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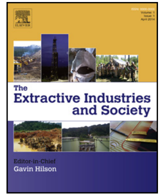

Original article

The tales and trails of a tuwama: Makushi perceptions of land use and disputes over resources in the South Pakaraima Mountains, Guyana

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ABSTRACT

Territorial claims over resource extraction in Guyana have been intensifying over the past years. This paper draws on a case from the South Pakaraima Mountains, in which a yearly fishing expedition takes place in an area that is being disputed by mining and logging interests. It becomes clear that these different perceptions of territory, cartographies, knowledge and practices coexist and conflict.

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1. Introduction

The Makushi village Tipuru lies in the heart of the Karasabai District, about one day's walk north from Karasabai, the administrative center. Nestled in a valley of brown–green Savannah hills between two creeks, surrounded by bush islands that extend to the east into the dense forest, it was the "metallic turquoise blue" reflection of the many fish shimmering at the surface of Tipuru creek that gave the village its name, *tifuru* or *tapupu.* To the west is the Ireng and across the water is Brazil (*karaiwa'ya* in Makushi), to the North, about two days' walk away is the last community of the district, Yurong Paru. Tipuru is considered the oldest village in the South Pakaraima Mountains, being the place of the oldest Church (1916) and school (1944) in the region but nowadays, some residents feel that the village's glorious days, when it was an important place of gathering, have gone. In comparison, today, many would complain Tipuru is a hard place to live in, with little food. The official population of about 334 fluctuates considerably, as especially young people, move in and out, spending some time at secondary school, across in Brazil, in the gold mines or at other villages and towns. Tipuru's inhabitants predominantly live off agriculture, cassava produce and wild meat and fish.

In comparison with the media attention given to the condition and future paving of the Linden–Lethem road, the construction of an all-weather earth road by the mining company Omai through the South and North Pakaraimas, which commenced in 2013, remained almost unnoticed by the public. Many of the villages were fairly isolated but now vehicle travel increased, especially of trucks carrying goods to mining areas. No prior social and environmental impact assessment was done, nor local villagers employed in the construction. The road closely follows a route previously cleared by the communities themselves, with their bare hands, ax, spade and cutlass, during the El Niño crisis in 1998, in the attempt to receive a delivery of school construction materials. They never received recognition for their efforts. The road is closely connected to the mining enterprises further north and with the intention to integrate the Pakaraimas in potential future "development options".[1]

2. Takutunen: a communal expedition

For the communities of the South Pakaraimas and as far as the North Pakaraimas, there are only few important seasonal sources of fish, where people journey to at different times of the year. Karona Falls, at the Ireng river, usually in July; Moreiro lake, for communal fish poisoning at the end of the dry season; and Takutunen, around Christmas time, in the dry season—all of which

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[1] I here refer to personal observations and to a lands and survey map "Development Options Hotspots and Linkages", depicting plans for future land development in Guyana, see http://www.lands.gov.gy/.

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are not inside Amerindian land boundaries. The focus here is on the latter.

Since my arrival in Tipuru people had told me about Takutunen—but it was only after some time that I understood what is referred to is not a specific place, but rather a region, laden with histories and movements. At least twice a year, whenever the tuwama decides to go, usually two weeks before Christmas and before Easter, a big group of community members, roughly twelve to over thirty people, young and old, go on a fishing expedition to Takutu river, to catch specifically Haimara (*Hoplias aimara*) and Huri (*Hoplias malabaricus*). The journey on foot takes about three days; the entire trip lasts about two weeks. Most of the women stay behind in the Savannah, between village and farm, preparing parakari, kasiri and paiwa, fermented cassava drinks, as well as cassava bread and farine, to welcome the expedition back and for the communal festivities in front of the Toshao's[2] house in the evening. Nearby communities such as Kara Kara, Rokamota, Karabaikuru and Maloca Nova would join in the Christmas celebration. Within other communities that do not practice large group expeditions and celebrations anymore, the example of Takutunen is perceived with awe and nostalgia. The importance of eating and drinking together, beyond one's immediate neighborhood or household cluster for the creation of community well-being and "proper human relations", has been highlighted in the ethnography of the area (e.g., Overing 1989, 2006; Mentore, 1995). Every expedition has a tuwama, a spontaneous and temporary leader, who never takes part in hunting nor fishing, but whose especial responsibilities rather concern the organization of the group and procedures during the journey, most importantly, the preparation and equal distribution of *kampu*[3] fish. Each person receives an extra portion to share with the Toshao who is then responsible for arranging the communal meal and celebration. What is interesting to note is the use of the word tuwama in connection with the leader of Tukui dances in the past. As Butt Colson and Armellada (2001: 26–33) highlight, by detailed analysis of Pemon and Kapon conceptual and ritual systems, Tukui celebrations were traditionally performed at the time of "fish marching" and spawning to attract a "prosperous fishing season" (p. 33). This might also explain why the tuwama does not himself engage in fishing, due to a spiritual commitment and mediating role between humans and *moro'potorî* (fish master).

3. Mapping the world through narratives

Everyone in the village knows the trajectory of the expedition. Along with the personal experiences that are being retold, the names of campsites, mountains, waterfalls and rocks, contain historicities and different layers of timescapes that help to understand the local "direct sensorial bond between person and place" (Basso 1996: 155). Whitehead (2003: 76) writes among the Patamona, how "ecological practices become thoroughly entangled with historical memory" and that landmarks, or *topoi*, related to these practices are constantly recalled "as discursive tropes in myth, ritual, and other oral performances". Much has recently been written about indigenous cultural and mythic landscapes and the socio-cosmological perceptions and conceptualizations surrounding the origin of place-names. Joanna Overing (2004: 81–84) has argued how "Amazonian space is activated by the interpretation and interaction of a multiple-world landscape of mythic beings and practices . . . "

In Makushi cosmology, *pata* (the place, the land) with its many creeks, waterfalls and *tepuis* was the result of the doings of the mythical creator brothers,[4] who by felling the tree of life *Wayaka*, formed mountains, distributed edible plants and carved river beds. In their *trickster* habit, they transformed people, animals, plants and things into stones and rock formations, accidently made rapids and found out many useful things for the people to learn. Furthermore, all landscape features are inhabited by a multiverse of non-human beings (e.g., *oma'kon*), who act as their *iteesa* ("owner"), like the *tuwenkaron* (a water being, often translated as mermaid), *ataitai* (a hairy giant or bush spirit) or the *eruberu* (a dragon-like creature), whose responsibilities are that of mediators and protectors. They have doors where to enter their world, roads they use and territories they take care of, which mark human/non-human borders. Moreover, every species has their *potorî*, a kind of leader or father, usually of a huge size, "who directs the movements and fertility (. . .)" (Butt Colson and Armellada, 2001: 28). Similar to the concept of *Umãní* among the Yawalapíti, all species have an excessive mythical reference, which constitutes the principle of all beings it represents (Viveiros de Castro, 1978). Thus, the *aimara potorî*, for instance, represents the essence of all the Haimara fish. Following Viveiros de Castro, Farage (1997: 62) suggests, for the Wapishana, that these are principles of the existence of all entities in this world (be they mountains, rivers, animals and other beings), potentially very dangerous due to their excess in relation to their actual specimens. Old people would take pepper to burn their eyes and mouths, as well as cassava starch bread as offerings for protection on passing these territories.

The journey to Takutunen is full of references to narratives of campsites and mountains that mark the way into a map of memories. Some examples are the *Kono'nosmo*, a place where it never stops raining, because there is a *kono*'tinki (a 'rain matapi'), a sacred rock one is not allowed to touch or otherwise gets sick, or the *Arirwaaka*, a mountain with a steep cliff where an old woman lives who sometimes throws with ash as an omen. At many spots along the journey are dense bushes of bamboo, said not to be endemic but brought and planted by the Carib Indians who used it to make flutes to chase away dangerous tigers (like the *prauya*). While most people "burn their mouths" with pepper as a protection when going into the forest, other precautions are not practiced anymore by the younger generations. However, even if many think these are "old time stories", they continue to learn and communicate about them. As Santos-Granero (2004: 102) puts it, these spiritual landscapes are "what common people cannot see but know that is there". This environmental knowledge is deeply connected to the local oral history and it teaches how to move and behave appropriately in a world that is highly ambiguous.

This kind of narrative cartography is a proof of people's engagement with the place, showing their knowledge and territorial legitimacy. As described for the Laguna Pueblo, "Specific features of the landscape help people remember the stories, and the stories help them to live in the land; traveling through the storied landscape corresponds to an interior journey of awareness and imagination in which the traveler grasp his-her cultural identity" (Glotfelty, 1996: xxxi). Quite paradoxical to its cultural value and use, Takutunen is not inside Amerindian titled land and is part of an area that is under dispute as a result of mining and logging interests.

[2] The Toshao, a term derived from the Tupi–Guaraní language, is the official head of the village.

[3] The Makushi refer with *kampu* (pronounced kambu) to a technique of smoke-roasting meat and fish on a high, wooden barbecue grill.

[4] These cultural heroes are references throughout the whole Circum-Roraima region. In Guyana most Makushi people refer to them as the brothers Insikiran and Aneke, however, there are many variations and others might refer to them simply as *Insikiranyamî* (plural form) or "the Makunaimas", including several brothers.

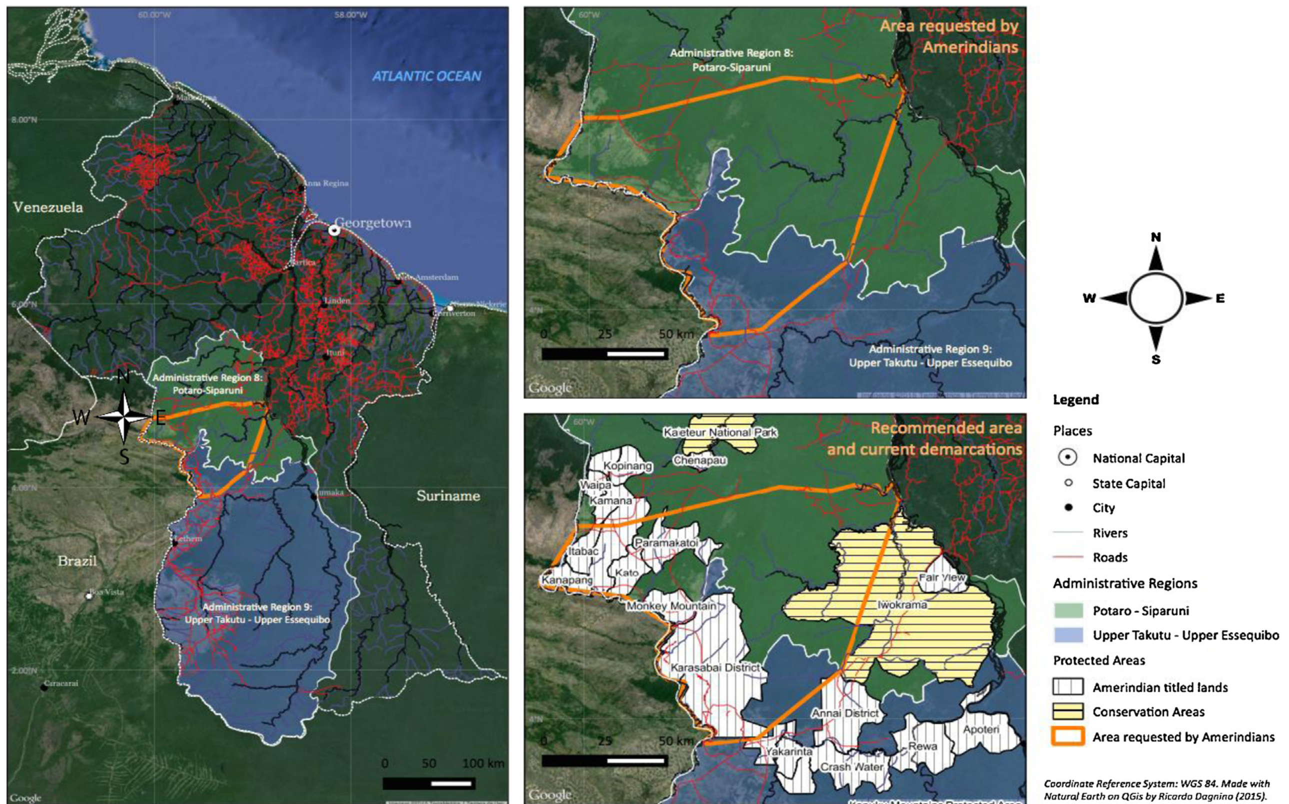

Fig. 1. The orange line redraws the boundary recommended by the Amerindians of the Karasabai District region in 1969. To highlight the difference the area is juxtaposed with current land titles and reserves. Map by Dr. Ricardo S. Dagnino, 2015. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

4. "The land the queen gave" and the dilemma of demarcation

> "Every boundary line is a myth."[5]
>
> "Todos os mapas são uma abstração do mundo, elaborada sempre a partir de algum ponto de vista. Na história das representações espaciais, os mapas começaram, não por acaso, como ficção, um meio de se pensar o mundo a partir da crença e dos mitos, e não a partir da geografia".[6]

Next to the mythological reference of *Kanawa*- and *Ariwayen*, connected to the *pepîn* (5-star) story, on the mountain's peak, hidden in the undergrowth, is another marker, the square cement block of the demarcation boundary of Karasabai district. This is not to say that this marker would stop people from Tipuru, Karasabai and other villages from going fishing beyond this point. In fact, learning about Takutunen, its narratives and its journey and understanding its cultural importance proves that this division does not reflect traditional land use patterns. The entire Takutu River with its big Haimara fish, sacred sites and an area known to have lots of greenheart and gold, is left out of the demarcation. A former Toshao and tuwama, who worked cutting the boundary line of the official demarcation, remarked that Takutunen originally was included in the recommendation by the Amerindian people of the area.

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

A similar description is written in the Amerindian Act of 1995, page 23, under the heading 'North Pakaraimas–Rupununi District', then 'Karasabai (Amerindian District)', quoting the Amerindian Lands Commission Report of 1969, which stated the following area redrawn below (Fig. 1).

> From Moreiro to the Burro-Burro river, then down the Burro-Burro river to the Siparuni River to the Essequibo, then down the Essequibo River to the Moruwa River, then up the Moruwa River to its source, then westwards past Kurukabaru and on the Ireng River back to the starting point of Moreiro (Government of Guyana, 1995) .

Thus, what many locals refer to as the land "promised by the Queen" could be the area recommended by the Amerindians as part of a collective request for the granting of land titles after independence from Great Britain, in May 1966. The government committed itself in its Independence agreements to recognize Amerindian land title (e.g. Sanders 1987). Ironically, up to independence, Britain's colonial government had not done anything to ensure Amerindians' legal rights to their land. Bulkan (2013: 6–7) argues that two events, in particular the 1967 AAG Convention and the Rupununi Uprising in 1969, which in both

[5] In Wilson Harris, 1960: 22.

[6] "All maps are an abstraction of the world, always drawn from some point of view. In the history of spatial representations, maps began, not by chance, as fiction, as a way to think about the world through belief and myths, not through geography." (my translation) Ascelrad and Coli (2008), "Disputas cartográficas e disputas territoriais", p. 13, In *Cartografias Sociais e Território*.

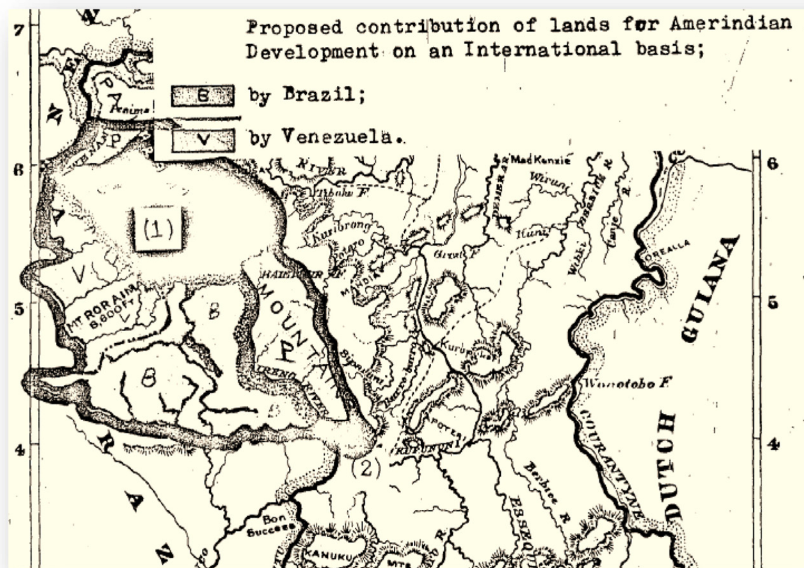

Fig. 2. "Proposed International District for Amerindian Development and Occupation", Appendices: Map 5, Peberdy Report (1948). Zoomed in on specific area and cropped out.

cases made territorial claims, were decisive for a breakdown of the original overall demarcation request from over 40,000 ha to merely a fraction. One of the areas that fell out of the original recommendation was Takutunen.

It is also possible that this "land of the Queen" refers to an area proposed by the Amerindian Welfare Officer, P. Storer Peberdy. The 1902/1910 Aboriginal Ordinance Act established several reservations and all Amerindians were advised to emigrate there. Only inside those reservations, would Amerindians receive "rights and privileges" and protection from exploitation by incoming settlers and land occupation (much of which took place under the "civilising" and "Christianising" ideology of State and Church), "until they reach the stage where they could manage their own affairs" (1948: 14). Bulkan (2014: 412) adds that the intention behind the reserves "was partly to separate them from the aggressive miners and was partly a reward for the support given to the British arguments against Venezuela in the 1890s during the boundary dispute". She continues,

> The reserves did not provide formal communal title until the 1976 revision of the Amerindian Act when 65 communities were granted Amerindian Village Lands with defined borders (2014: 412).

Thus, "under the prospects of developing the cattle industry", Peberdy (1948: 35) saw it in the "best interest" for the Makushi people living in the North and Central Rupununi, as well as Kanuku reserves to resettle to the 1904 established Karasabai reservation.[7] However, those that preferred to remain outside would lose their "privileges and special concessions" (p. 39). Concerned about the situation of indigenous people in the area, the 1948 "Report of a Survey on Amerindian Affairs in the Remote Interior", contains an interesting proposal for the establishment of a comprehensive 'Pakaraima Mountains Amerindian District', by joining Karasabai and Upper Mazaruni Reservations. Extending this idea even more, he suggested creating a kind of "Circum-Roraima-reserve", including international frontier areas of Venezuela and Brazil, connecting the land traditionally used by the Pemon and Kapon groups, respecting their frequent, daily movements between currently established fixed national borders (Fig. 2).

None of these proposals ever materialised. However, Butt Colson (2013: 63) rightly argued that while the two neighboring countries have protected large portions of the adjacent bordering regions – the roughly 174 million ha indigenous territory Raposa Serra do Sol in Brazil[8] and the 3 million ha National Park of Canaima in the Venezuelan Gran Sabana – Guyana has not made comparable efforts to establish a "substantial conserved area" (p. 65). What is important to note from all this and suggested here, is the necessity of continuous lands for Amerindian use and circulation, rather than small pockets of indigenous titled land, intersected by areas available for exploitation by outsiders.

Until the official demarcation attempts of the current Karasabai district took place, Toshaos and villagers of various South Pakaraima communities cut a demarcation line, claiming Takutunen as their traditional fishing and hunting ground. The 2 m-wide line also included Moreiro Lake and the trail took them over a month to complete. Every 5 miles they put a post out of a sheet of metal they carried on their backs, on which they wrote the Karasabai District number 91122 and their names. Apparently, the posts are still visible today.

The actual demarcation started in 1998/99 and experienced several impediments. The first attempt was apparently interrupted due to the death of the man in charge, who had gone home to Georgetown during the Christmas break. The second person sent is said to have received a large sum of money[9] to complete the demarcation, employed local workers but never paid and instead disappeared with the money and never returned. In the end, a third man was put in charge, who came equipped with compass and maps, and the demarcation blocks that were erected cut the

[7] At that time, in the Rupununi District 4500 square miles had been leased to ranchers and merely 456 sq. miles were Amerindian Reservations (i.e., Kanuku Reservation, 220 sq. miles; Karasabai Reservation, 208 sq. miles; Sand Creek Reservation, 28 sq. miles).

[8] For a detailed analysis of the demarcation process of Raposa Serra do Sol see Paulo Santilli (2001).

[9] Some say it was about 29,000.000 GY$.

initially recommended area shorter. In the 1976 revision of the Amerindian Act, thus, under Order No. 6, the Karasabai Amerindian District is described as follows:

> The area commencing on the left bank of Echilebar River at its mouth and extending up river for a distance of 10 miles approximately, thence East along the watershed of the Ireng River to the Otomung Mountain, thence South along the watershed between Tawaparu Mountain and Ariwa Mountain to Kawarieng Mountain, thence in a south-easterly direction to the source of Mora River, thence S for a distance of 4 miles approximately, thence due west to the right bank Ireng River, thence along the right bank Ireng River to the point of commencement (Government of Guyana, 1976).

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

5. Stories of gold and greenheart

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

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

There is already much mining going on along the Siparuni and Essequibo Rivers that the people know of and think it affects the amount of Haimara fish in the little Takutu River. The current tuwama reports that he witnessed commercial hunting and fishing to supply the dredge owners and workers of the mining areas. He thinks that this is why there is less fish at Takutunen, as when the fish swim up the Essequibo and Siparuni to spawn, fishermen from the "back dam" tie huge seines to block the Haimara from passing. He also sees the reduction in fish as the reason for the reduction in the size of the group going on the fishing expedition every year, as fish is getting scarce, barely enough to feed a communal celebration. Next to large-scale fishing, he witnessed illegal commercial hunting during the night along the Burro-Burro River and Iwokrama rain forest reserve, catching large amounts of labba, powees, deer and armadillo.

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

Along with resource pressure through mining and commercial fishing and hunting connected to mining enterprises, there also seems to be an interest in the commercial harvesting of timber. In 2014, a group of businessmen visited, first Surama and then Tipuru village (two communities roughly opposite each other, separated by State Land, as can be seen in the map above). The villagers' accounts are almost identical and describe a group consisting of about seven Chinese people representing a company, and an unknown translator from Georgetown, as the group of Chinese could not speak English.[10] The group was well equipped with GPS-systems, personal maps and computers and showed some of the villagers a large concession, for both logging and mining. Those that saw the map identified it as the area of Takutunen; others simply recognized the large terrain as bordering Annai and Karasabai district boundaries. None had been aware of the concession. The visit occurred unexpectedly, without prior notice, which meant that villagers were unprepared, uninformed and in some cases, leaders were absent. The purpose of the company's visit was to figure out if villagers knew of any drivable "access road" that existed leading to the concession and to acquire permission from the village to use their lands as thoroughfare. In both cases, the response deterred the visiting company members, as merely small footpaths were available with several days' walk, and obtaining village permission required a proper consultation with all villagers and leaders, likely to be turned down. In both cases, the group said that they would return better prepared another time. It is crucial to mention here that the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC) clearly states that no State Forest Exploratory Permits (SFEPs) will be issued "for any area that is occupied, claimed or used by Amerindians" (Forests Act 1997, quoted by Bulkan (2014: 414).

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

Greenheart is one of Guyana's most valuable and major timber exports and a large agglomeration of them an attractive, profit-raising site, under threat of future exploitation. Greenheart and other major wood species for export, such as Purpleheart, are

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

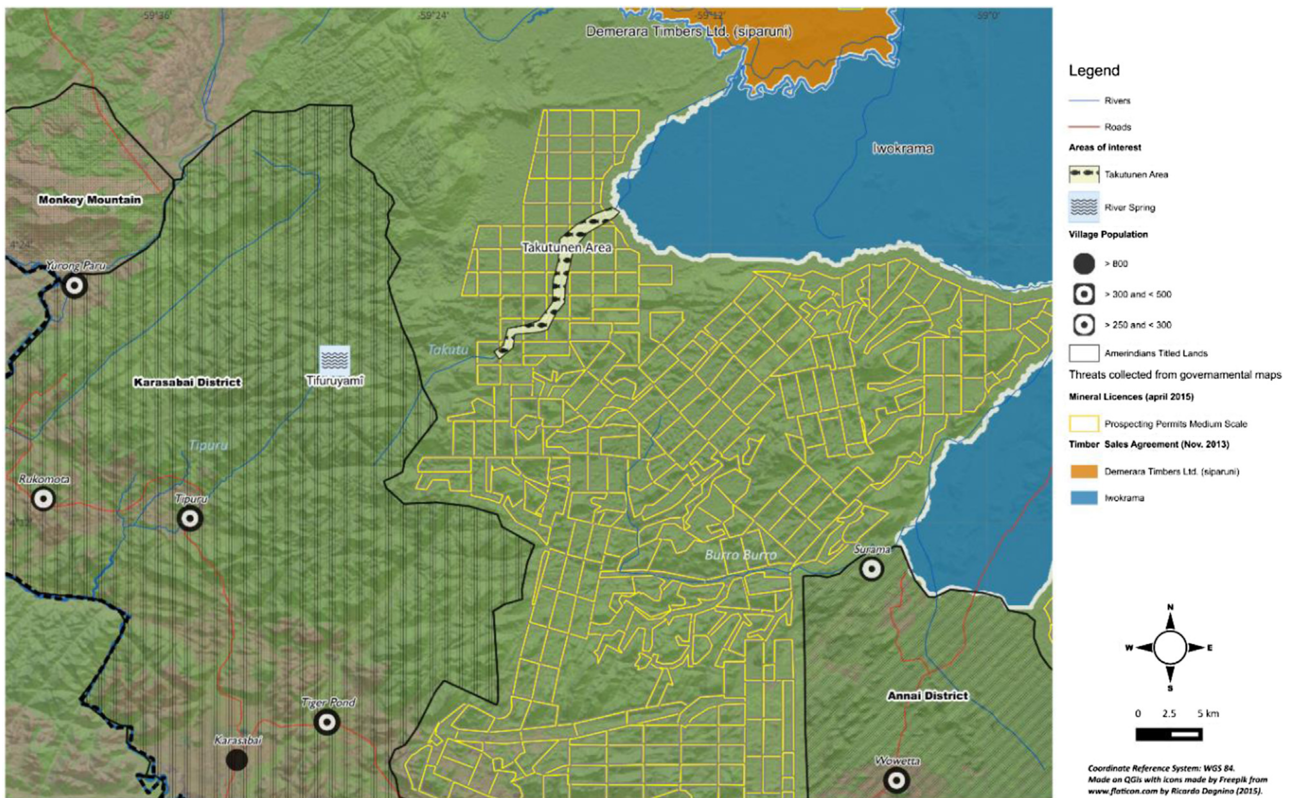

Fig. 3. The map shows the area of Takutunen and mining prospecting permits (in yellow), 2015 data from Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC); Iwokrama nature reserve (blue) and Demerara Timbers Ltd. (DTL) timber concession (brown, at the top). Map made by Dr. Ricardo S. Dagnino, 2015. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

considered by some experts to be overharvested and commercially extinct or approaching extinction in Guyana (Bulkan, 2015).[11] Within the last two decades, Asian logging companies have managed to accumulate "almost 80% of largescale, long-term forest concessions in Guyana, equivalent to one-third of the 15.8 Mha (million hectares) of public forests" (Bulkan, 2014: 423). Janette Bulkan (p. 408) further states,

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

The author (p. 424) explains that these agreements were made "through individual negotiations", in the case of Guyana, with the (previous) President, who as the "Minister of Forests", holds "the right to authorize any large-scale concession awards, without having to consult with or inform any other branch of government".[12] Especially the Chinese company Baishanlin has made headlines in recent times, because of its controversial claims over 960,000 ha forest (24 times the size of the land originally recommended as their entitlement by the Amerindians). The company managed to acquire such extensive land mainly through buying existing concessions and making joint-venture arrangements with other companies, as in the case of Jilang, Sherwood Forest, Demerara Timbers Ltd., (DTL) etc. The apparent "buy-out" or "illegal renting" of Demerara Timbers, a formerly nationalized logging enterprise during socialist rule, highlighted in brown on the map above, Fig. 3, had been a "murky deal" and was approved regardless of criticism from civil society (Bulkan and Palmer, 2008: 4).

6. Final considerations

It is possible that in the light of cash-making opportunities offered by large-scale logging or mining activities in the region, mixed with weak leadership and external pressure, representatives of companies like those that visited will succeed in their benefit-bringing rhetoric. Some villages' strong involvement in eco-tourism and conservation concerns (like those in the North Rupununi), with participation in regional organizations like the North Rupununi District Development Board (NRDDB),[13] makes them more prepared and informed to respond appropriately in these circumstances. For instance, the recent outcry and criticism regarding Baishanlin's take-over of the 167,000 ha Sherwood Forrest Inc., concession, led to various meetings and discussions on the topic among regional organizations. However, little awareness exists among the South-Pakaraima communities about recent "land-grabbing" activities and what consequences these might have for the sustainability of indigenous land use. There is no active overarching regional organization, nor are partnership meetings held with other Makushi organizations in the Rupununi,

[11] http://www.stabroeknews.com/2015/news/stories/05/31/iconic-timber-species-overharvested-near-commercial-extinction/.

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

[13] Since 1996, the NRDDB is an established umbrella organization of 16 North Rupununi Makushi communities, represented by their legally elected leaders (or Toshaos). It works in partnership with governmental and non-governmental organisations and institutions. See: http://nrddb.org/.

leadership tends often to be divided about what is best for the community and for the next generations. For those in Tipuru that want to make an income, there are few alternatives to temporary work migration. With the current road constructions through the Pakaraimas, expectations and resource pressure will grow. In that case, places and practices like those related to Takutunen that contain so many fundamental aspects of Makushi life, might find little space in profit oriented land exploitation policies. Considering the multiple forms of ecological knowledge and land use practices at stake, this would mean a loss of social and environmental diversity. Takutunen is a cultural heritage and should be included in Amerindian land; in fact, if customary lands were legally connected and continuous, conflicts like these would be avoided.

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