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1992

Prepared for the International Seminar on Race & Race Relations, Rio de Janeiro, April 1992

Two Variants in Caribbean Race Relations

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> Lewis condemns the Caribbean as an intrinsically racist region, yet concludes that if racial democracy is to be created anywhere it will be there." (Anthony P. Maingot [1991:19], commenting on the late Gordon K. Lewis's masterwork, *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought*)

In 1967, after a twelve-year sojourn in Curaçao and Puerto Rico, the Dutch scholar Harry Hoetink wrote a major treatise entitled *The Two Variants in Caribbean Race Relations*, concluding that the whole region might be understood in terms of two basic models -- one of Iberian origin (a somewhat gentler, more supple, less exclusionary version), the other coming from North-West Europe. The present paper, though playing on Hoetink's title, is decidedly more modest and intends to discuss two particular cases (not models) that I have experienced long-term and at first hand -- that of Martinique, an overseas *département* of France, and that of the Saramaka Maroons of Suriname, at the southern fringe of the Caribbean -- both "racist" yet both holding out at least faint hope that racial democracy may, as Lewis suggested, be created one day in the region. And although my cases are idiosyncratic, and both happen to fall within Hoetink's North-West European colonial domain, from an *inside* perspective they provide a number of contrasts that may shed light on the politics of race in the Caribbean more generally.

First, a brief detour, to evoke two recent vignettes of Dutch and French racism, both of which are based on a firm notion of clear difference and of distinctions between the colonial masters

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(who are white) and the former slaves (who are not) -- here, there's no white-black continuum (as in Hoetink's Iberian variant) but rather a set of strong and separate categories.

(1) When the captain of the Dutch national soccer team, Ruud Gullit (who is an Afro-Surinamer) takes the field, his appreciative Dutch fans make "monkey noises"; and when Stanley Menzo (who shares Gullit's origins) takes up position as goalkeeper of the prestigious Ajax team, his fans throw bananas and oranges onto the turf. In neither case, the Dutch fans say, is insult intended; rather, they mean to be cheering on their favorite stars.[1]

(2) Until recently, at the public hospital of multiethnic Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni, the heart of the former penal colony in Guyane Française, it was policy for outpatients to be received in the following order, regardless of time of arrival in the waiting room: metropolitan whites, local whites, Creoles (the local middle class), Chinese, Amerindians, and finally Maroons ("Bush Negroes"). When the head nurse (the locally-born Chinese-Creole wife of the present director of the hospital) instituted a first-come first-served policy, it created quite a scandal.[2]

Now let us travel, first to the former French colony of Martinique and then to the former Dutch colony of Suriname, for a more extended look. I will argue that Martinique is an extreme (perhaps *the* extreme) case of the "success" of colonialism, that what Edouard Glissant has called "the steamroller of French colonialism" has so severely bent identity and consciousness, including ideas about "race," that it is difficult to view the future with optimism. In contrast, the world of the Saramaka Maroons of Suriname, whose ideology and history are rooted in resistance to colonialism, may be taken to represent another extreme, but one now under considerable threat from state violence and the introduction of drugs. While Martinique constitutes an almost classic case of vertical, hierarchized racism, Suriname (as seen from a Saramaka perspective) leans more toward a pluralized, horizontal formula. To state the contrast somewhat baldly: if Martiniquans have, on the whole, swallowed the stone of colonialism, Saramakas have, almost without exception, spit it out (or, spit it back).

MARTINIQUE[3]

My very first memory of Martinique, in June 1962: I had just arrived and was having a drink in a café in Fort-de-France, where I was joined by two schoolteachers. Before long, the conversation turned to what one of them really wanted from me -- to know "*exactly* what was the color of the skin of Nat King Cole," a question which my vague answers (resulting from a white insouciance to degrees of blackness, born of North American racism) did little to satisfy. Soon the conversation turned to Ray Charles. "Is he darker or lighter than I am?" the man repeated insistently. (Fanon, as usual, was all too familiar with the phenomenon, though he gives it a generalized psychological twist: In *Black Skins, White Masks*, he argues that "the first truth" is that "the [Antillian] Negro is comparison.... The question is always whether he is less intelligent than I, blacker than I, less respectable than I.... It is the wreckage of what surrounds me that provides the foundation for my virility" [1967:211].)

During the second week of January 1992, just after the death of Martiniquan writer and radio personality Vincent Placoly, local radio rebroadcast one of his cultural shows in which he interviewed an elderly schoolteacher. She described an incident out of her past in which she had asked her most talented drawing student to sketch a man cutting cane: he drew an aquiline face and straight hair. When she asked if he'd ever seen a canecutter who looked like that he said no but that he "didn't know how to draw a *nègre*," which the teacher now explained made sense back then, when the only available drawings of blacks were cannibalesque thick-lipped caricatures in French comic books. But more interesting was the teacher's account of asking students in an elementary school class to draw pictures of their mother. All came out pink, rosy-cheeked, blue-eyed and blond-haired. When she asked if any of their mothers looked like that they all insisted that they did. And indeed, all the "mothers" they'd ever seen, in picture books, did look like that. Placoly, the 40-year-old interviewer, could hardly believe it had ever been like that in Martinique. But the elderly teacher asserted, with simple dignity, that this incident emblemizes the degree of "alienation" -- her word -- in Martinique during the 1950s.[4] Which brings us, once

again, to one of Fanon's central themes in *Black Skins, White Masks* (e.g., "It is in fact customary in Martinique to dream of a form of salvation that consists of magically turning white [1967:44]).

Another of Fanon's representations of Martiniquan received wisdom is that "the race must be whitened; every woman in Martinique knows this, says it, repeats it ... it is always essential to avoid falling back into the pit of niggerhood, and every woman in the Antilles, whether in a casual flirtation or in a serious affair, is determined to select the least black of the men" (1967:47). As if to demonstrate this principle, a (very typical) rural family I've known well for thirty years devoted its collective energies during much of the 1960s to assiduously preparing its ten daughters and sons for marriage and emigration in accordance with their shade of skin, the nature of their facial features, and the texture of their hair. (This was never openly discussed; it was simply the "natural" thing to do.) Born of a near-white father and a very "negroid" mother, the darkest daughter married a black fisherman and stayed home, while the lightest married a physician and moved to Fort-de-France; those in-between found in-between social placements (e.g., working as postal clerks or nurses' aides in the metropole). The emigration of sons to France worked similarly, with the lighter going off and the darker staying at home. It would be impossible to exaggerate the everydayness and normality of this racial calculus on the island, even with the post-1960s influence of Black is Beautiful ideas (and cosmetics) from the U.S. Today, skin bleaching and hair straightening remain major preoccupations for all but a small minority of "modern" women. And particularly dark-skinned people are frequently referred to by a host of derogatory labels -- from "macaque" (monkey) to "congo."

The calculus of color began early in the French Caribbean. By the late eighteenth century it was both fully theorized and an essential part of everyday existence. First, there was a strict color line dividing whites (those without a trace of "negro blood") from all others. As a late eighteenth-century French colonial document put it, "A person of mixed blood, even at a remove of seven or eight generations [from the "contamination"], and even if he has come to the point where his color has exactly the same appearance as that of a European, will in no way be less of a

mixed-blood and cannot claim equality or similarity with a European white" (*Mémoire de la milice*, cited in Bonniol 1990:413). Second, a fearsome mathematics developed to theorize the classification, and social status, of everyone who was on the non-white side of this rigid color line. The best known colonial French example comes from Saint-Domingue, where Moreau de Saint-Méry considered that it was reasonable to assume genealogical knowledge going back seven generations, that is to 128 individual ancestors, so that each person could be thought of as consisting of 128 "parts," yielding the following classification (which I reproduce from Bonniol 1990:414):

Categories	**Parts white**	**Parts black**
[*nègre*]	0	128
sacatra	8-16	112-120
griffe	24-32	96-104
marabou	40-48	80-88
mulâtre	56-70	58-72
quarteron	71-96	32-57
métis	104-112	16-24
mamelouc	116-120	8-12
quarteronné	122-124	4-6
sang-melé	125-127	1-3
[*blanc*]	128	0

As Bonniol has pointed out, the mathematics of such a system become rather complex, since each of the theorized "ranges" of proportions include different "combinations." "Thus, the simplest combination, that of a 'white' and a 'black,' yields a 'balanced' *mulâtre*, with 64 parts for each kind of ancestor, but there are 11 other combinations that yield a [classificatory] *mulâtre*, so that

one finds the following contemporary constructions: 'a certain *mulâtre* who is closer to white than is some other by 14 parts'" (Ibid.).

And for every "genealogical" category, there is an idealized phenotype and set of behaviors. As demonstration, I draw here on Moreau de Saint-Méry's more poetic contemporary John Gabriel Stedman, who wrote of the very similar system in Suriname:

> In short, one sees at Paramaribo not only white and black, but meets
>
> the Samboe dark, and the Mulatto brown,
>
> the Mesti fair -- the well-limbed Quaderoon. (1992[1790]:133)

Stedman then describes, as an example of the fine social distinctions made for each such category within the overall hierarchy of types, the special place of Quadroon [slave] women:

> And to give the reader a still more lively idea of these people, I will describe the figures and dress of a Quadroon girl, as they usually appear in this colony. They are mostly tall, straight, and gracefully formed, though generally rather more slender than the Mulattoes, and they never go naked above the waist as do the former. Their dress consists, besides often a satin petticoat covered with flowered gauze, of a close short jacket, made of best Holland chintz or silk, and laced before, showing about a hand-breadth of a fine muslin shift between the jacket and the petticoat. As for stockings, or shoes, none are worn by any slaves in the colony, but on their head (which is mostly adorned with a beautiful bunch of black hair in short natural ringlets) they wear a black or white beaver-hat, sometimes with a feather, or a gold loop and button, while their neck, arms, and ankles are ornamented with chains, bracelets, gold-medals, beads, &c.
>
> All these fine women have Europeans for their husbands, to the no small mortification of the Creoles and fair sex, while should it ever be known that a female European had kept a carnal intercourse with a slave of whatever denomination, the first is detested, and the last loses his life without mercy. (Ibid.)

Given that very real privileges came to be associated with certain phenotypes and genuine miseries with certain others (that is, each "racial" category came to be associated with a distinct micro-economic niche), it is hardly surprising that many slaves collaborated in reinforcing the system. And the master class could not have been more pleased, "these [race] prejudices being even more useful since they are in the hearts of the slaves themselves, which contributes to the peacefulness of the colony" (*Dépêche ministérielle* du 27 mai 1771, Saint-Domingue, cited in Bonniol 1990:416).

Though a good deal of space would be necessary to furnish proof, it seems reasonable to assume that today's insistent categorization of individuals on the non-white side of the color line in Martinique (according to skin color, hair texture, and facial features) is the direct legacy of this colonial calculus. Today, a fluid biological continuum continues to be cut up into hard-edged categories that have strong meaning not only symbolically but in terms of the smallest aspects of daily life on the island.

Although it is clear that how one envisions the system is in part a function of ones "place" in it, the nature of the system creates profound insecurity for all. On this Fanon and Glissant write as if in chorus. Fanon: "the Antillians have no inherent values of their own, they are always contingent on the presence of The Other" (1967:211); Glissant: "Some of us in Martinique wonder whether there may not be any community on the face of the earth as alienated as ours.... The thrust toward mimetism is perhaps the greatest violence that can be imposed on a people; especially when it includes the consent (and even the joy) of the mimic-men" (1981:63-64). And Césaire, though writing in a more heroic mode, concurs:

> "A mon tour de poser une équation: *colonisation = chosification*.
>
> J'entends la tempête. On me parle de progrès, de 'réalisations', de maladies guéries, de niveaux de vie élevés au-dessus d'eux-mêmes.
>
> Moi, je parle de sociétés vidées d'elles-mêmes, des cultures piétinées, d'institutions minées, de terres confisquées, de religions assassinées, de

magnificences artistiques anéanties, d'extraordinaires *possibilités* supprimées." (1955:19-20)

An anthropological take on all this is provided by Jean Benoist, who writes that "une véritable propagande, pas toujours systématique mais remarquablement cohérente, s'est exercée depuis les débuts de l'esclavage pour convaincre les esclaves puis leurs descendants de leur infériorité.... [et] on a abouti à l'intériorisation de ces valeurs, aussi bien chez les plus défavorisés que dans l'aristocratie blanche" (Benoist 1972:28-29).

This constant French psychological pressure on Martiniquans has not waned with the passage of time. Consider the following *témoignage* reported in the *International Herald Tribune* (Jan 9, 1987, p. 7):

> French [jazz] fans ... are often confused hearing Michel Sardaby [often described as a "world-class jazz improviser"] play piano. His fire, confidence and experience, combined with his dark skin, can lead them to believe he's American. Frenchmen come up to him and speak English. When they discover he's actually Antillais, he says, "their tone changes. They talk to me like a child, they rub my hair and tell me how much they love the biguine and rum. I hesitate to talk about it."

Or, consider the following highly successful television advertisement that appeared in Martinique throughout 1991: A black Martiniquan man, about 30, hair somewhat disheveled and looking a bit "country," is grating *prunes de cythère* (a local fruit) with a hand grater. An attractive, casually but well-dressed young woman comes into the yard and giggles seductively at him, as if to say, "Why are you doing *that*?" Next scene, he's relaxing in a hammock, very bourgeois, semi-party atmosphere. Everyone, including him, is drinking "Caresse Antillaise"-brand *prune de cythère* juice, poured from a liter carton (available in every super market). Message: who, in this day and age, would be backward enough to *work* to make juice when you could pour it from a carton? Unlike current U.S. ads, which might stress, for example, that what's in the carton is "natural" or "healthful," the Martiniquan one stresses that it's ridiculous (laughable, embarrassing) to *work* to

produce the stuff. Only a fool (or slave) would do that. And the fear of being viewed in that role continues to pervade the society, which may well be "at once the most materially advantaged and most psychologically dependent of all Caribbean islands" (Glissant 1981:174).

If Derek Walcott is correct in characterizing Martinique as "comfortable colonial" (1987:75):

> I memorize the atmosphere in Martinique
>
> as comfortable colonial-- tobacco, awnings, Peugeots, pink gendarmes...
>
> their nauseous sense of heritage and order
>
> revolving around Josephine's or Schoelcher's statue...

it can only be with an exterior gaze, for the island -- according to almost all commentators (including those most passionately attached to it) -- must certainly be one of the least psychologically comfortable of all places for its inhabitants. And the weight of the calculus of color, everpresent in daily interactions and discourse, is one of the forces of oppression most keenly felt.

There is an analogy between the push by the currently active generation of Martiniquan intellectuals (for example, Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant 1989), who choose *créolité* (rather than, say, *négritude*) as their emblem, and the ongoing effort in Ecuador or Mexico to stress *mestizaje*, where a new type of person -- neither Indian nor European -- has been created in the interests of nationalist goals. In both cases, the weight of colonial categories hangs heavy over the homogenizing political project, and the process unfolds within a contemporary arena where rich whitefolks still pull most of the strings. (See Williams 1991 for a more general discussion of the ways contemporary postcolonial nation-building both unfolds within the constraints of historically-produced stereotypes based on race and ethnicity and is firmly located in an international politico-economic arena of competing nation states.)[5]

SARAMAKA[6]

The Republic of Suriname, in which Saramakas and their Maroon neighbors constitute perhaps 15% of the total population, is the exemplary "plural society," arguably the most multiethnic nation in the Americas. In this respect it contrasts with Martinique, where nearly everyone (other than metropolitans or local whites) fits somewhere within the "creole" continuum. Let's begin with a look at how Saramakas themselves classify the diverse kinds of people they know in the world. Unlike Martinique, Saramakas are not operating within a European-derived colonial system (though it is equally historically rooted); rather, Saramaka ideology about ethnicity and race harks back to their own heroic struggles against colonialism.[7]

Among the most salient "others" in the Saramaka world we might list:

-- *bakáa* ("foreigners" or "whitefolks," depending on context), a term derived, like southern U.S. "buckra" or Jamaican "backra," from Ibo or Efik "mbakára" = "he who governs" (i.e. whites);

-- *djugá*, *paamáka*, *alúku*, *matawái*, and *kwintí* (the five other Maroon groups of Suriname [and French Guiana], whose members Saramakas consider more like themselves than any other "kind" of people);

-- *nêngè* (non-Maroons of African descent, in Suriname often called "Creolen" [in Dutch] and "Creoles" [in English]); there are several subtypes, including "Paa nêngè" (the descendants of slaves in the Para Creek region, where many of the ancestors of the Saramakas also served briefly as slaves) and French Guyanais "pandási nêngè" (rural Afro-Guyanais, with whom Saramaka men doing wage labor have sometimes lived as man and wife);

-- *íngi* (Amerindians, of several named varieties, the original inhabitants of Suriname);

-- *akulí* (East Indians, "Coolies," the descendants of indentured laborers imported to Suriname to work plantations after the African slaves were emancipated, and who today own much of the commerce in Paramaribo);

-- *yampanési* (Javanese, the descendants of indentured laborers imported to Suriname in the early twentieth century after East Indians, in their turn, began leaving the plantations for the city);

-- *sinési* (Chinese, who dominate the grocery trade in both Paramaribo and French Guiana);

-- *anamitji* (Annamites, mainly fisherfolk, whom Saramaka men have seen in French Guiana, and sometimes call "water Chinese")

-- *poité* (a term derived, via French Guyanais Creole, from French "déporté," [usually escaped] prisoners from the French Guiana penal colony whom Saramaka men used to run into occasionally in the forest).

And the list could be extended to include less salient "others" such as *potugísi* (Brazilians), *amíngo* (Colombians, from their always saying "amigo"), and *bàka sêibi* (Haitians -- from the Saramaccan for "after-sevens," that is "eights" [in Saramaccan, "aiti"]) whom Saramaka men have come to know in French Guiana, as well as various non-human others: the *wenti* gods who live near "Chinese country" and can bring individual Saramakas untold whitefolks' riches, and a plethora of other categories of gods and spirits, too complex to enumerate here.[8]

If we leave aside the three most important kinds of Saramakas' others (*bakáa*, *nêngè*, and non-Saramaka Maroons), the ways Saramakas construct their others seem on the whole unsurprising. Like ethnic stereotypes elsewhere when there is little at stake between groups (no competition for jobs or territory) but rather a kind of entertaining curiosity about radically different customs, Saramaka views of these others carry little emotional charge. For example, for Saramaka men who most often see Chinese behind the counters of city grocery stores, the noteworthy diacritica of these "others" are that they eat with chopsticks (which Saramakas find amusing), drink no water but only tea (which Saramakas find difficult to imagine), and -- perhaps, Saramakas reason, because of this alleged avoidance of drinking water -- never die. The Saramaka rhetorical question used to clinch this final, otherwise incredible, assertion is, "Have you ever seen a Chinese funeral?" (N.B. For all other ethnic groups dwelling in and around the capital city of Paramaribo,

funerals are large public occasions, but apparently not for Chinese.) Or, consider the tiny group of Annamites, who live(d) in houses floating on oildrums on the river off St. Laurent: Saramaka men say their menfolk can walk along the river bed fully submerged underwater for kilometers at a stretch, killing fish with a machete as they travel, and then emerge, dripping wet, with a heavy load of fish strung on a long vine. Unlike normal Chinese, Saramakas say, Annamites never run grocery stores and are perpetually dirty, "washing dishes, clothes, and themselves in the same water they drink and shit in." Or, finally, consider the *poités*, whom we first heard of from teenage Saramaka girls who described fearsome forest creatures that we assumed were supernatural. Only later did elderly men clarify for us, through eye-witness accounts, that these beings were desperate escapees from the French penal colony whom Saramakas used to encounter during the 1920s and 30s along the rivers of French Guiana. *Poités* 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; today, Saramaka mothers still frighten their children by repeating the adage, "Little children cooked up with dasheen, that's the *poité's* favorite dish!" And Saramaka ideas about East Indians, Javanese, various types of Amerindians, and other groups they interact with only peripherally follow much the same lines -- a mixture of "strange customs observed," "national character" stereotypes ("East Indians are the most greedy for money of any people"), and supernaturalized characteristics (one group of Amerindians who, at nightfall, collectively dive in the river and become fish till morning, another that walks in the trees like monkeys, and so on).

In contrast, Saramakas' most important "others" -- whitefolks, Creoles, and other Maroons -- are constructed from more complex, and interesting, clusters of attributes, whose multiple meanings are context-specific. In examining the representation of these kinds of others, one finds frequent shunts back and forth between distance and closeness, human and non-human characteristics, dominance and subordination, and resistance and assimilation.

One rich example is provided by the complexity of images with which Saramakas (the descendants of slaves who rebelled and escaped) regard Suriname Creoles (the descendants of slaves who remained in slavery until general emancipation and who often served as scouts and soldiers for the colonial government in the wars against Saramakas), who today control the military government of the national state. Historically, relations between Saramaka Maroons and Creole plantation slaves were never simple. Nor were accommodation and rebellion simple mirror images. As Sidney Mintz wrote more than twenty years ago, "the house slave who poisoned her master's family by putting ground glass in the food had first to become the family cook.... And the slaves who plotted armed revolts in the marketplaces had first to produce for market, and to gain permission to carry their produce there" (1971: 321). Indeed, the Suriname slave Joanna, who became famous as John Gabriel Stedman's genteel lover, was raised in part by Jolicoeur, who became one of the fiercest of all guerrilla leaders among Maroons (Stedman 1988); and the beautiful Paánza, who was rejected by her fellow plantation slaves because she was born of a white master who had raped her African mother, later became an ideologically central heroine among the Saramaka Maroons (Price 1983), and has recently been enshrined as an icon of black womanhood by the Guadeloupean novelist Simone Schwartz-Bart, in her *L'Encyclopédie de la Femme Noire*. There never was a single continuum leading from "accommodation" with whitefolks to "resistance," and recognition of this human reality forms the basis for Saramakas' nuanced, symbolically rich representations of Creoles as one particular kind of Other. More detailed exploration of Saramaka images of Creoles -- as well as of other Maroons -- is beyond the scope of this presentation (a number of relevant examples can be found in Price 1983 and 1990, and Bilby 1990 includes a nuanced discussion of the ways Aluku Maroons conceptualize French Guiana Creoles); here, I choose to focus, rather, on those most salient of Saramakas' others, whitefolks.

The depth and strength of Saramakas' enmity toward whitefolks -- by whom their ancestors were captured, enslaved, transported from Africa, forced to work Suriname plantations and, after

becoming maroons, hunted down for nearly a century -- has already been documented, most notably in *First-Time* and *Alabi's World* (Price 1983 and 1990; see also Price 1991). "If we forget the deeds of our ancestors," Saramaka men remind each other, "how can we hope to avoid being returned to whitefolks' slavery?" Or, as another man once told me, "This is the one thing Maroons really believe. It's stronger than anything else.... This is the greatest fear of all Maroons: that those times [the days of slavery and the struggle for freedom] shall come again." Today, despite changing circumstance, the ideology of "First-Time," the cry of "Never Again," remains powerful for Saramakas. As I have written elsewhere,

> For all those respected Saramaka historians or ritual specialists, for all those renowned woodcarvers or dancers, who are forced by economic necessity (and lack of Western schooling) to clean out toilet bowls in the French missile-launching base at Kourou (in French Guiana), First-Time ideology cannot but help remain a powerful relevant force.... Continuities of oppression, from original enslavement and torture to modern political paternalism and economic exploitation, have been more than sufficient to keep First-Time ideology a living force. (Price 1983:12)

But if First-Time (anti-white, anti-Creole) ideology remains a central weapon in Saramakas' ongoing struggle to maintain their identity, a related arm is their insistence on their own definition of *present*-day reality, their adamant refusal to accept the whiteman's (or Creole's) definition of the (wage-)labor situation. In Saramaka terms, a man can maintain his dignity even while doing degrading and servile labor *as long as he never accepts the Other's definition of the situation*. Indeed, for Saramakas, that is the only successful way -- barring violence -- to deal with the alienation of labor that their forefathers encountered on the slave plantations of Suriname and that many of them now face each day at the European Space Center in Kourou. Having for some years moved back and forth between servile wage labor in French Guiana and work in their own fields and forest back home, Saramaka men are acutely aware of the contrasts between controlling their own activities and selling their labor as a commodity. A Saramaka folktale, in

which plantation slavery and wage slavery are poetically merged, is emblematic of these concerns -- the story of "King-Nothing-Can-Hurt-Him." In this tale, a white king succeeds in killing every Saramaka who comes to work on his plantations until one man finally changes the basic rules of the game and thus manages to turn the tables. (This tale is discussed and briefly analyzed in Price 1991; for a fuller version and analysis, see R. & S. Price 1991:126-38).

To date, other aspects of Saramakas' views of whitefolks and their world have received far less attention than the anti-white attitudes that lie at the heart of First-Time ideology and its modern counterpart. Yet, *pace* Baudelaire's famous dictum, "Tout peuple est académique en jugeant les autres, tout peuple est barbare quand il est jugé" (1855: 954), Saramakas -- when judging whitefolks -- don't project only barbarity upon them. They also display intense curiosity, irony, wonderment, and sometimes even envy about whitefolks' lifeways and character. Tale-telling, which takes place at Saramaka wakes, comprises one setting (among others) in which these different, more varied representations of whitefolks emerge. Following the lead of Roger Abrahams, who has suggested that it is often in focusing on the ways Afro-Americans have reshaped African or European patterns to their own ends that the deeper meaning and significance of New World tale-telling emerges (1985:20), I wish to consider the ways Saramakas have adapted tale-telling patterns that appear throughout Afro-America, reshaping them to their own unique ends. And in so doing, I hope to throw new light on Saramaka images of their most salient Other, whitefolks.

In many of their folktales, Saramakas deliberately exoticize whitefolks. To get a handle on just how they do so, we might first compare Saramakas' representation of whites with that in tales told by other (non-Maroon) Afro-Americans, who draw on many of the same characters, themes, and plots, but who treat whitefolks and their world in different ways.

There is a central character in many Anglophone Afro-Caribbean tales called the Chiggerfoot (or Jiggerfoot) Boy, described by Abrahams as

an almost invisible character ... a "dark" figure: an "Old Witch Boy," a dirty and diseased misfit, a mysterious member of the white king's family.... He lives at the margins between the family and the wilds, and can be seen as something of a contaminating anomaly, and ... the upsetter of order. Described variously as "dirty," "smelly," "covered with ashes" (like Cinderella), he is best known for his ugly foot, which is described alternatively as diseased, constantly surrounded by fleas and nits ... or as a clubfoot.... [He is] contrasted with the king's beautiful daughter, ostensibly his sister. (1985: 22-23)

Saramakas have a similar folktale character, "the Scrawny Little Kid" (*makisá miii*). In Saramaccan, *makisá* means crushed, mashed up, messed up, weak, frail, and generally in a dilapidated state which could be regarded as either pitiable or laughable, depending on the sympathies of the observer; *miii* is the word for child, kid, or boy. So, physically, the West Indian Chiggerfoot Boy and Saramakas' Scrawny Little Kid are much alike. But there is also a crucial difference between them. In Saramaka, this ubiquitous character is the younger brother, not of a white princess in the family of a king, but of "normal" Saramaka sisters; in Saramaka terms, he is one of "us," not one of "them." Thus, Saramakas and other Afro-Americans are drawing the lines around their worlds, and thinking about alterity, in different ways. The difference is cardinal and points to an ideological contrast that helps us understand how Saramaka tales, while in general very much a part of the Afro-American tale-telling world, also stand alone in that comparative context.

As Abrahams glosses a common West Indian plot involving the Chiggerfoot Boy,

the daughter [the white princess] is courted by many of the best men in the land, but she rejects them all until one man comes riding by with whom she falls madly in love. Their courtship and marriage is therefore quickly achieved, and her new bridegroom carries her off with him to his home in the bush. The boy, through snooping or using one of his witching powers, is able to follow the couple and

discover that his sister has married an animal or bush spirit that has been able to transform itself into human form. The boy also discovers how the transformation is brought about -- it is commonly a song -- and he persuades his father to accompany him to witness what he has discovered. The boy sings the song, the bridegroom is transformed, and the king then does what he must do. (1985: 22)

In such a tale, the West Indian audience is meant to empathize and identify, at least to a point, with this rather bizarre royal family; it is the princess whose life is in danger, and her brother who is the hero. But in Saramaka tales, when there are white kings and princesses, they are portrayed as part of an alien, truly foreign world; in the most fully-developed depiction of a princess that we know in Saramaka tales she appears as a prototypical bitch -- self-centered, fickle, spoiled, condescending, and nasty (R. & S. Price 1991:314-346). And in Saramaka, the Scrawny Little Kid, who like his counterpart elsewhere in Afro-America saves his sisters from disaster, always saves normal, black sisters (who have body cicatrizations, participate in swidden horticulture, and generally conduct themselves as Saramakas), not -- as in the West Indian cases -- strange white ones. More generally, Saramaka folktales differ from those of other Afro-Americans in portraying the white world (with its kings and princesses, palaces and cannons, horses and coaches, ships and sailors, as well as slavemasters and wage-labor bosses) as fully "other," completely beyond the boundaries of their own society. When Bajans or Nevisians or Alabamians depict those same characteristics, they are talking about a much more integral -- if still in many ways distant -- part of their own social universe. In this sense, then, the contrast in folktale representations directly reflects social realities: those of the descendants of maroons vs. those of the descendants of plantation slaves.[9]

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What are we to make of this multidimensional contrast, so crudely sketched here? To continue painting with broad strokes: Martinique might be viewed as the "triumph" of colonialism and the interiorization (and further elaboration) by the population of European racist ideas. Among the Saramaka, we have seen the rejection of colonial categories and the development of an alternative, locally produced system of ethnic classification.

What does the future hold? In Martinique, as Césaire long ago predicted, a kind of "genocide by replacement" is gaining speed, with metropolitan French (and now also other Europeans) swarming into this about-to-be-fully "European" corner of the Caribbean. The traditional *douceur* and *politesse* of Martiniquans is being sorely tested by short-fused outsiders used to different kinds of "efficiency" (at the post office, the bank, the store), and open black-white conflicts over scarce resources (such as employment) are becoming increasingly frequent. There does exist a cultural nationalist, and even a small political independence, movement; but the island as a whole seems, for the time being anyway, to be set on an integrationist, assimilationist route.

Meanwhile, among the Saramaka, though their vision of the world has not profoundly changed, it is clear that they are increasingly losing control of their destinies. For them, decolonization has meant trading the stability and protection (as they saw it) of the Dutch crown for the uncertainties and (often) outright hostility of coastal Creole politicians (and the Creole-controlled military). The 1986-91 civil war, which pitted Saramakas and other Maroons against the national army, left hundreds of Maroon men, women, and children dead, some ten thousand as unregistered refugees in French Guiana (six thousand of whom still live in camps, surrounded by barbed wire, and run by the French Foreign Legion, in the vicinity of Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni), much of the interior of Suriname under the control of rival gangs of armed bandits, and Maroon villages with a newly introduced "drug problem" that is challenging the very fiber of the society. In recent months, the Suriname government has accepted legal responsibility for at least one of the unprovoked massacres carried out by the army against Maroon civilians and, as of this writing, levels of compensation are being negotiated before the

Inter-American Court now sitting in San Jose, Costa Rica. But it is difficult to be optimistic about the future of a country that is economically as well as morally bankrupt. The ethnic politics (and politicians) that ran Suriname before Independence remain the major players, now operating gingerly, under the watchful eye of the all-powerful military. And the Saramaka and other Maroons want nothing more than the peace and justice (and economic well-being) they thought they had won forever in their eighteenth-century treaties with the Dutch Crown.

Guyane may provide an instructive contrast to both Martinique and Suriname: like Martinique, it's a French overseas department, but like Suriname its population is truly multi-ethnic. The most thoroughly colonized and bureaucratized local group, the Creoles, feel much the same identity problems as their Martiniquan brothers and sisters, but with this difference: they are today under assault not only from continued French cultural-economic-political pressure and the waves of *métropolitains* sweeping in from across the Atlantic, but from all kinds of other new immigrants -- Haitians, Brazilians, Surinamers, and others. And demographically, the core population of Creoles, the people who have long considered themselves the "true" Guyanais, find themselves suddenly outnumbered and surrounded on every side. The latest population estimates suggest, for example, that there may be more recent Haitian immigrants (legal and illegal) in Guyane than Creoles themselves.... Given the strength of ultimate political (and military) control exercised from Paris, that is, given the relative lack of such power exercised by the Guyanais Creole population itself, these Creoles are particularly embattled. A Martiniquan "assimilationist" stance (which much of the Guyanais Creoles have espoused) is not protecting them against an immigrant flood -- so it is no surprise that Jean-Marie Le Pen's *Front National* has a thriving office in Cayenne.

For the past two years, intermittently, Sally Price and I have been involved in helping the local government of Guyane plan and execute a new Musée Régional in Cayenne -- designed to exhibit the cultures and peoples of Guyane. From the Creole perspective, there has been little conceptual problem envisioning the Amerindian and Maroon portions of the museum (after all,

these are the kinds of people one expects to find represented in an anthropology museum, people who have strong boundaries and a strong sense of ethnic identity). But how does one treat the proportionally-enormous newly-arriving populations of Haitians and Brazilians, most of whom are not, officially, even there? And how about the museum representation of Creoles, the representation of themselves? The decision to place ones own past and present on display has raised all sorts of knotty questions, and the solutions have not, as of this writing, been fully worked out. (Some of these issues are raised at greater length in R. & S. Price, *Equatoria*, New York, 1992.)

Sidney Mintz has written of the special challenge of understanding national identity in the Caribbean, where "populations ... are at once backward and modern, racist and anti-racist, European and non-European" (1974:328). And James Clifford (1988:13-15) has picked up on the notion that the Caribbean may provide a model for our more general future -- one whose contours he likes. Deriding as "too neat" the apocalyptic Lévi-Straussian vision that we are all caught up in an increasingly monolithic world culture, where "authentic human differences are disintegrating, disappearing in an expansive commodity culture to become, at best, collectible 'art' or 'folklore'," Clifford champions a "more ambiguous Caribbean" alternative. I would be rather less upbeat about this vision. To me, the heroic, poetic Martinique of Césaire's early writings, however much appreciated in the abstract by Clifford, is now taking the Lévi-Straussian path, and with a vengeance. The characteristically "rebellious, syncretic, and creative" aspects that Clifford so admires (and which, in fact, characterize Saramaka much better than they do Martinique) seem -- at least for now -- to be losing out to what he and we and Césaire uniformaly condemn: "degradation, mimicry, violence, and blocked possibilities." Might not the outcome, or even the present condition, of a Martinique look a lot rosier from the perspective of professorial chairs in New Haven (where a hip Bob Thompson can write with élan about celebrating "Callalou culture") or distant Santa Cruz, than from a fisherman's house in St. Lucia or a busdriver's in Cuba?

At once racist and anti-racist, the modern Caribbean, particularly in its more multi-ethnic incarnations, suggests both despair and hope. Given the supremely colonial history of the region, the quest for national identities in the Caribbean seems, as Williams has most recently suggested (1991), almost fated to reproduce ethnic bigotry and racism. But is the "assimilationist" route that Martinique seems to be taking an enviable alternative? Or might a solution we could call "modified Brazilian" -- one which finally succeeded in casting aside the hierarchized stigma of blackness and the hypervalorization of fair skin, for a horizontalized vision of difference -- actually be possible?

Notes

1. "Racisme op het voetbalveld: de bananen vliegen je om de oren" *Suriname: Onafhankelijke Weekkrant*, 19 t/m 25 December 1991, Special, p. 1.

2. Interview with Franck and Nicole Joly, July 1991.

3. In writing about colonialism and race in Martinique, it is very difficult to say anything that has not already been said, far better, by one of Martinique's three literary giants -- Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and Edouard Glissant.

4. RFO Radio, Fort-de-France, ca. 8 Jan 1992, "L'amour de lire."

5. It is a truism that all societies must deal with heterogeneity in some fashion. But it has not always been admitted, as Williams points out, that the use of such labels as "race," "ethnic group," "minority," or "nationality" -- or the search for roots or the focus on "mixtures" -- imply very different political projects in terms of identity construction within a homogenizing political process (1991:268). And she further notes that "in many instances, these label switches imply a homogenizing process directed at ignoring as much heterogeneity as possible" (Ibid.).

6. The following discussion draws on materials presented in Price 1993.

7. In this paper I do not attempt the more ambitious task of explicitly analyzing the view from Saramaka within the wider "national" system of Suriname, the region, or the broader world.

8. In his recent dissertation, Kenneth Bilby offers a considerably more detailed list and analysis of the "others" of the Aluku Maroons, in neighboring French Guiana (Bilby 1990).

9. Indeed, in this broader Afro-American context, it can be shown that the special ideological stance of Saramakas toward whitefolks renders unique the specific transformations by which they have made African, other Afro-American, and European tales their own. An addtional example concerns what Abrahams calls "Afro-American [non-Saramaka] 'In the beginning' stories [which] underscore the value of accommodating yourself to the way things are (and always will be) ...

[and] underscore the fact that [one must accept that] life isn't usually very fair" (1985: 39). But while the West Indian Chiggerfoot Boy, through his cleverness or witching powers, saves his sister or solves some other *domestic* problem, his Saramaka counterpart generally solves *community-wide* problems. Indeed, many Saramaka tales describe the way a particular individual -- often the Scrawny Little Kid -- *refuses* to accept a difficult, "unfair" status quo and sets out to alter it, changing some aspect of the world into the (better) way it now is. For example, in various tales, heroes render a particular stretch of forest, which had been inhabited by devils or monsters, safe for humans; in others, through their courage and initiative, they introduce central aspects of life -- drums, fire, polygyny, all-night dancing -- into the Saramaka world. No passive accommodation here! The contrasts, then, seem clear: slaves vs. maroons, tales of playful antagonism within a world of social inequities vs. genuine "hero tales." (Price 1983:13-14 presents an emblematic tale of this type, relating the way a Saramaka hunter foiled the attempt of a seductress/spy to obtain the secret of his powers; R. & S. Price 1991:16-19, 390 analyzes the ways the Saramaka version of that tale systematically differs from the thirty or so variants known from elsewhere in Africa and Afro-America.)

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