The London School of Economics and Political Science

Walking with Jesus in indigenous Amazonia:

for an anthropology of paths

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

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I declare that my thesis consists of 101,269 words.

This thesis has been proofread by the LSE Language Department, minus the conclusion.

Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of paths and Christianity among the Ye'kwana, a Carib-speaking group in the Venezuelan Amazon. It is based on two years of fieldwork among Christian Ye'kwana, mainly an extended family network from the Upper Orinoco region. Under the evangelizing action of the New Tribes Mission, an American missionary organization, the Ye'kwana from that region converted *en masse* to Baptist Christianity in the fifties of last century. Today, the Ye'kwana celebrate their own form of Baptist Christianity. One defining feature of the latter is that it is articulated using a social language of paths, mainly by Ye'kwana from older generations. Paths and tubes have been a recurrent topic in the anthropology of Amazonia, where they have been associated with ideas of energy transformation, indigenous notions of the body, or music and sound. It has also been suggested that paths and tubes might be a totalizing representation that some indigenous Amazonians use to think about the world. However, the implications that this possibility might have for how indigenous Amazonian conceive of sociality or change have not been fully explored. In this thesis it is argued that the Ye'kwana conjure up in their notion of paths an idea of the world and social life as made of rhythmic flows that are perceived and experienced through processes of entrainment. The transformations brought about by conversion to Christianity, including those centered on the body and sense of humanness, can be understood as taking place within this framework and being governed by ideas of how change happens within it. This thesis ultimately argues for an anthropology of paths in indigenous Amazonia that centers on direct perception of the world and that captures how indigenous people express this using the theme of the path/tube.

To the memory of Santana Tovar

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Acknowledgements

This thesis and research project have traversed a long rocky road.

First, there was the issue of the Venezuelan crisis. The project was initially conceived as research into the Christianity of the Panare, a Carib-speaking group neighbor to the Ye'kwana. With this idea I visited the Panare in 2016 and began to build a network of contacts in the field and the logistics for the work. However, this was also the moment when hyperinflation was beginning in Venezuela, including a dramatic scarcity of goods and medicines. Working in the Panare area became very difficult, so, I moved the project to Puerto Ayacucho, the capital of Amazonas State, which posed fewer logistical complications. There were still some obstacles there, but they could be more easily overcome.

Second, there was the personal stuff. It would be unfair to use this acknowledgement section to talk about myself. But bear with me for a second. At some point in my youth, I began to suffer from frequent migraines and brain fog. Things became difficult to read, socializing became difficult. But I did not pay too much attention, and I pushed on. Then, during the PhD, things went downhill, especially after returning from the field. All the symptoms intensified. Working on the thesis was close to impossible. The difficult financial situation of my family back in Venezuela and my own in London were not helping. That was when the first interruption came. I had thought that back in Venezuela I could continue working on the thesis at a slower pace. But COVID made sure my plans changed. An infection early in the pandemic left me with long-covid, which looked a lot like an intensified version of what I already had. The year of that interruption passed, and I had to ask for a second interruption. Only during this second year I could make a slow recovery by following the latest medical recommendations on managing long-covid. Curiously, but perhaps in line with what specialists are now saying about post-viral syndromes, this also helped with my pre-COVID symptoms. It was only then that I could resume work on the thesis.

I say all this not to make the reader feel sorry in any way. I say it because it makes immensurable the level of gratitude I feel towards all the people who have remained with me through all these years, and towards those who, despite having been important to me and my research at some point, I could not maintain contact with. Now you know why.

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Bringing this ship to a safe harbor and surviving the journey would not have been possible without the unconditional love and support of María Isabel, Carlos, Claudia, and Tomás. I love you all!

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A note on style

In this thesis I use **Yk.** to indicate words that are in Ye'kwana language and **Sp.** for words in Spanish.

The Ye'kwana language has at least three different grammars. Throughout the thesis I try to use, as consistently as possible, the one the Ye'kwana from the Upper Orinoco region inherited from the New Tribes Mission. Errors in consistency and transcription of the language are totally mine.

Introduction

Christianity along paths in the Amazon

I finally met Carlos in 2017 in a Ye'kwana community on the mid-Caura river. I had heard a lot about him. The Caura region is one of the areas where the Ye'kwana, a Carib-speaking group, live in the Venezuelan Amazon. I had gone there accompanying a Ye'kwana evangelical church from Puerto Ayacucho, the capital of Amazonas State, with whom I have worked for several years. They were doing evangelical work among non-Christian Ye'kwana people from the area and, at one of our stops along the river, we were joined by other Christian Ye'kwana from a community upriver called Chajudaña. One of them was Carlos, a young Ye'kwana man, the son of the pastor of that community. My interaction with Carlos only lasted for the duration of our stop, but I could finally put a face to the person whose name I came to associate with a crucial change in my years-long research into Ye'kwana Christianity.

By that time, I had already been living for some months in a Christian Ye'kwana community on the outskirts of Puerto Ayacucho. I had moved there with the intention of doing research into Ye'kwana Christianity. My PhD research had initially been conceived of as an exploration into the stability of indigenous Amerindians' conversions to evangelical Christianity. Following recent reflections in the literature on Christianity in indigenous Amazonia, which have called attention to the instability of indigenous conversions and the ontological drivers of this phenomenon (see below), I had deemed the Venezuelan Amazon to be a good place to explore and shed new light on these discussions. I had come to this possibility by considering the history of protestant Christianity in the country, especially the expulsion of the New Tribes Missions – an American evangelical organization, hereafter NTM – and other foreign missionary organizations by the late president Hugo Chávez in 2005. This event made the Venezuelan Amazon in general, I had thought, an appropriate context to explore research questions such as: How do indigenous communities produce and reproduce their own forms of protestant Christianities in the absence of external missionaries? What factors permit the persistence of indigenous Christianities in contexts where deconversion has not occurred?

With these research questions, I came to live in Carijunagua, as the community is called, in late 2016, and with the Tovars, the extended Christian Ye'kwana family from that community, with whom I would eventually join in their evangelical trips across the Ye'kwana territory. It was precisely on one of those trips that I met Carlos, in Caura, and it was around that time that I inevitably came to realize the need to

revisit my original research questions. Carlos and my exploration of Ye'kwana Christian music at the time are good examples of how the process of emerging ethnographic evidence led me to this point. Let me explain. Ye'kwana Christianity, I noticed early on when I started to live and work with the Ye'kwana, is infused with music, and Christian Ye'kwana spend a lot of time making music and singing Christian tunes, whether at church or in daily life. Understandably, I became interested in discussing music with people in Carijunagua and in collecting the vast repertoire of Ye'kwana hymns and stanzas. I invested a lot of time on this at that moment in my research. That was the moment when I began to hear Carlos' name come up more often. Carlos is one of the most prolific producers of stanzas that circulate and are sung by Christians across the Ye'kwana territory. Everybody I spoke with knows his songs, and they know the circumstances in which they were written. As I went through people's notebooks of stanzas and they explained to me who the author of each one was and the circumstances in which they were written, I was given more details than usual every time we came across those authored by Carlos. It was by looking at Ye'kwana Christian music and through engaging with people in interactions like those that I began to be more conscious about the recurrence of a social language they used to describe their Christian lives and many aspects of life in general, including Carlos' music.

I will call it, for now, a social language of paths. I noticed my Ye'kwana friends in Carijunagua using, mostly in Ye'kwana but also in Spanish, and in all kinds of situations, expressions in which paths were a recurrent theme and idiom. Carlos, again, was a case in point. First, people told me his songs had their own "paths". When they were performed by the youth music group of Carijunagua's church, the stanzas, together with the instrumental music, were also said to form "paths". All music did, not just Carlos'. When I was told the stories that led Carlos to write his songs in the first place, I was told that he did so to be protected as he travelled outside the community, so his "path" would not "deviate". This worry that people told me Carlos had – having his path deviate –, as well as the lyrics of his songs, reflected a perennial preoccupation shared by all Ye'kwana, Christian or not, about the contamination of the world caused by Odosha, a primordial figure which Christians now translate as the devil. The lyrics of Carlos' stanzas are mostly about being protected against the nuisances and risks that living in such a contaminated world entails. To avoid them, the Ye'kwana say, as Carlos often does in his lyrics, people must stay on the "good path", without deviating to the "bad path". There were many other examples beyond Carlos where the theme and image of paths came up. People described life in the community like a "walk" along "paths". The body was said to be made of "paths". When people spoke, they were also said to be forming "paths" with speech. Instances were endless.

As I began to register the daily use of those expressions more and more, I also began to realize that many of the themes I had been exploring regarding the Christian lives of people in Carijunagua were likewise articulated using the same images of paths. People also said that being Christian implied "walking" or "beating", as they say, "on the path of the *evangelio* [Christianity]". Carlos, for instance, was said to be "on the path" of Christianity, as well as all the people in Carijunagua and all Christian Ye'kwana. That path was the "good path" – Yk. *ashichaato äämä*. Elders narrated their conversion stories as processes that involved changing paths and focusing their minds on travelling down certain paths, implying following certain courses of actions they associate with being Christian. People referred to their collective Christian life as a path to be "walked" on together, among many other expressions.

It was inevitable at first to think that the regular use of such images was just coincidental. After all, what we might call images of linearity – paths, roads, lines, and so on – are regular idioms and metaphorical elements used across different linguistic and cultural contexts to capture ideas of spatiotemporal movement, as they are in the Venezuelan Spanish manner of speaking. Moreover, such images are likewise recurrent in Christian parlance more generally, where expressions like "walking in Jesus' footsteps", or "walking" on "broad" and "wide" "roads", are common. Thus, I was still hesitant at first to see anything particularly distinctive in the intensive use my Ye'kwana friends, particularly older generations, made of such expressions to talk about many aspects of reality, including of Carlos' songs and stories. It was the coincidentally growing presence in recent years of the theme of paths – often equated semantically to tubes – in the Amazonianist literature, including some works on the Ye'kwana themselves and on other groups on the Guianas, that led me to suspect there could be more to be said about this topic. Thus, I consciously began to pay more attention.

That was the moment during my fieldwork when many questions and conversations, especially with older interlocutors who had lived through the decades when the NTM arrived and lived in Venezuela, and including those about their own Christian lives, began to feel increasingly relevant. As I asked them about paths, older Ye'kwana began to tell me about the many elements of the world that, to them, could be considered as such. They even performed paths for me, as we will see later in this thesis. Through these conversations, some elements began to crystallize in what we might call their intellectualizations on this theme.

First, there was a perceived idea in the eyes of my interlocutors from older generations that "to speak about paths" reflected a worldview and way of speaking that was being forgotten by younger generations. One interlocutor put it thus: "[that] is how the elders used to talk in the past. To them, paths were about

so many things". Meanwhile, that person added, "today, the youth don't talk about paths anymore". Furthermore, as quotes like this suggest, a crucial theme that emerges is that, from my interlocutors' explanations, "paths" is not necessarily an explicit concept to be reflected upon explicitly, but more a tacit, extensive property that people identify in many dimensions of world; "paths were about so many things", that person said. Paths can be seen, I came to understand, as a property of, say, music, everyday social life, the body, cosmography, and so on. Crucially, moreover, a third element central to people's understandings of paths was the notion that wherever they are identified they unfold by, according to my interlocutors, "beating" – Sp. *golpeando* – and that people "walk" or "beat" on them. Another way of putting this is that, across all dimensions where they are identified, paths have a certain rhythm to them. Thus, encapsulated in the association of "walking" and "beating" with the social language of paths is the sense that joining them and being on a path implies the formation of some form of entrainment or synchrony.

Many of these points associated with people's reflections on paths became clear gradually as fieldwork progressed, as we will see through the ethnography presented in this thesis. However, back at the time when I met Carlos in Caura, the fact that many of the elements I had gone to the field to study, including accounts of evangelical conversion and Ye'kwana Christianity, were being made sense of by my older interlocutors with such a language as that of paths and "beats" inevitably led to a reformulation of my original research questions. These transformed into the **general research enquiry**, which concerns the older generations of Ye'kwana Christians in particular, of what it means to be Christian and to have converted to Protestant Christianity in a world that is articulated intellectually as being made of rhythmic paths? In this sense, given those same people's accounts of their experiences of conversion, what ideas of transformation and change are captured in their use of the language and the theme of paths? In sum, how have the worldviews that arrived with evangelical Christianity themselves transformed and interacted with the theme and social language of paths?

Answering these new general questions regarding paths and Christianity required dealing first with three more specific, separate subsets of issues regarding the definition of paths more generally. **First**, ethnographically, what does the Ye'kwana social language of paths entail? How is the theme of the path used by the Ye'kwana in their everyday life and what are the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of describing the world as formed by rhythmic paths? How does the idea of entrainment/synchrony fit into this picture? **Second**, ethnologically, how do Ye'kwana paths fit within or differentiate from how paths/tubes have been used as a theme by other indigenous Amazonians and with

how they have been treated in the Amazonianist literature more generally? **Finally**, how to capture paths methodologically as a native conceptualization with all their implications, including notions of entrainment?

Paths and tubes in the Amazon

To be sure, paths are not a new theme in the anthropology of the indigenous Amazon, especially considering that indigenous Amazonians often see a semantic parallel between them, conduits, or tubes. The Ye'kwana themselves translate path as *äämä*, which could also be translated as tube or conduit. Paths and tubes have figured sporadically in classic Amazonianist literature. Early on, Peter Rivière explored Carib ideas of hair tubes and blowpipes (1969) and Duvernay-Bolen analyzed the association of tubes and the Northwestern Amazonian myth of the Yuruparí (1967). Both explorations built on an early interest of Claude Lévi-Strauss in tubes and the notion of container/contained relations in Amerindian views that was explored in the latter's Mythologiques and in his writings on the associations between female potters and animals and birds that symbolize oral/anal continence/incontinence (Lévi-Strauss 1970, 1973). In those early works, paths/tubes began to be associated with ideas of energy and ontological transformation and conduction. Recently, however, the areas in which these categories, often also associated with threads and lines, have emerged, have broadened significantly. Instances include areas as broad as in indigenous definitions of the body and health (see Gonçalves 2016a, Miller 2009), in descriptions of the cosmos and physical space (see García 2012, Green and Green 2010, Schuler Zea 2010), in shamanic ritual work (see Langdon 2013; Ramos and Epps 2018, 2020; Townsley 1993), in indigenous use of tobacco (Russell and Rahman 2015), and in the material culture of groups who use the blowpipe or wind instruments (see Chaumeil 2001, Hill and Chaumeil 2011, de Menezes Bastos 2011, Mansutti Rodriguez 2011; Rival 1996). Significantly, idioms of paths/tubes have also been described in indigenous descriptions of the reproduction of sociality (Gonçalves 2016b), in indigenous ideas of language (Londoño-Sulkin 2003), and, importantly for us, to describe and talk about Christianity (Altman 2017).

Despite such a growing presence of the theme of the path/tube, few anthropological explorations have concentrated on this theme in a systematic, coherent manner as an indigenous conceptualization. The most dedicated treatment has come from Stephen Hugh-Jones' decades-long exploration of ritual and myth in Northwestern Amazonia. Speaking specifically about the latter region, Hugh-Jones has argued that "the tube" might constitute a symbolic native conceptualization that goes beyond specific ethnographic dimensions with which this has been associated in the literature of the region, including ritual and music (see Wright 2015; Hill 1993, 2009b). Following Marcel Mauss, Hugh-Jones has read the

"tube" as a "total social fact", or as "an abstract concept" that, for some indigenous Amazonian groups in that region, "unites physiology, psychology and productive processes with wider sociological and cosmological issues" (Hugh-Jones 2017, 27; see also 2019). It is useful to revisit how Hugh-Jones arrived at this point.

Hugh-Jones' interest in the tube cannot be disentangled from his own ethnographic work in Northwestern Amazonia and on myth and ritual, in which he has drawn a connection between symbolic elaborations around "the tube" – and processes of regulation of closure and openness, particularly of body orifices – and the particularities of the cultural complex of Tukanoan and Awarakan groups living mainly in the Vaupés and Upper Rio Negro regions, including the Barasana, the Cubeo, the Baniwa, or the Curripaco. According to Hugh-Jones, the notion of tubes in the region is entwined with the material, mythical, and ritual expressions around the use of aerophones and other wind instruments, and particularly associated with the different versions of the Yuruparí rituals and mythology, but also expressed in more mundane manifestations that include the maloca or the human body and the regulation of its physiological processes. Further to these particularities are common cultural traits of the region, which include the association of aerophones with rituals of male initiations, exogamic and patrilineal kin groups, or vertical shamanism (see Hugh-Jones 2019, 25-26). Such topics, as expressions of tubular forms, have also come up in the works of scholars like Theodor Koch-Grünberg, Robin Wright, and Jonathan Hill. Their association with tubular forms began to appear in Hugh-Jones' early works, particularly in his symbolic and structuralist exploration of the *He Wi*, the Barasana version of the Yuruparí (1979), and this group's cosmological and ritual themes. A more recent instance of such associations is given in his exploration of the signification of material objects in Tukanoan creation myths (2009), where tubes come across as an element necessary for the divine fabrication of bodies, for the creation of flutes, and for the circulation of vitality.

In the early treatment of this topic by Hugh-Jones, however, "the tube" is not explored as an explicit concept in its own right as it is in his latest publications (2017, 2019). Even though the theoretical emphasis in those early works was on symbolism and the structuralist forms in Barasana ritual and mythology, one particularity was that he engaged with these intellectual frameworks by emphasizing native conceptual constructions and indigenous manipulation of them, rather than assuming them to be part of some static binaries (see Nahum-Claude and Allard 2019, 4-7). This applies, for instance, to Hugh-Jones' and his wife Christine's exploration of gender and sex roles among the Barasana (Hugh-Jones 2001; Hugh-Jones C 1979), where we see the blurring of lines between male and female through hybrid concepts like the

androgyny of the *He Wi* ritual, or the containment of female capacities in male bodies (see Nahum-Claude and Allard 2019, 7). Such complexification of apparent oppositions, and seeing them as dynamic processes that usually encompass connections across categories and dimensions, reveals the influence on his work of Marilyn Strathern (see Hugh-Jones 2001). An example of such complexification of symbolic arrangements and how these integrate not only gender but also elements of cosmology, sociality, and kinship in indigenous thinking is the Barasana house (see Hugh-Jones 1993, 1995). As with gender, the longhouse comes across as a space of hybridity and androgynousness, where elements are contained within and change their quality depending on from where, and the ritual moment when, they are perceived. This reveals a dialectic that, following Strathern, is interpreted as happening via "de-totalization" and "re-totalization" of contained elements (see Barbira Freedman 2019).

Such an analytical interest in native conceptualizations has led Hugh-Jones in recent years back to the notion of the tube, an intellectual trajectory that captures his exploration of the complexity and the crosscutting potential of indigenous Amazonians' own philosophical abstractions. Certainly, as Hugh-Jones sustains, the Amazonianist literature, mainly in Northwestern Amazon but also in other regions where the theme of the tube has showed up, has come to the topic of the tube by considering it partially as an expression of separate dimensions (Hugh-Jones 2019, 27), such as material life, cosmology, or issues like bodily physiology, sex, and fecundity. However, in Hugh-Jones' analysis of the tube all of these converge as expressions of the same notion, one that ties together "an indigenous understanding of human anatomy, physiology, psychology, and perception with wider reflection on the human activities and capacities, social arrangements, the cultural, natural, and physical environment, animals and plants and the workings of the cosmos" (Hugh-Jones 2017, 28). In his scholarship, Hugh-Jones has made other generalizing points that have been productively used to analyze other Amazonian regions. For instance, these have included his proposed ideal types of shamanism – horizontal and vertical – intended to reflect how they emerge in ranked or more egalitarian Amazonian societies wherein sacred knowledge might be distributed differently (Hugh-Jones 1994). With his "model" of the tube, in turn, as he intends to capture the indigenous abstraction condensed in it, the aim points to an articulation of common processes that tell of human unity. The tube, as an indigenous intellectualization, encapsulates the unity of sociological and physiological processes. These are "one and the same", not modeled on one another as proposed by early perspectival writings (see Seeger, da Matta and Viveiros de Castro 2019; also Hugh-Jones 2019, 28).

The tube is, according to Hugh-Jones, an idiom that does not fit within post-Enlightenment assumptions. This is so to the extent that rather than having a particular meaning, it reveals different understandings

of perception and the senses in which these are embedded in processes, which Hugh-Jones has explored before, of differentiation through detotalization and self-replication (2019, 52-63). For instance, the player of the Yuruparí flute, himself a tube, in Northwestern mythology is a fractal figure, simultaneously part of Yuruparí's body and Yuruparí himself, both of them tubes. Again, in Strathernian terms, such totalization, as in the longhouse containing differentiated elements that also contain themselves, might be seen as an androgyny or as the absence of affinity and otherness (Hugh-Jones 2019, 64). A house is a tube that contains bodies as tubes, which also contain tubes. Hugh-Jones uses the concept of synaesthesia to capture such dilution of differences at the level of the totality. It is from this totality that the senses, humanity and animality, the genders, languages, and so on, flow out to become differentiated through fractal replications. In this logic, all of this happens as flows along tubes, as circulating forms of vitality that extend through self-replications. Such notion of flow, Hugh-Jones argues, is captured in Northwestern Amazonian societies in categories that include air and hair as symbols (see Hugh-Jones 2017, 2019).

Hugh-Jones' revision of this topic might provide us with a starting point to begin our exploration of how it might be expressed in relation to the cultural particularities of other Amazonian regions. Jean-Pierre Chaumeil, for instance, has shared this view when, in his exploration of the use of the theme of tubes among the Yagua, he has followed Hugh-Jones and suggested that the tube might be a form of "self-representation" in indigenous Amazonian cultures in general (Chaumeil 2024). Yet, there are important risks to this exploration in other regions. One, for instance, which Hugh-Jones himself highlights regarding the extensive presence of the tube in indigenous life in Northwestern Amazonia, is that the tube can be used to interpret all kinds of things in all kinds of ways" (2019, 65). The risk of this is that, as he himself admits, one might take on too little or might try to deal with "life, the universe and everything" (Adams 1982, cited in Hugh-Jones 2019, 29). Connected to this and relevant to our case, there is also the semantic question, which is also a question about the object of study. Despite the semantic equivalency of paths, tubes, conduits, and so on, we might ask, are all of them equivalent when they are used by indigenous people in other Amazonian regions? For instance, in which circumstances is a tube also a path? Could, say, a material form of tubularity be a path rather than a tube? In the Amazonianist literature the emphasis has mostly concentrated on the tubular form as material representation, as Hugh-Jones rightly points out. However, what are we to make of indigenous descriptions, for instance, of speech and everyday life as paths? Do spiritual journeys like those described in shamanic chants transit tubes or paths? How are we to explore all these dimensions with the lens of paths/tubes without making our object of study meaningless?

In any case, to evaluate the pertinence of such discussions against our exploration of Ye'kwana tubes, it is important, first, to consider the latter in the context of the Guianas.

Tubes and paths in the Guianas

In the Amazonianist literature that specializes in the Guiana Shield we see the same sporadic attention to the theme of tubes/paths that Hugh-Jones identifies in the Northwestern Amazonian literature. However, even though it has been unequal, such treatment might still point to the presence of the same theme and to its potential for native intellectualization among groups that, in contrast to Northwestern Amazonia, share more horizontal social institutions and the absence of clan groups, lack the mythological complex around the Yuruparí figure, have particularly strong ideas of personal autonomy and more proclivity to group fission and fusion (see Rivière 1984). Examples from the literature not only comprise Carib-speaking groups, including recent works on the Ye'kwana themselves, but other groups in the region as well. As mentioned before, Peter Rivière initiated explorations on tubes among the Carib-speaking peoples in Guyana in the sixties (Rivière 1969). He was following Lévi-Strauss' interest in hollow tubes – manioc squeezers, blowguns, musical instruments, etc. – and the latter scholar's suggestion that the hollow tube might be present as a symbolic theme throughout indigenous South America. Rivière also followed the French anthropologist's idea that this element might be tied to moral economies preoccupied with the proper regulation of the digestive tract among indigenous societies that share the blowgun and that consider the latter to be the inverse of the digestive tube.

Rivière considered the presence of the tube in the Guianas by looking at the occurrence of two expressions, the blowgun and the hair tube, among groups that inhabit the Upper Essequibo region, including the Carib-speaking Macusi, Waiwai, and Parukoto, and the Arawak-speaking Wapishiana, Taruma, and Mawayena. By revising the presence of the tube in the mythologies of the region and their use as material artefacts, Rivière speculated that, despite regional variations, tubes function as energy transformers. Hair, for instance, among the Waiwai, is a force that, as it passes through hair tubes, becomes a symbol of sexuality and, as such, carries the power to create and destroy. Blowguns, in turn, channel breath that powers darts, and they have the power to turn game into meat. Here the argument coincides with Hugh-Jones' point about hair and breath/air representing the flow that, as vital force, circulates along tubes. Rivière also finds evidence about the role of tubes as energy transformers in local mythology, particularly in creation myths, where the distribution of hair tubes and blowguns are associated, depending on the region within the Essequibo area, with sex and oral incontinence and with cosmic levels that have particular creative potential.

The presence of the tube and paths as a theme elaborated on by indigenous groups in the Guianas has continued to emerge separately in the anthropological literature since Rivière's original elaboration. The presence of paths and conduits that connect a multilayered cosmos and that generate links and continuities between separate entities and domains and permit the circulation of beings and different forms of vitality is expressed in other mythologies of Carib-speaking groups in the region. This theme also comes up among other groups in the region in other guises. For instance, the Warao from the Venezuelan Delta associate the concept of "paths", or *anaru*, with the trajectory followed by the invisible aspect of the person. Paths maintain connections between the latter and its owner/master, and they are manipulated by the shaman for healing (Briggs 1994, 154). Similarly, the Tupi-speaking Wajãpi from the French Guyana consider "paths" to connect cosmic domains as well as a being to its owners/masters, and they too can be perceived and manipulated by shamans (Gallois 1988, 1996).

Reflecting to some extent the trajectory in the anthropological exploration of tubes/paths as idioms in Northwestern Amazonia and in the Amazon more generally, the modest presence of such theme in the Guianas literature has broadened slightly in more recent years to include aspects that transcend cosmological and shamanic topics. For instance, among the Waiwai the concept of paths, *yesamarî*, has been identified as central to kinship and spatial ideas of relatedness marked by linear movement and connecting places and kin. People in this group say that, in the community, everybody must transit a path named according to their respective relatives or household members (Schuler Zea 2010, 2-3). Significantly, as themes regarding paths and tubes have broadened in the Guianas literature, they have also emerged in ethnographies of groups where they were not identified explicitly before. The case of the Yanomami is relevant here. Whereas in the vast literature on this group paths and tubes do not figure prominently, in recent publications they have come to the fore as a central idiom the Yanomami use to talk about their reproduction of social practices and the construction of relations and difference (Gonçalves 2016a, 2016b). For instance, regarding the reproduction of certain modes of action, the Yanomami are said to describe these as "walking the path of". Those that participate in the national health program, for instance, describe it as "walking the path of health".

It is within such a turn to new expressions of the idioms of paths and in their emergence in the ethnological literature of the region that we might frame the publication of recent material on Ye'kwana paths/tubes themselves. In the classic literature on the Ye'kwana (see Arvelo Jiménez 1973, 1974; de Barandiarán 1979; Guss 1990), paths as an explicit native category were virtually non-existent. Yet, it is with regards to music that paths have been explicitly explored more recently among the Ye'kwana by Majoi Gongora

(2017). In that work, based on Ye'kwana from Brazil, paths are said to be used to describe the melodic sequences of sacred chants – *aichudi* and *ameedi*. Such paths, said to form when chanting, are described as connecting spiritual dimensions when they are executed, thus permitting the circulation of spirit-doubles which travel along tied by a thread. It is along such paths, the Ye'kwana say, that shamans used to travel in search for spirit-doubles who had got lost after the connecting thread was cut. This point about Ye'kwana chanted paths echoes similar associations among other indigenous Amazonians beyond the Guianas between the theme of paths/tubes, their formation through chanting, and shamanic activity, as is the case with the Yaminawa (Townsley 1993), the Kaxinawa (Lagrou 2007), or the Kuna (Cesarino 2006).

Gongora's interpretation of Ye'kwana music paths draws heavily on the analytical framework of Amerindian perspectivism. In a context in which the ontological notion of humanness shared by the Ye'kwana is seen as a highly unstable one, always threatened by the contamination that mythical events are said to have unleashed upon the world, the ritual use for healing and the circulation and transmission of sung paths is a way of maintaining humanness. In an argument that coincides with the readings of Yanomami ideas of paths mentioned before, Ye'kwana paths, according to Gongora, articulate "modes of action" that maintain humanness. This happens for the Ye'kwana via replication, that is, through the notion that paths connect people and events that are replicas of one another, thus linking visible and invisible beings and dimensions.

Still, it might be argued that the question of indigenous people's own intellectualizations about paths remains to be fully explored in the case of the Ye'kwana. To capture such intellectual elaboration in the case of my Ye'kwana interlocutors and how they use it to also reflect on their Christian lives, we have to consider the issue of rhythm and entrainment. Thus, we can get closer at the main argument of this thesis regarding Ye'kwana paths.

Attuned to rhythmic flows

As I lived with the Ye'kwana and explored with them their reflections on the theme of paths, I came to a recurrent association that older Ye'kwana make, namely, that paths, wherever they are identified in the world, are to be "walked" on and that they "beat". Initially, this was an idea difficult to grasp. Describing physical displacement along a path, say, in the forest, as "walking" came across as just regular talk. But, as explanations developed, the notion of walking or beating on a path expanded to include, for instance, chanting, carrying out daily tasks in the community, descriptions of generational succession, and many others. To my interlocutors, all these are examples of dimensions they see as paths, and, as such, as being

formed by what can be described as some kind of beat: stops along a story narrating a geographical journey, people succeeding one another along generational lines, hits on a drum marking the rhythmic paddling on a canoe, among many other examples. Moreover, engaging in and being part of those actions involve "walking" or "beating". Or, as they also say, being on a path is to be "tied to" or "pulled by" "the sound made by the drum". Thus, as descriptions went, "with the sound of the drum" people talk, think, sing, take over elders' positions on generational lines, and so on. More importantly, as people join such "paths" with others by, say, singing or living collectively, they likewise "beat" and "walk" together, and they join the "drumming" made by a leading person. Thus, not only do such descriptions of paths suggest the possibility that wherever these might be found they carry some form of rhythmicity, but that joining on them with others entails doing so in synchrony, in a common "beating" flow. We will see examples of all of this throughout the thesis.

To complexify those notions, such synchrony, according to the intellectual elaborations of my interlocutors, can only take place given that the person carries within a living force that also beats and that gives the person the ability to "walk" along paths. An expression of this beating living force is what they refer to, in Spanish, as the *pensamiento*, literally thought, which is at the center of such processes of alignment and attunement along "beating" paths. As the reasonings of my older interlocutors went, once some stimuli from the world reach and enter the body – for instance, sounds, smells, visions, etc. – and the *pensamiento* visualizes them, the person can then align with that path. This is how people are "pulled" to a path, join it, and begin to "walk/beat" along it. In other words, this is a process in which the formation of alignments on paths depends on the generation of a dyadic synchrony between the beating person and the driving rhythm. We will see ethnographic examples of all this as well as the thought process of my interlocutors later in this thesis.

Certainly, the possibility that paths might be associated with courses and modes of action, as we saw, has already come up in groups like the neighboring Yanomami explored by Gonçalves (2016a, 2016b) and somewhat among the Ye'kwana themselves, as studied by Gongora (2017). In these ethnographies, the association between paths/tubes and relational ideas of how difference and sameness are built through the body have also been drawn. On the other hand, when it comes to the specific case of rhythms and synchronized movement, there have been explorations of how these, too, have been associated by indigenous Amazonians with the production of bodily difference and sameness and of human and non-human positions. Such is the case, for instance, of Runa women, in the Ecuadorean Amazon, who use

bodily movement and tapping while working with clay to generate common states of humanness with spiritual beings (Mezzenzana 2018).

In turn, when it comes to my older Ye'kwana interlocutors, the possible association between paths/tubes, movement, and rhythm take us back to a fundamental point made by Hugh-Jones in his exploration of Northwestern Amazonian peoples' intellectualization of tubes. This has to do with the issue of flow being at the core of indigenous Amazonians' totalizing understanding of the theme of the tube and how this, in their eyes, captures multiple processes of the world. As mentioned above, for Hugh-Jones, in his reading of tubes, the recurrence of this theme across different domains, rather than marking differences, speaks about the unity of life processes and the recognition that vital flows – both tangible and intangible – and their regulation are at the center of indigenous elaborations on tubes (see Hugh-Jones 2017, 2019). In this sense, although he does not elaborate extensively on this point, Hugh-Jones has briefly noted the association between flows that travel along tubes and "vibration". In particular, he notes that for Tukanoan groups there is a link between flows of forms of vitality on the one hand, and light, airy materials that make the former visible through vibration on the other, such as hair, feathers, leaves, fur, or palm fibers (see Hugh-Jones 2019, 23-26), and, moreover, that there is a further connection between these and other possible expressions of flows along tubes such as breath, semen, sound, and so on.

We saw before that the explorations of tubes and flows in the Amazonianist literature have come predominantly from symbolic readings (e.g. Chaumeil 2001; 2024, 2, 19). Hugh-Jones himself shares this view of the tube and of flow even though he offers a complexification of their symbolic interpretation through a revision of semiosis. Whereas scholars who have worked recently on semiosis in the Amazon have tended to frame the analysis of indigenous elements in terms of signs and code (e.g. Severi 2014), and thus of mind and meaning, Hugh-Jones argues that the use of the tube and flow as idioms rather expresses the interconnectedness and inseparability of elements that form a totality. A totality where, as expressed in his consideration of the notion of synaesthesia, words can be "eaten and incorporated in the body in the form of protective spells blown on food" or "where the sound of flutes and bursting fruit can penetrate and fertilize the bodies of women" (Hugh-Jones 2019, 42). For him, thus, the notion of flow captures such changing aspects of an interconnected totality which cannot be expressed with post-Enlightenment concepts about how meaning comes about.

The expression of ideas of rhythm and entrainment by the Ye'kwana presents us with a new dimension about paths and how indigenous people might perceive and interact with them that might also challenge symbolic readings of paths/tubes. The possible interpretation of perceptive processes as entrainment

with rhythmic flows, together with the limitations that Hugh-Jones himself has recognized in the use of semiotic and symbolic frameworks to analyze tubes/paths and to capture ideas of flow, continuity, and the senses, lead us to reconsider this theme with analytical frameworks where embodied perception and ideas of fluidity have a central place.

Paths, lines, and rhythmic correspondences

Thus, in dealing with the more specific question posed at the beginning concerning paths, **this thesis will argue** that the Ye'kwana's use of the social language of paths and their intellectualizations around this theme articulate a way of relating to the world that emphasizes unmediated and direct perception. That flows along paths might travel rhythmically and that these might come about in dimensions as disparate as in everyday life, in genealogical succession, in music, or in material objects, points to an understanding of the world where such expressions of fluidity can be perceived rhythmically and can be "walked" or "beaten" on. That is, rather than concentrating on what might be seen as a symbolic use of tubes and paths, this thesis will explore them by looking at rhythmic flows as processes of perception in all the dimensions where the Ye'kwana identify them.

To offer such an alternative reading on paths/tubes by looking at indigenous ideas of perception and entrainment, this thesis draws mainly on the analytical framework built around the work of Tim Ingold, particularly his theoretical elaborations on direct perception and how these are captured in the notion of the line. Ingold's work on perception goes back to his early revision of classic anthropological theories of perception, particularly the work of Merleau-Ponty and his notion of the "prereflective unity" of the senses. Specifically, Ingold critiqued existing theoretical positions that saw the senses as culturally constructed and, as such, as mediating the human relation with the environment (Ingold 2000, 262). He further emphasized this point later on by incorporating James Gibson's work on affordances and non-representational forms of perception into his argument on perception as an embodied process (see Ingold 2000, 245, 282, 276–281). Gibson (1977) saw affordances as intrinsic to the niche inhabited by the perceiving animal and as constituting the possibilities of a way of life provided by the environment. He defined affordances thus: "the affordance of anything is a specific combination of [its] properties in light of what it offers, provides, or furnishes for the animal that perceives it" (1977: 67–68). In Ingold's view, this idea of affordances encapsulated a theory of meaning without signification, of direct perception. In the niche, for the perceiver, the affordances *are* the meaning, and not mediating signs.

Beings, in their niche, the argument goes, perceive affordances through movement, as part of a sensory exploration of stimuli that come about as flows. Ingold, in successive works (2015, 2016), elaborates on this by developing a "philosophy of the line" tied to the Bergsonian argument that life takes place as processes of continuous transformation that unfold uninterruptedly through time and space (see Bergson 2002). Bergson calls this type of unfolding "duration". He, like Ingold, sees it as an expression of processes of constant "becoming" in the sense that there is no space for the stabilization of independent ontological states along uninterrupted flows. This argument develops further in Ingold's subsequent works, particularly as he explores the many possible expressions of the embodied perception and emergence of lines through movement, including through actions like writing, walking, dreaming, or music playing (see Ingold 2010b), which he considers to be equivalent forms of engaging in the processes of forming spatiotemporal lines.

Particularly relevant to us is a point inherent in Ingold's understanding of unmediated perception of the environment. This has to do with the rhythmicity of the ways in which affordances are perceived as spatiotemporal lines. As beings engage in different modes of path- or line-making or what Ingold, in a broad understanding of walking, calls wayfaring – which include actions like thinking, seeing, reading, writing, painting, other activities, and knowing more generally – (see Ingold 2010a; 2010b; Ingold and Vergunst 2016), they do so in "rhythmic resonance" with the movement of others and with the environment. That is, rhythms are intrinsic to the body's knowing-in-movement and to its perception of the affordances of the niche (see Ingold 2011, 16, 196-208). That is, an emergent engagement with flows happens through fluid attunement of the body and its movements with the rhythmic affordances of the environment (Ingold 2011, 18, 46, 53), and not through a set metronomic rhythm. In fact, rhythms, as part of the sensory experience of the environment through movement and through the different forms of "walking", couple action and perception. In a sense, the generation of attunements blurs the line between the person and the exterior and creates continuities between beings and the environment.

In successive, more recent works, Ingold has elaborated on this dynamic of direct perception to explore other creative and intellectual activities associated with the arts, architecture, teaching, and ethnography in particular (see Ingold 2017b, 2019, 2020). However, besides this, and relevant to the ethnography presented in this thesis, he has also broadened these discussions to bring his view on perception into discussions of social life. Certainly, this has come about as a response to criticisms of his previous works, which have highlighted the apparent tendency throughout Ingold's scholarship to move away from the social, as well as the lack of necessity for cultural mediation of social life indicated in his model of

unmediated perception, and the challenge of exploring the latter ethnographically (e.g. Descola 2016; Howes 2022). Thus, in the late phase of Ingold's publications, two themes in particular have been central in his response to those points: attention and what he has called correspondence (2017a, 2020, 2021). Both build upon the "linealogy" framework and will be relevant to our argument about how Ye'kwana paths are lived, particularly in social life.

Ingold's notion of correspondences captures the longitudinal affiliation of separate lines that come together. Since processes in the environment, including the existence of beings, take place along lines, as well as forming them, the confluence of these, including in their rhythmicity, makes possible the emergence of corresponding articulations and the unfolding of linear becoming *with* others (Ingold 2017a, 14). The formation of correspondences is part of an attentional process. In engaging with the environment through movement, a being engages with it through the habitual response to the environment "as he goes along" (Ingold 2017a, 19). Such attention, in its constant emergence through movement and engagement with the environment, is rhythmic and makes longitudinal resonances with the latter possible. In this argumentation, the social also emerges from such coming together of separate trajectories and their continuous unfolding in time and space. Whereas sameness comes about as lines converge, differentiation takes places through bifurcation, a point that inevitably echoes Hugh-Jones' point about flows along tubes producing otherness as they travel out from an initial state of synaesthesia and undifferentiation.

Bringing the framework of direct perception to the study of tubes/paths and flows in the context of Ye'kwana Christianity will provide us, for the analysis in this thesis, with an alternative view of that theme that emphasizes embodiment, entrainment, and rhythms as affordances[1]. Crucially, it will also give us a reading of older Ye'kwana's understandings of sociality and their experiences of Christianity with the language of paths. We now turn to this second part of the argument of this thesis.

On Christianity, sociality, and rhythms

[1] Surely, many of the Amazonianist works on tubes, paths, and flows resonate with and draw on Ingold's reflections on lines. "Linearity" and fluidity have, more generally, been recognized as a central element of the organization of spatial and social life of Amazonian groups, particularly among Ge groups. That is the case, for instance, of the Brazilian Panará studied by Elizabeth Ewart (2003). For this group, lines are at the centre of the logic of their village layout and their dual social organization, including the location of moieties and the men's house. In particular, their circular arrangement of the village produces a total inclusion of the group, generating an opposition between the centre and the periphery, although the circularity of this linear arrangement also ensures continuity through the inclusion of otherness at the centre.

The possibility argued for in this thesis, that social life, including how the Ye'kwana construct their own form of Protestant Christianity, might emerge from direct perception and linear processes of entrainment stands, in many ways, in contrast to intellectual influences that have recently shaped important works in the anthropology of Christianity, particularly regarding the analytical emphasis on the generation of signification through representational frameworks. This question has probably been best encapsulated in the use of the concept of so-called semiotic ideologies. In the anthropology of Christianity, the question of meaning has come to the fore, in the last two decades, in discussions concerning, among other themes, the epistemics of belief, the transformation of signs and their function during conversion, or the problem of presence of the divine (see Engelke 2007, Engelke and Tomlinson 2006, Keane 2007). Semiotics, as this literature has understood it, derives from the work of Charles Pierce (see Pierce 1955). Building on Saussure's semiological concern with the significance of signs, this view saw these as intrinsic to how people live and construct meaning in the world in general. In this understanding, signs always stand for something else which is not immediately present to the perceiver; that is, discontinuity between meaning and the sign that represents it is assumed. Semiosis is what results from the formation of systems of representation through the concatenation of signs and their meanings. The concept of semiotic ideologies picks up on this notion of semiosis and expands it to include forms of social regimentation – ideologies – that determine not just the semiotic status of signs, but also the kind of agentive subjects and acted-upon objects that might be found in the world, and the signification attached to them (Keane 2003, 419; also 2007).

Significantly, we have already briefly mentioned how Ingold has shown how social life itself might emerge from processes of linear, unmediated perception and through the formation of correspondences. We also saw how rhythms as affordances are intrinsic to the latter process. In this sense, it will be argued in this thesis that, by concentrating exclusively on processes of entrainment and on synchronization specifically, that is, on the rhythmic properties afforded by a world of paths, we might also account for the emergence of patterns of sociality, including Christian life. That is, for the possibility that sociality and the modes of action Ye'kwana people associate with being Christian result from those same processes of rhythmic synchronization and repetition. According to elder Ye'kwana accounts of all the elements in the world that could be paths, paths in social life could also be considered as part of the rhythmic possibilities of the environment. The Ye'kwana's recognition that, for instance, working and living together, generational succession, or the inter-generational transmission of knowledge through being inserted in chains of repetition, might each carry a rhythm makes them options for selves to attune to.

The possibility, as older Ye'kwana articulate it, of sociality emerging from processes of entrainment and synchronization, takes us to the question of how patterns emerge, including those associated with Christian life. The point is made in this thesis that trajectories of pattern repetition constitute the same linear process of spatiotemporal unfolding that is intrinsic to the direct engagement with the world and to it unfolding rhythmically. This is something we will see with respect to the Ye'kwana's description of the inter-generational transmission of social knowledge as a rhythmic path to "beat" on; a trajectory of gradual transformation that is captured narratively in their body of stories, the Wätunnä. According to this possibility, it is through the repetitive instantiation and linear derivation of prototypes that patterns emerge and are sustained through time. That the formation of this linear pattern is intrinsic to the basic point that rhythms involve repetition was captured in Giles Deleuze's notion of repetition (2014), which informed Ingold's elaboration on lines and direct perception. In this understanding, repetition produces patterns which do not exist outside of the very action of the repetition itself. Rhythmic attunement not being strict metric but free-flowing resonance, repetition does not need a pre-existent, external representation (see Deleuze 2014, 23-25). On the contrary, patterns emerge in this type of dynamic repetition out of the repetitive movement and the step-by-step internal differentiation of a running concept, and they are sustained and carried forward with each new instantiation.

Thus, the examination of Ye'kwana paths will paint a picture in which these can be approached ethnographically through the social dimension of their lived experience, including through explorations of aspects like relational agency, power, morality, the definition of subjects and objects, and so on. As we will see, all of these can be made sense of by the same logic of rhythmic entrainment; that is, by questions such as who marks the beats for the formation of entrainment, who follows and who leads in this process, how synchronization is enforced, to what degree a state of synchronicity is achieved, and so on. Understood thus, the idea that patterns of social life might emerge from the constant repetition of actions that are learnt and incorporated into a common trajectory entails that such rhythmic trajectories are also susceptible to acquiring new content, including elements people associate with being Christian.

Christians in a world of paths

The suggestion that conversion to Christianity in indigenous Amazonia might take place in, and imply, the persistence of indigenous intellectual frameworks that define how change and transformation happen is not new. By the turn of the century, the answer from the Amazonianist literature to the then-emerging anthropology of Christianity emerged as a particular concern with the issue of indigenous Amazonians conversion to, and the often-followed de-conversion from, Christianity, particularly Protestant versions

of it, as well as with how indigenous people engaged with and incorporated those worldviews (Gow 2006, 2009; Opas 2008; Vilaça 2011; Vilaça and Wright 2009; see also Viveiros de Castro 1992). As the Amazonianist literature transitioned out of late structuralism and the nature/culture binary collapsed, the answer to these intellectual revisions came as a shift towards bodies – and their points of view – as the axis upon which differentiation took place. Relations among such bodily positions defined what counted as humanity and alterity. Reflecting this transition, the analysis of the relationship between indigenous Amazonians and Christianity came to be focused mainly on the question of bodily transformation and of the navigation of different points of view. The marked preoccupation with the question of how indigenous peoples construct new Christian positions as they differentiate themselves from other beings by transforming their individual or collective bodies drove much of the ethnographic explorations of Amazonian Christianities. Thus, the relationship indigenous Amazonians established with Christianity, particularly in terms of conversion and de-conversion, was read as paralleling the same dynamics the ontology-minded anthropology of Amazonia identified in human-non-human relations (see Bonilla 2009; Grotti 2009, 2013; Vilaça 2009, 2016). The adoption of, and conversion to Christianity was assumed as the continuation of a relational process centered on the body as the place of humanness, and as a reaffirmation of the very "indigenous way of being" (see Viveiros de Castro 1992).

In some ways, some ethnographic points made on Ye'kwana Christianity in this thesis echo these arguments about continuity in Amazonian Christianities, such as indigenous people's concerns with maintaining stable human status in their new religious identities. However, as we have begun to suggest regarding Christianity, this thesis argues that the articulation of Baptist Christianity with the language of paths used by older generations of Christian Ye'kwana is a recognition that, even though the content of social paths – the modes of actions associated with them and to be repeated – could change with conversion, including what counts as proper humanness, there is continuity in the assumption that the world provides affordances in the form of rhythmic paths and that perception of these happens through the formation of synchronicities. That is, continuity is understood by older Ye'kwana to happen in the perceptive processes of the world and in the affordances provided by this in the form of rhythmic flows to attune to.

That affordances from the environment might constitute a fundamental aspect of how Christian change takes place and of ideas of continuity and change is a point that has been made recently. For instance, Naomi Haynes (2014) has tried to use the concept of affordances to switch the analytical focus that the anthropology of Christianity has tended to put on the individual as the primary object of study, towards

"the social, cultural, and political-economic aspects of Christian adherence". She suggests this might permit focusing specifically on the experience of the sets of practices and ideas that are associated with Christianity and that might orient human action. Drawing on this, Dena Freeman (2017) has expanded on the utility of the notion of affordances to inform the discussion about continuity and change in the anthropology of Christianity. She has made the relevant point that different expressions of Christianity offer different affordances of rupture depending on their different theologies. According to this argument, for instance, Orthodox Christianity tends to incorporate traditional beliefs and emphasize continuity whereas Evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity are the ones that afford rupture most strongly. However, Freeman argues that the socio-economic context in which people engage with whatever expression of Christianity they experience will ultimately determine the extent to which the affordance of rupture provided by the latter will be enacted, lived, and experienced. That is, despite different notions of rupture and continuity, there might be determinants that influence how people experience them.

Such works on Christianity and the role of affordances in continuity and change point in the direction of the analytical points that this thesis makes regarding Ye'kwana Christianity. That is, to the recognition of the world as being made of rhythmic paths and how these are understood to determine continuity and change in the conversion of Ye'kwana to Protestant Christianity. Certainly, the anthropology of Christianity has explored questions related to the lived experience and the sensory perception of the divine before, including the question of the epistemics of belief (e.g. Csordas 1993, Luhrmann 2012). These examinations have focused on how perceptual experiences are modulated by cultural practice and result in people attending to different elements, including sensations, depending on their culture. However, as Corwin and Erickson-David have noted (2020; see also Ingold 2000, 15), all these examinations still share the assumption of a separation between the perceiver and the environment, which is bridged by referring to an independent framework that shapes how the environment is apprehended and acted upon. Those examinations are constrained to account for difference relative to the perceiver, to the mind of the individual – a point which, Tim Ingold has argued, arises from anthropology's methodological emphasis on the perceiver at the expense of the process of perception (Ingold 2000).

It is in line with this critique and with our analytical framing of the theme of paths and entrainment that our emphasis in this thesis will concentrate on the continuity that rhythmic flows as affordances of direct perception might provide to Ye'kwana Christians. Thus, the possibility here is that, whereas the Ye'kwana form of Baptist Christianity might emphasize rupture in the process of conversion, this is ultimately

experienced within the perceptual framework that elders try to articulate with the social language of paths and their intellectualizations of them. That is, Christianity gives new content that is incorporated into, perceived, and lived in the same experiential logic of rhythmic walking on paths. Defining Christianity, as they do, as a path to "walk" on is a recognition by older Ye'kwana that Christianity continues to provide rhythmic paths to join. As Christianity gave social paths new content, it also defined new actions to replicate, new activities to perform collectively in daily life, new musical paths to sing in unison with others, and so on. That the resulting form of Christianity is one likewise experienced by "beating" on certain paths resonates with a point made by Ingold (2013, 736-737) regarding ideas prevalent in medieval forms of Christianity, such as monasticism, and the notion of wayfaring as a way of knowing directly and reading the world that dissolves the boundaries between self and other and between mind and world (Ingold 2013, 742-743). That is, that implicit in this is the possibility that the other-than-human world might be experienced directly through wayfaring, and perceived with the imagination and with dreams, in a process of reading its lines.

On studying paths and rhythmic flows

As we saw, it is Ingold's intellectual exploration of lines and of notions like the formation of correspondences that has led him to a recent, more dedicated consideration of sociality. It is, moreover, this same development that has also led him to a recent revision of categories like anthropology, ethnography, and participant observation. In part, this revision (see Ingold 2014 and 2017c) has responded to observations that his intellectual explorations have taken his anthropological scholarship away from ethnography and more towards philosophical and theoretical abstractions. It is in this sense that he has come to argue, in line with his point on forms of knowing through wayfaring and the role of the imagination, that anthropological theory should precisely heal what he perceives as a rupture between imagination and the real life. That is, it should become what he defines as a "philosophy with the people in", which, rather than aspiring to construct scientific knowledge from ethnographic data, is assumed as a collective educational project that can combine other forms of knowing in productive ways, including art, design, theatre, music, etc. Ethnography, in this sense, Ingold argues, should be better seen as just a method with a documentary purpose, and not as intrinsic to fieldwork encounters with anthropology's object of study, nor as a methodology in itself.

Without engaging with Ingold's specific arguments on anthropology and ethnography, his underlying suggestion about assuming that our work as anthropologists involves sharing the perception of our interlocutors' lives through the formation of correspondences with them, and as an educational process

in different ways of knowing, is of value to how this research has studied paths as rhythmic flows. In particular, Ingold's understanding of participant observation has informed the approach taken in this thesis with regards to fieldwork and to the construction of anthropological knowledge about Ye'kwana paths. He makes a marked distinction between what to him imply ethnography and participant observation. Whereas he does not consider the former as a methodology intrinsic to anthropology, he does see participant observation at the center of the educational project that he associates with anthropology. To him, participant observation is not a method of data collection either, but a process intrinsic to the formation of correspondences with the people and with study in the field. It is a form of getting involved in the same way of knowing, of attending to the spatiotemporal unfolding of our interlocutors' lives and joining in with them. In other words, it is "an ontological commitment". Observation in this sense does not involve objectification of what we study, but sharing a common process of experiencing and knowing, of perception and action. There is no observation without the coupling of "the forward movement of one's own perception and action with the movements of others" (Ingold 2014, 389). In sum, participant observation involves the same process described above regarding the coming together of separate lines, this time those of the researcher and the people he works with.

This thesis relies fundamentally on participant observation that was carried out consecutively over eighteen months of fieldwork, between 2016 and 2018, mainly in a Ye'kwana community in the outskirts of Puerto Ayacucho, Venezuela, and also joining Ye'kwana people in multiple journeys to various communities across the Ye'kwana territory. The conception of participant observation as involving the formation of correspondences and as a learning process of different ways of knowing is central to how that activity has been understood in the present research and to how the production of anthropological knowledge has taken place. As will become clearer throughout this thesis, understanding that, for the Ye'kwana, paths involve processes of synchronization and entrainment, even in social life, also implies that studying them meant for me as researcher *joining* in such paths. Realizing this was part of the process of grasping Ye'kwana intellectualizations on the theme of paths. Early on, my interlocutors transmitted the view that I myself, as I became involved with them in their everyday lives, was also living through a process of synchronization and coupling with them, despite me being unconscious of this at first. As this process unfolded – which is mainly illustrated in the first third the thesis – it became clear that joining on paths with them was not a metaphorical activity nor a strategy to extract ethnographic data, but a form of knowledge transmission that depended on becoming coupled with rhythmic flows in sociality, and in actions, including participating in collective daily activities, walking, singing, or speaking with them, and with the rhythmic action of repetition involved in each.

That is, to study Ye'kwana paths by joining them implied experiencing the world as made by them, including their social life and their rhythmicity. Such a generation of knowledge through direct experience involved three fundamental steps. First, learning to attend to flows and their many expressions. This was a learning process that was guided by some of my interlocutors, mainly Ye'kwana elders who use the language of paths. To illustrate this process, which also captures Ye'kwana intellectualizations on paths, in this thesis I bring forward the voices of Ignacio Tovar, Santana Tovar, and some other Ye'kwana. Such a guidance in becoming sensitive to particular forms of perception involved teaching me what walking meant to them. Secondly, this process also involved, for me, a guided imagination exercise in which such a notion of walking could be extended to encompass more than the actual physical action of moving one foot forward after the other. That is, to contemplate the possibility that some form of walking could be done in other dimensions of life and not just with feet on physical paths; to be sensitive to the rhythmicity of life in general and to the coupling of bodies with it. Finally, all this process led back to the analysis of everyday life, sociality, and Christianity through the understanding that these dimensions – and also issues related to power dynamics, personal agency, and so on – could likewise be accounted for using the logic of paths and walking.

The resulting ethnographic narrative in this thesis is presented as a whole that weaves together the following: first, the reflexive, dialogic process between researcher and Ye'kwana interlocutors; second, those reflections that are integrated into descriptions of everyday life and vignettes that illustrate ethnographically the theme of paths and, specifically, how this relates to Christianity; third, the fact that all these discussions are given ethnological context by placing such discussions within the wider fields of the anthropology of the Ye'kwana, of Amazonia, and of Christianity; and finally, that while all these discussions build on knowledge acquired mainly using participant observation, some particular sections, specifically those related to my dialogue with older Ye'kwana, come from many informal interviews and conversations I have had with them over the years. Moreover, other brief sections, such as those in a chapter on music and others in a chapter on biblical material, come from my registry of physical, written material, including the New Testament in Ye'kwana language, a study guide of the Book of Genesis, also in Ye'kwana, and collected material on Ye'kwana Christian music.

Setting the scene

The Ye'kwana are a Carib-speaking group that lives in the Venezuelan section of the Guiana Shield, and in Roraima State in Brazil. In Venezuela, their territory spans across Amazonas and Bolívar States, and their communities are located along some of the most important rivers of the region. Even though all Ye'kwana

locate their traditional territory in the Upper Orinoco region of Venezuela, in the area between the Cunucunuma, the Cuntinamo and the Padamo rivers, with Mount Marawaka in the middle, the group has extended to the northeast in the last two centuries. They now also live in the Manapiare area, along the Ventuari river, and in Bolívar State, along the Caura river and some of its tributaries, and along the Paragua river further east. More recent migration has also led them to establish communities in Roraima State, in Brazil, where they live along the Auaris and Uraricoera rivers. In the Amazonianist literature the Ye'kwana used to be identified as Maquiritare, which is the term that was given to them by criollos and anthropologists and whose origin has been the subject of speculation. They, however, call themselves *Ye'kwana*/*Dhe'kwana* or *So'to* – both for person and human. The difference between "Ye'kwana" and "Dhe'kwana" merely reflects a slight dialect variation in the region. In this thesis, although mostly based on the "Dhe'kwana" from Upper Orinoco, I still use the "Ye'kwana", as this is how my interlocutors are normally identified in the Venezuelan Amazon, and they themselves also use this pronunciation of their group's name freely. What is more, Ye'kwana is how the Amazonianist literature has come to identify the group as a whole.

In this literature, the Ye'kwana have probably been best recognized following David Guss' well-known ethnography on their weaving and singing (1990) and by their vast body of mythological stories, the Wätunnä, which was compiled by Marc de Civrieux (1997). Guss did his fieldwork among Ye'kwana in the Caura and La Paragua regions in the mid-seventies, areas where still to this day most communities have resisted evangelization. Meanwhile, for decades the situation has been the complete opposite in the Upper Orinoco. By the time Guss arrived in Bolívar State, most Ye'kwana in Upper Orinoco were already evangelical. The New Tribes Mission had arrived there, in the Cunucunuma river, in the early fifties. In the years that followed, as the Ye'kwana from the area converted to Protestant Christianity and adjusted to the new ways of life imposed on them by the American missionaries in the newly established communities, they also abandoned their weaving and singing practices. As they began to live a sedentary life in the new communities, they also came to experience a version of modernity structured around the mission and the new economic, social, and moral codes and practices promoted there. Acanaña was the first Ye'kwana community established by the New Tribes Mission as their base on the Cunucunuma river from which to reach all the Ye'kwana in the Upper Orinoco region.

Many other Christian Ye'kwana communities sprung up in the following years in the area. Most of them came to be structured around the church and the pastor as new social institutions. Another NTM mission was established in the sixties in the Caura region, specifically in Chajudaña, Carlos' community. Another

evangelical organization, the Missão Evangélica da Amazônia (MEVA), established themselves in the same decade on the upper Auaris River, on the Brazilian side of the Ye'kwana territory. In was in this context that many of the Ye'kwana leaders of the semi-mobile settlements of the area, including shamans and masters of chants, became Christian pastors in those decades, bringing their entire communities with them to the new evangelical communities. Those years also saw strong pushback against the American mission from Venezuelan anthropologists and some Ye'kwana organizations in the Upper Orinoco. However, the Venezuelan government, embarked as it was on a developmentalist project to "occupy" the "empty" south of the country, authorized the NTM to work with multiple indigenous groups, and relied on them, to an important extent, for the delivery of services like health and education to many communities.

In the following decades, as integration into the Venezuelan national society increased, many Ye'kwana from Upper Orinoco moved to Puerto Ayacucho and brought their extended families with them. That was the case for Santana Tovar's family, for instance. They, like many others, began to participate in the new political institutions and dynamics established during the two-party democracy in Venezuela in the second half of the twentieth century, which, in the Upper Orinoco included the clientelist mobilization of indigenous groups in favor of a certain political party. This participation, in the case of the Christian Ye'kwana communities, was encouraged by the NTM, who promoted Christian Ye'kwana candidates for the newly-created elected positions, like the mayoralty of the new Upper Orinoco municipality. Santana Tovar himself would become an influential figure among the Ye'kwana who supported the Acción Democrática (AD) party, and would even become the representative of the regional government of AD's Bernabé Gutiérrez in the Upper Orinoco.

The clientelist politics in which the Ye'kwana and other indigenous groups were immersed in the two-party democracy decades continued into the Chavista years. Chavismo introduced new political parties and institutions in the Upper Orinoco that carried on the dynamic of political mobilization in which indigenous groups had already participated. Alongside the penetration of new institutions like the Socialist Party or the Consejos Comunales – Communal Councils –, the presence of the NTM came to a halt when the late Hugo Chávez expelled them from Venezuela in 2005 under accusations of acculturation of indigenous communities and secretly exploiting mineral resources in the Amazon. This event was part of a drastic transformation that has taken place in the last two decades in the Venezuelan Amazon more generally. Initially, the Chavista government intended to use the military for the provision of services that the NTM used to give to indigenous communities. However, as years went by and the economic crisis

under Chavismo intensified, services like health and education deteriorated or stopped being provided altogether. Moreover, under Chávez and his successor Nicolás Maduro, particularly in the last decade, deinstitutionalization intensified in the country, hyperinflation rocketed, and poverty increased dramatically. In Puerto Ayacucho, during the time I lived there, all this was felt. Cash was almost impossible to find. Gold and Colombian pesos, only accessible to a few, had started to become regular currencies. Many goods had disappeared from the shelves, and the prices of those that remained had gone through the roof. In the Upper Orinoco, as in the Venezuelan Amazon more generally, this situation contributed to the massification of illegal gold mining in which many indigenous groups now participate, as well to dramatic environmental destruction.

The Tovars and Carijunagua

The Tovars, the extended family from Carijunagua, are emblematic figures of the evangelization process that took place in Venezuela and in the Upper Orinoco region. On the Cunucunuma river, Santana Tovar, together with other young Ye'kwana men, came to work closely with the American missionaries. They led the construction of Acanaña and became, as they call it, its "founding leaders" – Sp. "*líderes fundadores*". In addition, Santana and another Ye'kwana man became the first two people to be appointed pastors by the American mission in the fifties. After becoming pastor, Santana led groups of Ye'kwana missionaries who carried out evangelizing activity as far away as among Ye'kwana in Brazil. He was also in charge for a while of the evangelical mission in Chajudaña, in the Caura region. His close work with the NTM led to him being entrusted by them with important tasks in the evangelization process. That was the context in which Santana moved to Puerto Ayacucho. His twelve children grew up in the sphere of the NTM in Acanaña, some of them inserted in the families of the missionaries, and others later on working for the mission. As they grew, they took up roles that Santana had before them, such as evangelizing other Ye'kwana, engaging in translation projects, or leading churches as pastors. In that way, the Tovar family became stellar mediators between the NTM and the Ye'kwana. To this day, almost twenty years after the NTM were expelled in 2005, the Tovars are still important participants in the activities that the evangelical organization still carries out in Venezuela from outside the country and through façade groups.

Carijunagua is not the only Ye'kwana community that emerged in Puerto Ayacucho in the second half of last century. There have been others, both Christian and non-Christian. Usually, as in the case of Santana's community, these urban and semi-urban communities are structured around an extended Ye'kwana family from Manapiare or Upper Orinoco. In the case of Christian Ye'kwana, their communities are structured around a church, usually founded by a Ye'kwana pastor. In Puerto Ayacucho, such communities

form a network of Christian Ye'kwana who mostly live to the eastern side of town, mainly in four sectors: Carijunagua, in the semi-urban Carinagua area; Valle Verde, some half an hour on foot from Carijunagua; Parcelamiento Ayacucho, a large quarter already in the city; and Aeropuerto, a small area behind the city's airport. Of these Ye'kwana sectors, the first two are structured around two extended families from Acanaña, the evangelical community on the Cunucunuma. Aeropuerto and Parcelamiento Ayacucho are more mixed, comprising people from Cunucunuma, the Padamo river, and Manapiare.

All these sectors have their respective churches, and they all engage in constant exchanges; religious ones, on the one hand, as they share an intense agenda of Christian events whose hosting is rotated among churches – for multiple reasons, one of them being its recent creation, the Aeropuerto church is not fully included in this agenda. The agenda includes last supper celebrations, baptisms, weddings, and so on. The churches also often coalesce in, and organize larger events together, such as evangelization trips or so-called conferences. On the other hand, there are also domestic exchanges across churches and communities; people constantly come and go between quarters to visit relatives, pick up food, spend time away from their own neighborhoods due to conflicts there, and so on. Even though these exchanges mostly take place in the network of Christian communities, they are not limited to these, as people have relatives in other Ye'kwana areas of Puerto Ayacucho and might pay them a visit from time to time. There are also smaller Ye'kwana families who live in separated unifamilial houses scattered across the city, but they still converge in those larger quarters as many have gardens in the semi-urban ones, or for church services, visiting relatives, or other collective activities.

During the longest period I lived in Carijunagua, between 2017 and 2018, the community and its church were led by Ignacio Tovar, one of Santana's sons. Santana, then in his early eighties, was still alive – his death coincided with the moment I left the field in July 2018. Carijunagua is located in the semi-urban Carinagua sector of Puerto Ayacucho, and in fact people in the city use the same name for the community, Carinagua. However, the Ye'kwana having insisted that the actual name of the specific area where the Ye'kwana community is located is that of Carijunagua, in this thesis I use this name instead. When I lived there, life hovered around Santana and his wife Aurora's metal-plank shack, which sat behind the rest of the houses and a bit deeper into the forested area that surrounds the community. Coming out of the forested area towards the white-sand, mango-tree-surrounded central area, one finds on one side the house of Ignacio, Santana's son, and his cross-cousin wife, also called Aurora, and lined behind their house, already out in the open space, four single-family houses half-built by the government and never fully finished. There, two of Santana's daughters, Dionisia and Hilda, lived with their respective husbands

and their youngest children. Another house was for one of Santana's granddaughters, her criollo husband, and their two small daughters. Finally, the last house was Ricky's, the youngest adolescent son of Aurora and Ignacio, which also served as some kind of common space for the community's youth. Three other Ye'kwana families lived in other houses around this area, set into the forest or across the creek. They all converged on Sundays in the mud-walled, metal-plank-roofed church named Maranatha (see Figure 1). A couple of criollos and some other indigenous people from the area also congregated there, along with relatives of the Tovar and their in-laws. Plus, there were the regular comings and goings of people who visited Carijunagua and stayed there for days, weeks, or months, like other offspring of Santana and their respective families or, say, Ye'kwana visitors from Upper Orinoco, or from Caura.

Figure 1. Maranatha church. Carijunagua, Puerto Ayacucho, 2017.

Positionality, ethics, and data management

I had expected at the beginning of my fieldwork that my intention to work with Christian Ye'kwana would be met with resistance on their part. My **positionality** as a non-evangelical Venezuelan and, mainly, as an anthropologist, would very likely pose important barriers to access and to working with them, I had thought. My reasons for worrying about this were twofold. On the one hand, even though the presence of the NTM in the Venezuelan Amazon had been accepted by the Venezuelan government in the second

half of the last century, those decades saw strong pushback against the American presence from Venezuelan academia, indigenist activists, and certain indigenous organizations. All this culminated in the expulsion of the NTM from the country in 2005. There were a number of Venezuelan anthropologists involved in such an effort, and thus, up until the expulsion of the mission, a strong anti-anthropology sentiment had been brewing and was fomented by the Americans among Christian indigenous people. Connected to this, not being Christian myself, I was concerned that this would also add to that first problem.

However, some of these worries proved to be exaggerated. First, having arrived in the field through a series of indigenous Christian contacts, this facilitated the receptivity of my interlocutors to hear about my project. Second, I had not expected that, despite being an anthropologist and non-Christian myself, the fact that I was interested in studying the "*evangelio*" *as* an anthropologist was seen by my interlocutors as some kind of reconciliatory move and an about-time interest in their lives as Christians from the discipline they felt had treated them unfairly for so long. Christian elders came to me and expressed that they wanted to tell their own version of their story with Christianity and the NTM which, they felt, had been told only by voices who, in their eyes, had had an anti-evangelical agenda – both anthropologists and non-Christian Ye'kwana. There were other elements that played in my favour, such as the interest of older Ye'kwana, men in particular but also some women, in activities that involved studying and translating the Bible, discussing problems of the translation of Ye'kwana language terms and cultural notions to Christian framings, and so on. This interest reflected years of working with the Americans as translators and assistants in the evangelizing process. In a way, they saw themselves as the appropriate interlocutors if I was to explore their Christian lives and Ye'kwana Christianity.

Such willingness to engage with my work involved an interest from them in having their voices heard in a field that, to them, had not taken the voices of Christian Ye'kwana seriously, especially with the Ye'kwana being an indigenous group which anthropologists have been studying for years. That is why, as our discussions advanced, it became clear that my work with them had to involve registering those voices and their stories. It was made explicit that one important benefit they were to obtain from my work with them was that I would register the stories and testimonies of elders who had lived through the NTM years, and that I would create a repository of this knowledge. This applied mainly to my work with Santana Tovar. Having been one of the two Ye'kwana men appointed pastor by the NTM in the fifties, and with the other man having passed already, many Christian Ye'kwana saw that it was urgent and important to have Santana's stories recorded and his testimony registered so it could be passed on to the younger

generations. Together with this, and considering their story with the NTM, other people also saw it as important to work with me given that this would help them, they told me, to improve their own abilities as translators and students of biblical material. Thus, my presence was approved, and our collaboration began.

However, despite such initial negotiations and formal aspects of my positionality, these terms evolved as I lived with the Tovars and the Ye'kwana. Not only was I eventually adopted as a member of the Tovar extended family, but this also involved very peculiar circumstances that will be explained in detail in chapter II of this thesis. Very briefly, this involved their understanding that I represented the living replacement of one recently passed young member of the Tovar family. Thus, I was eventually given the treatment and considerations that they had had towards that person. Regarding my work, this entailed a more open collaboration, more access to their families, and the idea that passing knowledge to me was part of a regular transmission between elders and younger generations. Acquiring such a position as a member of the Tovar family also smoothed my presence in Christian ritual activities. As Carijunagua's church is made up of the extended family, it was seen as a normal thing by the community and the congregation that I could attend despite not being Christian myself.

Certainly, my work with the Ye'kwana carried important **ethical considerations and required decisions that would mitigate possible risks**. In general, I followed the LSE ethical guidance, which requires previous clearance and ethical evaluation of the proposed research. This included measures to be taken to mitigate possible risks to research subjects. In this sense, I followed the standard procedure of explaining my research to my interlocutors during our first encounters, part of which involved my intention to be respectful and to study their Christian lives seriously as an anthropologist. I explained to them the potential risks that my research could carry for them, which I had previously and tentatively identified. After discussing all these elements among themselves, my work was approved. Throughout my time living with the Tovars, I identified other potential risks and ethical challenges. For instance, I had to navigate a context of existing old feuds among extended Ye'kwana families. I tried to find a balance by developing cordial relations with Ye'kwana people from different churches and family groups, and by regularly updating them on my research and getting opinions and comments from them.

Another important challenge was how to deal with the general situation of the economic crisis hitting Venezuela at the time in the context of my relationship with the Ye'kwana and, moreover, with developing an adequate relation of exchange with them. I tried to find a balance between providing my Ye'kwana friends and family with some form of material support to navigate the crisis while also embedding this as

part of my own work with them and avoiding becoming an endless source of goods. Thus, early on a dynamic developed in which I supported the Tovars and other Ye'kwana with transportation to and from the city with my 1984 jeep. I would also take people to the hospital when needed or would buy them expensive and difficult-to-find medicines. By regularly giving offerings to the church during Sunday services, I also collaborated with the buying of foods and other material for Christian rituals or collective meals.

As I learned more and more about the Christian Ye'kwana from Upper Orinoco and about the Tovars' history with the NTM, I came to know that this included traumatic episodes, particularly regarding alleged sexual abuse of young Ye'kwana boys by one American missionary. The cases took place in the decades when the missionaries still lived in the Upper Orinoco among the Ye'kwana. The victims were adults by the time I did fieldwork, and some of them my good friends. The individual in question was an important figure at the NTM for decades and he spearheaded the evangelization of the Ye'kwana to a large extent. Yet, after reports about his behavior became public, he was eventually expelled from the organization. However, those events impacted the Ye'kwana in different ways and fed significantly into decades-long conflicts within the Ye'kwana church. To this day, such divisions are still felt among the Ye'kwana, despite the victims' families being sympathetic about the work of the NTM and about the American missionaries in general. Moreover, some of the victims and their families still have contact with the American missionary to this day, and some even speak highly of him, including some of my interlocutors. They even insisted at one point that I had to meet him. This was an ethical conflict. Following my Ye'kwana friends' insistence, I met him and interviewed him once when he visited Puerto Ayacucho. From that interview, in this thesis I use a small piece of information which is not related to the events from decades ago. Moreover, I do not give any indication of who this person is, nor do I reference any circumstance associated with what happened. Much more importantly, all the alleged Ye'kwana victims that I know of are not mentioned.

With regards to **anonymization** more generally, I informed my interlocutors of potential risks that might derive from using their real names in my research. We discussed these thoroughly and, with all the information at hand and concluding that my thesis would not explore any delicate or risky subject or events nor put my interlocutors in any physical, political, or other type of risk, they decided that they wanted their actual names to be used. Thus, the names used in this thesis are those of my actual interlocutors. Finally, regarding the **storing and processing of my research data**, the documentation of my research process and the data obtained through the multiple methods mentioned above are safely

stored in videos and audio recordings, extensive notes from participant observation activities and from interviews, photographs, and collected material like hymnals and copies of music notebooks. For this thesis, this material was coded using the logic of emerging themes and concepts. All data has been digitalized and kept securely in separate locations, both in hardware and in secure cloud services. Part of the visual material, including videos and photographs, has been shared with my Ye'kwana interlocutors.

The path ahead

Each of the following chapters carries forward a common thread, which is that of the development of the theme of paths. This is intended to reflect the totalizing nature of the logic of paths and how this emerges from my interlocutors' own intellectualizations. Thus, its presence is explored across dimensions of the world in which my Ye'kwana friends, particularly the older generations, identify them – e.g., sociality, speech, music, ideas of relational agency, and so on. The thread provided by Christianity also runs through all the chapters. However, the discussions on the former are a tributary to the main discussion of paths. It either provides pieces to complete this picture or gives us elements to understand how change and transformation have been understood as taking place within this worldview and how the latter itself has changed with Christianity. With this general idea of the thesis in mind, its arch could be seen as traversing three more or less distinctive levels of the argument regarding paths.

The first one, which covers chapters 1 and 2, introduces the notion of paths and tries to capture my interlocutors' intellectualization on this theme. **Chapter 1** sets the historical framework and introduces the theme of paths by letting Santana Tovar narrate the story of his life and his family, the encounter of the Ye'kwana with the NTM, and an episode from the Wätunnä body of stories. Paths here emerge associated with how the Ye'kwana narrate and construct ideas of temporality and historicity using oral narrations of geographical movement. Picking up the idea of "walking" introduced in Chapter 1, **Chapter 2** expands on this Ye'kwana notion to bring the same logic of paths to other dimensions of life where the Ye'kwana also identify them. This chapter presents the main argument about Ye'kwana paths forming rhythmic flows.

Having a general idea of what rhythmic paths look like, the second argumentative level, in which we could locate **Chapter 3**, explores how such a world of possible trajectories is navigated through alignments and deviations. To do this, this chapter draws on Santana's conversion story. This chapter completes the picture of what I call "the beating self" and explores how this navigates a world of paths by attending to them and by directly perceiving elements of it through bodily incorporation. In doing this, indigenous

ideas of change and differentiation and their association with conversion to Christianity in indigenous Amazonia are discussed.

Building on the framework presented in the first three chapters, the remaining four explore specific aspects of sociality and of the Christian life of the Ye'kwana more generally. More importantly for this thesis' argument about paths, they explore how these are navigated, in all these dimensions, through processes of entrainment and synchronies. They also illustrate how the changes provoked by Christianity have been understood to have taken place in terms of people's bodily abilities to follow paths.

Chapter 4 looks at how ideas of relational agency and personal autonomy fit into the picture of paths and how these were understood to have changed after conversion to evangelical Christianity. This chapter begins to demarcate how sociality as paths comes about through the production of synchronicities or dissolves when these synchronicities fail. It demonstrates that Christianity is perceived by older Ye'kwana to have altered the younger generations' capacity to follow social paths and opened the door to their unraveling. These themes are explored by looking at a series of events that took place in Carijunagua in 2018.

Chapter 5 goes into more depth about ideas of the formation of sociality and the good life, and how these depend on the formation of synchronicities. Achieving this successfully is expressed through the production of an animated, protective, and healthy atmosphere in the community. The changes that the NTM introduced into how an "animated" social life is produced are explored.

Chapter 6 considers how the logic of rhythmic paths involves constant derived replications and how this translates into the production of uniformity in social life and the form of Baptist Christianity practiced by the Ye'kwana. More generally, this chapter explores how patterns in social life emerge from the action of repeating. We conclude with a discussion about how Christianity entailed a transformation of ideas of replication, but not a break from the necessity to replicate.

Chapter 7 explores ideas of paths and entrainment in notions of singing and music shared by Christian Ye'kwana. It specifically explores the transformations of these with Christianity, and the persistence of the logic of paths in new forms of singing and Christian music.

Finally, all these strands come together in the **conclusion** in a closing general argument about rhythmicity and entrainment as promising analytical frameworks to continue exploring indigenous Amazonian intellectualization on paths and their use in order to make sense of sociality, continuity and change, and many other issues.

Chapter 1

Narrated paths, or a Ye'kwana account of the missionary encounter

The history of the Tovar family and their encounter with the New Tribes Mission in many ways encapsulates the history of Ye'kwana Christianity in the Upper Orinoco. If we were to make a historical examination of only the latter, this would probably resemble existing accounts of equivalent historical formations of indigenous Protestant Christianities in other parts of the Amazon (Capredon 2022, Grotti 2022, Opas 2008, Vilaça 2016). Such a review would probably begin with the devastating impact the rubber economy of the first decades of the twentieth century in the mid and upper Orinoco had on the Ye'kwana, including how the raids to capture Indian labour drove the displacement of many Ye'kwana to the headwaters of major rivers in the heart of the Ye'kwana territory[2]. The review would continue with the question of how this context set the social and economic scene in the Upper Orinoco, in which the New Tribes Mission found the Ye'kwana open to their presence and to embracing Protestant Christianity[3]. Other historical accounts of Protestant evangelization processes in the Amazon have noted that these have often followed drastic socioeconomic changes in indigenous lives (Bonilla 2009, Wright 1999). Next, we could go on to connect this context to the massive conversion of Ye'kwana people that quickly followed, as with other groups indigenous groups in other parts of the Amazon (Gow 2007; Vilaça 2016, 97-109), and to their new impetus to evangelize non-converted Ye'kwana. We would then have to cover the socioeconomic and political transformations that took place in the Upper Orinoco as Venezuela moved to democracy and to a two-party system, beginning in the fifties, and as new administrative institutions and new forms of client-patron relations entered indigenous territory. It was in this context of political transformation that evangelical and non-evangelical Ye'kwana began to participate in regional politics and

[2] The Ye'kwana locate their historical territory in the area formed by the tributaries of the upper section of the Orinoco River, with Mount Marawaka at its center. They call this region Ihuruña. There are registers of Ye'kwana presence along the Padamo, Cuntinamo, and Cunucununa Rivers as far back as 1758. Their expansion to the additional territory they occupy today – the Ventuari River in Manapiare Municipality, the Erevato, Caura, and Paragua Rivers in Bolívar State, and the Auaris and Uraricoera Rivers in Roraima State, in Brasil – came in waves of migration in the following centuries. Some of this migration was caused by warfare with other indigenous groups, some by the pressure of the rubber economy, and some by their interest in exploiting commercial routes (see Guss 1990, 10-11; also Koch-Grünberg 1968, 1969, 1971). For a history of the rubber economy in Venezuela, see Iribertegui 1987.

[3] For a specific revision of Ye'kwana history in the decades of the rubber economy see Guss 1994 and de Barandiarán 1979. The latter estimated that during the reign of rubber boss Tomás Funes in Amazonas state – then called Territorio Federal Amazonas (1913-1921) –, no fewer than one thousand Ye'kwana were killed and some twenty Ye'kwana communities destroyed.

in indigenist movements. And it was then when they began to establish stable Ye'kwana communities in urban areas, especially in Puerto Ayacucho. This review would probably finish with the founding of Ye'kwana churches in urban areas in recent decades, the Tovars' among them, and the new configurations of Ye'kwana Christianity that have emerged (García Briceño 2022).

Instead, in order to approach the history of the missionary encounter through the eyes of Upper Orinoco Ye'kwana, this chapter aims to do so by letting Santana Tovar, the patriarch of the extended Ye'kwana family from Carijunagua, set the historicity of this event by telling us three stories: that of the arrival of the NTM in Upper Orinoco and its contact with the Ye'kwana, that of Santana himself and of his family, and that of how Wanaadi, the mythical hero of the Ye'kwana, escaped from the earthly plane in primordial times. Having Santana tell us these stories is important in a couple of ways. First, because Santana, in his early eighties by the time I met him, lived through the missionary encounter, and he and his family were protagonists and exceptional witnesses of the fundamental transformations and events the Ye'kwana and the Upper Orinoco region more generally went through in the second half of the twentieth century. Santana not only was the very first Ye'kwana to be appointed pastor by the American missionaries in 1958; he also led the construction of the first settled Ye'kwana community in the Upper Orinoco, and led the evangelizing wave of indigenous people that would reach as far as Roraima State in Brazil. And, moreover, promoted by the NTM, he would later become the very first indigenous person to be appointed *comisionado* of the Upper Orinoco municipality – a then-newly-created position equivalent to mayor.

The second reason is that, through Santana's stories, we might approach how the generation of Ye'kwana who lived through these events make sense of them narratively, as well as the forms of historicity and temporality that comes through those same narratives. This is significant because Ye'kwana elders of Santana's generation have a particular way of narrating stories of the past, which they refer to as "paths" - Yk. *äämäcoomo.* For instance, the story of how the NTM arrived in the Upper Orinoco is "the path of the NTM" - Yk. *Nuevas Tribus emadö*. One Ye'kwana man once described for me what a narrated path is: "A path tells you where one began walking, the routes taken, the places visited, and how one arrived here". This translates to a very specific narrative logic shared by elder Ye'kwana, namely, one that follows narratively the journey of ancestors or primordial figures along specific geographical routes in the Venezuelan Amazon – or, in primordial stories, across the cosmos –, mainly along waterways. As the narration follows the characters' journey along their route, the narrator gives long relations of the successive locations at which the travellers stop, of events that take place at each place, of the people who lived there, and of the things that travellers learn or "see". And so on. That is, the narration advances

one location after the other. Narrated "paths", according to older Ye'kwana, are the actual trajectories traversed by the characters, and paths are also said to be formed by the very action of voicing a narration. So, if a person tells a story, that person himself or herself is also transiting that route mentally. This last aspect of narrated paths will be explored in following chapters.

Grasping the temporal and historical logic of this form of narrating shared by elder Ye'kwana is also useful in order to understand the idea, which comes through Santana's stories, that the missionary encounter took place as a confluence of separate journeys at a common geographical location. Moreover, this is also important considering that second and third generation Christian Ye'kwana, especially those who have grown in urban spaces and been inserted into the Venezuelan nation-state, no longer share this form of narrating to the same extent that older Ye'kwana people do. Descriptions of traditional forms of narrating among indigenous peoples that echo Ye'kwana elders', and which are likewise conceptualized as "paths" or "journeys", are not uncommon in the ethnographic record, both in the Amazon and beyond (see below). The emphasis in the Amazonianist literature has been on the usefulness of similar narrative structures as mnemotechnic tools for recalling the past, highlighting their similarity with the knotted cord weaving traditions of Andean groups and other Amerindians. In this chapter, however, in order to grasp the sense of the missionary encounter as a confluence of paths, we will focus on the notion of spatial and temporal flow that is constructed in Santana's narration of the geographical journeys of his family and the NTM.

Narrated paths and journeys

Among older Ye'kwana, the theme of "paths" and "journeys" is a regular feature of the narrations of stories – of primordial times and current ones –, and of how elders conceive of history and of narrating more generally. The Wätunnä is the best example of this. Translated by the younger generations simply as *historia* – literally, history – the Wätunnä consists of a body of chanted stories that used to be sung by a master of chants in the past and that is described by the elders as the "path of the Ye'kwana people" – Yk. *Ye'kwanacoomo emadö* (see de Civrieux 1997, see also Gongora 2017). It used to be sung in full during the some three-day celebration of the construction of a new conical house – Yk. *ättä adeemi jidi* –, the purification of a new garden – Yk. *adaja adeemi jidi* –, or the celebration of the return of hunters from an extended hunting journey – Yk. *wasai iadi adeemi jidi*. Its singing used to be done, it was explained to me, in strict order following specific trajectories travelled by primordial beings, as well as long lists of names and places across the multiple places and levels of the cosmos traversed by the travellers. During the celebration, dancers as well as chanters were said to be transiting along the same routes enunciated in

the chant. And they had to dance attuned to the percussion arrangements associated with the sections of the journey being chanted (see chapter 3). We will see examples of this below shortly.

As the elders describe it, Wätunnä is something that only important people tell or have – "Wanaadi has Wätunnä, Jesucristo has Wätunnä, Simón Bolívar has Wätunnä" – for, they say, those people were those who "founded, came first, were pioneers [doing certain thing]" - Sp. "*los que fundaron, los que vinieron primero, los que empezaron...*". The Wätunnä stories those people have are described as *their* "paths". For instance, in the Wätunnä body of stories, an episode is devoted to the deeds of Kuyujani. Kuyujani, the elders say, was the Ye'kwana chief who travelled across the Amazonas territory after the big flood, and gave each indigenous group its region to live in (see Medina 2003). That section in the Wätunnä tells the "path of Kuyujani" – Yk. *Kuyujani emadö*. The Ye'kwana master of chants – Yk. *adeemi edhaajä* – also used to have a Wätunnä, in this case that of the narrated "path" of the Ye'kwana people[4]. The person who tells a Wätunnä, it was explained to me, knows the "path" because he or she "transited it", including important historical figures like those above or the master of chants. In contrast, Ignacio, Santana's son and my adoptive dad, once told me that regular people cannot tell or "have" a proper Wätunnä. "To say that you, Luis, have a Wätunnä is wrong", said Ignacio. If a regular person tells a story of the past, he or she simply narrates a "path", but it is not a Wätunnä, it is just a story. "You Luis can tell the path you walked along [Yk. *"Iyä äämätai Luis weijödö*"]. That's Luis' map. It tells where you have been, the things you did. The paths walked by Luis".

The equivalency of the narration of stories, important or not, and the description of geographical routes is something that comes up in how older Ye'kwana express themselves in their daily life. For example, in one comparison Santana once made between people "who have lived a lot and have a lot to tell" and others who do not have enough experience, he said that the first ones have "a big path" - Yk. "*adaijooto chäämädö mädä*" –, whereas the second ones' are "just a hunting path". Santana used a very specific example of a geographical route to illustrate how big the "path" of the stories the first person could tell was: "the path begins here [in Puerto Ayacucho], goes upriver along the Orinoco, along the Padamo and Cuntinamo. One goes off the path [the river] when you get to Javarí. From Javarí you cross to another path that will take you to a river called Demecuni. Demecuni flows into Caura river. You cross the Caura. There is another river branch there called Juducomo. Juducomo flows into the Canadacuni river. After it

[4] The Ye'kwana classify their chants into two main groups. The *adeemi* chants, in which the recitation of the Wätunnä stories on important occasions is located, and the *aichudi* chants, which consist of shorter chants to be used as part of purification or healing ceremonies. This will be explored in following chapters.

leaves the Caura river and crosses a mountain, Canadacuni flows into La Paragua river. Then, La Paragua makes a turn and flows into a stream called Lima. That way you can get to Santa Elena de Uairén [the opposite side of the Venezuelan Amazon]".

Descriptions of oral stories as "paths" or "journeys" are found among other indigenous peoples in the Amazon, who often give them narrative coherence by following the journey of a character along specific cosmographical routes. This is a common feature of non-mythical narrations such as autobiographies (see Gow 2014, Oakdale 2005, Vilaca 2006), but also of shamanic spiritual journeying (see Carneiro da Cunha 1998, Langdon 2013), and of stories of primordial events. In those trajectories, which are commonly chanted, it is frequent that the story follows travellers as they make successive stops along their route and engage in specific events (see Basso 1995, Franchetto 2014, Verswijver 1992, Wright 1993). Narrated trajectories have also been linked with the notion of "topographic writing" (Hugh-Jones 2016, Koch-Grünberg 2010, Santos Granero 1998), that is, with the inscription onto the landscape that indigenous people make of memories of old house sites, of routes of migration, of mythical events, or of events in their oral histories more generally. Among Arawakans and Tukanoans groups, for instance, such geographical locations are tracked in oral narratives and chants, which give order to, for example, stories of cyclical creation or the discovery of sacred flutes (Wright 1993). Moreover, it is not only that chanters or shamans narrate or sing a geographical "path", but that they travel along them with their voices and thoughts as they enunciate lists of spirits' and people's names, places, artefacts, and so on. As they sing their journeys, their enunciations are rhythmically organized, and the singing is usually tonally and metrically synchronized to the listing and repetition of names, thus generating a stable chant (Hill 1993, 1996). The rhythmic chanting is not simply a repetition of disconnected words, but a thus defined "chasing after names" (see Hill 1993), namely, it consists in the narrator placing names into separate sets of categories as the geographical trajectory advances.

Whereas we might find commonalities in the way they are narratively construed by different groups, paths and journeys can be used narratively for multiple purposes. This is perhaps clearer when we consider their use in the larger context of indigenous groups across the world. In Aboriginal Australia, for instance, journey stories draw an association with memory and the totemic landscape (see Richards 2007) and are used to orient the spirit of the deceased (see Magowan 2007; Toner 2005). In Africa, the narration of migration routes is used to tell the history of genealogies, lineages, and the formation of and relation among clans (see Amborn and Schubert 2006). In the anthropology of Melanesia and the Pacific, where paths and journeys have emerged more explicitly as themes (see Fox 2021), stories also often follow

journeys by mythical, historical, or contemporary figures that trace geographical routes and are narratively as well as mentally transited while enunciated (Rapaport 2021, Toner 2007). Path and journey stories are also used to provide fundamental "origin structures" for society (Fox 1992, Parmentier 1987), and have been used to trace relations among kin (see Allerton 2004, Firth 1967), or have served to establish relations of seniority by giving sequential precedence to people (Barnes 2011, McWilliam 2002).

From these examples, an important factor that comes across is that the usefulness and widespread presence of the theme of the path and the journey in narrations might be connected to its utility into conveying the experience of human mobility. In this sense, it should not be assumed that paths and journeys might be themes confined to "exotic" indigenous groups and their "traditional" forms of narrating. In fact, the so-called "travel narrative" has also been a salient storytelling technique in monotheistic religions, as well as a well-documented organizing theme of narrations in ancient, medieval, and Renaissance Europe, and in Asia (see Piera 2018). Classic instances might be Homer's Odyssey and Iberian chivalric romances. Through many such stories larger historical processes can be captured precisely by looking at their use of the theme of the journey or the narrated path.

Santana's path

The day Santana told me the story of the NTM he had been narrating the path of himself and his family. He told me this and the other stories in this chapter sat on a wooden bench in the porch of a small, blue-painted metal-plank shack that rose alone in the small meadow behind the community. He had chosen this place to carry out what he proudly called "our lessons" - Sp. "*nuestras clases*". The idea I had originally was for him to tell me stories from the Wätunnä, the traditional body of chants that narrate the history of the Ye'kwana people. Santana, like other elder Christian Ye'kwana who were young adults at the moment the Americans arrived, knows these stories, as he was training to become a master of chants before becoming Christian in the fifties. In chapter 3 we will look more closely at Santana's conversion to Protestant Christianity.

Our lessons, which would go on to take place for the entirety of my fieldwork, quickly derailed into unstructured hours-long talks where Santana usually narrated stories without much guidance from me, except for brief questions to clarify certain points. This is a necessary clarification, for what follows is a structure that emerges from Santana's own narration. His narration follows the rivers he and his family travelled along before they settled in a sedentary community, the places they lived in, the things they did and learnt in each, the leaders under which they lived, and so on. Santana put special emphasis on the

things that he learnt, or that he "saw" at each place. It was when his journey got to the geographical and temporal point when the missionaries arrived, on the Cunucunuma River, that Santana took a detour to narrate the "path of the NTM" – Sp. *Nuevas Tribus emadö*. To have a clear idea of the geographical routes described in the rest of this chapter, see Figure 2.

Santana's narration of his path until that encounter, however, is much longer than that of the NTM (see below) and impossible to tell in full here. The way he narrates it is much more detailed than the other narrated "paths" quoted below. Importantly, it is mostly narrated in the plural, sometimes suggesting that he speaks on behalf of the entire community and on other occasions, as when he talks of the things he learns or "sees" for the first time, on behalf of his age group. The latter is also a relevant clarification, as it has been noted that in autobiographical accounts in indigenous Amazonia, oral stories are usually not of *a* life in an individualizing sense, even when they are narrated in the first person singular (Basso 1995, 293-303; Buitrón and Deshoulliere 2019, 195-196; Urban 1989). Rather, these are narrations in which the narrator is usually assimilated into a larger group.

Santana told me that, when he was born, his family was living at the headwaters of the Padamo river in the Upper Orinoco region. They had moved there in the first decades of the twentieth century, running away from the raids of rubber barons. Santana's narrated journey begins at a small conical-house community, Alacrán - Yk. *Mänätäña* -, at the headwaters of the Padamo. As mentioned, he narrates in plural. "We were born there" - Sp. "*ahí nacimos*", he says. And he describes Alacrán: Only three families lived there, and there were only a few houses. He says that his mom was there, while his dad was not. He said that "we lived" there until "one is able to recall" - Sp. "*ya uno se acuerda*". "We already had knowledge. We killed birds with arrows, with sticks... with blowguns... And we killed *paují* with arrows. The grown-ups did."

His narration would then take us down the Padamo river with his band of close kin through a succession of other small-group settlements they lived in, all of which would eventually disband after the death of their respective leaders or after conflicts erupted. He mentions a string of deaths, including that of his classificatory dad, Cito, and that of his father-in-law, until he gets to the last community where he lived on the Padamo river, which was led – Sp. "*manejada*" – by a certain Santiño. At this point he lists the people who were "left" there – Sp. "*quienes quedamos*": his grandad Emilio, Santiño, and others. He says that, at this point on the Padamo, he "already had knowledge" - Sp. "y*a teníamos conocimiento*". "We knew how to fish, how to walk, we joined the elders to go hunting, to go fishing".

The string of deaths of leaders he recounts and the disbandments that took place along the Padamo river led the remainder of Santana's band to join the group of a famous Ye'kwana leader from the Cunucunuma river, captain Turón. "He came and took us there [to the Cunucunuma river]", said Santana. Turón, who was the father of Jaime Turón, a known Ye'kwana politician, had a big community, Majacuña. "Lots of families, around forty families." Santana mentions the other leaders who led the group with Turón. And says that criollos used to arrive there to sell and buy goods. Other Ye'kwana people from the headquarters of the river also came to live there, he adds. In that place, like in the communities before, Santana learns and "sees" some things for the first time: "We learned... we knew everything... we saw dancing, we played *wapurú*, we danced … we learned all that at that place". He also saw the construction of a conical house for the first time, and he tells of the celebration that took place, carefully explaining everything they did in order to carry it out, the birds that were hunted, the fish that were fished, the number of women that participated. Santana also enumerates the shamans that lived in that community: Manuel Martínez, Emilio, Cucho Fermín, "Judumi's dad", and so on.

From Majacuña, Santana's band moved up the Cunucunuma river and settled in another community called Culebra – Yk. *Mawadianajödöña*. The group left for that place after captain Turón's death. "We came down, we funded another community, those who lived in Majacuña came down." The new Cajichaana – from the Spanish *capitán*, literally captain – of the Cunucunuma Ye'kwana was now a certain Paúl Padamo, Turón's son-in-law. At the new location, Santana learned to wrestle. "We began to wrestle … they taught us, 'do it like this'. They taught us … after that came wrestling matches." "We" learned to make canoes, and "we" started learning chants. There were chanters from whom to learn, and Santana mentions them: one was Joaquín Velázquez, "Alfredo Velázquez brother's"; another was Francisco Guerra, "Juán Guerra's dad." Then, Santana gives details of the family of each chanter, including which members were living with them and which others had left for other communities.

On the Cunucunuma River, too, Santana would move along the river as his smaller kin group joined other people to form two other smaller settlements – Yacade and Tawadi. "You know... back then, captains did not live with us all the time, maybe two years, one year, and they would leave to found another [community]. They just left". Paúl Padamo was still the chief of the Cunucunuma Ye'kwana in general, and he visited them from time to time. The people living there were mostly close kin of Santana and of his brother-in-law Teodoro. Santana goes on to mention the rest of the band that moved with them; there were their respective wives and their wives' respective moms, Santana's mom and Teodoro's, a group of their sisters-in-law. Mostly women. "We already knew to build houses and to hunt", said Santana. Then

came yet another displacement along the river, and now that Santana and Teodoro were married, they built their own big house and formed their own community, Cawadimäña. “There we lived. Francisco Guerra joined us. He came from Culebra ... He came with his wife, with his children. My brother Antonio Tovar also came. He was my mom’s first son. He was married to Francisco Guerra’s daughter.” Francisco Guerra became the Cajichaana of the new place, and Joaquín Velázquez was the master of chants.

Figure 2: Map of Amazonas State and the major rivers in the Upper Orinoco region.

It was while living in Cawadimaña that the NTM arrived in a nearby Ye’kwana community, Cosococosocoña. The Americans built seven houses, Santana recalls, and a couple of missionaries went upriver to Cawadimäña to stay with Santana and his group for a while. It is here that Santana’s path converges with

the “path of the NTM”. It was at this point in Santana’s narration that he began to recount the trajectory that brought the NTM to that point.

A note on the New Tribes Mission

The NTM is an evangelizing organization that, like the Summer Institute of Linguistics and the Wycliffe Bible Translators, saw the light amid an impulse toward missionization among evangelical Christians in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s, especially among Baptists. It was founded by an American evangelical, Paul Flemming, in Los Angeles in 1942. Close to the tradition of Southern Baptists, the NTM advocates reaching “all nations” with what they see as God’s literal word in the Bible, and driven by the urgency of their pretribulational and millenarianist views[5]. In this sense, their missionary strategy has been characterized by working with indigenous communities directly so, they expect, native churches can emerge organically from the former – what they call “church planting”. To achieve this, missionaries, usually families, are trained to live with indigenous peoples, to learn their languages in order to translate the Bible and to teach them to read and write, and to prepare them for building their own churches. Their missionary work, hence, in contrast to Catholic missionization in the Amazon, has been heavily dependent on the successful integration of the missionaries into native life[6].

It is in this sense that the initial encounter of the missionaries with the targeted indigenous group has been seen as a crucial moment for the success of the NTM’s evangelizing enterprise. The literature on Christianity in indigenous Amazonia describes many of these initial encounters. Many have been allowed by the indigenous people in the context of their interest in the health and education services offered by the missionaries (Caixeta de Queiroz 1999, Vietta and Brand 2004). In other cases, the NTM and other

[5] For a history of Baptist evangelism, see Leonard 2003, 2005. For a history of the presence of the NTM in the Amazon more generally, see Cabrera Becerra 2008. For a history of the presence of the NTM in Venezuela, see Mosonyi 1981

[6] In Venezuela, like in other Spanish and Portuguese American colonies, Catholic missions worked as a vehicle (*conquista de almas* – “conquest of souls”) for the enslavement and the geographical redistribution of the native population into *encomiendas*, cattle ranches, and plantations. In this sense, whereas Catholic missionization, until the Second Vatican council, emphasized “civilization”, Protestant evangelism sought conversion via revelation through God’s word in the indigenous language. This required the direct involvement of the missionary with indigenous people to learn the language, which entailed the engagement of small groups of missionaries directly with the communities. For a comparison between Protestant and Catholic missionization in the Amazon, see Vilaça 2014. Among the Ye’kwana, Catholic missionaries from the Fraternidad de Foucauld opened their first base, Santa María, on the Erevato River in 1959, that is, six years after the NTM had started working with the Ye’kwana in Upper Orinoco. And in the early sixties, Cacurí, another Catholic community, was founded on the Ventuari. Since then, other Catholic missions have opened in Tencua and Wacamo. And the Salesians have also maintained a permanent school in La Esmeralda, the capital of the Upper Orinoco Municipality, where many Ye’kwana attend. For a summary of Catholic missionization among the Ye’kwana, see Guss 1990, 17-18, and Arvelo-Jiménez 1974, 18.

evangelical organizations have entered by the hand of the government or specific institutions, like the military, which have relied on the former for their policies of contact, vigilance, education, or the "civilization" of the indigenous group (Morgado 1999, Vilaça 1997). In yet many other instances the missionaries have contacted communities directly with multiple intents and through strategies like the giving of presents – moves that in more than one case have resulted in unfortunate outcomes even including fatal casualties. Such misfortunes in the case of the evangelizing work of the NTM, which have been incorporated into an institutional mythology of their own, are important for the following story[7].

The path of the New Tribes Mission

The NTM arrived in Venezuela in 1946 (Luzardo 1981) and set foot in a Ye'kwana community on the Cunucunuma river in the early 1950s after obtaining a special permit from the Venezuelan government to work on the Orinoco River and in the Manapiare area[8]. This took place in the context of a push by the Venezuelan government to explore the "empty" south, which aimed at developing the region and exploiting its natural resources (Arvelo Jiménez 1974). Santana was then around twenty years old and, after having travelled along various rivers, was living with his close kin at Cosocosocoña, the small settlement on the Cunucunuma.

In Santana's narration of the "path of the NTM", this, like that of Santana himself and his family, follows certain routes that take the NTM missionaries to live at multiple locations in the Upper Orinoco until they finally arrive at the Cunucunuma. Along that trajectory they stop at successive places where they engage with the people living there and where certain events that repeat at each location take place again. Santana's narration of the "path of the NTM" started with him explaining to me that a scouting party of four men – two Americans, a certain "Mr. Phil" and missionary Jaime Bou, and two Venezuelans – were the first to make contact with the Ye'kwana on the Cunucunuma river. The rest of the missionaries had stayed behind waiting for the advance party to reach a new indigenous group with which to work.

[7] There have been various instances of fatalities in the history of the NTM. All missionaries from the first mission sent abroad, to Bolivia, were killed in 1944 by Ayoreo Indians. And, in Venezuela, a plane carrying NTM missionaries crashed, killing all on board in 1950 (Shaylor 2013, 18-19).

[8] Other evangelical and NTM missionary works would be established among the Ye'kwana in the years to follow. In Brasil, the Missão Evangélica da Amazônia (MEVA) established themselves in the beginning of the 1960s on the upper Auaris River. Meanwhile, in the Caura region, the NTM established their base on the Chajura River in the same decade. There were various American missionaries stationed there through the following decades, and Santana himself was appointed by the NTM, in 1971, to stay in that community, Chajudaña, for extended periods of time to sustain the evangelizing project.

Apparently, some misfortunes had happened to them leading to that moment. And so, Santana went on to explain what brought them to the Cunucunuma.

> **Santana**: "You see, when the missionaries first arrived here in Puerto Ayacucho, they wanted to establish the base of the NTM here in Tobogán, in Paria Grande, among the Piaroa [nearby Puerto Ayacucho, in the mid-Orinoco River]. They went there, and they did set up [their base]! But the governor heard about the new base of the NTM, and the priests [heard too]. Then [these authorities] spoke with the chief of the military, the captain. Then, they sent a party – the police and the guards and the priests – to invade what was founded, in Tobogán, in Paria Grande. Then, [the missionaries] had to leave.
>
> Then, they thought, 'where could we go?' They met Miguel Albino [a Baniwa man]. Miguel Albino had his small house in Isla Ratón. His settlement was there. So, [the NTM] made an agreement with him. Miguel Albino gave permission, and the mission went there. They founded their base [in Isla Ratón]. They went there. But wherever they went the priests would soon arrive … When [the authorities] heard that [the missionaries] were funding the base of their mission, they sent their party, together with the priests ... Well, it was impossible [to establish the base].
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> Then, [the missionaries] said 'well, let's go to San Fernando [San Fernando de Atabapo], to get in touch with the New Tribes Mission in Colombia'. There were Christians in San Fernando … So, [the NTM] funded [their base] among the Puinave, in Guasuriapana ... [But] the priests found out... There, in San Fernando, they agreed with the prefect to expel [the NTM]. They expelled them again. [The NTM] couldn't [establish their base].
>
> There was a Piaroa man, he was called Rafael Pérez. He was a chief, a famous, big chief. He had a big boat … Then, [the NTM] got to an agreement with him, when he was travelling up to Manapiare. He lived in Manapiare. They made their agreement in San Fernando. Rafael Pérez made an agreement with them, got in touch with them. 'Well, alright, at your service'. So, [the NTM] went upriver with him, with Rafael to Manapiare. They went up, up, until they reached Manapiare. They started teaching, to teach the Piaroa, to learn their language … [The priests and the guards] heard the news from Manapiare. 'The gringos are there, the missionaries, they are founding... they are teaching...'. The priests, a National Guard team, the police, the prefect, all of them, they went there. They expelled them, evicted them, brough them back to San Fernando. [The NTM] couldn't [found their base].

> The priests and the prefects were angry against [the NTM]. So, they said, 'what can we do with them? What is our thought?'. So, the priest said, 'well, they must be curtailed, sent whereto the indigenous people who eat human meat live'. They [the authorities] thought the Yanomami ate human meat. They sent [the NTM] to Platanal, far away, without their wives. Only Don Cecilio, Don Pepe, Jacobo, Frank... Only men. And Julio Jiménez [a criollo] with them … Up the Orinoco River, to Platanal... Far away! Like eight days travelling upriver. They left them without canoes, no engine, no nothing. [The missionaries] stayed there. Only Miguel Albino [the man from Isla Ratón] took them a bit of *mañoco* [ground manioc fiber]. Not good, fresh *mañoco*, but gummy, old *mañoco*. That's how the Americans lived there … You see, Platanal is far away from a waterway. It's difficult to carry water. You must walk. There wasn't enough rain nor buckets. [The missionaries] were taken there to die. That was the thought of the prefect and the governor. [But] They are intelligent [the missionaries] … They dug up close to a mountain, near a crick, they dug up, dug up. They sliced a *macanilla* [a palm tree trunk] across, and they joined them together. They joined. They joined. They joined. Then the water flowed to where they were. They washed their clothes there. That took place in Platanal. Then, the Yanomami began to learn... [the NTM] preached the Gospel to them. [But] the Yanomami are too thick. They did not understand. They lived scattered, not fixed at a single placed … While their gardens are growing, they leave for the forest … for three months. So, [the missionaries] did not do anything for three months. They got bored.
>
> Then, they spoke with Miguel Albino. He knows how the Ye'kwana live, quite different from the Yanomami. [The missionaries] said, 'here we cannot work. The Yanomami go away... and they cannot be taught.' Then, Miguel Albino said, 'why don't you go to the Cunucunuma?' He knew. Then, they travelled there. They got there. When they got there, Teodoro [Santana's cousin] was young... They [the missionaries] hang a white blanket with the vowels, a e i o u. Teodoro was with them, seeing the letters. Then, [the missionaries] thought 'here we can, here we can [live, teach]'. They stayed one night there, talking everything through with the *capitanes* [the leaders]. The chief said they could stay."

The narrated path of the NTM ends with Santana explaining that the promise made by the missionaries of education for Ye'kwana children and of healthcare for the community convinced the Ye'kwana to

accept them[9]. At this point in his narration, where both trajectories come together, Santana returned to narrating his and his family's story. We will come back to this shortly.

Knotting a path of encounters

It is perhaps in the narration of his and his family's path, of which he gives more details than he does of his shorter narration of the NTM's, that it is possible to see more clearly how Santana's narration is built as a succession of places where social groups come together and then, after some conflict or death, disband, with people moving up or downriver towards new settlements. In the path of his life, Santana sometimes identifies such places after the big man who led the place, the people who lived there, or by the knowledge that was acquired there. In Gustaaf Verswijver's notable revision of warfare among the Kayapó (1992), he gives evidence of how Kayapó oral traditions narrated raids and their history of warfare, likewise the migration routes along rivers in the Xingú region. Echoing Santana's story, Verswijver shows that in Kayapó narrated trajectories the "points" along the routes are the villages along those same rivers, and that these specific geographical points are sites of group fusion and group schism, which then lead people to continue their journeys to new villages up or downriver.

Indigenous Amazonian narrations, including autobiographical ones, often reflect the existence of centripetal and centrifugal dynamics, which translates as cycles of aggregation and disaggregation, of singularity and multiplicity, of personal autonomy and collectivity (see Course 2014). Among Carib-speakers and other groups in the Guianese shield, as well as for the Ye'kwana, this notion of constant fusion and fission of the settlement as social unit is at the core of their social histories and politics (Arvelo Jiménez 1973, Rivière 1984). Peter Rivière made the argument that one of the defining characteristics of the small social units in which indigenous people used to live in the region was their permanent risk of fission. Schisms would usually happen, as they did along Santana's path, following a conflict among the group's members or the death of its leader. In the latter situation, the community would most likely be totally abandoned and destroyed, whereas in the former the offended party would probably simply leave the group and join another down or up the river. This process would continue thus, in subsequent ruptures and fusions as people moved to other places.

Examinations of other instances where indigenous people see their oral narrations as "paths" or "journeys" have likewise noted that the places that are strung together by the narration of the

[9] Moreira Lauriola argues that, among the Ye'kwana of Brasil, the success of the evangelizing mission depended on the interest of the local people in the school opened by the MEVA missionaries, and reflected a long-sought access to formal education by them (2004, 356-361).

geographical trajectory – communities, houses, or locations where certain feats take place - are places of encounters, where people come to live or interact with others who arrive at the same place or who have already lived there, like in Kayapó stories of the past. This certainly takes place among other indigenous groups that define narrations as journeys or paths (see Kaartinen 2010, Rapaport 2021, Traube 1989). In the case of Santana's narration of the NTM's path, the missionaries encounter an indigenous group who help them along their journey at each location: the Piaroa near Puerto Ayacucho; Miguel Albino, a Baniwa, at Isla Ratón; the Puinave in San Fernando; the Piaroa again in Manapiare; the Yanomami in Platanal; and finally, the Ye'kwana in the Cunucunuma River.

To capture such encounters and moments of group fusion and rupture in narratives of journeys and paths, terms like "nodes" or "knots" have been used in other ethnographic regions (see Fox 2021). An idea raised in the Amazonian literature has been that narratives that follow equivalent logics – that is, the stringing of "nodes" by a character who travels along a geographic route – in some ways are akin to weaving and writing practices that use the knotted cord, such as the Khipu in the Andes (see Chaumeil 2011a, also Brokaw 2010, Salomon 2004). The equivalency identified between these systems springs from the consideration that the same logic of the knotted cord is used as a mnemotechnic technique among other Amerindian groups as well, and that structuring oral stories with those same patterns might likewise be a way to facilitate recalling the past (see Day 1957, Déléage 2007b, Hugh-Jones 2016, Severi 2009). That is, the storyteller might as well be stringing knots along a cord by narrating the character's journey and successive stops. In any case, similar systems that echo different versions of the string-and-knot arrangement can indeed be found among different indigenous groups in Lowland South America (see Chaumeil 2005, 2006). In Venezuela, equivalent ideas come up, for instance, in the Turén invocations among the Pemón or in "writings" among the late Motilones in the Río Negro region (Cruxent 1952, de Armellada 1972). Parallels between the knotted cord and other forms of "writing" – for example, petroglyphs along routes - have also been noted in the literature, both in the Andes and in the Lowlands (see Andrello 2005, Baer et al. 1983, Quilter and Urton 2002).

Movement along narrated paths

The usefulness of the knotted cord arrangement as a memory aide could indeed be one reason why it also seems to be productively used as an ordering tool in oral narrations of past events among indigenous Amazonians (see Gow 2014), as well as in non-indigenous oral and ritual practices that use similar cord-and-knot logics, like the rosary prayer in Catholicism. However, it might also be suggested that another dimension of its use in oral stories has to do with the notion of temporal progression that narratives like

Santana's conjure up, especially through the theme of the journey connecting stops where similar events repeat with some variations. And, moreover, where new events and encounters with alterity are incorporated into the orally traced sequence of successive replicative instances. In other words, the experiences and ideas of temporality and historicity that are formed by how the plot is construed using the cord-and-knot logic. It should be noted briefly that some of the Amazonian ideas of temporality that have been discussed in the Amazonianist literature do manifest themselves in the features of the stories above. For instance, the fact that indigenous histories are relational ones, moulded by the interaction of indigenous people with figures of alterity (Fausto and Heckenberger 2007, 10), is present through the constant interactions with other groups that make up the encounters Santana and his family have along their journey. And something similar could be said about the NTM encountering different indigenous groups at each stop along their journey.

The analytical point has been made that in narrations the sense of time experienced both by the story's characters and by the public does not necessarily equate to abstract clock time (see Bruner 1991, Ricoeur 1980). Rather, the sense of narrative time derives from the meaning assigned to the events experienced by characters in the narration. In this sense, the characters of a story live in a "within-time-ness" quality (Ricoeur 1980, 74; on cultural constructions of time see Gell 2001, Munn 1992), that is, storytelling places them "in" the time of the story, and the latter's temporality does not exist independently from the situations which characters are in, from their reactions to those situations, and from the interactions they engage in. Hence, the arrow of narrative time, whatever form it takes in the story's plot, is marked by how significant events are narratively constructed and arranged. And by how the characters of the story make sense of them. To explore this point in relation to Ye'kwana narrated paths and characters transiting a string-and-knot temporal line constructed by stringing together successive stops a geographical trajectory, consider a third story Santana told me. This time of the path of Wanaadi, the Ye'kwana mythical hero and creator, and Odosha, Wanaadi's enemy and failed replicator. In this episode of the Wätunnä, Wanaadi is escaping from the earthly plane after this becomes contaminated by Odosha. Santana tells a short, non-chanted version of what was a longer and more detailed narrated journey, yet the same notion of geographical movement and successive stops is present.

> **Santana**: "Odosha said to a person: 'What did Wanaadi do here?' 'Ahh, Here, Wanaadi ate this fish.' So, to copy Wanaadi, Odosha began to eat that fish, the leftovers. He ate, although Wanaadi did not do it. He only pretended [to eat] ... He [Wanaadi] only did it to delay [Odosha]. He [Odosha] continued to Picure rapids. There were people there. 'What did Wanaadi do here?' 'Here Wanaadi

ate Picure [agouti].' Odosha took off the picure's head and ate it. He ate there, just like Wanaadi. He [Odosha] was behind him, chasing him. Odosha continued after him. He got to Rayao rapids. Other people were there. 'How long since Wanaadi left?' 'It's being long.' 'What did he do here?' [asked Odosha]. 'Well, he ate *rayao* [catfish].' [The *rayao*] could be seen on a stone, chopped up."

Luis: "Where are those rapids?"

Santana: On the Cunucunuma river. So, Odosha ate there. He cooked *rayao*. That's why Wanaadi would fabricate rapids after rapids, so he [Odosha] would eat. So, he [Wanaadi] made the last rapids. Sangramón they are called, Sangramón rapids. Wanaadi finished off, and from there onwards no more rapids. He arrived at the Orinoco River. He went down the Orinoco. And when he got to Lombriz Island, Wanaadi did eat. He ate roasted earthworms [Sp. *lombriz*]. There he did eat. That's why they called that island Lombriz Island, because Wanaadi ate there. Then, Wanaadi made a looooong turn, so he could see his chaser coming behind him. And then he continued to Samariapo lagoon. He arrived there. There, he sniffed his *yopo*[10], and thus he went underwater. Not here, not there, but under. So, his brother-in-law, Wanato, who was travelling with him, asked, 'Wanaadi, Wanaadi, Wanaadi?,' searching for him. He found his *yopo* pot. It had ants. So, he [Wanato] dried it up [and] he found out where Wanaadi had gone, underwater.

They came out in Ciudad Bolivar. They came out there, with their canoe. Again, there were people [living] there. Then, right behind them, Odosha arrived. Rapids are tough there; one cannot go through. Well, so, Odosha had to walk on land towards Ciudad Bolivar. He got there … After a battle [had taken place] between black men and the criollos, Odosha could continue. He got far away, to the sea. There were people there. There were entrails there. Not human entrails, but animals'. [Odosha] asked, 'Was Wanaadi here?' 'Yes.' 'Has it been too long?' 'No, he just left.' 'How did he leave?' 'Well, you have to take out your gut. He did so.' Then, Odosha, like Wanaadi, took out his entrails. So, there he laid [dead]. But Wanaadi had not taken his entrails out. It was only to deceit [Odosha].

Then, [Odosha] resurrected. Friends came and helped him, healed him, resurrected him. Then, he continued to heaven, Odosha did, following Wanaadi. There, he found a person. He [that person] was chopping, chopping, chopping iron bars with a file. [Odosha] asked him, 'has it been long since Wanaadi passed by?' 'Yes, a while ago.' 'How did he pass through?' 'We, he chopped up

[10] The DMT-containing seeds of the *yopo* tree, *Anadenanthera peregrina*.

these bars and went through.' Odosha began cutting the bars. When he almost finished cutting, he would fall asleep. When he wakes up, the bars are grown again. [Odosha] has to start over. That happened to Odosha. He couldn't enter heaven, where Wanaadi is. He cannot get there."[11]

In this narrated path, the spatial displacement of the characters becomes more explicit as details of their movement from stop to stop along their route are given. They make long turns along the river, travel by canoe, travel underwater, walk on land, have to stop and then continue, etc. Added to the description of the route, this contributes to the sense of physical and temporal displacement. Then, there is the theme of the pursuit, which we also saw in Santana's story of the path of the NTM. In that case, it was the authorities, including the national guards and the priests, that chased the missionaries stop after stop. The element of the pursuit is a recurrent one in Ye'kwana stories – we will see instances of this in chapter 3. Guss gives one in his analysis of a Ye'kwana myth in which Wanaadi is taken forcibly to Caracas to face crucifixion (1986, 420). In this story, it is similarly the Catholics who pursue Wanaadi, as they do with the NTM in their narrated journey.

That Ye'kwana oral stories reflect the incorporation of historical events or Christian elements into them is a point highlighted by Guss (1981, 1986). The colonization by external actors in particular is reflected in the theme of the pursuit. As in Santana's story of the NTM's path, the theme of the pursuit has also been used more generally in indigenous narrations in the Amazon to tell the stories of evangelical missionaries and millenarian figures who, having been assimilated in some form into the indigenous position, are seen as victims of similar persecution from external forces[12]. That is the case, for instance, among indigenous groups of Northwestern Amazonia, of the figure of Sophie Müller, the American missionary who led the massive conversion of Arawak groups in the region to Protestantism (see Wright 1999, 2004). The stories of Müller these people tell speak of the persecutions she suffered from Colombian authorities, the guerrillas, and the Catholic Church. Interestingly, it might also be the case that in Santana's narration of the pursuit of the NTM the idea that these are chased by the authorities has also fed on the own mythologies of the NTM as an organization. The latter has produced printed material, and widely promoted the transmission of stories of the tragedies suffered by missionaries all over the world, from

[11] Other versions of this story of Wanaadi's departure from the earthly plane are given by Guss (1986, 418-419), and de Civrieux too gives episodes belonging to such journey (1997)

[12] On the use of the notion of the pursuit by indigenous people as an element in narrative journeys, see Wright 1993.

plane crashes to being murdered by indigenous peoples. Among evangelicals in the Venezuelan Amazon, booklets with such stories have circulated widely.

In Santana's narration, him switching between Odosha, Wanaadi, and Wanaadi's brother-in-law permits us to see the connection between geographical displacement and the pursuit in more detail. When one character arrives at a place pursuing another, that one has already left. On the other hand, besides the sense of temporal progression given by the physical displacement across successive stops there are also the repetitive events that take place at each stop. As in the two stories told before, here the shape of events at each location resembles that of those that took place before, with variations. Like the NTM on their journey, the travellers encounter some local people, receive some help from them, and then some hardship or setback makes them continue to the next stop. Such replication of events and their variation in detail gives a further sense of continuity to the journey[13]. That is, not just the physical movement along a route connecting stops, but also the successive actualization of a pre-existing logic at each of the latter configures a common line that progresses forward with every new addition. New events are incorporated into the narration in the forms of new stops along the journey. In other words, the structure of narrative paths permits the incorporation of new events into a known logic, as well as their chronological tracking. For example, according to David Guss' interpretation of a version of Wanaadi's journey leaving the earthly plane, this narrated journey traces the colonial history in which the Ye'kwana came into contact with the Spanish, the Dutch, and finally the Americans (Guss 1986, 418-420).

In sum, in Santana's stories the sense of temporal progression is intrinsically tied to the characters' movement in space and time, while the temporal beats that mark its forward flow come about as stops along the journey. If we are to assume that this might indeed reflect an equivalency with the logic of the knotted cord, Santana's journey narrations could then perhaps be equated to a weaving carried out by the narrator as the characters of the story move along their route. In such a weaving, the "knots" come about as successive moments of convergence and bifurcation, where events repeat, and where social groups come successively into existence and disappear in time. The tracing, then, becomes a genealogical

[13] Repetition has been identified as a typical narrative resource in indigenous Amazonian oral stories, specifically in biographical ones (Oakdale 2005, Déléage 2007a). In them, it is used to create continuities with past time, especially with primordial events, and thus to generate cultural schemas for social action in the present. It has also been seen as a narrative form indigenous people have for dealing with alterity and for forming dialogical narratives between the self and the other (Oakdale Ibid, 78); it permits the identification of the narrator and the story's characters with the collective, and creates uniformity and mimesis with a common history. In a sense, it collapses difference into sameness and "denies time" by collapsing past, present, and future (Ibid, 109) (see also following chapters).

tracking that uses physical movement and geographical routes to connect narrated events in space and time.

Down a common path

In Santana's story of his encounter with the NTM, the latter's path and that of Santana and his family converge at a small settlement on the Cunucunuma river. After arriving among the Ye´kwana, the NTM founded the first evangelical community in the region, Acanaña, where Santana and many other Ye'kwana moved to and converted to Christianity in. They joined, as Santana called it, the "path of the *evangelio*", Yk. *evangelio emadö* (see Chapter 3). Santana told me of the Ye'kwana's encounter with the NTM on other occasions as well. In one of them, we were both sat on a wooden bench sheltering from the sun under one of the mango trees that surround the central area of the community. That time, Santana took a wooden stick from the sandy floor and drew a straight horizontal line on the sand with it. He then drew a smaller one across, right at the middle. Pointing to where both lines intersected, Santana told me: "From there onwards we walked with the *Nuevas Tribus*". Santana used this idea on multiple occasions, and other people I met who lived with the NTM also referred to their time with the Americans in the same terms: "We walked with them" - Sp. "*caminamos juntos*". This use of the idea of walking, which will be explored in the next chapter, echoes the association between temporal progression and movement in space that come up in narratives of the past. However, in any case, the relevant point here is to underline that, according to Santana's stories, the Ye'kwana encounter with the missionaries constitutes a moment of convergence of separate trajectories, from which they begin to "walk" together.

After Santana's narration of how the NTM arrived at that point of encounter, on the Cunucunuma river, he resumed the narration of his path. Like Santana and his family, many other semi-mobile bands of Ye'kwana people in the Cunucunuma region moved to and settled in Acanaña. This was also the community from which the NTM would reach other Ye'kwana people in the region in the following decades. It was Santana himself who, under the direction of the American missionaries, led the foundation of the new community, bypassing the traditional authority of the elders, in this case of Paúl Padamo, the leader of the Cunucunuma Ye'kwana. Only some years afterwards, Santana and another young Ye'kwana man would become the first Ye'kwana pastors appointed by the NTM. Still at an early age and without going through the traditional ways of inheriting a position of leadership, both became the new leaders of Acanaña. Resenting this breakup and with his leadership undermined, Padamo initially resisted giving in and moving down the Cunucunuma to join his former followers in their new community. But, in the end, he was forced to move to Acanaña too.

In his account of the following decades, Santana carries on relating group schisms and fusions. The leadership conflict with Paúl Padamo was an important rupture, for instance. Another important conflict erupted in the years of Venezuela's two-party system after many Ye'kwana took opposite political sides. Santana's siblings were some of those and, to this day, they keep their distance and still recall those bitter moments. A similar feud happened again during the polarizing politics of the Chávez years. And yet another took place over the support of Christian Ye'kwana for the NTM, particularly following the denunciation of one American missionary for molesting many Ye'kwana.

However, from the moment his narration got to the point where they moved to a sedentary community, Santana stops narrating lives as geographical journeys. In his relation of group schisms and ruptures, with everybody already settled in a sedentary community, rather than moving off to a new settlement up or downriver, the dissenting party would now move to another part of the community. For instance, following the feud over the support for the NTM, the denouncing party abandoned the NTM-backed church and founded another church in the other half of the community. This echoes what Verswijver describes happened among the Kayapó after they became sedentary. The group divisions that used to drive the journeys of their oral histories now would only entail the formation of separate societies at the same location. That is, oral stories no longer tracked the geographical displacement across successive locations, despite the persistence of group divisions and fusions. In the case of the Ye'kwana from Acanaña, sedentarization probably caused that change to an important extent, and another factor might have been associated with the transformations triggered by their new Christian lives. These changes and the transformations that took place along with conversion to Christianity will be explored in the following chapters.

Schisms that took place among Ye'kwana in Acanaña can be traced to the present day, as these decades-old feuds still keep warring Ye'kwana families on tense terms (see García Briceño 2022). After breaking up, these families opened their own churches in Acanaña, and, nowadays, some of these churches have opened branches in Puerto Ayacucho and are led by the descendants of those Ye'kwana involved in the initial conflicts. Maranatha, the Tovars' church in Carijunagua, is one of them. Santana moved to Puerto Ayacucho to work full time with the NTM in the eighties. And he and his son Ignacio opened Maranatha in the mid-2000s when Carijunagua, their extended-family community, began to grow. Today, even though Maranatha's congregation has grown after other Ye'kwana have moved to Puerto Ayacucho, its core is still made up by Santana's extended family.

Santana died right before I finished my main period of fieldwork, in 2017. Days before his death, sensing what was about to happen, he summoned his adult children and asked them to put some longstanding conflicts with other members of Maranatha to rest. Santana had been ill for days, probably with not-fully-treated malaria. He was worried that yet another rupture might occur shortly after his passing, this time in Carijunagua and at Maranatha. In the decades after Santana founded Carijunagua, the community had grown as some of Santana's children and their respective families had moved in. Some close affines have come to live there too, as well as more distantly related Ye'kwana families who have moved to Puerto Ayacucho in recent years. In his sickbed, Santana was afraid that, after his passing, Maranatha's congregation would disband, as had happened at other stops along his narrated life's path. And, indeed, Santana's premonitions proved right. He died some days later, and it did not take long for old conflicts to burst open. The sisters of Aurora, Ignacio's wife, and another Ye'kwana family soon left Maranatha for another Ye'kwana church in the city centre. And they took others with them. Another Ye'kwana couple and their children left too. Santana's preoccupations and the rupture that finally took place take us back to the point above about characters in narrations existing *in* the time of the story. That is, to the notion conjured up in Santana's narration that people's lives, too, traverse along paths made of successive moments of fusion and fission. Santana's preoccupations before he died underscore this point. The same events that he and his family, as characters in his narration of their life-path, went through at each stop along their journey and the things they cared about also worried Santana on his sickbed. Santana worried that at the last knot of his path thus far, his death would cause people's trajectories to drift apart towards other churches, as they finally did, in ruptures like those that took place at the many locations along Santana's life-path.

Chapter 2

Beating with the Tovars, or what it means to walk

Santana, as we have seen, described the time he and his family lived with the NTM as the time they "walked" with the Americans; and so did other older Ye'kwana. That conversation under the mango tree took place in the early days of my fieldwork. In it, Santana also used a similar idea to refer to their Christian lives. Since the moment his and his family's "path" converged with that of the NTM, he told me, they have been "walking" on the "path of the *evangelio*". He also said that they have been "walking" with Christ. I remember back then noting down those expressions in my notebook without giving them too much importance. After all, I remember thinking, similar metaphors of walking and paths abound in many languages, and they are common among evangelicals in many places – "walking with Christ, being in Jesus' path" and so on. Thus, they faded away. As described before, it was only months after living with the Tovar extended family that I came back to these expressions after registering them successively in multiple situations through my fieldwork, and after seeing them come up linked to the social language of paths shared mainly by older generations of Ye'kwana.

One of the moments when the use of "walking" started to become inescapable was when people in Carijunagua began to talk about my own time living with them saying that I had been "walking with them" – Yk. "*iiña jadä Duichä nojoima*". By that time, I had already been living and travelling with the Tovar and their church's congregation for months. Throughout this time, I had seen them using the notion of "walking" to talk about the development of their lives, to describe people's speeches, to refer to the idea of living together, and so on. The comment that I was "walking" with them had become one part of a regular two-fold explanation they gave to other Ye'kwana who had not met me before and were curious as to my presence among the Tovar. The second part had to do with an unexpected situation that involved my initial arrival in Carijunagua. This was at the core of what later I understood my Ye'kwana interlocutors meant by walking. It involved a boy named Cristian, Santana's deceased grandson.

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I never got to know Cristian, who had died shortly before I moved in with his extended family in Carijunagua for the first time, but, as my fieldwork advanced, I eventually began to acknowledge the possibility that he and I could indeed be the same person. It was not entirely easy for me at the beginning,

I must say. It all used to make me feel a bit uncomfortable. In the early months of my time with what would go on to become my own Ye'kwana family I used to try to correct them whenever they called me Cristian, or I would uncomfortably try to discourage them when they treated me in the same overgenerous way I thought they had used to treat their deceased boy. But to no avail. And so, as fieldwork progressed, I began to respond to either of my now-two names, Luis or Cristian – or, lovingly, Duichä or Cödöana, respectively.

It all began shortly after the sunny afternoon when I first drove my 1984 long-chassis jeep into the white-sand central area of Carijunagua. That day I met Santana and his adult son Ignacio, who were both making repairs to their church. They invited me to visit again the following days. Then in his early fifties, Ignacio is a wide-faced, broad-shouldered, short guy with the robust phenotype of all Ye'kwana. He kindly received me during those days and agreed to teach me some Ye'kwana language and to talk with me about Ye'kwana Christianity. It was on one of those initial visits that Ignacio's wife, Aurora, approached me, with two of Ignacio's sisters standing shyly behind her. They looked a bit mysterious, as if they were up to something. Aurora did the talking. They had been looking at me from afar for the previous days and wanted to know who "the boy" that had been coming to "study" with Ignacio was. The thing was, they explained, that that boy looked exactly like Aurora and Ignacio's recently deceased son, Cristian. "Identical. It's like I was watching him", said Aurora without taking her eyes off my face. Ignacio's sisters re-affirmed profusely that impression with wide smiles on their faces.

It was impossible to have foreseen back then that that first encounter was to define my entire fieldwork and relationship with the Tovars to this day. As time passed, what had transpired in that interaction moved to another level. To my surprise, since my early days in Carijunagua, it was as if I had been a family member all along, one that, say, was returning to the community after having been away for a while. The Tovars were automatically at ease with my presence there and would look after me enthusiastically. They were excited to talk about everything, welcomed me immediately into their houses, and kept giving me food. It was then, as I began to join them on their visits to other Ye'kwana communities and churches, that they started to explain my presence to other Ye'kwana. To my initial surprise, when they met Ye'kwana who had not met me before, the Tovars, especially my mom Aurora and my aunts would tell their close and distant relatives that I was the son of Ignacio and Aurora. They certainly acknowledged that I was indeed a criollo anthropologist called Luis, but they added that I also happened to be Cristian.

To the incredulous looks on other Ye'kwana's faces, the three women would point to how physically similar I was to the late Cristian. Cristian was Ignacio's and Aurora's youngest son, and he had died just a

month before my arrival, unable to treat his life-long illness due to the medicine shortages that were hitting Venezuela at the time. I still remember the many awkward occasions I had to go through when my aunts would call me to introduce me to unknown Ye'kwana and the latter would stare at me studiously to confirm the similarity. Countless times I had that inexplicable bodily sensation of feeling someone is looking at you, only to turn around and discover a pair of eyes fixed at me and a wide smile beneath. I would smile back and get an answer along these lines: "you are *igualito* (exactly alike)". It was only logical that more and more people quickly started calling me Cristian and treating me as if I was their boy, to my initial confusion and awkwardness. "Cristian, go do this", "Cödiana, your dad that", "Cristian, speak to your little brother Ricky". Some would switch between Luis and Cristian while some others would just use the kin term they used for Cristian.

As time passed, the Tovars' explanations to other Ye'kwana incorporated the part of me "walking" with them. By then, I had already been living and travelling with my Ye'kwana family and their congregation for months, joining them on their evangelizing trips and on their visits to other Ye'kwana churches and communities. I had also by then noticed the use of "paths" in the language used by older and adult Ye'kwana. One example of this, we already saw, was Santana's description of life trajectories and stories as actual geographical routes of successive stops along which people "walked". And paths were also a recurrent theme in Ye'kwana primordial stories told by the elders. Considering all this, and in order to point out what "walking" meant – and, with that, what it meant that I "walked" with the Tovar and they did so with the NTM –, I went one day to my dad Ignacio to ask him.

A walk in Ignacio's living room

The day I came to Ignacio with the question of what "walking" meant, we were sitting around a shaky metal table in the empty, concrete-floor living room of his modest gray-brick house. It was a sunny day, the door was open, and we could hear the people in the community going about their daily businesses. While Santana would tell me stories and lecture me freely in our "classes" about many things, I used to go to Ignacio with doubts about things I had heard people in the community saying, with questions from Santana's "classes", or to discuss with him ideas I might have had. Ignacio, a second generation Ye'kwana Christian, is a natural teacher with a pedagogical vein and with a remarkable, almost anthropological ability to distance himself from his culture and to reflect and comment on it. This came across especially that day in his explanation of "walking".

What the Ye'kwana refer to by "walking", Ignacio told me from the plastic chair he was sat on, could hardly entail the same meaning as the Spanish verb *caminar* – literally, to walk – as in moving one step forward after the other. To explain what he rather understood by "walking", Ignacio stood up from his chair and made me stand up too. Standing by my side, he interlaced his left arm with my right one. Joined thus and making me coordinate my strides with his, Ignacio led me in a short walk across the room. I clumsily tried to imitate the pace of his strides. Not convinced that this expressed what he meant, Ignacio continued trying to perform this "walking" for me. He went again around his living room on his own, this time making slow jumping strides, pausing for a second every time one foot hit the floor. Still not convinced, he tried again, now leaping forward with his two feet together and, once more, pausing briefly every time his two feet hit the gray-cement floor, and so producing a regular cadence. It is, he tried to put it into words, "as if people did not have feet". Instead, it is "like hits, pulsations" – Sp. "*como golpes, latidos*".

Looking for another way to put it, Ignacio compared what he was trying to perform to a clock. "It [walking through pulsations] is like a clock – a clock does not have feet and yet it walks". Ignacio continued to elaborate on this comparison: He said that when there were no clocks among the Ye'kwana they used to orient themselves by following the sun's trajectory as he, the sun, which the Ye'kwana used to say was a person, also "walked" along "his path" in the firmament – Yk. "*shi wojoimadö chaäämadö ai*". Ignacio was trying to say that, just like a clock or like his own performance in his living room, the sun too moves along his "path" by making constant jumping "beats". Ignacio's explanation and performance immediately brought to my mind videos I had seen of the once-performed Ye'kwana dancing rituals. People interlaced their arms or held on to each other by the shoulders and followed one another in line while synchronizing their steps to the beatings of a drum – Yk. *sanjuda* – and the sound of a long bamboo flute – Yk. *wanna* – the dancing leaders played at the head of the line. I mentioned this to Ignacio, and he immediately made the connection: "Like the beatings [of the drum], one walks … It is the drumming that walks".

It is the drumming that walks. At some point in our talk, trying to explain what he meant, Ignacio used a comparison that he quickly discarded, but that we could use to convey his reasoning. He said that this idea of walking by beating was "like the marching of the military". This certainly resonated with the video recordings of the traditional dancing of the Ye'kwana. Curiously, after having known the Ye'kwana for some years, this idea also resonated with more everyday forms of walking common among them. Something that came naturally, almost unconsciously, when I travelled with the Tovars or we visited other churches or just went to the city center, was that one walked in line with others. This is a common image in Puerto Ayacucho, among Ye'kwana but also among other indigenous groups. For example, it is also

common to see groups of Yanomami walking in line crossing the streets and on sidewalks. They, like many Ye'kwana, would walk in lockstep, raising slightly and very quickly one foot after the other, as if there were small, invisible staircase steps ahead. Significantly, similar forms of walking have been described among hunter-gatherers and mobile indigenous groups in other parts of the world (see Gooch 2008, Tuck-Po 2008). Among the Ye'kwana, people from younger generations who grew up in the city do not tend to walk like that all the time, but with time I became used to identifying Ye'kwana families who were not from the city by how they walked.

Walking in Amazonia

There have been a small number of interpretations on the meaning of trekking and walking in indigenous Amazonia. For instance, Terrence Turner sustained that, among Gê speakers, trekking articulates the authority of fathers-in-law over sons-in-law. Another interpretation was that of Lévi-Strauss, who argued that Nambikwara treks reflect a pattern of cultural dualism tied to economic cycles and seasonal behavior tied to gender specialization (see Rival 2002, 17). Yet, it is in the evident connection between walking and mobility that we might find some resonance with Ignacio's embodied explanation of walking. Referring to what trekking means for the Hourani from the Ecuadorian Amazon, Laura Rival (2002) notices that, for the Hourani, "walking" or "trekking" is a broad notion that implies other actions like going hunting and gathering in the forest. Thus, for this group, walking along, for example, hunting paths, involves an embodied experience of perceiving the forest, its smells, the vegetation, and so on. Trekking, thus, encapsulates a lifestyle of nomadism and mobility, while also being a space for the unfolding of social life. In this sense, there have also been associations in the Amazonianist literature between walking and paths as spaces for the construction of sociality and kin relationships (see Schuler Zea 2010, Stang 2008). Movements along paths through the forest have also been identified as dangerous situations due to the risk of ontological transformation and the possibility of encounters with beings with which there might be predatory relations (see García 2012, Lima 1999).

Significantly, the use of the notion of "walking" in connection to the idea of "paths" and "journeys" as trajectories of moments of group fusion and fission, and specifically to how these cycles reflected seasonality, also comes up in Verswijver's and other authors' exploration of Kayapó journeys we referenced before (see Lea 1986, Turner 1979, Verswijver 1992). Trekking for the Kayapó was an activity associated precisely with their constant movements from village to village, and with the seasonal cycles

of warfare and group aggregation during the wet season and dispersion during the rest of the year[14]. This association between trekking, journeys, and the aggregation and disaggregation of groups along the way according to seasonality echoes the association in Santana's narrations between physical displacement along "life paths" and the succession of places and moments of group fusion and fission along geographical routes.

In Ignacio's explanation, associations between walking, paths, and rhythmic displacement also came up multiple times. One, for instance, was in his comment about the sun "beating" along a "path" in the firmament. Another was when we touched upon the point that I had "walked" with the Tovars. After all, besides the question of what "walking" meant, I had also gone to Ignacio with that of what walking *with* someone else meant - not only had I walked with the Tovar, but they too had walked with the American missionaries. Ignacio said that the same logic of walking as beating applied here. And he added that, in fact, when I were gone from the field, people in Carijunagua would talk about the "paths" along which I "beat" with them while living there. According to him, for instance, people would say "*Luis tö'täjödö sadä*" – "Luis beat here". Or that, when we lived together, we all "beat" together or the same – Yk. "*änönge tameedä cötä'tadöcoomo cönajäcä*" –, meaning that we did so coordinately.

The idea of displacement along geographical paths by beating also came through when, in our conversation, I brought up a recording made by the late anthropologist Walter Coppens in the seventies of a crew of Ye'kwana paddling down a river in a canoe. In the recording one can listen to the travelers paddling to the beatings of a drum someone in the canoe is playing rhythmically, and to a flute that joins the drumming occasionally. Ignacio saw there the same idea, and he compared it to the journeys I had myself embarked on with the Tovars' congregation to Ye'kwana communities in the Caura region as part of their evangelizing campaigns. During those journeys, we, as a congregation, always walked towards the host community playing Christian music, with Ignacio or Santana leading us upfront (see for instance Video 1[15]). Ignacio used this example to explain to me that the paddlers, like us, were moving with the music. It was not exactly the same, though, Ignacio clarified. In the past it was not Christian songs, but drums and a bone flute – Yk. *fiishu, cawaadi dhe'jä* – that had to accompany Ye'kwana people as they embarked on such journeys. The Ye'kwana term Ignacio used to refer to the team of paddlers was *ye'cwanamo*, which translates as literally "those who beat". To ratify his comparison to what Maranatha congregation did

[14] See also on the Kayapó, Bamberger 1979, also Vaughan Howard 2001, for a similar logic of movement and seasonal migration among the Waiwai.

[15] **Video 1**. Maranatha and Maripa churches enter Las Pavas, a Ye'kwana community in mid-Caura River, as part of an evangelizing campaign in 2017 (Recorded by a Ye'kwana boy, Santana Jr.): http://u.pc.cd/6H8otalK

when we travelled to Caura, this same term is used today mostly by elder Ye'kwana to refer to people who play music in general. To them, Christian musicians, even if they do no longer play drums, are, like the paddlers, "those who beat" – Sp. "*los que golpean".*

Spirits down cosmic paths

During my time in Carijunagua, there were multiple stories and everyday talk involving spiritual beings in which this connection between beating and movement also came up. For example, Santana, in one of our conversations about what used to be the ritual work of Ye'kwana shamans, referred to this. He was explaining to me how the *juwai* – the shaman – used to bring to the earthly plane the spirit-doubles of beings from other levels of the cosmos. According to descriptions elder Ye'kwana and especially non-Christian Ye'kwana give, the body has an animating force – Yk. *do'ta* – in the chest which comes from Wanaadi and travels back to live with him after dying. The Ye'kwana associate this force with the heart – Yk. *äwanö*. Besides this life-force, elders also say that a person has multiple spirit-doubles or shadows/reflections – Yk. *ä'cato* – which can become detached at any point through someone's life (see de Barandiarán 1979; Guss 1990, 49-51; Gongora 2017, 79-108). Standing in front of me imitating a shaman, Santana raised one arm above his head and slowly let it go down, simulating the descent of the lost *ä'cato* after its recovery by the shaman. Turning his hand rhythmically, he made a paced sound with his voice: "fui, fui, fui … hoo, hoo, hoo". The beatings were the sign that the spirit-double was arriving in the earthly plane. Throughout our talks, Santana made this same onomatopoeic sound on another occasion when he was explaining to me how to recognize the presence of a dead person's spirit-double arriving in the vicinity of the community. According to him, the beating sound – Sp. "*los golpes*" – would give its presence away.

That a spirit-double makes drumming sounds was common knowledge among many of my Ye'kwana interlocutors, who saw this as a normal feature of the former. And people also talked about the *ä'cato* of dead people re-transiting, after they die, the "paths" they used to "walk" along while alive. This was the case, for instance, of an indigenous "queen" whose spirit, according to the stories of some of my Ye'kwana friends, travels through the forest in the Upper Orinoco region along with her party. This group is said to always follow the same route that they used to travel along in the past, which take them, through a tunnel at the bottom of one curve of the Casiquiare river, to the Cataniapo river further north. Ignacio himself told me once about an occasion when he and another Ye'kwana man, while trekking through the forest in the area, heard the queen's party approaching through the woods. They heard voices and dogs barking,

and, when the party passed by, Ignacio felt a strong breeze and a pronounced smell of annatto. He added that drumming was heard accompanying the travelling spirits.

In the explanations elder Ye'kwana give of traditional singing and dancing, this idea of spiritual journeying and drumming is common. In his classic exploration of shamanic societies, Mircea Eliade already noted that percussion is a widespread, defining feature of spiritual journeying, including among Amazonian societies (Eliade 2004, also Harner 1980). The Tovars, like most Christian Ye'kwana, no longer sing or dance the chanted "paths" of the Wätunnä. However, elders who grew up singing it and dancing it explain that the transit of spirit-doubles along sung paths, too, was done to the beats of a drum or a gourd rattle. This applied especially to two genres of traditional Ye'kwana music associated with the idea of journeying: shamanic singing, and the ritual chants that told the larger body of the Wätunnä stories – Yk. *ameedi*. In the case of shamanic singing, for instance, the Ye'kwana shaman used a gourd rattle – Yk. *tucudi tödhe'cwamö* – with "magic crystals" – Yk. *widiiki* – in it which were said to have been brought from the upper levels of the cosmos (see de Civrieux 1997; Gongora 2017, 129-131; Guss 1986, 1990)[16]. In fact, according to Ye'kwana primordial stories, the first Ye'kwana shamans – Yk. *medatia* – became so, fundamentally, by learning chants and their associated rhythmic arrangements[17]. In the case of the singing and dancing of the Wätunnä during ritual occasions, this was led by a master of chants – Yk. *ameedi edhaajä* – who, together with his chanted declamation, would be beating a drum – Yk. *sanjuda*[18]. In those

[16] The use of rattles rather than drums is a distinctive feature of shamanism in most indigenous groups in South America, compared to other regions (see Sullivan 1988, 426-431). Yet, percussive idiophones are well extended and developed in indigenous South America, including drums, jingle and hollow rattles, stamping tubes, etc. (see Izikowitz 1970, 7-160).

[17] There are multiple versions of how rhythmic chants and percussion instruments were incorporated by the Ye'kwana in primordial times. One story is given in de Civrieux's registered version of the Wätunnä (1997, 144). According to it, Wanatu, a man, initially had a wooden flute which he had made following a model used by the people who brought down the giant tree that connected the earthly plane to the sky – which the Ye'kwana say is the Mount Marawaka in Upper Orinoco. Wanatu blew it and this made the inhabitants of Kahu, the next cosmic level up, came down to earth. They came down singing and dancing. These people taught Wanatu to celebrate the clearing of a new garden and named him the first master of chants – Yk. *adeemi edhaajä* – and master of dancing – Yk. *wanwanna edhaajä*. They also taught him how to do a *wasaha*, a dance stick, which Wanatu was to use to "keep the rhythm" and "to call the food spirits" that lived in the earth by beating it on the floor. They also made *wanna*, the long bamboo flute. Finally, they made the drums and the maracas. With all of that, they danced and celebrated. And they told Wanatu that with those instruments he could learn the "words" of the people of the sky and their songs and stories. With these he could summon them again and they would come down again. In other words, it was the music, and specially its percussive patterns, that made connection with the spiritual world possible.

[18] The generative force of the percussive sound is an important element in multiple Amerindian mythologies, especially in the origin and arrangement of the cosmos (e.g. Barabás and Bartolomé 1979; Wilbert 1977, 58-61), but also in making ontological transformation possible and in the origins and actions of shamans (Bartolomé 1979; Sullivan Ibid, 426-431). Many of the Ye'kwana I know carry with them a small gourd when they travel – Yk. *ma'da* –

ritual events, the spirit-doubles of singers and dancers were all said to be travelling along the routes described in the sung paths as these were enunciated together with the corresponding percussion[19]. Phrases my interlocutors used to describe those actions included such as, "with the drum, they sang," "with the drum, they travelled" or "with the drum, they danced."

In her study of Ye'kwana singing, Gongora (2017) argued that Ye'kwana chanted "paths" were formed by the melodic motif specifically meant for each chanting occasion, even though songs used in separate occasions might share the same lyrics. Nonetheless, at least from how my Ye'kwana friends describe it, out of the melody, what they identify as the defining feature of displacement along sung paths is the description of the cosmographic route and, fundamentally, its changing rhythmic patterns, the progression of beats. Like this, Eliade notes that, in shamanic journeying, drumming is often conceived as the shaman being "carried" by the drum (see Eliade 2004, 168-174). In Ye'kwana traditional singing, rhythmic displacement was usually achieved with a percussion instrument, but the cyclical repetition of stanzas that described the cosmographic routes also contributed to the rhythmic arrangement of the chants. Thus, the body of chants all painted a sung view of the cosmos as made of rhythmic trajectories[20]. In such descriptions, verse structures repeat for over a couple of stanzas, and then the path moves on to a new verse structure, to new lyrics, and to new percussive patterns, which are likewise repeated for a certain number of times. This conjures up a form of mantric declamation that, as such, is made of rhythmic cycles and a percussive base.

Chasing beats

Cristian died just a month before my arrival in Carijunagua, and my departure from the field was marked by the heart-breaking death of his granddad, pastor Santana. One day, months after I had finished my main period of fieldwork, Ignacio told me that weeks after his dad had died, he heard some Ye'kwana commenting on a video where Ignacio himself was seen predicating. They were saying that he spoke just like his dad used to. They said that it was as if Santana was now *inside* Ignacio, as if, Ignacio explained to me, now that Santana had died, they both had become the same person, or as though Ignacio had "killed" Santana and taken his place. This idea of one person substituting for another who had recently passed

which, they explained to me, they rattle pointing towards potential dangers to keep them protected. The most regular use I registered was against police and national guard check points to not get stopped.

[19] On songs and shamanic incantations as paths and journeys in indigenous Amazonia see Langdon (2013), Ramos and Epps (2018, 2020), and Townsley (1993).

[20] On versions of indigenous Amazonians' constructions of the cosmos as musical, see Basso 1985; Hill 1993, 2009a; Wright 2015.

clearly resonated with what I myself had experienced when I arrived in Carijunagua. However, by the time of Santana's death, after almost two years living with the Ye'kwana, I had witnessed the same idea of substitutes popping up in other guises on various occasions.

Take, for instance, what happened with Ricky, Ignacio's and Aurora's other son and Cristian's older brother, when I noticed a sudden change in him at some point during the first half of my fieldwork. It had been as if Ricky, then in his late teens, had become an adult overnight. People were also acting differently towards him. Do not get me wrong, he was the same Ricky as always - friendly, joyful, and chatty. But now he would spend more time with his brows furrowed, pensive, looking as if he was considering some pressing matters, and he carried a certain air of self-importance. When I arrived in Carijunagua Ricky had just graduated from high school and he would spend most of his time hanging around with his cousins, talking about girls and sex, playing football, and visiting school mates in neighboring communities. Yet, as he began to spend more time in the community after graduating, he started to take on more responsibilities there. He suddenly looked more mature. The change was more obvious when events took place in the community, or when the congregation attended invitations to other churches. Carrying a guitar on his shoulders, Ricky would now walk right behind his dad Ignacio to greet the pastor and the authorities of the local church and to talk to them. As far as I knew him, Ricky was a shy guy who would only recite a hurried verse in front of the congregation, but now in the church he would push himself to talk for longer, adding reflections on the verses, giving moral judgements about the behavior of other youngsters, or trying to engage with the public.

To my eyes, Ricky was looking more and more like his dad, as though he was consciously imitating him. Ignacio, a cheerful guy, could also drastically change his behavior every time he was in full chief or pastor mode. He would turn serious and look busy, as if dealing with very urgent matters, and he would treat people with rigorous manners, giving commands to the members of the church's youth choir and not a single smile. Standing on the stage, he would likewise moralize about matters of the community, or he would distribute tasks to be done by the congregation. Now Ricky looked like a younger replica of him. It was also in those days when I heard Ricky making fun with some of the girls of the community around the latter having to cook some food for him. They were refusing, and Ricky replied, half joking-half serious: "Doesn't matter, I am the next *cajichaana* [leader, chief] anyway". I eventually commented with Ignacio on the changes I had seen in Ricky, and I mentioned what Ricky had said about becoming the next chief. For Ignacio there was an easy answer to all this: "He said it because he is my son, because he comes behind me". And added: "That's his path. It doesn't depend on whether he wants it or

not. It is automatic. He was born with that, that is his path ... After Ricky, his son will come. And that will continue thus".

The use Ye'kwana make of the idea of "paths" to describe life trajectories, collective or not, is something that we began to see in the previous chapter[21]. A similar association also comes up in Ignacio's description of what "walking" means, especially in his association of someone's life with the "paths" they "walk" or "beat" along. Ignacio's explanation of what happened with Ricky and what people said after his dad's death opened the possibility that generational succession perhaps might be considered as a form of displacement along a "path". To support this, in our conversation in his living room, Ignacio referred to a definition of ancestors that I have heard from other Ye'kwana on other occasions, namely, that ancestors are "the ones who began to walk" - Sp. "*Los que comenzaron a caminar*". People also said that, today, one "walks behind" ancestors on their "paths". According to such descriptions, ancestors – Yk. *adaichoomo* – inaugurated "paths" that are continuous with those "walked" by today's Ye'kwana. Expressions of such walking along paths, in the eyes of my Ye'kwana interlocutors, are children following their parents, but also a community "walking" behind its leader, and leaders in turn "walking" behind leaders who came before, each with its respective extended family, all the way back to primordial figures.

Ignacio described this idea of walking/beating behind leaders as "chasing the sound of the drum" - Sp. "*persiguiendo el sonido del tambor*" – meaning chasing the beat. In the canoe paddling down the river, for instance, paddlers coordinated their strokes to the beatings of the drummer, and thus they advanced, beating forward. When it comes to people "beating" behind others, Ignacio's reasoning echoes that same logic of a displacement through synchronization to the drumming of someone ahead. Beside the idea of "chasing" a beat, I also registered descriptions of generational succession as a "pulling" - in Spanish, *halar* -, as if the one who "walks" ahead, the leader, "pulls" those walking behind with his drumming[22]. This time, however, it is not paddle strokes that mark displacement, but people moving forward by taking over the positions of those walking ahead. It was such an idea that led some Ye'kwana to express the view, when Santana died, that Ignacio had taken his place. Or it explained, in Ignacio's eyes, why Ricky was

[21] For a similar description of lives as paths among the nearby, Carib-speaking Waiwai, see Schuler Zea 2010.
[22] Interestingly, among the Lamaholot from eastern Flores a similar association is made between a leader and drumming. This group, too, traces journeys in their chanted narratives along which spatial succession becomes temporal succession. Even though no drum is used in the chant, the chief narrator (*opak*) who traces the route is explicitly called the "drum" (*bawa*), or "the one who beats the drum continuously" (see Rapaport 2021). Like this group, the drum is used by other indigenous groups in eastern Indonesia, whose narrations also constitute journeys, to mark the steps of the narrated routes and to contact the spirits through spirit-journeying (Fox 2021a, 11-12)

acting like him. Descriptions elders gave me of the cosmos also suggested this notion of successive substitution as a form of displacement. Traditional views of the cosmos before Christianity saw the former as a superposition of planes across which people were travelling, following those who departed before and moving up to a new plane after dying. In Ye'kwana language the verb to die could literally be translated in the same sense as "to continue down a path" – the root of the verb to die, *wäämana*, is *äämä*, "path".

That walking for the Ye'kwana can also take place by, for instance, chanting geographical journeys, generational succession, or when the sun crosses the firmament, would point to a question we began to put forward in the previous chapter: how, in Ye'kwana eyes, do spatiotemporal flows come about. The possibility of generational succession being a form of walking or percussion would lead us to consider that other expressions of mobility the Ye'kwana likewise describe as paths could also, in their eyes, reproduce the logic of movement by drumming/beating. This also raises the question of what a beat might ultimately be. For instance, in the previous chapter, discussing narrative flow, we saw this come about as a narrative stringing together of successive locations along a character's journey on a geographical route – and the events, kin relationships, and so on, that take place at stop. Here, following Ye'kwana explanations of walking-as-beating, we have come to the possibility that, along such trajectories, locations, just like persons along generational paths, could be considered expressions of how their respective flows come about as successions of beats.

Beating is repeating

I was finally shown a picture of Cristian one day when my adoptive mom Aurora found one on someone's mobile phone. I was genuinely shocked. In the picture, sat on his wheelchair, he certainly looked like a younger version of me: slim, a curved nose, thick lips and bushy eyebrows. My new Ye'kwana relatives had been right all along. The resemblance was uncanny, more strikingly so because Cristian's phenotype did not look very Ye'kwana-ish to me, already accustomed as I was to their wide faces, slim lips and thin eyebrows. To me, at that point, this looked like a remarkable coincidence. In the Ye'kwana' eyes, however, it was not exactly that. They were indeed amazed by the resemblance, but everything in the end seemed quite logical. To them, our physical resemblance was an indication that I was a replication of Cristian, and as such I simply took his position on the path of the Tovar. That was the moment when I began to "walk/beat" with them.

Saying that drumming involves repetition is to state the obvious. When I asked Ignacio about Ricky behaving like him and doing the things that he did, Ignacio replied that that was because they were on the same path. The same happened after Santana's death, when people began to say that Ignacio had taken Santana's place. As my older Ye'kwana friends see it, to walk on the paths inaugurated by their ancestors means that they should continue carrying out the same actions that the latter engaged in and that, through chains of replications of the same actions, connect to them (see chapter 5). In traditional Ye'kwana stories, for instance, there is always a primordial being that initiated a course of action of how to do things, usually through incorporation of objects or knowledge from the outside. Someone planted the first garden, someone obtained the first cassava bread, someone first carried out the purification of the garden, and so on. The Wätunnä stories and other Ye'kwana chants trace the transformations of such practices along successive versions of them and the people who participated in these. A clear example would be the construction of the conical house, which the stories tell had multiple versions and fabricators. So, in order to follow "on the path" of the latter, older Ye'kwana say they used to build their traditional conical houses as replicas of those that were built before. This applied to how songs should be sung, to how gardens should be built, to the food restrictions that had to be followed, and so on.

The use of repetition to create continuities with the past is especially emphasized among some indigenous groups in the Amazon (see Oakdale 2005, Déléage 2007a). However, that repetition never happens through exact replication was something that my Ye'kwana friends themselves reminded me of when they said that I was indeed Cristian, yet not exactly the same. I was still Luis, the anthropologist living with them. Differentiation by degree emerging from successive repetition is an idea that also comes up in the descriptions of paths and journeys in Ye'kwana primordial stories. We will explore this in detail in Chapter 6. For example, in the trajectories transited by Wanaadi, as they are chanted in the Wätunnä, the primordial hero changes names successively as he moves to a new cosmic plane or engages in a new cycle of creation through what the Ye'kwana call his "envoys" - Yk. *Wanaadi amoodedö.* They are described as *"*the same Wanaadi but different", which is reflected in that doubles adopt, at each new replication, a slightly changed name that is some variations of Wanaadi's, such as the likes of Wanasedume, Sedume Yanaadi, and so on (for a detailed analysis of the notion of replication among the Ye'kwana, see Gongora 2017). "They are all Wanaadi", Santana told me. This does not only apply to Wanaadi along his journey, though. In traditional chanted paths, this same successive transformation of names was a common feature of the transition of beings from one cosmic level to the next and of the transformations of their bodies. Through these successive stages, beings with different names were described as the same as

before, yet different. Or, as Santana explained once referring to cosmic planes, they were “copies” of the previous one.

Knotting beats

When I met Aurora, Ignacio’s wife, for the first time, she was in her early fifties. That was the day when she came to me to tell me that I looked like her deceased son. Always with an easy smile, Aurora has the stocky, solidly built phenotype that makes it easy to distinguish Ye’kwana women from other indigenous women in the Venezuelan Amazon. Seeing Cristian in me, it was understandable that Aurora immediately adopted me, and that, from that moment on, she looked after me dedicatedly. As I said, it was a bit uncomfortable at the beginning. She would make sure I always had one of the first plates when food was being served, both in Carijunagua and when we were visiting other communities. She would comment on whether I was dressing properly or not. She would repeatedly stare at me with loving eyes. Or she would caress me during religious services on Sundays. The most intense demonstrations of affection eventually settled down a bit, but Aurora continued to look after me and to make sure I always ate and had protein on my plate. Given that in Carijunagua, and in many other communities we visited, protein was not always available and rarely in substantive quantities, this was a remarkable expression of caring, one which Aurora and Ignacio also had toward their other sons, Ricky and Guillermo. I remember a couple of occasions in our evangelizing journeys up Caura river when my adoptive mom would sneak out of the main group, dragging me and my brother Ricky, to share with us food she would have managed to obtain from local Ye’kwana women. As for Ignacio, even though at the beginning he tried to keep a more serious relationship with me, he eventually also began to show the same demonstrations of paternal affection, to call me son or, affectionately in Ye’kwana, *chichucä* – “baby”. He, too, worried that I always ate. And he made sure not to be too harsh on me when I clumsily kept failing to carry heavy stacks of firewood or could not keep pace cutting down vegetation to build a new garden.

My adoptive parents used a specific expression to describe our relationship. They said that we were “tied up” – Sp. a*marrados,* Yk. *imijäacoomo* – as if by an invisible cord. A *mecate* – literally a rope – they called it once. This was an expression some of my older Ye’kwana friends used more generally to refer, for instance, to members of a community who are said to be “tied” to their leader, to a spirit-animal that is “tied” to its shaman, or even to a fabricated object, like a woven basket, which is “tied” to its maker. An equivalent expression Ye’kwana used to describe these types of relationships was “to be held” by others - Sp. “*estar sostenido”*; Yk. *ömmöjätödö*. Ignacio once described this to me in the following terms: the person who gives others their “sustenance” is “holding them” - Sp. “*los sostiene*”. Being “tied-up”, hence,

was not associated with biological descent, but was linked more with the Amazonian idea of caring through the fabrication of other bodies, mainly through feeding.

This also applied, for example, to Wanaadi's relation with the Ye'kwana. Wanaadi "holds" them because he fabricated the earthly plane for the Ye'kwana to live happily and feed themselves, according to what the elders say. And the same is said of Ye'kwana ancestors. They are "holding" and "tied" to today's Ye'kwana through the lines of repetition of the things they did first and that defined how Ye'kwana should live properly today. Aurora herself gave me a tacit definition of the idea of being "tied up". She had told me once that, in the past, Ye'kwana moms used to feed their children by passing chewed food from their mouths to their children's, "like birds". I remember vividly our last communal meal when I was to leave the field at the end of my formal period of fieldwork. My Ye'kwana mom was sitting across the wooden-plank table from me, under the mango trees, sad for my departure and afraid that I would never return to her. With her hands she took bits of cassava and fish, kneaded them into a small bite, and then she gave it to me straight into my mouth. That way we would be "tied up" and I would return to them, she told me. It was a very moving moment.

Thus, notions people had of an actual connection across bodies formed by being *amarrado* or *sostenido* were linked to the idea we have seen of being on "paths" with others. We saw another of such expressions earlier in that, along generational paths, one person "pulls" and is "pulled" by others. Another expression still that I registered was that, on a path, one is "the tail" of those walking ahead – Yk. *dhacödö*. These associations became explicit in Ignacio's explanation of walking. At some point during our talk in his living room, he returned to the idea of walking *with* someone else, as in me walking *with* the Tovar and the Tovars walking *with* the NTM. Ignacio had already explained walking as beating, but now he added that beating *with* other people is "as though everybody's feet were tied to each other". He did not mean someone's two feet tied together, but each foot of a person tied to the consecutive one of the people standing on each side. Ignacio had tried to perform this when he, standing by my side, interlocked his left arm with my right arm and pulled me on a short regular walk in his living room. In this logic, each beat, namely, each of the regular leaps Ignacio made across his room, was also a knot "pulling" other knots. Ignacio expressed this in words: "*sanjuda wä'tadö a'dha'jäya*" - "the sound of the drum [the beatings] ties you up".

In some ways, we have seen – in the previous chapter and in this one – examples of "beats" also being knots. Ignacio's leaps are made of feet tied up. Stops along Santana's life-path are confluences of separate trajectories in a single point. A leader "pulling" his followers with his drumming is "tied" to them. In all

cases, I also registered the idea that such "knots" involved some form of invisible string or cord. For instance, in descriptions of the human body I obtained from elder Ye'kwana, this was said to have multiple spirit-doubles, as we said above. Numbers vary depending on whom one asks. These spirit-doubles go in different directions when the person dies. One goes to live in the fire, another with the moon. The one in the eye, which is associated with the life-force in the chest animating the body – the *do'ta* – goes to live with Wanaadi. When the person is alive, however, these are all said to be "tied" with invisible cotton strings – Yk. *wadecu ejo'yajä* – to the body. I never heard it myself, but Gongora in her work on Ye'kwana singing registered that similar invisible strings are also said to be tied by a chanter when a singing path is initiated (Gongora 2017, 392-393). Before starting his singing journey, he or she would tie that thread to their aimed for destination at the other levels of the cosmos, so they would not get lost along their way, very much like Ariadne's thread. I also heard some people saying that invisible threads also connect a person with the spirit-doubles of deceased or distant relatives. If someone, say, dreams of a distant person, the image that comes to his or her mind does so along such invisible threads. As I write this chapter, I have just hung up from a Skype call with my Ye'kwana parents. My mom Aurora always knew I was going to call them today anyway because the previous night she had dreamt of Cristian. In her dream she was carrying him, and he pooped all over her, she told me laughing.

One reason the Ye'kwana are known in the Amazonian context is their traditional weavings. The Tovar and many evangelical Ye'kwana no longer weave, although Santana told me that he once was a very accomplished weaver. Descriptions he gave me of weavings coincided with those in previous ethnographies on the Ye'kwana that highlighted that the model of Ye'kwana cosmos was replicated in their weavings, especially in the serving trays – Yk. *waja* –, as well as in the conical house, and even in the human body (see de Barandiarán 1979; Guss 1980; 1990). In Santana's explanation, one of the features that made serving trays replications of cosmic planes had to do with the interwoven fibers of the trays being also described as "paths". There were other reasons, too, but the idea that the tray was made of interwoven "paths" reflected cosmic planes likewise being described as a meshwork of geographic paths along which beings travelled. I once heard some people say that Caura Ye'kwana call the points at which fibers interlock on a woven tray, *shidicha* - literally, stars. Like many Amazonian groups, Ye'kwana say that stars in the firmament, like the sun and the moon, used to be people in the past. But they also say stars in the night sky happen to be human settlements across an upper cosmic level. In fact, in one primordial story Santana told me, a Ye'kwana primordial figure, Macusani, journeyed along routes in the firmament. Along his journey, this person visited multiple villages in search of the sun's settlement, where this one lives with his extended family.

This point underscores the equivalency, in Ye'kwana eyes, of elements that could be considered "beats" along paths with these also being seen as some form of knot. The point that the joints where fibers cross on woven trays were seen as replications of human settlements reminds us that, along geographic trajectories, these too came about as confluences of separate trajectories, of paths that converged at points before drifting away again. In a way, beating/walking along paths is also knotting. Or, as Ignacio put it, the drumming "ties up". In his explanation of walking all these ideas came together in a phrase I wrote down in my notes: "tied by a thread we move down a path, lined up by the sound of the drum" - Yk. "*töntöda cötato ejoiya'jä que äämätai, sanjuda wä'tadö yesadöminchajä que"*. Drumming keeps people "straight" – Yk. *sadonna* –, or as people also called it, "aligned" – Yk. *chadöminchajä*.

In the previous chapter we called attention to the associations made between the structure of the narrative journey and the knotted chord traditions of many Amerindian groups. Nonetheless, cord or strings, as forms of generating connections, have other expressions in indigenous Amazonia, especially in the social fabrication of bodies. One instance is that of the Mamaindê-Nambikwara. In this group, invisible and visible bands of beads, which are located inside and outside a person's body, are manipulated by the shaman in the healing process. This group, too, say that bands or threads are considered paths. They make people dream and have intentionality and consciousness, and are equivalent to a person's spirit. Losing a thread implies also losing the spirit, and it is the shaman who has to recover it. In the healing process carried out by the Mamaindê shaman, wrapping the body of the patient with new bands means re-establishing ties that were broken when bands detached (Miller 2009, also Gebhart-Sayer 1986 on Shipibo healing). Among other Amazonian groups, invisible threads are also said to tie a person to certain objects, as these are considered extensions of the spirits of their makers or owners (see Fiorini 1997, Miller 2015). Shamans in other cases describe the cosmos as made of connections of strings along which beings move, like spider webs (Kopenawa and Albert 2013, 60, 376). An important association, perhaps more explicit in ethnographies of Northwestern Amazonia, is that of the string or chord – and palm fiber – with vitality and energy transformation and transferal, and with the multiple forms these take. Expressions of this can be, for instance, breath, air, or wind (see Chaumeil 2011b; Hill 2009b; Hill and Chaumeil 2011; Hugh-Jones 2019, 23-28). But it could also be sound and voice, and also names, usually seen as inseparable from the former (for elaborations on similar associations among the Ye'kwana see Gongora 2017, Guss 1986). Many of these elements are considered as extensions of the life force or spirit that animates bodies, and as such are made visible or are connected to the body by feathers, hair, strings, bands, fiber in weavings, lines in body designs, and so on (Hugh-Jones 2017, 31-33; 2019, 23-26; also, Mentore 2005).

In Ignacio's anecdote of his encounter with the travelling spirits of the indian queen and her party, he mentioned various things travelling together: the voices of people and the barking of the dogs, the smell of annatto, a strong breeze, and the drumming. For the Ye'kwana, the association of beating with the body comes in various forms, some of which we have seen through this chapter. But, in their view, probably the most important association is that of the multiple spirit forms of the person – their multiple doubles and the animating force in the chest – with drumming. We saw before that, when they detach from the body, these move along their respective paths by beating. This applies to detached spirit-doubles, but also to the animating force, the *do'ta*. It is the latter, I was told, that ultimately makes the person "beat"; as a vital force that resides in the chest, it makes the person move along his or her path. As we will see in the coming chapters, it also makes the flows coming out of a person through its multiple body conduits, "beat" as well – be these the voice, breath, fluids, and so on. It "animates" them (see chapter 6). And, moreover, it also permits the person to "beat" to the rhythm of externally marked drumming – that is, to form entrainments with them. Beating, hence, is an expression of vitality and, as such, makes fluidity possible. Throughout this chapter we have seen multiple instances of such fluidity: strings across knots, generational lines of people, fibers in weavings, breeze travelling through the forest, movement along geographical routes, and so on. The very description of all these as paths reflects this. Yet, it is a logic of drumming – that is, of successively tied beats – that is common to all of them.

Paths of drumming

As I mentioned in the introduction, throughout the time I have lived with and known my Ye'kwana extended family, I have heard them, especially the elders, referring to many aspects of their social and material lives as "paths", not just those mentioned in these first two chapters. We have seen some examples of this – a person's life, generational succession, oral narratives, movement in space, woven fibers, and so on. We mentioned earlier in this thesis that the term Ye'kwana use to talk about all this is *äämä*. They translate it more often as path, although *äämä* also translates as tube or conduit. For instance, body conduits are also *äämä*, or wind instruments can be *äämä* too. But other aspects of the world can be described as paths as well. Water flowing along a river, the trajectory of the sun and other stellar bodies, the songs of birds, and so on.

It was also mentioned in the introduction the recent body of work that has recognized the "tube" as an all-encompassing conceptual category that indigenous people use for "thinking, acting and ordering the world". Stephen Hugh-Jones has defined it, following Mauss, as a "total social fact" (Hugh-Jones 2019, 21) and Jean-Pierre Chaumeil as a form of "self-representation" (Chaumeil 2024) in indigenous Amazonian

cultures. However, in the first two chapters, rather than expressly engaging in a discussion of what *äämä* might mean as a totalizing concept for the Ye'kwana, or rather than exploring how they use it in connection with material expressions of tubularity, we have seen "paths" emerge from a wider concern with different manifestations of mobility, fluidity, and movement in general. An echoing association has been noticed in the tube literature, particularly regarding the Amerindian idea that tubes channel flows that often need to be regulated, be these human reproduction, bodily fluids, growth, or patrilineality (Chaumeil 2024; Hugh-Jones 2019, 33-35; Rivière 1969). The tube, in this sense, is connected with expressions of vitality, some of which we just mentioned above. They channel breath in the form of blowpipes and flutes, semen through the penis, food through the digestive track, and so on.

Yet, one semantic difficulty with "the tube" as a concept is that, as with the Ye'kwana, such flows are not always associated with material tubes. For example, there are other life processes that Amazonianist works have noted some indigenous Amazonians expressly describe as forming "paths" rather than "tubes", like singing, speaking, or dreaming (see Londoño-Sulkin 2003, Townsley 1993, Schuler Zea 2010). The Ye'kwana themselves, although they translate *äämä* more often as path, which is the reason I have been using this translation in this thesis, would switch to tube – Sp. *tubo* – if they were talking about tubular objects. However, focusing primarily on Ye'kwana understandings of movement, especially of walking, has helped us to bring to the fore the centrality that drumming and percussion have for their notions of flow and progression[23]. It has also permit us to consider the dynamics that, according to my Ye'kwana interlocutors, make that progression possible. Flows unfold, in their multiple forms, as drummings whose beats, rather than separate, successive instances, form interconnected continuities. The resulting arrangements, in a way, might ultimately express some version of the cord-and-knot logic[24]
.

Furthermore, focusing primarily on movement has also led us to appreciate that such understanding of spatiotemporal progression, in the eyes of the Ye'kwana, lies at the core of multiple aspects they identify

[23] On rhythms as an intrinsic part of spatiotemporal linearity, see Ingold 2011. The fact that rhythms are central to progression is underscored by the fact that percussion and drumming have been central for the cultural construction of transitions. In South American, for instance, the Quechua not only used different percussion instruments to mark the change of season and the transition of night and day, but also their transition from one daily activity to another (Urton 1981, 17-18). Rites of passage, too, are associated, among indigenous groups in the Amazon, with drumming and percussion instruments, as well as death (Wilbert 1977, 58-61; Whitten 1976)

[24] The Yagua explicitly identify the knotted string design as a path (see Chaumeil 2024), and, in other examples we have used in this chapter of indigenous peoples defining strings or bands as paths, these also consist of beads threaded together (see Miller 2009). Ye'kwana women, too, spend lots of time threading beads and making woven designs with such threads. These, too, are said to constitute paths.

as paths, including in their social lives and in the world more generally. Ignacio once told me that everyday life in the community could also be a form of drumming/walking. I asked him, intrigued, how could that be possible? My dad told me that his organization of daily life in Carijunagua, as its leader, was an example of this. He put it plainly, perhaps responding to my still intrigued face: "It is like when we are all fabricating something, let's say a table… After we all finish [the table] here, we then go to work there. After finishing there, we then go work over there. We all beat together". He summed it up with the expression, "to the sound of the drum, we work" (see chapter 4). The use of this expression to refer to other aspects of their lives showed the expansive explanatory potential this logic has for the Ye'kwana to recognize similar patterns in the world. For instance, elders used to say, I was told, that speaking too could be considered as a form of "beating". "With the drum, one speaks". Drumming, then, could be considered a model which might account for many aspects of their lived experience and perception of life, including things like walking, working together, singing, generational succession, or even everyday life in the community.

Identifying paths of drumming in multiple aspects of life might be a recognition that the same process of spatiotemporal unfolding takes place in all of them; and, moreover, that the experience of them happens through some form of movement that involves what my Ye'kwana interlocutors define as a continuous beating or walking. This possibility echoes Tim Ingold's appreciation, described in the introduction of this thesis, that perception of the environment takes place through some form of path-making movement that carries a rhythmicity to it. He captures this notion by using James Gibson's idea that we perceive through a path of movement, not from a fixed point of view (see Ingold 2011, 45-46). Ingold adds to this that such a movement does not exclusively involve observation, but a whole-body perceptive experience which, as the body moves through the displacement of feet on the ground, might be understood as a form of walking.

This notion of embodied perception through such a broad understanding of walking, as Ingold has argued, can be extended to encompass other forms of path-making movement. In that sense, walking as linear perception can take place through other forms of perceptive, path-making actions, including, for instance, reading, dreaming, or writing (see Ingold 2011, 196-208). The Ye'kwana notion of walking/beating along multiple forms of paths in different dimensions of life reveals an understanding of them as expressions of spatiotemporal unfoldings and as having a flowing, rhythmic character to them. Moreover, it likewise suggests that the Ye'kwana's grasp of such flows as a form of drumming or walking/beating captures the action of perceiving them as taking place not necessarily through an actual physical walking, but through

a broad understanding of this notion involving the formation of synchronies at all levels where paths are identified. We will see expressions of this in the coming chapters.

These two chapters have also begun to suggest that the description of the world as replications of the logic of drumming paths is shared mainly by older Ye'kwana's explanations and through how they talk. And in the stories they tell, from primordial times or not. As a person once told me: "That is how the elders used to talk. To them, paths were about so many things". In Carijunagua, for example, Santana, was one of such elders. His wife, also called Aurora, was another. There were people from the younger generations, like Ignacio himself, who could also articulate these ideas. Moreover, after having acquired some understanding of these views of paths myself, I could identify elements of it in everyday talk in the community. However, as that person's phrase also suggested, younger generations do not explicitly articulate these elements as often – "they don't talk about paths anymore". All this has brought us to a point where, in order to grasp the transformations of Ye'kwana life in the last decades, including their lives "on the path" of Protestant Christianity, we should consider how the generations that lived through them did so within the logics of paths. To do this, we should begin by going back to the years of the conversion of the first Ye'kwana Christians, and consider in detail how is it that a "beating" body navigates a world of paths.

Chapter 3

Christian by attention, or thoughts along paths

One of the American missionaries who lived with the Ye'kwana in the early days of the *evangelio* once told me that their original intention, rather than directly founding churches, was that Ye'kwana churches would emerge organically from people showing interest and engaging in learning about God's word. Already in the new Ye'kwana community, Acanaña, the missionaries built a hut with wooden benches inside where they would gather regularly to sing Protestant songs. Ye'kwana elders and American missionaries all attest to the fact that, right from the start, the singing was the main hook for the Ye'kwana. This came to me as no surprise, as I have myself witnessed that, still today, Christian music is something that Christian Ye'kwana are especially fond of and spend very significant parts of the day and of religious services doing. Initially, the missionaries sang Protestant hymns in Spanish, but they quickly began to translate them to Ye'kwana alongside the New Testament and the Book of Genesis. No sooner than having completed the last two, the NTM had a leaflet of hymns in Ye'kwana, and they began distributing copies in the community. The New Testament and the Book of Genesis would only be finished some years later, and, to this day, only a small number of Ye'kwana read them, mainly pastors. Instead, hymnals and the singing of Protestant songs were widespread from the beginning. Christian music attracted the Ye'kwana *en masse* to join the Americans in their new hut, and, as the Ye'kwana began to learn the lyrics, they started to take part in the religious activities. Those first sessions, I was told, would run for endless hours as everyone had requests for hymns to be sung.

It was the music that made Santana become evangelical too, according to the story he told me of how he converted. More specifically, it was one of the Protestant hymns: number twelve from the booklet. More exact still, the second verse. By then, Santana had already been living for a couple of years with the missionaries in Acanaña. He was around twenty years old. According to all testimonies, Santana was one of the most active participants in the activities of the mission, such as the foundation of the new community or the translation of hymns and other written materials. It was such active participation that, years later, in 1958, would make the NTM appoint him and Augusto Wendehake, another Ye'kwana man, both of whom were already Christian, to be the first Ye'kwana pastors. Yet, despite his involvement with the mission's work since the beginning, it had taken Santana some time to become *evangélico*. According to the stories he and the missionaries told me, Santana was a tough cookie for the NTM' message initially.

In his youth, before the arrival of the NTM, Santana had been learning to become a master of chants, practicing both the long recitations of the Watunnä – Yk. *adeemi* – and the repertoire of healing and protecting chants – Yk. *aichudi*. He was not interested in shamanic chants, Santana told me, but in those that bring protection against the contamination that, the Ye'kwana say, Odosha, Wanaadi's enemy, unleashed upon the world. As Santana and one of the American missionaries recount, the former used to "see many spirits" back then.

Until he finally became Christian. In Santana's account of how he finally became *evangélico*, his hesitancy is presented as a process that took him from having what he described as an "unstable" – Yk. *iätädäjönö* and *masuduijato* – or "deviated" – Yk. *iäcumeajä* – mind to this becoming "straightened" or "aligned" – Yk. *sadonna*. In his narration, this transition took Santana some four weeks. During this time, he felt that his "thought" – Sp. "*mi pensamiento*" – was "almost like wanting to be Christian" and that it "wanted to change". He would attend Sunday services, only to return to his house "confused". He also told me that his "*pensamiento*" felt "restless" and that he was "sad" and "angry", as if "everything bothers you".

On his fourth consecutive visit to the church, Santana says, he heard people "talking about salvation". Then, the congregants sang hymn number twelve. The second verse goes like this: "When I die, I will go to heaven. That is why I fear not. Upon arriving, I will be called up. Then there will be no nuisances [Yk. *täncanoode'da*, also no sadness, no hunger]. I have a brother [Yk. *Weichacoono* – friend, partner] there. He is with Christ. I will go behind him. I will see my friend". Hearing that, Santana said, he knew what "his path" was and his mind finally became "aligned" and "stable" – Yk. *iätädä*. Supposedly asked by the other members of the church what he "believed" in, Santana replied: "well, in Jesus Christ' death, that Jesus Christ died for us, to clean our sins, for forgiveness. That he resurrected on the third day for us to be resurrected like he was". Knowing "what Jesus did" for people to be "saved", and concentrating his thoughts strongly on that, Santana added, has kept his mind "straightened" since then. Thus, he has not seen any spirits ever again. "No bears, no tiger, no snakes" and, especially, "nothing that looks like a person" (see below).

Santana is not alone in how he narrates his conversion. Christian Ye'kwana in general, especially older generations, commonly share narratives of conversion or of breaking up and reconciling with the church and the community more generally where these are presented as processes that involve what they translate to Spanish as "*pensamiento*" – literally, thought. When someone breaks up for some reason with the church, with the congregation, or even with the community, his or her *pensamiento*, the Yekwana say, "deviates" – Yk. *wäcumenä*. When they "reconcile" – Sp. *reconciliar, arreglar,* Yk. *weconecanä* –, that

person's *pensamiento* "aligns" or "straightens". Music is, very often, presented as one cause for this "alignment", especially among first converts. I have witnessed many such narratives in people's testimonies during church services at Carijunagua's Maranatha and at other Ye'kwana churches I have visited. Standing in front of the congregation, people who are coming back to the church or those that might be joining it for the first time would say that their "thought" has become re-aligned from the "bad" or "contaminated" "path" – Yk. *amoijtato äämä*, *conemjönö äämä* – towards the "good" or "true/right" path – Yk. *ashichaato äämä*, *chanöngato äämä*.

Echoing what happens with Ye'kwana use of the language of paths, at first sight it might not come across as too unusual to find expressions of alignment and deviation being used by people in common talk to refer to courses of action, including evangelicals. Yet, as has been suggested regarding indigenous groups in the Pacific, there is a close association between societies who use the theme of paths and their use of ideas of alignment and deviation (see Fox 2021, 16-17; Koskinen 1968). We will see in this chapter that, in the case of the Ye'kwana, especially elders, their perception of the world as paths – as beating flows, that is – on the one hand, and their navigation of them through alignments and deviations on the other, conflate in how they understand the *pensamiento* to work. And, in the latter as an expression of what we might call the "beating self". While we continue to be guided by Santana's account of his conversion, we will see that it is with the *pensamiento*, as an expression of an embodied experience of the world, and especially with its capacity to attend to flows, that such a world is navigated, including conversion to Christianity.

Aligning thoughts on paths

Older generations of Ye'kwana in Carijunagua do not have a concept of the mind as a site of interior, bounded elucubration located in the head and distinct from the body. In fact, when talking in Spanish, they rarely use the term mind at all. Instead, they use *pensamiento,* literally thought – Yk. *tötajänä.* The place of this is usually associated with the heart and is linked to the body's animating life-force, the *do'ta*, that is said to be in the chest. The *pensamiento* is, according to how my interlocutors understand it, like the breath and the voice, an expression of that flowing, beating vitality. Like other parts of the body, it is marked linguistically with a suffix – *dö* – indicating inalienable possession – e.g. Yk. *Luis tötäjätödö*. It was mentioned earlier that my Ye'kwana friends, especially from the older generations, speak of the human body as made of "paths" or "tubes" – for example, the digestive, genital, auditory, or respiratory tubes – along which beating flows travel. Such appreciations are also accompanied by descriptions of the human body as a kind of recipient, usually associated with the chest as well. Some of my interlocutors describe

it, in Spanish, as an *estuche* – a purse, case – and some others as a *caja* – box – or a *baúl* – trunk. People say the body is "the case of the *do'ta*" – Yk. *do'tadö ewöötoje*.

It is into and out from this body-recipient that flows are said to travel along body tubes. I once asked Ignacio how he would define the verb *percibir* – to perceive. To him, he said, *percibir* implied that something "reaches" or "touches" the body – Sp. "*te llega", "te toca",* Yk. *adhajojoanäca* –, enters it along one of its tubes, and, in Ignacio's words, "fills up" the body – Sp. "*te llena*", Yk. *adötädö*. In my dad's description, something that is perceived "fills" the body, stays "in" it, and can be then "taken out" later, usually as speech or breath. It is common to hear Ye'kwana refer to, for instance, something that they heard in the past as though it is "inside" of them now. And when people speak, they would say they "bring out their words/voice" – Sp. "*sacar la palabra*", Yk. "*ucacä a'taaca nadö a'deu*". "As if you were grabbing it in your chest and pulling it out", it was explained to me. In chapter 7 we will explore ideas of speech and the voice in more detail.

In the indigenous Amazon, embodied epistemologies that involve processes of incorporation and extraction of substances into and out of the body, which might even include things like speech or breath (see McCallum 1996, Walker 2018), are linked with notions of the body as permeable and socially fabricated (Seeger et al. 2019, Viveiros de Castro 1987). In the case of the Barasana, for instance, this connection is explicitly expressed in the importance of body orifices for regulating such inward and outward flows along body tubes (see Hugh-Jones 1980). Gongora (2017, 122-123, 323-328) explains that, for non-Christian Ye'kwana in Brazil, it is said that people who have intelligence – Yk. *sejje* –, mainly shamans and masters of chants, have so because they have incorporated chants into their bodies via breath and saliva from other wise people (see Gongora 2017, 341), and they have also incorporated white crystals – Yk. *widiiki* – from the upper levels of the cosmos. These crystals are said to enter through the crown of their heads. Crystals, which bring the capacity to think, are associated with the vitality in the eye – the so-called "spirit-double in the eye" –, which is said to then travel down to the chest – the place of the *do'ta* – and to the body's extremities. They give shamans the power to "see", and masters of chants the power to sing. Although my Christian interlocutors do not have similarly elaborated ideas of this process, descriptions of how the expression of the vital force they call *pensamiento* works reflect similar understandings of knowing as the physical incorporation of external elements into the body as recipient.

According to descriptions I obtained and everyday usage of this term by the Ye'kwana in Carijunagua and other Christian communities, it might be possible to distinguish between three capacities that the *pensamiento* possesses, which might be seen as stages of a single process of perceiving and of thinking.

First, we have what some of my interlocutors sometimes call, in Spanish, "*reconocer*". The sense of what they mean by this, although it can literally be translated as the English verb "to recognize", could perhaps be better conveyed as a broad understanding of perceiving with the mind's eye, one that goes beyond just visualizing images in thoughts. It has to do with the capacity to conjure up in thoughts the external stimuli that "reach" and "enter" the bodily recipient, even if this "entering" happened in the past. Although such conjuring up certainly involves "visions"- Yk. *tänemö* -, like those that are perceived while dreaming, it also involves other things that enter the body, like smells and sounds. In a way, we might say, it is an idea akin to the Greek definition of *phantasia* as part of the human perceptual capacity; it refers to the information that is perceived by the senses and arises in thoughts as "appearances"[25]. However, implicit in this idea of "*reconocer*" is that what comes up in thoughts has "entered" the body from the exterior at some point. As people said to me, *pensamientos* are "put" inside. We will see shortly how this applies to visualizing the actions narrated in the Wätunnä.

In addition to the capacity to "recognize", the *pensamiento* also has the ability to tell whether such stimuli that enter the body and appear in thoughts are "good" and "correct" – Yk. *ashichaato* and *chanongato* – or "bad" – Yk. *cone'da*. I have heard Ye'kwana call this, in Spanish, "*adivinar*" or "*distinguir*" – literally, to guess or to distinguish, Yk. *chö'tammetojo*. I was described this capacity by a Ye'kwana interlocutor thus: "I guess/distinguish ["*adivino*"] what is inside" – Yk. "*taaca nadö wö'chotammeca*". This is a capacity that is intrinsic to the idea of being properly human – *so'to* or *ye'kwana.* Importantly, in this sense, the distinguishing is understood as a physical, somatic process, not a mental one. Or, as some older Ye'kwana say, it is the heart, as an expression of the beating vitality, that makes the distinguishing. We will also see ahead that rather than an overarching notion of judgement, this ability applies to being able to tell whether something that is perceived, an appearance in one's thoughts from the outside, is properly humanizing or, rather, comes from what the Ye'kwana see as a contaminated world and that might be a source of thought and body instability. In fact, people say that the ability to identify what is "good" and what is "bad" was given to them by Wanaadi through the beating life-force in their chest, and by making them live in a human, "good" way. Doing so permitted them to distinguish the things that would keep

[25] There is much debate about the sense in which *phantasia* was understood by philosophers like Aristotle or Plato, as well as multiple subsequent elaborations on this concept. Nonetheless, here, I am following Stephen Everson's exploration of Aristotle's use of *phantasia* as part of the perceptual system (Everson 1999, 139-186). Appearances are broadly understood in this sense to include not just images that might come up in thoughts as part of the imagination, but, more broadly, all perceptions of the world, including sounds, smells, and so on.

them on that trajectory or that would deviate them from this. The appearances that are recognized as "good" are those that "the heart likes", I was told, meaning that they make the body feel good. Meanwhile, as we will see shortly ahead, those that are "bad" are identified as such because they cause illness and fright, and deviate the *pensamiento* as a result. This takes us to the *pensamiento*'s last ability.

This has to do with the capacity to "align" the person along "paths" by concentrating on the things that entered their body. This is the third step in the process described thus far. An example Ignacio gave me connects the previous two capacities of the *pensamiento* with that of orienting the person along paths. "Aligning" the "thought" on a path is like when a jaguar in the forest senses a smell that catches its attention. That smell "enters" the jaguar's body, and so, as it appears in the jaguar's thoughts and this identifies it, the jaguar is then able to concentrate on it and know which route to go down through the forest following the smell. The jaguar's *pensamiento*, as an expression of its vitality, thus becomes "aligned" on that path. Hence, we might say that this third step of the process of thought alignment has to do with the attention that is paid to the appearances that come up in thoughts, and, through this, with the orientation of the person in a world of paths. By visualizing and keeping such appearances in one's mind and concentrating on them – or, as Ye'kwana say, by "thinking strongly" – the *pensamiento* "aligns" on a path and then the person, like the jaguar, is able to intentionally follow it.

A point made regarding Amazonian indigenous epistemologies is that, for some indigenous groups, it is the person's living force or spirit-double, as expressions of vitality, that does the perceiving of the world (see Brown 1986, 66; Santos-Granero 2006). Underlining this point is that, for instance, in dreaming or while under the effect of hallucinogens, the vital force has the capacity to perceive the invisible dimensions of reality and, through this, to acquire knowledge from entities in those realms, as is the case for Arawakan groups like the Wakuénai (Hill 1993, 214) or Jivaroan ones like the Shuar (Taylor 1996, 208-209). That is, there is an association between vitality and the capacity to acquire knowledge. For the Cashinahua, for example, this knowledge is then accumulated in the body (McCallum 1996). Furthermore, there are also cases in which, similarly to the Ye'kwana, the vital force being said to reside in the chest, there is a further link between thought and agency with the heart. This is the case for the Wari, for whom all entities, material or not, that have subjectivity are also considered to have a heart (Vilaça 2019, 48).

Besides the connection between vitality and the capacity to experience the world and to acquire knowledge, there is also a link that has been identified between vitality and agency and intentionality (see Buitrón 2021, 4). For my Ye'kwana friends, all this comes together as a process of orientation of the *pensamiento* on a "path" by attending to what is incorporated into the body and what is "identified" by

the heart as “good” or “bad”, which takes us back to an expression of the vitality that the Ye’kwana link to the idea of paths: that of the vital force as threads that run across a knotted flow. Gongora, again, points out that the Ye’kwana in Brazil see the learning of chants by the masters of chants as an incorporation via threads that are tied between the “true” owners of chants in an upper cosmic level and the head of the apprentice. The chants travel, like beads in a necklace, into the body of the latter, giving him knowledge (Gongora 2017, 387-389). This association resonates in particular with the Mamaindê-Nambikwara association of threads/bands with memory, intentionality, and consciousness. For this group, threads/bands, which are also said to be their “paths”, allow them to dream (Miller 2009). Without them, they do not know where they are, and become lost and sick.

There are multiple things that might “reach” the body that my interlocutors recognize can catch the *pensamiento*’s attention and take it down a path, including smells – like that from a *pusana,* a spell – or the sound of music. As we have begun to describe in the previous chapter and as we will continue to see in coming ones, these elements, usually themselves understood as expressions of vitality, are also described as having their own paths. Concentrating on these can also distract the *pensamiento* from following other paths as well. Not being able to concentrate the *pensamiento* on following a single path is, in Ye’kwana words, to have it “deviated” or “unstable”. And, therefore, to be a *masudui* person, an unstable person with an unstable body who cannot follow paths adequately. One dangerous cause of such instability is the contamination brought about by Odosha into the world. To this we will shortly turn. In sum, the three-step process of thought alignment connects the two levels that we have been delineating thus far in this thesis. First, the idea of the person as possessing a beating, animating life-force in the chest that makes possible the flow – the “walking” – along rhythmic paths. And, second, the notion of the world as made of beating paths. The *pensamiento*, as an expression of that beating vitality, emerges as the link between both levels. That is, it captures the correspondence between the beating self and the rhythmic path to walk along, the dyad that makes “walking” possible.

Thoughts down “good” paths

At one of our meetings in Puerto Ayacucho, as he was telling me about the first years of the *evangelio* among the Ye’kwana, the same American missionary who told me about the first years of the evangelio among the Ye’kwana also told me that something that helped the NTM evangelization of this group was that they distinguished between “good” and “bad”. He was referring to the opposite notions of *ashichaato* – good, adequate – and *chanöngato* – proper, true – on the one hand, and *conemjönö* – bad, polluted – on the other. These apparent equivalencies were to be used by the NTM to frame their translation of their

Christian message to the Ye'kwana, as we will see shortly. However, before Christianity and before their lives became inserted in modern Venezuelan society, according to the elders' accounts and their stories of primordial times, these categories used to speak of the idea of humanness shared by the Ye'kwana. We mentioned in the previous chapters that, according to Ye'kwana primordial stories, the early plane, which the elders used to say had been fabricated by Wanaadi for the Ye'wana to sustain themselves and to have happy lives, was contaminated after Odosha, Wanaadi's antagonist and failed chaser, was trapped in it. The contamination unleashed by this primordial event spread everywhere. Hence, until recently, in order to avoid having their bodies affected by it, the Ye'kwana would carry out regular purification rituals of practically everything with their *aichudi* chants – all food, hunted game, fiber for weavings, newborn babies, and so on. Not doing so would have brought disease or even death, whereas living a proper human life implied staying free of disease and contamination. Thus, being *ashichaato* or *chanöngato* entailed maintaining a stable and healthy body, which passed through to keeping the *pensamiento* aligned, and concentrated on a "good", human path.

Such a "good" path was the humanizing trajectory narrated by the Wätunnä. Through some fourteen chanted episodes, this body of stories traced the trajectory that began with Wanaadi's cycles of creation and with the first Ye'kwana who "began to walk", passing through the humanizing deeds of primordial figures, and reaching how the Ye'kwana used to live until recently. Moreover, it also narrated the route across the cosmos followed by Wanaadi and that, according to how Ye'kwana elders described it to me, also served as a road map for them to know their path after dying. It used to be chanted during the celebration of a new conical house, a new garden, or when hunters arrived from a long period of hunting. The celebration used to last for some three days. Game would be hunted for the occasion and plenty of manioc beer fermented. It was explained to me by Santana and others that, in the past, this event was a moment for the common "alignment" of the group's people's *pensamientos* on the path narrated in the Wätunnä (see chapters 5 and 7). Doing so, explanations went, permitted those living in the new conical-house community to know what their common path was, meaning that they would know the humanizing actions to be replicated in order to stay walking "in line" with their ancestors as well as the route they would follow on dying.

During the days the celebration lasted, the master of chants – Yk. *ameedi adhajä* – led the ritual. After confirming that there was enough manioc beer, he would start singing the episodes of the Wätunnä in strict order and always following the same pattern of rhythmic arrangements and declamations – the "paths". Deviating from this chanted trajectory would have posed the risk of getting the dancers' spirit-

doubles lost along the chanted routes, I was told, for it was the spirit-doubles – the *ä'cato*s – that were doing the walking/beating along the rhythmic cosmic routes described by the singer. As they travelled, the dancers' *ä'cato*s were said to be re-living and experiencing directly what was being chanted. To avoid getting lost, an invisible thread was said to be tied by the master of chants before beginning to sing, which was then carried along by him along his chanted journey until reaching his destination (see Gongora 2017, 387, 393). Standing at the head of a line of dancers holding each other by the shoulders, the master of chants would lead the group in a syncopated back-and-forth dance around the central pole of the conical house to the beatings of a drum, accompanied by the rhythmic arrangements of his declaimed narration and by someone playing a long bamboo flute – Yk. *wanna*. After each verse sung by the leader, the rest of the group would echo it in unison. Like Ignacio going around in his living room holding me by my arm, dancers would be "beating/walking" together.

This would last until the chanted Wätunnä transited its entire trajectory, or until the manioc beer ran out. Throughout this time, people had to avoid falling sleep. There is a direct connection between Ye'kwana ritual forms of "aligning" or "straightening" the *pensamiento* and the use of mind-altering substances and techniques, including sleep deprivation. For the singing of the Wätunnä, sufficient manioc beer had to be prepared. If this ran out before the entire body of chants was finished, the singing had to stop immediately. Contrary to what might be thought about what constitutes an attention or visualizing exercise, it was precisely by having the mind altered that people's spirit-doubles were said to be able to detach from the body and travel along the chanted path. The same idea used to apply to the Ye'kwana shaman in his ritual work, as we will see shortly. He "straightened" his *pensamiento* and travelled across cosmic realms by singing and practicing rhythmic arrangements with his rattle, but also by sniffing ground *yopo* seeds and ingesting the *caapi* vine, and by the smoking of tobacco.

Santos-Granero identifies in the Yanesha a similar association between mechanisms to disembody the vital force – for instance, dreaming, taking hallucinogenic drugs, or sleep deprivation – and the increased capacity derived from this for sensing and perceiving the world (2006, 61-62). This possibility, in the case of the Ye'kwana, underlines the idea that it is the non-physical dimension of the person, be it the life-force in the chest or its spirit-doubles, that perceives the non-physical realm while dancing and singing under the influence of the manioc beer. According to explanations I got, the alignment of the *pensamiento* through such purposeful alteration of the body also involved purging the latter. Vomiting was intentionally sought. Santana painted a picture of people dancing non-stop on pools of vomit and mud. At the end, when people woke up after having inevitably fainted from the non-stop rhythmic dancing, singing, and

drinking, they were described as having a "new *pensamiento*" – Yk. *eduwato tötajänä* – and that this had become "aligned" – Yk. *sadonna*.

The description of how the Ye'kwana aligned on the path of the chanted Wätunnä illustrates the process of thought-alignment described above, and also suggests how the sung narration served as an oral map for the attentional navigation of a world of rhythmic flows. "Knowing that [the events in the Wätunnä]", Santana told me, "one aligned the *pensamiento*". In his description, the experiencing of the Wätunnä during its singing and dancing put in people's thoughts the "good" trajectory to concentrate on – meaning that they were able to know the path transited by Ye'kwana ancestors which brough them to live proper human lives. And the path ahead for after they died. Having re-transited that trajectory themselves, people could then attune to it by continuing living in that same way; they were able to continue reproducing the same humanizing actions that made them Ye'kwana in the first place (see chapter 7). In Santana's words, by aligning the *pensamiento* people "knew where they came from and where they were going". Some of my interlocutors also referred to this idea of "aligning" thoughts on the path narrated in the Wätunnä as having the *pensamiento* "connected" or "in line" with Wanaadi. A deviation from that humanizing path would, in any case, be provoked by Odosha and by the contaminated world.

Interrupting flows, deviating paths

When asked about Odosha, my interlocutors reply that he is invisible, that he lives in the air, and they locate his contamination, also invisible, mainly in the forest. There are also some invisible beings that are associated with Odosha – Yk. *odoshancoomo* – and that, people in Carijunagua say, live at places like rocks or waterfalls. The forest, thus, is an important source of contamination – Yk. *weconematoojo*, *amoije* – and a place where people can typically be victims of Odosha. Probably everybody in Carijunagua has a story to tell about themselves or close relatives falling victim to Odosha while travelling outside the community, and, consequently, becoming ill or even dying. Hearing all these stories come up repeatedly and knowing that Odosha is said to be invisible, I asked Santana in one of our conversations how a person would know that they had been victims of Odosha. Santana replied: "Because Odosha makes a person's *pensamiento* deviate".

The association between Odosha and the idea of path deviation comes up in multiple Ye'kwana stories of primordial times where travelers lose their trails while in the forest. In one I was told, for instance, Odosha keeps distracting a hunter, it gets late, and the hunter loses his way back home. When he finds it again, Odosha chases him back to his community and, once there, he starts eating the people who live there. In

such stories, Odosha comes across mainly as a chaser and saboteur, someone who makes characters lose their paths or get delayed, usually by distracting them or by provoking an accident – such as a snake bite or a canoe capsizing (see chapter 1). I was told once that Adriel, one of Ignacio's brothers, used to be jokingly called Cajuu – from Cajuushawa, Odosha's other name – when he was a child. Even as an adult, when I lived in Carijunagua, Ignacio's mom continued to call Adriel that. When I asked why, I was told that, like Odosha, Adriel had been a naughty child, always playing tricks on people. In Ye'kwana primordial stories, being a trickster comes across as a normal feature of all beings until Odosha's contamination of the earthly plane and Wanaadi's escape from it brought a halt to bodily transformation. It was normal that, before then, characters would play tricks on others with the purpose of stealing something or escaping certain situations (e.g. de Civrieux 1997, 55-61). In such stories, being a trickster is associated with the generalized possibility of bodily transformation. Yet, this is also associated by my interlocutors with having unstable *pensamientos.* An unstable body, in a sense, implies an unstable *pensamiento* and not following on a single path. It is only after Wanaadi's escape paralyzed bodily transformation and the Ye'kwana began travelling the route of humanization narrated in the Wätunnä, that Odosha's contamination became the source of potential deviation from that path.

In Santana's explanation as to how to know that Odosha has attacked a person, he added that, even though Odosha is invisible, he "let's himself show up" – Sp. "*se deja mostrar*" – in dreams. In the past, I was told, shamans, having the capacity to enter the invisible realm, could see him and his beings. The Ye'kwana see an equivalency between dreaming, dying, and shamanic activity. In all of them, people's spirit-doubles journey out of the body and can visualize and interact with multiple entities, and, if they are not shamans, might be attacked and get lost (Guss 1980, 304; also, de Barandiarán 1979, 250-254). If this happened, the person would become ill and could eventually die if the lost spirit-double was not recovered and returned by the shaman. The Ye'kwana traditionally had extensive repertoires of dreams and their correspondent interpretations, which they would share in the morning and that helped in planning the activities for the day (Gongora 2017, 250-254; Guss 1980, 301-303). Even though Christian Ye'kwana no longer share complex elaborations on dreaming, they recognize intrusive dreams, which take place especially when they are travelling outside the community, as being provoked by Odosha or by his beings. For instance, an attack by a jaguar, snakes that bite, scorpions that sting, a canoe that overturns, and so on. More worrisome still are the visions of beings that might "look like human" - Sp. *"parecen personas*", Yk. *so'toje* – but that are revealed as not being so, like river dolphins with men's or women's faces. These might all be indications that a person has been infected by *amoi*, an invisible substance with

which Odosha is said to have contaminated the world and which can make people's bodies contaminated as well – Yk. *tänwadooto*.

With regards to those visualizations the Ye'kwana identify as caused by Odosha, I further asked Santana how one could be able to know that they were indeed caused by the former's contamination. "Because one keeps thinking of that, scared, and then you start getting ill. The preoccupation makes you ill. That's how you know it was Odosha, because he makes you fall ill" – Sp. "*te hace enfermar*". As another person put it, the *susto* – fright, Yk. *wäcatoncana* – "bites you and stays in you". In my interlocutors' logic, as in the thought alignment process described before, the intrusive visions and beings that come up in dreams are the expression of having *amoi*, an unwanted substance, inside the body-box. The intrusive appearances are how the body, or, to be exact, its life-force, perceives that invisible contamination. And, as the person keeps thinking of those appearances, worried, and having identified them as bad, that person then starts becoming ill. That is how their *pensamiento* becomes unstable and deviates from the "good" path.

My dad Ignacio once compared the shock brought about by a *susto* to a child who makes abrupt movements, like sudden kicks, while sleeping. Those sudden movements, according to Ignacio, are an indication that intrusive appearances are deviating the child' path in his sleep. There are also other body signs that something from the contaminated world has caused someone's *pensamiento* to deviate and made it unstable and unable to follow paths. They are all considered bodily illnesses. These involve physical manifestations or the person showing behavior that is not socially acceptable. I saw some examples of this in Carijunagua when people were accused of being *cädäije* – ill – or *medecunecä* – crazy, maladjusted – for talking too loudly, for becoming angry, or for being lonely and not wanting to take part with the group. That is his or her illness, people would say. The association with not being able to follow flows in everyday life was explicit in some cases. Instances included people who do not follow trains of speech, who get stuck while speaking, who speak too loudly, or who cannot follow the "path" of the music while singing. Take Yusuany, Ignacio's adolescent niece. People in Carijunagua said that she was "*especial*" or "*mongólica*", two terms they translate *medecunecä* into and which are Venezuelan Spanish pejoratives for people with cognitive difficulties. I, on my part, saw Yusuany as a regular adolescent, but she certainly was louder than the other adolescents, and had a tendency to become angry quickly and throw tantrums. She was the only adolescent in Maranatha's congregation that did not participate in any of the church's music groups. As I was told, she was uncapable of following the "path" of the music (see chapter 6), and

indeed, as I witnessed myself on a couple of occasions when she did try, she certainly had difficulties to sing in tune with the rest of the group.

In sum, a way to understand what Odosha and the contaminated world means to the Ye'kwana is to think of them as sources of attention deviation, as alterations of the bodily capacity to keep beating/walking on paths. We will continue to see examples of this in the coming chapters. Protecting oneself from such threats involves staying walking/beating on the "good" path. This used to imply maintaining the *pensamiento* concentrated on the humanizing events narrated in the Wätunnä and thus aligned on this path. Christianity, however, changed the "good" path to be aligned on.

Correcting the Wätunnä

In my meetings with some of the NTM missionaries who lived with the Ye'kwana in Acanaña, one thing that came up recurrently were the fundamentals of the translation work of the Christian message they carried out in the early days with the help of some Ye'kwana. Perhaps the most essential element that was mentioned was that the NTM relied on what some of the missionaries referred to as "cultural substitutes", namely, on finding in the Ye'kwana language and culture terms and concepts that could be used to translate the Christian message. This certainly is a not an uncommon translation strategy. Yet, as the missionaries described it to me, they framed the rationale of this method in a Christian narrative. They told me that what they were doing was finding, in Ye'kwana language and culture, the "traces that God leaves in every culture". "You only have to find them", one of them said.

I was given some examples of this. One was that, in the missionaries' eyes, Wanaadi represented for the Ye'kwana the figure of "God creator" – Sp. "*dios creador*" – analogous to the Christian god. They read it in this way given the Ye'kwana understanding of Wanaadi as the mythical figure who, according to the Wätunnä, created them and is, consequently, their "master" or "owner" - Yk. *Ye'kwanacoomo edhaajä*. So, the missionaries decided that, rather than finding or adapting a new term in Ye'kwana for the Christian God, they would just go with Wanaadi. The Biblical Wanaadi, as the NTM missionaries would present it in a study guide for the study of Genesis they distributed among the Ye'kwana, was now portrayed as the creator of everything. As such, the study guide puts it, Wanaadi was the "owner" or "master" of all beings, not just the Ye'kwana. Thus, Wanaadi would displace the respective "owners" the Ye'kwana used to say that animals, like the tapir or the peccary, or some things, like the cassava bread or the garden, had. Following a similar logic, and seeing in Odosha the opposite of Wanaadi, the NTM also kept this name for the devil. Another example was the one mentioned briefly above: the missionaries considered that the

Ye'kwana had clear notions of "good" and "bad". As we have seen, this used to have specific connotations for the Ye'kwana. However, what this missionary told me was that the fact that the Ye'kwana saw the ability to distinguish between what was *ashichaato* and *conemjönö* as residing in the chest meant that they had the same moral notion of the heart as Christians.

One crucial instance where this logic applied was in the missionaries' use of the term *Wätunnä* simply as "history" and to refer to the Biblical story as a whole. Rather than keeping "The New Testament" or "The Bible" on the latter's cover, the missionaries decided to go with *Wanaadi Ade'ddu* instead – literally "the voice/speech of Wanaadi". One reason for this, I was told by NTM missionaries, was that, now that they had made Wanaadi the Christian god, this was a way of reaffirming this resignification. However, a consequence of this was that it also re-signified the entire Wätunnä. The Wätunnä, as we saw earlier, used to narrate orally, in chants, the trajectory – the "path" – that began with Wanaadi's cycles of creation and that would lead the Ye'kwana to re-join him at the top level of the cosmic building. Some Ye'kwana even called this narration *Wanaadi Wätunnäi* – the story of Wanaadi. Having Wanaadi narrate a new story, hence, was a way of rewriting the humanizing path of the Wätunnä, of giving legitimacy to a new narrated path.

This was explicitly ratified by the titles given to each book of the Bible by the missionaries, where this new Wätunnä was further associated with what the notion of being "good" used to entail, namely, proper humanization: "*Ashichaato Wätunnä* [the Apostle's name] *Nimennä'jödö*". That is, "the good Wätunnä as narrated by this or that apostle". David Guss pointed out something Catholic priests told the Ye'kwana under their missionization decades ago that echoes the interpretation of the Bible promoted by NTM missionaries, and which also reflects an idea shared today by some Ye'kwana from the first generation of evangelicals. Namely, that the Bible contains the actual voice of Wanaadi in it (Guss 1986, 421). This idea was based on the notion shared by the Ye'kwana that a person's voice, as an expression of the vitality carried within the body, can come out from the latter and enter other bodies and objects (see chapters 5 and 7). The Ye'kwana with whom Guss worked went on to reject the possibility that the Bible had Wanaadi's word in it, as well as literacy altogether. Evangelicals like Santana, in contrast, embedded as they were in the wider process of acquiring literacy skills from the literalist NTM, went on to embrace it[26].

[26] Certainly, among evangelical Ye'kwana, the acceptance of the NTM's idea that Wanaadi's word could be in the Bible as physical object did not imply the same straightforward choice between orality and literacy that Guss identified. As we will see shortly ahead in an account of Santana's encounter with a Ye'kwana wiseman, the fact that the Bible came to be seen as another Wätunnä, one that is written, that is, carried with it the possibility of its

Drawing on equivalencies like these might have been intended as a strategy of "controlled equivocation" on the part of the NTM missionaries (see Viveiros de Castro 2004). The re-signification of the Wätunnä also implied that other elements of the narrated body were also re-formulated, in the missionaries' evangelizing message to the Ye'kwana, as part of the "good" Christian story. This came along with a message that told the Ye'kwana that the Wätunnä stories they knew were incorrect, but only partially so; that there were elements of the Biblical narrative in the Wätunnä, only that the Ye'kwana had been blinded about their true meaning and about the larger story they belonged to. "God's traces" had been waiting to be discovered. This message was transmitted to the Ye'kwana by the missionaries, as they themselves explained to me. However, the Ye'kwana themselves recognized that there were some elements from what the NTM explained to them that they already knew about in their stories.

Competing paths

Echoing a similar process documented by Peter Gow among the Piro people, who claimed that they already knew about the Christian god before converting to evangelical Christianity (2006), Santana told me about some of those things the Ye'kwana "already knew" but that the missionaries and the Biblical narrative set straight. For example, he said they knew that Jesus Christ was the son of God, only that they did not know his true name. He said they used to call him Wanacu, which was Wanaadi's son's name in the traditional versions of the Wätunnä. In the latter, Wanacu dies diving in a river while fishing, and Wanaadi's resurrects him with a new name, Ianudowä. Santana said that this was an indication that they also knew about Jesus Christ's resurrection. Another example Santana gave me was that the Ye'kwana also knew about the existence of two brothers, who were characters in Wätunnä stories, Iudeke and Shishomana, but that the correct story was that of Jesus Christ and John the Baptist. In Santana's eyes, in line with Ye'kwana cross-cousin marriage arrangements, the latter two had to be brothers given that their mothers were sisters[27].

content being adapted to oral narratives. As we will see, the Biblical stories, particularly those of the Book of Genesis, can be and indeed are narrated orally following the same logic of paths.

[27] In his analysis of the Piro people, Gow raises the very likely possibility that, after centuries of Catholic colonization, the Piro could indeed have incorporated elements of Christianity into their pre-evangelical conversion stories (2006, 221-222). This might be a possibility among evangelical Ye'kwana from Upper Orinoco, where Spaniards were present since the mid-eighteenth century. Guss, for example, presents evidence of Christian elements in Ye'kwana oral stories in the data he collected decades ago in the Caura region. One, for example, is the story that tells about Wanaadi being captured and taken to Caracas to be crucified, after which he resurrected (Guss 1986, 420-421).

There were many other examples of such equivalences. The new Wätunnä was supposed to be a correction from having the story wrong, and the Ye'kwana found evidence of this in their own stories. Thus, for instance, it was not exactly that Jesus Christ-Wanacu died while fishing, but that "he was killed by his enemies, was crucified, buried, and resurrected after three days", as Santana said was the right version. I heard Christian Ye'kwana share a two-fold explanation as to why they had the story wrong. The first part is a common talking point among indigenous Christians in Venezuela and among foreign missionaries, namely, that the big flood brought about a separation of cultures. From that moment onwards, this argument goes, people forgot what had happened before that event and, unaware of that, they went to live in their different cultures. The second part was that the equivocation was provoked by Odosha himself – now the devil. The missionaries, Santana told me, revealed to the Ye'kwana that the figure they used to call Wanaadi had been Odosha. Thus, the entire Wätunnä had, in fact, been Odosha's path[28]. To the Ye'kwana this meant that they had been walking on a "bad" path all along. They had only kept on that path because Odosha had "paralyzed" or "frozen" their *pensamientos* on the trajectory of the wrong Wätunnä. With the new Wätunnä, that was corrected.

This correction, however, was possible in a context where there were already competing versions of the Wätunnä among the Ye'kwana. One thing I quickly learned when I began to work with them was that different people had different versions of the Wätunnä stories. This was especially so among Ye'kwana from across different regions – Caura, Upper Orinoco, Manapiare, and Brazil – but also among people from a single region. For instance, some Ye'kwana I knew said that the first Ye'kwana came out of a boulder in the headwaters of the Cunucunuma, others said that the first *so'to* – people, humans – had been macaws, and so on. Santana, for example, told me that his version of the Wätunnä was the original one because he had learned it directly from a famous Ye'kwana wiseman, Barné Yavarí. Such differences would provoke unending discussions, particularly among elders, many of whom would claim that they know the proper version. Through the many evangelizing journeys I have gone along with the Tovars, as well as in the encounters of Santana and other Christian elders with non-Christian ones, I have witnessed how the Biblical and the non-Christian versions of the Wätunnä are often debated and compared. As

[28] Similar explanations were received by the Ye'kwana from Catholic priests in regions under Catholic missionization (Guss 1986, 412). There, opposite interpretations also emerged on the side of the Ye'kwana (Ibid, 424-425), some of whom identified the biblical message and what Catholic missionaries said to them as being Odosha's voice. Something similar also happened among non-evangelical Ye'kwana in Upper Orinoco. This was, according to Guss, one of the reasons why the Ye'kwana with which he worked decades ago initially rejected literacy and written materials and kept with orality, which they saw as the medium for Wanaadi's voice. If the priests claimed that the Bible had the voice of Wanaadi in it, it was because this had made them believe so in the first place.

Santana once said while explaining to me the evangelizing work done by Christian Ye'kwana on non-Christian Ye'kwana, "they have their own story. You have to go slowly, telling your own story".

Take Santana's own account of an encounter he had decades ago with Barné Yavarí, the wiseman from whom he had learnt his traditional version of the Wätunnä to begin with. Santana was visiting Yavarí at his house on the Upper Cuntinamo river. It was midday, Santana recalled, and they had been bathing in the river before the temperature went down in the afternoon. Barné Yavarí's shack was on the top of a hill, and halfway up they sat on the floor to let the sun dry them off. There, they told each other their respective stories. Barné, the path of the Wätunnä. Santana, that of the biblical generations in the Book of Genesis. The latter involved threading who came after whom in Genesis and, according to an abridged version Santana gave me of it, following the biblical constellation of characters and the family relations of each of them that can be known from the Bible, echoing somewhat the same narrated logic of the path of the Wätunnä. Santana told me that his tracking could trace the entire trajectory, from the Christian Wanaadi's creation of Adam and Eve to the descendants of Noah and to today's humans, as one of being human all the way rather than "descendants of animals" – Sp. "*descendientes de animales*". Meanwhile, he said, Yavari's narrative tracing "got blocked" when he got to the point of the flood. In the Wätunnä, like in the Amazon more generally, the flood is also an important event in indigenous stories of primordial events. Santana's biblical version of this event, in his view, could explain how humans continued to exist, through Noah and his family, "on the same line" as the people who came before the flood. Yavarí's narration, on the contrary and always according to Santana's account, simply said that one man survived the flood, but did not explain what else came after this. Yavarí supposedly just said that he knew what he had been taught by his elders. "They knew about the flood, they knew about fruits that could not be eaten, that's what they knew", Yavarí allegedly said before conceding: "Now, the Bible does tell everything, from the beginning to the end".

Evidently, this is only Santana's version of these events. The crucial point is to highlight the competing position, in the eyes of the Ye'kwana, of the Biblical narrative as a path *vis-à-vis* other versions of the Wätunnä. I asked Santana if Yavarí ever became convinced that the Biblical story was the right one. Santana admitted that Yavarí did not. But he said that the latter, in their meeting, supposedly conceded: "Yes, my nephew, there are two [Wätunnäs]. The one we already have, and the story of our evangelical elders. That one is real too".

Santana's mind down the new path

In the account of his conversion, Santana mentioned that his *pensamiento*, which was "like wanting to become Christian", finally became stable when he heard people "talking about salvation". Salvation is one thing that Santana and other older Christian Ye'kwana specifically say they did not know about in their initial versions of the Wätunnä. They did know, explanations went, that Wanaadi's son had died and was resurrected by his father, yet their stories omitted that this was "so that we be saved" – Sp. "*para que seamos salvos*". That day in Acanaña, people sang hymn number twelve, and it was the second verse that made Santana's mind stable. Again, here is what it says: "When I die, I will go to heaven. That is why I fear not. Upon arriving, I will be called. Then there will be no nuisances [Yk. *täncanoode'da*, also no sadness, no hunger]. I have a brother [Yk. *Weichacoono* – friend, partner] there. He is with Christ. I will go behind him. I will see my friend". Hearing that, Santana told me, he knew where his new path forward would take him and that this was one of tranquility, of no more nuisances.

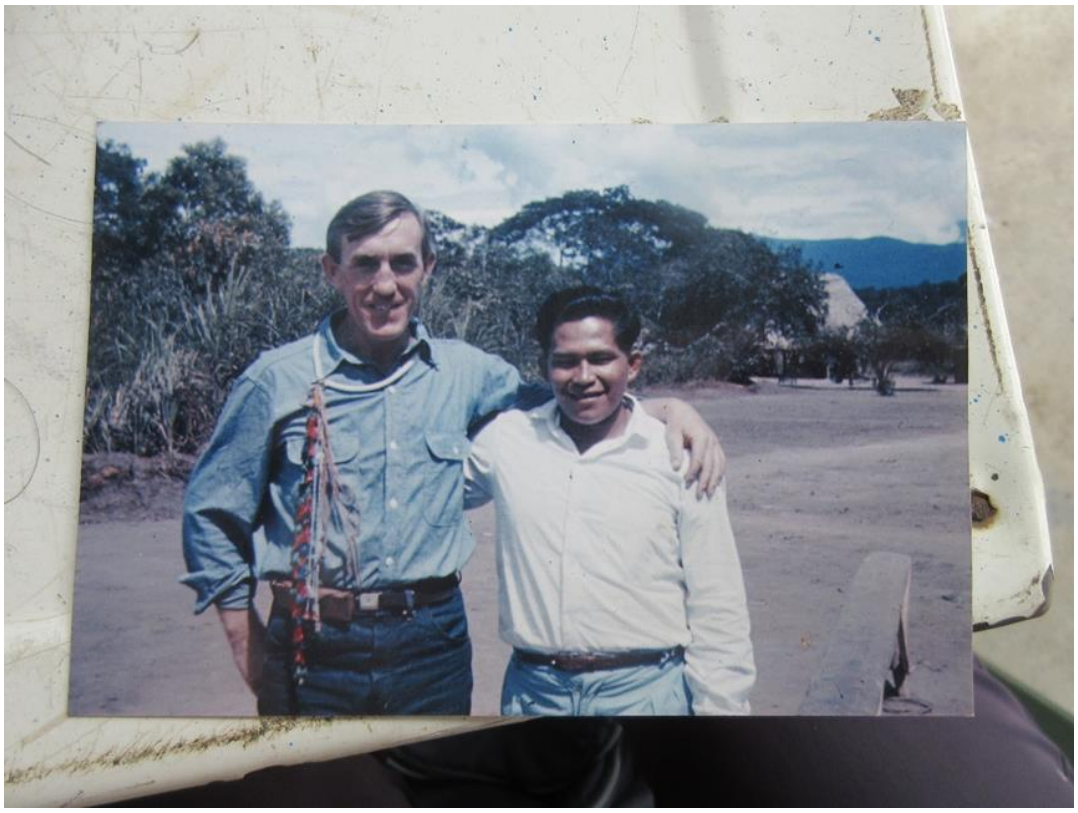

Figure 3. Santana Tovar, around thirty years old, with NTM missionary Thomas Blinco, in Upper Orinoco.

In chapter 7 we will go over Ye'kwana ideas and practice of Christian music. However, it is important to mention here that, as with the singing and dancing of the Wätunnä in the past, Christian Ye'kwana say

that Christian music also "straightens" the *pensamiento*s of those who are sad – Yk *wentumje* – or ill – Yk. *cädäije.* As with the Wätunnä, this is explained as a result of people's *pensamientos* "identifying", from the chants, what their "proper" or "good" path is. Which is why, as Ye'kwana composers of Christian songs kept reminding me, the lyrics must always be very clear. People have to be able to follow them easily. The theme of salvation is a defining element of the new "good" path; the lyrics of the songs Ye'kwana Christians compose speak preponderantly of this. The reason why salvation makes their new path "good" is that, as many Christian songs composed by the Ye'kwana indicate, Jesus' actions and death ensured that the Ye'kwana would have a life free of the suffering and nuisances of the contaminated earth. Jesus' salvation made their new path *ashichaato*, good.

Hymn number twelve's second verse made Santana's *pensamiento* "identify" the new path as one free from Odosha's contamination. On that fourth Sunday, upon hearing hymn number twelve, Santana then came to the members of the church and told them he wanted to be Christian. They supposedly asked him what it was that Santana "believed in". It should be noted here that the Ye'kwana translate the Spanish verb *creer* – literally, to believe – into the Ye'kwana verb *ecamjödö*, which they associate with the ability to evoke appearances in thoughts. To the question, Santana replied: "well, in Jesus Christ' death, that Jesus Christ died for us, to clean our sins, for forgiveness. That he resurrected on the third day for us to be resurrected like he was". With this idea already "inside" of him and having identified it as "good", Santana could now concentrate his thoughts on the new path. This made him happy, he told me.

Shortly after those events Santana withdrew to the forest for a long time. On the couple of occasions he narrated that part of his conversion to me, Santana mentioned different time frames. He said one year the first time, and some five months the second time. In any case, for a long time he went to stay alone in the forest, isolated from the rest of the people in Acanaña. He might visit the community for some hours on a certain day, but he would always go back to the forest. Intrigued, I asked him what he was doing. The way Santana described what he did during that time was as an intense practice of orienting his attention. He called it "*concentrado*" – focused. To achieve this, Santana explained, he sang Christian hymns and "spoke" with Wanaadi – in Ye'kwana language, to pray is translated as *a'dheuwä*, literally to speak. "As if by [a communications] radio", said Santana. Santana said that in order to be able to communicate with Wanaadi, he had to acquire the power of the Holy Spirit. Many Christian Ye'kwana, including Santana, see a connection between the Holy Spirit and the *do´ta*, the life-force in the chest, and so they say that, when people convert, the Holy Spirit enters the body and comes to reside in the chest as well. Thus, moreover, like the *do'ta* was said in the past to have been given to the Ye'kwana by Wanaadi

as an extension of his vitality, and thus formed an actual physical connection with him, some Christians now say that it is the Holy Spirit that orients their thoughts and connects them with the Christian Wanaadi. Since they are now on the path of the Christian Wanaadi, they are "tied" to and "held" by him through the Holy Spirit.

According to Santana, concentrating the *pensamiento* "strongly" – Yk. "*jooje ecamjödö*" – on the visualization of what Jesus and the Christian Wanaadi did, and of the events that brought salvation, permitted this communication. To be exact, what Santana said was that his time in the forest made *his heart* focused – Sp. "*mi corazón se concentró*". This is an important reminder that, even though we have referred sometimes throughout this chapter to the Ye'kwana idea of *pensamiento* as "thought" or "mind", this is actually seen by the Ye'kwana as tied to the living force in the chest and, hence, it is associated with the heart as an expression of how that beating force animates flowing vital processes. In the light of what was discussed in the previous chapter, it makes sense that, being the beating force that makes the person displace along paths, it also has the capacity to "identify" paths and to keep its orientation by being able to concentrate. When he was telling me about his time in the forest, I asked Santana if what he did to "straighten" his *pensamiento* was different from what Ye'kwana who were learning to be shamans used to do in the past. He admitted it was not. Shaman apprentices, Santana said, also got their capacities isolated for a long time in the forest, dieting and practicing "how to blow air" – Sp. "*cómo soplar*". And, more importantly for our argument, they did so by "aligning" their thoughts with Wanaadi by smoking tobacco and sniffing *yopo* snuff, and by learning chants and their rhythmic patterns.

In the early years of the evangelical missionization of the Ye'kwana in Upper Orinoco, entire communities followed their leaders in converting and in moving to the newly funded Christian community, Acanaña. These leaders, who in most cases were shamans or masters of chants, became the first pastors, which, in a way, was also Santana's trajectory. Before converting, he had been training to become a master of healing chants, and then, as leader of Acanaña, he became pastor. Thus, the Ye'kwana followed their pastors along their new paths. In the logic of walking on paths behind others, a leader, like Santana, would "align" his mind on the same path of past ancestors. Meanwhile, their followers would align their *pensamientos* behind their respective pastors and leaders (see chapter 4).

As has been shown in multiple ethnographies, training the capacity to attend to certain things is an integral part of spiritual and religious experiences, especially during moments of conversion and ritual transformation (see Csordas 1993, 138; Liénard and Boyer 2006; Throop and Duranti 2015). Certainly, Santana's account of how he "straightened" his *pensamiento* involved an exercise of orienting his

attention – what he referred to as "thinking strongly" and as "concentrating" his heart – towards elements, like salvation, that took it along the reformulated "good" path. An important understanding of how attention is oriented in religious contexts is that of making invisible things present in the mind by training it to conjure up and learn to attend to certain images (see Cassaniti and Luhrmann 2014, Corwin and Erickson-David 2020, Luhrmann 2012). In a way, what we have been describing in this chapter could be read as an explicit understanding that, on the one hand, equivalent processes might have taken place during Ye'kwana conversion to Christianity, as we have seen in Santana's account. But, on the other hand, it has been shown that, in the eyes of the Ye'kwana, the process of conjuring up in thoughts of elements incorporated from the outside is, more largely, intrinsic to how the *pensamiento*, as an expression of the body's beating vitality, orients the person in a world of paths. Understood thus, rather than attention being associated with a process of signification circumscribed to the perceiver, it is instead intrinsic to the mechanism of producing a dyadic correspondence between the beating body and the paths to beat along in the world. Santana was not training in the forest to conjure up new ideas or images in his *pensamiento*, as these were already "in" his body, but on fixing his attention on them, and, through this, on beginning to walk down his new trajectory. We will come back and expand on this discussion in the following chapters. In any case, this suggests that a world of paths is navigated, most importantly, by concentrating on the things that make people "walk/beat" along rhythmic flows.

Christian (and safe) by "thinking strongly"

After his time in the forest, Santana began to work more closely with the NTM in their evangelizing mission. With his heart already "focused", he became what he called a "*misionero*", a missionary himself. The NTM evangelization of the Ye'kwana in the Upper Orinoco relied to an important extent on Christian Ye'kwana for converting their own people. Santana, and his children years later, spearheaded this endeavor. In the years after his conversion, Santana, together with a small group of evangelicals, travelled across the region visiting other Ye'kwana communities, and reaching as far as Ye'kwana living in Roraima state, in Brazil, hundreds of miles away from the Upper Orinoco region. Throughout all this time, however, Santana told me he did not see any spirit or "what looks like a person" again during his travels.

He mentioned one evangelizing trip he made to Ye'kwana in Parupa, in Bolívar State, where he lived for some months evangelizing them. Santana remembered that these Ye'kwana were surprised that he was not afraid of walking alone in the forest and that he could sleep outside the community without being attacked by invisible beings. The explanation of why this was so, Santana told me, is simple. He has kept his *pensamiento* straightened by "thinking strongly" of what Jesus and Wanaadi did for humans to be

saved. That is how he has kept himself protected from the contamination of the world. Odosha's contamination continues to exist, Santana admits, but it does not affect the Christian who keeps his or her thoughts concentrated on the biblical story. Odosha keeps trying to sabotage people's paths, trying to deviate them, or posing what Christian Ye'kwana now call "temptations" – Sp. "*tentaciones*". The evangelical who falls ill or who starts acting inappropriately is still considered to have fallen victim of an attack from the contaminated world. Christians now say that that is their "*pecado*" – their sin. And they translate sin – Sp. *pecado* – as *cone'da'diyö*, a term to refer to physical defects caused by the contamination of the world. To be sinful, therefore, is to have the *pensamiento* deviated. A sinner has an unstable mind and an ill body. We will come back to this idea and to its implications, including the moral conflicts and evaluations it generates, in the next chapter.

Becoming evangelicals by "aligning" their *pensamientos* on the new path, hence, entailed for Santana and for Christian Ye'kwana a protection against the contaminated world, just like their lives along the Wätunnä trajectory used to. In the accounts I got of the early decades of the *evangelio*, there are some material and health changes introduced by the NTM which were seen by the Ye'kwana as forms of protection from Odosha's contamination and from his multiple beings. Examples of this included the wearing of clothes and shoes, the construction of latrines, or taking medicines and cleaning up the community. Yet, above all this, the concentration of the mind on two fundamental elements from the new biblical path gave a level of protection so overarching that it was substituted for all the expansive repertoire of purification rituals and chants that the Ye'kwana had to carry out on their previous path. Before Christianity, virtually everything needed to be purified in order to be consumed or incorporated into social life, from food and water to the physical space for a new community or a new garden. The first element on which to concentrate in order to be protected was that of salvation, as we have seen. This implied a sense of guaranteed access to a life without Odosha's contamination by becoming Christian and thinking of Jesus' actions to bring salvation.

We mentioned the second element above. It consists of thinking strongly that, as the bible says, the Christian Wanaadi is the master and owner of everything that exists. Doing this, as part of the process of keeping the person on the new "good" path, in this case also makes all foods edible, including all animals, without fears of upsetting any owner. If a new garden is opened, thinking strongly that Wanaadi created that space would make do. And so on. The only purification ritual that is still carried out on all those occasions is that of praying. Like in the account of Santana's time in the forest, praying is part of the process of thought alignment. In Ye'kwana words, they do it to put the *pensamiento* "in line" – Yk. *sadonna*

– with the Christian Wanaadi by speaking to him. As people explained to me, whereas in the past they used to purify things by singing purification chants to them, or by blowing air onto them in the case of the shaman, now Christians pray.

Navigating a world of paths

In the introduction to this thesis, we described how the anthropology of Christianity in Amazonia has shared, in their analyses of indigenous Christianities, the same marked preoccupation with the question of how indigenous peoples construct new ontological positions – now associated with being Christian – as they differentiate from other beings by transforming their individual or collective bodies. The adoption of, and conversion to Christianity was, ultimately, the continuation of a relational process centered in the body as the place of humanness, an ontological reaffirmation of the very "indigenous way of being" (see Gow 2006, 2009; Vilaça 2011; Vilaça and Wright 2009; see also Viveiros de Castro 1992). It might be possible to find elements in the idea of conversion described in this chapter that might suggest similar preoccupations among the Ye'kwana about maintaining humanness. Above all, conversion for Santana did involve a process of corporeal stabilization and individuation through protection from the contaminated world, as well as a consolidation of humanness vis-à-vis other beings. Santana summed this up in his description of his encounter with Barné Yavarí when he referred to the Biblical path as one where there are no "descendants of animals". There is also the notion that Santana and other Ye'kwana Christians have found in Christianity a form of protection against the contamination of the world caused by Odosha. And it could also be said that, while this reaffirmation of humanity might have been achieved with Christianity, the potentiality of transformation persists in the reformulation of Odosha as the Devil and as the source of potential deviation against which protection is still needed. However, Santana's and other Christian Ye'kwana´s explanations of these processes with the framing of paths suggest that, rather than immediately taking Ye'kwana conversion as only a perspectival transformation, we might instead consider the former processes as subsumed in an understanding of change defined precisely by the same logic of paths we began to describe in the previous chapters.

At this point we should go back to when Santana, sat on a wooden bench in the central area of the community, drew a line on the sandy floor to illustrate for me the encounter of the Ye'kwana with the NTM and with the *evangelio*. With the same wooden stick with which he drew that line, Santana then drew a shorter one cutting the former across, right at the middle. The point where the two lines intersected was the moment when, according to his explanation, the Ye'kwana began to "walk" with the NTM. This same expression, we saw in the previous chapter, was also used by Santana's generation to

refer to their conversion to Christianity – now they were "walking" on the "path of the *evangelio*". In this chapter, we have seen expressions of alignment and deviation that are likewise used by the Ye'kwana to give sense to their conversion to Christianity as taking place along paths. Throughout this chapter, also, the idea of a "before" and an "after" has been present underlying much of the discussion of conversion. What defines each has been presented as a process in which multiple voices intervene. Different Ye'kwana have different versions of what the right Wätunnä used to be, and the NTM too intervened in this process by seeking to reformulate these stories with a Christian content. Santana's own explanation of his conversion itself demonstrates that he and other Ye'kwana Christians also participated in the resignification of what their idea of their "traditional" trajectory used to be, themselves identifying Christian elements in those "traditional" narratives[29].

In this sense, what might be narratively constructed as a before and after conversion, and whether this is perceived as implying a continuity or rupture with the past, might be dependent in part on the explanations shared by the missionaries and the Ye'kwana[30]. However, something that this chapter has tried to show is that, regardless of the content of those narratives, explanations such as Santana's reveal that these give content to a way of experiencing the world that is understood to persist. We began to discuss in the introduction of this thesis how affordances determine how are continuity and change experienced as part of conversion to Christianity. There we referenced the work of Dena Freeman on how constructions about rupture by different forms of Christianity afford different experiences of change to Christians (see Freeman 2018). She associated, for instance, mainstream Protestantism, in which Baptists might be located, with an emphasis on rupture in the form of a stronger individual connection between the person and God and a disentanglement of the former from webs of social relations (Freeman 2018, 9). However, Freeman further argues that the way affordances of rupture are experienced is ultimately shaped by how people perceived such affordances based on their material lives, including their socioeconomic realities.

[29] This, in part, echoes the interpretation of Christina Toren about Fijian Christianity as involving processes of the resignification of tradition as Christian and as rooted in a pre-Christian past, particularly through their interpretation of Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper as reproducing Fijian ideas of hierarchy and reciprocity (Toren 1988). In the Amazon, a rather similar process was described by Peter Gow among the Piro, who "forgot" their conversion as they, like the Ye'kwana, identified elements of Christianity in their pre-conversion worldviews, thus assuming that they had always been Christian (Gow 2006).

[30] On the construction of discourses of conversion as processes of giving meaning to Christian practices and beliefs, see Tomlinson and Engelke 2006, also Engelke 2004. On whether conversion to Christianity constitutes moments of rupture or continuity see Cannell 2006, Keane 2007, Robbins 2007, amongst others.

Freeman's reflections regarding how wider material realities shape the perception of affordances of rupture are relevant to the argument about conversion in this thesis. What we have described about paths and Ye'kwana conversion to Baptist Christianity paints a picture in which the experience of conversion to Baptist Christianity and the notion of rupture that comes with it might be ultimately shaped by the perceptual experience of the world, which is assumed to persist. That is, by what a world made of rhythmic spatiotemporal flows affords and the way such flows are perceived through what the Ye'kwana define as walking or beating. Santana's and other Christian Ye'kwana's sense that conversion is a process in which they continue to align on "paths", but not a change of the very idea of having to "walk/beat" on a path, is indicative of the assumption of the continuity of what such a world continues to afford. Paths might be re-signified during the conversion process and according to the notion of rupture that comes with Baptist Christianity, as in the case of the Wätunnä being corrected by what the Ye'kwana learned from the NTM, but they are still seen as "paths" to "walk" on by older Ye'kwana Christians. We will see the practical implications of this in the coming chapters.

Thus, by looking at Santana's account of his conversion taking place by "aligning" or "walking" on the path of the *evangelio*, this chapter has begun to deal with the question of how change and differentiation can happen as part of "linear" processes that unfold in time and space. As part of the answer to the former question there is a construction of the person as having the capacity, as an expression of a beating vitality, of following and navigating paths with thoughts. In a sense, it is an idea of the person as a compass, which can be oriented towards different courses by identifying elements from them as good or bad – humanizing or not – and by concentrating on them. As we will see in subsequent chapters, this translates into a conception of social life transformation in which differentiation and change happens via derivation and bifurcation, whereas sameness emerges from the alignment and maintenance of trajectories.

In the Ye'kwana framework of paths, as we have seen in this and the two previous chapters, the logic of successive confluences and subsequent bifurcations is intrinsic to the fundamental dynamics of path emergence as flows of beatings. In a world of paths, whereas differentiation happens via path deviation, sociality and living forms, such as persons walking in line or conical-house settlements along rivers, emerge as confluences of separate trajectories into successive common knots. What we have described in this chapter about the *pensamiento* mediating the dyadic articulation of the beating person and external rhythmic flows speaks about processes echoing those described by Tim Ingold and mentioned in the introduction regarding the formation of correspondences between the person and external rhythmic flows, and the way attention influences this dynamic. Ingold's notion of correspondences, we saw,

captures the longitudinal affiliation of separate lines that come together, a process that involves attention to linear spatiotemporal unfoldings (see Ingold 2015, 2017a). That is, as the person engages with the environment as he/she goes along, the formation of corresponding articulations with it is part of a longitudinal attentional dynamic that is fundamentally rhythmic.

In this sense, as we saw in this chapter, sameness, as well as humanness and Christianity, in the eyes of the Ye'kwana mainly from Santana's generation, result from the formation of dyadic correspondences with flows that can be followed – "walked" – by attending to the things that keep people on those paths (see also chapters 4 and 5). This brings us back to the idea of conversion as a process of thought-alignment, and of attention as a way of achieving this and of navigating the world of paths. The re-signification of the Biblical message as the correct Wätunnä entailed an equivalency between being Christian and the Wätunnä as the humanizing path the Ye'kwana were supposed to stay on. As a result, becoming Christian, like becoming human – *so'to* –, consisted in aligning, and in staying on a trajectory, this time that narrated by the Bible. Music put the new path in Santana's *pensamiento,* and so he could concentrate on it. Assuming the Ye'kwana idea of the *pensamiento* as an attentional compass for the navigation of a world of paths entails also recognizing processes like humanization or conversion to Christianity as exercises of attending to courses of action described in narrative maps. In a world of multiple possibilities for change via bifurcating trajectories, a concentrated attention brings stability and becomes an orientation for action (see Pedersen et al. 2021, 318). Moreover, it also entails, considering the notion of "walking/beating" as a way of navigating a world of paths, that attention is part of the embodied process of perceiving rhythmic flows and that it is fundamental for the formation of entrainments between them and the beating self, and between the particular and the collective. To these themes we shift our focus now.

Chapter 4

Unstable thoughts: on and off social paths

On the fourth day of March of 2018 a page was finally turned on a series of upsetting circumstances that, for a couple of months, had been altering the normal life of Carijunagua and involved some of the community's teenagers. It was a Sunday, and Maranatha's congregation was visiting the house of Simón López Sr, an elder Ye'kwana man, in the Puerto Ayacucho quarter of Simón Rodríguez. Simón López had been severely incapacitated after having had a stroke months before, and in order to give him and his family spiritual support, Ignacio had decided to move that Sunday's service to their place. An improvised church table had been set up under a mango tree in the middle of the backyard of the López's house. And some thirty people had found places to sit around the clearing. From there, they participated in the usual singing of Christian songs, heard Ignacio give his sermon, blessed the López family, and so on. Then, the expected moment came. Ricky, Ignacio's son and Santana's grandson, and two other boys in their late teens, walked to the center of the clearing and, from there, one by one, gave their testimonies. For days, people in Carijunagua had been looking forward to this moment. The boys had not been seen at church for some weeks, and their testimonies were to mark their "reconciliation" with the congregation. There were still other two boys who had refused to face their actions and, as Christian Ye'kwana would say, "stand up" to give their respective testimonies. Shamefaced, the three boys who did stand up admitted their faults and said they wanted to "reconcile". It was then when Santana stood up from his plastic chair, came to the center of the clearing, and spoke to the troubled boys and to the public.

Santana spoke for a long time, cited the Bible, and sang a hymn. However, he framed his message around a couple of important transformations that conversion to Christianity brought for the Ye'kwana. Part of Santana's message to the boys went like this: "We, who are on the earth, are just human beings. I'm bad [*cone'da*] too, and like you, I'm of flesh and bones … You are young. We can't tell you to be always like that [good, *ashichaato*]. We make mistakes all the time, every day we make mistakes, every day, every minute … We all commit sins [*ocoonenadiiyö*], we all do … We are all held by the power of Odosha [*Odosha jäädudu ononcomo cönwanno*]". Through phrases like these, Santana's message to the boys used the pre-Christian notions of being "good" – Yk. *ashichaato* – and "bad" – Yk. *cone'da* – to refer to the Christian notion of the person as sinful. Like Santana, Christian Ye'kwana more generally associate being sinful with what used to mean being affected by the "badness" – Yk. *conemjönö* – of Odosha's contamination of the

world, that is, with a physical illness. Whereas the notion of *conenadiiyö* used to refer to the afflictions suffered by the body from the contaminated world, it is now used by Christian Ye'kwana to speak of a person's sins as an illness that is carried inside.

Santana went on to exhort the boys: "He [Wanaadi] wants you to straighten your *pensamiento* [*ätötäjätödö shadimin'chaa'dö töwö nijumma*] … Wanaadi gives you the strength to be alive … You have to commit yourself: 'To where I was before I will not return. With the strength/power he [Wanaadi] gave me, I will be firm/strong [*jääduje*] with him' … What Wanaadi taught me is not for deviating you. Instead, he taught me to forgive your sins. Wanaadi did not give it to me to judge you. I'm not authorized, Jesus Christ is …That's why he is aligned/right [*sadonna*] to forget our sins [*cöcoonenadiiyöcoomo*]". Santana's exhortation to the boys adds an important element that older Ye'kwana Christians perceive in the now internally contaminated person, one we began to describe in the previous chapter: If contamination is now inside the person, it is through an unstable, deviated thought which does not stay "aligned" on a single path that such internal contamination manifests itself. And so, as part of his message, Santana exhorted the boys to be, and to make their thoughts "firm" and "straightened" again.

Santana's message to the three boys that day has elements that are in line with the idea explored earlier of conceiving being Christian as having a *pensamiento* that stays "firm" and makes the person "walk" on the path of Wanaadi's biblical message. However, the fact that conversion to Christianity could have also brought about an internalization of Odosha's contamination suggests that, whereas the protection conversion generated was against external sources of contamination, now a source of potential deviation from that new trajectory could be carried inside each person. And, moreover, that this might increase the risk of a potential loss of the capacity to stay on the collective path of social life. We will see in this chapter that this transformation, particularly expressed in how Ye'kwana elders perceive younger Christians, also translates into a change in how the Ye'kwana see the Christian person and relational agency. Moreover, we will also see that such destabilization of thoughts can only be understood within an understanding of sociality and collective life themselves as beating paths that come about through the synchronization of individual path-following capacities. That is, as a coordinated intergenerational "walking" that takes place "tied" to other people in daily life. In this sense, building on the argument developed in the previous chapters about the beating person and the world as made of rhythmic paths, this chapter begins an exploration on how these form dyadic correspondences through the generation of entrainment, which in the case of social life includes forming synchronies with other people. To begin with, we should go back to what caused the boys to be standing in front of the congregation that day at Simón López's place.

Figure 4. Boys giving their testimonies on 4th March 2018. Puerto Ayacucho.

A series of upsetting events

Everything had begun a month and a half before. The first person in Carijunagua who brought up the fact that a woman in the community was pregnant was *Señora* Aurora, Ignacio's mom and Santana's wife. On mid-January she dreamt that she was gathering snails, then she knew. She told some of her granddaughters about her dream, and, immediately, speculation began. Those who knew about her dream began to rule out possibilities among the women of the community. They were left with only a few options. Yet no one suspected Elimar. Elimar, a Curripaco adolescent, had just recently moved to the community, together with her grandmother, to join her uncle, José Yavinape, the husband of Dionicia, one of Ignacio's sisters. She was a quiet girl, around fifteen. Having clear signs of neurodivergence and not speaking a single word of Ye'kwana, it was tough for Elimar to insert herself into the camaraderie of her age peers in Carijunagua, who would not make much effort to talk to her either. So, when people found out that it was her who was pregnant, they were all shocked, and when she confessed that the culprit had been Ricky, many could not believe their ears.

Until Ricky himself confessed. In the following days, multiple endless meetings of the entire community took place to discuss the matter. Indignation was palpable. José Yavinape was furious. It did not take long for news to travel across Ye'kwana networks in Puerto Ayacucho, something that had Ignacio particularly worried – "People are gonna talk", he told me those days. Faced with all this, Ricky himself announced on one of the meetings that he was going to "discipline himself" – Sp. "*autodisciplinarse"*. And that he was to withdraw from the church's youth music group, of which he is the leader. He was to stop attending church, and he was to abstain from taking the lord's supper. As an act of contrition, he would also withdraw from other activities of the community. From that moment on, Ricky was going to be, as the people in Carijunagua say, "*disciplinado*" – disciplined.

However, what happened with Elimar was just the prelude of what was to come in the following weeks. Ricky's "disciplining" did not last for too long. On the same day as the issue with Elimar burst out, two Ye'kwana sisters, also adolescents, were arriving in Carijunagua from Colombia. They had been living there, and upon returning to Venezuela, they had come to stay for some weeks in Carijunagua. Their arrival revolutionized the community, especially the boys. The newcoming teenagers, having lived for a long time in criollo environments, had different manners from the local Ye'kwana girls. They wore makeup and stylish *criollo* clothes, and were prone to more extroverted interactions. Ricky and the other boys of the community were rivetted. If Ricky was to show any contrition for what had just happened with Elimar, this was difficult to see. Just a couple of days after the arrival of the new girls, he was already the boyfriend of the oldest one. And Josué, one of my mom Aurora's nephews, was the boyfriend of the youngest. Initially, Ignacio tried to use this to his advantage to try to turn the page on the issue with Elimar. He said Ricky should marry his new Ye'kwana girlfriend, and promoted the view that his son return to leading the music group.

But Ricky was not going along with Ignacio's plans, to the frustration of his dad. He was happy with the visiting girl, but he was nowhere near wanting to marry her. To make matters worse, comments began to circulate in the following weeks that Ricky and some of the other boys wanted to stop congregating. One of them had already stopped attending services altogether. I remember a couple of times in those weeks when, seeing in me someone "from the *mundo*" – mundane –, as Venezuelan evangelicals refer to people who are not Christian, Ricky came to me to ask about life "in the *mundo*". He told me he had been thinking about moving to Caracas to study and wanted my advice on how to do it. To Ignacio, this was tough to hear. Not only had the disciplining not worked with Ricky, but his son had also refused the proposal to marry the new girl and had expressed a desire to leave the church. Now Ricky wanted to leave the

community too! Who was to lead the music group now? Who was to lead the church after him? These were some of Ignacio's worries.

All this situation affected daily life in the community and church activities. Ricky, Jonás, Josué, Santana Jr, and other adolescents had stopped being seen at church, and they had also withdrawn from other daily activities in the community. For instance, Ignacio had planned a Christian music festival to take place in Carijunagua in mid-February, to which other Ye'kwana and indigenous churches were invited. Thus, in the weeks leading to the festival, the community had to mobilize to prepare everything. Ignacio had set the agenda for the work we all had to do. The vegetation around the community had to be trimmed and the lawn around the church mown. A new platform had to be built inside the church and a new stage set outside for the music groups' presentations. Food for all the visiting churches had to be cooked. New lines for the football field had to be drawn. As we all began to work on our assigned tasks, the absence of the boys was palpable. They would simply leave for the city or just spend the day doing what they wanted. This became even more evident on the day of the festival. More than ten indigenous churches attended, and activities, including football matches and music playing, lasted almost twenty-four hours. It was only in the football matches that the boys participated. The music group of the community's youth could not go on stage because some of its members could not be found anywhere. As José Yavinape would describe later, what took place that night was "*puro hembriar*" – "just chasing women". The consequences would be seen in the following couple of weeks when one of the girls from a visiting church turned out pregnant. And so did one of the two new Ye'kwana adolescents. In the latter case, once again, the culprit was Ricky.

Steering other people's thoughts

Given how upsetting the events were for the community, it seemed inevitable that a complaint I have heard older Ye'kwana bring up from time to time about younger generations not behaving correctly like they themselves used to in the past would grow to a persistent rumble in those days. Similar complaints are probably expressed by elders everywhere. However, the content of those proffered by elder Ye'kwana brings their language of paths and thought alignment into notions of sociality, morality, and of agency. A common perception they expressed, which takes a cue from last chapter, is that people from the younger generations have many, unstable, or deviated *pensamientos* – Yk. "*wannato tötötäjatödö*, *tötötäjatödö ämmä tai täjönö*". Meanwhile, in the past, they said, people's thoughts used to be "stable" and "firm".

According to these views, some implications of the younger Ye'kwana having unstable thoughts is that, like people said of Yusuany, the adolescent who threw tantrums and was not able to follow singing paths,

they “turn angry easily and quickly”, “they fight all the time”, “they don’t obey”, or that “they are lazy”. Santana shared this view. In his elaboration on the notion of the *pensamiento*, what happens today with the youngsters’ thoughts is similar to what happened to him in the weeks leading up to his conversion to Christianity. As we might remember, in those days Santana’s *pensamiento* was “restless” and “confused”, as if “everything bothers you”, which was finally sorted when he became “aligned” on his new Christian path. Like this, “their *pensamiento* [of younger generations] is not stable, firm … it’s restless. The *pensamiento* doesn’t have tranquility … there is not just one *pensamiento*”, Santana told me. According to his reasoning, not having a stable thought and a stable path might cause gossip and conflict in the community, make people behave violently – “murders, people who fight… they have many *pensamientos,* they always seek revenge, they want to fight another tribe…” – and disorient them in everyday life – “‘where do I go? Do I go to fetch palm fiber, or hunting, or fishing, or to get firewood?’ You don’t have a single *pensamiento*, there are lots of preoccupations”.

In contrast to this, in the past, elders say, people used to live together happily. They all ate and worked together joyfully. Conflicts would be dealt with without fighting. Social life was, in their words, “beautiful” – Yk. *iñataje*. And this was achieved precisely, as they say, by having “only one thought” – Sp. “*un solo pensamiento*”. In the elders’ explanations, their association between a tranquil and “beautiful” collective life with the notion of having a single, stable thought or path was further linked with leading an ordered daily life by being “*manejados*” – governed, driven, Yk. *tä'se’tämo*, see below – by, as they say, someone “higher up” – Yk. *e’jodheiñe* – or “superior”– Yk. *ojodhaato*. As testimonies went, having a single thought entailed that everyone followed the leader’s organization of daily life, and that they did it autonomously and without fighting. Meanwhile, as they see it, nowadays youngsters have unstable thoughts and “everybody commands, everybody is a *cacique* [chief]”. One person, referring to the daughters of another of Ignacio’s sisters, put it thus: “there are people, like Feliciana, like Yusuany, who are growing up without guidance. Nobody can tell them anything. You tell them to do something, and they don’t listen”.

Once, during a session of translation work with Ignacio, he summed up these two understandings older Ye’kwana have of sociality – one of multiple unstable thoughts and disorientation in social life, and the other of a stable and single *pensamiento* oriented by a chief: in the past, the Ye’kwana used to live “*cajichaana woije*”, whereas now they live “*umjummadö woije*”. *Woije*, a grammatical postposition in Ye’kwana language, marks where agency resides in relation to the subject (see Cáceres 2011, 139). When this grammatical arrangement is translated to Spanish by Ignacio or by other Ye’kwana, they do so more often with the expression “to be *manejado*” – to be handled, governed. So, following Ignacio’s examples,

having lived "*cajichaana woije*" in the past implied that the locus of agentive capacity was on the *cajichaana* – the leader. We will come back shortly below to the more recent alternative – "*umjummadö woije*".

The choice my interlocutors make of Spanish words to translate the notion of *woije* into is a telling one. To be "*manejado*" – from the verb *manejar,* literally to drive, Yk. *e'se'tadö* – could at first be understood, in the context the Ye'kwana use it, in the broad sense of being governed. However, two explanations I got from older Ye'kwana as to what *woije* implies put it closer to its literal meaning, as in "to drive" or "to steer". One was from Ignacio himself on the same day when we were doing the translation work. He told me that, to him, the idea of *woije* is as if a person were a car. A car rolls, he said, but it needs someone at the wheel to steer it along the right direction. That someone, my Ye'kwana dad added, is the person who is "higher up", namely, the leader of a community or a parent, and it should not be the same person. The other explanation came from an elder Ye'kwana man who, in turn, compared the person to a canoe. The same logic applied here; the canoe by itself does not paddle along a river, it was explained to me; it must be driven and steered by someone.

The observation that agency in the indigenous Amazon takes place relationally among beings has been extensively made, especially in contexts in which multiple beings are considered to share the same potential human subjectivity. This agentive relation of others is considered to take place in situations in which virtually all existing entities, visible and invisible, including things and animals in some cases, are embedded in hierarchical relations of mastery and ownership that usually have a predatory or protective nature, and that entail some form of control or incorporation (see Brightman 2010; Fausto 2008; Santos-Granero 2009; Walker 2012). The connection of such relations with the notion of the double or replication is a point to which we will return shortly below. In some cases, notions of relational agency are articulated by indigenous peoples in Amazonia using notions of displacement and movement, including using the canoe as a symbol of propulsion, such as in the case of the Piro (see Gow 2012, see also Calavia Sáez 2005, Rival 1993, Surrallés 2005). For this group, there is an association of certain sociological roles of men and women in the community with their respective responsibilities in ensuring the propulsion of the canoe. Typically, older men would orient the canoe by poling from the prow whereas women would paddle at the stern.

In the Ye'kwana case, the elder added a crucial point that links the example of the canoe to the idea of ownership and mastery: The person who "steers" the canoe does so because he or she fabricated it as an extension of himself or herself, just like Wanaadi did with the Ye'kwana when he gave them their *do'ta*s

as extension of his[31]. You "steer" what you fabricate, he said. Thus, for instance, this logic could be extended to a child who is "steered" by his or her parents, to a shaman who "steers" his spirit-double, or to a community's leader who "steers" his group. They do so as their owners or leaders, Yk. *adaichoomo* – also antecessors. It was mentioned in chapter two that another way in which the Ye'kwana frame these derivative agentive relations is as being "held" or "pulled" by those with whom one walks/beats on a path and is "tied" to. Now we add to this picture that people who are "tied" together are also "steered" by those who come before, and they themselves "steer" those who come after.

Living steered by a single *pensamiento*

The process of making other people in the community have a single *pensamiento* is one that my older interlocutors saw as beginning when boys and girls are little and that involves teaching them to behave correctly and to do things in the community. "When a child is no longer a baby, one would begin to teach. 'You can't do this and that, obey your mom, obey your dad'", it was explained to me. This came across as a learning process that took place throughout the upbringing of children. However, in those testimonies it was repeatedly emphasized that there used to be a crucial moment in that process which was the epitome of how "giving" younger people "their *pensamientos*" worked in order to think autonomously and to align these towards a common one with the rest of the group. That moment is a good instance to understand what the Ye'kwana meant by having lived "steered" by a "common" or "single" *pensamiento*.

That occasion was the ritual whipping – Sp. *sobar*, Yk. *aijucudu* – of adolescents that the Ye'kwana used to practice until some years after the arrival of the NTM. In Carijunagua and in the Tovar extended family there are not too many people who grew up when the Ye'kwana in Upper Orinoco who converted to Christianity still practiced this. Elders like Santana and his wife did, as well as some people in Ignacio's generation. Santana told me that the whipping would take place when the children were "*grandecitos*" – big enough –, probably around eleven or twelve years old. It was done, he said, to "give" them "their *pensamientos*" and "to make them strong, disciplined". Women and men had to go through it. Girls, once, when they had their first menstruation. Boys, multiple times, at around the same age, particularly when they got back from their first hunts of big prey – usually tapir or peccary.

The girl, upon her first bleeding, would have her hair cut and be secluded in a hut for some four days, fasting without water nor food. She could not be seen by anyone or go outside. Only an elder woman

[31] For a revision of the fabrication of the Ye'kwana canoe and its transformation through this group's contact with the national Venezuela society, see Coppens 1981, 46-52.

would be there, looking after her. During this time, the girl would be twisting cotton to make strands for hammocks. On the fourth day, older men would line up in two rows forming what Ye'kwana referred to as a "path", connecting the hut's door to the central area of the village where a pole would be set up. Each lined up man would have a fiber rope – Yk. *cudawa*. And, as the girl walked quickly along the passage, each man would hit her with it. At the pole, an elder man, usually the community's founding elder and chief, would be waiting for her, and would begin hitting her, also with a rope. In the case of boys, these would not be secluded, but would likewise be "*sobados*" – lashed – standing by the head of the hunted animal. At the whipping place – Yk. *waataiju'tojo* –, girls and boys would be recited a series of indications – Sp. *instrucciones*, Yk. *wätä'se'totojo* – by the leader on how to live properly.

My interlocutors' reasoning of how the whipping worked to give adolescents their *pensamientos* reflects the process of learning through incorporation and of thinking by aligning thoughts along paths that we described in the previous chapter. As with what happened when the singing and dancing of the Wätunnä oriented people's spirit-doubles along a narrated path, here the emphasis was on having the body of the adolescents destabilized so knowledge could be incorporated, in this case also by using a constant beating. I was told that, as part of the ritual, it was necessary for the boys and girls to fast beforehand and to drink only *iadake* – fermented manioc beer. Apart from this, "no water, no *iucuta* [a hot manioc drink], nothing". It was that bodily preparation that made the learning effective. Only in that state adolescents would then be lashed and recited the instructions by the leader. As a rhythmic recitation took place, this was accompanied by the beatings with the rope. I was told that it was that constant beating that made "instructions" "stay inside" – Sp. "*el golpe hace que eso quede adentro*". That way, those instructions would "never be erased" – Sp. "*nunca se borra*". According to these reasonings, the whipping, rather than a punishment of sorts, was part of an idea of forming bodies by incorporating knowledge, and through an association between recitations and rhythmical beatings. To complete this process, as with the Wätunnä celebration, vomiting was sought "for purification". As we might recall, vomiting and fainting during the celebration of the Wätunnä was associated with achieving a "new *pensamiento*".

That the Ye'kwana see a connection between being given instructions by an elder or leader on how to live properly, on the one hand, and being given a path on the other, is captured in an explanation I once got of how the Christian Wanaadi created the sun, the moon, and the stars "with his strength" – Yk. "*töjäädudu que*". "He did it because he is superior – Yk. *ojodhaato* – to them". I was told that, by instructing the sun to go up in the morning and down in the evening, and the moon and the stars to go out at night, Wanaadi gave them "their paths" and made them "stable" – Yk. *iäätäda*. Importantly, in

similar explanations, the link between being given what makes a being live in a certain way and having a path and a *pensamiento* is extended to human sociality: Like the sun, who knows that he must go out every day, people have their "instructions", so they know to wake up every morning and to do the things they do to live a proper life. Without a path formed by indications for how to live and to be "stable", people are not "true" – Yk. *chanöngato* – nor "good"– Yk. *ashichaato*.

The association of the whipping ritual with giving people *pensamientos* that are autonomous while at the same time "aligned" with a single path shared by the group, was explicit. In the indications recited while the adolescents were being lashed there was an emphasis on "thinking good" and on "learning to think". Regarding boys, someone gave me the following example of what was recited to them as they were whipped: "learn to hunt, *think* about bringing food to your mom and dad, to your little sisters, to your nieces. *Think of that*. *Think of that*. *You have to think of that*. You have to wake up early. You have to work. When you are told [to do something], you have to obey. Don't answer back". Wham! A hit came. The following is one for the girls: "*You have to think good*, prepare your *iucuta* before your mom and your dad wake up, before they tell you to do so. *Think*. When your mom tells you to go clean a garden, do what she says. When your husband tells you to prepare *iadake* [manioc beer] for the visitors because he is building a house, do what he says. Don't answer back. Don't be angry. You have to be good [*ashichaato*]. Don't behave badly. Telling you that, I hit you". Wham!

It might be said that joining on a collective path and having "a single thought" involved an intended dual process of acquiring personal autonomy and responsibility while also producing conformity with the rest of the group through the transmission and incorporation of knowledge in the form of instructions on how to live properly. An explanation I got from Santana elaborates on the intended purpose of this ritual. Talking about the adolescents who used to undergo the ritual, he said: "they had to have their knowledge, do what their parents told them. 'You do this', and you do it. [A girl] has to start thinking about preparing *iucuta*, manioc bread, *ajicero* [a spicy soup]. Then she prepares it, even though she is not told. It is her own *pensamiento*. They are prepared to do it. That's what it [the ritual] was for. For them to learn. Her mom does not have to say, 'go cleaning'. She does it on her own. 'What am I going to do know? Ah, I go to the garden'. If she realizes there is no manioc for the manioc bread, she knows she has to go fetch it from the garden. That's what that [the ritual] was for, for them to think on their own, so they know how to think. That's why you hit them, so they have a good *pensamiento*".

Steered in daily life

In the past, this steering and thought alignment translated into everyday life, according to my older interlocutors, through achieving group synchronization in daily activities. On any given day in a Ye'kwana community, the activities for the day would be announced in the morning by the chief, the *adhaajä*. How this used to work in practice was that usually the deputy leader – Yk. *Cajichaana döseno* – would go to speak to the former upon waking up and, as my interlocutors describe, ask him "what his *pensamiento* was" for the day – Sp. "*Cuál es su pensamiento*?". The deputy would then operationalize the instructions he got from the leader (see Arvelo Jiménez 1973, 5). Take this explanation I got: "Before, we lived under the government of the *cacique*, well ordered. [In the morning] he distributed the tasks to be done, 'these people are gonna cut trees to build a house. Three people are going hunting. Three people are going out as messengers'". If there was no major task to be done, the leader would just say that he had no plans for the day and people would go their ways, or he would allocate minor activities. "'Tell the boys… Some people don't have woven trays, some people don't have *sebucán* [manioc squeezer], some people don't have canoes. Tell the boys that they have to make all that.' Then people will go fetch palm fiber. And then they will begin to weave. Thus we lived in the past. *Cajichaana woije*" – steered by the group's leader.

We had a glimpse of this notion of collective coordination in chapter 2, where we mentioned Ignacio's interpretation of daily activities as a rhythmic "walking/beating" with others and "tied" to the "drumming" made by a leader. To recall it, Ignacio put it thus: "It is like when we are all fabricating something, let's say a table… After we all finish [the table] here, we then go to work there. After finishing there, we then go work over there. We all beat together [Sp. "*todos golpeamos juntos*"]". It is not done nowadays in Carijunagua, but back in the day and still in some rural Ye'kwana communities I visited, the activities through the day are marked with shouts – Yk. *cä'tönä* – by the leader to indicate what is to be done at a certain moment of the day. In the past, a big seashell – Yk. *janacwa* – was also blown in some communities with the same purpose, I was told, and some Ye'kwana say that this is the same idea behind a bell that is used today in some communities. In yet other places, a drum was seemingly used. In any case, such forms of marking the timing of activities to be done together, according to my interlocutors, were also "the beats" – Sp. *"los golpes*" – of the collective daily walk. "Tied by the drumming, one worked", they summed it up.

We will come back to the idea of collective coordination in the next chapters. And we will see that the daily organization of activities by the leader does not necessarily entail a vertical authority nor forcing people to do things. Rather, it is the cheerful effervescence of working together in synchrony that the Ye'kwana say attracts their interest to join on the path of collective activities. That is how a leader "ties

up" people's individual paths in daily life. The important point here is to highlight the association the Ye'kwana make of having their thoughts and intentions "steered" by a leader with the notion of "walking" a single path in daily life by attuning to the "drumming" of the community's collective activities. Echoing Tim Ingold's point on sociality mentioned in the introduction (see Ingold 2015, 2020), it is an understanding of sociality in which this emerges out of the formation of a collective correspondence of people's path-following thoughts on a common set of actions. We see here the emergence of sociality from the same process of direct experience of rhythmic flows, this time in daily life, and from these affording a path for the person to walk/beat along. That is, the correspondences that are intrinsic to the process of longitudinal perception of the environment can emerge from the collective synchronization people achieve by attuning to the drumming produced by someone in the organization of collective life. We saw in this chapter some of the same logic of thought-alignment we described in the previous one. The young incorporate and are given their "thoughts" from the elders as they are told their "instructions" on how to live properly. The young are then able to "think" of and concentrate on these autonomously. And, finally, "knowing" their instructions, they are hence capable of aligning themselves with the rest of the community on the same daily walk.

Steered by what one wants, or contamination within

When the entire community found out that Ricky was the culprit regarding Elimar's pregnancy, indignation immediately ensued. After endless meetings of the entire community to discuss the matter, the solution was that Ricky was to be "disciplined". We already know that this did not last too long. But, at least for some days, it did appear as though Ricky was indeed "disciplined". He was rarely seen around in the community, spending most of the day in his house. He would only go out for short periods of time to do things like getting a bath. He stopped participating in the youth music group's activities. And he was not seen at church services on Sundays. Ricky was, as people in Carijunagua said during those days, *tänwadooto*. This is a Ye'kwana term that, in the past, people used to refer to those who had their bodies infected by Odosha's contamination and who, to avoid being vectors of this contamination themselves, often had to isolate from the community, engage in purification rituals, and usually fast (see de Barandiarán 1979, Gongora 2017, 262-290). For instance, someone would become *tänwadooto* for touching a death body, and would have to stay alone in the forest for days. Thus, *tänwadooto* was associated with the physical illness caused by Odosha and with this provoking an unstable *pensamiento*.

Many Ye'kwana still use *tänwadooto* in this sense, including older Christians. However, Christian Ye'kwana in general now also associate being *tänwadooto* with being sinful. We mentioned before that this also

applies to *chonenadiiyö*, a term that refers to the physical and behavior "defects" that also came from having the body affected by Odosha and his agents. Yet, these "bodily defects" are now also translated as sins – Sp. *pecados*. For example, I have heard Christian Ye'kwana often say of people who, like Yusuany, speak too loudly, get angry easily, or who have a physical disability that those are their "sins". Terms and descriptions such as these are explicitly associated with having unstable thoughts.

One thing that came up a couple of times in my conversations with Santana was that there are things today that might cause a destabilization of thoughts. He mentioned, for instance, living mixed with people from other indigenous groups, from whom, according to Santana, the Ye'kwana "learn to fight", meaning they become quarrelsome in everyday life. Also, living inserted in Venezuelan national society, attending the school, and so on, as appreciated by older Ye'kwana as these are, were described to me as changing how people live, and as destabilizing people's *pensamientos*. However, a more profound change that Ignacio, Santana, and other Christian Ye'kwana identify explicitly as a cause of thought instability is that, with Christianity, they "learnt" to "steer" themselves by their feelings – Sp. "*con el evangelio aprendimos a manejarnos con nuestros sentimientos*". That is, *umjummadö woije*, what Ignacio described as the opposite of being "*cajichaana woije*" – steered by the leader.

Ignacio made this distinction during the work we did to translate to Spanish a study guide of the Book of Genesis that the NTM had produced in Ye'kwana language. He was explaining to me some descriptions that the guide makes about contamination and the Christian person, which are also shared by Ye'kwana Christians in general. The book of Genesis study guide in Ye'kwana is recent material compared to the New Testament in Ye'kwana language, which was translated in the first years after the initial contact with the NTM. But it is a significant piece, for it underscores the importance for the evangelization process that NTM saw in translating and explaining elementary questions of Baptist Protestantism to the Ye'kwana. The study guide, which drew on material used more broadly by Christian missionaries elsewhere, was adapted to the issues and questions that had apparently been expressed by Christian Ye'kwana the most. But it was also adapted, in the missionaries' eyes, to Ye'kwana traditional cultural framings, on which they drew to translate their Christian message. To understand what Ignacio meant, it would be useful to look at the points made in the guide, including the equivocated translations the NTM missionaries did of traditional Ye'kwana ideas of the person and agency.

One of these was the reformulation of the notion the Ye'kwana had of contagion, which the guide's authors linked with Adam and Eve's disobedience. The guide frames the episode in which Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden fruit as a primordial contamination event that caused the world to be "*amoije*" –

dangerous, contaminated (lesson 7). The cause of the world's contamination, as we saw in past chapters, used to be described in pre-conversion stories as resulting from the trapping of Odosha in the earthly plane, which then, as the Ye'kwana began to walk on the humanizing path, became the source of potential bodily contagion and of a loss of capacity to follow paths. Moreover, the guide also portrays Adam as one of the *adaichoomo*, of the ancestors, as an *adhaajä* of today's Ye'kwana. At some point, Adam is even described as being "at the front" of the line of the Ye'kwana people. This reformulation of a new primordial contamination event and of Adam as the initiator of the generational "walk" can indeed be detected in that the older generation of Ye'kwana Christians sees what Adam and Eve did as the initiation of an actual bodily contagion that has been replicated through people to this day. They would use explanations such as this: "*mädä woijato amoijaato naajojoi cäyunacaajoto*" – "Because of him [Adam] who touched what was contaminated/forbidden, we suffer". This is something that younger generations of Christians often complain about; they say elders take too "literally" that what happened to Adam and Eve was an actual bodily contamination that still affects them.

The guide also explains that Adam and Eve's contamination took place because they did not follow the Christian Wanaadi's instructions, that they acted as though "steered by what they wanted". The authors do mention that the Christian Wanaadi gave people their *pensamientos* so they could "identify" the "good" – Yk. *ashichaato* – and the "bad" – Yk. *conemjönö*. This, we might remember is one of the capacities of the perceiving and thinking process described in the previous chapter, which the Ye'kwana said was something done by the beating life force in the chest given to them by Wanaadi. However, the guide then adds, Wanaadi only gave this capacity to humans, and not to animals or cosmic bodies. These do not know how to talk, it says, and they do not have the capacity to "identify". It continues telling the reader that, since humans do have the capacity to think, they can also "steer" themselves. Elaborating on this point, Wanaadi is described as "the owner/master of affection" – Yk. *wä'jummanä adhaajä*. And it is said that humans, like Wanaadi, as they have affection for others, can also act as though moved by this, not by what others tell them to do. This part intends to say that humans govern themselves by what they want and care about, but it equates this with the capacity to experience affection.

In any case, it is repeated in the guide that Wanaadi, as he made humans have *pensamientos*, also made them capable of steering themselves by what they want – Yk. "*So'to mmaane töwoije eijai waiña'je Wanaadi cönnöi*". This notion of having thoughts that are oriented by what people want is expressly tied in the guide to a break with the notion of being on a path by following instructions from others. It uses the example of cosmic bodies to make this point: "The sun, the moon, the stars, they cannot govern

themselves by what they want. Wanaadi told them how to live, *they have their paths* [my emphases, Yk. *chäämadööcomo toweiyemö*]. That is why *they obey*. Wanaadi, on the contrary, does what he wants … And that is why he made people to do what they want". A line between living with instructions from fabricators and therefore being "on a path" on the one hand, and doing and being guided by what one wants on the other, is expressly drawn. The beating path for cosmic bodies, as we saw earlier, is their instructions to rise at certain time of the day, to go back down in the afternoon, or to go out only at night. According to the guide, just following their given instructions means that they do not have the capacity to think – to walk on a path is to not think. Humans, on the contrary, do have the capacity to think and, hence, "steer" themselves by what they want and care about – *unjummadö woije*. They do not need to be oriented by instructions from others. They do not need to walk/beat on paths.

The association seen in the previous chapter between the incapacity to follow paths and being physically affected by Odosha's contamination comes to the fore in the explanation. Fast forwarding to Adam and Eve again, the guide tries to tie both ideas of contamination and disobedience together by saying that the latter resulted from them being victims of Odosha-the devil through the snake. And this is further connected with them having the capacity to then do what they wanted. Through subsequent lessons, it is said that Odosha deceived Adam and Eve and that, when Odosha enters a person, which might happen in their dreams, it takes hold of his or her *pensamiento*. The victim, it is added, is then incapable of realizing that it is Odosha and not his or her own thoughts. That is how, the guide says, the ancestors died with their thoughts "controlled" by Odosha without realizing it. They were incapable, as people still are today, of doing what Wanaadi's life-force should have made them capable of, namely, of "distinguishing" between the "good" and the "bad". Adam and Eve could not do it, and so, driven by what they wanted, they chose the bad, contaminated option. And thus, the line of reasoning concludes, bodily contamination began.

Echoing the change intended by the NTM in how the *pensamiento* works, it has been argued that Christian conversion might entail a transformation of ideas people have about how the mind works (SEE Luhrmann 2011; 2021). This might be especially so in the case of conversion to Protestant Christianity, which could imply an increase in "the social valued placed on individual intention and emotion in a way which strikingly altered the way people understood intention and emotion" (Luhrmann 2011, 8; see also Jaynes 1976). A manifestation of this could be an interiorization of the person as part of a process of giving new meaning to interior thoughts, including as expression of a new definition of the person as sinful (see Robbins 2004). With the apparent intended purpose of producing a sense of interiority among the Ye'kwana, in their

explanations in the study guide its authors tried to weave together two somewhat contradicting lines of argument when it came to the Ye'kwana logics of paths: on the one hand, the idea that the Christian Wanaadi created humans with the capacity to "steer" themselves by what they want; and on the other, that this transformation was also connected to the primordial contamination of Adam and Eve which provoked the contagion and instability of thoughts which Christians now associate with being sinful.

Yet, beyond the NTM's intentions, their explanations did reaffirm in the eyes of my older Ye'kwana interlocutors the idea that, whereas now the Christian path was the "proper" humanizing one to walk on, the infection of the body by Odosha-the devil's contamination and people "steering" themselves by what they want heightened the risk of the person not being able to keep his or her *pensamientos* stable on a single path, including those of the *evangelio* and of communal life. Whereas in the past the source of corporeal illness from contamination was located in the exterior and could eventually "enter" the body, it was now, in the eyes of many Christian Ye'kwana, permanently within the latter. In fact, some of them even say that the fact that babies cry is an indication that people carry that contamination within them since they are born. All this reformulation made permanent the potential risk of disarticulation of correspondences between the person and the collective rhythmic flow of social life. A contaminated body, and *pensamientos* which are unable to follow paths lead the person to break away from the trajectory along which the rest of the group "walks/beats" together. That was the complaint from elders after the event with Ricky and the other adolescents. In the past, when people did not "steer" themselves "by what they wanted", they said, life was harmonious. Meanwhile, now that people's *pensamientos* are unstable and do not follow the leader in his drumming organization of daily life, people fight, nobody follows instructions, the youth do not participate in the collective activities of the group, they do not know what to do and where to go, and so on.

All this picture of the transformation of the person and relational agency intended by the NTM in the guide would be incomplete without mentioning a further point made by its authors in their efforts to break with the logic of paths.

An unstable person, a stable Wanaadi

In the Genesis guide, the transformation of the underlying logics of paths intended by the NTM is not only presented as revisions of how the *pensamiento* works and of ideas of relational agency. Parallel to these transformations at the level of the person, the authors also present a revision of the concept of Wanaadi, which further reveals their intended purpose of breaking with the logic of continuity implicit in conceiving

paths as derived replications – as beats. These two reformulations – at the levels of the person and of Wanaadi – go hand in hand. Whereas the intended transformation at the level of the person happens through a destabilization of thoughts, at the level of Wanaadi, on the contrary, it happens through stabilizing this figure. In both cases, however, there is an intended detachment and singularization of instances – the person and Wanaadi – from the continuity implicit in paths. That is, of stopping fluidity and continuity through the production of bounded entities[32]. In the case of the revision of Wanaadi in the guide, this can be summed up in the authors' affirmation, in lesson 8, that "Wanaadi is stable. He is true/correct, and does not substitute/replace himself" – Yk. "*Wanaadi ñäädä yotoodono. Chäänöngeedä töwö weneene, enwacaama'da*". Strengthening

To consider this intended change we should go back to how Wanaadi has been conceived within the framework of paths by non-Christian Ye'kwana. According to the description of Wanaadi, there was not a single Wanaadi but many replications or doubles, in different bodies, of the prototypical shaman-like figure residing at the top of the cosmic building. According to such descriptions, as the cosmic building unfolded into a new level, Wanaadi likewise unfolded into a new figure; "the same Wanaadi" with a new body and often with a derived name – Atawanadi, Yadeyumadi, Yadeyu, Yavidiuwa, and so on. And the same logic of replication applied when a new "envoy" – Yk. *amoode* – was sent by Wanaadi to the earthly plane to protect it and to arrange it for the people living there. In that scenario, too, it was the same Wanaadi, with a new body and a slightly changed name as well – Wanasedume, Sedume Yanadi, Sedujeyanadi, Wadeyumadi, and so on. All of them, like the Wanaadi at the top, were shaman-like figures, and, as the former's doubles or replications, they were his *amoode*[33].

Amoode is a term that the Ye'kwana translate variably as envoy, messenger, or servant. Christian Ye'kwana also translate it as angel. It is somewhat equivalent to another term, *anonö*, which is also translated as messenger, envoy, or servant, and also, in some contexts, to *ecönö*, pet. All these are terms that denote a relational connection between beings who, along paths, are "steered" or "governed" by

[32] That the cutting of flows is part of projects of modernity or a fundamental aspect of the construction of relations is a point that has been made multiple times in the anthropological literature. For instance, the emergence of bounded hybrids and the break of flows is a point that Marylin Strathern has raised against the continuities and interconnections assumed by models that emphasized hybridity, such as Latour's network theory. Strathern argues that relations and hybrids always carry both continuity and the possibility of this stopping, and, moreover, of the possible subsequent restoration of flows (see Strathern 1996, also Latour 1993). In contrast, in Ingold's revision of the logic of lines and their growth through many of his works (see Ingold 2011; 2015; 2016), despite the fluidity of the latter being part of life itself according to him, Ingold has noted the existence of processes of line straightening and of projects, usually tied to modernity, involving the conception of growth as a superposition of blocks or the assumption of beings as bounded and possessing definitive ontological states.

[33] For a detailed version of this logic of replicability, see Gongora 2017, 36-120.

someone “higher up” – Yk. *e’jodheiñe*. That is, it refers to the being upon whom, as it is fabricated by and under a relation of caring and protection from another, agency-as-steering is exerted. In other words, it is the same logic of relational agency underpinning the logic of paths as replicated derivations – *anonö* and *amoode* are sometimes also translated as someone’s “copies”, “images”, or “doubles”. It should also be noted that *amoode* in particular is also the root in Ye’kwana words associated with the action of creation and fabrication – for instance, *amoodena* is the verb to create/fabricate. Even though these terms might be used interchangeably in some contexts, there are some important differences. *Anonö* is used in general to talk about, for example, a leader’s followers. *Ecönö* refers mainly to beings who are adopted, animals mainly or spirit-animals controlled by a shaman.

Amoode, in turn, is exclusively used when this logic is applied to the doubles-derivations of shamanic figures, like Wanaadi or a community’s *juwai*. For instance, Wanasedume, Wanaadi’s first envoy to the earthly plane, was his *amoode*, just like a shaman’s spirit-animal is that shaman´s *ecönö* and also his *amoode*. And a shaman is himself an *amoode* of Wanaadi. However, in contrast to a regular person’s doubles, who are confined to their position on a generational path behind the person who steers them and from whom they immediately derived, a shaman-like figure’s *amoode* has the ability to bypass the logic of successive replication. For example, on a path of ordinary people, Ricky is held and steered by Ignacio, Ignacio is held and steered by Santana’s, and a community is steered and held by its leader. They walk/beat along the generational path one step – one beat – at a time, substituting one another. Shamans, like Wanaadi, on the contrary, can, so to speak, jump the spatiotemporal line and travel at will along it with their *amoodes* while still “holding” them, “feeding” them, being them yet not exactly the same. Elder Ye’kwana say, for instance, that, in the past, shamans were “in direct connection with Wanaadi” and would travel to meet him and “eat” with him at the upper-most level of the cosmic building. Regular people cannot do this. As an *amoode* of Wanaadi, shamans were able to travel to other realms and get in touch with beings there, recover a person’s lost spirit, or ask the owners of animals for game to hunt.

It has been suggested that a logic of actualization of a primordial virtuality lies at the core of the Amazonian idea of the spirit as image/double (see Viveiros de Castro 2007, Stolze Lima 1999). The argument has been that the spirit, as an expression of a persistent virtuality, is actualized in new bodies as a reenactment of the magnified beings that started the process of separation of humans from nonhumans. Images are, in Viveiros de Castro’s words, not representations of that virtual potentiality, but its non-iconic representatives (2007, 160). Sharing the same spirit, all are agents. Regarding the Ye’kwana, our discussion of their notion of paths underscores the perception that the actualization of such an

existing virtuality happens as progressive, derived spatiotemporal transformations, changing by a matter of degree with each new beat with which the path progresses forward (see next chapter). Along such a progression, all beings, at their respective positions, are doubles of those walking before and masters/owners of those that come behind (for an exploration of the connection of doubles and owners, see Cesarino 2010, Fausto 2008, Viveiros de Castro 2007). They are held and steered and they themselves steer and are held by others, objects and subjects simultaneously. Among these, only shamans, as Wanaadi's direct doubles, can leave their respective spatiotemporal positions on the line of actualization and move at will along it with their spirit-doubles. We will come back to this in the next chapter.

Going back to what the guide says about Wanaadi, all this digression was necessary because the former to go directly against the logic of successive derivability and replicability implicit in the idea of paths – in which both the person and Wanaadi were inserted – in an effort to purify these figures as disconnected subjective agents. Through the first lessons of the guide, Wanaadi is described as capable of sustaining himself, and as being nobody's fabrication. As Ignacio paraphrased what the guide says, Wanaadi "does not have mom and dad". As such, the guide goes on, Wanaadi does not need anyone to be alive, he does not have an owner or chief, and he is therefore not "steered" by others. His *pensamiento*, like those of humans, his creations, does not follow other people's lead. Also, since Wanaadi is "superior" – Yk. *o'jodhaato* –, he does not have anyone "above him" who taught him to do the things he does. He did not need to learn from others. Defined thus, the guide explicitly says that Wanaadi is the "original" – Yk. *nudooto* – and not a "replica" – Yk. *chu'taajä,* also statue. He is "*amoodeta'da*", nobody's *amoode*, not created through replication. In sum, in the guide, Wanaadi, like the Christian person, tries to be detached from the logic of paths. Unambiguously, the guide says Wanaadi is "*äämäjöönö*". That is, he is without – suffix *jöönö* – a path – *äämä* –, meaning that he does not die or that he does not move. Not having a path is, ultimately, a negation of having a life of replicable transformations. In Ignacio's words that day, without a path, "Wanaadi always is" – Sp. "*siempre está*" – and nobody can reach to him.

Social paths in and out of synch

At Simón López's place, after Santana had talked to boys and to the congregation, Ricky and the others "stood up" and gave their testimonies. After that day, the boys returned to participating in the usual activities of the community and the church. On one occasion Santana explained to me what a testimony was for, an explanation also shared by Ye'kwana Christians in general. Santana told me that, after a person has sinned, it is important for everybody to see that that person has his or her thoughts straightened again. Ye'kwana Christians translate the Spanish word "*testimonio*" as *eichö*, life. Only by standing in front

of the congregation can everybody know that a person who has deviated is *ashichaato*, good, again. And, by doing that, that person can go back to participating in church and communal activities and to taking the holy supper with the congregation again. Only others can say that a person is *ashichaato*. The same person "never calls [himself or herself] good" – Sp. "*la misma persona nunca se nombra bueno*". The group does so by seeing that that person goes back to behaving appropriately, does not fight, and follows the instructions on how to live properly, and so on. Today, for Ye'kwana Christians, giving a testimony in front of the congregation after a person has "deviated" is an important aspect of how they undertake this collective evaluation of the "goodness" of a person. That is, of his or her return to the common, good path.

No doubt the framing of Santana's exhortation would resonate with moral exhortations and discourses probably everywhere in the world, including in Venezuelan *criollo* way of talking. However, one thing this chapter has tried to do, in line with has been suggested in previous ones, is to show that the moral and social use of similar expressions of alignments and deviations by Ye'kwana Christians reveals how the framework of paths we have been describing thus far is translated into Ye'kwana understandings of sociality. And, in this sense, that paths as a "total social fact" in indigenous Amazonia (Hugh-Jones 2019, Chaumeil 2024) can also provide an overarching framework for the experience and practice, within the same logic of spatiotemporal unfolding, of sociality and for its production and reproduction, as well as for the definition of relational agency, of the ethical formation of the person, or of the moral evaluation of communal life. The chapter has also tried to show, in line with the argument in the previous one, how changes brought about by Christianity took place and were made sense of by the Ye'kwana within the all-encompassing logic of paths. We will come back to this shortly below.

In the picture of Ye'kwana understanding of sociality as paths, the possibility that this might have been seen as coming about as a process of alignment of autonomous path-following thoughts suggests a strong emphasis on personal autonomy as the basis for the formation, in collective life, of the dyadic correspondence described before. A point specially made regarding groups in the Guianese shield is that indigenous societies in the Amazon put special emphasis on personal autonomy, in the sense that they share a "powerful and egalitarian social philosophy" that is maintained through everyday reproduction of the mutuality of the ties of community and, at the same time, an "obstinate individualism" (Overing 2003, 293; see also Buitrón 2016; Rivière 1984). Relevant to our discussion, such a notion of strong individuality and personal autonomy as the basis for the formation of harmonious sociality, has been linked with a capacity of having thoughts, such as in the case of the Piaroa. For this group, having a "life of thoughts"

and a "life of senses", which are acquired individually from crystal boxes in which the gods enclosed them to protect the world from their excessive use, forms a "beautiful, and highly private, internally designed self" (Overing 2003, 303). Thus, for this people, a harmonious social life, as an expression of a "community of similars", is the product of every person having the capacity of thought production. Likewise, it could be said that, according to older generations of Ye'kwana, the capacity to follow paths with the *pensamiento* might constitute a manifestation of personal autonomy, while also being the basis of a notion of "beautiful" – Yk. *iñataje* – and tranquil social life that comes about through the alignment of those expressions of autonomy along a single trajectory – having a "single *pensamiento*".

The understanding of collective life as resulting from each person following a single flow of set collective activities and instructions on how to live a good life with others speaks to a larger concern with how this is achieved through attunement and coordination. And with the reproduction of a way of life through, precisely, the production of intergenerational uniformity (see chapter 6). Coordination, as it was seen before, is at the core of the notion of how paths unfold as a rhythmic continuity; it is at the center of explanations of social life as a collective walking or beating that takes place as one generation succeeds and "pulls" another forward, and as people join others on a common trajectory of instructed daily activities. Thus, for instance, elements such as the understanding of agency as an intergenerational steering of others, or the ethical formation by elders of the young through the "alignment" of the latter's thoughts towards thinking autonomously about the correct activities of daily life, point to ways of achieving such uniformity across generational lines. In other words, echoing definitions of sociality in the anthropological literature of linear becoming cited in the previous chapter, which see the former as coming about through the formation of correspondences between separate lines (see Ingold 2015), paths might as well serve as an indigenous model for sociality that emphasizes its emergence from the synchronization of separate autonomous capacities to follow and to be attuned to spatiotemporal progressions in collective life.

Following this logic, it would make sense that agency and leadership might also be seen as being exerted linearly through the steering of followers, and as carrying the capacity to generate rhythmic synchronization by setting the pace for people to join along – that is, the instructions of how to live and what activities to do and when. Or, in the words of the Ye'kwana, agency upon others is exerted with the "drumming" that "ties" followers to their leader. In such process of entrainment, those same leaders who steer are themselves steered by and tied to others before them, forming a line of transmissible instructions for the continuous replication of a proper social life, a point we will explore in more detail in

the next chapter (also García Briceño 2022). Furthermore, it would also make sense that, in this framing of sociality, moral discourses and moral evaluation of others might as well take place in terms of to what extent people might be synchronized with the set common trajectory by using a language of alignments and deviations. The Ye'kwana, like other indigenous groups in the Amazon, refrain from evaluating and judging other people´s intentions and motivations to do things (see Buitrón 2021). However, what we have been delineating thus far about how the notion of *pensamiento* works to orient and be oriented by others along paths paints a picture of ethically influencing, forming, and evaluating others using the notions of path-alignment and coordination. Without "minds" to evaluate, in the sense of an interior private dimension, the point of reference for the Ye'kwana is instead whether a person has his or her capacity to follow paths – with the *pensamiento* – synchronized and "aligned" with a collective trajectory.

All this brings us back to the changes of these notions of agency and personal autonomy that conversion to evangelical Christianity produced among the Ye'kwana, and the impacts of these on the idea of sociality as a collective path. A distinguishing trait of the recent ontology-minded anthropology of Christianity in the indigenous Amazon, mentioned in the previous chapter, is the definition of the process triggered by conversion to Christianity as one of ontological stabilization centered in the body. One observation in this literature has been, following a wider point from the larger body of the anthropology of Christianity, that there is not an explicit association between individuality and Christianity, even in Protestant forms like Baptism (see Vilaça 2011, also Coleman 2015, Mosko 2010, Robbins 2004, 2010). This case has been made, for instance, regarding the Brazilian Wari, who were also converted to Baptist Christianity by the NTM. For this group, even though conversion to Christianity did involve an ontological stabilization, it also entailed a transit from what has been referred to as a form of "dividuality" – that is, of the notion of the indigenous Amazonian person as a dual, composite form of humanity/animality – towards what we might call an unfinished individuality (Vilaça 2011). Unfinished because, even though in cases like the Wari the Christian person was stabilized in the position of predator through a new humanizing perspective shared with the Christian god, the partibility that existed with animality persisted in new forms, particularly with the Devil as a form of alterity.

The transformations triggered in the notion of the Ye'kwana person by conversion to Christianity could, at first, suggest a similar two-fold change. On the one hand, a stabilization on an exclusive humanizing trajectory, which was explored in the previous chapter. On the other, a persistence of potential instability through a new inability to follow paths with thoughts. However, this picture would need to include the fundamental point that, even though the intended stabilization of Wanaadi in the guide of Genesis was

carried by the NTM with the explicit purpose of detaching it from the logic of derived replications entities, the destabilization of the Ye'kwana Christian person in turn involved a reformulation of the latter using the overarching logic of life and sociality as paths. That is, rather than this transformation of the Ye'kwana Christian person involving an explicit break with the logic of replicated derivations similar to what the NTM intended to do with Wanaadi, it took the form of an alteration of a person's ability to follow paths in social life. In the eyes of Christian Ye'kwana, this has been expressed as a transit between two forms of sociality and relational agency – from living steered by a leader towards living steered by what the person wants. In other words, this transformation brought about a potential source of instability for social life that is still experienced by older Ye'kwana through the collective synchronization of autonomous paths. Whereas personal autonomy as a capacity to follow paths was the basis for the formation of collective correspondences in the past, it has now become a force pulling against the synchronization of living aligned with a replicable way of life. Unstable paths became individual paths, that is, a diversification of individualized life possibilities. Not being pulled along a single trajectory, people could now take the individual courses they wanted. To face this risk of disarticulation of the common path and to keep people engaged in walking/beating together in social life, the Ye'kwana recur to making everyone "animated". To this we turn now.

Chapter 5

Pulling paths together: An animated Christian life

June and July of 2017 were exceptionally tough on Carijunagua. The first showers of the rainy season had fuelled the low-level malaria epidemic that had by then become the new normal in the Venezuelan Amazon, into a full-fledged epidemiological emergency. Mosquitoes were a buzzing menace and people had been falling ill like dominoes. Many of them had withdrawn to their houses and were rarely seen in the common areas during the day. Some would only pop up sporadically in the shared cooking/dinning shack to scramble around for crumbs of cassava bread or leftovers from the last meal; or to check if someone had arrived from their gardens or from Puerto Ayacucho with something to eat. But they would only drag their feet back to their houses in disappointment and with a growling stomach. Gardens were not producing enough cassava to feed everybody. Galloping hyperinflation was making it hard to buy in the city the highly desired cassava bread, fish, or *mañoco*[34] with the devalued salaries of one or two of the government employees of the community. Only the very suboptimal, bland alternative of *criollo* foods – such as white rice or pasta – from CLAP boxes[35], which had also seen their delivery frequency drastically reduced, were barely guaranteeing some caloric ingestion. The intermittent protein was reserved for the oldest of the community, including Santana and his wife. The latter lay with malaria in her hammock next to the never-fully-extinguished common hearth.

Sadness was in the air. I arrived one day from the city to a desolated community and found Dionicia, Ignacio's sister, also with malaria, clad in a shabby white robe walking aimlessly in the grassy area surrounding the community. To my question of how she was feeling, I only got the low-pitched response that she had had fever the night before and asked me to bring fever pills the next time I went to the city. She looked smaller than usual, and her always-vivacious eyes were now absent and staring into space. Meanwhile, Luciano, the Jivi leader of one of the church's music groups, Siloé Celestial, had also stopped going to the community some weeks before after a bitter episode over a new guitar that had been promised to him but never given. And Ricky, who is the leader of the youth music group, Los Hijos del Rey,

[34] Grated and roasted cassava fibre.

[35] A social programme established by the Venezuelan government in 2016 to guarantee access to subsidised food, mainly simple carbohydrates, amid the hyperinflationary crisis.

was not paying too much attention to his duties leading the group. The absence of both music leaders had an immediate impact on the music groups, which seemed almost to cease to exist in those days. During the church services, only people in pairs or in uncoordinated small groups would pass to the front and sing dispiritedly in front of a suddenly diminished, apathetic audience. A couple of Sundays even went by with no church services whatsoever. And throughout the rest of the weeks the normal soundscape of the place, usually filled with the singing and playing of Christian songs to the melodies of *raspacanillas* or Mexican *rancheras*[36], was gloomy and silent, except for the occasional barking of *Blanquita* and *Negrita*, the community's emaciated dogs who were being hit even harder by the lack of food.

Only then did I realise, after months living with the Ye'kwana, that I had got used to a permanent state of animation always bustling with the sound of guitars, voices singing to Christian tunes, children yelling, running and playing around, adolescents playing football, women cooking and chatting together, and men working in the communal areas. This period of sadness and apathy brought to the fore the effervescence that always impregnated community life in Carijunagua. Now it seemed as though everyone was minding their own business, remaining in their houses to deal with their illness and their relatives', feeding their children with the little food they had away from the eyes of others, or spending the day in Puerto Ayacucho trying hopelessly to find some cash or some food. Some people even began to murmur that the pastor was not fulfilling his role of leading and organising new communal activities. Ignacio, physically weak as he was recovering from malaria himself, was also distracted by a never-ending feud with other Ye'kwana leaders over the control of a translation project of the Book of Luke that was being coordinated from Colombia by the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

The situation only began to improve after Ignacio, perhaps convinced that he did not stand a chance in his quarrel with the other pastors, and finally recovered from malaria, at last took things into his hands and decided to organise a two-day missionary conference – Sp. *conferencia misionera* –, which finally took place in Carijunagua in mid-August. Given that people from other congregations were coming to stay in Carijunagua for the full duration of the conference, food and shelter had to be provided for them. So, the community had to mobilise to find enough manioc for the manioc bread and enough fish for the soups that were going to be consumed. Under Ignacio's direction, men began to make the necessary repairs to the church. Others were deployed in Puerto Ayacucho to find a music equipment – speakers, audio console, microphones – that could be rented for the event, and to deliver invitations to other churches

[36] Latin American rhythms popular in Venezuela – see chapter 7.

for the conference. As with all such events, the more visiting churches and people congregated in the community, the better. In the end, to the delight of the people of the community, the conference was very well attended. Ye'kwana from other Puerto Ayacucho churches, some Puinave and Curripaco churches and even a *criollo* church joined the event. To Ignacio's satisfaction, a charismatic *criollo* pastor from Puerto Ayacucho accepted his invitation to speak at the conference. And thus, the lively atmosphere slowly began to come back to the community – plus the malaria epidemic abated once the rainy season began in earnest.

The agenda of Ye'kwana churches is full of similar events throughout the year. Inaugurated by the NTM in the fifties, conferences and so-called mini-conferences – missionary or not, as they may be organised around diverse themes – take place multiple times a year and see the gathering in alternating host communities of numerous churches for a week of praying, predicating, giving testimonies, and especially singing. Other activities include sharing food, visiting relatives, playing football, and furtive and not-so-furtive amorous encounters. Each Ye'kwana church likewise periodically celebrates the lord's supper. In Puerto Ayacucho three churches rotate the hosting of the celebration of the supper on the last Sunday of every month. During my time with Maranatha there was also a music festival, frequent attendance to events in *criollo* and other indigenous churches, at least two or three long missionary trips per year, visits from other churches, and so forth. The community's agenda is capped with the usually unplanned and never-ending visits to ill Ye'kwana around Puerto Ayacucho to "animate" them and their families, with celebrations of dates like Mother's Day, and with eagerly anticipated weddings, baptisms, and baby presentations to the church. All these events engender a frenetic communal rhythm that leaves little room for depression, apathy, and loss of interest in Christian life, particularly as the free time in-between events is actively devoted to organising the next one and keeps the vibe going.

Having recently arrived in the field, when I asked Santana and Ignacio why the Ye'kwana are constantly singing Christian music, visiting ill relatives, and organising so many events, I got the apparently simple answer that they do so to be "*animados*" – literally animated, Yk. *chadoquejöda*. Only after several months of living with them did I understand how important it is for Christian Ye'kwana to preserve an animated collective state. The bustling that such events and their organisation bring to the community, the continual circulation of people around the place, the incessant strumming of guitars filling the air, the constant visiting of relatives from nearby and distant places are all signs of an animated community.

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The Ye'kwana, as we saw earlier, like other Carib-speaking peoples of the Guiana shield, have a very strong notion of personal autonomy to the point where, in the case of the former, agentive control over others – the pulling or steering – is exercised indirectly by orienting their *pensamientos* – their attention – towards the collective activities that make up the path of everyday life. That is, such autonomy is understood as an inalienable personal capacity to have path-following thoughts that are orientable and "steerable" by others. However, this capacity also carries a constant dormant menace to the stability of social groups, always on the brink of breaking down; something especially intensified by conversion to Christianity, as we just saw (see Arvelo Jiménez 1973, 1974; Rivière 1984). Individual paths can always deviate from the ideally cohesive alignment of all the members of the group. If not tackled promptly, deviations could dangerously build up to a time of collective apathy, illness, silence, sadness, and, ultimately, to a time of collective contamination. In the new Ye'kwana Christian life, someone's path deviating from the community's – by, say, getting ill – is seen as an open door for the contagion of sin throughout the group. Illness in particular would usually be interpreted as an indication that someone is failing as a Christian – something that had Dionicia profoundly worried during those days with malaria in 2017. Therefore, bringing in line all the autonomous *pensamientos* while facing the impediment of exercising a direct agentive influence upon others is crucial for the stability and the health of sociality. It is also why sustaining an animated life and making people want to be part of it is so important.

The Ye'kwana's strong emphasis on personal autonomy and the always-precarious nature of indigenous conversions represented a major difficulty for the NTM's missionizing project and carried the risk of people simply losing interest in Christianity altogether. The missionaries were aware of this and consciously designed a temporality marked by a frenetic rhythm of successive religious revivals that kept the Ye´kwana enthusiastically engaged in them and permitted the persistence through time of a bubbling collective atmosphere. Much has been written in the anthropology of Amazonia about the importance for Amerindians of achieving a collective state of good life and harmonious convivial relations, which often include humans and non-humans and that are built against a backdrop of predation, pollution, or violence (see Belaunde 2001, Descola 1996, Overing and Passes 2000, Walker 2015). However, even though in the Ye'kwana case we could say this is also the case in general terms, in this chapter I would like to refer more specifically to the construction of animated atmospheres and the intervention of existing temporalities as collective strategies to act upon the individual path-following *pensamientos* of the members of a community. That is, for the formation of the dyadic correspondence between the person's path-following thoughts and social paths.

Before the arrival of the NTM, in addition to the regular "animation" that the Ye'kwana saw in the daily life of social communities, states of heightened collective animation were associated by them with specific celebrations when people converged at a common location along geographic paths, generally prior to the inhabitation or occupation of a space, for instance, a new conical house or a new garden. In both cases – in everyday life and in special celebrations –, animation was conceived of as the result of a process of synchronization or "alignment" of separate paths. We have seen some of this in previous chapters: "walking" on the paths of daily life or those of the Wätunnä when this was sung and danced involved the entrainment of all members of the group to the beats marked by a leader. Producing such states of animation through synchronization used to be seen as having the implication of filling up the inhabited space and making it inhabitable by fending off sadness and illness in a world contaminated by Odosha. The NTM, however, in an effort to make the Ye'kwana participation in Christian activities durable in time, put in place a frenetic agenda of Christian events that made the Ye'kwana exist in a constant state of heightened animation, celebrating Christian event after Christian event. Now, living a sedentary life and following the Gregorian calendar for the organization of events, Christian Ye'kwana interpret such frenetic states of animation as their way of maintaining the unstable *pensamientos* of younger generations of Christians in alignment.

Figure 5. Maranatha members serving attendees to a Christian event in Carijunagua, 2018.

On the origins of sadness and illness

My aunt Dionicia was the first person who, in 2018, told me that it was with Christianity that the Ye'kwana "began" to cry. The day she told me this, Maranatha's congregation was attending the funeral of a Ye'kwana woman on the outskirts of Puerto Ayacucho. We were there, as the Ye'kwana always say, to "animate" the dead person's relatives. And so, for some twenty-four hours straight the congregation prayed for the deceased and her family, sang, and played Christian music. It was when we were about to leave, seeing the relatives of the woman crying inconsolably, that Dionicia came to me and told me about the Ye'kwana beginning to cry. According to what she told me, it still happens that in some Christian and non-Christian Ye'kwana communities, pastors and leaders advise people not to cry. Immediately, in the following days, I began to ask people, especially elders, about this. All confirmed what Dionicia had said. Santana, in our "classes", told me that the problem with crying is that "sadness" "enters" the body – Sp. "*entra tristeza*" – and this opens the door for Odosha to attack the person. This was the very reason why leaders used to advise against doing it.

The logic of this, according to Santana's explanation, is that a state of sadness after a relative has died "changes" the *pensamiento* of the person. This change comes from sadness making the person to keep thinking about the deceased, wanting to be with him or her. The risk is that, with the dead person in his or her thoughts, the mourner might fall ill. Therefore, leaders also used to tell mourners in the past that they should avoid thinking about the deceased; that they should not evoke that person in thoughts. This advice was not something isolated. Such emphasis on suppressing the dead person from thoughts took place in a context in which material elements associated with the deceased also had to be destroyed. Before the Ye'kwana became sedentary, when someone would die the house where that person lived was usually destroyed, in addition to his/her possessions. In some cases, especially after the dead of a leader, the entire settlement was abandoned altogether, and people would disband and go to join or form new ones at other locations. The elders' rationale for why this occurred is that, by doing so, the spirit-double of the dead would stop returning to "walk" along the same paths transited while alive. Not finding the things that belonged to it or the places where it lived, the spirit would be able to continue its journey to the upper levels of the cosmos[37]. To keep thinking of that person was likewise to keep him or her coming back. Sadness and crying came from that constant evocation.

We have already discussed in detail the idea the Ye'kwana have about Odosha also acting by "deviating" the *pensamiento* of the person. Santana, we might remember, explained to me that a person knows they have been victim of Odosha and his contamination when they fall ill after concentrating on things that scared them or that made their thoughts deviate from thinking of things that are *ashichato* or *chanöngato* – "good" or "proper". Sadness and crying are also expressions of that process of thought deviation, and of how it might bring about illness. It orients the person's thoughts towards "bad" paths – Yk. *conemjönö ääma*. The origin of such association between sadness and contamination used to be found in Wätunnä episodes that narrate the contamination caused by Odosha of the earthly place and Wanaadi's departure from it. Even though there are slightly different versions of these stories, there are general lines of what they narrate, some of which have been presented in past chapters. One aspect is that Wanaadi fabricated the earthly plane – Yk. *nono* – for the Ye'kwana to live happy lives and to sustain and to enjoy themselves. For this purpose, Wanaadi engaged in cycles of creation through multiple "envoys" – his *amoode*. The

[37] The destruction of the belongings of a dead person is something that has been identified as having been common in the past among groups in the Guiana Shield, including the destruction and abandonment of the entire community after the passing of a leader or when contamination is feared (see Rivière 2000, 261).

Ye'kwana, on their part, were expected to sing and dance like their ancestors at other levels of the cosmos were doing. However, Odosha appeared as the opposite of Wanaadi to contaminate all his creation. He shows up in *nono* to pursue Wanaadi all the time, to sabotage him in everything he does. Odosha constantly tries to replicate Wanaadi, but keeps failing at it. Tired of this, Wanaadi decides to abandon *nono* and to leave Odosha and his beings – Yk. *Odoshancoomo* – trapped inside, now always sabotaging the lives of the Ye'kwana, making these difficult, and trying to deviate people's paths, as well as contaminating everything.

This is the overall context in the Wätunnä in which older Ye'kwana locate their stories of the origin of sadness, dying, and crying. According to Santana's version of such stories, Odosha and Wanaadi had gone fishing with their respective sons, Wanacu and Wanadu. Odosha's son was called Wanadu for the former was trying to make a replica of Wanaadi's son. In his constant effort to sabotage Wanaadi, Odosha decides to kill the former's son while they were fishing. He therefore sends a big fish that eats and squeezes Wanacu. Wanaadi recovers his son's body after getting the fish out of the water, and he makes Wanacu live again with his shamanic ability to heal. Now in a new body, Wanacu's name changes to Yadunöwa. Wanaadi then decides to do the same to Odosha's son, he kills Wanadu. According to Santana, Wanaadi did it "so crying and sadness began" – Sp. "*para que comenzara llanto, tristeza*". "For Odosha to cry watching his son". Given that Odosha lacked the same power to revive his son in a new body, Wanadu's death becomes the first definite death. Thus, death, sadness, and crying began on *nono*, the earthly plane.

Paths as spaces of happiness and attunement

Every time I have asked my Ye'kwana friends about where Odosha ended up living when he was trapped in the earthly plane, they replied that he lives everywhere and that he is "in the air". They also locate him, as mentioned previously, especially in the forest and outside the community. His "beings" in particular – Yk. *Odoshancoomo* – are said to inhabit places like waterfalls or mountains. That external realm is where people usually claim to have been attacked when they venture out on a journey. However, it is not just the forest. The Ye'kwana say that Odosha, being in the air, reaches everywhere, for his contamination of the earth filled *nono* completely. Which is why, in the past, before conversion, in order to make a place livable for, for example, the construction of a conical house or a new garden, the Ye'kwana had specialists in purification – shamans and the masters of *aichudi* chants. These chants, which consisted of small pieces, shorter than the longer Wätunnä yet also made from episodes from it, were performed to purify spaces and all material aspects of Ye'kwana life, including the body. An implication of Odosha's general

contamination is that being on a “good” or “bad” path was also seen as a matter of spatial location. In fact, when older Ye’kwana speak about people who are said to be on either path, they say that they are “inside” – Yk. *aca* – what is good or what is bad – Yk. *ashichaato aca* or *conemjönö aca*. Life within the purified space of the community where people live human lives aligned with others is a “good” path, whereas the outside always carries the risk of deviation to the contaminated path.

However, there is a further implication of the connection the Ye’kwana see between good/bad paths and spatiality, which has to do with their idea that, when separate paths used to converge at a spatiotemporal point in times when groups were semi-mobile, “good”, humanized spaces had to be “filled” into existence, as it were, in a sea of contamination. Such notion of “filling up” a space reflects some understandings the Ye’kwana have of space and the body, and particularly of inhabited space. One day, while working with Ignacio on the translation of some material, we came across a phrase that kept popping up, "*Wanaadi tameedä yeichö wa'cä na*", which Ignacio translated freely as "Wanaadi is everywhere", but that could be translated literally as “Wanaadi is so that fills/occupies everything”. *Wa'cä* is a tricky Ye'kwana word. In her Ye'kwana grammar, Cáceres (2011) describes *wa'cä* as a suffix denoting sameness or completion, and the root in words translated as the English comparativ*e like* – Ye. *kwa'cä* – and, in some cases, as *exactly* – Ye. *töwa'cä*. However, when pushed for a more specific meaning, Ignacio explained that, to him, *wa’cä* rather conveys that, for instance, something fits somewhere, that the food that is eaten fills up the body-box, or, in sum, that a body floods a larger space. Perhaps seeing my confusion, he went further and explained that, to him, it is like a body that occupies a larger space. He gave me the example of an invasive person who takes over the common space where he/she lives with others, speaks over others and his/her voice is heard all over the place, moves around a lot, and is seen everywhere. Another example I was given was that of the leader of a community whose presence is felt all around as he organizes the life of the community, “animates” the group, and creates a space full of effervescent activity. In that way, according to Ignacio’s explanation, a leader “fills up” the space of the community.

This idea of a person filling up a space larger than the body has a further expression in older Ye’kwana’s descriptions of the latter – discussed earlier in this thesis. In the eyes of my interlocutors, filling a larger space with a body is not a metaphor. Underlying understandings of space shared by older Ye’kwana and encapsulated in Ignacio’s interpretation of *wa'cä* is the possibility that elements inside the body can extend to the outside space along the body’s multiple “tubes”, and then form or transit along paths in the exterior. This was seen earlier with respect to the spirit-double that, once outside the body, “beats” along the paths where the person used to walk. To the Ye’kwana, just like Odosha is “in the air”, spirit-doubles,

like those of the indigenous queen that travels in the upper Orinoco with her party, are also “in the air”. Or, to be exact, they themselves, outside their respective bodies, *are* air. The connection of the life-force and breath was discussed earlier and will appear again in chapter 7. David Guss also noted some of this among Caura Ye’kwana some decades ago, who said that breath carried the voice and healing power of chants outside of the body (1986). Suffice to add here that, according to how my older interlocutors see it, the voice, as breath and as an expression of the beating life-force in the chest, can indeed extend and carry the agency of the speaking and singing person through the air towards influencing and creating continuities with other beings and things. The voice, for instance, comes out of a person’s body through the tube of his mouth and enters the body of others through the tubes of their ears (see chapters 3 and 7). Connected to this, there is also the idea that, as a person fabricates and feeds other bodies, they also become extensions of their fabricators. This applies, we have seen, to, for example, the weavings fabricated by a person, or to the beings fed and fabricated by others, like children by their parents, or a community’s members by their leader. This is a way of “holding” others on a path and, thus, of successive beats being “tied” to one another. In any case, the point to highlight here is that, as part of the possibility that a person can occupy a space beyond its body there is also the understanding of the latter as a depository of a vitality that can extend to other bodies and to the outside along the body’s multiple paths/tubes.

It is with this background that being “*animado*” is considered an important way to “fill up” a physical space. “Animation”, according to my Ye’kwana friends’ descriptions, refers to a collective state that is attained by engaging with others in collective activities, by living, eating, working, and singing together happily. Moreover, this is attained by doing so co-ordinately and in synchrony with the rest of the group, something that is achieved by being in tune with the leader’s path of planned activities. That is, by being “pulled” by his “beating”. Or, as the Ye’kwana also say, by having a “single *pensamiento*”. The notion that, to the Ye’kwana, “walking/beating” with others in coordination might produce an extension of bodies’ life-forces in extra-corporeal space is not new to us at this point either. This is something I was told happened when the Wätunnä used to be sung and danced to for some three days. For the entrainment of path-following *pensamientos* – that is, their convergence in a common rhythmic flow –, beating spirit-doubles had to be detached from the body through the copious drinking of manioc beer, sleep deprivation, and non-stop rhythmic dancing and collective singing. According to people who participated in this, there was an actual detachment of the spiritual components of the body, which some say were then able to contemplate the body from the outside. Only thus, in that coordinated, collective trance,

thoughts could transit and visualize the paths described by the chant, and also fill the physical space of the new, soon-to-be-inhabited conical house. These were moments of heightened animation that filled the space with happiness – Yk. *acwanö*, *tacwaiñe* – and made it habitable.

There are other instances where a similar association between the extra-corporeal filling of a space and the idea of producing synchronization with others while walking/beating together on a path arises. One example is the descriptions I was given about pre-conversion time when more than one shaman used to live in a single Ye'kwana community. Two or three shamans were said to gather around an ill person and all of them would sing together around the body to heal it. They would sniff *yopo* powder and smoke tobacco, and chant together with the percussion of their gourd rattles. In this way they would travel together with their spirit-doubles along paths in the spirit realm. My interlocutors' appreciation of moments like those was that, by singing and playing the synchronized rhythms of their music, the shamans filled the surrounding space with the "paths" of their singing (see chapter 7), and that this atmosphere "looked beautiful" – Sp. "*se veía bonito*". There were other examples, including paths of daily collective activities that did not imply the ritual alteration of bodies, the singing of the Wätunnä, or the healing work of shamans involved. Yet, across all such instances there is the recurrent aesthetic appreciation of synchronization and the animated atmosphere this produced as being "beautiful" – Yk. *iñataje* – and "good". On quotidian paths, the collective animation generated while doing activities together – for instance, noise generated by people working together, the comings and goings, or the laughs of a lively group of people – was likewise perceived as the formation of a "beautiful" atmosphere. In this sense, people walking together by engaging in a synchronized, effervescent working, eating, and singing together, filled up their inhabited space with humanness, and fended off sadness and illness.

On the pull of animated knots

In Santana's recount of his conversion in the fifties it was the magnetism of the music that he credited for making his thoughts "straight" on the new path (Chapter 3). He described how hearing Christian music being played by the NTM missionaries attracted him, as well as many other Ye'kwana people, to the first religious services that took place in Acanaña, the Ye'kwana community in Upper Orinoco. According to his account, local people would gather around the place where the American missionaries and the first converts played music in order to see and hear what was going on. However, it was not just people at the community that were lured by what was going on. According to multiple Ye'kwana accounts, the NTM missionaries had had to build the new community in a large area because of all the Ye'kwana that had

begun to arrive at the place from other communities in the region. The stories elders share of those years all attest to the fact that entire family groups that lived in semi-mobile settlements along some of the main rivers in the Upper Orinoco, particularly on the Cunucunuma, moved to Acanaña in those years. Such a pull was an important factor in the expansion of Christianity among the Ye'kwana in the Upper Orinoco. Certainly, as in the case of the evangelization of the neighbouring Trio, the missionaries encouraged such movement (see Rivière 2000, 256). However, I was also told by older Ye'kwana that all those families arriving had been attracted to the new community because "there was movement" taking place – Sp. "*había movimiento*" – and that they "wanted to see" what was going on. At the new community, new houses were being built, as well as a dispensary and a school. All this, plus the comings and goings of people, the new activities introduced by the missionaries, including literacy classes, configured an atmosphere of effervescent activity. According to the testimonies, the people arriving wanted to be part of that.

That the Ye'kwana, when they still lived in semi-mobile communities, would travel to new places attracted by the effervescent activity taking place there was not something unusual, according to what was explained to me as well as to the elders' narrations of their own life-paths, like Santana's. This was part of the dynamic of converging at distinct locations along life-paths discussed in chapter 1. For instance, before they settled in Acanaña, at some point in Santana's detailed narration of his and his family's path of convergences and disbandments, they had moved from the Padamo river to the Cunucunuma river to join a big Ye'kwana group living there and led by captain Turón. Santana said that "lots of families, around forty families" lived there. Turón was a powerful chief and, according to Santana's description, many Ye'kwana had moved in wanting to live in his community and under his protection. Even though such movements were common in that time, they did not necessarily imply the dissolution of smaller social units when groups came to live under the protection of a big leader. Instead, as what happened when Santana's band moved to live under Turón's on the Padamo, groups would establish their settlements nearby up or down river from where the leader lived, forming clusters of villages, a point noticed more generally by Rivière regarding indigenous groups in the Guianas (1984, 15-29). Turón, I was told, kept his people "well protected" and hence he was a leader who "had many followers". Living under such big leaders, usually shamans and/or masters of chants, used to be seen as a form of protection from the risks of the contamination of the world, which back then also included, for instance, the menace of raids by

rubber barons[38]. Furthermore, in the eyes of my interlocutors, an indication of this potential for protection was precisely the large numbers of people living on the Padamo under that leader and the activity that went on at those places. The effervescence of many people living together was a sign of the healing and protective power of the local leaders and of the potentiality that such place had for living a good life, free of illnesses and suffering. In the logic of paths of constant fission and fusion, one could say that those communities were larger nodes of convergence.

Ignacio once articulated such dynamic of attraction to places of effervescent collective activity saying that people go there because "the sound pulls" them – Sp. "*el sonido hala*". He also said that people "search the sound" – Sp. "*la gente busca el sonido*". When he told me this, I immediately thought he was referring to the sound of music made at those places that attracts people. After all, as has been argued regarding, for instance, the Panará of Brazil (Ewart 2008), in indigenous Amazonia the experience of sociality involves a sensory perception and construction of collective humanness in a context of permanent potential bodily transformation (see also Rivière 1994). But Ignacio then went back to the idea that it is "the sound of the drum", meaning the beatings, that attracts people's path-following *pensamientos*. According to his explanation, this might not necessarily be an actual drumming sound, but a "beating" that is generated as the entire settings is involved in a state of collective animation. We learnt in the previous chapter that older Ye'kwana do share the idea that living together in a place takes the form of a walk/beating that is done collectively by engaging in the activities planned by their leaders. It is, we saw, a form of being "pulled" by the "sound of the drum". The idea that collective beats attract people's *pensamientos* to a place also reflects the same logic of thought alignment explored above, and, moreover, that living together in a place involves the convergence of separate paths. In fact, going back to the ritual singing and dancing of a new conical house, we saw earlier that the Ye'kwana used to see this, especially when they still lived in small settlements structured around a conical-house, as a necessary ritual for the "alignment" of people's thoughts that had to be carried out *before* inhabiting the new space. That is, individual path-

[38] The Ye'kwana, like some other indigenous groups in Amazonia, have a long history of mobilization following big leaders, usually shamans, around whom people come to live for, among other things, protection in times of transformation (e.g. Wright 1986 for the Arawakan groups of North-western Amazonia; Santos-Granero 2018 for the Ashaninka; also Clastres 1995 for the Tupi-Guaraní). Still today, the Ye'kwana recognize the existence of "*caciques*" – leaders – under whom multiple communities on a river live, particularly in the Caura region. Turón was one of those big leaders in Upper Orinoco, but previous ones included figures who, for instance, led the resistance against the rubber barons in that region, and the long-distance commerce with the Dutch at the mouth of the Orinoco. Cacique Aramare is probably the most famous one from the last two centuries. He controlled routes along the upper section of the Orinoco River in the mid-nineteenth century and participated in the exploration to the source of this river in 1896 led by the French anthropologist Jean Chaffanjon (see Chaffanjon 1989).

following *pensamientos*, as they converged on a place, had to be made "in line" with others; and the singing of the Wätunnä, with its sung routes and percussive arrangements, was a way of doing this.

Descriptions of the role of leaders also ratify the sense that the convergence of people on a place involves the leadership work of bringing together separate paths. It is said that one important element that defines a leader is that he carries out "*wejumma*" – that is, he "unites" people. In general, *wejumma* refers to the agentive capacity we have described of a person, particularly a leader, to "pull" people together, to tie knots, as with people who come to live with under a chief's protection. In the context of strong personal autonomy and the always-present risk of alteration of a harmonious social life, this "uniting" is seen as taking place, as we have already seen, among other things, by "pulling" them together with a beating; with "the sound of the drum". In other words, as in the collective dancing and singing to a leader's chanted path and rhythmic percussion, a leader joins up separate paths by making them "beat" together[39]. Wejumma is also a term that, as Gongora mentions (2017, 249), is likewise used to describe the ritual activity of a shaman to recover the lost spirit-double of a person and bring it back to its body and to the community, which usually involves, as we described in previous chapter, the idea of pulling and tying up a thread that was cut.

Returning to the idea of being "animated", we might say then that there is a connection between the notion of "beating" with others while living with them in a place and the formation of spaces of happiness and protection, which the Ye'kwana evaluate aesthetically as "beautiful" or "good" as opposed to the "badness" and illness brought about by Odosha to the word. In David Guss' book on the Ye'kwana (1990), he made a structuralist reading of the implications of the "good"-"bad" opposition – Yk. *ashichato*/*conemjönö* – on other levels of Ye'kwana life. Such binary was also identified by Guss, for instance, in the Wanaadi-Odosha opposition, or in that between Odosha causing contamination and Wanaadi purification. Other expressions of this could be the happiness-sadness, or health-illness binaries. In what we have been describing, those states, rather than defined opposite categories, are subsumed in the logic of path formation. In pre-sedentary times, moments of collective "animation" and happiness would occur and disappear along the same flow of successive convergences and divergences along the

[39] What we have been describing so far resembles something that Peter Rivière noted among the Trio, another Carib-speaking group in the Guiana Shield. This group defines "a collective state of animation" with the word *sasame*, which might be translated as happiness, but that is also associated with dancing and with the shaking sound made by the beads, shells, nuts, and pieces of aluminum women carry in their apron during dancing (Rivière 2000, 254-255). It is a word used in particular for moments of intense collective activity, as in large rituals when many people come together. We will come back shortly to Rivière's analysis of how the idea of *sasame* changed when the Trio began to live in settled, large communities.

geographical trajectory. They were knots along the cord. Happiness and animation attract path-following *pensamientos* and tie them together by making them beat together, whereas the death, sadness, and illness linked to the deviation of thoughts lead to the always-present risk of the unraveling of the social knot and the drifting of people.

In this logic, for the Ye'kwana, the evaluation of what Joanna Overing (1989, also Overing and Passes 2000) calls the aesthetics of a harmonious social life would involve a direct, embodied experience of collective animation through the attraction this exerts on people's *pensamientos* and through "beating" with others as part of it. In this sense, "animation" might be better understood as an embodied understanding of happiness and harmony in collective life that is realized by attuning to flows. As Ignacio once said to me, "it is the sound of the drum [meaning pulsations] that animates", and so, that "pulls". What we have described so far resonates with Mihály Csikszentmihályi's assumption that happiness is the result of people engaging in states of flow, or in activities where they become disconnected from other stimuli from the world (1992). Surely, Csikszentmihályi's definition assumes that a person's attainment of such states passes through the achievement of control over their "inner life". That is, flow is a process that, despite happening through engagement with the world, takes place within the individual. The Ye'kwana idea of the person and of how flows are achieved collectively is at odds with an interiorized version of the self and of flow states. However, Csikszentmihályi´s emphasis on the experiential character of the attainment of flow – he calls it "optimal experience" – is still valid in this case. What we have seen is that Ye'kwana ideas about how flow and states of animation are achieved collectively place emphasis on the direct experience of them by the person, who carries within the vital force that permits it to beat in the first place. In other words, in line with our argument in this thesis so far, this view assumes the person as "attunable" to and orientable by the beating flows that exist in the world. We have seen examples of this in previous chapters: the trajectory of the Biblical Wätunnä orienting Santana's *pensamientos*, people following the path of everyday life activities set by a community's leader, or a shaman's spirit-double travelling along cosmic paths carried by the percussion of his gourd rattle, and so on. It is the achievement of such attunement in daily life with others that is evaluated as beautiful and animated.

A new frenetic agenda

One of the reasons why Acanaña was built, as we have seen, was to house all the people who had begun to arrive in Cosocosacoña, the community on the Cunucununa river where the NTM had arrived initially. Santana's group was one of them. They moved in from Cawadimaña, further upriver. In Cosocosacoña the

missionaries had begun to teach the Ye'kwana new music styles, and to read and to write. As per the testimonies of Ye'kwana who were there, they had begun to participate enthusiastically in the new classes and activities planned by the missionaries. Also, word had begun to spread across the region about the teaching that was taking place there and about what the NTM had offered to them: health and education. According to the stories told by the Ye'kwana and NTM missionaries, the level of enthusiasm with which the Ye'kwana accepted the presence of the NTM and embraced their activities was what made the Americans work with them in the first place, after having tried to work with other groups in the region unsuccessfully. The large plain area that was chosen for the building of the new community was to solve a twofold problem. On the one hand, the problem of all the people arriving. On the other, the need on the part of the NTM for a large space for the construction of a base from which to evangelize the Ye'kwana in the region. Such a base required the construction of houses for all the American missionaries who were arriving, and also individual houses for the Ye'kwana families who were to live there. Also, a school, a dispensary, latrines, and so on.

These two elements went hand in hand; as activity increased as part of the construction of the new community, so did the arrival of more people. As Santana told me, people saw that "there was movement" taking place and they too wanted to participate, including in the new educational and health services. Soon, Acanaña became the largest Ye'kwana community in the region, and the first settled one for that matter, although new Christian, settled communities began to spring up across the area in the following years. Many elders claim they converted to Christianity in those years. Testimonies speak of a frenetic social rhythm in the new community during the initial years. Not only for all the comings and goings of people working on the new buildings, but also for the constant singing of Christian hymns, the celebration of religious services, the literacy classes, the arrivals of new missionaries by boat and by plane on the newly constructed airstrip, and so on. Elders also mention the new agenda of activities and the standardization of time into weeks and days introduced by the NTM in those years. This made possible the regulation of the duration and distribution of tasks by the NTM in the new community. Sunday, of course, was the day for going to church and for Sunday School. Saturday was for hunting in the morning and biblical study in the evenings. And, during the week, children and youths were to go to school in the mornings, whereas women and men had to "work" in their "professions"– both new concepts. The women in the garden, and the men weaving, building houses, and in other tasks. Evenings were for resting and for studying the bible. Wednesday's evenings were for so-called praying sessions – Sp. *cultos de oración*.

My Ye'kwana interlocutors describe that time as one in which they were "*animados*" and that this "animation" attracted people to Cosocososocoña first, and then to Acanaña. Before the arrival of the NTM, even though to be "animated" was a state that my interlocutors associated in general with living a good, coordinated life in a group, there were specific moments that were explicitly associated with the achievement of that condition. That is, with the alignment on a common path when people coalesced on a place. The celebration of a new conical house, as we have already seen, was one of those moments of heightened animation. James Bou, an American missionary who goes by the Spanish name Jaime among the Ye'kwana, was the missionary who told me about how he, back in the fifties, "substituted" the conical house celebration for a so-called Christian conference. This was one of the "cultural substitutes" that the NTM used among the Ye'kwana. Bou was following in the footsteps of another aggressive evangelizer working nearby – Sophie Müller among the Arawakan groups of the Venezuela-Colombia border – who had conceived of conferences as a way of drawing Christian elements onto the regularity of Arawakan ritual gatherings and celebrations. The first Christian conference in Upper Orinoco took place in 1958, in Acanaña. Bou designed it to be an annual event to take place around Christmas. As in the old days, people from various communities would reunite in an alternating host community, but this time they would do so for a week to attend religious services, to study the bible, and to sing Christian music.

Conferences, according to all accounts, were very popular events among the Ye'kwana, and would even be attended by Ye'kwana from Caura, Ventuari and Brazil, and on occasions by *criollos* and other indigenous people. In the eyes of Bou, however, the first conferences were not fulfilling their intended purpose. He told me that he had the impression that people attended these only to have a good time with relatives and friends, for the young to have fun and to look for partners, and so on. To him, this needed to be sorted out. In addition, as conferences only took place once a year, he also felt that people lost motivation and interest in Christianity through the year. Therefore, honoring their long tradition of Southern Baptist revivalism, Bou and the NTM embarked on organizing new events that would take place more regularly and that would keep the interest in Christianity alive[40]. These were smaller events to be

[40] Sophie Müller had also had the impression from the Arawakan groups with which she worked that they gradually lost interest in Christianity, which she explained in a booklet she published in 1960. There might have been some base to this impression, however, considering the abundant examples in the anthropological literature about indigenous Amazonians embracing Christianity enthusiastically at the beginning and converting *en masse*, only to lose interest quickly and "de-convert" or "forget" conversion (see Gow 2006; Vilaça 1997, 2009; Viveiros de Castro 2011). Thus, as a way of dealing with this dilemma, in a booklet that became a manual for the evangelization of indigenous people used by other NTM missionaries in the Venezuelan Amazon, Müller gave specific guidelines to the novice missionary to take advantage of the initial enthusiasm that the evangelizing work

attended mainly by nearby communities. Bou first established biblical seminaries, whose aim was to have people get together to study the bible for a couple of days. Afterwards he also created so-called mini-conferences, which were condensed versions of the annual conference but with a focus on biblical study. We will return to this in Chapter 6.

Even though for Bou the underlying problem seems to have been in part a lack of Biblical doctrine, the solution came via more frequent collective gatherings and moments of intense activity. As I have witnessed myself in many of these events, in practice they ultimately still do not work to bring about a substantive change in the knowledge of the bible; they continue to be, to an important extent, about having a good time with friends and relatives, visiting "decayed" families and ill people who need to be sung to, and, very importantly, singing Christian music nonstop. Still, despite this, the new agenda introduced by the NTM in the fifties and sixties did constitute a solution to the decay problem via a more frequent succession of events that keep the Ye'kwana participating in event after event throughout the year. What used to be occasional moments of intensive "animation" became repetitive events throughout the year, now inserted, together with daily activities, into a new organization of time according to the calendar. Thus, rather than the regular daily animation of a synchronized, happy collective life, Christian Ye'kwana were now living constantly, at a settled location, in the same state of heightened animation that used to characterize specific ritual moments on which separate people converged along life-paths in the past.

"God wants us animated"

"What is it that God expects from us?" Ricky, Ignacio's son, asked rhetorically while trying to control his nervousness and to keep a matter-of-fact tone at the same time. He was standing on the flamboyant ceramic-covered stage of the Dios es Amor church of the community of La Esperanza in front of a big crowd of Ye'kwana, Curripaco, Puinave, Jivi, and a group of *criollos*. Maranatha had travelled there to join this church, a mostly-Curripaco congregation in the southern outskirts of Puerto Ayacucho, in their two-day monthly celebration of the last supper. It was not the first time I had heard Ricky and other Christian Ye'kwana ask this rhetorical question while talking in front of an audience, the following answer always being something along these lines: "All that he wants is us to be animated while we wait for his coming,

generates among indigenous Amazonians: "The missionary should begin teaching the people immediately upon arrival, for that is the time of greatest interest. Their curiosity will draw them at first so that they are around all the time. The missionary must capitalize upon this initial interest and put it to use", she says (1960, 16).

yääje jönca? [*Isn't that so?*]". Ricky's question, however, reflected something I have always seen Ignacio and other Ye'kwana pastors worried about, namely, that their congregations, especially the younger members, stay "animated". Countless times have I seen Ignacio's concern about the participation of the community's youth in Maranatha's agenda of regular Christian events throughout the year. He makes sure that all of them participate, he pushes the youth to join the congregation in evangelization trips, he always signs up the youth's music group for visits to other churches, encourages them to join in missionary seminaries and mini-conferences, and so on. If, for any reason, an event is cancelled, it is normal to hear Ignacio grumble about the boys and girls already being animated and the cancellation discouraging them.

Ignacio's and other Ye'kwana pastors' special emphasis on keeping the younger members of their congregations animated reflects their concern, explored in the previous chapter, about the unstable character of the *pensamientos* of the younger generation of Christian Ye'kwana. The state of despondency of June and July of 2017 coincided with another episode of some of the youth of the community expressing their desire to leave the music group and the church. This, together with the general atmosphere of downheartedness and illness that was affecting the community, had brought the church's agenda to a halt. During those weeks, even a couple of Sunday services were skipped and others reduced to only a handful of people participating dispiritedly. The solution to the gloomy atmosphere came when, the epidemic having abated, Ignacio planned a missionary conference to take place in the community in mid-August. This way he expected people would become "animated" again. They had to mobilize for the event and, for days, they engaged frenetically in putting together the logistics for it according to the agenda Ignacio had planned. After the conference ended, things continued as usual. On the following Sundays, with Ignacio again at the helm, the church in full went back to the usual services and to attending the celebrations of last suppers at other Ye'kwana churches, as well as to prepare the one that Carijunagua was in charge of, which was also approaching (see chapter 6).

Figure 6. Pastor Ignacio Tovar allocating the community's youths into teams for a football match. Carijunagua 2018.

The agenda the Ye'kwana inherited from the NTM is now continued through the pastors' planning of successive activities, and through this, in the motivation they generate in their communities and churches. To this day, the Ye'kwana still celebrate the larger conference in December and countless smaller Christian events throughout the year. Ignacio, like the other Ye'kwana pastors, see in such frenetic agenda the answer to the potential deviation of thoughts, but also to keeping the entire congregation animated. The fact that pastors consider that participating in regular activities keeps *pensamientos* aligned speaks of the transformation from what used to be processes of thought alignment that were part of the dynamic of constant group fusion and fission at different locations in the past towards now maintaining people engaged in a single, settled community. Moreover, as part of their lives inserted in the Venezuelan national society, my Ye'kwana friends have come to identify the pull of animation in other contexts. There is one very telling example. Through the years I have worked with the Tovars and their extended family, even though they are inserted in the Venezuelan political dynamic of political clientelism and are often mobilized by the Chavista networks when elections approach, I have witnessed how in many cases many of them ultimately get behind, and get particularly enthusiastic about the candidate that looks "more

animated" in their eyes. This is so even to the point of showing up spontaneously at that candidate's events "to see" what is going on – Sp. "*para ver*". Making more noise, attracting large crowds, having more propaganda on the radio or TV and in Puerto Ayacucho's streets, and so on, are all indications of a candidate that is "*animado*" or, as the Ye'kwana also say, that is "making more sound" – Sp. "*sonando más*".

However, there is an important way in which Christian Ye'kwana make sense of their Christian lives as ones of animation, one which is reflected in Ricky's question to the congregation of the Dios es Amor church. This has to do with what we began to explore in the previous chapter about the resignification promoted by the NTM of Wätunnä with Christian elements and that, today, Christian Ye'kwana themselves articulate. "What is it that God expects from us?", Ricky asked. Christian Ye'kwana, like Ricky, have the idea that, as a church, they must be "animated" for this is what the Christian Wanaadi expects from them. In the pre-conversion versions of the Wätunnä, Wanaadi was said to have created the earthly plane for the Ye'kwana to live happy lives, free of illness and sadness. The Ye'kwana also used to say that they being "*animados*" cheered up their ancestors at other levels of the cosmos, who would dance and sing simultaneously with people on the earthly place and thus be "aligned" with them. "Beating" animatedly and in synch with them kept the Ye'kwana "connected" or "in line" with the former – Yk. *sadonna*. Meanwhile, now that the Biblical story has come to occupy the place of previous versions of the Wätunnä, I have heard older Christian Ye'kwana finding evidence in the former of the primordial significance that states of animation posed in their new trajectory as well as evidence that the Christian Wanaadi also wants them animated. How the Ye'kwana make the connection between their current lives and the narratives of primordial time in both the Bible and in the Wätunnä will be explored in the next chapter.

Suffice to say here that, whereas before the arrival of the NTM the Ye'kwana used to leave the ill to die away from the community and avoided been close to them, the American missionaries taught them to bury them and to celebrate funerals. To my Christian interlocutors, however, the celebration of funerals have come to be seen as moments for the "animation" of the family of the deceased and, through this, about preventing them from falling sad and ill. More importantly, to them, they are doing in funerals what, in their interpretations, is described in biblical passages like Jairus' daughter's and Lazarus' resurrections by Jesus Christ[41]. Consider part of Santana's explanation of what happens during Jairus' daughter's

[41] Mark 5:21–43, Matthew 9:18–26, Luke 8:40–56 for the episode of Jairus' daughter; and John 11:1–44 for that of Lazarus.

funeral: “And so they all came [To Jairus’ place]. From Jerusalem everybody came, playing [music], talking, animating [Sp. “*animando*”]. Everybody. The entire family. Playing flutes, the musicians playing, singing. That’s the wake they used to have [in Biblical times]”. Here is an extract of how Santana described Lazarus’ passage: “They went to Bethany, from Jerusalem they went to Bethany. They went to play flutes to help the [Lazarus’] family, so there’s no sadness, not too much sadness, no crying, no wanting of the body”. Curiously, in the bible’s verses where the events pertaining to Lazarus’ funeral take place, music and animation are barely mentioned. In fact, the agitation and noise in those scenes are, in most versions of the Bible, clearly presented as indications of sorrow and pain for the deaths. Yet, to Santana and others, they are primordial states of “animation” in the Biblical Wätunnä. What is relevant to them is that, like the Ye’kwana were now doing in their funerals when affines would go to the house of the family of the deceased to bring them “animation”, people went to the houses of those biblical characters to sing and play music for them, and thus to help them avoid crying or falling ill. Being animated with others was the way of fending against those risks as in the Bible.

Animated paths in time

As we have seen, before the Ye’kwana became sedentary, their creation of attractive and animated spaces took place at the spatiotemporal points where separate life-paths converged, through the formation of synchronies between the person and the “drumming” followed by the group during specific ritual moments and in daily life. The reorganization of life under the NTM changed this dynamic through the introduction of an agenda of frenetic daily activities and of regular revivalist events. The NTM adopted an understanding of ritual temporalization that reflected something that sociologist Randall Collins has defined as Interaction Ritual Chains (Collins 2004). That is, the idea that the success of rituals resides in the emotional energy that these generate and that makes possible their successive repetition in time. This type of energy “pumps up” individuals to keep participating in, and attracting them to, event after event. The new agenda of continuous events designed by the NTM, which is still reproduced today by Christian Ye’kwana, has come to be interpreted by the latter as a state of constant “animation”. Whereas such states of heightened animation used to be connected in the past to the achievement of synchronization during specific rituals when people came together to occupy a space, as well as in the cheerful everyday activities planned by the leader, now “animation” meant to achieve such synchronization in people’s regular participation in event after event and the effervescent planification of the following one in between events. The path of Christian everyday life became one of permanent effervescent animation.

We referenced before Peter Rivière's analysis of the Trio people's idea of collective happiness – *sasame* – which they associate with the sound produced by dancing (2000). Moving to a settled life and living with larger numbers of people, which resulted from their evangelization by Christian missionaries, signified for the Trio, according to Rivière, that they went to live in a sustained state of *sasame*, in contrast to the sporadic occurrence of those moments before then (Rivière 2000, 254-255). In such a constant state, ritual dancing and other ritual occasions where *sasame* used to be produced were no longer necessary, for this was now the permanent condition of a settled, Christian life. Rivière inserts this analysis in the larger context of the indigenous groups of the Guiana Shield, in which the Ye'kwana are also located. The Trio's appreciation of such states of *sasame* is a reflection of the high value that groups in the region have given to the formation of large networks and groups of kin and social relations, especially in the context in which social units used to be small and always prone to dissolution (see Arvelo Jiménez 1973, 1974 for the Ye'kwana; for the Guiana as a region, see Rivière 1984, 15-29). Certainly, this interpretation reflects the context in which such groups still maintained a mobile lifestyle in the region. It was seen earlier how, in the case of the Ye'kwana, their oral narratives used to capture such processes of social aggregation and disaggregation in separate places with the concept of paths that are formed by the physical displacement of people across successive stops. Linking that image of spatiotemporal progression with the logic of the emergence of knots through the generation of animation, we might say that the temporality of a such life-paths used to be marked also by the participation of people in successive effervescent moments at different locations – they were the beats on that path.

However, sedentarism itself entailed for the Ye'kwana a transformation of such ideas of spatiotemporal flow. Settled in a single place, moments of heightened animation now came in the form of successive Christian events carried out at a single location. Christian Ye'kwana can attend other communities for certain events, as for the celebrations of last suppers, but they are ultimately concerned with how much animated *their* community and *their* church is, as with what happened in June and July 2017. In the past, the idea of temporal progression was tied to spatial movement from animated knot to animated knot. Life-paths used not to have an objective existence to be transited along, but they were formed as the person travelled in space – what we saw that Tim Ingold defines as wayfaring – and engaged in moments of animation in different places. As argued in chapter 1, people's actions and movement in time and space implied rhythmic variability and contingency on social life. Spatiotemporal paths encapsulated a sense of "human time".

Meanwhile, in sedentary life, separated from the displacement in space, the temporal progression given by the succession of animated moments was tied by the NTM to the calendar planning of events and to clock time. The pastor in his organization of the group's activities now had to consider the new rhythms introduced with the new forms of time measurement. The Gregorian calendar provided a new underlying temporal basis upon which the more variable rhythms of social life were adjusted, and Christian ritual life ordered chronologically and on a regular temporal basis. Ignacio, for instance, usually selects dates for events – following the Venezuelan calendar of festivities – to schedule special church events, such as Mother's Day, Christmas, Youth Day, etc. Also, another way of organizing daily activities that the NTM introduced in Acanaña was by using a bell that was hung next to the church to indicate the fixed hours for religious services, for meals – now three per day: breakfast, lunch and supper –, and for other daily activities. Today, a rusted bell hangs next to the church in Carijunagua too.

In sum, evangelization and sedentarization brought about the objectification of and the separation between time and space (See Schiefflin 2002, Brightman 2012 for similar processes). However, like in the events of June and July of 2017 show, the regularity generated by, say, having church services every Sunday or the annual conference always in December, continued to be contingent on how animated the community was and on the capacity of the pastor to keep his church animated. The organization of social and ritual time still depends on the pace set by the leader. People still count on him to lead a path of collective activities that they are to attune to, to participate in. As in the past the timing of everyday tasks was set by the chief unpredictably crying out by the door of the collective house, as it still is in some Ye'kwana communities. Now the bell hangs silently throughout the day unless the pastor decides to sound it. This is probably why even in the context of the more regular rhythmic base provided by the chronologization of time, the risk of a sudden breakdown persists, the same that used to haunt the stability of social life in the past. If something faltered, as in mid-2017, people could easily deviate from the Christian path. The collective excitement produced nowadays by unexpected events, such as reconciliations, baptisms, or marriages, probably speaks to such a persistent temporal unpredictability.

Going back to the Trio, Brightman has described a similar process. Their conversion to Christianity and the standardization and objectification of time that it entailed, as fascinating as it was for them, did not imply an actual governing of personal lives according to new notions of time. The Trio still "live generally in the present" (Brightman 2012, 559), and embark on tasks based on what they need and prefer to do. In the case of the Ye'kwana, the revivalist temporal trajectory was a new animated path for them to go down in line with the rest of the group and following the pace set, this time, by the pastor. The Ye'kwana in

Carijunagua leave in Ignacio's hands the responsibility to prepare the agenda of activities for the future. It is how he "steers" and keeps them together. Such a future is usually a very near one, sometimes just a matter of days, weeks, or even hours as people very often spend the morning waiting for indications from their pastor about the agenda of healing visits for the afternoon or the evening. Like the Trio, therefore, Christian Ye'kwana are still mostly attentive to the present, which is that in which they live animated with others. In other words, it is the moment of the entrainment with the rhythmic path of the group. Therefore, given that moments of collective effervescence still depend on the voluntary and unpredictable *pensamientos* of the members of the group, as well as on the pastor's "pulling" of these, the decay and alteration of the animated rhythms of social life are always a constant possibility.

Chapter 6

In Jesus' footsteps: repetition and uniformity on a Baptist path

One morning in July 2018, Ignacio dropped by my house to work with me on translating and transcribing some material for my research. Soon, however, our plans were quickly derailed when my Ye'kwana dad ended up spending the whole morning telling me bitterly about Ye'kwana elders from another Ye'kwana church in Puerto Ayacucho who were – again! – accusing him and his church, Maranatha, of "becoming Pentecostal". That church, called Aeropuerto for its location right behind the city's airport, was by then led by some three elder Ye'kwana pastors of around the same generation of Santana's. I had myself witnessed some of the accusations Ignacio referred to as having been cast. To the pastors and elders of Aeropuerto, the signs that Ignacio's church was "deviating from the *evangelio*" were multiple. Especially indicative of that supposed "deviation" or "separation" from the "path" of Ye'kwana Christianity – Sp. "*el camino del evangelio*", Yk. "*evangelio emadö*" – was that Ignacio's recent acceptance of criollo and non-Ye'kwana evangelicals into the congregation had entailed some slight changes in worshipping forms at Maranatha. Indeed, as a couple of criollo families had joined the Tovars' church in the months before, they had been teaching Maranatha's youth some Christian pop songs and teaching them to play new instruments, and had encouraged more extroverted participations during services. As part of the latter, Ye'kwana members of the church were now clapping more and giving more space to singing non-Ye'kwana Christian music. Alongside the usual group testimonies by the congregation's women, men, and adolescents, now some Ye'kwana were participating enthusiastically in puppet shows or in the singing of pop Christian songs. It was even in those days that the Christian music festival referred to before took place in Carijunagua, something unusual in Ye'kwana churches's regular agenda of last supper celebrations and so-called Christian conferences and mini-conferences.

Throughout the years I have worked with Ye'kwana Christians, criticisms and accusations between Ye'kwana churches and by elders towards younger generations concerning supposedly becoming Pentecostal have been a recurrent feature, especially among urban churches. Much less common have been accusations of becoming Jehovah's Witnesses, but these also spring up sporadically. Often, such accusations and criticisms are not of the overt, public type. Usually, they might take place, say, as gossip over a bowl of hot boiled manioc fiber at breakfast or when older pastors from different churches get together after a Sunday service. They are usually cast against younger generations of Christians and

pastors who, like Ignacio, have grown in urban spaces and within the national society, and who try to introduce changes into their churches. Specifically, they consist of saying that younger Christians and other churches might not be sticking appropriately to the theological predicaments and worshipping practices transmitted to the Ye'kwana by the NTM and put into practice initially by the first generation of Christian Ye'kwana. More importantly, just like the accusations we discussed in chapter 4, these ones, which involve a more general evaluation of the forms of the Christianity the Ye'kwana share, are also often framed in the same language of path deviation and alignment we have been seeing thus far. In the elders' eyes, alterations in the worshipping and theological forms they inherited originally from the NTM constitutes a departure from the "path of the *evangelio*" and implies that the accused church and its pastor might be joining a different denomination. Changes in worshipping forms would very likely entail accusations of Pentecostalism, whereas new theological predicaments heard at church or from a pastor usually entail accusations of these turning into Jehova's Witnesses.

Crucially, Maranatha and all other Ye'kwana churches are, in all but name, Baptist churches. When the NTM was expelled from Venezuela by the late Hugo Chávez in 2005, the Ye'kwana were left practicing a Protestant Christianity infused with the Baptist tradition brought in by the Americans – that is, with the Southern version of literalism and inerrancy of the Scriptures, of premillennialism and belief in the pretribulational rapture, and of ordinance celebration (see below). Still today, almost two decades later, virtually all Ye'kwana churches, and more markedly those led by elders from the first generation of Ye'kwana Christians, continue to practice rigorously what they were taught initially by the NTM, even though they do not share any denominational label and just call themselves *cristianos* or *evangélicos*. Thus, for instance, they still sing the same Christian hymns and still follow the same religious service structure learnt from the Americans; and, following on the Baptist notion of ordinance celebration, they meticulously observe the last supper on the last Sunday of every month, baptize believers by immersion, appoint church elders following the same protocol shared by evangelical missionary organizations like the NTM, and so on.

Multiple contextual reasons might account for the standardized persistence, even after the expulsion of the NTM by Chávez, of the Baptist theology and worshipping forms the Ye'kwana learnt from the American missionaries. One of them might be that other Protestant denominations – Pentecostals and Jehovah's Witnesses being the two most important ones – began to work with indigenous people in Venezuela only in recent decades. Also, these churches have not shared the same evangelizing impetus

to "reach all nations" that has historically characterized Baptists' work in the Venezuelan Amazon[42]. Nonetheless, there is one reason that might have contributed in important ways to keeping Christian Ye'kwana on the Baptist "path". This, which this chapter explores, has to do with the idea shared mainly by older Ye'kwana that to walk/beat on a path implies to keep repeating the same actions and practices that a leader – such as that of a community or a primordial figure – taught or indicated to his followers.

We have already begun to see in previous chapters the association between the idea of walking/beating on a path and the process of aligning by replicating what leaders and past generations did. As we will see in this chapter, when brought into how older Christian Ye'kwana see their Christian lives, the idea of walking/beating by repeating past actions implies consciously replicating the same Baptist worshipping practices and religious forms they inherited from the NTM missionaries. Among these, especially so-called ordinances, of which they find primordial prototypical instances in their new Watunnä, the Bible. Elements to be repeated involve, for instance, always celebrating the last supper the last day of every month, always baptizing believers by immersion, always carrying out religious services in the same order, carrying out praying sessions on Wednesdays and Biblical study sessions on Fridays, and so on. More generally, this chapter considers how uniformity in social life emerges from successive, linear repetition, and how the virtual is sustained and transmitted that way. Continuing with the argument from the previous two chapters, the production and reproduction of uniformity in social life through repetition is an example of the experience of beating paths through the formation of entrainments; that is, of the insertion of the beating person in a collective walk/beating that connects him/her with others with whom a common line of transformations is shared. In other words, to repeat is to beat tied up with others.

Paths of repetitions

As we have seen, before the Biblical "path" replaced it, the Wätunnä was the "good" and "proper" humanizing path for the Ye'kwana to walk on vis-à-vis other possible, deviated trajectories of "contamination". Sung for some three days on special occasions, we also mentioned, it retraced, through

[42] Before the arrival of the NTM, the Christian presence in the middle and upper Orinoco regions was mainly that of Salesians based in cities like La Esmeralda and San Fernando de Atabapo and, in the Ye'kwana area, in missions like Tencua and Cacurí (for a history of the Catholic presence in the Upper Orinoco, see Iribertegui 1987). This presence began to be disputed in the Western Venezuelan Amazon by the millenarian presence of the evangelical missionary Sophie Müller among Arawak-speaking groups on the Colombian border (on the evangelical presence in this region see Cabrera Becerra 2008). Even though this messianic movement and the conversion wave that it triggered did not reach Carib-speaking groups and other indigenous peoples in the Orinoco basin, it paved the way for the arrival of further missionaries among Ye'kwana and Yanomami in subsequent years. For a critical revision of the presence of the New Tribes Mission in the Venezuelan Amazon, see Mosonyi 1981.

a narrative structure that reflected a knot-and-cord logic, the routes of successive transformation that primordial figures travelled along and the repeated actions they engaged in to move such a trajectory forward. Across those concatenated episodes, those figures carry out actions or incorporate cultural prototypes that take the trajectory of the Ye'kwana away from the initial state of undifferentiation with other beings. One thing that came up recurrently in my discussions with Santana and other elderly Ye'kwana as to how they used to live before the arrival of the *evangelio* was that staying on the path of humanness chanted in the Wätunnä and in their other repertoires of healing and purifying chants[43] implied that they had to replicate the prototypical actions that, according to those chants, inaugurated the Ye'kwana humanizing trajectory in primordial times. Replicating in their lives what primordial figures did was a way of continuing walking/beating behind them. And, moreover, sharing the same rhythmic flow kept them "connected" or "in line". In the Ye'kwana's chanted stories of primordial times, there is always someone who is the pioneer in engaging in certain cultural action that then becomes a defining episode in their path-tracing chants.

Events that my Ye'kwana interlocutors recognize as prototypical actions by primordial figures that were to be replicated by them include, for instance, the construction of the conical house, the celebration of the chanting and singing ceremonies for the purification and celebration of the house and of things like the garden and the hunted prey, the preparation of the first manioc bread, amongst others. Among all the episodes of the Wätunnä, the story of Kuyujani is a good example in this regard. This episode, the Ye'kwana elders say, does not strictly belong to the times of primordial bodily undifferentiation, when the first of Wanaadi's envoys – Wanasedume, Sedume Ianadi, and so on – visited the earthly plane. However, it is an important event in the definition of the path of humanness that the Ye'kwana has sought to replicate until recently. In Santana's version of the Wätunnä, Kuyujani, although described by elders as a further replication of Wanaadi – "he is the same Wanaadi" – makes his appearance shortly after the Ye'kwana version of the big flood takes place. In other versions I heard, Kuyujani is described as the Ye'kwana person who survives through the flood. In any case, after the flood, Kuyujani gives all indigenous groups in the Venezuelan Amazon their respective territory to live in. And, according to Santana's and other people's versions, he is the person who initiated, amongst other things, the ritual practice of dancing and singing to a new conical house and to prepare *iadake*, the fermented manioc beer made by non-

[43] In this chapter, "Wätunnä" is used in an encompassing way to include the vast repertoire of Ye'kwana chants, including both *adeemi* – those performed at specific celebration rituals, including the singing of the full Wätunnä – and the shorter *aichudi* – used for purification and healing purposes. Even though these are chants used for different purposes, both types refer to elements that are part of the larger narrated trajectory of the Ye'kwana.

Christian Ye'kwana. Also, according to some of those versions, the conical house that Kuyujani builds serves as a model for the one the Ye'kwana used to build until recently.

There are many other examples in the stories of the Wätunnä of elements of Ye'kwana life that my interlocutors see as primordial prototypes of certain actions or as incorporations from the outside – from the person who first did a weaving design on a serving tray to the celebration of specific purification rituals. Like the recognition of Wanaadi as the "owner" or "master" of the Ye'kwana for having fabricated them in the first place, the beings that fabricated or that incorporated into Ye'kwana life elements that made them human, such as the manioc tuber and the first manioc bread, or the person who first wove a design onto a basket, are likewise the "owners" of those elements. This connection between ownership and the beginning of something through its learning or incorporation also comes up in other forms in the Wätunnä and in other Ye'kwana chants and stories. For example, Mannedau, the figure who, following Wanaadi's orientation, fabricates the earthly plane for the Ye'kwana to live on, is its owner. Ejedishawa, the person who brought the cassava bread to the Ye'kwana, is the owner of cassava bread. Healing with tobacco began when it was first obtained it from its owner, Iadetacu. And so on.

Such association between ownership and the initiation or incorporation of cultural elements in primordial times that define humanness is common among indigenous groups in the Amazon, for whom such elements typically have a source with figures of alterity. A telling example is that of the origin of cooking fire. For the Tupi-Guarani groups, the fire belonged to the vulture, and it was robbed by humans, which could then begin to eat cooked meat, whereas for Gê groups the fire was robbed from the jaguar and permitted the distinction between cooked and raw food (see Fausto 2008, 338; also Costa 2007, Fausto 2002). In Ye'kwana stories, as told by Santana, it was the toad that had the fire. It kept it hidden in its throat and used it to cook. It was stolen by two brothers, Iudeke and Shishomana. They were fishing when they realized they needed the fire to cook the fish, and that the toad, who was the jaguar's wife, had it. So, they tricked her and, when she was preparing a soup, they pushed her into the cooking pot. However, something distinctive in the narration of this event is that it replicates itself multiple times in other guises – there is not a single robbery nor a single owner of the fire. In fact, in the story, the fire must be stolen successively from other figures of alterity by the two brothers. After stealing the fire from the toad, Iudeke and Shishomana go fishing again. This time it was the crested guan (*Penelope purpurascens*) that steals the fire from them when they are in the river. Like the toad, it hides the fire in its throat. So, the brothers have to deceive it so they can get the fire again. After doing it, they go fishing again, and this time it is the

caiman that steals it when they are occupied getting fish. Like the guan and the toad, the caiman swallows the fire. One more time, the brothers have to find a way to trick the caiman and steal the fire from it.

As in these episodes, the full trajectory of Wätunnä stories transmits the idea that there are no single episodes of initiation nor single initiators or prototypical objects or practices. Instead, these are processes that involve some form of continuous transformation of prototypes, both of the figures who incorporate or initiate them and of the prototype itself. Again, take the case of the conical house – Yk. *ättä* – that some Ye'kwana say Kuyujani built after the big flood as an example of a prototype that transforms as it is fabricated by multiple figures. I was told a couple of times that Kuyujani was the person who built the model of the conical house that the Ye'kwana fabricated until recently. Yet, it becomes clear in the full arch of Ye'kwana stories that there were previous models and constructions of conical houses before Kuyujani. For instance, in one story Santana told me, Wanaadi himself had fabricated a conical house whose construction he too celebrated by dancing and singing. That was, according to Santana, before Kuyujani and the flood. And in yet another story that took place before the fabrication of Wanaadi's house, another person, Udujede, is also said to have built the very first house that marked a transition from Ye'kwana people living in caves to living in houses[44]. Across the arch of the stories, multiple versions of the house appear, each with its own name and with slight variations in their physical structure. As Santana and others put it, each one is "the same *ättä"*, but different. For example, Wanaadi's house was roofed with bird feathers. Udujede built his conical house, which was called Wayantäjä, with a shorter pole at its center. After this came variations of this model – conical houses with a larger central pole, others with and without a roof hatch to let the smoke out, and so on. All "the same *ättä*".

A similar point could be made about the owners of versions of other cultural prototypes, and about the prototypes themselves. Once the Ye'kwana begin to trace the transformations of a cultural prototype, successive owners start to be mentioned, in a logic in which each of them, as well as each episode, is a variation of previous ones[45]. This is captured narratively in the larger body of stories using the knot-and-chord narrative logic and the tracing of cosmographic routes described in chapter 1 as well as through the recitation of names that change at each new episode and at each new location along the path. We saw before that this logic of displacement through successive replications – the "beatings" – transmits the flowing of a continuous potentiality. This is captured, for instance, in the idea of a common thread – for

[44] These episodes are organized differently and have different versions depending on the Wätunnä version one is told. For instance, in de Civrieux's book on the Wätunnä, he gives a version in which Wanaadi's is the first version of the house, of which he builds many for his people (de Civrieux 1997, 29-30).
[45] For an exhaustive analysis of the use of replications in the Ye'kwana body of stories, see Gongora 2017, 36-120.

example, the life-force given to the Ye'kwana by Wanaadi – across successively derived bodies. In any case, the point here about the successive replications of prototypical actions narrated in the Wätunnä stories is that my interlocutors see them as continuous with those that they used to carry out in their lives until recently in order to stay "on the good path". Repetition of successive prototypical actions kept them human. It might thus be said that, rather than as a baseline reference for current contemporary replications of prototypical actions, this paints the Wätunnä as a trajectory of gradual cultural transformation to be inserted in, as well as for tracing the transmission and emergence of cultural patterns.

There has been evidence about the emphasis indigenous Amazonians put on producing and maintaining uniformity and mimesis in their social lives through repetition. This, for instance, is the case in multiple genres of oral speech that emphasize continuity between the living, a mythological past, and the future, or that incorporate patterns of name repetition into their poetic arrangements (see Oakdale 2007, Déléage 2007a, Hill 1993, Wright 1993); also in daily practices carried out for the formation of uniform inter-generational experiences that bring about health and wellbeing (Oakdale 2007, 109); or in social and kinship arrangements that emphasize the intergenerational repetition of names or clusters of names (see Dumont 1977; Henley 1982, 20) or the substitution of notions of descent for those of replacement (see Townsley 1994, 313). Moreover, as it was shown earlier, repetition is at the core of knot-and-cord arrangements. For the Ye'kwana, their emphasis on inserting themselves in generational lines of replications speaks of an understanding of cultural development that rests on incremental, linear transformations of cultural prototypes. It could be said that the ability to replicate the latter across generations is what drives the process of definition of proper humanness. Terrence Turner expressed a similar understanding of indigenous Amazonian ideas of cultural transformation in these terms: "the essence of fully developed culture, as contrasted to the half-way house of the animals' prototypes, is … the ability to produce these things, and most importantly, what this ability further implies, the reflective ability to produce the process of producing them, as a generalized and infinitely replicable form of activity" (2009, 22).

Learn, think strongly, then repeat

Echoing Turner's point, another way in which Ye'kwana elders recognize ideas of gradual derivation and cultural transmission in the notion of beating paths and in the Wätunnä is in the sense that these processes are achieved as people – be these primordial figures who initiated a path or successive replicators – "learn" how to carry out those same humanizing actions themselves. A form in which this

idea was expressed to me was that people begin to replicate because they "have their mom and dad" or "someone" from whom they learn how to do those things. That is so even if those cultural elements were incorporated from the outside – the person or people from whom they were acquired themselves learnt them from someone else, and so on. That is the case of primordial figures who "began to walk", like Kuyujani and Wanaadi themselves, and of successive figures. Santana once raised this point when he was replying to a question I posed to him about what he thought came before God. Rather than telling me that there was nothing, Santana told me that humans are incapable of knowing what came before, but that in any case there must have been something. Otherwise, Santana asked rhetorically, how did God learn to fabricate and do the things he did. He must have had a dad and a mom of his own, just like the Ye'kwana used to say about their Wanaadi.

Also reflecting the idea of knowledge acquisition through bodily incorporation described in chapters three and four, another way my interlocutors put into words this process of cultural transmission through learning prototypical, humanizing actions is that such replicable actions are "put" into the *pensamientos* of people by their respective predecessors. One way in which that was done, we saw earlier, was with the whipping ritual. Another was by re-transiting the Wätunnä path while singing it and dancing to its rhythmic arrangements as part of major collective ceremonies like the celebration of a new conical house. During the celebration, under the effect of manioc beer, and having their bodies destabilized by the syncopated dancing and singing, people's spirit-doubles could retrace the path of the Wätunnä themselves and get to learn the events in it directly (see chapter 3). Having visualized and incorporated the narrated path, the dancers could then "align" their *pensamientos* with the "good" path and people could "walk" along by replicating in their daily lives the narrated primordial actions. That is, the logic of thought-alignment described before also orients people toward repeating; people are able to "walk" along the "good" path and to replicate its humanizing actions by being able to concentrate on what was put in their thoughts. We also saw this in Santana's conversion process described in chapter 3; namely, that thought-alignment takes place after "knowing" and concentrating on what can now be visualized.

This process, intended for repetition, was conveyed by the elders in their use of a verbal formula as part of their explanations to me of how such alignment used to be achieved in daily life; one that encapsulates the association of knowing what primordial figures did with the capacity to replicate those same actions in the present. The basic formula could be summed up as something like this: "knowing [for instance, what people did before, usually the events in the Wätunnä], one repeats [or does, an action]"– Sp. "*sabiendo, uno repite, uno hace*". People also used "naming" – Sp. "*nombrando, uno hace*" – instead of "knowing",

meaning that you have to "name" the people who carried out an action before, or evoke that action in thoughts, as part of the execution of such action in the present. One of the instances I was given were the chants for the purification of a new garden – YK. *adaha adeemi hidi*. During this ritual, I was explained, "you have to name the owner of the garden" by his multiple names – Udenadiwa, Wadayuniwa, Ecusewedu, etc. – and retrace its actions in the primordial times with the respective chant. "Naming that, one does it [purify the garden]". "Knowing that [what those figures did], one does it". Thus, along with the respective chant, this formula would evoke, as part of the specific ritual or everyday task when an association with primordial actions was identified, the events that shaped them (see Gongora 2017, 89-100). With such evocation in mind, people could concentrate – "think strongly", Sp. "*pensar fuerte*" – on those actions and repeat them.

In Jesus' footsteps, or why roosters crow at 3am

One day, Ignacio gave me an example that might conjure up more clearly how this logic of continuous replications, in the eyes of older Ye'kwana, links primordial events to current ones. Not just of what used to be important ritual occasions or the elaboration of complex cultural elements, like the construction and celebration of a new conical house, but of more quotidian actions. That day, Ignacio had posed to me a question about something he told me he has always wanted to understand. How is it possible, he said, that plants in the Mount Marawaka grow larger than in other parts of the Amazon? Mount Marawaka is a large mountain at the heart of the Upper Orinoco region around which the Ye'kwana localize their ancestral territory. According to primordial stories, this mountain was a giant tree that connected the earthly plane to the next level up. It was cut down by the people who lived under it, and, from the fallen tree, they obtained some of the plants that Ye'kwana still eat today, including the manioc and the papaya plants[46]. That day in our conversation, Ignacio was referring to the appreciation shared among Upper Orinoco Ye'kwana that, today, such plants grow larger on that mountain. Ignacio told me he has also wondered about who planted them there in the first place. Echoing the same discussion Santana had with Barné Yavarí when they compared their respective "Wätunnä", Ignacio wanted to know "who came first", "who planted". To him, in his reasoning, it must have been Adam and Eve.

In the same line, Ignacio brought up the rooster question. "How did they make it to the Marawaka?", he asked me. "Roosters?", I inquired back, genuinely intrigued. Yes, he said, people say there are wild roosters there. Many of them. And, like the plants that grow bigger on the mountain, those roosters are

[46] For another version of the episodes in which these events are narrated, see de Civrieux 1997, 127-137.

also larger than regular ones. Among those roosters, Ignacio added, there is one in particular that is even bigger. It supposedly lives in one of the Marawaka's caves. Non-Christian Ye'kwana say, Ignacio told me, that this is the master or owner of all the roosters of the world – Yk. *wamedi edhaajä.* Using this example of the rooster, Ignacio continued articulating his rumination about whether what happens in the Mount Marawaka fits in either the traditional versions of the Wätunnä or in the biblical path. He told me that he had always wondered why is it that regular roosters always start to crow every morning at 3 am. He has heard them crowing whenever they have vigils at the church. Why always exactly at that time? Ignacio wondered. How do they know that they have to crow at that time?

My Ye'kwana dad told me that he has discussed this issue with non-Christian Ye'kwana. According to him, the latter say that the answer is that, at exactly 3 am, the giant rooster at the Mount Marawaka crows first and this triggers a chain reaction across all roosters in the world, who echo the crow of that first rooster, their master. The giant's rooster's first crow is a "signal" – Sp. "*un aviso*" – for the rest "to communicate", one after the other. That is how they are all connected. Crowing one after the other, they are "following" their master in the cave on the Mount Marawaka. In Ignacio's reasoning, two things were connected. On the one hand, roosters, like plants, are derived replications of those larger prototypical entities on the Mount Marawaka. This, in the case of plants, is explicitly articulated in the Ye'kwana primordial story of how the people who lived under the giant tree obtained seedlings from it, which they went on to plant on their gardens. On the other hand, beings on a path are "in line" with their owner by replicating what it initiates. Like a leader of a community who "ties" his followers with his drumming, regular roosters "walk/beat" *with* their owner by replicating its actions across time and space. That is, there is a link between being "in line" with previous figures by replicating their actions and the notion of being "connected" and "communicated" with them. In other words, producing uniformity through replication forms connections.

Ignacio's reasoning about the singing of roosters encapsulates the logic of how replications along paths functions to connect, through successive actualizations – the "beatings" –, a continuous potentiality with present events and actions. But it also captures the resignification of this logic with Christianity. As part of his contrast between the Biblical and the Wätunnä paths, my Ye'kwana dad then went on to give me his Christian version of why roosters crow at 3am. Even though non-Christians might say that the giant rooster in the cave on the Mount Marawaka initiates the chain of crowing, Ignacio is convinced that it is not thus, he told me. After all, he had begun our discussion that day questioning if there were giant plants and roosters on the Marawaka at all. The right explanation, he reasoned, is provided in the New

Testament. It was God, through Jesus, who made roosters crow at 3 am. Ignacio referred to the verses in the New Testament where Jesus tells Peter that he was going to deny him three times "before the rooster crows" (see Matthew 26:34, Luke 22:34, John 13:38, Mark 14:30). He pointed out that roosters indeed crowed on the night Jesus had said. The verses where this is explained do not mention the exact time, but, to Ignacio and to other Ye'kwana who have heard them crowing at 3 am, it has to be at that time. To Ignacio, this reflects something we already saw in the previous chapters, namely, the substitution of the many masters that the Ye'kwana used to identify in the world by a single one, the Christian Wanaadi, as the creator of everything. In Ignacio's explanation, it is not that the logic of chains of derived replications no longer applies to the case of the crowing roosters. Rather, it is that the Christian Wanaadi has become the single author of the prototypical action that, today, still makes roosters crow at 3am.

The differentiation that Ignacio makes between the two versions of why roosters crow at 3 am is a complicated one, for the origin of the question of the crowing of roosters might already be an indication of the incorporation of Christian elements into Ye'kwana oral narratives. The crowing of roosters already figured in a Ye'kwana story, from those originally collected by Marc de Civrieux, about Wanaadi's capture and crucifixion in Caracas (1997, 150-153). This story in general is an example of how Christian elements are incorporated and adapted into "traditional" Ye'kwana oral narrations, as David Guss pointed out (1986, 420-421). In the story, Wanaadi's captors call a rooster to watch over Wannadi, who has been crucified, from a mountain – the story uses the adapted Ye'kwana word *kruza*, from the Spanish *cruz*, cross. And to let them know when Wanaadi dies. The mountain, we might guess, is located in the Upper Orinoco, for the story says that Wanaadi's captors have stayed in Caracas. At some point, the rooster sings three times, "Wanaadi's gone". This singing is an indication that Wanaadi's spirit has left his body, which is a way of tricking his captors. In chapter 1 we explored briefly how new external elements are incorporated into Ye'kwana narratives of paths and journeys. However, here, rather than going over this, the relevant point is to highlight how Ignacio's reasoning, in his separation and comparison of two possible explanations for the rooster question, gives an account of how paths work in the eyes of the Ye'kwana. That is, regardless of their content and who initiated them, paths connect with primordial beings through successive replications and gradual transformations of the same prototypical actions that initiated a sequence. Despite whatever the possible origin of the crowing of roosters, this is translated by the Ye'kwana into the question of why is it that they crow at 3am still today, and what is it that connects them back to that primordial event.

Learning new prototypes

This anecdote is an instance of a larger understanding among older Ye'kwana Christians that, as the Bible has become the new Wätunnä, many events in them might also be interpreted as prototypical actions that Christians now have to replicate to keep on the "Christian path", and that are now seen as having their authorship in Jesus Christ and in the Christian Wanaadi. This, for instance, underlies the moral discourses of elder Christians to the youth telling them to live "*Wanaadi adheddu woije*", that is, "steered" by what the Christian Wanaadi tells them through his word in the Bible. We will discuss shortly how the Baptist theology and a literalist view of the Bible fits into this picture, and specially into the religious practice of Christian Ye'kwana. For now, it is important to recall that much of the discussion elder Ye'kwana have about what is the "correct" Wätunnä – either the ones shared by non-Christian elders or the Biblical one – revolve around the issue of "who began" certain practices and how they continued to be replicated along the trajectory walked by the Ye'kwana people. Some of this was seen in Santana's recounting of his encounter with Barné Yavarí, the Ye'kwana wiseman. Like the tracing that took place in that encounter, Ye'kwana Christians often, in their regular talk, also engage in discussing events that might have had their "beginning" in the Biblical story. To connect them to their present actions as Christians, however, they make the point, also referred to earlier in this thesis, that they were walking on the wrong path until they finally corrected it when the NTM arrived, and when they converted to Christianity. Thus, as a result, their tracings of their replications of the prototypical actions found in the Biblical Wätunnä began recently, with what they learnt from the NTM. Let us go back to the conversation in which Santana told me about his encounter with Barné Yavarí decades ago to have a clearer idea of this point.

In our conversation that day, after just telling me the story of his encounter with Yavarí and the comparison they made of their respective versions of the Wätunnä, Santana went on to give me an instance of the things he thinks the Ye'kwana had been doing wrong and which were corrected when they joined the path of the *evangelio*. Just some days before our meeting, during a last supper celebration, a young Ye'kwana man had approached Santana to ask him about the "beginning" of Christian funeral ceremonies – Sp. "*cómo comenzó velorio*". In our conversation, Santana used this as an example in our talk of how their "path" changed. Before the arrival of the NTM the Ye'kwana used to have a strict rule of leaving the terminally ill or the very old off in the forest, away from the settlement, or they would destroy the conical house and leave the body inside. The settlement was usually abandoned if the person who died was a leader or an elder. It was absolutely forbidden to approach or touch a dead body. Only a person from another indigenous group, usually a Yanomami, could take care of it. There was no wake nor funeral ceremony.

Santana told me he had begun by telling the boy about the first time the Ye'kwana celebrated a Christian funeral – Sp. *velorio*. He told him that they were already Christians when the Ye'kwana person for whom the first funeral was held died. The NTM had already arrived in the Cunucunuma river, and many Ye'kwana from the area had already converted to Christianity. As Santana said, they already had "a new *pensamiento*". It was a woman, Sabina Velázquez, who died in a settlement further upriver from where the NTM missionaries were living. Santana said that, by the time, even though people living there were already Christian, they were still scared of dead bodies and would not touch them. So, one American missionary, Leo Melancon, travelled to the place and it was he who first explained to the people there what they had to do. According to Santana, under Melancon's indications, they stayed up the whole night and the following day around the body for the first time. Then came another death, this time in Acanaña, the evangelical community. Santana says that, as in the funeral of Sabina Velázquez, other Christians came to Acanaña from other communities to "animate" the family of the deceased (see chapter 5). "We were looking after the body, looking after the family. We were singing. The day broke and we were still singing. We were all there". Putting emphasis on very specific performative aspects of the funeral, Santana told me that by then they "already knew" – Sp. "*ya sabemos*" – that, at funerals, people drink coffee, that this has to have sugar and milk, that "important verses" have to be recited, specially "the one that says, 'I am the resurrection, the one who dies believing in me will resuscitate'", that the youth music group had to sing music with "a guitar and a *cuatro*"[47], and so on. That was how, Santana told me, he explained to the boy how the Ye'kwana began to do funerals.

In Santana's explanation, the "beginning" of funerals is equated with learning about them from the NTM and with the acquisition of the specific knowledge on how to carry them out. In his account to the boy, the Ye'kwana began to do funerals *because* they learnt how. This transmission of knowledge not only involved *how* to perform funerals in detail, but also learning *who* began to do funerals even before the NTM. In Santana's words, through the NTM "we got to know the history of funerals" – Sp. "*ya supimos la historia de velorio*". He referred specifically to the couple of episodes in the New Testament that we mentioned in the previous chapter and which, in Santana's eyes, were the moments when funerals started, as well as indications that people in Biblical times already "had funerals" – Sp. "*ellos tenían velorio*".

These episodes, we might remember, were the resurrections by Jesus' Christ of Jairus' daughter and of Lazarus. Santana described both of them to me as "the funeral that began earlier" – Sp. "*el velorio que*

[47] A Venezuelan ukulele-like string instrument.

comenzó antes". Santana saw on both occasions the same elements of the funeral the Ye'kwana learnt from the NTM, particularly the idea of animation. According to Santana, like in the version of the Christian funeral they celebrated with the American missionaries, people back then in biblical times also gathered to "animate" the family of the deceased. People in those episodes, as in the first funeral done with the help of Leo Melancon, came from distant places to visit the family of the deceased. "They all went from Jerusalem. From Jerusalem they went to Bethany". Also, like the Ye'kwana who have to play music to "animate" the family of the deceased, "they went playing music, animating, playing flutes, singing … They went to animate the family, so there is no sadness, no crying". Like what happens in Ignacio's explanation of Jesus Christ's indication setting off the crowing of roosters at 3 am, Santana suggested that it was Jesus' actions that likewise started funerals, for it was him who led the group of people who travelled from Jerusalem playing music and singing to resurrect Jairus's daughter and to animate his family.

Repeating on the Christian path

Hermana Lila was one of the American missionaries who lived with the Ye'kwana in those initial years. I met her, by then in her mid-eighties, during my time living with the Tovar family in Puerto Ayacucho in 2017. It had been more than three decades since Lila had left the Amazon. Before leaving, she had lived in Acanaña, evangelizing the Ye'kwana living there as well as at other communities in the region. Lila was returning to the Amazon after all that time to lead a translation project of the Old Testament with some Ye'kwana leaders. The Christian elders of around her age who welcomed her again to the Amazon with open arms had been young adults and the first converts when she last saw them, and the children of back then already had children of their own. In one of the meetings we had, Lila told me of something which I had already heard before from other American missionaries who also lived with the Ye'kwana for decades. She was impressed that, after all those years, in her eyes, the Ye'kwana were still practicing exactly what they learnt decades before. In our meeting we were joined by a couple of Ye'kwana men from the younger generation of Christians. Lila told us that it was impressive that, for instance, the same structure of church services was still in place, that people still sang the same hymns at exact the same moment when the NTM taught them to, that the same verses were recited at the same moment through the church service, and so on.

Lila was describing something I have myself come to be familiar with after years living and working with Christian Ye'kwana, namely, the discipline with which they try to maintain the same worshipping forms in church services and to stick to the same constant agenda of religious activities. For instance, regarding the latter, they religiously celebrate the last supper on the last Sunday of every month, carry out Bible

study on Saturday nights and praying sessions on Wednesdays, do so-called mini-conferences in Easter and at other moments through the year, and a conference in Christmas, and so on. All these are activities that began with the NTM. Conferences, as we saw in Chapter 5, were one of the "cultural substitutes" established by the Americans, in this case that of the annual Ye'kwana gathering of multiple communities for the inauguration of conical houses and the accompanying singing and dancing of the Wätunnä path. The first conference, in which Santana was appointed pastor, took place in December 1958. Mini-conferences, too, were inaugurated by the American missionaries. Other activities, like the celebration of immersion baptisms, last suppers, and the appointment of church elders, were also part of the regular Baptist program initiated by the NTM.

Today, decades after the NTM left the Venezuelan Amazon, these events are carefully put together by the Ye'kwana to make sure they are done in the correct way, even sometimes going to extremes to ensure that. Take the last supper celebrations. Their hosting is rotated between churches, and on the last Sunday of every month the host church is responsible for putting together the celebration and for welcoming the other Ye'kwana churches into the local community. Among other things, the hosts cook food for the visitors, set up a table in the church with a tablecloth on it, pour a grape-flavored drink into tiny plastic cups used specially on those occasions, set up serving trays with small bits of soda crackers, appoint four church members to distribute these among the congregants, and so on.

On the day of the celebration, the regular structure of a Sunday religious service is followed: the service starts strictly with the singing of hymn number 36 from the hymnal. Then comes a section in which congregants ask for hymns to be sung. After this, a prayer is said for the sick. Next, successive groups take the stage in order – children, adolescents, women, and men – to sing a song and give their testimonies, the pastor gives his sermon, and finally special announcements are made. In addition to this, last suppers have an extra section where visiting churches take the stage also to sing and to give their testimonies. And then there is the supper part as such. This, too, follows a strict order: those in charge of distributing the grape-flavored drink and soda crackers stand at the sides of the table, the congregation then sings hymns number 52 and 47, the pastor reads verses number 23-25 and 30-31 from I Corinthians and number 9 from I John, the congregation sings hymn 23, the bits of crackers are distributed and eaten, hymn 29 is sung, the plastic cups are distributed and the juice drunk, hymns 45, 55, and 17 are sung. To finish the service, the congregation sings hymn number 60. Finally, they all go to the open area of the community and form a circle grabbing each other by their hands around two poles with two flags: a Venezuelan one and one with a white and a blue stripe. They pray, sing a hymn, and then there is a transfer of flags to the

members of the church next in line to celebrate the last supper the following month. This church will set up the poles with the flags in their own community. And the next month they will transfer the flags to the following church. And so on. They learnt to do this with the NTM decades ago, and it is an illustration of the purpose of maintaining the events going among churches and of keeping people "animated" (see chapter 5).

Figure 7. Transfer of flags. Cristo Vive church. Valle Verde, Puerto Ayacucho 2017.

This is only an example of the structure of one of the Christian rituals carried out by the Ye'kwana. But equivalent careful procedures are sure to be followed in, among other rituals, immersion baptisms, in the presentation of babies, or in the regular carrying out of conferences and mini-conferences. I remember the last week of a month in 2017 when it was Carijunagua's turn to organize and host the supper celebration. As in every week leading to the event, Carijunagua was abuzz with groups of people doing multiple tasks: cooking food for the guests, making dozens of manioc breads, cleaning the church, and so on. I was in charge of buying the grape drink mix powder and the soda crackers. At the time, the hyperinflationary crisis in Venezuela was at its highest and food and goods shortages were rampant. The

grape-flavor mix was nowhere to be found, and the price of a medium sized pack of crackers was through the roof. When I told Ignacio about my difficulties to find them, he experienced a bit of a crisis. The supper had to be done with that, he told me. It had always been. Cookies and crackers occupy a prominent place in anecdotes the Ye'kwana tell about the time they lived with the American missionaries. The Ye'kwana recall with fondness that adults and children alike were often given cookies and crackers by the Americans, and that such treats were a constant when they lived with the latter, including when activities like the last supper started.

In the end, Ignacio and I could not find the soda crackers and the drink mix, so hibiscus juice and bits of cassava bread were used instead. But for the entire event, Ignacio was notably anxious about the matter and about people criticizing him and his church for not doing the ceremony right. After that week, and when we managed to find the drink mix and the crackers, he bought packages of both so he would not have to experience the same problem in future last suppers. Ignacio's worries reflect a wider concern among Christian Ye'kwana leaders that they might not do things exactly as they and their parents learnt them and did them before. And that they might be criticized and accused of denominational deviation by elders from other churches if they did not do so. For Ignacio, by the time of that last supper, his preoccupation was even more marked given that he had already been accused of becoming Pentecostal for permitting some slight changes in his church.

In a contemporary historical context in which churches from other denominations – specially Pentecostals and Jehovah's Witnesses – have proliferated in the Venezuelan Amazon and in which the younger generation of Ye'kwana Christians have been inevitably exposed to new Christian doctrines and worshipping forms, it is probably inevitable that some churches led by this generation show an interest in engaging with and in learning new things from non-Ye'kwana churches, as well as in introducing changes in their religious practices. Ignacio's church, despite my dad's concerns about practicing the last supper correctly, is one which has been open to small changes. Yet, as the two young men in my meeting with Lila expressed it, younger pastors who try to do so still face the elders' stubborn resistance, which was Ignacio's preoccupation. It is not unusual that, even in the middle of a church service, an elder might stand up and correct what is being done. Santana was one who did that from time to time. Even perceived small deviations might be criticized and seen as evidence of the younger generations' thought instability and their inability to repeat and to follow paths. In a context in which repetition is emphasized, disobedience includes not repeating correctly (see Oakdale 2005, 110). The two young men in our meeting brought up clapping as an example. They decried that elders criticize congregants who might clap during religious

services. Certainly, the Ye'kwana do not clap, and they have very toned-down physical expressions during services. Among other things, one of the reasons why Ignacio's church had been accused of becoming Pentecostal during my time living with the Tovar has been precisely the clapping and permitting more active physical participation during services.

Ordinances and the Baptist path

In their reasoning of why they insist on doing all these activities as they originally learnt them, elders make the connection with the idea of having to stay "on the path of the *evangelio*". Certainly, carrying out church activities and rituals correctly might be influenced by the pressure of being evaluated by other churches and pastors. Nonetheless, the preoccupation with achieving uniformity comes through even in elders' vigilance concerning the religious practices in their own churches, as well as in their insistence that everyone sticks to the "good" trajectory. It is in this context that, during religious activities at their own churches, older pastors, as they evaluate that they are done correctly, regularly appeal to two written materials when they perceive deviations: the New Testament but, more often, the booklet of hymns mentioned in a previous chapter. For instance, I remember one occasion when Maranatha's congregation had gone to a creek nearby the community to carry out an immersion baptism. During the activity, Santana resorted to the hymn booklet when the Ye'kwana man in charge of leading the ritual did not stick to the ritual protocol. The hymnal has a section at the end where it explains in detail how to carry out a list of Christian rituals: baptisms, marriages, appointments of elders, presentation of babies, funerals, amongst others. Reading from the section on baptisms, that day Santana made sure that we all followed the right order of hymns to be sang and the verses to be read, and especially that the immersion part was done correctly, with two helpers holding those who were being submerged. Given that the Bible substituted the Wätunnä as the "good" path of humanizing actions to be repeated, it might be understandable that this in particular might be seen by pastors and elders as a map for replicable prototypical actions, as in the cases of funerals. However, in the case of the hymn booklet, there are other factors that make it an equivalent reference, in the eyes of the Ye'kwana Christians, for replicable prototypical actions.

One in particular is how the hymnal in itself was designed, namely, with an annex of instructions of how to carry out Baptist rituals[48]. The origin of the hymnal booklet used by the Ye'kwana lies in the pioneering

[48] There might be other contextual reasons that could contribute to making the hymnal an authoritative guide to be used by Christian elders, including the high value the Ye'kwana put on music making in general, or the fact that pastors and Christians in general have come to see written materials as an authoritative source of knowledge. However, here the emphasis is particularly on the connection between the hymnal as a guide of instructions and the performance of church activities.

evangelization of Arawak groups in northwestern Amazonia by the American missionary Sophie Müller that began years before that of the NTM of the Ye'kwana. As part of her evangelizing endeavor, Müller was the author of a booklet she called Jungle Methods (1960), which would become a template for the evangelization of other indigenous groups in the Venezuelan and Colombian Amazon by Protestant organizations. In that booklet, apart from providing a Q and A for missionaries working with indigenous people, she drew on her experience with groups like the Curripaco and the Puinave to define some guidelines for carrying out Christian events and rituals with other groups. For example, she was the first person in the region to use Christian conferences, which would go on to become a regular feature among Arawakan Christians and other indigenous Christians in the region (see Capredon 2022), as a fundamental tool for the teaching of the Bible and as a Christian event rotated across communities in which people from different places would converge (Müller 1960, 11; see also Wright 1999). In the booklet she adds, as an annex, a section of activities to be carried out by indigenous Christians – she called this part "the Leader's Booklet". This section, Müller explains, was largely based on a Spanish booklet entitled "Helps for the Lay Preachers" (1960, 30). Most of the activities listed in Müller's Leader's Booklet went on to be adapted and translated into Ye'kwana language and integrated by the NTM into their own hymnal. For instance, among the activities on which Müller gives specific instructions, and which the Ye'kwana also carry out, we find evening devotions, Wednesday prayer sessions, prayer sessions for the sick, the conference itself, and so on.

Müller is exhaustive in her instructions on how to perform each of these. She enumerates the things to be done as part of each activity, gives specific verses to be read, hymns to be sang, etc. Her arguments as to why instructions of activities have to be so detailed are also provided in the booklet, emphasizing the spiritual necessity of achieving uniformity and the irreversibility of the new Christian forms. This is how she puts it:

> "Some people say that it cramps the Holy Spirit to have everything written down 'in order' for the services, but I know that it really cramps the devil. These services, especially such as baptism and the Lord's supper, would turn into regular witchcraft ceremonies if they did not have the mode of service all down in black and white, with all the scripture verses and songs written out in connection with each service. If an elder tried to slip in an old heathen custom everybody would know it immediately and put the elder out of office… The men who can read, borrow the Leader's Booklet from the elders and keenly study it because they all want to know as much as the leaders, so the more scripture and Christian instruction slipped into these special services the better" (Müller 1960: 10).

In Müller's eyes the activities in the Leader's Booklet were meant to be followed in a strict manner. At this point, I want to suggest that in order to understand the connection between, and the convergence of,

such emphasis on achieving uniformity of Christian rituals and worshipping forms on the one hand, and the Ye'kwana idea of walking on a path of successive replications one the other, we might have to look briefly at the Baptist theological notion of ordinances. A defining trait of Baptist theology, especially its American and southern versions, and shared in large part by organizations like the NTM and missionaries like Sophie Müller, is that Christian observances like baptism by immersion and the last supper are not to be considered sacraments, but ordinances. This view, which in large part comes from a XVII century revision of the doctrinal statements of London Baptists, rejects the notion that such observances involve "real presence" or transubstantiation (see Leonard 2003: 65; Leonard 2005: 76-77). Instead, they see them as "symbolic observances", commanded by Jesus Christ through Biblical passages like his exhortation to the disciples in the last supper – "do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19) –, to be followed by Christians, thus connecting all Christians through history to a common church (Leonard 2003, 7-8).

A common theological point shared by Baptists in their literalism is that their notion of ordinances – baptisms and last suppers – also reflects a correct reading of the New Testament. They make the point that it is in performing the observances as they are described in the Bible that their symbolic value resides. Baptism by immersion is often used as an example. The Ye'kwana, for example, say that baptism should always be carried out only by full submersion since that is how it was done in the instances where this takes place in the New Testament. In this sense, underlying the Baptist idea of ordinances as symbolic re-enactments there is an emphasis on the construction of a faith community based on uniformity between current practice and what they interpret as the original literal biblical event. From what Sophie Müller says in the extract above, this is apparently an important motivation of hers for the inclusion of detailed instructions of how to carry out the rituals she lists in her Leaders' Booklet. Certainly, in her booklet she also includes other Baptist rituals, like the appointment of elders or funerals, which are not originally considered to be ordinances like the last supper or baptism are. However, as is also shown in both booklets, it is not unusual that the latter ordinances are found alongside other rituals that are intrinsic to the Baptist evangelizing vision, shared by the NTM, and that all such activities are part of the process of church planting and of the organic emergence and organization of independent churches.

In any case, the fact that Ye'kwana elders and pastors resort to the hymnal's section of instructions looking for guidance to carry out their Christian rituals and to "stay on the Christian path" might reflect their identification of their notion of repetition in the connection Baptists see between the celebration of

ordinances by present Christians and Biblical events. That is, in the idea that performing ordinances, as per the booklet, is a way of re-enacting events that were originally undertaken by Biblical figures.

Same walk, new beats

This chapter has underlined the point made earlier, in chapter 3, that regardless of the different narratives about what constituted a before and after conversion – that of the NTM and of different Ye'kwana voices –, the way older Christian Ye'kwana perceived change was subsumed in a view of the world as made of paths, and in how sameness and difference came about in that frame. Specifically, change was seen as happening as a re-alignment involving a person's *pensamiento* on a connected trajectory, which however kept the same logic of derived replications, irrespective of what the content of those paths were. Christianity, like humanness, implied continuing to walk on a single path – the "proper" and "good" one. How the same logic of walking/beating was given new content with Christian elements has been the topic of these last two chapters, including the transformations that have taken place regarding ideas of alignment and repetition with new generations of Christians. In this chapter in particular, we have looked at another way in which change takes place within the framework of paths: this time "within" a trajectory through the repetition and actualization of prototypes incorporated into it; such repetition, however, also maintains uniformity and continuity and permits the emergence of cultural patterns over time.

Underlying this point is the premise that repetition is a way of constructing a relationship with time in which the past, the present, and in some cases the future are collapsed into the event of the repetition (see Bandak and Coleman 2019, 124; Bielo 2017; Pedersen 2016, 2019). And that each instance of repetition, while built on the production of sameness, always also implies some degree of differentiation (see Bandak and Coleman 2019, 123; also Deleuze 2014), thus blurring the line between break and continuity (see Tomlinson 2014). In the Ye'kwana idea of paths, this comes together in the affirmation that, on a path, successive derived replications are "the same, but different". In this sense, the assumption that by repeating ordinances and Baptist rituals Christian Ye'kwana walk/beat on their new Christian path is not just an indication that the framework of paths permits the incorporation of new content. It also suggests that such new content – in this case, Baptist Christianity – is likewise placed within the same understanding of spatiotemporal rhythmic unfolding through constant repetition, rather than assumed as a radical break with this logic by the first generation of Christian Ye'kwana. In other words, this underscores the all-encompassing potential of paths (chapter 2) to be an articulation of an experience of the world that also involves processes of cultural production and reproduction.

To consider how the emergence and gradual transformation of cultural patterns is tied to the action of engaging in successive repetitions, we could take a brief detour in our argumentation and perform a short intellectual exercise identifying tentatively two ideal types of repetition: we could call them repetition-qua-arc and repetition-qua-derivation. The fundamental distinction between both resides in their different understandings of what the objects of repetition are in relation to an also distinct understanding of temporality. In the case of what we call repetition-qua-arc, time is assumed as being made of successive, disconnected instances that are susceptible to being detached from separate stages along the common temporal flow and, in an exercise of abstraction, can be brought together and compared to each other. That is, this type of repetition implies an objectification of temporal events which can be "clipped" and be recontextualized and made present, as in a temporal arc, through an exercise of mediation (see Bielo 2017, 132). In this way, repeating becomes an exercise of representation of what is perceived as a replicable event, and its re-enactment through what Pedersen calls "the cultural work of repetition" (Pedersen 2016: 227).

An example of this understanding, relevant to our argument, might be that provided by Kierkegaard in his work on repetition (1983). The Danish philosopher sees an association of repeating in this way with Christianity. To Kierkegaard, repetition is inherent to the temporal mechanism of existence set by God, in the sense that, through the action of repeating, humans fashion themselves in line with the initial conditions set by the latter. Repetition connects the immanent human experience with the transcendental. It is ultimately "not something one brings about oneself, on the contrary, it is something brought about by someone, an other: God" (Garff 2005 cited in Tomlinson 2014, 165). Kierkegaard gives the example of a nameless young man who compares his tribulations with a woman to Job's tribulations in the Old Testament (Kierkegaard 1983). The young man reckons that, like Job, whose wealth is restored by God, the results of his own tribulations – becoming unknown to the woman again – reveal an experience of repetition that is spiritual, in the sense that it connects it with a transcendent truth. In other words, repetition is always double: the events that God started and that are captured in the Bible, and their counterparts in the experience of humans. In other words, repetition understood in this way is episodic; it requires the singularity from which the present broke and that of the present of the repetition itself. We might see ordinances as examples of such an idea of repetition considering that their symbolic character as present commemorations of biblical events likewise presupposes a disconnection between both instances, as well as a mediated re-enactment of the latter in the present of the repetition.

When it comes to our discussion of the Ye'kwana, however, the understanding of repetition that permeates their descriptions of paths as rhythmic flows – that is, what we have called repetition-qua-derivation – stands in contrast to the episodic one; this includes their new Christian path, which has been defined by the incorporation and learning of prototypical Christian elements, including ordinances. We have seen traits of this notion of repetition throughout this thesis. Rather than deriving from the singularization of instances along the temporal axis, this form of repetition results from the continuity of an uninterrupted derivation across successive instances. That is, repetition happens insofar as the instance of the re-enactment is connected to an immediately preceding one from which it derived. And thus successively all the way to the incorporation of the prototype. Hence, rather than an arc between a transcendental frame of reference and the moment of the mediated re-enactment, the connection between the latter and a primordial event happens through successive gradual instances, which imply direct connection.

This, for example, is what comes across in the Ye'kwana understanding that path-alignment through repeating what others, who are themselves inserted in the same chain of derived replications, did, requires learning what is to be re-enacted directly from one's elders. This notion of immediacy applies, for example, to ideas of inter-generational transmission – Ricky does what Ignacio did before him, Ignacio does what Santana did, and so on –, as well as to conceiving the learning of the Wätunnä as an actual experiencing done by the double-spirit who visualizes directly the evolution of the events chanted in it. Thus understood, repetition happens along chains of moments when people re-live the same ways of living, and not against the backdrop of a disconnected, transcendent frame of reference. The potentiality of what is repeated is transmitted forward with each new derived instance, as in the crowing being passed across roosters echoing each other all the way back to Mount Marawaka or, according to Ignacio, to Jesus' Christ actions in biblical times.

We might add that these two understandings of repetition point to two different notions of virtuality. On the one hand, an episodic understanding of repetition assumes an idea of the virtual in which this derives from the conditions of a primordial state, which is then actualized at disconnected future instances of reenactment. The virtual, in this case, exists as a backdrop against which actualizations occur. Meanwhile, on the other hand, the virtual in repetition-qua-derivation might be said to exist only via its perpetuation at successive, derived instances. In this understanding, the virtual exists and is sustained through the continuous process of inheriting the replicable conditions from an immediately-prior instance, and is propelled forward by constantly re-enacting them. That is, the virtual does not exist as a representation

outside of the very act of repeating. It actually emerges from doing it and transmitting it successively (see Deleuze 2014, 23-38).

It has been argued in the Amazonianist literature that there is the assumption, in indigenous worldviews, of an ontological instability among humanity and animality caused by an initial state of bodily undifferentiation described in indigenous primordial stories (see Viveiros de Castro 1998; 2004). In this view, the initial conditions serve as a "virtual field" against which ontological transformation in indigenous lives takes place in the present. Considering such readings of virtuality against the distinction we just made between how different forms of virtuality emerge from either type of repetition, it could perhaps be argued that such interpretations come closer to an episodic version of repetition insofar as it is assumed that it is the initial conditions – the primordial state of undifferentiation – that come to determine the present experiences of indigenous people. The notion that such initial conditions persist as a "field" against which indigenous people interpret their experiences, detach the reproduction of such conditions from the cultural work that sustains them.

This point, in a sense, reproduces Terrence Turner's critique of perspectivism (2009). Whereas perspectival authors make the argument that current ontological dynamics come to parallel primordial conditions, which persist in a field of potentiality, it is incremental transformation along processes of replicable cultural practice, Turner argued, that comes to define what it means to be human and animal. Repetition in this sense permits the emergence of cultural patterns along successive actualizations. Such patterns emerge out of the action of repeating successively and re-living the same conditions directly, and do not necessarily exist as an external representation that is made present by referring back to an original state. To make a similar point about the emergence of patterns from successive repetition, Deleuze uses Lévi-Strauss' description of the use the Caduveo make of repeated motifs in their weavings: "These elements interlock with each other through dislocation, and it is only at the end that the pattern achieves a stability which both confirms and belies the dynamic process according to which it has been carried out" (2011, 191).

Echoing this, what we have seen in this chapter and so far in this thesis is that, for the Ye'kwana, virtuality is not so much given by a primordial state as by the capacity to be inserted in processes of linear replication and derivative transformation – in their words, in a walk/beating. Reformulating Viveiros de Castro's own analogy of virtuality, which is particularly well-suited to capture the Ye'kwana notion of "beating" on paths, it could be said that the virtual is a "frequency" people are attuned to (Viveiros de Castro 2007, 161). Or, in the words of my Ye'kwana interlocutors, to walk/beat on a path is to replicate by being "tied"

to the drumming of those who walk ahead along the same trajectory. More importantly, as we saw in this chapter, virtuality and cultural patterns emerging from the action of repeating and from the gradual transformation of prototypes implicit in it makes such trajectories susceptible to acquire new content depending on what prototypes are incorporated. Here we saw how the incorporation of elements associated with Christianity redefined the path for the Ye'kwana to walk on by repeating them.

Chapter 7

Still walking together: the paths of Christian music

On April 2017 Maranatha carried out a two-week evangelising campaign to non-Christian communities in the Caura river. Going down river we stopped at El Playón, a Ye'kwana community mid-river, to spend the night. In order to take advantage of our short stay there we set up an unplanned church service in the common conical house. The congregation sat on shaky wooden benches arranged in U-shape forming an improvised central stage, and around us local Ye'kwana began to gather attracted by the music and the singing. In front of us, Maranatha's youth music group, Los Hijos del Rey, was performing some of their hits. Straight after them came Maranatha's other group, Siloé Celestial, formed of the adult women of the church and led by Luciano, a Jivi man who plays the guitar. Half-way through the first songs of the service, a shirtless Ye'kwana boy sitting on the bench behind mine poked me in my back, and curiously asked me in Spanish: "Are you *cristiano*?". I had noticed that he and other local Ye'kwana had been muttering and pointing at me, intrigued as to the presence of such a weird *criollo* in such an event and at such a place. In Playón, *criollos* are not uncommon but they do not tend to look much like a glasses-wearing anthropologist, nor do they mix with the local Ye'kwana too much; they are usually miners travelling upriver to the wildcat gold mines, members of the *sindicatos* para-military groups controlling the gold trade, or the sporadic members of the National Guard. Therefore, a good explanation might have been that I was a *cristiano* myself. To the boy's unexpected question, I clumsily gave him a self-exonerating reply: "I am with the *iglesia*". Not buying my elusive answer, he insisted, adding this time special emphasis to each of his words, as if I had not understood his initial question: "Yes, but, *do-you-sing*? *Are-you-a-singer*?"

Equating being Christian with singing is commonplace among Christian and non-Christian Ye'kwana. Gina – my wife, who lived for a while with me in the Amazon – and I were asked similar questions during our first weeks in Carijunagua when we began to attend religious services. The question of whether we were Christian was one that only came up a couple of times, mainly in our initial introductions. People were more interested in knowing whether we were singers of praise songs – Sp. *alabanzas* –, knew how to play instruments, or, when they found out that Gina does sing, whether she could teach them how to sing "better". They wanted to know if we were going to join any of the music groups and every time we stood in front of the congregation to give our testimonies they encouraged us to sing a song. The first song in

Ye'kwana language we were taught was a praise hymn where the women sing a line of every stanza – "*Ashisha, ashisha, ashisha, ashishato*" – and are followed by the choir of men who sign the next line – "*Jesucristo*". In Carijunagua, joining one of the groups is expected from every new member of the church. Every Christian Ye'kwana who decides to congregate at Maranatha or that visits Carijunagua for several days automatically starts to be seen taking part in the rehearsals of one of the groups and singing alongside them at church services. Among Christian and non-Christian Ye'kwana, *cristianos* are expected to be musicians, to sing and/or to play instruments. Thus, underlying the boy from Playón's puzzlement was the fact that that evening in Caura I was not standing and singing with the music groups. How could I be Christian if I was not singing?

His puzzlement is understandable, moreover, considering that Christian Ye'kwana are indeed always singing and playing music. In Carijunagua only rarely does music stop, as we saw in the last chapter. People sing or play music during church services and football matches, at funerals and at birthdays, at home and when travelling, when they wake up in the morning and before going to sleep in the evening. When they are not singing, strident audio recordings of Christian songs come out of the community´s few mobile phones, which work as transitory repositories for the circulation of some of the most popular tunes. When a group of members of the music groups are together, they seem to be in endless rehearsal mode; walking along the dirt road that leads to the community they mutter the lyrics of the songs and strum their guitars, and when they rock themselves in the hammocks and one starts singing other voices join in from the nearby hammocks.

This chapter will explore Ye'kwana Christian music and singing. In the anthropology of the Amazon the Ye'kwana have had a prominent position when it comes to Amerindian music. Some of the most known and knowledgeable works on the Ye'kwana have had singing and voicing at the centre (see for instance Gongora 2017; Guss 1986, 1990; Moreira 2012), which to some extent demonstrates the prominence that singing had in pre-conversion times. These works have shown that for non-Christian Ye'kwana, as Seeger put it regarding music in the Amazon more generally (2004), every time music is heard in a community something important is going on, be it the long-lasting singing of the Wätunnä for the inauguration of a new conical house, the shaman's singing to heal an ill person, or the singing by a purifying expert to make food edible or a place inhabitable. In Carijunagua, meanwhile, I found a soundscape filled with a peculiar musical potpourri made of protestant hymnology and Christian tunes played to the unexpected rhythms of Mexican *rancheras* or Venezuelan *raspacanillas*. The latter, incorporated by the Ye'kwana decades ago, is today the widespread distinctive musical style of Ye'kwana Christian music across communities.

Christian *rancheras*, in turn, were sung only in Carijunagua for a while. This style arrived just some years ago with Luciano, the Jivi director of Siloé Celestial by the time I did fieldwork. Since Luciano left the church, the style has been fading.

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One day during my time living with the Tovars, when Luciano still led Siloé Celestial, I heard some of its members complain to him: "Without you we cannot sing". We were standing in the dark, dingy living room of Luciano's house in La Reforma, some hour from Carijunagua. This complaint had resurfaced multiple times in the previous weeks after Luciano had stopped coming to church and to Carijunagua under the pretext that he was very busy looking after his adolescent children and his garden back in his community. The truth is that Luciano had been in a bad mood lately and had confessed to me he was thinking of leaving the music group and the church. The pastor Ignacio and the women had been demanding too much from him, asking him to be based in Carijunagua for long periods of time just to lead rehearsals and to fulfil his role as leader of the women's group. His departure had impacted Siloé Celestial greatly and the presentations and rehearsals had slowly come to a halt. Or as they would say, without their leader, the group was "decayed" and "depressed" – Sp. *decaídos, desanimados*. Hence, that afternoon, packed into my 1984 long-chassis jeep, I had driven most members of the group, plus the pastor, and others who just wanted to come along for a ride, to La Reforma. They were trying to convince Luciano to come back to Carijunagua and to leading the group. Without him, Dionicia and other women had said to me, they did not know *how* to sing. But, how could that even be possible if I had seen for myself the command that all members had of the lyrics, melodies and rhythms of the group's signature *rancheras* repertoire? Could not they just sing together without the necessity of, as they said, "a leader"?

Having a leader – Yk. *adhaajä* – is an important feature of every Ye'kwana Christian music group. Like the master or chief of a community, the leader of a music group is also typically its founder. Ricky, for instance, is the founder and leader of Maranatha's youth group, Los Hijos del Rey. As the Ye'kwana see it, a leader is responsible for keeping the group animated and away from decaying, but, more importantly, for initiating and orienting the course of what they refer to as the "path" of a song. Without Luciano, there was no one who could create such "path" for the members of Siloé Celestial to sing along. During my time in Carijunagua I witnessed some other moments when the leading of the singing of other groups also failed. On a couple of occasions, as when he was disciplined, it was Ricky who did not carry out his duties as the youth group's leader and people complained that Los Hijos del Rey was "decaying". Without their respective leaders alongside them, singers remain uncomfortably quiet for minutes during presentations

at the church, watching each other awkwardly while waiting for someone to start singing or play the guitar. Having a leader is therefore a necessity, be it for the singing of *rancheras*, *raspacanillas*, or even for the children's choir at Sunday school.

Meanwhile, during my time living with them, I only ever witnessed Christian Ye'kwana performing solo singing on a few occasions, and in all of them the situation felt rather awkward. The soloist looked uncomfortable, their eyes glancing nervously to the floor or the ceiling while hopelessly trying to articulate songs that sounded out of place in the Ye'kwana group repertoire. These occasions would usually take place shortly after visits to non-Ye'kwana churches and after seeing Christian pop songs being sung there by non-Ye'kwana soloists. Some of the church's youth would try to sing them, but in vain. After the embarrassing attempts, they would just go back to singing in groups as usual and no one would insist on doing it individually. Someone who did try to "teach" them to sing individually was Adriel, Ignacio's youngest brother who grew up with the NTM and more embedded in criollo Christian circles. On the rare occasions he came to church services at Maranatha on Sundays, Adriel would take the guitar and confidently stand in front of the congregation singing slow-paced Christian ballads. Ye'kwana singers should not wait for someone else to start singing, he insisted to Maranatha's members. They should learn to do it alone. However, Dionicia once confessed to me with a mix of resignation and secret satisfaction that no matter how much her brother insisted, they were not going to sing that way.

Unlike what happens when they sing individually, every time I hear the Ye'kwana singing protestant hymns congregationally I feel moved by the overwhelming sensation produced by their perfectly tuned voices. It is not just me; the first time Gina heard them she told me she got goose bumps. Having directed choirs for years, she was surprised by the level of attunement and coordination that Christian Ye'kwana reach, apparently effortless and without intention (Video 2)[49], very often amid the disorderly comings and goings of people during church services and without getting distracted from, say, the attention-demanding task of picking lice from each other's heads. The coordination that they seem to achieve so naturally could very well take some years of rehearsing for a well-trained choir director and a decent-level choir. To confirm the subjective impressions of our western ears, the NTM missionaries to whom I mentioned this had the same opinion. What is more, they said that it has been like that since the Ye'kwana enthusiastically learnt to sing Christian hymns back in the fifties. Moreover, it is not only Protestant hymns; nowadays *raspacanillas* and *rancheras*, although definitively less of an imposing sound, also have an equally coordinated intonation. This especially applies to *rancheras*, which are sung in difficult two- or three-

[49] **Video 2**. Hymn singing during Sunday service at Maranatha: http://u.pc.cd/cInctalK

voices harmonies and in a flawless so-called *tercera mexicana*; that is, a harmony of an interval of a major third.

The determination to keep singing in groups and not individually, the level of attunement achieved when singing together, and the necessity for a leader to initiate a singing path reveal the persistence in Christian music of important pre-Christian notions of singing as forming and transiting paths with others. This is the topic of this chapter. The arrival in the fifties of protestant hymns with the NTM presented the Ye'kwana with a radically new understanding of music, singing, and the voice. One where individuality was emphasized, both for the performer and for the music to be performed. The latter had the form of self-contained units – e.g. hymns, songs – that could now have a life of their own detached from the act of singing them and from the agentive capacities of singers' corporeal paths. And yet, even though hymns were continued to be sung by Christian communities throughout the following decades of *evangelio*, paths and pre-Christian ideas about music have found their way into Ye'kwana Christian music in peculiar ways. The result is a distinctive repertoire of protestant hymnology combined with other rhythms incorporated by the Ye'kwana themselves and adapted in such a way that still permits the creation of music paths to be attuned to and transited along as a group. Of those styles we will look closely at *raspacanillas*, the signature style of the Ye'kwana Christian repertoire.

Hymns and the protestant person

NTM missionaries who were at the beginning of the *evangelio* in the Upper Orinoco recount how eagerly the Ye'kwana took up the singing of protestant hymns. Without even converting to Christianity many men became translators of the hymns that arrived in the missionaries' hymnals and composers of new ones. The masters of chants – Yk. *adeemi edhaajä* and *aichudi edhaajä* – were the most enthusiastic ones. For instance, the Guerra family, an important lineage of masters of chants in Upper Orinoco, became prolific producers and translators of Christian hymns and nowadays are in charge of the music ministry of the entire Ye'kwana church. This was in the fifties and the sixties when there were no *raspacanillas*, no *rancheras* and no instruments yet. There was, it should be mentioned, certain exposure to criollo music. Santana, for example, recalled the first gramophone that someone brought to one of the communities where he lived as an adolescent, as well as some Ye'kwana who learnt to dance some criollo tunes.

Santana also remembers that in the first decades when the NTM missionaries lived among them, the Americans did not used to sing in groups. They only sang Christian hymns individually – Sp. "*solitos*" – or in pairs, and did not play instruments either. They only sang *a capella*. I once spent an afternoon with

Hermana Lila, the American missionary, discussing Christian hymns. I could witness her vast knowledge of hymns in English, Spanish and Ye'kwana. Despite some young Christian Ye'kwana being with us that day, *hermana* Lila however spent the whole afternoon singing by herself from a dark-tanned old hymnal. Baptist hymn singing, as Lila was doing, is mainly done individually or, also, congregationally at the church, more than in ensembles. Hymns and hymnals are important mediators in the definition of Baptist communities and of the Baptist Christian personhood through certain ideas about what music and singing are and do, as we will see shortly below. That old hymnal that Lila had in her hands was one of the first hymnals that was used as a template for the translation of hymns to Ye'kwana language decades ago. As soon as the NTM had some hymns translated they distributed loose sheets with individual hymns printed on them for each Ye'kwana to have one and for these to practice their incipient literacy skills. Sometime afterwards, once the Americans had a fully translated hymnal, they edited and circulated many cheaply edited copies among Christian communities. To date, there have been two main editions of a full Ye'kwana hymnal: in 1986 and 2016. The first edition was a compilation of classic Baptist and protestant hymns, including all-time hits such as "Jesus Loves Me, This I Know", "All People That on Earth Do Dwell", or "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross". The second one included the same hymns plus an extra twenty-five hymns that had been either translated or composed by the Ye'kwana themselves since the publication of the first hymnal. It is fair to say that nowadays probably almost every Christian Ye'kwana has a hymnal.

One of the main missions of the NTM, and of other Baptist missionary organizations such as the Summer Institute of Linguistics, is to bring God's word to all people on earth by translating the New Testament to local vernaculars. Such translation draws on a conception of language according to which the first mother language of a person, or "heart language", is the only way through which God's word can be communicated effectively and can touch the heart of the person (see Handman 2007; also Claydon 2005). This "language ideology" presupposes a specific model of the self: "When a person speaks in his mother tongue, it isn't his intellect that is involved, but his whole self, including his emotions and will" (Cowan, cited in Handman 2007, 171). It is only through linguistic interaction in someone's first language that the true, individual self is expressed and interacted with. By defining someone's mother's tongue as *heart* language the emphasis is precisely on the internal, on the emotional and affective forces mediating the relationship with God. However, missionaries also often acknowledge, as with what happened in their work with the Ye'kwana, that God's message does not always arrive in the Bible, but does so very frequently via hymns and Christian songs, and so these too need to be translated into vernaculars. Seen thus, music is understood as an appropriate medium through which God's word in someone's heart language can touch the soul of the person. Therefore, as part of the missionary endeavor, the translation

of hymns and protestant songs very often represents a task as important as the translation of the New Testament, as was the case in the evangelization of the Ye'kwana.

Protestant hymnology, since Luther, has been tied to the privatization of the person's relation with God through, precisely, the definition of a notion of a private "heart" that could be moved by music (see Brown 2005, Leaver 2017, Wagner Oettinger 2001). "Luther thought that music prepared the heart to hear the word, and thus when worship was combined with music the human spirit was stirred more easily and more strongly" (Wagner Oettinger 2001, 44). Yet, in the Western musical tradition, the possibility of the soul being touched affectionately by music was an idea that already existed since Plato through to the Augustinian turn to an "inner dimension" of the self as a private space (see van Maas 2008). Luther built on this his notion of the relationship between music and the individual person. However, whereas for St Augustine the inner space of the soul was immaterial and not circumscribed to the spatiality of the body, for the Protestants the relationship of music to the person was tied to the redefinition of the heart as a new private location limited to the body. Music thus became "a vehicle for the expression of pure inwardness" (Hegel, cited in van Maas 2008, 756).

In parallel, the individual character of hymns as separate, short stanzas and their reproducibility onto individual sheets and booklets have also given shape to self-contained musical units which are capable of having a life of their own. Detached from their original authors, protestant hymns are often perceived as authorless creations printed in authorless hymnals, whose ultimate authorship lies in any case with the Holy Spirit. In the literalist Calvinist hymnology tradition on which Baptist hymnology has mainly fed, this idea of divine authorship was further consolidated with the use of psalms as the unmovable base for the lyrics of hymns, which has contributed to solidifying the self-contained and individual character of hymns even more and to strengthening the nexus between hymns and God's literal word in the New Testament. It is in such conception of protestant hymnology as mediating a personal relation with God that hymns, as distinct units, are also appropriately fitting for private use, for connecting God's word and the person's heart (Brown 2005). The generalized access of individual persons to their own private hymnal contributes to the adaptation of hymns to personal circumstances and makes them susceptible to be infused with personal meanings in every new context.

Even when congregationally sung, the private connection of individual believers with God through hymns is assumed, particularly since the use of hymns in protestant corporate forms of worship is typically conceived of as an aggregation of individual expressions of devotion (see Brown 2005, 8). The dynamics of hymn singing during church services at Maranatha is an expression of how congregational hymn singing

was used by the NTM missionaries to advance an intended individualization of the person and its relationship with God. At church services, after singing *raspacanillas* for some half an hour as an "intro", the pastor opens the floor for the congregation to suggest hymns to be sung. People individually call the numbers of the hymns from the hymnal that they want all to sing, and the congregation then sings the selected hymns together. The NTM missionaries were the ones who introduced this one-hymn-one-person pairing dynamic back in the early years when hymns were being introduced among the Ye'kwana in Acanaña. One of them recounted to me that this section of the service used to be endless in the first years; every Ye'kwana picked one hymn and all requests had to be satisfied. The missionaries finally began to put limits on the amounts of hymns to be sung and reduced it to just a selection of requests. Unlike *raspacanillas* and *rancheras*, nowadays Christian Ye'kwana do sing hymns without the need of a leader to initiate the singing, with the caveat that this is done congregationally and not in groups.

Ye'kwana traditional ideas of music and singing were considerably different from all this, as we have seen in previous chapters, especially in their fusion of individual path-following capacities into a collective synchronization. Before coming back to our discussion of Ye'kwana Christian music, let us go back to this.

The paths of the beating voice

There was a moment during my main period of fieldwork when I slowly stopped seeing "paths" as an anecdotical way of speaking shared by older Ye'kwana, and they started to come to the fore as an object of research in their own right. That was the moment when I met Carlos. I began slowly to ask more questions about paths. Gradually, questions began to feel relevant. That was the moment when Ignacio and others began to share with me their elaborations on paths and how they are found everywhere. Eventually, this avenue took us to discussing the issue of beatings. Yet, still hesitant, I kept asking people about aspects of their lives that, to them, could also be paths and that could "beat". Two of these aspects were the voice and speech, for both of which the Ye'kwana use the word *a'dheu*. They translate the latter to Spanish as *palabra*, literally "word", and use it to refer in general to the sound that is made by the action of voicing. I was told back then that when someone speaks or sings, that person's voice and what is said "beats". I had not heard this before, but Ignacio told me to be attentive, during the meetings of elders, to how some of them referred to their speeches and to the action of speaking. Indeed, as I began to pay attention, I began to notice how some elders do say that they "beat", meaning that they speak, and that "beat" together with others with whom they speak.

Eventually, as I spoke more with my interlocutors about these topics, it became clear that the connection older Ye'kwana saw of the voice and voicing with beating passed through the idea that these are likewise understood as expressions of the beating life-force said to animate the body from the chest – the *do'ta*. In their eyes, in the same wat that objects from the outside can be taken into the body-recipient through its various "tubes", they can also be taken out. The voice is an example of this. It is an instance of how the life-force in the chest can extend into the exterior by the action of voicing. "*Sacar la palabra*" – "to take out the word" –, "as if you were grabbing it in your chest and pulling it out", was a way in which this was described to me (see chapter 3). David Guss referred to this same idea in a 1986 article on Ye'kwana orality. There, he called attention to the connection the Ye'kwana with whom he worked decades ago also made between the voice and breath, particularly when they sang healing songs – Yk. *aichudi*. At those moments, the words of the chant were powered by the breath that animated them, and so they were blown to the forces they were meant to influence (1986, 423; see also Gongora 2017). My interlocutors call these ritual actions "*soplar*" – to blow, Yk. *ajimmadö*, *ätummajo* – which used to be performed by experts of chants to purify objects and to heal the person. But, more generally, in their explanations, my friends transmit the idea that the same connection between the voice and breath might apply not just to singing but to regular speaking as well.

The connection indigenous Amazonians make between breath, voice, and vitality has been amply documented, and discussed in chapter 2 and 5 (see Chaumeil 2011b; Hill 2009b; Hill and Chaumeil 2011; Hugh-Jones 2019, 23-28, Walker 2010). There we also saw that, to the Ye'kwana, the *pensamiento* is another expression of the beating life-force in the chest, and that, as such, it has the ability to orient and make the person follow paths. Besides this, in the case of the voice, in my interlocutors' understanding of it as also an expression of that beating vitality, the connection with paths came as well in the idea that, as the voice comes out of the body when the person engages in the act of voicing or singing, it also forms "paths" of speech. Londoño-Sulkin noted similar accounts about speech among the Muinane (2003). Some of my Ye'kwana friends called these "paths" of speech, in Spanish, "*figuras*" – shapes, designs. For instance, a person who speaks a lot, with abundance of details, like an elder during a collective meeting, is said to have a "beautiful" or a "big" *figura* or path – Yk. *äämä adaijato*. Ignacio once compared the action of speaking to what a mime does. Similar to what the latter does, he told me, a speaker creates *tänemö*. As we might remember, *tänemö* refers not just to visions in general, but to all appearances in thoughts of things that enter the body – smells, sounds, visions, etc. – and that make a person's *pensamiento* concentrate on them and follow paths.

In this sense, according to Ignacio, speech paths, as they appear in the listener' mind, they also make him or her follow those same paths with what is said – Yk. "*a'deu chuta'jä ancädä*". A "beautiful" speech path is, hence, according to descriptions, one where the person's reasoning does not "deviate" and carries the listeners along the way, despite how many details might be given and argumentative turns taken. In fact, the more of these, the better. That is what, in part, makes a *figura* big and beautiful. In contrast, someone who gets blocked while speaking, whose speech is rushed or diverges with no clear direction, or speaks too little, has a short path, a small *figura*. This, together with speaking too loudly or incoherently, might be an indication that the body is affected or contaminated by Odosha or his many beings, as well as of a physical inability to follow paths more generally, as we saw before. In chapter 3, I mentioned Yusuany, one of Carijunagua's adolescents by the time I did fieldwork, as an example of this. She was seen as unstable and "*especial*" – having a cognitive difficulty – because she spoke too loudly and easily became angry, but also because sometimes she did not speak coherently. This was paired with her inability to sing in tune with the rest of the church's teens in their music group.

Thus, there are no specific words in Ye'kwana language for what we would normally identify as music or singing, as these were seen – and for some Ye'kwana still are – as variations of the act of forming beating paths with the voice and speech. In fact, the Ye'kwana refer to people who sing and dance, including Christian musicians who nowadays only do the former, as *yecwanamo* – "those who beat", Sp. "*los que golpean*". Something that, to the Ye'kwana, used to make sung paths in their pre-Christian music styles distinguishable from the "shapes" of everyday parlance was precisely their heightened movements across varying rhythmic frequencies and voice registers to create their own path "shapes" at ritual moments. These "shapes" were also formed by what was chanted. Namely, by the sung narration of the cosmographical trajectories along which the singers' spirit-doubles travelled, such as the occasion of the collective singing and dancing of the Wätunnä, or when a shaman's spirit-double travelled to those realms in search of a lost double. It must be pointed out that on all these occasions, percussion was used. This is an important aspect because rhythmic percussion – the "beats" – is a key component of how the visualization of spoken paths in thoughts took place. In his explanation of how speech puts visions of paths in the listeners' thoughts, Ignacio emphasized that "the sound of the drum makes you see" and carries the person's spirit-double along the visualized routes on those ritual occasions.

That is, the voice, as an expression of vitality, opened paths along which spirit-doubles, also as expressions of that same vitality, moved. The connection of voice and breath with threads was something also mentioned before (see chapter 2). During those sung journeys, as the singers' spirit-doubles travelled

along sung paths, they were also said to be carrying a thread that would keep them from losing their direction (see Gongora 2017, 392-393). The idea of a possible detachment of a spirit-double that needs to be recovered along paths formed by singing brings us to another aspect of the voice, namely, their also detachable character. In Ignacio's account of the indigenous queen that Ye'kwana say travels through the forest in the Upper Orinoco with her party, he mentioned that when he and his friend felt their spirits passing by, a strong breeze and the voices of the travelers gave their presence away. Likewise, in the accounts I was given by elder Ye'kwana about what used to be the work of Ye'kwana shamans, I was also told that once a spirit-double was recovered by the shaman in his journey along cosmic paths, this entered the shaman's body and he could then speak with the voice of that person. This would then be transferred to that person's body by blowing breath over it[50]. Something similar would happen when a shaman brought to the earthly plane the spirit-double of an ancestor. Having the latter in his body, I was told the shaman could then speak with that person's voice. The fact that a spirit-double, breath, and the voice were seen as a single expression of the same vitality, one that could detach from the body, made possible, in the eyes of my Ye'kwana interlocutors, that a voice could exist outside of a body and "beat" along paths. Moreover, this voice could also be transduced or captured into other bodies, including objects, as per the Ye'kwana shamans' actions. This, for instance, is one reason that led the first Ye'kwana converts to think that Wanaadi's actual voice could actually be inside the physical book of the Bible (see chapter 3, also Guss 1986).

Santana also explained to me that, in chanted journeys, as the names of beings and places were recited, they changed to reflect the different forms acquired along the path (see also Gongora 2017). Naming provoked the creation of channels through which properties of beings and places, including knowledge or abilities to, for example, heal or inflict damage, or certain material elements from those realms, could pass from one domain to another and acquire differently perceived forms. For instance, when the shaman named Acuena – the lake of healing water at the top of the Ye'kwana cosmos – in his healing chants, this used to be followed by him blowing his breath over the ill person's body. Inhabiting the earthly plane, people would have perceived it as breath but, as Santana explained, it was actually water from Acuena brought down by the shaman that was poured over the body. This was another example of the correspondence in essence of voicing/singing – and naming as part of the formation of paths with the

[50] Heurich argues that, among the Araweté, different modalities of reported speech – in daily life, semi-ritual, and ritual discourses – are different points along a continuum of voice incorporation, which includes the capturing of voices by a shaman (2018a). This, in other contexts, also explains the possibility seen by the Areweté that a voice could be inside physical objects like a flash drive (2018b). On a rather similar possibility of bodily incorporation of external words among the Urarina, see Walker 2018.

voice –, breath, and the travelling life-force, and of their capacity to make possible the transduction of elements across dimensions[51].

Tuning up beating vitalities

That day in Playón, minutes after the boy had asked me why I was there, my aunt Dionicia came over and sat next to me on the same shaky wooden bench. The singing of Los Hijos del Rey was still going on in front of us and more local people had gathered around to watch and listen to the music. The boys behind us were being noisy and Dionicia kept giving them angry looks over her shoulder. At one point one of them dropped a phrase that made Dionicia turn around completely and look at him in indignation. Noticing her strong reaction, I asked her what the boy had said. "He said that with all the music he needs to be drinking *iadake*", she explained shaking her head censoriously, and added: "he might need *iadake*[52], but I don't need any". Manioc beer and alcohol in general was one of the things forbidden by the NTM in the early days of the *evangelio* in Acanaña. And today drinking alcohol or any fermented beverage is a practice strongly rejected by Christian Ye'kwana. However, before conversion to Christianity *iadake* was drunk normally, and especially in large quantities during important events when collective singing took place, in particular during the singing of *adeemi*. That is, of the Wätunnä. For those events, therefore, large quantities of *iadake* – usually a canoe was used as container – had to be prepared beforehand. For some three days, as people avoided falling asleep, heavy drinking took place while they sang the body of chants and danced to the non-stop beats of percussion instruments. As elders remember, this led inevitably to the point where participants would end up fainting and dancing in pools of vomit and mud. Importantly, as soon as the *iadake* ran out, the singing and dancing had to stop, regardless of whether the Wätunnä had been sung in its entirety.

It was mentioned before (chapter 3) that the reasoning as to why such heavy drinking was necessary for collective singing was that, only by destabilizing the body, by opening its multiple tubes with mind-altering

[51] The idea that chants and singing in indigenous Amazonia mediate the relationship with alterity has been demonstrated in many cases, which include the Shipibo (Brabec de Mori 2013), the Kamayurá (de Menezes Bastos 2013), and the Curripaco (Hill 2013) (see also Brabec de Mori and Seeger 2013). In fact, music and singing has in many ethnographic cases been shown to be itself a incorporation from alterity and a language that permits the maintenance of that communication. In the case of the Ye'kwana, Gongora has noted that, among her interlocutors, chants are said to be incorporated by the apprentices of chants in the form of beads that enter their heads through threads (Gongora 2017, 387-389). And we also mentioned in chapter 2 the stories told by the Ye'kwana that speak about the incorporation of percussion instruments and music from the people who lived in the upper levels of the cosmos. Music was their language and learning it permitted the Ye'kwana to maintain communication with them.

[52] Fermented manioc beer.

substances or techniques like sleep deprivation, could sung paths be formed and spirit-doubles detached to travel along them. Only thus could what was sung be directly visualized and incorporated in thoughts. As Santos-Granero argued regarding the Yanesha (2006, 61-62), it is the spirit that is seen as doing the learning, and therefore it needs to be uncoupled from the body. A similar logic, we mentioned, was seen as applying to the ritual work of the Ye'kwana shaman, who used mind-altering substances – *yopo* seeds, ayahuasca, and tobacco – to induce the same state of bodily destabilization in himself, so that he could then free his beating vitality. In this way, he was able to travel along cosmic paths with the drumming and the singing and recover lost spirit-doubles or engage in relations with nonhuman beings and other spiritual entities. Thus, singing paths and destabilizing the body for the travelling of the detached spirit-double permitted the shaman, like regular people during the singing of *adeemi*, to perceive and acquire elements from those realms[53].

The perceived idea that the generation of bodily instability was necessary for the collective alignment on a common rhythmic path while singing in group is a particularly relevant point to highlight for the argument of this chapter. According to the descriptions I was given of the collective dancing and singing rituals, coordination was sought in multiple ways during the three-day-long singing and dancing of the Wätunnä. Having their bodies altered, the master of chants would lead the group by chanting a large number of successive stanzas. After each, he would be followed by the chorus of dancers repeating the same verses. Such replication was nonetheless not just about repeating the lyrics. Just as the master of chants had to follow the rhythmic and melodic patterns transmitted to him by chanters before him, the group was to execute a rigorous replication of the same musical aspects that constituted their master's singing. This involved, as Ignacio demonstrated to me with his walk in his living room, attuning the singing and the dancing moves to the rhythmic patterns marked by the leader with his percussion instruments. This vocal and rhythmic adjustment resulted in remarkable levels of collective attunement. Faithfull replication and coordination was the way to follow the master of *adeemi* along his sung path. Of "walking/beating" *with* him. That is how movement along paths was achieved. The result of this was that, once the Wätunnä path had been transited in its entirety or the manioc beer ran out, the separate path-following *pensamientos* of the members of the group would be "aligned" – Yk. *sadonna* – into one. Purging the body was part of that sought result, which would involve vomiting and the fainting of the dancers –

[53] For a similar explanation of how sung paths permit the acquisition of knowledge through the visionary experience among the Yaminahua, see Townsley 1993.

or, as my interlocutors described this state, “being dead”. Upon waking up, participants would be said to have a “new *pensamiento*” – Yk. *eduwato tötajänä*.

Through previous chapters we have seen that there are two fundamental aspects of how the body and the self are understood by my Ye’kwana interlocutors: That they are powered by a beating life-force, and that, because of this, they have the ability to move along paths. The *pensamiento*, as an expression of that beating life-force, is central for making the person identify and follow paths. However, the ways in which the body interacts with paths are multiple, and we have also seen examples of this through the thesis: speech paths are formed by the action of voicing of speaking, paths of woven designs are formed by weaving them, music and smells deviate the mind towards different paths, a contaminated body is incapable of following paths, and so on. Through instances like these, the image we get of the body and the self is one of a beating entity capable of engaging in processes of entrainments – that is, of rhythmic synchronization – with flows of beatings in the world and, moreover, capable of doing this with other beating selves. Namely, people “beat/walk” with others “held” by “the sound of the drum”. In other words, by coming together on a single rhythm. Collective singing and dancing, as expression of such a common walk, produced such synchronization through the alignment with a single line of percussion and sung paths. It made the groups’ path-following *pensamientos* “straight” on a single trajectory. We will return to this discussion in the conclusion.

“One is not enough”

One day, when asked why the Christian Ye’kwana began to sing in groups, Santana stated categorically that to them, back in the day when the NTM introduced Christian music in Acanaña, one-person singing was simply “not enough” – Sp. “*no suficiente*”. Initially, the only Christian music in Acanaña was the hymns brought in by the American missionaries, which would encourage the Ye’kwana to sing themselves. It was thus that local Ye’kwana began to learn hymns and sing them. Santana, however, emphasized to me that people in the community thought that “they [the first Ye’kwana hymn singers] needed help, support.” He added his appreciation that “it has to be three” persons at least doing a collective singing and music playing. In Carijunagua I sometimes heard the singers and instrument-players of the music groups referred to, in Spanish, as *obreros* – workers – or more sporadically as *sirvientes* – servants – of the groups’ respective leaders. Both words are approximate translations of the Ye’kwana term *anonö. Anonö*, as we saw before, refers to the beings over whom a leader or a master/owner exerts direct agentive command, that are “steered” and “pulled” by his beating. An *anonö* follows a leader along his designed rhythmic

path, even in singing. As the Ye'kwana see it, Christian singing should still be done as a group, by a leader and his or her followers. In addition, as we will see below, also by following the path created by the former.

The first Christian music group, Cristo Viene, was founded in Upper Orinoco in the late fifties. Still existing today, Cristo Viene is made of the descendants of its original members. It was created by Marcos Gonzalez, a member of the Jehová Salón church in Acanaña. His descendants, the Gonzalez family, recognized by many Ye'kwana as first-hand connoisseurs of Ye'kwana Christian music, nowadays run the Valle Verde church in Puerto Ayacucho, a so-called "branch" of Jehová Salón. As part of the original group, certain Daniel Yadacuna and another man called Alejandro Silva were two of the three people who first learnt to play guitars in the fifties and sixties. The third musician, the one credited with having brought the first guitar to Acanaña along with a new music style which would go on to become the signature style of Ye'kwana Christian music, was Alberto, Santana's eldest son. Santana, by then already a missionary for the NTM travelling from time to time to criollo churches in other Venezuelan states, had taken Alberto to Apure State to attend a *criollo* evangelical school. There, according to Santana, Alberto learnt how to play the guitar and he discovered the *raspacanillas* style, and he brought both back with him when he returned to Upper Orinoco. The first *raspacanilla* group was born with that trio of musicians and with some women they chose to be the singers. In some Ye'kwana churches, like nowadays in Maranatha, the classification introduced by the NTM of people into differentiated groups – women, men, youth, children –, which is promoted during church services when each group has its own section to participate, has permitted the creation of music groups along the same lines. In Maranatha there are two music groups, which the reader already knows about: the women's Siloé Celestial, led by Luciano when I lived in Carijunagua, and the group of the youth, Los Hijos del Rey, led by Ricky. The children also participate as a separate choir during church services.

In the eyes of the Ye'kwana who lived through those first years, the individualization intended by the NTM with hymn singing required a substantial departure from their collective and relational form of music and singing. As we saw above, even congregational singing could not be equated with pre-Christian Ye'kwana singing by following paths. In a sense the transformation in music making intended by the NTM was a sort of "democratization" of music insofar as it looked to individualize each person's relationship with it and to eliminate people's dependency on following a leader along sung paths. This would have implied a halt in the logic of replication that governed Ye'kwana relational experience of music and singing. Even *aichudi* purifying chants and those of shamans, although performed by a single person and consisting of smaller extracts of the bigger body of chants, were still inserted in chains of collective replication and connection

to other beings and spiritual forms through the formation of paths. Hymns, meanwhile, were to be performed by anyone without the need of joining a common path with others or following a person's lead. The selection of one hymn by each person at the beginning of the service is an example of how personal autonomy and spontaneity when engaging with music was promoted by the missionaries. To sing "what one's heart wants" was very different from the dynamic of repetition and path-following of *adeemi* and *aichudi*.

If to Santana's impression of what happened in the fifties we added Siloé Celestial's inability to sing without Luciano in 2017, we might get the impression that certain notions of pre-Christian music have continued to get in the way of a radical transformation of relational notions of music and the individualization that the new forms of music and music making could have brought about. Even though today, after decades of exposure to Christian and criollo music, the idea of a song as a musical unit has been incorporated into Ye'kwana Christian music, we have seen that individual singing is still not effective enough in the eyes of the Ye'kwana. Singing in pre-Christian times was exactly the opposite of individualizing; through the formation of collective entrainments the person was assimilated to the group and the isolation produced by the possible contamination from the world was counteracted. Music served to prevent the breaking apart of the community and the disbandment of its members by keeping them "animated" and their path-following *pensamientos* on a common trajectory. The attunement of voices when people sang together, and the faithful replication of predetermined rhythmic and melodic arrangements, were important elements for producing such collective harmony; a vocal habitus still detectable in the high level of attunement achieved today when Christian music is sung collectively. In sum, music could only be experienced through the formation of synchronicities with others. In the eyes of Christian Ye'kwana, *raspacanillas* songs achieve this.

Raspacanillas

Raspacanillas, sometimes also called farmers' merengue – Sp. *merengue campesino* –, is not a highly regarded or known music genre among educated Venezuelan musical circles. Originally from Venezuela's and Colombia's Andean highlands, it is a characteristic blend of Andean folk music and Colombian cumbia or vallenato-like rhythmic patterns. It has nowadays extended somewhat to the Venezuelan Andean piedmont, to some flatland regions, and finally, decades after Alberto first learnt it in Apure State, it has become popular in the Venezuelan Amazon. It is usually played at small provincial celebrations by groups of aficionados, sometimes male members of a single family, and danced in a way that resembles Caribbean merengue dancing. The lyrics usually speak of love disenchantments, relation breakups,

unrequited love, or painful adultery, and they do so very often in farmer parlance or with a double sense. It is thus not strange to hear a song about, say, a new young rooster in the henhouse taking over the reign of a poorly performing old cock. Lyrics are peppered with frequent references to alcohol drinking, partying, and sexual episodes. All not very Christian. *Raspacanillas* are commonly performed with a leading acoustic guitar, a second guitar, a Venezuelan *cuatro*[54], a *charrasca*[55], and maracas. More sophisticated groups may switch acoustic guitars for electric ones and add keyboards, an accordion, or a violin. Finally, they have a leading vocalist and a group of backing singers who usually play some instruments as well.

During my time in the Amazon, I once received an invitation from some non-Ye'kwana friends to the birthday party of the criollo wife of a prominent indigenous rights activist. It took place one evening at the couple's half-constructed, two-storey house in the centre of Puerto Ayacucho. Throughout the first hours of the party the guests sat placidly on white plastic chairs in the house's walled terrace, talking to each other and sipping passion fruit *guarapita*[56] in the fresh Amazonian night. The lethargy was suddenly interrupted by the arrival of the husband of the birthday girl with a *raspacanillas* band. Once the band had set up an improvised stage and begun to play their hits, the mood of the party drastically changed. People catapulted out of the plastic chairs and into the dining room of the house which had become an impromptu ballroom. For hours dancing did not stop and, as the effect of *guarapita* grew, couples danced faster and tighter. That night a couple of local ladies tried to teach "the boy from Caracas" how to dance *raspacanillas*, but to no avail. My clumsy off-beat movements could simply not follow the rapid left-right moves of the ladies' feet, perfectly attuned to the repetitive binary tempo. The marking of such binary tempo with a *charrasca* is a hallmark of many popular music styles in Latin America, including vallenato and the many versions of cumbia. In *raspacanillas*, it is particularly fast. There are multiple versions as to the origin of the name, *raspacanillas*. One very telling explanation refers to the scraping of shins that is supposedly produced by the action of dancing fast and close to the dancing partner – *raspa-canilla*, shin-scraper.

Having come to *raspacanillas* through Ye'kwana Christian music, it was striking how different my party experience was compared to what I had seen in Carijunagua. Unlike the pull towards dancing that *raspacanillas* rhythms exert on mestizos' bodies, Christian Ye'kwana do not dance or clap to its rapid,

[54] An ukulele-like four-string instrument.
[55] A metal jawbone used as a percussion instrument.
[56] A blend of aguardiente liquor, passion fruit juice and sugar.

festive tempos, nor associate it with partying or drinking. The incorporation of *raspacanillas* to Ye'kwana Christianity took place amid the resignification produced by conversion in which alcohol drinking, dancing, and the consumption of mind-altering substances begun to be associated with risky, unwanted body instability, a sinful life, and the action of Odosha. Their abandonment, it should also be mentioned, was actively promoted by the NTM. In the past, those practices were used as strategies for intentionally destabilizing the body as a prerequisite for singing, dancing, and the travelling of the beating spirit-double along sung paths, and for the incorporation of new knowledge. Meanwhile, with Christianity, the drinking of alcohol or the smoking of tobacco became highly disapproved practices, as Dionicia's harsh look to the boys at Playón showed. Dancing, which used to be part of the rhythmic displacement along sung paths, also ceased. In turn, new ways of singing and music playing stopped being seen by Christian Ye'kwana as posing any danger for people's bodies and spirit-doubles. Especially as the latter, and the voice as an expression of such vitality, no longer extended from the body for travelling along cosmographic paths, which the new music styles no longer described either. Yet, despite all this, Ye'kwana *raspacanillas* were still seen as an expression of how music making in general was still regarded by Christian Ye'kwana as reproducing the idea of paths and of forming alignments.

The paths of Ye'kwana *raspacanillas*

There is no such clear a thing as a Ye'kwana *raspacanilla* "song". Instead, during presentations music groups play uninterrupted sound blocks of *raspacanilla* music. Music groups consist of a clear-cut division between the men, who play the instruments – they only use one or sometimes two guitars, one *charrasca* and one *cuatro* –, and a chorus of women who perform the vocal sections. Throughout the constant loudly-played instrumental thread, the chorus of female singers join in at various points to sing short Christian-themed stanzas in Spanish or in Ye'kwana. *Raspacanillas* blocks tend to be shorter at church services when each of the many groups' presentations spans for some five to some twenty minutes (For an extract of one such block, see Video 3)[57]. However, they typically last for longer during events such as conferences. On these occasions, groups from various Ye'kwana churches frequently join in a single, spontaneous-yet-perfectly-orchestrated thread of music which could easily go over thirty minutes.

Raspacanillas is a music style clearly drawn from the tonal western music tradition, and in the description that follows I use that language to better convey the particularities of how the Ye'kwana interpret them. However, they talk about *raspacanillas* blocks – and about other music styles – using the same vocabulary

[57] **Video 3**. Maranatha's youth music group singing *raspacanilla* Christian music: http://u.pc.cd/FpFotalK

used to describe paths in pre-Christian music, or paths more generally. They say that *raspacanillas* have their own paths – Yk. *raspacanilla chäämädö mädä que* –, that the music of blocks is a flow that might "go up" or "go down", and that the leader of the group is the "master" or "owner" – Yk. *adhaajä* – who "commands" – Yk. *e'se'tadö* – the rest of the group –, again, their "servants" or "followers" – who are following him or at "his tail" – Yk. *dhacodöje*. As in pre-Christian music, the "walking" along paths of *raspacanillas* is led by the leader of the group. However, unlike in pre-Christian music where the leader oriented the collective walk by singing the geographical routes to be followed and marked the rhythmic displacement with percussion instruments, the walking on *raspacanillas* paths is now oriented by the leader's fingerpicking on the leading guitar. He no longer plays percussion instruments – the *charrasca* marking the rapid binary tempo is played by one of the secondary musicians – and rarely sings. It is the role of the choir of women to perform the vocal parts. That is, *raspanicallas* paths are formed melodically with the instruments, led by the leading guitar, and completed with the successive interventions of the choir.

No matter how geographically distant churches are from one another, all the Ye'kwana *raspacanillas* groups dominate the vast majority of the repertoire of stanzas, the same musical aesthetics, and the same melodic formulas. All *raspacanillas* share a constant, rapid binary rhythmic base – constant pulse and rhythmic cells – with the harmonization of the *cuatro*, the second – rhythmic – guitar, and the percussion provided by the characteristic strum of the *charrasca*. The harmony is completed with the leading guitar guiding the melodic movements. Musicians in all *raspacanillas* groups construct their melodies using only three tonal functions, tonic, dominant, and subdominant, generally in the tonality of D major; base note D, subdominant G, dominant A. However, since Ye'kwana groups almost always tune their instruments one tone up, it all sounds in E major; base note E, subdominant A, dominant B. All this gives their *raspacanillas* a distinctive cheerful character. For only having three chords, combinations usually result in surprisingly rich and varied melodic arrangements. The regular use of all this basic structure by all Christian music groups contributes to reaching a remarkable level of coordination in a single musical block when multiple groups play together during Christian events.

During the instrumental section, the leading guitar uses certain aesthetic formulas to construct the melodies. Many of these formulas do not originate from Ye'kwana musicians, but have been copied from criollo *raspacanillas* groups, especially from *Los Serranitos de América*, an Andean band. Such formulas play with the expectations created by the melodic logic of the piece. The leader periodically adds syncopations and counter tempos, both as forms of disruption and alteration of the regular rhythmic flow.

He also plays with the loudness and the climactic moments of the melody, at which points it is common for him to add rapid trembling effects with the guitar. It is in the gaps between vocal stanzas that the main variations in the instrumental line take place and the leader draws new melodies. Even despite the widening of possibilities of melodic paths, the improvisation and variation that each leader affects onto his path take place within certain recurrent musical patterns, associated with the aesthetic of *raspacanilla* music more generally. Now detached from the voice and voicing, the instrumental flows of *raspacanillas* are more open to the variability that the leader wants to impinge onto them than were the paths of pre-Christian music. These, we might remember, used to be inseparable from the leader´s recitation of a determined lyric arrangement tied to certain rhythmic patterns. They were also inseparable from the idea that everybody participating in the dancing and singing had to replicate the leader's phrases exactly and be attuned to his rhythmic beatings. By contrast, in *raspacanillas* paths there is no longer a single standard trajectory that should flawlessly be replicated in each performance, although there are common parameters within which this variation takes place.

After diverging along these melodic paths, the leader then decides to call on the chorus to join in. The leading guitar takes the melody at this moment to the low tones and stays strumming on a single chord. The concentration of the harmony on that single chord is the cue for the women to start singing. There is then the issue of who starts to sing first. It is necessary that someone inaugurates a singing line upon which others can then join. On occasions the group leader does this himself but, oftentimes, groups solve this issue by appointing one of the female singers, on a rotatory basis at least in Carijunagua, to do two things. First, to initiate the singing thread and, second, to select the stanza that will be sung by all. The rest of the singers do not know which stanza they will have to sing until the right moment when the female leader starts singing it. The rest then follow the singing leader in her chosen song. That is, there is a double following: instrument players and singers follow the group's leader along the overall music path, and singers in particular follow their own leader when they are singing.

Even though a chorus of young women often tend to repeat the most known stanzas or those that are the most hip at the moment, this still requires a good memory given the big number of stanzas that circulate among Christian Ye'kwana. Vocal stanzas are usually composed by them or are translated from Spanish. Stanzas circulate across Ye'kwana communities in written or verbal form, usually recorded on mobile

phones, learnt by memory, or on pieces of paper[58]. Thus, they make up an economy of stanzas spanning across the Ye'kwana territory, wherein each one of them is identified by the person who composed it or translated it. Carlos, the Ye'kwana man from Caura, is one of the most prolific composers. As new stanzas arrive in a Christian community, they are incorporated into the *raspacanilla* instrumental path that local music groups form when they play. The standardization of a common form of interpreting *raspacanillas* among all Ye'kwana groups provides a framework for this continuous circulation and incorporations of stanzas into paths to keep going. It also provides for the immediate synchronization of new members or among groups when these come together.

"They sing for the sake of singing, not for praising"

On a couple of occasions, I have witnessed how frustrated two different "outside" musicians – Luciano himself and a criollo Christian music teacher who once came to the church invited by one of the members – became when they tried to instruct the members of Los Hijos del Rey in new music styles. The criollo teacher wanted them to do solo singing of pop Christian music and to exploit their individual singing and instrument-playing talents. Luciano, on his part, tried to teach them to play new styles with the guitar. At the beginning the members of the group were excited about all this, but after just a couple of weeks they would begin to lose interest in the classes and performed the new styles dispiritedly at the church. It was a situation similar to what happens when youths try to sing pop Christian songs individually. On both occasions the teachers eventually gave up and the group went back to *raspacanillas* blocks as usual. In the case of the criollo teacher, clearly disappointed, he simply stopped going to the church altogether.

Before leaving, he complained to me, bitterly judging the group's members' religious convictions: "they sing for the sake of singing, not for praising" – Sp. "*Cantan por cantar, no para alabar*". Some days later, walking on the road to the community with Ricky, I got to speak with my Ye'kwana brother about the episode with the criollo teacher. He said indifferently that there was no point in learning new music. The teacher was not going to teach him anything music-wise that he actually needed to learn. Ricky's

[58] Relevantly, today non-Christian Ye'kwana also have notebooks with the lyrics of traditional *aichudi* chants, which allow them to also circulate in written form (see Moreira Lauriola 2012). It might perhaps be said that the solidification of the voicing aspect of music paths onto written forms could have contributed to a displacement of the function of voicing for the creation of sung paths in favor of creating music paths with instruments. Percussion instruments in pre-Christian chants were used to mark the rhythmic and melodic patterns created by the syllabic declamations, and were inseparable from tracing geographic routes and events with the voice. However, now fully detached from the action of voicing, instrumental lines in *raspacanillas* blocks can be played for longer without the interruptions that singing compartmentalized songs would require. Despite such objectification of "the vocal" and "the instrumental" as separable dimensions of music, paths of *raspacanillas*, as we have seen, comprise both aspects.

conclusion echoed Dionicia's reaction when her brother Adriel tried to teach the women of Siloé Celestial how to sing without a leader. They all always showed enthusiasm for new music styles initially. However, if this required them to depart from the way they always do music, they would become apathetic and uninterested. The incorporation of new music styles apparently had to take place on their own terms and use familiar notions of how music is created and played collectively.

I once enquired of Ignacio about his thoughts as to why music might be effective and how it "works". He replied that it is a mystery to him, but that he suspects it must be because it "drives people to sentimentalism", and that it is thus that music "animates" them. Ignacio's opinion, however, cannot simply be interpreted as a reference to the Christian notion of an internal heart moved by music. Instead, it is an expression of the logic presented in previous chapters of how music "pulls" the attention of people's *pensamientos* – also tied to the heart as an expression of the beating life-force – and make people's personal paths converge on a common, collective flow. Music makes people walk/beat together. In synch, it makes them "animated". Being animated, as we have already seen, is expressed by living a happy collective life, by sharing and eating together, by creating a bubbling atmosphere in the community, and still more importantly, by singing together and filling the inhabited space with music. By "sentimentalism" Ignacio was translating the idea of a collective happiness into which music drives people. Music orients people's *pensamientos*, always at risk of deviation, towards enjoyment, a state only attained by living attuned with others. In this sense, making paths beat together when singing permits Christian Ye'kwana to keep in their own hands the group's collective capacity to have a good, animated collective life without having to transfer this capacity to an external agent or to separate individuals. Singing collectively has been an effective way of doing this, both before Christianity and still on the Christian path. The capacity of the Ye'kwana, today as well as before the *evangelio*, for singing with such a high level of attunement might be an indication of the persistence of an embodied capacity to form an entrained cohesion by singing together. Therefore, they resist giving up singing in a group, despite the evident attraction that other music styles hold for them.

Conclusion

On paths, rhythms, and Christianity

This thesis was conceived originally as research looking into Ye'kwana Christianity and conversion. However, as fieldwork developed and the articulation of experiences of conversion and Baptist Christianity by older Ye'kwana with the language of paths came to the fore, it became clear that dealing with the initial questions on indigenous Christianity had to involve an exploration of indigenous elaborations on the theme of the path. That is, questions such as what the Ye'kwana social language of paths entails, how the theme of the path is used by the Ye'kwana in their everyday life, and what the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of describing the world as formed by rhythmic paths are, became a fundamental part of this research. Thus, this thesis has tried to demonstrate that, through our ethnographic exploration of these questions, the articulation of the theme of paths by the Ye'kwana suggests an inductive articulation of how the world functions based on the rhythmic experience and perception of fluid processes of that very same world. The notion of paths, in this sense, conjures up the articulation of a process of conscious perception and awareness. Paths, as my Ye'kwana interlocutors see it, are assumed to just exist "out there", as a property of life processes. They are a quality of the world to be experienced directly through entrainment and the formation of synchronies; to be aligned with or deviated from. As a tacit property of the world, I approached them only by asking people about examples of what to them forms paths, about walking, about how they describe their experiences of things that are said to be paths.

In this sense, this thesis made the argument that, rather than a symbolic understanding of the world, the use of the theme of paths/tubes by the Ye'kwana echoes a point made by Tim Ingold about notions of linearity being associated by indigenous people with processes of unmediated perception of the world that take place as spatiotemporal unfoldings. In this thesis, as we delineated what a world of paths and a Christianity along paths look like, our methodological emphasis concentrated on paths themselves at various dimensions where they are identified by the Ye'kwana; that is, on experience and perception as processes. In particular, it was argued that Ye'kwana paths speak about such linear processes of perception as being rhythmic and people's experience of them taking place through the generation of synchronies between external rhythmic flows and what is seen as the body's ability to beat. In other words, the experience of paths happens through the formation of correspondences between the person

and external beating flows. The way this process is captured by the Ye'kwana's intellectual elaborations on paths is through the notion of walking/beating. This does not only take place through the forward displacement of feet, but as the experience of activities like speaking, dreaming, thinking, singing, or perceiving any spatiotemporal flow that could be said to constitute a path.

What we have discussed regarding rhythms and entrainment in this thesis paints what we might consider to be a view on affordances, perception, and attention based on the perception of rhythmic flows. In Gibson's original ecological approach to affordances (1977), these are defined as intrinsic to the niche inhabited by the perceiving animal. They constitute the possibilities of a way of life that are provided by the environment. As Tim Ingold sustains, this idea of affordances encapsulates a theory of meaning without signification, of direct perception. In the niche, for the perceiver, the affordances *are* the meaning, and not mediating signs. Object and meaning are one and the same. Here is where Tim Ingold's notion of linear movement comes into the picture of direct perception. Beings, in their niche, perceive its affordances through movement, as part of a sensory exploration of stimuli that come about as flows. In representational analyses there is the assumption of a triadic process of perception; the perceiver's attention is directed towards the affording objects, and these in turn mediate an independent meaning. In contrast, the entrainment process at the core of the rhythmic notion of perception is dyadic. That is, there are only two levels in such a dynamic of perception: the driving and the driven rhythms (see Jones 2018). And both come together through attunement. In this logic, when it comes to the perceiver, what attunes to the rhythmic flows is their body – in Ye'kwana's eyes, the beating vitality within it. According to how the Ye'kwana see this process happening, there are two steps involved. First, the perceiver's attention is attracted by the incorporation into his or her body of elements from the outside which have their own rhythmic trajectories – sounds, visions, smells, and so on. Second, by visualizing and concentrating on that element, the person then "walks/beats" on the new rhythmic path. We saw this, for example, in Ignacio's description of how the jaguar senses a smell in the forest, concentrates on it, and then follows it along its path.

Another piece of this picture of rhythmic perception has to do with what Gibson calls the niche. Following elder Ye'kwana accounts of all the elements in the world that could be paths, such descriptions capture the environment as made of rhythmic possibilities, of options for the capture of attention and the formation of entrainments. This is a world that is navigated by attending to such possibilities, but also by diverting that attention from one flow to another, by attuning to and concentrating on one at the expense of another – in other words, by processes of alignment or deviation. Such rhythmic possibilities could have

a more “material” character to them, such as in the action of weaving, in the sounds of a drum, or in a paced walk in the forest. However, and this is where rhythms become an answer to the questions of the emergence of sociality, paths in social life could also be considered as part of the rhythmic possibilities of the environment. The recognition that, for instance, working and living together, generational succession, or the inter-generational transmission of knowledge through repetition, carry a rhythm to each of them makes them options for beating bodies to attune to. That is, they too are to be experienced by the person through the formation of synchronicities with their bodies. In other words, the person is ultimately navigating the world by forming dyadic connections with rhythmic flows at multiple levels of experience, including in sociality.

We saw in particular that the Wätunnä captures a process of emergence of patterns through repetition and incorporation. It tracks the trajectory of gradual transformations of recurrent elements, of prototypes that define for the Ye’kwana what it is to be human and how to live in a certain way. To repeat such prototypical actions is to be inserted in their rhythmic flow. In this sense, the content of what defines a way of life is tied and constantly emerging through a collective rhythmic synchronization, and through new incorporations that are to be repeated. That is, through the formation of uniformities. The emerging pattern does not need to exist as an independent frame in order to influence how the world is perceived. People just need to participate in it through repeating. For instance, the Ye’kwana see the capacity to tell whether something that “enters” the body is “good” or “bad” as determined precisely by already knowing what it is to live “aligned” on a humanizing trajectory. For instance, they can recognize that something is “bad” because it alters the bodily stability achieved by staying carrying out the things that keep them human, and because it makes them lose the capacity to stay on that line. Meanwhile, something “good” or “proper” is that which keeps them from deviating their *pensamientos*. In sum, understood thus, the idea that patterns of social life emerge from the constant repetition of actions that are learnt and incorporated into a common trajectory implies that such rhythmic trajectories are also susceptible of acquiring new content. For older generations of Ye’kwana it was that described in their versions of the Wätunnä, but for new generations of Christian Ye’kwana, the content was redefined by Baptist Christianity.

In sum, the examination of Ye’kwana paths paints a picture in which these can indeed be approached ethnographically through the social dimension of their lived experience, including through explorations of notions of relational agency, power, morality, the definition of subjects and objects, and so on. And not exclusively through the examination of, say, materiality or music. In this sense, the argument was made

in this thesis that those dimensions of social life are likewise determined by the same logic of rhythmic entrainment; that is, by questions such as who marks the beats for the formation of entrainment, who follows and who leads in this process, how is synchronization enforced, to what degree a state of synchronicity is achieved, and so on. Capturing all these, in sum, requires a vocabulary and an analytical framework that has rhythm and entrainment at its core, as well as considers the biological underpinnings of how these are experienced corporeally. Beginning the transit towards such an anthropology of paths is something that this thesis has intended to do.

Walking on new paths

These points on paths take back us to the questions with which this thesis began regarding Ye'kwana Christianity. That is, what does it mean to be Christian and to have converted to Protestant Christianity in a world that is articulated intellectually as being made of rhythmic paths? What ideas of transformation and change are captured in the Ye'kwana use of the language and theme of paths for describing their conversion experiences? And, in sum, how do the worldviews that arrived with evangelical Christianity themselves transformed and interacted with the theme and social language of paths?

It was argued in this thesis that the articulation of Christianity with the language of paths by older generations of Christian Ye'kwana is a recognition that, even though the content of social paths could change, the same process of perception and attention persists. As we discussed at a couple of places earlier, the argument has been made in the Amazonianist literature that conversion to Christianity in indigenous Amazonia is made sense within, and implies the persistence of a way of thinking that defines how change and transformation happen. That way of thinking has been identified as that defined by perspectival thought and the idea that differentiation takes place as part of a relational process centered in the body. In some ways, some ethnographic points in this thesis echo these arguments about continuity in Amazonian Christianities. However, there is a fundamental difference between these views and what we have been arguing about Ye'kwana Christianity and paths. In the latter case, what is assumed to stay the same, as we just discussed, is the perceptual experience rather than the "way of thought". That is, continuity is not assumed to happen at the level of the mind of the perceiver, but in processes of the world in which the person is inserted as a living being. In other words, as we discussed with regards to Dena Freeman's argument about affordances determining how continuity and change are perceived by Christians, in this case continuity is assumed to take place in the rhythmic flows afforded by a world of paths and the person's direct experience of them. The articulation by Christian Ye'kwana of Baptist Christianity as a "path" to "beat" along is a recognition of this.

With conversion to Christianity the Ye'kwana might have found useful to re-align on a new path as this implied continuing living a "good" life. However, what changed was the content of the rhythmic flow to attune to, not the necessity to do so through the formation of entrainments. This re-alignment on a new trajectory was part of the regular process of navigating a world of path possibilities. It carried the implication that now the Ye'kwana must replicate actions from the Biblical Wätunnä they came to learn from the NTM and from the bible. To be able to do so, the same process of synchronization had to take place: new Christians, like Santana, had to visualize events from the new path and concentrate their *pensamientos* on them so that they could then begin to "walk" on the new path. In other words, their attention had to be switched from one flow to another, which, as the elements to concentrate the mind on changed, also involved a process of differentiation through deviation. Throughout this thesis, similar processes were explored at different levels, such as in the reformulation of paths in music, in the agenda of ritual events, or in daily life. As Baptist Christianity gave social paths new content, it also defined new actions to replicate, new elements to concentrate the *pensamiento* on, new activities to do collectively in daily life, new musical paths to sing in unison with others, and so on.

Moreover, this transformation of the social paths to walk on carried on the idea of unmediated presence that used to apply, for instance, to the Ye'kwana's relation with Wanaadi, with beings in the invisible world, and with beings in general with whom a common rhythmic flow is shared. This has also to do with the assumption that actual bodily connections are formed between the agent who marks the beats and the people who follow when they join in the same line of replications. Successive beats along a flow are actualizations of a running virtuality, and as such they are connected to the initial source of the movement. They are part of the same line of transformation. This makes people, as derivations, to be in direct connection with previous figures who began chains of repetition, which for older Christian Ye'kwana now includes the Christian Wanaadi and Jesus Christ. It was this direct connection that the NTM tried to break in their Genesis study guide with their attempt at isolating the figure of god from the logic of derived replications. In contrast, before conversion, the fact that the primordial Wanaadi was said to have left the early plane and be living at the top of the cosmic building did not entail that the possibility of a direct connection was lost. Separation was geographical yet did not entail a break of the vital connection generated through the flow of derivations and repetitions. For shamans, for instance, this translated into an actual process of using percussion and mind-altering substances to free the spirit-double, which would then be able to travel and be with Wanaadi. For regular people something similar was possible during the celebration of rituals like the singing of the Wätunnä, but it was also something that was likewise achieved through inserting themselves in the same flow of daily life activities inherited from initial figures. Thus,

after conversion, the possibility of a god that had separated from people was not a preoccupation for older Christian Ye'kwana, who saw being in direct connection with the former as persisting in their capacity to join on certain lines of replications.

Attuned to a pulsating world

To conclude, I want to bring the discussions about the Ye'kwana use of the theme of paths presented in this thesis to a larger point about rhythm and about the potential of the indigenous use of the former theme to raise new questions on current issues such as biorhythms and attention. Throughout this thesis, we have seen paths being formed, across multiple dimensions, by different expressions of "beats". People substituting for one another on paths of generational successions. Episodes on the path of the chanted Wätunnä. Settlements along rivers on Santana's life-path. Activities done together on the path of daily communal life; and so on. As paths, we have seen, all of these come about through what the Ye'kwana describe as "the beatings" or "the sound of the drum". Another way of saying this is that such paths, as expressions of spatiotemporal progression, unfold rhythmically. This account of paths was discussed early in the thesis (chapter 2) and underlay the ethnography presented in the following chapters. However, despite this, the term rhythm has been used rather loosely throughout. This has had a two-fold reason. On the one hand, rather than beginning by explicitly defining rhythm, we have let it emerge as a theme by concentrating on our exploration of them, and in order to find commonalities in what might have been seen, at first, as disparate expressions of its different expressions. Second, and in accordance with this point, this line of thought also required avoiding assuming reductive notions of rhythm as those we have in Western construction of meter, namely, as just regular measurements of time.

In fact, beating paths in all the dimensions where the Ye'kwana identify them – be it in everyday life in the community, in the singing of Christian and non-Christian music, in speech, in walking, dancing, paddling, in generational succession, and so on – might actually be more akin to what ethnomusicologists have defined as "free rhythm" or "flowing rhythm" (see Clayton 1996, Frigyesi 1993). That is, consecutive pulses with no set metrical periodization. In all the dimensions where older Ye'kwana see beatings paths, these are marked variably through some form of emerging "drumming" and, in the case of the chanting of the Wätunnä, it is precisely the constant change of meter that defines the progression of the journey. Another example of the irregular variation of the rhythms of paths can be seen in that of everyday life, where decay is always a possibility. That was the case, for instance, when the animated agenda of Carijunagua sank during the intensification of the malaria epidemic in 2017. It was only when Ignacio resumed the frenetic celebration of events – the "beats" – that the community became animated again.

In contrast with the strict metric regularity that we are more familiar with in the modern West, flowing rhythm is actually a very common feature of religious, ritual, musical, or artistic contexts around the world: in the recitation of religious texts in Jewish, Islamic, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, or Shinto traditions, in many forms of shamanic ceremonies, in vocal and instrumental music styles in the Arab world, in Africa, widespread in Asia and Melanesia, and so forth (Clayton 1996, 324). Specific musical expressions include, and sometimes combine, melismas, laments, trance songs, and so on.

However, despite this widespread presence of flowing rhythms, it has been noticed that ethnomusicology and anthropology have tended to overlook them and neglect their analysis and discussion. This resistance, Clayton suggests (1996), might be tied to the difficulty of flowing rhythms to be represented. They, this author argues, do not fit comfortably in the available concepts and frameworks that people working in the Western rhythmic tradition have at their disposal to represent them. It has been claimed that the historical trajectory of rhythmic structures has seen a transition from free and flowing rhythm to such strict rhythmic patterns (see Rowell 1981). In this trajectory, "successful" representations of rhythm such as that of regular pulse and tempo in Western music became possible only after the sedimentation and objectification of rhythm onto certain forms of notation, like Western staff notation. We also find the same problem of representation of flowing rhythm in non-Western musical analyses, which hardly transcribe them either. When it is attempted, such as in the Javenese or Balinese cipher notation, a lot of side explanation is required by the author (see Clayton 1996, 326). This challenge, we could imagine, would become even more salient if we were to consider that, for instance, a generational "walk" could also be said to have a rhythm where each person is the "beat".

The reason why free rhythms resist representation might ultimately be linked to the fact of their state of intuitive and free-flowing emergence and that the experience of this is particularly inseparable from bodily attunement (see Ingold 2000, 198-201). Going back to the Ye'kwana, we might remember that, to begin with, paths is not a concept people articulate explicitly. Paths as rhythmic flows are just a property of the world that are to be "walked" on. Ignacio, who tried to explain paths for me through his idea of "walking", only did so by *performing* them (chapter 2). He first jumped with slow strides across his room. Then, when he realized I was not getting what he meant, he tried again by leaping forward with his two feet together. He struggled to put what he meant into words. It only made sense to him to perform it. When he finally found a way to verbally convey the idea of movement along a path through pulsations, my Ye'kwana dad recurred to the reference of a clock, an object of standardized tempo and not of free meter. However, the "successful" representations of strict metrical rhythm, like in musical notation or the

clock Ignacio used as an example, rely on sedimenting rhythm onto mediating forms. In contrast, when it comes to free-flowing rhythms, in daily life these emerge freely from many of the activities we engage in. They are the "time we live by" (see Jones 2018). Surely, this speaks more generally of the embodied perception of external rhythms more generally. People dance, clap, or tap on the floor to the beats of songs they, run a marathon by adjusting to the pace set by the peloton, or wake up and go to bed following the day/night cycle. In the case of the Ye'kwana, we have seen throughout this thesis, expressions of rhythmic bodily attunement include people participating in the agenda of activities set by the leader of an indigenous community, the synchronization of their paddling to the drumming someone makes at the stern of a canoe, the effort to maintain uniformity in daily life by joining in lines of successive repetitions, the singing and dancing to the percussion produced by a master of chants during the celebration of the Wätunnä, and so on.

In this sense, it could be said that the Ye'kwana notion of paths as beating, derived replications – in speech and chants, bodily fluids, generational succession, life in the community, water in rivers, narrations, the threads of a weaving, and so forth – reveals a form of relation with the world that, at all these levels, happens precisely through an attunement to flows that streams forward by pulsating, in a constant emergence, with every beat. It is a self-evident point to say that many physical and biological processes of the world, including those that we living beings are attuned to, unfold temporally in a similar flow-and-beat logic of emergence: a new day/night cycle is added to the succession of day/night cycles; walking takes place as one stride succeeds another; breathing is a repetitive cycle of inspiring and exhaling; and so on. When it comes to the body, a free flow-and-beat logic can be seen, for instance, on the beating of a heart as captured visually on an electrocardiogram (see figure 8). A new extension is added, propelled forward as it were, with every new pulsation. Just as a new body-beat is added to a generational walk, a new settlement to a journey along a river, or a new episode to the Wätunnä trajectory, rhythmic pulsations provide the basis for the progression to keep flowing. This same logic can also be seen, according to recent brain research, in neural cognition and in how attention takes place. This point is particularly relevant to our argument about perception in a world of paths. This research has shown that our conscious experience of the world does not just happen as a continuous stream, as it was thought, but that perception actually takes place in the form of neural rhythmic oscillations that form entrainments with frequencies from the environment (see figure 9) (see Bauer et at. 2020, Hickok et al. 2015, Lakatos et al 2019). It is not just that these rhythmic waves in our brains index states of consciousness, but that they are in fact a cause of it and also determine movement, perception, attention, among other processes.

This research has shown that rhythms in the environment draw these neural oscillations into their tempo, literally attuning our brain's rhythm to external ones, and that this attunement might play a central role in how we pay attention (see Landau and Fries 2012, Pomper et al. 2022, Power et al. 2012). Importantly, connecting with our point about flowing rhythms, all these rhythms are not clock time, but, as psychologist Mari Jones puts it, "the time we live by". This is an appreciation made also by voices arguing for a theory of attention in which this takes place dynamically through the synchronization of biological rhythms with rhythms in the outside (see Jones 2018). According to this logic, external rhythms to attend to are "events" that have the form of structures that unfold in time – a vision of a child running in the park, speech, a song, and so on. Jones' emphasis is on the dynamicity of this process. In it, synchronization takes place between a driving and a driven rhythm. For this author, the most elementary theoretical unit in such a process of entrainment is what she calls "a driving-driven dyad" (2018, 3), which consists in the interaction of two separate rhythms. In this interaction, "the driven rhythm changes its phase relationship to the driving rhythm to realize a fixed (stable) coupling of the two rhythms" (Jones 2018, 3).

However, it is not only at the brain level that entrainments with the exterior take place. For instance, relevant to our point about the Ye'kwana associating a state of animation with achieving synchronicities with the drumming path of the group, it has been likewise demonstrated that achieving a synchronization of biological processes with external rhythms, particularly through music, does induce an emotional state in the person. Such synchronizations and alterations of bodily rhythms caused by external rhythms involve the whole body, including changes in the rhythms of respiration, of heart rate, of motor movement, and so on (see Trost and Vuilleumier 2013). In a sense, we might say that the image that this body of research has been painting is one where processes of entrainment blur the line between the person and the exterior. They generate continuities between beings and the environment. Or, if we put it in the words of the Ye'kwana, the "beating" forms actual connections, it "ties up" bodies who "walk/beat" together.

Significantly, processes of neural oscillations and entrainment with external rhythms have also been observed to be at play in shamanic trance states (see Flor-Henry et al. 2017, Huels et al. 2021, Konopacki and Madison 2018). As we saw early in this thesis (Chapter 2), to achieve these states, besides taking mind altering substances in many cases, shamanic healers play percussive instruments which, this recent body of research has shown, produces a coupling of their brain waves with the frequency generated by the repeated beating. It is by doing this that shamans enter an altered state of consciousness, and thus that they claim to be able to perceive – to "see" – the invisible world. This brings us inevitably to the Ye'kwana description of paths as a "beating" and to a point Ignacio made that summarized much of his logic of how

the *pensamiento* works. He said that "the sound of the drum [referring to pulsations in general] makes someone see". Ignacio made this point regarding speech paths. Not only were these described as "beating" themselves, but it was this beating that, according to the Ye'kwana, made the *pensamiento* of listeners to follow them and "see" the trajectory described in them. The "drumming" made them "walk/beat" on that spoken path. This was also a process described as taking place when people danced and sang drunkenly and collectively to the rhythmic, chanted paths of the Wätunnä. According to the Ye'kwana, dancers too could visualize and their spirit-double re-live the events being described by the master of chants. This was only possible, after destabilizing the body with mind-altering substances, by dancing and singing in tune to the rhythmic patterns of the chanted trajectory. The beatings made the visualization possible and people's *pensamientos* aligned.

Beyond these explicit examples of perception through entrainment, this logic also applies more generally to how the *pensamiento* is understood by the Ye'kwana to follow paths and to how "walking" on these takes place more generally. Once some stimuli from the world reach and enter the body – for instance, sounds, smells, visions, etc. – and the *pensamiento* visualizes them, the person can then align with that path. This is how people are "pulled" to a path, join it, and begin to "walk/beat" along it. They all involve processes of attention through entrainment. To ratify the point that this is an understanding of processes of perception and attention that likewise depend on rhythm and bodily synchronization, we should remember that, for the Ye'kwana, the *pensamiento* is only an expression of the life-force that is said to animate the body, which they also say "beats" and permits the person to follow paths. In other words, this is a process in which the formation of alignments on paths likewise depends on the generation of synchronies between the beating person and the driving rhythm. They constitute the dyad of that entrainment. That synchronization, we might also remember, is described by the Ye'kwana as forming actual physical connections across people joined in a common process of synchronization. Entrainment, in a sense, forms collective bodies.

As we have seen in this discussion and throughout this thesis, the articulation of many of these themes – attention, perception, entrainment, and so on – with the language of paths by the Ye'kwana presents us with promising lines of inquiry for future research. One of these concerns the potential of the theme of paths to be explored comparatively across the indigenous Amazon. In particular, the possibility raised in this thesis regarding the language of paths capturing indigenous ideas of direct perception and rhythmicity might provide us with a framework for carrying out such comparative exercise ethnographically with other groups in the Guianas and in other regions. That is, given the spread of the theme of the path/tube among

indigenous groups in the Amazon, the comparative, anthropological exploration of such "tubology" might use the theme of perception as an entry point for exploring the multiple expressions that tubes/paths take in different contexts. This could represent a departure, as this thesis intended, from symbolic readings of such topic and a more thorough exploration of indigenous intellectualizations on them. A second, related line of inquiry has to do with the exploration of indigenous Amazonians' notions of rhythmicity. This is a topic that only recently has begun to be explored anthropologically in the region. This theme, together with the emerging relevance that paths/tubes are acquiring in the Amazonianist literature, invites us to consider how indigenous peoples articulate in their own terms processes of synchronicity and entrainment and how these might play a central role in their perception of the environment. Finally, as we saw, recent research on similar topics has come from fields that include neurology and psychology. Understanding paths/tubes in terms of rhythms and processes of entrainment, as we just discussed in this conclusion, invites for an increased interdisciplinary dialogue as part of the research into such topics.

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