Women’s routes: gender, mobility, and knowledge among the Makushi of southern Guyana

Lisa Katharina Grund
*Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi, lisakgrund@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti

Part of the Archaeological Anthropology Commons, Civic and Community Engagement Commons, Family, Life Course, and Society Commons, Folklore Commons, Gender and Sexuality Commons, Human Geography Commons, Inequality and Stratification Commons, Latin American Studies Commons, Linguistic Anthropology Commons, Nature and Society Relations Commons, Public Policy Commons, Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons, and the Work, Economy and Organizations Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti/vol20/iss1/4

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Trinity. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Trinity. For more information, please contact jcstanz@trinity.edu.
Women's routes: gender, mobility, and knowledge among the Makushi of southern Guyana

Lisa Katharina Grund
orcid.org/0000-0002-7611-566X
Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi
Brazil

Introduction

The Makushi territory extends throughout the circum-Roraima region, an area that crosses the national divisions of Guyana, Brazil, and Venezuela. People travel on a daily basis across all three borders, as well as outside the territory’s limits, through open savannah and dense rainforests, along paths and roads that lead to Amerindian villages and urban spaces. At least 12,000 Makushi, the most southern Pemon group of the Carib-speaking peoples of the circum-Roraima region, live in the northern Rupununi and southern Pakaraima Mountains in Guyana. The majority of more than 33,000 inhabit urban areas and Indigenous territories of the Roraima state of Brazil. Notwithstanding the importance of more permanent migration for work, education, and marriage, many people—both men and women, in groups and individually—move temporarily to visit others, attend meetings and events, go to the farm or hospital, do shopping, or simply out of a desire to be on the road rather than in the village. It was these everyday practices and conceptualizations of movement that I turned my attention to during my doctoral fieldwork in southern Guyana between 2012 and 2014 (Grund 2017).

The analytical lens of my study was not so much on the political history of villages or groups as laid out by Guianese ethnology (Rivière 1984; Santilli 1994a), but instead on Makushi journeying. Methodologically, this meant traveling with my interlocutors and sharing the experience of the journey, its social premises and effects. Equally important were the narratives that people recalled from their travels, while on the move as well as back in the village. It was through this “ethnography in motion” that I could apprehend a crucial notion of Makushi sociality, which is related not merely to knowledge of the surrounding world, but to how people make themselves at home in that world.1

As most journeys were shared with or narrated to me 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. Certainly, the travels of women—be they unmarried young girls or mature women—are significant among the Makushi today. Exploring the journeys of some Makushi women, especially through the accounts of two middle-aged women, Maira and Phillis,8 this article highlights the relevance of gender to the question of (im)mobility in contemporary Makushi life. Despite women commonly being portrayed as restricted to villages and gardens in the ethnography of lowland South America, the article argues that female mobility is indeed significant, and that it fluctuates according to a woman’s age and fertility and comes attached with different perceptions and teachings surrounding womanhood. Taking these fluctuations into consideration, the article argues that women’s journeying contributes to knowledge through encounters with the world outside.

These encounters are crucial because, as I argue elsewhere (Grund 2016), journeying through cultural and mythical landscapes helps one to understand the socio-cosmological perceptions and conceptualizations connected to them (see also Basso 1996, 155; Casey

1. In this sense, the research aims to be a critical approach to settlement-based ethnography, while at the same time contributing to the anthropology of the everyday and ordinary (Overing and Passes 2000) through an exploration of mundane, temporary, and quotidian movements.

2. All personal names have been changed.
Furthermore, walking through human and nonhuman terrains requires an understanding of how to communicate and create relationships with diverse beings (see Grund 2019).

In the first section of the article, the theme of movement will be discussed in the context of central debates of Guianese ethnographies. The next section looks at the image of gender and mobility as typically pictured in the ethnography of lowland South America. The following three sections illuminate the question of female movements in and outside the village throughout different stages in a woman’s life that are accompanied by changing perceptions about womanhood. The article then explores different practicalities and social narratives at play when on the move and concludes with a narration that highlights the importance of women’s engagements with the world outside. In the final section, the article resumes some more general arguments and realizations about movement in the Guianas and the importance of the Makushi traveler, and hence the female traveler, to “world-making” (Overing 1990).

Movement in the Guianas region

Overing’s seminal ethnography on the Piaroa (1975, 1989, 1990, 2003) highlighted the value of the equation between spatial and social distance across the ethnographic region of Guiana. One of the most important propositions of the author was that in the Guianas, sociality was based on an ideology of the village as a “community of equals” in a world populated by dangerous strangers. Physical co-residence was a socially predominant value for the creation of community, as, conversely, social distance was for the creation of difference. On a broader scope, too, the category of space has proven crucial in the theoretical groundwork of the Guiana ethnographic area, including, in particular, the importance of movement, as shown in the contributions of the XLII Congrès International Des Américanistes (Overing 1977). Indeed, the ethnological picture of the Guianas region is one of movement of groups and whole villages, which embodied, as Rivière (1984) once said, the political history of the region. Thomas (1982) also stressed the mobile and ephemeral nature of local Indigenous villages, as well as the fluidity of social relations.

The concept of an unlimited territory in which villages move clashed with the process of colonization of the whole circum-Roraima area, and recently, as a consequence, with official processes of territorial demarcation in the scope of national laws. Surprisingly, however, Santilli (1994a) has shown for the Makushi in Roraima that, while the demarcation was a limiting factor, it did not eliminate the dynamics of traditional settlement patterns.

Commonly, the everyday circulation of people, and specifically of Indigenous people, has not been perceived as “mobility.” However, as has been argued in the case of Suriname, it is precisely “these movements from village to village, from kampu to kampu” (Carlin et al. 2015, 2–3) that are historically interesting. I would suggest that the same is true for Guyana, where the “traditional notions of bounded ethnic groups” (ibid., 3) have “fixed” the image of the Amerindian population to specific territories in the interior of the country, where they are “encountered” by mobile Others—scientific travelers, incoming settlers, and the coastal and Brazilian populations. Amerindian mobility has been highlighted predominantly in the form of labor migration to Brazil and the mines, rather than as constitutive of Indigenous communities and the historical construction of the region (e.g., Forte and Benjamin 1993; Baines 2005). More recent studies have highlighted the importance of movement in the trajectories and narrations of Makushi and Wapishana women in this triple frontier region, though typically focusing on experiences of permanent migration to urban centers (see Frank 2014; Martes and Pereira 2023).

Brightman (2007), writing on leadership among the Trio and Wayana of Suriname, stresses the significance of movement in the Guianas and its important relationship to communication...
and, therefore, to power. The centrality of the journey in the acquisition of knowledge was already highlighted by Butt Colson (1985), who has shown, on the basis of written sources, that from the end of the eighteenth 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, thereby indeed establishing “routes of knowledge.” For instance, the Indigenous religious Hallelujah cult among Kapo 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 travelers (see also Amaral 2019).

This article demonstrates that journeying is an experience not only of men but also of women, and that their encounters with the unpredictable and unknown play a significant role in taming the other, and in bringing back new interpretations of the world outside.

The question of female (im)mobility

Commonly in the ethnography of lowland South America, mobility is typical of men, with male “territorial” movements described as much more extensive than those of women. Female movements are thought to be connected with village life and the gardens, and restricted to short gathering excursions (see, e.g., Gregor 1985). As Murphy and Murphy (1974, 218) have argued with regard to the Munduruku, 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…” Ethnographies that followed have tended to point out this perceived correlation of men and movement, and women and immobility, respectively (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-centered immobility. Men’s learning, in contrast, derives from the “relationship with beings and spaces outside,” affinal kinship, and movement away from the houses, between forest and cities (McCallum 2001, 48). This goes along with the understanding that the wider movements of men are more important to knowledge and power, whereas women, reduced to more consanguineal and intimate interactions, exchange communications of less public and political influence (Brightman 2007, 50).

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. Rivière (1969, 1984; see also Butt Colson 2009) suggests the same dichotomy as being common for the Guiana region, where it is reinforced by the tradition of uxorilocal marriage arrangements, with men moving and women staying in their natal communities. Brightman (2007, 44–45), who postulates that there is an understudied intricate relationship between uxorilocal residence, mobility, and the male life cycle in the Guianas, argues that there are fluctuations in male mobility dependent on age, marital status, and the seasons. This article highlights that these sorts of fluctuations in mobility are not restricted to the experience of men, but that they are also true for women (see also Lasmar 2008; Celigueta et al. 2014).

Fisher (2001, 115) shows that in the case of the Kayapo, “gender attributes” can indeed differ throughout a woman’s life cycle, and points to an “inconstancy of gender imagery,” an inspiring aspect that I would also like to highlight with regard to the Makushi. Farage (1997, 140) argues that among the Wapishana, 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. Farage (1997, 134–136) further suggests that over time, as age subsumes gender, female trajectories become more analogous to those of men. This is interesting when considering the issue of mobility. I would suggest that, in a similar vein, the movements of Makushi women as they grow older become more analogous to those of men, which is connected to a change in “gender imagery” and women’s enhanced wisdom.
Learning to fear and staying still

Maira's grandmother, who brought her up after her mother died when Maira was still a small child, was a source of guidance and a central figure in her life. Maira frequently recalls what she learned from her “about the place,” about what to eat and what to avoid, how to behave and what not to do. She often argues that it was her grandmother who made her persevere in the village, as she watched Maira’s moves carefully and taught her how to stay away from dangers. When Maira was young, she sometimes accompanied the older female players to sports events in Wowetta, Rupertee, Annai. She used to go together with her father, but she always had to be back the same night. She was never able to stay overnight for any of the celebrations or parties many of the youngsters would go to, in villages as far as Yakarinta, Massara, and Toka.

Her grandmother’s mistrust and strictness were specifically directed towards Maira’s movements, especially those that would be undertaken 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 place, and thus they are controlled in their mobility. Probably the main preoccupation with a sexually active girl is that she will become pregnant too early and remain dependent on her family without the support of a husband if her parents (or grandparents) fail to control her movements. Whenever Maira complained, the old lady made sure Maira 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 Maira frightened to move away from her.

“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 [talk] with anybody. I used to be frightened [high, crying].

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

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.

Moving from one spot to the next at a party meant for her grandmother that Maira would adopt a personality where she later would not be able to stick to one partner and would change husbands frequently; she would be careless and indecisive, and would not find long-term support through marriage. If Maira wanted to become a marriageable woman and not end up on the “wrong track,” she had to learn how to behave early on, in situations as apparently insignificant as seating arrangements at her uncle’s birthday party. Maira’s grandmother also taught her that a person could incorporate and adopt the behavior of certain animals if they ate them at the wrong time. Her granny explicitly forbade her to eat the meat of chickens, as she considered these domestic birds to behave in a cocky, unclean, unsettled way, always in heat, wanting to “sex up” with any- and everyone. These characteristics would be imprinted on the young girls’ bodies and attitudes, making them behave “madi-madi.” They would be feverish and not be able to “sleep one place” anymore, always wanting to “go and sleep to a next house.” In their relationships with their parents and grandparents, they would become disrespectful, refusing to listen and “playing rude ‘pon them.” Moving “appropriately” as a young girl, i.e., “taming” one’s “wild” movements, is then inextricably interlinked with acquiring the “right” body and skills to become a proper woman.

**Becoming “wild” and being “tamed”**

Following the feminist critique of anthropology’s disregard of the domestic, intimate, affective, everyday interactions crucial to Amazonian sociality, and moving away from kinship terminologies and marriage rule, ethnographers of lowland South America became interested in gender and “the complexity of the ‘biological’” as expressed in Amerindian conceptualizations (Vilaça 2002, 348; Overing 1986; Overing and Passes 2000). These highlight that areas of the “biological,” such as consanguinity, do not automatically create kinship, but that it is rather co-residence, proximity, and consubstantiality that do. Gender studies of Indigenous Amazonia 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., Hugh-Jones 1979; Gow 1991; Belaunde 2001; McCallum 2001). It is through commensality and
the exchange of bodily substances that (gendered) bodies are continuously fabricated, and the composition of the individual’s body is affected by its transactions with other human and nonhuman bodies (Conklin 2001, 145; Seeger et al. 1979; G. Mentore 2005). Makushi boys and girls have ideally learned this gendered embodied knowledge by the time they marry. For a girl, along with household chores and cooking, this most certainly includes the preparation of kîse (bitter manioc), the quintessential food and symbol of “a capacity for extended socialization” (Grotti and Brightman 2010, 62).

Cassava work, in fact, provides an interesting perspective on female agency, gender embodiment, and expectations. By the time a young woman has learned all the correct procedures and skills in the process of cassava work—from planting, reaping, and 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 u’wi (flour) or kari (cassava beer). 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 McCallum (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 everything right, and mothers, grandmothers, and other family members take great pride and care in teaching “the proper way,” so necessary to becoming 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 [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 tînki (squeezer) to fill it with the appropriate amount of grated cassava, 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 each step, accompanied by 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. Female personhood and gender roles are thus deeply connected to cassava cultivation and production.

Furthermore, as Rival (2001) 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. This is further interconnected with Makushi ideas on plant personhood and the nurturing bond between farmers and their cassava crops, which is akin to that between mothers and their children (Daly 2021, 385; Daly and Shepard 2019). 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.

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 flirtatious and “play manish” or “madi-madi,” as Maira 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 manish, the man 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 manish” 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 of 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. Not being ready can result in getting “stuck” with the wrong man, or being left by him later. To avoid this and “break the laziness from them,” and to help mold her granddaughters into being hardworking and willing, Phillis’ grandmother would blow them with a mixture of hot pepper and riwana muran (magic plant), combined with prayers. “You mustn’t be stupid and then take a man!” the grandmother would caution. This underlines the constant process of molding female bodies through food and plants—both in daily life and ritual practice (shamanism and taren [incantations or magical spells])—and the actions of other kin (e.g., Belaunde 2000).

The time of aurono’pi

Most of the young girls today stay at secondary school dorms, away from home, around the time of their first menstruation, when “turning young lady”—auronta (verb) or aurono’pi (adjective) in Makushi. It marks a crucial stage in life that, together with other important phases such as infancy, initiation, pregnancy, the postpartum period, and illness, is characterized by a particular susceptibility to “the possible loss of a properly human identity” (Vilaça 2002, 349). The practice of seclusion when a young girl menstruates for the first time is accompanied by a variety of teachings about social etiquettes, food taboos, and skills, a custom considered to have faded with Maira’s generation. The isolation period ends with the girl’s “first outing:” “Ase, ayaponka’ya sirîr!”—“Let’s go out for the first time!”, the girl being now ready to face the world again. This expression is used in a similar vein when carrying one’s baby “out” for the first time, as it is appropriate and safer to keep newborns at home for at least one month due to their vulnerability to the outside world. This idea is connected to the couvade, practised by parents to protect their newborn from harm, as its “soul matter” remains connected to its parents through a “spiritual umbilical cord” (Rivière 1974, 429).
This relates to the idea that for many Indigenous people, babies born to humans are not automatically humans themselves but only become human through the process of sharing food and commensality with their mother, father, and other kin (see Vilaça 2002; Gow 2000, 47). When Phillis’ oldest daughter gave birth to her twins in the capital Georgetown, she was eager to get back home immediately. After only a few days, she embarked with her newborns on a packed minibus back to her village. The journey, twelve hours through the night, took them along bumpy roads through the dense forest. After their arrival, the babies started acting “strangely,” making animal sounds while their eyes remained fixated into the distance, scorning the mother’s comforting breast and milk. Alarmed by the babies’ transformation, apparently caused by spirit beings along the road, a combination of prayers, human food, and commensality were needed to reconstitute the babies’ humanity (see Farage 1997, 60; Grund 2019, 205 for similar ideas).

What the “outing” of a young baby has in common with that of a young girl at the time of auronópi is that, just like the baby, a menstruating girl is considered highly vulnerable when facing the surrounding human and nonhuman world. She should not travel alone, enter the forest, or go near a river, due to the danger of being lured into the home of a tuwenkaron (a sub-aquatic spirit being), or the ataitai (a giant hairy creature that lives in the forest). Furthermore, auronópi is no doubt a time when the parental “spiritual nurturing” of a girl is of great importance and her gendered body is still being molded. During my fieldwork, I heard many accounts of schoolgirls “going mad” at secondary school dorms throughout the region, and as far as a Baniwa community along the Negro River (Vianna 2012)—all following 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 diagnose their sickness, and then home to their village, afraid to continue staying in the dorms. The following account is by Maira, about girls who 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, agitated], watch he coming!” And that one there half drunk [meaning Maira’s husband, who was absent at 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.”

Maira and the older generation who know the history of “Bina Hill” believe that it is the “Bina Master” who 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 a specific kind of muran (magical plant or “bina” in Guyanese Creole), called kumi. At the time, many people were against the location of the school on top of this sacred hill. When building the school, the workers dug out the earth from the ground to use it as construction material and thus disturbed the powerful plant and its “master” (pootori). Maira is convinced that it is the “Bina Master” now attacking the girls, “because you can’t trouble that thing! Granny used to tell me like that, nah, long. I used to frighten baad, frighten them!” Burning one’s eyes, mouth, and body with pepper is used as both a preventative measure and a cure.

It is probably little 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 when their bodies were considered particularly porous and malleable, during
In the 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. Furthermore, many young women around the age of fifteen, after they finish secondary school and before they marry, nowadays leave their villages to gain experience and find work in the nearby city of Lethem, across 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 could be argued, in line with what Abu-Lughod (1986, 132–133) said about Bedouin women, that “fertility calls attention” to the girls’ heightened sexuality, which makes female movements a focus of close observation. When the first vehicle route into the Pakaraima Mountains was cleared, leading through Tipuru, the main concern expressed by the old people was the threat this road would pose to the young, unmarried girls and their subsequent disappearance from the village, as the ararinmi ta, “the huge caterpillar,” as they named the men coming from outside in Bedford trucks, would take the women away.9 In fact, the non-Indigenous population that passes through the Makushi territory is almost entirely male, usually temporary laborers or contractors working in mining, logging, construction, transportation, trade, or as civil servants. Vehicles, in the form of 4x4 jeeps, trucks, minibuses, and motorbikes, are scarce and expensive, and their owners hold a special status, partly due to the responsibilities that might fall on them such as giving lifts, delivering goods, and carrying injured or even dead bodies. Drivers are particularly popular with young women due to their mobility.

9. A similar idea can be found in Rivière (1969, 42). See also Brightman (2007, 142) on the symbolic association of the caterpillar with dangerous sexual relations with wild and unknown outsiders.
It frequently happens, especially in those villages close to a town or border known for having young people and few local employment opportunities, that a vehicle appears one fine day, driving from house to house, asking if there are girls available to work. The person enquiring is usually a woman, often an Amerindian, “the relative of a relative,” possibly to gain trust. Decisions need to be made in a matter of minutes, and even if parents agree to send their daughters, they are often left with an uncomfortable feeling. Maira 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 to 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. Hmmmm [stretched, high], I not gone nowhere!

Maira’s grandmother’s worries were not unfounded. There are many accounts that circulate of girls who are taken to mining camps or other establishments in the cities where they are forced to work as prostitutes or do “dodgy” work, including smuggling or slave labor. 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 of Tipuru, had just turned fifteen when a vehicle passed through 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 rumors spread that she was working in a hotel that offered unofficial room services involving sex work.

The danger of the trafficking of young—notably Amerindian—girls 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 located, is, according to Trotz and Roopnaraine (2009, 237), a three-fold transit place: movements of “foreign” women being trafficked through from Brazil and Venezuela; of coastal women being trafficked to work in the mining regions; and a home from which Amerindian women are trafficked to coastal communities for prostitution. As the authors register (ibid., 240), those communities that are more accessible from the coast, like the communities in the Rupununi along the main road, are particularly vulnerable.

Although premarital sex is common, women are expected to restrain and control their sexuality more than men, and it is quickly associated with madness, excessiveness, and developing a bad character. This is connected to the idea, common in Amazonian matters of conviviality, that the wellbeing of a community depends on the individual’s ability to moderate negative emotions in oneself and others (Overing and Passes 2000, 20–24). From an early age onwards, Makushi children are taught to control their anger by joking and teasing, as feeling and causing anger is seen as potentially dangerous. They should also not do anything in excess, and especially girls should not laugh too loud, become too excited, or desire something too much—“You’re overdoing it!” Phillis would caution her daughters. A woman who cannot control herself becomes associated with male/animal/wild qualities. Mîîpan, which roughly translates as presumptuous, cheeky, or loutish—mannish and madi-madi, as Maira mentioned about the behavior of chickens—unsettled, and in heat, brings with it different qualities and characteristics that for the Makushi are associated with asocial and improper behavior. For instance, at the time when girls turn “young lady” with their first menstruation, they are often described as becoming “wild,” which becomes imprinted on them physically. People might comment in a spooky tone of voice:
The girls’ transformation into a wild category through their newly acquired fertility is expressed in their eyes acquiring other-than-human features.10 Thus, through the adoption of “rotten” and uncontrolled behaviors—for instance, overindulgence in alcohol, sex, and parties, or simply by spending time in the gold mines—a woman can become e’im’i’m, “spoiled.” These conceptions are linked to and highlighted in ideas about the city and male “coastlanders” and miners in general, whose behavior towards women is considered excessive and predatory. It is further reflected in Makushi perceptions of the forest and mountains, where mining areas are typically situated, as “wild,” “uncivilized,” and dangerous places, as opposed to the social environment of the village and the savannah. This is also supported by the assumption in the Guianas that social distance grows with spatial distance (e.g., Overing 1989). People would say that the woman was indeed “spoiled” (e’im’i’m) by someone, probably out of jealousy and envy, which similar to the Makushi idea of death, is associated with an evil act of “ritual blowing” or a kanaima attack,11 through the use of magic plants (muran), spells (taren) and shamanic practices. Once “spoiled,” the transformation can become permanent if the person is not brought back to the village, nurtured and cared for by close kin. Knowing how to move appropriately in a world considered predatory and dangerous is therefore crucial.

Some girls who leave their villages never come back; they become accustomed to living in the city, marry, and remain there. Others decide to return, often after leaving their families without any notice for months or even years. Maureen, for instance, a close neighbor of Maira’s, was away for more than two years. Initially, she went to Lethem together with her cousin Danja because of the possibility of finding work in the shops. Then we heard that both had gone to Bonfim in Brazil, where they were “taking care of babies.” People in Maureen’s native village were making jokes about her change of name to “Maviselina”—a name many girls adopt when moving to Brazil to make them sound more Brazilian. Hence, when villagers were commenting about Maureen, they would jokingly correct 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 highlights the villagers’ negative attitude towards the change in identity and body brought about by an incorporation of a foreign language, food, and place12. 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, as outlined above. 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”]!”13

After Maira had spent some time in Georgetown, her husband Rick, who could hardly recognize her when she came back, remarked that she did not look like herself anymore but had become slim and “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 can also have 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 Phillis, who always

---

10. See Carneiro de Carvalho (2015, 138) for a similar idea about Makushi concepts of the body.
11. Kanaima (or kanaimî in Makushi) is a complex and manifold Amerindian notion prevalent throughout the Guianas’ region, which refers to the act of vengeance in the form of predation and death. In contemporary ethnographies, kanaima has usually been naturalised into a human assassin (e.g. Whitehead 2002) or interpreted as a ‘mode of doing’ (Farage 1997; Grund, 2019).
12. See Carneiro de Carvalho (2015, 139–140) for a similar idea on Makushi social transformation when in Brazil. However, the process of becoming Brazilian described to him by a man, included the intentional destruction of personal identification documents, social abandonment and rough-sleeping, which does not reflect the female experience explored here.
13. “Looking fat” is regarded as beautiful and desirable.
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 instability of the body and its transformative character are connected to the Makushi’s perspective on humanity (see Seeger et al. 1979; Viveiros de Castro 1998; Vilaça 2005; Grund 2019), while the scorning of Makushi food ultimately means a refusal of Makushi sociality.14

In sum, 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 emphasized in the villages in connection with the anxiety about the movements of young women. Nevertheless, it has to be stressed that women’s journeys are usually of a deliberate and pleasurable nature and fortunately only in some cases marked by oppression and abuse.

14. As McCallum (2001, 166) states for the Cashinahua, “[l]iving bodies also transform into other kinds of people… [I]deally this transformation would involve sex with foreigners as well as eating their food.”

Rooting womanhood

When a woman is “asked home,” i.e., “takes” a man, marriage usually puts an end to her “wild” movements. Maira commented once about the disappearance of a young woman from the daily village scene: “Long she used to walk. I tell you when you tek man, you does hide!” stressing the immobility that characterizes a newly formed marital relationship for a woman, at least at first. It is interesting to note here that the Makushi term esepannîpi is used for both “to tame” and “to marry”
someone, and thus, it could be argued, is related to a process of “undoing” traces of wilderness (cf. Grotti and Brightman 2010, 63 on the case of a Trio newborn) in a woman through making her become more “sedentary” and accustomed to the conviviality with her newly established family.

“ Asking home for a girl” is hence connected to the idea of the control over female movements. This extends to the control over the movements of young men by their fathers-in-law in the case of uxorilocal marriage rule and connected bride service, which are characteristic for the Guianas region (Rivière 1984, 91, 93). Knauft (1997, 244) observes on modernity and gender roles in Amazonia and Melanesia that with the increase in dependence on the cash economy and commodities, younger men have become more autonomous, while younger women are increasingly under the direct control of their husbands as heads of nuclear households. In consequence, in the context of increased female “licentiousness” and interaction “with a larger social universe” (through roads, school, and work), many men try “to keep women close to home” (ibid., 241). This seems to be quite true in the case of the Makushi. While uxorilocal marriage and bride service continue to be practiced, for those men who have material wealth (e.g., in the form of vehicles) and a source of income, arrangements tend to be looser. On the other hand, with more women on the move, female movements might be under increasing scrutiny by jealous husbands and village gossip (see also Carneiro de Carvalho 2015, 138–139) —not, however, without criticism and revolt by the women affected.

Maira remembers that her husband for a long time did not want her to go 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, Maira decided to leave for the capital Georgetown in the middle of the night with a group of villagers who had been invited to do a cultural performance at the Caribbean Festival of Arts (Carifesta), in that year hosted by Guyana. They were going to go for two weeks, but they stayed “one month straight.” Without any news from her, and with the gossip spreading that she had apparently found another man, her husband got increasingly worried. “Ugh, them people talk! What does travel, does talk big, big, big!” Maira recalls. Since she took control over her own movements, her husband learned through her absence that he never wanted to do anything without her anymore, and since then, they have become inseparable. “He don’t want I left back no more at all,” and so they accompany each other everywhere, on walks from one mayu (cooperative work) at a farm to the next, on trips through the forest to find seeds, to fish and to the city. Maira’s story, although unique, seems to follow a more general trend that shows that the movements of women become more equal to those of men with advanced age, and couples increasingly travel everywhere together later in their lives.

It could be argued that Maira’s experience shows that a woman’s agency and trajectory cannot simply be defined as static and stable, as it has often been presented. Furthermore, female trajectories are frequently marked by restlessness and the desire to break away from being tied down to one place. Maira constantly questions, complains about, and rebels against situations where 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. Phillis, for instance, made sure to regularly let her husband know that she “might be gone tomorrow,” and this despite them having been married for more than two decades and having several children and grandchildren. This could be interpreted as a way for her to demonstrate control over her own movements.

Learning “on the move”

*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.* (Phillis, Surama village, 2014)
With women being increasingly “on the move,” their engagement with the world outside of the village becomes more and more important. They pay and hitch rides, negotiate their passage, observe social etiquettes, create networks, bargain prices, and actively make themselves familiar with unknown milieus. Many movements, especially in groups and by motorized transport—whether it is a football team going for a game in a neighboring village, a trip to a check-up at the hospital, a school meeting, or culture group members traveling to an event across the border—are not gender-specific, and the distance covered by women is comparable to that covered by men. This is true for unmarried girls and young mothers as well as mature women. Furthermore, it can be said that traveling by vehicle (for instance, to go to social events) reinforces a kind of commensality between men and women, kinsfolk and nonrelatives that is not common in other forms of movements, such as hunting and fishing.
Journeys in the Guyanese interior frequently turn into “lengthy traveling experiences” and have “little or no chronological regularity” (Roopnaraine 1996, 54–55). Periods of stagnation and waiting, caused by the condition of the roads and terrain, tend to be filled with significant communal activities and convivial exchanges between travelers not dissimilar to those at play in the village. Abilene, a mother of three in her twenties, recalls a journey with around forty culture group members from different villages, traveling to an important Indigenous event in Brazil:

> We all left on the same Bedford truck, reached Normandy crossing [a small town on the Brazilian side of the Ireng river] in the rain, it was raining, remember? We waited for someone to cross us, we negotiated with a ranch, they were so welcoming. We stayed there for like three to four hours, I remember slinging hammocks all over the place [smiling]. And… it was a nice experience. They had laughter, 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.

In often overcrowded vehicles, journeys tend to be characterized by much laughter and slapstick humor, in which every circumstance is creatively made into a joke, so necessary for the “Indigenous understandings of the social” and to “oil the wheels of a convivial existence” (Overing 2004, 71). After travelers return back home, experiences, mishaps, and running gags from the journey continue to circulate in the village for days. Hence, it can be said that the process of the journey and of traveling together recreates an extension of the same values at play within the village, strengthening relations between kin and affines, and contributing to the actualization of memory and community.

While traveling in groups is more focused on the inside, and on making the journey fun and memorable, traveling alone, on foot, requires different forms of social etiquettes to reach one’s destination, which center around relationships with others. While these etiquettes are not gender-specific, it could be argued that women, when traveling, tend to share their experiences and establish their trusted connections primarily with other women and within female “microterritories” (Barboza et al. 2019). One day, on her way back from the border town of Lethem, Maira had initially been unlucky in bargaining the price of her bus ticket with the young, male minibus driver. Without the amount necessary to continue her journey, she then approached a young woman whom she vaguely knew and who worked “‘pon gold” to lend her money, and connected with a pregnant female passenger who took care of her with food and drinks throughout the hour-long journey. When Marcia, a Makushi lady in her sixties, walked from Tipuru to Tusenen, passing through several villages whose hospitality she depended on along the way, she shared interior female spaces and work, such as helping with scraping cassava and accompanying other women to their gardens.

As highlighted elsewhere (see Grund 2016, 2019), as people pass through different Amerindian villages, savannah, and forest regions, traversing human and nonhuman domains, a subtle and complex host-guest relationship is played out. Knowing how to move through these multiverses skillfully and appropriately is absolutely necessary, as for the Makushi it is always marked by potential dangers. As has been described for lowland South America, there is a widespread understanding that relations of alterity have a destabilizing effect on the body and its (specific) humanity (Viveiros de Castro 2002, 380–447; see also Amaral 2019, 269). Movement out of the village particularly tests this balance. The other is at the same time, however, a life-giving potency if handled appropriately, as difference is a necessary ingredient for the wellbeing of a community. Affinal relations have to be captured, tamed, consanguinized, and incorporated (Overing 1981, 1989). In a similar way as between co-residents, the traveler has to actively transform her- or himself from stranger/affine into consubstantial by sharing practices and substances, at least temporarily. It can be argued that Makushi travelers, including female travelers, make an important contribution to negotiating this difference by actively creating familiar bonds and translating what they have learned from the world outside into a social experience.15

---

15. For a more elaborate discussion on social etiquettes when on the move, see Grund (2019).
Knowing how to use one's repertoire of familiar people, whether relatives or non-family members, and making new contacts by making oneself known to strangers who might be helpful on the way, are an essential part of the practical aspects of travel. For instance, when on the move passing through less familiar villages, it is crucial to avoid arousing suspicion by way of proper dialogue, disclosing information (rather than withholding it), visiting (rather than hiding), and finding familiarity (rather than scorning difference). As a host, one must be welcoming and generous (rather than negating hospitality and being stingy), and as a traveler, make oneself at home (through the sharing of food and commensality). Travelers passing through villages are also welcomed for their entertaining qualities. Hosts appreciate their guests’ news, stories, and impressions, and enjoy questioning them on the latest gossip and up-to-date information about what’s going on in the world outside. Although a visit from an unknown or less familiar traveler needs to be handled with care, households that are visited gain in prestige and status through acquiring knowledge about other people and places as travelers exchange their experiences.

When travelers’ expectations are not met, this arouses disappointment and disapproval, and will be the reason for much village gossip on people’s return. This was the case, for instance, on two occasions when a group of Guyanese Makushi culture group members were invited to perform at events across the border in Brazil. Much to the criticism of the Guyanese Makushi, the transportation organized by the Brazilian Makushi was, as they complained, more like a “farm truck,” “watermelon truck,” or indeed a “garbage truck,” where the participants had to squeeze together like sardines, rather than the passenger bus with seats they had hoped for. With Brazil being considered a powerful economy and leading in technology, the choice of vehicle for the Guyanese guests was an improper and displeasing gesture. On another occasion, performing in the Brazilian border town of Bonfim, the group had to sleep on the hard, dirty floor, due to the event organizers’ biased expectations that every Amerindian walked around with their own hammock and therefore would not need any care and sleeping arrangements.

These experiences and encounters that occur when engaging with the world outside the village are not trivial, as through them knowledge of “the other” is acquired, which is brought back home in the form of powerful relations and information, ideas, gossip, and—in the case of Phillis, as we will now see—songs.

**Bringing the other home**

I would like to conclude with Phillis’s narrative of her rather mundane journey to the Casa do Índio [Indigenous health center] in the Brazilian town of Boa Vista. Her encounter with a group of Yanomami women there is a powerful example of Makushi cosmopolitics, of establishing relationships outside of one’s kindred and community and making oneself at home amidst unknown worlds. It shows the importance of learning from outside in the context of events as apparently unimportant as a doctor’s visit, and the importance of the (female) traveler in bringing new ideas and experiences back home. It is a story of “losing fear” and actively expanding one’s circle of familiarity.

> You know, when I saw them, the song 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 prove 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 was cut into boy cut, they had no tops but just skirts, and I was amazed how the baby was fitted to the back, and the song was most sounding like the song of the animals, like the howler, like the spider monkey. They were like, uhhhhhh [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 a hand pointing at herself], and their smile
Phillis's move to join the circle of chanting Yanomami at the Indigenous health center in Boa Vista was received with awe and surprise by the other Brazilian Makushi who were 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 the Brazilian Makushi having experienced a different kind of “proximity” to the Yanomami. While Phillis articulates a similar respect and fear, as well as exoticization, of them, she has had very few encounters with them, unlike the Brazilian Makushi, who regularly meet Yanomami leaders and representatives at regional Indigenous meetings and celebrations. The Yanomami are often perceived as people who do not participate and intermingle with other groups, but isolate themselves and are therefore left alone and not approached by others. Phillis'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,” Phillis's discourse recognized them as part of an extended general Amerindian identity, as “my people” with whom she had familiar ties, her “brothers and sisters in Brazil.” Phillis 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 Phillis, 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.” Phillis told all her children about her experience with the Yanomami, which left a lasting impression on them. Inspired by the Yanomami's chanting and imitation of animal sounds, she also composed songs herself, using the sounds and stories of beings that live in her own surroundings.

While moving through a potentially dangerous world, the traveler negotiates his or her way, and through it actively neutralizes and tames the outside. Mixing these elements is a constant process of creation and maintenance. Since the other is, at the same time, a life-giving potency, this mixing is essential, and mobility out of one's village therefore can be said to indeed strengthen the stability of the village. Phillis not only tamed and molded her relations with the Yanomami, she also brought powerful stories back home, songs and sounds that since her return have created new ones, which were in turn appropriated and sung by the following generations to represent the Makushi as a people/community/village in heritage celebrations and music performances to national and international audiences in the region, in Georgetown, Lethem, Brazil, and Suriname.

Final considerations

Makushi women have increasingly been spending time traveling, and more and more women, especially young ones, are “on the move” due to the novelty of the road, vehicles, school, and work in the city. Following particularly the travels of mature women 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, 134–136), I want to argue that the mobility of women increasing with age stands in an inverse relation...
to their 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 shared experience of accumulating wisdom.

Unlike other ethnographic areas, where there is a specialization of knowledge and temporal depth (as, for example, with African genealogies), 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 consequently the legitimacy of its claim on knowledge) is confined, it is space, and hence the journey, that gains prominence as a source of knowledge. It seems that for the Makushi, the longer and more difficult the journey, the richer the knowledge derived. Travelers gain prestige and social acknowledgement through bringing their experiences from outside back to the community.

In a way, the experiences of travelers and their encounters with the unpredictable and unknown resemble shamanic flights in that they serve to bring back new interpretations of the world outside and, as Phillis taught us, create and transmit knowledge to the next generations. The issue is relevant, as contemporary ethnology tends to describe shamanism as a focal point of Amerindian cosmopolitics (see Overing 1990; Santilli 1994b; Carneiro da Cunha 1998; Viveiros de Castro 1998, 2012). 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. Like the shaman or the Hallelujah prophet who brings new translations from other worlds, the traveler is a maker of worlds. Here, rather than specialized knowledge, journeying contributes to non-specialized, mundane knowledge about social realities that crucially feed into everyday life. Indeed, just as much as the chants of shamans and Hallelujah prophets, narratives of travels are a mode of “world-making” (see Overing 1990); however, they are accessible to all people and marked by great freedom of creativity. This is important, as 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 parts of their own world. In this manner, their social world is continuously being created through relationships and stories, and every day, Makushi women on the move bring their perspectives and weave their histories into the fabric of the world.
Acknowledgements

I am especially grateful to Phillis and Maira, without whose contributions this article would not have been possible. I am thankful for the financial support of the PCI/Cnpq scholarship at the Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi in Belém, and to the organizers of the SALSA panel “Indigenous Peoples in the Guianas” (2021), Leonor Valentino, Luisa Girardi, and Virginia Amaral, for putting together this special issue. I would like to thank them and others who read different versions of this article, especially Nádia Farage.
References


