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BUSH NEGRO PROPHETIC MOVEMENTS: RELIGIONS OF DESPAIR?*

February, 1892: In the small village of Sophiboeka on the upper Surinam River strange events took place. Three months earlier the village headman had died, and now the inhabitants of the village, Saramaka Bush Negroes, were interrogating his spirit in the traditional way. Two men were carrying a plank on which was fastened a small packet containing the deceased's hair and nail parings. Like most other Bush Negroes, the Saramaka believe that the spirit of the deceased can communicate with the living by moving the bearers of the plank in response to questions. But there were signs that something had gone awry. The bearers seemed restless; they stamped the ground with their feet. Then, when the moment had come for the community to part with the spirit of the deceased, the bearers suddenly ran off into the jungle with the plank on their heads. They did not return until the middle of the night. Anake, one of the bearers, fell on the ground in convulsions. For three days, he wandered aimlessly through the village and refused to eat or sleep. When Anake finally recovered, he was a different man. At once he launched a daring attack on the then prestigious *Gaan Tata* cult; he chopped down its sacred tree and desecrated its cult objects by wrapping them in menstrual clothes. This alone was enough to undo all inherent supernatural power. Then he had all *Gaan Tata* "medicines" thrown into the river. Once this cult was out of the way, he pronounced

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revelations of things to come. Huge ships would moor in the river in front of the village, unloading their rich cargo, and many shops would line *Sophiboeka's* wide avenues. The prophet promised children to the childless, good health to the sick, prosperity to all villagers and eternal life to his followers.

This dramatic account of the beginning of Paulus Anake's messianic movement is taken from Voorhoeve and Van Renselaar's article "Messianism and Nationalism in Surinam" (1962: 202). It is a central case in an article that deals with movements of protest and despair, and it attempts to link these movements with the overall political and economic conditions in Surinam in the 19th and 20th centuries. The paper is also concerned with a slave rebellion around 1830 and with forms of modern nationalism. Here we will confine our attention to that part of the article which deals with prophetic movements among the Bush Negroes.

The Bush Negroes or Maroons are descendants of slaves brought to Surinam from West Africa. Their ancestors escaped from the plantations and fought a successful guerilla war against the Dutch colonial regime. Early in the 18th century, the guerilla fighters built their villages along the upper reaches of the rivers that flow through Surinam's tropical rain forest. Between 1760 and 1770, the planters had to conclude peace treaties with the various Bush Negro groupings. Semi-independent tribes were then established: the Saramaka along the Suriname River, the Djuka along the Tapanahoni and the Matawai along the Saramacca River. Other, less populous, tribes emerged at a later stage: the Aluku or Boni on the Lawa, the Paramaka on the Maroni and the Kwinti on the Coppename rivers. While retaining their Tapanahoni villages, the Djuka also built settlements along the Maroni and Lawa, Cottica and at a few other places in Surinam (see map).

The significance of Voorhoeve and Van Renselaar's paper lies not only in the wealth of new material it presents on Bush Negro religion; it is also most valuable because it attempts to explain the occurrence of prophetic movements among the Maroons. The authors also feel they can offer a prediction: they indicate when to expect prophetic movements among Bush Negroes.

The overriding idea is that prophetic movements can best be understood as a form of protest against oppression and misery. Human misery, the argument continues, is felt more keenly when others within the same country are prospering. In any given period, if other ethnic groups in Surinam are making more economic and social progress than the Bush Negroes, then we can expect prophetic movements to arise. We

will now paraphrase the authors or quote directly from their article.

After the peace treaties of the 18th century, the Bush Negro was satisfied with what he had gained (1962: 209). Although his life was full of hardship, he had achieved what he wished for: the freedom to make a life of his own far from the cruel coercion of slavery (1962: 208). But the abolition of slavery in 1863 altered this. "The emancipated negroes were suddenly on the same level as the white masters..." (1962: 210). On top of this, the Creoles, as the emancipated negroes were called, were now thriving. "As a result of the profits from small agricultural holdings (cocoa) and the high earnings in gold and balata extraction, after 1880 the negroes could actually make rapid social progress" (1962: 210).

Written in clear language without jargon or trappings, this is a theory of relative deprivation. As in any theory of this type, the mechanism which must account for the social phenomena studied is the process of comparison. The Bush Negroes had always compared their lot with that of those who had remained behind on the plantations and, for a very long time, they saw every reason to congratulate themselves. But, according to the authors, in the second half of the 19th century, their 'reference group' began to fare much better. As a consequence, the Bush Negro felt disoriented and miserable. In brief, this is the reason why prophetic movements began to occur after 1880.

"The Bush Negro was painfully conscious of the fact that very close to his world a better life was possible than the one he lived" (1962: 210). "He came to the city and saw in the stores an unimaginable profusion of goods brought by huge sea-going ships. Now he was the frustrated one, and this is when the wish to be saved by a messiah first appeared in the interior" (1962: 210). Again (1962: 208): "Before emancipation no messianic movements are reported among the Bush Negro groups, *nor were they to be expected*" (our italics).

To support their argument with empirical data, the authors mention religious movements among the Saramaka and Djuka Bush Negroes, all of which happened to arise *after* 1880.

Unfortunately, attractive as this theory sounds, it has to be refuted on the basis of empirical evidence. We do not take issue with the statement that many religious movements occurred after 1880; in fact, Voorhoeve and Van Renselaar's list of these phenomena can easily be expanded.¹ But we do argue two points. First, the authors have over-

¹ One should, for example, add the Jesus-Maria movement of the Saramaka that was first reported for the year 1921 (Müller 1922). With even more justification, the important *Gaan Tata* cult could be considered a prophetic movement. It began around 1885 in the Tapanahoni village of Dritabiki with the revelations of a prophetess. A God of wrath and revenge had manifested himself to castigate a corrupt world. Around 1890, the message of this Jehovah was carried to all Bush Negroes. During most of the 1890s, it looked as if all Bush Negroes would go over to the *Gaan Tata* cult, Christians included.

looked evidence of prophetic movements before 1880 or even prior to 1863. Secondly, for the period after 1880, Voorhoeve and Van Renselaar have overestimated the prosperity of the Creoles and disregarded the affluence of the Bush Negroes. In fact, as we will show, movements arose at a time when the Bush Negroes were better off economically than the Creoles.

I. BUSH NEGRO RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS AND THE MISSIONS

A source of inspiration for Voorhoeve and Van Renselaar has been the work of Van der Linde (1956) on the Congregation of Moravian Brethren. The missionaries of this congregation reported a number of religious movements among the Bush Negroes of Surinam. Van der Linde (1956: 199) referred to these movements as 'prophetic-messianic'. Voorhoeve and Van Renselaar have chosen to stress the messianic side as may be seen from their preference for the term 'messianic movements'. In view of the fact, however, that few leaders of the movements mentioned by the authors had any messianic pretensions at all, it seems better to avoid this term as a central concept.

Of all religious leaders listed by Voorhoeve and Van Renselaar, only Anake was a messiah by any ordinary meaning of the term. Anake claimed to be God and he promised to deliver his people. For all his followers a blissful life would be waiting. The other religious leaders mentioned by the authors (1962: 211) are Afaka, Atjarimikule and Winsi. There is, however, very little evidence that either Afaka or Winsi ever claimed to be a divine redeemer who would create a paradise on earth for his followers. What they all had in common was that they acted as prophets and were leaders of religious movements. Thus, the term 'prophetic movement' seems more appropriate to describe these phenomena.

A prophet is a visionary who claims divine inspiration. Direct contact with supernatural powers enables him to perform extraordinary feats, that is to say, to act as a religious *virtuoso*. A prophet, while acting as the mouthpiece of his godhead, diagnoses a society's ills and suggests remedies. Or he may, as did the Djuka prophet Afaka, at God's command, present the faithful with a new script. Such innovations and prescriptions are likely to run counter to the interests of established religious authorities. Friction with other power holders often becomes inevitable.

Thus, in defining a prophetic movement, two conditions must be

fulfilled. There must be a visionary who claims to speak for a deity when he advocates change and there have to be followers. The last criterion is usually met when the prophet's revelations cause friction between groups within the society. Anake's movement clearly meets these criteria: when, in a state of trance, he launched an attack on the *Gaan Tata* cult and its priests, it soon became apparent that he had a following. Albitrouw (1892-1894: 42) observed that people cooked meals and performed other menial services for Anake. At his command, they also neglected to cultivate their gardens, and kept him company during the night.

Not every revelation or form of religious change can be linked to prophetic movements. Take, for example, what happened to the headman of the village of Heikoenoe (Albitrouw 1892-1894: 58). During the night of October 29, 1891, he dreamed that a woman came to him with a warning from God. A terrible epidemic would spread among the Bush Negroes. People would die like flies; everywhere in the villages corpses would lie around because there were not enough people to bury them all. There was only one cure for this sickness: to turn to the only true God, that of the Christians. All idols and medicines of the false gods (*krukutu gadu*) had to be destroyed. The following morning the village headman told his people of what he had seen in his dreams. However, we find no signs of any movement organized around this headman. A year later he died.

The literature also abounds with examples of religious change that cannot be considered proof that a prophet had arisen. In the early nineteenth century, Mähr, a missionary working among the Saramaka, noted a rising opposition to the Moravian Brethren and a revival of pagan religion. Many of the older Saramaka expressed their amazement at the rebirth of traditional religion which, in its intensity, surpassed anything they had known before. Whereas formerly spirit possession was a preoccupation of a few older women, now it had spread to all age categories. Shrines were being installed in front of every house in the village. Mähr recounted some events that reveal the prevailing mood. During the nights of September 22 and 23, 1810, the atmosphere was tense; the heathens were fabricating a new idol, and as no divine signs of satisfaction reached them, the drumming and singing went on and on (Staehelin 1913-1919 c: 225). This religious revival and the political tensions between Saramaka and the colonial administration at that time made the situation untenable for Mähr. He departed from the mission post of Bambey in 1813.

In this case, there is no indication that the movement was initiated by a prophet or visionary. There are, however, other accounts of Bush Negro religion available that lend support to our contention that prophetic movements occurred in the 18th and early 19th centuries. As the main sources of information are the correspondence of missionaries edited by Staehelin (1913-1919) and missionary journals, a few words on the position of the Moravian Brethren will have to precede the discussion.

The earliest movements among the Bush Negroes were closely associated with the work of the Congregation of Moravian Brethren, the so-called *Herrnhutters*. The upper reaches of the Suriname River and its tributaries became their sphere of action. Beginning in 1765, the missionaries worked at various places in Saramaka territory until 1813, when missionary Mähr abandoned his post at Bambey. Many *Herrnhutters* had died as a result of the unhealthy climate; the results, measured in numbers of the baptized and faithful Christians, were poor.

In 1840, Rasmus Schmidt resumed missionary work among the Saramaka of Bambey in the 'middle' section of the river. In the second half of the century, the *Herrnhutters* extended their work to the Saramacca River (Matawai territory) and to a tributary of the Suriname River, the Sara Creek. Here Djuka had settled who had left the Tapanahoni. At the end of the century, the missionaries expanded into the areas of the Cottica, Coppename and Lower Maroni, that is to say, into Djuka, Kwinti and Paramaka territory. Though the attempts to convert the Bush Negroes to Christianity were often disappointing in the eyes of the missionaries, the impact of this religion on Bush Negro cults and cosmology cannot be denied. This fact is reflected in most of the religious movements with which we shall deal in this article.

II. PROPHETIC MOVEMENTS BEFORE 1863

a. *The movement of the new priest*

In 1772, the *Herrnhutters* found that they were losing converts to a priest from the neighbourhood of Quama (see map). The missionaries noted with some emphasis that this priest was a new religious leader of the Saramaka. Although it remained implicit in their account, it is clear from the phrasing that they wondered how such an upstart could attract people in such great numbers. The priest certainly had a grip on the people: they flocked to him from villages all over Saramaka

territory. They came to him to renew their amulets, but as the account suggests this was not a routine replacement of worn-out amulets by new ones of the same type. The Saramaka also responded in great numbers when he called on them to attend religious celebrations (Staehelin 1913-1919 *a*: 176-178).

This seemed to be the first time that the Christians came under serious pressure from the Saramaka. The acolytes of the new priest showed themselves hostile to the converted Christians (1913-1919 *a*: 176). Only with great difficulty could the mission retain the loyalty of a handful of Saramaka.

The evidence presented here is *not* conclusive. Yet it strongly suggests that a prophetic movement of importance had arisen. In what way could a *new* religious leader bring together great numbers of people and renew their amulets, save on authority of divine revelation or inspiration? How else could he have inspired confidence in the people to the point that they became hostile to their kith and kin? Moreover, that he succeeded in bringing together great numbers of Saramaka from many villages to attend long and costly celebrations also points to some form of organization around the new leader.

b. *The movement of Paulus Puly*

Nearly two decades later, in 1789, the missionary Randt (Staehelin 1913-1919 *b*: 143) wrote with alarm about Gran Adama, a medicine man who, like Paulus Anake a century later, was revered by the people as God. Two years later, in 1791, a colleague of Randt's visited Gran Adama's village on the Quama Creek, and noted with great relief that the latter's position was now considerably weaker: "Satan's throne is tottering!" (1913-1919 *b*: 140; *c*: 40).

Tantalizing as such entries are, they do offer insufficient grounds for concluding that a prophetic movement had arisen. From the missionaries' account, it seems likely that Gran Adama had had a large following for at least a couple of years. But we are given no information regarding the crucial aspect of religious innovation. Thus there is no reason to conclude that this was a prophetic movement.

Meanwhile, the missionaries were reporting another upheaval that shook Saramaka society (1913-1919 *b*: 133, 135-136). Overnight, many Saramaka had thrown away their 'medicines'. In 1790, unexpectedly large numbers of people flocked to the mission post to listen to the gospel. On many days the missionaries were busy from dawn till dusk. Those who had formerly been among the most bitter adversaries of the

Moravian Mission now begged for redemption and showed themselves 'hungry' for the word of God.

The driving force behind this mass conversion was Paulus Puly, a Saramaka who had been a well-known medicine man and was recognized as a disciple of Gran Adama. In December, 1788, Paulus came to Bambey to tell the missionaries how he had outraged pagan feelings by preaching the message of Christ. He had disregarded all warnings that he would be killed by the deity whose medium he was; the spirit was probably connected with the Gran Adama cult. People were puzzled by the conversion of this famous medicine man and were astonished that the renunciated godhead did not take revenge (1913-1919 c: 37, 40, 54). In August 1791, Paulus appeared to have a large number of followers. Even in the village of Gran Adama, his message carried weight. Although he had been baptized in 1789, Paulus worked rather independently of the mission. This independence was not due to a lack of zeal: on the contrary, the missionaries had to restrain him. Wietz, a missionary, wrote: "He has good intentions, but often he forces his message upon the people, and when they don't listen to him his feelings run high about their idolatry" (1913-1919 c: 40). Information about the content of his teachings is scanty, but there are indications that they deviate considerably from those of the mission. The songs Paulus taught his followers did not have much in common with the psalms. He also attempted to introduce such innovations as the firing of rifles during prayer, an essential element in pagan death rites (1913-1919 c: 50). Paulus considered his achievements the work of God. When he clashed with Gran Adama, who held him responsible for the desertion of many of his followers, Paulus replied: "I cannot help it; I did not do it, God did it" (1913-1919 c: 54). The last references to Paulus were made around 1800.

c. *The movement of the village headman*

In 1796, missionaries travelled along the Suriname River and visited most Saramaka villages. They were struck by the prevailing atmosphere of frustration and discontent with obeahs and medicine men (Staehelin 1913-1919 c: 131). Naturally, missionaries are likely to exaggerate such feelings among the natives, and these entries in their diaries and letters should be read with due caution. But certain events demonstrate that their remarks were not altogether biased.

In 1797 (1913-1919 c: 137), discontent was rife among the Saramaka. On the upper reaches of the Suriname River, a headman spoke about the

overpowering guilt and sin of the black people, how they had erred and how God had been forced to punish them through subjugation to the whites. More recently God had inflicted further retribution upon them: heavy rainfall in the dry season had interfered disastrously with slash-and-burn cultivation. "Deliver yourself unto God", the headman told his people. He sent the same message to the *Herrnhutters*, who noted dryly that this was what they had been saying all along, without anyone paying attention. At about the same time, another prophet attributed an epidemic to a similar cause. Neither the missionaries nor their few devoted followers trusted these new prophets: "This had nothing to do with Christianity", they noted, "but was merely a new and false god brought to deceive people". In particular, they deplored the reinstitution of heathen ceremonies which had been abandoned before. They also regretted that because of these new gods, there was a great deal of unrest among the Saramaka.

After the withdrawal of Mähr in 1813, the converts lost contact with the mission. When the *Herrnhutters* resumed mission work in Bambey in 1840, they found few traces of Christianity in the upper river area.

d. *The pole belief*

On a day in October 1843, a loud and fearsome noise was heard in the Saramaka village of Katjoe, not far from the mission station of Bambey. In the beginning, it had sounded like a beating of drums in the distance but then, all of a sudden, the noise became much louder, almost as loud as the roaring of a jaguar. This frightening sound was produced by Tiopo, a native of the Bambey region and a well-known medium in a fit of possession. The spirit that was upon him and spoke through his mouth, said "I have been sent by God to tell you that from now on you must stop doing evil. There has to come an end to aggression; the man-handling of others with sticks and iron implements, killing, poisoning, adultery and stealing. The bearing of false witness also is a horror to God. There are two roads to choose from: one is broad and made for easy going but leads people to eternal pain. The other, however, is narrow and made for hard going. Nobody would go this way out of his free will, but yet this leads to Christ and the eternal blissful life. God the Lord makes it known to you that you have to prepare yourselves and pray" (Schmidt 1846: 527). When he was asked to which God they had to pray, the answer was: "To Christ. You must go to the church and your prayers have to be sincere. But even those who do not go to the church must repudiate all other gods and pray to the Great God

three days a week" (Schmidt 1847: 630-631). Tiopo announced that he would bring this message to all Bush Negroes.

On 22 October 1843, Tiopo sent a message to Bambey, the mission station where Rasmus Schmidt and his wife had resumed missionary work in 1840. The first reaction to Tiopo's divine message was one of consternation. Some declared that it was all deception and they did not even want to discuss it. Others felt differently about it and listened to Tiopo's message. From that time onwards, interest in church and mission school greatly increased.

A second visit of Tiopo to Bambey in November 1843 revealed two important aspects of the new movement: profound ambivalence towards Christianity and an apocalyptic vision of the world. Tiopo's immediate aim was to remove his stepdaughter from Bambey to his own village of Katjoe; the girl's mother did not approve of her attending church. A few days after his arrival, Tiopo began speaking in trance. Christian elders kept aloof by refusing the sugar-cane juice he offered them to drink. After some hesitation, Tiopo finally delivered his divine message: "I have called upon you to harken to what I have to proclaim, right here in the country of the Bush Negroes. You who belong to the church, read books and listen to the word of God; what do you think of the end of times? When is it to be? I will tell you this: it is imminent. The son of God will soon come to judge the world". At last he concluded by pointing one hand at a Christian elder and the other at the heathens. To the first he said: "You belong to the children of the Lord" and to the latter: "A curse rests on you". He instructed the Christians to start praying for the heathens so that they might also go to heaven.

The message made a deep impression. Sampie, one of the more prominent village headmen of the area, urged the people to work out a compromise that would allow them to escape doom and yet remain free in religious matters so that they could retain their obeahs, or supernatural medicines. They fell back on a response resorted to earlier in times of catastrophe (Schmidt 1846: 531-533): they built dual shrines in honour of both God and the ancestors. They erected a *Gran Gado pau* (a pole in honour of the Great God) and an *ouwroe nengre pau* (a pole for the ancestors). The first one was a long pole with a plank attached to its top, from which a flag hung down and a bell jingled in the wind as an answer to God. The second one, much shorter, was dedicated to the ancestors. Tiopo was chosen as high priest and given responsibility for the celebrations which consisted of three days of praying and were crowned with a night of singing and dancing (1846: 535).

When the Saramaka further upstream heard about the events, they were anxious to install similar shrines in their own villages. They invited Tiopo to erect the poles. Tiopo, possessed by his spirit, addressed audiences at various places: "Everyone is free to go to the church; those who do not want to pray with us at the poles can go to the whites at the mission post at Bambey". The response of the people was enthusiastically in favour of the new cult. They cheered Tiopo massively: "We do not want to go to the church, we will stay with you and pray to *Gran Gado*" (1846: 537).

Signs of dissatisfaction with the *tiki bribi* cult were not long in coming. By the end of 1843, a few of Tiopo's original followers had returned to the church of the Christians. Interesting also is Tiopo's own vacillation. When, on 30 August 1844, a heavy earthquake was felt in the interior of Surinam, Tiopo sent his followers a message that had been revealed to him by *A Geesi Gado* (he who resembles God), the spirit that possessed him: the wisest course would be to turn their backs on the 'pole belief' and return to the church. The missionary Schmidt grasped the opportunity. He travelled to the villages upstream to inform people of the message of Tiopo's spirit but he met with little response (Schmidt 1847: 618).

Other reports also stress that the new movement apparently had taken root. In an account of his travels in 1846, the missionary Treu (1847: 395) reported that he had seen shrines of this new cult in all Saramaka villages with the single exception of Bambey. People also complained to Treu about the high fees exacted by Tiopo for his ritual services. For 1847 an innovation was reported; the followers of Tiopo added a third pole to each shrine, this one specially dedicated to Christ. In the same year, they also brought pressure to bear upon the Christians of Bambey to join ranks with the faithful of *tiki bribi*. As a result of this pressure, the Christians decided to leave: in 1848 they settled at a place downstream from Bambey and much closer to the plantation colony (Meissner and Meissner 1850: 427). The place founded was called Ganzee, later to become a stronghold of the *Herrnhutters*.

The 'pole belief' kept a much firmer grip on the Saramaka than any of the other movements. In the early 1880s, an anonymous account by a missionary stressed the central role of the *tiki bribi* shrines in the ritual life of a Saramaka village (MBB. 1883: 62-63). In 1885, Martin (1888: 61) visited Saramaka villages in the middle section of the Suriname River; he described the *tiki bribi* shrines in minute detail. Schneider, writing in 1883 (1893: 21-22), mentioned the prevalence of

this 'pole belief' among Saramaka. Even in this century, interested observers of Bush Negro life have noticed the presence of *tiki bribi* shrines (Junker 1925; Leerdam 1957).

e. *Johannes King of the Matawai*

Johannes King, the son of a Matawai mother and a Djuka father, was born about 1830. During his childhood he lived for some years in Paramaribo, capital of Surinam. Before King's family finally settled at Maripaston on the lower Saramacca in 1852, they had lived at various places in the border area between the plantation colony and Bush Negro territory. During his first marriage, he spent a few years among the Saramaka, not far from the mission post of Ganzee. There he became gravely ill, and was brought back to Maripaston (Freytag 1927: 19). It was during this period that the first revelations came to King in his dreams. He dreamed that God showed him heaven and hell and warned him that the Bush Negroes could only be spared the terrible sufferings of the damned if they turned to Christianity (1927: 20-24). Specifically, God instructed him to apply to the Moravian missionaries for religious instruction. King took this decisive step in 1857 (1927: 27).

Through dreams, God showed King how to build a church and continued to guide him until the work was completed. In October 1861, two missionaries visited Maripaston to see what Johannes King had accomplished. To their surprise the church building had been completed and all traces of idolatry had vanished from Maripaston (1927: 30).

A number of confrontations between King and the obeah men of Maripaston had preceded this visit. King's way of dealing with these rivals was very direct: he accosted the medicine men when they were in trance and challenged their spirits. All these confrontations ended successfully for King, and the medicine men stopped their work or disappeared from Maripaston. King then crowned his success by an iconoclastic campaign in the village. He consolidated his position by converting a number of his relatives and a few important elders. The conversion of *Granman* (paramount chief) Kalkun in particular proved to be crucial: it opened the way for the *Herrnhutters*. The missionaries now began to support King openly; they treated him as the spiritual leader of Maripaston, and sent a teacher to assist him. Until 1875, Maripaston remained the principal station of the *Herrnhutters*; afterwards, schools and churches were established in several other Matawai villages. Voorhoeve and Van Renselaar (1962: 211) dismiss King and his movement with these words: "... we except Johannes King, who

first became active at about the time of the emancipation and who did not attempt to achieve any religious ideals of his own but was entirely absorbed into the missions ...".² The question is: was he "entirely absorbed into the missions"? How regular a member was he of the Congregation of Moravian Brethren? Anyone who reads the Diaries of Johannes King³ knows that his primary source of inspiration was not the Bible, but the revelations that reached him through dreams and visions. The revelations first came to him through dreams, and were later reinforced by visions. In his diaries, King described how in clear daylight his mind wandered away from his body and experienced sensations of a most extraordinary character. Other Christians may also have had such visions, but what distinguished King was that he began to convert people to Christianity *on the basis* of these revelations. When preaching in the church at Maripaston, he mentioned these dreams and visions to the faithful and offered them as important sources of supernatural guidance. In 1867, this brought him into open conflict with Manille, a teacher sent by the Moravians. Much as they valued the results of King's work, the Moravians looked askance at King's means of religious persuasion. After his conflict with Manille, King was no longer allowed to act as God's mouthpiece during regular church services. In private, he continued preaching on the basis of his dreams and visions till the end of his life.

There seems to be very little reason to dismiss King as a prophet. To all intents and purposes, King's performance in the 1850s and 1860s was an astounding *virtuoso* fact. Until the end of his days, King's charismatic appeal proved to be a building block for the Christian congregation. This became apparent in the beginning of the 1890s, when the *Gaan Tata* cult succeeded in getting a foothold in most Matawai villages. This happened when King's position had been severely damaged by the hostility and incessant attacks of *Granman* Noah Adrai, King's brother. When Adrai eventually banished King from Maripaston, there

² Voorhoeve and Van Renselaar are right when they say that the Johannes King movement began around 1863. It probably started some years earlier, in 1857. However, they emphasize the year 1880 as the watershed in the history of the Bush Negroes. Therefore, there is little reason to exclude this movement from consideration.

³ The diaries of Johannes King have been partly translated and edited by De Ziel (1973). Bibliographical notes on the work of King are to be found in De Ziel (1973: 8-9). In this article we made extensive use of the biography of Johannes King written by the German missionary Freytag (1927). A publication on Johannes King's dreams and visions is in preparation under the editorship of Professor Voorhoeve (*Skrekiboekoe* or Book of Horror).

were only a few relatives willing to follow him in exile to his bush camp. But King quickly recouped part of his former influence after his brother's death in 1893. Aided by the colonial government, King brought the downstream villages back into the Christian fold. He also had remarkable success in the upper river villages where life was still dominated by traditional religious specialists and where opposition to Christianity had been persistent (Freytag 1927: 78-79). All this would have been unthinkable without Johannes King's visionary exploits and charismatic appeal.

III. THE GOLD RUSH

It cannot be denied that many prophetic movements occurred among the Bush Negroes of Surinam after 1880. But to confirm the Voorhoeve and Van Renselaar thesis, it is equally necessary to prove that the Creoles had made more economic progress than the Bush Negroes, because a core element in their theory is the following proposition:

The position of the Bush Negroes, relative to that of the Creoles of the coast, deteriorated considerably as the result of (a) abolition of slavery in 1863; (b) rapid social progress after 1880 as a result of new economic opportunities (1962: 210).

At the invitation of the authors, let us examine the period beginning in 1880. We propose to limit it to fifty years, that is to say, to take the Great Depression, when all groups in Surinam were having a difficult time, as the end of it. Within this half century, the economic position of the Bush Negroes will be assessed and then compared with that of the Creoles. As we will shortly hope to demonstrate, there is no basis at all for the statement that the relative position of the Bush Negroes 'deteriorated considerably'. Quite the contrary. After 1880 the Bush Negroes experienced a most spectacular economic upsurge that put them ahead of the Creoles for half a century. The exploitation of their key position in river transport, on which both gold diggers and balata bleeders came to depend, rendered the Bush Negroes dividends far in excess of Creole income.

The gold industry began in neighbouring French Guiana in the 1860s. In 1877, gold was mined in substantial quantities for the first time in Surinam as well. In the 1880s average yearly production in Surinam rose from 670 kilograms (KG)⁴ to a level of 813 KG in the 1890s and again reached a higher level in the first decade of this century (950 KG). The second decade was still a fairly good one with yearly averages of

⁴ A kilogram is equivalent to 2.2046 pounds.

826 KG. Afterwards, production fell to a level just above 300 KG per annum. Earnings were high. In the year 1900, for instance, the gold industry netted 1,196,141 florins; in 1905, 1,402,176; in 1910, 1,446,073 and in 1915, 1,619,844 florins (Van Traa 1946: 209). Impressive though this may be, the Surinamese gold industry was dwarfed by developments in French Guiana where production levels were three times higher.⁵

The gold was mainly produced through placer mining. Although deposits containing gold were scattered widely over Surinam and French Guiana, they were for the most part located in the interior which is covered by the dense South American rain forest. So transport had to follow the rivers that flow from the low mountainous region on the border of Brazil to the Atlantic Ocean, a distance of 200 to 300 miles. But about 30 to 50 miles from the Atlantic, all rivers are blocked by a natural barrier of rapids and falls. These obstacles repeat themselves every 5 or 10 miles. Moreover, both in Surinam and in French Guiana, the rivers are often shallow. That leaves only one means of conveyance suitable for transport under these circumstances: the dug-out log canoe. And one group had a virtual monopoly over this resource: the Bush Negroes. They held the key that could unlock the interior of Surinam and French Guiana to the thousands of gold-diggers who came from all parts of the world.

Attempts to reach upriver placers without employing Bush Negroes proved to be hazardous and time-consuming (Polak 1908: 180), and often ended in disaster (Franssen Herderschee 1905a: 85). Each month the course to follow through the meander of rapids and falls was different from the preceding one; seasonal variation in water level altered the labyrinth of water and rocks considerably. Only the Bush Negroes knew where to go, and only they had the nerve and the skill to navigate the dangerous rapids.

From 1880 onwards, most Bush Negroes were gainfully employed in river transport, both in Surinam and in French Guiana. In the latter country, the river transporters were mainly Saramaka. They found a hefty demand for their services from gold-diggers and companies working in the basins of the Mana, Sinnamary, Approuague, Comté and Oyapock. Many of the Saramaka married Creole women and built villages along the upper reaches of the Mana and the middle section of the Oyapock (Neumann 1967: 104). In 1923, the number of Saramaka men who worked in French Guiana was estimated at no less than 2,000 (Junker 1946: 83; Wong 1938: 323). Most of these came from villages on

⁵ Cf. *De Indische Mercur* 1905: 614.

the upper Suriname River and its main tributaries, the Pikin Rio and the Gran Rio.

The border between Surinam and French Guiana is formed by the Lawa and the Maroni (after the confluence of the Lawa with the Tapanahoni, the river is known as the Maroni). The tract of land drained by the Lawa and Maroni rivers and their tributaries was to become another main area for the gold industry. Before 1920 this basin was almost a preserve for the Djuka, to be shared with small groups of Paramaka, Boni, Matawai and Saramaka. But in the early 1920s, the numbers of Saramaka boatmen grew rapidly; they became formidable competitors for the Djuka (Albina Commissie 1921-1922). Long before the gold rush started the Djuka had built settlements along stretches of the Lawa and Maroni River, while retaining their villages along the Tapanahoni. Later, the Matawai and Saramaka obtained a share in this market as well (Albina Commissie 1921-1922: 13). Of all the main areas of gold mining, we will take only this basin for closer scrutiny. It will give us a chance to examine how the Djuka, a group so prolific of prophetic movements, were doing economically.

A BONANZA IN THE BUSH

Gold production in the Lawa-Maroni basin was at its highest between 1890 and 1920, hence demand for river transport peaked during this period. The basin had known two great gold rushes. The first, from 1885-1888, had brought 5,000 or 6,000 treasure hunters from all parts of the world swarming over the huge tract of land between the Tapanahoni and Lawa rivers. The second, in 1901, lured 5,000 of them to the Inini Creek, a tributary of the Lawa (Franssen Herderschee 1905a: 108). When the euphoria was over, enough placers had been opened up and enough labourers employed to require the regular services of a great number of boat crews. For French Guiana, the population of independent gold-diggers and labourers of gold companies was estimated at 6,000 in 1902, 12,000 in 1911, 10,000 in 1926 and 4,500 in 1936 (Dupont-Gonin 1970: 241). All these gold-diggers had to be shuttled to the placers and back, and food and equipment had to be brought up. Travellers noticed the busy traffic of boats going up and down the river (Kersten, 1896: 99; Franssen Herderschee 1905a: 47).

The following table gives an idea of the development of gold mining in Surinam and French Guiana with particular attention to the Lawa-Maroni basin.

Table I *Gold production in the Lawa-Maroni basin (Dutch and French side) compared with total production for Surinam and French Guiana (KG)*

period	1. Surinam	2. French Guiana	Lawa-Maroni		Total basin
			3. Dutch side	4. French side	
1880-1885	3,134	9,292	533	3,178	3,711
1885-1890	3,550	8,465	182	2,895	3,077
1890-1895	3,870	10,730	853	3,670	4,523
1895-1900	4,258	13,182	1,502	4,508	6,010
1900-1905	3,701	18,514	1,668	6,332	8,000
1905-1910	5,705	19,118	2,221	6,538	8,759
1910-1915	4,555	18,293	1,955	6,256	8,211
1915-1920	3,701	13,004	1,420	4,447	5,867
1920-1925	1,915	7,100	1,088	2,428	3,516
1925-1930	1,087	6,909	504	2,363	2,867

Compiled from the following sources: Snellen (1935: 155) for columns 1 and 3, *Statistiques* for columns 2 and 4 (see note 6).

The steady decline of gold production after 1920 was cushioned to some extent by the booming balata extraction industry. Earnings from balata 'bleeding'⁷ rose from 500,000 florins annually between 1900 and 1905 to three or four times that amount between 1920 and 1930 (Van Traa 1946: 208). Rudolf van Lier estimated that in some years between 8,000 and 9,000 labourers, mainly Creoles from Surinam and British

⁶ For the Surinamese side of the basin we have a breakdown of gold production figures at the district level: the Surinamese district of Marowijne (Maroni) represents the whole of the former Dutch part of the basin; the figures can be copied from published material (Snellen 1935: 155). For the French part the task was less easy. As far as we know, the statistics of the French colonial administration do not give a breakdown for all rivers. It is with the help of the *Tableau général de la production minière en 1909 (Statistiques)* that we can separate production figures of two basins (Mana and Maroni) from those of other rivers, but only for 1909. During that year, the two river basins taken together produced 57 % of all gold in French Guiana. As a first step, we have assumed that ratio to remain constant over the whole period between 1880 and 1930. Secondly, we assumed that the ratio between production in Lawa-Maroni and Mana basins was 6:4. This is based on the distribution of concession areas over the two river basins given in a map by Dupont-Gonin (1970: 256) and on another map indicating the location of the main placers (Seyer 1956: 520). Thus gold production in the Lawa-Maroni basin is 0.57×0.60 % of total production in French Guiana.

⁷ The word 'bleeders' refers to the way balata gum is obtained. Incisions are made in the bark of a bully tree and the juice which slowly flows out is then collected (Buschkens 1974: 116; Van Traa 1946: 128).

Guiana, were employed in the interior. With the exhaustion of easily accessible forest areas, the 'bleeders' had to penetrate deeper into the interior. Like the gold-diggers before them, they needed the Bush Negro to carry them upriver, over rapids and falls. When Willem van Lier arrived at the confluence of Lawa and Tapanahoni in August 1927, he was struck by the sight of so many boats carrying 'bleeders' and their produce (1927).

But by comparison with the first two decades of the century, the golden days were over after 1920. The first Annual Report of the colonial administration to mention a return of the Bush Negroes from river transport to their traditional occupation of lumbering is that of 1921 (*Koloniaal Verslag* 1921). A few years later, Willem van Lier (August 1924) wrote that at Forestière in the lower Maroni 200 Bush Negroes were engaged in lumber work. Although it had been reported earlier that Bush Negroes were unwilling to work in balata extraction (Sack 1909: 21), in 1927 Willem van Lier, then working as a prospector for a balata company, found that he could easily hire Bush Negroes at wages comparable to those of the Creole labourer. In the 1920s, there clearly was more competition and less demand for river transport. Prices fell from an average of 20 or 25 florins per unit of freight in the early 1900s to 7 florins in 1930 on the Albina-Contesté route (Van Haaren 1932: 27). As early as 1924, experienced Djuka carriers poured out their troubles to Willem van Lier (1924). After 1930, the Great Depression caused a precipitous drop of income both for Creoles and for Bush Negroes.

How much did the Bush Negroes profit from transporting gold-diggers and balata bleeders during those golden decades (1890-1920)? The answer is given by a missionary writing in 1901: "Overnight, the Bush Negroes have become men of means" (Neumann 1967: 102-103). And in 1894 another missionary wrote: "They can buy whatever European goods they wish to have" (1967: 103). Kersten (1896: 99) thought that river transport was most expensive. Leaders of expeditions (Franssen Herderschee 1905a: 33; De Goeje 1908: 174) considered the transport business lucrative for the Bush Negroes. Schneider (1893: 17) contemptuously dismissed a remark by a Bush Negro that he possessed over 7,000 florins, but had to admit that the house of his informant was stocked full with valuable goods. In the accounts of the missionaries, one regularly comes across expressions of amazement at the affluence of the Bush Negroes (Mitt. 1895: 711). One missionary noted with surprise that a Bush Negro handed him 500 florins in a rather casual

way with the request to keep it for him until he came back from a trip upriver. Pareau (1898: 178) mentioned the diligence of one District Commissioner at Albina who helped the Bush Negroes to recover claims on French subjects worth several thousand florins. Earlier, in 1888, Coudreau noticed that gold-diggers working in the Lawa region were greatly impressed by Boni prosperity; they estimated that the 200 Boni households owned more than 144,000 florins (300,000 French francs).⁸

Many writers at the turn of the century were struck by the luxury goods the Bush Negroes could afford to buy. Van Panhuys (1908: 38) wrote that the Djuka spent their money on "tea-sets, clocks, musical boxes and clothes". Members of an expedition in 1903 marvelled at the sight of Bush Negro boatmen dragging fancy furniture (Viennese chairs) over the slippery stones in the rapids of the Lawa river (Franssen Herderschee 1905: 53-54). These chairs, it should perhaps be noted, were destined to adorn the interior of a Bush Negro hut, not the dwelling of a European living in colonial style. Now it may be claimed that all these signs of Bush Negro affluence are only circumstantial evidence, but fortunately more substantial data are available.

A number of indirect but significant indicators reveal full employment for the male Bush Negro population. Many writers have observed that around the turn of the century, the Djuka were abandoning their traditional occupation, lumber work.⁹ River transport, though equally arduous, was obviously more lucrative. Employers found it extremely difficult to hire Djuka as labourers¹⁰ although the wages being paid were often more than double the pay that a Creole in Paramaribo would collect.¹¹

⁸ Before World War I, 100 French francs were equivalent to about 48 Dutch florins or 19.20 U.S. dollars.

⁹ Reported by Neumann (1967: 102), Polak (1908: 70), Spalburg (1899: 3) and Van Panhuys (1908: 37).

¹⁰ Reported by missionaries such as Kersten (1895: 70), employers in the gold industry (Polak 1908: 203), leaders of expeditions (Franssen Herderschee 1905a: 26, 40, 84; De Goeje 1908: 63) and government officials (*Koloniaal Verslag* 1882).

¹¹ Creole labourers in the gold industry usually earned fl. 1.25 a day plus keep, but some received 2 florins or even fl. 2.50 (Polak 1914-1917: 316). Government expeditions had to pay 4 (Franssen Herderschee 1905a: 11), and sometimes 5 (1905: 80) or even 6 florins a day (1905: 96). The Gonini expedition employed a Bush Negro with a wooden leg (1905: 80) for a wage of 4 florins a day. Creole labourers working for the same expeditions received 2 florins a day, but only after they had repeatedly shown their discontent (1905a: 102). Conditions were not so different in other parts of Surinam. In 1912 a District Commissioner and a chief of the Matawai signed a contract which fixed wages at 4.50 florins a day (Benjamins 1915).

TYPES DE PIROGUIERS BONIS
RAVITAILLEURS DES CHERCHEURS D'OR

Bush Negro boatmen (from Tripot 1910)

Ladies of the placers (from Coudreau 1893)

Bush Negro boatmen teaming up for difficult passage (from Crevaux 1884)

An even stronger indication is the inelasticity of labour market conditions. Once gold mining had begun, any increase in the demand for river transport caused freight prices to rise steeply. The discovery of rich deposits along the Inini, a tributary of the Lawa, which has its source in French Guiana, is a case in point. Between 1894 and 1900 freight prices climbed slowly from 10 florins per barrel (*vat*)¹² in 1894 (Mitt. 1895: 711) to 17 florins in 1900 (Van Loon 1904: 13). But in 1901, right after the discovery of the bonanza on the Inini, prices shot through the roof. Although the extra miles from the Lawa to the Inini justified only a 10 % increase, hundreds of treasure hunters were willing to pay 50 or 55 florins a barrel (1904: 13). The population along the Inini rose from a few hundred to five thousand. As a result, the *Compagnie des Mines d'Or*, the main concessionary on the Dutch side of the border, found itself short of supplies of food and without opportunity to ship in more equipment or spare parts. This situation continued even after the company agreed to pay an increase of prices by 100 %. It appeared there were simply not enough Bush Negro carriers available to handle the extra demand. But in 1904 the Inini gold rush was over and prices were back to 20 florins a barrel (Franssen Herderschee 1905b: 14).

From published sources and manuscripts, a few estimates on the income of Bush Negro boat crews can be gleaned. In 1894, a missionary (Mitt. 1895: 711) estimated the earnings at 120 florins per trip. Spalburg (1899: 16), reporting on his journey to Dritabiki in 1896, calculated that the boat crew had earned 240 florins in one week. A missionary writing in 1901 (Neumann 1967: 102) mentioned an even higher figure: 1,000 French francs or about 480 florins for a single trip. In 1922, Nahar, an agent of the *Compagnie des Mines d'Or*, estimated the earnings of a boat crew at 900 French francs a month or 450 florins before the devaluation of the French franc (Albina Commissie 1921-1922: 22).¹³

¹² The unit of measurement in river transport is the *vat* (Dutch) or *baril* (French), a barrel of salted meat with a weight of approximately 90 kg. Although passengers are usually counted as one barrel, or one and a half (Levat 1898: 86), some reports indicate that passengers considered more important than others had to pay more (Neumann 1967: 164). A soldier was rated as one barrel, while a sergeant had to pay for two barrels and a medical doctor for 3.5 barrels. A woman, by the way, was considered the equivalent of 1.5 barrels (Bonne-Wepster 1927: 207).

¹³ There is good reason to be on guard against bias here. Nahar was an agent of the *Compagnie des Mines d'Or*, and was presenting his testimony to a commission of inquiry set up to determine the causes of the strike of the river

For a more systematic comparison of the economic position of Creoles and Bush Negroes, we need an estimate of the yearly income of a Bush Negro boat crew. To obtain such information two ways are open. One could start with the individual boat crew (a) and estimate the number of trips that could be made in one year. This approach would also require information on the amount of freight the average boat carried and on freight prices and their fluctuations. At a later stage, the distribution of income among crew members would have to be known. The second method (b) takes the total sum spent on transportation by companies or individual concessionaries and then divides this amount by the number of crews operating in the basin.

a. *Maximum income of a boat crew*

i. Number of return trips

Nahar (Albina Commissie 1921-1922: 22) offered as his opinion that a crew could complete two trips per month from Albina, at the mouth of the Maroni, to the main gold fields on the Lawa. This sharply differs from Van Loon's (1904: 140) estimate that a crew would need three weeks to get from Albina to the Lawa. They were both right but for different periods of the year. It could take three weeks when abundant rainfall had swollen the river, but under normal circumstances the trip could be made in ten days.¹⁴

transporters in 1921. Nahar's company had everything to gain from lower freight rates. This may have been a reason for his rather sanguine estimate of what a boat crew could do in one month: two trips a month from Albina to the placer of his company.

¹⁴ Under 'normal circumstances', the trip from Albina to a settlement near the confluence of the Lawa and the Tapanahoni would take five or six days, Struycken de Roysancour (1909: 7) informs us. However, due to high water levels and some unspecified mishaps, it took him 9½ days. The distance from Albina to the confluence of the Lawa and the Tapanahoni equals about 2/3 of the voyage to the Lawa gold fields. Here are a few examples from the notes of travellers.

January 1892	6½ days to confluence, 2½ more days to Lawa gold fields (Loth 1892: 547)
April 1895	6 days to confluence (Kersten 1896: 99)
August 1923	6 days from Albina to a place 20 miles 'into' the Tapanahoni (Diary, W. van Lier)
July 1924	5 days from Albina to confluence (<i>Ibid.</i>)
January 1925	5 days to confluence (<i>Ibid.</i>)
January 1926	5 days to confluence (<i>Ibid.</i>)
September 1927	5 days to confluence (<i>Ibid.</i>)
Parreau (1898: 61)	estimated the trip from Albina to the Lawa gold fields to take 10 days.

Any calculation has to be based on a year consisting of only ten months. The month of June was often unsuitable for transport because of high water levels, and by the end of August and the beginning of September many transporters were engaged in clearing their fields. This leaves us with about 300 days. In the remainder of the year, the average number of days needed for the upstream voyage could safely be estimated at 12 days, while the return trip could be completed within 4 days. Add another 4 days for loading, unloading, boat repairs and waiting in line for payment at the District Commissioner's office. Thus, the average return trip would take 20 days, which implies that the number of return trips a boat crew could make would be 15.

It might be argued that such a schedule would tax the boat crew too much, or that it would leave Bush Negroes insufficient time to manage religious and kinship affairs. We agree with the first point. Older Djuka men have told us in great detail how arduous river transport was: they did tax themselves to the utmost. Our informant, commenting on the long working days spent in chopping down giant trees for the clearance of plots, said: "Well, this is children's work compared to what we used to do in river transport. We worked so hard and so long that many of us killed ourselves. We rowed longer stretches than we should have, always trying to pass over just one more barrier or rapids before sleeping for the night". As for religious and kin obligations, it should be pointed out that Djuka often conduct a whole string of rituals at a time when everyone is around. The days just after New Year's Day are a favourite period, but also late August and early September when plots have to be cleared. Moreover, many Bush Negroes in the Lawa-Maroni basin can manage kinship affairs without incurring great losses of time because they live in permanent settlements on islands in the river; they are the Paramaka, the Boni and that part of the Djuka which is called the *Bilo*. The last group has retained its villages at the lower end of the Tapanahoni, while at the same time building permanent settlements in parts of the Maroni and the Lawa adjacent to the Tapanahoni. Furthermore, many of the Opo (upper or upstream) Djuka, the segment which has its villages farther into the Tapanahoni, built temporary settlements near Albina and at a few other places in the basin. For these groups, honouring kinship obligations would not clash with gainful employment: they would stop for the night in their own settlement and discuss family or lineage affairs in the late afternoon or early morning.

ii. Load of the average boat

There are examples where a boat carried as many as 16 barrels (Spalburg 1899: 16). But the average boat would take between 8 and 12 barrels (Van Loon 1904: 140; Levat 1898: 85). Here we will take as an average 10 barrels for every upstream trip, or 150 barrels for all upstream trips taken together.

For the downstream traffic, there would be less demand. Food and equipment went upstream, never the other way, and the monthly production of gold of the *Compagnie*, the biggest concessionary of the Dutch side, could fit into one little box (Franssen Herderschee 1905a: 86). But in the 1920s the balata had to be shipped to the coast, and there had always been considerable demand for the transport of passengers. The 250 labourers of the *Compagnie*, for example, were mainly Creoles who wanted their regular vacations in Paramaribo. In 1903, the population in the Inini region was estimated at 5,000 and most of these had to be brought back, with or without a fortune. Independent gold-diggers, poachers, labourers for the mining companies and balata bleeders, all needed a rest after a long stint of work in the humid rain forest. They made constant demands on the facilities for downstream transport. But it was never on a par with the demand for transport in the other direction.

iii. Freight prices and fluctuations

We will give the prices per unit of freight, the barrel, on the upstream run from Albina to Contesté (now Benzdorp), where the *Compagnie* had its concession (see Table II).

The income on the downward trip is difficult to gauge. There was less freight to be transported downstream, and the whole distance could be covered in a few days and with less effort. Polak (1908: 232) mentioned 10 florins as a fair average price per barrel in 1903, whereas upstream transport in this year netted fl. 25 per barrel. There seems to have been a good deal of variability in the price ratio between the two streams of traffic. Gold-diggers returning from the Tapanahoni in 1898 had to pay fl. 12.50 per person (Spalburg 1896-1899), while the upstream price level stood at 15 florins (Pareau 1898: 60). In 1907, the price for a barrel from Granbori to Albina, a distance comparable to the Albina-Contesté run, was fl. 17.50 (De Goeje 1908: 150), while the upstream price could not have been higher than fl. 25. In view of the

Table II *Freight prices per barrel on the Albina-Lawa route for upstream traffic*¹⁵

<i>year</i>	<i>price in florins</i>	<i>Source</i>
1885	38	Ministerie van Koloniën 1892
1888	35	Gouvernementsresolutie 1888
1892	19	Ministerie van Koloniën 1892
1894	10	Mitt, 1895: 711
1896	15	Spalburg 1899: 16
1898	15	Pareau 1898: 60
1898	22	Seyer 1956: 322
1900	25	Dupont-Gonin 1970: 240
1901	15-32.50	Polak 1908: 207
1901	15-50	Van Loon 1904: 141
1902	17	Polak 1908: 207
1902	25	Van Loon 1904: 141
1903	20	Franssen Herderschee 1905a: 107
1904	20	Franssen Herderschee 1905b: 14
1905	25	Koloniaal Verslag 1906
1908	20	Willem van Lier 1908
1909	25	Koloniaal Verslag 1909
1915	14.10	Albina Commissie 1921-1922: 21
1920	12-15	Albina Commissie 1921-1922: 21
1925	7	Secretaris brieven 1926
1930	7	Van Haaren 1932: 27

1885 and 1892 Ministerie van Koloniën Litt. B. 67/328, May 4, 1892, National Archives Schaarsbergen.

1888 Gouvernementsresolutie La. A. no. 8007, December 10, 1888, National Archives Schaarsbergen.

1925 Secretaris brieven S.B. 648, July 3, 1926, Central Archives Paramaribo.

lesser demand for downstream transport, a safe estimate would put the earnings on downward trips at 25 % of the income gained on the long pull against the force of the river. The calculation of maximum boat crew earnings can now be made (see Table III).

b. *Transportation costs*

We will now look at total expenditures of companies and gold-diggers and then divide this by the number of boat crews in the Maroni-Lawa basin.

¹⁵ A few references here, for the years 1894 and 1896, are to the Albina-Tapanahoni route. The distance is less, but the difference is not big enough to distort the comparison.

Table III *Maximum income of a boat crew on the Albina-Lawa route between 1894 and 1930 (in constant florins) per annum*¹⁶

year	price per barrel	load	upstream earnings	downstream earnings	total earnings
1894	10	150	1,500	375	1,875
1898	15	150	2,250	562	2,812
1903	20	150	3,000	750	3,750
1905	25	150	3,750	938	4,688
1915	14.10	150	2,115	529	2,644
1920	15	150	2,250	562	2,812
1930	7	150	1,050	263	1,313

In 1903, the *Compagnie des Mines d'Or* footed a transport bill of 54,355 florins, more than 15 % of their gross earnings for that year (300,000 florins). Despite the fact that the *Compagnie* was by far the biggest concessionary on the Dutch side of the Lawa, calculation of the total amount paid cannot be made from this figure because most of the Bush Negroes worked for other companies and independent gold-diggers in French Guiana.

The fact that it was the policy of the Dutch colonial administration to channel all payments to carriers through the District Commissioner's office at Albina led us to believe that his figures (175,000 florins in 1915¹⁷) were more reliable. But this is not the case: even the District Commissioner (Albina Commissie 1921-1922: 17) had to admit that boat crews from the Tapanahoni were increasingly inclined to evade his office at Albina¹⁸ and go straight to the French side of the river for receiving payments and buying goods in the shops of St. Laurent (1921-1922: 34).

The business Bush Negroes did with French companies was more than ten times greater than that done with the Dutch firms (1921-1922:

¹⁶ It should be emphasized that we are dealing here with *maximum* earnings. We have little doubt that in 1894, 1903 or even 1920 the *real* income of a boat crew was close to the figures mentioned here. But in 1930 there was not enough demand for transport so boat crews would not make 15 trips a year fully loaded.

¹⁷ The commission mentioned a sum of 280,000 French francs for a period of 9 months in 1915, which is about 375,000 francs or 175,000 florins for that year.

¹⁸ The Dutch colonial government had at several times attempted to control river traffic by acting as an intermediary between 'Dutch' Bush Negroes and *all* their business partners, whether French, Dutch or of other nationalities. Cf. Struycken de Roysancour (1909).

13). The estimates of agents actually working in the Lawa region are closer to the real situation. According to the representative of a gold company in this area, Bush Negroes were paid 350,000 French francs (168,000 florins) in the single year of 1894 (Polak 1908: 70). Tallying clerks working for the colonial administration counted all boats going up and down the Lawa River in April and May 1903. Taking freight prices of fl. 25 for upstream and fl. 10 for downstream transport, they computed that all boat crews, taken together, would net 61,520 florins a month.¹⁹ For reasons mentioned above, a figure for aggregate annual income is obtained after multiplying the monthly earnings by ten, which would set it at 600,000 florins.

As this is a rather narrow basis for extrapolation — just a single two-month count by tallying clerks — a more comprehensive calculation seems required. Starting from production figures in the Lawa-Maroni basin (Table I), the aggregate income of firms and independent workers is easily computed. The next step is to calculate transport costs as a percentage of earnings. This can be computed from the records of the *Compagnie des Mines d'Or* (Van Loon 1904: 141) at Contesté. From 1897 till 1902, the company produced gold worth 4,584,772 French francs. Its transport bill for this five-year period was 933,727 French francs, approximately 20 % of gross income. This ratio between gross earnings and transport costs will be considered a fair average for all companies in the basin; obviously a few placers, such as l'Esperance on the Beiman Creek, were much closer to the coast and therefore had lower transport costs, but most of the bigger companies had their placers in the Inini region, an additional three days from Contesté.

The outlay on transport thus calculated only partially represents the gross income of all Bush Negro crews in the Lawa-Maroni basin. Two sources of income are not reflected in these figures. First, there are the transport expenses of gold-diggers who ventured into the interior and came back without an ounce of gold; such cases of total failure were certainly not rare. In particular, during the feverish months of the gold rushes (Lacroix 1970: 110), — Mana (1880), Lawa (1889), Carsewéne (1894) and Inini (1901) — there must have been hundreds of unsuccessful treasure hunters. Second, among those who did strike rich veins, there were many who knew how to evade the gold tax by smuggling

¹⁹ But the statement on which we rely (Polak 1908: 232) is somewhat unclear. There is also the possibility that the 61,520 florins were earned in a period of two months.

Table IV *Transport costs as percentage of aggregate income of the gold industry in Lawa-Maroni basin (1880-1930)*

<i>period</i>	<i>production of basin</i>	<i>price raw gold (florins)</i>	<i>aggregate income (florins)</i>	<i>transport costs 20%</i>
1880-85	3,771	1,200	4,453,200	890,640
1885-90	3,077	1,250	3,846,250	769,250
1890-95	4,523	1,250	5,635,750	1,130,750
1895-00	6,010	1,250	7,512,500	1,502,500
1900-05	8,000	1,370	10,960,000	2,192,000
1905-10	8,759	1,370	11,999,830	2,399,966
1910-15	8,211	1,260	10,345,860	2,069,172
1915-20	5,867	1,429	8,383,943	1,676,789
1920-25	3,516	1,521	5,347,836	1,069,567
1925-30	2,867	1,503	4,309,101	861,820

column 1: based on Table I.

column 2: before 1900 estimated; after 1900 based on Van Traa (1946: 209, 218).

the precious metal out of the country (Dupon-Gonin 1970: 241). It goes without saying that this gold never entered the official records. For several years around the turn of the century, French government publications cautioned readers almost annually against the distorting consequences of massive tax evasion on official statistics of the gold industry (Statistiques 1900: 35; 1904: 211). According to Levat (1898: 204), almost all the gold produced in French Guiana was refined in Paris; in 1895-1898 the refined gold from this country was valued at between 15 and 18 million French francs per annum. This figure is more than 50 % higher than those given by government statistics for gold production in French Guiana, an increase that cannot be accounted for by the value added in the refining process. Obviously companies and gold-diggers who smuggled gold out of the country needed the services of the Bush Negro transporters as well. In conclusion, we would emphasize that although calculations based on official figures of gold production would bring the collective income of Bush Negro crews to a level of 400,000 or 450,000 per annum in the period between 1900 and 1910, real earnings were probably higher. Thus, the figure of 600,000 florins, based on counting by tallying clerks in 1903 in the Lawa region, is realistic. All Bush Negro boat crews plying the Lawa and its tributaries had about 600,000 florins to share.

The next question is the number of boat crews in this basin. Around

1910, the highest estimate for the Djuka population is 4,000 (Struycken de Roysancour 1909: 1). A number of these were working outside the Maroni-Lawa basin. For example, the Djuka of the Sara Creek were, until a railway was completed in 1911, fully occupied in providing the gold-diggers in this area with food and machinery. So let us put the figure for the Djuka living in the basin at 3,000. There were probably fewer than 300 Paramaka and about the same number of Boni (Albina Commissie 1921-1922: 14, 15). This adds up to a total population of 3,600. From the male population of 1,800 we may safely deduct about 1,000: children and men over 60, unfit for the exertions of river transport. These older men were village headmen or held prestigious positions at oracles or in village councils. This leaves us with 800 potential transporters. It would be safe to deduct at least 200 as those who had other occupations: there were, after all, a few Bush Negro labourers on the placers and a few independent gold-diggers as well. Then too, there were a couple of shopkeepers and some who were employed by the colonial government. Additionally, some Paramaka seemed never to have quit lumber work, while other Paramaka men were profitably engaged in smuggling between Dutch and French Guiana. We should perhaps add a few Matawai (Franssen Herderschee 1905a: 20) and some Saramaka, but before 1910 their numbers were not large enough to distort this calculation (Albina Commissie 1921-1922: 16; Neumann 1967: 104). This leaves us with fewer than 600 carriers, who had the enormous sum of 600,000 to share in 1903, and probably for many years afterwards as well. This figure of 3,000 per boat crew does not seem to be wide of the mark, if one compares it with the figure of 3,750 florins given for the year 1903 in Table III.

The distribution of earnings among crew members was uneven. The boat owners got the lion's share. The price of a big, dug-out canoe (*lai boto*) fit for carrying loads of more than one ton (1,000 kilograms) was high, often well above 250 florins (Franssen Herderschee 1905a: 101; Spalburg 1896-1899). A second category consisted of those who did not possess such boats, but could sell their skills at high rates, probably around three or four florins a day. A third category was formed by the young men who were dependent kin. They were employed on the basis of a savings-plan. Their father or mother's brother would first supply them with food, clothes, hammocks and other bare essentials. After a good number of trips, when the men were far into their twenties, they were given a few hundred guilders to equip their first and future wives with clothes, household utensils and supplies. Without these goods,

no self-respecting girl would consent to marriage. It is obvious that the inequality among members of a boat crew would give the boat owner an income that nearly equalled the earnings of the whole crew, especially if he had male dependent kin.

Compare these figures with the income of the Creole labourers as given in Rudolf van Lier's (1971: 245) summing-up of the economic situation around 1910: "The Creole labourer working on an estate earned 1.17 florins a day on the average, whereas in the gold industry the labourer received an initial wage of 1.50 florins a day plus keep, while for the skilled labourer this wage came to 2.0 or even 2.5 florins a day. In the balata industry a labourer could make 250 to 280 florins plus keep in a period of three to seven months, and his earnings might even come to 1,000 florins for the same period". Buschkens's (1974) judgement on the economic situation in the rural areas is of equal relevance. The Creole farmers who settled in the vicinity of Paramaribo "never attained the slightest degree of prosperity" (1974: 111). The only group among the rural Creole to experience a period of affluence were the cacao-growing smallholders, but their prosperity was over when the crops were struck by a disease in 1895 (1974: 111).

The Albina Commission of Inquiry (Albina Commissie 1921-1922: 22) was not far from the truth when they said that the income of Bush Negroes engaged in river transport was high enough to make the mouths of many labourers in Paramaribo water. In fact, for many years, only the highest paid Creoles could be meaningfully compared with the Bush Negro entrepreneurs. The Creole gold-diggers and balata bleeders who worked for wages which seldom rose above two florins a day (Polak 1914-1917: 316) met with the 'uncivilized' Bush Negro of the interior who was willing to work only when he was paid double the Creole wage. In a period when prophetic movements were springing up like mushrooms from moist soil, the Bush Negro was enjoying a time of affluence.

IV. CONCLUSION

We have dealt with the Voorhoeve and Van Renselaar theory on two levels. First, we discussed the assertion that no prophetic movements had occurred among the Bush Negroes of Surinam before the abolition of slavery in 1863. This appears to be an untenable position: Paulus Puly, the village headman, Tiopo, and Johannes King were prophets, and were at the centre of religious movements. Thus, there is no warrant

for the assumption that emancipation marked a turning-point in the religious life of the Bush Negroes. On the contrary, for all we know, there was a constant ebb and flow of prophetic movements.

Secondly, we examined the building blocks of their theory in the light of pertinent historical data: the independent and dependent variables and the mechanism. For those authors, the independent variable is the declining economic and social position of Bush Negroes vis-à-vis the Creoles of the coast. The dependent variable is the prophetic movement itself. Comparison is the mechanism that converts status inconsistency into prophetic protest; the Bush Negroes became aware of disadvantageous developments because they regularly assessed their own position against that of the Creoles. A painful awareness of economic and social decline was the result; feelings of disorientation and bitterness were fostered. Finally these erupted into prophetic movements.

If we follow Voorhoeve and Van Renselaar by concentrating attention on the period after 1880, the evidence of prophetic movements (the dependent variable) cannot be denied. Equally, there is no reason to question the significance of the process of comparing and assessing positions. Anyone who has lived among Bush Negroes for some time is struck by the frequency of such comparisons and by the great interest that they take in developments in Surinamese society. However, to grant that this part of the mechanism had an empirical referent is not to affirm the whole chain of processes that are either postulated or implicit in the thesis under scrutiny. As we will presently argue, we have no reason to suppose that feelings of discontent engendered by a declining economic position would find their principal outlet necessarily in prophetic movements. Neither are we convinced that it is necessary to subscribe to the specific form the comparison is supposed to take. The Bush Negroes, we submit, compare their lot with the coastal society *as a whole* and as part of a wider Atlantic civilization. Of course, Bush Negroes were aware of national differences, rifts and even — as they express it — fratricide of European nations. Yet from their villages in the bush, to all intents and purposes, it looked like one powerful empire that held the secrets of how to produce wealth, marvellous machines and coveted goods. Not that they were overly impressed by the sons of this empire; in the bush they behaved like clumsy barbarians, and their moral stature was often dubious (Diaries of Johannes King, cf. De Ziel 1973: 44). But the Bush Negroes have always realized that they were dependent upon this 'conglomerate of nations'.

The Creoles, although part of this Atlantic empire, were considered

an off-shoot of paupers. After 1955, this changed when the Bush Negroes realized that Creole politicians from Paramaribo held positions of real political power. But for most of the half century that began in 1880 and ended with the Great Depression, as we have seen, the Bush Negroes were better off than the Creoles. Both Bush Negroes and Creoles must have been aware of this fact. Bush Negroes regularly visited Paramaribo and other places on the coast, and the Creoles travelled and worked in the interior as gold-diggers, balata bleeders or labourers on expeditions. Nothing supports the view that the prophetic movements of this period were reactions to Creole prosperity. The correlation between a declining economic position vis-à-vis the Creoles and the rise of prophetic movements, the chief prop of the Voorhoeve-Van Renselaar thesis, does not exist.

During this fifty-year period, there were short intervals when economic prospects were less favourable for the Bush Negroes. For example, at the end of the First World War, the devaluation of the French franc cut deeply into the income of the Bush Negro carriers. However, during these lean years no prophet rose to prominence. Destitute boat owners did not rally behind such banners. The response of the Bush Negroes was strictly pragmatic: the great strike of 1921 paralyzed river transport for four months (Albina Commissie). There are also accounts of brief but fairly successful strikes in 1904 (Franssen Herderschee 1905b: 127), 1906 (Polak 1908: 70) and 1925 (Willem van Lier, July-August 1925). Such well-planned and carefully executed responses, unaccounted for in the Voorhoeve-Van Renselaar theory, raise further doubt as to the validity of their argument. When Bush Negroes felt cheated out of their prosperity, they did not appear to need a prophet.

We do not intend to offer an alternative hypothesis, but some remarks seem pertinent here. Prophetic movements among Bush Negroes in Surinam have taken very different forms. As we have seen, Paulus Anake started a millennial movement that bore striking resemblances to Melanesian cargo cults. The eschatological tendencies, so prominent here, were mostly absent from other Bush Negro movements. Among the Saramaka and Matawai, the preoccupation with the Christian message and the struggle between the forces of darkness and light were predominant themes. Equally striking in Saramaka prophetic movements was ambivalence about the pagan heritage. But among the Djuka, the intellectual and emotional orientation of prophet and followers was often quite different. Many of their movements were primarily witch-cleansing cults (Thoden van Velzen and Van Wetering 1975).

It has become common to regard prophetic movements as expressions of social and political protest and to assume that the most significant fact about these cults is that they offer an outlet for feelings of despair. In Köbben's opinion "we may safely assume that one of the principal functions of *all* these movements is to offer relief to those who are, or feel themselves to be humiliated and suppressed" (Köbben 1960: 117). Such assumptions, however, hardly can serve as starting points for an analysis. The political stance of the prophet and his followers is a subject for empirical research; there is no basis for assuming that all such movements would necessarily attempt to promote the interests of the oppressed.

Recently, one of the present writers has suggested that at least two of the more important movements among the Djuka, the *Gaan Tata* cult and its sequel, the Akalali cult (1972), got their impetus from the support of successful groups within Djuka society (Thoden van Velzen 1977). It appeared that the *Gaan Tata* priesthood was dependent on the well-paid freight carriers and became in its turn the defender of the boatmen's interests. A similar relationship exists between the prophet Akalali and that segment of the male Bush Negro population which found permanent and gainful employment in Paramaribo. However, we certainly do not wish to imply that all prophetic movements among Bush Negroes are cults of affluence. We suspect that the Anake cult of the Saramaka, for example, might have had a radically different orientation. But it is the task of empirical research to find that out.

Finally, we advocate a cautious step-by-step policy in the search for explanations that would take one cult, or a group of linked cults, as an object of study. Hopefully, such an undertaking would reveal to what extent the character of the movement (theology, routine ritual) is moulded by the political conditions and the prevailing mode of production at the time of its birth. First of all, the exercise should provide information on the social and economic anchorage of its principal actors and supporters. This would be a preliminary for a realistic assessment of the economic and psychic forces behind each movement.

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