

Saramaka Maroons on the Brazilian Frontier

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Maroons in the Americas have always been champions at seizing the moment, whether in battles against their colonial enemies or in carving out imaginative economic niches in more recent times. This essay focuses on Maroon men from central Suriname who, in the second half of the nineteenth century, migrated to French Guiana where they monopolized the river transport system that supplied thousands of non-Maroon goldminers in that colony and, in the process, created a new way of life for themselves and their descendants.

The Oyapok region of French Guiana, which borders the Brazilian state of Amapá, might best be considered the distant frontier of a distant frontier — many thousands of kilometers from the metropolitan political center of Paris, many hundreds through the forest from the colonial capital of Cayenne, and, from the perspective of the Saramaka Maroons of central Suriname, at the farthest edge of the known geographical universe. In 1900, the mayor of the Commune de l'Oyapok gave the total population as 304. (He did not include members of the Aindigenous tribes of autochthonous or African origin living in the region — which, according to a 1901 document, lived there under the administrative protection of the customs service.) Despite plans on the drawing board in 2002 for a bridge between St.-Georges-de-l'Oyapok and the Brazilian town of Oiapoque and for a road between St.-Georges-de-l'Oyapok and Cayenne (which would in theory permit direct road travel between, say, Macapá and Cayenne) the region has long remained a backwater — in 1971, for example, the largest town in the region, St-Georges-de-l'Oyapok, boasted only two cars.¹

By 1900, when Saramaka Maroon migrants from Suriname (the main tribe . . . of African origin living in the region of St.-Georges) arrived in force and our story begins, their people had been free from slavery for a century and a half, local French Guiana Creoles had been free for a half-century, and the former slaves across the river in Brazil had been free for little more than a decade.

Let us begin with the main lines of Saramaka settlement in French Guiana, told more or less in the style of modern narrative history and based on archival documents, secondary sources, and narrative accounts by Saramaka historians of their ancestors' arrival in the colony. This is a history that *matters* to Saramakas, as it establishes both their temporal precedence and numerical importance (relative to other Suriname Maroons) as migrants in French Guiana — which is one important reason why I have bothered to figure it out and present it here.²

Saramaka Maroons in the Colony of French Guiana: A History

The first Saramakas arrived in French Guiana from Suriname in the 1860s, in the early years of the gold rush in that colony — the first major sites were on the Mana, the Sinnamary, and the Approuague rivers.³ (For example, in 1887, a group of 100 Saramaka men was reported to be returning home at the end of a nine-year-long stay at Mana.)⁴ By the early 20th century, there seem to have been at any one time about 12,000 goldminers in the interior of French Guiana — Creoles, people from the Antilles, Brazilians, and others — though some estimates run up to 25,000, and all of these miners depended heavily on Saramaka canoemen as their supplyline to the coast.⁵ The upriver placers were — on the Approuague and the Mana — as far

as 350 kms upstream, through innumerable treacherous rapids, requiring some 60 days to arrive by canoe.⁶ During the early years of the rush in French Guiana, there were so many accidents on the river that a decision was taken to summon to the Mana, the Approuague, and the Oyapok really expert canoemen, the Saramaka Maroons of Suriname. Toward this end, the governor of French Guiana signed an official agreement in 1883 with the paramount chief (granman) of the Saramakas.⁷

In a detailed account of these Accords of 1883, the administrative system set up by the French colonial government in Cayenne to handle Saramaka immigration and residence, Marie-José Jolivet stresses the resulting Saramaka autonomy and privilege.

In effect, the group of immigrants was placed under the authority of a chief designated by the *granman* and recognized by the governor of Cayenne with the title of *Acommandant*. This chief went to live on the lower Oyapok, at the place that was later to become Tampaki, the base for canoemen on that river. But the Oyapok was hardly the only river with navigational challenges. In addition to the Maroni, which was the domain of the Boni [and Ndyuka] Maroons, there was the Approuague and the Mana, and two other groups of Saramakas took over there. At the head of each of these groups was a *Acaptain* named by the governor with the approval of the Saramaka *commandant*. Assisted by a *Alieutenant*, whom he chose and who was also recognized by the governor, the captain was charged with maintaining discipline within the group. To accomplish this, he stayed in close touch with the mayor and the gendarmes, but these latter never intervened directly in the affairs of the group. When there was a dispute between two Saramakas, it was solely the captain who had authority to find a solution. If the dispute involved a Saramaka and a Guyanais which in fact very rarely occurred the gendarme would always go first to the captain and then, with his help, resolve the problem.⁸

Beginning in 1883, then, Saramakas enjoyed a special status in French Guiana, remaining throughout their stays under the legal authority of the Saramaka paramount chief in Suriname. No other group of people in French Guiana had this legal independence from the laws of French Guiana or of France. Only Saramakas. Indeed, an additional official agreement dates from 1892 and, to our knowledge, neither of these Accords has ever been officially rescinded or renegotiated.⁹ During the 1940s, the colonial governor made reference to the 1892 treaty, writing in a circular on the subject of Saramakas that the origin of their coming to French Guiana and the special advantages they enjoy date from 1892, when a treaty was made with the Saramaka *gaama*. Every special privilege they enjoy (entry without official papers, entry without a deposit against repatriation, residence without registration, exemption from all levies and taxes) was designed to facilitate, under the best possible conditions, transport on the rivers.¹⁰

[INSERT ABOUT HERE: Saramaka canoemen in French Guiana ca. 1900 (postcard)]

In the 1860s, the coastal town of Mana became the first main target of Saramaka settlement, and there was a strong Saramaka presence for one hundred years, with several hundred men in residence at any time. As early as 1883, a shopkeeper in Mana was

writing about the advantages offered by Saramaka canoemen: AIt was common to see a flotilla of twenty-five canoes leaving for the Upper Mana, transporting a full fifty tonnes of merchandise@ B and at half the price charged by Creole canoemen.¹¹ Once they brought the merchandise to the upriver camps, Saramaka canoemen were paid in gold. ATremendous precautions were taken with the payments in gold. They would be coated with lead and placed in a sealed case attached to a float. That way, if the boat sank the case containing the precious metal could be recovered.@¹² Soon, Saramakas had an absolute monopoly of river transport on the Mana. Indeed, there were so many Saramaka men in Mana in the period 1910-1920 that there was active discussion between France and the Netherlands of establishing a Dutch sub-consulate in that tiny town.¹³

Today, Saramakas have precious memories of their pioneer ancestors who Aopened up@ French Guiana for them: the first men who went to Mana. They tell, for example, about Asimadjo from the village of Dangogo, who left Saramaka in haste in the wake of the scandal caused by his having slept with a mother's brother's wife, walked for days through the forest to the east until he arrived at the Ndyuka villages along the Tapanahoni River, and was welcomed there by his Ndyuka friend Hansibai. He and his friend each made a canoe and, accompanied by the sons and sister's sons of Hansibai, paddled down the Maroni to its mouth and entered the Mana. In the town of Mana, Asimadjo learned to speak Creole and saw how Creoles from French Guiana, along with a handful of Ndyuka and Aluku Maroons, controlled the river transport trade. He saw that Creole canoes were far smaller than Saramaka ones, holding but 6 barrels (= 600 kilos) compared to Saramaka ones that held up to 45, and that the Creoles maneuvered exclusively with paddles, rather than with the poles Saramakas always used at the prow of the canoe to get through the rapids. AThe Creoles were dying in the water and the goods weren't getting to their destination ... and neither Alukus nor Ndyukas were up to the task either,@ an old Saramaka told me. Hansibai and Asimadjo succeeded in the transport trade, working the lower river for some time. And when Asimadjo made his triumphal return to Saramaka, bringing back a case of fancy French soap and a magnificent French sword, large numbers of men were ready to follow in his footsteps.

The work was tough, very tough, remember Saramakas. They tell about Akoni, another pioneer in Mana and the first to try to bring a load all the way up to the mines at St. Léon, on the upper river. Unable to get through the rapids at Saut Continent, he and his crew built a platform in the forest, stocked the merchandise there, and went downstream to seek help. His father-in-law who lived in Mana went upriver, found the load, and was able to bring it up some distance further but when he got to the rapids called Saut Par Hasard he, too, was stymied so he and his crew built a platform for the goods and went back downstream. Tata Agadahansu, who was at the place called Délices with his sister's sons Asantifutu and Akaaso and with Tata Kogá, said they'd do it. And they did! They found the goods and, using their poling technique, brought them way upstream. At the mouth of Crique St Leon, a tremendous fallen tree blocked their entry. They cut at it with their axes for a whole week but couldn't get through, so they unloaded the canoes, made a camp, and called their gods for consultation. Tata Kogá had a god called Ma Kambó, Agadahansu one called Miisí. The gods said, Aif you give up and go back now, you will die. Cut the tree.@ They worked at it for three more days and called the gods again. This time the gods said they would work with them the following day. As the men were cutting at the tree, they saw two ducks and shot them. It was the gods who'd brought the ducks. The Creole goldminers upriver at St. Leon heard the gunshots and figured the Saramakas didn't know where to find them and were signaling with their guns. So they answered with their own guns and went down to meet them B a moment of joy still remembered by Saramakas with emotion. As Saramakas say, AHonors for opening up the

upper Mana go to Tata Agadahansu and Tata Kogá, and those for the lower Mana go to Asimadjo, but not to him alone, for it was his Ndyuka friend Hansibai who first told him there was a river over there with work to be had.

The second major site for the pioneer generation of Saramakas in French Guiana was the Approuague River B first the coastal town of Guisambourg and later, beginning in the 1920s, the town of Régina. By the late nineteenth century, several thousand goldminers of varied origins were working the upper river and there were more than twenty factories for processing *bois de rose*. As Sophie François notes, ASaramaka canoemen quickly gained a monopoly on river transport along the Approuague.¹⁴ Saramakas still remember their pioneer ancestors in the region by name: Tata Támenu and his sons Kónima and Tomasié. Another, Tata Abaasá, is remembered as having brought an important carry-oracle from Saramaka and taken it with him to the Carsewene goldfields, where large numbers of Saramakas worked in the 1890s before coming back to the Approuague around 1900, when Carsewene officially became part of Brazil.

From a Saramaka perspective, the glory days of the Approuague stretched from the 1880s till the mid-20th century, when river transport and work in *bois de rose* offered steady work. At its height, the Saramaka presence is said to have numbered 400 men.¹⁵ Between 1920 and 1940, there was always a community of 200 to 300 Saramakas in Régina, as well as the numerous children they had with Creole women.¹⁶ According to Saramakas, in contrast to the women of St.-Georges (see below), many of those in Régina refused to recognize the Saramaka fathers of their children, preferring to take a Creole husband as soon as they realized they were pregnant. (Indeed, an old song from the Régina carnival makes reference to these shenanigans.¹⁷) In the late 1960s, there were still some thirty Saramakas working as loggers and canoemakers in and around Régina.¹⁸ When we visited in 1991, we were shown the AVillage Saramaka,@ which consisted of the overgrown ruins of more than one hundred houses; there were only three elderly men, all of whom were still there in 2001.

At the very end of the nineteenth century, St- Georges-de-l=Oyapok became the third B and most important B center for Saramakas in French Guiana. Founded as a penal center in 1853, with a prisoner-and-guard population of some 200, it became the jumping-off place for goldminers in the Oyapok basin, which had a gold rush after 1855. The population was unusually mixed B by 1874, 81 East Indians, 14 Africans, and 5 Chinese had been imported as immigrant labor to the region,¹⁹ there were a number of immigrants from the French Antilles, there were the metropolitan French associated with the government services, and there were Brazilians from across the river. Saramakas, with their special status, monopolized river transport on the Oyapok but it was only after 1900, when there was a large migration of French and Antilleans, with their Saramaka canoemen, back to the Oyapok from the now-Brazilian Carsewene goldfields, that the region really took off economically and demographically.²⁰

It was in the wake of this reflux from the Carsewene that Saramakas built their village of Tampaki, a few kilometers downstream from St.-Georges. Of all the towns in French Guiana, St.-Georges developed the reputation among Saramakas as the place where Creole women were most available to them as wives, and soon Tampaki was a thriving village of some 300 residents B Saramaka men, their Creole wives, and their children. By 1910, Tampaki was said to have the largest ancestor shrine of any Saramaka village in the world. One Saramaka resident told me that when he first arrived in 1939, there were still some 300 people living in Tampaki, and a *bois de rose* factory continued to function there into the 1950s.

Saramakas remember Tualu, who had been working in Mana, as their pioneer on the

Oyapok, and also as the very first Saramaka to take a Creole wife. When he arrived in Cayenne from Mana at the end of the 19th century, there were already many Saramakas working in the area. Margarite, his wife, suggested they go to the Oyapok, where she and her husband formed a river transport team, Tualu at the prow of the canoe with a pole and Margarite steering at the rear, bringing goods up as far as Camopi and from there to the placers of Bienvenue. Before long, Tualu returned to Cayenne and told other Saramakas about the opportunities on the Oyapok, and he was soon followed there by Abelíti, Kodjobii, and Tata Kodji (a famous curer who had just arrived from Haarlem, on the Saramacca River in Suriname), as well as a group of men from the Pikilio in Suriname: Gasiton, Kositan, Agbago, Wenwenkaká, Gidé, and Kodjo.

Saramakas tell how a French Captain at St.-Georges was about to be sent to Cayenne to have his leg amputated but was instead cured by Kodjobii, at which point the French authorities in Cayenne encouraged Saramakas to settle in the area. They'd offered Kodjobii the first Acaptain's position on the Oyapok but he declined in favor of his elder, the already-respected Kodji, who then served for two decades until his death in 1923. (After Kodji's death, his son B today remembered as ACommandant Kodji,@ who died in 1972 B took the position, and he was in fact named by the French colonial government, in 1942, to be the first Acommandant@ of all the Saramakas in French Guiana.²¹)

Since the 1860s, when they began labor migration to French Guiana, Saramaka men have held a consistently favorable view of that colony, relative to their native Suriname. Both before and after general emancipation in Suriname, when doing wage labor or conducting logging or trading trips on the coast of that colony, Saramakas felt themselves embedded in a rigid colonial system, and were well aware that other ethnic groups saw them as low men on the totem pole. While coastal Suriname continued to represent the very world from which Saramakas' First-Time ancestors had liberated themselves by force of arms, French Guiana was perceived as a much looser, more frontier-like system, as having a "homier" atmosphere and a more relaxed environment B and as a place where they could earn good money far more freely, in occupations that left them considerable independence. Arriving during the early days of the gold rush, Saramakas, as we have seen, monopolized major supply routes to the interior and became French Guiana's rivermen par excellence, taking their pay from Antillean prospectors in bags of gold and living high off the hog with what their descendants still remember as gorgeous Creole women who were readily available, they say, for men with gold in their pockets. (Even older men, they add, could always find available young women.) Saramaka men of the generation now past eighty like to say that while Suriname is their "*mama kôndè*" (their Amatrilineal B home B village@), French Guiana is their "*tâta kôndè*" (their "father's village," their sentimentally favored place to be).

Some Saramaka men never came home from French Guiana, founding large families with Creole women, and many of their daughters (and their daughters= daughters) married later Saramaka immigrants. But the very great majority of Saramaka men in French Guiana returned to Suriname, often going back and forth at several-year intervals during their whole adult lives, until they came home to die. The relative welcome felt by Saramakas in French Guiana, as opposed to the coldness they have always sensed in coastal Suriname, was clearly expressed during the late 1970s, when the situation of Maroons in newly-independent Suriname was already beginning to deteriorate, by aged Saramaka Paramount Chief Agbago Aboikoni: "If only I were a few years younger,@ he said, AI would simply pull up stakes and lead my whole people across the Marowijne.@²²

In the region of St.-Georges and Tampaki, escapees from penal colonies B both French and Brazilian B caused frequent problems for Saramakas. Some Saramakas served the

French penal colony as bounty-hunters. In one celebrated case, a Saramaka named Voisin B probably the man brought up by Kodji (père), who inherited many of his powers B successfully brought in a recidivist escapee in 1939.²³ And Saramakas B some 30, according to old men today B often lost their lives in this activity, as did innocent Saramakas who were attacked by escaped prisoners in the forest. Escapees in the forest were often starving, and Saramakas preserve numerous stories of their attempts, sometimes successful, to ambush, rob, or kill Saramakas who happened to cross their path. Something of the excitement of this period was expressed to us when we lived in Suriname, where old Saramaka men used to tell us about their tremendous fear of escapees from the *bagne*. Well into the 1970s, Saramaka mothers still frightened their children by repeating the adage, A Little children cooked up with dasheen, that's the convict's favorite dish!@ Books on the *bagne* recount how four particularly fierce North Africans, who had been sowing mayhem throughout the colony in the several months since their escape in early 1934, fell upon a Saramaka garden camp along the Oyapok and killed a woman. Before they could cross the border to Brazil, they were captured by Saramakas and, in return for a reward, turned over to the authorities on the other side of the colony in Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni. (Another account suggests that the Saramakas lynched them, with machetes and clubs.) Saramakas still say that *Aalábi poité*@ [Arab prisoners] were Athe worst of the lot.@²⁴

Saramakas also had to deal with évadés from the Brazilian penal colony of Clevelândia do Norte, just across the Oyapok, where large numbers of rebels and anarchists from the 1924 revolution in the south of Brazil had been sent. Elderly Saramakas still remember bloody encounters with these évadés during the late 1920s. One man described to me how his father and three others were attacked on the Brazilian bank by men who tied their hands, put them up against a tree, placed long guns to their bellies and threatened their private parts with razors, before the Saramakas succeeded in escaping back to Tampaki.

With the opening of the European Space Center at Kourou in the 1960s, work opportunities shifted and the Saramaka population of Tampaki never recovered. Today, there are but seven elderly men who remain (plus three in St.-Georges, as well as two younger, more recent arrivals), including Saramaka Captain Lalani, who is the successor to Commandant Kodji. The village is increasingly populated by Amerindians from Brazil. Nonetheless, the Saramaka imprint on the region of St.-Georges remains important. A significant portion of the Creole population has at least one Saramaka grandparent or great-grandparent (e.g., the mayor of St.-Georges, who is proud of his Saramaka grandparent²⁵), and a number of Creole women with Saramaka fathers still speak Saramaccan.

Today, the Oyapok is the spiritual center of Saramakas in French Guiana. The river is speckled with sites sacred to Saramakas B including places where annual rites to the sea-gods are still performed. In early 2001, for example, rites at sacred sites both downriver and upriver from St.-Georges attracted more than one hundred people: some fifteen Saramakas, seventy of their Creole descendants, and fifteen or so Amerindians who live in Tampaki, and there are numerous other sacred sites where the deeds of Saramaka pioneers in the region, such as Kodji, are periodically commemorated. (I take up these matters more fully, below.)

I end this historical sketch with the observation that there are today in French Guiana some 14,500 Saramakas and a total of some 37,200 Maroons (Saramakas plus Ndyukas, Alukus, and Paramakas), many living there illegally but making up more than 20% of French Guiana's population.²⁶ It is in this general context that the history of how each group arrived in the colony and what their early ancestors did there matters so much to its Maroon residents today²⁷

Saramakas on the Oyapok: An Ethnographic History

The story of Saramaka settlement in French Guiana, as told above, is based on archival documents, secondary sources, and narrative accounts by Saramakas. The story I next explore is based, rather, on the haphazard personal experience of (occasionally, and almost randomly) Abeing-there,²⁷ that is, living the ethnographic life among Saramakas. It is a story I have not (could not) ever explore in full but even in partial form it helps lends texture and meaning to the history of settlement, and it helps make sense as well of the vital concerns of the Maroon migrants who were hauling those canoes through the rapids of the early 20th-century Oyapok.

In 1966, the nonagenarian sister of Paramount Chief Agbago, who was our immediate neighbor in the Saramaka village of Dangogo, announced matter-of-factly to us that it was a *Awenti-gádu* (Asea god²⁸) who had brought us to Saramaka. Two years later, a four-year-old who often stayed with us while his mother worked in her rice field was attacked by a flock of hornets on his head and, within a minute or two, died of cardio-respiratory shock in Sally's arms; during the subsequent days, we were treated by a powerful Saramaka *gaán-óbia* (A great spiritual power²⁹) called Dunguláli, in order to ritually Aseparate³⁰ us from the dead child we had been so close to and to prevent him from taking us with him to the land of the dead. And that same year, after several misfortunes had struck the region (drought, an attempted political assassination) I B like the other men of the village B was told to bring my axe to a shrine across the river for a special ceremony conducted by the oracle-deity known as Mama-gádu.

Although we had no way of knowing it at the time, these three events B which took place in central Suriname in the 1960s B created strong personal links between us and the Saramakas on the early- 20th-century Oyapok, who discovered there the *wenti-gádu* who Abrought us³¹ to Saramaka, who discovered there the *gaán-óbia* known as Dunguláli, and who developed there the cult of Mama-gádu.²⁸

*Wenti-gádu*s. I have seen and spoken with *wenti-gádu*s a number of times during the past thirty-five years, when I happened to be present at the time they possessed a person, and I have bathed with some of them in the sea near Cayenne and in the Oyapok itself as recently as this year. These particular *wentis* varied from boys who spoke Sranan-tongo, the language of coastal Suriname, with a strong East Indian accent, to voluptuous women who spoke and sang seductively in Saramaccan and enticed men into the deeps of the rivers. Despite considerable personal differences from one individual *wenti* to the next B on the same order as differences among humans B *wentis* (like humans) do have certain things in common. Pretty much everything that Saramakas know about *wentis* has been learned from people in possession, through whom the gods recount aspects of their normally invisible lives.

Wentis are much like humans, except that they live underwater. Their home territory is the sea, where they have numerous towns and cities (including Gánlolo, Olóni, Akínawebí, Laibení, and Luuza) but they also travel up rivers and often live for a time at the base of rapids. Sometimes they come ashore and mingle with people, which they very much enjoy, unnoticed. Most important, *wentis* bring humans good things B in particular, money, whitefolks' goods, and babies.

The first *wentis* were discovered by Saramakas working on the coast of Suriname in the late 19th century B gods such as Wanzanzái, who possessed Kodji (who later became the first Saramaka captain on the Oyapok); Basi Senkeneí, also known as Tata Yembuámba, from the undersea city of Olóni, who possessed Pobôsi of Ligolio and was the first *wenti* to show himself in Saramaka territory; Tulí, who possessed Djamelêti of Godo and ritually

prepared hundreds of early 20th-century Saramaka men to go to the coast to earn money. I know men who saw Tuli in their youth and describe him diving into the river and coming up hours later wearing a beautiful necklace and holding a perfectly dry flower in his hand, asking a bystander to take two bottles to the river and to fill them up, and when they tasted them back in the village one was filled with rum and the other sugar syrup, and much more....

When Saramakas first came to the Oyapok, they realized they had truly arrived in the heart of *wenti* country. Kodji's god Wananzái would dive into the river in the morning and come back in the evening with remarkable tales of the underwater world, and he brought back other *wentis* who, in turn, possessed other residents: Kositan got Zaime; Kodjobii got Naosí; Agbago got Todjê, and one *wenti* named Asantéa even came and possessed Antuani, a Creole woman who was married to a Saramaka. The folks at Tampaki learned from Wananzái and the other *wentis* he brought back, for example, that at Gaama Lajan (which might be translated as 'The Mother of All Money') a rock formation several kilometers below Tampaki on the French side of the river under the water was what might best be described as the Central Bank of the World. There, *wenti* maidens not at all unlike Wagner's Rhine Maidens (Woglinde, Wellgunde, and Flosshilde) stood watch over barrels and barrels of golden money, which they sometimes rolled out into the sun to dry, singing beautiful songs all the while. They learned that *wenti* villages are almost like a school, there are so many children running around and that if asked appropriately, *wentis* delighted in placing a baby into an often infertile human woman's womb. And they also learned that *wentis* abhor death and blood, nor do they like rum or other strong drink, nor do they like sun or heat, nor do they mix with evil. Rather, they love white, bright, shiny, clean things, sugary, bubbly things, and all things cool from the sea.²⁹

At about the same time Kodji was discovering a host of new *wentis* on the Oyapok, two girls from one of the northernmost Saramaka villages drowned when their canoe sank in a rapids. Some time later (some people say 17 days, others three months, others a year) one of them appeared on a river rock at Mamadan, the great rapids that marked the effective border between Areal Saramaka and the outside world.³⁰ When she had been ritually cured and could once again speak, she told of having been taken to a beautiful underwater *wenti* palace, where she was waited on by a bevy of young girls. She eventually returned, she said, because she missed salt (which *wentis* do not eat) and begged them to bring her up to the surface. Older men have told me how, throughout the first half of the 20th century when on their way to the Oyapok to work, they would stop at the *wenti* shrine at Mamadan and pour an offering of white kaolin-water, and then, on their way back with their canoes laden with whitefolks' goods, they would pour an offering of sugar syrup.³¹

Todjê, the *wenti* who possessed Agbago Aboikoni, the late Paramount Chief, was often credited by Saramakas for instigating the program of gradual rapprochement with the political and economic world outside of tribal territory that took place during the second half of the 20th century. And Todjê provides one of the links between the early 20th-century Oyapok and Sally and me, for it was this god who is said to have brought us into the world of the Saramakas.

This part of the story begins around 1905, when Asimadjo one of the first Saramakas to go to French Guiana (see the Mana-opening story, above) brought his sister's sons Gasiton, Kositan, Gidé, and Agbago from Mana, where they'd been working for several years, to the recently-founded village of Tampaki. Though I do not have details, I know that Agbago married a Brazilian woman named Laguai there, that he had a daughter (Adonice Dompi) with her, and that he lived with her together for a time in Tampaki.³³ He also apparently via relations he had developed with a Brazilian coffee planter across the river

traveled to Belém, where he then shipped out for three years on a freighter that plied the Caribbean, visiting among other places Martinique, Guadeloupe, St. Lucia, and Trinidad. Then in his eighties, the Paramount Chief used to tell me how he and his fellow sailors, on shore leave once in Fort-de-France, were arrested and spent a brief time in jail in the wake of a political assassination B an incident I can date to 1908, when mayor Antoine Siger was shot on election day. The chief also enjoyed telling and retelling me about the size of that ship, and imitating the sounds of its powerful, chugging engines. (Steamships, which Saramakas experienced close-up for the first time during this period, exercised a powerful pull on their imagination and play an important role in *wenti* lore. In St.-Georges, I recently spoke with Creole women in their sixties, the daughters of Saramaka men, who remember as children standing with the nighttime crowd at Tampaki watching great *wenti* ships, ablaze with lights, steam up the far bank of the Oyapok and dock at the mouth of a creek there.³⁴)

Agbago was one of the young Saramakas who was possessed by a *wenti*, brought by Kodji's Wananzái, in the early days of Tampaki. Thereafter this god, Todjê, shaped his life in many ways, bringing him into especially close relations with whitefolks, assuring his success in a broad range of economic and political endeavors, and even bringing him two children with a wife who Acould no longer have children.@ Though it is not possible to more than mention them here, Todjê's full sisters and brothers also possessed Saramakas and played (and continue to play, even today) an important role both in Tampaki and back in Saramaka territory C Basi Senkeneí (mentioned above, who led his Amaster@ Pobôsi to become official guide for the ill-fated early-20th-century Eilerts de Haan expedition into the Suriname interior), and three beautiful *wenti* women, Korantina, Amentina, and Yowentina (who is currently married to a god who recently told me, through the mouth of an old blind man in Cayenne, that he is A1900 years old@ and who, with this same husband had a *wenti* son called Basi Kumenai who is in the head of one of the wives of the Saramaka captain of Cayenne and with whom Sally and I swam at dawn recently on a deserted beach on the edge of the city C the very large, middle-aged woman, once possessed, frolicked in the surf like a young mermaid.) The parents of this sibling set, Dibiónsu of Olóni (Aa name to be very careful with B she *is* the sea@) and her husband Adjéunsu, are also active today: Sally and I recently visited an elaborate shrine to the latter along the Cayenne-St. Laurent-du-Maroni highway, maintained by a great-grandson of Kodji, whose name is forever associated with the *wentis* of the Oyapok. I could recount the personalities and deeds of many other such *wenti* families, their intermarriages with other kinds of gods, and the complex roles they play in people's lives today. For present purposes, however, the bottom line is that *wentis* B who are forever associated with the early-20th-century Oyapok B bring Saramakas happiness, in the form of money, whitefolks' goods (and relations with whitefolks in general), and children.

[INSERT ABOUT HERE: The *wenti* house in the center of Tampaki, 1982. (Photo: Baj Strobel)]

Dunguláli-óbia. For Saramakas, the extraordinary powers known as *gaán-óbias* B the magical forces to which they credit their 18th-century military victories over whitefolks and their ability to survive in a hostile environment B remain each clan's most valuable possessions and most are believed to have been brought by specific ancestors from Africa. Yet, in a recent discussion of his people's A great *obias*,@ the captain of the Saramakas in Cayenne told me, in a parable, that AThere were once three brothers: Bofaángu, the oldest [the *gaán-óbia* owned by the Abaisa clan and said to have been brought from Africa³⁵], Mandánfo, the middle one [owned by the Awana clan and said to have been brought from

Africa³⁶], and Dunguláli, the youngest. Like so many *wentis*, who are such an important part of present-day Saramaka life, Dunguláli is an important *gaán-óbia* and was in fact discovered for the first time on the Oyapok, only at the very beginning of the twentieth century. Kodji once again plays a central role in the story.

Kodji had several gods in his head besides his famous *wenti* Wananzái, including a ghost-spirit known as a *nêngè-kôndè-nêngè* (roughly, an African person), a class of ghost-spirits conceptualized as ritually-powerful African men who can possess Saramakas and teach them *óbias* and other ritual lore. Kodji's ghost-spirit was Akoomi, who worked closely with a *komantí* forest-spirit called Afeemaónsu. In an oft-repeated story, a man paddling down the Oyapok would see a small, white-haired old man with a short paddle standing on the bank calling out "Take me across, please! My canoe got loose and drifted downstream! And after the paddler did as asked and continued to Tampaki, he would see Akoomi at the landingplace, speaking through Kodji, accosting him and joking with him, "Man, that place you left me on the other side of the river is that was a no place to leave me, I almost got killed there!" So the miracle of Akoomi's omnipotence would again be confirmed.

It was Akoomi (perhaps in the guise of Afeemaónsu, who often spoke through him, becoming almost synonymous with him) who taught the secrets of Dunguláli to Kodji, but Akoomi himself learned them from his father-in-law in the land of the dead. Here, very much in brief, is how it happened. In the land of the dead a powerful man named Pupú, the owner of Dunguláli-*óbia*, had a beautiful daughter called Djesu-akóbita. One day she crossed paths with Akoomi, who was on one of his frequent visits from the Oyapok to the land of the dead. *nêngè-kôndè-nêngè*s are so ritually powerful that they move effortlessly between the worlds of the living and the dead and she decided to sleep with him, the dead with the living (as Saramakas say). But other dead people intervened and bound him up with ropes preparatory to killing him, so she ran off to tell her father. Pupú prepared himself ritually, throwing his sack of leaves and roots over his shoulder, grabbing his calabash rattle, putting his pipe in his mouth and lighting the tobacco, and setting out on the path, very displeased. Eventually, his sack barked to warn him he was arriving and he chased off the aggressors, found his son-in-law and untied him with Dunguláli-*óbia*, taught him the ins and outs of its rituals, and then sent both Djesu-akóbita and Akoomi off to the land of the living, where they lived in a place a day's journey upstream from St.-Georges called Dadiaféi, where Saramakas still proffer offerings whenever they pass on the river.³⁷

Over a period of years, during the treatment of many cases of illness and misfortune, Kodji learned the leaves, roots, and vines, the taboos, the songs, the drums, the sacrifices, and the other esoterica of the Dunguláli cult, which has always specialized in separating the living from the dead and helping free living people from the machinations of the dead. In fact, the young Agbago (the future Paramount Chief) was cured by Kodji's Dunguláli at Tampaki after he had accidentally killed his own brother in a tree-felling accident on the Approuague, and eventually he and another brother, Gasiton, learned the *óbia* and, around 1920, brought it back to Dangogo in central Suriname, where Gasiton established the shrine and cult that, in 1968, ritually separated Sally and me from the ghost of the boy who had died in our arms.³⁸

In 2000, back home in Martinique, an important businessman who knew I had connections with Saramakas discreetly asked whether I might recommend a ritual specialist whom he could fly up to Acure his construction-supplies business.³⁹ (He explained that his cashflow was suffering and that he was convinced that something very terrible had been done on the very spot of his business which sat in the midst of canefields during slavery-times, and he wanted the stain removed.) A Saramaka Dunguláli master visited for several days and, together, we smoked the entire premises (xerox machines and all) with a mixture of

fragrant Dungulali leaves brought from the South American forest, all the while chanting in call-and-response its sacred words, ADungulali-ée!@ APasi-paati!@, ADungulali-ée!@ APasi-paati!@, ADungulali-é!@ AAwíi kandikandi!@, ADungulali-é!@ AAwíi-kandikandi!@ There were also midnight baths in Dunguláli leaves with various things, including a live toad, buried in a hole behind the parking lot, bottles of Dunguláli mixtures to be drunk over time, and even pre-dawn ritual baths in the sea B for Dunguláli and *wentis* like each other, both being devoted solely to doing good, and sharing a common history on the Oyapok.

Mama-Gádu. Saramakas, like other Maroons, have a special class of gods called *sóoi-gádu* B oracle-deities who can be consulted in the form of a sacred bundle affixed to a plank carried on the heads of two men, fore and aft.⁴⁰ (The god moves its bearers to answer Ayes@ or Ano@ to questions posed to it by its priests.) The most important such god for Saramakas resides in the village of Bendiwata on the Gaánlío and is the possession of the Langu clan who, it is said, brought it from Africa. It was thanks to this god, for example, that the ancestors of the Saramakas were able to settle on the Suriname River which, until the god's intervention, had been unsuitable for drinking.⁴¹ It turns out that Kodji, the man of many gods who became the first Saramaka captain on the Oyapok, was, before his departure for the coast in the late nineteenth century, a priest of the Bendiwata god. While he lived in the vicinity of Haarlem on the lower Saramacca River, where he first found his *wenti*, Wananzái, he established in the nearby village of Santigoon a shrine to Mama-gádu, a new oracle-deity that might best be seen as a A-lite@ version of the Bendiwata god B that is, it was used to help sick people get well and to solve other local problems, but, unlike the Bendiwata god, did not help fight wars or regulate affairs of state. When Kodji moved to the Oyapok and helped found Tampaki, he brought Mama-gádu with him (leaving her Santigoon shrine in the hands of relatives).

In Tampaki, the cult of Mama-gádu truly flourished and she became the central arbiter of village affairs. In front of her house, in a sacred grove in the forest behind the village (which she still shares with Dunguláli-*obia* today), men would gather several times a week to consult her about everything from what day to begin a canoe voyage upriver to how to deal with a Creole wife's difficult pregnancy. During the early years of Tampaki, her rites, specializations, and rituals developed apace. And one of the ritual specialties she developed was the periodic A-cleansing@ of men's axes, called for whenever she determined that things in the world were going awry B too much rain or not enough, epidemics of illness, or other general misfortunes. All men in the village would bring their axes, lay them out in a prescribed manner in front of the god's shrine, be A-bathed@ by the god in ritual leaves, and then pick their axes up the next morning, after the god had fixed them up during the night. In Tampaki on the early-20th-century Oyapok, the religious triumvirate of *wenti-gádu*s, Dunguláli-*obia*, and Mama-gádu reigned supreme, regulating the lives of Saramaka canoemen and their families.

I have heard several versions of how Mama-gádu traveled from the Oyapok to Dangogo but the most credible suggests that, around 1918, in an accident on the upper river, Kodji sank the large canoe owned by Kositan and that, as compensation, he A-gave@ (that is, he taught and gave authorization to take home and use) a A-piece@ of Mama-gádu to Kositan, who brought it back to his home village of Dangogo around 1920 and there established the shrine where my own axe was ritually cleansed in 1968 by the priest, Tioyé, who was Kositan's sister's son. For the past eighty years, Mama-gádu has been the central oracle-deity for the half of Dangogo that lies on the east bank of the Pikilio, and Sally and I often participated in oracle-sessions in her realm. Her house lies only a few score meters from the shrine of Dunguláli-*obia*, brought back from the Oyapok by Kositan's brother, Gasiton.

[INSERT ABOUT HERE: Mama-gádu, borne on the heads of two men, presiding over the ceremony at which a one-week-old baby, whom the god helped bring into this world, is carried outdoors for the first time. (Dangogo, 1968. Photo Sally Price.)

Conclusions

Many years ago, in my doctoral dissertation, I argued that Saramaka religion had undergone fundamental changes since the days of rebellion and war. I suggested that

a high level of physical violence, the prevalence of direct revenge as a means of social redress, was an important feature of Saramaka society even a century ago. Male values stressed power and force; an ideology born in the wars was still central for men at the turn of the century. But with the changing relationship to the outside world came a much less fierce definition of Amanliness@ and an important shift in the whole tone of religion. The focus of religion shifted from power, as seen, for example, in *gaán-óbias* (the magical forces to which Saramakas credited their military victories and ability to survive in a hostile environment), to morality, represented by, among others, the *sóoi-gádus* (oracle-deities used widely in divination). Much of the communal divination which I have described as being so important in Saramaka society focuses particularly on these *sóoi-gádus*, and the stress of these deities on A good living@ (in contrast to the stress of [traditional] *gaán-óbias* on adherence to taboos) represents a genuine change in emphasis in Saramaka religion.⁴²

Later, after I had learned much more about Saramaka history, I further developed the idea of such shifts in *Alabi's World*, citing examples from around the turn of the nineteenth century B how the great war god Wámba was replaced by three gods of peace associated with agricultural abundance, and how the most important of these (Tjímba) was, in turn, replaced by a god (Sáa) that promised whitefolks' riches. I summarized: A While Wámba's gift was to defeat whites in battle, and Tjímba's to bring miraculous harvests, Sáa was the harbinger of cargo from the coast. With her help, [early 19th-century] men could be assured of returning from their increasingly frequent trading trips with canoes laden with whitefolks' goods.@⁴³ I now believe that this generational shift, which took place just as Saramaka society was beginning to open up to non-bellicose relations with the coast, served as direct prototype for Saramakas' discovery, many decades later at the end of the nineteenth century, of the sea-gods known as *wentis*, the new *gaán-óbia* known as *Dunguláli*, and the *sóoi-gádu* called *Mama-gádu*.

Late 19th-century Saramaka men trying to adjust to the new realities they encountered on the Oyapok frontier needed ways of casting aside older, ill-adapted ideologies and creating newer, better-adapted ones. The fierceness associated with the days of war had become less relevant amidst the long-since-free Creoles of French Guiana or the recently-freed Brazilians with whom they now lived. Maintaining relations with the gods of war or the *gaán-óbias* who helped them defeat colonial troops now mattered less (and was less easily accomplished because of these powers' strict taboos against sleeping with women and consorting with non-Saramakas) than developing strategies for living intimately among non-Saramakas and finding ways of earning money and acquiring whitefolks' goods to bring back home to Saramaka after a several-years' stay.

Whatever the general faults of a common-sensical, Malinowskian structural-

functional explanation of magicoreligious realities, it would seem reasonable to suppose that *wenti-gádu*, *Dunguláli-óbia*, and *Mama-gádu* Amade sense@ as a focus of Saramaka religion in this new socioeconomic context on the Oyapok. Gentleness rather than fierceness, morality rather than taboos, powers that bring money and merchandise and children B powers that make sick people well and exorcize evil in the form of the dead B rather than making warriors invulnerable to bullets all fit the optimistic moment that the opening up of the Oyapok represented to Saramakas.

The two parts of this essay B the brief narrative history of Saramaka settlement on the Oyapok and the very partial and fragmentary ethnographic history of the supernatural powers they discovered there B form a package. The stretching out of Saramaka society in the direction of post-emancipation Brazil, where the two briefly touched but B at least from a Saramaka perspective B hardly mingled needs both kinds of history to be fully understood. Saramaka men, supremely sure of themselves culturally (in a way that French Guiana Creoles even today, a century and a half after emancipation are not), brought much baggage with them to Tampaki B beliefs, practices, specific gods and oracles.... But above all, they brought an openness to new experiences and built-in cultural processes of discovery and incorporation that had long been central to Saramaka life. So, once a *nêngè-kôndè-nêngè* encountered on the Oyapok named Akoomi B who, after all, had the Aauthority@ that derived from being a ritually strong African-from-Africa B taught Kodji the rituals he himself had learned from his father-in-law in the land of the dead, Saramakas could ever after incorporate this knowledge and its associated practices into their way of life, calling on (in this case) *Dunguláli* whenever a ghost threatens to bother a human. Or, when divination was needed for ongoing problems and questions, from minor personal afflictions to the regulation of canoe trips upriver or relations with non-Saramakas, it made sense to confide in *Mama-gádu*, an oracle-deity who was born, as it were, on the coast (rather than having been brought over, like most other *sóoi-gádu*, from Africa), a god who was attuned to current needs rather than to the exigencies of First-Time wars. Or again, when infertile women seek help in having a child or men seek that extra edge in earning money on the coast, it makes a great deal of sense to sponsor a ceremony for the *wentis*, trying to encourage them to place one of their many available children in the womb of the female supplicant or to roll out their barrels of golden money and spread some of it around to the Maroon men trying to make a go of it in the exotic world of the French Guiana-Brazilian frontier.

NOTES

1. Jacques Adélaïde-Merlande, editor, *Histoire des communes Antilles-Guyane*, [n.p.], Pressplay, 1986, vol. 6, p.15.
2. An earlier version of this story was written for publication in Portuguese, *ALiberdade, Fronteiras e Deuses: Saramakas no Oiapoque* (c. 1900), in Flávio dos Santos Gomes & Olívia Maria Gomes da Cunha (eds.), *Quase-Cidadão: histórias antropológicas da pós-emancipação no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: ****, pp. **-** (2003).
3. Serge Mam-Lam-Fouck, *Histoire de la société guyanaise. Les années cruciales: 1848-1946*, Paris: Editions Caribéennes, 1987, pp. 88-96, and Saramaka oral testimony.
4. Dossier benoeming Akrosoe, Landsarchief, Paramaribo.
5. Mam-Lam-Fouck op. cit, p. 111, Marie-José Jolivet, *La question créole: essai de sociologie sur la Guyane française*, Paris: ORSTOM, 1982, p. 121.
6. Mam-Lam-Fouck op. cit, pp. 97-98, and Saramaka oral testimony.
7. Jean Hurault, *Français et Indiens en Guyane, 1604-1972*, Paris: Union Générale d'Editions, 1972, p. 196.
8. Marie-José Jolivet, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-155.
9. In 1892, an additional contract was signed in Cayenne between A. Bally, owner of various placers and member of the colony's *commission d'immigration*, and Gaama Akoosu, paramount chief of the Saramaka, who was on a visit to French Guiana.

In the name of all my captains, village chiefs, and all my subjects, I, AKROSOE ABRAHAM, Granman of the tribe of Saramakas established in Dutch Guiana, wishing to recognize the services rendered to my tribe by M. Adolphe BALLY, citizen of France and ex-president of the conseil général, have concluded a peace treaty that includes the following clauses:

Granman Abraham agrees to furnish all canoe transport requested by M. Bally, either for himself or for his friends. He further agrees to furnish all necessary personnel for this task.

He also agrees to send M. Bally families of Saramaka both for logging and the extraction of balata and for making gardens which will furnish various crops in whatever regions of the country M. Bailly designates.

For his part, M. Bally agrees to provide every aid and assistance to the Saramaka men. He assures Granman Abraham that French laws, which protect the freedom of labor and the equality of men, will cause no interference with the free execution of the present treaty made with the good faith of both contractual parties.

A. BALLY

AKROSOE ABRAHAM

M. Bally added a personal note at the bottom of this document: AIn order to persuade the Saramaka Granman to agree to this treaty I had to give him numerous presents B among others, a very fine little cannon with powder.@ (This document is in a folder labeled simply ASaramacca @ in the Archives Départementales.)

10. Territoire de l=Inini, cabinet du gouverneur, circulaire, 20 mars 1942 (Archives Départementales, dossier A Saramacca @).

11. Letter cited in Sophie François, *Les piroguiers de l'Approuague: Mutations sociales, techniques et culturelles d'un patrimoine fluvial peu étudié*. Rapport à la Mission du Patrimoine Ethnologique, 2001, pp. 144-146.

12. Sophie François, *Les piroguiers de l'Approuague*, p. 148.

13. Ben Scholtens, *Bosnegers en overheid in Suriname: De ontwikkeling van de politieke verhouding 1651-1992*, Paramaribo: Afdeling Cultuurstudies/Minov, 1994, p. 194.

14. Sophie François, *Les piroguiers de l'Approuague*, p. 153.

15. Sophie François, *Les piroguiers de l'Approuague*, p. 147.

16. See, for example, the letter from Saramaka Captain Fracas to the governor, dated 8 February 1934, which explains that there were 250 Saramaka men in Régina at the time (Archives Départementales de Guyane).

17. I am grateful to Marie-Paule Jean-Louis for this information.

18. Jolivet, *La question créole*, p. 233.

19. Mam-Lam-Fouck 1987:75.

20. Unfortunately, the direct links between Saramakas still alive today and the Carsewene are almost broken. In 2001, I spoke with an old man who told me that his mother's mother's brother, the man who brought him up as a child, had been on the Carsewene with many other Saramakas before they came back to the Oyapok but B not knowing I was going to be writing this paper B I did not follow up and ask for details. There must be few such memory-links still extant, and I am not aware that stories about the Carsewene matter much to Saramakas today.

21. According to a document in the Archives Départementales, AAndré Coggie@ was named ACommandant des Saramacas de la Guyane Française et du Territoire de l'Inini@ in January 1942, having served as AChef des Saramacas de l'Oyapok@ since 4 August 1923.

22. Indeed, in 1987, disgusted by the Suriname civil war and the deteriorating state of the

country, Paramount Chief Forster of the Paramaka Maroons made an official request to the French Government to change the status of *his whole people* from Surinamese to French. (See the letter reproduced in Kenneth M. Bilby, *The Remaking of the Aluku: Culture, Politics, and Maroon Ethnicity in French South America*, Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1990, pp. 678-679.)

23. Jean-Claude Michelot, *La gullotine sèche: Histoire du bagne de Cayenne*, Paris: Fayard, 1981, pp. 192-193.

24. For stories of encounters between Saramakas and escaped prisoners, see Michelot op. cit., pp. 153-159, 193; Michel Pierre, *La terre de la grande punition: Histoire des bagnes de Guyane*, Paris: Ramsay, 1982, pp. 223, 235; Richard Price, *The Convict and the Colonel*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1998, p. 107.

25. The mayor's mother, married to a Creole, speaks Saramaccan. Her father was a Saramaka immigrant, her mother (who also speaks Saramaccan) is herself the daughter of a Saramaka immigrant. This pattern of Saramaka men marrying the daughters of a Saramaka man and a Creole (often half-Saramaka) woman was common throughout the twentieth century in St.-Georges and Tampaki.

26. R. Price, "Maroons in Suriname and Guyane: How Many and Where." @ *New West Indian Guide* 76: 81-88, 2002.

27. See R. & S. Price, *Etre Marron en Guyane*, Châteauneuf-le-Rouge: Vents d'ailleurs, 2002.

28. In the standard accounts of Maroon religion there is scarcely a mention of *wenti-gádu* (or, simply, *wenti*), a category of sea-gods that in any case do not play a significant role in the religion of Maroons other than Saramakas. Similarly, in the published literature on Maroon religion, there is not, to my knowledge, a single mention of *Dunguláli-óbia* or *Mama-gádu*.

29. An old man told me recently, with the greatest tone of wonder, of having worked for a time near the mouth of the Saramacca River near where Wananzái had first appeared to Kodji. One day, seeking palmnuts in the forest, he happened to wander into the god's realm and found himself in a veritable Garden of Eden: forest pools overflowing with fish, a stream running through where you could sit down in the rapids on flat, white stones that were like tables, beautiful varieties of pineapples and other fruits that no one had ever seen elsewhere, and other miraculous proofs of the powers of *wentis*.

30. Below Mamadan the Saramaka villages were largely Christian, not considered fully Saramaka by the men of the Upper River. We saw Mamadan for the last time in 1966, just before the waters of the artificial lake, built as part of Alcoa's hydroelectric project to make cheap aluminum, covered it over as well as 43 Saramaka villages where some 6,000 people lived forever.

31. For a photo of this shrine, see R. Price, *Alabi's World*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, p. 387.

32. See R Price *First-Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983 (2nd edition, University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 14-21, 29, et passim.

33. See also Ben Scholtens, Gloria Wekker, Laddy van Putten et Stanley Dieko, *Gaama Duumi, Buta Gaama: Overlijden en opvolging van Aboikoni, grootopperhoofd van de Saramaka Bosnegers*, Paramaribo: Afdeling Cultuurstudies/Minov, 1992, p. 41.

34. Just below the mouth of this creek, across the river and a bit upstream from Tampaki, was the large *wenti* village called Tosuósu. According to men I've spoken with, whenever Saramakas riding downstream in a canoe make an offering of beer in the river near that shore, a hand reaches up to accept the bottle B which they say they have seen many times. I myself saw such an offering being made but I missed seeing the hand.

35. This would seem to be the power for which Ma Kaala served as priestess at the end of the seventeenth century B see R. Price 1983 op. cit., pp. 70-72.

36. On Madánfo, see R. Price 1983 op. cit., p. 112, and R. Price 1990 op. cit., pp. 229-272, which describe the trajectory of this *gaán-óbia* from Africa, through its role during the eighteenth-century wars to its central place in the dramatic battle between Christianity and Saramaka religion in the 1780s.

37. In the old days, I am told, canoemen heading upstream with a load of merchandise would always leave a protective iron or copper biceps-ring on one of the stones in the great savannah there and then, on their way down weeks later, recuperate it all fixed-up ritually by the gods and spirits who had the place.

38. The priest who presided over our rites was Aseni, Gasiton's brother's son. The Amother@ shrine of Dunguláli remains at Tampaki. The most important subsidiary is at Haarlem, on the Saramacca River, where Kodji's son brought it before he died, and it was to this latter shrine that Paramount Chief Agbago repaired briefly in 1989, just before leaving the hospital and Paramaribo to go back to his village in the interior to die in 1989, at the age of 102. Besides the lesser shrine in Dangogo, there has for some years been an important Dungulali shrine in Cayenne, where the priest, whose is Kodji's sister's daughter's daughter's son, learned the rites from his cousin, the Dunguláli priest in Haarlem.

39. For obvious reasons, I disguise the nature of the man's business here.

40. For a book largely devoted to the history of the most famous of Ndyuka Maroon *sóoi-gádu*, Gaan Tata, see H.U.E. Thoden van Velzen and W. van Wetering, *The Great Father and the Danger: Religious Cults, Material Forces and Collective Fantasies in the World of the Surinamese Maroons*, 1988, Dordrecht: Foris. On its cover, that book has a photo of this god being carried on the heads of two men.

41. R. Price 1983 op. cit., pp. 98-99.

42. R. Price, *Saramaka Social Structure*, San Juan P.R.: Institute of Caribbean Studies of the University of Puerto Rico, 1975, p. 43.

43. See R. Price 1990 op. cit, pp. 248-251, 423. The quote is from p. 251.