Chapter 5

‘This Tide Will Be a Good Tide’

On Movement, Anticipative Waiting and Tricking on the Islands of the Parnaíba Delta, Brazil

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Introduction

Shrimp tide (I): Expecting a ‘good’ tide

Seu Miguel bends over to starboard to comb the river water with his splayed fingers. ‘The water is still too clean’, he says, while the wooden canoe powered by a rabeta, a 5.5-horsepower outboard engine, glides smoothly through the water. We had left the port of Água Doce – a small town on the maranhense mainland – a couple of minutes before. Driving against the rising tide, it will still take us a good hour to reach Barrinha Island and the village of the same name. The canoe is heavily loaded. Ice-filled Styrofoam boxes and sixty-kilogram bags filled with farinha (manioc flour) and rice pile up between the canoe’s back thwarts. The gunwale is barely a hand-width above the water surface, but Seu Zé confidently steers the canoe along through the mangrove forests. He knows from experience where snags are hiding just below the surface and where, despite the rising tide, sandbanks are dangerously high. Branches protruding from the river bottom could damage the engine if not detected in time, and running the canoe onto a sandbank would have disastrous consequences.

‘This tide is going to be a good tide’, Seu Miguel, who had visited town to look for fishermen to complete his shrimp-fishing team, had told me with joyful anticipation some hours earlier, while we were waiting in Água Doce’s small port for Seu Zé’s provisions to arrive. Both men are

Figure 5.1. A marisqueira (shellfish collector) makes her way through the mud to gather sururú molluscs in the Parnaíba Delta, March 2018. Photo by Nora Horisberger.
expecting a ‘good tide’ (maré boa) to start in the coming days. Good tides can occur during the spring tides at new or full moon, when the rise and fall of tidal levels is the greatest. During such tides, Barrinha similarly seems to swell, for the number of people in the village sometimes almost doubles, as shrimp fishers from villages all along the mainland travel to the island. From tomorrow onwards, they will hang up their hammocks between the wooden bars of the fishermen’s huts at the edge of the beach or in one of the permanent inhabitants’ backyards, setting up a temporary home for a period of seven days. The bags of farinha and rice, together with sugar and salt, as well as gasoline, diesel, tobacco and sugarcane rum (cachaça), are part of the basic supplies Seu Zé will provide to ‘his’ fishers during the shrimp-fishing period. In exchange, the fishers will sell all the shrimps they have caught exclusively to Seu Zé, their ‘boss’. Nowadays the only shrimp buyer in Barrinha, he will then ensure the commercialization of the shrimps – either preserved with ice in Styrofoam boxes or sun-dried – in various cities of Maranhão and the neighbouring State of Piauí. If the tide, despite expectations, is a ‘bad tide’ (maré ruim), at least the fishers’ basic needs are covered and they can pay back the resulting debt in the form of shrimps during the next tide. If, on the other hand, the tide is good but Seu Zé faces difficulties in reselling all the shrimps right away or if his buyers in the city delay the payments, making it impossible for Seu Zé to pay the fishers in cash, the latter will similarly carry over the resulting credit to the next tide.

We have now made more than half of the journey to Barrinha. Night begins to fall. Startled by the engine’s noise, a flock of scarlet ibis take flight. Red crabs stare at us from the muddy banks of the mangrove thickets, only to disappear quickly into their holes some seconds later. In front of us, a mullet (tainha) jumps out of the water. The men’s eyes follow its movement and attentively scan the water’s surface. Frightened shrimps pop up from the muddy river bottom and with a powerful movement of their tail they propel themselves over the water surface; blob, blob, and off they go. The movement of a rising school of fish makes the water stir. The men point with excited anticipation, but I am unable to detect all of the quivering and shivering they indicate – isn’t it just the wind churning the water’s surface? During my fieldwork, I learned that attentiveness to, and observation of, various kinds of movements in and on the water – including that of fish, shrimps, birds, water currents, changes in water texture and colour and also other fishers’ movements and their catches – is valuable in order to be able to anticipate the beginning of the ‘good’ tide and to locate good fishing spots for the coming days.
On the sandy islands of the Parnaíba Delta, movement is indeed probably the only form of permanence. In this chapter, I describe both the interplay of various movements and the delta inhabitants’ conception of these movements, as well as their relation to, and implication for, everyday delta life and relations. In the first section, I trace some of the interweaving seasonal and tidal movements on and around the deltaic islands, and how their repetitive aspects shape anticipation and preparation. I argue that amidst the manifold movements, people create a sense of order and constancy through their practices of anticipating, preparing and adjusting. I then explore how the continuous movements, which require observation, attentiveness and flexibility to adjust, relate to the perception of time, and to people’s preference for living ‘in the moment’ – that is, from one tide to the next, rather than making and following plans and fixed schedules. I then focus in more detail on the particular kinds of anticipation and waiting that this ever-becoming deltaic world entails. I argue that the openness and thus uncertainty of the outcome of most movements must not be confounded with primarily negative feelings of doubt, but that it also opens up possibilities and spaces for action and hope. In the final section, I explore situations where things do not turn out as anticipated or as hoped for. In spite of their skills, knowledge, continuous observation, attentiveness and anticipation, getting it wrong and failing to adjust to movements, too, is part of everyday life on the deltaic islands. Delta inhabitants often explain these situations in terms of enganar, which means being deceived but also being tricked or cheated, and involves human as well as non-human beings. More-than-human movement, anticipation and tricking are significant dimensions of people’s lives beyond the Parnaíba Delta, and indeed beyond any river delta. But according to Seu Miguel, Seu Zé and other barrinhenses, it is especially in the delta that these dimensions matter. In fact, this is how these people distinguish life on the island from life on the mainland, where movement is less pronounced and anticipation is less focused.

A fluctuating village, fluctuating waters and shifting activities

In Northeast Brazil, between the States of Piauí and Maranhão, a labyrinth of fresh and salt waterways with more than seventy islands of different sizes and shapes forms an area commonly known as the Parnaíba Delta. Barrinha, currently consisting of around twenty houses – most made of mud and covered with palm leaves – and several wooden fishermen’s huts, is situated in the larger, maranhense part of the delta. Since 1996, the
entire deltaic area has held the status of an Environmental Protection Area (APA),\(^1\) although it still lacks an official management plan. In addition, since 2000, some islands eastwards of Barrinha are included in a marine extractive reserve (resex marinha)\(^2\) with stricter regulations. Barrinha has a rather conflictual relationship with the administration (ICMBio)\(^3\) of these protective areas, partly because the latter has recently declared illegal some of the fishing techniques inhabitants rely on. After conflicts almost escalated in 2007, villagers succeeded – at least for a while – in keeping the protected-area managers away from the island. Additional conflicts, this time over land titles, further led the inhabitants to set up a residents’ association, the APAMEX\(^4\) (Association of Artisanal Fishermen and Shellfish Extractivists).\(^5\) Under the current Brazilian legislation, the distribution of land rights is indeed based on identity criteria. Certain identity categories such as Indigenous, quilombola\(^6\) and traditional peoples were institutionalized during the last two decades of the twentieth century, and members of those categories subsequently received territorial rights and specific health and educational programmes (Boyer 2015). Outsiders commonly name barrinhenses and other delta inhabitants as ribeirinhos – river dwellers of mixed Indigenous, African and European descent. Whereas the inhabitants of Barrinha are certainly of mixed origin, I prefer to call them barrinhenses, which seems to me a more neutral term, especially because the few times barrinhenses employed the term ribeirinho, they did so to emphasize the negative habits of other villagers (e.g. ‘this ribeirinho is so lazy’). The deltaic islands, Oliveira (2017) points out, have historically been – and for the most part still are – portrayed in terms of emptiness and social backwardness. While access to some of the islands improved from the 1970s onwards, the Parnaíban urban elite in particular maintained and steadily reinforced a clear separation between themselves – the urban civilized – on the one hand, and the poor rural islanders on the other. This went hand in hand with their valorization of the islands’ natural features. The contrast proved to be beneficial for national tourism\(^7\) as tourists were promised that they would visit rather ‘exotic’ realities. These ideas of marginality persist, and Adams and colleagues’ (2009) observation that ribeirinhos are generally characterized by a common socio-political invisibility at the national scale is thus pertinent for the deltaic context.

In this way, officially assuming an identity linked to traditional activities (artisanal fishing, gathering) enabled barrinhenses to legalize and guarantee their continued livelihoods in the protected area. Relabelled as a ‘traditional population’, they were able to gain at least some visibility in territorial conflicts, as this designation distinguished them from the heterogeneous and marginalized ribeirinho group. Nevertheless, Barrinha’s inhabitants rarely introduce themselves solely as fishermen and even less
as shellfish gatherers or members of the ‘traditional population’. Such singular categories would not do justice to the *barrinhenses’* multiple past and present activities. Although fishing – especially for shrimps – is indeed of importance, and during ‘good tides’ constitutes the main source of income on the island, most people nevertheless equally rely on a range of complementary livelihood strategies. These include chicken and duck breeding, cultivation of home gardens or small fields (maize, beans, watermelons, fruits), harvesting of cashew nuts and forest fruits, temporary jobs for neighbours (construction, cleaning), exchanging dried fish with other villages, social assistance (*bolsa família*) and pensions. Furthermore, trajectories of intensive migration are very common in Barrinha. Of the adult inhabitants currently living in the village, not one was born on the island. The majority come from neighbouring islands or villages or towns of the *maranhense* or *piauíense* mainland. Also, before coming to Barrinha, most inhabitants lived in various other places (e.g. São Paulo, Pará, Goiânia, Rio de Janeiro), where they worked on sugarcane plantations, in the construction of hydropower dams, in aluminium companies, in the navy, as carpenters or housemaids and even in golf clubs.

Movement is not only a crucial element in people’s biographies – for example in the form of leaving, coming back and leaving again – but also very much part of everyday island life. Indeed, many people’s movements interweave with and adjust to seasonal transformations – water fluctuations, migrating fish, ripening fruits – as well as monthly and daily changes in tidal flows. Delta inhabitants commonly name the period of abundant rain (January to July) ‘winter’ and the subsequent dry period, when rainfall completely ceases and strong winds prevail, ‘summer’. In winter, people dedicate more time to their fields (*roças*) of various sizes, located either in their home gardens or in parts of the – previously cleared and burned – nearby *caatinga* (tropical dry forest, a type of savannah). Thus, in this period, freshly harvested green beans accompany rice and fish, *maxixe* (maroon cucumber) and *quiabo* (okra) give the stews a special taste and roasted maize is snacked upon in the evenings. After the first weeks of intense rainfall, lower-lying areas turn into swamps and temporary lakes start to form all over the island. Although the rains soak extensive areas, the sandy ground prevents serious flooding, as the water continuously seeps into the sandy substrate and flows away beneath it towards rivers and the sea. As soon as the transitory lakes are deep enough to shelter a variety of fish, people turn to lake-fishing activities. While fishing on the river is mainly a men’s activity, often the whole family participates in lake fishing. Villagers perceive these moments of children playing in the water, of bathing together and laying fishing lines, as joyful and pleasurable.
Generally, whenever the typically short but heavy rainfalls start, a vibrant bustle takes over the village as people open covered water tanks and (re)position all kinds of receptacles under improvised gutters to collect as much fresh rainwater as possible. After the first months of rain, the *guabiraba* – a small black fruit – ripens in the caatinga. The ‘*guabiraba*’s time’, as people call this period, is particularly fleeting, so those who want to snack on these appreciated fruits usually do not wait long to undertake a trip to the nearby forests. Shortly afterwards, huge swarms of sardines migrate through the deltaic waterways. For many shrimp fishers, this ‘time of the sardines’ is rather annoying; sardines have little market value, but require a lot of time to be untangled from nets, and through their frantic movements cause many of the valuable shrimps to drop out of the net back into the water.

Towards the end of winter, rain becomes sparser and eventually completely ceases. When strong winds start blowing and the landscape gets increasingly dry, villagers say that summer is about to begin. Lakes and swampy areas dry up, and previously fervently sprouting herbaceous plants, called *matinho* (small forest), shrivel and die. Women now spend several hours a day pulling out dried weeds, raking, sweeping and burning withered *matinho*, which they consider an ugly, unpleasant presence in the surroundings of their houses. Only when the garden’s sandy soil resembles a white sheet stretching between selected plants (e.g. coconut palms, cashew trees, papayas, banana palms, acerola, ornamental succulents) do people feel satisfaction and a sense of beauty when contemplating their gardens. As the rains become sparser, water is now – thanks to the infrastructure funded by an evangelical pastor a few years ago – pumped up from the groundwater table into a five-thousand-litre water tank and distributed through a network of plastic tubes to the surroundings of most houses. Rather than keenly watching for dark rain-filled clouds, people are now more attentive to the rattling noise of the generator, switched on every two to three days and prompting a bustle of water bucket activity. With the appearance of the first reddish flowers on the cashew trees, a restless excitement spreads through the village as preparations for the appreciated ‘time of cashews’ begin. People start to attend to their trees – often planted in more distant parts of their home gardens – and clear the ground underneath. This facilitates the later gathering of fruits and nuts but is also said to please the trees, which reward the ‘caring’ (*cuidar*) by producing nice big fruits. When the first yellowish-red fruits then begin to appear between the dense green leaves, women and children in particular spend several hours a day collecting fruits and nuts. While acidic fruits now give the fish stew the desired sour taste and the juice of the sweet fruits offers a pleasant refreshment, women sell the nuts to traders, some
of whom live in the same village. As an important temporary source of income, cashew nuts are indeed often called ‘the women’s salary’.

In addition to these seasonal transformations, people stay attentive to the lunar cycle. The power of the moon, barrinhenses say, is immense. Besides moving masses of tidal waters, it influences activities as diverse as the cutting of wood, the hatching of chickens and ducks, and other animal behaviour, and it regularly ‘burns’ numerous cashew fruits. High and low tides arrive twice a day and spring tides twice a month during either new or full moon. High tides completely flood mangroves, making the gathering of crabs and seashells impossible. During low tides, an extensive field of mud stretches between Barrinha village and the river, and many waterways, especially creeks, become too shallow for canoeing. Fishers in particular observe daily the time the moon rises and its position in the sky to anticipate the strength of a tidal flow, decide whether it is a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ tide for a certain type of fishing and calculate the coming and going of high and low tides.

In Barrinha, many of these seasonal and tidal transformations are referred to and explained by the phrase ‘everything has its time’ (tudo tem seu tempo). What people call ‘times’ are annually or monthly recurrent events such as the migration of fish or the ripening and harvesting of fruits. Their coming and going varies from year to year but together they still form a sequence of happenings. Some, such as the ‘time of cashews’, require preparation; others, such as the ‘time of the guabiraba’, are so short that they are easily missed if one is not attentive; and still others, like the ‘time of the sardines’, are rather disturbing and unpleasant. Following Ingold’s (1993) perspective of rhythms and Harris’s (1998) work on seasonality and sociality in an Amazonian floodplain, it is pertinent to say that attending to ‘times’ requires experience and continuous observation of other-than-human movements, in order to adjust one’s own movements to these changes. Harris (1998) indeed sees the rhythmicity of activities making up social life as constitutive of seasonality and not simply expressive of it. Seasonality, he argues, is an ‘embodied periodicity, produced in the attendance of people to their environment’ (1998: 66).

In this way, ‘times’ should not be conceived of as external changes happening somewhere ‘out there’, but rather as rhythmically coming into being through intimate relations between humans and non-humans (see also Krause 2013; Whitehouse 2017). For instance, many fruits ripen in the forest, but only through relations of gathering or harvesting do their ripenings become conceived of as ‘times’. Many kinds of fish are present during the whole year, but at certain moments – during their ‘times’ – people fish for them more frequently because they are particularly fat and tasty or because the fishing technique only allows them to be caught
during these moments. Amidst the various interweaving seasonal and tidal movements, the repetitive aspects of ‘times’, which allow – at least to some extent – for anticipation and preparation, create a sense of ordering of movement (cf. Simon, this volume). Therefore, if ‘times’ are movements that emerge through people’s attentiveness and adjustments to other-than-human temporalities, it is through their practices that people create a sense of constancy in an otherwise fluctuating environment.

However, in spite of this relative ordering, ‘times’ are far from fixed events or mechanical repetitions. Not only the moment of a ‘time’s’ arrival, but also whether it is actually going to happen at all and in what way, are impossible to predict with certainty. ‘Times’ indeed need to be understood in the context of other kinds of movements, especially those relating to what is locally seen as nature’s ‘making and unmaking’, considered a particularity of island life, as I outline in the next section. The detailed observations of non-human movement described so far must not be misread as an argument for environmental determinism. Shrimp, the moon and cashew trees do not determine anything for the people of Barrinha, but rather the inhabitants’ observational skills, ability to anticipate and readiness to seize opportunities are what make ‘times’ in relation to these movements. There can be no ‘shrimp tide’ without the fishers’ anticipation, preparations and actual fishing, even if shrimp are plentiful. For instance, one week in June 2018, when the Brazilian national team was playing at the World Cup, many fishers decided not to travel to Barrinha even though considerable numbers of shrimps were appearing at the island’s beaches. Thus, the ‘times’ and other rhythmic phenomena come about in relation not only to tides, precipitation and growing cycles, but also to such ‘social’ dynamics as bolsa família payments, festivities, football games and price fluctuations.

**Attentiveness and anticipation on the ever-becoming islands**

The inhabitants of the Parnaíba Delta see themselves as inhabitants of islands, rather than inhabitants of a delta (cf. Richardson, this volume). If they use the term delta, it is usually in reference to tourism or nature conservation, fields of activity within which actors in the 1990s started to introduce and actively promote the denomination Parnaíba Delta. At times, delta inhabitants refer to the sandy islands they live on simply as ilha (islands), but sometimes also call them croa. Croa is an ambiguous term that refers to various kinds of sandy formations emerging in the tidal waters, some of which completely disappear during high tides, while others, such as the inhabited islands, are much more permanent, but still partially.
flooded and continually reshaped by tides, rains and moving sand dunes. When using the term *croa*, inhabitants usually emphasize the dynamic, temporary, transformative character of islands, as well as the qualities of the porous sandy ground, through which water not only flows downwards but also wells up from below. Older inhabitants narrate that the mainland, or *terra firme*, was directly created by God several hundred years ago and has remained largely unchanged since. Not so the sandy islands. This area was once entirely composed of rivers and mangroves until a big sand dune passed over it. The sea spat out sand to the east of the delta and the wind transported it westward; it was the sand dune’s movement, people narrate, that created their islands and made the area inhabitable.

Indeed, from the delta inhabitants’ perspective, the distinctiveness of their place is that ‘nature’ (*natureza*) continually ‘makes and unmakes everything’. A fisherman illustrates this with the following words:

*Look, this igarapé (creek) has previously been bigger. For us it is dying, but not for the sea. At any time, if the sea wants to, it opens it up again. It has nothing to do with laws, not at all. As far as I know the sea made these islands, but it is also going to dissolve them. I do not rely on laws. I rely on nature’s power, because nature makes and unmakes everything.*

It is important here to point out that the local conception of ‘nature’ – even if the term, *natureza*, is similar – differs in many ways from the Western concept of nature. Nature, in the delta dwellers’ perspective, has its own intentions. People often describe nature as mysterious and inexplicable, emphasizing that it is impossible for people to entirely understand nature and its actions. Nature’s power, moreover, is considered to be much stronger than human power and thus nature cannot be controlled or tamed, and humans do better by following nature’s doings.

*Croa* life thus unfolds in continuous material transformation and dissolution: sand pours over waterways, invades mangroves and lakes, trickles into houses and hammocks; rivers ‘eat’ sandy shores; rains swamp low-lying areas, forming transitory lakes and temporarily ‘sweetening’ saltwater flows; tides flow deep into mangroves, submerging roots and crabs’ homes, and wash over flat lands, leaving ponds and crusts of salt after ebbing away. *Croa* life is never fixed or ultimate; following Haraway (2008), it is fundamentally a ‘becoming with’, challenging delusions of separation, where entities cease to be bounded and the understanding of human beings themselves is essentially based on entanglements with other beings. If there is a constancy in this volatile world, it is the permanence of movement itself; it is the making and unmaking of nature that is ever-present. Transformation and dissolution, however, are not simply destructive but, as Deleuze (2004) tells us, a source of creativity and of be-
beginning anew. Importantly, the idea of beginning anew, as McLean (2013) points out, is not a beginning from scratch, because there is always something preceding the beginning itself. Therefore, there is no going back to a unique origin. The ever-present making and unmaking in this sense opens up possibilities of becoming, which do not have a direction and thus do not fit any linear chronological time. Islands, McLean (2013) further argues, might have something different to teach us. They are sites of encounters not only of human and a range of other-than-human materialities, but also of different kinds of temporalities, for instance human-centred time and a more elusive, impersonal and non-linear time of becoming and dissolution.

Indeed, on the sandy islands, through the interplay of various movements, time becomes remarkably manifest and palpable. The continuous becoming and people’s attentiveness to these movements ties them to the immediate here and now. The present, then, is of much greater importance than the past or future. ‘Times’, as repetitive human–environment relations, certainly create a sense of ordering of movements and at least a temporary constancy, which allows for particular forms of anticipation and preparation. However, this has to be understood in the broader context of ‘nature’s’ constant ‘making and unmaking’, which mostly takes people by surprise. Therefore, the only relatively reliable and stable ‘thing’ is the present time. While the future is unpredictable and open, the past is constantly being wiped out or dissolved, as Lima and Alencar (2001) argue. They relate Brazilian floodplain inhabitants’ circular rather than linear collective history and memory of their communities to the fluctuating landscape and people’s frequent moving. As the floodplain changes and reforms each year, people’s memories are continuously disconnected from fixed references, and because of intensive migration, they do not share the same pasts. Therefore, their interest lies in the present. In the same way that they start anew each year, after each flood, their stories also start anew and thus take on a cyclic rather than a linear chronological form. Such observations are also pertinent for Barrinha. Barrinhenses generally prioritize the present over their past trajectories or future projections; many remember having moved to a variety of places before coming or returning to the island, but the dates and sequences of these past events remain hazy and some do not even recall where they were born. In addition, barrinhenses are generally decidedly resistant to fixed scheduling. ‘Here, there are no commitments’ (aqui não tem compromissos), they enjoy saying, to praise their way of life and contrast it with life in the mainland cities, full of fixed plans, schedules and obligations. It is also common to live ‘by the water’ (por água), that is, from one shrimp tide to the next, which for instance means that money earned during one tide is rarely saved longer than the beginning of the next tide.
This does not mean, however, that in everyday croa life, the past and future are completely absent. Rather, there is a kind of over-layering, a peculiar co-presence of past and future in the present. The future is there in the forward-looking, the anticipation of what might come; the past is there in the form of experiences. What is to come is not necessarily completely new, but neither is it definitive. This experience of time comes close to Lefebvre’s (2004) understanding of rhythm as ‘repetition with difference’ and Deleuze’s (2004) ‘beginning anew’ but not from scratch. Fixed plans, schedules or forecasts would not make sense in this world of open becoming. Flexibility to jump to respond to whatever possibility opens up, or to change plans if an opportunity dissolves, is essential. What prevails is a kind of anticipative waiting imbued with attentiveness. Anticipation and preparation do not replace continuous perceptual alertness, because what is expected remains merely one possibility among others. Indeed, following Nuttall (2010), in a world of constant movement and open becoming, what is important is not anticipation in terms of predictions, forecasts and scenarios, but rather anticipation as learning: ‘A way of orientation, exploration and possibility – a way of imagining, framing, and viewing the world . . . a way of finding one’s way in and around an environment and in and around one’s social and cultural worlds’ (2010: 24). In this way, as Nuttall (2010) pointedly illustrates, anticipation may complement and broaden many of the discussions of adaptation. If adaptation revolves around responses, he argues, anticipation is about agency, intentionality and creativity; it is also about imagination, envisioning possibilities and choice, and about being doubtful, uncertain and fearful. In Nuttall’s words: ‘Anticipation is also about perceiving the world, relating to it, moving around in it, making sense of it, thinking about what to expect from it, and what possibilities can be gained from it’ (2010: 25). Focusing on anticipation therefore emphasizes that people not only follow, and adapt and adjust to changes, but that they also enact, form and co-create changes, and their futures. It is in this context that I portray the volatile dynamics of delta life (cf. Krause 2017) as movements. This emphasizes not only their materially and spatially grounded temporalities, but also their trajectories, which barrinhenses learn to observe and anticipate. As movements, volatilities do not appear as the random and catastrophic transformations that casual observers may perceive in the delta, but as the directed and repeating, but never entirely predictable, way delta life evolves for its inhabitants.

Shrimp tide (II): Waiting for the water to get dirty

Seu Miguel looks up when I approach: ‘The water is still too clean’, he announces, anticipating my question. It’s almost eight o’clock in
the morning when I meet him in the knee-high tidal waters in front of Barrinha. Using the upper part of a sliced plastic bottle, he throws water on his canoe’s thwarts, washing off the remnants of yesterday’s night fishing. Shortly after our arrival in Barrinha, he had left with his fishing team for a first exploratory trip. These early explorations rarely yield good catches, but are necessary to find out when exactly the actual shrimp tide begins and whether it is a good or bad one. While the observation of the position of the moon allows the arrival of spring tides to be calculated, not every spring tide is equally suitable for shrimp fishing and thus what barrinhenses call a ‘good tide’.

A good tide’s waters are turbid. The turbidity of water results from the interaction of tidal flows with mangroves. Mangroves flourish in areas periodically flooded by salty or brackish tidal waters. Their complex root system, extending above and below the water surface, slows down currents and traps silt and sediments. As assemblages of interacting plants, animals and micro-organisms (Schaeffer-Novelli et al. 2000), mangroves harbour an incredible number of life forms: fish and shrimp find protected nurseries and rich feeding grounds; crabs hide between the roots, burrowing into the mangrove’s mud and feed on mangrove leaves; oysters, barnacles and snails, among other organisms, cling to the roots’ hard surface; and microbes and fungi consume decaying material. When the strong spring tides that flow deep into the mangroves retreat, they carry with them considerable quantities of suspended organic and inorganic material – mud, sediments, leaf litter, phytoplankton, algae and so on – which turn the river’s water into the muddy liquid that Seu Miguel and the other shrimp fishers eagerly await. Only when the water is dirty (suja) enough do the shrimps move from the deeper canals towards the ‘beaches’ (praias), the muddy shores in the intertidal zone, amphibious transitions covered during high tide and exposed during low tide. There, the shrimps linger in the engodo, a squishy, soft kind of mud, the shrimps’ favourite mud, according to the fishermen. It was this soft mud that Seu Miguel had looked for the previous evening, when he left with his team of four men for the exploratory fishing trip. At the beaches, equipped with headlamps, barefoot in hip-high water, he and the other men dragged the redinha (lit. ‘small net’, a trawling net) over the muddy ground. ‘When the net touches the shrimps lingering in the mud, they jump up and get caught in the redinha’s fine meshes’, Seu Miguel explains. Last night, however, they caught only one kilogram of shrimps, and Seu Miguel deduces that the water was still too clean, and the shrimps had not moved to the beaches yet. Seu Miguel and the other shrimp fishers are still waiting for the water to get dirtier.
It is precisely this kind of anticipative waiting, so characteristic of everyday _croa_ life, that characterizes the days preceding a shrimp tide. As Janeja and Bandak (2018: 1) argue, waiting is ‘a particular engagement in, and with, time’, where what is hoped for, eagerly or anxiously anticipated, has not yet arrived. The fishers’ waiting for the shrimp tide is neither a ‘doing nothing’ nor a passive enduring, but rather a waiting full of preparation, perceptual alertness and anticipation. While provisions are made, teams organized and nets mended, the fishers’ senses are constantly and intently focused on the water’s texture, colour and movement. Again and again they check the water’s turbidity, walk along Barrinha’s beach to see if the first shrimps ‘jump’, and consider whether it is worth making an exploratory fishing trip. While passive waiting is characterized by a certain confidence in, or in some cases indifference to, the outcome, active waiting differs in that it keeps the outcome or what is anticipated open and therefore ‘entails hope as generative of action’ (Marcel 1967: 282 cited in Janeja and Bandak 2018: 3). It is the – often uncertain – interplay between such forms of waiting, the ‘in-between’ modalities of waiting, that, according to Janeja and Bandak, opens up to what they call the politics and poetics of waiting. Waiting, they argue, is not only to be found in the absence of action but is often an ‘uncertain terrain’ (2018: 16) full of tensions, where doubt and uncertainty coexist: ‘it is a form of becoming emergent in the very oscillations between doubting and hoping but also of suspending both’ (2018: 5). The anticipative waiting before shrimp tides is such a form of waiting, full of tensions, of impatient lurking and eager expectations as well as, at times, undecidedness and doubt. Whereas all waiting is, to some degree, anticipative of something, I use this attribute here to emphasize how this is not a passive and empty period for delta inhabitants. On the one hand, anticipation addresses the rhythmicity of these processes, part of which is the suspense in people’s waiting for a phenomenon’s re-emergence in new form (cf. You 1994). On the other hand, speaking of anticipation signals that this waiting does not entail fixed expectations, but people are clear that things may always turn out differently.

Even if everything points to a ‘good’ tide, the tension remains until finally the first good catches are brought home. In Seu Miguel’s words: ‘There are always tides with more and tides with fewer shrimps. Sometimes it is the new moon tide (maré de escuro) that is better, sometimes the full moon tide (maré de lua). One can never know it for certain in advance. Dirty water is an indication of a good tide but still never completely safe; ultimately, only good catches can confirm a good tide’. Even if one knows the movements and habits of animals and tides, and even if one knows how to anticipate these movements (Nuttall 2010), ultimately the outcome remains open. However, this uncertain outcome is not to be confounded
with overall negative feelings of doubt, uncertainty or even fatalism, but this same uncertainty of what is to come conveys feelings of enthusiasm and hope. Contrary to a closed perspective, which leaves little space for imagination, the uncertain outcomes of this world of constant becoming allow for actively imagining a range of possibilities. It is therefore not a ‘waiting for’, where one is stuck, having little power, but a ‘waiting on’, a waiting full of agency, where people are able to choose when to wait and when to act (Schwartz 1974 cited in Janeja and Bandak 2018: 21, cf. Simon, this volume).

‘Enganar’: tricking, cheating, deceiving

Shrimp tide (III): Tricking, cheating, deceiving

Two days later. The typical smell of raw fish hangs in the air of the barracão – the central hut – in the early morning. It is one of the few traces still hinting at the nightly hustle and bustle. The barracão is the nodal point through which all shrimps fished in Barrinha pass before they embark with Seu Zé on his journeys to different buyers all over the region. It is where catches are meticulously weighed and numbers of kilograms noted, where smaller shrimps are separated from bigger ones. From her kitchen just next to the central hut, Dona Joana, Seu Zé’s wife, signals for me to come over. ‘The first fishers came back around midnight’, she tells me as I enter her kitchen. For this tide, she works with some other women as a catadora – shrimp picker. Their work starts with the arrival of the first fishers; depending on the catch sizes, it takes them three, four or even five hours to sort the shrimps. ‘The waters are good’, she continues, while pouring freshly brewed coffee into my cup, ‘they caught around a hundred kilograms, with only three teams fishing. That’s good for the first night’. She goes on with a detailed account of the amount each team fished. This information will spread in no time throughout the village and perhaps beyond. In the next few days, it will definitely be the favourite subject of conversation. ‘Only Seu Adriano’s team is not coming this tide’, Dona Joana continues after a pause, pointing to one of the empty wooden huts at the beachside. Surprised, I ask why he would miss one of the ‘good’ tides. Having fished for more than forty years in the waters around Barrinha, Seu Adriano is certainly one of the most experienced fishers, regularly coming for shrimp tides from his village on the maranhense mainland, sometimes with up to sixteen men. ‘As the last two tides were bad, he thought that this one would have few shrimps
too’, Dona Joana responds to my question. ‘Here you have it, this time Seu Adriano got it wrong, he was tricked!’

So far, I have pointed to the continuous becoming with no directionality and the resulting anticipative and attentive waiting so characteristic of everyday croa life. Seu Adriano’s example, however, shows that people do not spend all their time in such a state of perceptual alertness, ready to jump to whatever coming possibility. Sometimes they are annoyed and become tired of the waiting and checking, and instead try to deduce patterns of what is to come. Thus, after having come to Barrinha twice, only to find a bad tide, Seu Adriano was quite sure that the coming tide would be bad too. If something happens repeatedly, people are likely to start to convert their observations into predictions, forgetting that what they experience is only one possibility among others. At other times, in spite of continuous observations and attentiveness, even experienced people interpret things the wrong way or come to the wrong conclusion. It is in these situations that what people call ‘tricking’ comes in. Trick ing (enganar) is indeed very common in everyday life and relations on the deltaic islands, and transcends boundaries of human and non-human worlds: fishers trick other fishers by spreading false information; trees trick people by pretending to produce nice, big fruits when actually they provide none; and the sea might trick people by arriving at a different time than expected. The way that tricking is understood locally comes close to ‘pretending something but doing it differently’. When someone is tricked, it is usually either because she was not attentive enough or because he relied too much on the observed. Trick ing emphasizes the dimension of openness of movements, of becoming with no directionality, and at the same time illustrates that these aspects are not restricted to the non-human environment but deeply permeate all kinds of relationships on the deltaic islands. Trick ing might be a reminder that one can never really rely on the anticipated. It might even turn into a sort of game, a playing with each other’s observations and attentiveness, continually reintroducing the uncertain and openness into relationships.

A second short example of a line-fishing trip should make things clearer. The incident happened a few weeks after the shrimp tide that tricked Seu Adriano and helped me to better understand the various aspects of tricking, and its role in everyday life. One morning in mid-June, Mauricio invited me to go line fishing with his younger brother and their aunt who was visiting. Just before leaving, an older and experienced fisherman came by and indicated a good fishing spot to us. Mauricio, in spite of being much younger (twenty-nine years), was respected and considered
a good fisherman in the village, and of course had his preferred fishing spots too, but this time he decided to check out the spots indicated by the older man. It turned out that the older man’s spot was not good for line fishing, so we continued on to Maurício’s preferred spots, but because of the detour we arrived there quite late, when the tidal flow was already pushing too much. In the end, Maurício was convinced that the older man had intentionally directed us to the wrong spot, that he had tricked us. Shortly after we came back to the village, the old man passed by to ask how much we had caught. I first expected that Maurício would react angrily or accuse him of having tricked us. Contrary to my expectation, Maurício thanked the old man for the indication and greatly exaggerated the amount we had caught. Knowing that later in the evening the old man would visit a couple of other fishers, who were planning to go line fishing the day after, Maurício continued playing the game. Indeed, the next day these other fishers went to the same bad fishing spot that we had been to; the old man had spread the information as anticipated by Maurício, who of course was amused that his trick had worked out.

It is common among fishers in Barrinha to trick each other, for instance by playing on the quick spreading of information or, during fishing, by pretending to be making poor catches in good spots. Usually the aim is to keep other fishers out of preferred fishing spots. As the incident with Maurício shows well, it is part of everyday life to trick and be tricked; rather than getting angry, people usually continue the game and trick someone else in turn. Tricking works best in a context of uncertainties, as a person never knows for sure whether she was tricked or not and whether a trick was intentional. Maurício in this way does not know for sure if the old man really tricked him – was it intentional or a coincidence? He assumes that he was tricked, and the continuation or counter-trick only works because the old man too cannot know if his trick – if it was a trick – worked. Similarly, Maurício is amused that the old man spreads his false information, but the wide range of possibilities makes it impossible for him to know beforehand if his trick is going to work – that is, if these people are going to make bad catches too. Tricking in this sense is similar to stumbling: one only notices that one has stumbled after or during the stumbling; the same goes for tricking – you cannot know beforehand that you are going to be tricked.

Tricking requires not only agency, but also intentionality. In the deltaic world, such characteristics are not limited to human beings. Animals, plants as well as supernatural beings are considered as being endowed with power, agency and intentionality and thus might also trick other beings. Fish are often described as smart or brave, and they sometimes play with fishers. Plants are ‘living beings as we are’ that, for example, sleep,
and like to be taken care of. Some cashew trees that pretend to make good
fruits when actually they provide none are described as ‘liars’. Furthermore,
people consider all sorts of environments as domains of ‘owners’ (donos),
supernatural or enchanted beings, that take care (cuidar) of their
respective environments and all beings living there. Especially in works
on Amazonian ribeirinhos, there is an abundance of references to beings
with similar characteristics (e.g. Galvão 1976; Tiphagne 2005; Wawzyniak
2012). Wawzyniak (2012), for instance, shows that river dwellers from
Pará conceive the world as transformational, populated by a plurality
of human and non-human agents who transform under certain circum-
stances one into the other. Barrinhenses frequently told me that ‘every-
thing has an owner’ (tudo tem dono). Their accounts most often relate
to the owners of watery environments (rivers, creeks, lakes, sea), who are
variously called the ‘mother of water’ (mãe d’água), the ‘mermaid’ (sereia),
Yemanjá as well as the ‘owner of the sea’ (dono do mar) or ‘owner of fish’
(dono do peixe). Fishers frequently ask for permission and protection be-
fore entering the river or sea, and from time to time offer tobacco or sug-
arcane rum (cachaça) to the owners, most often to the mother of water or
the owner of the sea, as far as I witnessed. Fishers also at times explained
bad catches as punishment by the owners because they did not respect
them. Most often this disrespect comes from the fisher’s greediness, and
owners show their discontent by giving few fish. Owners are not evil,
but they protect their space, they decide whether to give fish or not, they
might interfere if people do not treat them with respect and, as Seu Adri-
iano’s example illustrates, at times they trick people. In the deltaic world,
where intentionality, agency and power are not restricted to the human
world, tricking is one way among others of relating to other beings, tran-
scending boundaries between human and non-human – including spirit –
worlds.

The word enganar translates not only as ‘tricking’, but also as ‘cheat-
ing’ or ‘deceiving’. Depending on the context, tricking, which is a playful
rather than harmful interaction, easily slips into negative feelings of being
cheated or deliberately deceived. This is the case, on the one hand, when
too much alcohol or drugs are involved. For instance, crack, one of the most
addictive forms of cocaine, has recently become available on the island
and has turned into a serious problem, especially for some of the younger
fishermen, who are rapidly drawn into vicious cycles. To get money and
satisfy crack cravings, it thus happens that dishonest cheating gets out of
hand and eventually leads to mistrust between inhabitants. On the other
hand, feelings of deception are mostly apparent in uneven relationships
with more powerful outside actors, including local politicians, ICMBio
and Fishermen’s Colonies. Inhabitants have abundant experience of re-
peatedly unfulfilled promises and unfinished projects, or of outsiders coming for lunch and leaving without paying. Therefore, in these relationships distrust is dominant and *enganar* is no longer considered a reciprocal, playful interaction. Instead, delta inhabitants feel that these actors abuse their power and always intend to deliberately deceive the ‘poor’ and less powerful people (*eles só querem enganar nós pobres*).

Interestingly, if tricking leads to stumbling, it also brings about continuity. This happens, on the one hand, through systematic continuation of tricking: if people are tricked, they will not wait long to trick someone else. On the other hand, continuity emerges from extending tricking relationships to the most varied spheres. On the sandy islands, not only seasonal and tidal movements, but also all sorts of relationships are characterized by an openness of becoming and therefore require the same attentiveness and flexibility. Tricking constantly reminds people that becoming is not fixed, be it the becoming of environmental fluctuations or of relationships – between humans as much as between humans and non-humans. What is seen, observed or heard is only one possibility among others; what people expect based on their observations might happen, but they might also have been in the process of being tricked.

\[\text{Shrimp tide (IV): Moving on}\]

Last night was the seventh consecutive night of shrimp fishing. Tonight, if they still have the strength, some of the shrimp fishers living – more or less permanently – on the island will probably return for a last fishing trip. Most of the shrimp fishers from the mainland, however, already left Barrinha in the early morning, returning to their homes and families. The morning air is thus filled with an unfamiliar calm, contrasting remarkably with the bustle of recent days. No more hammocks in the backyards, no queue for water to fill plastic bins, no loud songs resonating through the wooden bars of the fisher huts. With the expectation of dirty waters just over a week ago, Barrinha, one could say, literally swelled with busy preparations, net repairing, team building, with fishers’ arrivals, meeting and socializing, with the shrimps arriving, with excitement, eager anticipation and lively chatter. Now, a week later, as the dirty waters become clearer and shrimps start moving on, followed by fishers and other villagers, seizing the quiet days to visit or get things sorted in town, Barrinha shrinks again, calms down and takes a moment to rest, only to swell again with the next shrimp tide. It is as if the village breathes – inhales and exhales – with the rhythm of shrimp tides.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that if anything is constant on the deltaic islands, it is movement itself. For everyday life, the ever-present becoming requires observation and attentiveness as well as flexibility to jump to take advantage of opening possibilities. If observation of various movements allows anticipation and preparation for upcoming events, these are never really sure to happen; they constitute only one possibility among others. This leads to a kind of waiting that is both anticipative and attentive. People do wait for something to come, but whether it is going to arrive, and if so when exactly, remains open. I have further elucidated, through the example of tricking, that these kinds of open movements permeate all relationships between people as well as between humans and non-humans. Trickling emphasizes the fact that not only do environmental fluctuations follow a becoming that is not definitive, but all relationships are based on similar dynamics, and therefore people need to stay attentive, never knowing whether a trick is being played.

I have described everyday life in Barrinha as unfolding in the rhythms of shrimp tides, which confers to this place a particular dynamic, a sort of ‘breathing’ or ‘pulse’. However, this pulse should not be understood as fixed and eternal, happening always in the same ways. Rather, shrimp tides can be thought of as what Tsing (2015: 24) refers to as ‘polyphonic assemblages’ – that is, the gathering of temporal rhythms of divergent lifeways – fishermen, shrimps, tides, mangroves, shrimp buyers and so on. These lifeways, be they human or non-human, as Tsing (2015) points out, shift historically, and assemblages coalesce, change and dissolve. Fishermen told me, for instance, that it is getting more and more difficult to catch shrimps, both because of big shrimp-trawling ships, which drag their huge nets over the seabed in front of the coast, depleting the stocks, and also because of a change in their own fishing techniques. The nets they use nowadays are much bigger, with finer meshes, catching smaller shrimps without allowing them to grow up and reproduce. Market prices and the availability of shrimp buyers also have a crucial influence. While previously several shrimp buyers were based in Barrinha, nowadays only Seu Zé is left. During my stay, it happened on one occasion that Seu Zé was not able to resell the shrimps because they were too small, and therefore he had to tell ‘his’ fishers to stop fishing. Finally, stricter environmental regulations also affect shrimp tides. The redinha net is already forbidden in the area of the extractive reserve in the delta, and the protected area administration currently tolerates it in Barrinha only because of Seu Zé’s successful negotiations. In this way, the assemblages through which shrimp tides
come into being are only a temporal coming together, responding always also to worlds outside the deltaic area, to a larger economic and political context (cf. Scaramelli, this volume).

On the ever-becoming islands of the Parnaíba Delta, lifeworlds can indeed be seen as characterized by movement, or, as Krause (this volume) puts it, by volatility rather than stability. Having explored some of the local concepts, it becomes clear that delta inhabitants perceive the continuous intersecting movements as constitutive of the deltaic world, and thus as normal rather than exceptional or threatening. At the same time, people do not passively await the arrival or the effects of these movements, but actively participate in them. Their practices, their active engagement with movements, allow them – at times – to stay with the flow, to anticipate and prepare for upcoming changes, or to bring order in volatile movements, and also to playfully navigate uncertainties.

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Notes

1. Área de Proteção Ambiental.
2. From the 1980s onwards, rubber-tappers, supported by diverse movements, demanded extractive settlements, that is, areas for the exploitation of forest products where they could live and work without fearing expulsion and de-
forestation (Chartier and Nasuti 2009). The murder of the emblematic figure of Chico Mendes accelerated the process of institutionalization of this demand, and in the early 1990s the first so-called ‘extractive reserve’ (‘resex’) was created as one of the first models of ‘sustainable development’. The Brazilian government recognized the ‘resex’ officially as an instrument of territorial policy and extended it from rubber-tappers to all sorts of ‘extractivists’. In this way, Brazil nut collectors, babassu coconut breakers, artisanal fishermen and mollusc pickers, among others (Chartier and Nasuti 2009; Barreto Filho 2006), now referred to as ‘traditional peoples’, were granted long-term usufruct rights for collectively and sustainably managing natural resources (Pace 2004).

3. The Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation, bound to the Ministry of Environment, was founded in 2007 and is responsible for implementing and managing Brazil’s protected areas.

4. Associação de Pescadores Artesanais e Marisqueiras Extrativistas.

5. ‘Extractivist’ (extrativista) is commonly used in Brazil (related to the ‘extractive reserves’ mentioned earlier) and refers to populations living off traditional extractive activities such as hunting, fishing and gathering of animals and plants. As the term is not common in English, and neither is it used in local everyday language, I instead use ‘fishing’ and ‘gathering’ in this text.

6. Residents of quilombo settlements, originally founded by escaped Afro-Brazilian slaves.

7. By the end of the 1970s, Parnaíba had become Brazil’s ‘third national tourist center’ (Oliveira 2017).

8. In Afro-Brazilian religions (Candomblé, Umbanda) Yemanjá is the Orixá (Goddess) of water (ocean, river, lakes).

9. Similar to the Syndicates for rural workers, the Fishermen’s Colonies (Colônias de Pescadores) are responsible for defending the rights and interests of workers in the artisanal fishing sector. They also allocate fishing licences, inform fishers about fishing rules and restrictions, and are in charge of paying pensions and social securities, such as the compensation during the annual period during which fishing is prohibited. However, the first colonies, built from 1919 onwards, aimed to organize fishermen as a reserve for the navy, to assist in controlling and defending the coast (Ramalho 2014).

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