'A Peesi fu libi': the Cottica Ndyuka families in the space-times of Moengo

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The aim of the presentation is to explore the presence of the Maroon Ndyuka families in Moengo, Marowijne District – a Surinamese settlement constructed by a post-colonial modern, urban US factory-based bauxite extraction project at the start of the twentieth century - within different ‘existential spaces.’ The region is occupied by flooded forests and savannahs, interspersed by devastated open spaces produced by the expansion of mining and logging pursued by Surinamese, US, Canadian and Chinese companies since the end of the nineteenth century. Uniformed technicians, workers and heavy machinery advance relentlessly on the forest and swamps populated by Maroon and indigenous villages. A town began to develop in 1916 to serve as an industrial base, accommodating and supplying workers involved in the extraction, storage and transportation of the mineral along the Cottica River to Paramaribo. The work of deforestation and clearing large areas of forest and swamp was carried out through informal agreements and occasional contracts with Ndyuka – some of them formerly residents of villages in the region, others migrants from villages on the Tappanahoni. Over the course of the twentieth century, Moengo was transformed by different presences, colonial landscapes and transnational agencies.

However, from the viewpoint of the Maroon families who not only live today in Moengo but form the majority of its population, the territory of the former concession can be described as a point of connection, a rural-forest area, but also
a zone of contact in which a few histories of the town and Suralco merge with many memories of life in the villages of the Cottica River. Histories of the period in which Maroon workers began to be hired and, particularly, spatial-temporal inscriptions utilized to locate modes of existence in time and in the territory that precede the arrival of Suralco, but also, they are effects of the Internal War (*Binnenlandse Oorlog*): a conflict between the army led by Dersi Bouteser and the Maroon guerillas, lasting between 1986 and 1992, which forced thousands of families from the region to seek safety in refugee camps in French Guiana The paper will describe relations associated with the space-time of the villages, the colonial experience and local industry. Its aim is to explore how Ndyuka families, but particularly, the women coming from refugee camps in Guianese territory, who arrived in Moengo during the first half of the 1990s, reconfigured and transformed the rural, forest and industrial landscape.