facebook has become a hotspot for debates about the current state of the road, where many locals or by-passers post smartphone pictures of their travels, accompanied by statements such as this one from a young Makushi girl: “This is our high way now!!! And the government saying its good!! I tell u!! Bull shit!!! to them.”

These are some of my photos and ones re-shared from online newspaper articles that circulated at the time among my Guyanese friends on Facebook:





Figure 7. Photos from top to bottom, left to right: a punctured wheel being fixed by the driver of a minibuss from Aranaputa village, transporting passengers from Lethem back to their villages in the North Rupununi home (my photo); photo collage, in Kaieteur News Online²⁵ depicting the bad state of the road with a broken bridge, where minibusses coming from Georgetown get stuck, requiring the usual communal effort to pull the vehicles out (photos like these circulated on facebook to inform

about and criticise the current state of the road); the inside of a minibuss, usually these busses are fully loaded with little leg space (my photo); a hole in the tire of an ATV motorbike being fixed with a gum (my photo); school children from the South Pakaraimas going home after a sports event in the South Rupununi. Many of the people in the fully loaded Bedford trucks travel for hours standing up, which can be more comfortable than sitting during the bouncing ride (my photo).

²⁵ <http://www.kaieteurnews.com/2014/02/04/linden-to-lethem-road-upgrade-only-feasible-from-linden-to-mabura/>

Roopnaraine (1996: 54-55) notes on travels in the Guyanese interior, “there is little or no chronological regularity” to the journeys, which frequently turn into “lengthy travelling experiences”. Villagers recall and retell their experiences numerous times on arriving back in the village. Amusing experiences during the journey become running gags for long after returning from the trip. Those that have shared the same experience create strong bonds as a result, at least temporarily.

Thus, while “roads and road travel were framed as unwelcome Western intrusions into non-Western worlds” (Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012: 461), I would suggest that for the Makushi, important relationships are created and expanded through the road. Furthermore, “roads *gather* events” (Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012: 463, my highlight). Like places that *gather* stories (chapter 3), roads also *gather* experiences, adventures, as well as mishaps, and “generate meaningful interactions (and separations) in the diverse rhythms and differential speeds” (Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012: 463). The road is where stories and jokes are created and told, gossip and information spread, where life is happening, where many want to be, especially the young people. This is why people like driving vehicles and simply being on the road. It gives them a chance to be not only “somewhere else” but also in the midst of all these occurrences.

The travelling experience

In this part, Abilene, a young woman from Surama in her 20’s, the daughter of Jill and Gordon, narrates her experience of a journey to Georgetown, together with a large group of people with whom she has both consanguineal and affinal relations. It was a special occasion, where villagers were invited to attend an award ceremony for a respected village leader in the capital. Abilene went along with the ‘culture group’, a group of young women and men, who have a repertoire of Makushi songs and dances composed and choreographed by themselves. The group, headed by her parents, is frequently invited to perform at official occasions. Both the truck and driver (from the village) were funded through the event and so many people used the opportunity and gathered at the collection point at the football ground before sunrise. As becomes evident from the narrative, the journey, as is often the case, did not go very smoothly, but became itself an essential aspect of the overall experience.

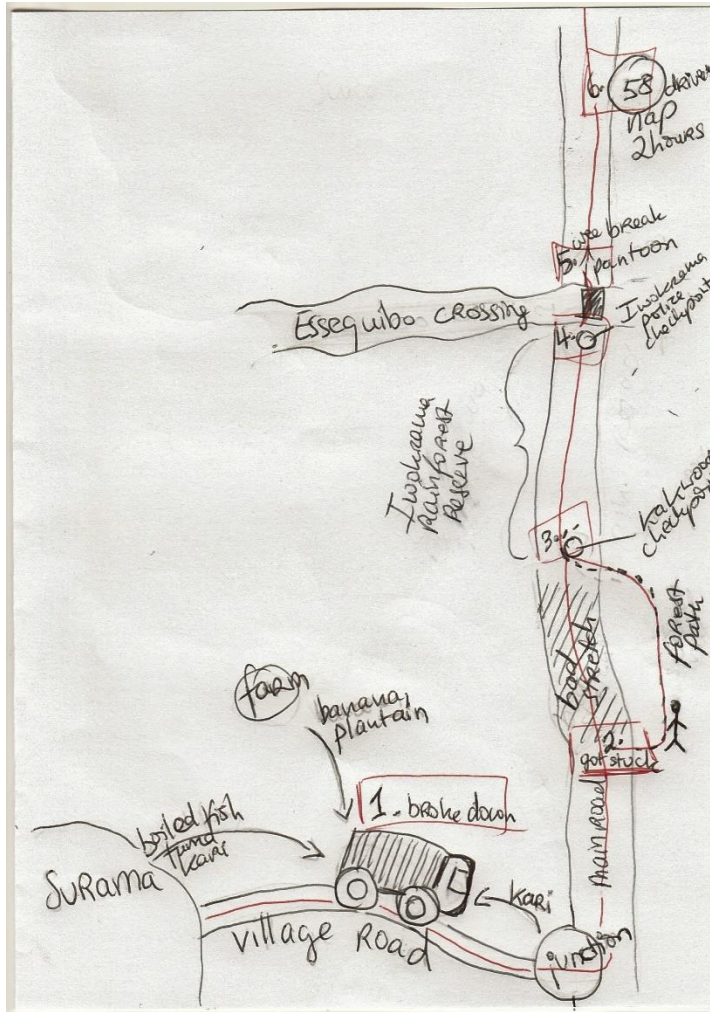


Figure 8. Map of the journey from Surama to junction 58 (my drawing).

We got on the Bedford again, our Bedford, “Surama truck” we call it. We were all in there, all the culture group members, villagers who were interested to attend the award because it was the very first time someone from Surama win an award, turn a celebrity as such, I must say, and we all was so excited again! Travelling with the culture group, you could tell anybody, never been bored, never get bored. We always have jokers, even if you try to be serious they would make you laugh at some point. The first thing that happened to us on the journey, well we got stuck, the truck broke down like some two miles from here, I must say, from the main village on the road. We were there for like how many hours, six? We all got frustrated, we should have just walked back and take breakfast because I remember that morning mommy was getting some big, nice fish (stress). And she left all in her tuma, but everybody was so excited, no one wants to be left behind. No one want to come back and see the truck just start up and go. It was such a big episode (laughing). Some people went off to the junction to get Kari, daddy go back to get some boiled fish, tuma and Kari. We were all there. We cut banana bush, I remember, the leaves and putting it on the highway, lying there for hours, let the boys fix this truck. It was some...not bearing...gear flakes and the flakes went off and the boys had to lose everything. And then this idea came into my mind, or someone push it into me I can't remember, I had banana and plantain and stuff like that. So we all went, I can't remember, it was a bunch of us went into my farm and gather all this stuff. When we reach back, we started roasting banana (laughing), plantain, all these things on the road, which was funny (laughing).

At some point we got onto the truck back on again and we went off. The road was very, very much in a bad stage at the time, during that travelling period. I remember going, I don't know how far it was, but somewhere between Surama and Iwokrama, there were big (stress)...well, this very, very terrible piece of road. It was like about two miles with terrible road. Everyone had to get off the Bedford, everyone (stress)! And we took a side track along the rain forest. We were walking in slush and, again, it was fun. The culture group again, all challenges, we keep going, we never give up. We gone, we reach in front of the Bedford truck. We were waiting there for hours lying again on another red mud (stress, laughing). Road, lying, and everybody was hungry, I think some went off with vehicles to Iwokrama, came back with water for us. Eventually the truck came through by the help of an excavator. Came through and we got on, reach at the crossing and...in Guyana, you have to reach the last crossing at six at least. But it was a very big event, some calls were made and the pantoon was made available for the culture group to cross at a very late hour that night. We then again went off, it was joke all the time...we stopping the drivers cause someone want to urinate and when the truck stop it's not that one person who want to urinate...time to load and it would take another hour because that one ain't finish (laughing). It was such fun (laughing) but then the driver was getting upset with us because he said "we have to reach at a certain point, and you guys are getting on" what he said "like Yawari²⁶!" (laughing) Getting on the truck is not easy, on and off, on and off. I remember space (stress) again in the truck! We put some of the seating through the middle so some was on buckets, and we want to sleep, some of us was in the middle in the passage of the truck, sleeping, and it rain, rain, rain, never forget this journey, rain! And I remember, someone was blaming Auntie for peeing (laughing), she was so asleep, but it was the rain. That was so much fun on that trip (laughing)! We all slept at 58 (a restaurant and gas station, 58 miles from Georgetown) for some two hours, I think, I'm not too sure but the driver had to take a nap. And we're off!

The breakdown of the truck almost immediately after the excitement of leaving the village and getting stuck again shortly afterwards in the deep mud of the main road, highlights, anecdotally, the unpredictability of the course of journeys people embark on and the many moments of waiting that need to be taken into account. Abilene's narrative emphasises that while journeys have a particular destination, they are not simply about 'getting there'. The frequent stagnations of movement are filled with significant communal activities and convivial exchange between travellers. Thus, while the driver and a few helpers are busy sorting out the vehicle, the rest of the passengers are occupied with turning it into a "fun" experience, like organizing food and drink for a spontaneous communal meal at the side of the road, walking ahead to a place where they can rest and freshen up in the creeks on the way. These spontaneous activities become a real "communion of experience (Ingold 2000: 222). They are always accompanied by much story-telling, and the journey in

²⁶ The *yaware*, in Makushi, Yawari in Creole Guyanese, or opossum, is a nocturnal mouse-like rodent. He is commonly referred to in jokes and traditional narratives, as behaving foolishly and impatiently, but at the same time, as being enduring and not giving up easily. He is also a great mythological reference for the neighbouring Wai Wai, who imitate the Yawari's characteristics of stealing food during the night, in song and dance performances (Schuler Zea 2009: 217).

often overcrowded vehicles is characterized by an enormous amount of laughter and slapstick humour, in which the circumstances (heavy rain fall and weeing) are creatively made into jokes. Overing (2004: 71) rightly states that “indigenous understandings of the social” are “framed through a rich philosophy of folly” and it is suggested here that the laughter and joking that is connected with the journey is necessary to “oil the wheels of a convivial existence”. The many ‘detours’ of movement show, as Schuler-Zea (2009: 211) pointed out for the Waiwai, that “it is the process and not the goal that appears with an accentuated meaning”.

Whereas some scholars propose that driving is a solitary experience that lacks authentic and sensory engagement with one's surroundings (Bean et al, 2008), travelling by vehicle in the Rupununi, as we have seen, is a collective emotional and physical experience. In this way, a sense of place and community is created. The heat, the bumps, the dust, the rain and the mud on one's feet when trying to push the wheels out of the swamp, is a shared experience, and “a way of *appropriating* portions of the earth” (Basso 1996: 83). In a similar vein, Young (2001: 53) states that for the Anangu aborigines “travelling in a car, even if the whole day, seems to be an emotionally and physically satisfying contact with the earth.”. Thus, one can say that the vehicle and its maintenance also symbolize an investment in community well-being.

Another striking feature of Abilene's journey is the worry the passengers expressed of going off to have something to eat when the truck had broken down, afraid they would miss the moment the truck was ready to go. Although repairs and bad road and weather conditions might last for hours, everyone knows that it is necessary to stick together, remain in the vehicle or close to it, and be attentive at all times for the moment the driver turns on the engine and the wheels start to roll. It seems to be an implicit rule that vehicles do not wait; they are almost like trains, but without a specific time schedule. Everyone knows that leaving the spot and not going with the flow can mean one arrives back “too late”, which is considered not an injustice on the part of the driver and the other passengers, but rather the fault of the one who did not return at the “right” moment.



Figure 9. Drawing by Laurindo John, 2017.

A journey back home

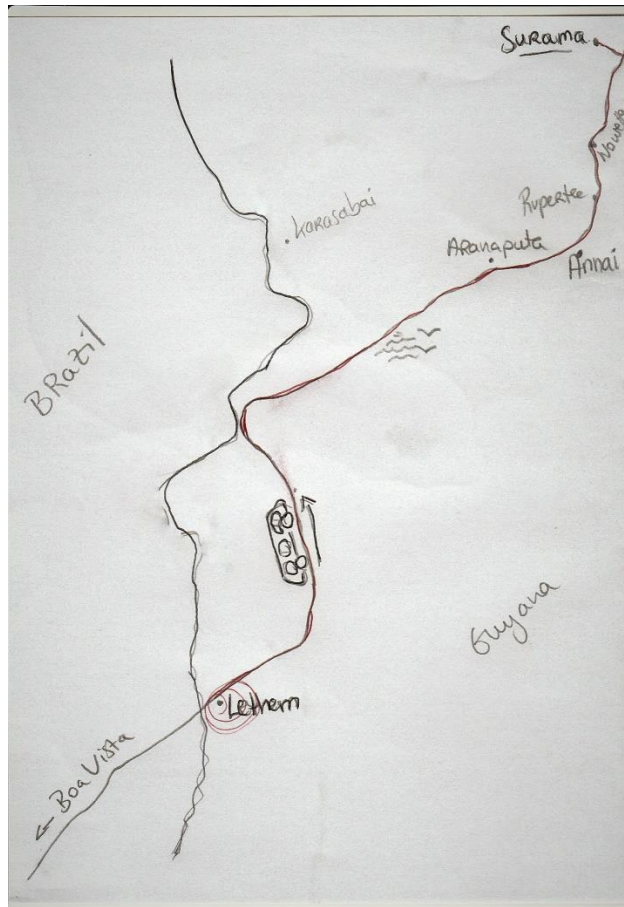


Figure 10. Celia's journey back home.

The following narrative by Celia, a middle-aged woman and resident of Surama village (whom we will meet again in Chapter 4), about her “odyssey” from Lethem back home to her village, highlights the great extent to which one is subjected to the will of the driver. While delays are caused by unexpected difficulties with the vehicle and road, as mentioned above, many moments of waiting are also caused by the driver himself, by the people he wants to socialize with and the drinks that make him drunk. Thus, as we will see, the driver’s endless “circling around”, something passengers have to expect and simply adhere to, is almost part of ‘a day out’. Knowing this, when travelling to Lethem, a border town of 3000 inhabitants, many women dress up in their ‘city-look’ with Jeans, white T-shirts and baseball-caps, put on make-up, spend time at relatives, maybe overnight, go to the hospital, visit their children at school, celebrate, buy material and eat Indian ‘roti’. Passengers, like Celia, who just want to get to their destination quickly and have no money to spend will

simply have to put up with these delays. Celia rarely uses paid transport and it becomes evident in the following narration based on her account that she had to be cunning and inventive to reach her destination.

Celia woke up early, around 5 o'clock. Marvella was washing clothes in a big plastic basin in the cemented open yard. She wrung out one bed sheet after another and hung them up in the still cool air. Soon the sun would get hot and Celia went over in her head which of the drivers she knew might possibly be in Lethem today – Bertwin with *rauta*, on a hire to do shopping for villagers; Radcliff with the Surama truck, maybe taking a load of logs to sell. Marvella went inside and came out with a plate of float bake, scrambled eggs and instant coffee with powdered milk and plenty of sugar. Celia was hungry but she was so preoccupied with how to get home that she was hardly able to eat. Marvella managed to persuade her to rest a little bit on the veranda; from here, she would at least be able to look over the little wall down onto the main street towards Tapatinga Bridge and see if a minibus was passing in the direction of Georgetown. After a few minutes she left anyway. "I gone!"²⁷ Without looking back, Celia grabbed her belongings and walked along one of the side streets.

Suddenly a taxi man pulled up next to her. The young man told her to jump in, so she did. "Where you from?" "Come from Surama", Celia replied wondering whether the man would charge her. "Oh, you is North?" "Yeah", she replied. The short lift to Keira's house cost her "1000 dollar". Celia felt confused, still she paid, although it meant that she would not have enough to pay the minibus fare home. Keira, a former villager, was at home. Keira had seen Byron, the driver from Aranaputa, around and called him to arrange for Celia to meet them at Angela's snack place. The white minibus was already waiting, many of the passengers had been sitting, probably for a while, but the driver was missing. A man in sunglasses, hanging over a plastic table in front of a sea of green and brown beer bottles, was eating, in obvious delirium, from a bag of passock²⁸. Tall Byron came smirking from the bar with another round, holding four bottles in each hand. "Oh, oh, oh, is you, auntie²⁹?", recognizing Celia from driving the Culture Group to Culture Shows. "How much you go charge me?", she asked him promptly. "3,000, boy!", he replied, not sounding at all sorry and equally quick, and hammered the eight bottles on the table that several empty ones fell like bowling pins. Celia tried to barter, as she knew him from all kinds of places, telling him that she only had 2,000 dollars left, which was the truth. "2,000-dollar-days

²⁷ Very common Guyanese Creole expression, derived from the Makushi *uttî sîrîrî*, meaning "I am going", or as mentioned "I gone", typically used to say goodbye before leaving.

²⁸ Sundried cow's meat and farine (coarse cassava flour) pounded together in a huge pestle and mortar. The word for this 'cowboy snack' typical of the region is derived from the Portuguese word *paçoca*. In most parts of Brazil, however, *paçoca* is sweet and made with grinded peanuts, sugar and condensed milk.

²⁹ In Guyanese Creole, every older woman is referred to as "auntie", irrespective of kinship or family status (whether someone is considered an "older woman" and "auntie" also depends on the perspective, thus, someone of my age would be referred to as auntie by children.) Similarly, men are referred to as "uncle". In the Makushi language this is a bit more complex. In accordance with a cross-cousin-marriage system, the brother of the mother and the sister of the father are potential father-and mother-in-laws and are referred to as *u'mî* and *wanî*. The sister of the mother (*maama*), however, is called, *maamai*, and the brother of the father (*paapa*), *paapai*. The practice of calling everyone who is of certain age "uncle" and "auntie" is common in Creole English throughout Guyana, which has a personalising and familiarising effect. In Makushi, addressing someone depends on someone's relationship to the other person and who the person is talking to, i.e. an older sister would call her younger sister *manon*, towards others, however, she would call her *uyaakon*. In general, 'on the road', a younger woman would be addressed as *manon*, for instance, which can also mean 'my daughter', she might also be called *eru*, daughter-in-law. Older people are referred to as *ko'ko* and *amooko*, granny and grandpa.

finish!“ he countered mercilessly and turned his attention to the beers. Celia looked around, contemplating what to do next. Luckily, she met a girl from Annai she knew, “one of the Brown”. She simply approached her “„Manon, you ain't got no 1,000 dollar?“ “Yes I get” the young woman whispered, and pulled out a 1,000-dollar note. Her man must be someone who “work 'pon gold” Celia thought to herself and returned to Angela’s snack bar in great relief.

Byron told her right away to jump in the bus and for almost the rest of the day they went spinning round and around in Lethem, up and down. Every time the driver joked, “Mary goes round again“, and they laughed. By then it was only she and a pregnant girl with a young child who endured the hot air inside the vehicle, the other passengers had gone shopping in the meantime and waited for the bus to return. Celia was not sure if Byron was looking for someone and soon she dropped to sleep against the steamed-up window of the bus. “Oh my! Sun hot, hot, hot, and she belly de big”, was the last thing she thought.

“Aunty, le' we come out and drink!” The same girl woke her up a few minutes later. “I not get money, girl“, Celia replied. Still, she followed the girl with the big belly and the child out of the bus; she could remember them vaguely from the neighbouring village Annai. Sweet drinks quickly turned into rounds of beers when Celia admitted, with a touch of self-pity that today was her birthday. They drank and gaffed - the girl had come from Boa Vista that morning, having got a lift with a nice Brazilian man. Celia repeated that she, on the contrary, had been particularly unlucky in getting transportation and that this was the reason why she was “still around”. In a much better mood for the rest of the journey, Celia made sure that she told everyone around her that it was her birthday. Maybe this was her luck in the end. She even missed Lethem now, when they finally “flew out”.

Celia’s odyssey continued late into the night - due to several stops on the way before arriving at Annai, a motorbike ride with a girl from her village, waiting at an acquaintance’s home in Rupertee - until Bertwin passed with Surama’s community vehicle *rauta* that finally took her back home.

However, I would like to stop here to consider some aspects of the nature and function of travelling in the Rupununi that the narrative highlights. Celia’s experience shows how solidarity might be lacking where expected and appear where least expected. Byron, for example, who, although known to Celia, refuses to reduce his fare for her, contrasts with the unanticipated help of the girl who happens to cross Celia’s path and lends her money. Another young girl, who Celia vaguely recognized from a neighbouring village, joins Celia to celebrate her birthday and invites her for some drinks – luckily, as Celia had spent all her money - and with whom she has conversations and fun on the journey. Help from people (i.e. in a town like Lethem, from less familiar or unfamiliar passengers, drivers or passers-by) in the form of accommodation, food, drinks and money - however important, is not something guaranteed a priori. One can be lucky but other times help might not be forthcoming – travels depend on what happens along the way. As became clear in Gordon’s narrative

about a walk with his family from his native village to the Brazilian border, on some days the savannah itself provided food and shelter.

Having said that, Celia's story makes evident that without a network of relationships such a trip would be difficult. Thus, knowing how to use one's repertoire of familiar people, whether relatives or non-family members, and making new contacts, making oneself known to strangers who might be helpful on the way, is an essential part of the practical aspects of travel (more on this in chapter 5). This dependency on social networks for one's mobility requires adaptability on the part of the traveller. While the challenge depends to a high degree on luck and on people one encounters, it also depends on one's endurance and flexibility to let events flow. It must be noted that Celia, married and in her forties, has neither the potential advantages a young unmarried woman has of getting a free ride with a male driver, like the pregnant girl with the Brazilian, nor the possible compassion an old woman might receive. She has no close family in Lethem, nor does she show much familiarity with the place, which explains, in part, the challenges she faced. On several occasions, her 'defencelessness' is abused, for instance by the taxi driver who overcharges her, maybe also because he knew she would not complain, maybe due to differences in power relations and gender. However, while she somehow accepts these events as 'failures' they do not discourage her from using other kinds of 'techniques' to get what she wants, which involves knowing how to network and exchange messages and social gossip, making oneself familiar with people and telling them about oneself – she is aware that these shared histories will become useful at some point.

Vehicles and Drivers

While driving, in most cases, is a domain of men, women cover the same distances as passengers - whether it is the female football team going for a game in a neighbouring village or mothers going for a check-up at the hospital or a school meeting. Thus, as we have seen above, movements by motorized transport are not gender-specific and the distance covered by women and men in groups and by vehicle is comparable (see Gregor, 1985 on differences between male and female movements). In fact, it can be said that travelling by vehicle to go to social events, for instance, reinforces a kind of 'commensality' (Santos-Granero 2000: 283) between men and women, kinsfolk and non-relatives, which in other forms of movements,

such as hunting and fishing, are not common.

Motor vehicles are few and usually community-owned and function to serve the community's needs. Private vehicles almost inevitably become objects for hire requests – thus, every person who drives usually also works as a driver. The drivers are known to everyone and the vehicles come to be identified with the communities they belong to and thus can be seen as embodying, metonymically, a temporary extension of 'shared identity' (cf. Young 2001: 39-44).

The ownership of a vehicle arouses much envy; they are expensive, usually bought through full-amount cash-in-hand deals, which indicates that someone or a community had "nough cash" to make the purchase. Buying a vehicle, therefore, is associated with employment characterized by high earnings, such as gold-mining, logging and other temporary activities, rather than with the monthly salaries of public workers, and if a village has numerous communal and privately-owned vehicles, it is a sign of its wealth.

Besides the enhanced mobility, possessing a vehicle is also a source of income through hires. Larissa, a 'real Guyanese mixture' of diverse ethnic backgrounds, including Makushi, who married into a Makushi family from the Rupununi savannahs, is probably the only female driver in the region who also does hires. She explained to me that she faced a lot of jealousy from fellow female villagers the moment she sat behind the steering wheel. It is interesting how she sees cars and driving as analogous with "making it in life".

Envy! Well envy is everywhere especially in my village, some people seen others making it in life and they envy them not know how hard they have worked for what they have so they try to turn people against them and don't want them to go further.

Official prices for vehicle hires are regulated by the tourism board, which are high for locals. Currently, a hire from Surama to the nearby village Annai, a roughly 40 minute ride, costs GY\$ 20,000 (almost US\$100), to the town of Lethem, about 4 hours ride, GY\$ 50,000 (roughly US\$ 250). However, these prices vary substantially, depending on the reason for hiring and other circumstances, and most vehicle owners accept 'payments' in the form of farm produce, work or other kinds of services. As Larissa points out:

If it's for health, I charge less or if they help with fuel. Many times, there are situations where we would help out family and friends. I would bring some things for someone from Georgetown or Lethem and even bring people to and from Lethem. We try to keep a good relationship with everyone it's not always about money, someday I

might be in a situation and will need help and maybe that person that I help will be there for me.



Figure 11. A young Makushi woman on the road, driving, in Havaianas, the popular Honda cross-country motorbike. Drawing by Laurindo John, 2017.

The driver must fulfil diverse social obligations and favours, ranging from delivering messages to the transportation of people and even dead bodies, and if he fails to do so, becomes the target of gossip and complaint. These expectations are especially evident regarding one's close kin, as well as current leaders, whose mobility is particularly important for the negotiation of community matters between different locations and political spheres.

There also seems to be an implicit rule about paying for one's passage through making the trip pleasant and worthwhile for the driver – i.e. by socializing with the driver over rounds of beer and rum³⁰. As a form of reciprocity, journeys are characterised by frequent stops for copious drinking, for which the driver usually does not pay. Even if the original purpose of the journey is taking several villagers to Lethem to sell off logs, it is always also connected with other kinds of activities, such as celebrating a day out, turning a rather boring functional journey into a whole day of fun. Those who remained in the village usually know that the vehicle will reach home late that day, as the return journey will most probably be extended and interrupted. Making the driver merry will ensure that the journey lasts long and is fun - in the end, it is the driver who decides when it is time to leave. When villagers want to get back

³⁰ This is the case with male drivers and predominantly male passengers.

fast, they will avoid giving alcohol to the driver. The many married women on board, especially when they travel with children, do not join the men in their drinking. They might be annoyed but they still wait patiently, together with older people, in the vehicle in the hot sun, or gather under trees in the shade, until the men decide to leave. In all this ‘surrender’ to male interests, women tend to develop a strong solidarity among each other, do their own thing and create their own pleasurable experience of the journey.

It is interesting to note that due to the high costs of motorized transport and the dependency on a few drivers for their favours, those that possess neither vehicle nor close relations with people who do, frequently complain they cannot join an event because they “don’t get transpi”, or “don’t get money”. What becomes evident in these remarks, more than the literal meaning of being rendered immobile, is an underlying resentment towards the injustice and inequality perceived in being left out of important convivial events. Having said that, if necessary or urgent, people would find a way, by bike, walking or by bargaining for a ride to get to their destination, as we have seen in Celia’s narrative.

Crossings

This part looks at experiences of crossing the border and perceptions of Amerindian and national identities, reflected in impressions from their journeys on “that side”. Many movements connect Guyana and Brazil: exchange of people, goods, business contracts and information, as well as radio and television programmes that reach into villagers’ homes³¹. The contact with the other side of the border is evident and rather than long-term work migration, this section is concerned with impressions of temporal journeys.

The following account is again one given by Abilene, who together with a group of about 40 people from three different North Rupununi villages (Surama, Rupertee and Annai) was invited to join and perform (as “culture groups”) at an important celebration in Brazil, the demarcation of the indigenous territory Raposa Serra do Sol (Comemoração da demarcação da Raposa Serra do Sol).

³¹ In the early 1940s, Iris Myers argued that “notwithstanding [the] interplay [between Amerindian, Brazilian and British settlers] the predominant factor modifying the Makushi world view has been the Brazilian one” (1944, repr. 1993: 17). In 1989, a publication by the Amerindian Research Unit commented on the increasing extent of Brazilian cultural influence in Guyanese Amerindian communities, that was visible in “[the importation of] manufactured foods – farine pans to sugar and salt; music and dance; in the esteem in which ability to speak Portuguese was held and [in the steady migration of young people] to look for salaried jobs across the Takutu” (1989: 50).

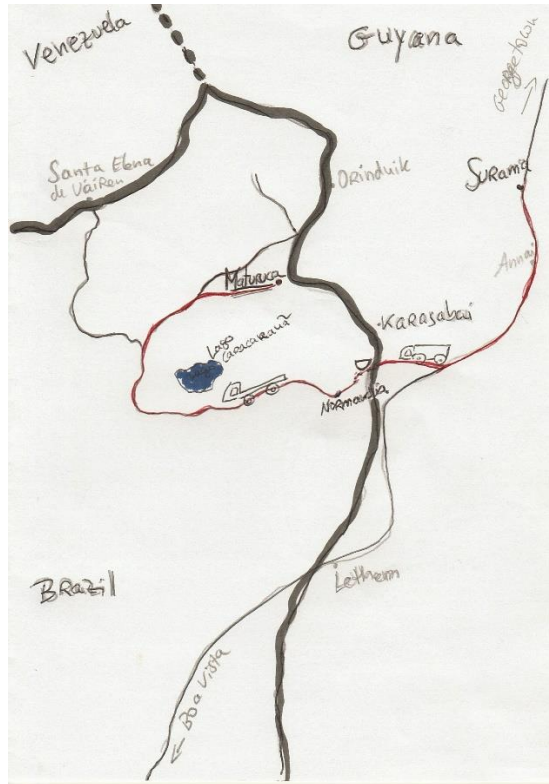


Figure 12. Map of the journey to Maturuca (my drawing).

Because none of the group members had passports, they decided to cross early in the morning at one of the crossings at Karasabai to the small Brazilian town of Normandia, where a truck from the Brazilian organizers was supposed to pick them up. Along with the description of the journey to a large Makushi village (Maturuca) in the mountains no one had ever been to or knew the way to, some perceptions and expectations in relation to Brazil are interesting to analyse here, particularly those related to vehicles and road conditions.



Figure 13. The journey to the crossing by truck.

We all left on the same Bedford truck, reached at Normandia crossing in the rain, it was raining, remember? We waited for someone to cross us, we negotiated with the

check-point people there. Eventually we started crossing in a boat, it was like three in a boat. We went across now just to know no one was across there waiting on us. Which was a bit disappointing [laughs].



Figure 14. Crossing the Ireng River by boat.

Met at a ranch, they were so welcoming. We stayed there for like three to four hours, I remember slinging hammocks all over the place, not even hammocks...on the floor [smiling]. And...it was a nice experience, especially for the culture group, they had laughter, they had complaints but no one was complaining, everybody was into it, making it noisy and joyful, what must I say. They made every stressful part into a joke. That's how we are as Amerindians, we never make nothing stress out. And I had my little baby with me, it was Konaiki, which was very tiring but the culture members really helped me there. At some point in the evening, maybe about four I would say, a truck, a very...farmish truck [laughing]...we were all expecting a Intraserve bus [laughing] so to speak [laughing], something with seats. We were all expecting this big [stress] ride because it was Brazil with all these fancy roads and cars and so we were gonna go and enjoy everything and leave our Bedford behind, with all these bumpy roads. When the truck, the transportation do arrive we were all "ha?" [making

a surprised and shocked expression], we all wanted to turn back. It was a festival there, it was something remarkable for the Amerindians over there because that was the first time ever the Brazilian president could have visit them to a territory like that. So it was something huge for them over there and we were invited as a team, happy to be with them. We got onto the...I would say “water melon truck” [laughing]...really it was a “garbage truck” [laughing], they use it to throw garbage in it [looking embarrassed, somehow disgusted]. We all was there like sardines, we were all fighting for the most comfortable spots, someone leg was touching you or “common, I need space here!” [imitating an angry voice]. I was up like this with my baby for hours (holding up her baby, straight), “ok, I need to stretch” [stretching out her legs] that person would stretch his or her leg up to him or her to make space, so when I catch cramp...



Figure 15. On the crowded water melon truck to Maturuca.

At some point we stop again, I can't remember but we stop at a big lake or ranch for very long [at Largo Caracaraná], we went swimming and stuff like that. The problem is, you getting out the truck but getting in was the problem because you want back the same comfortable places, you couldn't get it. And then...the journey wasn't ending, serious! We thought it was just right there, and their big guides or the people who went and meet us with the truck would always say like “we're not too far, not too far!” Not too far, and then we came off the gooder road, or what to say, onto the rocky road back again. And we were going and going [stretched] and the rain started now and everybody was so soaking wet [stressed]. We had like about two or three umbrellas, if it was so much. I remember toshao Mike putting his hand over me to safe my baby [laughing]. And someone else was helping me out, some of the culture group members. There and then, I regretted going, but...it was so much pain with so much laughter, I must say, going there. In the middle of nowhere because I don't know where across there. We got frustrated I must say. Then we went climbing hills, it was like “where are we going?” One time it was like this [showing with both hands a very steep inclination] and then it was like this, back [showing a steep inclination back down]. It was like up “ok, all the men come off now to help get this truck up”, when we look down, miles, miles, miles down you see another car coming. “Where the hell are we right now?” We couldn't see anything because it was pitch dark. We don't know how high the mountain was, anything. We come for hours and hours, we

eventually reach to this big flat land on top of everything, I would say. We went in there, they had a lot of people already on site. A lot of transportation had got up there before us.

For the Guyanese Makushi, Brazil, as a major exporter of mass-produced goods and industrial machinery, is the symbol of a thriving economy. Connected to this perception are the excellent asphalt roads commencing at the border in Bonfim and the air-conditioned cars people usually drive in Boa Vista. Those that have been there recognize it as a striking difference to their home. Bearing this in mind, the group expected a transportation that would match their picture of Brazil, for instance a vehicle like the Brazilian-owned orange *Intraserve* bus that used to carry passengers through the Linden-Lethem Road. They expected to leave the rough, wild roads, and old-fashioned uncomfortable vehicles behind and experience something more ‘sophisticated’ and “civilized”, with proper seats; not hours of waiting on the other side of the crossing but a certain ‘reliability’ and ‘punctuality’, a contrasting picture to that of Guyana.

Their surprise and disappointment about the “water melon truck” and the conditions of the journey might have also been due to expectations of a more generous welcome by the Brazilian ‘brothers and sisters’. Some time back, Makushi representatives of the indigenous organization CIR in Roraima had visited some of the North Rupununi communities. There had been enormous excitement: “the Brazilian leaders are coming”, “the Brazilian Amerindians are coming”, and the Guyanese leaders involved made a major effort to welcome them. The fact that Abilene interpreted the vehicle as a “garbage truck” mirrors her perception of how the Brazilians viewed them, as if used to bad conditions and not in need of better comfort. Interestingly, the coordinator of the CIR, at that time a Makushi from Maturuca, remarked to me during a shuttle in the Rupununi, “people here are still free”, referring to the lesser degree of encroachment he felt people had suffered here onto their lands and lives, and continued commenting on the road: “we will help them to improve this road”. This almost contradictory suggestion (an improved road will most probably increase encroachment) reflects his view of coming from a ‘superior’ place that can influence changes upon people here. Furthermore, it might have reminded Abilene of a similar mishap that occurred when the culture group was invited to perform at an event in Bonfim, where they had to sleep on the floor. While the group had expected to be accommodated in a hotel (at least these are the usual arrangements when they

perform in Georgetown), the organizers, in contrast, had expected they would bring hammocks (maybe they thought Amerindians always travel with their hammocks). In the end, the group slept on the hard ground, which was the reason for much anger and many complaints and the story circulated widely on their return to the village.

The bad road conditions up the mountains to Maturuca were something not previously experienced when travelling in Brazil. Guyanese Makushi rarely travel to far away Amerindian villages across the border, they prefer to visit urban areas, where they can find jobs items they need to purchase and where relatives have moved to. Additionally, being from a flat savannah region, most participants were not used to travelling along rough mountain roads; many were afraid of the height, and not knowing the drivers and not being able to communicate with them due to the language barrier made them feel less secure. Amerindian territories are less of a destination and there is little knowledge about the daily realities in the communities and about cultural and political events connected to them. This is also noticeable in the fact that many did not actually know what the big ceremony was about, even though it was an incredibly important event for the Brazilian Makushi.

What aroused particular anxiety at the festival was the amount of police and military personnel that suddenly appeared on the day of the visit of the then president of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. The fear was due to the fact that the group had not come through Brazil's official border, but crossed at an unofficial spot over the Ireng River into Brazil, without passports. When several helicopters arrived with the president, a long corridor of chanters and dancers was formed to welcome his arrival; the Guyanese Makushi among the crowd, anxious due to their 'illegality', avoided speaking English so as not to be discovered. This very tense atmosphere reached its peak with Lula's speech. Instead of listening to the president's full ceremonial talk, which was the highlight for most people present, particularly the Brazilian Makushi, to commemorate their legal demarcation of territory, the Guyanese hid in their hammocks until the President had left, out of fear the police would ask them for their passports. This almost anecdotal situation highlights several issues which are important for the indigenous population who live along the border.

Border issues

In general, the Guyanese Amerindian population living in the area around the official Brazilian border think that entering through the checkpoints, with the intention of travelling beyond the frontier town Bonfim (i.e. to Boa Vista for instance), requires passports. Brazil, however, was a signatory of the Pact of San José de Costa Rica, which acknowledged the right of circulation of Amerindian peoples across international boundaries in 1969. This disposition was ratified by the more recent Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the United Nations (2007) and by the Organization of the American States (2016), which were endorsed by the state-members Brazil, Guyana and Venezuela. These declarations state very clearly that indigenous people, like the Makushi, whose traditional territory extends across national frontiers, have the right to circulate in their own traditional territories and keep their cultural relationships across the borders. However, these diplomatic conventions are far from the realities played out at the frontier: neither is the population aware of this right, nor do the local border officials act accordingly. People going to Brazil for formal meetings and public events, like village toshaos and councillors going to the General Assembly of Indigenous people in Roraima (Assembleia Geral dos Povos Indígenas de Roraima), would generally check in legally, being mistrustful and reluctant to go without the required documents or the backing of an official invitation from the event organizers.

Even those Amerindians who have passports, like Celia (because of her involvement with the culture group), who visited me in Boa Vista, experience certain fears and challenges. When stamping in at the federals, she had difficulties filling out the form, stating the purpose and length of stay, not only because she could not speak Portuguese but also because she was not used to this kind of procedure and what best to answer. Apart from the fear of not having the correct documents, many are nervous about filling out questionnaires informing the police of their stay, as it confines them to specific dates and statements that might possibly change. When visiting their relatives, or looking for temporary work, for instance, people would not be exactly sure of their plans. And as we saw with Gordon and Jill, a visit might turn into several weeks, months or even years. On her way back, Celia either forgot to stamp out or she wanted to avoid the border police and merely passed. This worried her so much that

she was convinced she would never be able to enter Brazil again and that the police were already searching for her³².

As a result of their fear of not possessing the right documents, most Amerindians of the area avoid passing through immigration at Lethem, and instead cross at “unofficial landings”. Makushi people living further away from the official border tend to be less likely to take a boat at these unofficial crossings than those who live along the Ireng and Takutu Rivers, for whom the frontier is a daily reality. These ‘landings’ are used daily by locals, and while on the Guyanese side they are ‘officially’ watched-over by a few individuals, who charge a small fee to help cross people, animals and vehicles by boat or canoe, on the Brazilian side these landings have remained largely incognito or even ignored by the Federals. At the time when Jill and Gordon, their children, the parrot and the donkey eventually reached the border, the Brazilian Federals did not allow them to cross with the donkey. Rather than leaving the donkey behind, they waited until it was dark and crossed with the donkey through the Takutu River at night. Many families prefer to walk several hours to cross the Ireng River to Brazilian towns and communities to buy processed foods and other items for personal use, rather than go to the shops in Monkey Mountain, Kato and PK (Paramakatoi). Although well-stocked, these shops that get deliveries via truck from Lethem and Georgetown are overpriced due to mining. Several landings also exist along the Takutu River, and although citizens of St Ignatius and Lethem use these points daily, they are also aware of illegal activities along these same routes and the potential danger involved. Names of these points of crossing and their routes into the neighbouring country are notorious and infamous for their criminal histories, commonly referred to in daily discourses:

“where a man crossed with marijuana and was shot in the head”

“where people contraband rum, shilling oil and garlic”

“where a young woman carried her dead baby filled with drugs”

The stories that circulate, whether they actually occurred or not, reflect people’s perceptions of the border, their concerns and fears.

³² A lot of Amerindians are afraid of uniformed men, police or military personnel. In the Rupununi, police and military, predominantly Afro-Guyanese, are not necessarily associated with safety but with power and often the abuse of it, corruption, and for those that witnessed the aftermath of the Rupununi Uprising, with violence.

While many Amerindians merely have a Guyanese ID card, others hold ID cards from both (or all three) countries, termed locally as “complete documentation”³³. The latter would have households on both sides of the border, usually one in an urban area in Brazil and another in their native village in Guyana. The advantages of Brazil to the Makushi lie not so much in the differentiated education system in the villages or the public university, as was mentioned, along with welfare and economic opportunities, for the Kari’na population on the border with Suriname and French Guiana (Collomb & Renault-Lescure, 2015). Of interest are mainly state benefits - *bolsa família* (funds for low-income families), *minha casa minha vida* (funds for low-income families to build their own house), old-age pension (*aposentadoria*), 600 Reais (roughly 250 US\$) in comparison to only 10,000 GY\$ (50 US\$)³⁴ - as well as other specialized services like the indigenous health care system Casai, all social services that are being cut under the current neo-liberal regime in Brazil. That mobility creates opportunities seems to be a factor widespread along the northern borders of South America. According to Tritsch et al. (2015: 19-32), many indigenous families that live along the Brazilian-French Guianese border have multi-sited households. Part of the year they spend near urban areas of French Guiana, where French citizenship has the advantages of exclusive public services and benefits as well as good salaries. However, the forest environments on the Brazilian side, to a large extent a national park, are visited many times a year, where people stay in “swidden farm houses” and “hunting camps” (Tritsch et al. 2015: 32). To sum up, the different national financial stimuli and public services on each side have influenced residential and mobility choices of the indigenous population whose territories traditionally expand across the borders.

A journey to Venezuela

One day, when I was sitting with Winford under a mango tree in Tipuru he told me he considered himself “lucky” that he had always kept out of trouble when travelling without documents.

You know I never think of reaching into certain places, I always be frightened because I don't have the full documents to go across into Brazil, or Venezuela or any

³³ Or “documentação completa”, personal conversation with the lawyer of the Socio-environmental Institute (ISA), Ana Paulo Souto Maior, working for the base in Boa Vista.

³⁴ This was calculated during the time of my fieldwork. Today the Brazilian Real has been devalued considerably against the US dollar.

part of the country. But I don't know why I does be so lucky. Yet sometimes, I don't know how, I reach, come back safe, no police, nobody never, never trouble me. I don't know why.

He specifically refers to a journey he embarked on to the border town Santa Elena de Uirán in Venezuela with a friend of his son-in-law in Boa Vista. Winford's daughter Edlyn, who works in a fruit pulp factory near the city of Boa Vista was surprised about her father's luck and courage to travel with "nothing". Although she has the necessary documents, she is afraid of the Venezuelan border.

Daddy? You come in a short time and yet we come before you, we living right here but we never reached to that country as yet. You lucky to go that side without documents'. You have nothing and still you went.

The daily mobility across all the three boundaries is, at least on a micro-level, very significant and accounts for a spread of information about each place (see also Carlin et al. 2015). The presence of Venezuelan popular culture, music, food and language is strong throughout the gold-mining frontier regions of northern Guyana. The Makushi to the south rarely visit Venezuela, their lands do not immediately border with it, and hence Venezuelan influence is less pronounced. Although several people I got to know have Arekuna parents or grandparents from the "area of Mount Roraima" or more specifically from the Venezuelan border town Santa Elena, like Candace and Maceo from Kara Kara, Marcia and Winford from Tipuru, as well as Celia and Phelps from Surama, most people have not visited Venezuela yet. Getting there through Guyana would mean travelling through a distant, rough and mountainous terrain, an unfamiliar area and unknown paths – thus, people would choose the more familiar and accessible route through Brazil and across the official border controls at the Venezuelan frontier.

One day in Boa Vista, Winford decided spontaneously to hop in the car of a friend and take the opportunity to see Venezuela, but it was a tense trip throughout, as they crossed the guarded border without passports. His anxiety was further enhanced by the fact that his acquaintance's intention was to smuggle cheap Venezuelan gasoline back into Brazil. With gasoline roughly 100 times more expensive in Brazil³⁵, reselling it is an extremely lucrative business³⁶. However, it is a risky undertaking and the price one pays when caught by the federal police is high³⁷.

³⁵ http://pt.globalpetrolprices.com/Venezuela/gasoline_prices/

I enter into Santa Elena, I was frightened! They stop our car coming back from Santa Elena because the driver he did not check his tank and it was leaking. You know the man tried to fool them, them police man 'is water leaking, water they smelling', poor me sit down inside, with two cases of beer. I was only waiting for them to say "Where is your document?", I was watching at them, "I wanna know what these people gonna do me?" They released us, we gone down. We went back that same afternoon again, back to Santa Elena. The man, the driver, I mean there's a lot of people that selling gasoline in Santa Elena, and we gone there but the place where he does buy he get no gasoline. So a man come now and say "Man, I have gasoline, wait here". He borrowed his money, 10 Reais, he say he got nothing at home to eat so you meet me, lend me so much. We wait, we wait, we waiting for this man. You know that man fool us too? We have to go back before the gate close. We went [stressed]. Coming back to Sorokaima, the gate closed now, we can't pass! That is worries! That man beg, that was an ex-police, a security then, he beg, he beg, until they open the gate. I said "Thank the lord!" I still there safe, nobody ask me, nobody check me, nobody question me about what I do or where is your documents! The next morning we went back 7 o'clock early in the morning. Everybody rush inside. I feel hungry [stressed] boy! I wait, I stand up by the flagpole, I read what was written: The same [stress] boundary line!

Suddenly, Winford noticed that the border, associated with so many negative, deep-seated emotions of fear of being "illegal", was, in fact, the same familiar boundary that his mother had helped to construct in her 20s, carrying cement blocks all the way up to Santa Elena for the British boundary commission. He was impressed to find that one of these cement blocks still lined the current border.

My mother told me that there were white people in the British days, in the colonial days then, who I believe started the boundary that is now right through Ireng River. There are blocks of concrete with a written word on it, maybe from the beginning but I never went to see or to check what is it really. They did wanted draggers to carry load, to fetch cement, and that is how my mother and her brother join the work. And they went from Karasabai as far as Santa Elena, fetching the load for those white people on their backs, walking on their feet, right through.

Seeing the same cement block that his mother, and others he knew, had carried on their backs, made the place less hostile and strange. And although this boundary was the reason for his anxiety and feeling restricted in his mobility, it suddenly disclosed their shared history, a landmark of memory that his own family had laid there, a connection between here and his home, which comforted him. The risk of getting caught and the discovery of his mother's trajectory, were all part of what made

³⁶ Profits made with the smuggling of gasoline to Colombia nowadays yield as much as drug trafficking, see

http://www.bbc.com/portuguese/noticias/2015/01/150126_venezuela_contrabando_gasolina_cj

³⁷ The smuggling of Venezuelan gasoline into Boa Vista has risen to such an extent that it recently became the topic of a short film, *Fronteira em Combustão* (2016), directed by Thiago Briglia, with the intention to deter people from this illegal activity, which also has become a problem among the indigenous population.

this journey a true ‘travel experience’ he was happy to recount on many occasions afterwards. We shall come back to the theme Winford raises in his travel adventure in chapter 5, in order to discuss the important aspect of creating familiarity in foreign places through the work of memory.

This chapter has particularly focused on travelling by vehicle, the mode of movement that nowadays dominates drivable roads. Usually a communal activity, it often turns into a day out involving a lot of fun as well as drinking. Because of the unpredictability of events along the road, it is marked by moments of waiting that are filled with significant experiences, as was highlighted in Abilene’s narrative where the course of the journey proves an end in itself. Celia’s odyssey of getting home showed the great dependence on one’s social networks, particularly when moving between the city and village. The fear of being caught at the border without documentation was further highlighted in Winford’ adventure at the Venezuelan border. These travelogues and the knowledge that is being created during the journeys, crossings and encounters are characterized by an attitude open to chance, contingency and randomness. Roads or trips to the city, to another village or across the border are never mundane and isolated experiences but are full of meaningful surprises and create long-lasting friendships and memories - experiences on the move that constitute forms of Makushi sociality.

Chapter 2

“Coming Down” and Moving Together:

Narratives of Settlement Histories

“What is a man on a road?”
“Time.”

Maya riddle, in Keller (2012: 133)

The many movements of humans and other beings that together make up the history of a settlement is what this chapter is about. It will focus specifically on the Makushi community *Tifuru*, or Tipuru. Relying on personal narratives and oral history, this chapter outlines how people have come to move and live together. What particularly interests me here is that all these narratives make a clear statement about movement.

In the *Individual and Society in Guiana*, Rivière (1984), departing from the established ethnography for the Guianas, makes a significant analysis of the duration and criteria of the settlement patterns in the area. Following the findings of Arvelo-Jimenez (1971), Overing (1975) and Thomas (1982), the author highlights the importance of the political history of the village. He argues, after comparing ethnographic and historical accounts from the whole Guiana region, that reasons for changes in settlement duration, location and composition cannot merely be reduced to ecological or economic factors, i.e. mainly shortage of meat or the quest for new agricultural lands, as many studies had stated previously. Other factors have to be taken into account that play an important role, such as personal, political, ritual and social reasons (Rivière 1984: 50). The history of a village, its foundation and size, and people’s mobility from one settlement to the next can be influenced by political institutions, social organization, or by hostilities, bad leadership and outbreaks of diseases (Rivière 1984: 52).

This is true for Makushi communities, where the attraction of church and school, as well as issues of expansion, leadership, personal motives and ecological reasons play a role. What is remarkable is the fact that movements have formed these

villages. Unlike other places once inhabited but then abandoned and never returned to, which is the case with various previous settlements – the old 19th century Pirara maybe being the most famous example (Rivière, 1995)³⁸ – commonly these villages have been crossed, moved to, visited and abandoned on and off by a variety of people and for different purposes throughout past times.

While new settlements might come into existence, old ones fall into disuse. I witnessed an example of the latter during my stay at Tipuru. The satellite village Kara Kara, hosting nowadays only one family, was left deserted, after Candace’s last daughter and family had moved to Brazil for personal reasons, and Candace and her husband felt too old to manage on their own. They moved to relatives in the town of Lethem; however, most of the chickens remained and Candace mentioned a few times that she would go back to collect them and harvest her crops. On a return visit, the couple might stay weeks or months, or even stay for good, and soon a son might decide to join them and build a new house, and the settlement starts afresh.

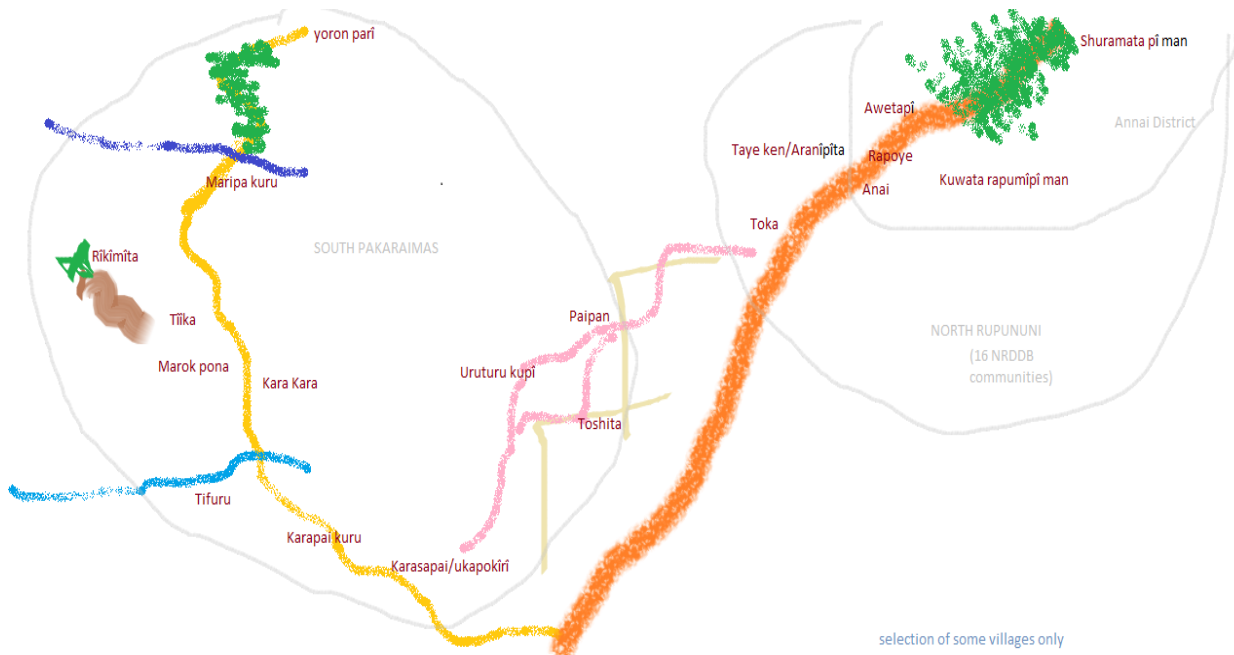


Figure 16. A selection of current village names of the South Pakaraimas and North Rupununi, spelled in Makushi. The toponyms of Makushi villages, which have been corrupted into their English versions on the map, are strongly connected to their foundation narratives. Their names open up to past ethnic conflicts, settlement creation and movement; they describe environmental formations, or names of animals and plants found in abundance. Their origin relates back to the doings of the trickster brothers, to outbreaks of epidemic diseases and major tragic events (my drawing).

³⁸ Once a Makushi village, Pirara became a mission and point of religious gathering in the 1840’s. It later vanished and gave room to a cattle ranch at the beginning of the 20th century. Pirara is a famous case as the localization of the British mission was contested by the Empire of Brazil, leading to the dispute of borders between the two countries, settled in 1904. For the history of Pirara see Rivière, 1995.

The current locations and compositions of Makushi villages, as shown on the map, are usually not older than one hundred years. Many indeed were “founded” in recent times, such as the present community of Surama in 1973, which was started by two brothers who moved there from nearby settlements (Makushi Research Unit, 1996). The duration is significant, as usually an elder is still alive who remembers when and who first moved to this place, and commonly one family becomes known as the “founding family”, which has major political implications.

Today the villages vary in size from 207 to over 1600 inhabitants, with an average of about 480³⁹. This fairly high population density usually has administrative reasons, as smaller communities are incorporated as “satellites” into larger, central villages they depend on for schools, health posts and political leadership. Furthermore, according to the Amerindian Act, settlements can only become eligible for land title recognition and legal demarcation if they have a minimum population of 150 inhabitants and a settled village life of at least 25 years. Considering the ephemeral character of local traditional settlement patterns as described for the Guiana region (see Rivière, 1984), this disregards the probable mobility of people and communities, and many smaller communities either remain legally unprotected or become incorporated.

Conflicts and rivalries between villagers, as well as population pressure, might be a reason to move with one’s family to another place, often previously discovered during trips to farms, or distant hunting and fishing grounds. What is significant is that in the majority of cases, such as with many Makushi villages like Rewa, Crashwater and Surama, the history of the community starts with a specific kindred group as initiators and inviters. Narratives that give an account of the origin of settlements often have several versions to them, from different times, and are also used as a way of legitimizing a particular family as the “founding family”. They are told and constructed in a way that highlights the important involvement of one specific family and their leadership role. Thus, founding a new settlement and inviting

³⁹ If we exclude the three most populated villages, whose size is unusually high (1200, 1600 and 1625), the average village population is more likely to be around 363. Furthermore, the Makushi population of three North Pakaraima communities of Region 8 (Monkey Mountain, Tusenen and Taruka) is missing. Annexed is an excel table I put together with information I was able to gather from internet sources (governmental and non-governmental websites), as well as project reports about Makushi villages in Guyana, their population, number and size of households, incorporation of satellite communities, origin of name in Makushi and administrative region. Unfortunately, the data was insufficient to fully complete the table.

others to join has major political implications and distributes power among the ‘host’ family. A settlement that forms itself around a “founder”, usually an elderly man, his kindred and other often non-related families that recognize his leadership, is a typical residential pattern for the Guiana region (Rivière, 1984; see also Collomb & Renault-Lescure 2015: 98).

Many ways and paths have formed Tipuru and the political history of the village. Narratives revolving around the settlement history of Tipuru are little known outside the area and are worth recounting in more detail. The narratives that I gathered from several women, in this case Marcia, Amaris, Candace and Rita, who all have been crucial in my fieldwork and whose voices will be presented here, reveal much about how people explain their present situation and how things have turned out the way they have, their origins, history, their self-perception and life trajectories. What interests me in particular is once again the aspect of movement highlighted in all these narratives.

Tipuru – Arrival

The old jeep’s engine overheated on the way to Tipuru while bumping over the steep and stony path up *Stipan* Mountain. We had left the highest and most impressive *Kosho* Mountain behind us, also called *Kaieteur*, referring to Guyana's majestic one-drop waterfall, and in its valley we had reached the end of the current road construction.

of Kari⁴⁰ to offer them to us. I was longing for a drink and with a few jokes in Makushi and my joyful emptying of the bowl, I received a warm welcome in return.

The rest of the villagers were at the football ground in the centre of the village, close to the Tipuru River. The road wound up and down through the small village, disclosing a beautiful valley, surrounded by bush islands (*yu*) that extended to the east into the dense forest (*inkarîta*), with many farms hidden in the mountain slopes. On several grassy savannah hilltops, small rectangular houses appeared, with beige-brown adobe-walls and wooden shingled roofs, each with a different angled view, and in wide extended family clusters, with a cleared compound of red earth, dotted with jammon, orange and mango trees.

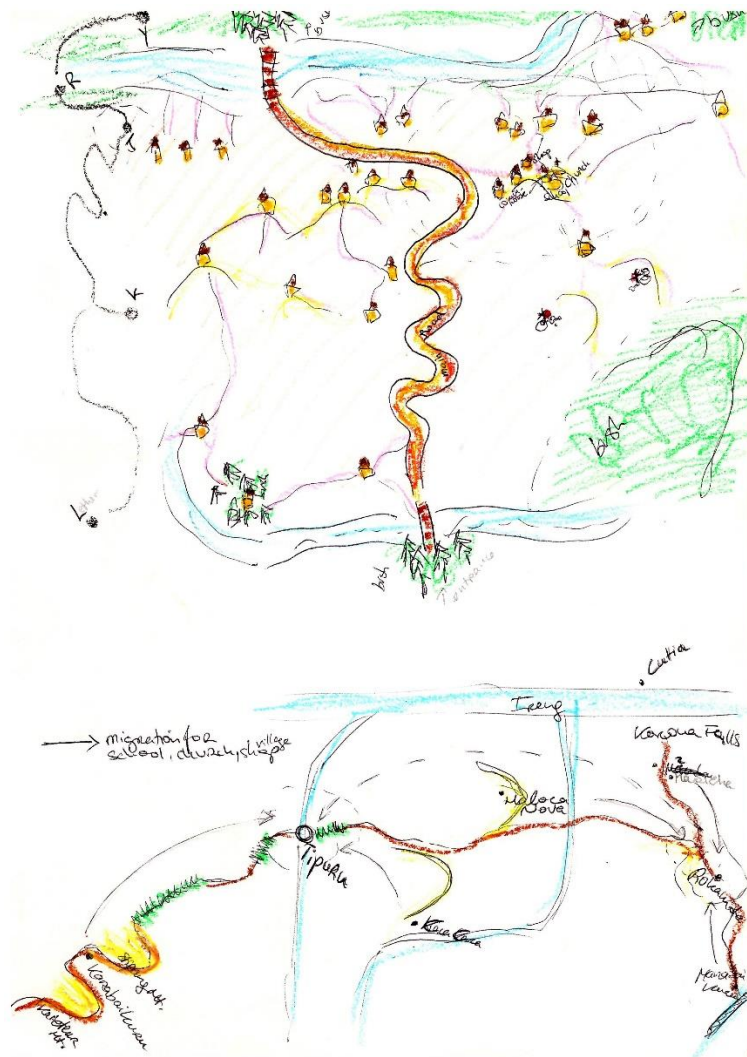


Figure 18. Above - Sketch of the village of Tipuru from a bird's eye perspective, entering the road from South Karasabai. Below - Sketch, zoomed out, of the way getting to Tipuru, passing the two steep mountains (my drawing).

⁴⁰ Parakari or pîrakkari in Makushi, is the most popular and widely made alcoholic drink from fermented cassava.

The air was cooling after a hot day and those that were playing a game of football were red in the face and sweating away under their team tricots, cheered on by small groups of spectators around the field. Some of them, visibly drunk, had started early to ravage the “market stalls” to supply themselves with alcohol and were dancing to loud Forró, bursting into shouts of joy once in a while, usually in broken Portuguese, to accompany the Brazilian music. A large group of people were sitting on benches shaded partly by a tall, leafy tree, but so close to the speakers that most were only staring at what was going on around them, silenced by the blasting music. Standing behind tables decorated with filled buckets and bottles of alcoholic cassava and potato drinks, were mainly women, selling their bananas and other farm produce, as well as portions of pepper pot with fish and cassava bread, their good mood and frequent shouts and laughter adding to the general atmosphere of the scene.



Figure 19. At the football ground in Tipuru.

In a similar fashion as before, the toshao parked us, the newcomers, right in the centre of the crowd and, immediately, people came over to shake our hands and to see who we were and why we had come⁴¹. The most common question was “where

⁴¹ The way I was received by the people at the football ground reminded me of descriptions I had previously read in the literature of the late 19th and mid-20th century. Appun (1871: 342-343) for instance, on arriving in a Makushi villages recorded “Beginning with me, each of the Macuschi’s gave

you going?”, making the typical long arm movement into the distance up the path, as if we were heading further north. When I replied that it was right here I was coming to stay, I received a surprised look, as if Tipuru was a place that people usually only pass through, without the intention of remaining.

As I was to find out over time, many of the villagers consider Tipuru a “place of hardship”, where there is little food, “only *Kumasi* (cassava water) with pepper and sweet Kari”. By a lack of food, people mean a scarcity of fish or meat in the area (see chapter 3). While every household has a number of chicken and some have pigs, most of the cattle is “community-owned” and rarely slaughtered due to the lack of money to buy the meat. The few salaried workers and those that own cattle are seen as the only ones who can afford to purchase consumer goods.

Furthermore, some residents see Tipuru’s glorious days when it was an important village with the oldest church (1916) and the oldest school (1944) in the South Pakaraima region as a thing of the past. I was told how all surrounding communities from Yuron Paru, to Tiger Pond and Karasabai used to come here to attend school, mass and to celebrate - until these villages established their own schools and churches - and today the only “satellite” communities left are Karabaikuru (to the south) and Kara Kara (to the north). “People used to come from all over. Now people laugh about Tipuru cause it's so little developed”, complained one of the local teachers. Perhaps this feeling of stagnation is particularly strong when talking to outsiders and reflecting on one’s own home in comparison to other places which are apparently more exciting. Clearly, life in the Pakaraima Mountains is “still traditional” and “how it used to be” is an opinion often expressed in conversations with Makushi people from the North Rupununi. During my stay in Tipuru, I met a young woman from Annai (North Rupununi), who had come to stay overnight on a work visit. Eager to leave, she commented how the village was just like her place used to be a long time ago. She kept boasting how much better and more “developed” everything is in “the North”, with lots of things happening, in comparison to the

me a slight blow to my chest with the words "Bakangbaimong, matti!" and repeated it along the whole line of Arekuna, with each one of them" (my translation). Schomburgk (2010 [1848]: 190) noted a similar greeting among the Makushi: “As they arrived in the village, the train of people stopped, and with outstretched hand the leader came up to us, and shook our hands with the words: "Matti" (...)" (my translation). It becomes clear from these accounts that *matti* was a common greeting in the past, which today, however, is not in use anymore. In the Carib language (Courtz 2008: 315), *mati* [noun], means “friend” as well as, mainly, “black man”, referring, in its origin probably to the maroons of Surinam.

silence and boredom she was experiencing here. She had no qualms about gossiping in public, expressing her criticism in a loud voice so everyone could hear.

The church and school compound (primary and nursery) is situated on a hill within an accumulation of other houses and community buildings that form the centre of the village. The possibility of me staying in the old two-storey house, built by the first school teacher and priest Jessy Rodrigues, an Arawak from the Santa Rosa Mission community at the coast, was quickly turned down. It had been used since by many priests and by-passers, however, people said it was haunted; at night, visitors heard footsteps of people walking in the room and on the roof, and one time a construction worker was woken by someone pulling his big toe. They agreed on the guesthouse instead, a typical government-funded zinc-roofed building that the villagers had constructed four years ago to accommodate visitors. The last time someone had stayed there was a while ago, when a group of nuns had stayed overnight during a church workshop. The toshao's sister immediately cleaned the floors from lizard and bat poo, and dusted out the two narrow single-bed frames. I assured her, however, that I would sleep in my hammock, out of personal preference and to feel more integrated with the majority of Tipuru's 334 inhabitants who sleep in hammocks. This and the fact that most use fire to cook formed a stark contrast to what I knew from the North Rupununi communities, especially Surama, where most households are equipped with gas-burner stoves and beds.

Soon, the toshao and others had arranged for two teenage girls to move in with me, so that I would not have to be alone. The house was beautifully situated close to the creek and the centre of the village, along the new road that was being constructed. This was a perfect spot, I thought. Nothing would pass unnoticed.

And indeed, this is how I got to know Candace, for instance, an older woman from Kara Kara, who one day passed with her husband Maceo and daughter Paula on their way to church. She later invited me to her home where I spent a considerable amount of time, and where she explained to me some of the things discussed in this chapter, for instance, that it was the colourful reflection of the many swimming fish shimmering through the water surface that gave the village its name *tifuru*, which in Makushi means a kind of "metallic turquoise blue"; it was a welcoming place, when people used to come and fish here. Later the name was written down in English as "Tipuru", and today the shimmering fish have disappeared. What struck me, apart from the nostalgia felt about the time Tipuru was a magnet of gathering, was that

many of Tipuru's inhabitants did not consider themselves to be from here.



Figure 20. Cassava house at Kara Kara, satellite community of Tipuru.

Coming across

There is a general perception that the people that constitute the village of Tipuru today are descendants of people who came from the area of Mount Roraima down into the Pakaraima valley, close to the Ireng because they were escaping from enemies. Who these enemies were is not quite clear but both Amerindians - Akawaio, Carib and Patamona - and Brazilians are usually mentioned.

According to Marcia, a principle interlocutor who will feature more prominently in Chapter 5, her great grandparents “came down” fleeing across the Ireng River, followed by their enemies:

And is so they come, everywhere they come. They were wild then, very, very wild. The settlers who become civilized was our parents. But the other ones was not and they mean to destroy everything, everybody, they kill. And then plus the Portuguese was on the other side raping the young girls and killing them, so most of them come to the South.

Marcia remembers that because of the constant threat, her grandparents hid in caves, which she called *Insikiranyamî yewî'ya* [the houses of Insikiran (plural)]⁴², however only temporarily until they spied their enemies' approach. Then they covered

⁴² More about the *trickster* Insikiran and his siblings will be said in the next chapter. Schomburgk (2010 [1848]: 173) already mentioned these kinds of rock caves, “Makunaima-auté” (or Makunaimî uttî), and that they were the “Wohnung des grossen Geistes” [housing of the great spirit].

up the place and continued moving.

Rita, the half-sister of Winford from Tipuru, with whom I conversed extensively at her home in Boa Vista, Brazil, remembers her mother telling stories about how she was eight years old when she fled with her grandparents in the middle of the night [*To'epe'pî awaron ya*']. They lived hidden away in the bush [*Teesenonse to'ko'manpîti'pî yu'ya*']. They did not cook, they only ate fruits from forest trees, *empî* (Sawarri or Butternut; *Caryocar nuciferum*) a big nut, which is used like butter on cassava bread. When it falls from the trees in July, it cracks open. It can be eaten roasted or raw. They would also eat *maipa* (Waiki, *Inga edulis*), *moope* (*Spondias mombin*, or cajá in Portuguese), *kun* (Lu, *Oenocarpus bacaba*) and *kuwai* (Ité, *Mauritia flexuosa*) palm fruits. They would say: *maipa yeperu emîrî piya'tîpî' man aase'nîkon ipîikai'nîkon* [Waiki fruits are becoming ripe, let's pick some].

At night they would sleep, hidden far away in the bush. They carried *maruwayamî* [a kind of resin], to light the way at night and warn off “tigers” (commonly used in Guyanese Creole English for big cats, usually jaguars). When they came to a settlement of relatives, they warned them that enemies were coming and when the dogs started barking, they escaped, sleeping in the bush until dawn, her mother said. Rita's mother described these times as “a state of war” and the enemies “Kanaïma”, who Rita said were Patamona or Carib Indians.

She said that these *Karina'yamî* [Carib] were enemies at this time, these and the Patamona are “índios brabos” [“wild/fierce Indians”]. At this time, they hardly wore clothes, they only wore aprons. My mother still saw these naked people. I never saw them, only clothed Indians. They said that the men tied leaves on their arms and penises. My mother wore her little apron (my translation).

The Carib have been associated with accusations of warfare, slavery and cannibalism since the colonial era, which has also fed into Makushi concepts of the “wild”, “savage”, “naked” and “fierce” Indians. Here, words such as enemy/Kanaïma/“índio brabo”/Carib/Patamona are used interchangeably, within the same classification, creating an antipode of victim/civilized/Makushi to distinguish themselves from the Other. Farage (2002) and Cavalcante (2010) have shown for the Roraima region, how divisions between “índios brabos” and “civilizados” (wild indians and civilized) function as a temporal marker.

Some remarks about the Makushi's relationship to the Carib are relevant here. “Tribal wars” with the Carib, Carib slave-raiding of Makushi villages, as well as their

exo-cannibalistic practices of eating the captive men, feature in many Makushi narratives. These accounts seem to disappear with the end of the fleeing and fighting, and the Carib are considered enemies of the past. There is a large body of literature on the issue of the emergence of the term Carib, the role of the Carib in the slave trade, their resistance to colonial rule and their political and economic alliances, especially with the Dutch (see Farage, 1991; Hulme, 1992; Whitehead, 1988; 1996). Whitehead (1988: 172-174), for instance, points out how the Spanish Crown between 1503 and 1652, in their conquest of the Guiana region, systematically used accusations of cannibalism to enslave and fight the indigenous people to supply the colony with labour force and take control over their territories. The creation of the terms “Carib” and “Cannibal” are intimately connected and the term cannibal, in Spanish, in fact, derives from Carib, first registered by Christopher Columbus (see for instance Hulme 1978; 1992). Whitehead (1988: 177) furthermore stresses that these horrifying and sensational accounts of cannibalistic rituals, served the Spanish, morally, to justify “their own excesses”. Although the French, British and Dutch had similar cultural biases and preoccupations with cannibalism, they were, however, interested in establishing alliances with the Carib, clearly also as a political strategy against the Spanish (Whitehead 1988: 177). The capturing of indigenous men and women by the Carib, which features so prominently in the many local narrations, can be seen in connection with the so-called Dutch-Carib slave trade that began in the 18th century.

Building on Drummond’s (1977:78) questioning of the assumption of a Carib “master race” that spread over large portions of the continent, Farage (1991: 105), suggests that the designation Carib/Caripuna was not confined to one particular ethnic group [i.e. the Carib]. Importantly, intertribal relations supported the trade system introduced by the Dutch, where “multiple mediations operated” (p.105, referring to Porro 1984: 6; my translation). Farage explains on the basis of archival research of the colonial occupation of the Rio Branco region by the Portuguese, how “raiders” and “raided” varied in origin, depending on their war enemies and alliances, and cannot be attributed to a fixed system of perpetrators and victims. Criticizing Whitehead, Farage stresses that while he discusses the political origin of the creation of the name Carib, he still tries to prove that Carib Cannibalism did indeed exist. However, in the context of the eighteenth-century Amerindian slave trade, Carib rather seemed to have functioned as a vague and accusatory term designating “warrior and cannibal”, “attributed to the group, or groups, which conjunctively monopolized the slave trade

for the Dutch” (Farage and Santilli 1992: 268, my translation). The Brazilian anthropologist concludes:

For the purposes of our discussion about the slave trade, it is important to bear in mind that the ethnonym in the colonial epoch comprises various distinct peoples (ethnic groups) [probably including the Makushi]. Beyond the ethnographic reality, and as an accusation, the designation Carib would even go beyond the boundaries of linguistic groups. Caribs would thus be a colonial fiction, and with this perspective we should consider it, although the sources require the utilization of the term (Farage 1991: 106, my translation).

When referring to Makushi oral history, and the frequent reference to the Carib occupation in the region, it is indeed difficult to avoid using the term Carib as a fixed ethnonym. However, it should be remembered that the term Carib in these sources has to be understood in the light of Farage’s convincing argument⁴³.

What particularly interests me is that all these narratives about fleeing and escaping, coming across and down, make a clear statement about people’s origins. Those people now living in the area are not actually from Tipuru, but that their ancestors came from far away. They came across to a place that they did not consider theirs, and they settled down here. Marcia says:

So that is how we come across this side, we belong to Brazil, or we belong to Venezuela. So all of us, when you listen to their talking, all belong to that place, Roraima, Mount Roraima. So from the North to the South, we belong together.

The perception of having come here from a different place is evidence of people's movements across time.

Kuwariana and Arekuna

As mentioned above, it is not quite clear who the “enemies” were- sometimes they were Akawaio, Arekuna, Patamona or Carib- or who exactly the ancestors were that came, Arekuna, Kuwariana, Makushi, and who the people were that were living here before. In the end, “they were all mixed - they say - they were all mixed”.

During the time of escaping and “war”, different groups of people from all around came “across” [into Guyana, over the Ireng]. Here they met and intermarried. “Whoever from this group see the group of the young ladies over there they marry

⁴³ Note also the fact that one of the nine indigenous groups in Guyana is officially registered as Carib, their self-denomination however is *Karina*, meaning ‘person’, which is also the same term used in Makushi (*Karinayamî*) and other Carib languages to refer to the Carib.

together and maybe join her family or maybe bring the girl to join the family, and that is how they start living.” Marcia’s parents were both Arekuna, she says, i.e. her grandparents were the ones that came; her parents were “born and grow here, among Makushi, that is why they had to speak Makushi, is only their parents were Arekuna people.” Still, they spoke Arekuna at home, not to their children but with each other. “When my parents were talking by themselves they would talk their language, Arekuna, but not to us. And then, when my mother died, my dad never speak his language no more. It used to remind him of her, he said.” This shows that people were greatly intermixed and that several languages were co-existing at that time.

According to Marcia, it was particularly one “family line” of Arekuna people that spread and intermarried throughout the region: the second sister, the eldest and the youngest brother remained in the area of Tipuru, one of the brothers went to Annai, one to Tiger Pond, the eldest sister to Moco-Moco [all these are Makushi villages today]. Marcia likes to tell the story about how Georgetown got its name, which was apparently through one of the brothers who left for the North. “The only person [a brother] that get away [to Georgetown] his name was George. In his life time, together with his wife they had a large family, many intermarried with negroes from the coast. Later, after George had died and people asked about him, his relatives would respond “George done”, which gave Georgetown its name – *George town*, *George done* in Creole.

As mentioned in the beginning, the fact is significant that, according to Marcia, it was particularly down to one Arekuna family line to found several of the current Makushi villages, and even today’s capital Georgetown. These narratives, whether accurate or not, help to legitimize the presence of Marcia’s family in the area, albeit having come from far away.

After the Arekuna, an apparently distinct ethnic group called Kuwariana came. Some people from Tipuru, like the elderly woman Candace from Kara Kara, have grandparents who were Kuwariana. Candace sees herself as the product of all those movements and the intermixing of people described above. The grandparents from her mother’s side were Arekuna and Kuwariana; from her father’s side Patamona and Arekuna. She does not remember much about the Kuwariana people except that her grandmother’s language was unintelligible and that they did not eat cassava, the staple food, because they were not accustomed to growing plants. They would eat their meat with *man yare*; *yare* being the name for ‘leaves’ in Makushi, a type of leaves from a

forest tree. They did not like their meat or fish to be too well-cooked, only half-roasted and never anything boiled. Candace was never told where the Kuwariana came from, except that they “came across”, and she never enquired about it either. What she knew though is that it was the Kuwariana who discovered the place *Karona*⁴⁴, the falls where the whole of the Ireng river breaks over three major rocks. It is an important place for fishing, as it is believed to be the place where the fish march to their “father”, *moro 'yamî pootorî* (see Chapter 3).

This Kuwariana people were the ones who found Karona first. They do eat baboon, which means they were the hunters of the baboon, wherever the baboon howl, they follow from one place to the next, just like men go hunting powis at 5am, they went out 3am for baboon, the place had plenty baboon. They ate them out, a few got scared. They went up the mountain, most went to the top of the *kasana yen* [King Kavier Mountain, the double-headed king-vulture, the master of the vultures] and they still follow baboon across the Ireng River. After hunting them across the river, they were returning to their family and were crossing over through Karona Falls, only to meet the plenty, plenty fish, different kinds of fish. So, this is how they found out about the *taiwî*, where the small fish march to their god or master.

The descriptions of the Kuwariana⁴⁵ as almost nomadic hunters, eating food like wild leaves and monkey meat, which is considered ‘improper’, and not being able to communicate are all ways of classifying a people as different, strange, “less

⁴⁴ What is interesting, too, is the analogy between the Arekuna brothers that “came down” and the ‘mythic brothers’, the Insikiranyamî, who, according to Candace’s husband Maceo, also “came down” from the side of Mount Roraima - “I believe they belong there”. “There was a famine, they were suffering, without food.” The brothers cut down the tree of life, *Wîyaaka'ye*, as tall as “from here to the sun”. When it fell down, its plentiful fruits spread on the side of Brazil and Venezuela and the place flooded from the water in the hollow trunk. A piece of this tree became a rock and is now at Karona Falls. However, Maceo comments that the waterfall “is really called *Arona*”, which means “I will wash” in a different language, perhaps Arekuna or Carib. To catch Haimara fish and Kuru snails, the brothers blocked them with a trap called *maurusî*. It now remains as a dangerous “people trap” at the river that sucks one in and spits only one’s guts out. When digging for labba, the brothers made Karona Falls.

⁴⁵ While these narratives clearly point to the ‘savagery’ that marks the difference between past and present (see Carneiro da Cunha, 1978; Gow, 1991; Farage, 2003), several hypotheses could still be made as to who these Kuwariana could have been. Thomas (1982) mentions the Sapé as neighbours of the Pemon. The Sapé are also called Caliana, Chirichano, Kaliána or Kariana, and traditionally lived in the area of the middle and upper Paragua River in Venezuela and Brazil. According to information from the websites *etnologue* and *linguamón*, after major epidemics and invasions, the Kariana population was reduced to about 25. Only five are estimated to still speak their language, which is considered an isolated language, or belonging to the Guinao, Warao or Arutani family. Many intermarried with the Pemon (see Crevels 2012: 219-220), which could maybe be an explanation for their migration to Guyana. Whitehead (2001, 2003) mentions a people called the Kawaliyana, which his Patamona interlocutors describe, similarly to the people in Tipuru, as “a people without horticulture, living on the fruits, fish and game of the forest (2003: 67-68)”. Another hypothesis could be that the Kuwariana refer to people from the settlement 'Kaualianalemong', mentioned by Koch-Grünberg (1923), or 'Kavariana-remon', noted by Fr Cary-Elwes (1911-12) (personal communication with Butt Colson). This settlement, situated on the Gran Sabana between Mount Roraima and the adjacent Kukenam Mountain, is also called Jeremiah’s village named after its ‘Arekuna’/‘Taurepang’ leader - Jeremiah – who was in fact, according to Butt Colson, “an ‘Akawaio’ (i.e. Kapong) who seems to have married into the Roraima-gok (Roraima people)” (personal communication).

civilized” and “savage” (see Overing, 1989). Furthermore, it can be said that these notions of ‘savagery’ seem to function as a marker to differentiate between past and present (see Carneiro da Cunha, 1978; Gow, 1991; Farage, 2003). In general, there are two interesting statements here: that people’s relatives and ancestors were different and that they came into this valley from far away and were not native to the place.

The Karina, Tigers and Bamboo

The following narrative, well known among many people of Tipuru, is about huge “tigers” that used to live in the area and often killed hunters looking for game, which made life very dangerous. These *kaikusi*, the generative term in Makushi for Jaguar (there are more than 20 names for different wild cats in Makushi), can be better understood as mythological beings, also referred to as *prauya*, a kind of flying-cat⁴⁶. What is curious about the following story is that it was the *karinayamî* (Carib), who came to “free the path” after hearing rumours that these dangerous tigers were tormenting the people. Contrary to the negative reputation the Carib mostly have in Makushi oral history, here they feature as heroes- as skilful and powerful hunters who knew the arts of making and playing bamboo flutes, who knew how to get rid of the tigers and succeeded in making the place safe for the people to live in. It was only afterwards that life was possible in this place and the *karinayamî* played a major role in achieving this. As suddenly as they had come, they also left again and were apparently never seen again. It seems from the narratives that they did not intermix and intermarry; they came and went. The fact that those that came and killed the tigers were Carib shows that there was not always a clear conception about their relationship as enemies. It shows that new alliances could be formed throughout time, to combat a common enemy, an enemy that was not human.

The following narrative is told by Amaris, Marcia’s older sister and mother of the current toshao at Tipuru. Amaris and her husband Clelant, from the village of Yakarinta in the northern Rupununi savannahs, have seven children, who all stayed in Tipuru or moved to other South Pakaraima communities. Amaris always ends her narrations by saying “I don't know, this is what the old people say, but why would they teach their grandchildren all this, if it wasn't true”:

⁴⁶ There are also “tigers” that live in the water, for instance, like *Kamshirei*.

This place, Tipuru, was empty, no one lived here before. People came from Roraima killing one another. Who left back, settled in groups without noticing each other and they get to each other very slowly. One day, two from one of the groups went hunting in the West, they never came back. This continued for a long time, until one day, two went out in the same direction but one friend stayed behind to defecate and the other went ahead. When he was reaching the big rock, the friend who left back saw when the tiger jumped out from his house to a nearby high rock, then to another rock, then jumped down on the ground. His friend ran but he was too late, the tiger caught him and killed him. During the time this was going on, a next tiger jumped out from the same rock. Afterwards the man ran from where he was, he reported everything. The news spread all around, the news reach the Carib. Carib are strong type of people. I don't know where they came from but they were many. So they decided to kill the tiger. They always have bamboo arrows and bamboo flutes. With these they went. When they reach only a mile away from the tigers' house, there is a hill. This is where they set themselves in three lines, each one had 16 white rocks. From this you could see they were many indeed. From there they sent their 'champion' to be eaten by the tiger. When he was getting near to their house, they blow the flute and the tiger came out to a high rock. Then to a second rock. The champion ran for his life and passed the shooter. The first line shot, the second line killed. Then all went to kill the tiger's wife in her house. But she got away to the top of the mountain. She came down back and crossed over to another mountain and at the foot of that mountain she went in the water, so that this water never dries and it is very deep. They say, the *pia'san*⁴⁷ [shaman] turned her face downwards, so that she would not eat people anymore. This is how the Carib free the path to Karona (Tipuru, 2013, translated from Makushi by Marcia).

One day, when resting after a long walk through the forest to fetch a load of tapir meat Candace's adopted son had shot and left there for other villagers to take, Candace told a similar version of the tiger story. Contrary to Amaris, she likes to end her narrative performance with the more sceptical phrase: "I don't know if this is true, the old people must have been lying to us".

Finding Karona was after killing the tiger. Before, no one could pass the big rock where the tiger lived. They used to eat them, when the people went hunting or fishing. I do not remember the tiger's name but I think it was *prauya*. I also do not know where the Carib came from, but after hearing the talks between friends, the Carib decided to kill the tigers. Bamboo was never around here, they were the ones who brought it and planted it wherever they had settled. With it, they made bamboo spears and flutes to call the tiger. They went as close as they could to the tiger's house and counted themselves with rocks in three lines. It was many, many rocks. Tigers hate bamboo flutes, so they blew the flute and one came out running towards them. They killed him and they close in to the wife, but they missed her, when she came out she went away. When they found her back, she jumped on *Puriman'ying* [name of a mountain] and then she went to *Taparuuka* [name of a place/village] they did not find her anymore. They went back and cut up the husband and with the blood they wrote whatever in their language [rock painting in red, still visible today]. Just that⁴⁸ (Kara Kara, 2013, translated from Makushi by Marcia).

⁴⁷ This spelling is taken from the trilingual Makushi-English-Portuguese dictionary, edited by the Makushi linguist Miriam Abbott (2009: 29).

⁴⁸ Another version can be found in Charles Barrington Brown's book *Canoe and Camp life in British Guiana*, 1876, pp. 130-131.

Tawailing: a place of refuge

Tawailing is a beautiful table-top mountain to the north of Yurong Paru, the last Makushi village of Region 9. Its wrinkly contours shine in various shades of blue and red during sunset. Evelyn Waugh (1933: 132) gives a nice description of this mountain and the area around it:

In the forenoon, on the following day, we came out of the forest upon a magnificent and extensive savanna valley, the views from which in all directions were truly grand and charming. To the north-west a high, bare, table-topped mountain, called Tawailing, rising gradually up to a height of about 4000 feet, the last 500 feet or so of which was quite perpendicular. On the west was the valley of the Ireng river, formed of grass-land with savannah mountains to the westward. To the south and east the country was wooded and rough, and to the north a great wooded escarpment, called Mowarieteur, stretched away to the eastward. In a deep gorge between Tawailing and this escarpment ran a large river, called Echilebar, which is a tributary of the Ireng.

There is a story, told by Marcia, that explains the origin of the name Tawailing. Apparently of Arekuna origin, *tawai*, was the name of a being that lives (lived) inside the mountain. Mainly hunters that travelled far to search for animals used to see him. Because he hardly talked, or did not know how to communicate, very little is known about him, except that he had a path and a door and that he gave name to the mountain:

Tawailing was a man that used to come out through the mountain and back through the mountain but they don't know where he came from, he was just there. This is what they don't know, probably he belong there in the mountain. Maybe he come out and hunt or maybe he visiting a neighbour in the other mountain, or whatever. But he say his name was "Tawai", so they call the name of the mountain *Tawaiyin* [in Makushi]. Tawai, I think, is an Arekuna name or word. He looks like a human being and the kind of door that we see like a statue from far that is where he used to come out. Is only he could have open it. Nobody cannot open it. When people see him they ask him, where he going, who he was and so. Without stopping and talking to them he would tell them he is Tawai, he is Tawai and he gone, "I am Tawai" and he gone. Maybe he said it in Arekuna, I don't know. If it was in Makushi he would say "*Tawai urîîîîîîîîîî, tawai urîîîîîîîîîî, tawai urîîîîîîîîîî*" and then he would go off. When people see, the hunters see him, "who are you, where you come from?" they would ask the questions, so that's how he used to answer. He would not stop to talk to them, but that was his road and that was his door. Where he going, they don't know, where he coming out from they don't know.

There are several interesting aspects of the narrative: Tawai was an Arekuna name, and Tawai was solitary, mysterious, human-like but not human; people did not know where he came from and who he was. He only answered them while passing by, always repeated the same words, only his name, maybe because he did not speak their

language. All this shows an image of “the Other” and as it was an Arekuna settlement and a solitary place of refuge, there exists an analogy between Tawai and the people that came to settle there and the circumstances they found themselves in.

“Many families that came down settled there because they felt safe from attacks”. Marcia talks about this high mountain as a place of refuge that her grandparents escaped to and settled on, and where her parents grew up and got to know each other. Not only Marcia’s parents used to live at Tawailing, Rita and Winford’ mother were also born there. The place is protected from outside views as one side is steep and rocky and the other fenced off by a “wall” of dense forest. The table-top itself, covered with hard savannah grass, is crossed by a small creek that during the rainy season widens out. When Marcia and I walked across Tawailing and started our climb, we passed two abandoned houses, close to where she said her parents had lived, but no trace was left of their settlement.

At parties, invitations to go and drink Kari here, there and there, that’s how they meet together. My mother’s parents used to invite the father of my father and everyone and that’s how they see each other. When they bring their daughters, he see you, ask your parents, and if your parents say yes, you marry them.

With parties, Marcia meant specifically *Kaakayamî*, “betting games”, running competitions between settlements that were common at that time. The time when people used to live at Tawailing is seen as the time before other villages, such as Yurong Paru and Tipuru, existed.

Inkarisimî and the last fight

When Marcia talks about “the grandparents” she is referring not only to her own grandparents but as well to those of most families in Tipuru. *Amookoyamî* (“grandparents”) in Makushi is often used as a general term to talk about one’s forebears, the old people that lived and died long ago. Whatever generation of grandparents she is referring to, Marcia says that at that time, the *amookoyamî* were in their early teens, they were the ones that “spread out after the fight.” And it was one of the grandfathers who is said to have killed the “last enemy” during the “last fight/war”, which occurred in the valley of Tipuru. Her sister, Amaris, tells the following narrative in Makushi, later translated by Marcia into English:

Inkarisimî was the leader of Kanaima (*Kanaimîyamî’ pootorî*). I think he was Patamona or Arekuna. The brother of the old lady was in Georgetown to buy gunpowder and so, when the killing took place. The enemy would only kill men and boys and leave women and young girls to be their wives. First, they killed at *Kawari’yen* foot. Then at *Kara Kara*. They were going back the next day. The sister of the man told the bad men she will go looking for firewood and then reported everything to her brother. The brother told her they must all go with them and he will follow from a distance and catch them in close passage way. The women were happy to go with the men, although they knew they had killed their husbands. This sister had a dog. She deliberately broke one of his legs. So he was limping behind her and then she called him *Inkarisimî, Inkarisimî, Inkarisimî, Inkarisimî!* That is the message sent to the brother. *Inkarisimî!* So he know who is the guy. In fact she was signalling the brother, where they are and who is the person taking them. whom she deliberately broke his leg and named him with the name of the Kanaima leader, so that she could keep on calling this name for her brother to know which group was killing them. They travelled the whole day and stopped at the top of *Kuwakuwai’yen*. The lady again met her brother who told her to make a camp fire at midnight. She did everything as he was told. On the other hand, the leader of the bad men wanted to know why she was doing this. “Why are you piling so much fire wood?” he said, “we have to be undercover!” The lady said “whom are you afraid of after killing all our men, there is no one to be afraid of”. The men were still afraid, then they settled down quietly. They heard something made noise and said “what is that?” The lady again said “I hear nothing, except the branch of a crabwood tree falling”, for she knew her brother was preparing his gun that made noise. Then she went to catch fire. At first she refused to lie down with the leader, but for this killing time she would put him to sleep. After having sex and with the heat of the fire they all went into deep sleep. She got up and told the other ladies to get up too. Some listened to her and they were safe, except one, she did not come down. The lady picked up all the bows and arrows of the bad people and gave it to her brother. First, he killed the leader, then the others. He killed the woman that did not want to come down, by mistake. He told them “how can you sleep with the men who killed your husbands?” The noise woke the rest of the men, so the brother had to hide, run along with them to come his direction and keep killing, until four more noticed what he was doing. They got away from him by jumping from top of the mountain. He followed them until *Tawaiyin* (Tawailing). From the top, they curse him “you will again see vultures circling over the *puraiwa’ yin*” they said, shooting at him, but the bullet was light, it couldn’t meet grandfather.

Grandfather answered “you will also see the vultures circling over the [? *Place name*]. Then I will make my road like labba [*Wirana ye'mari*]”, that is how he made a name for himself, labba. And he was shooting at them and his bullet was heavy, it reached them and killed them. Maybe one or two got away, so they were hunting him for a long time. He returned to the women, they started home.

Although both fighting parties cursed one another afterwards, warning that this was not the end, these people were the last that fought and this point in time is perceived as the crucial turning point to peace and the settling down into dispersed groups. “And that is how they live, that is how they start living. But they were never in Tipuru yet, they were spread out in the bush, far, far. They were always in the bush, always in the bush.” And Marcia concludes by saying:

They were the settlers of few that left back from the fighting, the parents of my mother. The fighting was going on all the way from Roraima to around here. Some were together, some were scattered like four people, three people that is how they were all the way. And the people that was here long time ago, Makushi people, welcomed them.

The “last fight” is a famous narrative. What is important in terms of settlement history is that it marks a significant transitional point in time: the end of fighting and the beginning of times of peace. It put an end to the constant fear and fleeing from enemies. From then on, those of the “grandparents” that survived settled down. Settling down therefore also meant an end to nomadic life which meant fleeing and escaping, killing and warfare. However, the people were still dispersed “spread out in the bush”, settled into distant, consanguineous groups, inside the forest and its edges. Thus, this narrative marks the change from constant movement to settling, from wartimes to peaceful times. The fact that people still lived dispersed, in small groups and “in the bush”, marks the times before the emergence of large, central savannah communities, school and church, as we will see in the next section, and can be seen as an analogy of times that were still “wild”.

Moving Together

The time of Tavi and the time of Pedro

It is from “Church times” onwards that the place Tipuru came into being as a village, when people from around the area decided to move, attracted by the church, and later especially the school. Before the Catholic Church established itself with Cary-Elwes at the beginning of the 20th century, there was an attempt by Anglican

missionaries, at the end of 19th century, to get a hold in the area. However, this did not last long and was replaced by Jesuit missionization (Butt-Colson, 1998; see also Bridges, 1985). After the mission at St. Ignatius, Tipuru was the first church in the South Pakaraima Region, established in 1916, older than the church in the much larger community of Karasabai further south. Candace recalls:

Before any catholic priest, Anglican priest was here at ‘hot wind’. Not for long, because when the catholic priest came in, everyone became catholic. So the Anglican had to go. I did not meet the first priest, called Ignacio. The priest I know was Father Banham, who baptised me. I cannot remember Father Keary, only Father O’Rilley.⁴⁹ (Kara Kara, 2013, translated from Makushi).

With the advent of the church, families from all around moved out into the savannah, close together; surrounding communities like Kara Kara became later incorporated as satellite communities into Tipuru⁵⁰. The link between the setting up of Christian missions and settlement mobility is also highlighted in Butt Colson’s description of the “enthusiastic movement” that characterised this region (1994/1996: 3-4):

Converts, impelled by their sentiments of enthusiasm for a new life, may voluntarily make journeys to carry their acquired knowledge and faith, whilst others may be hired or persuaded to do so as part of Mission policy for obtaining new adherents and bringing in communities from afar.

Marcia remembers:

At that time, they were all scattered in the bush, but they know when priest come. There was a messenger who would go around telling them when the priest is coming. And all gathered together. At that time Tipuru was a village already (not Yurong Paru yet) and that’s why it had school and church. Tipuru was before everything else, then second came Karasabai. When the school was there, the church was there, then they came down, everybody came out from the bush. Wherever they were, they gathered there. My grandparents died [at Tawailing] and then my mother came down this side [to Tipuru]. Everybody from Yurong Paru came to church here. Tiger pond still attended the church here. So when the priest come, it was like heritage, everyone gather from every direction. People, people, people used to be here. Until (stretched) the church was built at Karasabai, and Tiger Pond later. Yurong Paru still come to church here then. And then afterwards they get their little church by themselves. That’s how we separate.

⁴⁹ Evelyn Waugh (1934: 127-129) describes the mission at Tipuru and the importance of the place, at the time when Father Keary was staying there as a priest.

⁵⁰ Barrington Brown (2010 [1876]: 130-131), who passed through the area in 1870 mentions a small settlement “Cara Cara”, and several other agglomerations of extended family homes around it on his journey from Cara Cara to the Burro-Burro River.

Candace defines these major spatial movements from forest to savannah as correlating with the transition from the time of her grandfather, *Tavi*, whose name later became David in English, and the time of her mother's brother, Pedro, when the church and school started:

People lived in the bush, far apart at the time of *Tavi*. But in my uncle Pedro's time, the church and school came in. People then started coming out from far and make houses near each other because children couldn't come to school from far (Candace, Kara Kara, 2013, translated from Makushi).

There are many narratives about long school walks early in the morning when it was still dark and children had to walk hours to school, arriving tired and hungry, often sleeping in school, and having to walk back home without any food. While there must have been great enthusiasm and a feeling of obligation on the part of the parents to send their children to school, in the rainy season, during harvest or whenever help was needed at home, many parents felt it was a useless journey to take. The initial fascination and importance people generally placed on education, might also be connected to "expressions of enthusiasm" with regard to paper, preaching, and 'the white men's knowledge', much described in travel accounts and discussed in ethnographic literature of the area (Butt Colson, 1994/1996; Appun, 1871; Schomburgk, 2010 [1847&1848]; Koch-Grünberg 1923).

The process of village formation was gradual and eventually grew into the current size and shape, especially due to schooling. The first school was built in 1944 and its first schoolteacher and headmaster was Jessy Rodrigues, a 24-year old Arawak from the mission village of Santa Rosa/Maruca, where he had been trained by Catholic preachers to become a teacher. Thus, teaching was highly influenced by the church and brought about numerous changes, such as the introduction of the Christian calendar and names, religious dogmas and beliefs.

The same teachers used to carry us to say rosary every day. We never had service on Sundays, just the rosary. When the priest come, we used to have Sundays' mass. And because of that everyone will go to confession. People used to come here a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot. (Marcia, Tipuru, 2013)

Jessy Rodrigues introduced the time, months and year, together with the toshao they will set the time for Christmas holiday by tying different coloured strings, for example, red was for Christmas, white for going hunting, blue for reaching home. With this, the captain will go house to house because they were still far apart in the bush. (Candace, Kara Kara, 2013)

Marcia also explains how personal and family names at that time became registered by the church and village administration, where often first names and surnames were exchanged or translated from Makushi into English. Marcia believes that this resulted in certain kindred family names being mixed up, which the younger generation is ignorant of.

Only four families were here before, Mr. Green, Mr. Pedro, Mr. Johnston (Candace's father) and Mr. Gregory. Gregory Louis, I think that's my grandfather, but they name us Simon. Our father is Simon, Simon Gregory. So we should be Gregory but we end up as Simon. And people didn't know how to write, people didn't know how to call their names either. When they reach to toshao "who is this person?" they would call them in Makushi, *Semi*. Ah, Simon, so they register him.

For Amaris, the coming of Christian religion also meant another kind of break with the past. Thus, as she puts it, the mythical times, when all animals were humans, were replaced with priests and prayers.

The time of Tavi when "everyone used to live in the bush" was replaced with the time of Pedro, when people started "coming down, 'pon down, 'pon down" and settled in Tipuru. The narratives are marked, as Feather (2010) notes for the Nahua, by a "spatial dimension of change", here, with the transition from forest to savannah and from dispersed settlements to centred communities. These changes correlate with the creation of a mission and later school, which resulted in families moving in and attracted temporary gatherings. The time of Tavi is seen as past - the time of the grandparents - and the time of Pedro marks the transition to contemporary times, permanently settled and "civilized".

The move from forest to savannah, or in other cases of lowland Amazonia, from forest to periphery or river, is connected "with a prevailing regional idea of the 'wild Indian' as associated with the centre of the forest while 'civilised Indians' are associated with the rivers (Feather, 2010: 61-62; referring to Gow, 1993)." Similarly, for the Makushi, the forest in these narratives is associated with images of the past, primitiveness, tradition, war and fear and the savannah with peace, sociality, civilization and modernity. The time of "coming out of the bush" coincides with permanent settlements, the institution of church and school, as well as a different kind of knowledge and education.

Taken together, the narratives examined here propose, for the Makushi in Tipuru, a fundamental delimitation of the time/space of contemporary humanity. As we have seen, what all the narratives have in common is that they point out how village formation, as well as regional settlement, was conceived of by the shared

condition of the wild and foreign, attributes that refer to time and space, respectively. With regard to savagery, as has already been pointed out in studies on social memory in the Circum- Roraima region (Farage, 2003; Cavalcanti, 2010) and for the western Amazon (Gow, 1990), the history of contact that underlies the narrative differentiates the people of the present from the ancient times - the one that ignores the use of fire, clothing and other indices of civilization. This narrative marker expresses a principle of historicity - a valorisation of sociality in the present, the time of the lived relations; the strangeness of the past would thus be the north Amazonian version of the rupture between the dead and the living, a principle that Carneiro da Cunha (1978) proved to be crucial for the South American lowlands.

The Makushi narratives add, however, a dimension of space to such a reading. Beasts - huge and powerful jaguars, originally, occupied the place that contemporary people live in today. Evoking the classical analysis of Levi-Strauss' (1963: 215) Oedipus myth, it can be said that in the Makushi case, the narrative also reflects on the dilemma of autochthony: in the case of the monsters in the Oedipus myth, it is the wild cats that are native, not men. In order to make human occupation possible, the jaguars had to be killed. Those who "cleared" the area, the Carib, were, and this has to be stressed, not only highly skilled warriors, but also foreigners. In this sense, the Carib function in the narrative, on the one hand, as intermediaries between mythical animals and early humans while on the other, paradoxically, they appear to match the savagery that needs to be abolished so that social life is established – thus, they leave, never to return. It is particularly interesting that in dealing with the dilemma of autochthony, the Makushi narrative solves the matter, placing movement as a central value for contemporary sociality.

Chapter 3

Takutunen:

A Collective Journey

“Every boundary line is a myth.”

Wilson Harris, *Palace of the Peacock* (1960: 22)

This chapter is about a journey, a fishing expedition to Takutunen. The place-name refers to a stretch of the little Takutu River, as it is affectionately called by the locals, to distinguish it from the large river of the same name that forms the border with Brazil, flowing south to the Amazon valley. The little Takutu, on the other hand, is a tributary of the Siparuni River and flows into the Essequibo River, whose waters flow to the Atlantic coast of Guyana.

Takutunen, which is roughly three days' walk from Tipuru village, is considered to be the only place in the whole region - with the exception of Karona falls, on the Ireng River - where there is an abundance of large fish in the dry season. Indeed, the beginning of the rainy season is the time of the “marching” of fish, but this is a period when people move with greater difficulty through the flooded lands. In turn, in the dry season, when fish disappear from the small creeks near the village, mobility becomes easier and more pleasant. Furthermore, occurring from around September to March or April, it corresponds with the season of big village celebrations, like the Heritage Month in September, Christmas and Easter. Then it is time to journey. A fishing expedition is a ritual event, which sets the whole village in movement, even the ones who stay behind. This is what this chapter is about. It aims to be an ethnography of the collective journey, with an emphasis on what it means to be outside the realm of daily village life.

Classical ethnography, since The Nuer (Evans-Pritchard, 1940; see also Mauss and Beuchat, 1979; Mauss and Durkheim, 1963), has pointed out a distinction regarding sociability between village and camp life among seasonal peoples. Camp life, as opposed to village life, appears informal, where relationships, be they kinship or gender based, tend to be non-hierarchical or symmetrical. This is also the case with

the Makushi in Tipuru. Building on Overing's (2000) reflections on the informality that characterizes social life in the Guianese area, Santilli (2010) emphasizes the even greater informality and *plaisanterie* involved in collective work among the Western Makushi in Brazil, here, it is worth noting, in distant locations from the village, such as farming places, which bring together related and non-related members of a village. Similarly, the fishing expedition may include any member of the community and of neighbouring settlements, and unlike hunting expeditions it is not gender exclusive.

My questions, in particular, concern the interface between the journey and the village regimes. For this, in the first section of the chapter, I will look at the organization, the procedures and practices related to the journey, but most of all, I will explore the significant and unique role of the *tuwama*, the leader of the expedition.

The last section will focus on the actual movement of the group; the mythological and historical commentaries that mark the place from camp to camp, the knowledge of the land and how to move in it. Juxtaposing the stories that people in Tipuru have told me about Takutunen on a daily basis, with the commentaries I heard en route, I will try to draw a trajectory through culturally significant landscapes.

Stars, animals and us: seasons and movements of life

For the Makushi, a year is composed of two major seasons: *kono 'yei*, the rainy season, which goes from April to August, and *wei 'yei*, the dry season, from September to March. There are 'smaller' seasons in between, like the "Cashew or Christmas rains" during December-January, and the "small dry season" around February/March. Before the rains begin again, a whole cycle is completed: *mia tunî uurî pona sakane kapoi. Tiwin kono'* – one rain - thus means one year, an expression that has been appropriated to count someone's age, adding the corresponding number in front. *Wei* meaning sun, on the other hand, counts the days, *kapoi*, the cycles of the moon.

The transitions from one season to the next are marked by the movements of stars and animals and correlated with specific times of practices and rules linked to the characteristics of the weather and to a wider cosmological understanding. Thus, in the short dry season, before the rains begin, villagers make sure to clear and burn new land for farming, while the start of the fish marching period – *Moro 'yamî' eseruru piya 'tîto'* – is the time for planting. The rainy season is also a good period for

hunting, as it facilitates the tracking of animals that walk over the muddy grounds. After the “crab season” – *murûi kompî* – in June/July, at the height and towards the end of the rains in August, it is time to complete the work on one’s farm⁵¹ and search for a new one, on elevated areas that have not been flooded. The new farm is cleared and with the beginning of the long dry season and come *tamî’kankon ruppe epa’kasa’ man* (the time when *tamî’kankon* shoots his arrows onto Earth), farms are burned again. During this short period, it is advised to get up very early, before 3 am, to avoid getting ill, as *tamî’kankon*’s arrows are said to cause abscesses and toothache in people.

With the heat and absence of rain, the creeks begin to dry up, which causes the fish to return to big rivers and lakes. This is a time when many people use traps, like the *masua*, to block their passage. The “cashew rains” in November/December are used to plant one’s farm again. However, the supply of water might be scarce and healthy growth hampered. Furthermore, with the time of *tauna kompî*, the morning star, rains turn the shallow water in the creeks and lakes dirty. Catching fish becomes difficult and many fish die, signalling a time of scarcity and hunger - *iwana*. Similarly, the Akawaio and Pemon call it *iwankan*, the “time of hunger” (Butt Colson and Armellada 2001: 23)⁵².

With the “beginning of the rains” – *kono’pîti* - when the earth gets soaked with water, heavy rains pour, sometimes non-stop for days on end. The savannah fills up with large lakes and puddles, rivers rise high, spill over the brim of their earthen beds, flood wooden bridges, paths, roads and form new creeks. Like tentacles the water digs a passage through the ground, forming numerous temporary creeks, such as *moope wîti* (cajâ fruit creek), *kîsapan wîti* (sand creek) (see drawing below). Their small riverbeds, depending on depth and width, can easily be mistaken for paths, when walking through unfamiliar ground in the dry season.

⁵¹ The Makushi call their large forest gardens farms. These agricultural plots are outside the village on the mountain slopes in the forest, usually at least 30 min on foot. Typically, a great variety of cassava is grown, interrupted by some sweet and “purple” potato plants, eddoes, yam, hot pepper and papaya (or paw-paw) trees. In the forest, conditions are better, the earth more fertile, the place shadier and more humid. Most trees need to be felled in order to plant the fields, however, those valued by the Makushi are left standing, such as certain palm and fruit trees. It is customary to have two farms, one planted at the beginning of the rainy season in April, and the other with the start of the cashew rains at the end of the year so that one is never without cassava.

⁵² From pages 9-26, the authors describe in minute detail the seasons of the region.

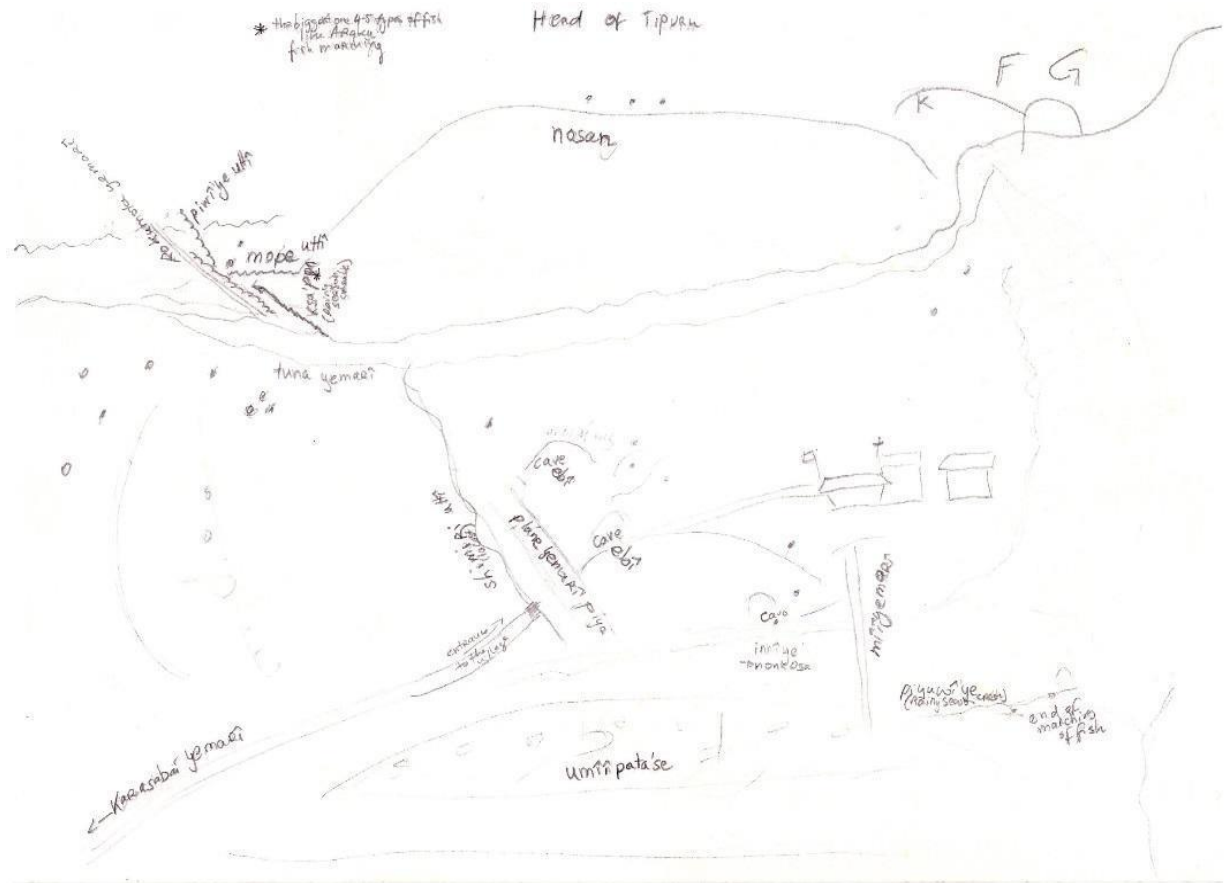


Figure 21. The village of Tipuru with the many named creeks which only flow during rainy season. Drawing by Marcia, 2013.

Not only water moves but also the animals in it. The principle rainy season, *kono'yei*, from May to September, is the great time of ‘marching’, when the fish, crabs and frogs swim, jump, crawl and walk to other places, to mate, spawn and look for a temporary home. According to Birknell (2012: 8), it is this seasonal flooding and fish migration that results in an impressive fish diversity in the Rupununi wetlands, due to the dispersion of fish between the Guiana Shield river basin and the Amazon drainage system (see also Watkins et al, 2005).

One day, during the dry season of 2013, when Marcia and I were walking towards Kara Kara to visit Candace at her home, we passed a dried stony hollow path, meandering at the side of the newly re-drawn vehicle road of pounded red earth. Marcia looked with nostalgia into it and a warm smile spread across her face. “In rainy season time it’s up to here the fish march. They come dancing, circling around, dam dam da dam.” She closed her eyes passionately and sang along, while mimicking the fish, lifting her arms, as if two other fish were hooked onto them, swaying from

side to side, back and forth. “They come dancing like this, they are merry and they sing, you can hear them march”. Marcia’s imitation of the fish dancing evokes the way people of long ago used to dance the humming bird dance *tukui*, at the beginning of the rainy season, to obtain luck in fishing⁵³. As mentioned above, *seuuri’sa*, “the time of marching”, is an important event in the annual calendar that indicates the beginning of a new season and new life. This time of abundance used to be celebrated with *tukui* (and *parishara*) dances, and today coincides with Easter celebrations. The ‘marching’ of these animals is something observed closely and is an important source of knowledge regarding the annual cycle, change of seasons, star constellations, levels and qualities of water - and routes. Let us look at one specific fish, the hassar, which is considered a traveller.

The armoured ‘flat belly’ hassar, or *kaariwau*⁵⁴ that lives in the ‘bush’ can travel out of water for several days during the dry season, in search of a riverbed where there is still water flowing. It is therefore quite distinct from the savannah hassar, which does not travel and lives in small pools, where people search for them, especially in the dry season when the holes dry out.

Kaariwau witti’ke, pata’ pro sake – “the hassar travels, he likes to walk about the place” – Marcia explains. According to her, they make cracking sounds when they move, through the leafy underbrush, they can store water in their mouths and every six hours or so throw their head up and sprinkle water over themselves, so they always keep wet. The description the Pemon gave to Butt-Colson and Armellada (2001:27) is very similar: the fish wriggles along, oozing out a secretion that keeps it wet while out of the water. For this reason, the ‘bush hassar’ can show the way through the mountains to the nearest water and people follow its track to find the best shortcuts. The hassar, Marcia tells me, only travels during daytime, during the night they sleep under fallen leaves. Butt-Colson and Armellada (2001: 28) draw an analogy between the movements and habits of the *ariwai*, who features in many Pemon and Kapon myths as seasonal reference marker on Earth, with the movement cycle and positioning of the star constellation *tamökan* (or *tami’kankon* in Makushi).

⁵³ See Butt-Colson and Armellada 2001, pp.31-35; see also Koch-Grünberg, 1924.

⁵⁴ Butt-Colson and Armellada (2001:31-35) mention *ariwai*, a hassar considered the leader of the fish marching. Marcia’s sister, for her part, spelled the hassar as *arauwai*. I presume that all three spellings refer to the same fish. It is a type of armoured cat-fish, of the *Callichthyidae* family. Beyond its importance as a traveller, the armoured hassar is recommended to pregnant women, so their belly does not grow too big. This differs sharply from the usual restriction of the other skin cat-fish, forbidden to pregnant and breast-feeding women.

The authors affirm, following Koch-Grünberg, that *tamî'kankon* is correspondent to the Pleiades, Hyades and Orion and marks the annual changes from dry to wet in the sky (Butt-Colson and Armellada 2001:15)⁵⁵. *Arauwai* acts as the leader of the fish, directs their movements and watches over the well-being of all of them. I shall elaborate on this topic later.

Along with the different types of fish (*moro'*), frogs (*turue, wuare*) and crabs (*yakara', mîrii*) are also markers of the rainy season. *Turueyamî*, huge toads commonly called 'Mountain chicken', come down from the mountains into the savannah pools. Some villagers in Tipuru, like Muriel, eat them, and she reiterates that she is not embarrassed about this 'custom'. Sometimes Makushi people from the North Rupununi would gossip about the Makushi from the mountains and their 'strange' eating habits, like eating frogs, a practice in which they greatly differ from their Patamona neighbours.



Figure 22. Map of the North Rupununi and South Pakaraima communities, published by North Rupununi District Deevlopment Board.

When Muriel meets her friend from Yupukari, a Makushi community along the Rupununi river (bottom right on the map), the man likes to make jokes about how in Tipuru (top left on the map) people gather buckets of small, spotted crabs, *yakarayamî*, that “walk about” the village during the rainy season:

⁵⁵ As Lévi-Strauss (1964: 218 et passim) has extensively demonstrated, the relation between the Pleiades and the dry season is a strong theme in Amazonian mythology.

He's always teasing me about *Yakarayamî* [laughing] "You bring *Yakara*?" he does say [laughing]. You know, I talk about it, what we does eat. We don't find big fish like them. The people in North they would find big fishes: Baiara and Lukunani and Arapaima, but we don't have that here! We have them fine [stress] little fishes, and I told him that we got plenty crabs during rainy season we does catch *Yakarayamî* [breathed out, stress], I tell he. So is that they does always tease me with [laughing].

For the people in the Rupununi, who live near large rivers and who are able to eat big fish daily, gathering small crabs seems a somewhat funny and 'poor' thing to do. Similarly, people in Tipuru, in comparison, see themselves as suffering hardship and having to live off little meat and only 'fine fish' or crabs.

For the communities of the South Pakaraimas and as far as the North Pakaraimas (corresponding roughly to the administrative division of Regions 8 and 9 of Guyana), there are only a few important seasonal sources of fish, where people journey to at different times of the year: Karona Falls, on the Ireng river, usually at the end of the rainy season, Moreiro Lake, at the end of the dry season and Takutunen, around the Cashew rains, in the dry season. It is not without significance that these places, although fundamental to Makushi ritual and material life, are not inside Amerindian land boundaries. The scale and importance of these seasonal movements are expressed by the following comment:

From Region 8 people does come! Way [stretched] back Kurukabaru, Kato, Monkey Mountain, everybody does come right there to catch fishes. All fish, how much fishes they does get, plenty, plenty. The whole Karona does there full of people, the whole from the top right down. Everybody just enjoy fish. (Winford, Tipuru, 2013)

However, these places, with falls, stretches of rivers and lakes are not just about fishing. They are landscapes loaded with meaning, and the journeys must be seen in the context of ritual performances. Thus, Horacio, from Tipuru, excitedly describes some common economic practices at Karona Falls:

People come with money, they buying fish. Carrying line, fishing line, exchanging fish. All kind of thing going on like that. People carry things for sell like, nah, fishing line, hooks and so, so they exchanging those with the fish. (Horacio, Tipuru, 2013)

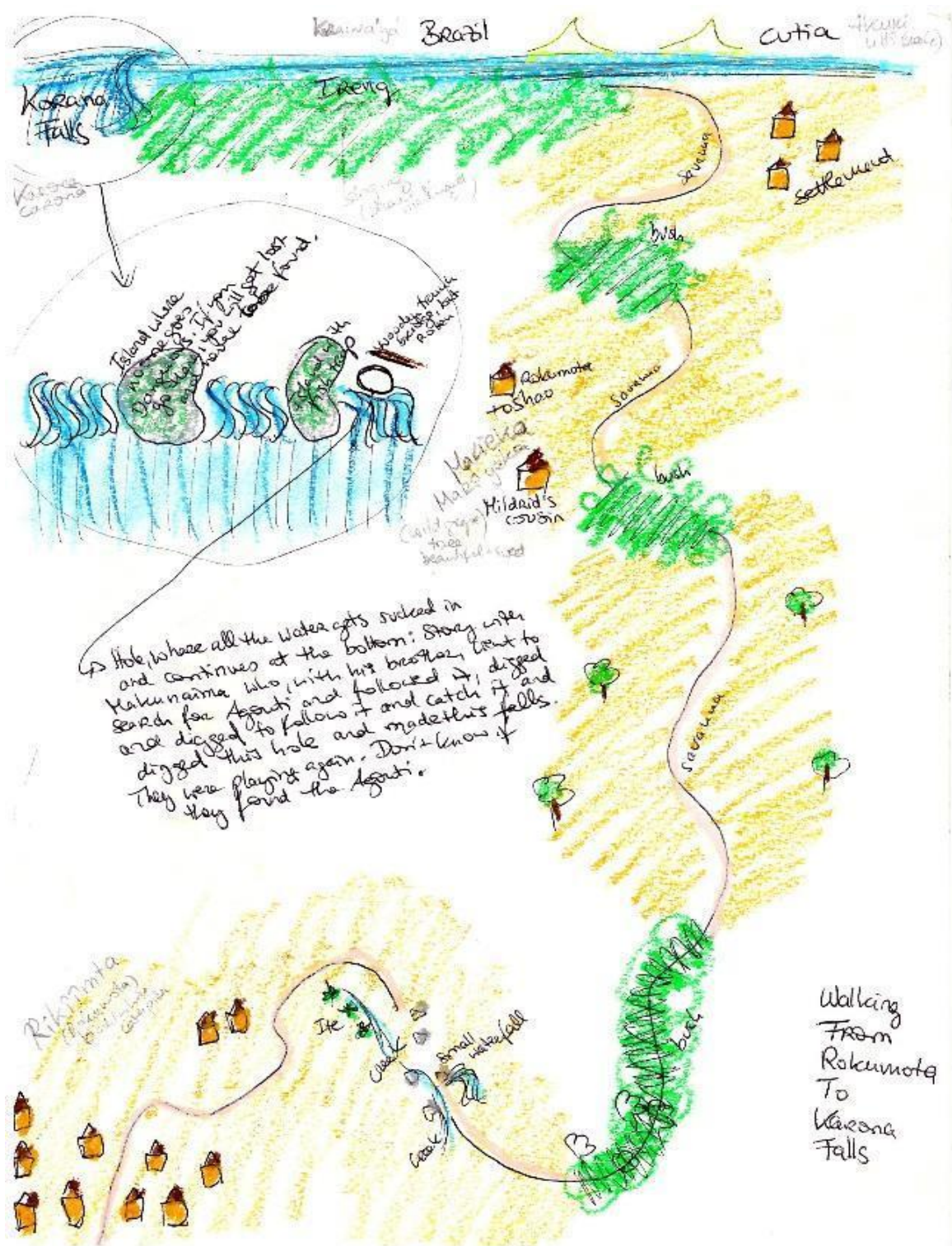


Figure 23. Sketch of the journey to Karona Falls, my drawing, 2014.

Whereas the roughly five-hour walk from Tipuru to Karona Falls through hilly savannah is occasionally shaded by bush islands (see figure 23 for a sketch of the trajectory), the much more distant Takutunen leads through a variety of dense forest

landscapes. People believe it is only there that big types of fish, such as the haimara (*Hoplias aimara*), or *aimara* in Makushi, and the huri (*Hoplias malabaricus*) can be found. As Muriel stressed: “That is the only place the people normally go to catch their haimara and the big [stretched] huri”. Unlike the more individualistic Karona Falls expedition, the fixed group that goes to Takutunen always stays together and over a longer period in camps away from the village. During the Christmas period, the group remains fishing for around two weeks returning on Christmas Eve for the big celebration. Although both men and women go, couples and whole families, the majority of the group, ranging from about 15 to over 30 people, consists of men, in this case from Tipuru, as well as relatives from close settlements like Kara Kara and Maloca Nova. Young and old people participate, those who can somehow contribute in fishing or hunting and who are ‘old enough’ to be introduced to the excursion for the first time. Small children would usually not join the group, because the journey is long and the terrain strenuous. In the following part, I describe the procedure of the journey to Takutunen, with particular focus on the role of the leader of the expedition, the *tuwama*. I will look at the corresponding practices and the semantic field of the expedition.

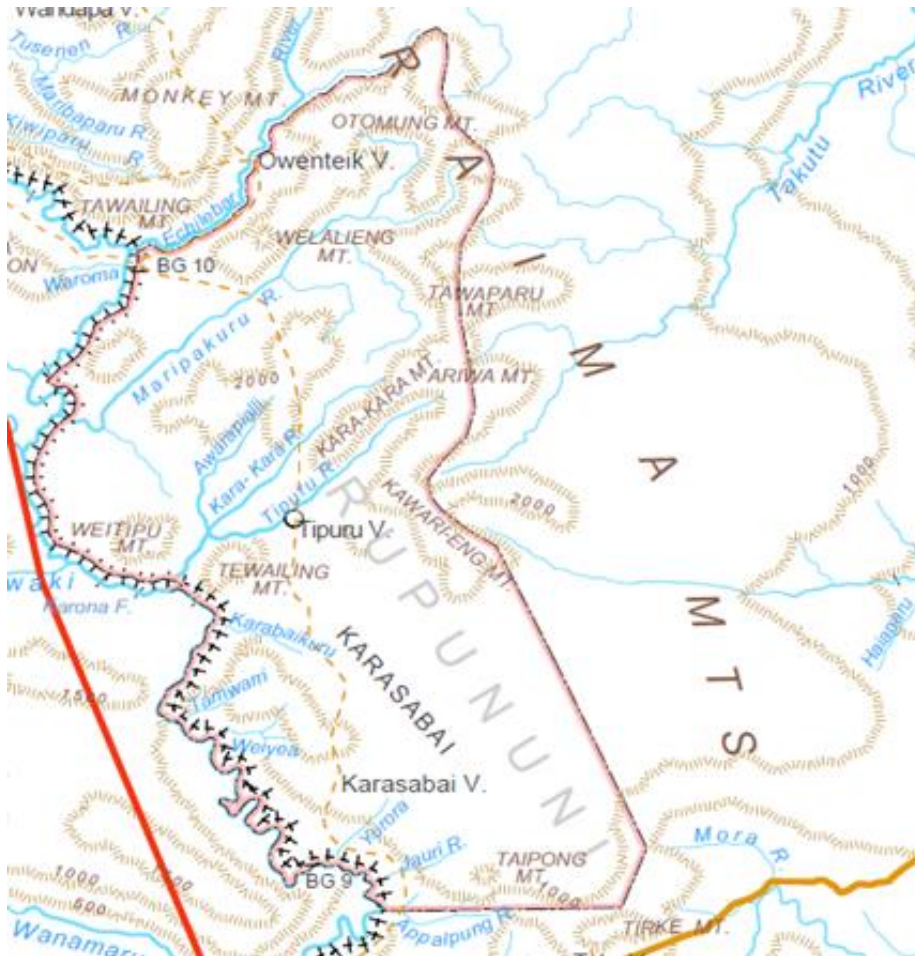


Figure 24. Karasabai District Amerindian Land boundary (purple line) and the Takutu River (in the East)

The procedure of a journey

A fishing expedition to Takutunen may begin any time around the beginning of December, at the start of the Christmas season. Although the journey takes place at a specific time of the year and runs a definite course, it starts spontaneously, just triggered by someone’s decision to invite people to go.

If taken up, the initial informal character of the invitation soon becomes a very detailed plan for the journey, as becomes clear in the following description of the necessary preparations for the fishing expedition in the year 2013.

Reinaldo is nowadays the *tuwama* for the expedition to Takutunen and he also led the journey that I am about to relate. When I asked Reinaldo about how one becomes a *tuwama*, he explained: “Like if you say we going! So if they say we going Takutunen, alright, we going, we going, so you done tell already, so the people got for depend

'pon you now, the *tuwama*." This however does not give the *tuwama* his status, but rather the individuals who decide to follow him, i.e. accept him in the role of the leader. Reinaldo is about 33 and has been more than 23 times to Takutunen, both as a *tuwama* and as a member of expeditions aimed at hunting, fishing and clearing of the paths. For Chuck, his eldest son, it was the first journey to Takutunen. He had just finished secondary school at Annai, where he had spent several years, interrupted by holiday breaks back home, and for Reinaldo it was important to take him on the expedition and have him learn about the place, the route and procedures.

Early in the morning, just after the light was beginning to brighten the place through the drizzly clouds, Reinaldo and Chuck came both loaded with their *warashi* (*rutu* in Makushi). A *rutu* is an Amerindian carrier bag made from the stem of the *mucru* plant stripped into thin, long pieces, dried and then plaited neatly with different patterns. The back is square and sits like a rucksack; the sides, shaped like a 'U', open at the front and top, are tied only with strings made of the *karau'ya* plant. The two tarpaulins (one of them borrowed from Mr Green, a villager and experienced Takutunen traveller) to make the camp roofs, were wrapped tight, serving as a cover to keep the luggage from falling out and the rain from dripping in. Under the tarpaulin were the necessary items for this type of a journey.: a hammock or *atta* (for travelling, many people, like Reinaldo's son, carry the thin and light 'garimpeiro' hammocks); a cutlass to clear the path of small fallen tree trunks, lianas and underbush. It is also used as a defence against snakes and for general chopping purposes, collection of fire wood, sticks for the construction of camps and for hanging hammocks. Sharp knives to cut fish and meat, and various hooks and lines, for fish of different sizes, were packed meticulously into recycled, washed-out rice or chow mein packaging and recycled peanut butter jars. A piece of dry, easily inflammable wood (*washtu ye'*) to help in the first moments of lighting a fire, and a change of clothes (Bermuda shorts and T-shirt) were essential.

The bags also contained two hand-torches, the plastic ones made in China which can be found in village stores and in Lethem and that shine far but do not last very long. Wrapped in several maths exercise-book papers, used for rolling cigarettes, was a stack of Brazilian "Extra forte-tobacco". Smoking, for some, definitely for Reinaldo, becomes 'a way of life' during these kinds of journeys, and people one might never have seen smoking before, roll cigarettes at every possible moment of rest. Tobacco is also offered as a sign of respect to spiritual beings, whose territory is

passed by closely, traversed or camped in (see chapter 5).

We had obtained about four big cakes of thin cassava bread from the *toshao's* wife, folded in half, and a can of 4 litres of farine from another villager, who had just finished parching a new batch. Despite the gift offered to us, the common procedure is that each traveller's household will prepare enough rations to last for the trip. To make the boiled food on the way tastier, it was important to have a plastic bottle of *Kumaasi* (thick black cassava molasses), salt, hot pounded chikitai-pepper (in the forest it is always good to "burn one's mouth"), a big pot (we took another one with us that we found at *Kari'na* camp) to boil fish or prepare coffee in, a pot spoon, spoons for eating, a plate and containers. Reinaldo's son carried a bow (*uraapa*) and arrow (*prîn*), as well as some pointed arrows with a thin iron stick used to shoot or spear fish. He also carried home-made goggles, used when diving for fish hiding under the big rocks.

Winford summarised the luggage of the average traveller in the following list:

- ammunition (*piroto'*) and gun (*rukusa*)
- bow (*uraapa*) and arrow (*prîn*)
- fishing kit
- 8-litre farine (*uwi*)
- 4 cake cassava bread (dried, *kenan*, *ikei*)
- empty water bottle (*wei*)
- something against the rain, tarpaulin
- hammock
- pepper
- kumasii*
- salt
- pot

Before departure, we gathered at the outdoor kitchen of Reinaldo's in-laws to exchange the final conversations and eat some food. Cynthia, Reinaldo's wife with whom he has eight children, was going to stay in the savannah, like many other women, preparing *parakari*, *kasiri* and *paiwa*, the alcoholic cassava drinks, as well as cassava bread and farine to welcome the expedition back and for the communal festivities in front of the *toshao's*⁵⁶ house in the evening.

Passing the outdoor kitchen, we walked along a narrow deep-trodden footpath through high savannah grass, dotted with stones and the occasional rock. It led past four adobe houses with thatched roofs, which seemed to be empty. The forested hills

⁵⁶ The *toshao* – or *tuxaua* a term from the Brazilian colonial "língua geral", based on Tupi Guarani language - is the official head of the village. I will talk about the *toshao's* role and qualities in the discussion at the end.

in front were the end of the savannah. The boundary between them can be remarkably clear. The vegetation of itchy, dry savannah grass that scratches one's legs when walking along the narrow footpaths and the bright light and heat immediately change upon entering the tunnel of trees - a dark seemingly independent sound-scape. It is not only a visual change but also an acoustic one comparable to the sensation between being above and under water. However, as became apparent, the journey to Takutunen did not lead through one forest space alone, but through many, each one different, characteristic in its own way and, as we shall see, immensely 'storied'.

On the way, we met several villagers, those whose houses we had found closed-up, working on their farms, reaping, planting or returning with their fully loaded *rutu* on their backs. An elderly lady turned her head towards me from under the carrier strings, "*minke!*" (far!), she stretched the word into a long, high-pitched sound, waving her arm into the distance. Her voice was full of pain, not only from her own experience of the distance and strenuous nature of the journey, but also out of compassion for me, who, in her eyes, was not accustomed to this type of journey (with my white, unfamiliar, weak body). "*Minke pra!*" (not far!) I replied teasingly and she laughed. I learned that if I wanted to convince people that I could manage to live in this place like a local, I had to show that I was not worried or afraid, that I could take things with humour and ease, and turn serious situations into jokes. "Careful with the snakes!", she called, watching us disappear into the distance.

Takutunen is indeed far from Tipuru village, but not that far, in comparison to other villages in the North Pakaraimas. It is one of the closest villages and the journey on foot takes about three days' walk, "slow walk", if you go hunting on the way. As mentioned above, every traveller must carry an adequate amount of rations to last for the entire trip. Carrying enough food, mainly farine and cassava bread, is essential for a long journey on foot like the one to Takutunen, where there are no fields or homes offering provision on the way. The importance of organizing and rationing one's food is emphasized in Horacio's description of techniques that villagers use who come from places even further away:

Monkey Mountain, they have a road going that way. From Tusenen they say it's two weeks travelling. Yeah, two weeks. So the people will start with two can of farine and they leave their ration in each camp, they dig a hole. They dig holes on the way, so they would leave like two litre farine here, another two litre of the way, so when they coming back they would find the ration. They would start with heavy load but they would leave it on the way. Travelling is one week,

fishing is one week and coming back is another week, so actually three weeks.
(Horacio, Tipuru, 2013)

The first possibility to fish is the little Takutu River, at the foot of *Kuta'yeka* Mountain, which is more than two nights away, so people make sure they pack some preserved meat or fish for the journey.

There are clear divisions of tasks between the *tuwama* and the other travellers on route. During the journey, the former is responsible for organizing the group, naming hunters and 'cleaners' to clear the trail. He decides which camp to stop at for the night and he is the one others turn to if they have a query or suggestion:

[My] father time, when he was *tuwama*, he would pick two people to cut the trail because it is with women and children. And then he will get at least three hunters before, they will go through the bush that is their job. And then the cleaners will be there and he will direct them and then we'll come, we'll go slow, slow, slow. By the time they're at the bridge we will start and when we reach we will sit down while they clean it. And is so we going. (Marcia, Tipuru, 2014)

When leaving in the morning from the village, the group often spends the first night at *Sipuru'ya*, literally “manicole there”: “Everybody know the place where we camp. The *tuwama* might say, “*Sipuru'ya pata're*”, 'today we going to sleep at *Sipuru'ya*'.”

A few manicole palm trees grow here and there along the shallow and still creek water. Manicole (or açai, in Portuguese) is a popular palm fruit widely consumed in the Amazon region, made into a thick juice that is drunk or eaten together with food. The seeds are used as beads in craft and clothing. However, the Makushi do not appreciate this palm fruit as much as another type, which in Guyana is known as “Lou” (‘bacaba’ in Brazil). The thick juice is a lot milkier, “like milo”, some say.

As it was getting dark, Reinaldo decided to camp here, too. There were hardly any signs of previous camps, the ground was uneven and muddy, the water shallow and covered with leaves. Although quite hidden, the stream was the reason why this place was a preferred campground. Camps are always, if possible, set up at the side of, or close to any kind of creek or river, to have water to drink, bathe, wash and cook. Travellers make sure, and here especially the *tuwama*, that hammocks are slung and tarpaulins tightened before it gets dark, and enough day light remains to bathe and to prepare a fire for cooking.

Days turn fast into nights and around 4 o'clock, people stop walking and start making preparations.

Without taking a break, Reinaldo put down his bag and began clearing the area with a cutlass, chopping thin trees and shoots. It was one of the rare moments it had stopped raining and he and his son unfolded the tarpaulin to make a roof over the hammocks. Chuck was observing his father closely, following his moves. Reinaldo disappeared in the forest in search of a tree with white wood - *reira ye'* (or *aiya ye'*) -, even if wet and cut fresh, it is dry inside and easy to set fire to. He separated the mossy bark and outer layer and grated from top to bottom, leaning the trunk against his legs. Since leaving Tipuru he had been carrying a piece of orange-yellow wood - *washtu ye'* (or *washtuwe ye'*) – something that people take with them on journeys to start a fire, by grating fine, almost hairy, shavings from it. With only a few blows and a constant feeding of the flames with more pieces, he got the fire going in a short time. Chuck was always on hand and kept chopping more wood for the fire.

As soon as the iron pot with water was hanging from a stick across two forked pieces of wood, the first drops of rain came down⁵⁷. Immediately, Reinaldo went for several long large leaves of young shoots of the manicole, or cocorite palm to build a “marudi (powis) tail” - *powee yakkî* - to protect the fire. This is probably the quickest way of making a spontaneous shelter and only requires some horizontal sticks against which the leaves can be leaned. The way the palm leaves are arranged and bent over into a tail, is what gives it this name, after the Guianese powis or black curassow (*Crax Alector*). The *powee yakkî* is the most common shelter to protect fires and food as well as bags and people from a sudden rainfall, and is often constructed between the roots of big trees.

At a later stage, I will return to the subject of camps and their importance as reference markers and for mythic cartography during the journey to Takutunen. In the following part, I will continue by describing the procedures when arriving at the final camp.

Fish, fishermen and the tuwama

⁵⁷ Even in the dry season, rain might fall frequently inside the forest.

During at least two weeks, or as long as there are fish and people want to stay, the expedition remains camped at Takutunen. Early in the morning and after “burning one’s mouth” with pepper pot, people disperse into small groups, some might search for better spots further down river.

Due to the haimara’s size and weight, fishing techniques at Takutunen consist of diving and spearing. Certain people that are renowned swimmers dive underwater to search under big rocks, where the fish like to hide. When confronted, the fish opens its mouth wide, the diver hooks it with his bare hand and in that moment, gives a sign to the person holding the thick line to pull. Many divers own home-made goggles. They burn the lenses out of broken car windows, left behind by passing travellers, using a thermal shock technique. The frame and the head strings are made of rubber, usually from bicycle or car tubes, which is glued onto the glass. The goggles are fastened tight enough around the head so that as little water as possible gets into the eyes, while the nose remains uncovered.

In the afternoons, after a tiring day, the fishermen slowly gather back in the camp to rest and chat about the adventures of the day over a collective meal. The *tuma* is warmed up throughout the evening for any late-comers. Nights are usually early due to exhaustion but might turn into lively story-telling sessions. It is worth noting that throughout the journey no alcoholic beverages are consumed, which is in stark contrast to the usual collective activities characterized by collective drinking sprees and drunkenness.

While everyone eats fresh fish at Takutunen, grilled or boiled in pepper pot, the *kampu*, the Makushi word for smoked meat or fish, is what people take home and as provision for the journey back. *Kampu*⁵⁸ - is done by making a *shura* (a grill) out of several strong young tree trunks with forked twigs, placed upright into a structure and thick sticks across it, with a certain height to allow space between the blazing flames from the fire underneath. The meat remains on the grill for several hours until the outer skin is burned black, the inside dried and cooked. Cooked may not be the precise term; as Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966 [1965]:41) pointed out, the long and intense process of smoking constitutes a hyper-cultural elaboration of food that goes

⁵⁸ Interestingly, *kampu* has been appropriated into the Carib languages, but is originally a term used by the Maroons of Suriname, to name permanent or temporary “horticultural” camps (Migge & Léglise 2013: 70-110). Sometimes these *kampu* have grown into the size of big villages (*ibid.* p. 90). Although the Makushi use *kampu* in a different way, it is still connected to camps and to activities when camping in the forest during hunting or fishing trips.

beyond cooking. Although the Makushi technique of almost “smoke-roasting” the fish does not match the smoking with hot air, it still falls under Lévi-Strauss’ differentiation between cooked/roasted and smoked categories. It is worth noting that smoking fish is one of the multiple tasks assumed exclusively by the *tuwama* during the days at Takutunen. It is time to look more closely at his role.

Even if the definition of a *tuwama* is loosely the one who takes the initiative, it depends on the recognition by the community of a set of skills and knowledge, which enable him to lead successfully. Although women join the expedition, the *tuwama* is a man with a reputation as an experienced hunter and fisherman. He needs to know the area well and be skilled at travelling through the forest, good at coordinating and organizing a big group of people, as well as making appropriate choices and decisions for the well-being and safety of the group journeying with him.

On the way to Takutunen the most notable aspect of the *tuwama*’s performance is what he refrains from doing: unlike all the others, he does not hunt or clean the ‘underbush’, or walk in front to lead the group; he walks at the back, heavily loaded⁵⁹.

As Winford explains:

Everybody carry up to a limited ration you could carry, the hunters maybe go a little lighter but not much. No one goes without weight, everybody will carry. Specially the *tuwama*, he is the loaded man. He's the one who will also share out on the way, whatever little bit, he will carry. He catch fire, or tell somebody to catch fire and then whatever we have to cook, he cook there. If we find meat on the way, the *tuwama* is the one to clean it or to tell 'ok, let we do this, let we do that', we share then, we share our work together. We share everything, the fish, the meat is the same. We share. (Winford, Tipuru, 2014)

Most surprisingly, the *tuwama* never engages in fishing during encampment; he never accompanies the other members on their daily fishing expeditions along the river. All those days, the *tuwama* stays at the camp, while everyone else scatters into little groups looking for good rocks, diving spots, going from bay to bay down the river. His abstinence from fishing, as well as from hunting – he does not even carry a gun or fishing gear - is related to his ritual leadership:

We does bless ourselves whilst going. You pray, you thank the lord, the almighty, everybody together. The *tuwama* lead it or you ask anybody ‘Ok, you lead us in prayer today’. Remember we travelling, this is a journey we don’t know what can occur there.

⁵⁹ The fact that on our excursion to Takutunen Reinaldo, although heavy-laden, was walking in front, cutting the way through the bush was unusual for a *tuwama*. The reasons for this were that the majority of us were going for the first time and Reinaldo was by far the most knowledgeable about directions and how to move through the forest, so this was an exceptional situation. Furthermore, Reinaldo wanted to teach his son Chris about the trajectory.

We put ourselves in front of the father and we always reach. Sometimes it happens yes, we get snakebites and so. We have people who know how to bless all of that. (Winford, Tipuru. Priest, former *tuwama* and *toshao*, 2014)

This aspect of the *tuwama*'s position becomes particularly evident in connection with the seasonal fishing trips to Karona Falls. There, I learned about a different technique to catch the fish swimming upstream that involves a trap called *taiwî* that can only be handled by a *tuwama* following specific procedures of abstinence, sharing and spiritual practices. Muriel explained:

And when they catch their fishes with the same trap, they would share to families. And they would divide them. And set it again. All the time like that now, every day they working. But there is only one person with the trap, he looks after it. He's a trap man. For the fishes to swim plenty like that, an old man would look after that same *taiwî*. They would normally make strong [stretched, stress] burned cassava drink, *kipotsa*. You know there's some people who would [laughing] I wouldn't say [laughing], the young ladies, they send the young ladies to chew this burned cassava and they set it up nice, leave it there for maybe two weeks to get strong, strong, strong, and with that the old man would wash the same *taiwî*. Bless it! Yeah, bless it and wash it. And so the fishes would swim up. That same drink is for their god maybe. But this old man now who blessed this thing, wouldn't eat fish for maybe a month or so. He wouldn't [stress] eat it. After when he clean up this *taiwî* he wouldn't eat the fish. Cause he is like the father for them. He is looking after them. If he eat the fish, he would get sick, nah, because he already turn the father. The father would shoot him, they say like this. He will get abscess, maybe get paralyze.

In both cases – in Takutunen and Karona Falls -, despite their differences, the common ground seems to be that the *tuwamas* are not at the centre of the killing. Indeed, they remain at the periphery of the scene: in Karona Falls, he acts before the killing, by blessing and preparing the trap that others will set; and in Takutunen, he keeps processing the already dead fish. I would suggest it is no coincidence that they try to distance themselves from the death of the fish, as they establish an ambiguous identification with the fish themselves: as Muriel says, the *tuwama* is like a “god” or “father” for the fish.

The *tuwama*, as we see, can use *taren* – incantations – to call the fish in large quantities or to lure them into the trap. The old Tukui songs and dances which were performed at the time of the “fish-marching” had the same purpose, according to Butt Colson and Armellada (2001:26-33), of mimicking the fish in order to attract them and ensure a “prosperous fishing season”.

By means of incantation or just by abstinence, the *tuwama* posits himself as an intermediary between fish and human beings. By temporarily holding the position of

the father of the fish, he counter-acts the dangers of excessive fishing, which is the case of seasonal group expeditions.

As has been widely registered in Amazonian ethnography, forms of excessive harvesting or killing are perceived as an insult, which provokes anger in the father of the species concerned. For the Makushi, every species has their *potoorî*, which they translate as father or master of living beings, who takes care of them, particularly, according to Butt-Colson & Armellada (2001:28), of their trails and their fertility.

Overing (1975: 45-68; 1989) describes the role performed by the leader in creating fertility for all life forms, focusing on the *ruwang*, the religious/political leader among the Piaroa in the neighbouring Venezuelan forest. A *ruwang* is also expected to apply his magical knowledge as an intermediary for the external relations of his community, especially by securing reproduction for humans and animals alike and ensuring that hunting does not result in depletion of the other species. Furthermore, through magical words, the *ruwang* turns the dangerous hunted prey into a safe vegetal food, as the Piaroa consider the consumption of animals, their forest fellow creatures, to be an act of cannibalism. It seems that for the peoples in the savannahs, like the Makushi, this performance corresponds to the various roles of shaman, *toshao*, *taren* practitioner and *tuwama*.

In his analysis of the eco-cosmology of the Makuna, Arhem (1996: 198-202) proposes that hunting excessively for ritual purposes involves extraordinary dangers, which have to be mediated by protective shamanism. The shaman, or *cumua*, neutralizes the destructiveness of hunting by giving back the vital principle of the prey to its birth-house. In this vein, the author suggests that hunting is a kind of “male gardening”, which insures the fertility of all forms of life. The emphasis on hunting, as distinct from fishing, is justified by the author by the fact that the Makuna only regard game animals as active agents or ‘persons’, which have to be de-humanized and made safe to consume through “food shamanism”. In contrast, fish are considered creative by-products from mythical times and count as prescriptive food, thus less dangerous to kill and eat. While offerings are made to the fish father, he is not negotiated with or asked for permission (Arhem 1996: 193).

For the Makushi, such a distinction would not apply, as their fish *potoorîyamî* are also consulted by the *pia'san* or the *tuwama*, who act as intermediaries. Furthermore, the large-scale fishing in Takutunen, using the techniques of spearing, shooting and manual hooking, could be understood as a form of “sub-aquatic

hunting”, where the fisher/hunter enters into an individual relationship with the fish under water, in a dangerous eye-to-eye encounter, especially with the huge haimara.

Following the analytical path of Arhem (1996), which also highlights the inversion of male hunting and female farming, we could see the *tuwama* as occupying a female space in relation to the other members of the expedition, as he is always engaged in the preparation of communal food and its distribution. He is also the only one who refrains from eating or killing. Although we cannot say that the *tuwama* performs shamanic regeneration of life, he definitely mediates between life and death of the fish and can be seen as the guardian of life in the ritual scenario of death.

Furthermore, the *tuwama* establishes a consanguineous relationship with the fish, occupying temporarily the position of their father. There are evident implications of this fatherhood. The paternal relationship established is obviously dubious, due to the deceptive performance of the *tuwama*, who tricks the fish into a mortal trap. At the same time, such a position is acquired through a negotiation for the permission of the actual *potoorî* or father of the fish. Thus, the blessing of the *taiwî* with a specially prepared *kipotsa* can be seen as a compensation offered to the *potoorî* and a way to show respect and ask permission for the killing.

The *potoorî* will take revenge if the fishing gets out of the *tuwama*'s control and if the *tuwama* breaks dietary and other restrictions. In this case, the punishment – abscess or paralysation – is analogous to the death inflicted to the fish, by the wound of an arrow or spear and the use of paralysing poisons. This aspect unveils once more a magical link between *tuwama* and fish. It also evokes the *tamî'kankon ruppe*, the *tamî'kankon*'s arrows, which are sent at the closing of the season of fish fertility – or ‘marching’ – and bring disease to human beings, as a kind of cosmic counterbalance to the excessiveness that characterized the past season.

The *tuwama*'s mediating role also implies that he stays behind to prepare the communal meals and to organize the sharing of the food. He ensures that there is always fresh fish boiling in several pots for the feast. For these varied tasks from cutting fire wood, to cooking and organizing these on-the-spot communal feasts he usually chooses people to help him. The *tuwama* gets little rest and being at the centre of social interaction when people gather and relax after a long day, he is entertained by the stories people tell about their adventures along the Takutu River. Reinaldo summarizes:

After a big tuma pot in the morning, people go off fishing, they come back more late, like 5 o'clock. Light fire, burst firewood, prepare and kampu the fish, get partner to help the *tuwama* „go cut that wood for me“. I cook first for them, then I prepare them fish. We got plenty little pots, 7 or 10, some more big. Everybody eat together. The *tuwama* never don't sleep, you know. He roast whole night, whole night. Maybe not whole night, he does sleep when the fire go out. Then he light it again. Night time they does eat too, you know. Three o'clock they wake up and they eating. Then you take a rest. (Reinaldo, Tipuru, 2013)

As Reinaldo describes above, the *tuwama* is always busy smoking the large quantities of fish that will be carried home. Unlike the fresh fish consumed daily in the camp, the *kampu* taken home has to be divided by the *tuwama* into equal amounts for every household present. Thus, sons and daughters living in a separate household, as well as an old person who lives alone count as an extra unit:

The *tuwama* needs to know how to do it. Once you catch fish, you got to divide it equally: like he now [pointing with his lips to his 15 year old son], he don't get. Once he get girl, he get wife, you share with he. But he don't get girl, so he don't get. Each person get head, head, head...and middle part again, til the middle done, then the tail, until the tail done, until they done. About 16 pieces we get, each person, each person, each person. (Reinaldo, Tipuru, 2013)

As Reinaldo describes above, the *tuwama* not only shares out equal portions, but also ensures that everyone gets each of the different parts, for instance, the much sought-after head.

Rather than having the *tuwama* divide a separate *warashi*-load of *kampu* for the *toshao*, each person who received a share, when coming back into the village, gives a part of it to the *toshao*, the official chief of the village, who is then responsible for organizing the communal meal and Christmas celebration:

So if the captain, the *toshao* come, each person will give one piece, one piece, one piece, to make big *warashi*, so that everyone have food together outside the *toshao*'s house (Reinaldo, 2013)

The number of pieces given to the *toshao* is variable and depends on the size of the Takutunen group and the success of the catch. In times of scarcity, the participants would give more of their share so that there is enough *kampu* for the communal celebration. The *toshao* should also receive enough to be able to keep some of the fish for his own consumption.

Proper distribution, organization and preparation are crucial qualities of the *tuwama*, and having someone who is responsible for leading and caring for the group is understood as necessary to ensure equal distribution of food and the well-being

during the journey. Unlike the networks of reciprocity between kin, in-laws and neighbours, the *tuwama* has a redistributive role – he rather *shares out* (*raatai*). *Raatai*, the term that describes this practice, is generally used for the shaman's helper spirits, literally translated as “his parts”, which again points strongly to the organic link between the *tuwama* and the collective fishing.

While cassava bread and farine are rations that travellers take with them individually, the meat, regardless of who was successful in hunting or fishing, is shared. In contrast to Takutunen, in the context of daily hunting trips, the one who is successful (*kamota*) is the one who takes the catch home and divides (*kamo'ti*) it among his family, in-laws and residence cluster. Those who have lent guns or ammunition used in the successful hunt also receive a piece of the catch. In G. Mentore's examination (1995: 26-29; also 2005) of a spontaneous Wai Wai peccary communal hunt, for instance, only the hunters that were successful in the hunt take whole peccaries home, uncleaned and uncut, and they decide who to give the meat to, according to reciprocal moral obligations within a large network of kinship and marriage relations. His analysis looks specifically at white-lipped peccary hunts, as they which in that they happen spontaneously upon the sighting of a herd, occur in groups and end in a wider communal meal in the house of the village leader. However, the cooked food brought to the chief for the purpose of a communal meal is prepared at home. The case of Takutunen, where there is a leadership post responsible for the cleaning, cutting and preparing of raw fish and the sharing out of cooked food among all members of the group present, is quite unique, even for trips arranged in groups. The whole feast is completed with the preparation of the cassava to accompany the meat. As mentioned before, during the fishing expedition the women who stay behind in the village will be busy preparing cassava bread and drink; in this way, although it happens elsewhere, cassava preparation is an integral part of the journey.

The cassava work is done jointly in extended family households, and larger groups of women might get together to assist. Depending on whose farm and cassava house is used, the respective women might call out a collective *mayu* to get helpers or take the initiative to invite other women to do the cassava work at their house. During this time, as Amazonian ethnography has described extensively (for instance C. Hugh-Jones, 1976) the women scrape, grate, squeeze and transform raw, poisonous, inedible roots, by heating them over the fire, into edible food and drink for the

communal meal. Without cassava bread and farine, the *kampu* fish would not be considered a proper meal and a celebration without *parakari* (cassava drink) would not be such fun or go on for so long.

The older generation of women remember using cotton strings – *wekui* - to count down the days until the return of the expedition, a practice that was common among the indigenous people of the area, already described by ethnographers such as Im Thurn (1967 [1883]), Roth (2011 [1915]) and Koch-Grünberg (1923)⁶⁰. They would knot the string into the amount of days before the celebration, with different colours for different activities - such as blue for fishing expeditions - and every day the women would undo a knot to know when to start preparing the different cassava products. These *wekui* were also very common in the preparations for *Parishara* and *Tukui* celebrations and other kinds of festivities like *Kakayamî*, running competitions among villages.

The alcoholic cassava drink has to be ready in time. When the group arrives back at the first camp, *Kari'na* camp, nearest to the village, they call the women to join them by firing guns, sometimes blowing flutes or horns. On hearing the flute sounds and shots, the wives and other villagers that remained in the savannah come to meet them, bringing bottles, bowls and “gobies” [large, round storage bottles made of balata gum] of alcoholic cassava drinks. This makes up for the abstinence of alcohol during camp life:

The women who stay back here, we would prepare like *paiwari*, *parakari*, and later on, when they near to come back now we would prepare the *kassiri*, because some of them wouldn't want to drink strong drink when they reach back. So we does carry *kassiri*. Some would carry *paiwa*, some would carry strong drink. So whoever want to drink this *kassiri*, who want to drink strong one they would enjoy themselves. They normally reach Christmas Eve. If they reach before the women, they would fire them gun "pah!", like soldiers. [laughing] The women would hassle to go and meet them, to bring the load. Sometimes [high] if they don't get enough meat, they would come before the Christmas Eve and they would come by that bush mouth, by Phillip George, and they would fire up and their wives would go and meet them. (Muriel, Tipuru, 2013)

The flutes were characteristic of earlier days. Marcia remembers their sounds

⁶⁰ Im Thurn (1967 [1883]:320) for instance writes that these knotted cotton strings were also handed out to the headmen of the settlements invited to a celebration, so they would know when to arrive. He also mentions that this kind of counting system of “knot-tying”, which he compares to the “quippoo system of the Peruvians”, was also used to record “owed articles”, such as cotton balls, where both, “debtor” and “creditor”, would keep a string to remember the amount borrowed.

from past journeys when she was a young woman. There are three kinds of flutes, one of them without holes but with a hollow opening at the bottom, covered with the palm of the hand to make noise in different frequencies. The repeated high and long blows of “hooo, hooo, hooo”, followed by a few gunshots, she recalls, was the sign for the arrival of the group, which could be heard far into the savannah⁶¹.

Usually, at Karina camp, the party begins right away with everyone drinking and resting, talking about their adventures in the forest and dancing and singing merrily. Some might retire early to bathe and change clothes, and others stay on and move straight on to the Christmas celebration outside the house of the *toshao*.

Christmas celebrations in Tipuru used to be important communal events in the past, when the village was the only church mission in the region, established under the catholic priest James William Curtis in 1916. People came from all over the South Pakaraimas, from Karasabai, Tiger Pond, Yurong Paru among other places, to gather at Tipuru. At that time, Marabaikuru would bring *aima* (haimara) from the *tunaka* river; Maurice Mine would bring big skin fish like *popokaimî*; Karabaikuru would bring game from the head of Karabaikuru Mountain; others would bring kuti (*poro'mai*), baiara (*wînîyamî*) and manji (*katîrîna'*). Tipuru would contribute with haimara from Takutunen. Today, only nearby communities of Kara Kara, Rokamota, Karabaikuru and Maloca Nova join in the celebration. In rows of three, swaying back and forth, like the fish marching mimicked by Marcia described at the beginning of the chapter, the Christmas dancing circles around the houses and invites those who are not yet following the procession to join in.

Christian holidays, especially in the case of Christmas – *Kresemoshi* - have become ‘naturalised’ into the Makushi calendar and transformed into important events and get-togethers of families, similarly to Parishara, Tukui and Kakayamî festivities in the past. It is a time of day-long merriness, when couples get to know each other. The whole month of December has received the name of this Christian holiday season, *Kresemoshi Kapoi*.

Sharing, as Overing (2000; 2003) has demonstrated, is the core of the production of community in Guyana. It is in this light that we should see the

⁶¹ Marcia also told me about two other flutes that were used: one with two holes that was played by moving the fingers alternately, making short sounds, to warn others that someone is in danger or sick and to call them to hurry for help. Another single-holed flute making one long, deep sound, followed by a gun shot, informed the villagers that someone died or is about to die and that help is needed to carry the body.

Kresemoshi celebration. Smoked fish and cassava produce are complementary and an equally valuable contribution to the party. Every villager who added to the ingredients plays a role in the preparation of the final collective meal, as important as the *tuwama* and the *toshao*. Communal meals thus mirror all these political, social and economic relations in a village and are “an open expression of shared village life” (G. Mentore 2005: 158).

However, more than a communal meal, *Kresemoshi*, like the Piaroa festival – Sari – analysed by Overing (1975: 49-57), is an event that goes beyond the village boundaries, bringing together a cluster of villages. As she pointed out, this is the space for external relations, where the political network of a village leader is mobilised and tested.

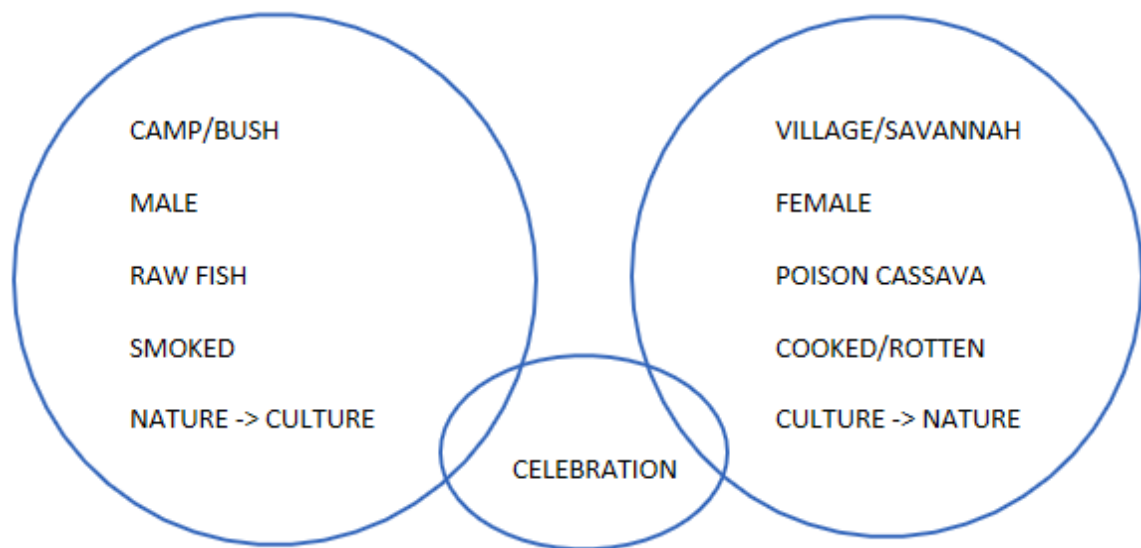


Figure 25. The graph shows the complementary features and practices that play into the celebration.

The temporary role of the *tuwama* ends with the return to the village. While he does not have any functions outside Takutunen, *tuwamas* continue to be known for their role and skills.

The aim of the first part of the chapter about the journey to Takutunen was to acknowledge and understand the role of the *tuwama* as an important cultural practice and traditional leadership post. It showed that there are different leadership roles within a community apart from the officially recognized chief. What good leadership means, does not necessarily correlate with those qualities officially gazetted in the role of the *toshao*⁶². Apart from dealing with “matters which affect the community”

⁶² A thorough comparison between *tuwama* and *toshao* is unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis.

(management of village land, maintenance of access roads, attending meetings and negotiating with the government etc.)⁶³, a chief must have great entertaining and rhetorical skills, be funny and humorous and know how to make people laugh (Overing, 2000, p.67-68). He is constantly called on to show generosity, a crucial prerequisite of leadership which is obviously not officially laid down.

In comparison, the role of *tuwama*, the temporary ritual leader, is all about giving. As we have seen, although his ritual role is necessarily performed outside the village realm, it is fundamentally directed towards the collective celebration and therefore towards village life.

Moreover, and most importantly, what all leaders have in common is that they journey. Their movement to other places is what enables them to gain the necessary knowledge to lead a certain group of people. The way the *tuwama*, the *toshao* and the *pia'san* gain their knowledge for the benefit of their community is through movement. The relevance of acquiring knowledge through the contact with other worlds is strongly emphasised by the ethnography on shamanism (Overing, 1990; Santilli 1993; Carneiro da Cunha, 1998; Fausto, 2014).

'Mapping' the land through narratives

From the time I arrived in the village of Tipuru in the South Pakaraima Mountains, people told me about *Takutunen* - a place full of big haimara fish, mountains where it always rains, dragons, gold and hairy giants.

In the next part, I want to address the multiple layers of meaning that become crystallised in the campsites and landmarks along the journey to Takutunen. This will lead to a discussion on place-names, oral mappings and mythological reference markers. I also want to look at how these stories and memories are made sense of and lived in practice, which becomes evident in the way Reinaldo, the *tuwama*, orientates himself and how his son experiences the journey. Given its cultural value, it is paradoxical that Takutunen, as already mentioned, is not in any of the Amerindian titled lands of the Pakaraima communities and is part of an area currently under dispute as a result of logging and mining interests. Travellers commented on these recent threats when passing the spot where a cement block was erected that marks the official indigenous land boundary.

⁶³ Information taken from the Amerindian Act A.D. 2006, No.6, pp. 12-13.

The night before we left for Takutunen, a group of villagers gathered outside the house of the *toshao*, like on many evenings. A bunch of women, sitting in a circle on top of a deerskin, were handing around bowls of thick Kari, interrupted by happy chatter and laughing. The moon was bright and as always when there are no clouds, the millions of stars seemed to touch the grass. From below, the solar-powered lights inside the closed-up adobe houses shone through the little gaps of the shingled roof, as if everything on earth mirrored the sparkling of the sky. The *toshao*'s wife gave me a calabash with parakari saying:

“Here, so you fall down plenty on the *mo'we*!”

Everyone started laughing and she explained that on the way to Takutunen, there is a mountain that is covered by mounds of earthworm faeces (i.e. *mo'we*), and that these are so slippery that they make one fall to the ground immediately. The women around me could not stop giggling at the thought of me sliding down the hill on my backside and one after the other repeated the *toshao* wife's joke amid a lot of laughter.

Many women have been to Takutunen before and even those that have not been there know the stories and will be able to explain the route, where to camp and the important knowledge that lies behind the names of campsites, mountains, plants and so forth. Muriel is a good example. She has never done the journey herself but assured me: “but I know, I does talk about it”. She continued in a mysterious voice:

“After *Tika'pipai* is *Eruberu yen* [“dragon” mountain]. It has a dragon living there. He hides over the gold. He comes like strong, strong wind. The mountain is always in the clouds!” Another woman excitedly joined in the conversation:

“It get an Ataitai rock-house⁶⁴, where he was living at Tipuru river, downside. After big El Niño fire, he now moved to a big sheet-rock at Ireng River, bottom side of Maurice mine. If you catch fish before him, he cannot catch. If he catch before you, you cannot catch anymore!” The crowd giggled. Another woman added

“After the *Mo'we* you reach *Kono'nosmo*, a mountain where it always rains, because there is a *kono'tinki* [a kind of ‘rain cassava squeezer/matapi’]. It rains any time of the year, every day, it never, never stop”.

The *toshao*'s wife added:

“At *Arirwaaka yen* [a huge rock] there is an old lady, she throws with ash at

⁶⁴ Or Bush-daidai, often described as a hairy giant or bush spirit (see chapter 5).

you - if you look at her you going to die soon!”

“The old people used to burn your eye with pepper before you looking at it”, commented a next. “But this is long time story.”

“*Mekurusii yunka*”, remembers yet another woman, “is a Negro man die there, a pork-knocker. The burial ground is right there, his grave. So they does call it *Mekurusii*, “black man grave” [laughing] *Mekrurusii*”.

Everyone laughs.

“He dead under there. Pork-knocker. So is that they fighting for right now. They wanna find the place but they never find it.”

Casey (1996: 25) talks about places that *gather* “things in their midst – where “things” connote various animate and inanimate entities. Places also gather experiences and histories, even languages and thoughts”. In a way, all these places, the camps and other sites along the way to Takutunen, are referential points through “a multiple-world landscape” (Overing, 2004: 81-84) of numerous personal and collective memories, oral history, recent and mythological events. Toponyms also give clues about what can be found at these places, their cultural usages, and the territorial arrangements of places and beings. These places and the narratives about them are in a way a mental map of the journey through which people memorize and orientate themselves along the way. Its function is as Peter Nabokov describes “[...] to preserve the economy and actuality of memory, it roots its actions in place, not dates [...] It is called into being during and for interpersonal situations. It nurtures the family and community and cosmic continuities of which it speaks” (1987:145; in Palmer 2005: 83). In the following part, I shall describe some of the campsites and topoi along the trajectory to Takutunen. It becomes evident that these landmarks are important not only as points of gathering, but “become thoroughly entangled with historical memory”, constantly recalled “as discursive tropes” along the journey (Whitehead 2003b: 76; about ecological practices among the Patamona).

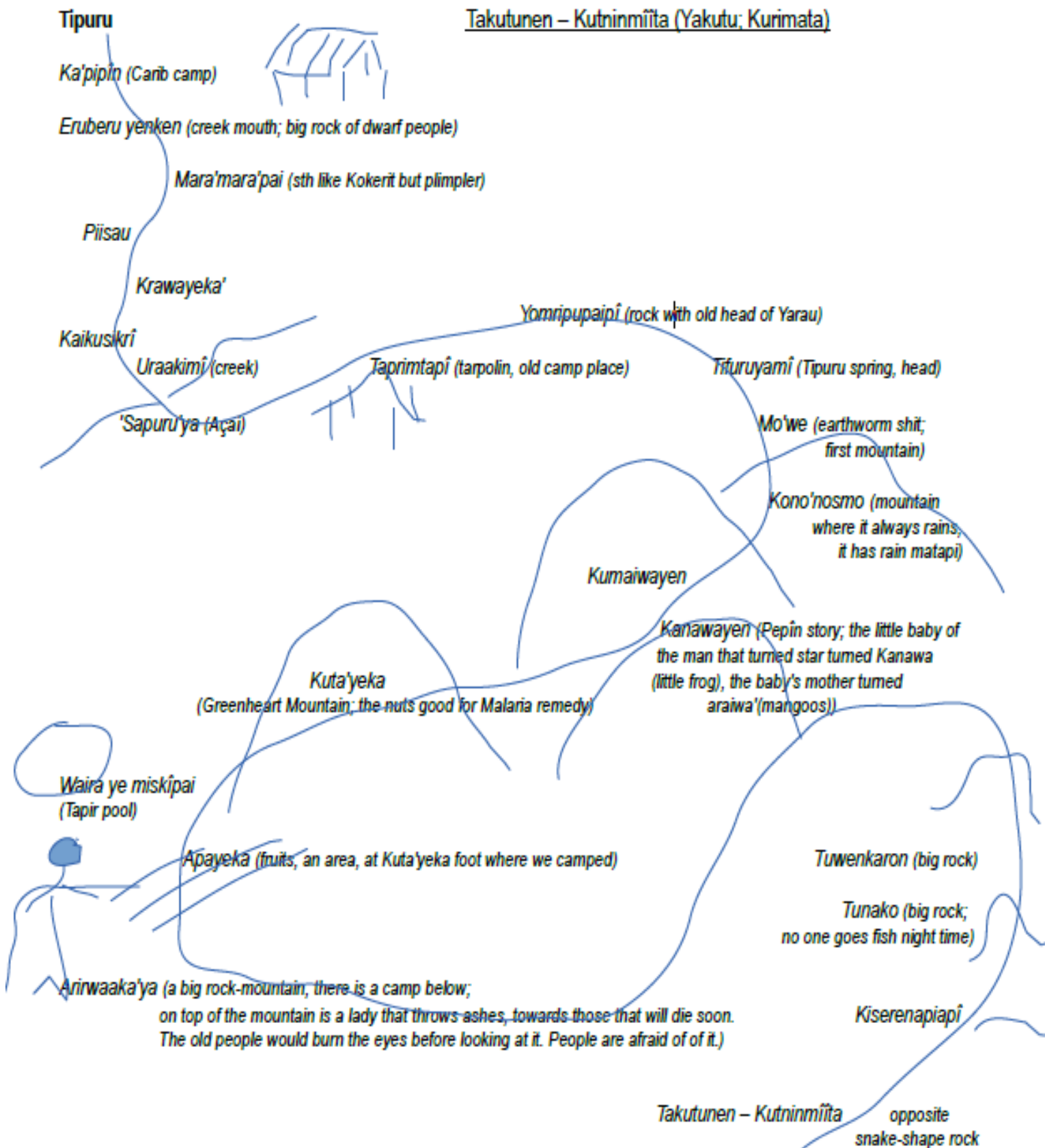


Figure 26. A mind map of the journey to Takutunen, depicting the different place-names commonly referred to on the way and some of their stories.

Campsite KAPIPÎN

The path led up a hill. Once in a while a farm appeared, sometimes an old one, overgrown but with rows of cassava plants visible in between and some which Reinaldo pointed out that I would not have noticed otherwise. After some time we reached a small clearing with a thatched farm house on a hill slope close to Tipuru creek that people call *Ka'pipîn* (Carib camp), as it was George, one of the villagers, who built it, whose father was Carib and who frequently is referred to as “the Carib” in the village. George and his wife Balbina spend much of their time here, farming, doing cassava work and searching in the forest and rivers for food. At some point he will move away from the savannah and stay “in the bush”, his son once said, commenting on his parents’ preference for staying close to their farm rather than in the centre of the village. I heard several people say similarly that when their children have finished school and are married, there is no need for them to live close to the village centre anymore. They would prefer to move closer to their farms and away from the busy community full of people. *Ka'pipîn* is famous for being the first and the final gathering point of the Takutunen expedition. It is from here that the hunters blow the horn, fire the gun to notify of their arrival. And it is here that the women come with their Kari, Paiwa and Kasiri to welcome the others back and “make them merry”. In that sense, *Ka'pipîn* is the initiation of the Christmas celebration and an important marker on the Takutunen trajectory.

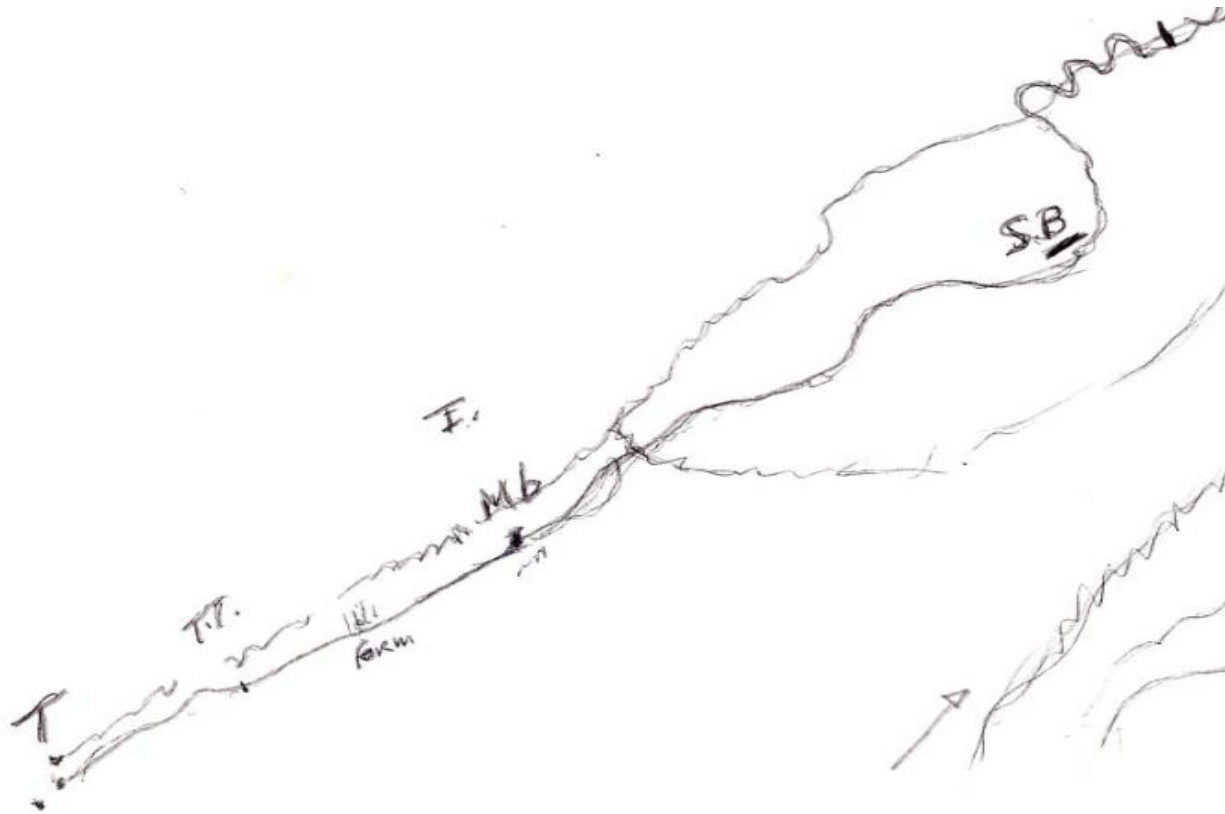


Figure 27. A mental map drawing by Marcia of the trajectory to Takutunen (Tipuru, 2014).

Campsite: MARA'MARA'PAI

The forested path continued along the roaring Tipuru creek to the left, up and down uneven rocky and earthen lines. We passed *Eruberu'yen*, a mountain rising above the clouds on the other side of the creek, named after *Eruberu*, the *iteesa* ('owner') of the mountain, who lives there - "Dragon Mountain", as commonly translated into English. In Makushi, *Eruberu*⁶⁵ can be described as a strong circling wind, which is believed to guard the gold and has the bell bird as his pet (*yekîn*). Thus, where one hears the bird's beautiful song, this is where *Eruberu* hides the gold. Locals who want to prospect for gold on this mountain are cautious as the "dragon" is said to have an ambiguous personality. They might take tobacco and rum to offer to *Eruberu* in exchange for gold, which he usually accepts. There are reports about outsiders who came searching for gold close to Takutunen but were never successful, as a frightening, roaring and swirling wind made the team flee and never return. There

⁶⁵ Whitehead (2003b) mentions the Patamona version *Ulubelu*; similarly, Farage (1997) the *Oropiro* for the Wapishana.

are many stories of locals who found gold during their journey to Takutunen and there are certain spots the communities know about (through stories) but hide from outsiders. I will return to this later.

Mara'mara'pai is the place where the group would camp for the first time if they left the village in the afternoon, after stopping at every house for a drink of Kari on the way. If the group left early in the morning, they would probably sleep at *Sipuru'ya*, or *Tifuruyamî*, several hours further on. For Reinaldo the walk brought back memories of his first school days, when he and his sister and cousins set off early in the morning into the savannah. He pointed towards a very dense bushy corner, bent over the creek, where his family had lived until he was five years old:

We had to walk one hour to school, that time the road [through the bush] was clean, clean. I used to like living in the bush, I used to catch fine fish, my father used to hunt, shoot something. For people now here is hard, no fish. The farm used to be close, close. Banana, eddoes, pepper, 'nough, 'nough. Because of church and school people moved.

Mara'mara'pai is named after a broad-leaf 'plimpler' plant, a kind of *cocorite* palm that is found in abundance here and, as Reinaldo explains, "carries a green fruit, the nut inside, when it soft we does drink it, nice thing like coconut, it has jelly inside, small ones like this."

I was struck by the agglomeration of high bamboos, leaning across and embracing each other:

Is Carib people who bring them [the bamboo], that time it was a dangerous place, it get tiger, they asked Carib to come to kill the tiger, the Carib bring the bamboo, they used it as blow pipe, arrow, shoot it with Wurali, that poison, they use it as flutes to call the tiger.

In numerous narratives by people from Tipuru and Kara Kara (see Chapter 2), the Caribs feature as those who brought and planted the bamboo, a particular type which is not seen as endemic to the area. Because of the Carib, the bamboo is here. The bamboo is intrinsic to the reason why the Carib came in the first place – to kill the tigers. In many versions, the Carib had heard the rumours about these dangerous tigers and came to help the people against this threat that had made life difficult in this place at that time. In contrast to the majority of Makushi narratives, which depict the Carib as blood thirsty warriors, cannibals and slave raiders, these narratives speak of them in a very positive light. They were more knowledgeable and experienced in killing the tigers, as they knew the art of calling them with the sound of flutes. The Carib therefore not only needed the bamboo as arrowheads and blowpipes, but also to

make the flutes that were necessary to call the tigers (see Chapter 2). What remains today, now that both Carib hunters and tigers are perceived to have disappeared, is the bamboo. The bamboo plants that the Carib planted, as well as the narratives revolving around them, are remembered by those who pass them in the forest on their way to Takutunen. For Reinaldo, as we learned above, the place in which the bamboo grows was also one of his family's homes during his childhood. Different kinds of layers of time, memory and history overlap here.

Campsite AKSAPAN

"...then tomorrow morning we would say "*ok, kuta'yeka prakon mona*". And it's 'til [stretched] that side we going. And then the following day we will reach straight into Takutunen." (Winford, 2013)

When spending the first night at *Sipuru'ya*, the 'expedition' tries to reach the foot of *Kuta'yeka Mountain* for the second, which we failed to do by far. We were late breaking camp because we were waiting for the rain to stop. The soaked and completely overgrown path was slow to navigate but still Reinaldo cleared the way and walked with remarkable speed. His steady, strong and fast steps were difficult to keep up with and it was often a choice between running after him or getting lost. Even his son Chuck occasionally lost track of his father, although it was sometimes because he chose to stay at the back with us. I remembered how Winford, leading the way to Karona Falls, walked at such speed that it was hard work to keep up with him and he would only stop when we passed a house, to have a chat and the usual cassava drink. It was the same this time - not a relaxed walk through the woods while talking, or frequently stopping to tell stories, no time while clambering over and under fallen tree trunks, in and out of the water and through thorny bushes to watch out for the snakes so many villagers had warned me about. Reinaldo knew exactly how many times we would have to cross the Tipuru creek until reaching its head, *Tifuruyamî*, where the water disappears into the mountain, and he did not want to lose time. Furthermore, it was raining incessantly and so it was not a good idea to have a break. When we stopped, it was only to share some cassava bread and smoked fish, it was at a spot that was a known campground or the last opportunity to drink water or to rest on top of a hill slope.

The narratives I had heard from the villagers before were now beginning to make sense geographically, like dots on a blurry, wiggly, random line, and these points of significance mapped the way for Reinaldo. What became clear was that Reinaldo consciously chose to find the spots known to him using the maps based on narratives. Stopping, recalling, and pointing out these exact reference markers and not setting up camp at other spots, and thereby creating new markers, was also important in order to teach Chuck the right way to travel and go about doing things, which would become engrained in his memory thereafter. We stayed the night at *Aksapan wîttî*, named after a muddy shallow creek, where, as Reinaldo quickly noticed, the essential fire-lighting white-wooded tree that enflamed even if wet, was missing, and so we went to bed early without cooking any food. It never stopped raining that night, the rain pelting down on our tarpaulins until almost 9 o'clock. By now, even the clothes we had brought to change into were soaked and we felt damp and chilly. Although this night's campground had not proved to be the best, due to its muddy floor, the tiny stream, which was too small for bathing in and the lack of dry wood, it was a familiar campsite on the trajectory to Takutunen, and as such it not only helped Reinaldo to remember the route but also enabled Chuck to learn about it.

It seemed like a route in the form of 'known' dots, connected by 'unknown' lines. These spaces in-between were in a way 'storyless'. Reinaldo rushed through them, as if they were only a means to an end, which involved finding the old trail, clearing the path, counting how many times to cross the creeks or how often to climb hills. By avoiding stopping in-between, by simply passing without commentary he, in a way, eradicated them from the memories of references and marked them into connecting lines. Of course, these spaces can be narrated too. When we returned from Takutunen we arrived with new stories to tell about places.

Often it seemed that Reinaldo lost his way, often there was no path visible anymore, and then he tried to remember it again, to bring back the memory by pointing with his arm stretched in different directions, or he tried walking different ways to see if he could find the thread again. It was interesting how Chuck made sure he followed the exact path of his father, imitating his way of orienting himself, even if the path went under or over fallen trees, or in zigzags. When his father seemed lost, he

waited attentively, observing him closely as he tried to find the way⁶⁶. Walking in the footsteps of the person ahead was also necessary to create the path in the first place and clearing the path not only made it more walkable but more visible as well.

‘Crossing’, ‘camping’, ‘breaking’ and ‘climbing over’ were methods of navigation. We crossed the meandering, narrow stream of the Tipuru creek so many times that it felt to me as if we were moving in circles around the same bush island. However, counting how often we had to wade through the water enabled Reinaldo to memorize and orientate himself. When I asked him about this he promptly said “23 times we need to cross until we reach.”

“Tipuru 'nough, 'nough, like 21 times, Takutu 2 time we go 'cross. *Kanawayen, Kumaiwayen, Mo'we, Kono'nosmo*...4 mountains we got to climb, *Kuta'yeka* is from here now we climb up, on the way back.” Whether he really counted each crossing of the river or whether it was a mixture of embodied and visual memory and counting, I was not sure. Memory certainly played a major role and he continued by saying that how he knew and found his way was by following the ‘direction’ of memory. “I wanna *see* it, the cut off tree, but sometimes it don't show. The old marks. I know the line, but sometimes big tree fall on the ground and block off the road and I have to cut around”.

After leaving *Tifuruyamî*, the vegetation consisted of bush islands shaped by the meandering riverbed with predominantly long grass, large leaves, and thorny plants, growing on decomposing twigs and trunks, we entered a hilly area with large trees. It soon became clear why the slope ahead of us had received the name *Mo'we*, earthworm shit, and why the women laughed so much about the *toshao* wife's joke. And every time I slipped with my heavy backpack I silently joined in their laughter. The clay-brown *mo'we* mounds, with a consistency of egg yolk, plastered the earth everywhere, their inhabitants, the earthworms are about one meter long and as thick as a small snake. The mounds were so enormously slippery that one step on them was enough to slide, legs first, down the steep mountain; it was better to sidestep them and Reinaldo helped by constantly pointing them out to caution the other travellers.

KANAWAYEN

⁶⁶ Similarly, for Ingold (2000: 37) knowledge and skills are ‘grown’, not readily transmitted, skills are developed *in* the world, through imitating and observing, and by way of moving.

Kanawayen is one of the four mountains one passes on the way to Takutunen. Its name derives from a small “baby thunder frog”, which is probably found in abundance there, but what is more important is the fact that the *kanawa* frog is part of a wider story about *pe’pîn*, the “Three Marys” or five-star constellation. All the characters in the story - the mother, father, brother and baby and what they turn into: a mangoos (*areiwa*’), stars (*pe’pîn* and *kaiwano*’, the large morning or evening star) and the frog (*kanawa*) - are represented in the names of mountains, which are all facing each other, some more distant, others closer – on the way to Takutunen. In connection with Takutunen and when travelling passed *Kanawa* Mountain, people recall this story, which is about two brothers, one of whom has a wife who likes her brother-in-law more than her husband. She wants to get rid of her husband and chops off his leg to kill him when going palm fruit picking. The five-star-story is a recurring theme throughout the Guianas (see Roth 2011 [1915]). I heard various versions of it. Here is one which Reinaldo told one night on the journey after the camp had been set up, the food eaten and we were all lying lazily in the hammocks:

That is hunter man, so he see fruit some part in the bush. So “Le’ we go and cut”, say he wife. “Alright, le’ we go”, he say. And decide to file the axe. You know long time they file with something like stone, not with file. So he sharpen the axe now, he hear he axe talk “ape, ape, ape, ape”, this is “leg, leg (your leg)”, this axe talking, but he don’t know. So they gone where the fruits now. So he wanna cut but he wife say to climb the tree, cause she wanna cut he leg. So he climb with the *Warashi*. “I come down, I come down”, now he come down, so she cut with the axe off he leg “buff!”, cut it. Then he ask she “Where is me brother?” He went to shoot like deer, or tapir, he be back tomorrow, he say. But he brother know it, he brother know it, that he passed. Day, night, next day. So he brother know it, he know the place, so they gone. He heard it from far, the brother singing and singing: “*Shirikîpe noku, shirikîpe noku.*” So he now become star, *pe’pîn*. It’s a nice song, a nice song he singing. It’s sad, it’s sad.

The man wants to revenge his dead brother and makes the woman transform into an animal.

They find honey. “Le’ we go and cut it”. It get a Gobi to put the honey inside, so he gonna slowly, slowly, slowly fill it more, block it off with the same wood and push she inside, let she turn mangoos (*areiwa*’). Gone, turn animal now. And the baby left back with the same *kanawa*. He cry, he cry, he cry, can’t stop. That man sleep now, about one o’clock, two o’clock time...that is a little baby, not even a year, like 6 or 7 months. He wake up, the baby gone ‘til over so, far! He bring he back again, sleep again. More far he gone, the same baby, he turn frog now, *kanawa*. All three of them father, mother and a baby. And his brother turn a star too, *kaiwono*’, that is evening star, or morning star. First one is *pe’pîn*, the wife now turn mangoos, the baby turn frog and the brother turn *kaiwono*’.

As well as the mythological reference of *Kanawa-* and *Areiwa'yen* on the mountain's peak, hidden in the undergrowth, there is another marker, the square cement block of the demarcation boundary of Karasabai district. This is not to say that this marker would stop people from Tipuru, Karasabai and other villages from going fishing beyond this point. In fact, learning about Takutunen, its narratives and its journey and understanding its cultural importance proves that this division does not reflect traditional land use patterns. The entire Takutu River with its big haimara fish, sacred sites and an area known to have lots of greenheart and gold is left out of the demarcation. A former *toshao* and *tuwama*, who worked cutting the boundary line of the official demarcation, remarked that Takutunen originally was included in the recommendation by the Amerindian people of the area.

The demarcation was right through Takutunen, right up to Moreiro pond; our boundary line started more in front of that, going into the highway line, right through. Those mountains that you see from Toka, Toka Mountains, right through. Going into Burro-Burro and then from Burro-Burro gone across into Takutunen, up the Siparuni river, then to Ottoman mountain, then coming to the commencing point, to the Ireng river. That is what we had before. We have the description. I don't have the maps but everybody know that. They make it smaller than what was given to us.

A similar description is written in the Amerindian Act of 1995, page 23, under the heading 'North Pakaraimas – Rupununi District', then 'Karasabai (Amerindian District)', quoting the Amerindian Lands Commission Report of 1969, which stated the following area redrawn below (figure 28).

From Moreiro to the Burro-Burro river, then down the Burro-Burro river to the Siparuni River to the Essequibo, then down the Essequibo River to the Moruwa River, then up the Moruwa River to its source, then westwards past Kurukabaru and on the Ireng River back to the starting point of Moreiro.

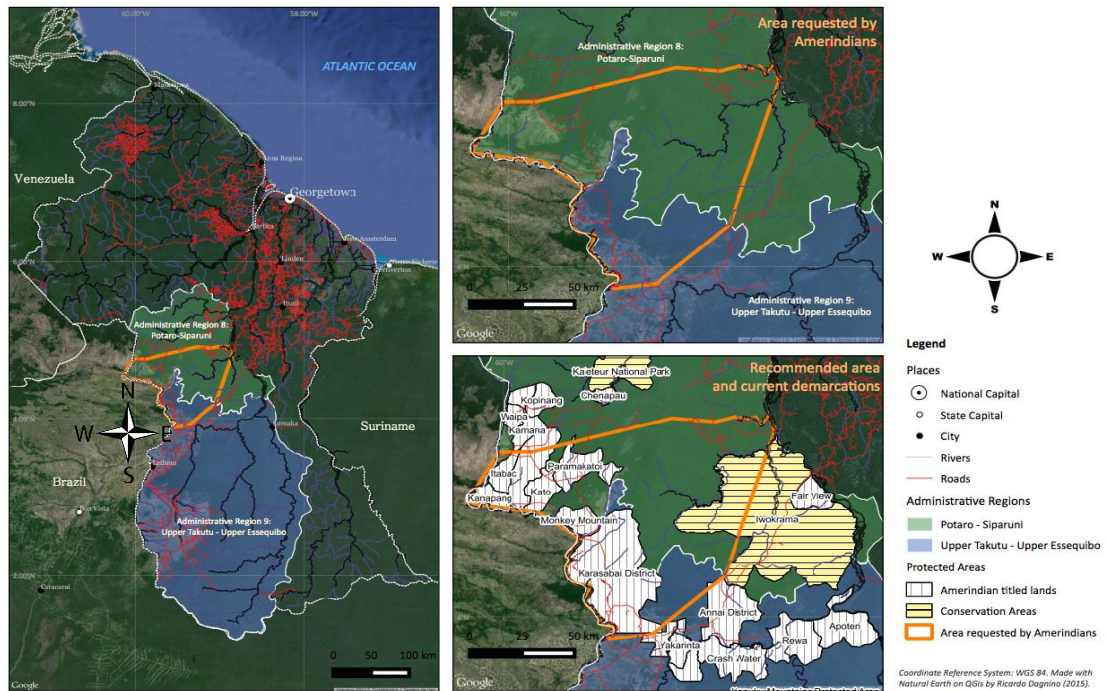


Figure 28. The orange line redraws the boundary recommended by the Amerindians of the Karasabai District region in 1969. To highlight the difference the area is juxtaposed with current land titles and reserves. Map by Dr Ricardo S. Dagnino, 2015.

Thus, what many locals refer to as the land “promised by the Queen” could be the area recommended by the Amerindians as part of a collective request for the granting of land titles after independence from Great Britain, in May 1966. The government committed itself in its Independence Agreements to recognize Amerindian land title (e.g. Sanders 1987). Ironically, up to independence, Britain’s colonial government had not done anything to ensure Amerindians’ legal rights to their land. Bulkan (2013: 6-7) argues that two events, in particular the 1967 AAG Convention and the Rupununi Uprising in 1969, which in both cases made territorial claims, were decisive for a breakdown of the original overall demarcation request from over 40,000 hectares to merely a fraction. One of the areas that was dropped from the original recommendation was Takutunen.

It is also possible that this “land of the Queen” refers to an area proposed by the Amerindian Welfare Officer, P. Storer Peberdy. He was concerned about the situation of indigenous people in the area, and his 1948 “Report of a Survey on Amerindian Affairs in the Remote Interior” contained an interesting proposal for the establishment of a comprehensive ‘Pakaraima Mountains Amerindian District’, by joining Karasabai and Upper Mazaruni Reservations. Extending this idea even further,

he suggested creating a kind of “Circum-Roraima-reserve”, including international frontier areas of Venezuela and Brazil, connecting the land traditionally used by the Pemon and Kapon groups, respecting their frequent daily movements between currently established fixed national borders (figure 29).

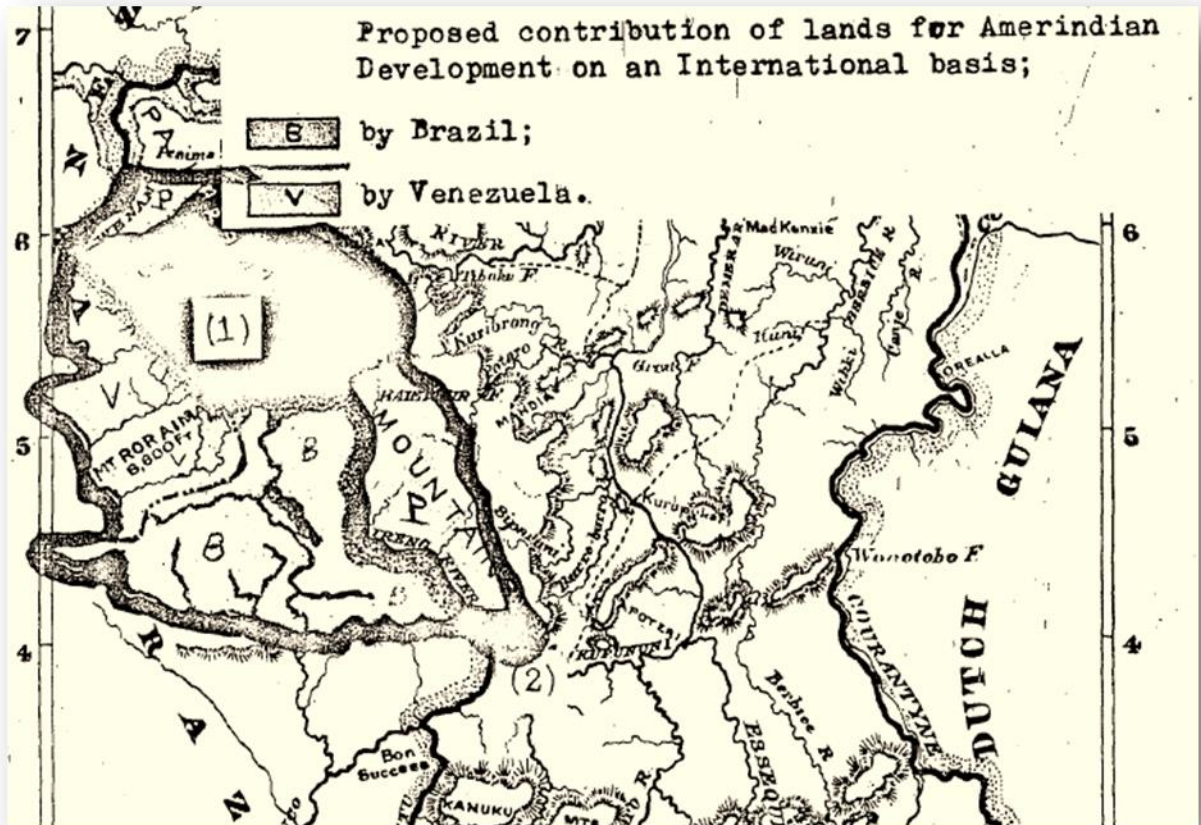


Figure 29. "Proposed International District for Amerindian Development and Occupation", Appendices: Map 5, Peberdy Report 1948. Zoomed in on specific area and cropped out.

None of these proposals ever materialised. However, Butt Colson (2013: 63) rightly argued that while the two neighbouring countries have protected large portions of the adjacent bordering regions - the roughly 1,74 million ha indigenous territory Raposa Serra do Sol in Brazil⁶⁷ and the 3 million ha National Park of Canaima in the Venezuelan Gran Sabana - Guyana has not made comparable efforts to establish a “substantial conserved area” (Butt Colson 2013: 65).

Until the official demarcation attempts of the current Karasabai district took place, *toshaos* and villagers of various South Pakaraima communities cut a demarcation line, claiming Takutunen as their traditional fishing and hunting ground.

⁶⁷ For a detailed analysis of the demarcation process of Raposa Serra do Sol see Paulo Santilli, 2001.

The 2-metre-wide line also included Moreiro Lake and the trail took them over a month to complete. Every 5 miles they put a post out of a sheet of metal they carried on their backs, on which they wrote the Karasabai District number 91122 and their names. Apparently, the posts are still visible today.

The present demarcation started in 1998/99 and experienced several impediments. The first attempt was apparently interrupted due to the death of the man in charge, who had gone home to Georgetown during the Christmas break. The second person sent is said to have received a large sum of money⁶⁸ to complete the demarcation. He employed local workers but never paid them and instead disappeared with the money and never returned. In the end, a third man was put in charge, who came equipped with compass and maps, and the demarcation blocks that were erected reduced the initially recommended area. In the 1976 revision of the Amerindian Act, thus, under Order No. 6, the Karasabai Amerindian District is described as follows,

The area commencing on the left bank of Echilebar River at its mouth and extending up river for a distance of 10 miles approximately, thence East along the watershed of the Ireng River to the Otomung Mountain, thence South along the watershed between Tawaparu Mountain and Ariwa Mountain to Kawarieng Mountain, thence in a south-easterly direction to the source of Mora River, thence S for a distance of 4 miles approximately, thence due west to the right bank Ireng River, thence along the right bank Ireng River to the point of commencement.

It is curious to note that on several official maps created since, the shape of the eastern boundary of the Karasabai district varies. As one villager once put it, the problem is that in many cases maps (from different makers, e.g. Guyana Lands and Surveys, Geology and Mines and Guyana Forestry Commission) diverge and if juxtaposed, show how boundaries (of Amerindian titled lands, concessions, Conservation areas etc.) overlap. As argued in the quote above, a map is always drawn from some point of view and never devoid of certain interests.

KONO'NOSMO

The next day, Reinaldo explained that we were close to *Kono'nosmo*, the mountain “where it always rains”. I had heard a lot about this place and about the *Kono'tinki* or “rain matapi” but when we reached the mountain and walked along its steep slopes, it was not raining. However, the air turned foggy and even more humid. The vegetation was very different here - lianas hanging down as if from nowhere

⁶⁸ Some say it was about 29,000.000 GY\$ (well over 100.000 pounds.)

through the clouds, long ferns in various shapes and colours, even purple, and lumps of shiny green moss. From everywhere came the sound of water slowly dripping onto wet plants and the muddy black earth was covered with roots of all kinds and numerous small mushrooms. It seemed we had entered an aquatic world and the name *Kono'nosmo* described this well. It means that rain can be provoked by looking or coming close to the *Kono'tinki*, a long stone, in the shape of a narrow tuber (a squeezer that is used to extract the poisonous juice from the grated cassava).

It's just a rock but rain never stops there, never stops, neither rainy season, nor dry weather. Always rain, not much but rain is always there. It's the same old people that could prey, half piai people, they said that was rain matapi, *kono'tinki* (Marcia, Tipuru, 2013).

To avoid the stone the path passes it below. One villager told me:

No one should go close. The old people tried to see if it's true and sent their fastest runner to lash the stone and run back, but he didn't make it. Rain fell heavy before that, so much that he froze. The others found him frozen the next day. There was nothing they could do.

'Frozen' here means 'immobile', usually in the sense of becoming transformed into stone, which is a recurrent feature in Makushi cosmology and linked to the culture heroes who travelled through the place and turned food, people, plants, animals and houses into rocks, often as a form of punishment and reference marker. The person 'froze' as a punishment for not believing in the truth of what is said about this place, the power of the rock, and becomes himself a reminder of it. The stories about the consequences of such acts are a way of warning others not to make the same mistake. A similar incident happened after Maceo, an Arekuna who lives in Kara Kara, pushed over a sacred stone, whose owner is a big snake, to prove its powerlessness. He became sick during the Takutunen journey.

But Maceo was curious to try it and he didn't believe what the people said about getting sick, he thought it was just superstitious. So one day he went with a friend and they tried to push and push the *Seman piya'pî* [a stone where a snake lives, meaning "the end of the wind"] down, by putting broad sticks under it and levelling it up. Same time, December, all went to Takutunen. Maceo went too, but he was already feeling sick, since he tried to push the rock, so on the journey to Takutunen he got even more sick. So sick that the people had to drag him home in a hammock, while people from Tipuru went to help, after they received the news. He lost all body hair: hair on the head, under the arm pits, eyebrows, pubic hair. He got weak, weak, weak. He could only groan and rob from one side the other in pain. He didn't have any blood in his veins, his lips and finger nails turned purple-blue. People said he turned snake, he didn't look human anymore. Candace's father cut him up all over [made knife marks] and rubbed gun powder, lime and garlic in the wounds and bathed him like that. He asked him what he had done, before he got sick. He told him about troubling

the *Seman piya 'pî* rock and Candace's father said „See, you didn't want to listen, you shouldn't have troubled it! You got sick because you didn't respect!“ (Marcia, Tipuru, 2013)

His body metamorphosed into a snake, the owner of the rock he had 'troubled', and thus he became the mirror of his own mistake. People would mention these incidents when anyone showed disbelief in the authenticity of these stories and power of these sites. Much as these stories are told and taken seriously and these places feared by most, they are, at the same time, commented upon with mistrust: “well, this is what the old people say”. While most people “burn their mouths” with pepper as a protection when going into the forest, other precautions are not practised anymore by the younger generation. However, even if many think these are “old time stories”, they still continue to learn and talk about them. These socio-cosmological conceptions surrounding the origin of place-names include “what common people cannot see but know that is there” (Santos-Graneros 2004: 102). Furthermore, Santos-Granero (p.119) states with regard to Southern Arawakan toponyms:

They might no longer believe the stories that explain the origin of these sacred landmarks, or perform the rituals associated with them in the past, but they preserve their memory as much because they are central to their self-identity as because of the aesthetic pleasure they inspire.

This environmental knowledge is deeply connected with the local oral history and it teaches how to move and behave appropriately in a world that, for the Makushi, is highly ambiguous.

Paul Veyne (1988), when addressing the problem of belief among ancient Greeks, proposed that belief is always dependent on the contexts of its occurrence. Thus it is no contradiction when people believe in different and even opposed statements. This seems to be true in the case of the Makushi: whatever doubts they might have at home, they do not have them when journeying.

After Kono'nosmo we walked through an area with a mixed and dense forest, the ground almost dry, having been sheltered from the rain. For a while, we heard the roaring sound of a big waterfall in the distance and once the canopy disclosed a view onto a rocky hill with a high but thin waterfall, *Arinmaraaka meru*, the dog waterfall.

It get a big hole inside where dogs live. Sometimes lightning strikes inside, falls between *Mo'we'* mountain and *Kumaiwa'yen*. This is how they find out that it was *Arinmaraaka meru*, when the old people, long time ago people, went hunting and carry their dogs, without bull they used to get pregnant when they were there, and you could hear them mating in the night. So they know it's *Arinmaraaka meru*. And then they used to be 'prayful' people, a sort of Piai people, and they could see. So that's

how they know that it's *Arinmaraaka meru*. They don't have owners. Maybe that is their door to come out, that is why they call it *Arinmaraaka meru*.

The word *piai*, as explained before, refers to *pia'san* (*piya'san*), the Makushi word for shaman. With the expressions “half-piai”, “sort of piai”, “prayerful people”, “the old people”, and “long time ago people”, the speaker distinguishes between mythical times and now, or might be simply referring to the times of the forefathers, as these times often overlap. Sometimes these half-piai people are the mythological brothers, *Insikiranyamî*. In Makushi cosmology, *pata* (the place, the land) with its many creeks, waterfalls and *tepuis* was the result of the doings of these mythical trickster brothers, who by felling the tree of life *Wîyaaka'ye*, formed mountains, distributed edible plants and carved river beds. These cultural heroes are references throughout the whole Circum-Roraima region⁶⁹. In Guyana, most Makushi people refer to them as the brothers *Insikiran* and *A'neke*. However, there are many variations and others might refer to them simply as *Insikiranyamî* (plural form) or “the Makunaimas”, including several brothers. In their *trickster* habit, they transformed people, animals, plants and things (like houses/caves) into stones and rock formations, accidentally made rapids and created marks and memory references for the people.

Among the myths collected by Roth (2011 [1915]) of the Akawaio, Warrau and Makushi, Makunaima and his brother Pia were children of the sun. In the Makushi version, Makunaima disappeared to ‘Spanish Guiana’ and Pia remained. After his mother’s death, he “travelled from place to place, teaching the Indians many useful and good things. By him and his teachings we have the Piai men” Roth (2011 [1915]: 65). According to this myth, it is through Pia that the piaimen and the art of shamanism were born, an era to which the narrator above might have been referring, when more people practised shamanic and ritual knowledge. In a different vein, *pia*, or *piya*, as understood from my fieldwork, refers to ‘the beginning’, the mythic origin of time rather than a specific person. The “door” that is mentioned at the end is a common feature of Makushi description of the landscape. Everywhere that is inhabited, whether mountains, rocks or waterfalls, has doors through which one can enter the world of the beings that live there. Often these entries are feared, as they can transform people and make them never return. Makushi notions of this multiverse (see Overing 2004), with multiple “doors of entry” to different timescapes (Halbmayer

⁶⁹ See for instance the large collection of narratives about them by Koch-Grünberg (1924).

2004: 144), can also be understood as a “house with many rooms, each room in turn constituting a house on its own, with its proper ‘owners’ and ‘dwellers’” (Arhem 1998: 97). I shall return to this topic in chapter 5.

Campsite KUTA’YEKA

Kuta ye’ka, “greenheart mountain”, is full of massive greenheart trees that have wide shady canopies. The nuts are traditionally used by the Makushi as a malaria remedy: “Malaria and anything to do with the women’s period, if you does suffer with pain, if you have haemorrhage, if you have diabetes, you drink that. So always when they go hunting, the men would string it up and bring it (Marcia, Tipuru, 2013). Close to *Kuta ye’ka* is where Marcia’s third sister was born. “We had farm there. So she said whenever she come back she wants to open up that place and live there.” Like most families, they decided to “come out” to Tipuru because of school. At the foot of *Kuta ye’ka*, near the creek, is a spot where the expedition usually camps. The *tuwama* would say “*Kuta ye’ka prakon*”, “we going right into Kuta ye’ka”. Winford, a former *tuwama* and *toshao* states “Right at the foot of it, that is camp ground there, so whatever you got, if you don’t have this you have to go and look for leaves for a little shelter, just in case rain. Or if you have plastic you just search your food.”

Along with resource pressure through mining and commercial fishing and hunting connected with mining enterprises, there also seems to be an interest in the timber industry. In Winford’ words:

Takutunen is in State land now. It could be because of minerals, or I know that bush here, going back that side, that is sheer greenheart wood. So maybe the government is looking into it and say ‘let it be mine’ (Winford, Tipuru, 2013).

In 2014, a group of businessmen visited first Surama and then Tipuru village (two communities roughly opposite each other, separated by State Land, as can be seen in the map below). The villagers’ accounts are almost identical and describe a group consisting of about seven Chinese people representing a company and an unknown translator from Georgetown as the group of Chinese could not speak English⁷⁰. The group was well-equipped with GPS-systems, maps and computers and showed some of the villagers a large concession, for both logging and mining. Those that saw the map identified it as the area of Takutunen; others simply recognized the

⁷⁰ There is the tendency to refer to Asian-looking people as “Chinese”, it is therefore not clear, whether these indeed represented a Chinese-owned company, or rather a Malaysian, Singaporean one, also active in the Guyanese timber market, as these might have been confused. However, more precisely, the company was by some villagers identified as the Chinese logging enterprise Baishanlin.

large terrain as bordering Annai and Karasabai district boundaries. None had been aware of the concession. The visit occurred without prior notice, which meant that villagers were unprepared, uninformed and in some cases, leaders were absent. The purpose of the company's visit was to figure out if villagers knew of any drivable "access roads" that existed leading to the concession and to acquire permission from the village to use their lands as a thoroughfare. In both cases, the response deterred the visiting company members, as only small footpaths were available involving several days' walk, and obtaining village permission required a proper consultation with all villagers and leaders, which was likely to be turned down. In both cases, the group said that they would return better prepared another time. It is crucial to mention here that the Guyana Forestry Commission clearly states that no State Forest Exploratory Permits (SFEPs) will be issued "for any area that is occupied, claimed or used by Amerindians" (Forests Act 1997, quoted by Bulkan 2014: 414).

Whether or not these events will be repeated or simply remain as village gossip, without a clear understanding of intentions and plans, what is important to note is the obvious lack of transparency and lack of information given to the local Amerindian population regarding interests and negotiations taking place around them and which affect their livelihoods. Furthermore, while issues regarding land rights and resource exploitation have recently featured more frequently in informal conversations, there exists a certain fear of disclosing unofficial information and talking critically about it in public. In her article on land-grabbing through forest concession practices, Bulkan (2014: 428) reveals how there is a strict blackout on details regarding logging concessions, exporters and tree species. Furthermore, since the 2007 Act revision, the GFC prohibits and penalizes the disclosure of unauthorized information, which, she argues, "severely restricts the free access by citizens to information which is guaranteed by the national Constitution (Article 146)" (Bulkan 2014: 430). Thus, information and consultation about logging and mining activities and access routes to these that can have negative impacts on the communities should be made available.

Greenheart is one of Guyana's most valuable and major timber exports and a large agglomeration of these trees is seen as an attractive, profitable site for future exploitation. Greenheart and other major wood species, such as Purpleheart, are considered by some experts to be overharvested and commercially extinct or

approaching extinction in Guyana⁷¹. Within the last two decades, Asian logging companies have managed to accumulate “almost 80% of largescale, long-term forest concessions in Guyana, equivalent to one-third of the 15.8 million hectares (Mha) of public forests” (Bulkan 2014: 423). Janette Bulkan (2014: 408) further states,

It is certainly not generally appreciated that Asian loggers now control 79% of the area of TSAs [Timber Sales Agreements] and WCLs [Wood Cutting Leases] and 75% of the area of SFEPs. The same companies are also major purchasers of logs from small-scale and community logging associations.

Bulkan (2014: 424) explains that these agreements were made “through individual negotiations”, in the case of Guyana, with the (previous) President, who, as the “Minister of Forests”, holds “the right to authorize any large-scale concession awards without having to consult with or inform any other branch of government”⁷². The Chinese company Baishanlin in particular has made headlines recently because of its controversial claims of over 960,000 ha forest (24 times the size of the land originally recommended as their entitlement by the Amerindians). The company managed to acquire such extensive land mainly through buying existing concessions and making joint-venture arrangements with other companies, as in the case of Jilang, Sherwood Forest, Demerara Timbers Ltd. (DTL) etc. The apparent “buy-out” or “illegal renting” of Demerara Timbers, a formerly nationalized logging enterprise during socialist rule, highlighted in brown on the map above (figure 3) had been a “murky deal” and was approved regardless of criticism from civil society (Bulkan and Palmer 2008: 4).

Campsite TAKUTUNEN

After walking along spacious paths under tall, shady trees, we stopped at a thick bush of overhanging long bamboo plants. Reinaldo took a while to cut a tunnel through it. Slowly he disappeared into the bamboo bush and soon only the chopping noise could be heard. The others used the moment to rest. Reinaldo observed the surroundings, carefully beating on trunks and leaves, as spiders, scorpions and snakes like to hide in-between them; occasionally a swarm of bees were woken and angrily

⁷¹ <http://www.stabroeknews.com/2015/news/stories/05/31/iconic-timber-species-overharvested-near-commercial-extinction/>

⁷² It is important to note here that these arrangements happened under previous government administrations. The general elections on 11th May 2015 resulted in the victory of the opposition party, which has to make positive changes in this regard and is committed to the Amerindian cause.

circled the area where we stood. The bamboo bush itself connected two dark forests and was itself an opening where for the first time you could feel the warm air and the hot sunshine again. Reinaldo pointed to a hole he had cleared at the side. As if through a window, a huge misty cliff was visible. “*Arirwaaka!*”, said Reinaldo looking at his son, whose eyes were full of excitement. We were all staring at it when Reinaldo said “You cannot look at it for too long. That was long time. If you want to see it, the old man gonna blow with pepper, he get plants and he put it in your eyes and then you gonna see it.” When one looks at it and the old lady on *Arirwaaka* throws ashes towards one, it is a prophecy and means death. Old women that live on top of or inside mountains are recurrent features in Makushi landscape perception. Apart from the ‘old lady’ on *Arirwaaka*, the large hill at the side of Tipuru village called *Nosan’ton* (Old woman’s place) has a woman that cries and calls to lure one into her place through a door on the mountain slope. In the myth about Pia and Makunaima, the former carries his mother to Mount Roraima, where she still lives. Roth (2011 [1915]) writes, “Whenever the mother of these two heroes of our race is sorrowful, there arises a storm on the mountain, and it is her tears that run down in streams from the heights of Roraima.” From his mother Reinaldo learned many prayers and ‘blowings’ – incantations whispered through breath – and in the role of the *tuwama* he would ensure to “be taking the old man”, like Valentino, who knows “everything” about *taren* incantations (more about this in chapter 5). So in case of a snakebite or other kinds of emergencies, he can “blow you”. Reinaldo adds that it is mainly “the old Patamona people” that “know 'nough, 'nough’” about barks, medical plants of the area and healing procedures.

balata bleeding. I don't know what his name is. Just a few people would bleed and carry it there.” This was where people used to stay, bleed balata, plant and catch fish - an area that has been visited by many people from outside, balata barons as well as “pork-knockers” from the coast in search for gold and diamonds.

You going 'til you meet banana landing. Yeah, Takutunen. That is where the people used to come walking, balata bleeding, yeah, bleeding balata. Diamonds. The pork-knockers then, also them used to dig there, working on diamonds and gold, yeah. So is that they fighting for right now, that they wanna find the place but they never find it (Muriel and Horacio, Tipuru, 2013).

That the area outside the land boundary has a lot of gold is recalled in many stories that are so often retold that they have become mythicized (Roopnaraine 1995; 1996) - gold the size of blocks or cow dung, mountains where it pours down like water and people who filled bottles with it. People are very aware of the interest others have in the resources of the area. While the land is ‘owned’ by the State and therefore always potentially made accessible to strangers, only locals have detailed knowledge of the area and how to move appropriately in it. Previous attempts by outsiders to mark spots where gold was found were countered by locals unmarking these landmarks, making invisible the sites of interest and hiding oral mappings and concrete directions from them. In this way, the people make a clear statement about who should use the place and for what.

There is already a lot of mining going on along the Siparuni and Essequibo Rivers that the people know of and they believe it affects the amount of haimara fish in the little Takutu River. Reinaldo himself had gone further than Takutunen many times, also up the Siparuni River, to dig for gold in a mining area. He spent about a year in Mhadia, but then he got malaria and received pressure from his mother-in-law to return to his family when the news spread that he “get next girl”. When Reinaldo was searching for gold along the Siparuni, he witnessed large-scale commercial hunting and fishing to supply the dredge owners and workers of the mining areas:

You know Siparuni mouth, it get fishermen there, putting seine, a biiig seine. You can't pass. Nothing can't pass. They come 'til Ireng creek. I see them selling fish at the Ireng mouth, back dam. They do mining there. I been in there, four years back, I spent one month in there, in the bush. More far than Maurepai. Siparuni mouth, biiig seine they putting out, no haimara can pass, they block it off. The fish they coming up from Essequibo. Plenty, plenty, there's seine, there's seine, there's seine, they catch plenty plenty haimara. That is backdam people, they supply Brazilian man. They get nothing that side, so they got to buy fish. Plenty people, that is French man (landing). They hunt night time along the Burro-Burro. They come back early in the morning, 8 o'clock. 30 labba, 30 powees, night time they does hunt. In Iwokrama, that is night

time they does hunt. That is problem. 'Nough, 'nough, 'nough labba, deer, tatú (armadillo). From the same money he buy a mini bus, his son buy ammunition, everything, and next thing his brother buy ATV. Yeah, they does hunt night time, like rally people.

The current *tuwama* thinks that this is why there is less fish at Takutunen, as when the fish swim up the Essequibo and Siparuni to spawn, fishermen from the “back dam” tie huge seines to block the haimara from passing. He also sees the reduction in fish as the reason for the reduction in the size of the group going on the fishing expedition every year, as fish is getting scarce, barely enough to feed a communal celebration.

Indeed, as the map above shows in yellow, the entire area, neatly circumventing the eastern limits of the Karasabai district and up to the boundaries of the Iwokrama Reserve and Annai Amerindian district, is divided into numerous mining prospecting lots, for which permits were issued by the Geology and Mines Commission until April 2015. It becomes evident that while prospecting activities might have not yet begun, there is clearly an interest in resource exploitation in the area immediately beyond the current titled boundary, which is used by and precious to many communities.

It is possible that in the light of cash-making opportunities offered by large-scale logging or mining activities in the region, mixed with weak leadership and external pressure, representatives of companies like those that visited will succeed with their benefit-bringing rhetoric. Some villages’ strong involvement in eco-tourism and conservation concerns (like those in the North Rupununi), with participation in regional organizations like the Makushi North Rupununi District Development Board (NRDDB), makes them more prepared and informed and therefore better able to respond appropriately in these circumstances. However, little awareness exists among the South Pakaraima communities about recent “land-grabbing” activities and what consequences these might have for the sustainability of indigenous land use. There is no active overarching regional organization, nor are partnership meetings held with other Makushi organizations in the Rupununi and leadership often tends to be divided about what is best for the community and for the next generations. For those in Tipuru that want to make an income, there are few alternatives to temporary work migration. With the current road constructions through the Pakaraimas, expectations and resource pressure will grow. In that case, places and practices like those related to

Takutunen that contain so many fundamental aspects of Makushi life, might find little space in profit-oriented land exploitation policies. Considering the multiple forms of ecological knowledge and land use practices at stake, this would mean a loss of social and environmental diversity. Takutunen is a cultural heritage and should be included in Amerindian land; in fact, if customary lands were respected and Amerindian territories legally connected, conflicting land claims like these would be avoided.

We have seen that the expedition to Takutunen leads through cultural and mythical landscapes. Recalling the stories of places, such as camps, bamboo groves, rocks and mountains, helps one to understand the “direct sensorial bond between person and place” (Basso 1996: 155) and the socio-cosmological perceptions and conceptualizations connected to them. The journey is crucial as it provides the context for this narrative performance; so is the traveller, through recalling the narratives along the way and bringing knowledge about them back to the community.

We have seen that the stories surrounding these “topographs” (Santos-Granero 2005) act as a form of “oral mapping” or “performance cartography” (Woodward & Lewis 1998: 1–10, 537–541). The spoken texts help people to navigate along their routes. Much more than gaining knowledge to orientate oneself, the journey enables people to engage with the place, learn to move appropriately in it, and recreate and reinforce their perceptions of their own identity and their territorial legitimacy. As Glotfelty (1996: xxxi) stated with regard to the Laguna Pueblo,

Specific features of the landscape help people remember the stories, and the stories help them to live in the land; traveling through the storied landscape corresponds to an interior journey of awareness and imagination in which the traveller grasps his-her cultural identity.

The first section has shown that the journey to Takutunen and the ritual performance of the temporary leader, *tuwama*, contributes fundamentally to collective village life. Thus, the way the *tuwama*, just as other leader figures like the *toshao* and the shaman, acquire their knowledge is through movement, through appropriating and transforming what they learned from the journeys outside of the village boundaries. I further suggest that for the Makushi a large part of their knowledge, be it specialised or not, derives from journeying.

Chapter 4

The virtue of impermanence:

A woman's roots and routes

*Why this child
so spin-spin spin-spin
Why this child
can't keep still*

*Why this child
so turn-round turn-round
Why this child
can't settle down
(...)*

“Poor Grandma” by Grace Nichols, 2013: 19

Typically in the ethnography of Lowland South America, men are described as the travellers par excellence. By contrast women are described as ‘immobile’, confined to life around the house and farm. As Murphy and Murphy (1974: 218) have described with regard to the Mundurucu, the “female stays home, the male leaves. The woman works in the village or close to it, but the man ranges out in hunting, fishing, trading (...)” The theme of structural female immobility was perhaps most prominently laid out by Melatti about the Gê, and seen as being due to uxori-local rule. However, as the author pointed out, the immobility of women/mobility of men under the marriage regime is compensated by a naming system, in which names of women “move” via their brothers, while conversely, male names return to their original homes, via their sisters (Melatti, 1979: 46-79).

Ethnographies that followed tend to point out this correlation of men and movement, women and immobility (for instance Gregor 1977; 1985). According to them, female agency and women's learning derive socially and geographically from the 'inside', from close kinship relations and are characterized by house-centred immobility. Men's learning, in contrast, derives from the “relationship with beings and spaces 'outside'”, affinal kinship and moving away from the houses, between forest and cities (MacCallum 2001: 48). The female/ consanguine/ inside versus male/ affine/ outside, is also proposed by Descola (2001: 101-108) with regard to the

Ashuar, who like the Makushi, have very loosely defined gender roles. The same dichotomy is suggested as being common for the Guiana region by Rivière (1969; 1984; see also Butt Colson 2009a), reinforced by the tradition of uxorilocal marriage arrangements, where men move and women stay in their natal community.

Fisher (2001: 115) shows, in the case of the Kayapo, that “gender attributes” can indeed differ throughout a woman’s life cycle, and points to the “*inconstancy* of gender imagery”. Farage (1997: 140) argues with regard to the Wapishana that knowledge is equal to both women and men, but increases with the loss of vitality and distance to one’s gendered body, connected to the reduction in sexual and reproductive activity (p. 140). Similarly, for the patrilinear Muslim Bedouins, older postmenopausal women are considered masculine, or “like men”, due to their loss of reproductive capacities and menstruation. Their acquired ‘maleness’ and the fact that they are less or not sexually active, makes them purer, closer to god, their movements not in need of monitoring, and allowed to participate in male activities such as prayers and, in extraordinary circumstances, sacrifice and slaughter of animals. As Abu Lughod (1986: 134) observes, “only for men and postmenopausal women can sexuality be divorced from reproduction”.

Farage (1997: 134-36) further suggests that as age subsumes gender, female trajectories become more analogous to those of men throughout time. This is interesting when considering the issue of mobility. In a similar vein, I would suggest that as they grow older, the movements of Makushi women become more analogous to those of men, which is connected to the change in “gender imagery” and their enhanced wisdom accumulated through experience – wisdom which is essential when on the move, especially alone.

As most travelogues in this thesis derive from the experiences and memories of Makushi women, this chapter focuses on the gender specificity of movement. It discusses the role and implications of mobility in the lives of Makushi women, and is in particular narrated by Celia, a middle-aged woman from the village of Surama, who guides us through various other female accounts. It shows how many Makushi women, at a young age, are taught to fear the dangers of journeying away from their home, but how their immobility changes in the course of their lives and their trajectory corresponds increasingly to that of their husbands and men in general as they get older. Thus, Celia’s story points out that a woman’s agency and trajectory cannot simply be defined as static and stable as often presented.

Celia and I

One day Celia commented in a spooky tone of voice, just when her grandchildren were listening carefully: “I di frighten Lisa [me, author] bad [breathed out] when she di coming! I jus’ frighten you [looking towards me]! The eyes [“blue”], they go thief me away, if I lazy or something. You eyebrow them too long [stretched, high tone; laughing]. I frighten she bad [stretched, high]!”

Neither of us can exactly remember when and how we became “accustomed” to each other. This happened gradually, when we met frequently in the same places: at the many birthday parties, dancing to old-school reggae, drinking one bowl of Kari after the other until late, making jokes and laughing a lot; helping other villagers on their farms or with thatching their roofs, going fishing or sitting in the cassava house scraping cassava roots the whole afternoon, going on journeys to the forest, other villages, Georgetown, Lethem, Brazil.

The notion of “accustomed”, or “customed” in Creole Guyanese, plays an interesting role in Celia’s narrative and in the way she relates to people and places. It is closely connected to the aspect of “getting stuck” and “sticking” with a person and place. Sometimes she would lament to me, “I don’t know why I’m there with you all the time. I get ‘customed’ to you, must be”, as if she did not know what she liked about me at all and why she got “stuck” with me the way she did. Similarly, when once staying in Georgetown, she said “First I did not like the place, then I forget.” The process of “getting accustomed” is thus a process of transformation and familiarisation. Becoming accustomed to something, someone or somewhere for the Makushi also means one loses fear. *Kane, aranne’pe pra wai* – “No, I am not afraid anymore”, meaning, “I am accustomed” now. What is interesting about the notion of ‘accustomed’ is that seemingly fixed categories of strange and familiar become rather fluid, moulded through life experience, apprehension and movement.

The rooting of womanhood

Certain people play a particularly important role in Celia’s life: her granny, her brother in Raposa, Brazil, and her husband and these are the ones whose personality and active involvement in her life she often remembers and quotes. How things began

when she was young, how things have changed and why things have turned out the way they have. Celia is a ventriloquist when it comes to imitating other people's voices, especially of those she knows well. She acts out their ways of speaking and seeing the world, their personalities and mannerisms, as if they were indeed present. In the following section, several excerpts of her narrative deal with the issue of who made her "stuck" and "stick to" the village of Surama, where she has been living since moving there as a young girl from the savannah community of Wowetta.

Beginning with her grandmother, whom she called "mommy" because she was the one who brought her up after her mother died when Celia was still a small child, she remembers what the old woman taught her "about the place", about what to eat and what not, how to behave and what not to do. She was a guidance and a central figure in her life. Although Celia often complains about her granny's strictness, she shows great affection and appreciation for the influence she had on her person. She often argues that it was her grandmother, who made her persevere in this village, as her grandmother watched her moves carefully and taught her how to stay away from dangers.

About "getting stuck"

When Celia was young, she sometimes accompanied the older female players to sports events to Wowetta, Rupertee, Annai. She used to go accompanied by her father but she had to be back the same night. She was never able to stay overnight for any celebrations or parties where many of the youngsters would pilgrim, to villages as far as Yakarinta, Massara, Toka. Her grandmother did not want her to go, she mistrusted the world outside and saw it as dangerous for Celia and feared she would become pregnant too early.

She's strict, that old lady is strict, I tell you. And you know, them people want carry me [stretched], she don't want I go. Like if they want carry me to a party, she can't trust me [ending in a question mark] She used to say "you go bring outside child" [stretched], she used to tell me like that. That's how I used to left back. I can't go, Granny never [stretched] trust me for go at all [stress]. Make I still living in Surama up to now.

Her grandmother's mistrust and strictness were specifically directed towards Celia's movements, whether far away, alone or during the night. Much more so than boys, girls are warned of possible dangers when leaving the home. They are taught

about the virtues of patience and remaining “still” in one place⁷³, and thus they are controlled in their mobility. Probably the main preoccupation with a sexually active girl is that she “brings an outside child” and becomes dependent on her family without the support of a husband, if her parents (or grandparents) have failed to control her movements.

Whenever Celia complained, the old lady made sure Celia understood what could happen to her if she did not respect her grandmother’s advice. She should neither talk to nor go near strange and unknown people because they could rob her and kill her. With horror stories of children being abducted and murdered at parties during the night, she made Celia frightened to move away from her and so remain at home.

“This old man will come and he will thief you!” she used to tell me like that. So, I used to believe she too. You know, after she telling me over and over, over and over. And she want I stick to she like. “Me, I can't do you nothing, I can't kill you but the other [high] person, they go kill you”, she say like that. So I used to be frightened for gaff with anybody [breathed in]. I used to be frightened [high, crying].

She warned her specifically of the *Yankiyamî*⁷⁴ and their apparently cannibalistic rituals: they kill the small ones while the big ones have to watch. There was a little boy who the *Yanki* cooked and roasted and then ate his fingers. “You must not go with people them! They go eat you!” [imitating her grandmother’s angry voice] Make I frighten you [laughing, directed towards the author].” These strict educational measures made Celia never leave her grandmother’s side.

I never [high, stretched] move from me granny. Party-time, she go make you sit right [stress] down there. If you wanna dance, you get up and dance, when the music done, you come back and sit down next to she. You can't [stress] go to that next seat. Right [stress] where you sit down you got to sit down. If you move to next bench, she go tell “just like that you go and left your husband. Just like that how you moving, moving you go pick a next man!” So I never used to walk about.

Her grandmother explained that disobeying and not “sticking to” her would mark her character for the future and influence Celia’s later behaviour in a marital

⁷³ See similar idea in McCallum (2001: 53) about Cashinahua women.

⁷⁴ I am not sure how the word *yanki* is spelled, what it means and who it refers to but it sounds like the word *yankee*, which could have been associated with Dutch traders (according to the Merriam-Webster New Book of Word History 1991: 516-517), or those working for them, or white colonials in general. Maybe this is why Celia draws an association between the *yankiyamî* and me, a stranger with blue eyes that might “thief” her away, which she accused me of many times. Much has been mentioned in literature on the colonial history of the region, about the Dutch-Carib slave trade with other Amerindian groups (Farage, 1991; Whitehead, 1988; 1996; 2000) and so-called “tribal wars”, and many oral histories describe attacks on Makushi settlements during the night, killing many of the men, raping the women and carrying them and the children away.

relationship. Moving from one spot to the next at a party, rather than staying next to her grandmother, was a sign of disrespect and disobedience and meant that Celia would develop character traits her grandmother thought would harm her. She would be less successful in life and would not find long-term support through marriage. If Celia wanted to become a marriageable woman and not end up on the “wrong track”, she had to learn it early on, in situations as apparently insignificant as seating arrangements at her uncle’s birthday party.

Roots

Gender studies of indigenous Amazonia build on the work of theorists such as Judith Butler and Henrietta Moore who show that gender is performed, and not given and people acquire it throughout their lives via everyday relationships of work, sex, kinship and through food (e.g. C. Hugh-Jones 1979; Gow 1991; Belaunde, 2001; McCallum, 2001). Cassava work gives an interesting perspective on female agency, gender embodiment and expectations. Until a young woman has acquired all the correct procedures and skills in the process of cassava work, from planting, reaping, replanting, to loading a Warashi and preparing the correctly-sized cassava cakes and so forth, she has, at the same time and *through* it, been made aware of a variety of important teachings that go far beyond a completed batch of farine or Kari. Thus, while a young woman who has successfully learned how to prepare all the desired cassava products has acquired a highly valued and marriageable status, she has at the same time been trained in the virtues of working hard and caring for a family. Similarly, L. Mentore (2012: 149) observes for the Carib-speaking Wai Wai that a woman’s relationship to cassava is not merely symbolic but one of identity, embodiment and intersubjectivity:

To embody the capacities of motherhood is at one and the same time to embody the capacities for cultivating and processing cassava. (...) To fail in the arts of cassava cultivation (...) is to ensure failure, or at least great difficulty, in the arts of reproductive womanhood.

The cassava house and work, the scraping, squeezing, baking etc. form a crucial space of conviviality, of learning, communicating and reflecting about the world, an exchange of skills that every girl and young woman goes through. As MacCallum (2001: 49) describes for the Cashinahua, it is

(...) the words they hear, the sights they see and the substances with which they come into contact, all these shape and penetrate their beings as embodied knowledge.

(...) The way that the body is made to know, therefore, is the self-same process in which gender is produced.

The young girls are observed closely on their way to the farms and in the cassava house, how they move and whether they do it right, and mothers, grandmothers and other family members take great pride and care in teaching “the proper way” – so necessary to become a grown woman.

The young girls are always under much scrutiny and people tend to tease them, make comments and jokes:

See how you emptying out your *rutu* (warishi or carrier bag)? All your cassava coming out difficult because you didn't pack it right! This is how you will deliver your children; you will get difficult birth!

See how your sister scraping cassava [pointing at a well-formed heap of peels]? And how you scraping all about? This is how you will keep your family together as a mother!

Similarly, when lifting and tapping the *matapi* (squeezer), to fill it with the appropriate amount of grated cassava ‘meli’, the girl's zestful, rounded movements are watched closely, as they imitate the gentle lifting of a baby to the mother's breast.

Having carefully incorporated the correct procedures of every step, accompanied with the words of “ferment good, ferment sweet, don't become sour, make people drunk”, the intensity of the sweetness of the Kari is then said to be the result of ‘good hands’, - the appropriate care and touch – which, ultimately, leads to a good choice of husband.



Figure 31. Ripened and fermented Kari, which then is sifted with water into a thick drink. The colour and fluffiness of the mould, and the sweetness in taste are all indicators of “good hands”.

Female personhood and gender roles are thus deeply connected to cassava cultivation and production, and female (as well as male) bodies are moulded through food and plants – both, in daily life and ritual practice (shamanism and *taren*) – and the actions of other kin (e.g. Belaunde 2003). Furthermore, as Rival (2002) notes, the fact that the Makushi, as well as many other indigenous societies, establish an identity of substance and structure between plants and persons, evident in the linguistic associations drawn between cassava roots, bark, leaves, stems and so forth with human body parts, underlines the association between cassava cultivation and human fertility and procreation. While a woman prepares cassava, she prepares herself, her womanhood, and just as a woman needs to have expertise in her cassava work, cassava also plays a role in determining her - what kind of woman she is and will be.

Becoming “wild” and being “tamed”

Celia’s grandmother taught her that a person could incorporate and adopt the behaviour of certain animals through the intake of food. Her granny explicitly forbade her to eat the meat of chicken, as she considered these domestic birds to behave in a cocky, unclean, unsettled way, always on heat wanting to “sex up” with any and every one. These characteristics would be imprinted on the young girls’ bodies and attitudes, making them behave “madi-madi”. They would become feverish and not be able to “sleep one place” anymore, always wanting to “go and sleep to a next house”. In their relationship with their parents and grandparents they would become disrespectful, refusing to listen and “playing rude ‘pon them”.

Not having acquired expected skills and body formations but still wanting to enjoy certain ‘advantages’ of grown-up women and have sexual relationships with men at a young age, is often held against the girls by older women. Hence, when the young girls get flirty and overly ‘aroused’ by the presence of men, a behaviour described to me by a woman as *mîpan*, “play mannish” or “madi-madi”, as Celia mentions above, the older women throw critical remarks at them, reminding them of their “incompleteness”:

“You not making hammock yet!”

“You don't get up early in time!”

“You not ready, you not good-looking, you don't have bumsy!”

“You still need your mommy to tell you to put on pepper pot!”

“If you start playing mannish, the men going to ask home for you, but what will you do with him? You're not ready!”

In conversations about this topic, married women might complain about unmarried young girls who “want to play mannish” with their husbands, arguing that they are not the ones who wash the man’s clothes, cook the man’s food and take him in when he comes home – all signs for a more permanent, serious relationship.

Furthermore, the formation of womanhood and its related skills of caring for a family and husband, are deeply connected to physical features. The ‘right’ skills and ‘right’ body, the body of an adult with more shape and fat, go hand in hand. Thus, if a girl is ‘not ready’, not independent enough to run a household, she is also not ‘good-looking’ yet. In these comments, it becomes clear that it is the girl’s “wild” behaviour that is the root of the problem and it will be her responsibility if her excessive behaviour makes her “stuck” with a man permanently. Not being ready can also result in being left by a man later.

At the time when girls turn “young lady”, with their first menstruation, they are often described as becoming “wild”. People might comment:

“You know how they does get on!”

“You see how their eyes does turn?”

As soon as the young Makushi girls are procreative, they are sexually active and desired by men. As Abu Lughod (1986: 132-133) said about Bedouin women, “fertility calls attention to their sexuality” and “their value as reproducers leads men to want to control them”. Similarly, the heightened sexuality of the young Makushi women is closely observed and therefore their movements are limited. However, women rather than men are expected to restrain and control their sexuality.

Although premarital sex is common among young girls it is quickly associated with madness, excessiveness, becoming emotionally spoiled (“done spoil”) and developing a bad character.⁷⁵ A woman who cannot control herself becomes

⁷⁵ This contrasts for instance to the Gitanas of Jarana in Madrid, whose bodies, according to Gay y Blasco (1997), are foremost considered “physically” spoiled when losing their virginity before marriage. In fact, for the Gitanos “a woman is a woman because she has - or has had - the *honra* inside

associated with male/ animal/ wild qualities. *Mîpan* - which roughly translates as presumptuous, cheeky or loutish - mannish and *madi-madi* - unsettled, on heat, wild - all bring with them different qualities and characteristics associated with men and what men can do and be. Similarly, on discovering a young woman's attitude towards married men, people ask critically in Guyanese Creole: "oh, so you's a bad man?" When a young girl has sexual relationships with a married man, it is always considered her fault, causing, in the worst case, the young girl to leave her native village.

When a woman is "asked home", i.e. "takes" a man, marriage usually puts an end to her "wild" movements. Celia commented once about the disappearance of a young woman from the daily village scene: "Long she used to walk [stretched]. I tell you when you tek man you does hide (laughing)!", stressing the immobility that characterises a newly formed marital relationship for a woman, at least at first. It is interesting to note here, that the Makushi term *esepannîpî* is used for both "to tame" and "to marry" someone. "Asking home for a girl", is hence connected to the idea of the control over female movements. Arbor (1999: 175) observes on gender and modernity in Melanesia and Amazonia that in the context of increased female "licentiousness" and interaction "with a larger social universe", it becomes "particularly important to keep women close to home".

The time of auroño 'pî

Most of the young girls today stay at the secondary school dorms, away from home, around the time of their first menstruation, when "turning young lady" - *auronta*, (verb) or *auroño 'pî* (adj.) in Makushi. It marks a crucial stage in life, a time when important gender-related knowledge and skills ideally should be acquired. The practice of seclusion or isolation when a young girl menstruates for the first time is characterised by a variety of teachings concerning behavioural patterns, food taboos and skills, a custom considered to have faded with Celia's generation⁷⁶. The seclusion ends with the girl's "first outing", when she can walk out of the house for the first time facing the world again: *Ase, ayaponka'ya sîrîrî!* - "Let's go out for the first time!"

her body" (Gay y Blasco 1997: 531), a "tangible, physical feature through which gender is 'culturally constructed'" (p. 519) that vanishes with sexual intercourse.

⁷⁶ See e.g. Riley (2000: 240-245) on more elaboration on the topic.

This expression is used in a similar vein when carrying one's baby 'out' for the first time, which is maybe connected to principles of the couvade in the past. If a woman is seen in the village carrying her baby around that is merely a few days old, people might comment: *Aka! Ayaponka'ya mîrîrî?* – “Oh my! So early you carrying out your baby?”

People believe that it is appropriate and safer to keep newborns at home for at least one month, before carrying them outside to the farm or village for the first time, due to the baby's weak soul. This idea is connected to the couvade, practised by parents to protect their new-born from harm, as its “soul matter” remains connected to its parents through a “spiritual umbilical cord” (Rivière 1974: 429).

As Rivière (1974: 429) puts it for the Trio:

Indeed the short-lived infant is regarded as someone who has not made a proper and complete entry into the world; he fails to become an individual in his own right. The soul flows into the child by way of the parents, whose duties therefore are not simply concerned with the physical growth and care of the child but also with his spiritual nurturing.

What the “outing” of a young baby has in common with that of a young girl at the time of *aurono'pî* is that just like the baby, a menstruating girl is considered weak and vulnerable when facing the surrounding human and non-human world. This is no doubt a time when the parental “spiritual nurturing” of a girl is of great importance.

During my fieldwork, I heard many accounts of school girls “going mad” at secondary school dorms throughout the region and as far as a Baniwa community along the Negro River (Vianna, 2012) - all with a remarkably similar course of events. The girls become ill, feverish, their mouths froth, they go mad, screaming because they are frightened of what they see. They are sent to a doctor who is unable to detect their sickness and then home to their village, afraid to continue staying in the dorms. The following account is by Celia about girls that had been sent home from the dorms at Bina Hill Secondary School in the North Rupununi.

You see how Gizella di come home? And Subira? Ailani? Ailani was like that when she was going to school, right there. You could hear Gizella hollering "Maureen [stretched]! He coming, the man coming!" The man coming and he get long [stretched] hair and long [stretched] beard! So she does saying like that. And Ailani di say like that too. Is a tall [stretched] man and he want hold she. He want hold she but that's how she di running away. She proper [high tone, stretched] di holler up, Ailani make I get frightened, frightened [breathing out, suffering], I telling you. And she come behind me and she say "Auntie [breathing out, suffering], watch he coming!" And that one there half drunk [meaning her husband who is absent in the moment] "Let [stretched, breathing out] we burn she eyes! I see she get mad!" He drop pepper

in she eye now. "Since [stretched, high tone] then, Auntie, I never see the man no more", Ailani say. I tell them "Y'all should have burn Gizella eye before she get more worst!" And Subira, I tell she mother too. "Burn she eye! She go get more worse and she go dead just like that."

Celia and the older generation who know the history of "Bina Hill" believe that it is the "Bina Master" that is "troubling" the young girls. She explains that the secondary school, built roughly at the time of her son's birth in 1998, was constructed on top of a hill, known to have a large accumulation of "bina" (or *muran* in Makushi), a type of magical plant called *Kumi*.

It was the trickster brothers, "Insikiran them", who dug a hole there on their travels through the region and buried the magical plant under the hill. Celia describes the bina as being "like them, loooong!", comparing it to the height of the tricksters. "That is for you run speed, and for you walk. If you wanna go in the bush, you could just go and come back quick [high tone, short]."

Celia's grandmother used to burn Celia's "bumsy" [in this case anus] with the *Kumi* bina and pepper to prevent laziness and to ensure willingness to be hardworking and wake up in time – a common procedure in the past with children that "don't want to listen" or "play rude". The Insikiran brothers used the *kumi* to be able to "run and come back quick, quick, quick!" between the Rupununi River to fish and fetch water, and the farm on the mountain slope. So when they continued their travels, they decided to dig a big hole and "lock them [the *Kumi*] up in the mud [breathed in]. That's why they does call it Bina Hill, because it get 'nough bina."

When building the school on top of this sacred hill, the workers dug out the earth from the ground to use it as construction material and thus disturbed the powerful plant and its "master" (*pootorî*). Celia is convinced that it is the "Bina Master" now attacking the girls "because you can't [stress, angry tone] trouble that thing! Granny used to tell me like that, nah, long. I used to frighten baaad [breathing out], frighten them!" At that time, many people were against the location of the school and dorms, but still it was built, as most people argued:

"That's long-time story!"

"That thing happened but not today, it can't happen!"

"You can't believe them thing like old people!"

There are several interesting aspects in the narrative: I believe it was not a

coincidence that these attacks of ‘madness’, which happened exclusively to girls, occurred at a time when they were “turning young lady”. Thus, the girls, far away from home, fell ill at a time when their bodies and souls were considered weak and vulnerable; a time traditionally laden with important teachings and taboos hardly practised today. Knowledge of the history of the place and what not to “trouble” is usually handed down to the younger generations by their parents and grandparents. Learning to fear the dangers of a highly ambivalent and potentially dangerous non-human world around one is essential to protect oneself from sickness outside one’s home. Furthermore, the descriptions of the “man” the girls saw in their “visions” draws an interesting analogy with the way the Insikiran brothers’ appearance is commonly described – tall with long hair and beard.

Anxious Movements

Many of the young girls nowadays, around the age of 15 after they finish secondary school and before they marry, leave their villages to gain experiences and find work in the nearby city of Lethem, over the border in Bonfim and Boa Vista, or more commonly now, in the Guyanese capital Georgetown. The type of work they do ranges from domestic housework to babysitting, shopkeeping and other kinds of services.

It frequently happens, especially in those villages close to a town or border, or known for having young people and few local employment opportunities, that a vehicle appears one fine day driving from home to home asking if there are girls available to work. The person asking is usually a woman, often an Amerindian, “the relative of a relative”, maybe to gain trust. Decisions need be made in a matter of minutes, and even if parents agree to send their daughters, they are often left with an uncomfortable feeling. One girl in the village connected the long-term move of the girls to a bad relationship with their parents, and a lack of education and respect. She further criticised that she would never go away and leave her mother “punishing” [Creole for suffering] alone at home like many of the other girls do.

Celia was once in a similar situation, where she nearly decided to leave the village together with a woman who was looking for a girl to work.

One time a lady wanna carry me [stretched] „Le' we go, you go work with me“. You believe granny wanna send me? Granny wanna send me nowhere. „Bah [breathed

out], they gonna stab you, stab you for death!“ She used to tell me like that. „You wanna go? You go long, nah! They gonna kill you! And when they kill you, you gonna study back granny!“ She used to tell me. Hmmm [stretched, high], I not gone nowhere!

Her grandmother’s worries were not unfounded. There are many accounts that circulate of girls that are taken to mining camps or other establishments in the cities where they must work as prostitutes or doing ‘dodgy’ work, including smuggling or slave labour. Letting one’s daughter go to the city under uncertain circumstances is seen by many as a lack of control of the parents (or grandparents) over their children and a lack of knowledge regarding the dangers the girls will potentially be exposed to.

Janaina, for instance, from the village Tipuru, had just turned fifteen, when a vehicle passed in the village and “asked for her”. Although her grandmother, with whom she had grown up after her parents died, did not want her to leave, she decided to go. Increasingly bored in the small village and with helping her grandparents on the farm, Janaina had been wanting to leave for a long time and this was her opportunity. After Janaina left, her grandmother did not hear from her and rumours spread that she was working in a hotel, which offered unofficial room services involving sex work.

The danger of human trafficking of young girls, notably Amerindian, to the gold mining areas and the city is indeed a real concern in this triple frontier region and has been the object of state policies and international agreements. The “interior”, where both Amerindian communities and mining areas are, is a three-fold transit place: movements of “foreign” women being trafficked *through*, from Brazil and Venezuela; of coastal women being trafficked *to*, to work in the mining regions; and a home *from which* Amerindian women are trafficked to coastal communities for prostitution (Trotz 2009: 237). Furthermore, as Trotz registers (p.240), those communities that are more accessible from the coast, like the communities in the Rupununi along the main road, are more vulnerable.

Horror stories like the following circulate among young men (and women) returning from working in the “bush”, like Dale. When his cousins and sisters showed excitement about joining him on his return to the mines, he deterred them by explaining what happens to the women that ‘just come along’ to the gold mining areas: “Their ‘O’ big, big, big!”, “They have to do it with several men at the same time!” The change in the women’s bodies and enlargement of their genitals, is something assumed and ‘fantasised’ about when young women leave for the gold

mines or the city. On their return, women are considered “worn out” and “done spoil”. Although these movements away from the village are mostly of a temporary nature, once “spoiled”, it influences one’s character and behaviour permanently and irreversibly. “Spoiling”, here, is not necessarily the result of an evil act of “magical blowing” but is usually indeed self-inflicted, through adoption of a “rotten”, immoral character and excessive and uncontrolled behaviour. These conceptions are linked to and highlighted in ideas about the city and male ‘coastlanders’ and miners in general, whose behaviour towards women is considered excessive and predatory.

When the first vehicle route was cleared into the Pakaraima Mountains, through Tipuru, the main concern expressed by the old people was the threat this road would pose on the young, unmarried girls and their subsequent disappearance from the village, as the *ararinmî ta*, “the huge caterpillar”, as they named it – i.e. men from outside in Bedford Trucks - would take the women away.

Some girls go and never come back, become accustomed to living in the city, marry and remain. Others decide to return, often after leaving their families without any notice for months or even years. Maureen, for instance, a close neighbour of Celia’s, was away for more than two years. Initially, she went to Lethem together with her cousin Diane because of the possibility to find work in the shops. Then we heard that both had gone to Brazil, Bonfim, where they were “taking care of babies”. Later the rumours spread that Maureen was living in Lethem with “two big Negro men”. People in Maureen’s native village were making jokes about her change of name - “Maviselina” – a name many girls adopt when moving to Brazil to make them sound more Brazilian. Hence, when villagers were commenting about Maureen they jokingly corrected themselves:

“Oh, oh, you mean Maviselina, she called Maviselina now!”

“She gone Brazil, come back speaking Boa Vista!”

- another running gag in response to enquiries about the whereabouts of Makushi girls who had left across the border, which highlights the negative attitude towards the change in identity and body through an incorporation of a foreign language and place.

Many young girls refuse to eat cassava-related produce or to do cassava work after finishing secondary school or spending time in the city, thus distancing themselves from important convivial aspects of community life that are part of the

Makushi cultural identity. People in the village would comment contemptuously:

“They come back and only want to eat rice!” - the staple diet on both the coastline and in Brazil.

“They don’t want their belly to grow pregnant!” - referring to the typical belly-paunch, seen as formed by the intake of cassava produce that makes one ‘flare up’. Furthermore, ‘looking fat’ is regarded as beautiful and desirable.

After Celia had spent some time in Georgetown, her husband Phelps, who could hardly recognise her when she came back, remarked that she did not look like herself anymore but had become slim and fair: “You come home fair, fair, fair!” A typical comment about Amerindians coming back from the city, where they spend less time in the open sun, making their skin turn lighter and where the absence of local food makes them lose weight. Having said that, city food, nowadays, also has the opposite effect on people’s bodies. The omnipresent availability of meat, the fatty fried foods and lack of movement make people “grow fat” in the cities, in comparison to the villages. Another example is Jill, also from Surama, who always said that her son and daughter, Dale and Maryjane, grew so tall and white-skinned because they drank lots of cow’s milk when they were living in Brazil. Cow’s milk is considered a foreign food, although most communities have cows, they do not milk them; milk is only available in the form of expensive, packaged powdered milk, imported from Brazil. Because milk is ‘white’ and ‘foreign’, it is associated with tall and ‘fair-skinned’ bodies.

The change in eating habits is connected to a change in body shape and beauty ideals, different ideas about womanhood, marriage, identity, a different kind of knowledge all together. The scorning of Makushi food ultimately means a refusal of Makushi sociality⁷⁷. Furthermore, from a Makushi point of view, the instability of the body and its transformative character are connected to the Makushi’s perspective on humanity (see Viveiros de Castro, 1987 [1977]; 1998; Vilaça, 2005). I shall return to this point in chapter 5.

⁷⁷ There is a similar idea in MacCallum (2001: 166), where she states for the Cashinahua that “Living bodies also transform into other kinds of people. (...) [I]deally this transformation would involve sex with foreigners as well as eating their food.”

The exploitation of fear and bodies

It was during the Christmas period that Winford and Priscilla from Tipuru introduced me to their daughter Edlyn, who lives in Boa Vista, the capital of the Brazilian state of Roraima. Edlyn and her husband work with another Guyanese couple from the Makushi community of Wowetta at a small fruit pulp factory in a rural suburb on the other side of the Cauamé creek. The pulp factory is within the private property of the owner, the “patrão”, as they call him, and as part of the salary and employment arrangements they live at the back of the same property in a small workers’ quarter.

Edlyn and her husband have been living there for the past 10 years. It surprised me that they had chosen to live under these restricted circumstances. From the perspective of fellow villagers in Tipuru and other Makushi people in Guyana, Edlyn was seen as having made a “success” of her life, having left the remote village and now earning money in Brazil. However, in doing this, Edlyn and the others have exchanged their freedom of coming and going for an adherence to strict work regulations. They are dependent on the will of a land owner and are stuck with the status of lower-class citizens. The “bossman” always stresses that they should consider themselves lucky and that their children’s education and health has benefitted greatly from his support.

The majority of Guyanese Makushi who go to the area of Boa Vista looking for work end up doing manual labour in farms, factories and construction, as well as domestic and nanny service. This employment is easy to get and does not require language skills or specialized education. Most have entered the country without passports and do not possess Brazilian ID cards; otherwise, they are not conspicuous among the large permanent or temporary indigenous city population.

However, the easy entry by way of the many ‘unofficial landings’ (see chapter 1) and the fact that they do not attract attention, is often abused by employers, who play on the workers’ vulnerability and fear of the police. As a result, they work long hours, under often exploitative working conditions, without holidays and breaks and are often paid less than the minimum wage.

This situation was the case with several children of parents from Tipuru that moved to Brazil and that I visited. Two of Philomena’s daughters and their husbands, for instance, were working at a small but intensive vegetable farm in a suburb of Boa

Vista. Exposed to pesticides without protection, they worked overtime without extra pay almost every day, with hardly any breaks, and received a salary below the minimum wage. They were afraid, however, to complain as their employer, in a threatening tone, reminded them of their “illegality”. Those young Guyanese Makushi women and men often experience a life separate from Brazilian Makushi, who are aware of the network of support and infrastructure available for indigenous people living in the city. The Guyanese are badly informed about their rights, do not belong to indigenous organizations, do not make use of available education facilities and lack the necessary contacts. From the point of view of Brazilian employers, Guyanese Amerindians, in comparison to the local indigenous population, are considered more reliable, hardworking, obedient and unproblematic.

Many Makushi people I spoke to view Brazil as a dangerous place. They see endless reports of daily violence in tabloid papers and on TV and they walk past houses protected against assaults by high walls and electric wiring. Some have undergone personal negative experiences. One lady in Tipuru commented that she did not like to live “that side” because she was too frightened. On one night, when she was working as a nannie taking care of two small children, some burglars entered the house. While they were hiding under the bed, the men emptied the house but luckily left without harming anyone. As she hardly spoke Portuguese and did not know how to react, call the police and so forth, she simply waited in the dark until the owners came back. This had traumatised her so much that she immediately went back home to her village in Guyana.

The food industry of human slaughterhouses

The violation of bodies and souls experienced in cities and work spaces is expressed in horror stories of cannibalism and human slaughterhouses that circulate on people’s return to their villages. The transition to intensive forms of capitalism is a recurrent topic in peasant and indigenous experience (see Taussig, 1980; Santilli, 1997; Santos-Granero, 1998; 2009). The narratives of abuse and cruelty here reflect opinions about working in Brazil (i.e. Roraima), in factories, farms and construction, and specifically target the production of Brazilian industrially processed food. These experiences of exploitation and violence are of course also narrated and lived by women and are therefore meaningful in the discussion on gender and mobility.

One night in Tipuru, one of these horrific stories was thrown into a round of *mayu*-participants (cooperative farm work) standing around a fire, waiting for their share of boiled yam with pepper and salt fish from the host, drinking the last bucket of Kari. These moments, in the cool evening, after heavy physical work, when people are still sweaty and dirty from the farm, are good moments for story-telling, where women and men are gathered, slowly getting drunk and loud. Suddenly, one of the villagers began telling the following narrative; soon others added comments, as everyone present knew or had heard about “the man from Yupukari” (a Makushi village in the Central Rupununi) who had escaped a human slaughterhouse:

The following account is based on my fieldnotes:

The man from Yupukari had escaped a terrible crime and on his return to the Rupununi reported to his community of a place “somewhere in Brazil” where they produce soya-bean oil from human fat and corned beef from human flesh.

The procedure is well-organized. They first call people, mainly 'buck man' (Amerindians), to do some easy work, like planting tomatoes and other farm produce. During this time they give them plenty of food. Afterwards they send them to a next place, where they fatten them even more. They give them plenty of beans, rice and meat, the typical Brazilian meal, from morning until evening. Then they carry them to a factory, where they chain their feet together. “The ‘boss man’ I think is German”, one person commented, referring to the owner of the operation. While the victims wait, they are able to observe what will happen to them next. One by one, they are killed, their bodies stripped on a production line, their fat extracted and made into oil, their flesh grinded and made into tinned meat. The building is like a prison, heavily guarded, with men with machine guns and high barbwire fences all around. The man from Yupukari escaped, running for his life across the savannah, passed the border over the river. Back in his village, his story spread like wild fire.

The people standing around at the *mayu* gathering were listening carefully, convinced that the story was true because the man was an eye-witness himself, he must know. Since then, most people in Tipuru feel reluctant about eating corned beef or tinned food in general. However, in the end, many still do and continue buying Brazilian soya oil, the only oil available in the village. Sometimes the soya oil “smells rank”, people say, “because it's not soya-bean oil, it's human-being oil!” The grotesque word play was repeated several times and not long afterwards turned into a joke, which made people laugh on several occasions that night. Even in the most serious of moments, someone will break the silence and make jokes so others can laugh⁷⁸.

The systematic fabrication of indigenous bodies into ‘white’ industrial products, such as cooking oil and tinned meat, symbolizes the experiences shared by many of a work relationship perceived as oppressive and brutal. This narrative, circulating from mouth to mouth, makes those listening and telling the story participate in or anticipate the reality people face in this frontier space. It helps to

⁷⁸ The “ludic” is part of Makushi life, characteristic for the peoples of the Guianas and indigenous people in general, see Overing and Passes (2000) and chapter 1 and 5.

understand how they see themselves in the world as Amerindians. The fact that no one actually talked to the survivor did not make these horrific events less plausible for them, as what mattered is that many could *imagine* the fear and alienation as a result of discrimination and abuse.

There are several significant aspects in the narrative that require further explanation. Amerindians are frequently “called” by some friend or relative to work on fruit and vegetable plantations in Roraima, “somewhere” in areas that are often rural and isolated. Some might have come into contact with the industrial processing of food, like Edlyn who works in the fruit pulp factory, as well as meat in particular, when working in animal slaughter facilities. Many have seen the guarded buildings protected by barbed wire in the city, especially those houses belonging to middle and upper-class families that Makushi women might have worked at as nannies, carers or servants. The assumption that the ‘boss man’ might be German is due to the fact that many white settlers in Roraima, who are land owners of large-scale agricultural projects, *fazendas* and industries are from Paraná or Rio Grande do Sul, two southern states of Brazil with a considerable proportion of German immigrants.

Furthermore, almost all industrially processed foods in Guyana come from across the border and soya-bean oil and tinned meat and fish, especially corned beef, have flooded the village shops and are consumed by villagers on a regular basis. However, processed food is usually eaten when nothing else is available. Tins help with meat shortages, spontaneous visits, especially from foreigners. They are typical *garimpeiro* provision, and travellers from the coast will always have a stock of them when they are on the move. A tin is useful in many ways, as it can be stored for a long time and does not need refrigeration. The “key” of the tin is known to be a good tool for tightening the valves of vehicle tires, the container might be reused for storage, but it is often blamed for causing the spread of mosquitos and malaria in the village, through stagnant water in the leftovers of burned rubbish. Thus, although corned beef and other industrialised foods are bought, shared and their packaging is reused, they are always associated with “lesser”, “foreign” food and the logic of the market.

A similar suspicion of human slaughter and cannibalism grew among those working for the Brazilian road construction company Paranapanema (see chapter 1), clearing the road from underbrush between Annai and Kurupukari. Phelps, Celia’s husband, recalls that during lunch breaks the workers would gather at a company camp and were provided with a meal, usually in the form of tinned corned beef. One

day someone found a chopped off human finger inside one of these tins. The news spread widely. Phelps himself stopped eating at the camps and instead decided to walk home every night. It is definitely significant - as in the case of the “human-being-oil” - that the finger was found in a tin of meat handed out by a powerful, foreign company that was bringing about major changes in people’s lives.

The violation of indigenous bodies by a foreign company was also a recurrent *topos* in narratives of the Yanéscha, natives of Peru, and shows some interesting parallels. According to Santos-Granero (1998: 137), when a road was built through Yanéscha territory, *pishtacos*, a white “personage associated with the powerful” and employees of the foreign road construction company, were seen walking along the road killing the indigenous inhabitants. Horror stories circulated about the victims’ bodies that were used to extract human oil for export, to build bridges and prevent landslides.

Taussig (1980: 232) concludes by describing how in “a myriad of improbable ways” Colombian and Bolivian workers ‘translated’ their experiences through rituals and magic, thus strengthening “the critical consciousness that a devastatingly hostile reality forces on people”. He states further:

The devil in the Cauca plantations as much as in the Bolivian mines grew out of precolonial and indigenous systems of belief, West African and (preincaic) Andean, as those systems responded to conquest, Christianity, and capitalist developments. The devil is not unambiguously terrifying. He is not more terrifying than the settlers (p. 231).

Santilli (1997) notes that ‘white cannibalism’ is a recurrent theme in indigenous representations of contact, also in narratives of Makushi people in Roraima who he worked with. Drawing on Heinen (1986), he suggests that there is a possible etymological association between the word Carib, from which the term ‘cannibal’ is derived, and *karaiwa*, a Makushi term to designate ‘white people’, used also by other Carib-speaking groups, “thus stressing the irony of a specular (mirror image) effect between opposing representations of contact” (Santilli 1997: 97; my translation). What I have to add here is that the word *karaiwa* is used by the Guyanese Makushi exclusively for (white) Brazilians and the place where they live, *karaiwa’ya*, i.e. Brazil. Other whites, Europeans for instance, are referred to as *pîrannakîrî*, associated with those who ‘came over the big water’ (*pîranna*) and who they perceive as different from Brazilians. Santilli (1997: 113) sees an evident link between representations of ‘white’ cannibalism and the systematic exploitation of the

indigenous workforce, a colonization process that began in the Rio Branco region in the nineteenth century. He says that the Makushi experienced the relationship with ‘white people’ as cannibalistic because it was not based on reciprocity between affines but on unilateral, predatory exploitation, a relationship that he compares with that of humans with dangerous non-human beings (Santilli 1997: 121). Furthermore, the exploitation of labour, especially during the rubber boom, forced people, mainly men, to migrate to forested areas which, unlike the familiar savannah surroundings, were associated with cruelty and cannibalism (see Chapters 2 and 5 on perceptions of “the wild”).

I suggest that Santilli’s reading of the 19th century representations of white cannibalism is very relevant for the contemporary narratives of Amerindian slaughter that I came across during my fieldwork. There exists a logical correlation between Makushi narratives containing accusations of ‘white’ cannibalism and the inhuman, hostile and predatory relationship based on exploitation of labour and bodies. It is interesting, however, that through the wide distribution of these globalized industrial items, the Amerindian population is part of the web of cannibal consumers. The narratives of chopped off fingers and human-being-oil act in some ways as a critique of modern-day life and a criticism of the dependency on industrial items and on having to earn money to purchase them – trapped in a vicious cycle of consuming one’s own bodies.

Although the exploitation of bodies in distant places, in the cities, on the other side of the border, on the coast and in “the bush” affects everybody, this recurrent theme is even more emphasised in the villages regarding the anxiety towards the movements of young women. Nevertheless, as we see in this thesis, these movements are usually of a deliberate and pleasurable nature and fortunately only in some cases marked by oppression and abuse.

Being left and becoming accustomed

Like most Makushi in Guyana, Celia has family on the Brazilian side. Her brother, as opposed to Edlyn and other Guyanese Makushi who have moved to the city of Boa Vista, lives in the Amerindian community Raposa and currently holds the position of a *toshao* (chief), at least that is all Celia knows about his whereabouts and doings. Although she talks about this brother frequently and although she has been to

Boa Vista, she has never actually visited the place where her brother lives. Celia is convinced “If I di go, I would have never come back, I would have join them! If I di go, I can't come back for real you know! I don't know why I still sticking to Surama?”. Thus, apart from her grandmother, she frequently accuses her brother in Raposa of having “left” her here and made her “stuck” to the village, because he was the one who made her “stick” to Phelps. Celia was “small yet”, about 12 and going to school, when her older brother came walking from a neighbouring settlement, where he had been to a party. “Granny! I bring a brother-in-law for me!” This brother-in-law was Phelps, about 15, from Aranaputa Valley, Celia's husband up to today.

For a long time Phelps did not want Celia to go with him to communal events and parties, to fish and hunt, he wanted to go his own way, but on the other hand “vexed up” with her when she would not remain at home. This went on until one day, Celia decided to leave for the capital Georgetown in the middle of the night with a group of villagers who had been invited to perform at a Carifesta event. They were going for two weeks but they stayed “one month straight”. Phelps was worried, without any news from her and having to listen to the usual gossip that she had apparently found another man. “Ugh, them people talk! What does travel, does talk big, big, big!”, Celia recalls.

Since Celia took control over her own movements, Phelps has learned through her absence that he never wants to do anything without her anymore. They have become inseparable. Anywhere Phelps goes he says “Le' we go!” If he goes fishing, “Le' we go!” [Celia laughs] “He don't want I left back no more at all.” In everything they do they seem to have a strong bond and subtle mutual understanding based on almost identical preferences, accompanying one another on walks from one *mayu* at a farm to the next, on trips through the forest to find seeds and to fish or sometimes to the city.

As mentioned before, the movements of women become equal to those of men with advanced age and couples increasingly move together later in their lives. Furthermore, female trajectories are frequently marked by restlessness and the desire to break away from being tied down to one place. Celia constantly questions, complains about and rebels against situations when she feels trapped. This “female restlessness” was also evident with other women who frequently stressed the impermanence and unpredictability of their situation and marital relationships. Jill, for instance, made sure to regularly let her husband know that she “might be gone

tomorrow”, and this despite them being married for 25 years and having 9 children. This could be interpreted as a way for her to demonstrate control over her own movements.

Village routes and “getting fed-up”

One of these days, Celia and I were sitting in the outdoor cassava house; she was baking cassava bread and spinning cotton at the same time, I was helping her sift the meli, turn the large bread cakes and blow and feed the fire occasionally.



Figure 32. Inside the cassava house. Scraping cassava roots (left) and baking cassava bread (right).

It is when doing something quiet or when resting, cooling down from the heat or after a downpour of rain that Celia most likes telling stories, philosophising about the world, complaining about things that are going on in her neighbourhood, laughing and “gaffing”.

“The village so quiet. I’m just there [stretched]. I sometimes study where all the people are. I don’t know what happening in the village. No one passing here anymore. If I go dead, no one would’a notice.” She said this in a quiet voice, but her disappointment is noticeable. At this moment, Celia pointed with the tips of her lips towards the light airplane just taking off from the newly re-opened red-earthen airstrip⁷⁹, directing me to follow its movement as it flew in a curve around the village, disappearing in heavy rain clouds above the Iwokrama mountain range, taking a group of ‘nature tourists’ to Georgetown via Guyana's main tourist attraction, the

⁷⁹ Surama used to have an airstrip until the 1960s, when the area functioned as a balata bleeding and distribution ground for the Garnett company. After the founding of the current village in 1975, leaders had long pushed the issue to re-open the airstrip in front of the government. Now, finally, planes can be flown straight into Surama rather than to Annai, which is a 40-minute drive away.

Kaieture Falls.



Figure 33. Waving the plane goodbye (Surama, 2014).

While Celia rushes out with enthusiasm every time a plane lands and waits to see it off, she feels the airstrip and the shifted routes have affected her convivial exchange with fellow villagers that are not in her immediate neighbourhood. Whereas before, all vehicles and by-passers came through the centre of the village, close to her house, there are now two roads in a wide circle around the airstrip.



Figure 34. The centre of Surama taken out of an aircraft. It shows the large red airstrip (red arrow), Celia's house (blue arrow) and the new main back road (black arrow). Photo taken from the Surama Ecolodge website.

She used to be able to watch these movements from outside her house; now the absence of gossip and news from people passing by has left her with a feeling of not knowing what is going on anymore. Now she can only guess from distant sounds and engines. However, not only is there nothing to observe and gossip about but the many narrow, meandering footpaths between their part of the village and the houses opposite have been eradicated and replaced by a wide red-earthen strip that has been fenced off all around, to ward off cows and other animals⁸⁰.

⁸⁰ Fences are by many considered a nuisance and as not corresponding to the 'Amerindian way of living', especially around one's house, disturbing the flow and freedom of movement. Indeed, I noticed, especially when getting lost in the largest Makushi village St Ignatius that almost every house has a barbed wire fence and that it is often difficult to access roads, houses and paths because they are cut off by fences. In Surama and Tipuru hardly any houses are fenced off, only farms, but there is constant complaint about cows entering farms and houses, the main reason why fences are erected.



Figure 35. View from outside Celia's cassava house onto the fence of the airstrip. At the back, in the distance, the thatched roofs of houses are visible of neighbours Celia would have usually passed by on her way back home and stopped at for a drink of Kari.

Now, only those that specifically intend to visit Celia would use the path towards her house - and as Celia mentioned above, hardly anyone does. The laterite gravel has permanently covered the paths that had been trodden into the earth through the various movements of villagers. While the airstrip marks a large, permanent route manually and mechanically drawn into the earth, the many feet that had trodden the narrow earthen-sandy lines reflected the spontaneous and temporary movements over a long course of time which have now been rerouted. Furthermore, the airstrip cut off shortcuts that connected houses with the centre, the entrance and exit of the village and the new arrangement of trails around substantially increased walking times.

While this is an issue for Celia, many young people and villagers who have made enough money to purchase motorbikes and bicycles have no problem with it. It is interesting to note that those people predominantly affected by the airstrip's division do not possess transportation. While it rendered some houses obsolete in terms of social interaction, others were drawn closer to the new routes and the daily events and village happenings that they carry with them - in Celia's opinion a privileged position. An example of the latter is Bautista, who is now living along one of the main routes through the village and has therefore easier access to catching

rides, sending messages, being invited for the occasional drink, and can sit in his hammock and make his own observations. Thus, not everyone thinks the same about these changes as Celia.

The villagers in general were proud and saw the air-connection as a great success for Surama. Above all, it has been a great boost for Surama's ecotourism. Charter flights to and from the village have made access easier for tourists, researchers, student groups, as well as NGO workers and government officials. The villagers themselves have benefitted and many have used the opportunity to hitch a "ride" back to Georgetown or have been flown out in cases of emergency.

Tourism has had a remarkable effect on village decisions, infrastructure and organization. Celia and Phelps rarely get involved in tourism-related work. Maybe occasionally they are invited to showcase cultural presentations or help with constructing river camps, digging toilets, re-thatching roofs or clearing trails. They also hardly ever attend village meetings and thus do not get involved in decision-making processes; however, their lives have become transformed and moulded along with these.

Next to the airstrip, there are many houses with zinc roofs, brick walls and cemented floors - the surrounding government buildings as well as many villagers' homes - which further underline this 'project of permanency'. The 'corner' where Celia and Phelps live stands in great contrast, as there the houses are predominantly thatched and adobe-walled. They are in need of repair and are occasionally torn down. As if unsure what to go for in the future - or maybe where to go -, Celia and Phelps have been hesitant in rethatching their outdoor *benab* and with every rainstorm the large holes in the roof are washed into even bigger ones. "My son wants to put zinc sheet", she told me once. Like most people these days, 15-year old Lorenzo prefers the "new style" of housing constructions with materials that are durable, seen as less work in the long run, easier to rid of insects and dirt, but which are expensive and must be purchased outside the village. Celia's neighbourhood, characterized by people living the "old way", has become a rare sight in the village and while thatched roofs are considered to be less practical, this corner has become an attractive route for tourists on guided tours around the community.



Figure 36. A woman fishing at the lake. Drawing by Laurindo John, 2017.

When Celia does not feel good about being at home and in the village, she wants to go somewhere else. That ‘somewhere else’ could be the forest, the river, communal work on someone’s farm, a nearby village or just paying a visit to someone they have not seen for a while. On these occasions, she tells her husband, “I don’t wanna stick one place! I [breathed out] wanna go somewhere!”

When Celia is ‘fed-up’ with being ‘stuck’ in the same place, her restlessness makes her break out of fixed daily routines and move. If Celia and Phelps feel like that, which happens regularly, they escape to the nearby forest, to the river to go fishing and to their farm where they spend some time before going back. For them, the forest, where their farm is, is a cool place, where there is enough food, where the hustle and bustle of the hot savannah community fades away. Being on the farm is a break from the village, a journey, a time out, close but “in the bush” instead of “out in the savanna”.

Being “in the bush” has many advantages. The ‘time out’ is used in multiple ways: to wash, bathe, play, read, talk, cook, do cassava work, visit neighbouring farms, exchange cassava sticks and invite people to help with farm work. Frequently, the whole family goes fishing, often staying overnight at the Burro-Burro river camp. A journey offers many possibilities, and Phelps always carries his bows and arrows, just in case.

With several of their neighbours’ farms close to one another, people regularly

‘call out’ a *mayu* (cooperative work). A kind of parallel world is created within this forest space, which nourishes important social values - like sharing tasks and having fun together - that are often vanishing in daily village affairs. When not helping each other, the *mayu* group might drink buckets of Kari, and increasingly drunk, make jokes, imitate jaguar sounds, invent Makushi songs using calabashes and plastic drums, swim in the nearby creek, box each other, dance or row in play. This ‘ideal world’, albeit temporary, reinforces important values of conviviality and community – an escape for Celia.

This chapter has demonstrated that a Makushi woman’s mobility fluctuates throughout her life. Learning to fear and the importance of staying in one place, as a form of protection from a hostile world in which it is necessary to know how to move “appropriately”, marks the first stages in the life of a young girl. In a contemporary world, with children spending a great amount of their youth at secondary schools and dorms, away from home, the wider movements of young girls correlate increasingly with those of boys and the usual teachings of Makushi knowledge are dismissed to a large extent. The individualistic movements of young women to the cities and coast highlight female vulnerability in a modern world and the anxiety that female mobility brings with it. While initially marital relationships are marked by a house-centred immobility of women, couples, later in life, tend to travel everywhere together. With advanced age and wisdom and the loss of reproductive vitality, women’s movements intensify and become more independent. Revisiting female mobility has unveiled subtle nuances of the static and stable image of women’s trajectories. If we have interpreted the women’s voices accurately, women’s agency and learning derive from the outside just as much as men’s.

Chapter 5 Asarîikî:

the one who walks

And if you find her poor, Ithaka hasn't deceived you.
So wise you have become, of such experience,
that already you'll have understood what these Ithakas mean.

“Ithaka”, by Konstantinos Kavafis

This chapter is about a journey Marcia and I undertook from Tipuru up North to Tusenen, the last mixed Makushi-Patamona community, which, although outside the village boundaries, passed through a known Makushi territory. Our journey raised important aspects of knowledge and imagination when traversing human and non-human domains. The journey, as recalled in this chapter, is partly interwoven with Marcia’s memories of a previous journey she undertook from Ayanganna, far North in the Cuyuni/Mazaruni region, travelling through more distant, unfamiliar settlements.

Asarîikî, “the one who walks” (cf. Raposo 2008: 26), depends on the hospitality of others, their directions and knowledge of paths, which is not a trivial consideration; on the contrary, it brings to the fore core values of Makushi sociality that this chapter will try to unfold. When visiting others, there are numerous social etiquettes to observe that describe a host/guest relationship. Here again images of the “wild” and dangerous are resumed, highlighted in the notion of *kanaima*, as well as linguistic aspects in dialogues between travellers. Marcia is the voice that guides the present reflection; her considerable knowledge of the area and her longstanding experience were particularly helpful in understanding Makushi sociality on the move.

Marcia’s trails

Marcia’s trajectory is special in many ways. As a young girl she accompanied her father on his journeys to bleed balata or hunt in often faraway forest sites where she would imitate the animal and act as a bait. She travelled to remote places, spent years in Moruka, an Arawak village in the North, and now resides in St. Ignatius, a much larger Makushi village, near the city of Lethem, on the border with Brazil. As a

community health worker in Tipuru, she used to be responsible for visiting patients living in the many small, far-spread settlements throughout a large, sparsely populated area of about five hundred people. Every month she walked alone to each settlement, treating emergencies, helping women in labour “the modern way and the Amerindian way”, sometimes travelling even in the dark during the night. Marcia knows all the short cuts in the region, at least she used to, and sometimes she had to cut her own trails through the forest.

Marcia is separated from her husband and lives alone. Having been married to a man from Georgetown, she is accustomed to ‘coastlanders’. This gives her better access to their world, which is useful when on the move. Being alone has a lot of advantages, she thinks, as she feels a lot freer in her movements and does not have to be accountable “to anyone for everything”.

She speaks Makushi and English fluently, which is helpful when on the road and passing through villages. As a PLA (Parish Assistant) for the Catholic Church, she is respected as a person of faith; being older now, she is respected for her age and knowledge. People attribute ‘almost shamanic abilities’ to Marcia and see her as a strong-spirited person, who knows how to protect herself, which is necessary when on the move. When in Tipuru, she stays with her older sister Amaris and her husband Clelant. In contrast to Marcia, Amaris was a “sickly person” as a young girl and spent most of her youth resting in her hammock. “So she spin plenty, plenty cotton”, Marcia remembers. She made cotton hammocks so they could trade them for things they needed, such as a gun or a grater.

The fact that Marcia travels widely and frequently on her own is also the fruit of her advanced age and wisdom (see chapter 4). Rivière (2000) shows among the Trio that for old people the increase in knowledge can, on the contrary, reduce their mobility. He gives the example of a man who used to travel extensively through the region when he was young, but now that he is older, is received in the villages he passes through with fear and accusations. The suspicion raised by the others is directed at his ability to harm others through witchcraft, of which old people are considered to be more knowledgeable (Rivière 2000: 263).

The fact that we were female visitors probably influenced the way we were received by our hosts, the consideration given towards our accommodation and the access we gained to ‘female spaces’ - the inside of houses, where people sleep and prepare food. A male visitor, particularly an unknown traveller, would certainly not

have been invited in and would have had to remain outside, where he could talk to the male members of the household and sleep in a hammock.

Furthermore, Marcia would most probably not have done this journey alone, just like that. My company was crucial and added another purpose beyond her general interest in revisiting people, which was that she was taking me around. As a white person, one is automatically considered a stranger and very possibly a tourist and thus an easy excuse for Marcia's movements. Marcia would have probably not done this journey alone with a man. This would have been a reason for widespread gossip.

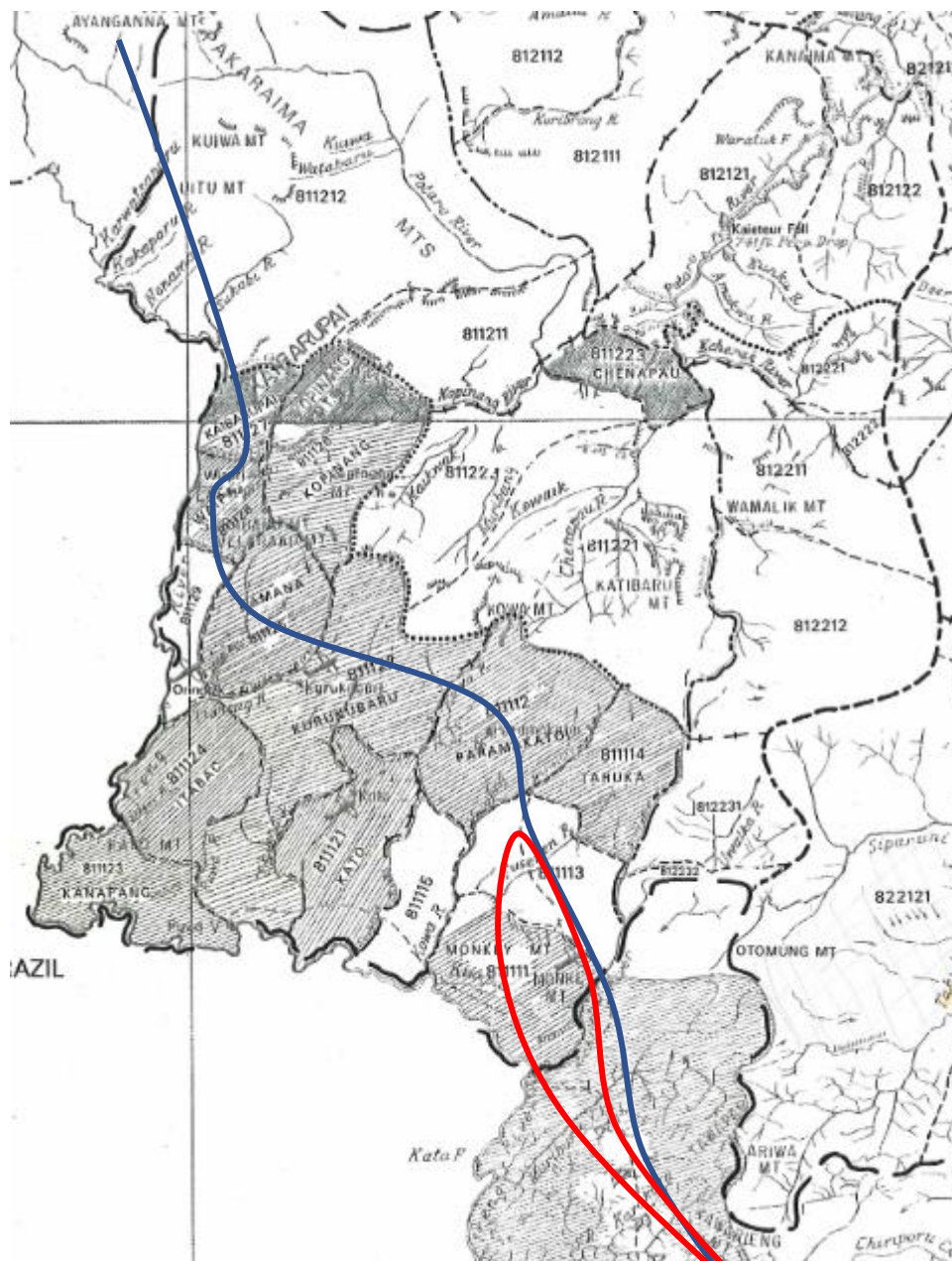


Figure 37. The trajectories of the two journeys discussed in this chapter: Our journey from the community Tipuru to Tusenen and back (in red), and Marcia's return journeys from Ayanganna to Tipuru.

Journey from Tipuru to Tusenen

One day, we decided to go to Tusenen. I had never been there and Marcia had not been back for years. As always, she was in a good mood. She opened her eyes wide, broke into a broad smile and giggled excitedly: “I knew it was time for me to get a boyfriend.” Marcia is in her sixties and she likes to take advantage of her age, use her charm and make wicked jokes. Her strong, wise and fresh personality compliments her small height and young, agile body. She likes to dress in colourful long skirts and a woolly jacket. Her black hair is a little wavy and cut just below her chin, her skin is dark-brown, tanned from the open savannah sun.

Marcia often reiterates that “from Karasabai to Yurong Paru we are all family, cousins married there and here, all brothers and sisters”, i.e. from her parents’ and grandparents’ generation that have spread across the whole area of the South Pakaraimas, with more than ten communities, and beyond. She laments the fact that the younger generation is mainly ignorant of who their more distant relatives are. Knowing about one’s kinship ties is especially useful when on the move visiting different villages. Tusenen, although beyond this familiar cycle, is still a place known to Marcia as she had already visited some of the Patamona communities further north during the time she worked as a PLA. However, Marcia has not visited for a while and is not up to date with people’s movements and local news.

While on the move, one is dependent on others for shelter, food and well-being, and if one has plenty of family and knows people all around, travelling is a lot safer and easier. Stopping off at one’s acquaintances and relatives on the way is also good for refreshing and strengthening relationships and to exchange important information for the continuation of the journey. Visits like these are usually quite spontaneous. Travellers just turn up without prior notification.

Reasons for journeying

Marcia’s journey preparation:

“Far places, walk with enough rations

Calculate three days to prepare cassava bread and at least 4 litres farine: reap, fetch, scrape, grate, soak (for farine), matapi, parch/bake

If we go and visit people we share among everyone, so when they sharing their things, we share our things as well

Any food is welcome, but reduce weight

Hammock**Blanket (it can get cold at nights)****Change of clothes (because you don't know what the journey will be like), walking boots, long pants if distant and rough****Make a little bottle with pure lime juice and mix it on the way, carry sugar separately****Carry knife, if needed cutlass”**

Depending on the purpose and length of the stay, the most essential pieces of equipment individuals take on a journey are a sharp knife for protection and general use, a hammock (many people like the light-weight “garimpeiro hammock”), maybe a change of clothes and some food, such as a small bag of farine. It is not common practice to carry mosquito nets or blankets, even if the nights are cold in the mountains. People would rather get up early in the morning to continue their walking, and warm themselves in the sun or at the fire. Considering that our journey meant several days’ walk passing through other communities, it was important to take sufficient rations to share with the households we would stop at. Taking enough farine and cassava bread meant some three days of preparation.

For Marcia and other people of the South Pakaraimas, Patamona land to the North is considered a no-meat-zone, where there is not much hunting and fishing, with few cattle and overpriced meat, often in the form of industrialized products flown in via the capital Georgetown. It is mainly a gold mining area and some make a living driving cattle up from the cattle-rich parts in the south, like Karabaikuru and Karasabai, to the mines and villages further north. Others, like a young man travelling by bicycle from Toka village in the North Rupununi, do business trading salted fish from communities where fish is plentiful, like Yupukari, to inhabitants of the Pakaraimas. Frequently trucks pass up and down, on hire, carrying goods to private shop owners and village stores or transporting construction material and gasoline for dredge owners in the mining areas. While most truck owners are coastlanders, who might have settled in Lethem, and have business connections to the coast, the Toka boys are an exception. This group of young Makushi men from Toka, a village adjacent to the main highway into the interior, have specialized in selling to local shops in the Pakaraimas.

Unnoticed by the public and without prior social and environmental impact assessment, the Omai company, Guyana’s former largest gold mining operation, has been constructing an all-weather earth road through the Karasabai District, with the aim of creating a proper access road to the mining areas in the North and integrating

the Pakaraimas for future development plans. Many of the villages used to be fairly isolated but now vehicle travel has increased and everyone who is at home pokes their heads out to see who is arriving. Someone from outside the community is easily identified, and people are very good at recognizing vehicle sounds from a distance. No traveller enters the village unnoticed. People are curious to know who has arrived and for what reason and the gossip and stories continue long after that person has left. Being on the alert about who is moving in and out of the village is also a form of protection and the only way to monitor the freely accessible roads.

Conversations⁸¹ might be like this: in this case between two women sitting in the open cassava house:

Vehicle sound.

“*Anî?* [Is who?]”

“Big Jack!”

“*Aka* [expression of surprise], he late! Dropping off them school children?”

“*Inna* [yes], Rita going back with he this afternoon.”

“Where she going?”

“Lethem, she baby sick!” – *ta’pîiya* [she said]

“*Haman* [oh my]!”

Unlike other villages, where the main road is a long way away and connected via an additional village route, in Tipuru the road goes straight through the middle. There are of course other reasons why people are so nosy about incoming vehicles, for instance because they hope to catch a lift. Giving locals a ride is also an advantage for the drivers. It makes them known and popular among the inhabitants and gives them a way in. In future they might stop by one of the houses, be offered food and drink, a place to sling a hammock or find help if the truck breaks down.

⁸¹ This conversation also gives an idea about the mixture of Makushi and Creole English people speak in their daily lives. Sentences are usually full of expressions such as “*Aka!*”, “*Are!* [expression of astonishment]” and “*haman*”; words for questions, agreement and disagreement, etc.



Figure 38. En route by truck (right) through the Pakaraima mountains.

With a perfect view onto the road and a short distance to run, the Green family from the opposite hilltop had quickly waved down an incoming truck. While the young mother tried to convince the big middle-aged Negro driver to take her two teenage children – “newly blond” Marlis and her older brother Jonas - to Monkey Mountain, the siblings hastily packed their bags. Marcia and I used the opportunity and jumped in, too; Marcia in the front, between the driver and a young pregnant girl from Yurong Paru; the rest of passengers at the back with the luggage, two truck wheels, some sacks of rations and about 12 big blue plastic drums of gasoline.

Amaris was standing outside the cassava house, watching the truck leave. “She always worrying”, Marcia had commented before. “She will be worried with me until I reach back”. Marcia had told her that we should be back in a week’s time but added cheerfully, “Maybe they feed us good and Tipuru will never see us again!”

The roads were dusty and those that did not cover their faces with a cloth were soon covered with a film of red and white earth. After crossing Tipuru creek the road went up and down little savannah hills, dotted by white and grey rocks and covered with bristled grass, occasionally through forest islands. Soon after, close to the community of Maloca Nova, we passed the workers' camp and the end of the road construction and continued along a large, much stonier path, with several potholes and areas washed away by erosion. This was the road the people themselves had cleared

with their bare hands, or axe, spade and cutlass to transport school construction materials during the El Niño crisis in 1998, an effort for which they never received recognition from the government.

Our journey through Yurong Paru-bush, the mountain forest between *Marapaikuru uttî* (creek) and the large village of Yurong Paru, the last in Region 9, was rough and interrupted with moments of waiting and clearing the path.



Figure 39. Pools of mud on the way that pose a challenge to the heavy-loaded trucks.

Just after we managed to pull out of a large pool of mud, a fallen tree barricaded the way, where another truck had been stuck for nearly a week, and empty packets of chow mein noodles, plastic bottles and tins were scattered all over. Marlis's brother and the porter were busy chopping the thick trunk with cutlasses, the driver slept, and the women gathered to exchange conversations and search for a nearby creek to drink water and "wash their skins".

By the time we continued, night was beginning to fall. Under the immense dark canopy of the forest our truck seemed to plod on like an elephant, the strong headlights illuminating the path ahead. The air had cooled down and the sound of the

engine was so loud that it was impossible to talk or sleep. Everyone had to hold onto the metal bars to which the green tarpaulin roof was tied. On the other side of the bush mouth, a large, hilly savannah began.

As mentioned in previous chapters, there are many reasons why people move between the various villages. They range from visiting family, driving cattle, buying and selling goods to looking for work, collecting pay or going to hospital. While the occasional opportunity to catch a ride with a passing vehicle might arise, the common form of movement in the area is walking, or sometimes by bicycle or on horseback. Those travelling with children or cows slow down their pace, setting up camp or using existing temporary encampments on the way to stay overnight between villages far apart. Cows might get away in the villages; in a bush camp, small herds are easier to control.



Figure 40. A bush camp in a forest island next to a creek between Monkey Mountain and Tusenen, used mainly by herders and larger groups of travellers.

Depending on the mode of transport, routes differ; on foot, there are various shortcuts across and up and down the hills. Not all the paths are still in use and some become engulfed during rainy season; only frequent travellers would know how to find them. Young people would mostly stick to the road construction.

People do not usually just go for a walk for leisure. Young girls like Marlis that leave to stay for a longer period at their relatives' home, would usually visit during the school holidays, especially at Christmas time, or generally during times of plenty, when their hosts have enough to share. It is longer school holidays (Christian

holidays) that define the times for visiting family and relatives, at least for those with small children. Sometimes people might be simply too busy with their own work on the farm and around the house or have left for the city. Occasionally, whole families might visit relatives in a village and stay for several weeks.

Mapping social cartographies

Marcia was not acquainted with many people in Monkey Mountain. She started talking to the wife of the owner of a large East Indian shop and explained where she was from, which family she belonged to and that she had come here before. It is always good to mention if one has visited the village before and for what purpose, to make people feel comfortable and make oneself less of a stranger. Marcia also stressed that her grandparents and parents used to live at Tawailing Mountain, a high table-top mountain not far from this village; in the end the two of them discovered they were related. On finding out, the shop owner prompted us to come inside into the private kitchen in the back and offered us chow mein with chicken⁸². A woman had told me that on the move “Amerindians always try and fit you into the family line”, meaning searching for possible kinship ties or other forms of relations, to create personal connections between each other – and within the Rupununi and Pakaraima Makushi communities there is a good chance one is lucky. Thus, being aware of the advantages that arise from “being family”, or at least friends of family - being welcomed in and offered food and accommodation, Marcia tried to figure out possible kin relations between the people she met on the way. While we sat, she enquired about the people she knew in the village and used the opportunity to help herself to another plate of chow mein. One of the sons of a relative from Kara Kara had gone to Brazil. The brother of Winford from Tipuru was currently staying on his farm behind the mountain slopes and rarely came into the village. However, Noreen, one of Marcia’s “distant cousins”, who works as a nurse, was at home and the shop owner showed us the way.

Noreen welcomed us and immediately brought out food and Kari. She said

⁸² Chinese chow mein, Indian rice and roti, have become an integral part of Makushi cuisine, especially for those families dependent on purchasing foodstuff. Furthermore, chicken and beef are the most commonly eaten sources of meat. While both chickens and cattle are reared, the high consumption of chicken (typical in Caribbean cuisine) necessitates importation of packaged, frozen chicken from Brazil to the interior regions of Guyana.

many times that we were very fortunate to have turned up at a time when food and drink were plentiful, probably the reason why we remained for five days. We were fed generously with pepper pot and fresh farine several times a day and seemingly never-ending rounds of Kari. These were not only large leftovers from a recent wedding celebration but the family had also just finished doing cassava work. Many neighbours, including Marlis, came to visit during this time, knowing that Noreen was hosting guests that had come from far away and therefore would surely have something to offer. Noreen, although much younger, is related to Marcia through their grandparents' generation, and conversations and gossip were flowing non-stop.

As the above examples have shown, Marcia, whenever looking for someone, additionally gave information about herself, explained which village she was from, why she had come here and how her family was related to people in this community. Like this, she made herself known to the people, aroused trust and could create comfortable relations. Expecting others to disclose information about the presence and location of a fellow villager without knowing more about the visitor who is enquiring arouses suspicion, as these are considered “kanaima techniques” to get hold of their victims. There is another side to knowing one's way about, knowing the village's composition, knowing who lives where, who is who and where one is going, as this is very powerful information that can potentially be used in a harmful way⁸³. While I will be saying more about kanaima at the end of this chapter, in short, *kanaimî* (in Makushi), is a complex and manifold Amerindian notion prevalent throughout the Guianas' region, which refers to the act of vengeance in form of predation and death. In response to these kinds of enquiries, people would ask questions in return, such as “how are you related?”, “where do you know the person from?” or “why are you looking for him/her?” Dangers of the unknown and their neutralization - by way of discovering genealogical connections and extending the circle of familiarity through creating social links - are the two sides of this social cartography. An awareness of these two aspects is absolutely necessary when on the move and both will be discussed in this chapter. For now, let us continue the journey.

The subtle duties of hospitality

⁸³ In the past, for instance, disclosing one's Makushi names was avoided in public, as these could be used in prayers for bad purposes (see Roth 2011 [1915]).

The day we decided to leave for Tusenen, our host invited a lady to come over. She offered food and Kari and they conversed. The woman was living halfway between Monkey Mountain and Tusenen and because it was already late in the day, Noreen suggested we should accompany her friend and sling our hammocks at her house. The roughly two-hour walk was what the woman had to make twice a day during the week to take her four-year-old daughter to primary school. While the mother waits all day at a relative's house, assisting with chores whenever necessary, the daughter is at school, usually tired and hungry. The schoolteacher is trying to convince them to move to Monkey Mountain to be near the school, which would mean leaving their place and family at Japan Hill behind. The long, daily journeys to school have always been the principle reason for families with smaller children to move closer to the main village. School is among the main reasons why nuclear families disperse, why children leave their homes early and often do not want to return anymore.

We left after three o'clock and darkness fell on the way. The five houses on "Japan Hill" all belonged to the same extended family. The woman's house was still in its building stage, with an unfinished zinc-roof and no walls, so we used its wooden structure to tie our hammocks. On arrival, she disappeared into the locked-up house of her parents-in-law where bits of light escaped through the cracks in the wall. Soon the door opened and we were called inside. The adobe-walled, thatched house was warm and cosy. It had two hammocks slung close to the wall, one occupied by the grandfather, the other by his grandson. The grandmother was sitting on the floor unpacking cassava bread. She was blind in one eye and she hardly looked up when we entered. The floor was covered with several pepper pots, some made of clay, some of old metal, filled with pepper⁸⁴, *kumaasi* (thick black cassava water) and "fine fish". A fire was blazing in the back and the woman's husband was sitting there quietly warming his hands, staring into the flames. Three tiny wooden benches were the only furniture in the house. No one said a word for a while. The woman who had brought us pointed with her lips towards the food, ripping bits of *kenan* (thick cassava bread) and dipping hungrily through the pepper pots, while feeding her youngest daughter. The old lady in charge of the smoked labba meat was sharing out pieces to everyone,

⁸⁴ Pepper in Makushi cuisine is always chili and people eat their food very spicy, including children, There are many different types of hot pepper, "Ataitai pepper", "bird pepper", "Chikkitai", "malagueta" etc.

except to me. To explain who I was and make people feel comfortable around me (white, tall, stranger) Marcia told them that I was accustomed to “Makushi ways”, how to bake cassava bread, make Kari, that I eat anything and that I came here because I wanted to learn more about the people and the place. Feeling reassured about my familiarity with local food and customs, the old lady suddenly called out “*Eru, indikî, manon, karan pe pra, karan pe tîwe’ku’sè pra!*” (Sister-in-law, join in, don't make yourself a stranger!) and handed over a piece of labba. The husband later said to Marcia, “She is no stranger to us. I like the way she moves herself, because the way I am living (*ko'mannî'pî*), she don't scorn us.” Keeping oneself away and scorning the food and habits of those one is visiting, i.e. not making oneself at home, is something that creates otherness, distance and uncomfortable relations. As it was, the fact that I had accepted their offer of food and shown familiarity with the way people live made the family feel comfortable about welcoming me into their own home⁸⁵.

When visiting someone’s house, the host offers whatever they have, most commonly Kasiri or Kari. The host also usually supplies the farine, cassava bread, the pepper pot if they have some, or at least some pepper broth. It is important to “always have enough to help the others”, a woman once told me, “even if it is just a little Kari, some oranges or cassava from your farm”. Having a productive farm enables one to share; this again will result in strengthening kinship ties, engaging in a large network of reciprocal exchange, and receiving food and presents, like animals, in return. Generosity and inviting others is also a sign of being ‘hardworking’, which used to be a form of competition for future sons and daughters-in-law (Jill, Surama, 2014). On the contrary, *iwan*, hunger, describes the state when there is no food at home, neither to eat nor to offer (*itîrî*), and is seen, rather than with pity, as being self-inflicted. Being greedy or lazy go hand in hand and are considered shameful and unhealthy behaviour.

If the visitors have brought some dried or salted meat (like “tasso”) or fish,

⁸⁵ Im Thurn (1967: 35) already mentioned the importance of these etiquettes among the Makushi and explains in a rather prejudiced fashion: “Etiquette demands the offer, and etiquette demands that the visitor should finish the horrid draught to the last dregs. Intent on establishing friendly relations with the people, I often found myself obliged to undergo this disagreeable ordeal; for, after it, I was allowed to walk about the house, handle all things, and ask any number of questions.” He further says how often their hosts would return their visits on other occasions, simply out of curiosity as well as to barter.

they give the family a piece to roast. Packages of instant noodles and tinned food would be shared for personal use or to be extended into a big meal for everyone, if people have not enough to offer. Then the family would call for everyone to sit together “*entimokan!*” (let us all eat together!). Strangers are asked for permission before being offered anything:

“Do you mind eating a little pepper pot?”,

“You don’t mind drinking Kasiri?”,

or

“Eru (sister-in-law), we are punishing. This is how we live in this place cause there is nothing else we could do. Do you want to try some?”

The reason for this etiquette is that the host is unsure about the stranger’s “style”, what the person usually eats and drinks. Only strangers, non-locals, are asked for permission, more familiar people and relatives are simply offered whatever there is. This helps to explain why the old woman at Japan Hill enquired about who I was and why Marcia’s answer made her decide to include me in the distribution of labba meat. Frequently, as in the example above, embarrassment and shame are expressed about the type of food and small amount. People known to the family, on the contrary, are always offered food without prior permission and it would be rather insulting for a relative to request food, without waiting to be offered some.

If food items, in this case the labba, are scarce, someone usually shares out rather than leaving the rest of meat for everyone to take, as some might end up without any. Whatever the host gives is for one’s own consumption and not expected to be shared with others. I noticed on many occasions when I was the host that I had made the mistake of handing over an entire loaf or a whole packet of *rapadura* (Brazilian sugar cane sweets) to the first person in the round as the person who received it would gladly accept and keep it, rather than share it with the other people present. The “correct” thing as a host is to break it into pieces and share these out to everyone.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ At parties (birthday, marriage etc.), the host is not only responsible for providing the drinks (i.e. preparing buckets of cassava beer) but also for distributing them throughout the night. Thus, it is the birthday child and his/her family who are responsible for feeding the entire party and making sure everyone feels included. This is usually done by walking around with a bucket, filling a bowl of alcoholic drink, Kari, Kasiri etc. for each person and waiting while it is being drunk. It is not common to simply put a big drum of alcohol in the middle of the dance floor and let everyone serve themselves, as only the very “blunt” ones would take and the shyer ones would stay at the back thirsty. By sharing

The mosquitos were biting fiercely in spite of the strong cold breeze throughout the night. The young daughter, who had been crying on the walk back home from school from hunger and exhaustion, was still shivering and crying and it was hard to get her to sleep. The next morning, we were again asked to come inside. The pots were warmed up and we were invited to dip some cassava bread into the hot pepper sauce. It was only then that they found out that Marcia's grandparents on her mother's side were closely related and that they all used to live near each other on the table-topped Tawailing Mountain.

An elder son had joined us inside the house, while his wife squatted outside on a little bench chatting with two other women, surrounded by several children. The son started conversing with Marcia, passing around a bowl of sweet Kari his wife had strained. He was happy to see me enjoy drinking it. When Marcia told the story of her time working as a health worker and PLA, the man suddenly became excited and realized that it was Marcia who had saved his life after he had fallen off a horse. Far from any hospital, he had spent days in great pain and could not walk, when Marcia happened to walk by. She stayed with them for three weeks, treating him with massages, painkillers, herbs and prayers, until he could walk again. He had never forgotten that and immediately went home to strain more Kari to offer to us.

On a journey through familiar as well as unfamiliar places, passing a village or 'being a guest' at someone's home often entails more commitments than simply slinging a hammock and sharing food, such as assisting with work and sharing knowledge and skills. Marcia told me that on her long walk from Ayanganna in the north-western Pakaraima Mountains, Cuyuni-Mazaruni Region 7, she met a young woman suffering from an illness. Marcia used what she knew about curing and was invited to stay longer, a request difficult to turn down. In return the family offered farm produce for Marcia to take home:

In Waipa the woman was suffering with 'Nar' (?). She fell down, she couldn't walk, she was 6 months pregnant. I looked after her. I cracked her, massaged her and she was able to walk and because of that they asked me to spend 3 more days again. The family was so happy that they offered me a lot, a lot of eddoes. One eddo was 6 pounds.

Marcia has experienced this commitment to helping a traveller in need herself. On the same journey when Marcia helped the pregnant woman, she fell and dislocated

out bowls, the host not only fulfils an important etiquette of reciprocity and maintaining good relations with one's neighbours, but also ensures fair distribution.

her knee. In agony during the many days walking, she had several people look after her, using different curing techniques:

3 o'clock we reach...dragging, crying...the woman was parching farine, she left everything for the sake of me. She pray, she pray on the fire coal and put it on my foot, she pray the water and wash it. I felt relieved, the pain was gone.

In the community of Karisparau, it was a young Patamona girl who practised *taren* with her, incantations or ritual 'blowings' used for all kinds of ailments.

My foot, my knee was in pain, in pain. A young [high pitched voice], young girl used to look after it. She would pray on it. A blessing of Makushi then. Taren. Then she would tie the leave of bina on it and bless it. To me the language over there was a grammatical Patamona, not mixed, that's why I couldn't understand it.

Taren prayers are spells blown over a person's body or onto things like liquids used as "curse or cure", as many people would say. Its practice is associated with *muran* (in Makushi) or *binas* (in Guyanese English), magical plants, in rare cases animals such as frogs. Those that have this powerful knowledge, even if they are part of one's community, are likely to fall under suspicion of using it as *kanaima*. We shall return to this point later.

While Marcia was delighted to have someone to look after her, she was surprised about how young the person who practised *taren* on her was. In her experience, only older people had this knowledge and knew the proper words. Among the Patamona and in this region, however, it seemed that even young people were knowledgeable of ritual 'blowings'. Marcia knew how powerful *taren* was and that it could be used in 'good and bad' ways, and the fact that she could not understand what the person was mumbling in the spells made her feel uncomfortable and vulnerable, but she was careful not to show mistrust and 'spoil' her relationship with the people. As Butt Colson (2001: 204), among others, observed, the act of blowing and the act of saying the necessary words go together, as they are both aspects of the soul.

The ethic of giving and sharing goes far beyond communal boundaries and includes reciprocal invitations and exchange with neighbouring settlements. This is fundamental to the creation and maintenance of good social and political relationships (see the data summarized by Rivière 1984; 2000) and prevents anger and sickness blown by others. Butt Colson (2001: 224) interprets the overwhelming envy and suspicion, resulting from an imbalance in the ethic of giving and sharing within egalitarian societies as a reason for evil-doings. She explains that among the Akawaio,

inviting others to feasts creates alliances with powerful people and manipulates the system of exchange, which in turn causes envy among those with less to offer (see also Overing 1975; 1985 and Whitehead 2002).

Marcia remembers several occasions when travelling through Kamana and Waipa where she had to give away some of her things:

This old woman asked me, “Daughter, I don't have hammock and I see that you have a beautiful hammock. May I have it?” And this was the only hammock I had. I had to say yes, I give it to her. It looks so pitiful to say 'no' to a woman like that.

From Waipang somebody show us the way to Kamana and he asked me for a pants and for a shirt. “This is the shirt I am wearing and it is dirty.” “I will accept it and wash it when I come home”, he said. “If you said so, you may have it, friend.” Maybe the clothes were a return for bringing us, the man brought us all the way, maybe because he wanted to ask something.

Beside pity, Marcia felt an obligation to accept the old lady's request for the hammock and the man's request for the T-shirt in exchange for his help. Marcia preferred not to disappoint people's expectations and give whatever was requested of her, so as not to harm their relationship, out of fear that refusing could have a negative effect and arouse anger. The way she describes that the man even accepted worn, dirty clothes, expresses her surprise and the difference she felt between them. Being well-equipped, having acquired these things during her moves between city and village spaces, Marcia is struck by the 'poverty' that people face in this region.

Refusing hospitality and not giving is not well thought of and causes friction in the large network of reciprocal relations that extends to passing strangers and goes beyond the realm of familiar places and people, particularly visible in the relationship between the visited/host and the traveller/visitor. Social etiquettes of hospitality are taught from an early age in the form of moral-laden stories, such as this one Marcia told me about a man who brought famine to people who did not receive him well and spared those who did:

When mom was still here, a person came – to me, in my small eyesight, he was a tall Negro man. He had a grater in his Warashi. Mom said he was the “master” of the famine. We welcomed him in, he was soaked through and through with rain. Mom take out his clothes, rinse it, dry it up over the fire. A whole set of water came in – maybe that's why she knew...Then she feed him with little pepper pot, we ate along together with him. The man went away. Then someone quarrel him at Karasabai. Why did they do that? I don't know. So when the famine came, everything, everything dry up at Karasabai. Is only here we survive. And from Karasabai they came walking to collect cassava sticks and roots here. Some of them made farine, bags of farine and cassava bread. Some carried it as cassava meli to make Kari that side. They helped themselves. Some of them would pay their foodstuff with a young girl or young man.

So they give away their children for their own food. Those were the only few things I remember. Because of that mom used to tell us: “don’t ever quarrel a stranger, because you don’t know who they are!”

What is also interesting about this narrative is that the responsibility towards treating an ‘uninvited’ stranger (or foreigner) as a guest has implications that go beyond one’s own home and affect the whole community. Thus, Marcia’s mother’s hospitality saved Tipuru from being punished by drought; in the same vein, the hostility by “someone” in Karasabai punished everyone else in the community.

When Marcia first visited the Patamona community of Kato, where she had no relatives or personal connections, she had a very unwelcoming experience:

Kato didn't receive us, they didn't welcome us at all. One man said, drunk, “for you to tie your hammock here, you didn't help to bring even one Truli leave! Who tell you that you could tie your hammock in my house!”

Makushi people who live far from Patamona communities frequently accuse its people of being the reason for tragic incidents in their villages, though never without finding a reason for this to happen as a logical consequence. Marcia relates several examples, which also explain why she did not refuse to give the strange lady her hammock. As in the above story of the man in Kato, some Patamona people, who were passing through Marcia's village, were refused permission by the vice-toshao (vice-chief) to sling their hammock in the community house. Another time a villager refused to sell farine to people, with the argument “You ever cut a farm for me?” By the end of the month, the two people who had been rude and refused shelter and food, died under inexplicable circumstances.

The angry reactions shown in the above examples all make a clear statement about the other person’s obvious non-residential status. Thatching leaves or helping in the farm is a common communal activity, which strengthens reciprocal ties and good relationships within a village. As she was only passing through the village, Marcia had clearly not had the chance to participate in communal labour. This makes the reaction particularly mean and offensive as it is based on the grounds of Marcia being a stranger. It also shows how many people seem to regard it as “natural” to request something in exchange for their hospitality.

During his fieldwork, when investigating what he calls kanaima sorcery, Neil Whitehead (2002: 22) visited some of the same communities as I did, i.e. Tusenen and Monkey Mountain. He describes how in Taruka village, a predominantly Makushi

community in the heart of Patamona land, most of his Patamona companions refused offers of Kasiri drink, mistrusting their hosts' intentions. In return, Whitehead assumed this "breach of etiquette" made the Makushi refuse to sell their starving visitors food.

For Marcia, the Patamona are only "sort of civilized right now" and she remains wary in her behaviour towards them and the "magical danger of the envy of uninvited strangers" (Pitt Rivers 2012: 511): "to make them annoyed like that be terrible for us. So when the Patamona come around I don't tell them anything, I welcome them any time."

Leaning on "laws of hospitality" of ancient Greece, Pitt Rivers (2012: 508-509) writes:

(...) meeting with the stranger is a confrontation between the known world and the realms of mystery. (...) If his danger is to be avoided he must either be denied admittance, chased or enticed away like evil spirits or vampires, or, if granted admittance, he must be socialised, that is to say secularised, a process which necessarily involves inversion (...) from hostile stranger, *hostis*, into guest, *hospes* (or *hostis*), from one whose hostile intentions are assumed to one whose hostility is laid in abeyance.

Houses, particularly those close to paths frequently travelled on, are commonly chosen as stop-overs, which entail a duty of hospitality on the part of those who live there. Finding the right path is not so easy sometimes for those who are less familiar with the area. As we have seen in chapter three, routes are memorised through an embodiment of the trajectory and the narratives connected to them. The incorporation of place and its paths is "perceptible" and highlighted in the way people give directions, as we will see in the next section.

The speaking paths

Unlike forest paths that usually need to be cleared manually of high bushes and undergrowth, paths in the savannah are simply formed by walking; the more frequently a route is trodden, the more easily visible and more used by other travellers. Paths can be "over-used" or damaged by rainfall and become hard to walk along, especially when flooded during the rainy season. New ways are chosen on higher grounds, often in close proximity to the previous ones. Travellers need to be knowledgeable of these different kinds of paths, used for different purposes.

When giving directions, people are very careful to point out paths that could be mistaken by outsiders for farm roads or dead-end paths used for woodcutting in the forest. When crossing creeks and rivers, the traveller needs to be informed how often and where to cross, whether at the far end or near a specific land mark, as the right path might continue from a different point and angle on the other side (cf. chapter 3). When taking shortcuts through the forest and bushy slopes, different routes must be distinguished: roads commonly used by people when travelling (*urînkôn ye'marî* – our road), hunters' roads (*iwo'nonkoi' ye'marî*), roads used by animals (e.g. *waikin*, deer) *ye'marî*) and farm roads (*umû ye'marî*). Otherwise it is easy to lose one's way - “*E'ma porî yu'se anna wanî mîrîrî*”. Many have had the experience of getting lost at some point in their lives, especially when going hunting alone - adventures which are often recalled in moments of socializing at communal gatherings. The following photos are examples of paths that need to be distinguished.







Like the Mayan word *beh*⁸⁷, in Makushi there is only one common term used for path, *e'ma*. Thus, rather than a qualitative distinction common in European languages, the noun *e'ma* can be used for any sort of path, road or trail. The term can be modified by adding adjectives, such as *kure'nan*, “big”, therefore a “large road” (*e'ma kure'nan*), or *e'ma piya*, the beginning of the route. By putting *e'ma* into context, i.e. adding places and activities to the word, “farming path” or “hunting path”⁸⁸, the Makushi distinguish seemingly identical narrow trails that lead through forest and savannah. Thus, the Makushi term their roads depending on where they lead or what one does along them. All these distinctions, however, similarly to the Mayan *beh* “are more a matter of degree than kind” (Keller 2009: 156)⁸⁹.

On our way a lady, a cousin of Winford from Tipuru, crossed our path returning from the farm: “*Siiinpata'*! [far!, stretched], it is faaar, auntie, you cannot make it with this sick knee! You sure you can make it? Because it is not here, it is

⁸⁷ However, the image of the road seems to be much more central and complex in Mayan thought and cosmology, where it also refers to one's course of life and destiny (Keller 2009: 156).

⁸⁸ *E'ma* in combination with these words then becomes *ye'mari*.

⁸⁹ Although I use it quite interchangeably, as the Makushi do, Earle (2009: 255), for instance, makes a comparative analysis of roads throughout the Americas and Mesopotamia and distinguishes three routes and their use: Paths, in that they are “local” and used daily; trails and roads in comparison are “regional and long distance”, “seasonal and periodic”. Roads, however, are also commonly used both locally and daily.

faaar!” said the young woman with a pained voice and full of worry. As described in Chapter 2, on my arrival in Tipuru, distance is emphasized through high pitched, long-drawn tones, usually accompanied by hand and arm gestures making a wide half-circle into the direction one has to go. These gestures follow the circulation of the sun, thus also estimate the time it takes. The stretched sound of the words follows the slow motion of the arm movement. The slower and more extended the words and gestures, the longer the journey. Repetitions are also commonly used to describe long distances. On the contrary, if destinations are close-by, arm gestures would be quick and pointing and words abrupt and staccato. Directions are also accompanied by intonations that express the physical sensations connected to them. The suffering experienced on a journey, - the long distance, exposure to the sun, difficult climbs - is recalled and transmitted through the language. In our case, after expressing her worries about the distance we had to walk, the woman went on to stress the arduous nature of the journey by telling us about the hills/mountains we would have to climb, in this case four:

a(ahhh)ttî mîrîrî!”

a (ahhh)

a (ahhh)

“attî mîrîrî

up, until you come to the top of the mountain.

up

up

you go up

4 attî mîrîrî - increasingly high and breathed out, expressing suffering

3 attî mîrîrî – increasingly high pitched and breathed

2 attî mîrîrî – increasingly high pitched and breathed

1 attî mîrîrî - breathed out, short, stressed

and go!”

and go

“you will go

Through intonation, manner of breathing and imitation of pain in the voice, suffering and hardship are expressed that turn otherwise purely informative words

such as “far” and “up” into a vivid and lived experience. *Ipîra, ipîra, ipîra!* (breathed out). *Ipîra umoron pu'tî'pûya enu'ku pe* “I punish bad, bad, bad to walk up this mountain!” “*Ipîra!*” is frequently heard as an expression of hardship, punishment, exhaustion and pain. Marcia explained this phenomenon by saying that when people talk they are “going up *with* the mountain”, sharing and experiencing the pain and exhaustion when walking.

References to time and weather conditions are incorporated into direction-giving and orientation. In one conversation, a man said “you will reach when heat on your face”, meaning that we would get to the village around 4pm when the sun was beginning to set but was still hot. The fact that the sun would shine brightly into our faces indicated the direction we would face. By adding “aka, aka, aka”! many times, a typical expression of dislike, annoyance or shock, he vividly evoked the feeling we would experience when heat shines on our faces, blinds us and makes us sweat.

On the other hand, the comfortable feeling of “arriving with the sun on one’s back” is expressed through the calm, stretched voice and intonation.: “*U’wani’ pra a’ne’ peeeee* (stretched, easy sound) *wei tîise eerepamî*”. Rhythm and tone when giving directions also help to convey the ease and speed of going down the mountain, as in the following example:

attî mîrîrî

attî mîrîrî

attî mîrîrî

is repeated with short intervals. When describing reaching the flat land, the sound fades out into a stretched and lasting tone.

Tedlock (1983) and Sherzer (2002), in their studies on poetic discourse and speech play respectively, make several crucial observations on sound symbols, iconic images and repetition functions in indigenous languages, which are useful for the examples mentioned above of daily, rather than functional language. Sherzer (2002: 16-17) talks about how onomatopoeia and sound symbolism develop, in discourse, a “form/semantic relationship, so that meanings like size, texture, movement, and shape seem naturally related to the sounds that describe them.” I suggest that the directions given by the Makushi woman about climbing the mountain create an iconic image, the sounds draw a connection between the size and shape of the mountain, the upward movement, and the physical effort involved. Sherzer (2002: 23) gives an interesting

example of reduplications (of “to go”) and as he stresses, “a pattern commonly used as a humorous, expressive, onomatopoeic device in narrative performance” to describe continuous and repetitive movements, similar to the example above. In general, reduplications seem to function as an indication for intensity and a habitual and continuous action (Sherzer 2002: 19-21), and are, in Makushi, very common in descriptions of movement: “The place far, far, far (*aminke, amike, amike mîrîrî!*)”

Ingold (2000: 409) argues that “words gather their meanings from the relational properties of the world itself”. Similarly, as in the case of the directions up the mountain, he proposes that there are “iconic links between verbal signs and the properties of the exterior world” and that qualities (such as hard and soft) of words are uttered through their sounds, analogous to the differing tone, speed and volume in music to achieve such qualities. The “many ways of “singing” the world” (Ingold 2000: 410), an expression taken from Merleau-Ponty (1962: 187), have to be seen, Ingold (2000: 410) stresses, as a way of “entering intentionally and expressively into [the world], of ‘living’ it”. These embodied “topographies of experience” and “shapes of sensibility” (Keller 2009: 157, quoting Hoffman) are evident in the use of sounds and iconic images in Makushi, the guttural and the far flung-fading tones emphasise the physicality of words spoken through lived and shared experience of being in the world. This physicality of language and landscape is expressed in discourses about movement, obvious on numerous occasions throughout our travels.

Furthermore, the stretched “gone” (in Creole English), the long “uttî sîrîrî” (in Makushi), is a profoundly characteristic marker in narrative performances. The soft, sometimes whispered, sometimes dramatized “I goooooone/ uttî sîrîrîîîîîîîîî” is used repeatedly in almost every sentence, often highlighting the only punctuation. The use of intonation, imitation of sounds, the use of repetitions, long melodic stretches and stresses are all ways of re-enacting scenes and bringing the world alive.

Traversing and visiting

This part of the journey from Tusenen back to Yuron Paru down Tawailing Mountain turned out to be by far the most exhausting and challenging. We took several short cuts but Marcia had difficulty remembering them and we had to try out different paths before finding the right way. After having several visitors around until

late in the evening to see “Sister Marcia”, we set off early in the morning. As we were leaving, we saw three ATV motorbikes from the Ministry of Agriculture parked in someone’s yard. I decided to enquire about the direction they were going in, seeing that Marcia, although she tried to hide it, was in great pain with her knee. The men were on their way to Taruka village, a nearby predominantly Makushi village, carrying heavy equipment to fog out farms against Akushi ants. The men were completely overloaded but at least they agreed to carry our backpacks, and we continued the journey much lighter and happier after several rounds of very tasty purple potato Kasiri. The young wife of one of the ATV men assured us they would drop off the bags at the spot “where the excavator gone in the mud”. “*Manni’ pata, excavator, womi’pî ta!*” “*Pu’tîpî’ wai*” –I know where it is– replied Marcia. I did not have a clue and was surprised Marcia knew. After two to three hours’ walk, mainly up the hills, we got to a steep curve in the road. Japan Hill was visible in the distance, when Marcia suddenly stopped at a seemingly dead, leafless tree. “See?”, she said in her teacher-voice, pointing at two arrows drawn into the sand, one downwards towards the tree, the other upwards towards the mountain slope. “This is where they leave our bags, and this is the shortcut we will take. They leave us the direction.” I would have surely passed the sign without taking any notice of it. We picked up the bags from under the tree, swung them on our backs and continued our ascent following the second arrow.



Figure 41. The tree and the directions.

For some time we went along the top of the hilly landscape. Travellers who drive cattle, Marcia explained, use the difficult and narrow path as a shortcut to Tusenen. From here we could see all kinds of paths, roads and movement markers cut into the savannah grass.





The road to Mutum, built long ago by a Brazilian miner (see also Roopnaraine 1996) to the east, the many meandering lines leading to Tawailing Mountain to the west, and *Insikiran ye'mari*, a large white trace on the mountain to the side of us (see photo below).



Figure 42. The large white road of the trickster *Insikiran*, the *Insikiran yemarî*.

Marcia explained that the *trickster* brothers on their travels use the *Insikiran ye'marî*, the road of *Insikiran*. During my time in the Pakaraimas, several people pointed out routes to me that had been created by the movements of *Insikiran* and *Makunaima*. These were not tiny lines or narrow paths typically used by people but wide roads, even marked by tracks of trucks, as these highly mobile mythological brothers, according to a couple in Monkey Mountain, have their own large vehicles, more precisely Bedford trucks, with which they traverse the land. Although the *trickster* brothers created these landmarks and trajectories during mythical times, they are believed to return occasionally, using these routes and checking on the things that they “planted”.



Figure 43. The tracks of the truck of Insikiran, pressed into the rocks.



Figure 44. The tracks of the truck of Insikiran, pressed into the rocks, at the entrance to Monkey Mountain.

Therefore, paths that have to be distinguished from one another when

travelling include those of other beings, as they travel and traverse the area too. I heard many narratives of “short” men visiting during Christmas or crossing the village to go fishing in a nearby river. I heard of the *ataitai* who used to live in a huge rock along the path to Takutunen but then moved his house closer to the settlement, Maurice Mine. Thus, places can be inhabited and “dis-inhabited”. I heard, regarding the *trickster* brothers, that they might move spirits from one place to the next. Thus, new rocks can turn into sacred sites while others cease to be meaningful. The door of a *tuwenkaron*, a mermaid-like creature, might be under the waterfall of the creek just where one bathes every day. There are spirits that come right to one’s doorstep, like *mo’ke* who circles the house early in the morning and makes young girls sick if they are not already awake and spinning their cotton. *Mo’ke* can attack when one is still asleep because one’s spirit is believed to travel at night, which makes one more vulnerable towards malicious forces. Tunnels into the mountain of the old lady *nozanton* in Tipuru are right opposite the village and her sad cries can be heard on many occasions inside someone’s house. All these are interesting aspects in the discussion about movement. Especially at night, just as it gets dark, movements of spirits are feared and people try not to be outside alone and make sure to shut their windows and doors⁹⁰.

Turning left after the big Mango tree we had bathed at on the way and after drinking some water from the shallow creek, we continued our journey through a landscape which became increasingly dry and was dotted by strange-looking cacti, such as the *amooko pupai* – grandfather’s head – common in this area and used for various medical purposes, for instance diarrhoea.

⁹⁰ I remember the dreadful fear the children had of peeing outside during the night (the pit latrines are always at a certain distance from the house) in the family I lived with for more than a year. They would never go alone, always wake up their mother or older siblings and remain close to the house walls. Mothers for their part would teach the older children to always accompany the young ones when they woke up in the middle of the night. Many people leave the solar lights on the whole night for safety reasons, until they automatically go off.



Figure 45. The Amooko Pupai (“Grandfather’s head”)

The ground was full of holes and grooves, where individuals looking for diamonds had dug up the white sandy ground, Marcia explained.



She also pointed out several abandoned miners' campsites, some with rotten frames of wood that had remained, others where nothing visible remained but Marcia could remember the stories related to these places.



Figure 46. Old *garimpeiro* camp on Tawailing mountain.

There were many Brazilian miners looking for diamonds at that time, when the Guyanese government turned them out after villagers had complained about dirty creek water. At the side of a bush, Marcia took a quick rest and commented in a matter-of-fact tone of voice: “this is where one of the Brazilians turned tiger.” She described how the man one morning woke up in his hammock, stretched and yawned and then his yawn transformed into a loud tiger’s roar and when he jumped out of the hammock, he was a tiger. The other miners ran away towards Mutum and hid in a Brazilian bar on the way; they never saw their comrade again. It is specifically in unfamiliar places, when people are far from their homes, that these transformations most commonly occur. The Brazilian man would have most likely not turned into a tiger in his own house or familiar surroundings.

Losing one’s way, choosing the wrong path can lead to unfamiliar grounds and into the realm of danger. Certain situations make one more vulnerable, such as walking alone and in the forest, as well as being hungry, which makes one’s *yekaton* grow weak. People thought to have weak *yekaton* like menstruating or pregnant women, sick people, babies and small children (see Riley, 2000) can easily “fall prey”

when on the move. According to Marcia, “invisible things” appear to piaimen, or when one is hungry. “When you are hungry anything would appear to you.” Hunger (*iwan*) is connected to the powerful forces of abstinence, practised, for instance, during shamanic initiation, when the piaiman-to-be goes alone into the forest and ‘starves’ himself, surviving merely on tiny bits of unfamiliar food, such as the thigh of a humming bird⁹¹. While the *pia’san* (shaman) is able to move and mediate between different worlds without ‘becoming transformed’, a common person risks stepping beyond this ‘border’.

There are numerous narratives that tell about lonely hunters, hungry and lost in the forest, children alone at home, or menstruating women washing at the river being lured into the home of an *o’ma’kon*. These non-human entities would, at first, appear to them to be just like ordinary people. They might be strangers but seem to be kind nevertheless and after an initial suspicion, the person follows the other to his home where food is offered, or to a village in the middle of the forest, where one is invited to dance and feast. The food at first tastes good and everything seems familiar, until suddenly one discovers that something is wrong with the behaviour of the people, with the way they prepare food and do things. Suddenly, food and drinks turn out to be raw or rotten or even made of excrements. Suddenly the familiar sounds of Forró music transform into frog sounds and the party ground into a puddle of water. Instead of a bed or hammock they sleep on an uneven, uncomfortable floor, and instead of using human speech the others start grunting or growling and behaving in an “improper” unhuman way. At this moment, the realisation dawns that something is different, as if waking up from a dream and the only way to get out of this situation is by escaping unseen. What is interesting is that it is through changes in behaviour, habits and speech that the person then becomes aware of the other-than-human body and appearance - it is these that mark the distinction between the human and non-human.

A transformation can occur when losing touch with what is familiar, what is ‘human’, by becoming accustomed to eating what for the Makushi are essentially poisonous substances like rotten fruits, poo, blood or lizards and in this way forgetting one’s humanity. On returning to the village, a person that got lost in the forest might scorn otherwise familiar food. One way of getting the person back is by insisting on

⁹¹ See also food taboos and “anti-nutrition” in Viveiros de Castro (1978: 62)

offering local food to make him or her recognize who he/she is and where he/she belongs. A grandparent, or someone who knows the appropriate words of *taren*, might blow and pray over the person, accompanied by using a “home-made” cassava fan to lead the person back home to its body.

There are ways to avoid getting lost and lured into the other’s home, one being to eat before going into the forest. Hot pepper is considered very powerful and is used in various applications on body and mouth to protect and strengthen people on their journey. With a weak spirit, caused by an empty stomach (and in other situations like drunkenness), one can easily get lost, be lured into a stranger’s home and fed on strange food. *Antayaikî!* - “Burn your mouth!” - is the advice and expression that describes the act of eating before leaving the house, which can be a full dish of pepper pot or *tuma* or simply some cassava bread with *kumaasi* - but what is important is the pepper (*pimi pî*) inside. “That’s why they used to burn from head to toe, that is why people always ensure to eat at least pepper, salt and water, so that the *o’ma*’ doesn’t see you!” Along with pepper, tobacco (*kuwai*) is used as a form of protection, by offering it when passing the ‘homes’ of certain beings (see below), as well as by smoking it while on the move (see Reinaldo, chapter 3). The sniffing, gurgling and swallowing of tobacco water is connected to shamanic practices and “whistling-talking” through its smoke has the power, as Butt Colson (2001: 204) notes, not only to blow away malicious entities that are following people on their journey but also to carry ‘*taren*-blowings’ to their destination.

Not far from a dense forest island stood a house, with adobe walls and thatched roof, all entrances closed up but surrounded by a nicely cleaned yard. This was the area where Marcia’s grandparents used to live and where her parents were born (see Chapter 2).



From there the steep descent down Tawailing Mountain began. Marcia took a while to find the right path. She walked up and down along the edge of the abyss, trying out several narrow lines that all soon turned out overgrown and unused, until she found the right one.



The view from the over 1200-metre-high table-top mountain, according to Evelyn Waugh's measurements (1933: 132), stretched over the Ireng River and into the mountainous regions of Roraima, Brazil. In a distant valley ahead, behind various ranges of hills, the white zinc roofs of Yurong Paru village flickered in the strong early afternoon sunlight - the place Marcia was determined to reach that day. In contrast to orientating oneself in dense vegetation via dots of memories (like camps and their narratives), as well as counting the crossing of water, bends of creeks, hills and so forth (see chapter 3), in the savannah, the focus is on certain spots on the horizon. Thus, in highland savannah regions like these, with wide views, local travellers orientate themselves according to hills and mountain peaks in the distance, especially the "naked" ones that are not covered with vegetation. When paths and shortcuts are lost or disappear amidst the multitude of hummocks, the large skyline in the distance helps one to keep track of directions and village locations.

The steep path down Tawailing was rough, full of rolling stones, some so high that we had to squat or crawl, without trees or bushes to hold on to or to protect one from falling. I wondered whether in the rainy season and for older people this way was not too much of a challenge.



It was remarkable that so many people chose this shortcut between Yurong Paru and Monkey Mountain. They did so because the main vehicle road makes a wide, time-consuming bend around Tawailing. Marcia informed me about another trail people use to get to Monkey Mountain, which goes alongside the Echillibar River, but which is equally steep and unsafe.

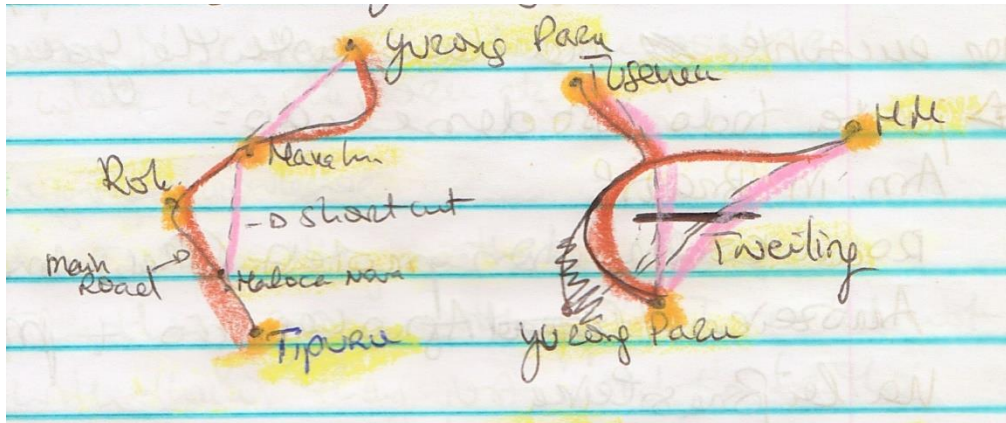


Figure 47. Hand-drawn map of shortcut (pink line) from Yurong Paru to Tipuru and from Tuseneu down Tawailing Mountain to Yurong Paru - both of which we chose to walk. The main vehicle route is in red, the shortcuts are in pink.



Figure 48. Different routes on our way.





We were completely exhausted and glad to stop at the ranch house at the foot of the mountain. Pigs, cows, chicken, donkeys, sheep and two green parrots were running around, and after a while, a woman in her fifties came out. As if it was the most natural thing to do, she brought water and later Kasiri. Marcia also observed the general etiquette of conversation and after explaining where we were heading and why, enquired about the well-being of the lady's family. People are quick to disclose information about sickness, suffering and death within the family. The woman talked at length in a sad and serious tone until Marcia changed the subject and asked for directions to get to Yurong Paru. After listening patiently, Marcia started to feel

hungry and as we had not yet been offered any food and the sun was getting low, she decided it was time to go. On leaving, the two women exchanged the typical farewell: *Witînpî' wai!* Gone again! I don't know when I come back. Maybe, some day." Marcia once mentioned to me that often a breeze blows at this very moment of saying goodbye. These kinds of resolute but rather 'open-ended' farewells are common and reminded me of the time when Winford was leaving to go back home to Tipuru, after staying for more than a month with his sister, Regina, in Boa Vista. For many days he was supposed to leave but was never ready to go. That day, after they had eaten, watched TV and talked a little, he stood up in a decisive manner: "*Uttî'se sîrîrî, nana, uyewîta komannî'se enapo.*" "I am going, older sister, return to my house, to live there once again."

On approaching the house of Marcia's uncle in Yurong Paru late that night, our two dark figures were illuminated by the moonlight just as we reached the doorstep. The uncle, who was resting in the dark outside to cool down, shouted in an ironic but indeed relieved way: "*Pa'se [daughter-in-law], I thought it was Kanaima but it's you!*" He immediately brought two small wooden benches and after we sat down the conversations rolled on throughout the night.

Necessary dialogues

One of the stories that we were told that evening depicted an incident which we heard about several times on our way and which we ourselves passed on in our informal talks with villagers. This is an excerpt from my fieldnotes:

A big group of people was sighted near Kato village, heading to Tusenen.

"They walk with all their children and women, with clay pots and graters!"

Apparently, a truck driver on his way to Lethem had given them a lift. They wanted to get off where there was no village near.

“This is typical for them” Marcia explained. “They would not get off at a village, always before, and then hide in the bush. They would not speak to anyone”.

People were convinced they are kanaima people.

“They come to do you harm, they eat people.”

For the Makushi there are four suspicious modes of behaviour in this context: first, carrying heavy clay pots - something that seems to have been a common practice in the past but today is considered suspicious⁹²; second, moving in large groups and outside holiday periods - which means, for instance that the children are not going to school; third, not sleeping in the villages on the way but rather in ‘the bush’ – which means they are probably strangers, have no kinship ties in the region and want to remain hidden away from people; and fourth, being silent and secretive about one’s purpose, origin and the destination of one’s journey – i.e. failing to observe an important etiquette among travellers. All these patterns of behaviour are regarded as “improper”, “wild” and potentially dangerous.

Perceptions about the “naked”, “uncivilized”, the “bush” and “mountains”, the Patamona and the fear of kanaima assaults are for the Makushi all connected and deeply embedded in Makushi cartography. From her father Marcia knew that there are “naked”, “scary” people somewhere living at the foot of Mount Roraima that he had encountered when working as a “dragger”, carrying the load for some “malaria personnel”. In fact, they had not actually met “the wild people” as no one was at home, but they found anteaters and tiger skins hanging at their house posts – seen as typical indications of kanaima practices. Mountains and forests are places of powerful knowledge and knowledge acquisition, connected to shamanism and the realm of non-human beings. These distant places, and their people and beings, function as the antipode of what Makushi people distinguish themselves from, specifically those living in the savannah. This is also supported by the assumption that social distance

⁹² The description of large groups travelling with children, graters and clay pots, reminded me of a description by Schomburgk, p. 190, Vol 2 (German version), where he describes in detail a spontaneous ‘dance ceremony’ in the Makushi settlement Torong Yauwise (Bird’s nose) in the Pakaraima mountains. Groups of Makushi, Paushiana, Wapishana and Arekuna came walking, with their entire families, carrying Warashis filled with articles of barter. It is interesting how in the past large groups journeying to barter items and visit communities further afield used to be the norm, now viewed with suspicion.

grows with spatial distance in the Guianas (Overing, 1973) and other Amazonian regions (e.g. Descola, 2001).

Gold and diamond mines, usually in forested, mountainous areas, are also places where people feel threatened by kanaima assaults. This might be due to the fact that the population in such places consists primarily of non-consanguineous relationships, which are marked by anonymity, a constant flow of in-and-out movements of people, activities such as prostitution and a strong presence of greed, envy and jealousy. Mining areas like *Itcharak*, close to the Patamona community Paramakatoi, are indeed famous places for kanaima attacks, and horror stories circulate widely, deterring others from going there. Marcia's niece and her partner left the gold mine because of the threat of kanaima. They felt constantly in danger, were afraid of sleeping or walking alone and she had warned Marcia in a mysterious tone - "There, it's very, very wild!".

The fear of what is "strange" and "wild" is connected to the idea of ambiguity and capacity for evil, highlighted in the act of "doing kanaima". It is believed that every human is capable of "evil", but unrelated and unknown people are much more suspicious and unpredictable. As mentioned previously, potentially insulting behaviour is better avoided – and as Marcia comments, "We don't know them. We don't know what type of people they are."

When Marcia passed through the Patamona community of Kurukabaru during her travels from Ayanganna to her native village Tipuru, a Patamona woman asked her to join them to collect and eat Akushi ants, roasted over a fire, called *tempe*. In order not to disappoint the woman and make herself fit in, Marcia readily accepted, but as she says:

With eating Akushi ants there were two problems. They take them out from the graveyard and they eat them raw. Then they boil it with pepper. I couldn't handle it. The head was very strong-smelling, to me then. Because we have another Akushi-ant, that one I eat - but the bottom side, not the head.

Although Marcia was generally familiar with eating Akushi ants, she linked the fact that the Patamona ate the insects "raw" and rank-smelling, dug up from underneath a graveyard, to notions of the "wild" and "uncivilized". According to Marcia, the people living in this mountainous area showed a scary and "savage" attitude, behaving in an unpredictable manner and taking away other people's belongings:

One thing about them...you see how I come here? I never know what is in your bag.

There they would tumble down your bag and take out what they want. It was scary, really, really scary! They take out everything! Empty out your bag and chose what they want. Without you telling them what to do. What we had to do is to put on three clothes on top of one another, to survive there. Three clothes, three pants, three shirts. I remember I had expensive clothes, like 16,000 GY\$ that somebody give me as my birthday present. They take it away. I didn't want to be greedy, maybe they looking for trouble, maybe they planning for something. I just didn't say anything.

Marcia warned her Arawakan travelling companion:

Be careful with them! If they want to take you away from me, I say, go! Don't be stupid! They are young and they are nice girls. If they want to try with you, go with them because we don't know what they will do! Probably they will kill me, or kill you! Maybe that's what they looking for, we have to be careful!

Giving in to their demands was the only thing she felt safe with and all she wanted was to maintain comfortable relationships⁹³. Her mistrust and fear had grown to such an extent that she could imagine they might kill her and her companion. They had shown all signs of strangeness, which made them capable of evil and excessive behaviour. And she adds “You just behave calm as if nothing's happening to you. Because I never see people do like that before.”

Marcia's perception of what she considered a “savage” attitude of the people she encountered on her journey was linked to her understanding of *o'ma'kon*, entities who inhabit the forest and mountains, classed as “not tame” or “something wild” in Makushi imagination (Marcia, 2014)⁹⁴. “Troubling” or “tumbling down” other people's belongings are typical expressions used when talking about “mountain people” or “short men”, who are part of the non-human category of *o'ma'kon*, and often empty out bags of travellers overnighting in the forest⁹⁵. Marcia knows too that due to their ambivalent and conditional relationship to humans, “troubling” the place of an *o'ma'kon* or a *pootorî* (the father or master) of an animal, is dangerous and arouses anger. As punishment, the person might fall sick, suffer misfortune or even die.

In a similar vein, *o'ma'* can also be used as a verb and adjective, “doing *o'ma'*”, “behaving *o'ma'*” – behaving “wild”. *O'ma'taikî* (adjective), for instance,

⁹³ See Ellis (1997), for instance, on the importance of creating comfortable relations for the Tsimane indians when on the move.

⁹⁴ *O'ma'kon* also categorizes all animals that the Makushi do not eat, from inedible small insects like flies and mosquitos, to animals like snakes (*ikîi*) and jaguars (*kaikusi*). This compares to *Kamoyamî*: ‘game or prey’, edible animals that are hunted.

⁹⁵ Makushi people take the utmost care with the belongings of strangers. Whenever something goes missing, it is a huge embarrassment, and children who are accused are questioned and reprimanded immediately and given a lecture about how to behave properly.

describes a person, often a child who behaves in an offensive way, troubling other people. Similarly, *o'ma'ta* (verb) is used when someone is “insulting or mischievous”. *O'ma'* is therefore also a quality and one can turn *o'ma'* through behaving in an ‘improper’ way.

To clarify the Makushi ideas of what is considered “civilized” and “uncivilized”, it is important to look at these categories in Makushi terminology. Marcia defines “civilized” as *karanpe kompe senîhasan* in Makushi – which she translates as: “We are friends, you not a stranger (*karan*) anymore”. She goes on to explain that people who are “civilized”

visit, they are sociable, they socialize. They would talk to any and everyone. We learn to stick with one another; we learn to socialize. We are civilized now because we would not run away from you anymore. We are not frightened anymore.

“Civilized” is thus the equivalent of being sociable and not being frightened. It should be noted that Marcia seems to include her own people into the process of having become “civilized”, having been “wild” before. Marcia defines “wild” in Makushi with the expression *aranneko'*. *Aranne'* is an adjective meaning “frightened” that can be used to describe the behaviour of recently captured wild animals. The suffix *ko'*, as explained earlier, means “inhabitants of”, referring usually to a place but here rather to behaviour, i.e. “the (still) frightened people”; “the wild people”. Marcia further explains:

We don't see each other. If I try to talk to them, they run away. Frightened of people, of strangers. They can turn into animals, when they put on alligator, anteater or tiger skins.

The analogy between hiding, not communicating and “being wild” is clear and a marker for unsociability. Furthermore, according to Butt Colson (1989: 2), in Pemon and Kapon concepts of being, the spirit/soul (*yekton*) as opposed to the body (*esa*) is associated with moral values, wisdom and sensibility. Those that behave in an unsociable manner are seen to possess less *yekaton* and less knowledge of how to “live well” with one another. Furthermore, these considerations on wildness are subsumed under the larger notion of *kanaima*, which I would now like to discuss.

Throughout the Guianas, death is always attributed to some form of causal intervention, which for the Circum-Roraima people, is associated with *kanaima*, or *kanaimî*, as the Makushi call it. The notion of *kanaimî* became a literary *topos* of the Guianas in the accounts of travellers and scientists in the 19th century, originally

personified in the form of a ‘secret avenger’ (Im Thurn 1883; Schomburgk [1847] 1922; Roth [1915] 2011; Myers 1946). At the same time, some of the authors have interpreted Kanaima from a functional sociological perspective as a law of retaliation, a “system of vendetta” (Im Thurn 1883: 329), which facilitates social regulation (Schomburgk [1847] 1922; Roth [1915] 2011). Not contradicting the sociological explanation, other authors have viewed the notion of *kanaimi* as a philosophy of causality, a native theory of “cause and effect” (Myers 1946: 28; see also Koch-Grünberg 1923 and Farabee 1924).

In her thesis on Wapishana rhetorical practices, Farage (1997) highlights the fact that Koch-Grünberg’s analysis (1923) of the *topos* recognizes a crucial aspect of kanaima revenge that goes beyond ethnic borders, which is the “wrath of vengeance” (“*furor da vingança*”). Thus, rather than naturalised into a human assassin, as kanaima is usually described in contemporary ethnographic literature (e.g. Whitehead 2001, 2002)⁹⁶, Farage suggests that kanaima should be read as a “mode of doing” (1997: 107, my translation). Following the work of Overing (1985, 1986) on Guianese Amerindian philosophy, she proposes that kanaima refers to the break with and denial of communication, which must define human sociability, and thus, needs to be understood as a kind of cosmopolitics of conviviality (1997: 60). Hence, as Farage (1997: 113) has demonstrated, the act of kanaima is made possible when the dosage that humanity depends on, which lies midway between shamanic chant and kanaima silence, gets out of balance. The importance of proper human communication and the caesura of communication which results in kanaima silence, is a reading which reflects my own fieldwork experiences among the Makushi and is most relevant for the present discussion on movement.

In order to understand the negative value of silence, let me first say that for the Makushi, as for other Amazonian peoples (e.g. Riviere 2000 etc.), anger is an emotion that is suppressed and not demonstrated openly and publicly, an attitude that is ‘trained’ throughout life, by teasing and joking. Young people are constantly tested in their ability to respond to the teasing by others, to react with humour and laughter rather than getting offended and irritated by it. From my own experience, responding to the teasing and provocations of villagers with jokes to make people laugh was a ‘way in’ to the community. As Overing stressed for the Piaroa, laughter and the ludic

⁹⁶ See also other anthropological literature that discuss kanaima, for instance Foster (1993), Riley (2000) and Butt-Colson (2001).

are very important for the creation of conviviality and the maintenance of community life (e.g. 2000). Furthermore, the very lively and constant gossiping ‘behind the scenes’ acts as a kind of catalyst but as well indirect moral judgement.

However, open and loud expressions of anger and the consequences that arise from these are feared. As Rivière already noted for the Trio (2000: 257), there is another side to this, as the “ultimate rage is when noise turns to silence, when speech and communication cease”. Staying away from the general village chatter and daily gossip and keeping to oneself is associated with sorcery and arouses suspicion of unimaginable, uncontrolled behaviour. The anger and revenge understood as the consequence of negating the ethic of sharing and ‘proper’ human dialogue are analogous with the silence surrounding *kanaima*.

The victim never sees the perpetrator nor is able to talk about what happened due to the typical swelling of the tongue⁹⁷ – this inability to communicate is the prominent symptom of *kanaima* attack, which for its part is carried out secretly. Silence, as Farage (1997: 110) explains

carries with it a threat: a man who does not speak meditates revenge. (...) the man, who, overcome with fury, refuses dialogue, is prone to act (my translation).

In Farage’s view, unspoken words cause decay, they “spoil” and ferment anger and revenge⁹⁸. *Kanaima* inverts the human condition through a continent mouth and incontinent anus (victims become mute and intestines are usually pulled out through the anus), which mean a lack of sociality through uncontrolled poisons and a denial of social dialogue (see also Whitehead 2001: 241-242)⁹⁹. It is interesting to note here that among the Kapon and Pemon, as Butt Colson (1989: 3) stresses, *ewan*, the abdomen – the area mutilated as a result of *kanaima* attacks – is the seat of “feelings and emotions”.

Being human is an unstable condition that depends on a balance of ‘proper’ food and ‘proper’ dialogue to create sociability. *Kanaima* can be seen as the denial of this dialogue. In Farage’s words:

Between devouring and song, lies human dialogue. An unstable point and always likely to be exceeded, the human condition depends on conduct within human

⁹⁷ For more descriptions of *kanaima* deaths, see Whitehead, 2002; Butt Colson 2001; Riley 2000.

⁹⁸ About the power of words and breath in shamanic practices and in connection with the use of magic plants and prayers, see e.g. Mentore, 2004.

⁹⁹ See also Overing (2006) on the Piaroa’s notion of asocial diseases through unrestrained passions and excessive behaviour.

parameters: proper food and appropriate words (1997: 60, my translation).

Making oneself at home

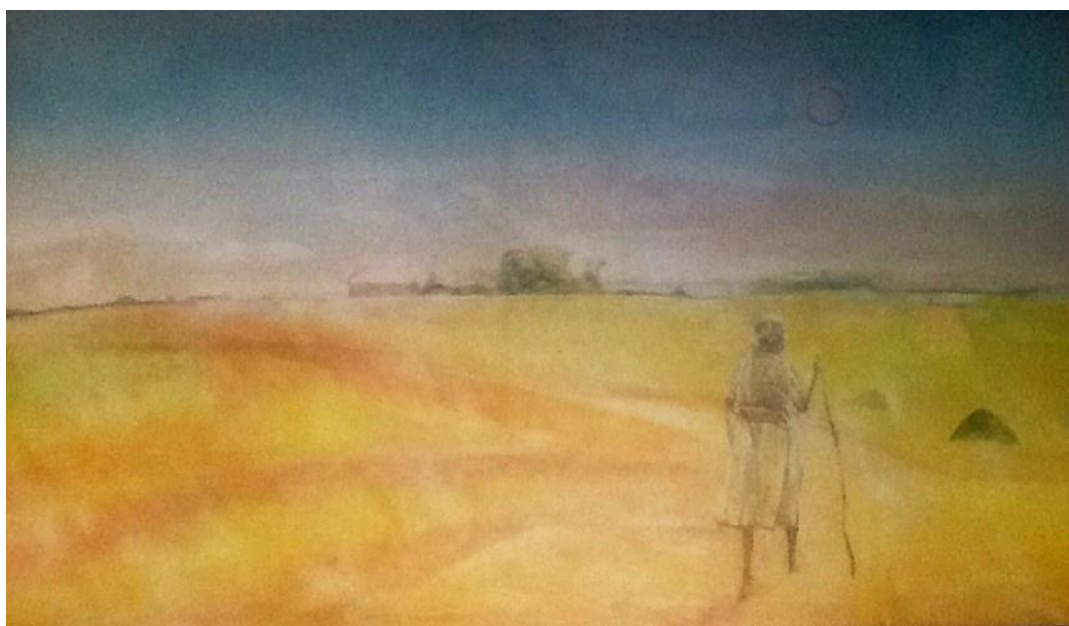


Figure 49. Painting “Mother going Home”, by the Arawak artist George Simon.

As we have seen, the etiquette of travelling revolves around the difficult task of communicating with others. The importance of communication between travellers is one aspect in the story about the “big group” of strangers mentioned above that I would like to highlight at this point. We rarely met people on the way. One man from Yurong Paru village passed us walking very fast, heading, as we found out, towards “PK” (Paramakatoi, a Patamona village) to “get pay” for some construction work he had done there. With him we exchanged the usual information about where he was going and coming from and for what purpose. It is a common practice to slow down when approaching someone on the road and exchange a few words.

O’no pata attî mîrîrî? - Where are you going?

O’no pata awe’numî’pî ko’manpîra? - Which place you sleep last night?

Asarî panma sîrîrî - Just passing?

If you say you will sleep over in the village: Who will you stay at? Who do you know?

The person might look to the ground while responding, hiding his face behind a football cap. However, the willingness to talk and give information is what creates comfortable and safe relations. On the contrary, people who merely pass without exchanging a word, not even a greeting, are perceived with much ambivalence.

It is also important to create a good relationship with non-human beings when crossing their paths and territory by talking to them, explaining who one is and what one has come to do, the same etiquette in fact which is observed when visiting another village. In this way one shows respect to others and familiarity with the place and its inhabitants.

The Ataitai, also affectionately called *amooko* or “grandfather”, highlights the ambiguous relationship people have with non-human entities. A dialogue on hearing the Ataitai sound - a kind of “shi shi – shi shi shi” he makes when walking up and down the mountain slopes - would be something like this:

“*O’ma’kon!*” (*Beast!*)

“*Anî?*” (*Who?*)

“*Amooko!*” (*Grandfather!*)

“We does hear him when he go fishing and when he going home, faaar [stretched]. Daddy would say ‘*Amooko* is going home, he must be fish a lot of fish.’” Knowing where an Ataitai lives helps one to prepare when visiting the area and offer food to permit a safe passage. Marcia is convinced that the Ataitai makes the whistling sound to let the travellers know where he is and along which path he is walking. “Maybe people call him grandfather because he used to thief and teach people, and bring them back...and because he calls humans ‘grandsons’”, says Marcia, stressing the aspect of kinship ties.

Marcia told me that whenever she walks through the forest alone and on passing the *pata*’ of an *o’ma’kon*, she would talk in a loud voice to them:

Inapsa’sê sîrîrî, inhekana wai (*I come back again*)

ka’ran pepî urî (*I am not a stranger*)

Tarîron uurî (*I belong here*)

Kawai seni’ (*this is tobacco [leave the tobacco, but far]*)

E’pîikka’tikî, amooko! (*help the other, grandfather!*)

Unmukuyamî’ insemoro (*here are my children*)

To’ pî’ tiwo’ma’tai pra (*don’t trouble them*)

Tamî’nawîrî si’ma ko’mannîpai’nîkon (*let us live together*)

Epa'ka típoose un mukuyamî' ko'mamî tiwookon pi' (my children are hunting until I go out)

Seni' imu kisa yapi'ti aasare'tikonpa! (here is starch cassava bread, have something to eat!)

Taking along food on one's journey that is known to be preferred by the *o'ma'kon*, such as cassava bread coated with starch (on some occasions people might take drinks like Kari or rum), helps to mould one's relationships with Ataitai and other entities, negotiate one's passage and use of the place, create friendly ties and lower potential anger. Marcia is convinced that in this way the Ataitai will not trouble her: "They are good, depends on how you greet them!"

Once more the crucial aspect of travelling, i.e. moving between the strange and the familiar, is highlighted: "proper food, proper words" - which builds on basic Guianese concepts on how to live well with one another. As discussed in the ethnography of the area, Amazonian places are multiverses composed of a vast array of entities (see Overing, 2004) and knowing how to move through them appropriately is a prerequisite.

'Proper' words are essential when on the move, in order to prompt the good will of those whose place one passes on the way: like in the *Odyssey*, it is the "skill with words" (Kahane 2005: 68) that is essential when on the move to create good relationships. Odysseus receives hospitality, food, accommodation, gifts and sympathy through his "well-shaped" words, indicative of his noble mind, and because he "narrated" his tale "skilfully" (Kahane 2005: 67).

Having argued that "proper words" create "proper relationships", fundamental to the understanding how journeys operate, it is necessary to reflect on what these "proper relationships" are. As pointed out throughout the chapter, a successful journey implies observing forms of social etiquette, in which a complex and subtle host/guest-relationship is played out. By making oneself known to others and trying to connect to local genealogies, the traveller undergoes a kind of "rite of passage", from stranger to a person "at home". The transformation from stranger to person "at home", as Pitt-Rivers (2012: 503) pointed out, requires that "an old status is abandoned and a new one acquired. In this case it is the status of stranger which is lost and that of community member which is gained." However, while in the case discussed by Pitt-Rivers, a stranger is converted into a community member predominantly by the way

he is received by the host, in the Makushi case it is the traveller, the “guest”, who has to actively make him- or herself “at home”.

Indeed, in Makushi journeying the guest makes him- or herself “part” through a careful scrutiny of kinship ties. As consanguineous ties fade with spatial distance, on the move the memory of social ties or the limits of one’s social cartography are tested – or rather, they are re-enacted. Locating oneself within this social space, no matter how tenuous the link, is the privileged way one makes oneself at home. Indeed, as shown in the classical ethnography of Evans-Pritchard (1940), the structural relativity of *cieng* (“home”) for the Nuer, encompasses one’s village, but by way of lineages, can be extended to the entire Nuer territory. In a context like the Guianas, where genealogical memory usually does not go beyond two or three generations, kinship ties are correspondingly limited in space.

Commensality and dialogue, as we could see throughout the chapter, are the devices then convoked to create safe relationships, which, in fact, are the same as those at work for the creation of a “shared substance” inside a “community of equals” (Overing, 1989; 2003). Nevertheless, it is the traveller who sets these devices “in motion” outside the limits of his or her kindred to establish relationships and make him-or herself at home amidst unknown worlds. Movement out of one’s community is always marked by potential dangers but at the same time is fundamental for the appropriation, recreation, and actualization of memory and for the acquisition of knowledge. Jill, a middle-aged woman from Surama who features in the first chapter, summarises these ideas:

Well, one of my hopes in life, I always like to travel and to make up the times and the knowledge that I’ve lost from people passing away over time, my ancestors, I missed out to learn all I wanted to have learned, so to make up those times, I want to travel, to visit friends and see the different places and see how they do things.

Bringing “home” closer when on the move requires, paradoxically, to be cosmopolitan, since this home must be built with new ideas and relationships - a place in movement. This place requires, as Wardle and Shaffner (2017: 28) propose, “imaginative capacity”, an “empathic ability (or inability) to orient myself in another’s world”. The opposite is also true, as the “wild” is the one who refuses such communication. From this perspective, home is wherever one communicates, a notion

which encompasses sharing one's existence with diverse kinds of beings in different places.

I would like to conclude with Jill's narrative of her rather mundane journey to the Casa do Índio [indigenous health centre] in the Brazilian town of Boa Vista, where she met a group of Yanomami, which is a powerful example of such cosmopolitics:

You know, when I saw them, the song (stretched) I heard, the hum, it really impressed me! So I decided to go closer to have a good look and to hear the song. I wanted to proof if the other tribe would hurt me, so I went. With the spirit in me, I had no fear. I went and I stand next to the group and they were chanting, round and round. Their hair were cut into boy cut, they had no tops but just skirts and I was amazed how the baby was fit at the back, and the song was most sounding like the song of the animals, like the howler, like the spider monkey. They was like uhhhhhhh (long sound, up and down, imitating their chants). And it impressed me and I went closer just to look and to listen because I am interested to learn more about my people. And to my surprise they break the ring, the circle that they were dancing, they give me a space and welcome me and we join hands together. And as they chant we dance, we dance in a circle round and round and it was so beautiful and so touching to me. And when we finished I decide to give them a song of my own, so I said "could you allow me?", in a sign (holding up the hand pointing at herself) and their smile in the face send a message to me that it was ok for me to sing. So I started to sing my song "Koko naikapi" and the others, I sing to them. And they smile and we go dancing round and round. But I had no fear in me, I wasn't scared. I was so happy, forgetting all that my mother told me about the different tribe. I was so happy to join them, to know who they are, and then when they finished they clapped, we give a handclap and I said to them "good bye" (lifting both hands opened) and I went off. Today it left in me like a dream, I can't believe that I danced and I hold my brothers across Brazil's hand, the Yanomamis, you know. Even though if I don't understand, I understand in the sign, in the reflection of their face. I read signs the local way, so I can tell you whether they angry or they were pleased.

Jill's move to join the circle of chanting Yanomami was received with awe and surprise by the other Brazilian Makushi present. They considered her brave, as they would not have dared to ask to dance with them, they told her. For one thing, this has to do with a different kind of "proximity", experienced by the Brazilian Makushi towards the Yanomami. While Jill articulates a similar respect and fear, as well as exoticization of them, she has had very little contact with them. As Yanomami leaders and representatives are often invited to regional indigenous meetings and celebrations, the Brazilian Makushi have had more encounters with them. However, the Yanomami are often perceived as those that do not participate and intermingle with other groups but isolate themselves and are therefore left alone and not approached by others. Jill's step in a way broke not only the "circle" but also these expectations. Although

influenced by her mother's stories about the dangerous "other tribes", Jill's discourse recognized them as part of an extended general Amerindian identity, as "my people" with whom she has familiar ties, her "brothers and sisters in Brazil". Jill was struck by what she considered their authentic traditional appearance and practices, something that for her was part of the past, her ancestry. Their naked breasts and short hair distinguished them from the clothed indigenous spectators, including herself. For Jill, they were not in the negative sense "uncivilized", but rather "still natural", untouched by the influences of "development". Although she saw herself as different from them, she still felt she had something to share with them, and as she put it: "Today, as development come our way, things change but still, we have it, we still know a little and we passing it on, our local way of life, because I know I did not come here as a stone or anything, I am just passing by and on my way I am sharing."

Jill told all her children about this experience with the Yanomami, which left a lasting impression on them. Inspired by the Yanomami's chanting and imitating of animal sounds, she also composed a song herself using the sounds of beings that live in her own surroundings.

Conclusion

(...)
Caminante, son tus huellas
el camino y nada más;
Caminante, no hay camino,
se hace camino al andar.
Al andar se hace el camino,
y al volver la vista atrás
se ve la senda que nunca
se ha de volver a pisar.
Caminante no hay camino
sino estelas
en la mar.

Antonio Machado, "El Caminante"

"L'Odyssée, c'est un monde (...) nous là-dedans essayant de comprendre, nous n'y arrivons pas", remarked Jean-Pierre Vernant in 2003 at one of his last conferences on "L'Odyssée" in Aubervilliers, France¹⁰⁰. The warning the lifelong researcher in ancient Greek thought expressed at the end of his talk, that "we will never totally arrive at an understanding", certainly resonates with the conclusion of the present work. Bearing in mind the open-ended nature of ethnographical experience, I will attempt to draw together the lines that have made up this "Makushi anthropology".

As I said in the introduction of this thesis, the significance of movement in the Guianas has been pointed out by ethnography with regard to changing settlement patterns, stressing the mobile and ephemeral nature of local indigenous villages, as well as the fluidity of social relations (see Riviere, 1969; Overing, 1975; Thomas, 1982). The approach chosen here does not contradict this literature; on the contrary, as can be seen, values and practices which shape the making of community life are also prompted by movement. Focusing on journeys, the present ethnography has thrown light on the changeability and capacity of extension of these very values and practices. We could see how communication operates through the extension of kindred ties and commensality to tame the potential dangers of difference when facing the world outside.

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.fabriquedesens.net/L-Odysee-Jean-Pierre-Vernant-a>

Cultural encounters, as Sahlins (1985: xi) has argued, always put values at risk; the results are unpredictable and can be manipulated by political power. The road between Brazil and Guyana is paradigmatic: much of the on-going debate among the Makushi, as we saw in Chapter 1, concerns the political “taming” of the damaging effects arising from uncontrolled movement into their territory and discusses the issue of making the road “theirs”. Unlike all other paths, be they in the savannah or forest, which are ephemeral, this road is permanent, no matter what its condition, and for this reason, it is viewed rather as a space of encounter, comparable to a river with boat traffic. Much more so than the narrow Amerindian paths the road is a gateway, not because Amerindian paths are not open to the world or Amerindians otherwise would not travel to the capital or Brazil – they have many ways to do that -, but because the others come in via this route. Their own journeys *out* are the other side of the same coin – they put traditional values at risk, with a highly unpredictable outcome. At the same time, however, if communication is successfully established, movement leads to the acquisition of knowledge.

The search for knowledge and wisdom is a crucial aspect of social life for the Makushi, much as it is in the Guianas at large. The major ethnographies of the area, notably the works of Overing (1990) and Butt Colson (1985), pointed to this quest associated with specialised or shamanic knowledge. In the same vein, Santilli (1985) showed how the openness of shamanic discourse in dealing with the unpredictable and unknown was best suited for translating the colonial cosmology, which gave rise to the Alleluia movement. However, non-specialized knowledge has not been explored enough by the ethnographical literature of the Guianas. The present work contributes to furthering the research on knowledge in the Guianas, its creation and oral transmission.

In the scope of this study, we can summarise two fundamental aspects of creative acquisition of knowledge among the Makushi. First of all, unlike other ethnographic areas, where there is a specialization of knowledge and temporal depth (African genealogies, for example), the relationship with time in Lowland South America and, in particular the Guianas, seems to be offset by a denser relationship with space. When the temporality of memory (and its legitimacy to knowledge) is short, it is space, and hence the journey, that gains prominence as a legitimate source of knowledge. It seems that for the Makushi, the longer and more difficult the journey, the richer the knowledge derived. Thus, the theme of the journey becomes

relevant if connected to the ways knowledge is acquired. Travellers gain prestige and social acknowledgement for their knowledge through bringing their experiences from outside back to the community. The issue is relevant, as contemporary ethnology tends to describe shamanism as a focal point of Amerindian cosmopolitics (see Overing, 1990; Santilli, 1995; Carneiro da Cunha, 1998; Viveiros de Castro, 1998; 2012). In a certain way, the experience of travellers and their encounters with the unpredictable and unknown, resemble shamanic flights, in bringing back new interpretations of the world outside and, as Jill taught us, creating and transmitting knowledge to the next generations.

In this sense the worlds envisaged when on the move are not any different from those envisaged in Lowland eschatologies, which, according to Carneiro da Cunha (1981) are fields open to personal fabular creativity. Indeed, just as much as shamans' and Hallelujah prophets' chants, narratives of travels are a mode of *world-making* (see Overing 1990), accessible to all people and marked by great freedom of creativity.

Let me then again stress the connection between journeying and narrating, as part and parcel of Makushi experience. As we saw in the third chapter, focused on a fishing expedition from the village Tipuru to Takutunen, the group journey lasting several days led through densely storied landscapes. The places where they set up camp and their narratives helped the travellers to orientate themselves, learn and memorize the course of the overgrown route. Knowing the trajectory is knowing the stories, and knowing the stories is through moving and stringing them together. Exploring the ritual performance of the temporary leader, the *tuwama*, it has also been suggested that for the Makushi a large part of their knowledge, specialised or not, derives from journeying. Thus, while on the move, knowledge is generated which becomes a fundamental part of communal village life. For the Makushi the actual movement along the paths, incorporating the world, while observing one's surroundings, is what leads to the empirical and perceptual acquisition of knowledge and makes the world intelligible (see also Ingold 2000: 37).

The narrative of a journey is the adventure of telling stories of adventures, and even those that stayed behind, although they missed out on the experience, are able to recount the stories they have heard. And somehow, by retelling these "adventure tales" women and men know about places, learn the trajectories, incorporate the experience as if they themselves had been in motion. We could say the narrative is the

journey itself. It is no coincidence that *The Odyssey* and the ways of reading it have been an analogy throughout the present work – an experience of wisdom, as Kavafis poetically said, that makes intelligible “what these Ithakas mean”.

In the last two chapters, we focused on the experience of two Makushi women, namely Celia and Marcia. They told us that moving through places outside one’s home means traversing borders, be they human or non-human, laden with prescriptions about how to move appropriately. Instead of villages, here, personal trajectories give clues about how society operates: what is considered outside and inside, strange and familiar, hostile and hospitable, wild and civilized, communication and silence, who is a friend and foe, when to laugh and when to fear. Movement has taught us too that these categories are ambivalent and changeable - what is community can be extended.

The question of gender has been highlighted throughout this thesis. Makushi women, increasingly so in their lives, have been spending time travelling, and this ethnography has shown that more and more women are “on the move”, especially young ones, due to the novelty of the road, vehicles, school and work in the city. The ways in which mobility of young women and girls (will) impact gender roles among the Makushi is still to be an object of specific analysis. The present study, following the travels of mature women in particular, clarifies that for the Makushi the acquisition of knowledge is not really gender-based, as gender is subsumed by age. Adding to the findings of the ethnography of the area (see Farage, 1997: 134-6), this work has shown that the increasing mobility of women correlates with age and the construction of the person, in an inverse proportion to fertility. In consequence, the journeying of mature women is not peculiar, from the point of view of the Makushi, but on the contrary seen as part of a general experience and wisdom.

Reflections on movement have led us to the notion of “home”. It is the traveller who constantly reconsiders this notion in search of a common ground in the world, which can expand or conflate from kin to co-dwellers. Thus, Rapport’s correlation drawn between the notion of home and movement, also applies for the Makushi: “not only can one be at home in movement, but that movement can be one’s very home” (Rapport and Dawson’s 1998: 27).

Viewed from this perspective, we can now understand Celia’s assertion that it is not her who travels, “you travel”! Much more than a comparison of my movements, as someone from abroad, with hers, she meant that she did, in fact, not

leave her “home”. That is, in relying on making herself close to and familiar with places like Lethem or Georgetown, she actively extends her sense of home. So what Celia could have meant is that she does not travel because she is already “at home”.

Nevertheless, there is another perspective to contemplate in the equation between home and movement for the Makushi. It derives from the value of movement in itself. As noted before, the main characteristics of the *trickster* brothers, Insikiran and A’neke, is that they moved “about the place”, as many would say, and what is relevant is that it is during their travels that they transformed the world into what it looks like today. On the move, they developed a diverse range of skills and knowledge. They learned about the place not only by going after animals and searching for food, but simply by playing, having fun and doing “wicked things”. Thus, transformations and the dynamics of the world are enabled by the experience of movement.

Furthermore, as we saw in the second chapter, the narratives of the present human occupation of the land refer to people from “far away” places, who “came down” and eventually settled in the area. These foreigners fought and banished the first inhabitants, tigers and Caribs, all of whom shared the same predicate, that of wildness.

The narratives then highlight a link between autochthony and wildness, which is fundamental in order to comprehend what could be defined as Makushi cosmopolitanism (cf. Rapport, 2007; Wardle, 2010; Wardle and Shaffner, 2017). Movement seems to be the touchstone of the Makushi’s considerations on contemporary sociality, or what it means to be “civilised” - as “wild” is the one who refuses communication. However, “wild” is also the autochthony of the past, the reverse of which is contemporary social life. Such an equation implies a rootlessness, not only with regards to the Makushi’s perception of an unlimited territory and land resources (Santilli, 1994), but which also springs from the conception of belonging to vast and multiple worlds. That is the reason why making oneself at home is wherever and whenever communication is established. In this vein, Makushi sociality seems to convey what Rapport defined as “mutual guests in sociocultural milieus”, and consequently “humanity might escape the mutual destruction that derived from singular, exclusivist identities fixed to territories” (Rapport 2016: 201).

Finally, we have to note that journeys, being anthropological experiences which capture differences and place them on a common ground, constitute a Makushi reflection on their own existence. Like the transient “trails in the water” [estelas en la mar] in Machado’s *El Caminante*, Jill’s comment on her own experience of journeying and telling clearly summarises this idea: “I am just passing by and on my way I am sharing”. If all communication involves a risk, the Makushi, as I understand it, accept this unpredictability as being part of their sociality, their notions of time and history. The journey is, in this sense, a powerful image of Makushi thought, for again, as the poet sums up – “no hay camino, se hace camino al andar”.

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