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### Drifting studio practice

van Brummelen, I.V.

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# Drifting Studio Practice

## ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor  
aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam  
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus  
prof. dr. ir. K.I.J. Maex

ten overstaan van een door het College voor Promoties ingestelde commissie,  
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<i>Copromotor:</i>	dr. H.P. Slager	Hogeschool voor de Kunsten Utrecht
<i>Overige leden:</i>	prof. dr. C.M.K.E. Lerm-Hayes	Universiteit van Amsterdam
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## PROLOGUE

The PhD research project *Drifting Studio Practice* has as its subject coauthorship and was developed in coauthorship. In the framework of this research, I initiated two film projects with my partner Siebren de Haan for which we collaborated with communities. Also the present thesis I wrote in dialogue with De Haan. For this reason it is written in the we-form.

A first version of Chapters 1 and 2 was published under the title “Drifting Studio Practice: From moulding sugar to the unknown depths of the sea” in *World of Matter*. The book was edited by Inke Arns, and published by Sternberg Press (Berlin, 2015). I coauthored the article with De Haan and we developed its central ideas in dialogue. The article references literature we both read. We contributed equally to the article.

The passage in Chapter 1 that discusses coauthorship is partly taken from the article “The Artist as Coauthor,” which was published as part of the *Radical Materialism* dossier edited by Emily E. Scott and Ashley Dawson in *Periscope*, the curated online webforum of *Social Text* (2015). I coauthored the article with De Haan and we developed its central ideas in dialogue. The article references literature we both read and we contributed equally to the article.

An early version of Chapter 8 was published under the title “Something is There: Filmmaking in multiple realities” in *World Records Journal*, edited by Jason Fox (New York, 2018).

I coauthored the article with De Haan and we developed its central ideas in dialogue. The article references literature we both read. We contributed equally to the article.

After finishing the manuscript, ArtEZ invited us to rework Chapters 3 and 6 for their online Studium Generale. We published them under the title “Stories from the Rainforest” (Arnhem, 2021) in the *Land* dossier. Due to the late moment, this publication could no longer be included in the end notes. I added the missing notes in an erratum. I coauthored the contribution with De Haan and we developed its central ideas in dialogue. It discusses shared experiences and references literature we both read with the exception of the writings of Hugo Grotius (aka Hugo de Groot), which were read only by me.

In an appendix, I included an overview of the consulted sources, vimeo links to the discussed films, and summaries. The thesis ends with a section of color images. In the book version, published by Hatje Cantz, the image section is followed by the Dutch manuscript. The graphic design of the thesis was made by Matthias Hübner and Janis Gildein.

Lonnie van Brummelen  
Amsterdam, July 12, 2021



# INTRODUCTION

Artists who present PhD theses serve strange masters, many seem to think. They no longer care about art and its audiences, but view academic values as an indisputable touchstone. Why do artists want to exchange their sensorial engagement with materials for the study of texts and the production of discourse? Shouldn't they just make works of art?

Despite the skepticism, we started a PhD research project in 2011. We had noticed that the tribunes of art were dominated by debates in which the process of making was largely ignored. Works of art were reduced to a concept: a construct of references illustrating the theories then in vogue. Our experience as makers, however, was of having to constantly adjust our concepts during their implementation. What could we learn from the unruliness of practice?

As an artist duo we sculpt and write, but mostly we make films. We try to relate to the region where we live, i.e. Europe, by exploring its boundaries, its actions in the world, and its colonial past.<sup>1</sup> Frequently, we travel into territories divided up by politics and trade, such as border zones, ports, industrial areas, agricultural lands, and mines. With the camera we follow flows of people and goods, letting ourselves be carried away by changing light, swelling vegetation and the stories of the people we encounter. Working *in situ* involves negotiations with various agencies that co-determine what and from where we film: military, managers, and local residents, but also fences, mountain slopes, or water

bodies. We call the resulting films “our works,” but are we indeed their authors, in the sense of “the original spiritual owners?” Is a creative process, propelled by interactions with multifarious acting bodies, not rather a more collective matter? It was questions such as these that incited us to do an experiment.

In order to arrive at a language in which words are once again more connected with things, we consulted sea fishermen and farmers: experts by experience who, like us artists, attune their actions to circumstances they can never quite fully control. We experimented with how we could enter into coauthorship with them and how to extend these relationships to nonhumans. The encounters resulted in two participatory films that, together with this book, form the outcomes of our research.

Over the past decade, the Netherlands, where we are based, has undergone radical sociopolitical changes. Art and the multicultural society have increasingly lost public support. In an effort to understand something of this change, we visited the fishing village of Urk in spring 2011, where at that time conservative populism was beginning to take hold. In this setting we entered into a dialogue with the fishermen. We accompanied them to sea and, after many encounters, together developed a film script which was performed in front of the camera on quays and cutters by the fishermen themselves and by other community members.

The collective effort resulted in *Episode of the Sea* (2014), a film in which various story lines come together. While the fishermen deliberate about the increasing regulatory burden, the disruption of the fish market, and the loss of tradition, we reflect in scrolling titles, from our makers’ perspective, on the parallels between filming and fishing. Recorded on 35mm film, but converted into a Digital Cinema Package

based on the recommendation of the fishermen, the images found their way to arts venues, film festivals, universities and cinemas.<sup>A</sup>

Our interactions with the fishermen gave us a close-up view of their struggle with a globalized economy that disrupts ecosystems through its unscrupulous extraction processes. It was this experience that prompted us, for our next exchange, to consult a group of farmers who were not producing for distant markets but were guided more by the laws of the earth. We would enter into collaboration with Surinamese Maroons. Their ancestors had been deported from Africa to the Guianas three centuries ago to toil on plantations under Dutch colonial rule. They had succeeded in freeing themselves from slavery and in building a new life in the rainforest. Here, they developed their own shifting cultivation practice and a strong, ritualized bond with their natural environment. With the support of the Indigenous people and with the forest as their ally, they fought a long guerrilla war against the plantation owners and colonial mercenary armies, finally forcing the Dutch to make peace with them. Two centuries then passed in relative peace, until the global extraction machine pushed forward into the deep Suriname rainforest.

After long and careful consideration, the Maroons were prepared to engage in a cinematic exchange. We agreed to make a film together which would tell of their struggle

A  
*Episode of the Sea* (2014), 63 min, 4K DCP. Aspect ratio: 1:1.37. For an exhibition index, see p. 183.



35mm film stills *Episode of the Sea*, 2014.

for freedom and their alliance with the forest. In dialogue with them, we developed a script which was reenacted by the Maroons themselves in front of the camera, with trees and stones as co-actors. Using a mobile cinema, we presented the resulting film *Dee Sitonu A Weti* (2018) in the Surinamese interior. This was followed by screenings in art spaces, festivals, schools, libraries, movie houses and other cinemas.<sup>B</sup>

In this dissertation, we reconstruct what we learned from the two collaborations. We seek to gain greater insight into the different entities — human and nonhuman — that are involved in an extensive coauthorship, as well as into their mutual relationships. And we try to elucidate why certain voices in euro-western traditions are ‘forgotten’ time and again. By placing our practical findings in conversation with a range of written sources that reflect on participatory authorship, (de)coloniality, new materialism and the Anthropocene, we hope to arrive at a story about expanding coauthorship, one in which making and thinking become inseparably intertwined.<sup>C</sup>

To stimulate the interaction between theory and practice, we intersperse the essayistic chapters with fragments from the film scripts, and with transcripts of conversations with participants and audiences. The textual components are accompanied by black and white illustrations: film stills, snapshots, and historical images such as maps. A selection of these images can be found in a color section

B  
*Dee Sitonu A Weti*  
(international title *Stones Have Laws*, 2018), 100 min., 4K DCP. Aspect ratio: 1:2.4. For an exhibition index, see p. 184.

C  
By “new materialism” we mean perspectives in the social sciences that recognize matter as something that is active in itself, often focussing on entanglements of human and nonhuman agency. “Anthropocene” refers to the period in which “man” (at least a certain group) uses the earth as an inexhaustible raw material for his plans, thereby increasingly disrupting ecosystems.

in the middle of the book between the Dutch and English language versions. We use a dual noting system. The endnotes refer to the written sources. The sidenotes refer to oral sources, make cross-references within the book, or provide additional context. In order to reflect our approach of coauthorship in the book's layout, the graphic designers invited eleven colleagues to select the typefaces for the different chapters.

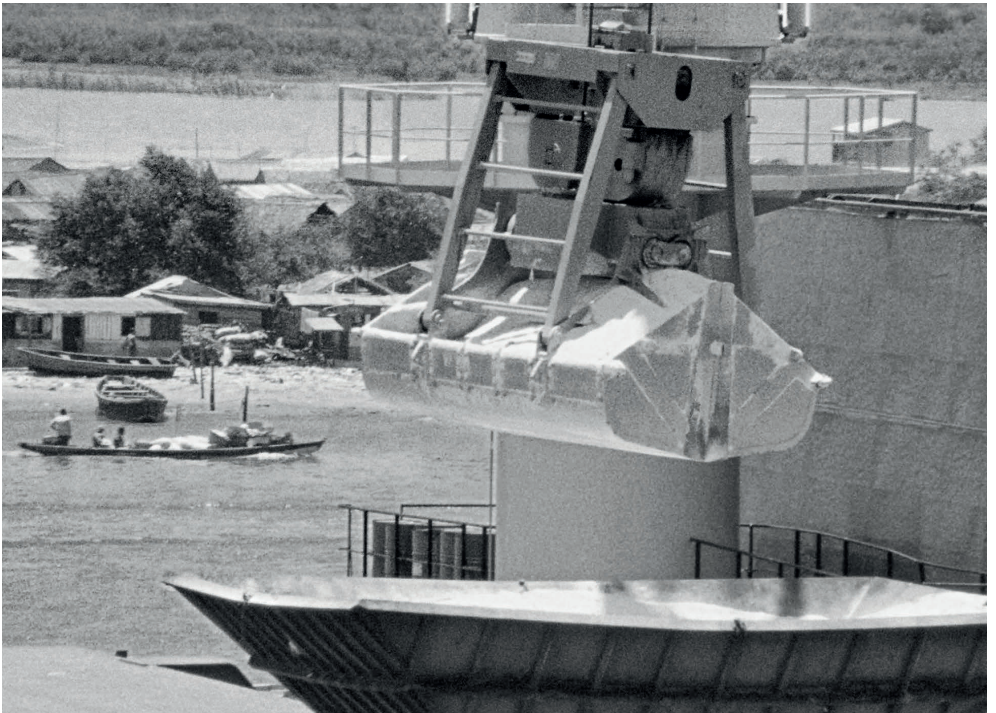
We begin Chapter 1 with a brief consideration of the agency of objects, starting from our experiences during the making of *Monument of Sugar* (2007), a sculpture that deconstructed itself.<sup>2</sup> It is Graham Harman's theory of tool-being that initiates us further into the rebellious dimension of things.<sup>3</sup> Walter Benjamin and Jean Rouch's reflections on participatory creative processes then provide the starting points for an alternative approach to authorship, one defined not by a claim of originality, but rather as a function that is shared with all agents — human and nonhuman — involved in a creative process.<sup>4</sup>

In Chapter 2 we give an account of our first experiment with coauthorship with the Urk fishermen. We outline how the island of Urk became part of the mainland with the reclamation of the Zuiderzee and how, despite a radical transformation of its environment, the community succeeded in continuing its fishing tradition. Following this, we explain how we developed a film script in dialogue with these former islanders and filmed it with them. We also report on our experiences on board, where we learned how to insert ourselves and our instruments into the macabre dance of casting out and hauling in the net, sharing the deck with running fishermen, streaking ropes and floundering fish. It was this material performance of humans and nonhumans on a bouncing ship that initiated us into coauthorship. We found ourselves part of a collective body that was at the

mercy of the instability of the sea and what was receding into its depths. At the same time, we got a glimpse of what it meant to be part of a pounding machine producing for the world market.

In Chapter 3 we tell what led us to follow an ‘episode of the sea’ with an ‘episode of the land’ in collaboration with the Maroons in Suriname. With the help of Arturo Escobar, we situate the Maroons’ struggle against the exploitation of their habitats in the broader context of South American resistance to the capitalist extraction logic.<sup>5</sup> We also place their struggle for livable land in the debate about the Anthropocene, starting from Michel Serres’s new materialist view that people have become a geological force through their large-scale interventions in ecosystems. According to Serres this renders obsolete the dividing wall that euro-western thinking has built between nature and culture. He argues for including “nature” in social contracts. We parallel his appeal with the new constitution adopted by Ecuador in 2008, which, at the initiative of Indigenous groups, includes natural entities as legal entities.<sup>6</sup> Along the way, we discuss the Plantationocene, an alternative interpretation of the Anthropocene that does not designate ‘man’ as the disruptor of ecosystems so much as the global production model that originated in the colonial plantation economy.

In Chapter 4 we try to gain more insight into the colonial roots of the nowadays dominant production model. To this end, we delve into two eighteenth-century eyewitness accounts of Surinamese plantation society. The diaries of Swedish biologist Daniel Rolander and Scottish-Dutch soldier John Gabriel Stedman provide us with an almost tangible impression of how humans, animals, plants and water flows were put to use to produce goods for overseas markets.<sup>7</sup> Between the lines we discern the manipulative



Film stills *Monument of Sugar*, 2007. Above: sugar refinery in Groningen. Below: bulk carrier unloads sugar in the harbor of Lagos.



techniques of the plantation regime, as well as the rising opposition to it.

In order to gain a better grasp of the precariousness of engaging in a coauthorship in a postcolonial setting, we explore in Chapter 5 the decolonizing strategies of Aimé Césaire, Édouard Glissant and Anton de Kom.<sup>8</sup> These authors propose alternative courts (Césaire), speculate on another basis for legitimacy (Glissant), and narrate different versions of colonial history (De Kom). We parallel the strategies of these authors with forms of resistance by the Maroons, as expressed in their customs and oral traditions. We conclude the chapter with a reflection on Walter Mignolo's proposal to "delink" and "relink," based on his analysis of the workings of the colonial matrix.<sup>9</sup>

In Chapter 6, we trace some of the assumptions on which the colonial matrix was constructed. To this end, we explore the arguments that Dutch East India Company lawyer Hugo Grotius (aka Hugo de Groot) developed in the early seventeenth century to justify activities of appropriation, trading and travel.<sup>10</sup> We then contrast Grotius's views on nature and property with the way land is used by the Maroons, who seem to regard the other-than-human entities as co-owners. In the process it begins to dawn on us how western standards disguise expropriation processes. We try to apply this insight to the practice of filmmaking as well as to the representation regime of cinema with the help of Donna Haraway's critical consideration of the power of the observer.<sup>11</sup>

In Chapter 7 we return to the Suriname rainforest. Based on the sociological studies of Carlo Hoop and Erney Landveld and on a literary work of Dorus Vrede—all three of them Maroon—we discuss the impact of the Afobaka dam. This colossal structure built across the Suriname River was part

of a hydroelectric project aimed at generating electricity for an aluminum smelter.<sup>D</sup> The resulting reservoir inundated much of the Maroons' habitat, forcing thousands to abandon their lands.<sup>12</sup> We also discuss the lawsuit that twelve Maroon *lo's* (clans) instigated at the beginning of the 21st century against the state of Suriname in order to halt the neocolonial exploitation of their ancestral land for resource extraction by foreign multinationals.<sup>E</sup> In doing so, they had to align themselves with the western concept of 'nature', in which what is nonhuman or not made by people — such as a rainforest or river — has no value of its own, but acquires value only as a resource for people. This collision of world views makes visible the fact that the same concept of nature that is responsible for the destruction of ecosystems underlies as well the legal system by which they must be defended.

D  
The Saamaka  
Maroons call  
the Suriname  
River  
*Saananlio*.

E  
The case was  
brought before  
the Inter-  
American  
Court of  
Human Rights  
in Costa  
Rica by the  
Saamaka  
Maroons  
represented  
by the VSG  
(Association  
of Saamaka  
Authorities).

In Chapter 8 we take a closer look at the trend towards enshrining the rights of nature in law.<sup>13</sup> We start with the new legislation introduced by New Zealand, in which the Whanganui River was declared a legal person thanks to activism by Maori groups. With the help of Juan José Guzmán's research into the implementation of Ecuador's new constitution, we discuss the difficulty of upholding the rights of nature in practice. We then explore Kyle McGee's new legal model, which is based not on delineated legal persons, but on multiform and intertwined collectives whose members negotiate their own jurisprudence.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, we attempt to translate this model into the way in which the Maroons co-exist with the rainforest and into a participatory practice of filmmaking in which also nonhuman entities become part of the collective of coauthors.

In the last three chapters, we report on our second experiment with coauthorship. In Chapter 9 we explain how, in dialogue with the Maroons, we arrived at a working method giving them greater control of the film story. In Chapter 10, we outline the multifarious negotiations required for making a film with a collective of coauthors consisting of humans from different cultures, as well as nonhumans, each with their own specific needs and interests. We conclude the book in Chapter 11 with a debriefing on the reception of *Dee Sitonu A Weti* by the Maroon community, and by other audiences in Suriname, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

Although this is a dissertation, the conclusions of our research are not, as is customary, distilled and written out at the end. For us artists, the films form the conclusions. These two sequences of images and sounds condense the many different exchanges and collective efforts. During the making of the films, an expanding company of coauthors gradually gathered in our drifting studio: cast, crew, ancestors, tools, animals, rivers, reservoirs, seas, but also production chains and audiences, and of course always the stones, those old witnesses who saw everything pass by. Some of them were invited by us, others were introduced by our fellow authors, still others signed themselves up. In the provisional commune that we formed with each other, all participants influenced one another, and we were constantly in conclave. We would never fully understand each other and were certainly not always in agreement, but that turned out unnecessary for making a many-voiced film together. Our divergent interests resulted in a patchwork of agreements held together by one common interest: that everyone be



Film stills *Dee Sitonu A Weti*, 2018.

able to express him-, her-, their-, or itself in our extended diversity. In this way we found that a drifting studio practice not only involves loosening the grip of overly dominant mental frameworks, but also and above all recognizing others as active co-players and forging reciprocal alliances.

We wrote this account largely during the Covid pandemic lockdowns. For months, encounters with others seemed utopian. A virus had made a species jump from bat to pangolin to human. Within a short space of time, it reached all continents. To stop the spread, public life was suspended. For a moment, global production chains creaked to a halt. It was in this indeterminate state that we thought about participatory cinema, solidarity beyond one's own group and ways of responding to polyphony. Because as the Maroons taught us: all things speak to us, even if we do not always understand what they are saying.





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# DRIFTING STUDIO PRACTICE

## THE RETURN OF THE MATERIAL

Our essay film *Monument of Sugar: how to use artistic means to elude trade barriers* (2007) opens with the epigram “the return of the material.” Why did we choose this phrase as our guideline? To explain this, we must revert to our supposedly postindustrial society as it existed before the 2008 financial crisis. The production and assembly of goods had disappeared from our view and was considered anachronistic—those activities were something “we” westerners had left behind. The material reality of things, how and where they were manufactured and which landscapes they connected, no longer seemed relevant. Society was focused instead on creating fictions with which to lure people into a dream world. We artists, too, were expected to produce artworks with press releases to match, framing our works with the cultural references of the day. Artistic production was increasingly turning into a matter of linguistics. Had artworks really become so powerless as to be unable to attract audiences on their own merit?

As artists who derive pleasure from the encounter with materials and the search for unexpected entanglements, we felt somewhat ill at ease in the so-called knowledge economy, which seemed to have disconnected itself from the physical world and to have lost interest in the folds that connect times and places. We felt a greater affinity with Michel Serres’s crumpled handkerchief. According to the French philosopher, a linear understanding of time makes us experience the most recent event on the timeline as the most contemporary and relevant; however, such a conception cannot explain why certain events from the past continue to exert their influence today. He therefore introduces the alternative model of the handkerchief; two points that are far apart when the cloth is stretched out can be next to each other when crumpled.<sup>1</sup> Such considerations formed the starting point for our practical experiment aimed at making banished matter return.

That sugar became the protagonist of this experiment was prompted by an off-the-cuff remark from a farmer we spoke to at the Polish-Ukrainian border on May 1, 2004, the day it switched from a national to a European border. While offering us coffee and sausages, he told us that Polish *cukier* had become twice as sweet since the country’s entry into the European Union: the price of sugar had doubled overnight. According to the farmer, it was now indeed cheaper to buy Polish sugar in the Ukraine than in Poland itself.

What had caused this price difference? To protect local industries from price fluctuations, governments set price floors for certain

products that are higher than the world market price. They also erect tariff walls to ward off foreign competitors. Export subsidies then serve to artificially lower the price of expensive products, to enable them to compete outside their own market. It was market interventions like these that made Europe's sugar cheaper outside its borders than within.<sup>A</sup>

Our *Monument of Sugar* operation consisted of reversing the flow of subsidized sugar leaving Europe by tracing it to its final destination, sculpting it locally into a monument, and then shipping it back to its origin. As a monument, sugar could be imported into Europe under heading 9703 of the European Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System, which ensures the duty-free passage of "original sculptures and statuary, in any material."<sup>2</sup>

United Nations commodity trade statistics showed that the bulk of Europe's subsidized sugar was being exported to Nigeria. Armed with this information, we departed for Lagos. After weeks of intensive fieldwork, however, we were unable to track down any European sugar. Our experiment appeared to have run aground. The Nigerian artists with whom we shared a studio asked us why we were so adamant to find sugar originating from Europe. Could we not work with the materials at hand? We had speculated that by reversing the flow of sugar we would bring the sugar home again, and in this way make the material return, but our Nigerian colleagues pointed out



16mm film stills *Monument of Sugar: how to use artistic means to elude trade barriers*, 2007. Production of sugar blocks.

<sup>A</sup> Such economic paradoxes are commonly referred to as the "47th Street Photo Phenomenon," named after a shopping street in Manhattan where, in the 1980s and 1990s, Japanese cameras could be purchased more cheaply than in Japan. See James Fallows, "Containing Japan," *The Atlantic* (May 1989).



Eroding sugar sculpture in the exhibition *World of Matter*, HMKV, Dortmund, 2014. Photograph: Hannes Woidich.

The *Monument of Sugar* installation consists of a floor sculpture of 304 sugar modules and a 67 minute silent 16mm film. We made 144 modules from Nigerian sugar and 160 from Dutch sugar. Both groups represented the amount of sugar we could purchase for 1,000 euros. The modules are each one Rhenish foot long and in the proportions of the Golden Ratio. In exhibitions, we show the eroding sugar sculpture together with the 16mm film essay *Monument of Sugar: how to use artistic means to elude trade barriers* (2007). In it scrolling titles relate the production of the monument. This narrative is intersected with documentary recordings of industrial landscapes and of the temporary studios where we created the sugar blocks.

to us that this approach was not yet sufficiently materialist. After careful consideration, we decided to reverse the European sugar flow using sugar produced in Brazil as raw bulk and refined to white sugar in Nigeria.

We soon discovered that the Nigerian sugar behaved quite differently from the white table sugar we were accustomed to in Europe. Artists like to talk about “the resistance in the material,” but Nigeria’s sweet crystals proved positively rebellious, with the fine grains almost impossible to shape into a stable substance. In the tropical humidity, the fragile blocks refused to harden properly. Emerging sharp and white from their molds, they gradually morphed during drying into grimy, sagging lumps full of craters and bumps. Only with endless retouching and restoring did it prove possible to get the sugar blocks into more or less firm and uniform shapes. But then, during the voyage by cargo ship, the morphing process set in again. On arrival in Europe after their long journey, the sugar blocks were softer than butter, and almost impossible to extricate from their packaging.

Our initial plan had been to stack the sugar blocks to form a three-dimensional bar chart, but their fragility entailed that they could only be displayed on the floor next to one another as separate modules. And as a floor sculpture, the monument did not come close to the generic geometric composition we had in mind: the

entropic Nigerian sugar blocks broke out of the grid and with every exhibition more material was left behind in the exhibition space. The monument seemed to gradually deconstruct itself.

Did we succeed in having the material return? Or had we still seen sugar as too much of a neutral, passive substance that could be instrumentalized to reverse a trade flow? Perhaps the experiment was successful precisely because we failed, because the sugar effectively revolted, undermining our will to shape it.

## BEING IN THE WORLD

How could we avoid falling yet again into the trap of mistaking the knowledge that circulates about matter for the circulating material itself? In the last chapter of the essay film *Monument of Sugar: how to use artistic means to elude trade barriers* we speculate about installing a working space aboard the cargo ship transporting sugar. With a mobile studio, we would not lose sight of the material on board and could accompany it as it traveled the world's oceans. Could such a *drifting studio practice* allow us to make material return?

When philosopher Bruno Latour heard our account of the self-deconstructing sugar blocks, he remarked that their journey had transformed the sugar modules from solitary “objects” into “things” that entered into relations with the world.<sup>3</sup> The sugar blocks were circulating in a world of connections, and these ongoing connections were also part of their *thing-ness*.

Perhaps we can sharpen this “being in the world” of things by looking at Graham Harman’s tool-being theory, based on Martin Heidegger’s phenomenological account of a broken hammer.<sup>4</sup> Heidegger noted that we forget the hammer in the act of hammering. In everyday use, it seems self-evident that the hammer does what we humans want it to do. Only when the hammer breaks or falls from our hands do we notice that this thing is more than just a tool for human use. Taking up Heidegger’s observation, Graham Harman suggests this insight extends beyond the practical realm of hammers and chisels. Things, he argues, are more complex than our theoretical or practical understanding of them. They have an unfathomable dimension that refuses to reveal itself or be put to work.<sup>5</sup> Or as Harman puts it:

Staring at a hammer does not exhaust its depths, but neither does wielding that hammer on a construction site or a battlefield.<sup>6</sup>

For Harman, the hammer-that-hammers is part of a network of things working together.<sup>7</sup> The hammering connects the hammer to the nail, the nail to the wood, and so on. But because the hammer's *thing-ness* is not solely determined by its role in the network, we as users of the hammer cannot take for granted the stability of this constellation which is bound together by the task at hand. Given this instability, Harman speaks of a "weird realism," one in which things can enter into contact with one another only indirectly.<sup>8</sup>

Where does this weird realism leave us artists who seek a more reality-based encounter with things? We began to suspect that a drifting studio practice would involve more than a simple moving along with traveling matter. After all, weren't we also one of those weird things that can never be fully understood, possessed, or controlled? But if we are part of a community of things that do not reveal themselves fully and that can withdraw at any moment, what do our encounters then look like?

## THE POWER OF TOOLS

As artists we are accustomed to handling the camera and sound recorder ourselves. While operating the equipment, our senses seem to be amplified. We simultaneously perceive how the leaves move on the trees, bodies pass through the landscape, and changing light makes colors brighter or duller. When working with film-tools we are responsive sensory bodies more than we are "artists with ideas." In this way, we learned, through the practice of filmmaking, that not only are the tools put into service during the work, but so too are those who operate them.

It was the filmmaker and anthropologist Jean Rouch who first drew our attention once more to the transformative power of film tools. He noticed how, during the filming of a possession ritual, not only were those taking part in the ritual apparently controlled by a strange force, but he and his crew were as well. About this he says:

I now believe that for the people who are being filmed, the "self" of the filmmaker changes in front of their eyes during the shooting. He no longer speaks, except to yell out incomprehensible orders ("Roll!", "Cut!") ... Paradoxically it is due to this equipment and this new behavior ... that enable the filmmaker to throw himself into a ritual, integrate into it, and follow it step-by-step. It is a strange choreography, which, if inspired, makes the cameraman and soundman no longer invisible but participants in the ongoing event. For the Songhay-Zarma, who are now quite accustomed to film, my

“self” is altered in front of their eyes in the same way as is the “self” of the possession dancers: it is the “film-trance” (*ciné-transe*) of the one filming the “real trance” of the other.<sup>9</sup>

In another interview, Rouch even appears to suggest that a filmmaker who is in a film-trance during the filming cannot be held responsible for his choices: “Once I’ve a camera in my hand, I’m someone completely different, so don’t ask me why I did what I did.”<sup>10</sup> But if the filmmaker is not responsible for the images he or she makes, who then is directing? Thus, it dawned on us that the alienating effect of the film-trance could have consequences for authorship.

The alienating influence of the camera appears to reach beyond the filmmaker and his team. According to Rouch, it is also those being filmed who change their behavior in the presence of the film tool. To express the transformative power of cinematic instruments, he introduces the idea of the “participatory camera,” a concept he borrows from the film practice of Robert Flaherty, and in particular from his collaboration with a group of Inuit when filming *Nanook of the North* (1922).<sup>11</sup> According to Flaherty, during filming the Inuit acted differently than they usually did. At times, they interrupted their routines to wait for the camera to be ready, or repeated actions to enable themselves to be filmed from different perspectives. They applied an obsolete hunting technique and reenacted their domestic life in an enlarged half-open igloo specially



Film still *Nanook of the North*, Robert Flaherty, 1922. “Nanook,” whose real name was Allakariallak, visits a trading post with “his family.”

built for the film.<sup>12</sup> The fact that the Inuit had artificially adapted their daily practice in front of the camera was concealed in the final edit. The film gives the impression that the life of the Inuit was recorded as the filmmaker found it. But it is the interventions for the sake of the camera that seemed to fascinate Rouch, who appears to have seen here the potential for an alternative way of practicing ethnography. For him, the participatory camera ensures that “knowledge is no longer a stolen secret,” which is later consumed in another place, at another time, by another culture.<sup>13</sup>

Only a film that is transparent about the intervening effect of film tools could claim to be objective. In an interview, he clarifies:

Ciné-verité is the truth of cinema, the truth that one can show in the cinema with a mechanical eye and an electronic ear ... This is the objectivity that one can expect, being perfectly conscious that the camera is there and that people know it. From that moment, we live in an audio-visual galaxy: a new truth emerges, *cinéma-vérité*, which has nothing to do with normal reality.<sup>14</sup>

Rouch’s conviction that filmmaker and persons filmed mutually influence each other under the authority of the camera, and that this creates a “new truth” during filmmaking, led him to consider the ethnographic documentary as the outcome of a “cine dialogue.”<sup>15</sup> He experimented with how to render perceptible his own entry as a filmmaker into the world he was filming. He also tried to involve actively his so-called subjects in the filmmaking process. A number of these innovations come together in the film *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961), made with his colleague Edgar Morin. The documentary shows how the two filmmakers instruct the persons they are filming, how these people then question each other, and how all involved ultimately view and discuss the result in a theater.<sup>16</sup> For later projects, Rouch would even write film scripts together with the individuals he was portraying, the results of which were partially fictionalized documentaries. The approach led critics to come up with a new hybrid genre for these films: *ethnofiction*.<sup>17</sup>

We were intrigued that it appeared to be the camera-as-tool that had provoked these experiments. Harman had already reminded us that tools have a rebellious dimension, a hidden layer that resists being known or put to use, but of which we can get a glimpse when tools break or fall out of our hands. Rouch’s reflections brought us back to the agency of tools. For the “participatory camera” appears to not merely serve the person operating it, but also to have the power to transform those involved into participants. The persons



in front of the camera are no longer passive subjects, but change their behavior and become co-creators. The filmmaker is no longer the director in charge, who knows what he or she wants, but is constantly influenced by the film tool and the other people present.

The work of Jean Rouch gave us a first glimpse of the working community in which people and tools collaborate. But if a drifting studio practice involves becoming part of a collective of fickle authors who at times command and at others serve, and who can always withdraw, what then could our role in this be?

## THE OPERATIVE AUTHOR

Rouch's commitment to sharing his authority as a filmmaker reminded us of the "operative writer" mentioned by Walter Benjamin in "The Author as Producer" (1934).<sup>18</sup> In this essay, Benjamin distinguishes between two types of authors: the writer who informs and the operative writer. Both are committed to the class struggle, but the first see themselves as intellectuals and view solidarity as a task of the mind, while the second recognize the part they play in the "production apparatus," and as technicians they seek to improve this apparatus. He writes: "The apparatus will be the better ... the more readers or spectators it turns into collaborators."<sup>19</sup> Thus it seems that this author's task consists of redistributing the creative work.



Film still *Chronicle of a Summer*, Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch, 1961. The directors discuss with Marceline Lorian-Ivens, one of the film's characters, how the film will be made.

Benjamin takes the model of the operative writer from the Russian Sergei Tretyakov, who not only defined the model but also embodied it with his own literary practice. The operative writer's first task, according to Tretyakov, is to free himself of his ignorance. He must participate in "the life of the material." Because: "Either you see like a local, or you see nothing."<sup>20</sup> To achieve this the writer should settle *in situ* for a longer period of time and immerse himself or herself in the daily routine. This approach is intended to enable the writer to acquire knowledge with which he or she can make a meaningful contribution to the work of the community.

As artists, we recognize something in Tretyakov's urge to participate in the life of the material. Were we not, with our own somewhat romantic desire for a drifting studio practice, hankering after something similar? Were we not also looking for a way to move along with the material? Ought we not to follow Tretyakov's example and seek to insert ourselves into a community? But if we did, how would we be able to participate?

In his essay, Benjamin describes in detail how Tretyakov put his operative authorship into practice. When the Soviet Union introduced the *kolkhoz* in the early twentieth century, Tretyakov was able to convince one of the peasant communes to appoint him as a scribe.<sup>B</sup> In this capacity, he committed himself to political, cultural, and agricultural activities: organizing mass rallies, convincing independent farmers to join the *kolkhoz*, collecting funds to buy tractors, and writing as an *in situ* correspondent for Moscow newspapers. He also worked as an editor for the local *kolkhoz* newspaper, published a wall newspaper in the commune, and introduced radio and travelling film shows there.<sup>21</sup> Tretyakov, according to Benjamin, considered all such activities part of being an author. Authorship was for him not only a thinking activity, but above all a multifaceted material operation.

<sup>B</sup>  
A *kolkhoz* was a collective farm during the Soviet Union.

Like Tretyakov, Benjamin too seems more interested in the practice of production than in

the ideas about it. More important than how a literary work relates to the relations entailed by the production processes of its time, according to him, was the question of how a work positions itself *within* these relations. He therefore sees it as incumbent on the writer to get to know and understand the relations inherent in the production process: “The more exactly the writer knows his position in the production process, the less he will be tempted by the idea of passing for an ‘intellectual,’” he states. The figure of the intellectual was for him too strongly attached to individual freedom, opting to lead the proletariat as an “ideological patron.”<sup>22</sup> For Benjamin, this was an impossible position. Critical of ideologues that fail to put their solidarity into practice, he writes:

However revolutionary it may seem, [it] functions in a counter-revolutionary way so long as the writer experiences his solidarity with the proletariat *only in the mind* and not as a producer.<sup>23</sup>

The producer Benjamin referred to seems not to be the figure with the proverbial cigar at the top of the hierarchy of production relationships. As artist filmmakers we got to know this figure when confronted with the hierarchical production model of the film industry. In this model, the producer is the one in control and who appropriates the reproduction rights of the film to accumulate capital. Below him is the author, the supposedly original intellectual owner of a creative work. And at the very bottom of the heap we find the implementers: those who give material form to the plans. In this model, it is the producer who determines how tasks, responsibilities, and resources are distributed.

When Benjamin speaks of an author who sees himself as a producer, he does not seem to mean that the one with the ideas must take the lead. He seems first and foremost to be pleading for an author to take on an organizing role, not as someone who delegates from above, but as a coworker on the work floor. This organizing role would be an inseparable part of authorship: it is through the redistribution of the creative work that an author-cum-producer could break through the prevailing hierarchies and divisions.

As artists, the role of the author who claims intellectual property has always puzzled us. Ideas aren’t that important, right? Because shouldn’t they be first tested in practice? And when all’s said and done, how original are our ideas? Are we not generally building on the thoughts of others? However, Benjamin and Rouch’s hands-on proposals encourage us to rethink authorship, not as a person’s capacity to think, determine, and claim ownership, but as a role shared with others (people, tools, sugar granules, etc.).

What would a working community look like in which implementers think and thinkers roll up their sleeves, in which instruments, filmed subjects, and audiences become coauthors, and in which we all lose ourselves in the work, but can always withdraw? What sort of practice can “we” (who are all coauthors) develop in a drifting studio despite the multiplicity and instability of our relationships?

## FIELDWORK AT SEA



35mm film stills *Episode of the Sea*, 2014.

On a stretch of former seabed covered by ancient boulders transported there during the glaciation by drifting ice, women of Urk recite the ecological transformations that were set in motion by the reclamation of the sea.

## FIRST ENCOUNTER

An opportunity to attempt our drifting studio practice and extended coauthorship presented itself when Museum De Paviljoens invited us to conduct artistic fieldwork with the fishing community of Urk.<sup>1</sup> Who could have greater experience of instability and things that retreat than fishermen, who, from generation to generation, have confidently lowered their nets from rolling decks into unknown depths? Until the mid-twentieth century, Urk was an island in the Zuiderzee, then a large inland sea. Today, this sea is much smaller and is now called the IJsselmeer. In the period when the Dutch colonies began to claim their independence, the inland sea was closed off with a long dike and largely drained. The fishing island of Urk suddenly found itself surrounded by reclaimed land, with its inhabitants expected to switch from fishing to farming. But the fishermen exchanged their small wooden boats for iron trawlers and sailed out into the North Sea, finding new fishing grounds on the Dogger Bank, a full day's sailing from the coast. Their daily fishing trips turned into fishing weeks. Within a few decades, virtually every fisherman, skipper, or deckhand was earning as much as high-ranking government officials, in what became known as "the miracle of Urk." The village still purportedly has the largest fishing fleet in the Netherlands.

We visited the former island in the spring of 2011. A few weeks earlier the Dutch Cabinet had announced a stiff package of budget cuts for culture. The rationale for these cuts was explained by the prime minister's statement that "artists are turning their backs on creativity and holding their wallets up to the government."<sup>2</sup> Cultural producers were

## EPIISODE OF THE SEA

Script page of prelude

English translation of the Urker dialogue is based on the film's subtitles.  
Differences may occur due to improvisations by the actors.

### EXT. FIELD WITH BOULDERS – DAY

WOMAN 1                    The saltwater turned fresh and the fish died.

WOMAN 2                    The rotting fish became fare for larvae.

WOMAN 3                    They grew into mosquitoes.

WOMAN 4                    This attracted spiders, followed by flocks of  
starlings.

WOMAN 5                    The rainwater became contaminated with  
bird shit

WOMAN 6                    We had no drinking water anymore.

WOMAN 1                    The dried-out seabed created huge dust  
clouds.

WOMAN 3                    Then came the mice, the owls, and the  
weasels.

WOMAN 5                    The burning of the reeds brought black clouds  
of soot.

WOMAN 7                    Our white laundry turned gray.

WOMAN 6                    It was like the plagues of Egypt.

## BEUTEN KEIENVELD – DAG

- VROUWE 1            Ut zoute waoter worde zuut in de vis ging dood.
- VROUWE 2            De rotte vis worde kost vor de larven.
- VROUWE 3            Die eutgruuden tot moggen.
- VROUWE 4            Ier kwammen de spinnen wier op of, opevolgt  
duur zwarmen spraauwen.
- VROUWE 5            Ut regenwaoter worde bedurven duur de stroent  
van de voegels.
- VROUWE 6            We adden glad gien drinkwaoter maar.
- VROUWE 1            De beum van de zie, die droge kwam te leggen,  
veroorzaakte grote stofwolken.
- VROUWE 3            Toe kwammen de meuzen, de kateulen in de  
wiezels.
- VROUWE 5            Duur ut ofbranen van ut riet krieggen we zwarte  
roetwolleken.
- VROUWE 7            Oenze witte wassien worde grauw.
- VROUWE 6            Ut liek wel op de plagen van Egypte.





Urk in the middle of the Zuiderzee, General Map of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 1830. From the Kadaster image collection.





Preliminary design by Cornelis Lely proposing the closure and partial reclaiming of the Zuiderzee, 1891. From the Zuiderzeemuseum Enkhuizen collection.



recast as subsidy scroungers. So, when we introduced ourselves as artists to a group of fishermen, we cautiously added that the reputation of our sector had recently suffered damage. The fishermen reassured us that for them too, the days when they were seen as heroes of the sea were long gone. Nowadays, they were the criminals who were fishing the seas bare. We observed that we shared an image problem—this is how our collaboration began.

Although the island had been part of the mainland for over half a century, the inhabitants still spoke their own distinct language, known as Urkers, marked by a kind of archaic vocabulary and uttered in a marvelous singing tone. Our conversations with them were conducted in “Foreign,” their term for speaking Dutch. Several bad experiences with journalists who had taken their words out of context to illustrate their own preconceptions had made the Urkers wary of curious outsiders. But by doing our rounds through the village, we slowly succeeded in winning their trust.

We proposed to the fishermen to make a film together, one in which they would share their practice and we ours. They agreed to take part in the experiment, introducing us to the local fish factories, the auction house, the wharves, and taking us to their second home port in Harlingen. We then visited these sites both when busy and when deserted. Our cinematic eye filled itself with working bodies, surfaces eroded by saltwater, billowing nets, and all those lifeless fish being measured, weighed, and filleted for delivery straight to the shops or frozen into stiff boards. And then there was the sea. It never rested. It was always there. We placed sound



35mm film stills *Episode of the Sea*, 2014.  
Fish industry in Urk.



35mm film stills *Episode of the Sea*, 2014.  
On board in the North Sea.

recorders in the docks to record the waves smacking against the quay wall when the sea was rough, or softly lapping when it was calm, at high tide and at low tide. Microphones in shelters captured the rustling, whining, and ghostly moaning of the wind and the screaming of the ever-present seagulls.

Sometimes we and our instruments were invited to ride the waves with the fishermen. There, we adopted their rhythm of two hours' work followed by a short nap. We learned that the whipping of ropes and creaking cables announced that nets full of fish would appear on board, and that, as soon as the pin was pulled from the railing, we needed to stand back while the heavy nets slid violently across the deck to careen back into the sea. It was during these fishing trips that we experienced what it meant to become part of a floating collective of people, tools, and animals, living and dead, all existing unstably together in the same boat. Nowhere on board could we get enough distance to catch this floating community in its entirety. As we dutifully fed roll after roll of film into the camera, we sensed that we too couldn't entirely avoid having an instrumental relationship to things.

On their free Saturdays, we would visit the fishermen at home and engage in long conversations about their trade, and sometimes about our own. Their stories drifted from the role of religion to the behavior of the fish, and from technical aspects of fishing gear to the territorial divisions of the sea. Still, it wasn't the sea, or the fishing gear, or the fish that predominated their stories, but the disturbed mechanism of supply and demand. Although confident in handling their nets, the fishermen found themselves entangled in an intricate

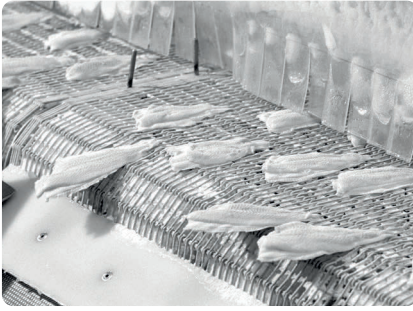
network of relations. They told us how, after Great Britain's accession to the European Economic Community, fishing rights were redistributed. British fishermen were given a larger quota than they could catch, but at the expense of other North Sea fishermen. With their quota allocation, the Urkers could no longer cover their costs. They started purchasing ships in other EU member countries, because, as one fisherman explained to us: "If you bought such a boat, you also obtained its quota."<sup>A</sup> So they put to sea under different flags, becoming Englishmen, Danes, Belgians, and Germans, with all the attendant paperwork. But even the additional identities could not have turned the tide: massive imports of Asian farmed fish and rising fuel prices meant that two-thirds of the local fleet already lay idle. "I spend all day doing my sums," one of them said. "Most of us are technically bankrupt," another told us. Their days had become stressful. Sons were no longer willing to succeed their fathers. Increasingly, skippers set out to sea with foreign workers. And the North Sea was overfished. That was clear to them too.

Our idea had been for the fishermen to teach us how to handle instability and things that retreat into themselves, and we were prepared to open up coauthorship to their gear, the wind, migrating fish, sea currents, and anything else that may retreat in the depths of the sea. But what were we to do with their lamentations about falling fish prices, the power of the big players, and the scourge of endless inspections? These invisible, hated players exerted a considerable influence on the fishermen's material activities. Were they too coauthors? Was this yet another lesson in realism?



35mm film still *Episode of the Sea*, 2014.

<sup>A</sup>  
Conversation with  
shrimp fisherman  
Kobus Post, Urk,  
November 3, 2011.



35mm film still *Episode of the Sea*, 2014.  
Frozen flatfish.

The most disruptive experience was the sight of the endless flow of floundering fish being gutted one by one with the flick of a knife. How could we account for this cruelty of their practice, in which we now seemed to be implicated as collaborators? When we asked the fishermen about this brutal aspect, they explained that they had been taught this way by their fathers, who had learned it from their fathers. One of the fishermen reflected, “Nowadays people are no longer used to that; nowadays you’re expected to have feelings with everything you do.”<sup>B</sup>

Had we, in focusing on the fishermen’s material practice, forgotten their ancestors who now emerged from the folds of Serres’s crumpled handkerchief? Would these ancestors agree with their descendants’ local catches of flatfish being transported over the world’s oceans to be sold on the global market as generic white fish? An island that is no longer an island, old trades that have lost their self-evidence, sons not continuing the family tradition, and a sea that is no longer generous, now being fished bare. Had “broken tool” become the new condition here? Or were we witnessing the drama of the hammer breaking? Were we seeing, like one last flicker of a dying star, everything that had once been connected by the tool falling apart?

## LOYAL TO THE BROKEN TOOL

Not only were the ships old and cumbersome, but also the analog 35mm film camera we used was unwieldy and had long since written off by the industry. It was the fishermen who understood the needs of our tool better than we did, instructing us to grease it after each day’s

<sup>B</sup>  
Conversation with  
fisherman Tjeerd  
de Boer, Urk,  
September 14, 2011.



## EPISODE OF THE SEA

Script page of chapter "Threading the Boards"

English translation of the Urker dialogue based on the film's subtitles.  
Differences may occur due to improvisations of the actors.

### EXT. HARBOR – NIGHT

FISHERMAN           As a fisherman, I feel best when I find a good fishery. When we catch one full net after the other. And then tell our mates about it. That way we all profit. We've always done that.

FISHERMAN 2        It goes from father to son.

FISHERMAN 1        That's where our heart lies.

FISHERMAN 2        Then we feel rich.

FISHERMAN 1        Then we also can give away a fish or two on shore. Cause you know what the Bible says: It's more blessed to give than to receive.

FISHERMAN 3        But they put a stop to that. Nowadays, when we enter the harbor, we can swap our blue collar for a white one. We have to inform the inspectors of our arrival. Ask the harbor service where to unload our fish. Arrange papers for our foreign crewmembers. And so on and so forth.

FISHERMAN 4        Last week we berthed at midnight. We were the last to unload. Then two men came up to us: a customs bloke and a guy from the military police. "May we come on board?" I said: "Well yes, come aboard. What's up?" "Inspection. Who are you?" "I'm the skipper," I said. "Born?" he asked. "Yes, you might say that..."

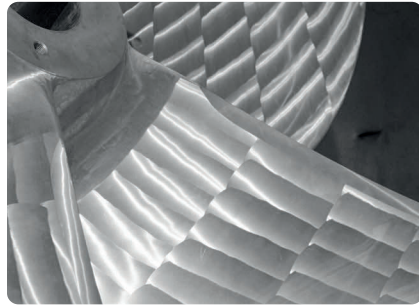
## BEUTEN AVEN – NACHT

- BOKKER 1           As bokker voel ik m'n ut mieste gelukkig as ik un mooi visserijtjen veen. Dat je 't iene net nao 't angere vol mit vis vangen. In dat je dat dan duurgieven an je maos. Dan eawen we er allegaor wat an. Dat doenen we m'n al zolange.
- BOKKER 2           Dat got van vader op zuun.
- BOKKER 1           Daor legt oens arte.
- BOKKER 2           Dan voelen we oens rik.
- BOKKER 1           Dan kunen m'n an de walle ok nog er us een visjen weggieven. Want jelui wieten wat er in de biebel stot: Ut is zaoliger te gieven dan te ontvangen.
- BOKKER 3           Maar daor eawen ze een stukkien vor estieken. As we nou de aven in koemen moeten we oenze overall gelijk ommerealen vor un overimpjen. Ziedagen duurgieven an de avendienst. Papieren in orde maken van oenze beutenlaanse knechten. Naotellen van wat je evongen eawen of dat niet mää is dan je quota. 't Logboekien invullen in gelijk binnen un alf uur inleveren bij de AID.
- BOKKER 4           Lest kwammen we midden in de nacht de aven binnen. We konnen nog net lossen. Toe kwammen er twee man op oens of, een douane vint in een mannetjen van de marechaussee. Ze vroegen of ze an boord moggen koemen. Ik zeen: "Wel ja koem maar an boord. Wat is er loos?" "Controle. Wie bent u?" "Ik bin de skipper", zeen ik. "Geboren?" vroeg ie. "Ja, dat kuun je wel zeggen..."

shooting against the corrosive salt. Just as we could not understand why the fishermen worked the way they did, they too were surprised at our devotion to our old camera that had to be reloaded every four minutes. Some were intrigued by our apparent evading of technological determinism, that inescapable driving force that obliges all practitioners to adopt the newest techniques. Others, more pragmatic, asked whether, by opting for anachronistic equipment, we were not placing ourselves outside the production relationships of our day. We answered that we generally chose our medium on aesthetic grounds, and just like them, called upon (artistic) predecessors to explain ourselves.

Still, the question raised doubts in our minds. Shortly after we started shooting, the last Dutch film laboratory went bankrupt.<sup>3</sup> A little later Fuji announced it was stopping the production of cine camera film. The days of perforated acetate strip seemed to be over. Why then should we stick to analog film technology? Did our fascination with the medium that transformed sensory impressions into material grain storms perhaps honor not new materialism, but only nostalgic devotion? What do you do when your tools fall out of their network of relations and become obtrusive in all their strangeness? Throw them away on the scrap heap of progress? Or do they claim our loyalty in the name of a pact we have made with them, of shared history, of work performed together?

With near-Calvinistic faith in the cleansing power of hard work, we had written down everything we had heard, and turned the hundreds of pages of transcripts into a script. We



35mm film stills *Episode of the Sea*, 2014.  
Installation of a new fuel-saving propeller.

submitted it to some fishermen for comment. The script contained much that was recognizable to them. Even so, a number of fishermen indicated that they were missing something. The call for sustainability was compelling their profession to modernize and they, the Urkers, were leading the way. For example, they had recently started using GPS to record where the fish swam into the nets. Because, as a fisherman explained to us: “Only fish that can be tracked right along the production chain can be marketed as ‘sustainable.’” A number of fishermen were participating in an experiment to replace the heavy chains that dragged across the seabed with “floating tentacles” that chased flatfish into the net with electric pulses. The new fishing gear was supposed to cause less damage to the seabed and save a lot of fuel.<sup>C</sup> One fisherman, it turned out, even had a test set up on board with which to stun the fish before gutting them. We understood from these stories that innovation should not be absent from the film.

In the meantime, a number of local drama club members had signed up to interpret the dialogues. They were (former) fishermen, employees of fish processing companies, a teacher of the local fishing school, a construction worker, a painter, all men and women enthusiastic to contribute to a film about fishing. They told us that they read poetry in their spare time, sang in a choir, and visited movie theaters. It reminded us of Jacques Rancière’s research into the literary aspirations of workers in nineteenth-century France, many of whom, it appeared, read literature and wrote their own stories about the vicissitudes of their lives and their dreams for the future. Rancière notes that with their artistry the workers “suspend the ancestral hierarchy subordinating those dedicated to manual labor to those who have been given the privilege of thinking.”<sup>4</sup>

Rancière published his *The Nights of Labor* (1981) at a time when many of his left-wing colleagues seemed to view themselves as an intellectual vanguard tasked with leading the oppressed working class toward liberation. His study seemed to ask whether the “oppressed” — who, as it turned out, were able to articulate their experiences and desires pretty well themselves — really needed the intellectuals. In other words, do not intellectuals underestimate workers? And hadn’t we, as artists, experienced something similar? The

<sup>C</sup> The electric fishing technique was banned by the European Union in 2016, following campaigning against it by French fishermen.

fishermen too proved perfectly capable of telling their own story.

We organized a workshop in the drama club's rehearsal room, to introduce the participants to some basic filmmaking techniques. We demonstrated, for example, how images and sounds are recorded with different devices and how these tracks could then be re-synchronized using the clap of a clapperboard. We also tried to provide insight into why a door that opens once in the film usually has to be closed many times during recording. We added some maritime clips from our movie collection, including a scene from *Klassenverhältnisse* (1984) by Danièle Straub and Jean-Marie Huillet, in which professional actors and non-actors collectively performed dialogues on a ship, as well as Robert Flaherty's *Man of Aran* (1934), in which Irish islanders reenacted historical versions of themselves. But the clip the Urkers appreciated most was a scene from Luchino Visconti's *La Terra Trema* (1948), in which members of the Sicilian Aci Trezza fishing community played the roles of fishermen exploited by wholesalers.

Once the script had been translated from the so-called Foreign (Dutch) into Urkers, the words were reappropriated by a diverse group of passionate non-actors and amateurs.<sup>D</sup> Filming then took place during ten consecutive weeks on free Saturdays. It took a while before together we found a fixed procedure. "Camera running!" became the signal that the clapper could be operated, after which the action could begin five seconds later. Cardboard plates with excerpts from the script hung all over the set for those who hadn't had time to memorize the words. Once they'd got



35mm film still *Episode of the Sea*, 2014.

<sup>D</sup> Trijntje and Willem van Eerde translated the script.

the hang of the filmmaking routines, the Urkers became more articulate. At times, when things were in danger of becoming too solemn and a Straubian strictness began to develop, often we often heard participants call out: That's not how we say it on Urk."<sup>E</sup> Furthermore, our proposal that the fishermen recite their lines while standing on deck was firmly opposed with: "We fishermen don't stand, we lean."<sup>F</sup> Gradually, the Urkers took control.

When we had recorded and edited all of the scenes, we organized a screening for the participants. Those who had cocreated the script, had interpreted the dialogues as actors, and had coached each other as dedicated codirectors, gathered to give feedback on the final result. We had interspersed the staged dialogues with documentary sequences. Scrolling titles appeared at intervals, telling of our encounter with the fishing community while drawing parallels between fishing and filming. All of this was embedded in a soundscape of pounding engines, flapping ropes, screeching seagulls, and rushing water.

<sup>E</sup> Straubian refers to the filmmakers Straub and Huillet, who were known for sticking strictly to the words of the script, and requiring the actors even to perform punctuation.

<sup>F</sup> Commentary provided by ex-fisherman Jaap Romkes during the recording of the night scene.

<sup>G</sup> The sentence that Sjoerd Visser, teacher at the local fishing school, started, was finished by ex-fisherman Jaap Romkes. The preview took place in the Urk op de Planken drama club's rehearsal space, on November 10, 2013.

"Very artificial, but this way it's real."<sup>G</sup> It's with this commentary that the film passed the test. Despite its experimental character, the Urkers seemed to appreciate the result. Afterward, we received only one piece of advice: to have the film strips scanned. And so our encounter would enter the world as immaterial data. For three years in a row, the community screened the digitized film on their annual fleet open day. Fishing communities in the United Kingdom, France, and Canada also expressed interest in their colleagues' story. But the interest was not limited to the fishing community. *Episode of the Sea* went on to find its way to exhibitions, movie houses, international film festivals, community centers, and schools. US audiences appeared particularly interested in an attempt by artists and fishermen to make a film together despite their differences.

## HAULING IN AND MENDING

Having been made attentive to the agency of matter through rebellious sugar grains, a theory of "broken tools," and a "participatory camera," we had started a collaboration with a fishing community. We had been keen to learn from the fishermen how to handle instability and

things that retreat. However, drowning out the instability of the sea was another and much more disruptive instability. The collaboration had given us a sense of what it meant to have to work in the pounding, thundering production machine of the world market, which seemed to render all routines obsolete, time and time again. We were all absorbed in the work, the fishermen in their fishing, and we in our filming of them fishing. It was the experience of that strange trance dance that temporarily binds people and tools. We would also learn something else from the fishermen, namely the ancient ritual of mending which always follows the hauling of the fish: that *Trauerarbeit* of repairing one's net, the reciprocal relationship with one's tools, with which it seemed possible to delay, if only temporarily, their breaking.



35mm film still *Episode of the Sea*, 2014.  
Mending the nets.





# PLANTATIONOCENE



Tomato greenhouse in Noordoostpolder.

## A CONTRACT WITH NATURE

Our plan had been to follow *Episode of the Sea* with an “episode of the land,” working together with Dutch growers. We had already held several conversations with farmers in the Noordoostpolder and we filmed both a potato and a tomato harvest. But doubts quickly surfaced. It turned out that the tomato grower no longer grew his crops in the soil but above ground in gutters filled with mineral wool. The potato farmer barely touched the ground either. His tractor was satellite-controlled so that he could sow his seeds with geometric precision in order to maximize yield. It was explained to us unhesitatingly that the goal was to grow a high-yielding quality crop that met the needs of a demanding market. Did these growers still have a relationship with the soil beneath their feet? Were they not—like the fishermen—too much at the mercy of the discipline of the market with its logic of extraction? Were these the people from whom to learn how to let ourselves be guided by matter, rather than by *ideas* on matter?

In 2014, as we embarked on our land-based episode, a debate about the Anthropocene that had originated in the Earth sciences was reaching the wider public.<sup>A</sup> Geologists and atmospheric chemists were observing that the Earth had entered a new era in which its systems were increasingly disrupted by human action. Mankind, or at least its industrialized members, had set in motion something with the impactful force of a meteorite, something so large-scale that animals and plants would potentially die *en masse*. A different future loomed; not one of progress for more and more people, but a dystopian era of climate

A  
The term Anthropocene was coined in 2000 by chemist Paul Crutzen. He used the term in the context of his research into the ozone layer.

change, forest fires, melting ice caps, and rising sea levels, one in which planet Earth's ecosystems could no longer meet the increased needs of this one rapidly multiplying species. Slowly, people would begin to realize that we humans can no longer separate ourselves from the material processes of the Earth and its biosphere.

The name Anthropocene is somewhat misleading. "Anthropos," which means "human" in Greek, seems to suggest that all humans are equally responsible for the damage to ecosystems. Humanities scholars are therefore inventing new terms, such as Capitalocene, a word that emphasizes the pursuit of profit and the commodification of nature, or Plantationocene, referring to the plantation economy and its remotely financed circulation of humans, plants and animals, exploitation of workers, and monoculturing practices.<sup>1</sup> The starting point is also disputed. When had we left behind the Holocene, that long ecologically stable period that had enabled us to practice agriculture and develop complex societies? Was it the industrial revolution that had hurled Earth into the new era, or the European colonization of the Americas?<sup>2</sup>

It is Michel Serres who was one of the first to observe, in his manifesto *The Natural Contract* (1990), that humankind, with our far-reaching technological capacities, had become a geological force that was profoundly affecting the Earth's ecosystems.<sup>3</sup> He noted how the hard, hot architectures of megalopolises has the ecological impact of deserts, and how, when massed together, human beings change the composition of the air with their emissions of carbon monoxide and toxic chemicals.<sup>4</sup> Serres concludes that this invalidates the boundary that western knowledge systems have drawn between man and nature. And for him it raises the question of why nature does not appear in our ideas of community, and why it is not included in our social contracts.

"Those who share power today have forgotten nature," he writes.<sup>5</sup> We humans have withdrawn into our own human world, busy with our own language in our own networks. We have split the world into a human world and a world of objects that we think we can appropriate. As a result, we have lost the world as an entwined collectivity of culture and nature. Or as he puts it:

We've lost the world. We've transformed things into fetishes or commodities, the stakes of our stratagems; and our a-cosmic philosophies, for almost half a century now, have been folding forth only on language or politics, writing or logic. At the very moment we are acting physically for the first time on the global Earth, and when it in turn is doubtless reacting on global humanity, we are tragically neglecting it.<sup>6</sup>

Serres calls for a new collectivity in which people are part of the world again. This collectivity will require a different contract than the exclusive



Exhibition *World of Matter*, HMKV, Dortmund, 2014. Photograph: Hannes Woidich.

B  
*World of Matter* was an interdisciplinary research project, which lasted from 2011 to 2018. The collaboration was initiated by photojournalist Uwe Martin and artist Ursula Biemann. Besides us and Tavares, Mabe Bethonico, Emily E. Scott, Frauke Huber, Peter Mörtenböck, and Helge Mooshammer also took part in the project. The project aimed at developing an archive on resource extraction and the associated ecologies. It resulted in exhibitions, seminars, and a web platform: [worldofmatter.net](http://worldofmatter.net).

social contracts that we humans have previously formed with each other. Members of this new contract will be symbionts, a role he opposes to that of parasites. The symbiont recognizes the rights of the host, while the parasite condemns to death the one it loots, not realizing that it undermines itself in the process.

The parasite takes all and gives nothing; the host gives all and takes nothing. Rights of mastery and property come down to parasitism. Conversely, rights of symbiosis are defined by reciprocity: however much nature gives man, man must give that much back to nature, now a legal subject.<sup>7</sup>

We learned from the fishermen what it meant to have a reciprocal relationship with tools. Fetching was followed by mending; repairing and taking care of the fishing gear. But of a reciprocal relationship with the fish there was no question. What could a reciprocal bond with nature look like? How can we humans give back to nature? And how could nature find a place in human contracts?

## NONHUMAN PERSONS

It is the Brazilian activist Paulo Tavares who informed us, during a meeting of *World of Matter*, that Ecuador was the first country in the world to introduce a new social contract that includes nature.<sup>B</sup> Tavares was presenting his research on “nonhuman rights,” for which Serres’s *The Natural Contract* forms the starting point. He outlined how large-scale oil extraction in Ecuador’s rain forest had led to a series

of ecological disasters. The Indigenous people living in those areas had filed lawsuits to hold the oil companies to account. In the struggle for livable land, they presented nature as a witness.

After a decade of social uprisings and political tension, the country adopted a new constitution in 2008 incorporating Pachamama (Mother Earth) as an entity with its own rights.<sup>C</sup> This constitution, which accords fundamental rights to mountains, forests, and rivers, is based on the community idea of the Indigenous peoples of Ecuador. When they speak of “community” they mean both its human and its nonhuman inhabitants. Or as Luis Macas,<sup>D</sup> Indigenous politician of the Kichwa people, puts it:

We believe that everything is interrelated. Nothing is disconnected, nothing is separate. For us, everything, absolutely everything, has a life. This conception has allowed us to recognize that the community is the community of all to all.<sup>8</sup>

The essay, “Latin America at a Crossroads” (2010), by Arturo Escobar draws our attention to the fact that Ecuador’s constitutional change is part of a wider political movement in Latin America. Although neoliberal reforms had resulted in an improved export position, increased foreign investment, greater equality between men and women, more decentralization and more multiculturalism, these successes had a downside. For example, unemployment had risen, the gap between rich and poor had grown, and ecologies had been disrupted.<sup>9</sup> According to Escobar, this had given rise to a multitude of social opposition movements. Although different and sometimes even mutually opposing, these renewal movements shared the attempt to find an answer to the double crisis of the (neo)liberal system and its “Euro-modernity.”<sup>10</sup> Escobar gives a long list of dualistic divisions and hierarchical assumptions that this form of modernity views as self-evident. These include the bifurcation of nature and culture, the primacy of humans over nonhumans, and (continuing the colonial divide between “we” and “them”) the priority of some peoples over others. The individual is presumed to be autonomous and separate from community. Both “the economy” and “the market” are viewed as self-regulating entities, independent of social practice.

C  
The new constitution stipulates, among other things, that nature has the right to exist, to regenerate itself, and to be repaired in the event of damage. It also provides that Ecuador is a plurinational state, which entails the right of Indigenous peoples to live on their ancestral territories according to their own customs and laws.

D  
Luis Macas is one of the founders of CONAIE, the organization in which the Indigenous peoples of Ecuador have come together.

E  
Suriname lies on the so-called Guiana Shield, a Pre-Cambrian volcanic stone plateau on which rain forest grows. It is the central country of the three Guyanas that are considered to be part of both the Caribbean and the Amazon regions.

Objective knowledge, reason, and science are recognized as the only valid ways of knowing. The worlds constructed on these assumptions form a kind of universe in which capitalism, the state, the individual, private property, representative democracy, industrial agriculture, etc. are recurring manifestations.<sup>11</sup>

Escobar sets out how the Latin American renewal movements are trying, with varying strategies, to break open this universe to make room for other types of community building. Several countries are experimenting with political, economic, legal, cultural, and linguistic pluralism and with direct, more community-based forms of democracy. The state, territories, education, rights, and law are being redefined. Attempts are being made to create new hybrid socio-natural formations in which human and nonhuman actors are reconnected, bridging divisions previously taken for granted.<sup>12</sup>

In this reorientation process, Escobar sees a special role for Indigenous and Afro-communities. These groups would have built their ways of life and their knowledge systems not on divisions, but on “subjects in relation, including the relations between humans and non-humans.”<sup>13</sup> With their relational approach, these groups would challenge and disturb the universalizing dualist order of (neo)liberal modernity, and would even have the potential to “de-naturalize” them. The activism of such groups on the Latin American continent should therefore, according to Escobar, not only be read as ideological, but also as “ontological struggles.”

## LAND STRUGGLES IN SURINAME

As European Dutch people, we are somewhat familiar with the struggle for livable land in South America due to our nation’s historical ties with Suriname.<sup>14</sup> For three centuries the country was a Dutch plantation colony. Using African slave labor, Dutch colonists transformed biodiverse ecosystems into rectilinear plots planted with a single crop to produce products for the European market. With the abolition of slavery, the plantations gradually disappeared. But even after political independence, Suriname’s economy continues to depend on the extraction and export of raw materials. Today it is mainly gold and wood that are leaving the country.

Just as elsewhere in South America, a battle has been going on here for decades against the destruction of ecosystems for the purpose of resource extraction. It is the Maroons who seem to be taking the lead in this. The ancestors of these African descendants succeeded in liberating themselves from slavery hundreds of years ago, choosing a life of freedom in the rain forest. From here they waged a guerrilla war against the colonial armies and the planters. While eventually making peace with the colonists, they



New map of the the wonderful and gold rich land Guiana, situated under the Equatorial Line, between Brazil and Peru: recently visited by Sir Walter Raleigh, Knight of England, in the year 1594, 95 and 1596 (transl. from Dutch), Walter Raleigh, Jodocus Hondius, Amsterdam, circa 1599. Copperplate. Allard Pierson UvA. Loan KNAG.

# NIEUWE CAERTE

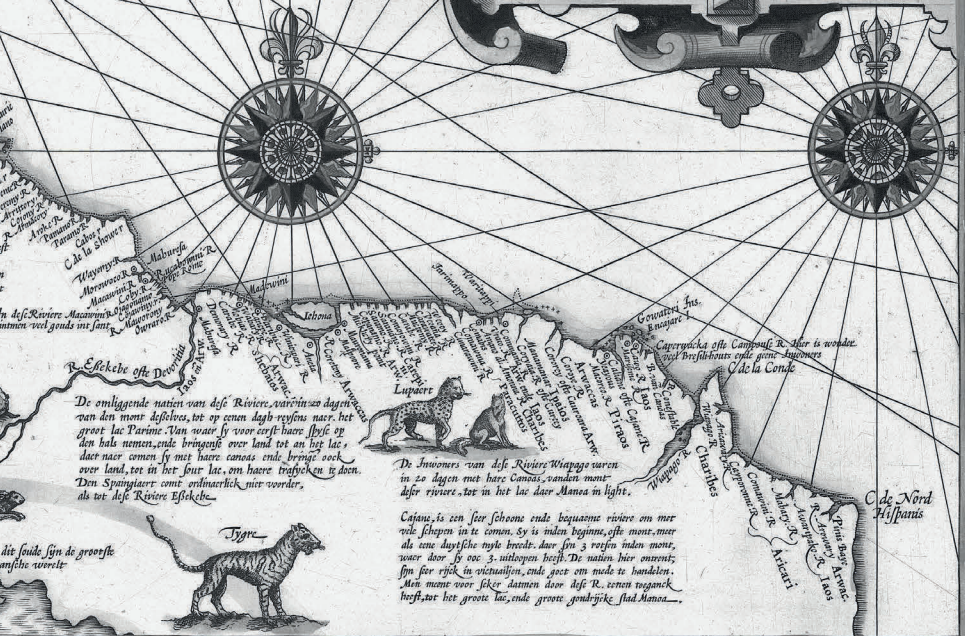
van het wonderbaer ende goudrijcke landt GUIANA, gelegen onder de Linie Aequinoctiaal, tusſchen Brasiliaen ende Peru, nieuwelick beſocht door Sir Water Raleigh Ridder van Engelandt, in het jaer 1594. 95 ende 1596.

De Cuſten van deſe caerte, ſijn ſeer vlietich geteekent op haer hooghten ende waere ſtrackingen, door een ſeker ſtierman die dit ſelve beſicht ende beſocht heeft, inde jaren voornamt.

De binnen Provincien, ſijn door groote mayte getrocken, uit beyde de boeckens, die door ende by laſte van Raleigh voor ſint int licht gegeven ſijn.

de la Tabaco al  
Tabago  
Spaniſches  
in de la Gallera

Ls. Dornardo



De omringende natien van deſe Riviere, varo'in so daegen van den mont desloets, tot op enen dagh reysen naar het eynde lae Parione. Van waar ſy voor eerst haere hofte op den hals nemen, ende bringhen over land tot an het lae, daer naer comen ſy met haere canoes ende bringe soek over land, tot in het four lae, om haere vrachten te doen. Den Spanglaer comt ordinarlick hier voerter, als tot deſe Riviere Eſlecke.



De Inwoners van deſe Riviere Wiapago waren in 20 daegen met haere Canoes, vanden mont deſer riviere, tot in het lae daer Manoa in light.

Cotiau, is een ſter ſchoone ende bequaeme riviere om mer vele ſchepen in te comen. Sy is inden beginne, ofte mont, mer als ene duyſche myle breedt. daer ſyn 3 weſen inden mont, waer door ſy oec 3 uithogen heeft. De waten hier mrent; ſyn ſeer rijk in vintuſſen, ende geve ons mede te handelen. Men mone over ſiker datmen door deſe R. voren teganch heeft, tot het groote lae, ende groote goudrijcke ſtad Manoa.



Natie de eylanden

## A E Q U I N O C T I A L I S

Van man uyt de Provincie Iapanona ſonder hooft

Gedaente van ene Amazoniſche vrouwe



Alle deſe gedaerten die wy hier geteete hebben, vintmen in Guiana, met veel meer andere geve om eten, als oock vele hoerdenen, Parityen, Phuyanten, Conen, Quackelen, Keygers ende vele andere ſorten van vogel.



T I S N A D A



R de las Amazonas

## B R A S I L I Æ P A R S



continued to oppose the western production system. It was one of these militant Maroon peoples that, at the beginning of this century, filed a lawsuit against the State of Suriname at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. The Saamaka appealed to their collective ancestral land rights in an attempt to protect their habitat from further exploitation.

From the writings of anthropologist Richard Price, we learn that the ancestors of the Surinamese Maroons hailed from different parts of West and Central Africa.<sup>14</sup> Their oral tradition preserves, we are told, stories of how their ancestors got to know the rain forest, an environment hitherto unknown to them, with the help of the Indigenous people. After they had freed themselves from slavery, their fugitive condition required them to remain hidden in the forest, well away from hostile pursuers. This apparently resulted in a shifting cultivation practice designed to allow land to be abandoned quickly, if necessary after just one harvest. In this way, they learned to survive in existing ecosystems with minimal intervention.

In their new habitat, they encountered spirits residing in trees, large stones, and streams of water. By trial and error, they learned to form alliances with them. Together with the gods they had brought from Africa, these new deities helped them to build a life in the rain forest. Their descendants would still maintain these alliances and would continue to have a strong bond with their natural environment. Like the Indigenous peoples of Ecuador, Surinamese Maroons appeared to attribute agency to the rain forest and to maintain a reciprocal relationship with it. Could we learn from them how to inhabit land without fully owning or exploiting it? But would these people, whose distant ancestors had fought ours, be willing to make an episode of the land with us?



# PLANTATION SOCIETY

## ON THE EDGE OF THE PLANTATION

Where do you begin as a Dutch artist wanting to initiate a collaboration with Surinamese Maroons? Like many Dutch people, we knew only in rough outline the history that our country shares with Suriname. How could we obtain a picture of the plantation regime that the Maroons' ancestors opposed? Before traveling into the Surinamese interior, we first immersed ourselves in two historical eyewitness accounts recorded *in situ*.

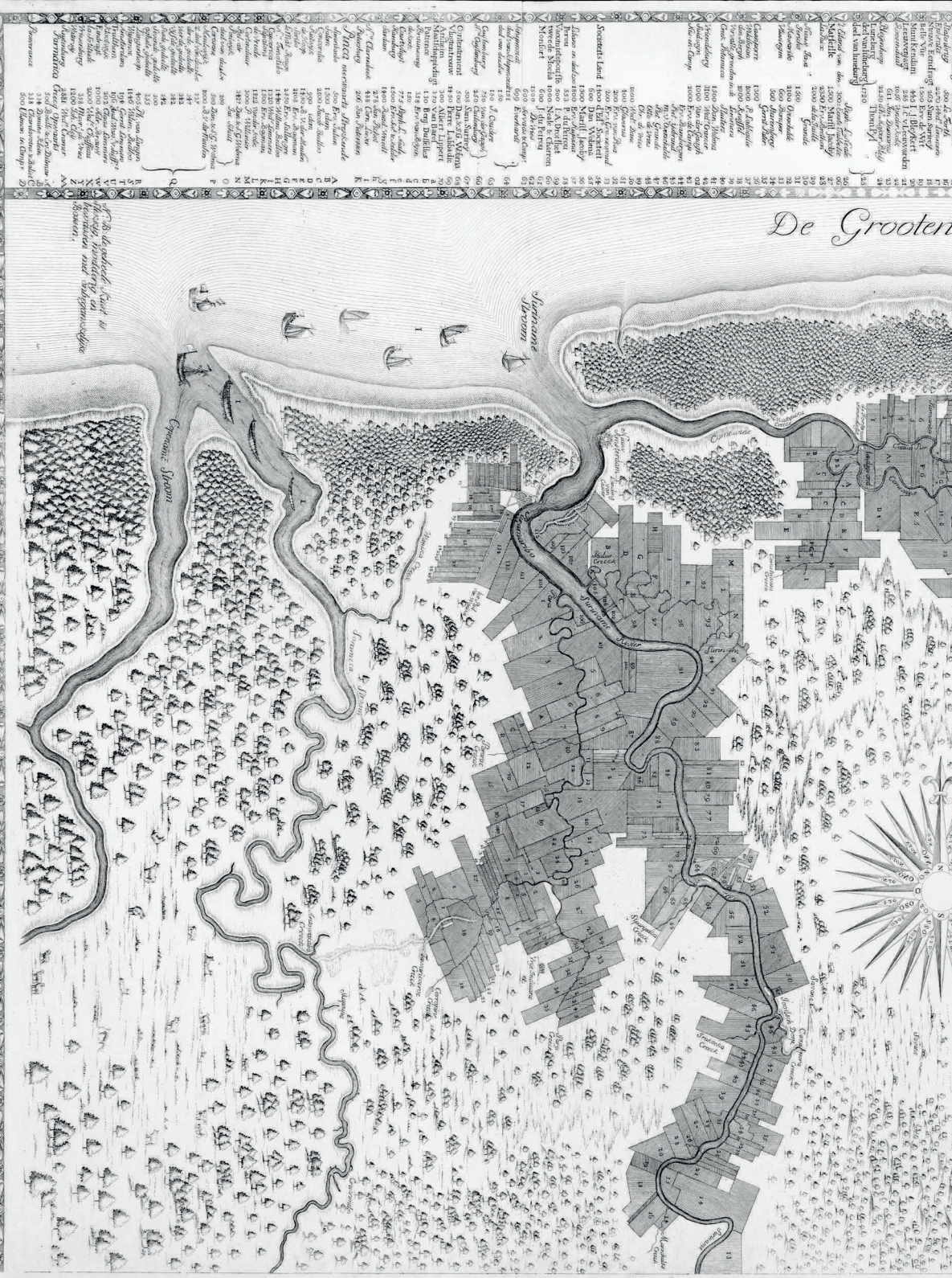
It is Swedish botanist Daniel Rolander who provided us with a first impression of the plantation. This student of Carl Linnaeus traveled to Suriname in 1755 to perform zoological and botanical fieldwork for his taxonomy.<sup>1.A</sup> However, his interests expanded beyond the mere classifying and naming of animals and plants. In his diary, never translated or published until 2008, he documented in minute detail how the different population groups used the surrounding flora and fauna for their daily rituals and customs, a form of study that would later go under the name of ethnobotany. On his arrival in Paramaribo he noticed that something strange was going on within his own group, "the European whites."

The customs, attitudes, and gestures of the whites, even for those who have grown up in Europe, appear to be so much different from those in Europe, that they cannot be recognized any more. It is difficult to say whether the cause of these remarkable changes was the hot climate of this land—hardly a sound conjecture—or some other actor. They have given free rein to stupid levity, arrogance, and extravagance, and the vice of false accusations, dispute, and contempt of others.<sup>2</sup>

A  
Daniel Rolander's diary, written in Latin from 1755 to 1756, was only translated and published in English in 2008. The late publication is said to have been caused by a dispute with Carl Linnaeus. On his return to Europe, Rolander was unwilling to give his teacher access to his Surinamese specimens, probably because he feared Linnaeus would publish his research and take the credit to himself.

Rolander seems surprised that there are so many "black people" in the streets and houses. "The whites have imposed the yoke of slavery upon all of them, so that they do all the work in the houses, at the plantations, and all the whites' doings," he concludes. He constantly hears the lashing of whips from the houses. With a focus more on his own discomfort than that of those actually having to undergo the whip, he notes: "The slightest violation condemns terribly miserable black servants to a type of punishment that is horrendous to hear and wretched to view."<sup>3</sup> Yet he thinks "the whites" need to be on their guard, because "the blacks" form the vast majority of the population and "their harsh treatment at the hands of the whites will have filled their hearts with courage."<sup>4</sup>

# De Grooten



General Map of the Province of Suriname of Military Campaigns, including the measured Sizes of Plantations (transl. from Dutch), Alexander de Lavaux, Amsterdam, 1737. With a register of all plantations. Collection Allard Pierson UvA. Loan KNAG.



Rolander stays on the coffee plantation of fellow countryman Carl Gustaf Dahlberg, but also visits neighboring plantations where sugar, cocoa, and timber are exploited. In passing we gain an impression of the infrastructure of the plantations, how they are situated in the landscape and their flow of goods. He witnesses enslaved men cut down large tracts of dense forest to construct new planting beds.<sup>5</sup> With only axes and saws and at the risk of their own lives, they attack logs that are three cubits thick and as hard as iron.<sup>6</sup> Others are up to their groins in the heavy clay digging out water channels. Connected to the river, these water channels irrigate the planting beds in the dry season and quickly drain excess water in the rainy season.<sup>6</sup> He observes that sugar plantations are on low, wet clayey soil, and feature water-driven mills for crushing the cane. Where fast-flowing water is absent, horses turn the grindstone. “Every day you can see sixteen of them powering wheels by walking in a circle,” we read in his diary.<sup>7</sup>

From Rolander’s notes we deduce that most of the plantations are located in the coastal plain on rivers or creeks. Using the tidal currents, the ox heads (barrels) of raw sugar, the bales of coffee and cocoa beans, and the felled wood can be brought to the city.<sup>8</sup> Here, after a period of storage, the goods are loaded onto cargo ships bound for the Dutch Republic.<sup>9</sup> On the return voyage, the ships bring in clothing and provisions that the European settlers were accustomed to in their homelands. In the port of Paramaribo, Rolander sees a Dutch ship from Guinea with: “a cargo of blacks—human merchandise—to be auctioned off to white people as slaves according to the usual practice.”<sup>10</sup> He seems to have difficulty with this, but does not elaborate on it.

Nor does he spend many words on the homogeneous planting beds for commercial cultivation. His main focus of attention is the biodiverse edges of the plantations and the vegetable gardens, where the enslaved Africans grow their food. Rolander observes how they cultivate not just useful plants, but also ornamentals.<sup>11</sup> Apparently, they are able to nurture their contact with the ecosystem despite their daily forced toil on the unshaded planting beds. In the undergrowth and near the drainage channels, they find the medicinal plants they need for tending their illnesses and wounds. It is the Indigenous people who have passed on to them the medicinal properties of plants. According to Rolander, they are the experts in this field.<sup>12</sup>

The plantation monocultures constantly contend with invasions from the other species, we learn from his notes.

**B**  
A cubit is an ancient measurement based on the distance from the elbow to the fingertips. Three cubit is about 54 inches, or 138 cm.



Termites nest, Pikin Slee, 2017.

Sugar plantations can be besieged by feral cattle that eat and trample the sugar, supposedly the descendants of imported animals that wandered off into the forests.<sup>13</sup> Brown capuchin monkeys appear to have an interest in the sweet stems as well. Rolander notes how each monkey is able to carry away five canes at once: “one under its tail, one under each front leg, one under the chin, and one in its mouth.”<sup>14</sup> It is to keep the monkeys away that the sugar plantations have to be guarded at night. Coffee beans are apparently popular with sparrows, called *kiskedi*, but also with *pingos* (forest pigs).<sup>15</sup> The biggest threat to a coffee plantation, however, is wood lice. Rolander observes how this “social and peace-loving insect” builds spherical nests of soil and tree bark. Living in large communities, they construct underground corridors and delight in gnawing at the roots of coffee and cocoa plants along the way, causing the leaves to yellow and the plants to bear almost no fruit.<sup>16</sup> Another dreaded wood louse targets settlers’ homes and properties. Not without a degree of *Schadenfreude* he writes: “After the white residents started constructing buildings in these lands, this insect has migrated from the woods to these people with whom it wants to cohabit.”<sup>17</sup> Effortlessly, the animals ate their way through walls, floors, and pantries, grinding between their jaws books, expensive clothing, correspondence, and valuables.

Invasions of wood lice or *pingos* are not, however, the only threat planters face. An even greater menace Rolander sees in the resistance of the enslaved workers against the harsh regime they are subject to on a daily basis. If a “servant” stirs fresh bitter cassava root, yellow oleander, wormwood, or mimosa into the “master’s” food, the latter’s days are numbered.<sup>18</sup> Collective revolts take place at regular intervals on the plantations. Sometimes



even entire groups succeed in freeing themselves. These “runaways” have learned from the Indigenous people which stems, berries, and flowers contain lots of moisture.<sup>19</sup> Using these hidden water sources, they are able to cover long distances, while their pursuers have to turn back for lack of water. During his trips across the river, Rolander passes several overgrown plantations that, he is told, have been abandoned “because of repeated pillaging by hostile blacks.”<sup>20</sup> He sees skulls impaled on sticks along the banks, the heads of enslaved people who have had to suffer this fate “because of crimes.” But at times they are the heads of colonists, because, as Rolander notes: “the disloyal, or runaway, black slaves give tit for tat in the case of white settlers they come upon wandering in the forests and also attack them by night in their homes.”<sup>21</sup> Although denouncing them as “disloyal,” Rolander seems to have had some degree of sympathy for their counteractions.

The botanist moves mainly on and around the plantations. He does not enter the deep rain forest. Still, from time to time, he picks up something of what was going on there. For example, at the end of his stay, he learns how a battalion of soldiers sent into the forest to “destroy the black rebels” had returned defeated and humiliated.<sup>22</sup> The soldiers had been led astray by a Black guide who walked them in circles through the forest. When the soldiers finally found the enemy’s settlement, they were faced with superior numbers. The spokesman whose job it was to negotiate the peaceful withdrawal was asked by the Black leader (“their Governor”) to undress to show his body to the leader’s wife. The woman had heard of the whites, “the cruelest of all creatures,” but born and raised in the forests, she had never seen one alive. After that, the negotiator was sent back with conditions that were unacceptable to the soldiers. They were then forced to flee, with many of them killed or injured in the process. Rolander summarizes the event as a “deadly precedent.” At least, that is, for the colonists, because the triumph of the “rebels” would give those who were enslaved greater confidence. The result was, he notes: “that the respect, fear, and obedience which they owed to their masters had begun to diminish.”<sup>23</sup> From his formulation we infer that he already seems to take the balance of power for granted more than when he arrived in the colony seven months earlier.

## TRACKS IN THE FOREST

How could those who escaped from the plantations keep themselves alive in an apparently impenetrable rain forest? To gain more insight into this, we consulted another eyewitness who had followed the material trail of the Maroons in the forests. John Gabriel Stedman was an officer of the Scottish Brigade of the Dutch colonial army who, a few decades later, also visited Suriname and likewise kept a diary of his experiences. Unlike Rolander’s, his account would not disappear untranslated into the archives for two and a half centuries, but was published in England in the last year of his life. *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796) became an influential book and was published in several countries. This was one of

the first eyewitness accounts to confront Europeans with the atrocities of overseas colonization and slavery. Stedman reports frequently and in detail about the horrific corporal punishment meted out to the Africans for even the smallest crimes.<sup>24</sup> He asks himself and the reader the ominous question:

Why in the name of humanity should they undergo the most cruel racks and tortures, entirely depending upon the despotic caprice of their proprietors and overseers, which it is well known, is too generally the case throughout the West Indies?<sup>25</sup>

The atrocities Stedman describes were portrayed by William Blake with iconic accompanying prints. But, first and foremost, his *Narrative* gives a firsthand account of his experiences during the military campaigns against the Maroons.

In the first chapters, Stedman sketches how, at the time his garrison was dispatched in 1773, a guerrilla war had been waging in Suriname for a century between the “Rebels” (whom we will call Maroons) and the European settlers.<sup>26</sup> Peace had since been concluded with the two largest groups, the Saamaka and Okanisi.<sup>C</sup> Although this had brought a degree of peace to the colonists, Stedman does not appear to be in favor of it. “The wrong example of making peace” had, he said, “stimulated the other slaves to rebel in the same way in the hope of achieving the same success.”<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, a new group of Maroons was active: the “Cottica Rebels.” It was to combat them that Stedman and his garrison were sent to Suriname. But when the fleet anchored in Paramaribo, they encountered the colonists in the flush of victory.<sup>28</sup> The Maroons’ fort of Boucou had been taken shortly before, although the dreaded leader Barron and his remaining men had escaped in the woods.<sup>29, D</sup>

C  
Every year Maroons still commemorate the fact that the Okanisi were the first Maroon community to conclude a lasting peace with the colonists on October 10, 1760.

D  
Some historians believe that Stedman has his facts wrong here, and that it was not Barron but another leader, Boni, who led the attacks from Boucou and was on the run.

During the more than four years that Stedman spent in Suriname he took part in seven campaigns against the Maroons.<sup>30</sup> During the months spent pursuing them through dense forests, swamps, rivers, and savannas, there would be only one battle. In most cases the Maroons managed to escape with clever tactics. Rarely did Stedman get to see the bodies of his opponents. To his surprise they were “plump and fat.”<sup>31</sup> The military’s main achievement seems to have been the destruction of abandoned houses and of “fields of provisions”: rain forest gardens full of rice, cassava, yams, bananas, etc.<sup>32</sup> Stedman performed this operation unwillingly, as he and his men were constantly hungry from running

out of provisions. In a settlement newly abandoned by the Maroons, deep in the forest, they discovered fresh butter made from palm worms, peanut butter, wine from fermented palm juice, honey, wax candles, and salt extracted from the ashes of a burnt palm. They also found clay pots, calabash bowls, and various brooms and hammocks made of lianas, palm leaves, and grasses.<sup>33</sup> In a swamp, the troops stumbled upon tea kettles and iron pots, which, as Stedman puts it, “the rebels had formerly pillaged from the estates and had now thrown into the water, to conceal them from us with a view of returning and fishing them up.”<sup>34</sup>

In addition to the Dutch state troops, of whom Stedman was a part, other groups of soldiers appear to have been active in Suriname. Some troops were paid directly by the planters and the Society of Suriname.<sup>E</sup> Sarcastically, he describes these two battalions as a hodgepodge of Europeans: “dastardly scarecrows that will absolutely not bear to be mentioned as fighting men.”<sup>35</sup> He is much more positive about the small “Black Rangers” corps, a regiment consisting of former plantation workers who had been promised their freedom in return for fighting the Maroons.<sup>36, F</sup> During one campaign, Stedman witnessed an oral confrontation at night between these Rangers and the Maroons. He heard the Maroons curse the Rangers as “poltroons, and betrayers of their [African] countrymen.” In turn, the Rangers poured scorn on their opponents as a “parcel of pitiful skulking rascals,” who had “deserted the masters being too lazy to do their work.”<sup>37</sup> It would appear that using the Rangers was also a strategy to sow discord among the Black population.

The nighttime shouting was followed by hours of screaming, singing, and gunfire. The next day, Stedman and his



Film still *Dee Sitonu A Weti*, 2018. Submerged pots, pans and tools.

**E**  
The Society of Suriname was a private company founded in 1683 with the aim of exploiting the colony of Suriname. Nowadays, the main University of Amsterdam library building occupies the site where the Society had its offices, at Singel 425.

**F**  
This corps is also known as Redi Musu (red hats).

**G**  
The version we refer to in this chapter is *Stedman's Surinam, Life in an Eighteenth-Century Slave Society* (1992), edited by Richard and Sally Price. This is an abridged reissue of Stedman's original manuscript with modern spelling.

**H**  
According to Stedman, the army commander had obtained his position through corruption and indulged in luxury goods such as wine, ham, and sausage while his troops were dependent on meager and worm-eaten rations.

fellow soldiers discovered that the noise had been no more than a diversionary maneuver. Above all, it was intended to prevent the troops from hearing the inhabitants of the settlement of Cofaay preparing baskets of food, before disappearing into the forest.<sup>38</sup> Stedman seems deeply impressed by the cunning ruse with which the Maroons had once again managed to mislead the colonial troops and notes:

This most certainly was such a piece of generalship in a savage people, whom we affect to despise, as would have done honor to a European prince.<sup>39</sup>

Although the colonial troops continued to pursue their scorched earth tactics, he notes with satisfaction after his final (and only) confrontation at the Maroon settlement Gado Saby that in his eyes his men had done a good job: “everything bids fair to see ... the colony soon reestablished to its former grandeur and tranquility.”<sup>40</sup>

#### ARTLESS NARRATIVE

“Artless narrative”: with this qualification the *Narrative* is recommended to the reader on the front cover of the first edition. Devoid of any artistic frivolity, his report would appear more truthful, the publisher may have thought. But the diary proves to have been thoroughly rewritten prior to publication.<sup>G</sup> Anthropologists Sally and Richard Price compared Stedman’s original diary entries with the manuscript he wrote based on his notes, and this again with the first book edition. They discovered significant differences.<sup>41</sup>

Although the manuscript follows the chronology of the diaries, Stedman has in particular redefined his own role. For example, the routine sexual contacts between European men and enslaved women, which his diary frequently reports, are reduced to a minimum. He also presents his own relationship with the “beautiful Mulatto maid,” Joanna, in a more romantic light. The editor hired by the publisher to prepare the story for publication sanitizes the manuscript even further, excising passages both about the planters’ excesses as well as comments about their jealous spouses mistreating enslaved women. He alters critical reports about Stedman’s imperious army commander.<sup>H</sup> A passage in which Stedman states that Africans are “made of no inferior clay” but are “our equals” is replaced by the editor with a wording that describes them as “perfectly savage.”<sup>42</sup> His characterization of the Maroons as “nature-men” not plagued by “too much aspiring,” was drastically rewritten. Upon correction, they are “wild savages” who exhibit no “signs of civilization, order, or government,” but are characterized by “ungovernable passion, debauchery, and indolence.” Passages critical of the slavery systems were also excised. Thus, Stedman’s to-the-point statement that “in twenty years two million people are murdered to provide us with coffee and sugar,” disappears.<sup>43</sup> The question quoted above that inquires as to why the atrocities of slavery were so widespread, we find condensed and

toned down in the first edition of 1796. The reference to the West Indies has been omitted, making the torments and torture seem more like incidental excesses than widespread colonial practice.<sup>44</sup>

As a result of countless adjustments of this kind, “the whites” appear less degenerate and “the blacks” less human. The revised *Narrative* seems to suggest that the living and working conditions indeed ought to be improved, but that the system of slavery can be continued. Nevertheless, the *Narrative* catalyzed discussions among its European readers regarding the need for abolition.<sup>45</sup>

## ANOTHER RECIPROCITY

Because the Maroons were always outsmarting Stedman and his fellow soldiers, we eventually only get a glimpse of their life in the woods from his account. Yet the descriptions of abandoned food, fields of provisions, and well-fed bodies suggest that they had already become quite familiar with the rain forest. When we presented this speculation to the Maroons during our fieldwork in the Surinamese interior, they confirmed that their ancestors had indeed already managed to bond with their new habitat. They said it was the *Ingi* (Indigenous people) who had taught them how to plant cassava, and that they were already growing highland rice and okra, the seeds of which they had brought from Africa. With the help of their *obias* (ritually prepared herbs), the ancestors had been able to speed up the ripening process of crops such as bananas, allowing them to be harvested quickly when the enemy approached and the Maroons had to relocate.<sup>1</sup>

When we told the Maroons what we had read about the attacks by colonial troops on their ancestors' hidden forest settlements, they came up with their own stories. In this way, we learned how their ancestors had special *obias* which gave them extra strength to escape and to fight. They reported how some herbs reduced anxiety and others made the body invulnerable to bullets and machetes. There was even an herb, they said, that—if properly prepared—made its user invisible to the enemy. Once they got talking, they told us which techniques their ancestors used to ambush and mislead the colonial troops. But when we alluded to the tactic of hiding under the water utensils stolen from the plantation, we were immediately corrected: “That wasn't stealing, we came to get what had been whipped from us!”

<sup>1</sup> We learned this during a group discussion at the Saamaka Museum in Pikin Slee, November 17, 2015.

This seemed like a form of reciprocity we hadn't yet thought of: not a mutual giving, but a process of dispossession and retrieval. Our slip of the tongue had betrayed a hidden assumption. Because: if we labeled as "stealing" the retrieving by those whose labor and lives had been extracted from them, were we not then privileging a European operation of business as setting the norm? Had the strategy of concealment and rewriting to modify the image of the colonial enterprise (as applied in the *Narrative*) also blurred our own perception?

# TILTING PERSPECTIVE

## ANOTHER COURTROOM

How can European artists wanting to make a film with Maroons find a way to confront their own preconceptions? Maybe we can start with that one prosecutor who didn't need a courtroom. We are referring to Martinican writer Aimé Césaire who, in his "Discourse on Colonialism" (1955), calls upon Europe (or at least its privileged part) to justify itself.<sup>1</sup> This so-called "civilization" takes refuge in hypocrisy, misusing its civilizational principles in the service of trickery and deceit, in order "to legitimize the hateful solutions provided for them."<sup>2</sup> He presents his literary indictment, hailing the "the European masses" (the so-called "proletariat") to join in solidarity with "tens and tens of millions of men who, from the depths of slavery, set themselves up as judges." It is the latter complainants who know that "their temporary 'masters' are lying." For how can these "masters" claim that colonization is a form of civilization? Europe is called upon to answer to a tribunal of world scale. For Césaire, the European continent will never be able to justify itself "before the bar of 'reason' or before the bar of 'conscience.'"<sup>3</sup>

As evidence in his case he cites several nineteenth and twentieth-century European administrators and high-ranking military personnel. He quotes, for instance, a colonial administrator from Indochina who believed it "puerile" to oppose the European colonial undertaking in the name of "an alleged right to possess the land one occupies, and some sort of right to remain in fierce isolation, which would leave unutilized resources to lie forever idle in the hands of incompetents."<sup>4</sup> He also recites the words of "one of the conquerors of Algeria" who reports cynically: "I had some heads cut off, not of artichokes but of men." He then gives the floor to a marshal who sums up: "We lay waste, we burn, we plunder, we destroy the houses and the trees." Another senior soldier describes how his troops collected "a whole barrellful of severed ears." The brutality of this expropriation that destroyed cultures is proof, for Césaire, that "colonization dehumanizes even the most civilized man."<sup>5</sup>

He subsequently describes how human contacts are transformed into relationships of domination and submission in the name of "the smooth operation of business." Murderous, marauding colonizers now become classroom monitors, prison guards, slave drivers, and the Indigenous peoples "instruments of production." He concludes: "My turn to state an equation: colonization = 'thing-ification.'"<sup>6</sup>

The thing-ification that Césaire establishes seems to refer to the reduction in law of enslaved peoples to 'things' that can be used as tools. Or as Surinamese lawyer Quintus Bosz describes their legal status:

They were 'objects', ... immovable by destination, which followed the plantation in transfer or inheritance and were subject to the



mortgage on the property. To them applied only the generally applicable business law, meaning that they could be rented out etc. and were subject to seizure.<sup>7</sup>

As a writer-prosecutor who begins and ends his story with “the proletariat,” Césaire will likely have been familiar with the Marxist theory of reification, a specific form of alienation as developed by George Lukács. According to this theory, capitalism ends up reducing all social relationships to quantifiable, tradable “things.” The so-called “commodity form,” as Lukács explains, “stamps its imprint upon the whole consciousness of man.”<sup>8</sup> As a result, people no longer understand their qualities and abilities as organically linked to their personality, but as “things” that they “possess” which can be bought and sold. By alluding to this Marxist criticism of reification, Césaire appears to attribute a common identity to the ostensibly differing systems of capitalism and colonialism.

However, reified man is not, it seems, reduced to a mere thing. He is deployed “instrumentally” for the smooth operation of business, becoming a *tool* in the service of his user. It was Graham Harman who argued that “tools” have their own unfathomable dimension that can neither be instrumentalized nor known.<sup>9</sup> Would this dimension of inscrutability also hold true for a human being made into a thing of use?

## A DIFFERENT LEGITIMACY

Aimé Césaire’s fellow Martinican, writer Édouard Glissant, examined in even greater detail the experiences of those who are expropriated and objectified. In the narrative poem “Open Boat” included in his collection *Poetics of Relation* (1997), Glissant seeks to articulate what the Africans who underwent deportation to the Americas experienced.<sup>10</sup> He describes how men and women are torn from their familiar communities and from their “ochre earth and savannas” to be trapped in “the belly of the slave ship,” transformed into anonymous cargo during the long sea voyage. They sense their languages ebbing away, the words of their gods disappearing, and the images of the most everyday objects, the most familiar animals, vanish. They enter the unknown land in a state of panic, haunted by the memories of the old land, until finally allying with the new land imposed on them.

Glissant parallels the experience of being torn away, of forgetting where one comes from and of not knowing where one is going to falling into an “infinite abyss,” an experience that changes those who plummet through it.

Peoples who have been to the abyss do not brag of being chosen. They do not believe they are giving birth to any modern force. They live Relation and clear the way for it, to the extent that the oblivion of the abyss comes to them and that, consequently, their memory intensifies.<sup>11</sup>

It is this shared experience of loss that unifies those who endured it and their descendants into a people. It provides them with a perspective of the unknown. As a result, they no longer fear what they did not know, but greet it unreservedly. The expression of this new community is poetry. “Our boats are open, and we sail them for everyone,” Glissant invitingly concludes his poem.

In the essay “For Opacity” he elaborates on what it requires to be open to what one does not know. He argues for “the right to opacity,” a right which is far from any legal anchoring of possession and conquest, but rather supplements the “right to difference.”<sup>12</sup> The latter right might well have contributed to the recognition of minorities, but because western thought can only recognize what it can “understand,” the other still remains subject to reduction. Playing with the French, Glissant describes understanding (in French *comprendre*) as *taking or grasping* (in French *prendre*): “a movement of hands that grab their surroundings and relate them back to themselves.”<sup>13</sup> With the same greedy movement, western thought grasps that which is different and relates it to its own norm, reducing difference to what can be made transparent in relation to this norm.<sup>14</sup> Placing himself in the position of the westerner who claims to be tolerant but who still reduces the other to a recognizable stereotype, Glissant unfolds the hidden violence of such an “understanding” way of thinking:

I understand your difference, or in other words, without creating a hierarchy, I relate it to my norm. I admit you to existence, within my system. I create you afresh.<sup>15</sup>

The right to opacity is for him the right to an irreducible difference. It offers the freedom to be different, the right not to be made transparent, and to not be reduced to a derivative.

Could Glissant’s opacity have a relationship with the inscrutability of things that Harman speaks about, that unfathomable dimension that makes us unable to trust the stability of the constellation in which we perceive and use things? Because by addressing the recurring western desire to capture the other in an essence—a deepest unchanging nature—Glissant seems to suggest that people too have dimensions that do not reveal themselves and that resist being known. But if we cannot fathom each other, what do human relationships look like? Or as Glissant himself puts the question provocatively: “Now it’s back to barbarism! How can you communicate with what you don’t understand?”<sup>16</sup> Again he places himself in the westerner’s shoes to propose a different approach to the other from this perspective:

To feel in solidarity with him [the other] or to build with him or to like what he does, I do not need to grasp him. It is not necessary to try

to become the other (to become other) nor to “make” him in my image.<sup>17</sup>

In various essays in *Poetics of Relation* (1997), Glissant explains how the right to opacity can lead to other types of relationships that eschew a one-sided transformation into stereotypes or likenesses, and toward a different understanding of identity. For example, in “Distancing, Determining,” he outlines how identity does not necessarily require an “entitlement to the possession of land,” but is rather something shaped by a relation with others.<sup>18</sup> In the essay “Relinked, (Relayed), Related” he adds that the “elements” that enter into a relation are changed by this, in a transformative process that does not lend itself to “analysis.” The relation cannot be “proven” but “emerges” with the help of the senses and the imagination.<sup>19</sup>

He concludes that when people regard each other as not fully knowable and when they respect each other’s opacity, it will no longer be possible to reduce anyone to a truth he or she would not have generated on their own. Widespread consent to opacity therefore does not impede interconnectedness, but rather strengthens it. It is for him the most straightforward equivalent of “non-barbarism.” Proposing opacity as a new basis for legitimacy, he closes with: “We clamor for the right to opacity for everyone.”<sup>20</sup>

## SACRED PLACES

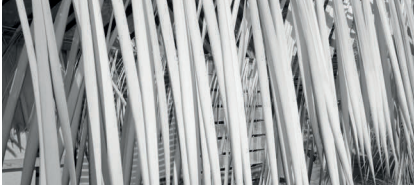
The Maroons too invoked their right to opacity. For example, it occurred to us that those we spoke with sometimes



Ritual specialist Onie (Moi) Doekoe and Esino Amania (*basia* Sito) following the conversation in Pikin Slee, November 16, 2015.



Film stills *Dee Sitonu A Weti*, 2018.  
House of worship (staged for film recordings).



Film still *Dee Sitonu A Weti*, 2018.  
Shrine in Lebidoti.

suddenly switched to a language of metaphors and parables. At other instances, speakers would counter almost all our questions with a decisive: “We know nothing about this.” This usually meant that they did know, but did not want to tell us. And when Maroons guided us through their villages, we were led on detours to avoid the sacred places.

Their commitment to guarding that which should remain hidden was again demonstrated during a conversation about a deity in Pikin Slee. The deity had prevented the Maroon ancestors from losing each other in the rainforest in the first days after they had liberated themselves. The god, we were told, was still able to make contact with “wanderers” and guide them. He was able to support not only those who lost their way in the woods, but also those with “psychological complaints.” Two men who presented themselves as “herbalists who work with him” were willing to speak to us about the deity. One of them reported: “Our ancestors brought him from Africa in a bag. We too each have a bag of him. Some of this is tangible. I could show some of it, but not in front of the camera.” The interpreter tried to clarify: “It’s kind of a parable. And now you must listen carefully. He says: he has come with his bag. Everyone comes with their bag. There is a form of it that you can see. But it’s not suitable for the camera.” The ritual specialist continued: “He’s now in a house, where his amulets are too. His source of power is in the house, but the spiritual knowledge is in every member of the *lo* (clan) as well.” When we then ignorantly asked whether there were now two gods, one with those who stayed in Africa and one with them in Suriname (one that was simultaneously

in the house and in all the members of the lo), the men were silent for a moment. Then one of them said: “You can see it as though we are separated from each other by a high mountain. One does not know what the other one is doing behind the mountain. So we don’t know how things are in Africa. We at least cherish that god of ours.”<sup>A</sup>

Gradually it became clear to us that although the men had agreed to speak about their deity, they seemed troubled by their decision. Their sentences became shorter and more enigmatic until at a given point we were told by the interpreter: “It’s not a name that you may mention again and again.” Since his name had been said out loud, the deity had been invoked. “He’s already around, though you don’t see him,” the interpreter added. This was the sign that the conversation had to be ended. We westerners were asking again for more transparency, but the Maroons appealed to the deity for us to stop. His name was not mentioned anymore. Nor would we get to see his house.

## OTHER PROTAGONISTS

“Every history of Suriname has to start with the Indigenous peoples,” we frequently heard in Suriname. With these words, the inhabitants were keen to make clear to us that their country’s history did not begin with our white ancestors. When Europeans “discovered” the Wild Coast of the Guyanas, the area had been inhabited by Indigenous peoples for thousands of years. Anton de Kom too starts his account in *Wij, slaven van Suriname* (We, slaves of Suriname, 1934) with these same peoples. But first he sketches the biotope in which his narrative will be set, the land that is called “Mama Sranang” (Mother Suriname) in the vernacular Sranantongo.

Untouched and unexplored, the dark forests of mother Sranang have been waiting for thousands of years. Strange animals live here, their names almost unknown in the West: tree anteaters, porcupines, vireos, tanagras, the tiegrieman and the blue badger, pepper-eaters sitting on the high palm tops and swarms of butterflies, the brilliant blue morphos, the yellow and orange

<sup>A</sup> Translated transcript of an audio recorded conversation conducted in Saamakatongo, Pikin Slee, November 16, 2015. Speakers: Onie Doekoe (Moi), and Amania Esino (basia Sito). Duncan Prijor moderated the conversation.

callidryas often rising up to below the tree canopies. Human beings? There are almost no human beings around to enjoy this beauty.<sup>21</sup>

In a vast nature, in which humans appear to play only a modest role, countless other beings figure prominently, ones whose “names are hardly known in the West.” Is De Kom wanting to draw our attention to the fact that western knowledge has gaps? A little later, he addresses those readers who “in between typewriter and calculator, dream of the golden fullness of past times.” Mocking the glorification of whiteness, he warns those who imagine themselves in a “crow’s nest,” a vantage from which the ship resembles “a white fish” and from where they enjoy “the curving whiteness of its wind-swollen sails,” to go no further with their imagination. Were they to descend to the deck they would hear the “wail” and smell the stench of “a thousand slaves packed into the hold ... men separated from women, all chained, then crammed together to save space.”<sup>22</sup>

Following his rhetorical attack on the dream of whiteness, De Kom proceeds to write a new history for his fellow countrymen. He explains his need to do this by means of a childhood memory.

When we, black boys, the children or grandchildren of slaves, were taught National History at school, it was of course the history of the white warriors. The reverend Tilburg brothers stood in front of the class and taught us the exploits of Piet Hein and De Ruiter, of Tromp and De Evertsen and Banckert ... We endeavored to quickly and conscientiously recite for the exam the names and dates of the Dutch governors under whose rule our fathers had been brought into slavery. And the system worked. There is no better way to cultivate the sense of inferiority in a race than by history lessons where only the sons of another people are mentioned and praised.<sup>23</sup>

The absence of Black resistance fighters such as Boni, Baron and Joli Coeur in these history lessons instilled an ideology in which, according to De Kom, white was more valuable than other colors.<sup>24</sup> His historiography therefore has other protagonists, other highs and lows. This time, it is not a story of European power struggles and trade, but rather one of the resistance of peoples of color against their white oppressors. The heroes of this story are not—as in the history book of his youth—the European warriors and administrators, but those who stood up and revolted such as “the slave women Séry and Flora” who, despite torture, did not betray their “brothers and sisters.” Or “the slave Darius” who filed a complaint at the Court of Justice for “the inhuman treatment of the slaves,” but was urged to be obedient and was given corporal punishment for speaking out.

De Kom reports the kinds of tyranny that different groups were confronted with and how they took up arms against this. The original inhabitants, referred to by De Kom as the Warans, the Arawaks, the Caribs, the Trios

and the Ugas, were the first to rebel by attacking plantations.<sup>25</sup> The Africans too revolted, both on the ships carrying them to the Americas, and on the plantations where they were forced to toil.<sup>26</sup> The “Chinese coolies,” who were recruited in Macao to take over the plantation work in anticipation of the abolition of slavery, also protested upon arrival, challenging their bosses’ attempts to amend their contract terms such that those who hired them could now treat them as “slaves.”<sup>27</sup> So too did the Hindustani “contract coolies” brought to Suriname from British India after the abolition of slavery.<sup>28</sup> Javanese contract workers were transported to Suriname in such miserable conditions that many did not survive.<sup>29</sup> Those who did survive protested against the appalling terms of their employment contracts as well.<sup>B</sup>

In his account, De Kom also focuses on those the colonists systematically referred to as “the scum”: those “that cannot be bought with promises and cannot be suppressed with violence.”<sup>30</sup>

The free Djukas still live in the wilderness, descendants of the Maroons who fought to liberate their brothers and sisters.<sup>C</sup> ... Here folk dances, folk songs, folk art, folk customs still exist, here the natural folklore still flourishes, which today, in Europe, they are trying to revive as a fairground entertainment for tourism. People work in the fields and in the forests, but not continuously and no longer than is necessary to provide for the simple and natural necessities of life.<sup>31</sup>

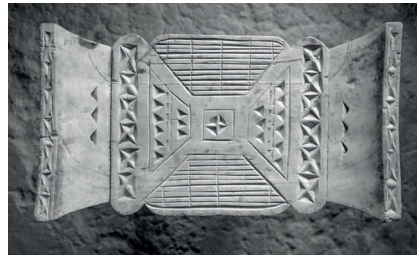
De Kom was not a Maroon himself. His ancestors had survived for generations



Chairs in Lebidoti, donated by “Bouterse administration” in election time.



Elephant bench. Saamaka woodcarving, Asindohopo.



**B**  
In 1932 De Kom founded a consultancy in Suriname to inventory the complaints of Surinamese workers and to mobilize them collectively. Shortly afterwards he was arrested and exiled to the Netherlands as a “dangerous state communist” and “agitator.”

**C**  
De Kom used the word “Djoekas” (Djukas) which is now considered pejorative. See also Field notes, Lebidoti, November 10, 2015.





on plantations where “white masters” determined who was rewarded and who was punished. Even after *Ketikoti* (Chains Broken)—as the abolition of slavery is called in Suriname—the system of white hierarchy would be slow to die out.<sup>D</sup> The Maroons, however, had walked a different path. After being torn from their African soils, they freed themselves from slavery. They “fought to liberate their brothers and sisters” still in captivity, forcing the colonial government to sue for peace with them.<sup>E</sup> When the Maroons founded their independent societies in the rainforest, they did so on their own terms. They did not abandon their ancestral practices, but constructed “new” ones. They crumpled Serres’s handkerchief anew, so that in its folds past and present were able to touch once more.<sup>F</sup>

Again, De Kom adduces a childhood memory to provide insight into how the ways of the Maroons disrupted the codes he had learned.

We, as children, looked up to them with a certain anxious curiosity, like savages from whom anything can be expected. When they chatted among themselves, we didn’t understand their language. At school we told the interesting news that the Djukas had been at our house. We scoffed at their stupidity. We felt far superior to the forest blacks because we had learned the noble art of writing and reading and because we wore European clothes. And yet this noble art of writing later served us only to sign the hated livrets with the “Balata Compagnieën Suriname en Guyana,” whereby worker De Kom or Bidoeu or Lichtveld reduced himself to number x of series y.<sup>G</sup> And yet, often unconsciously, in those European clothes we only aped our masters. And the Wild West films of the cinemas and the tinsel pleasures of the city were but a cheap surrogate for the eternal beauty of the great outdoors in which those despised Djukas lived. And our contempt itself was one of the tightest links in the chain with which we were bound to the Western production system.<sup>32, H</sup>

The Maroons spoke a different language. They didn’t wear “European clothes.” They didn’t master “the noble art of writing and reading.” They didn’t participate in western urban culture. Yet, as De Kom ambivalently

**D**  
The Netherlands did not abolish slavery until July 1, 1863. The former owners, not the enslaved, received 300 guilders “compensation” from the Dutch government per “freed slave.” The law stipulated that those who were freed in Suriname were obliged to continue to work on the plantations 10 more years under the supervision of the State, now as wage laborers. Therefore, the ending of the slavery system is often dated 1873.

**E**  
The peace treaties the Maroons agreed upon with the colonial government stipulated that the Maroons had to hand over any new refugees who came into their communities. De Kom is therefore critical about the independence they gained by the peace treaties and writes: “Peace was bought by the fact that one deviated forever from the original aim of the Maroons, who prepared their fields in advance to receive all their brothers and sisters, whom they wanted to free together from the yoke of slavery. The peace was bought with a divorce, which was drawn within the black people of Suriname themselves.”

asserts, it was those “despised Djukas” who were free. They were not bound by the chains of the “Western production system” in which he himself participated as a replaceable worker.

By making his value judgments explicit—that he feels “inferior” to whites and “superior” to those “Djukas”—he signals a double effect of the western civilizational script. In this script, a universal “we” is supposed to climb an upward path, with a savage state of nature at the bottom and at the top a future in which a metropolitan life of prosperity, freedom, and leisure awaits everyone. Here, moderns stand higher than pre-moderns, developed persons higher than underdeveloped ones, urbanites higher than provincials, culture higher than nature, or “European clothes” higher than “folklore.” By presenting the bonds of tradition as constricting—functional today only as a “fairground attraction”—the even more constricting chains of the production system are further concealed. For does not the perspective of progress suggest that the oppression will only be temporary?

## THE MATRIX

F  
For Serres’s time-model of the crumpled handkerchief, see Chapter 1 *supra* in this book.

G  
Balata is the name of a tree that provides latex. The juice (also known as caoutchouc) was harvested in Suriname in the first decades of the twentieth century, to be processed into a stiff rubber that was called Balata, like the tree.

H  
De Kom used the word “bosnegers” (forest blacks) which is now considered pejorative. See note C and Field notes, Lebidoti, November 10, 2015.

The Argentinian semiotician Walter Mignolo takes a closer look at how the rhetoric of progress came into existence, carrying over into the present.<sup>33</sup> First, he calls on his readers not to be misled. Even if the rhetoric changes (from nation-states to civil rights to human rights), it only ever serves to mask the “logic of coloniality” so as to divert attention from the exploitation, the expropriation, the forced displacement and the marginalization that are the painful consequences of capitalist economies.

According to Mignolo, in the sixteenth century a “Colonial Matrix of Power” was formed, a management structure that has gone on to control today all aspects of our lives.<sup>34</sup> In order to understand itself as a civilized empire, Europe in this period constructed an outer space that was presented as barbarian (and that could therefore be marginalized and colonized).<sup>35</sup> A knowledge system was set up based on epistemic *rankings*: classifying dichotomies articulated in the west and imposed worldwide by “coloniality.” With the term coloniality, Mignolo emphasizes that this colonial logic has not stopped, but continues to affect the present day.<sup>36</sup>

DEE SITONU A WETI

Script page of chapter "Fighting the Whites"

English translation of the dialogue in Saamakatongo based on the film's subtitles. Differences may occur due to improvisations of the actors.

EXT. CAMPFIRE BY THE RIVER - NIGHT

MAN 1            We fled from Kumako to a place called  
                    Timba and from there to Hwenye.

MAN 2            That village was built on top of the  
                    Bakakununu mountain.

MAN 1            That mountain had a single gully. Only  
                    from there could one reach the top. We cut  
                    large logs and rolled them uphill. The  
                    whites had found out we were hiding on  
                    that mountain. When they climbed up, we  
                    were waiting for them and threw the heavy  
                    logs. Clang-a-lang-a-lang!

MAN 3            They couldn't run fast enough to save  
                    themselves.

MAN 3            This is how we made weapons.

MAN 1            Yes, a special kind of weapons. In  
                    military terms it's called...

WOMAN 1        An ambush?

MAN 1            Yes, an ambush!

A DOO PAUFAYA A LIOBANDYA - NDETI

WOMI 1 Di u lowe kumutu a Kumako hen u go a wankamia de ta kai Timba teka u kumutu go a Hwenye.

WOMI 2 Di konde de bi de a di kununu de kai Bakakununu hedi.

WOMI 1 Di kununu de bi abi wan benga. Naande wanwan i bi sa subi go a liba. U bi ta koti gaan paulodu. Unmeni womi ta lola dee lodu de tya go buta a kununu liba. Dee bakaa bi yei taa u de a di kununu hedi. Di de subi ko dou a liba ala, noo u bi de kabakaba kaa, hen u disa dee lodu lola saku kununu. Klengelengeleng!

WOMI 3 Ya bi sa kule kumutu a pasi da de moo.

WOMI 3 So u waka ko fendi fetilai.

WOMI 1 Ai, wan pei fetilai, sodati ta kai en...

MUJEE 1 Wan tyutya?

WOMI 1 Ai, tyutya!

Narratives that have been produced by this knowledge system continue to define what is to be considered “human.” The concept of progress is always modelled on the image that those who assert and reproduce it have of themselves. The rhetoric of these narratives has evolved, but the colonial logic that first defined those excluded as “lesser humans” remains unchanged.<sup>37</sup>

In one of his essays, Mignolo elaborates on the persons who carry out this knowledge operation.<sup>38</sup> He points out that “scholars” created “the figure of the detached observer,” which he describes as: “a neutral seeker of truth and objectivity who at the same time controls the disciplinary rules and puts himself or herself in a privileged position to evaluate and dictate.”<sup>39</sup> Given that these “social actors” (who just happen to be white, Christian, residing in Europe or North America, etc.) take their body and social position for granted and localize their knowledge “only in the mind,” they assume the knowledge they produce to be universal in value. They suppose that what is good for them and fulfils their own passions is equally valid for the rest of the world.<sup>40</sup> But they overlook the fact that they are developing their knowledge from a specific place in the colonial matrix and within particular historical and geopolitical conditions.

According to Mignolo, this western thinking that claims universality reduces its outside to “silenced societies.”<sup>41</sup> By this he does not mean that these societies have stopped speaking or writing, but that their stories are not heard because their knowledge systems are marginalized by the matrix. It is precisely in these suppressed local knowledge systems that he sees a potential way out of the matrix. He argues for “epistemic disobedience”: a “delinking” from the ideological framework with which the west claims its universality.<sup>42</sup> In its place one should opt for that which is marginalized by this episteme as being traditional, barbarian, primitive, mystical, etc., a choice he refers to as “the decolonial option.” Epistemic disobedience is performed not as an activity of the mind to frame, categorize and arrange things from a distance, but rather as a situated practice. He writes:

Epistemic disobedience takes us to a different place, to a different “beginning” (not in Greece, but in the responses to the “conquest and colonization” of America and the massive trade in enslaved Africans), to physical sites of struggles and buildings, rather than to a new temporality within the same space (from Greece, to Rome, to Paris, to London, to Washington DC).<sup>43</sup>

For Mignolo, the epistemic disobedient are located in those places where people combat the hegemonic structure of knowledge and beliefs of the matrix; where oppressed life forms are defended and new societies are built. These societies aim not at “the *production and reproduction* of goods at the cost of life,” but at the “*regeneration of life.*”<sup>44</sup> Instead of the recurring



Film still *Dee Sitonu A Weti*, 2018.  
As the Maroons waged battle against colonial troops, the mountains became their allies.

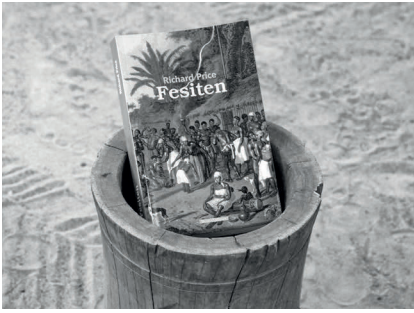


Film stills *Dee Sitonu A Weti*, 2018.  
Reenactment of the ambush at Bakakununu mountain.

destruction of their own autonomous ways of being in the name of progress or development, they opt for a “decolonial disobedient conservatism” by relinking with their own memories and legacies.<sup>45</sup>

The Maroons were willing to give us an insight into what it meant to them to delink. They told us how their ancestors freed themselves from slavery and retreated into the forests to fight colonial, and later neo-colonial, exploitation. They also introduced us to some of their relinking practices, sharing how they built their settlements, got to know their gods, and made alliances with the Indigenous people and the forest. But before we recount what we learned from the way they created a network of relations through rituals, songs, prayers, dreams, stories, and even species jumps; we want to make another detour. We’ll first attempt to meet our own ancestors. In what circumstances did they design their episteme, that blueprint from which they omitted their own role as designers? We do not opt for this digression because we want to return to a narrative that we as Europeans are more comfortable with, but rather because we need to better understand our own beginnings before we can shift to a different one.

# NATURE INTENDED IT THAT WAY



During a conversation about Maroon history (Nieuw Lombe, November 6, 2015) Elmond Finisi showed us his copy of *Pesiten*. This book on the traditions of the Saamaka was a special reissue of *First Time* (Richard Price, 1983), translated into the language of the Maroon people.

A  
The different Maroon peoples speak their own languages. The terms we quote are usually in Saamakatongo, because we mainly worked with the Saamaka Maroons.

## THAT OTHER ANCESTOR

When the Maroons spoke to us about their past, they used both the Dutch word *geschiedenis* (history) and the word *fesiten* (first time).<sup>A</sup> The first concept seemed to place events at a greater distance, emphasizing that these were occurrences one had not observed oneself. The latter was reserved for the traditions handed down by those ancestors who had freed themselves from slavery and built new lives in the unknown forests. It was the *fesiten* stories that explained the origin of customs that linked the present to the past. Such stories told, for example, of the experiences that had taught the community to be cautious in sharing its knowledge. Or they recounted the circumstances in which ancestors concluded agreements with the other entities, agreements that were still observed, even if the community was no longer always able to abide by them owing to advancing “development.” The ancestors of these early days were still invoked when the community was in need.

Could we, inheritors of the Dutch colonial legacy, also invoke a progenitor from our first time to figure out how our predecessors had arrived at their assumptions that led to that unrelenting production system? Perhaps we can consult that one Dutch ancestor who was a lawyer and a poet: Hugo de Groot, better known by his Latinized name Grotius. Legal scholars worldwide seem to regard him as the spiritual father of the Peace of Westphalia (1648), the peace talks that would put an end to the protracted civil wars and religious strife in Europe.<sup>1</sup> During these negotiations, in which more than a hundred European delegations participated, the foundation



of so-called Westphalian sovereignty was allegedly laid. It was agreed, the historians tell us, that every state had the right to territorial self-determination and was part of an international community of states that determined when the use of force was justified. Post-colonial critics often regard Westphalian sovereignty as the legal basis for Europe's imperial expansion. As a result, international law, according to these critics, became above all an ideological tool to justify the dispossession and marginalization of those who did not conform to the standards established by European states.<sup>2</sup> Or as Kwame Nimako and Glenn Willemsen expressed it in *The Dutch Atlantic*:

For the 'outside world', the importance of the Peace of Westphalia lay not in the reciprocal recognition of the sovereignty of the signatories, but rather in the non-recognition of the sovereignty of 'others'.<sup>3</sup>

If Grotius's ideas had been at the basis of this peace, could we perhaps find in him some of the assumptions on which western epistemology was founded?

From the time of its founding in 1602, Grotius had been the lawyer for the Dutch East India Company (VOC), the Dutch colonial trading company whose monopoly over the European spice market was often maintained through violence.<sup>B</sup> This company was followed in 1621 by the West India Company (WIC). The WIC was established on the same model, engaging in the triangular trade between Europe, West Africa and the Americas, including the slave trade to Suriname.<sup>C</sup> Grotius was one of the foremost thinkers who provided the rhetoric to justify these companies' invasions into foreign lands, markets and seas.

Even so, the opening lines of his *Mare Liberum* (The Freedom of the Seas, 1609) read like an anti-colonial pamphlet. In the first sentence, he denounces "the mighty and rich of the earth" who think they have the right to "suppress the rebellion of persons born in subordinate positions by invoking law and justice."<sup>4</sup> A little later, he even appeals to "the court of conscience" and "the court of reputation," informal tribunals which are typically a refuge only for the marginalized.<sup>D</sup> He writes:

These two courts are wide open to those who have knocked on all others in vain. It is to these courts

**B**  
For example, the VOC committed genocide against the population of the Banda Islands in order to gain control over nutmeg and mace production. In its pursuit of greater profits, the company destroyed almost all of the clove trees growing on the Moluccan islands.

**C**  
Together with the city of Amsterdam and the Amsterdam merchant Van Aerssen van Sommelsdyck, the WIC was the controlling shareholder of the Society of Suriname, a Dutch private company which held a monopoly on the trade with this colony. The Society was founded in 1683 and formally dissolved in 1795, resulting in the nationalization of its assets.

**D**  
See Césaire's invocation of "the court of conscience" in Chapter 5.

**E**  
In the patent that the VOC received, the East Indies was identified as the area between the Cape of Good Hope and the Strait of Magellan. This amounts to a vast area of the Southern Hemisphere bounded to the east by the west coast of the Americas and to the west by the east coast of Africa.

that the powerless can appeal. Here the mighty stand powerless, those whose arbitrariness is limitless, who find anything cheap that is paid for with blood, who justify one wrong with another, whose obvious crimes are unanimously condemned, those who have no mercy even in their own hearts.”<sup>5</sup>

Which “powerless” are referred to in these words by an advocate of a colonial company? Are we directly confronted here with misleading rhetoric that turns everything on its head? Let’s delve a little deeper into the circumstances in which Grotius developed his ideas.

Grotius’ thinking is said to have been shaped by a maritime incident occurring less than a year after the VOC was founded. The company had obtained a monopoly on trade in the East Indies from the States-General, but its fleet had encountered violent Portuguese resistance in the area.<sup>E</sup> A few decades earlier, a papal decree had divided the world map into Portuguese and Spanish territory, these countries being the most powerful colonial empires of that moment, awarding the East Indies to Portugal. It was in this context that a Dutch captain near Singapore captured a Portuguese merchant ship discovered to be loaded with china, silk, spices, sugar and gold bars. The booty would increase the VOC’s capital by half, but was the seizure legitimate? The Dutch captain could not produce a so-called letter of marque in which the monarch declared the robbery of an enemy ship a legitimate act of war, for the Dutch were then in revolt against their rightful monarch, the king of Spain. Portugal demanded return of the cargo, and other European countries, fearful of the precedent this might set, threatened to become involved. The VOC hired the then 20-year-old Grotius to justify the conquest in the European political arena of his day.<sup>6</sup>

To show that the robbery was just and lawful, Grotius appealed to natural law, a law that “would be valid even if we were to suppose that there is no God.”<sup>7</sup> It was the principle “planted in us, not by an opinion but by an innate force.” He also described it as “that which all nations have a consensus on” and a “divine light” which is “superior to human law.”<sup>8</sup> On behalf of the VOC, he then attempted to prove that appropriation, trading, and travel at sea should all be considered natural rights.

According to Grotius, God (or Jupiter, or nature, entities he seems to consider interchangeable) had not willed that every region was supplied with all the necessities of life. He cites phrases of unnamed poets to provide the evidence for this, such as: “Not each plant grows in every soil.” And also: “Others will mold the seething bronze more fair.”<sup>9</sup> Because nature did not make all crops and products available everywhere, it had, according to Grotius, given all peoples the right to exchange things with one another. As further proof of the right to trade, he invokes the oceans and the winds:

Consider the ocean, with which God has encircled the different lands, and which is navigable from boundary to boundary; consider the breath of the winds in their regular courses and in their special deviations, blowing not always from one and the same region but from every region at one time or another: are these things not sufficient indications that nature has granted every nation access to every other nation? <sup>10</sup>

He concludes his argument with: "Trade comes to the rescue where nature falls short." <sup>11</sup>

It takes some getting used to poems being invoked here as legal arguments. For a moment, we allow ourselves to be seduced by the images of wind-swollen sails coursing across oceans. We envision sovereign plants choosing their own soil. But when we read that trade comes to the rescue of nature, we begin to suspect that this could be another rhetorical reversal. For do not the sovereign plants, powerful winds and connecting oceans featured here primarily serve those men driven by the urge to trade? Are the natural actors not reduced here to subservient means of production?

We, who read Grotius in the Anthropocene, experience the revolt of the means of production. <sup>12</sup> The earth has proven to be an unstable background for the form of human activities that his poetic argumentations depict. In an era of trade propelled by the massive consumption of fossil fuels, even the winds and the ocean rebel. Grotius, however, does not seem to foresee such implications, for he is primarily concerned with ensuring the freedom of trade. For him, whoever denies to another the freedom to trade: "disconnects the highly prized fellowship in which humanity is united, destroying the opportunities for mutual benefactions." <sup>13</sup>

So, for Grotius, nonhuman things seem to serve human fellowship. His man-oriented view of nature becomes even clearer in a later formulation:

He who bestowed upon living creatures their very existence, bestowed also the things necessary for existence ... Inferior things were given for use by their superiors. Plants and herbs, for example, were given to the beasts, and beasts—as well as all things in general—to man ... God bestowed these gifts upon the human race, not upon individual men. <sup>14</sup>

Could we identify here, in the representation of a nature given to man as a species "superior" to "inferior things," the emergence of the colonial matrix?

After this speculative initial state in which according to Grotius all things belonged to the entire human community, individuals began to appropriate things from this common property. <sup>15</sup> He seems to regard "nature" as the architect of its own annexation when he explains: "Nature intended it so



Film still *Dee Sitonu A Weti*, 2018.

In a scene recorded in Lebidoti, a village that had to relocate to make way for the Brokopondo reservoir, a Maroon elder points to the ruthlessness of western perseverance: "Our experience with westerners is that if they want something, they persist, even if people die. Take that trip to the moon. It failed a few times, but they persisted until they landed on the moon. And compared to the moon, that dam is an ant."



Lebidoti's children playfully "reappropriate" the film set after the shoot.

F  
It is because of his reflections that the sea and the sky belong collectively to all humans that Grotius is quoted in contemporary debates about human rights and the *commons*: those resources that need to be accessible to all members of a society such as knowledge, water or genetic material.

that some things remain common, but others can be appropriated by diligent work."<sup>16</sup> "Things" can be appropriated by "seizing" them, which he explains by reference to the picking of fruit or catching of fish. Immobile assets can be appropriated by "occupying" them, for example by fencing off a piece of land, building a fort on it, or by working the soil. Only the acts of *seizing* or *occupying* can, for Grotius, change the status of a thing from something that belongs to everyone into something that belongs to a particular person, who may then defend this thing as his property. In this way he declares the specific acts of seizing and occupying as legitimizing procedures for appropriation, procedures that – because "nature intended it that way" – for him apply to everyone. But whose standard is being construed here? For although he suggests that he is speaking for humanity as a whole, he seems to take no account of those peoples who neither erect fences nor build fortresses.

Grotius has to admit that acquiring property is like stealing. "In occupation the crime is implicit," he quotes from the Stoic philosopher Seneca. However, an appropriator's wrongdoing could be compensated for by his persistence, for, Grotius says, quoting Quintilian: "Things that are available to all sometimes become the reward of the one who is industrious."<sup>17</sup> Is it a coincidence that the argument that irons out "crime" is provided by a Roman pioneer of the art of rhetoric?

What cannot be appropriated by seizure or occupation is, according to Grotius, exempt from possession.<sup>18, F</sup> The sky is once such elusive thing, and so too the ocean:

The Ocean, which is immense, infinite, the parent of all things, bounded only by heaven; whose never-failing waters, according to the ancient belief, feed not only the springs, rivers and seas, but also the clouds, and even the stars; in closing, the ocean which encompasses the terrestrial home of mankind with the ebb and flow of its tides, and which cannot be held nor enclosed, being itself the possessor rather than the possessed.<sup>19</sup>

But even this poetic reflection on “the parent of all things” serves a legal purpose, for our lawyer needs an almighty ocean to trump human rulers. Appealing to the non-human ancestor who could not be possessed, he sought to demonstrate that his Iberian opponents had falsely claimed the ocean for themselves. For ought not an ocean that was no one’s property be freely navigable by all nations? <sup>G</sup> This allowed Grotius to argue that by denying Dutch ships access to the East Indies, Portugal had violated the natural right of all peoples to travel and trade. The capture of the Portuguese merchant ship would be mere “compensation” for this breach, and for that reason it was “just.”<sup>20</sup>

On the basis of the principles Grotius developed to justify a contested looting, anything that was no one’s property was available to be rampantly exploited.

Jurists after him, invoking this standard, qualified land inhabited or worked in other ways as “wilderness.”<sup>21,H</sup> They considered territories that were not appropriated by the “correct” procedure as *terra nullius*, or no man’s land, and thus free to be legitimately taken and colonized. The scheme of placing “cultivated” land higher up the scale than “wilderness” (“inferior” because not fenced) would also be projected onto the inhabitants of these areas, with their own local knowledge systems and associated practices viewed as inferior by those imposing this scheme.<sup>22</sup> This in turn would justify extending the logic of extraction to colonized people, utilizing them as enslaved or subjugated wage laborers to exploit the land more efficiently.

The sky, the ocean, the rivers, unfenced land, even the bottom of the sea and the planets were reduced to *externalities*, things that do not have to be budgeted for, but could be used free of charge. The freedom of the

**G**  
Of course, not all peoples had merchant fleets of sea-going ships with cannons and therefore not all could enjoy equally the freedom of the sea.

**H**  
It was the utilitarian thinker John Locke who, ninety years after Grotius and building on his legitimizing procedures for appropriation, argued in *Two Treatises of Government* (1690) that God’s command to man was to subdue “the earth, and all inferior or irrational creatures.” He would argue that land may be withdrawn from communal property because it would yield “ten times more” through human labor than if “the wasteland remained in the hands of the community.” Underused, built-up land would fall back into “waste land” and be taken over by someone else. This argument was often used to expropriate Indigenous peoples.

seas (also called the freedom of navigation) would lead many to believe that exhaust fumes from ships and aircraft do not need to be included in emissions calculations. The seas that, according to Grotius, were no one's to own, would eventually acidify, heat up, and become polluted and depleted.

Let's imagine we were able to give this ancestor a glimpse into the future (our present day) to point out to him the far-reaching consequences of his legacy. Would he reconsider the "procedures" of seizure and occupation that legitimize appropriation and extraction? After all, that immense water body that "encompasses the terrestrial home of mankind" has the avenging power, with its sea levels rising, to claim back the land from nation-states.<sup>23</sup>

## SPECIES JUMP

We learned from the Maroons that private property is not common to every community. It is not their habit to install fences and locks. They manage their land, fruit trees and houses collectively.<sup>24</sup> Even though these things are used by individuals, it is customary for them that they remain the property of the *lo* (clan). Land is not to be sold, given away, or used as collateral for a loan. For this reason, outsiders often regard collective ownership as an obstacle to "development." But for the Maroons, it is the community that protects things from the temptations to which individuals are exposed. One individual owner can be misled, but not the entire group.<sup>1</sup>

I  
We learned this from Hugo Jabini during a conversation about a.o. Maroon customary law in Nieuw Aurora on November 2, 2015.

J  
*Gaduakamia* is the god of the place. *Apunku gadu* are forest spirits. *Gaangadu* is usually translated as "mighty deity." The gods are part of the forest pantheon of the Saamaka Maroons.

Where Grotius saw a "crime" when someone claimed ownership without first following the appropriate legitimizing procedures (of seizing, occupying, and exploiting ambitiously), the Maroons are concerned about a different offense: their appropriation of things of which other beings are co-owners. Aware of the violence associated with appropriation, they inform the other forest inhabitants of the expected impact of their plans. With a prayer or ritual they ask permission to fell a tree, to create an agricultural plot, to found a village, or to hunt. They "pay" the forest with offerings for what it provides them with in food. For all such matters, they make contact with the *Gaduakamia* and with the *Apunku gadu*, a pantheon often simply referred to as "the forest."<sup>J</sup>

The *Gaangadu* and the ancestors are then invoked as well. Usually this is done by voice, although a drum can also be used, and sometimes a libation is made. Larger interferences require more complex rituals. For example, to negotiate with the forest about the construction of a new village, a small entrance gate has to be built, the so-called *azanpau*.<sup>K</sup> A young Saamaka Maroon showed us how to construct such a gate using young trees he had skinned bare and fresh palm branches whose leaves had not yet unfurled. Then he mixed water with a white clay called *pembe* in a calabash bowl and poured the milky liquid as a libation onto the ground under the *azanpau*. To conclude the ritual, he consulted the gods and ancestors in a prayer.<sup>L</sup>

Gaangadu, we are here to pray.  
Gaduakamia, we would like to live here.  
We pray to the Apunku gadu, to Gaduakamia,  
and to our ancestors.  
We will clear large trees, small trees, and lianas.  
We will burn down this piece of forest.  
All creatures that live here will need to move.  
Our prayer can never be enough.

After the prayer, one had to leave the area, returning only later to find out the answer. That the procedure was not merely a formality we learned from an *obiama* who told us that the forest can also refuse.<sup>M</sup> If the *azan* had fallen to the ground, it would be a sign: "Then the god of the place is saying: No."<sup>N</sup>

The forest spirits had their own possession practices. The *obiama* told how members of the community were sometimes visited by a disturbed *apunku gadu*.

Obiama Alfons Doekoe:

If you cut down a tree in which a forest spirit dwells, or kill an animal that has a forest spirit, you disturb that spirit where it resides. That god then starts looking for a new home. He will no longer take up residence in a tree or an animal. He will move in with someone close to you.<sup>O, 25</sup>

Using ritually prepared herbs, the community was able to make contact with the *apunku*. The forest spirit then communicated through its new host body how the disturbance had taken place. It conveyed decrees and

K  
To ward off evil, the Maroons also construct *azan* gates at the entrance to their villages and at paths leading to their sacred sites.

L  
Quincy (Kukcy) Sinei consulted the elders about which ritual acts should be used for asking permission and then performed the ritual in the forest of Pikin Slee. See Chapter "Willing Woods" in *Dee Sitonu A Weti*.

M  
*Obiama* means medicine man. Alfons Doekoe is *obiama* in Pikin Slee.

N  
Translated transcript of an audio recorded conversation conducted in Saamakatongo in Museum Pikin Slee, November 17, 2015. Speakers: Alfons Doekoe, Joney Doekoe, Edje Alingo Doekoe. Dorus Vrede moderated the conversation.



Film stills *Dee Sitonu A Weti*, 2018.  
Constructing the azanpau.

O  
The species jump of a forest spirit chased from its home, has striking parallels with the findings of virologist David Quammen. He found that due to the disruption of ecosystems, viruses are expelled from their habitat and then start looking for new hosts. He writes: "We cut the trees; we kill the animals or cage them and send them to markets. We disrupt ecosystems, and we shake viruses loose from their natural hosts. When that happens, they need a new host. Often, we are it."

P  
Dorus Vrede recites this statement from obiama Alfons Doekoe in *Dee Sitonu A Weti*, in the film chapter "Willing Woods."

reported as to its gender. "Because the spirit can also be feminine," the obiama emphasized.

Obiama Alfons Doekoe:

When you get a god, your whole life changes. Because a spirit has come to join your own spirit. From now on you will share your body with that spirit. You are going to move forward together. Maybe you got the spirit of a weasel. Weasels love sugar cane. So you're going to eat that often. If you received the spirit of a caiman, you can suddenly catch fish under the rocks, because the caiman knows how to do this.<sup>P</sup>

The host or hostess would get access to the god's experiences as well while the spirit was still in an animal, a stone or a tree. In this way, the community acquired new knowledge of the forest, gained from the perspectives of the other beings.

When the Maroons told us of these additional perspectives, we immediately thought of our camera eye. Wasn't this viewing instrument also able to embody different points of view? In narrative cinema, changes in perspective usually depict the viewpoints of human protagonists, but could this sensory instrument make a species jump? It might require us to break with some of the habits of the cinema, for this production system too appears to have been shaped according to the logic that the "inferior things" are in the service of the human protagonist. For example, the activity of filming is often described in terms of *taking* or *shooting* pictures, *capturing* on film. What appears in the film frame is hierarchically ranked in foreground and background, main



and supporting role, and (at the bottom) extras and props. There are numerous techniques to emphasize the human players. For instance, a shallow depth of field can visually set apart and elevate human actors from their surroundings.<sup>Q</sup> With the help of special microphones and audio filtering techniques, the human voice can be amplified and isolated from other sounds.<sup>R</sup> In a movie theater, the human protagonists are literally placed at the center. Just behind the middle of the film screen, the so-called center speaker is mounted, reserved only for the human voice. The voices of other entities (such as rustling leaves, singing birds or an engine's roar) are diverted. Transmitted by other loudspeakers, ones mounted on the side and back walls of the theater, they sound much quieter than in the world outside, merely providing background noise for the human voice.

In the film we wanted to make with the Maroons, more actors would claim attention than just humans. These nonhuman actors would not allow themselves to be reduced to the background, because, as the Maroons had made clear to us, they were beings with their own knowledge and agency. But would we, who had learned from "our" culture that "our" knowledge and procedures were the norm, be able to transmit this pluriverse through the cinematic apparatus?

## DANCE OF RELATING

How could we learn more about what perception and representation have to do with ranking? Maybe Donna Haraway's research into the power of those who are observing and knowing could help us on our way. In the essay



In the garden of the Saamaka Museum, Dorus Vrede (right) prepares to record a voice-over about the forest deities. Obiama Alfons Doekoe (center) and codirector Tolin Alexander (left) give him advice. Pikin Slee, 2017.

**Q**  
A "shallow" depth of field means that only a few objects are in focus and the rest is blurred. The technique can be used to separate a person from his or her background.

**R**  
For example, a shotgun microphone (also called supercardioid) amplifies the sound source that it is aimed at. A lavalier microphone (attached to a person's clothing) records only his or her voice while reducing noise from the environment. Often, during and after the recording, filters are applied to further suppress "disturbing" background noise.

"Situated Knowledges" (1988), she tries to unravel the effect of the "god trick," a delusion created by a spying observer. About the gaze of this observer she writes:

This is the gaze that mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation. This gaze signifies the unmarked positions of Man and White.<sup>26</sup>

This "unmarked" observer would effect a disappearing trick. He imagines himself in an impregnable position, enjoying his disembodied view from above. With a conquering gaze that assumes that it can see "everything from nowhere," he claims to produce objective knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

The observer who disregards his body as well as his power relationship with his subject we encountered earlier in the writing of Walter Mignolo. Haraway, however, points to yet another domain from which this observer disengages: the earth-wide network of connections. Following the "logic of domination built into the nature/culture opposition," the deluded observer sees things as objects that are valueless in themselves, acquiring value only when appropriated. For this reason the world appears to this knower—who perceives himself as discoverer—as passive and inert, a mirage that according to Haraway is inevitable:

The object both guarantees and refreshes the power of the knower, but any status as agent in the productions of knowledge must be denied the object. It—the world—must, in short, be objectified as a thing, not as an agent; it must be matter for the self-formation of the only social being in the productions of knowledge, the human knower.<sup>28</sup>

As makers of moving images, our attention is raised by the warning that observers who forget that they are situated bodies will see only what they expect to find: an inert world, no more than raw material for their images. Would those who operate the camera eye be condemned to objectify, to see without being seen themselves? Had we not experienced that those we observed through this artificial eye usually looked back at us and informed us how they wanted to be represented (and above all how not)? Had we not come to know filming perception as an incessant negotiation with everyone acting in front of the camera?

Haraway speculates on this negotiation between observer and observed. Accounts of a "real" world, for her, do not depend on the one-sided logic of "discovery" but on a power-charged social relation of "conversation."<sup>29</sup> Avoiding the logic of discovery would require the object of knowledge to be pictured as an actor and agent, not merely as a resource for the observer.<sup>30</sup> She compares this to poetry, in which language itself is an actor, independent of the author's intentions. "'We' [who] are permanently

mortal, that is, not in 'final' control," should therefore re-imagine the world, not as a thing for appropriation, but as a "coding trickster" with whom we must learn again to converse.<sup>31</sup>

In *When Species Meet* (2007) and *Staying with the Trouble* (2016) Haraway elaborates on the acting of this enigmatic wilful world and how people can co-act within it. She suggests that humans, like all other beings, make "oddkin" relations with entities other than those to which they are tied by ancestry or genealogy, without wanting to completely fathom, appropriate, or exploit these others.<sup>32</sup> All actors who "become who they are *in the dance of relating*" would require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations.<sup>33</sup> This is all the more necessary now that species have to survive together on a damaged soil. She warns: "We become with each other or not at all."<sup>34</sup>

Those who claim to be human and therefore find it normal to exploit the nonhuman, have, according to Haraway, lost sight of how they are mutually connected with other organisms, ones on which they think they are not dependent.<sup>35</sup> This Man, mostly understanding himself as the exception, has, for her, radically split off from a web of relations:

Human exceptionalism ... is the premise that only humanity is not part of a spatial and temporal web of interspecies dependencies. So being human means being on the other side of the Great Divide from all others."<sup>36</sup>

The Great Divide that Haraway here outlines—that unbridgeable gulf between those who declare themselves humanity and everyone else—reminds us of the Cordon that our Dutch ancestors built in the Surinamese rainforest to separate the "civilized" plantations from the "wilderness" (where the "marauding" Maroons were in hiding). We came across this line of defense in the diary of military officer John Gabriel Stedman, who witnessed seven hundred enslaved men clearing a long path in the forest. He wrote that the Cordon was intended "to defend the estates against any further insurrections from without, and prevent deserting to the enemy from within."<sup>37</sup> It is said to have been a 94-kilometer long, ten-meter-wide track, cleared straight through the rainforest. The first line of defense was an impenetrable 1.5 meters high thorn hedge with glass shards behind it. The border was guarded by more than 1,000 soldiers and defended with cannons.<sup>38</sup> Could this eighteenth-century military line separating civilization from the wilderness, with its dual function of inclusion and exclusion, be viewed as material evidence of the radical splitting gesture?

The Cordon is today overgrown. The glass shards lie buried beneath a layer of humus. The rainforest has dissolved the dividing line. But has the border disappeared? Or does it maintain a phantom existence, with its shards still haunting the forest? We too, who wanted to meet the Maroons,



Suriname River, dry season, 2016.

S

A *hedikabiten* (head captain) is the highest authority figure of a lo (clan).

T

As image-makers working with cameras, it intrigued us that the “city” was referred to by the Maroons as *foto* (the Dutch word for photograph). The word proved to be derived from the word fort, referring to Fort Zeelandia in Paramaribo, a brick fortress built in the seventeenth century at the mouth of the Suriname River to defend the colony against sea-borne attacks by other European powers.

U

Translated transcript of an audio recorded conversation conducted in Saamakatongo, Djumu, October 27, 2015. Speaker: Albert Aboikoni. Dorus Vrede and Paitoia Doekoe moderated the conversation.

encountered shards and obstacles. An invisible hand, time and again, seemed to force us to relate to the western norm. Was it actually possible for us westerners to make the crossing? And if so, what would it involve?

In the village of Djumu we heard from the *hedikabiten* of the Matjau-lo that the Maroon community used to have its own rituals for crossing the border with the colony.<sup>S</sup> He told of one place along the river where his ancestors always ritually cleansed themselves when they came back from the *foto* (city).<sup>T</sup> The place apparently lay just behind the Cordon.

Albert Aboikoni:

Further downstream there is a creek called Mawasi. Mawasi has a few large stones. They are stones like here. When you returned inland from the city, you would stop there to bathe. *Man wasi* means the place where men wash themselves. So there’s the border. Of course, this border was not set by the government. But not a single Maroon is going to say there’s a border beyond Mawasi.”<sup>U</sup>

The Maroons seemed to have a ritual that helped wash off the “civilization” of the city. What ritual would be necessary for us as western image makers in order to make the crossing? But before we recount how we, with a team of Maroon advisers, travelled up the Suriname River in a canoe loaded with bottles of rum (for pouring libations), we want to make one last detour, through an intervention that changed the course of the river.

**BATTLE FOR THE  
RAINFOREST**



The stone that warded off the hail of bullets intended for their ancestors is called *hagusitonu* ('hail of bullets' stone). Suriname River, 2015.

**A**

*Obias* are ritually prepared herbal mixtures and objects with magical power that can heal diseases, provide strength for fighting, cleanse rivers, and help the community connect with other entities. *Ingi* is the word in Saamakatongo for Indigenous people.

**B**

A *kunu* is a revenge spirit, hereditary through the female line.

**C**

Translated transcript of an audio recorded conversation conducted in Saamakatongo, Semoisie, October 27, 2015. Speakers: Rudy Kodama, *kabiten* Humphrey Bappa. Dorus Vrede and Paitoia Saaki moderated the conversation. Kodama explained it was the *Ingi* who taught them, for example, how to make a boat out of a tree, and how to grow cassava. The shaman of the *Ingi* also protected the Langu people.

## NEW SHAPE OF THE FRONTIER

The Maroons lack a term to refer to “nature” as a passive resource. More precisely, they do have a word, but it seems to signify something else. In our meetings, they talked about *matu*, which was usually translated as “the forest.” Many entities seem to be actors here: animals, plants, stones, water and air currents, but also spirits and gods, and of course people. The alliance with everything that lives, flows or simply exists here, is a recurring theme in the oral traditions of the *fesiten*. These stories recall, for example, how stones or trees caught enemy bullets intended for their ancestors, or how the *baai matu* came to their rescue by attacking colonial pursuers with a torrential downpour.<sup>1</sup>

The traditions also recorded the first encounter with the forest deities. From Rudy Kodama, whose father was a member of the Langu lo, we heard, for example, how his ancestors made an agreement with the river. At a time when the community was ravaged by the many *aboma* snakes in and around the water, his ancestors were able to make contact with the river god with the help of an *obia* that was given to them by *Ingi*.<sup>2, A</sup> The deity is supposed to have said: “I’ll make the snakes disappear from the river, but then you mustn’t kill them, otherwise you’ll get a *kunu*.”<sup>B</sup> The *kunu* still existed and also the *obia* had not lost its strength. Or in the words of Kodama: “If the river is unwell, we have the medicines that we can throw into its water.”<sup>C</sup>

Stones that protect, rain showers that come to the rescue, and a river



Etching of snake-infested river in the Guyanas. From *Historia Antipodum oder Neue Welt*, 1631. Collection Maritiem Museum Rotterdam.





DEE SITONU A WETI

Script page of chapter "The Flood"

English translation of the dialogue in Saamakatongo based on the film's subtitles. Differences may occur due to improvisations of the actors.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

WOMAN           The way we are here, the things speak to us. When the andole and the paaka birds sing, we know it's going to rain. When the yellow ipe blossoms, the short rainy season begins. The rain will wash the flowers away. If the leaves on the trees rustle, they are speaking, even if you don't know what they're saying. This is how the forest tells us that something was going to happen. At the time, game animals appeared at the edge of the village we could even hunt them there. They were game animals you normally came across only after walking all day in the forest. Birds like toucans and parrots came to the village. You could easily take them down with a slingshot. Also vultures landed in the village. They ate anything edible, even awara fruits. Thus the rainforest warned us, but we didn't understand the message.

MAN 1           Suddenly we saw that the river water didn't flow down anymore. It flowed upwards. It returned to the interior.

MAN 2           There was a mighty waterfall. We called it loosens-your-ribs. When this mighty waterfall was flooded, we all got nervous.

A DOO LIO - DIDIA

MUJEE 1           Kuma fa u de aki, noo dee sonde de ta fan ku  
u. Te andole naso paaka ta bai, noo i sabi  
taa tyuba o kai. Te gianti buta folo, noo  
pikideewei. Di tyuba ta sawa dee folo puu  
tya go. Ee dee pauuwii ta seki, noo fan de  
ta fan, winsi ee ya saandi de ta taki seei.  
So matu bi ta piki u te wansondi o pasa.  
So u bi de te wan pisi hen mbeti booko ko  
a kondebandya da u fu u ta fendi ta suti.  
Mbeti di i bi musu waka wan hii daka bifo  
i bi sa fendi de suti a matu. Hii dee fou  
kuma kuyake ku peipei papakai ko zuntu ku  
konde. Taa ee ku abaleti seei noo i ta suti  
kii. Tingifou ta saka a kondeganda. De ta  
nya hiisonde di de fendi, ee awaa seei. So  
di matu bi ta fan ku u, ma na hiiten u bi ta  
fusutan di bosikopu.

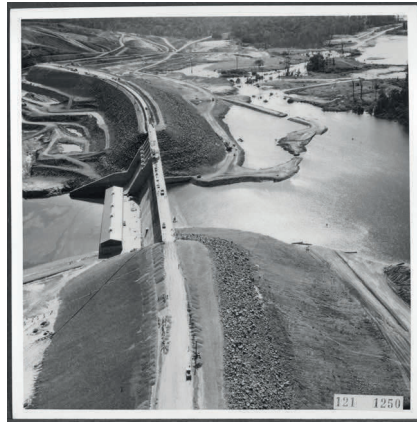
WOMI 1           Te wan pisi, hen o ko si taa di lio an ta  
kule go basu moo, ma a nango liba. Di wata  
bia ko ta subi lio.

WOMI 2           Wan gaan dan de bi ta kai Alosubandya. Di a  
singi go a basuwata hen u bi ko fee.

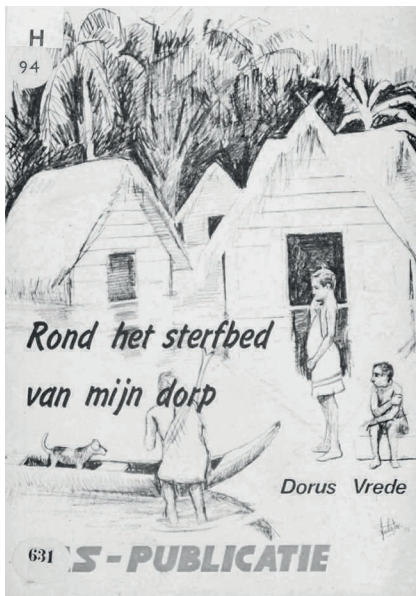
that negotiates: the nonhuman entities here seem to have capacities that we westerners tend to regard as exclusively human. But it was precisely these sentient and responsive beings that, half a century ago, signalled to the Maroons that something disruptive was about to take place.

“A piece of wilderness is taken from them and useless seclusion comes to an end.” It is in this rhetoric of progress that the Brokopondo Plan was announced in the 1958 brochure *Licht en kracht uit de oerwouden van Suriname* (Light and power from the jungles of Suriname).<sup>3</sup> Its writers waxed enthusiastic about the anticipated benefits of the planned damming of the Suriname River. The hydropower plant would generate electricity for an aluminum smelter, making the country no longer dependent on the export of its raw bauxite. It would now be able to produce aluminum itself. This new industry would generate many new jobs and the entire capital of Paramaribo could be supplied with electricity. The new reservoir, when filled, could serve for entertainment and tourism and become an excellent breeding ground for fish. The Brokopondo project was therefore hailed by many as a motor that would propel the country along the road to prosperity.<sup>4</sup>

But damming the river also meant that 1,350 square kilometers of forest and 27 Maroon villages disappeared in the reservoir. More than 5,000 Saamaka and Okanisi Maroons were forcibly displaced.<sup>5</sup> The disruptive experiences of this transmigration not only entered into the oral



Damming of the Suriname River at Afobaka (circa 1960). Collection Netherlands Government Information Service.



Around the deathbed of my village by Dorus Vrede.

traditions, but were recorded as well in writing by several Maroons. Writer and poet Dorus Vrede, himself forced by the rising water to leave Lombe in his early years, was one of the first to commit his experiences to paper. In the short story collection *Rond het sterfbed van mijn dorp* (Around the deathbed of my village, 1986) he portrays what had to be left behind: the sacrificial places, the agricultural plots, the houses, the animals and the trees. The characters in his stories don't want to leave this world. Even as the water rises, the narrator still wants to postpone his departure.

I looked at the first village that was already completely under water and thought about my house, which was built with the best woods. The door posts were of walaba, the fittings of sumaruba, the doors and windows of cedar, and the roof of shingles.<sup>6</sup>

A moment later he exclaims in desperation: "I would like to take something from my house, if necessary the windows."

In the story "I won't leave until the water reaches my feet," village elder Tata Granwan is angry with his fellow villagers "who had not kept their word and left." He's even furious at his obias, "which had not provided even the slightest resistance by pushing back the water." But Tata Granwan too would be forced to leave the filling lake by *korjaal* with his children, dog and obias.<sup>7, D</sup>

That which Vrede describes intimately and in detail, Carlo Hoop examines from a wider perspective.

**D**  
A *korjaal* is a dug-out canoe with side boards.

In *Verdronken land, verdwenen dorpen* (Drowned land, lost villages, 1991) he seeks to uncover the geo-political forces that caused the environment in which he grew up to disappear into the reservoir. He explains how the altered relationship between Suriname and the Netherlands had a catalysing effect. In 1954, Suriname's status within the Dutch Kingdom changed from "colony" to "partner." From that moment on, Suriname officially had "full autonomy in all internal affairs."<sup>8</sup> In practice, however, the Netherlands intervened as soon as its own interests were threatened. To become more independent, Suriname focused on "the 'Surinamization' of foreign companies" by participating in *joint ventures*.<sup>9</sup> The country aimed to use this strategy to "get a better grip" on the industries that were exploiting its natural resources. However, it was the multinationals that had the capital and which, from their much stronger negotiating position, forced Suriname to make concessions.<sup>10</sup> The Brokopondo reservoir is, for Hoop, one of the drastic results of this unequal trial of strength.

In his book *Alles is voor eeuwig weg* (Everything is gone forever, 2009), Erney Landveld confronts his readers with the Maroons' unremitting anger at the lack of solidarity shown towards them by political leaders, the transmigration service, and "the cheering masses in the coastal area."<sup>E</sup> He describes with evident displeasure how on February 1, 1964, a large number of people gathered in Afobaka to celebrate the closing there of the Suriname River dam.<sup>11</sup> They were



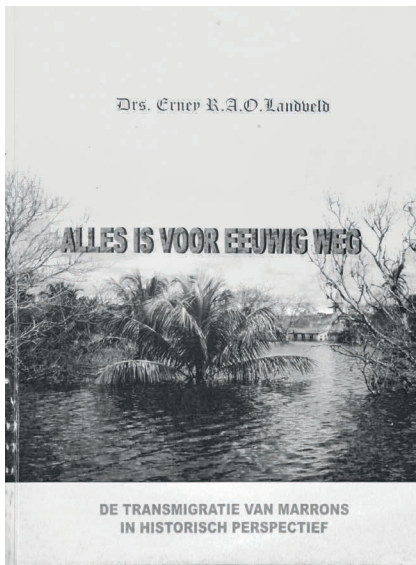
Verdronken land,  
Verdwenen dorpen

De transmigratie van Saramaccaners  
in Suriname 1958 - 1964

C. Hoop

*Drowned land, lost villages* by  
Carlo Hoop.

**E**  
The three authors each cooperated in *Dee Sitonu A Weti*. Quotations from the books of Vrede and Landveld were recited by the community in the film, such as the dream that predicted the flooding (Landveld, pp. 102–103), and the precautions to be taken to move obias to the new village during the transmigration (Vrede, p. 61).



*Everything is gone forever* by Erney Landveld.

**F**  
The Hague is the governmental city of the Netherlands.

**G**  
The so-called Bruynzeel houses were prefabricated houses made of wood materials that were custom-made in the factory and could be put together by inhabitants themselves at the construction site. They were produced by Bruynzeel Suriname Houtmaatschappij N.V. between 1950 and 1990.

reported as being “filled with joy” at the prospect of “cheap energy,” and because “Suriname had now finally succeeded, independently and outside the direction of The Hague, to realize a large-scale project of this kind.”<sup>F</sup> In the festive atmosphere, little attention was paid to the fate of the Maroons. On the contrary, they were accused of holding back the development of Suriname with their “refusal to cooperate in their relocation.”<sup>12</sup>

The many Maroon witnesses that Landveld cites in his book provide a clear picture of how the community experienced the transmigration. They tell of all the unfulfilled promises such as the *froisimoni* (compensation) that was never paid, the Bruynzeel prefabricated housing that was never built, the delayed or abandoned provisioning of electricity.<sup>G</sup> Decades after the events, they were still baffled that the government had just let their villages drown, and that there was not even a “film or photo” made that could be shown in a museum “to teach the young people what it used to be like.”<sup>13</sup>

The interviewees speak not only of their own experiences, but also offer the testimonies of other entities. They recount, for example, how the forest gave them signals and “the spirit world” passed on messages, indicating that something was about to happen. As early as a decade before the construction of the dam started, someone had received a dream in *nongo* (imagery) that predicted a major flood.<sup>14</sup>

Already in our first meetings with members of the Maroon community,

we observed that the flooding of their ancestral land lives on in their collective memory, and it was made clear to us that this event could not be left undiscussed in the film to be made. We visited a number of transmigration villages to speak to those who had experienced the rising waters themselves. Many still remembered how the river water suddenly stopped flowing to the sea and flowed back to the interior. They saw the Suriname River overflow its banks and mighty *sulas* (rapids) vanish in the rising water. While animals clambered into trees in terror, the Maroons hastily dismantled the houses of their gods and loaded their belongings into canoes. They attempted to quickly harvest their crops by boat before they fled.

Some communities paddled upstream to settle on hilltops that were transformed into islands by the rising water. Others went further inland and negotiated with the communities who lived there in hopes of settling among them. Still others chose to live downriver, behind the dam, in locations designated by the transmigration service. However, many left their communities for good, moving to the city or migrating abroad. In neighboring French Guiana, another large-scale modernization project started in the year that the dam was closed. This was the construction of the Kourou missile base, where many Maroons found work.<sup>15</sup>

The Brokopondo reservoir lies much deeper in the rainforest than the now overgrown “cordon” path that separated colonial society from the forests. It is much further



Projection of the forest land that would disappear into the reservoir, including the habitats of the various Maroon communities. Drawing: S. Lekidjah, 1958. Collection Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), The Netherlands.



In *Dee Sitonu A Weti*, Helena Doenoe, Silvana Donoe and Louisa Vrede (above) recite the transmigration experiences of Nora Pamarie and Griselda Waandels Snel (below). Upper photo by Tolin Alexander.

## FIELD NOTES

Brownsveg, November 7, 2015.  
Conversation in Saamakatongo.

The memories of the transmigration are still vivid for Nora Pamarie and Griselda Waandels Snel, both around ninety years old. They are aunts of Dorus Vrede, who also takes part in the conversation. Roxan Rahaman, a young woman from Victoria, another transmigration village, will ask the questions this time.

**Nora Pamarie:**

The authorities had warned us that the village would disappear under water, but we thought that just could not be. So we kept waiting until it became clear that the rising water was really going to drive us away. Then the villagers who lived closest to the river began to move. But we who lived higher up did not. We persisted to the very last moment and then had to rush to save what could still be saved. Many agricultural plots full of paddy (rice) ready for harvest had meanwhile been flooded, including mine. By boat.

**Roxan Rahaman:**

During the period of Marronage, our ancestors often had to move. They always took seeds with them to sow again at the next living place. Did you do that this time as well?

**Nora Pamarie:**

We did. This was the case during our departure from Old-Ganzé as well. We too took seeds to grow in our new village. Do you see all this fruit? The seeds were brought for it then. We took everything that mattered as our small children needed fruit, of course. We also took paddy, napi (tuber), cassava, bananas, sugar cane, cashew. So we brought all that with us!

**Dorus Vrede:**

I returned with my grandmother from a trip to Wakibasú and we saw women with all kinds of crops. They called out to us: “We’re calling it quits!” My grandmother responded with: “Go then!” She didn’t want to hear anything about a forced departure.



upstream than Mawasi, that old frontier where the Maroons used to cleanse themselves after visiting the city. With the construction of the reservoir a new frontier seemed to have come into being. The forest area behind the dam was opened up by a road that would be used for further exploitation of the rainforest. Upon Suriname's independence in 1975, the extraction still continued unabated.

## COLLECTIVE LEGAL PERSONALITY

“We’re living in a gold mine,” an Okanisi Maroon in Nieuw Koffiekamp explained to us. His parents had to move to make way for the reservoir, but in the meantime their new habitat had also been appropriated by a multinational corporation. The government had issued a gold concession to a Canadian mining company for the land the community inhabited. “We’re not allowed to hunt here anymore, because our land is now owned by the whites,” the man continued.<sup>H</sup> To survive in this situation, the inhabitants went into gold mining themselves.

Nieuw Koffiekamp, it turned out, was not the only community confronted yet again with expropriation upon their relocation. In the transmigration village of Kajapaati, Saamaka women told us about the “Sineisi” who had appeared unannounced on their agricultural plots with containers, excavators, chainsaws, and “the correct papers.”<sup>I</sup> The *kabiten* from the neighboring Maroon village Nieuw Aurora was familiar with them as well. He told



Brokopoondo reservoir, 2015.



Film stills *Dee Sitonu A Weti*, 2018.  
Goldfields at the transmigration village of Nieuw Koffiekamp.

us: “The Chinese clear everything. They cut down all the trees, removing even the smallest twigs.” The loggers blocked creeks with sand and logs for their bulldozers to drive over. Our interpreter, also an eyewitness, explained: “The creek can then no longer flow. You get a swampy morass and everything gets disrupted.” Closing creeks was disastrous for the community: “We drink water from those creeks and then have no more drinking water.” The animals had no business here: “Because if you remove all the trees, there’s no more fruit for the animals to eat. There’s no more water because the creeks have been closed. The destruction of the forest destroys their food source. Then the animals leave.”<sup>J</sup>

**H**  
Translated transcript of an audio recorded conversation conducted in Okanisitongo, Nieuw Koffiekamp, November 7, 2015. Speakers: Albert Eersteling, Alfred Prijor, Joseph Adrie Prijor. Dorus Vrede moderated the conversation. Eersteling and Prijor recited their experiences themselves in *Dee Sitonu A Weti* in film chapter “Bowels of the Earth.”

**I**  
Translated transcript of an audio recorded conversation conducted in Saamakatongo, Kajaapati, November 1, 2015. Speakers: Sylvi Adjako, Pomba Adjako, Petrusi Adjako, Christina Adjako, and *basia* Luben. Hugo Jabini and Dorus Vrede moderated the conversation.

**J**  
Translated transcript of an audio recorded conversation conducted in Saamakatongo, Nieuw Aurora, November 2, 2015. Speaker: *kabiten* Nicolaas Petrusi. Hugo Jabini moderated the conversation and complemented the stories on Chinese loggers with his own experiences.

The Chinese lumberjacks that these Saamaka speak of are not descendants of the ones De Kom wrote about. Their ancestors did not come to Suriname in the nineteenth century to take over the work on the plantations after the abolition of slavery. They are a new group of labor migrants. When China declared a domestic logging ban in the 1990s, its logging companies flocked to foreign countries.<sup>16</sup> They also ended up in Suriname, welcomed with tax exemptions and flexible enforcement of the rules.<sup>17</sup> Suriname rapidly issued commercial logging licenses for its forests. A significant portion of these concessions were in the habitats of the Indigenous peoples and the Maroons. The residents were hardly ever informed in advance. They were offered no say in the matter nor were they compensated for damages done.<sup>18</sup> To stop the destruction of the rainforest, the Saamaka people appealed to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 2001.<sup>19</sup>

The crime seems clear: biodiverse habitats are being destroyed. But can an ongoing destruction of rainforests be stopped in a courtroom? In his article “When the forest screams” (2019), anthropologist Juan José Guzmán argues that it is one of the many faces of neo-colonial dynamics that the same western values and worldviews responsible for the destruction of nature also underlie the legal system by which ecosystems must be defended. He writes:

The invasion of indigenous territories—and the human rights violations associated with

extractive practices—are a consequence of a development discourse that relies on the exploitation of so-called ‘natural resources’. In other words, neocolonial extractivist practices are sustained by a particular conception of nature as a set bunch of passive and agencyless objects intended to satisfy human needs.<sup>20</sup>

The “passive and agencyless objects” that Guzmán speaks about are not far removed from Grotius’s concept of nature, which rendered nature as “inferior” to and in the service of man. In this way the colonial ideology continues to impact a postcolonial world.

How can nature be protected from the destruction caused by resource exploitation if its purpose is to be a resource for humans? The Saamaka would be confronted with this paradox in the courtroom of the Inter-American Court. In the report of the lawsuit written by the Saamaka’s lawyer Fergus MacKay, we read how the Maroon witnesses tried to express the value of the forest in terms of appropriation and utility. In the words of the testimony of Wazen Edwards, the *hedikabiten* of the Dombi-lo, from Pikin Slee:

The forest is our market, this is where we get our medicines: our medicinal plants. This is where we hunt so as to have meat to eat.<sup>21</sup>

The Maroons’ age-old pact with the rainforest would not be legally recognized by the tribunal. But what could be presented as evidence was the old Saamaka peace treaty with the colonial government. In this 1762 agreement, which according to the Saamaka oral tradition had been ritually ratified before the gods and ancestors, it was agreed that the community was entitled to hold the territories for which their ancestors had fought.<sup>22</sup> Or as several Saamaka said to us: “The whole area from the stones at Mawasi to the source rivers of the Suriname River has been ours ever since.”

Suriname’s legal team, however, defended the position that all land was owned by the state. It held that the Saamaka could not derive any rights from peace treaties concluded at a time when Suriname was still a colony. Their land use had been merely “tolerated” by the state. According to the state’s attorneys, there was a lack of clarity about the boundaries of the land they used. Their interests were subordinate to the national interest. In addition, they hardly formed a distinct group, and had been almost entirely “assimilated into the larger, and inherently superior, Surinamese society and economy.”<sup>23</sup>

“Distinct” turned out to be a key word, because only a “tribal people” that differed from the “Western” norm could claim ancestral land

rights under the laws of the tribunal. With some regularity, the Maroon witnesses were therefore asked questions such as: “Are you familiar with Western codes, with Western law, or do you have a different system that you use?” Or: “Do the Saramaka people have their own customary laws, their own values, and mores according to which they have been living for more than three hundred years?”<sup>24</sup> From Hugo Jabini, a Saamaka who had attended the sessions, we heard of the lengthy discussions such questions provoked about “the boundaries of being Saamaka.”<sup>K</sup> Were members of the community who used chainsaws or motor boats still Saamakas? And what about those who worked in the gold industry? Or those who lived in the city, who wore modern clothes and spoke Dutch? The debate elicited from Saamaka witness Albert Aboikoni the statement that: “Even if you live on the moon, you are still a Saamaka.”<sup>25</sup>

To support their claim of “distinctness,” the Saamaka turned to Richard Price as an expert witness. In *Rainforest Warriors* (2012), the anthropologist describes being forced to “do the splits” in court. According to the current standard of anthropology, the “us-and-the-other” dichotomy is obsolete. But because this “fiction” still lives on in international law, he had to rely on it. He writes:

It becomes necessary, for the purposes of argument, to accept the multiple fictions that created the category of “tribal peoples.” And it becomes equally necessary to engage in the teaching effort—aimed at the judges and the State, who are likely to share certain stereotypes about “tribal peoples”—stressing that such peoples live (and have always lived) fully in history, exercise their own agency, adopt (and have always adopted) changes and possess a degree of historical consciousness that permits them to make sophisticated choices about directions for their society’s future. It becomes necessary to insist that “they” are in every way as modern as “we.”<sup>26</sup>

The Saamaka eventually won the lawsuit in 2006. The Inter-American court ruled that the Saamaka had the right to live on their ancestral lands and use

**K** Hugo Jabini is one of the initiators and spokesperson of the VSG (Association of Saamaka Authorities), the organization that brought the complaint against the state of Suriname before the Interamerican Court. He accompanied us to a number of Maroon communities struggling with timber concessionaires. The conversation about the lawsuit took place during a research trip to Kajapaati, Jaw Jaw, Lespansi, and Nieuw Aurora in the Upper Suriname area, November 2015. See Chapter 9.

these according to their customs. The state of Suriname was ordered to recognize and guarantee the Saamaka's collective property rights to their territories. Since Suriname's constitution only accepts individual entities as having a legal personality, it had to be amended to also acknowledge collectives as legal persons.<sup>L</sup> When issuing concessions, the Surinamese government would have to respect the rights of the inland residents by requiring the concessionaires to present their plans to the communities living there.<sup>27</sup> The plans could then be implemented only if the communities approved them.<sup>M</sup>

The recognition of collective property made the judgment significant for all tribal peoples in the Americas who practice this particular form of property. Moreover, this judgment gave all Maroon communities (including those in Jamaica, Colombia, Belize, Brazil and elsewhere) an internationally recognized legal status, making them equivalent with Indigenous peoples. The lawsuit provided a basis as well for obliging initiators of major development projects in the Americas to supply communities with timely notice of their intentions in order to obtain their free, prior, and informed consent.

But what the Saamaka's lawsuit demonstrates above all is that complex maneuvers are needed to defend biodiverse habitats in courtrooms. Within a legal order that regards nature as a resource for man, the former can only be protected in a roundabout fashion, namely by appealing to human rights. Collective land rights can be assigned solely to collective legal persons, and only a people that can prove themselves to be "tribal," by distinguishing themselves from "modern" western standards, can qualify for this status.

## ALL THINGS EXIST IN PARTS

In collaborating with the Maroons, we learned that they do not permit themselves to be caught in a stereotype. Their culture is not static. They make their own choices and reflect on them—as Price had sought to prove in court. In particular, one

**L**  
In Chapter 8 we will elaborate on the juridical concept "person."

**M**  
Concessions would only be allowed in community habitats if the state met strict conditions. For example, the impact on the environment had to be investigated in advance; the community had to be consulted beforehand, and the exploitation had to have a reasonable advantage for them too. The state would be allowed to limit the community's property rights to their lands only for major social interest, with a purely economic argument being insufficient here.



Boatmaker Bernard Boji draws on an oil drum how one digs a tree to make a boat. Pikin Slee, 2015.

conversation in Pikin Slee provided us with further insight into the adaptability of tradition.<sup>N</sup> A few days earlier, we had filmed two experienced boatmakers crafting a dug-out canoe from a tree. For days the men worked with ax and chainsaw deep in the forest. After a tree had been felled, hollowed out and peeled, the boat-to-be was towed by tractor along the long forest path to the riverside workshop. Documenting the process had caused a degree of controversy because, as some argued, making the boat for the film should have been done in the traditional way. Which means: “without machines.” Others, however, were of the opinion that tradition could be continued “with machines.” Four men “well-versed in the culture” gathered in the boat workshop to discuss the issue further. One of the boatmakers opened the conversation.

**Pantooie (Loly) Doekoe:**

We no longer live with our culture in exactly the same way as our ancestors did. Things have started to change. We descendants have changed it. We have mixed *bakaa* life into it. I’ve seen this myself. I’ll leave it at this right now.

“I’ll leave it at this right now” was the sign that the others could add their own contributions. In a lively discussion, the men then analysed how *bakaa* life (“white-life”) had affected their society. While the speakers appreciated modern conveniences, they were aware of how they disrupted their culture of coexistence. For example, the noise of the chainsaw now forced them to “sing silently to the forest

<sup>N</sup> Translated transcript of an audio recorded conversation conducted in Saamakatongo, Pikin Slee, November 12, 2016. Speakers: Bernard Boji, Pantooie Doekoe (Loly), Onie Doekoe (Moi), and Arnold Djamanto (Jelisie). Tolin Alexander moderated the conversation.

deities.” Also discussed was how “the machines” appeared to be seducing them increasingly into a more individualistic lifestyle. The boatmaker Bernard Boji, in whose workshop the conversation took place, explained:

Previously we would have used thirty men to pull that boat out of the forest. In the process we would have told each other many stories ... But the tractor doesn't give you the words of your older brother, your uncle, or your grandfather. It only helps you with your work and that's it!

Other speakers agreed with him that although the machines made the work go faster and “without sighing,” they also made them less dependent on each other, and consequently less available for each other. The men then discussed “the money economy.” One of them, Onie (Moi) Doekoe, said:

Where our origin lies, our life cannot become like that of the whites. Bakaa has nothing to do with color. If you work for money, then you're white.

“Where our origin lies” appeared to refer to the ancestors' struggle against the *saafubasi* and the exploitative plantation system.<sup>o</sup> The speaker seemed to suggest that these ancestors would not approve of them “working for money.” In the conversation about motorized tools, it was also mentioned that the ancestors “have you catch a fever if you work freely and easily.” Or even: “If we don't pay attention, the people who went before us could kill us because we do everything very



Film stills *Dee Sitonu A Weti*, 2018.  
Bootmaking in the forest.



Film stills *Dee Sitonu A Weti*, 2018.  
Widening the boat by burning it.

**O**  
*Saafubasi* means “slave boss” in Saamakatongo.

**P**  
A bill was submitted to parliament in 2018, but this has not been discussed to date (January 2021).

quickly these days.” Were the Maroons here being urged by their ancestors to what Mignolo called “disobedient conservatism” towards the money economy and its irresistible pressure to do everything faster? Even so, the men believed that money and machines could no longer be banished from their society. The outcome of the conversation was offered by Bernard Boji:

**All things exist in parts. Anything is always divided into several parts ... We descendants can change the things that our ancestors passed on, but you have to know which parts of it you are going to change.”**

He added to this reflection that the practice of making the other proud—“so that he is not ashamed”—is something that should not change. But would this community that was seeing bakaa life coming its way be able to offer sufficient resistance to maintain those habits they held dear?

Despite the Saamaka's successful lawsuit, Suriname continues to issue concessions on the ancestral lands of the Indigenous peoples and the Maroons. A smooth implementation of the Inter-American Court's judgment has not happened. The collective legal personality is still not enshrined in the Surinamese constitution.<sup>P</sup>

The Maroons we met seemed well aware that the binding force of law is not effected by judges alone. Many would be willing to participate in a film about their alliance with the rainforest in order to bring their struggle for land rights to the attention of a wider audience. Together we would try to form a creative collective locally in the rainforest. But before we tell how our Maroon collaborators invited the Suriname River to become part of this collective, we will first make one last detour along another river, which recently experienced a change of status.



SYMBIONTS IN  
JURISPRUDENCE

## A NONHUMAN ANCESTOR AS A LEGAL ENTITY

We began our research for an ‘episode of the land’ in Ecuador.<sup>A</sup> Two years after the Inter-American Court had ruled that Suriname must legally enshrine collective legal personhood of the Saamaka, Indigenous peoples on the other side of the Amazon rainforest succeeded in amending their country’s constitution to also recognize rivers, mountains and forests as legal entities.<sup>B</sup> In Ecuador’s new social contract, nonhuman entities were accorded rights comparable to those of human beings. Their value was no longer determined by how people use them. Rather, these entities were recognized as having an existence and value of their own (even if human beings would still be needed to represent them in courtrooms).<sup>1</sup>

Other countries too have now enshrined the rights of nature in laws. Often, these laws were the culmination of long-drawn disputes. For example, a number of Maori peoples waged a 140-year battle against the Crown of New Zealand until the Whanganui River—after which these peoples call themselves—was recognized as a legal entity in 2017. In an interview, the chief negotiator of the Whanganui Iwi pointed out why it was important to his people that the legal personality of the river be enshrined in law:

The reason we have taken this approach is because we consider the river an ancestor and always have ... We have fought to find an approximation in law so that all others can understand that from our perspective treating the river as a living entity is the correct way to approach it, as in indivisible whole, instead of the traditional model for the last 100 years of treating it from a perspective of ownership and management.<sup>2</sup>

We had previously encountered a body of water considered a relative in the writing of Grotius, who presented the ocean as a “parent” so that it might be safeguarded from human appropriation.<sup>C</sup> Apparently a century and a half of activism were needed in order to correct the regime that Grotius had helped to legitimize.

**A**  
See Chapter 3 of this book.

**B**  
The new constitution not only incorporates the rights of nature, but also recognizes the collective rights of Indigenous peoples. It redefines Ecuador as a plurinational state, one in which different peoples, cultures and worldviews coexist.

**C**  
For Grotius defining the ocean as nonhuman parent, see Chapter 6 of this book.

Upon examining New Zealand's new law, we note that much attention is given to 'reparation'.<sup>3</sup> It contains a lengthy article entitled "Crown acknowledgment and apology." Herein the Crown admits that upon assuming authority and control over the river in 1840, it had failed to recognize the special relation of the Whanganui Iwi with the river.<sup>4</sup> It apologizes for not involving these communities in the management of the river and for introducing laws that made it possible to exploit it.<sup>D</sup> The article also describes the steps that the Whanganui Iwi undertook to oppose exploitation of the river, and explains how, as a result of the Crown's actions, these communities had been unable to exercise their customary rights in order to meet their "responsibilities" towards the river for its "care, protection, management, and use."

Although the legislative text is largely written in English, certain articles are included in the Whanganui Iwi language, and references are made to concepts from their culture. For example, it is stated that the Whanganui Iwi consider the river ecosystem as "Te Awa Tupua," what is described as the "permanent concept" of "the inseparability of the people and the River." The legal entity of the river is named after this concept. It is defined as: "an indivisible and living whole, comprising the Whanganui River from the mountains to the sea, incorporating its tributaries and all its physical and metaphysical elements." The metaphysical elements are not specified, but the physical ones are. These are understood as: the body of water known as the Whanganui River, including all tributaries, streams, and other natural watercourses, and all lakes and wetlands located within its catchment. The beds of these bodies of water are part of the legal entity, including "the subsoil, the plants attached to the bed, the space occupied by the water," and even "the airspace above the water."

Remarkably, the communities living in the basin do not appear to be part of the legal entity that was named after the very inseparability of the people and the river. The land irrigated by the river is also excluded, as is the river water itself, because,

**D**  
For example, by enacting legislation stipulating that everyone was free to sail on the river, that gravel and shingle could be extracted from its bed, that minerals present in the river bed belonged to the state, that it was allowed to divert the river to permit the passage of steamboats, that certain fish species could be exterminated, and that the river and its tributaries could be used for hydropower installations.

under New Zealand common law, water cannot be owned. Moreover, the law determines that existing property rights will be respected. Because of this, parts of the river that are owned by companies that exploit hydropower, irrigate land, or engage in fishing or tourism, for example, fall outside of the legal entity.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, it is stated that two “guardians”—one appointed by the state and one by the Whanganui Iwi—will be responsible for the “health and well-being” of the river.

That a river considered an ancestor is recognized as a legal person appeals to the imagination. Yet it is striking how accurately it is delimited by law. Can the collectivity of people and river be protected by the guardians in a situation in which the irrigated land, the river water, the people living in the catchment area, and the parts of the river that are private property are split off from the legally recognized entity?

The New Zealand law is still too new to judge its viability, but in Ecuador nonhuman legal entities have been around for a little longer. Ten years after its introduction, the effectiveness of enshrining the rights of nature in law was examined by the anthropologist Juan José Guzmán.<sup>6</sup> He describes how shortly after the introduction of the constitution, President Correa appealed to the international community to compensate his country economically if Ecuador refrained from extracting oil in the rainforest. When his call was scarcely heeded, the country continued to issue oil concessions. It even passed a new law to boost mining.

Not only policymakers, but also judges allowed the economic importance of resource extraction to outweigh the interests of ecosystems. Virtually all lawsuits invoking the rights of nature were lost. Guzmán observes that the judges appear to have lacked knowledge of how to apply the new constitution. The ecosystems declared legal entities became competitors of the other legal entities in court, the former being jurisprudentially disadvantaged by the absence of a solid body of case law.

Even so, Guzmán concludes that enshrining the rights of nature in the constitution has had a positive influence. It has introduced the wider society of Ecuador and beyond to the Indigenous principle that humans and nonhumans are part of the same life cycle. This in turn has led to a greater appreciation for their historically repressed knowledge and ways of life. Moreover, the new constitution has made Indigenous communities more aware of their cultural identity and given them greater confidence in standing up to neocolonial practices of extraction.

## COLLECTIVE OBLIGATION

You can win lawsuits and change constitutions, yet the practices of extraction seem to continue no less than before. Are today's legal systems equipped to protect biotic habitats from destruction? Lawyer Kyle McGee notes that a legal apparatus based on the legal entity of the "person" is less suitable for this purpose. To trace the fault in the weave, he goes back to Roman law. Here, a bifurcation of nature was introduced through the "law of persons."<sup>7</sup> The law instituted a rigid hierarchy. At the top was "the free citizen," who was said to have free will and therefore was empowered to act. At the bottom was "the slave," who had only their body at their disposal, and could not even possess that. Whether someone could incur debt, conclude contracts, acquire property, etc., was determined by their status in this hierarchy. In this way, the law of persons detached humans from their social fabric, and split them into a body and a legal personality. A person's status then dictated which actions his body was allowed to perform.

In modern law, the concept of "person" continues to individualize, separate and rank entities. For McGee, this makes today's legal systems less suitable for protecting collectives—whether human communities or ecosystems—given that collectives are inextricably intertwined and sensitive, and difficult to demarcate or divide. When an ecosystem is framed as a legal person, something of its interdependence and reactive capacity is always left unaccounted.<sup>8</sup>

However, McGee maintains that practices of extraction can only continue to disrupt ecosystems so long as divisions and hierarchies continue to shape legal relationships. In order to repair this "original sin of law," he searches for another foundation of legality.<sup>9</sup> For this, he dives down into an underexposed side where theory and practice are not separated, but linked.<sup>10</sup> It is here that lawyers undertake the challenge of collecting case law. They find connections with earlier lawsuits—which at first sight have little to do with the present case—to present a "provisional systemization" for submission to the judicial body deciding the case.<sup>11</sup> The jurisprudential handiwork of making new connections highlights, for McGee, that law is not one pre-given, pre-constituted legal system, but a work in progress that is constantly being built upon.<sup>12, E</sup>

McGee argues that the so-called "binding force of law" is not generated by legal theory, but arises from its implementation in practice. In order to be effective, judgments and laws need to be ratified in "a living, changing, material territory composed of entangled humans and nonhumans, shifting natures and cultures, dynamic bodies and signs."<sup>13</sup> In this earth-bound territory, legal

relations (such as rights, duties, privileges, powers) are instantiated and disseminated through material things.<sup>14</sup> People encounter these “mediators” of legal values and negotiate with them in a performance which is repeated over and over again. He explains this with a reference to property law that is reaffirmed each time someone’s behavior is influenced, for example, by a fence. Whenever a person encounters a physical boundary and decides not to enter the fenced area, that person confirms, by his or her act, the law that gives owners the exclusive authority over their property. With this observation, he does not seem to be wanting to urge people to climb over fences in order to undermine property rights. Rather, he wishes to point out that those who do *not* climb over fences actively enlist themselves in the collective with this behavior. For him, a fence not only divides and excludes, but also connects. In this way, he reminds us that a community is not a collection of bodies that passively follow laws, but that its members actively forge themselves into a community by fulfilling collective obligations.<sup>15</sup>

**E**  
The term “jurisprudence” may give rise to some confusion. In a European context, the term refers usually to precedents and case law, whereas in an Anglo-Saxon context it also, and mainly, refers to the philosophy of law. McGee appears to use jurisprudence to refer to the source of law provided by practice, which seems closer to the European tradition.

**F**  
Although McGee himself does not refer to this, the emergence of laws in practice seems to have parallels with customary rights—that old unwritten source of law that the Maroons still use, but which has now been almost entirely supplanted in Europe by written law.

States and their institutions proclaim themselves to be the only authorities that can decree binding collective obligations, but McGee points out that the members of a society comply with obligations that are not (yet) included in the law as well.<sup>16</sup> Every day, members express through their behavior: these are the things to which we commit, these are the relationships that are important to us, these are actors we depend on for our survival, and that is why we adhere to these rules. These unwritten precepts that members collectively fulfil in practice, constitute, for him, the “raw materials of law.” In this way, “a kind of experimental jurisprudence” is created in society, one that can change the written laws from below.<sup>17, F</sup>

McGee signals that our existential dependence on entangled ecosystems equally generates collective obligations to which we as humans collectively respond every day in order to survive on earth.<sup>18</sup> To fulfil these obligations, he urges us to mobilize the widest possible coalition by connecting the “ecological injuries” caused by extractive

industries to their chains of dependency.<sup>19</sup> He writes: “The more numerous and more heterogeneous the alliances forged, the more articulate the affected publics become.”<sup>20</sup> For only a broad coalition would be able to withstand the broad assembly of co-conspirators who disturb life on earth, and would ultimately be able to change the legal system by way of experimental jurisprudence.

Such a coalition, for him, not only unites diverse human groups. Ecosystems and even speculative actors such as future generations would too be part of it. He suggests that this pluriverse is not guided by one sovereign power—a ruling role now being claimed by “Man.” Rather, its members share sovereignty.<sup>21</sup> As interdependent coexisting actors they constantly renegotiate the norms and impose laws upon each other. He even talks about “the jurisprudence of the symbionts.”<sup>22</sup>

Even so, McGee’s reflections on a broad coalition of vulnerable interdependent actors developing their own jurisprudence remain somewhat sketchy. For what does jurisprudence look like if other-than-human beings are part of the alliance? How can we, as human members of the collective, recognize the laws imposed by all those other acting entities that—as Rouch, Glissant and Haraway have suggested—are constantly changing in relation to each other? Or, to paraphrase Glissant’s question for a biodiverse alliance: how can we form a coalition with what we cannot grasp?



Constructing the *azan* gate at the path leading to a place of worship in Lespansi, 2017.



*Azan* gate at the village entrance of Lebidoti, 2017.

**G**

The Maroon construct *azan* gates out of palm branches at the entrance of their villages and at the paths leading to their sacred places. For this gate-building ritual, see *supra* Chapter 6, and film chapter “Willing Woods” in *Dee Sitonu A Weti*.

**H**

Words of Theo Maai from Grantatai. Translated transcript from an audio recorded conversation conducted in Saamakatongo, Pikin Slee, November 16, 2015. Moderated by Dorus Vrede.

**I**

Words of Amoni Agi from Bendikwai, cited in *Everything is gone forever*, Erney Landveld (Paramaribo, 2009), pp. 102–103.

**J**

Words of *obiama* (medicine man) Alfons Doekoe. Translated transcript from an audio recorded conversation conducted in Saamakatongo in Saamaka Museum, Pikin Slee, November 17, 2015. Group conversation moderated by Dorus Vrede and Duncan Prijor.

**K**

Words of Sylvi Adjako. Translated transcript from an audio recorded conversation conducted in Saamakatongo, Kajaapati, November 1, 2015, moderated by Hugo Jabini and Dorus Vrede.

Could a community that does not place fences to shut out the unknown, but builds *azan* gates to make connections, perhaps provide clues as to how we can form alliances with those who never fully reveal themselves? <sup>G</sup> In their conversations with us, the Maroons time and again alluded to the “messages,” the “signs,” and the “hints” of the forest, the meaning of which they were unable to understand immediately. We remember the man from the village of Grantatai, who said to us: “The way we are here, things talk to us. When the leaves on the trees rustle, they speak, even if you don’t know what they’re saying.” <sup>H</sup> We recall the man from Bendikwai, who had been puzzled by the strange behavior of animals which heralded a devastating flood, and who concluded: “That’s how the rainforest warned us, but we didn’t get the message.” <sup>I</sup> Our minds go back to the *obiama* who described how members of the community sometimes inadvertently disrupted a forest spirit: “You swing your ax, and the forest beckons you not to do it that way. But you don’t notice it and you just keep going. Until you, or someone close to you, is overcome by the *apunku* and the deity makes clear to you what’s going on.” <sup>J</sup> With statements like these, the Maroons seemed to express that for them the rainforest was an entanglement of beings that could never be completely fathomed, with whom they had nevertheless entered into alliances. Was recognizing the right to opacity one such collective obligation in order to join the coalition of symbionts?

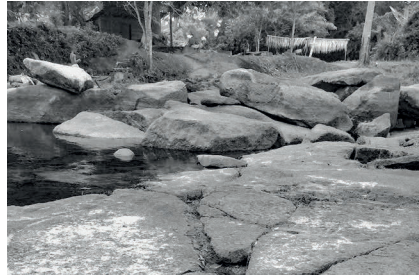
Working with the Maroons, we would learn that they had a whole range of practices for maintaining relationships with those who never fully revealed themselves. With libations, prayers, and other rituals, they seemed to re-enroll themselves over and again in that broad coalition of allies comprising the human and nonhuman, because to them the *matu* (forest) was a *mati* (friend). The ethos of this broad collective seemed to be that all species needed to be able to thrive. Or as a Maroon woman from Kajaapati expressed this solidarity: “The forest takes care of us and we take care of the forest.” <sup>K</sup>

And indeed, the beings of the forest passed their rules onto them. The Maroons, for example, told how



the deities residing in large stones in the forest had taught them that no agricultural plots could be built near them, how the river god had forbidden them to kill snakes, and how deities in certain trees passed on to them the message that they could not just be cut down. Were these precepts that the Saamaka called *weti*, not also a kind of jurisprudence?<sup>L</sup> By observing the *weti*, they seemed to know how to act so as not to disrupt the entangled ecosystem and had managed to attach themselves to that generous but sensitive ecosystem.

The Maroons who—in De Kom’s words—opposed the “Western production system” and relied on reciprocal relations with the unknown, after careful consideration, allowed us *bakaa* (whites) to pass through their gates.<sup>M</sup> They turned out to be willing to make a film with us about their alliance with the forest. Collectively we would try to start in dialogue. Would we, as an ad hoc collective making a film together, be able to develop some form of jurisprudence for an extensive coauthorship?



*Azan gate at the village entrance of Dangogo, 2017.*

<sup>L</sup> *Weti* seems to be rooted in the Dutch word *wet* (law), which is etymologically derived from *weten* (knowing).

<sup>M</sup> *Bakaa* usually refers to white persons, but is also used more broadly for those who adopt white culture. See Chapter 7.



## CHAPTER 9

# FIELDWORK ALONG THE SURINAME RIVER



Boatman Blanki Asoedanoë on the Suriname River, November 2015.



Arrival in Lebidoti, 2015.

A

Advisors: Marcel Pinas, Erney Landveld, Berry Vrede, Dorus Vrede, Hugo Jabini, Tolin Alexander, Ann Hermelijn, Soulamy Laurens, Pricella Ledes, Corine Spoor.

B

The *kabiten* is the highest authority figure of a Maroon village, a position somewhat comparable to that of mayor.

## ANOTHER CRUISE ADRIFT

This time it was not the sea — that ancient ancestor, that carried us — but a relative: a river that had dug its bed into the rocks of the Guyana Shield. We traveled upstream to its source rivers in slender dugouts called *korjaals*. The many stones, sometimes invisible under the water, forced the boatmen to constantly maneuver. Skillfully, they guided the boats through the rocks and over the waterfalls in low water and in high. Our lives depended on these experienced helmsmen of the Suriname River.

Before embarking on this journey, we formed a circle of advisers in Paramaribo to develop a plan of action with them.<sup>A</sup> They drew our attention to the fact that Maroons in the interior do not like being photographed, urging us not to “steal images,” but always seek permission before bringing out our camera. We proposed to compose a script based on interviews which could be reviewed by the community before it was filmed (similar to how we had previously collaborated with the Urk fishermen). The procedure seemed to appeal to the advisers. It was pointed out to us, however, that the Maroons might not always understand our “western questions.” These would first have to be “culturally translated.” They suggested that we travel inland in the company of Maroons who could both translate and intercede. In *kuutus* (meetings) we could then discuss our proposal to make a film in the different villages.

With this advice our fieldwork began. Writer Dorus Vrede invariably traveled with us, his *kabiten* status radiating the necessary authority.<sup>B</sup> When visiting Okanisi communities, theater maker Tolin Alexander, himself an Okanisi,

joined the team. When traveling to communities facing resource extraction on their ancestral lands, we were accompanied by Saamaka lawyer Hugo Jabini. Sometimes a production assistant came along too, to organize our stays in the different villages. On the way, other local experts got involved. With this group we visited thirteen villages. <sup>C</sup>

In the front of the boat was always a box of rum. Immediately after mooring, we would visit the village council to hand them a bottle and to explain our intentions. After a *basia* had summarized our message for the *kabiten*, a brief discussion often followed. <sup>D</sup> To conclude the meeting, a drink libation was offered to the gods and the ancestors. Following this ritual, we would be introduced to speakers with “knowledge of the culture” and the work could begin.

Although we were usually warmly welcomed, the conversations did not always get off to an easy start immediately. The fact that we — as whites — were interested in the experiences of the Maroons sometimes aroused suspicion. Several speakers asked us: “First our ancestors were enslaved by yours, and now we must give information to you as well. What’s in it for us?” Others said: “I know something about it, but I don’t want to tell.” The ancestors and the gods did not allow knowledge to be shared with strangers just like that. Past experience had taught them the danger of indiscretion.

Despite this, many saw the benefits of a film in which they could elaborate on their history and way of life from their own perspective. It was often mentioned that with the new medium, the culture could be transferred to those who had left the villages to “earn money or study in the city.” Everyone seemed to agree that the knowledge of the culture should not be lost. But on whether this ought to be shared through the film with outsiders who lived far from their river, even with “descendants of slave masters,” opinions differed.

Most, however, realized that a film could once again highlight their struggle for the rainforest. Although the Inter-American Court had ruled that the state should recognize the land rights of the Maroons, the government continued to drag its heels in implementing the decision. In the meantime, permits to extract resources from the Maroon’s lands continued to be issued unabated. It was *basia*

<sup>C</sup>  
On the upper reaches of the Suriname River we conducted fieldwork in Asindohopo, Akieshamau, Semoisie, Pikin Slee, Jaw Jaw, Nieuw Aurora, Kajapaati and Lespansi. Downstream, north of the reservoir, we consulted the residents of Nieuw Lombe, Nieuw Koffiekamp and Brownsweg. We also visited the communities of Lebidoti and Baku, who lived on islands in the reservoir.

<sup>D</sup>  
The *basias* are a kind of councilors, who assist the *kabiten*. On plantations, the *basia* was an enslaved person, supervised by a who was charged with overseeing his fellow workers in the fields. The Maroons adopted the term and gave a new meaning to it.

<sup>E</sup>  
Transcript of the audio-recordings of the *kuutu* in Asindohopo, October 27, 2015.



Conversation in Lespansi with basia Nettie Kobita (Maa Tooy) and *kabiten* Wee Wee Sofesie, 2015.



Conversation in Kajapaati with Sylvi, Pomba, Petrusi and Christina Adjako, 2015.



Group photo following the *kuutu* in Asindohopo, 2015.

Tablet's fierce speech during the *kuutu* in Asindohopo that seemed to articulate why all the communities we visited ultimately decided to cooperate with the film.

Basia Tablet:

Wherever something of value can be taken, the whites will come. But if they are interested in the resources in our soil and in our forests, surely there must be some way to talk about it? Then there's no need to come with coercion and oppression, is it? That's outdated, isn't it? So let's work with these whites who appear to be people of goodwill to ensure that others will deal with us and the earth more fairly.<sup>E</sup>

## FILM SCRIPT AS A CONTRACT

It was during the conversations in the interior that the screenplay came together slowly but surely. With each meeting, the twists in the plot took on greater relief. A recurring starting point was the *fesiten* traditions on their escape from slavery and their struggle against the colonial troops. Via the encounters of Maroon ancestors with Indigenous people and the forest deities, the story then led to the peace treaty. When this had been told, the transmigration from the reservoir came up, as well as the new exploitation of the rainforest for mining and logging. Sharing knowledge with white outsiders and unknown distant audiences also became a common theme.

The audio recordings of these consultations, conducted in Saamakatongo and Okanisitongo and often lasting several hours, were written out in Dutch by a team of passionate translators.<sup>1</sup> When reading





*Kuutu* in Pikin Slee, November 15, 2015.

these transcripts, we noted that the Maroon speakers frequently used coded language. We encountered all kinds of indirect formulations for talking about payments. For example, we came across the cryptic question: “Will I get a bit of *soft*?” This was answered with an equally puzzling: “They’re going to put some tobacco in your hands. I don’t know if it’s wet or dry tobacco, but you’ll get it.”<sup>F</sup> Evocative images were also summoned to admonish someone to be restrained in sharing knowledge, such as: “Never steer the *korjaal* directly downstream.”

Based on the topics raised by the Maroons in the discussions, we selected excerpts from the many pages of written material. Usually we incorporated pieces of dialogue unaltered. Sometimes we shortened narratives. Every now and then, we intertwined passages from different conversations on the same subject. And very occasionally we integrated quotations from books written by Maroons or in which they were cited.<sup>2</sup> This was how we compiled a first script. It was Vinije Haabo and Tolin Alexander who translated the draft script back into the Maroon languages.<sup>G</sup> This was then submitted to the community for feedback. After processing the comments, the script acted as a kind of contract. It contained what could be made public and thus indirectly what had to be kept secret.

But then there were those other contracts, the contracts that caused division. Because while we and the Maroons were figuring out how to make a film collectively, we were confronted with the protocols of the film industry. We (the two Dutch makers) were presented with a contract, in which we had to confirm that we were the “authors” and “sole rights holders” of the film script, transferring our copyrights to the

<sup>F</sup> Translated transcript of an exchange between Sylvi Adjako and Hugo Jabini conducted in Saamakotongo, Kajapaati, November 1, 2015.

<sup>G</sup> Vinije Haabo is a Maroon language specialist and chairman of the *Tyaanga* of the Saamaka Maroon Museum.



producer.<sup>H</sup> But how could we claim to be the only authors? Weren't the Maroons, whose stories defined the script, the actual authors? But they didn't appear to view themselves as the spiritual fathers and mothers of what they told either. After all, they had consulted their ancestors and gods to see if they could share their traditions. Who in fact are the authors of wisdom passed on from ancestors and gods?

Things became even messier when it became clear that all participating Maroons would also have to sign contracts in which they too transferred their rights to the Dutch film producer. The *hedikabiten* of the Matjau-lo was so appalled that he threatened to advise the entire Saamaka community not to cooperate with the film.<sup>I</sup> "Our ancestral stories are not for sale," he said.

Despite all opposition, the legal standard of this production system in which expropriation is business-as-usual turned out to be non-negotiable. It would take a year of deliberation and a thorny change of producer to smooth out the resulting frictions. The outcome was that the Maroons would not have to sign a contract. Instead, they would verbally consent to the public showing of the final result, in statements that we documented with a camera or sound recorder. It was further agreed that all storytellers and actors would receive a copy of the film and be entitled to show it in cultural or educational contexts.

H  
The transfer of copyrights involved the rights to film the script, and the screening rights and exploitation rights of the resulting film.

I  
The *hedikabiten* of the Matjau-lo at that time was Albert Aboikoni.



Dorus Vrede with boatman on his way to the island Lebidoti, 2015. Vrede (1949–2020), writer and *kabiten* of Kapasikele, grew up in Lombe, one of the villages that was flooded by the reservoir in 1964. The transmigration became a recurring theme in his books (see Chapter 7).

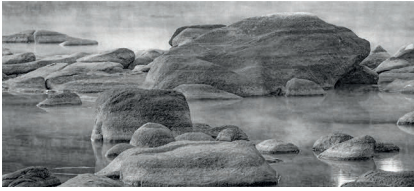


Hugo Jabini (right) with boatman Edson Bodji. Lespansi, 2015. Jabini (1964) has been the spokesperson for the Association of Saamaka Authorities since its founding in 1998, the organization which brought the land rights case to the Inter-American Court.



Tolin Alexander (left) with Harry Lienga on the Suriname River, 2017. Alexander (1971) combines in his work Maroon traditions with new theater techniques, creating plays with actors and non-actors staged in playhouses and outdoors.

# ETHNOBOTANIC THEATER



Film stills *Dee Sitonu A Weti*, 2018.  
Morning mist on the river.

A  
It was boatmaker  
Bernard Boji who  
informed us about  
the incident.  
From Vinije Haabo  
we learned how  
the community  
interpreted the  
event.

## BAPTISM OF FIRE

At the end of 2016, after a year of preparation and negotiation, we sailed up the Suriname River once more, in hopes of starting the film recordings. However, when we moored in Pikin Slee, we were notified that filming needed to be postponed a little longer. The inhabitants were preparing a ritual which would last a full week. During the ceremony all of the ancestors and gods would be informed of the missteps that the community had committed over the past forty years. Because the summoned ancestors would include those who in earlier times had fought against the Dutch, we were urged to stay away. The presence of whites might confuse the ancient warriors.

To the hours-long sound of distant drum-beating, we explored the environs and tested our tools. The rainforest on the far side of the river seemed an impenetrable leaf wall. When connecting the microphones, we were caught off guard by the roaring hum emitted by all that lived there. With the camera, we tried to follow the layers of mist that floated above the river in the early morning. It was the dry season and the water level was falling. More and more rocks were surfacing. The tinted stripes left by the sinking water on the stones provided a calendar of passing days.

On the seventh day there was a knock on the door. It was the boatmaker from the adjacent workshop. He reported that there had been a hunting accident in which one of the villagers had been injured. “The man had just been able to catch the bullet with his hand,” we would learn later.<sup>A</sup> The accident was interpreted as a sign from the gods that the ritual needed to be extended by a week.

After two weeks of waiting, the time had finally come. A new clearing was to be burned along the outskirts of the village, and we were invited to record the process. The Surinamese rainforest soil is fertile, but the humus layer is thin and the many powerful rains quickly leach out the minerals. Every two or three years, the agricultural plots are therefore exchanged for new ones. Women bear the responsibility for the daily labor involved in growing crops, but men prepare the plots. When the dry season begins in August, they clear open spaces in the rainforest. The felled trunks, branches and leaves are left to dry in the blistering sun for six weeks. Then the withered lots are torched.



Film stills *Dee Sitonu A Weti*, 2018.  
Alingo Doekoe (Edje), Abete Doekoe and  
Wilgo Doekoe burn the plot.

After a brief consultation with the three men who would light the fire, one of us sat down in the undergrowth with the directional microphone, while the other climbed an improvised platform with the camera.<sup>B</sup> Barely were we in position when the men invoked their gods and ancestors and set the arid vegetation on fire. Flames quickly flared up. Dancing across the burning lot, the men directed the blaze, pointing and shouting: “Fire, fly like a bird!” “Fire, burn more in that direction!” Apparently insensitive to the heat, they walked right next to meter-high flames on the steaming earth. They had long since forgotten us. We too surrendered to the spectacle. Chasing the conflagration was hypnotic. The microphone caught the low roar of the fire, along with the crackle of the creeping flames at the edge of the lot, where the vegetation was still damp. The camera recorded white plumes of smoke drawing across the ground, while the crown of an uncut tree began to shake in the fire’s draught. Operating our instruments, we were so involved with

<sup>B</sup>  
For the new film, we  
exchanged our old  
analog film camera  
for a digital one.



Discussing the script, Nieuw Lombe, 2017.



Rehearsals on the jetty at the waterfront, Pikin Slee, 2016.

our work that we didn't notice the wind turning. Suddenly we felt the scorching heat of flames now sweeping over the forest path. What to do? Retreat through the thorny undergrowth? Impossible. Then we must move down the path, closer to the conflagration.

The baptism of fire reminded us of Rouch's observation that film tools put their operators into a cine-trance.<sup>1</sup> But here, where everything reacted with each other and was intertwined, circumstances did not allow us to pay attention just to those senses needed for operating the film tools. When looking through the camera eye, we had to learn to use our ears as well. And when listening to what the microphones picked up, we could not forget to also smell, to look around us, and to keep our sense of touch. But above all, the experience would teach us the need to become more attuned to each other before we could call ourselves a filmmaking collective.

#### APPROPRIATING THE SCRIPT

The script we compiled from the transcribed conversations was reviewed word for word by the Maroons who would recite the stories. Imperfections that had crept into the text during the back-and-forth translation process were identified and corrected. For example, some prospective actors wondered why one of the scenes spoke of a "big Indigenous woman," because weren't Indigenous people usually short in stature? The narrator on whose story the dialogue was based immediately understood what was going on. The woman was big in a figurative sense: she was wise!

During these sessions, we became aware that certain stories existed in more than one version. For example, the script contained a narrative about the destruction of Kumako, a settlement where several *los* (clans) had lived together.<sup>C</sup> This village had been raided by colonial soldiers while the men were out hunting in preparation for a mourning ritual. The version in the script had been narrated by someone from the Matjau-lo, but certain actors from the Dombi-lo found that something was missing in this version. It turned out that it was their illustrious ancestor who had died and for whom the mourning ritual was being prepared. However, extending the Kumako narration with the adventures of this ancestor meant that another important narration in the script—about the successful ambush against the whites at Bakakununu Mountain—needed to be abridged.<sup>D</sup> Moreover, not all twists of the life story of the Dombi ancestor were shareable with outsiders. After a full day of deliberation, it was decided that two men would interrupt the Kumako tradition with a tête-à-tête. One was going to indicate that this was not the whole story, to which the other would reply that they kept the missing piece to themselves. In this way, the Dombi actors could subtly hint to their descendants that there was more to be said.

It was theater maker Tolin Alexander who moderated these gatherings in which the Maroons scrutinized the script in detail, while we listened.<sup>E</sup> With voice exercises and witticisms he first put the actors at ease. Then, the dialogues were read out aloud.<sup>F</sup> Once the stumbling blocks had been flagged and the proposals for adjustments noted, the speaking roles were assigned. Now, rehearsals could begin. In most



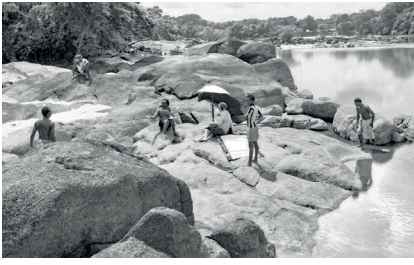
Carrying gear to the film location, Gaanlio, 2017.

C  
The Saamaka people have twelve *los*, of which six are said to have lived together in Kumako. In *Dee Sitonu A Weti* chapter “Fighting the Whites,” it is narrated by Dorus Vrede.

D  
For a transcript of the scene about the ambush at Bakakununu, see Chapter 5.

E  
These conversations about the script were conducted in Saamakatongo and Okanisitongo, both of which Alexander speaks, but which we could only understand to a limited degree.

F  
Since the Maroons were not familiar with reading their oral language, it required some practice to get used to the orthography. Furthermore, not all participants were familiar with the written word, but those who were helped the others.



Recording the film's title song, Pikin Slee, 2016.



Cast and crew arrive at the filming location in the Brokopondo reservoir, 2017.

G  
Erney Landveld transcribed the message in *nongo* (picture-language) in *Alles is voor eeuwig weg* (2009). It is recited in the film by the Saamaka poet Felukamisa from Jaw Jaw.

cases we quickly received word that our presence was no longer needed. While the actors appropriated their lines, we started packing the gear. What items were important to take with us? Because the trip to the filming location was often quite a trek—by moped, with the tractor, into the boat, out of the boat, clambering over rocks, and walking for miles along narrow, winding forest paths—we thought carefully about what equipment we could leave behind to avoid unnecessary lugging.

## ART DIRECTION

The film script began with a dream in *nongo*.<sup>G</sup> The spirit world foretold that a great flood was coming that would inundate the rainforest. This message was followed by a scene in which some Maroons debated what information should be made public. Then, a libation followed to ask the ancestors and the gods for permission to share the lore in the film. These scenes would initiate future audiences into a filmed realm that had its own rules and customs. Here a language was spoken that would not necessarily be understandable to outsiders. Here other entities acted besides people. But how should the scenes be portrayed? What positions could the camera take? How could the ancestral traditions be combined with the new rituals of cinema?

At first, we were reticent for fear of imposing anything on the community. It was Alexander who urged us not to give up the artistic work, but to make proposals. If the community did not agree with something, they would certainly let it be known. Hesitantly, we suggested placing the camera at some distance from the human actors, so that



DEE SITONU A WETI

Script page of chapter "Fighting the Whites"

English translation of the dialogue in Saamakatongo based on the film's subtitles. Differences may occur due to improvisations of the actors.

EXT. CAMPFIRE BY THE RIVER - NIGHT

MAN 1            If you'd escaped slavery and met another Black person in the forest, you encountered danger. Because you didn't know if he'd also escaped slavery or was sent by the slave master to capture you. So, if you met a Black brother in the forest ... how would you see him?

WOMAN 1        As an enemy?

MAN 1            Yes, you'd see him as an enemy.

MAN 1            But that man wouldn't trust you either, because if some managed to free themselves, the slave master would punish those who stayed behind. And that wouldn't mean three strokes of the cane, you understand? You'd be mutilated. Even killed.

Kwasi Mukamba was one of those people whom our ancestors met in the forest. First they were cautious. But he told us the slave masters' plans. He also had the knowledge to cure people. This is how he won our trust. We began to see him as one of our own.

Then he asked our great ancestor if he had an obia - a source that gave him strength. But the forest spirit Wamba warned our ancestor not to tell. Because Kwasi Mukamba had joined us in order to betray us!

A DOO PAUFAYA A LIOBANDYA - NDETI

WOMI 1 Ee wan lowema miti wan oto lowema a matu, noo hogi a miti. We biga ya bi sa sabi ee lowe a ta lowe naa kisi a ke kisi i tya toona go buta a katibo. Hen mbei ee i bi miti wan nenge baaa a matu, noo i bi ta si en a di ten de kuma, we awa, me saanfa mi musu kai en, e ...

MUJEE 1 Feanti?

WOMI 1 Ai, noo u ta si useei kuma feanti.

WOMI 1 Noo di saafu seei an ta fitoou i tu, biga ee wantu saafu bi si kansi lowe, noo di saafubasi ta ke du sonde ku dee di fika a baka. Noo na dii pasi wipi noo, ya fusutan u? The bi ta sitaafu i ku go makei, te ku kii seei.

Kwasi Mukamba bi da wan u dee sembe di dee gaansembe bi miti a matu. A fosu noo u bi ta koni. A bi ta taki da u andi dee saafubasi bi o du. A bi sa u kula sembe tu. Sofasi a bi ko mbei guwenti ku u. U bi bia ko ta si en kuma sembe fuu.

Noo hen a hakisi di gaanwomi fuu ee un obia a abi, teka a ta fendi kaakiti. Ma di matugadu de kai Wamba wasikou en fu an taki. Biga Kwasi Mukamba ko nama ku u fu a tya u go sei!

MAN 3            That's why our ancestor pointed  
                     randomly at a cane bush.

MAN 1            Suddenly we didn't see Kwasi Mukamba  
                     anymore. He came back with colonial  
                     soldiers. The soldiers cut the cane to  
                     make our ancestor lose his strength.

MAN 3            The soldiers fired their guns on those  
                     canestalks.

MAN 1            We killed all those soldiers. Our  
                     ancestor captured the traitor. He  
                     told him: "I won't kill you but I will  
                     destroy your face." Then he cut off his  
                     ear. The traitor had the same roots as  
                     our ancestors. He too was taken from  
                     Africa. We all came on the same ships.  
                     We fed him as if he were one of us  
                     but the slave master also paid him to  
                     betray us. That's the kind of person he  
                     was. He played both sides.

MAN 3            That's why one should avoid telling  
                     everything at once.

WOMAN 2        Indeed. In sharing knowledge, you move  
                     like an old man with a cane. You walk a  
                     few steps then you stop. You take some  
                     more steps and stop again.

MAN 2            A boat is not cut from a tree in a  
                     single stroke either.

MAN 5            If you share your knowledge, it may  
                     destroy you. But if you don't share it,  
                     it will be lost!

- WOMI 3 Hen di gaanwomi manda en go a wanlo kambaluwa dendu.
- WOMI 1 Te wan pisi hen wa si Kwasi Mukamba moo. Hen a toona ko ku wanlo sodati. Dee sodati koti dee kambaluwa u mbei di gaanwomi fuu lasi hen kaakiti.
- WOMI 3 Hen de suti dee kambaluwa teee gonilai u de kaba.
- WOMI 1 Hii dee sodati de tuu u kii. Di gaanwomi kisi di konkuma panya gbala, hen a taa: "Mi o disa i, me o kii, ma mi o poi i fesi." Hen a koti hen yesi puu zolou. Na a otokonde di konkuma de kumutu moo dee gaansembe fuu. Henseei na Afiikan noo a kumutu. Ku diwan sipi noo u waka. U deen nyanya u di a bi mbei taa hen da sembe fuu, ma paka dee saafubasi bi ta pakeen fu a tyaau go sei da de. So wansembe a bi de. A bi ta nya a de tu se tuu.
- WOMI 3 Feen mbei an bunu fii konda hiisondi a wan pasi tuu.
- MUJEE 2 So a de! Te yoo da sembe koni, noo a moo bete i deen kuma fa wan gaansembe ta waka ku kokoti. U ta waka te wan pisi noo u tapa boo, noo u toona hopo waka, noo u boo.
- WOMI 2 Te i ta mbei boto noo na wan pasi noo i ta koti di pau.
- WOMI 5 Ee i da sembe yu koni, a sa kii ku en. Ma ee ya paati en da sembe noo a lasi go.

the trees and the stones would play a more noticeable role. We explained that if the dialogue was spoken without haste, the frogs and the birds would be heard in the silences between the words. We proposed to record some of the dialogue with a camera peering from behind bushes, or filming while lying on the ground in order to provoke the film audience to wonder if they were witnessing something that had not been intended for them. These suggestions appeared to be well received. Others, however, were met with resistance. For example, the Maroons rejected our proposal to perform the libation in the night, explaining: “You are allowed to trouble the gods and ancestors only in the hours of darkness when great danger looms.”

The Maroons also came up with their own proposals. For example, two men who would show how a tree was turned into a boat asked: “Before we cut down a tree, we always request the protection of the gods and ancestors. Can’t we include that in the film as well?”<sup>H</sup> Three other men who were to roll weighty logs up a slope to demonstrate how their ancestors ambushed the colonial forces suggested: “Before we do something that heavy, we must first take an herbal bath. That gives us strength. An herbal bath should not be omitted.”<sup>I</sup>

“Here folk dances, folk songs, folk art, folk customs still exist, here the natural folklore still flourishes, which today, in Europe, they are trying to revive as a fairground entertainment for tourism,” Anton de Kom wrote in 1934.<sup>2</sup> The folklore turned out to still exist. Although the Maroons dressed in modern garb when working or traveling, traditional clothing was still frequently worn. The most



Film stills *Dee Sitonu A Weti*, 2018.  
Herbal bath.

H  
For a further exchange with these *korjaal* builders, see Chapter 7.

I  
Andreas Doekoe, Jules Majana, and Ridowald Doeko reenacted laying the ambush. Their performance is included in *Dee Sitonu A Weti*, film chapter “Fighting the Whites.” The herbal bath ritual opens the film chapter “Willing Woods.”



Film still *Dee Sitonu A Weti*, 2018.

commonly used item was the *pangi*. Women wore this rectangular piece of cloth as a wrap skirt. Men tied a larger version—the *bigipangi*—around their shoulders into a kind of tunic. Some pangis were made of single-color fabric decorated with cross stitches, either clustered in geometric patterns, or with a figurative representation. Others had colorful African wax prints. Still others were made of patchwork: small rectangular pieces cut from different textiles sewn into a cloth. Checked Madras cotton sometimes served as the background for imagery cut from another fabric representing snakes, tree roots, leaves, or airplanes. Often people combined their *pangi* with an *angisa*, a small cloth folded into a triangle that men tied around their necks and women around their hips.<sup>5</sup> Some men wore under their *bigipangi* a *kamiza*, a loincloth wrapped between the legs, but most opted for boxer shorts. T-shirts and blouses were also included in their clothing repertoire. In their outfits the Maroons blended various cultural influences into a mix of their own. All things considered, this didn't seem like the kind of folklore that sets itself apart from modern life.

#### J

For example, actors brought bunches of bananas, homemade candle lanterns, oil lamps, shotguns, axes, machetes, gourd bowls, wooden stools and baskets.

#### K

Salomo, Kaloese, Dualis and Bramelo Doekoe composed and sang the song *Dee Sitonu A Weti*, together with Leandro Chagan Haabo, a visiting cousin from French Guiana. It was recorded on a rock in the Suriname River, November 2016. Tolin Alexander coached them during the composing process.

It was in such colorful attire that the Maroons arrived on set to promote their culture in front of the camera. Other aspects of the 'art direction' were taken care of by the community as well. Actors proposed suitable film locations and provided necessary props.<sup>J</sup> It was not uncommon for them to supplement the scenes with matching songs. New song pieces were even composed. For example, while waiting for the camera to be installed on a rock, five young men improvised the song *Dee Sitonu A Weti* from which the film took its title.<sup>K</sup> Three women turned the tradition

about foremother Pansa—who had been wise enough to bring rice stalks from Africa—into a new *seketi*.<sup>L</sup> The women presented the song in front of the camera while picking rice stalks.<sup>4</sup>



Film still *Dee Sitonu A Weti*, 2018. *Baai matu*, a downpour, or literally a forest sweep.

## EXPERIMENTAL JURISPRUDENCE

During our collaboration with the Urk fishermen, we had already experienced how uninvited guests can sneak in when authorship is opened up. When the fishermen entered, their ancestors joined them. Nonhuman actors such as winds, sea currents, and economic forces turned out to also have a say. From the Maroons, who were constantly aware of all the ears that might be listening, we learned that audiences too shouldn't be left out of a collectivity of coauthors. The delusion that spectators can observe without being perceived themselves—the *god trick* of cinema—did not apply to them.<sup>M</sup>

Among the invisible spectators for whom the Maroons performed were the members of the Maroon community who had left the interior for study or work, a diaspora that stretched from Paramaribo to neighboring French Guiana and on to other continents. Members of another Black community—whom the Maroons called *foto nenge* and who due to their specific history sometimes looked down on the Maroons—were also present in the auditorium.<sup>N</sup> In this circle of latent bystanders were whites as well, the “descendants of slave masters” with whom not just anything could be shared. Gods, spirits and ancestors were among the attendees too. The Maroons had invoked them to guard all of us. And then of course there were the

<sup>L</sup>  
*Seketi* songs are composed spontaneously and are sung by both men and women on the job. The song about Ma Pansa was composed and sung by Sandra Amiemba, Brigadier Eduards and Zoiya Eduards. It was recorded in Sandra Amiemba's vegetable garden in August 2017.

<sup>M</sup>  
See Chapter 6 on the phenomenon of the “god trick”.

<sup>N</sup>  
*Foto nenge* in Saamakatongo means “Black person from the city.”



Film stills *Dee Sitonu A Weti*, 2018.  
Women pick rice in a vegetable garden in the forest, while singing about Ma Pansa.

CHORUS:

*Foremother Pansa  
Ma Pansa brought rice seeds to feed her people  
She multiplied the seeds and shared them with  
her people*

SINGER:

*Did she bring her wisdom from Africa?  
When she left Africa  
She took a rice stalk and laced it in her hair  
When she arrived and was able to rest  
She combed her hair  
She took the seeds and planted them  
She planted one stalk's seeds and it became a  
bundle  
One bundle became more bundles  
She multiplied the seeds  
And shared them with her people  
Foremother Pansa*

(Lyrics based on the movie's subtitles)

O

In the audio mix of *Dee Sitonu A Weti* we did not separate this polyphony, nor did we place it in a hierarchy, as is typical in cinema. Instead, the crickets, frogs, and running water formed one many-voiced score. As well, the center speaker, usually reserved in the cinema for only the human voice, emitted this polyphony. For the divisions of the cinema, see Chapter 6.

nonhuman attendees. They had not read the script, but accompanied the human actors uninvited with their polyphony and claimed their indisputable place within the film's frame. <sup>O</sup> The film recordings in the rainforest turned into ethnobotanic theater: stories and rituals performed for a biodiverse audience that listened, watched and played along.

Not infrequently we were attacked by a *baai matu*, and thus she too was included in the film. We learned to recognize her impending burst from a sudden rising of the wind. This was followed, shortly afterwards, by a massive clattering on the foliage. Rainwater pouring over the hot rocks suddenly warmed the river. After the deluge, the forest was quiet and its hues had changed. The ground was soggy and opaque, but the leaves glistened.

In order to portray the diversity and multitude of attendees, we often filmed in the morning or late afternoon. At that time of day, the light was soft and details appeared which, when the sun was high in the sky, vanished into dark shadows or patches of overexposure. With short focal lengths and small apertures, we sought to achieve a deep depth of field to allow people and forest to share the focus. Usually the camera stood firm and unmoved on all three legs, but sometimes we swung her through the woods. Then her eye wandered slanted, slightly swaying, and largely out of our control. Did she follow our movements or we hers? Or was it the entangled liana plants, the wind, the uneven terrain, or the force of gravity that directed her? Perhaps at such a moment the camera experienced a species leap.



In this way an interweaving of bonds came about, something which might be called experimental jurisprudence. The practice of collaboration culminated in multiple covenants: between us and the Maroons (about what could be made public); between the Maroons and their ancestors (about what should be kept secret); between the Maroons and the forest (about the actions that would be performed); between observer, observed and filming instruments (about the influence we exerted on each other); between the human cast, the crew, the stones, the trees, the crickets, the birds, the frogs, the rain, and of course the burning sun (about the active presence of all entities); between the entire creative collective and future audiences (about the customs of this filmed world); not to mention between all human contributors and the overseas film producer (about the screening rights of the film).



Film still *Dee Sitonu A Weti*, 2018.  
Maroon actors discuss the film contract,  
recorded with camera lying on the ground.

In a scene that was not initially included in the script, Maroon actors discuss this latest disputed agreement. They repudiate “the language of money country” in which the contract with the producer is drawn up, and wonder if its intention is to steal their knowledge.

WOMAN:

We won't sign any papers..

MAN:

We'll do it in our own way.



# FINAL FEEDBACK



Installing the temporary cinema in the community hall of Jaw Jaw, 2019.

A  
The Maroons use the word *kino* for film and film-screening.

B  
*Mofo koranti* means “mouth newspaper” in Sranantongo.

C  
Approximately 300 Maroons attended the premiere in Pikin Slee. In Jaw Jaw about 140 viewers joined, in Asindohopo 95, and in Lebidoti 125.

## MOBILE CINEMA

In the spring of 2019, we sailed upriver once more, this time for a *kino-tour*.<sup>A</sup> After four years of collaborating the film was ready and we could now show it to the Maroon community. The news that *Dee Sitonu A Weti* was screened in the interior had traveled ahead via the *mofo koranti*.<sup>B</sup> Everywhere we docked, people were waiting in anticipation and helped install the improvised cinema. When it turned dark, crowds flocked in, excited for the screening to begin.<sup>C</sup>

There was always jubilant shouting at the moment in the film when an actor states that their ancestors had not “robbed” things in their attacks on the plantations, but came to fetch what had been “whipped” from them. As well, the utterance by an actress that no contracts would be signed with a Dutch film producer was generally met with loud approval. In each of the villages, we were asked if we could make a copy of the film available for educational purposes. As one teacher said: “We don’t have any textbooks on our history here.”

It was during these screenings in the interior that we discovered that jokes had been incorporated in the film that we were unaware of as Dutch makers. For example, chuckles were often heard in response to a scene in which, after a mother and three children pull hard on a cassava plant, only a few undersized tubers appear. Hilarity also ensued when, following a dialogue about the peace treaty with the whites, a man begins sharpening his knife. Audiences fell silent during the testimonies about the forced relocation because of the reservoir. During a post-screening discussion in Jaw Jaw, the *kabiten* of

the village said: “Now the children can not only learn about the transmigration and how the trees, animals and houses drowned at the time, but they can also see the reservoir. That way they get a picture of what happened.”

It was again in Jaw Jaw that we were asked if the film could be adapted, in response to the scene in which a drummer beats non-musical rhythms on his *apinti* drum. The *apinti* has a language of its own and is therefore called “the speaking drum.” It is used to convene the community, but also to convey messages to the gods and ancestors. Someone from the audience had a suggestion:

We here, have lost much knowledge during the transmigration. We no longer understand the *apinti*. Can the drum be subtitled? Then we can learn again what it’s saying.<sup>D</sup>

It was again in Jaw Jaw that a scene in which women talk about their experiences with Chinese loggers stirred up a debate about resource extraction. A man stood up to make his point:

Those Chinese have nothing to lose here. It’s not their country. They cut everything roughly. What they don’t need, they leave to rot. They’d do better to ask us to cut those trees for them. We’d cut only the trees that are needed and leave the saplings standing. This way the forest can recover.

But after expressing their anger about the wasteful working methods of the Chinese, the Maroons consulted among



Screening in the community hall of Jaw Jaw, 2019.



Screening in the community hall of Pikin Slee, 2019.

<sup>D</sup>  
In response to this request, Quincy (Kukcy) Sinei contacted the *apinti* player Amania Esino, who sent us a translation, so that the scene could be subtitled.



Screening in community hall of Lebidoti, 2019.



Departure from Asindohopo after the screening, 2019.

themselves. Then it was discussed whether the community was on the right track now that their young men were mining gold, in this way contributing to the destruction of the forest.

When we first visited the reservoir island of Lebidoti in 2015, the village elders had been somewhat reluctant. They wished to reveal little of the path their ancestors had traveled after extricating themselves from slavery. In the film, therefore, inhabitants of the island only discuss their experiences during the transmigration. In spite of this, we noticed after the screening that some audience members regretted the absence of their group's ancestral traditions in the film. One young Maroon from Lebidoti, however, believed that his fellow villagers had still shared *too much*: "Why did the people of our village share the knowledge that enabled us to survive slavery under the whites, with the very people that enslaved us?"<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes the film would make the inland inhabitants see their familiar landscapes anew. For example, a boatman from Asindohopo remarked in surprise: "I ply the river every day, but it wasn't until watching the film that I noticed how beautiful the *Dan Owii Folo* are. We live here in paradise." *Dan Owii Folo* means "flowers of the dam." They are pink-purple flowers on thick stems that grow on the stones in the rapids and that remain standing proudly despite the turbulent current.

After the presentations in the interior, the film screened in The Back Lot Cinemas in Paramaribo, attracting a diverse audience. The story that the

Maroons tell, it turned out, was not well known among Suriname's other groups. One of the visitors commented during the post screening discussion:

We here know too little about our own history, how the various groups ended up in Suriname. The film is an invitation to further investigate our history ourselves.



Screening at Tembe Art Studio, Moengo.

A particular scene provoked a striking number of responses from the viewers in the capital. It is one in which five Maroons discuss that they would receive the city dwellers in the interior if the coastal plain were to be flooded due to the rising sea level. Someone in the audience explained why this moved him:

As an urbanite of Javanese descent, it strikes me that, despite their precarious situation, the Maroons would be willing to receive us if necessary. That reminds me that Suriname is a beautiful country, in which the different population groups can live together.

## RELEASE

The tour in Suriname was followed by the theatrical release of *Stones Have Laws* in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.<sup>E</sup> With our codirector, Tolin Alexander, we attended fifteen screenings in Dutch theaters for discussions with the audience.<sup>2</sup> We detected that some viewers had to get used to an unfamiliar frame of reference. Someone said: "Why are no dates mentioned? And why all those strange words? I've the feeling this film was not made for me."<sup>3</sup> We also noted that spectators occasionally

<sup>E</sup> In the summer of 2019, ICA London distributed the film in the UK. In autumn, Windmill Film released it in Dutch cinemas.





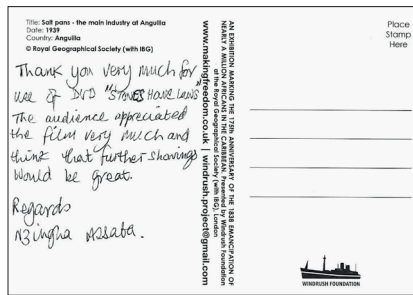




struggled with the dubious supporting role assigned to the whites in the Maroons' stories. They figured as slave masters, colonial soldiers, or the greedy owners of foreign mining companies. Even if they did not appear in the film, their presence still exerted influence. The fact of our invisible position as white European filmmakers raised questions too. For was this not a case of hidden observers who saw themselves as embodying the norm? Who had actually determined the script here? Had the white filmmakers put words into the Maroons' mouths? Why was almost everyone dressed in folk costume? And where were the cell phones? Were these "marginalized people" not being exoticized as stereotypical "nature people?" As a theater maker of Maroon descent, Alexander had previous experience with countering skepticism. He taught us how to use the freedom of poetry when questioners pushed too hard to have us clarify cinematic choices. Where necessary, we invoked our joint right to opacity.

Mobile phones indeed don't feature in the film, although chainsaws, motorboats, and even an excavator do appear (with which the Okanisi of Nieuw Koffiekamp turn over their forest in search of gold). Still, these responses seemed to point to a deeper, if unspoken, wariness. The questioners appeared to be genuinely concerned about what they could trust of a documentary in which whites had stood behind the camera and everything seemed staged.

But in addition to these skeptical responses, there were many enthusiastic reactions. A recurring comment was: "The film tells a story that we Dutch



Postcard from Pollard Hill Library to distributor ICA, London.

F  
Alakondre in  
Sranantongo  
means "all  
countries."



Film stills *Dee Sitonu A Weti*, 2018. Plants that grow in rapids are interwoven in the montage with the lore of a Saamaka ancestor's first encounter with the forest god Wamba.

G  
Forest god Wamba led ancestor Lanu through the rainforest to a group of Indians, a story told in *Dee Sitonu A Weti* in the film chapter "Forest Spirit." In the film chapter "Fighting the Whites" Wamba reappears with a warning for the community of imminent treason. Transcripts of these scenes are included at the end of Chapter 11 and in Chapter 10.

I  
Maawina is the name of the river in Okanisitongo. In Dutch it is called Marowijne, and in French Maroni.

should all know." One of the spectators called for a public holiday in honor of Wamba, the forest god who had supported the Saamaka during their escape from slavery.<sup>G</sup> There also proved to be much interest in Ma Pansa, the foremother who had brought rice from Africa. When leaving the cinema, we heard many visitors hum the title song about stones and trees having laws.

As well, the community of Maroons living in the Netherlands seemed to appreciate the film. They showed *Dee Sitonu A Weti* on their celebration of *Fiiman Dey*, the day when they commemorate the first peace treaty between a Maroon people and the Dutch, which was signed on October 10, 1760.<sup>H</sup> A delegation also attended the première at IDFA in Amsterdam. It was Hellen Ajentoena, *kabiten* of the Dutch Okanisi, who came to us after the screening and commented: "There's only one thing wrong with this film, namely that it is not about the Maawina." The Maawina is the country's other large river that forms the border between Suriname and French Guiana.<sup>I</sup> With this, she alluded to a hoped-for sequel. There was still more to tell.

DEE SITONU A WETI

Script page of chapter "Forest Spirit"

English translation of the dialogue in Saamakatongo based on the film's subtitles. Differences may occur due to improvisations of the actors.

EXT. STONE PLATE IN THE RIVER - DAY

NARRATOR     There was a time, a time of slavery, when we lived on the white man's plantations. Slave life was arduous. It was very heavy. There was often turmoil on the plantation. It was really tumultuous. Because of this, the slave master brought in warriors from Africa, to maintain order. Our great ancestor was one of them.

Forefather Lanu, I ask permission to use your name. Not for a bad reason. But to preserve your memory for our descendants.

So the whites brought in warrior slaves.

At one of the plantations our ancestor had a lover. A beautiful African woman. Osima. Osima from Dahomey. She was a real beauty.

At the plantations most people worked in the field to grow sugar cane. But the handsome women, the young African women, worked in the house of the white man as his mistresses. Osima was one of them.

Black people toiled on the sugar cane fields. They crushed the cane. But the juice of the sugar cane was not for the Blacks. The juice was for the slave master. We couldn't have a single drop.

One day, forefather Lanu had to work on the plantation where Osima was living. He was thirsty. Osima took the white man's glass, poured it full of cane juice, and gave this to Lanu. But Osima was the white man's mistress. That man loved her. And Lanu drank the juice. He drank it all.

Someone saw this and told the white master.

When he heard this, he grabbed Osima. He beat her till she was dead.

A DOO, PALALA SITONU A LIO - DIDIA

DAWOTOMA      A di ten de noo fanya bi de a dee bakaa pandasi. De bi ta mbeidyugudyugu. Dee saafubasi bi manda tei fetima kumutu na Afikan u ko ta peeta dee saafu. Di gaanwomi fuu bi da wan u de. A bi de saafu tu, ma hen bi da di sembe di bi musu ta tya bosikopu go a dee oto pandasi. Feen hedi a bi ta lei hasi.

A bi abi wan lobima a wan u dee pandasi teka a bi nango. Osima. A bi kumutu a wan konde de ta kai Daume na Afikan.

Gaanse u dee saafu bi ta wooko a di pandasi, ma dee hanse nyonku muyee bi ta wooko da di basi kuma hen wakamuyee. Osima aki bi ta wooko a di wosu u di saafubasi.

Dee nenge bi ta paandi tyeni a dee pandasi teka de bi ta wooko. Dee nenge de bi ta mbii di tyeni, ma dee bakaa de bi abi di tyeniwata. Nenge an bi sa bebe di tyeniwata seepiseepi.

Noo hen di gaanwomi lei ku hasi ko dou. Hen di muyee tei di gaasi u di bakaa, hen a kandi tyeniwata buta neen dendu hen a langa da di nenge. Di gaanwomi bebe di tyeniwata a di gaasi u di bakaa. Kuma fa a bi de, noo toto u di tyeniwata an bi sa nama a di nenge bukakakisa seepiseepi. Nounou noo hen a ko fendi wan hii gaasi feen bebe kaba!

Wansembe bi si en gbolo, hen a go konda.

Fa i yei de, noo di bakaa womi bi ke di muyee, ma na kuma muyee di a lobi tyika u tei buta a wosu. Di tyeni wata di muyee tei da di gaanwomi bi de gaansondi deen moo leki di lobi feen da di muyee.

Then they took her dead body, brought it to Lanu and threw her body at his feet. "Here is your woman," they said. Then they grabbed him and then they beat him too, till he was unconscious. "Let's leave him here," they said. "He will not live." And they left.

After some time, the spirit of the woman entered Lanu's body. He screamed. He got up and ran into the forest. He ran into the forest screaming. He called out names.

And Wamba, the local forest spirit, heard his cries and entered him. The spirit guided him through the forest to a group of Indigenous people who lived there. The Ingi received him. They fed him and they washed him. And they nursed him until he was better. Then Lanu moved on. He followed the river. He walked all the way to where the river wells up. And here he stayed. He never wanted to face the whites again.

Wamba, the forest god, was the first god that inspired a Black person in the forest. Wamba. Our ancestors met him in the forest.

Hen a fon di muyee tefa a kai dede bigidi. Hen de tei di dede tya go da di gaanwomi. Hen de taa: "Then di muyee fii aki." Hen de fonmee teee a faau. Di de si kuma a dede, hen de disa en de.

Hen di gaanwomi sai de te wan pisi, hen di muyee ko kisi en a hedi. Hen a bai "Mmmmm!" hen a hopo vuu kule go a matu, hen a ta bai ta kai hen gaanne. Fa a bi ta bai de noo di matugadu de ta kai Wamba ta piki en. Hen Wamba tyeen go miti dee Ingi. Hen de kisi en hoi, tyeen go wasi. Hen de deen nyanya a nya. De kula en tefa a bete, hen a subi lio. Te aki Wamba tyeen ko dou.

Wamba bi da di fosu gadu di kisi di gaanwomi a hedi.







INTRODUCTION

- 1 For our works exploring European border landscapes, trade and migration politics, see our essay “Reframing the Border,” published in *Moving Images, Mediating Migration as Crisis*, ed. Krista Lynes, Tyler Morgenstern and Ian Alan Paul (Bielefeld, 2020).
- 2 We published an earlier version of Chapters 1 and 2 under the title “Drifting Studio Practice: From molding sugar to the unknown depths of the sea,” in *World of Matter*, ed. Inke Arns (Berlin, 2015). *Monument of Sugar* consists of a floor sculpture and a film essay entitled *Monument of Sugar: How to use artistic means to elude trade barriers*. A proto-version of the film essay’s English scrolling title can be found in the publication released at the group exhibition *Just in Time* at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam in 2007. That same year came a second publication with the final text of the title generic and with French translation to accompany the exhibition *Monument en Sucre* at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. A third publication with a translation into Mandarin was made for the 2008 Shanghai Biennale.
- 3 Graham Harman, “The Well-Wrought Broken Hammer,” *New Literary History* 43, no. 2 (Spring 2012).
- 4 Earlier we wrote about coauthorship in “The Artist as Coauthor,” *Radical Materialism* dossier, *Periscope, Social Text*, ed. Emily E. Scott, Ashley Dawson (2015).
- 5 Arturo Escobar, “Latin America at a Crossroads,” *Cultural Studies*, vol. 24, no. 1 (2010).
- 6 Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract*, trans. Elisabeth MacArthus and William Paulson (Ann Arbor, 1990). Originally published as *Le Contrat Naturel* (Paris, 1990).
- 7 Daniel Rolander, *The Linnaeus Apostles: Daniel Rolander’s Journal, Volume 3, Book 3: Europe, North & South, America* English trans. from Latin by Eivor Cormack and Claes Dahlman, ed. Lars Hansen, Dennis Goodall and James Dobreff, intr. Pehr Lofling (Munich, 2008). John Gabriel Stedman, *Stedman’s Surinam, Life in an Eighteenth-Century Slave Society, An Abridged, Modernized Edition*, ed. Richard and Sally Price (Baltimore, 1992). Originally published as *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (London, 1796).
- 8 Aimé Césaire, “Discourse on Colonialism,” trans. Joan Pinkham, *Monthly Review Press* (New York and London, 1972). Originally published as “Discours sur le colonialisme,” *Editions Présence Africaine* (1955). Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor, 1997). Originally published as *Poétique de la Relation* (1990). Anton de Kom, *Wij, slaven van Suriname* (Amsterdam, 1934).
- 9 Walter Mignolo, “Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom,” *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 26, 7–8 (SAGE, Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, and Singapore, 2009): 1–23.
- 10 Arthur Eyffinger, *Hugo de Groot: De Vrije Zee, Mare Liberum* (The Hague); Hugo Grotius, *Iure Praedae Commentarius, Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty, Translation of the Original Manuscript of 1604*, English trans. Gwladys L. Williams (Oxford, 1950).
- 11 Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges, the science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective,” *Feminist Studies* (Maryland, 1988): 575-599.
- 12 Erney Landveld, *Alles is voor eeuwig weg* (Paramaribo, 2009); Carlo Hoop, *Verdrongen land, verdwenen dorpen* (Alkmaar, 1991); Dorus Vrede, *Langs het sterfbed van mijn dorp* (Paramaribo, 1986).
- 13 See, *inter alia*, Juan José Guzmán, “Decolonizing Law and expanding Human Rights: Indigenous Conceptions and the Rights of Nature in Ecuador,” *Deusto Journal of Human Rights*, No. 4/2019. We published an early version of Chapter 8 in “Something is There: Filmmaking in Multiple Realities,” *World Records*, ed. Jason Fox (New York, 2018).
- 14 Kyle McGee, “For a Juridical Ecology of Ligatures,” *A Book of the Body Politic: Connecting Biology, Politics and Social Theory*, ed. Bruno Latour, Simon Schaffer and Pasquale Gagliardi (Venice, 2020); McGee, “Hybrid Legalities,” *Law, Obligation, Community* (Abington, 2018); and McGee, *Heathen Earth* (Goleta, 2017).

- 1 We published an earlier version of Chapters 1 and 2 under the title “Drifting Studio Practice: From molding sugar to the unknown depths of the sea,” in *World of Matter*, ed. Inke Arns (Berlin, 2015). For the concept of the crumpled handkerchief, see Michel Serres with Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, trans. Roxanne Lapidoux (Ann Arbor, 1998), p. 45.
- 2 Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2658/87 of July 23, 1987, *Official Journal of the European Communities* (September 7, 1987): 657.
- 3 Conversation during the Concerning Knowledge Production conference, held at BAK, Utrecht, December 2006. We included Latour’s comment in the last chapter of the film essay *Monument of Sugar: how to use artistic means to elude trade barriers*, where he is referred to as “a philosophical Frenchman.”
- 4 For the purpose of clarity, we use the word “things,” but Harman himself speaks about “objects.” See Bruno Latour, Graham Harman, and Peter Erdélyi, eds., *The Prince and the Wolf: Latour and Harman at the LSE* (Ropley, 2011), p. 9.
- 5 Harman and Latour both are often counted as thinkers of object-oriented ontology (OOO), though each have differing conceptions for explaining the instability of constellations. Harman speculates that the instability is caused by the fact that things have an essence that we cannot fathom or control. For Latour, the emphasis is on the network of relations. It is these relations, which bring about change in things. In Chapter 5 of the present book, we discuss Édouard Glissant, who combines the two approaches with his concepts of “opacity” and “relation,” although he does so to talk less about things than about people.
- 6 For the passage about the hammer, see Graham Harman, “The Well-Wrought Broken Hammer,” *New Literary History* 43, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 183–203, here pp. 186–188.
- 7 Harman refers to this condition of things as not being “standing reserve” for the purpose of the network, with standing reserve as a translation of the German word *Bestand* used by Heidegger.
- 8 The indirect contact of objects is explained by Harman in Levy Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman, “Towards a Speculative Philosophy,” *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, ed. Bryant, Srnicek, and Harman (Melbourne, 2011), pp. 8; and in Harman, “Technology, Objects and Things in Heidegger,” *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 34, no. 1 (2009): 17–25.
- 9 Rouch speaks about the *ciné-transe* in Jean Rouch, “On the Vicissitudes of the Self,” *Ciné-Ethnography*, ed. trans. Steven Feld (Minneapolis, 2003), p. 99. Originally published as “Essai sur l’avatar de la personne du possédé, du magicien, du sorcier, du cinéaste et de l’ethnologue,” *La Notion de Personne en Afrique Noire*, (Paris, 1973).
- 10 The quote from Rouch about the transforming role of the camera, see Dan Yakir and Jean Rouch, “Ciné-Transe: The Vision of Jean Rouch: An Interview,” *Film Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (Spring 1978): 2–11.
- 11 Rouch introduces the term “participating camera” with reference to Luc de Heusch and Robert Flaherty in Rouch, “Vicissitudes” (see note 9), p. 92. It is also discussed in the introduction of the book, p. 13.
- 12 For Flaherty’s collaboration with the Inuit during *Nanook of the North*, see Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of Non-fiction Film* (New York, 1993), pp. 36–38. The intervention to build an enlarged open igloo was necessary because the regular igloo was too small for the large film camera and too dark for the light-sensitive film that the filmmaker had available to him.
- 13 For Rouch describing ethnographic knowledge as a stolen secret, see Elisabeth Cowie, “Ways of Seeing: Documentary Film and the Surreal of Reality,” *Building Bridges: The Cinema of Jean Rouch*, ed. Joram ten Brink (Westminster, 2007).
- 14 For Rouch on *cinéma-vérité*, see Yakir and Rouch, “Ciné-Transe” (see note 10).
- 15 For Rouch on ethnographic filmmaking as a cine-dialogue, see Jean Rouch with Enrico Fulchignoni, “Ciné-Anthropology,” *Ciné-Ethnography* (see note 9), p. 185.
- 16 Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin, *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961). Original title *Chronique d’un été*.
- 17 Many authors attribute the term “ethnofiction” to Rouch, but it appears to have been introduced by critics. Rouch himself preferred the term “science fiction.” See, *inter alia*, Johannes Sjöberg, “Ethnofiction: Drama as a Creative Research Practice in Ethnographic Film,” *Journal of Media Practice* 9, no. 3, (2008); Paul Henley, *Beyond Observation: A History of Authorship in Ethnographic Film* (Manchester, 2020).
- 18 Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer” (1934), *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London

- and New York, 1998). Earlier we wrote about coauthorship in "The Artist as Coauthor," *Radical Materialism* dossier, *Periscope, Social Text*, ed. Emily E. Scott, Ashley Dawson (2015)
- 19 Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer" (see note 18), p. 98.
- 20 We recited Tretyakov as quoted by Maria Gough in "Radical Tourism, Sergei Tretyakov at the Communist Lighthouse," *October* 118 (Fall 2006): 159–78. She writes that Tretyakov made four visits to the *kolkhoz* totaling five months' time, between July 1928 and continuing through the summer of 1930. <https://mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1162/octo.2006.118.1.159>.
- 21 On Tretyakov's activities on the *kolkhoz*, see Benjamin, "The Author as Producer" (see note 18), p. 88.
- 22 On the ideological patron, see *ibid.*, p. 93.
- 23 For the quote of the writer as a producer, see *ibid.*, p. 91. Italics by Benjamin.
- Chthulucene: Making Kin," *Environmental Humanities* 6M (2015): 159–65.
- 2 For the discussion on the starting point of the Anthropocene, see Mark Maslin and Simon Lewis, "Why the Anthropocene began with European colonization, mass slavery and the 'great dying' of the 16th century," *The Conversation*, June 25, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/why-the-anthropocene-began-with-european-colonisation-mass-slavery-and-the-great-dying-of-the-16th-century-140661>.
- 3 Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract*, trans. Elisabeth MacArthur and William Paulson (Ann Arbor, 1990), pp. 19–20, 40–42.
- 4 *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 32.
- 5 *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 38.
- 8 Luis Macas in conversation with Paulo Tavares, Quito, February 2012. Tavares, "Nonhuman Rights," *World of Matter*, ed. Inke Arns (Berlin, 2015). See also Arturo Escobar, "Latin America at a Crossroads," *Cultural Studies* 24, no. 1 (January 2010); and Juan José Guzmán, "When the Forest Screams," Master's thesis (University of Duesto, 2018/19), p. 44.
- 9 Escobar, "Latin America at a Crossroads" (see note 8), p. 8.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- 12 *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 40, 43, 35.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 43.
- 14 Richard Price, "Africans Discover America: The Ritualization of Gardens, Landscapes and Seascapes by Surinamese Maroons," *Secret Gardens and Landscapes: Ritual and Agency*, ed. Michel Conan (Washington, 2007). We also read *First-Time* (Chicago, 1983) and *Rainforest Warriors: Human Rights on Trial* (Philadelphia, 2011), both by Price.
- CHAPTER 2
- 1 Museum de Paviljoens, Almere, the Netherlands, commissioned our fieldwork in Urk in 2011. The museum withdrew the assignment during our first research period in Urk and was forced to close its doors in 2013.
- 2 The Rutte I government ruled from October 14, 2010, to November 5, 2012. It was formed by VVD and CDA with support from PVV. This government imposed budget cuts on the care for disabled persons and those with chronic illnesses, special education, nature, culture, public transportation and mental health care.
- 3 Filmlab Cineco and its subsidiary company Haghefilm were ultimately taken over, and continued trading as Haghefilm Digital.
- 4 For the distinction between those who do manual labor and those given the privilege to think, see Jacques Rancière, *The Nights of Labor*, trans. John Drury (Philadelphia, 1989), author's preface, viii. Originally published as *La nuit des prolétaires* (Paris, 1981).
- CHAPTER 3
- 1 On the Plantationocene, see "J. Davis, A.A. Moulton, L. Van Sant, B. Williams" by "Janae Davis, Alex A. Moulton, Levi Van Sant, and Brian Williams," "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, ... Plantationocene? A Manifesto for Ecological Justice in an Age of Global Crises," *Geography Compass* (2019). See also Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene,
- CHAPTER 4
- 1 See Tinde van Andel, Paul Maas and James Dobreff, "Ethnobotanic Notes in Suriname (1754–1756), Are Rolander's Plants Still Used in Suriname Today?," *Taxon* 61, no. 4 (August 2012): pp. 852–63.
- 2 Daniel Rolander, *The Linnaeus Apostles: Daniel Rolander's Journal, Volume 3, Book 3: Europe, North & South America*, trans. from Latin Eivor Cormack and Claes Dahlman, ed. Lars Hansen, Dennis Goodall, and James Dobreff, introduction Pehr Lofling (Munich, 2008), June 21, 1755 entry, pp. 1259–60.
- 3 *Ibid.*, July 1, 1755 entry, p. 1275.
- 4 *Ibid.*, June 21, 1755 entry, p. 1260.
- 5 *Ibid.*, August 28, 1755 entry, p. 1351.
- 6 *Ibid.*, October 14, 1755 entry, pp. 1394–98.
- 7 *Ibid.*, July 7, 1755 entry, p. 1287.
- 8 *Ibid.*, September 18, 1755 entry, p. 1376, and November 14, 1755 entry, p. 1428.

- 9 Ibid., July 26, 1755 entry, p. 1311, and June 21, 1755 entry, p. 1258.
- 10 Ibid., November 24, 1755 entry, p. 1439.
- 11 Ibid., October 23, 1755 entry, p. 1405.
- 12 Ibid., January 21, 1756 entry, p. 1543.
- 13 Ibid., August 8, 1755 entry, p. 1325.
- 14 Ibid., November 17, 1755 entry, p. 1431.
- 15 Ibid., July 28, 1755 entry, p. 1312, and September 22, 1755 entry, p. 1379.
- 16 Ibid., December 16, 1755 entry, pp. 1466–69.
- 17 Ibid., January 17, 1756 entry, pp. 1513–16.
- 18 Ibid., October 23, 1755 entry, p. 1405. Sometimes the poisonous plants were used by the enslaved workers themselves out of desperation, as abortifacients or even to take their own lives. See *ibid.*, August 23, 1755 and January 5, 1756 entries. He also writes about bitter herbs that prolong life. See *ibid.*, August 16, 1755 entry. For the sake of readability, we have translated the Latin names that Rolander notes with the help of Tinde van Aniel and Sofie Ruysschaert, *Medicinale en Rituele Planten van Suriname* (2014). See also Van Aniel, Maas, and Dobreff, “Ethnobotanic notes in Suriname” (see note 1), pp. 853, 859; and Tinde van Aniel, “Suriname in de ogen van een 18<sup>e</sup> eeuwse biologie student,” *OSO Tijdschrift voor Surinamistiek en het Caraïbisch gebied*, 2 (2010), pp. 375–84.
- 19 Ibid., September 15, 1755 entry, pp. 1363, 1371, 1372. See also Tinde van Aniel, “What Makes a Plant Magical?,” in *African Ethnobotany in the Americas* (Cham, 2013), pp. 264–65; and Van Aniel and Ruysschaert, *Medicinale* (see note 18), p. 374.
- 20 Ibid., November 13, 1755 entry, pp. 1427–28.
- 21 Ibid., August 5, 1755 entry, p. 1322.
- 22 Ibid., December 27, 1755 entry, p. 1485. The same encounter between the colonial troops and the Saramaka is described by Chris de Beet and Richard Price in *Saramakaanse vrede van 1762, geselecteerde documenten* (Utrecht, 1982). The authors base their report on the diary of army chief Hentschel. This records how the troops returned to Paramaribo on Christmas Day 1755 after three grueling months. Both sides had apparently taken heavy losses. The conflict supposedly arose after the colonists had violated an earlier peace agreement.
- 23 Ibid., January 13, 1756 entry, p. 1508.
- 24 For example, severe corporal punishment for stealing a small amount of money, torture to death for fleeing, or being skinned alive for failing to respond to the master’s advances.
- 25 John Gabriel Stedman, *Stedman’s Surinam, Life in an Eighteenth-Century Slave Society, An Abridged, Modernized Edition*, ed. Richard and Sally Price (Baltimore, 1992), Chap. 3, p. 27. The complete manuscript Stedman prepared, was published in the original old English spelling under the title *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam, Transcribed for the First Time from the Original 1790 Manuscript*, ed. Richard and Sally Price (Baltimore, 1988). Unless stated otherwise, we refer to the 1992 edition.
- 26 On the name “Maroons,” see Chapter 5 in this book.
- 27 Ibid., Chap. 4, p. 33. Stedman calls the Okanisi “Aucas” or sometimes “Djukas.”
- 28 Ibid., Chap. 4, p. 39.
- 29 Ibid., Chap. 4, p. 37. It is Captain Hannibal who tells Stedman that the name “Boucou” means: “I shall be molded before I shall be taken.” (“I” here seems to refer to the village), *ibid.*, Chap. 20, p. 208.
- 30 Ibid., Introduction, xxii.
- 31 Ibid., Chap. 20, p. 216.
- 32 Stedman, *Narrative* (1988), Chap. 28. Original text adapted to modern spelling. (see note 25)
- 33 Stedman, *Stedman’s Suriname* (1992), Chap. 20, p. 216. (see note 25)
- 34 Ibid., Chap. 21, p. 220.
- 35 Ibid., Chap. 4, p. 35.
- 36 Ibid., Introduction, p. xx.
- 37 Ibid., Chap. 20, pp. 214–17.
- 38 “Cofaay” is said to mean “Come and try me, if you be men.” *Ibid.*, Chap. 20, p. 208.
- 39 Ibid., Chap. 20, p. 217.
- 40 Ibid., Chap. 28, p. 293. Translation of the name Gado Saby: “God only knows and no one else knows,” Chap. 20, p. 208.
- 41 Ibid., Introduction.
- 42 Ibid., Chap. 26, p. 259. We compared this to the book’s first edition, Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (London, 1796), p. 203.
- 43 Ibid., Chap. 26, p. 273.
- 44 Editor William Thomson was, at the time of the *Narrative*, involved in pro-slavery groups and is said to have made these types of changes on his own initiative. However, Price and Price suggest in the introduction of the book that the interventions may also have been aimed at reaching a larger readership. They suggest that at the time of publication, public opinion was critical of the anti-slavery movement, the book coming shortly after, among other things, the bloody uprising in Haiti in which 40,000 British soldiers had been killed.
- 45 Still it seems Stedman himself was not pro-abolitionist. Pragmatically, he writes that this will only force the British “to go to foreign markets to buy [the products] at double price.” In addition, he feels uneasy toward the planters: “I cannot help thinking it ungenerous thus wishing to deprive the West India planters of their property, by a sudden abolition of the slave trade.” The retention of property and the continuation of production ultimately seemed to him more important than the self-determination of a Black population that had been robbed of these. See *ibid.*, Chap. 9, p. 92.

## CHAPTER 5

- 1 Aimé Césaire, “Discours sur le colonialisme”, *Editions Présence Africaine* (Paris, 1955). We read Joan Pinkham’s English translation published under the title “Discourse on Colonialism” in *Monthly Review Press* (New York and London, 1972).
- 2 Ibid., pp. 1–2.
- 3 Ibid., p. 1.

- 4 Ibid., p. 4. Césaire is referring here to colonial administrator Albert Sarraut, the former governor-general of Indochina.
- 5 Ibid., p. 5.
- 6 Ibid., p. 6.
- 7 A.J.A. Quintus Bosz, “De ontwikkeling van de rechtspositie van de vroegere plantageslaven in Suriname,” *Emancipatie 1863–1963: Biografien, Surinaamse Historische Kring* (Paramaribo, 1964), p. 9.
- 8 Georg Lukács, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, 1971). Original edition: Georg Lukács, *Studien über Marxist Dialektik* (1923).
- 9 For an introduction to tool-being, see Chapter 1 *supra* in this book. We do not want to argue here that the theory of tool-being condones or justifies the process of forgetting, but we are looking primarily for the agency of the inscrutable dimension, a dimension that seems parallel to Glissant’s opacity, which we examine later in the chapter.
- 10 Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, “Open Boat,” trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor, 1997), pp. 5–11. Originally published as *Poétique de la Relation* (1990). We consulted the English version.
- 11 Ibid., p. 8. Capitalization of “Relation” by Glissant.
- 12 Glissant’s volume *Poetics of Relation* (see note 10) contains two essays discussing opacity: “Transparency and Opacity,” pp. 111–121, and “For Opacity,” pp. 189–195. For his remark on conquest and possession, see p. 189.
- 13 Glissant, “For Opacity” (see note 12), p. 190–192. For his paralleling of understanding to the French *comprendre*, see p. 141.
- 14 Ibid., pp. 190
- 15 Ibid., pp. 189–190.
- 16 Ibid., p. 189.
- 17 Ibid., p. 193.
- 18 Glissant, “Distancing, Determining,” *Poetics of Relation* (see note 10): 141–158. Entitlement to the possession of land: p. 143. Rooted identity: pp. 141, 144.
- 19 Glissant, “Relinked, (Relayed), Related,” *Poetics of Relation* (see note 10): 169–183.
- 20 Glissant, “For Opacity,” *Poetics of Relation* (see note 10), p. 194.
- 21 Anton de Kom, *Wij, slaven van Suriname* (Amsterdam, 1934).
- 22 Ibid., pp. 28–29.
- 23 Ibid., p. 57. We here translated the offensive Dutch word “negerjongens” with Black boys.
- 24 Ibid., p. 57. De Kom spells the name Boni as Bonni.
- 25 Remarkable in this regard are the first sentences of his book, in which Indigenous peoples are presented as powerless: “In the lower lands live the Warans, the Arowaks and the Caribbean, feeble dying Indian tribes, powerless descendants of the native population, pushed out of the best places by the whites.”
- 26 Protests by Africans on the ships, see *ibid.*, p. 29.
- 27 Protests by Chinese workers, see *ibid.*, p. 126.
- 28 Protests by Hindustani workers, see *ibid.*, pp. 157–159.
- 29 Protests by the Javanese workers, see *ibid.*, pp. 159–163.
- 30 Ibid., p. 50, 64.
- 31 Ibid., p. 84.
- 32 Ibid., pp. 84–85. On p. 143 De Kom elaborates on the *livret*, which he describes as: “the bulky code of regulations that has not been approved by a people’s council, has not been ratified by a parliament, which has been compiled in full power by the directors of the company, but whose observance is nevertheless protected by all organs of the state, by police and army.”
- 33 For the rhetoric of modernity vs logic of coloniality, see Walter Mignolo, “Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto,” *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* (Merced, 2011), pp. 45–46.
- 34 Walter Mignolo, “Coloniality is far from over and so must be decoloniality,” *Afterall*, Volume 43 (London, 2017), p. 40. By “our lives” he seems to be referring to all people.
- 35 For barbaric vs civilized, see Mignolo, “Epistemic Disobedience: A Manifesto” (see note 33), p. 48.
- 36 Coloniality is a concept coined by Anibal Quijano and later developed by Mignolo. See Walter Mignolo, “Border Thinking and the Colonial Difference,” *Local Histories / Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking* (Princeton, 2012), p. 50; and Mignolo, “Coloniality is far from over” (see note 34), p. 42.
- 37 Mignolo, “Coloniality is far from over” (see note 34), p. 43.
- 38 Walter Mignolo, “Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom,” *Theory, Culture & Society* Vol. 26, 7–8 (SAGE, Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, and Singapore, 2009): pp. 1–23.
- 39 For the bodiless neutral seeker of truth, see *ibid.*, pp. 2–4.
- 40 Ibid., p. 19.
- 41 The term “silenced communities” he quotes from essayist Abdel Hebir Khatibi, see Mignolo, “Border Thinking and the Colonial Difference” (see note 36), p. 71.
- 42 For epistemic delinking, see Mignolo, “A Manifesto” (see note 33), p. 64, footnote 8.

- 43 Ibid., p. 46.  
 44 Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience ... De-Colonial Freedom" (see note 38), p. 3. Mignolo's italics.  
 45 For examples of decolonial disobedient conservatism, see Mignolo, "Coloniality is far from over" (see note 34), pp. 40–41, 44–45.

## CHAPTER 6

- 1 For Grotius as father of Westphalian sovereignty, see for example Eric Allen Engle, "The Transformation of the International Legal System: the Post-Westphalian Legal Order," *University of Bridgeport Law Review* (Bridgeport, 2004), pp. 23–25; Martin van Gelderen "'Iustitiam non includo': Carl Schmitt, Hugo Grotius and the *Ius Publicum Europaeum*," *History of European Ideas* 37 (Fiesole, 2011), pp. 154–159.  
 2 For postcolonial criticism of Westphalian Sovereignty, see Juan José Guzmán, "Decolonizing Law and expanding Human Rights: Indigenous Conceptions and the Rights of Nature in Ecuador," *Deusto Journal of Human Rights*, No. 4 (Bilbao, 2019), pp. 62–64. Guzmán here quotes Gómez Isa.  
 3 Kwame Nimako and Glenn Willemsen, "Transatlantic Slavery and the Rise of the European World Order," *The Dutch Atlantic* (London, 2011), pp. 20, 24.  
 4 Quote on the mighty and rich, see Hugo Grotius and Arthur Eyffinger, *Hugo de Groot: De Vrije Zee, Mare Liberum* (The Hague, 2009), pp. 92–93. Our translation from Latin. Originally published as Hugo Grotius, *Mare Liberum* (Leiden, 1609).  
 5 Ibid., pp. 94–96. Our translation from Latin.  
 6 In *De Iure Praedae* (On the Law of Prize and Booty, 1868), which was not published until long after Grotius' death, we found the full legal reasoning by which he would attempt to justify the seizure of the merchant ship. A chapter from this was already published during his lifetime: the previously quoted *Mare Liberum* (The Freedom of the Seas, 1609). In this, Grotius would formulate the legal basis for what we now know as the 'international waters', that is, the oceans and seas beyond territorial waters that can be navigated freely by vessels of all countries. Grotius would elaborate on his arguments about the right to booty and the just grounds for war in *De Iure Belli ac Pacis* (On the Law of War and Peace, 1625). It was this last book in particular that would have a major influence on the Peace of Westphalia and the European peace that resulted from it.  
 7 Hugo de Groot, *Van 't regt des oorlogs- en vredes, voorreden van*

- den schryver aan den lezer*, item 11, Dutch trans. from Latin by Jan van Gaveren (Amsterdam, 1732). Originally published as *De Iure Belli ac Pacis* (Paris, 1625). Source for English translation: Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, edited and with an Introduction by Richard Tuck, from the Edition by Jean Barbeyrac (Indianapolis, 2005), introduction, p. xi, The Preliminary Discourse, p. 87.  
 8 For his definitions of natural law, see Hugo Grotius, *Iure Praedae Commentarius, Commentary on the law of prize and booty, Translation of the Original Manuscript of 1604*, Engl. translation Gwladys L. Williams (Oxford, 1950), Chapter 2, pp. 12, 29, Chapter 8, p. 98. Originally published as *De Iure Praedae* (The Hague, 1868).  
 9 Quote on plants choosing their own soil, see Grotius and Eyffinger, *Mare Liberum, De Vrije Zee* (see note 4), pp. 102–103. Our translation from Latin. Quote on peoples having different talents, see Grotius, *Iure Praedae Commentarius* (see note 8), Chapter 12, p. 218.  
 10 Presenting winds and oceans as evidence, see Grotius, *Iure Praedae Commentarius* (see note 8), Chapter 12, p. 218. See also Grotius, *Mare Liberum, De Vrije Zee* (see note 4), pp. 102–103.  
 11 Trade comes to the rescue of nature, see Grotius and Eyffinger, *Mare Liberum, De Vrije Zee* (see note 4), pp. 174–175. Our translation from Latin.  
 12 Bruno Latour speaks of "generalized revolts of all the means" in *Politics of Nature* (2004). He describes this as: "No entity—whale, river, climate, earthworm, tree, calf, cow, pig, brood—agrees any longer to be treated 'simply as a means' but insists on being treated 'always also as an end'." Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 155–156. Originally published as *Politique de la Nature* (Paris, 1999).  
 13 Grotius and Eyffinger, *Mare Liberum, De Vrije Zee* (see note 4), pp. 104–105. Our translation from Latin. See also Grotius, *Iure Praedae Commentarius* (see note 8), Chapter 12, p. 218.  
 14 Grotius speaks about inferior things in *Iure Praedae Commentarius* (see note 8), Chapter 2, p. 11. See also John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (London, 1821), pp. 26, 55. Originally published in London in 1690.  
 15 Grotius and Eyffinger, *Mare Liberum, De Vrije Zee* (see note 4), pp. 126–127. In Grotius's speculation about the first division of the land, their commodification already appears to have been decided, for he writes: "With a view to the production of



- clothing" and "the yielding of food, land would be similarly be divided up." 16  
 Ibid., pp. 94–95. We followed the translation of Arthur Eyffinger. 17  
 Grotius writes about ownership in Grotius and Eyffinger, *Mare Liberum, De Vrije Zee* (see note 4), pp. 125–127, 95, 107. Our translation from Latin. 18  
 For discussions about the commons in relation to Grotius see, for example, Sean Cubitt, *Finite Media, Environmental Implications of Digital Technologies* (Durham and London, 2017), pp. 7–9; Vid Prislán and Nico Schrijver, "From Mare Liberum to the Global Commons: Building on the Grotian Heritage", *Grotiana* 30 (Leiden, 2009), pp. 168–206; and Alejandra Mancilla, "What we own Before Property: Hugo Grotius and the Suum," *Grotiana* 36 (Leiden, 2015), pp. 63–77. 19  
 For the ocean as the parent of all things, see Grotius and Eyffinger, *Mare Liberum, De Vrije Zee* (see note 4), pp. 142–143. Our translation from Latin. See also Grotius, *Iure Praedae Commentarius* (see note 8), Chapter 12, pp. 238–239. 20  
 Grotius and Eyffinger, *Mare Liberum, De Vrije Zee* (see note 4), pp. 200–201. Our translation from Latin. Also see Grotius, *Iure Praedae* (Oxford, 1950), Chapter 15, pp. 348–357. 21  
 John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (see note 14), pp. 24–25, 216–218. 22  
 For how the ranking system that places culture above nature influences other dualisms, see also Arturo Escobar, "Latin America at a Crossroads," *Cultural Studies*, vol. 24, No. 1 (Abingdon, 2010), p. 39. 23  
 The imagery of a sea engulfing nation states is derived from Kyle McGee in *A Book of the Body Politic*, ed. Bruno Latour, Simon Schaffer, Pasquale Gagliardi (San Giorgio, 2017), p. 207. Kyle McGee refers for his imagery to Bruno Latour's *Facing Gaia* (2017). 24  
 For land ownership among the Maroons, see also Fergus MacKay, *Saramaca en de strijd om het bos* (Amsterdam, 2010), p. 12. 25  
 David Quammen, "We Made the Coronavirus Epidemic", *New York Times*, January 28, 2020. 26  
 Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges, the science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective", *Feminist Studies* (Maryland, 1988): 575–599, p. 581. 27  
 Ibid., pp. 581, 585, 589. 28  
 Ibid., p. 592 Our italics. 29  
 Ibid., p. 593. 30  
 Ibid., p. 590. 31  
 Ibid., p. 596. 32  
 For her exposé on ties other than by ancestry or genealogy, see Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* (Duke University, Durham, 2016), pp. 4, 24. 33  
 Ibid., introduction, p. 4. For the dance of relating, see Donna Haraway, *When species meet* (Minnesota, 2007), p. 25. Italics by Haraway. This dance of relating (which is simultaneously a dance of becoming), appears to correlate with Glissant's reflections on "Relation." See *supra* Chapter 5. 34  
 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* (see note 32), introduction, p. 4. 35  
 For Man-the-Destroyer, see Haraway, *When Species Meet* (see note 33), p. 11. For the metabolism between humans and the rest of the world, see Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* (see note 32), p. 46. 36  
 Haraway, *When Species Meet* (see note 33), p. 11. 37  
 John Gabriel Stedman, *Stedman's Surinam, Life in an Eighteenth-Century Slave Society, An Abridged, Modernized Edition, transcribed for the first time from the original 1796 manuscript*, red. Richard and Sally Price (Baltimore, 1992), introduction, xxii, Chapter 27, p. 282. See also *supra* Chapter 4. 38  
 Ibid., introduction, lxx, note 11.

## CHAPTER 7

- 1 **It was members of the Biitu lo who could make contact with the rain. Richard Price, *First Time* (Chicago, 2002), pp. 122–123. First edition published in 1983.**  
 2 **Anthropologist Richard Price defines an *obia* as a "magical power source." See Richard Price, *Rainforest Warriors* (Philadelphia, 2012), p. 14; Price, *First Time* (see note 1), p. 43.**  
 3 **J.H. Westerveld relayed the content of the flyer, published by the Brokopondo office around 1958, in *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* (September 1996). See Landveld, *Alles is voor eeuwig weg* (Paramaribo, 2009), p. 43.**  
 4 **For the Brokopondo project as developmental fantasy, see Carlo Hoop, *Verdwenen land, verdronken dorpen*, (Alkmaar, 1991), p. 13. See also Landveld, *Alles is voor eeuwig weg* (see note 3), p. 128. In 2015, the joint venture's American partner ALCOA withdrew from Suriname and aluminum production has virtually stopped.**  
 5 **Hoop, *Verdwenen land* (see note 4), introduction.**  
 6 **Dorus Vrede, *Rond het sterfbed van mijn dorp*, "Rond het sterfbed van mijn dorp" (Paramaribo, 1986): 21–44, p. 23.**  
 7 **Vrede, *Rond het sterfbed van mijn dorp*, "Ik vertrek niet voordat het water tot mijn voeten komt!" (see note 6): 51–69.**

- 8 Hoop, *Verdwenen land* (see note 4), pp. 2–3.
- 9 For the Surinamization of foreign companies, see *ibid.*, p. 9. See also Landveld, *Alles is voor eeuwig weg* (see note 3), p. 40.
- 10 Hoop, *Verdwenen land* (see note 4), pp. 4, 8–9.
- 11 Landveld, *Alles is voor eeuwig weg* (see note 3), p. 6.
- 12 On the image of the Maroons, see *ibid.*, pp. 6–7.
- 13 Baia Rotney Aseri from Tapuripa, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 151.
- 14 For the messages from the spirit world, see Amoni Agi from Bendikwai quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 102–103. Saamaka poet Felukamisa recited the dream in the first scene of the film *Dee Sitonu A Weti*. Amoni Agi also mentioned that the community received signs from the forest that something was about to happen, such as strange animal behavior. It was Theo Maai from Grantatai who explained to us how such signs could be interpreted during a conversation in Pikin Slee, November 16, 2015. Silvana Donoe from Nieuw Lombe presented the signs of the forest in the film.
- 15 Price, *Rain forest warriors* (see note 2), p. 41. According to Price, half of the Saamaka ended up working here clearing rainforest and building bridges, roads or other facilities.
- 16 *Ibid.*, pp. 104–109. See also Anne Thiel and Xiufang Sun, “China’s logging ban impacts not just its own forestry industry, but others around the world as well,” *Forest Trends*, March 14, 2016.
- 17 The legal maximum amount of land that can be granted to a company in a single concession is 150,000 hectares. However, according to Price, companies frequently succeed in controlling significantly more than this amount through subsidiaries, acquisitions and with the help of bribes. Richard Price, *Rainforest Warriors* (see note 2), pp. 106–107.
- 18 Fergus MacKay, *Saramaca en de strijd om het bos* (Amsterdam, 2010), p. 17.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p.19. In 2001, the Association of Saaamaka Authority Holders filed the petition with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in Washington D.C. When the State did not follow up on the committee’s recommendations, the body referred the case for binding judgment to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in Costa Rica, which ruled in 2006. Case No. 12.338.
- 20 Juan José Guzmán, “When the forest screams,” Master’s thesis (University of Duesto, Bilbao, 2018/19), p. 7.
- 21 MacKay, *Saramaca* (see note 18), p. 97.
- 22 For the Peace Agreement, also see Price, *Rainforest Warriors* (see note 2), pp. 7–9; Chris de Beet and Richard Price, *De Saramakaanse vrede van 1762: geselecteerde documenten*, ed. Van Lier, Thoden van Velzen, Sterman (Utrecht, 1982).
- 23 State attorney’s argument, see Richard Price, “The Anthropologist as Expert Witness,” in *Comparative Law and Anthropology*, ed. James A.R. 8 (2017), p. 424; MacKay, *Saramaca* (see note 18), p. 30.
- 24 Price, *Rainforest Warriors* (see note 2), p. 170. The question was posed by Judge Ventura Robles (in Spanish).
- 25 Albert Aboikoni, at the time *hedikabiten* (head captain) of the Matjau lo, had been summoned as a witness by the State. He spoke in Dutch and used “Saramakaan”—the Dutch name for a Saamaka person—which rhymes with “maan” (moon). See also Price, *Rainforest Warriors*, (see note 2), pp. 174–175.
- 26 *Ibid.*, pp. 174–175. To study other cultures within the framework of an us-them dichotomy, Michel-Rolph Trouillot introduced the term *savage slot*. See Trouillot, “Anthropology and the savage slot, the poetics and politics of otherness,” *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard G. Fox (Santa Fe, 1991), pp. 17–44. A rewritten version of the essay was published in Trouillot, *Global Transformations* (New York, 2003), pp. 7–28.
- 27 MacKay, *Saramaca* (see note 18), pp. 19, 31–32.

## CHAPTER 8

- 1 The Indigenous peoples referred to here are the Llanchama community of Yasuni, the Waorani communities of Pastaza and the Sarayaku people, see Juan José Guzmán, “Decolonizing Law and expanding Human Rights: Indigenous Conceptions and the Rights of Nature in Ecuador,” *Derusto Journal of Human Rights*, No. 4 (Bilbao, 2019): 59–86; and Guzmán, “When the Forest Screams,” Master’s thesis (University of Duesto, 2018/19). We published an earlier version of this chapter as “Something is There: Filmmaking in Multiple Realities,” *World Records* 1, ed. Jason Fox (New York, 2018).
- 2 Quote from Gerrard Albert, chief negotiator of the Whanganui iwi in Eleanor Ainge Roy, “New Zealand river granted same legal rights as human being,” *The Guardian*, 16 March 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/16/new-zealand-river-granted-same-legal-rights-as-human-being>.

- 3 Two years earlier, New Zealand had also declared the Te Urewera nature reserve to be a legal entity. However, it seems to have been particularly its legislation with regards to the Whanganui River that inspired similar laws in several other countries. The draft version the law—which was announced to the world in 2014—served as an example to the Colombia’s Constitutional Court’s 2016 law that granted the Atrato River Basin the right to “protection, preservation, maintenance, and restoration.” It also inspired the highest court of the northern state of Uttarakhand in India to pass a law recognizing the Ganges River and its tributary Yamuna as “living entities.” This latter decision would be partially overturned by India’s Supreme Court two years later. See Sudipta Sen, “Of Holy Rivers and Human Rights: Protecting the Ganges by Law,” *Yale University Press Blog*, April 25, 2019. <http://blog.yalebooks.com/2019/04/25/of-holy-rivers-and-human-rights-protecting-the-ganges-by-law/>; Ananya Bhattacharya, “Pure waters, India’s sacred rivers now have human rights,” *Quartz India*, March 21, 2017.
- 4 See Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River Claims Settlement) Act 2017 Part 3, 69, 8. <http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2017/0007/latest/DLM6830851.html>
- 5 For New Zealand customary law and the demarcation of the legal entity, see Matthias Kramm, “When a River Becomes a Person,” *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* (2020): 307–319, p. 308.
- 6 Juan José Guzmán, “When the forest screams” (see note 1)
- 7 Kyle McGee, “For a Juridical Ecology of Ligatures,” *A Book of the Body Politic: Connecting Biology, Politics and Social Theory* (Venice, 2020), ed. Bruno Latour, Simon Schaffer, Pasquale Giardi. McGee discusses the “law of persons” on pp. 176–177. The third region of Roman law is “the law of actions,” which McGee does not elaborate on. *A Book of the Body Politic* reports on a conference held in San Giorgio in 2017. Along with the lectures of the various participants, it also contains a report of the debates.
- 8 McGee, “Debate,” *A Book of the Body Politic* (see note 7), p. 203.
- 9 McGee, “Hybrid Legalities,” *Law, obligation, community* (Abington, 2018), p. 20; McGee, “For a Juridical Ecology of Ligatures” (see note 7), p. 176.
- 10 McGee calls this underexposed side of the law a “minor tradition” in “Hybrid Legalities” (see note 9), p. 20.
- 11 McGee, “For a Juridical Ecology of Ligatures” (see note 7), pp. 183–184.
- 12 For the different meanings of “jurisprudence,” see Christos Marneros, “Gilles Deleuze: Jurisprudence,” *Critical Legal Thinking, Law and the Political*, 14 November 2019. <https://criticallegalthinking.com/2019/11/14/gilles-deleuze-jurisprudence/>
- 13 McGee, *Heathen Earth* (Goleta, 2017), p. 124.
- 14 McGee, “Hybrid Legalities” (see note 9), p. 7.
- 15 McGee seems to be referring here to what he succinctly describes elsewhere as the “Lockean articulation of a liberal mode of legality.” Locke proposed that social contracts are not concluded once and for all by members of a collective, with everyone henceforth bound by it. Rather, consent is tacitly granted by the members of a community through their use or ownership of something that falls under the rule of government. John Locke, *Over het staatsbestuur* (Amsterdam, 1988), trans. F. van Zetten, Chapter 8, item 119. Originally published as *Two Treatises of Government* (London, 1690). McGee himself refers to Locke in “For a Juridical Ecology of Ligatures” (see note 9), p. 175. McGee cites the example of the fence in “Hybrid Legalities” (see note 9), p. 15. He also refers to the encounter with a fence in “Debate,” *A Book of the Body Politic* (see note 7), p. 202.
- 16 McGee, *Heathen Earth* (see note 13), pp. 129–130.
- 17 *Ibid.*, pp. 125–128 and McGee, “Hybrid Legalities” (see note 9), p. 21: “We are no longer (purely) in discourse, but we are in law: a kind of experimental jurisprudence.” In *A Book of the Body Politic* (see note 7) in particular he speaks about case law and precedent in the “Debate,” on pp. 35, 132, 168, as well as in “For a Juridical Ecology of Ligatures,” on p. 175. McGee refers to the bonds of obligation, liability and alliance as “ligatures,” a term he derives from the Latin verb *ligare*, which means to bind. Michel Serres makes a similar parallel in *The Natural Contract* when he writes: “Sometimes I imagine that the first legal object was the cord, the bond, *lien* in French, which we read only abstractly in the terms *obligation* and *alliance*, but more concretely in

- attachment*, a cord that materializes our relations and changes them into things." Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract* (Ann Arbor, 1991), p. 45.
- 18 McGee, *Heathen Earth* (see note 13), p. 20.
- 19 McGee, "Debate", *A Book of the Body Politic* (see note 7), p. 203; McGee, *Heathen Earth* (see note 13), p. 143.
- 20 McGee, *Heathen Earth* (see note 13), pp. 119, 133.
- 21 Ibid., p. 62.
- 22 Ibid., pp. 63–67. For symbiosis, McGee refers to Lynn Margulis, who describes this principle as "the intimacy of strangers." Lynn Margulis, *Symbiotic Planet: A New Look at Evolution* (New York, 1998). We ourselves came across the term in Serres' *The Natural Contract* (see note 17), *supra* Chapter 3. McGee uses the term "broad assembly of conspirators" in "For a Juridical Ecology of Ligatures" (see note 7), pp. 184–185. In this lecture, he speculates about collective indictment, which could hold entire industries to account.

#### CHAPTER 9

- 1 The conversations were translated by Annelies den Boer-Aside, Vinije Haabo, Erik Brunswijk, Carlo Hoop, Suedy Maurico, Roxan Rahaman, Andoime Seedo, Kashindra Vrede, Kensley Vrede, Berry Vrede, and Amayota Weewee.
- 2 We incorporated into the script a number of quotes from Erney Landveld, *Alles is voor eeuwig weg* (2009); Dorus Vrede, *Langs het sterfbed van mijn dorp* (1986); and Richard Price, *First Time* (1983).

#### CHAPTER 10

- 1 Dan Yakir and Jean Rouch, "Ciné-Transe: The Vision of Jean Rouch: An Interview", *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 31, no. 3 (Spring 1978): pp. 2-11. See also *supra* Chapter 1.
- 2 Anton de Kom, *Wij, slaven van Suriname* (Amsterdam, 1934), p. 84. See also *supra* Chapter 5.
- 3 For an extensive description, interpretation, and images of the Maroons' clothing, see Thomas Polimé, Alex van Stipriaan, *Zeg het met doeken: Marrontextiel en de Tropenmuseumcollectie* (Amsterdam, 2013).
- 4 Stories about ancestors who brought rice stalks in their hair are also known to other Maroon groups. The Okanisi, for example, have a similar tradition involving Ma Sapa. Sapili rice was named after this ancestor. According to another Saamaka tradition, Ma Pansa

brought rice seeds to the interior when she escaped from the plantation. Saamaka expert Vinije Haabo told us that it is not unusual in the Saamaka tradition to attribute experiences of different ancestors to a single person. See also Valika Smeulders, "Sapali," *Slavery* (Amsterdam, 2021).

#### CHAPTER 11

- 1 The question was recorded by Xaviera Arnhem following the screening in Paramaribo, March 25, 2019.
- 2 To launch the Dutch release, we participated in nine post-screening discussions in Forum in Groningen; Filmhuis O42 in Nijmegen; Cinecitta in Tilburg; Lantaren-Venster in Rotterdam; Louis Hartlooper Complex in Utrecht; and Plein-Theater, Filmhallen, Ketelhuis and Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam.
- 3 The question was asked after the screening in the Louis Hartlooper Complex in Utrecht, November 2, 2019.

## EXHIBITIONS AND REVIEWS

### MONUMENT OF SUGAR

- 2019 *Borderlines*, curator: Tessa Giblin, Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh, and The Edge, Bath (UK).
- 2018 *Iona Nemeth: Eastern Sugar*, KHB, Kunsthalle Bratislava (Slovakia).
- 2017 *Sticky Business*, Stedelijk Museum Schiedam (Netherlands).
- 2016 *Made of Sugar and Salt*, CBK Groningen (Netherlands).
- 2015 *The Way Things Go*, curator: Rikrit Tiravanija, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco (USA).
- 2014 *All that Glitter*, curator: Jason Fox, Anthology Film Archives, New York (USA).  
*World of Matter*, Hartware MedienKunstVerein, Dortmund (Germany).
- 2013 *Revolt of the Giants*, curator: Mirjam Varadinis, Kunsthau Zürich (Switzerland).  
*Chambres de Canaux: A Tolerant Home*, Huis met de Hoofden, Amsterdam (Netherlands).
- 2012 Goldsmiths, PhD programme Research Architecture, London (UK).  
Motive Gallery, LOOP, Barcelona (Spain).
- 2010 *The Crude and the Rare*, The Cooper Union Gallery, New York (USA).
- 2009 *Foodprint*, Stroom, The Hague (Netherlands).
- 2008 *The Age of Migration*, curator: Chi-hui Yang, The Robert Flaherty Film Seminar, Hamilton (USA).  
*Modern Mondays, an evening with...*, curator: Sally Berger, Museum of Modern Art, New York (USA).  
*Masques Noir—Sucre Blanc*, Cinémathèque Nantes (France).  
*Translocalmotion*, curators: Julian Heynen, Zhang Qing, Henk Slager, 7th Shanghai Biennial (China).
- 2007 *Monument en Sucre*, Module 1, Palais de Tokyo, Paris (France).  
*Monument of Sugar*, curator: Katerina Gregos, Argos, Brussels (Belgium).
- 2006 *Just in Time*, curator: Maxine Kopsa, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (Netherlands).  
*Concerning Knowledge Production*, BAK, Utrecht (Netherlands).
- Maja and Reuben Fowkes, "Assembling Bittersweet Testimonies for Posterity," *Iona Nemeth: Eastern Sugar* (Berlin, Germany, 2021).
  - Paula Rebuelta, "Monument of Sugar: Utilizar el arte para evitar las barreras del comercio exterior," *ROOM*, 5 June, 2019 (Spain).
  - Katie Moore, "Borderlines," *The Student Newspaper*, 13 March, 2019 (UK).
  - Sofia Cotrona, "Borderlines," *Reviewsphere*, 12 March, 2019 (UK).
  - Susan Mansfield, "Borderlines: As Brexit looms," *The Scotsman*, 6 March, 2019 (UK).
  - Phil Miller, "Borders in focus," *The Herald*, 19 February, 2019 (UK).
  - Lietje Bauwens, "Leven in een multiversum," *Mr. Motley*, May, 2018 (Netherlands).
  - Bodil Keikes, "Made of Sugar & Salt (CBK Groningen)," *Filter Groningen*, 1 November, 2016 (Netherlands).
  - Ian Cook, Peter Jackson, e.a., *Food's Cultural Geographies* (Hoboken, VS, 2016).
  - Kimberly Chun, "The Way Things Go: Food inspires art that reveals a culture," *AF Gate Domus*, 18 February, 2015 (USA).
  - Christian L. Frock, "Unpacking Rirkrit Tiravanija's Curatorial Project," *KQED Arts*, 27 February, 2015 (USA).
  - Chloe Johnson, "Global movement of food explored ... at YBCA," *The Examiner*, 26 March, 2015 (USA).
  - Volker K. Belghaus, "Zuckerberg," *K-West Magazine*, 1 April, 2014 (Germany).
  - Jim Supanick, "MEDIUM BULK MATERIAL TRANSFERRED FROM ONE COUNTRY TO ANOTHER," *The Brooklyn Rail*, 5 February, 2014 (USA).
  - Aoife Rosenmeyer, "Review 'Revolt of the Giants'," *Frieze* 160, January/February, 2014 (UK).
  - Anthony Downey, *Art and Politics Now* (New York, VS, 2014).
  - Paulina Szczesniak, "Zuckrig, bis bitterzüss," *Tages Anzeiger*, 4 September, 2013 (Switzerland).
  - Philip Mayer, "Machtstrukturen: Filminstallation des Niederlandische Kunstlerduo," *Zürcher Zeitung*, 20 September, 2013 (Switzerland).
  - Feli Schindler, "Die Reise des Zuckers: eine Sage von Raub, Handel und Migration," *Tages Anzeiger*, 7 October, 2013 (Switzerland).
  - Svea Jürgenson, "Reconsidering the Monument: Robert Smithson and Contemporary Site-Based Practices," doctoral dissertation VU (Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2013).
  - Pamela Lee, *Forgetting the Art World* (Cambridge, VS, 2012).
  - Daniel Bertina, "De onzichtbare hand en de cultuur van de aarde," *Mr Motley*, 16 June, 2012 (Netherlands).
  - Kara L. Rooney, "The Crude and the Rare," *Mutual Art*, 1 December, 2010 (USA).

- Susanne Boeker, "Translocalmotion," *Kunstforum International*, November/December, 2008 (Germany).
- Carol Yinghua Lu, "7th Shanghai Biennial," *Frieze* 119, November/December, 2008 (UK).
- Jason Sanders, "Migrating Talents at the Flaherty Seminar," *Filmmaker Magazine*, 16 July, 2008 (USA).
- Ingrid Commandeur, "Cultuurclash," *Metropolis M*, 30 September, 2008 (Netherlands).
- Christophe Gallois, Andréa Picard, Tessa Giblin, *Redrawing the Boundaries*, ed. Mariska van den Berg (Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2008).
- Christophe Gallois, "How to use artistic means to elude trade barriers," *Untitled Magazine* No. 44, 2007 (UK).
- Luk Lambrechts, "Over schijnwerelden: politieke video's in Argos," *Knack*, 30 July, 2007 (Belgium).
- Hans Hartog Jager, "Follow the Money," *NRC Handelsblad*, 21 March, 2007 (Netherlands).
- Mufu Onifade, "Universal Studios hosts Dutch sugar installation," *New Age*, 29 September, 2006 (Nigeria).
- Sacha Bronwasser, "Een niet onaangenaam allegaartje," *De Volkskrant*, 18 December, 2006 (Netherlands).

#### EPISODE OF THE SEA

- 2019 *Borderlines*, curator: Tessa Giblin, Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh, and The Edge, Bath (UK).
- 2018 MUBI, internationally curated streaming platform (UK).  
*Conjurer la Tracabilité*, curators: Isabelle and Marie-Ève Charron, Orange triennial, Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec (Canada).
- 2017 Festival Pecheurs du Monde, Lorient (France).
- 2016 *Migrating Forms*, BAM, New York (USA).  
BRAIN Arts, Boston (USA).  
*Cracking the Frame*, Rialto Film Theatre, Amsterdam (Netherlands).  
Film Philosophy Seminar, ASCA, University of Amsterdam (Netherlands).  
International House, Philadelphia (USA).  
24th Annual Environmental Film Festival, Washington (USA).
- 2015 *Episode of the Sea*, TPW Gallery, Toronto (Canada).  
Filmhuis Oosterbeek, with post-screening discussion by Johan Verreth and Jan de Boer (Netherlands).  
Ashkal Alwan, Home Works 7, Beirut Art Centre (Lebanon).  
ANTOFADOCS, International Documentary Feature Competition, Antofagasta (Chile).  
BIFED, Panorama, Bozcaada International Festival of Ecological Documentary (Turkey).  
Festival Internacional de Cine Independiente de La Plata Festi-Freak, Buenos Aires (Argentina).  
Bear River Film Weekend, Dalhousie University Centre for European Studies, Nova Scotia (Canada).  
Queensland Film Festival, New Farm Cinema's, Brisbane (Australia).  
*Artistic Research Methods*, KABK, The Hague (Netherlands).  
*Post exotism*, curators: Le peuple qui manque, festival Diep-haven (UK).  
*Cinéma Permanent*, curators: Le peuple qui manque, Centre Pompidou Metz (France).  
Jeonju International Film Festival (South Korea).  
Filmhuis Cavia, Amsterdam (Netherlands).  
Ukrainian Documentary Festival, Kiev (Ukraine).  
International Environmental Film Festival of Mexico, Cinema Planeta, Cuernavaca (Mexico).  
Second Ward Foundation, Hudson, New York (USA).  
CalArts, Los Angeles, California (USA).  
Cornell Cinema, Ithaca, New York (USA).  
*The Aspect Series*, The Maltings Cinema, Northumberland (UK).  
Ann Arbor Film Festival, Michigan (USA).  
Luxembourg City Film Festival, MUDAM (Luxembourg).  
MoMA's Documentary Fortnight, New York (USA).  
Punto de Vista, Islands, Pamplona, Navarra (Spain).
- 2014 Human Rights Film Festival Zagreb, HRFF, Cinema Europa (Croatia).  
Festival Mar del Plata, Altered States, Buenos Aires (Argentina).  
IDFA, Framing Reality, Amsterdam (Netherlands).  
RIDM Recontre Internationales des Documentaires: Territoires, Montreal (Canada).  
CPH:DOX, New Visions Program, Copenhagen (Denmark).  
Vlaams-Nederlands cultureel centrum DeBuren, Brussels (Belgium).  
TIFF, Wavelength program, Toronto (Canada).  
*World of Matter*, Hartware MedienKunstVerein, Dortmund (Germany).
- 2013 Kunsthaus Zürich, preview screening (Switzerland).  
Urk op de Planken repetitieuimte, preview screening, Urk (Netherlands).
- Jordan Cronk, "The decade in experimental film," *Film Comment*, 2020 (USA).
  - Michael Scinski, "Best 30 avant-garde feature films of the decade," *MUBI*, 2020 (USA).
  - Colm Guo-Lin Peare, "Breaking Down Borders: Talbot Rice's new show coincides with Britain's scheduled date to leave Europe," *The Skinny*, 20 February, 2019 (UK).
  - Amalie Proulx, "Épisode de la Mer, Expression," *Orange catalogue*, 2018 (Canada).
  - Tetsu Saito, "Episode of the Sea," *razmatazrazzledazzle*, 2018 (Japan).
  - Dimitri Lahaut, "Filmsector gebaat bij flexibelere financieringsprotocollen," *Boekman Cahier* 109, winter 2016/2017 (Netherlands).
  - Jos van der Burg, "Kunstfilms krijgen drie weken alle ruimte," *Het Parool*, 5 May, 2016 (Netherlands).
  - Susan Morrison, "Episode of the Sea: A Double Eulogy," *CineAction*, 1 December, 2015 (Canada).

- Nick Nolly, "Episode of the Sea, review of screening at the inaugural Queensland Film Festival at New Farm Cinemas," *The essential film journal collective*, 1 July, 2015 (Australia).
- Felix Hubble, "Episode of the Sea," *4:3 review*, 27 July, 2015 (Australia).
- Lotte Arndt, "Conversation with the artists," *Gallery TPW*, May, 2015 (Canada).
- James Hansen, "Tracking Changes, the 53rd Ann Arbor Film Festival," *Filmmaker*, 20 April, 2015 (USA).
- Mike Eveleth, "2015 Ann Arbor Film Festival: Award Winners," *Underground Film Journal*, 7 April, 2015 (USA).
- Gentiane Bélanger, "World of Matter: Complex Thought of Terrains," *Espace*, 1 March, 2015 (Canada).
- Rafico Ruiz, "Capturing Practice(s) on Urk Island," *Seachange Journal*, McGill University, 1 March, 2015 (Canada).
- Marie-Eve Charron, "Matières premières, matière grise," *Le Devoir*, 28 February, 2015 (Canada).
- Aaron Cutler, "Public Works: MoMA's Documentary Fortnight," *The L-Magazine*, 13 February, 2015 (USA).
- Howard Feinstein, "Moma's International Festival of Nonfiction Film: Episode of the Sea," *Filmmaker*, 12 February, 2015 (USA).
- Daniel Walber, "Enacting and Reenacting: MoMA's Documentary Fortnight," *Nonfics.com*, 11 February, 2015 (USA).
- Nicolas Rapold, "Festivals: Toronto," *Film Comment*, 12 January, 2015 (USA).
- Stanislav Bitutskiy, "Episode of the Sea," *Cineticle Kino Journal*, 31 December, 2014 (Ukraine).
- Brian Holmes, "'Something that has to do with life itself': World of Matter and the Radical Imaginary," *CUNY on curating*, 30 December, 2014 (USA).
- Jason Anderson, "Exorcise Regime," *Sight & Sound*, 24 December, 2014 (UK).
- Jordan Cronk, "Best of Avant-Garde 2014," *Fandor*, 17 December, 2014 (USA).
- C.J. Prince, "Best Undistributed Films of 2014," *Way Too Indie*, 3 December, 2014 (USA).
- James Lattimer, "CPH:DOX: Degrees of the Documentary," *MUBI Notebook*, 2 December, 2014 (UK).
- Daniel Kasman, "Episode of the Sea," *Cinemascope 61*, 1 December, 2012 (Canada).
- Dana Linssen, "Bij docu's heet nep nu 'hybride'," *NRC Handelsblad*, 12 November, 2014 (Netherlands).
- Murat Turker, "Ada ana karaya baglaninca, Episode of the Sea (Deniz Vakasi)," *Biamag*, 4 October, 2014 (Turkey).
- John DeFore, "A remote village of fishermen tells its own story, sort of," *Hollywood Reporter*, 16 September, 2014 (USA).
- Jordan Cronk, "TIFF's Wavelength Features," *Fandor Magazine*, 15 September, 2014 (USA).
- Dana Linssen, "Festival eert nieuwe filmvisionairen," *NRC Handelsblad*, 6 September, 2014 (Netherlands).
- C.J. Prince, "Episode of the Sea: TIFF review," *Way Too Indie*, 6 September, 2014 (USA).
- Michael Sicinski, "TF WVLNTS (or TIFF Wavelengths For Those Who Don't Have the Time)," *MUBI Notebook*, 5 September, 2014 (UK).
- Nick Cunningham, "Inland Island," *SEE no. 16*, September, 2014 (Netherlands).
- Allan Berg Nielsen, "CPH:DOX 2014 van Brummelen og de Haan," *Filmkommentaren*, 1 September, 2014 (Denmark).
- "Film over Urk naar internationale filmfestivals," *Het Urkerland*, 18 July, 2014 (Netherlands).
- Felix Koltermann, "Rohstoff zum Konflikt, on World of Matter," *Neues Deutschland*, 5 June, 2014 (Germany).
- Volker Belghaus, "Zuckerberg, Über die globalen Ökologien von Rohstoff," *K-West Magazine*, 1 April, 2014 (Germany).
- Daan van Lent, "Kunstenaars en vissers voelen een band," *NRC Handelsblad*, 31 October, 2013 (Netherlands).
- Yvonne Volkart, "Revolt of the Giants," *Springerin*, 2013 (Austria).

#### DEE SITONU A WETI / STONES HAVE LAWS

- 2021 Streen, streaming platform (Italy).  
DAS Arts, Creative Producing, A-Lab, Amsterdam (Netherlands).
- 2020 True Story, international streaming platform for documentaries (UK).  
*Lost Species Day*, ONCA, Brighton (UK).  
*In search of the pluriverse*, Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam (Netherlands).  
Anthropology and History Laboratory, Federal University, Museu Nacional, Rio de Janeiro (Brazil).  
ARTEZ Studium Generale, Arnhem (Netherlands).  
45 jaar onafhankelijkheid Suriname, Filmhuis The Hague (Netherlands).  
FIFAC, St. Laurent (French Guiana).  
Timehri Film Festival, Georgetown (Guyana).  
*Plein Air*, Plein Theater i.c.w. Cineblend, Amsterdam (Netherlands).  
Another Cinema i.c.w. Wembley Park, London (UK).  
Cinema of the Dam'd, Amsterdam (Netherlands).  
Filmklubben, Moderna Museet, Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm (Sweden).  
Third Horizon Film Festival, Miami (USA).
- 2019 Picl, arthouse streaming platform (Netherlands).  
Bijlmer Parktheater, Amsterdam (Netherlands).  
Luxor Theater, Zutphen (Netherlands).  
Universiteit Groningen, benefietvoorstelling (Netherlands).  
Cinecitta, Tilburg (Netherlands).  
Lantaren Venster, Rotterdam (Netherlands).  
042, Nijmegen (Netherlands).  
Ketelhuis, Amsterdam (Netherlands).  
Plein Theater, Amsterdam (Netherlands).  
Louis Hartlooper Complex, Utrecht (Netherlands).  
*Taxed to the Max, World, People, Places: Resistance Through Culture*, curators: Hester Keijser, George Knegtel, Laura Carbonell Reyes, Noorderlicht, Groningen (Netherlands).

- Forum, Groningen (Netherlands).  
 Filmhallen, Amsterdam (Netherlands).  
*De Grote Suriname Tentoonstelling*,  
 Nieuwe Kerk, Amsterdam (Netherlands).  
*Decolonial Futures*, curator: Astrid  
 Korporaal, Sandberg Instituut, Rietveld  
 Academie, Amsterdam (Netherlands).  
*Afro-Vibe Festival* i.c.w. Dag van de Marrons,  
 Theater aan het Spui, The Hague (Netherlands).  
 Festival Latino Americano, Paramaribo  
 (Suriname).  
 Pollard Hill Youth Centre, Black History  
 Month, London (UK).  
 Padat Merayab in-Lab, Jan van Eyck  
 Academie, Maastricht (Netherlands).  
 Film by the Sea festival, Vlissingen  
 (Netherlands).  
 The Ultimate Picture Palace, Oxford (UK).  
 Friends of the Earth Festival, HOME,  
 Manchester (UK).  
 Wales One World Film Festival,  
 Abercych (UK).  
 Strode Theatre, Street (UK).  
 Bertha Doc House, London (UK).  
 MAC EcoFest, Midlands Art Centre,  
 Birmingham (UK).  
 UQ Art Museum & Queensland Film  
 Festival, Brisbane (Australia).  
 Vereniging Ons Suriname, Amsterdam  
 (Netherlands).  
 Film festival Frames of Representation,  
 ICA Cinema, London (UK).  
 Tour in Suriname: Pikin Slee, Asindohopo,  
 JawJaw, Lebidoti, Paramaribo, Moengo  
 (Suriname).
- 2018 IDFA Competition for Feature-Length  
 Documentaries, Amsterdam (Netherlands).  
 INTER-NATION, European Artistic  
 Research Conference door EARN, Dublin  
 (Ireland).
- Valika Smeulders, "Sapali," *Slavery: an exhibition of many voices*, ed. Gerie Klazema, Barbera van Kooij, Rijksmuseum (Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2021).
  - Halbe Kuipers, "A Mode of Existence Closer to Rocks, or Treading with Spirits: The Modesty of the Experimenter with van Brummelen & de Haan," *Perspectives and Event, A Study on Modes of Existence & the More-Than Human*, doctoral dissertation University of Amsterdam (Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2021).
  - Zoë Dankert, "Kunst & Klimaat # 3: De Rechthebbenden," *Metropolis M* no. 4, 2020 (Netherlands).
  - Gordon R. Barnes, Jr., "Revolutionaries to Reactionaries: Marronage, Slave Revolt, and the Black Freedom Struggle," *The Activist History Review*, 29 February, 2020 (USA).
  - Jos van der Burg, "Stones Have Laws portrays past and present traumas of the Maroon community," *The Low Countries*, 17 February, 2020 (Belgium).
  - Astrid Korporaal, "Stones Have Laws en de meerstemmige documentaire," *rekto:verso*, 16 January, 2020 (Belgium).
  - Ben Nicholson, "The Skinny's Films of 2019: Our Writers' Top 10," *The Skinny*, 29 November, 2019 (UK).
  - Clarice Gargard, *Drakendochter: Op zoek naar mijn vader* (Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2019).
  - Annemarie de Wildt, "Stenen Hebben Wetten," *Landelijk Netwerk Slavernijverleden*, 28 October, 2019 (Netherlands).
  - Rianne van Dijk, "Tradities en rituelen in moderne tijden," *NRC Handelsblad*, 17 October, 2019 (Netherlands).
  - Jaime Donota, "De Marrons in Suriname overwonnen de kolonisator—maar hun strijd gaat door," *De Kantekening*, 10 October, 2019 (Netherlands).
  - Berend Jan Bockting, "Stones Have Laws: een uniek portret van de Surinaamse Marrons," *De Volkskrant*, 9 October, 2019 (Netherlands).
  - Joost Broeren Huitinga, "Stones Have Laws geeft een lesje over wetten van de natuur," *Het Parool*, 9 October, 2019 (Netherlands).
  - Dana Linssen, "Stones Have Laws: schuldige aarde in het wingewest," *NRC Handelsblad*, 8 October, 2019 (Netherlands).
  - Helmut Boeijen, "Stones Have Laws," *Docupdate*, 2 October, 2019 (Netherlands).
  - Omar Larabi, "Stones Have Laws: Gij zult niet zomaar oordelen," *Filmkrant*, 23 September, 2019 (Netherlands).
  - Karin Wolffs, "Wat het geldland kan leren van het bos," *Filmkrant*, 23 September, 2019 (Netherlands).
  - Guy Mackinnon-Little, "Stones Have Laws: A collaborative documentary created with the Maroon peoples of Suriname urges us to think beyond the genocidal ignorance of carbon capitalism," *TANK Magazine*, 13 September, 2019 (UK).
  - "Parky at the Pictures," *The Oxford Times*, 15 August, 2019 (UK).
  - Wendy Ide, "Stones Have Laws: an escape back to nature," *The Guardian, The Observer*, 11 August, 2019 (UK).
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  - Leslie Felperin, "Stones Have Laws: captivating stories of ancestors, forest gods and modern life," *The Guardian*, 7 August, 2019 (UK).
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# ERRATUM

Chapter 3 is missing an end note after the first sentence on page 51, indicating that a reworked version of this chapter has been published by ArtEZ in the context of their online Studium Generale in the Land dossier, as part of *Stories from the Rainforest* (Arnhem, 2021). It is published under the title “Plantationocene.”

Chapter 6 is missing an end note after the first sentence on page 89, indicating that a reworked version of this chapter has been published by ArtEZ in the context of their online Studium Generale in the Land dossier, as part of *Stories from the Rainforest* (Arnhem, 2021). The section that discusses Hugo Grotius’ ideas on property are published under the title “Nature intended it that way, Part 1.” The section describing Maroon practices of dealing with land and ownership, and Donna Haraway’s reflections on appropriating are included in “Nature intended it that way, Part 2.”

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  - Conversation in Saamakatonogo with boatmaker Bernard Bodji (Pikin Slee, November 17, 2015). Moderation and translation: Dorus Vrede, Duncan Prijor.

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- “Drifting Studio Practice: From molding sugar to the unknown depths of the sea,” *World of Matter*, ed. Inke Arns (Berlin, 2015).

#### REFERENCED ARTWORKS BY VAN BRUMMELEN & DE HAAN

- *Dee Sitonu A Weti* (2018), codirected by Tolin Alexander, made in collaboration with the Saamaka and Okanisi Maroon communities from the Suriname River water shed.
- *Episode of the Sea* (2014), in collaboration with the inhabitants of the fishing community Urk.
- *Monument of Sugar* (2007).

#### VIMEO LINKS

- *Dee Sitonu A Weti | Stones Have Laws*  
Video introduction to the project, 7 min.  
Spoken languages: Dutch, Saamakatongo  
Subtitles: English  
Vimeo link: <https://vimeo.com/351884282>
- *Dee Sitonu A Weti | Stones Have Laws*  
Complete film, 100 min.  
Spoken languages: Saamakatongo, Okanisitongo, Dutch  
(Sub)titles: English  
Vimeo link: <https://vimeo.com/377338310>  
Password: DEE\_SITONU\_EN\_EN
- *Dee Sitonu A Weti | Stones Have Laws*  
Complete film, 100 min.  
Spoken languages: Saamakatongo, Okanisitongo, Dutch  
Title and inbetween titles: Saamakatongo, English  
Subtitles: Dutch  
Vimeo link: <https://vimeo.com/364313183>  
Password: SITONU\_NL\_SUBS
- *Episode of the Sea*  
Complete film, 63 min.  
Spoken languages: Urker dialect  
Title and inbetween titles: English  
Subtitles: English  
Vimeo link: <https://vimeo.com/88240250>  
Password: EPISODE\_EN\_EN

- *Monument of Sugar*  
Documentation of installation, and fragment of film, 4 min.  
Title and inbetween titles: English  
Vimeo link: <https://vimeo.com/85480526>  
Password: MONUMENT\_OF\_SUGAR

#### ENGLISH SUMMARY “DRIFTING STUDIO PRACTICE”

As an artist duo we sculpt and create printed matter, but mostly we make films. We try to relate to the region where we live, i.e. Europe, by exploring its boundaries, its actions in the world, and its colonial past. Frequently, we travel into territories divided up by politics and trade, such as border zones, ports, industrial areas, agricultural lands, and mines. With the camera we follow flows of people and goods, letting ourselves be carried away by changing light, swelling vegetation and the stories of the people we encounter. Working in situ involves negotiations with various agencies that co-determine what and from where we film: military, managers, and local residents, but also fences, mountain slopes, or water bodies. We call the resulting films “our works,” but are we indeed their authors, in the sense of ‘the original spiritual owners’? Is a creative process, propelled by interactions with multifarious acting bodies, not rather a more collective matter? It was questions such as these that incited us to do an experiment.

In order to arrive at a language in which words are once again more connected with things, we consulted sea fishermen and farmers: experts by experience who, like us artists, attune their actions to circumstances they can never quite fully control. We experimented with how we could enter into coauthorship with them and how to extend these relationships to non-humans. The encounters resulted in two participatory films that, together with this book, form the outcomes of our research.

In spring 2011, we visited the former island of Urk in the Netherlands, where at that time conservative populism was beginning to take hold. Here we entered into a dialogue with its fishermen. We accompanied them to sea and, after many encounters, together developed a film script which was performed in front of the camera on quays and cutters by the fishermen themselves and by other community members. The collective effort resulted in *Episode of the Sea* (2014), a film in which various story lines come together. While the fishermen deliberate about the increasing regulatory burden, the disruption of the fish market, and the loss of tradition, we reflect in scrolling titles, from our makers’ perspective, on the parallels between filming and fishing. Recorded on 35mm film, but converted into a Digital Cinema Package based on the recommendation of the fishermen, the images found their way to arts venues, film festivals, universities and cinemas.

Our interactions with the fishermen gave us a close-up view of their struggle with a globalized economy that disrupts ecosystems through its unscrupulous extraction processes. It was this experience that prompted us, for our next exchange, to consult a group of farmers who were not producing for distant markets but were guided more by the laws of the earth. We would enter into collaboration with Surinamese Maroons. Their ancestors had been deported from Africa to the Guianas three centuries ago to toil

on plantations under Dutch colonial rule. They had succeeded in freeing themselves from slavery and in building a new life in the rainforest. Here, they developed their own shifting cultivation practice and a strong, ritualized bond with their natural environment. With the support of the Indigenous people and with the forest as their ally, they fought a long guerrilla war against the plantation owners and colonial mercenary armies, finally forcing the Dutch to make peace with them. Two centuries then passed in relative peace, until the global extraction machine pushed forward into the deep Suriname rainforest.

After long and careful consideration, the Maroons were prepared to engage in a cinematic exchange. We agreed to make a film together which would tell of their struggle for freedom and their alliance with the forest. In dialogue with them, we developed the script which was reenacted by the Maroons themselves in front of the camera, with trees and stones as co-actors. Using a mobile cinema, we presented the resulting film *Dee Sitonu A Weti* (2018) in the Surinamese interior. This was followed by screenings in art spaces, festivals, schools, libraries, movie houses and other cinemas.

In the dissertation, we reconstruct what we learned from the two collaborations. We seek to gain greater insight into the different entities—human and nonhuman—that are involved in an extensive coauthorship, as well as into their mutual relationships. We also try to elucidate why certain voices in euro-western traditions are ‘forgotten’ time and again. By placing our practical findings in conversation with a range of written sources that reflect on participatory authorship, (de)coloniality, new materialism and the Anthropocene, we hope to arrive at a story about expanding coauthorship, one in which making and thinking become inseparably intertwined.

## NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING “STUDIO OP DRIFT”

Als kunstenaarsduo maken we sculpturen en schrijven we, maar meestal maken we films. In ons werk proberen we ons te verhouden tot de regio waar we wonen, Europa. We verkennen haar grenzen, haar handelen in de wereld, en haar koloniale verleden. Vaak begeven we ons in territoria die door politiek en handel worden opgedeeld, zoals grenszones, havens, industriegebieden, landbouwgronden, en mijnen. Met de camera volgen we verkeers- en goederenstromen, en laten we ons meevoeren door veranderend licht, in de wind wiegende vegetatie en de verhalen van hen die we tegenkomen. Het werken in situ gaat gepaard met onderhandelingen met diverse betrokkenen die mede bepalen wat en vanuit welk standpunt we filmen: militairen, managers, en lokale bewoners, maar ook hekken, berghellingen, en waterlichamen. We noemen de films die zo ontstaan “onze werken”, maar zijn wij wel de auteurs van deze werken, in de zin van ‘de oorspronkelijke geestelijke eigenaren’? Is een maakproces dat wordt voortgestuwd door interacties met veelsoortige handelende lichamen niet veeleer een collectieve aangelegenheid? Het waren dit soort vragen die ons motiveerden om een experiment te doen.

Om te komen tot een taal waarin de woorden weer meer verbonden zijn met de dingen, gingen we te rade bij zeevissers en landbouwers: ervaringsdeskundigen die net als wij kunstenaars hun handelen afstemmen op omstandigheden die ze nooit helemaal kunnen beheersen. We experimenteerden hoe we met hen een coauteurschap konden aangaan en hoe

deze relaties konden worden uitgebreid naar de niet-menselijken. De ontmoetingen resulteerden in twee participatieve films die samen met dit boek de uitkomsten vormen van ons onderzoek.

In het voorjaar van 2011 bezochten we het voormalige eiland Urk, waar op dat moment conservatief populisme voet aan de grond kreeg. Hier gingen we een dialoog aan met de vissers. We vergezelden hen naar zee en kwamen na vele ontmoetingen gezamenlijk tot een filmscript, dat door de vissers zelf en door anderen van de gemeenschap op kades en kotters voor de camera werd opgevoerd. De collectieve inspanning resulteerde in *Episode of the Sea* (2014), een film waarin verschillende verhaallijnen samenkomen. Terwijl de vissers delibereren over de toenemende regeldruk, de verstoring van de vismarkt, en het verlies van traditie, reflecteren wij in rollitels vanuit ons makers-perspectief op de parallellen tussen filmen en vissen. Opgenomen op 35mm film maar op aanraden van de vissers ingescand en omgezet naar digitale video, vonden de beelden hun weg naar kunstpodia, filmfestivals, universiteiten en bioscopen.

Door onze interacties met de vissers kregen we van nabij mee hoe zij worstelden met een globaliserende economie die met haar nietsontziende processen van extractie de ecosystemen ontwricht. Het was deze ervaring die ons aanspoorde om voor onze volgende uitwisseling een groep landbouwers te raadplegen die niet voor verre afzetmarkten produceert, maar zich meer laat leiden door de wetten van de aarde. We zouden een samenwerking aangaan met Surinaamse Marrons. Hun voorouders werden drie eeuwen geleden van Afrika naar de Guyana's gedeporteerd om onder Nederlands koloniaal bewind zware plantage-arbeid te verrichten. Ze wisten zichzelf uit de slavernij te bevrijden en bouwden diep in het regenwoud een nieuw bestaan op. Hier ontwikkelden ze een eigen zwerflandbouwpraktijk en een sterke, geritualiseerde band met hun natuurlijke omgeving. Met de steun van Inheemsen en met het bos als bondgenoot voerden ze een decennialange guerrillastrijd tegen plantage-eigenaren en koloniale huurlegers. Zo dwongen ze de Nederlanders uiteindelijk om vrede met hen te sluiten. Twee eeuwen verstreken in relatieve rust, totdat de mondiale extractiemachine ook het Surinaamse regenwoud binnendrong.

Na rijp beraad waren de Marrons bereid om deel te nemen aan een cinematische uitwisseling. We kwamen overeen om een film te maken die zou gaan over hun vrijheidsstrijd en hun bondgenootschap met het bos. In samenspraak met hen ontwikkelden we een script, dat vervolgens door de Marrons zelf voor de camera werd opgevoerd terwijl ook de stenen en de bomen meeacteerden. Met een mobiele bioscoop presenteren we het resultaat *Dee Sitonu A Weti* (2018) in het Surinaamse binnenland. Daarna volgden vertoningen in kunstruimtes, festivals, scholen, bibliotheken, filmhuizen en andere cinema's.

In het proefschrift reconstrueren we wat we van de twee samenwerkingen leerden. We proberen meer zicht te krijgen op de verschillende entiteiten – menselijk en niet-menselijk – die in een uitgebreid coauteurschap voorkomen, alsook op hun onderlinge relaties. Tevens trachten we te achterhalen waarom bepaalde stemmen in euro-westerse tradities steeds weer worden 'vergeten'. Door onze praktijkbevindingen in dialoog te brengen met een waaier van geschreven bronnen die reflecteren op participierend auteurschap, (de)kolonialiteit, nieuw materialisme en het Antropoceen, hopen we te komen tot een vertelling over uitdijend coauteurschap, waarin maken en denken onlosmakelijk verstrengeld raken.











