

## **Ethnographic and Archaeological "Cultures" in Guiana, Northern Amazonia**

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### **Introduction**

For decades, Neil Whitehead (1994:33; Whitehead and Alemán 2009) has prompted that "*it is necessary to reconceptualise basic social and historical processes in this region, rather than just to add 'new data' to 'old theory'*" (emphasis added). The region I focus on in this chapter is the Upper Maroni Basin, frontier zone between Suriname, French Guiana, and Brazil, northern Amazonia. The 'old theory' of time-space graphs as developed by Irving Rouse (1968, 1986; Cruxent and Rouse 1958-1959; Meggers and Evans 1961) is grounded in the conception of a culture-historical mosaic aimed at fixing "*typological peoples*" in time and space by a set of reference points measured in terms of socio-culturally meaningful events such as migrations, contact, and conquest, with intervals of homogeneous "empty time". Social phenomena, however, occur in complex dialectical relationships of negotiating discontinuities and contested practices. Reconceptualization of basic social and historical processes ought to begin with – drawing on the work by Sian Jones (1997) – a critical rethinking of (1) the correlation between "archaeological cultures" (assemblages) and "ethnographic cultures" (communities), (2) the nature of archaeological distributions and taxonomic classifications, and (3) the very existence of bounded, homogeneous, cultural entities. This dialogue permits developing an alternative to the time-space graphs and what Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1996) called the Standard Model of Tropical Forest Cultures that remain fundamental in Amazonian and Caribbean archaeology.

### **From ethno-archaeology to engaged archaeology**

There is a long tradition in Amazonian archaeology linking the ethnographic present to the archaeological past, going back to

Domingos Soares Ferreira Penna, Erland Nordenskiöld, and Kurt "Nimuendajú" Unckle (Barreto and Machado 2001:246-247). Clifford Evans and Betty Meggers (1960), ensuing their archaeological research at the mouth of the Amazon (ibid. 1957), conducted an ethno-archaeological study in the south of Guyana among indigenous Waiwai communities. Archaeological "cultures" (assemblages) were paralleled with ethnographic "cultures" (communities), and ethnographic villages were equated with archaeological sites. Contemporary settlements were described consistent with archaeological terminology: "Habitation sites of the Wai Wai Phase" (ibid.: plate 48). This ethnographic, even ethno-archaeological, study was merely to illustrate perished elements of an archaeological past. Grounded in this paradigm, and parallel to excavations in the Caribbean, I began an ethno-archaeological study in French Guiana to investigate indigenous vernacular architecture and settlement patterning (Duin 1998). Lending a hand in the construction of houses aided in gaining insight in formation processes. I studied, photographed, measured and mapped, various houses and related structures. This research design was within the tradition of Caribbean archaeologists from Leiden University drawing on Amazonian ethnographies (Versteeg and Schinkel 1992), and Peter Siegel's (1990a, 1990b) ethno-archaeological studies among the indigenous Waiwai of Guyana, previously visited by Evans and Meggers. Nevertheless, a few years into my research, Wayana asked me "if you are so interested in the past, why don't you study OUR history."

From 1996 to present, my research on the Maroni River (border between Suriname and French Guiana) consequently, yet unintended, paralleled the shift from ethno-archaeology (a generalist approach searching for cross-cultural comparison through participant observation) to engaged archaeology (historically situated and in close collaboration with descendant

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Figure 1. A collaborative effort for the research, study, and preservation of Wayana history

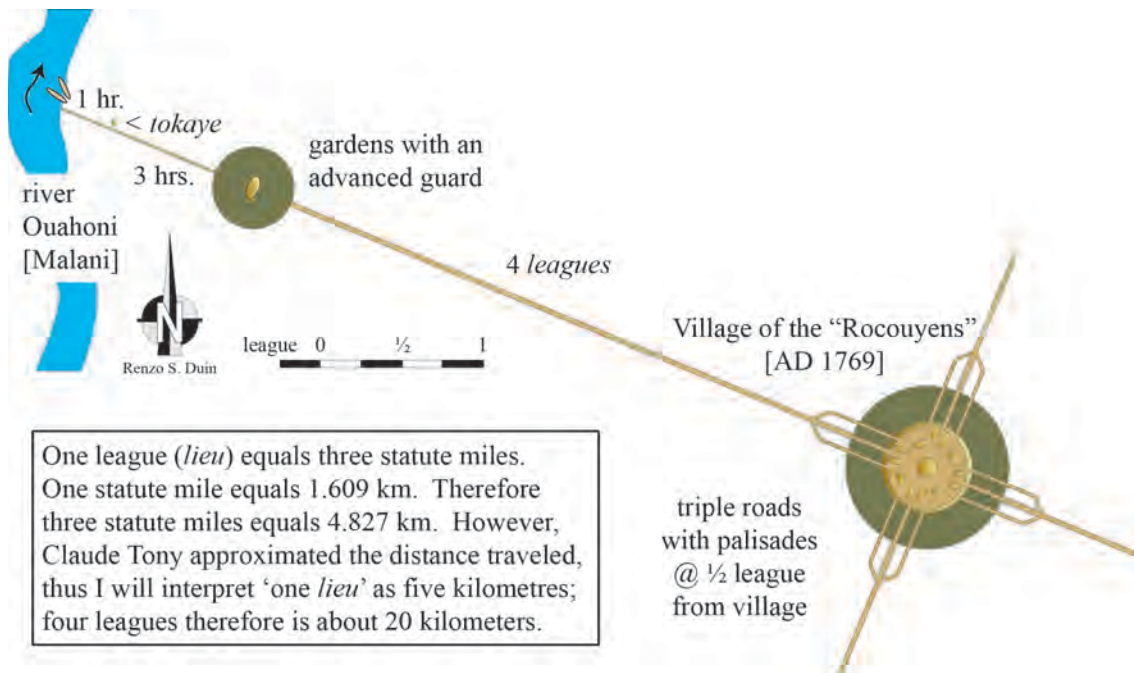


Figure 3. Reconstruction of the road leading towards the village of the Rocouyens in 1769 (Tony 1835)

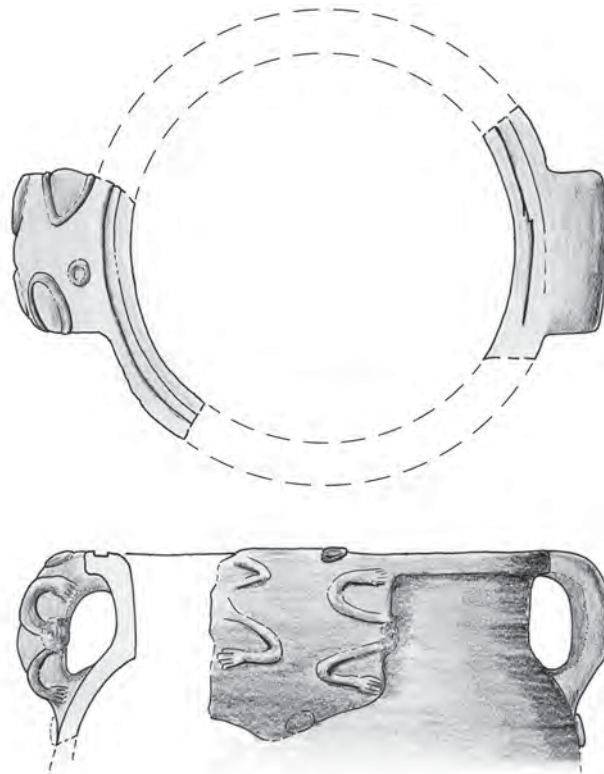


Figure 2. Two rim-sherds recovered in Pilima (Ø 11 cm. Drawing by Renzo S. Duin © 2013)

communities). The indigenous Wayana people and I developed a common research agenda for the research, study, and preservation of history (in Wayana: *uhpak aptau upijëmëtop, aklamatop, taklamai male*). Historical documents, engravings, photographs, and prints of museum objects, provided a meeting ground for dialogue (Figure 1).

During the past 15 years, collaborative approaches with descendant communities changed how we perceive archaeological practice (Bruchac *et al.* 2010; Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2007; Heckenberger 2004; Murray 2011). Archaeology, or “the study of ‘things left behind in the ground,’” has been rephrased as “reading the tracks of the ancestors” (Green *et al.* 2003)<sup>1</sup>. With the same underpinning, the Wayana and I have been “reading” the tracks of the ancestors. For Wayana, history is situated in the landscape and therefore we piloted several expeditions upriver to identify traces of history, and record these traces by means of Global Positioning System (GPS), photographs and video. For the Wayana, these expeditions were to endorse as well as to materialize their social memory. For me, these expeditions contribute to writing a

new chapter of the unrecorded histories of northern Amazonia.

Beyond map-reading and map-making, we were mainly engaged in “mapping” in the sense of Tim Ingold (2000). Often the sites visited were only a few decades old, demonstrated by, amongst others, the occasional wooden house posts, glass bottles, Dutch earthenware gin bottles, or cement markers of the 1937 border expedition. During the cartographic mission of 1962 it was explicitly mentioned that no cultural remains were found on or around Tchoukouchipann (Hurault 1968:152; Hurault and Frenay 1998:103). Everywhere in the Upper Maroni Basin, however, even in the Tumuc-Humac between Massif du Mitaraka and Tchoukouchipann, where botanists considered the forest “pristine” (de Granville 1978, 1994), we encountered traces of history immediately related to Wayana social memory (Duin 2006, 2009, Duin *et al.* 2013).

There thus exist two conflicting ontologies: 1) a western point of view grounded in the established disciplines of natural science, perceiving this area as a *natural monument* of rich biodiversity, i.e., a pristine heartland of Amazonia that has to be preserved, and 2)

an indigenous perspective perceiving this very same landscape as the heartland of their Wayana culture, hence a *cultural landscape*. It is a task for anthropological archaeologists, in collaboration with both indigenous peoples and natural scientists, to mediate between these two conflicting perspectives.

Cultural landscapes, more often than not, are a palimpsest of multiple occupations. Fragments of a Koriabo style vessel (Figure 2), for example, were recovered in one of the Wayana villages<sup>2</sup>. Village elders said that it was not good to touch these fragments of decorated pottery, which they referred to as “*tamok jolok*” (“ancestral evil spirit”). They explained that in the past this vessel most likely served the *pījai* (shaman) to drink blood. If we would touch this potsherd, it would certainly going to rain ... which in fact it did some fifteen minutes after we had unearthed it. A Koriabo style vessel (undated, but at least 500 years old) became incorporated in Wayana social memory.

#### **Settlement patterning and socio-political organization in the interior of Guiana**

Compliant with the default model of tropical forest cultures, the Wayana village is typically described as a socio-politically autonomous unit, “always built following the same scheme: a grand round house in its center, the *tukusipan*, in the service of the dances and gatherings, and the household dwellings arranged in surrounding corona” (Hurault 1968:70; also Butt 1977:11). Wayana settlements without a roundhouse are considered “non-traditional” and generally ignored in ethnographic studies (cf. Duin 2009). Thirty years ago, Peter Rivière noted that the Wayana, described in the eighteenth century as having a “centralized military organization with a hierarchical chain of command” (1984:83) may be an exception to the standard Guiana model.

One historical account (Tony cited in Ternaux-Compans 1843:104)<sup>3</sup>, hints to a centralized military organization with a hierarchical chain of command. This exceptional case of regional organization in Guiana in 1769 (Tony 1835, 1843) has not been further explored as it was concluded that this organization had disintegrated (Coudreau 1893:238) and completely vanished by around 1800 (Hurault 1965:18). In the *Voyage*, with its contentious biographical history, Claude Tony points towards a regional integration of Wayana socio-political organization:

“The Indians told us that, by going to the southwest, on the other side of the river Ouaboni [= Marouini] [...], there is a series of villages of the *roucouyens* [i.e., Wayana], and of the *Amiconane* [most likely *Upului*] and *Appareille* [= *Apalai*] nations, all friends and allies, who all communicate by means of a beautiful path [linking a series of villages], and they also say that these united nations have established a chief, a kind of general leader (*une espèce de capitaine général*), who lives in the last of this [series of] villages, who is also the most important” (Tony 1835:317-318; all translations and interpretations are mine).

Furthermore, Tony described the road leading towards the village of the “Rocouyens,” unfortunately not the village of the most important chief, as follows (Figure 3):

“The following morning we set out on a straight road, well opened and well kept clean, towards East-South-East. After having walked for an hour, we perceived next to the road, under the trees, a *tocaye* [a shelter from palm leaves; *mimnë* in Wayana] a small circular lodge about ten feet [about three meter] in diameter ending in rotunda [...]. After having walked another three hours, we have arrived in a garden plot, in the middle of which we found, inside a *carbet* [= hut] some ten men with their leader, all well-armed. [...] From this sort of advanced guard to the first village, there is still about four leagues [about 20 kilometer]; however it has to be brought to the attention that this road is made with still more care. [...] Four triple roads [...] arrive at a perpendicular angle in the middle of the village, where, in a kind of public place, an elevated tower is located, [...] the *carbets* [= houses] are along the roads. [The road leading towards the village] is eight or nine feet wide [about 2.5 to 2.75 meter wide]; it is straight and aligned, as it was by means of a string, as far as halve a league [about 2.5 km] from the village; and from here, this road branched in three to arrive there [at the village], that is, there are three roads parallel, connected one to the other; the middle one is about nine feet [about 2.75 meter] wide and all along, at both sides, it is fenced off with pickets [palisades?], similar to the gardens in the new city of Cayenne; all three roads are maintained in a utmost cleanness” (Tony 1835:307-308, 312, 217; all translations and interpretations are mine; Figure 3).

This historically described village and road system of the “Rocouyens” in the Upper Maroni Basin does not resemble the typical Guiana inter- and intra-settlement patterning, but rather the “galactic” settlement systems of the Upper Xingu (Heckenberger 2005; Heckenberger *et al.* 2008; other volume of 3 EIAA), and therefore urges for a reconceptualization of basic social and historical processes in the region. Beyond acknowledging that more complex societies

(*confederações*) did exist in the past in Guiana, but that indigenous Guiana societies today are autonomous units (*grupos atomizados*) (Grenand 1971; Gallois 1986, 2005; Rivière 1984), it is needed to rethink basic social and historical processes of these more complex Guiana societies.

Retracing the route described in Tony's *Voyage*, the "village of the Rocouyens" must have been located in the land of the Kukuiyana<sup>4</sup>, between Marouini and the eastern foothills of the Tumuc-Humac Mountains (Figure 4). The road described by Claude Tony and discussed earlier, may link the Upper Maroni Basin with the Upper Jari Basin<sup>5</sup>, i.e., a road system in use at the turn of the century (Crevaux 1883, Coudreau 1893). Possibly, this road may have continued towards Samuwaka (Koelewijn 1987:253), the legendary village in the Sipaliwini Savanna where all Trio, Wayana, and other nations of the region lived together before they spread across Guiana (Figure 5). Peter Rivière (1969:17-18) had tabulated the various ethnic groups in the region (see also Chapuis 2006:532-535; Frikel 1957:541-562; de Goeje 1943), yet regarding the historical identification of Trio subgroups, he stated that they "appear to be as definite as anything can be in this ethnographic chaos" (ibid.:21). Moreover, it was assumed that when "the Wayana" crossed the watershed (Tumuc Humac), the Trio subgroups Kukuiyana and Okomëyana became extinct. So how do I account for the fact that some Wayana today identify themselves also as Kukuiyana or Okomëyana?

The answer to the predicament of (parts of) Trio subgroups becoming Wayana, I argue (Duin 2009, 2012), is the model of "partible and plural bodies" as developed by Marilyn Strathern (1988). A taxonomic classification of Tiliyo speaking communities results in listings of particular "singular bodies" such as the various Trio subgroups or "tribes" (Frikel 1957:541-562; Rivière 1969:18-17; see also de Goeje 1943; Chapuis 2006). These (in)dividual communities are partible persons in interaction, exemplified, from a Trio perspective, by the "friendly" Pijanakoto<sup>6</sup> and Okomëyana and "wild" Akuriyo and Kukuiyana. Taken-for-granted are the composite external relationships with non-Trio (*witoto*)<sup>7</sup>. Wayana, however, consider the Okomëyana fierce as the *okomë*-wasp, and these internal relationships must be suppressed to affect one Collective of the "plural body." I (Duin 2009, 2012) have called this eclipsing process encompassing

multiple communities: "*Wayanafication*." Rather than bounded, homogeneous entities, Wayana and Tiliyo speaking communities (language based entities), I argue, have to be considered as partible and plural social bodies constantly emerging in dialectic interrelationships.

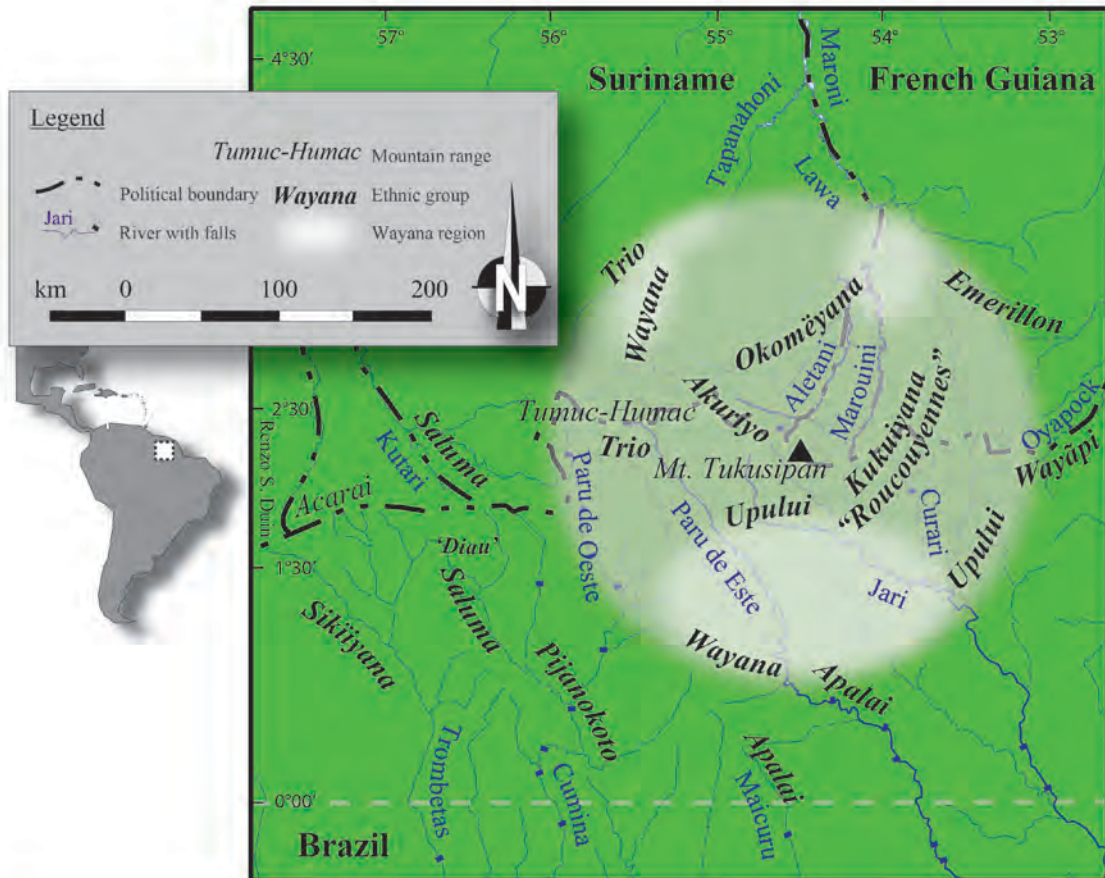
This process of Wayanafication, or Wayana ethnogenesis, was instigated by Kailawa, the historical leader who settled the Great Wars. These Great Wars took place after indigenous people had withdrawn into the Guiana Highlands after being attacked by the Europeans, who shot and killed everybody upon landing ashore. People who were not shot and killed were soon felt by pandemic death, known among Wayana as *kumamai*, resulting in a demographic nadir in the mid-twentieth century (Duin 2012:34).<sup>8</sup> Local histories of the interior of Guiana between AD 1500 and 1900 are mostly unrecorded (cf. Koelewijn 1984; Chapuis 2003; Duin 2009), and further historical and archaeological research on its socio-political ramifications is desired.

This historical process of Wayanafication is foregrounded during the *grand maraké* ritual (*éputop ihle watop*; discussed in detail elsewhere: Duin 2009, 2012) that takes place at the roundhouse (*tukusipan*), which is in synecdoche to mount Tukusipan<sup>9</sup>. Rather than that Wayana are losing their tradition, in that not every village has a roundhouse, the roundhouse during the *grand maraké* ritual becomes the place of legitimization, in a contesting manner, by means of transmission of material and immaterial property. Tukusipan (both the roundhouse and the mountain) manages the process of decomposition and composition of social bodies fundamental in be(com)ing Wayana. This social field of interaction, a 'region' in the sense of Edward Casey (1996; drawing on Munn 1986), can be manipulated in a tactical manner by competing heterarchical forces amidst subgroups. Wayana (Guiana) socio-political organization is thus more complex than presumed in the conventional model of tropical forest cultures.

### Archaeological and ethnographic "cultures" in the interior of Guiana

Historically situated ethnographic models with dynamic, open units of analysis, contribute to the reconceptualization of basic social and historical processes. Amazonian archaeology and anthropology has to critically rethink (1) the correlation between "archaeological cultures"

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Form	Relations	Action	Effect
Particular 'singular body' (in)dividual, partible person in interaction	(1) Trio / <u>Tilíyo</u> speakers	> taxonomic classification	'friendly' / 'wild' Pijanokoto / Akuriyo
	(2) non-Trio		Okomëyana / Kukuiyana taken-for-granted
Collective 'plural body' encompassing multiple persons	(3) allies vs. enemies		taken-for-granted
	(4) <u>Wayanahle</u> , <u>Upului</u> , <u>Kukuiyana</u> , <u>Okomëyana</u>	> rendering into Collective	<u>Wayanafication</u>

(1) Dual internal relations, which must be detached to affect one of a pair.  
 (2) Taken-for-granted composite external relations.  
 (3) Taken-for-granted dual external relations.  
 (4) Composite internal relations, which must be suppressed (eclipsed) to affect one Collective.

Partible and plural bodies (after Strathern 1988): the case of Trio and Wayana.

Figure 4. Example of the historical process of Wayanafication  
(incomplete mapping of ethnic communities often labeled as 'subgroups', 'tribes' or 'clans')

(assemblages) and “ethnographic cultures” (communities), (2) the nature of archaeological distributions and taxonomic classifications, and (3) the very existence of bounded and homogeneous cultural entities, that are the unit of analysis of the ‘old theory’. This contributes to “*a new ethnology, a new archaeology, and a new history of the indigenous peoples of Amazonia and nearby areas [...] exposing a previously inconceivable dynamism to the region’s societies?*” (Fausto and Heckenberger 2007:3).

Fundamental is to acknowledge that ethnographic cultures (people based communities) are *not equal* to archaeological cultures (assemblages, mainly based on fragments of [decorated] pottery). For example, the Polychrome Tradition (Rostain 2013:105-110), Division (Howard 1947:42-59) or Horizon (Meggers and Evans 1961:379-381), consisting of various “phases”, “styles” or “cultures,” from Napo in Ecuador to Aristé (Cunany) in Brazilian Amapá, is mainly based on elaborately decorated funerary urns. Then again, the ethnographic alternative to taxonomic classification may be applied to these archaeological distributions. As demonstrated earlier, some Trio subgroups remained ‘Trio’ while other Trio subgroups were incorporated into the Wayana confederation. In order to apply these historical dynamic processes to archaeological assemblages, it is needed to critically rethink the very existence of bounded and homogeneous cultural entities. I therefore postulate that we have to rethink archaeological assemblages as *the materialization of interrelational processes of dynamic partible and plural bodies*.

As a case-study for the implementation of archaeological assemblages as dividual bodies, I draw on the archaeology of Brazilian Amapá and recent additional findings of Mazagão, Aristé, and Koriabo (Saldanha, J. and M. Cabral 2010), that urge rethinking of the ‘old theory’. Early Mazagão developed into Late Mazagão, yet I posit that, drawing on the concept of “dividual bodies”, Early Mazagão *also* developed into Koriabo. According to Meggers and Evans (1957:97), Early Mazagão pottery, i.e., Mazagão plain (ibid.: 85-87) and Uxy incised (ibid.:89-91), is characterized by temper of crushed or ground quartz and mica particles (muscovite)<sup>10</sup>. Most Koriabo pottery is also tempered with “micaceous quartz sand (53.3%)” (Boomert 2004:253). In categorizing mica particles merely as temper (techno-economic means), the golden shininess of mica particles, which can be of great importance in

a ritual economy (Duin 2012), is undervalued. Instead of linking the Koriabo assemblage to a single ethnographic community, it is needed to understand the role of Koriabo style vessels within a living community.

## Concluding reflection

In order to gain insight into the rise and fall of the Koriabo “culture,” or any other archaeological assemblage in Guiana, and its relationship with contemporary indigenous peoples living in the region, there is a need for further ethno-historical and archaeological research. Rather than just add ‘new data’ to ‘old theory’ (i.e., time-space graphs) we have to further our understanding of the Guiana ritual economy underpinning a socio-political landscape with elements of regional integration. This implies that we have to abandon the notion of the very existence of bounded and homogeneous cultural entities as Aristé, Mazagão, or Koriabo. Acknowledging frictional, historically situated and regionally integrated societies, demands a rethinking of archaeological and ethnographical “cultures” in Amazonia and beyond.

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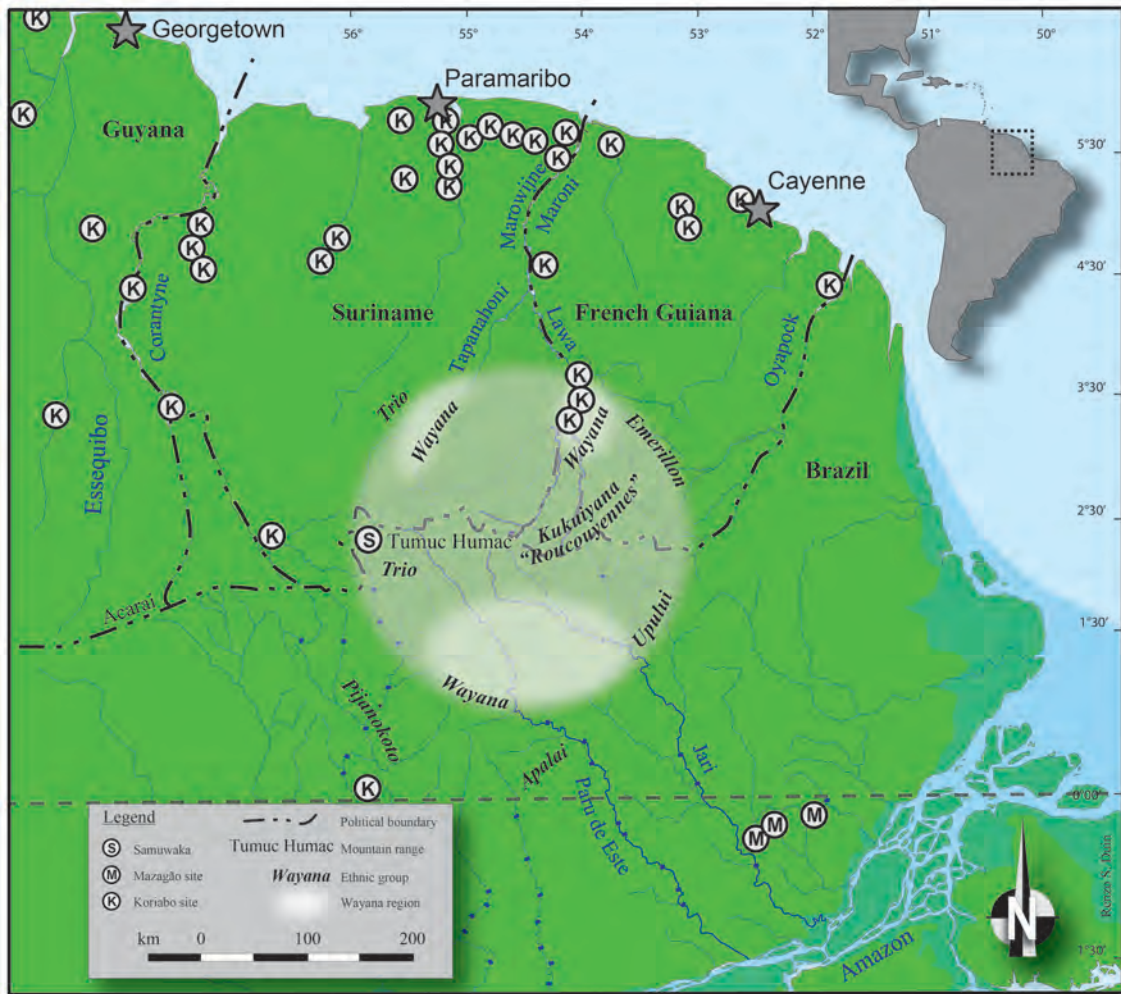


Figure 5. Location of Mazagão sites at the lower Amazon, Koriabo sites in Brazil, French Guiana, Suriname, and Guyana, and the posited location of Samuwaka in the Sipalinini Savanna (including the general location of the Wayana region)



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<sup>1</sup> An early example can be found in Protásio Frikel (1961, 1969) who went with the Trio of the Upper Paru de Oeste to sacred sites in order to “read the tracks of the ancestors,” rather than studying the things left behind in the ground.

<sup>2</sup> The village of Pilima where fragments of a Koriabo style vessel were recovered (Figure 2), is located near the former village of Taponaike, and possibly the location where Paul Sangnier in 1938 recovered pottery fragments currently at the Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (e.g.: MQB inventory number 71.1939.25.654). The decorative style of the vessels, the bamboo patches, and the location of the site some ten meters above the river, are all hallmarks of a Koriabo site, first defined by Evans and Meggers (1960:124-144). The Koriabo phase is dated around AD 750-1500 (Boomert 2004:256-257; Rostain 1994:457-458, 2013:125).

<sup>3</sup> When most anthropologists and archaeologists cite ‘Tony 1843,’ they actually refer to Peter Rivière 1984:83.

<sup>4</sup> I (Duin 2009, 2012) therefore argue that the “Rocouyens” are no other than the Kukuiyana,

a Wayana subgroup, earlier classified as a Trio subgroup (Frikel 1957:541-562; Rivière 1969:17-18).

<sup>5</sup> Regarding the other three roads: Tony arrived in the village via the road connecting to the Marouini, and the other two roads, I posit, led to the road system of the Oyapock and across the watershed via Curari to the Jari.

<sup>6</sup> Rather than “friendly,” Wayana consider Pijanakoto (tall, painted black, with shields and quivers) their archenemy.

<sup>7</sup> Non-Wayana are referred to as *kalipono*.

<sup>8</sup> Ethnographic studies at the foundation of the standard model of tropical forest cultures were conducted in the late nineteenth until the mid-twentieth century, that is, during the demographic nadir of indigenous Amazonian peoples. Regarding Wayana demographics, the first estimates were provided in the late eighteenth century; that is more than a century after Claude Tony described a more complex society with elements of regional integration. Based on historical demographics alone, it is doubtful if early twentieth century ethnographies are useful to gain understanding of indigenous socio-political organization before contact.

<sup>9</sup> Where the *tukusipan* is the hub in the Wayana village, and even the hub in an agglomerate of Wayana settlements, Mount *Tukusipan* is in the center of the Wayana region (Figure 4).

<sup>10</sup> Warapoco plain, which had an occurrence of 58.8% in the lower levels of the Koriabo phase (Evans and Meggers 1957:138-139), resembles contemporary Wayana pottery, and particularly the example of an “Uxy incised” vessel (ibid.:54) corresponds with the dimensions of the Wayana vessel described by Duin (2000/2001).



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