



Submerged Histories of the Kukama takes the reader on a voyage down the Marañón River in the Peruvian Amazon, sharing tales of the river, its people and an astonishing spiritual world beneath its surface. The Kukama call their river the *ia* (ee-ah) –the center, life force and mother of their universe. But oil spills and megaprojects like hydroelectric dams and dredging threaten the river and the Kukama's survival.

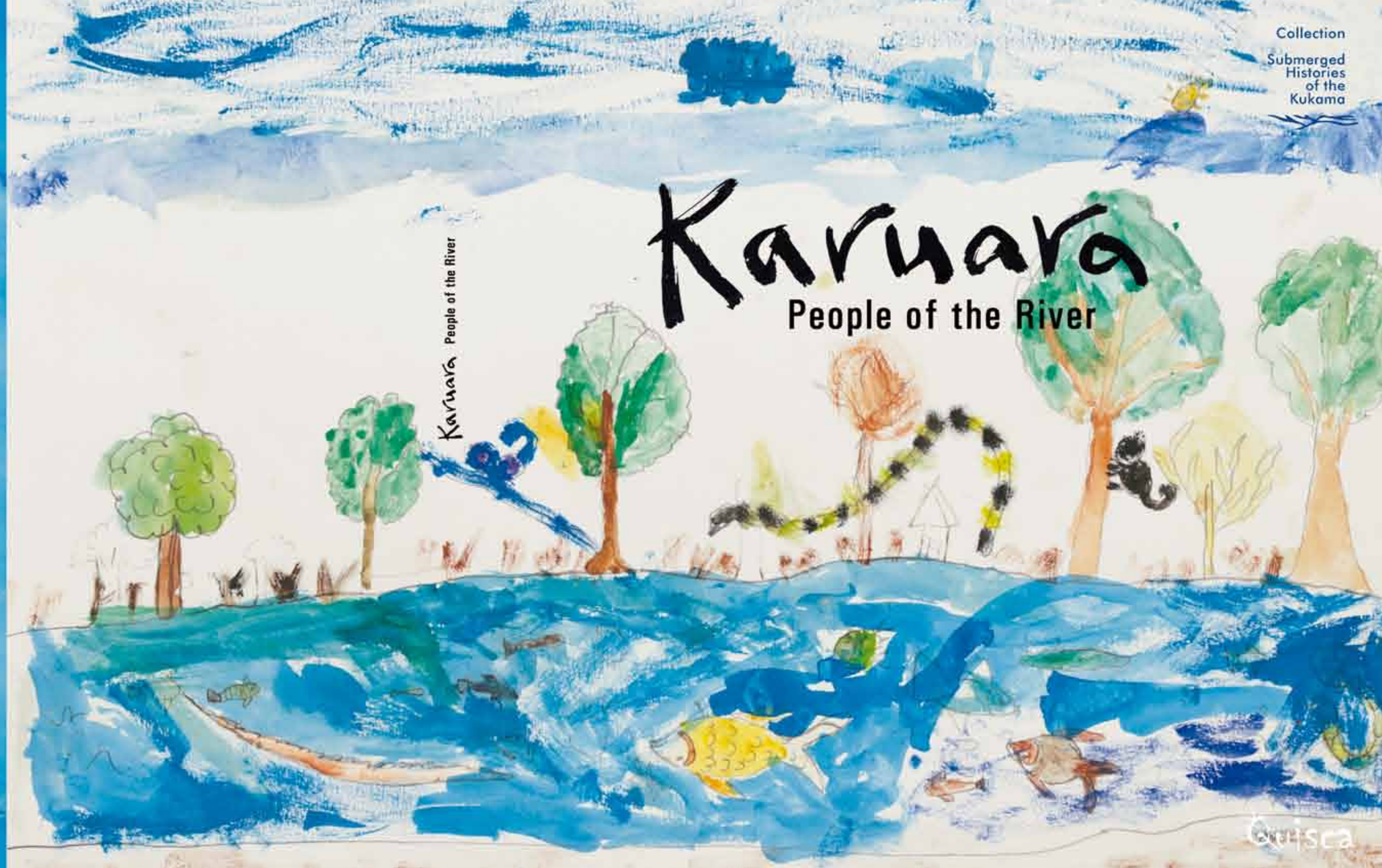
The Kukama language is also endangered. Unless bilingual education projects are successful, within a decade the language will disappear, taking with it a wealth of cultural knowledge. Copies of the Spanish-Kukama version of this book have been donated to schools and community groups in an effort to help keep this vibrant language and culture alive.

People of many cultures came together to produce this book: Kukama, Andean, Canadian, U.S., British and Spanish. Our team traveled to villages along the river recording stories narrated by Kukama grandmothers and grandfathers. Their grandchildren drew and painted the illustrations during workshops with an artist from the Andean highlands.

So dive into these pages and journey into the hearts, minds and spirits of the *Karuara, People of the River*.



LUSH FRESH



Collection
Submerged
Histories
of the
Kukama





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Financial support: Development and Peace, Lush Fresh Handmade Cosmetics, Global Greengrants Fund, United Church of Canada, Emily S. Goldman, Steelworkers Humanity Fund, Rights Action, Indiegogo campaign supporters

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ISBN 978-612-47184-1-0

Hecho el Depósito Legal en la Biblioteca Nacional del Perú Nº 2016-05194

First edition: June 2016

1,000 copies

Printed on FSC certified recycled paper

Printed in:

Tarea Asociación Gráfica Educativa

Pasaje María Auxiliadora Nº 156 – 164

Breña, Lima, Perú

June 2016

Karuará

People of the River



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the Kukama people and everyone else who helped us make this book possible (and whose names, unfortunately, do not all fit on this page).

We also want to thank the children who painted the book's illustrations, from the following communities on the lower Marañón River: Parinari, Shapajilla, San Juan, Santa Clara, Leoncio Prado, San Martín de Tipishca, Nueva Fortuna and the Escuela Ikuari Kukama language school in Nauta.

Float down the river

Around the globe there is a battle going on between conflicting ways of seeing the world. One point of view sees everything as a commodity to be extracted and turned into profit: water, land, resources, people and stories. The other sees all these same elements—all of life—as interconnected, in dialogue and relationships of reciprocity.

In an era of resource depletion and climate crisis, holistic indigenous worldviews may be the key to our chance of collective survival. Grasping the interdependence of all things is the medicine for a world and a culture sickened by extraction and consumption.

This makes the book you hold in your hands extremely precious. Those who have made this book possible are not only opening a window into an indigenous culture that has everything to teach us—they are also fighting tooth and nail with respect



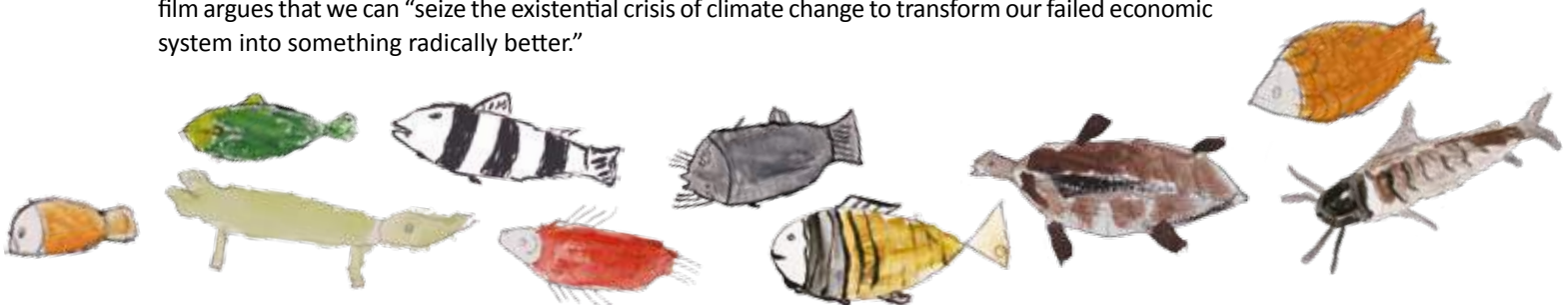
and deep understanding and unfathomable commitment. At stake is the very survival of the Kukama, their language, their stories and their river.

So float down these pages and dive into another world: our own. Our only.

Avi Lewis (film director) & **Naomi Klein** (author)

Naomi Klein is an award-winning journalist, syndicated columnist and author of several international bestsellers, including *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs The Climate*.

Avi Lewis is a filmmaker and TV host with a 25-year history of pushing the boundaries of mainstream media. He directed the documentary *This Changes Everything*, inspired by Naomi Klein's book. The film argues that we can "seize the existential crisis of climate change to transform our failed economic system into something radically better."

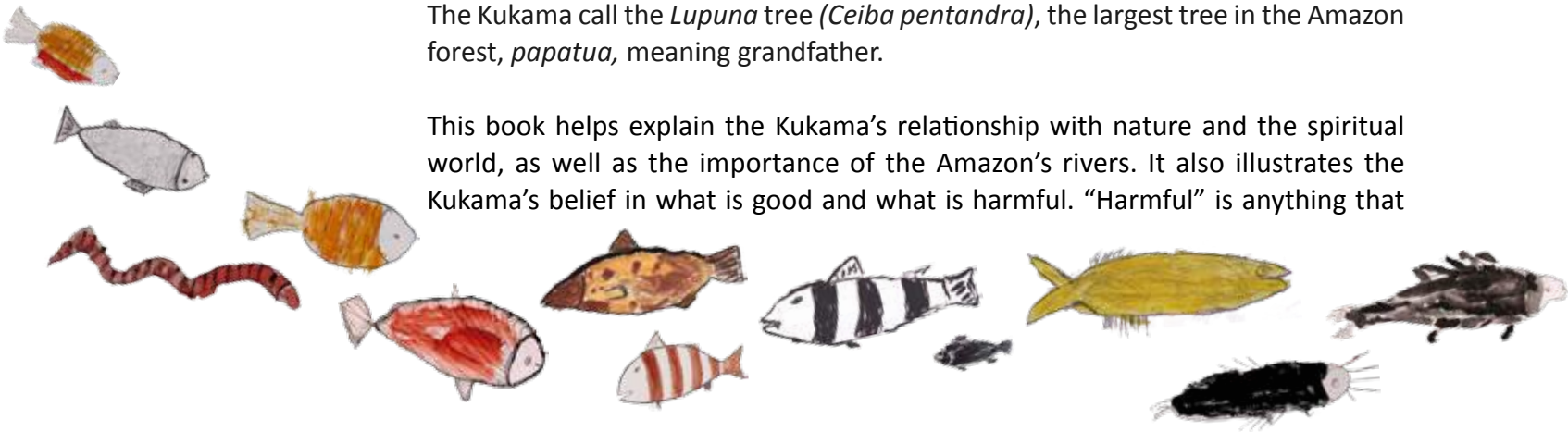


Prologue

Submerged Histories of the Kukama is a collection of books by the Kukama people, the indigenous group I belong to in the Amazon rainforest. This marvelous book forms part of our historical memory; it is both ancestral and current for the Kukama. It is part of our efforts to make ourselves visible and to share our genuine knowledge about the river. The book is also a response to interesting events that affect us, both happy and painful, to the emotions that mark our lives and to the struggle to defend life in the lower Marañón River Valley in the Peruvian Amazon.

The stories in this book take us through different worlds. These worlds are important for maintaining harmonious relationships and sustaining life. “We must respect the fact that we are all people,” say the Kukama, which means that we must live with dignity and respect the various categories of “people.” The phrase refers to the intrinsic relationships among “spirit-people,” “animal people,” “plant-people,” “fish-people” and “bird-people.” The stories inside this book include a boa that can transform into a “person,” a heron that changes into a “person,” and Kukama people who can live in the realms where these other categories of “people” live. The Kukama call the *Lupuna* tree (*Ceiba pentandra*), the largest tree in the Amazon forest, *papatua*, meaning grandfather.

This book helps explain the Kukama’s relationship with nature and the spiritual world, as well as the importance of the Amazon’s rivers. It also illustrates the Kukama’s belief in what is good and what is harmful. “Harmful” is anything that



prevents one from living a dignified life. External events often affect the Kukama. For example the “Hidrovia,” or Water Highway project that would dredge four major rivers, is a bitter story for all the people living in the Amazon. It makes one think. We have always been thinkers, but the “Prior Consultation” process, where the government consulted indigenous people about the Water Highway, took our leaders far away from their own communities to think alone, far from their wives, husbands and children. In the Amazon people do not think alone, and people are not the only ones who think. The “people” I spoke of earlier also think.

The stories in this book have been translated into four languages: Kukama, Spanish, English and French. This is important because Kukama is a marginalized language, just as the Kukama are a forgotten nation. The younger generations no longer speak Kukama and their native tongue is in danger of disappearing. There are two Kukama translations of each story: a masculine and a feminine version. For example, a man addresses another man as *ima* and calls a woman *kuña*. But a woman calls another woman *pajá* and a man *kiwi*, to address them as her brother or sister. The Kukama language defines the roles of women and men in daily life, roles that are complementary. Girls learn their role as women and boys learn their role as men in a complementary manner. With the arrival of capitalism, this complementary duality was broken.

This book is part of a larger project by Radio Ucamara, Wainakana Kamatawarakana (the Federation of Kukama Women), and Asociación Quisca. We are also producing a documentary film called *Karuara, People of the River*, that will feature animations of Kukama myths. This film will show the world the importance of our rivers and the need to defend them.

Leonardo Tello Imaina
Director of Radio Ucamara



Karuara, People of the River

NARRATED BY: RIBELINO RICOPA ALVIS

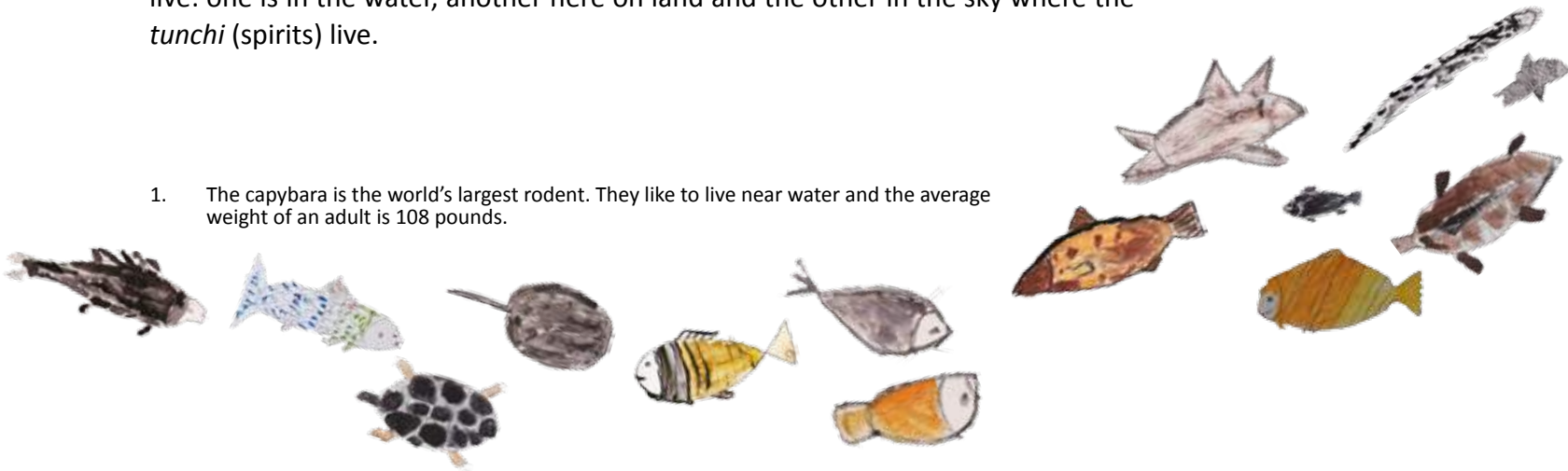
COMMUNITY: SANTA CLARA, DISTRICT OF PARINARI, MARAÑÓN RIVER

A long time ago, all the animals and even the trees could speak to people, for example a bird, a capybara, or a dolphin.¹

As time passed, the inhabitants of the earth began to misbehave. They didn't listen to anyone, not even the mothers of the lakes or the biggest trees, like the *lupuna* and the *catahua*. They began to plunder and do other bad things. They lost all respect. No one had any respect.

When the world got really bad it turned upside down. At the time, not everyone on earth lived on land. Many people lived in the water. Those who lived on land went to live in the water. Some of the people who lived on land went up to the sky. That's why our grandparents thought there were three worlds where you could live: one is in the water, another here on land and the other in the sky where the *tunchi* (spirits) live.

1. The capybara is the world's largest rodent. They like to live near water and the average weight of an adult is 108 pounds.



My grandmother told me the *lupuna*, the largest tree, is the balcony of God's house. Up above, even higher than the *lupuna*, there are other souls that can protect you, but they can also harm you. It's the same thing in the water. There are people in the river who can do good things or bad things to you. It all depends on how we behave on the earth.

My grandmother told us there's life in the river. There are also villages and cities, because when the world turned upside down, all the villages and cities went underwater. So a lot of people also live in the river. They must be respected. They also want to live in peace. They don't like it when we make noise or tell them they have to leave their homes. How can we tell them they can't live in the river? That makes them angry. They're not like us anymore; they've become *Karuara*.

The *Karuara* have feet that point backwards. They don't have an anus, and they eat mud. The *Karuara* are very important in the river. They protect it and take care of the fish. They also take care of the other people living in the water. They want to be happy; they don't want to be sad. That's why when a person is sad here on the earth and they look sad in their canoe the *Karuara* say, "He's sad. I want to be his friend so that he'll come and live in the river and feel better."

When a child drowns, if his body is never found, he'll eventually communicate with his family. He'll say, "Mom, Mommy, Dad, don't worry. I'm fine here. I'm a young woman now. I'm a young man. I live here. I have friends. I have a girlfriend or a husband. I have children."

This happens a lot. When we're sad in this world, on land, we end up going to live in the river.



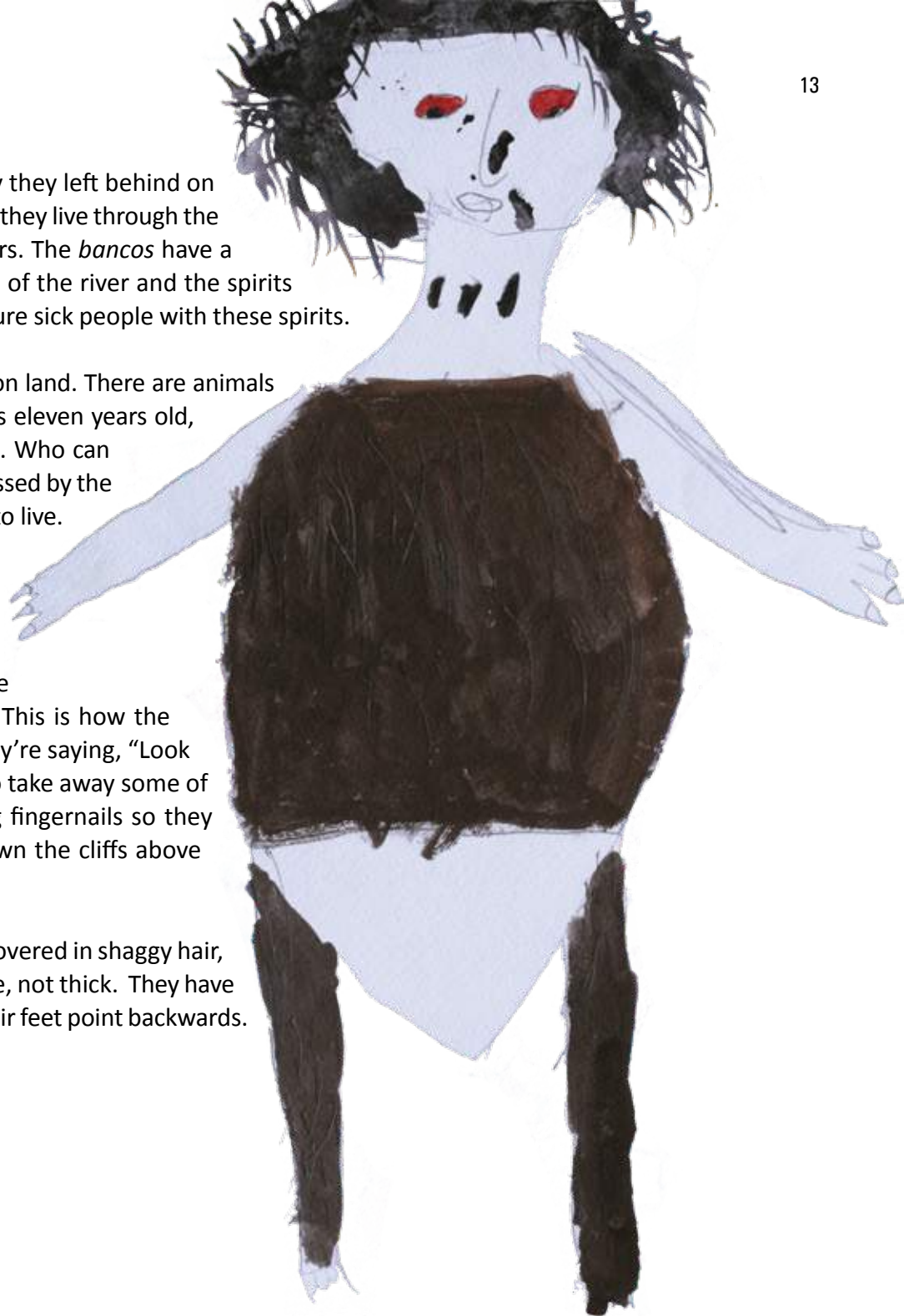
The *Karuara* take care of the family they left behind on land. We hear about them and how they live through the *bancos*, Kukama shamans or healers. The *bancos* have a direct relationship with the people of the river and the spirits that live in the water. *Bancos* can cure sick people with these spirits.

Life in the river is the same as it is on land. There are animals too. If your younger brother, who is eleven years old, catches a water spirit, he'll get sick. Who can cure that? When people feel oppressed by the water, they look for a calmer place to live.

When a community is misbehaving a lot, like making noise and not respecting the lake or the river, the *Karuara* react. They break apart the cliffs and pull them into the river. This is how the *Karuara* call for your attention. They're saying, "Look you're not behaving so I'm going to take away some of your land." The *Karuara* have long fingernails so they can dig into the earth and pull down the cliffs above the river.

They are people like us. Some are covered in shaggy hair, others have long hair, but it's sparse, not thick. They have long white beards on their faces. Their feet point backwards.

That's how life is in the river.





Kuatiaran mari imitin karuara

İMİYARATAN:

RIBELINO RICOPA ALVIS

KAKIRITUPA:

SANTA CLARA (TUŸUKA PARINARI, PAÑANA MARAÑUN)

Ashun iminua, upimanda animarunu, iwiranu, yai inu amaska uwakatsufi, awa Ari. An mia: wipi wifakifa, wipi kapiwara, mari taku wipi ipirawirari.

Watatsuyka, tuyükari kakirinminu, upa inu iya aitsi ukuatsufipi. Tima inu tsapiafiukuatsufi ni awa: ipatsu mamanu, iwifanu ashun nuanminu tsamunaŷa, yambuŷa uwachi. Inu ŷupunita apukatapatsufi, inu ŷauki amua marinu tima iranminu. Tima puray inu tsitakakatsufi. Ni awa tsitakakitsufi. Iyanga, ini mundu tima puray iratsufi, ini mundu iriwakatsufi. Tima upimanda tuyükari ŷutinminu kakiritsuŷi anjanga. Awiri inu uritsuŷi unikuaratsui. Anjanga kakirinminu inu utsutsufi uni kuaŷa kakiritaŷa. Awifiŷa tuyükari kakirinminu inu wafikatsufi kuarachika. Yikuaŷa, pinu amuy inu ikuaka inu iyatsuŷi imiti mutsaprika mundu maka in tsita kakirifa: wipi ŷukun unikuaŷa, amua anjanga tuyükari amua yai kuaŷachi aŷi, maka taku maisangaŷa yai kakiri.

Tsa nay imiyarata tsa ukuatsufi ŷukun tsamuna, iwifa ashun nuwan, ŷukun diusu uka warimata, anjan tsuyka, ashun iwati tsamuna tsuyka, imiti amua tsawanu inu amaska mainani ini, yai ŷa amaska aitsita ini. Uni kuara yai ukuata yatanan: Awanu kakiri ira ŷumuŷaritaranu yai tima ira ŷumuŷaritaranu, ay ŷukun maŷawa na kakiri tuŷukaŷi.



Tsa nay im̃yarata p̃inu ukuatsufi, pařana kuařa im̃iti kakiri. Yai im̃iti kakiri tupanu, im̃iti řitamanu. Ỹukun řitamanu, kakiritupanu, pařanakuara ỹukun ini mundu iriwakapuka, upi kakiritupanu, řitamanu, inu utsu ip̃ip̃i unikuařa. Iyanga, pařana kuara yai kakiri chita awa. Inu yai in tsitamira inu. Inu yai tsita kakiri tsitsaři. Ni awa gustashka inu yaukitsin ni mari iputakan, inu kumitsara inu, uchimatsin inu yutitupatsuy. iMařawa in amaska kumitsa mia t̃ima inu kakiritsin yaip̃i! Inu yumira. Kuinminu t̃ima puray ini ya, inu uwakatsufi karuarari.

Im̃iti inu p̃ita inu chikuařařup̃i. Yambuřa t̃ima inu chikakuara yařa inu iyu chirin. Uni kuařa, ỹukun řanminu, inu ỹukun řataka in pařana. Inu mainani ipiranu. Inu mainani, am̃ua awanu yutinminu ya kuařa. Inu tsita yuti tsariwa, t̃ima inu tsita yuti yamimawa. Yikuara, wip̃i awa yutipuka yamimawa anjanga tuyukari, ya utsu yamimawa ya iařakuara, inu umi yambuřa inu kumitsa: “Yamimawa ya yuti, itsi yauki utsa ya iřuařa ya uřitsin kakiritara anjanga pařana kuařa, ya yutitsin tsitsari”. Yikuara, wip̃i m̃im̃ira unikuara upuripuka, ni mařapuka inu purařa ya tsakuafatsufi, yatsi tsuy ya ukriaitsita ya papanu, inu kumitsa: “Mamita, t̃ima, mamita, papa t̃ima ip̃i yuti mařawa, itsi yuti ira anjanga, ai tsa yuti kuřati, ai tsa yuti kunumikira; tsa kakiri anjanga, im̃ita tsa irua im̃iti tsa tsitan, im̃iti tsa mirikua, ai tsa tařa yařa”. Awiri uyaři ip̃i ukriatsi ya. Yamima in yutipuka in mundu ařiwa tuyuka, in uchika utsu kakiritara unikuara. Yaip̃i tsuy inu mainani inu iruanu tuyukari yutinminu. Yai p̃inu ikua inu tsuy, mařawa inu kakiri, banku nu muki: ikarapu mutsanaka waranu kukamanu. Kuinminu im̃yaraka yumati awanu uni kuara kakirinminu muki yambuřa tsawanu unikuara kakirinminu, ỹukun tsawanu muki, kuinminu amaska mutsanaka aikuanminu. In kakiri unikuara ỹukun indira tuyukarinan. Yai im̃iti anumarunu. Yikuara,

