

DUIN Renzo S., 2011. *Plus d'une Langue: Archaeology and Ethnography in the Guiana Highlands*. In: Corinne Hofman & Anne van Duijvenbode (eds.). *Communities in Contact: Essays in archaeology, ethnohistory & ethnography of the Amerindian circum-Caribbean*, Sidestone Press. pp. 439-453.

*PLUS D'UNE LANGUE* (NO MORE LANGUAGE / MORE THAN A LANGUAGE):

ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE GUIANA HIGHLANDS

RENZO S. DUIN

Six decades after the publication of *Tropical Forest Tribes*, Amazonia appears more complex than assumed thus far, more heterogeneous, more dynamic, and more socio-politically complex with regional elements of organization. This study demonstrates an integrated regionality in Wayana socio-political organization, based on in-depth ethnographic fieldwork conducted from 1996 to 2004 in over twenty Wayana villages and abandoned places of the upper Maroni basin (in Suriname and French Guiana). In due process, this paper critically evaluates past archaeological and anthropological studies of the region, particularly as to why the posited regional integrated organization has not been recognized hitherto.

*Spanish*

Seis décadas después de la publicación del *Tropical Forest Tribes*, Amazonia parece ser más complejo que lo fue presumido antes, más heterogéneo, más dinámico, más complejo sociopolíticamente con elementos regionales de organización. Este estudio demuestra una regionalidad integrada en el organización sociopolítica Wayana, fundada en trabajo de campo etnográfico conducido de 1996 hasta 2004 en más de veinte pueblos Wayana y lugares abandonados de la cuenca superior Maroni (Suriname y Guayana francés). Entretanto, este tratado críticamente evalúa los estudios arqueológicos y antropológicos anteriores, particularmente en lo que se refiere a explicar porque la organización regional íntegra todavía no ha sido reconocida.

*French*

Soixante ans après la publication de *Tropical Forest Tribes*, l'amazonie apparaissent plus hétérogènes, plus dynamiques et socio-politiquement plus complexes qu'on ne le pensait jusque là, laissant paraître des éléments d'organisation régionale. Fondée sur des recherches ethnographiques de terrain approfondies, menées de 1996 à 2004 dans plus de vingt villages Wayanas et sites abandonnés du bassin du Haut Maroni (au Suriname et en Guyane française), cette étude met en évidence une régionalité intégrale dans l'organisation socio-politique des Wayanas. Parallèlement, ce traité examine d'un œil critique les études ethnographiques et archéologiques antérieures de cette région cherchant en particulier à comprendre pourquoi le postulat d'une organisation régionale n'a pas été reconnue jusqu'à présent.

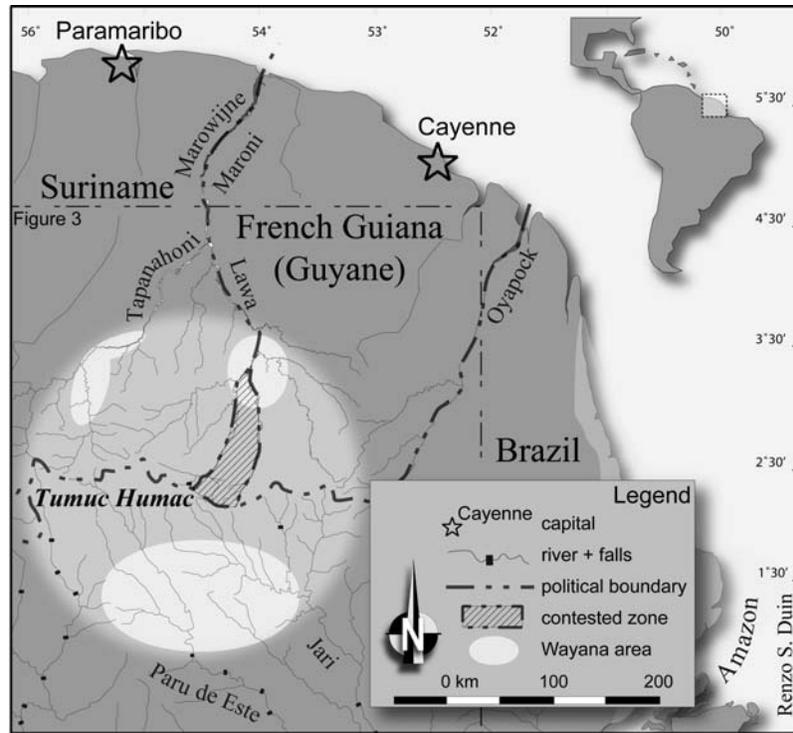


Figure 1: Wayana situated in the frontier zone of Suriname, French Guiana, and Brazil.

### Beyond Tropical Forest Cultures and Stone Age Indians

This study is situated in the current debate on socio-political complexity. I will specifically focus on the Guiana Highlands, the watershed between the Guiana Shield and the Amazon Basin (Figure 1). Amazonia appears more complex than assumed thus far (Heckenberger and Neves 2009; Silverman and Isbell 2008). The Guiana Highlands are archaeologically almost virgin territory and the ethnography of this region remains deeply rooted in what Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1996) called the “standard model” of tropical forest cultures. Historically, however, complex and centralized societies have been recognized in the Guianas (Dreyfus 1983/1984; Grenand 1971; Rivière 1984; Tilkin Gallois 1986; Whitehead 1988, 1994, 1998, 1999). Recent multi-disciplinary studies reveal that contemporary indigenous Guiana communities appear more heterogeneous than previously assumed, more dynamic, and more socio-politically complex with regional elements of organization (Duin 2009; cf. Tilkin Gallois 2005). When acknowledging a deep-time history of the indigenous peoples of Guiana, and no longer relying on site-based approaches only, a different picture emerges.

Preconceived ideas and problems of translation are at the heart of the current research in the Guiana Highlands. Therefore I refer to Jacques Derrida’s deconstructive formula of the “*plus d’un*” and the reflection upon the singular and/or plural. There is a tradition of classifying archaeological complexes in the Caribbean and the Guianas following the language based dichotomy of Arawakan or

Cariban. Then again, the pitfall of linking potsherds to languages demonstrates the power of Derrida's "*plus d'un*" as the archaeological record is "no more" language and "more than a" language. Language categories often determine ethnographic studies: "I study the [blank]." Time and again, ethnographic data is superimposed on archaeological findings without critical evaluation. Communities are more fluid than language groups or material cultures. Communities are singular and/or plural. Aim of the present work is to provide a meeting ground to facilitate multivocality in postcolonial transdisciplinary research (bridging between archaeological, historical, ethnographic, and indigenous voices) of socio-political organization in the past in the largely unknown Guiana Highlands. Now is the time for a peopling of the archaeological record and deep-time ethnography.

The *Handbook of South American Indians* (Steward 1948-1950) culminated and mediated the standard model of Tropical Forest Cultures as the culture types of South American Indians were defined and catalogued. Complex societies in South America were the Andean irrigation civilizations (essentially the Inca) as well as the theocratic and militaristic chiefdoms of the Greater Antilles (Taino) and the Circum-Caribbean (see also Steward and Faron 1959). The greater part of South America (mainly Amazonia) was lacking the typical "culture core" characteristics of chiefdoms, and therefore, by default, labeled "*Tropical Forest Tribes*" (Steward 1948; upgraded to "Tropical Forest Cultures" in Steward and Faron 1959) with here and there bands of nomadic hunter/gatherers. It was in the border zone of Brazil, Suriname, and French Guiana (in the Tumuc-Humac region; Figure 1), that the 1937 Dutch boundary expedition encountered bands of nomadic hunter/gatherers (van Lynden 1939:853; Meuldijk 1939:873-876; see also Ahlbrinck 1956; de Goeje 1943a; Geijskes 1970). Thirty years later a second "first contact" was made with these so-called "Stone Age Indians" which excited scientists, adventurers, and missionaries (Carneiro 1969; Schoen 1969). Such encounters supported the hypothesis that Amazonia was nothing more than a "counterfeit paradise" (Meggers 1971, 1996) unsuitable to sustain high civilizations.

Grounded in the neo-evolutionary episteme that simple societies developed into complex societies, Evans and Meggers (1960) applied, without critical evaluation, their ethnographic observations among the Waiwai in southern British Guiana to interpret their archaeological findings in the region. We have to credit them for these early ethno-archaeological expeditions in Amazonia, and it was the spirit of the time to conduct "rescue ethnography" on these disappearing "primitive" communities. They assumed that indigenous life had not changed and that these small autonomous and ephemeral villages were located in a pristine rainforest setting. These traditional settlements consisting of a single roundhouse housing the entire community were considered the unit of analysis. Following the then current definition of Tropical Forest Tribes, the village was an autonomous unit and could thus be studied in isolation. Much has changed the past sixty years in Amazonian archaeology and ethnography. For Amazonia in general, there is a growing number of archaeologists unearthing large man-made structures (e.g., Erickson 2008;

Heckenberger 1996, 2005, 2008; Heckenberger et al. 1999, 2001, 2003; Lima, Neves and Petersen 2006; Roosevelt 1987, 1991, 1999; Rostain 1994, 2008; Versteeg 2008). Their findings evidence pre-contact socio-political supravillage organizations, indicating that social complexity and large populations were not ruled out by environmental factors. Whilst aspects such as cosmologies demonstrate remarkable continuity, archaeological findings signify important changes of indigenous life in the past.

### **Roundhouses and villages**

Roundhouses are archetypal in Guiana and seem to prevail (Roe 1987). A center for public gathering and ritual ceremonies surrounded by private dwelling compartments is demonstrated in case-studies among the Yekuana (Guss 1989; Arvello-Jimenez 1971, 1977), Waiwai (Fock 1963; Howard 2001; Siegel 1990; Yde 1965), and Trio (Bos 1973; Rivière 1995) (all Cariban-speaking peoples in the interior of Guiana). These studies furthermore acknowledge the influence of missionaries from the 1950s onward (for the case of Western influences among the Wayana see Boven 2006). Due to missionary intervention and other global influences, the “traditional” communal roundhouse model “exploded” into a settlement patterning wherein dwelling compartments of the communal roundhouse became private dwellings surrounding a community roundhouse. This community roundhouse was a reduced version of the communal roundhouse that once housed the entire community (Figure 2). This model of a post-1950s Guiana village with a community roundhouse in its center is congruent with the Wayana literature, exemplified by the village of Janamale (Darbois 1956; Mazière and Darbois 1953, 1959). Based on the photos of Dominique Darbois, and the personal histories of the son and daughter of the late Janamale, a plan view of the village of Janamale was reconstructed. The result was similar to the widespread post-1950s Guiana village, namely a public roundhouse to receive guests (indigenous people and foreigners) surrounded by private dwellings housing local inhabitants. Several Wayana villages follow this typical model, even though they are bestowed with modern influences such as corrugated iron roofs, rectangular houses on stilts, a French school, and a dispensary. Elsewhere (Duin 2009), I have nevertheless demonstrated how the villages with community roundhouses are unique rather than typical Wayana settlements.

At first, I took for granted that the Wayana community roundhouse (named *tukusipan*) was the only “traditional” structure. Then again, that this roundhouse withstood the modern influences of globalization is rather remarkable. These roundhouses, rather than being a mere backdrop against which village life takes place, play a central role in the complex socio-political organization of the Wayana. Female specialists produce bottomless vessels to protect the roof where it is penetrated by the central pole. These vessels are bottomless as they are meant to be penetrated by the central pole of the community roundhouse. Male specialists produce the distinctive wooden disk (*maluwana*) onto which historical men-killing monsters are painted. These roundhouses and the *maluwana* above all, are exemplary of how Wayana manage their history, today and in the past. Not insignificant is that

only a paramount chief holds the power to request people to gather and manufacture the 40.000-plus palm fronds needed to roof this domed structure. Note that roofing of a *tukusipan* is not a basic necessity as these are public buildings rather than a dwelling that houses the entire community.

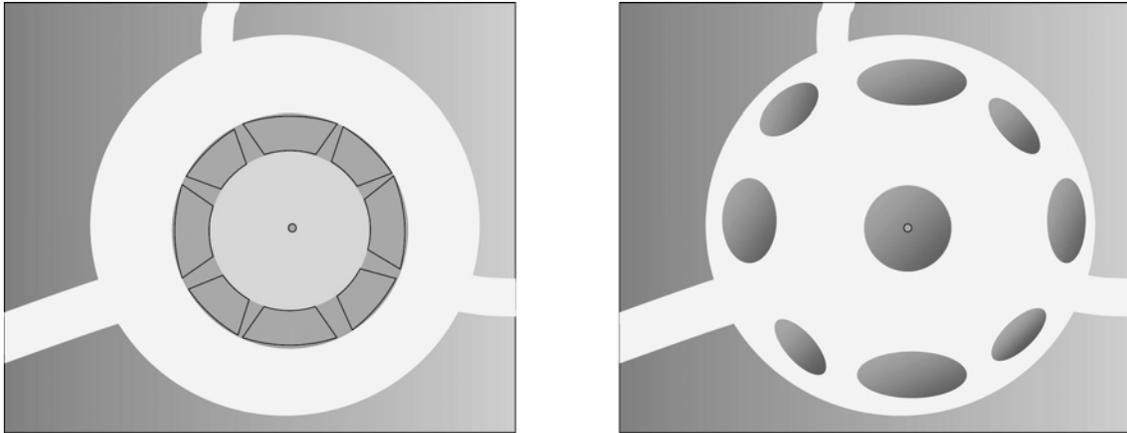


Figure 2: Sketches of village planviews of with a communal roundhouse (left) and a community roundhouse surrounded by private dwellings (right).

### **Beyond the house, village, and ethnic boundaries**

Before expanding the analysis beyond the boundaries of the settlement, a few assumptions have to be established. First we have to acknowledge that traditional ethnic groupings were based on linguistic groupings such as Wayana, Trio [Tiliyo], Waiwai, Apalai, Emerillon [Teko] and Wayãpi (the latter two are Tupi-speaking peoples, whereas the others are Cariban-speaking peoples). Secondly, we have to acknowledge the politically imposed boundaries of Guyana (former British Guiana), Suriname (former Dutch Guiana), French Guiana or *Guyane*, and Brazil. Contested zones remain. We also have to be aware that prior to 1900, French Guiana was larger than today. Thirdly, Anglophone researchers mainly studied the indigenous people of British Guiana, Dutch researchers focused on Suriname, French researches remained on French territories, while Brazilians and Germans conducted research in Brazil. Expeditions among the Wayana and Apalai, for example, were written in Dutch, French, English, German, and Portuguese, which does not facilitate literature research. Furthermore, as modern political boundaries cut through the Wayana region (Figure 1), these studies offer only part of the larger whole. Wayana and Guiana can thus be perceived as singular and/or plural, as over time boundaries change and (new) identities emerge out of interaction.

Several villages have been mapped and plotted on the map. Traditionally, settlements have been the unit of analysis in Guiana, albeit intervillage relationships were recognized (Rivière 1984). Ethnic units were defined yet the location of indigenous peoples “appear to be as definite as anything can be in this ethnographic chaos” (Rivière 1969:21). In order to make some sense of this “apparent

ethnographic chaos” the data has to be perceived from a more dynamic perspective. It is about historically situated (individual + society), rather than freezing (individual) + (society) in time. Rather than working on different scales, a true multi-scalar approach focuses on the relations between the various scales, as well as on the relations between the units (in this case: the relations between the settlements, that is, the relations between the dots on the map). In other words, we have to focus on the dynamic social landscape laden with history.

There is one historical reference of more complex societies in the Guiana Highlands, namely from Claude Tony (1835, 1843). Based on this source, Pierre Grenand (1971) and Dominique Tilkin Gallois (1986, 2005) acknowledged socio-political difference between centralized confederations (*confederações*) of the past, opposed to the autonomous atomistic units (*grupos atomizados*) in the present. Although Peter Rivière (1984:83) referred to Tony’s account, it was not further explored why this complex socio-political organization in 1769 in the Wayana heartland was no longer present, or as I argue, was not recognized as the conventional model of autonomous villages reigns supreme in Guiana. Most case-studies serving as basis for overarching studies (e.g., Rivière 1984; Steward 1948; Tilkin Gallois 2005) were site-based. A site-based approach will not allow for an understanding of regionally integrated socio-political organization, such as described by Claude Tony in 1769 and recognized during my in-depth ethnographic research conducted since 1996 among the Wayana.

Let me zoom in on the frontier zone between Suriname, French Guiana, and Brazil (Figure 3), in order to shed some light in this apparent “ethnographic chaos” situated in history. Peter Rivière praised Protásio Frikel (1957:541-562, 1960:2) for his “conscientious and methodological attempt to order and classify the tribes of the whole region [i.e., Eastern Guiana]” (Rivière 1969:16), beyond a mere listing of real and imagined peoples (*cf.* de Goeje 1941, 1943b). When mapping out this apparent chaotically complex history of Trio subgroups (Rivière 1969:17-26; see also Bos 1998; Chapuis 2006; Frikel 1957:541-562, 1960:2), an image emerges that spatially distinguishes “friendly” (light grey) Trio subgroups from the so-called “wild” (dark grey) Trio subgroups. The “wild” subgroups correspond with a spatially rather restrict area in the mythical Tumuc-Humac range where nomadic hunter/gatherers were encountered, such as the “Stone Age” Akuriyo referred to earlier. By drawing the map of Trio subgroups (Figure 3) I tried to avoid defining ethnic groups and freezing them in time and space (fading boundaries and dotted lines are to make boundaries less strict), because we have to focus on interrelationships.

It was in this frontier zone that in 1769 Claude Tony (1835, 1843) mentioned the Roucouyens. More than a century later, Jules Crevaux stated that “the Indians of the upper-Maroni, Jari and Paru, who are known in French Guiana under the name Roucouyenne, name themselves Ouayanas [=

Wayana]” (Crevaux 1882:17; my translation). Historically, the Kukuiyana were situated in the region visited by Tony. Kukuiyana were named after the *kukui* (glowworm; *Lampyris noctiluca*, Elateridae) and contemporary Wayana say that the Kukuiyana are short of stature. Their northern neighbors were the Okomëyana. Although classified as a friendly people by Protásio Frikel (1957:545), contemporary Wayana say that the Okomëyana were fierce as the *okomë*-wasp (hence their name). Both Kukuiyana and Okomëyana are assumed to have disappeared when the Wayana migrated from the south. When discussing the Trio subgroups with Wayana, they told me that, actually, Janamale (the Wayana paramount chief from the mid twentieth century mentioned earlier) was an Okomëyana and Twenke (a fellow paramount chief from the mid twentieth century) was a Kukuiyana. I thus had to rethink conventional linguistic categories as Tiliyo (Trio) and Wayana. Some Trio subgroups assumed extinct, particularly the Okomëyana and Kukuiyana, now appeared at the heart of Wayana society. Ethnicity is a fluid concept and I argue that “the Wayana” did not migrate *en bloc* from Brazil to Suriname and French Guiana, as generally assumed. Wayana ethnogenesis, I posit, occurred when Wajanahle and Upului (from south of the watershed) encountered Kukuiyana and Okomëyana (north of the watershed) and established common grounds under the leadership of Kailawa; the Wayana confederation (consisting of heterarchical continuous social units) was born in the Guiana Highlands.

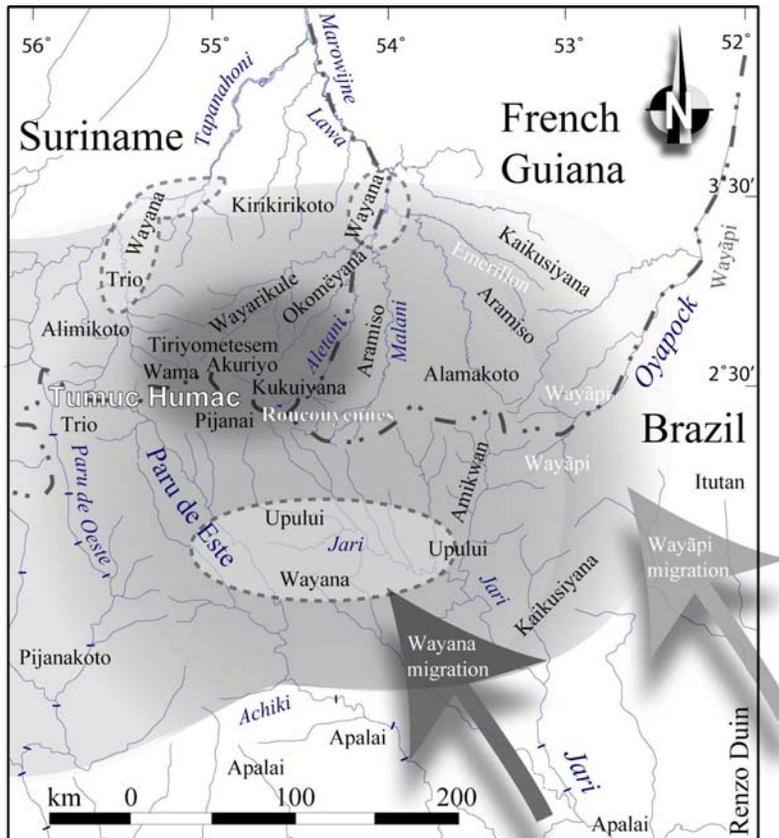


Figure 3: Some ethnic groups mapped in the frontier zone of Suriname, French Guiana, and Brazil.

Wayana have narratives on interrelationships, exemplified by the story of Tulupere (Duin 2009:151-159). The patterned reptilian skin of Tulupere was divided between Wayana and Apalai and served as a template for their basketry motifs (van Velthem 1976, 1995, 1998, 2001), and that is why Wayana and Apalai basketry motifs look alike. This event is said to have occurred at creek Achiki, the old frontier between Apalai and Wayana/Upului (Schoepf 1972:54). Killing this monster united Wayana and Apalai. As posited above, Wayana had made alliance with Trio subgroups (Okomëyana and Kukuïyana in particular), thus the killing of the water-monster Tulupere is metaphoric for the bridging of the frontier between Trio subgroups and Apalai (Figure 3). Basketry motifs are a mnemonic device to recall this watershed moment. Another unique sighting of Tulupere (this time its skin was entirely black), occurred at the Aletani, and well at the latitude of the frontier between Okomëyana and Kukuïyana (respectively a “friendly” and a “wild” Trio subgroup discussed above). These were not innate friendly or wild people, other than these labels were given in relation to the main Trio subgroups, Pijanakoto above all. The historical hero Kailawa is said to have killed a Tulupere, but it was only after he had killed and entombed the monstrous caterpillar Kuluwajak at Taluwakem (Duin 2005:292), that the Wayana confederation was established in the Tumuc-Humac, which is at the heart of Wayana society. Interrelationships exist in overcoming boundaries.

### **Reflection**

Remarkable is that the stories of contact with the so-called “Stone Age Indians” mentioned in the beginning of this essay, took place in the very same region of the mythical Tumuc-Humac mountains where the Wayana confederation was born after the historical hero Kailawa had killed and entombed the monstrous caterpillar Kuluwajak in the Tumuc-Humac mountains, after he had established a path across the watershed, and after Kailawa had climbed the mountain resembling a domed roundhouse (Duin 2009: 415-422). Wayana bridged boundaries in the frontier zone between Suriname, French Guiana, and Brazil. This landscape where the Wayana confederation materialized, albeit deeply saturated with history, was silenced by the search for Stone Age Indians. This landscape, a sacred landscape saturated with Wayana social memory, is today classified as “pristine” rainforest. The indigenous people have thus been written out of history.

Results of knowledge production are directly related to research strategies. When conducting research at site-based level, one will not acknowledge integrated regional structures. When data is collected in easily accessible places, e.g., along the coast, main rivers, main roads, and near missionary stations, no data is collected in harsh and difficult to access terrain. Therefore the Guiana Highlands remain almost virgin territory archaeologically and ethnohistorically. We have barely scratched the surface of Wayana sociality, the cultural history of the region, and socio-political organization in Guiana ... beyond the boundaries of a single village.

This deep-time ethnographic study crossing political boundaries and the boundaries of established disciplines is not only of importance to the Guiana Highlands. Caribbean archaeology is grounded in a comparable situation of a division of islands between colonial forces (British, Dutch, French, among others). Modern political boundaries did not exist for indigenous people in the past. Secondly the ramification of traditional units of analysis where one settlement represents one community does not allow for an understanding of regionality. Identities emerge in the interrelationships of communities. The connotation of “wild” versus “friendly” people, such as among Trio subgroups, may aid an understanding of these terms applied to indigenous people in the Caribbean, such as the classic distinction between “wild” Caribs and “friendly” Arawak. These terms of reference are relational and subjective rather than objective labels. A multi-disciplinary approach focusing on interrelationships is needed for multi-scalar research questions.

My research among the Wayana would not have been possible without Ronnie Tikaime, grandson of Janamale. Other Wayana, who had worked with anthropologists, told me that Ronnie did not know anything about Wayana history, and therefore he would not be a good informant to me. We thus had found a common research agenda. To conclude my story in a typical Wayana manner: *Tuwale lëken. Kohlenma lep, lome kuhpime tētīhe malalë. Ma, huwalëken.* (This I know. There is much more to tell, but that will be very long indeed. Well, it is like this).

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