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THE COPPENAME KWINTI:
NOTES ON AN AFRO-AMERICAN TRIBE IN SURINAM

II. ORGANIZATION AND IDEOLOGY

The Kwinti are the smallest and least known of the six Bush Negro tribes of Surinam. One of their villages, Pakka Pakka, lies on the Saramacca River within Matuari territory. Bitagron and Kaaimanston, the only other Kwinti villages, are on the banks of the Coppename River. Some aspects of their 'History and Development' were noted in part I (*NWTG* 50, p. 7-17) of this publication.

SOCIAL RELATIONS

From kinship to inter-tribal politics, Kwinti organization is characterized by a certain defiant individualism which is evidenced in a willingness 'to go it alone' and a disinclination for team work.

Foreign Affairs

The Kwinti see themselves as friends of all Bush Negroes except the Matuari. The Matuari paramount chief, *Granman* Aboné, is technically their Granman, and they bristle at this reminder that they are the only tribe without a Granman of its own. Furthermore, they believe that their ancestors fled the Matuari for their very lives, and they recount dark tales of sorcery suffered on the banks of the Saramacca, of brutal and vicious mistreatment, and of slave labor. Their attitude is best illustrated by the single case of witchcraft accusation we encountered: it concerns a young Bitagron Kwinti whose father is a Pakka Pakka Kwinti. Years ago the young man was accused of having murdered a Kaaimanston elder by witchcraft. The only discernible reason for the accusation was the young man's link to Pakka Pakka: "His father is a Matuari!" This example also illustrated the distrust and contempt in which the Kwinti hold the people of Pakka Pakka. They look down upon them for living willingly under the yoke of alien and unreasonable oppressors, witch-ridden and miserable. There have been no Matuari on the Coppename for any length of time. The Coppename Kwinti claim that at present there are no marriages between their people and the Saramacca River Kwinti on either

river. Furthermore, they point out, Pakka Pakka husbands of Coppename Kwinti just have not lasted very long.

On the other hand, Djuka, Saramacca and other Bush Negroes are welcome in the villages. There is full acceptance of these alien tribesmen, and the Kwinti remember that some decades ago a few Boni visited them. They often talk about the chances that some of the Saramacca who were displaced by Lake Brokopondo may decide to settle on the Coppename, and they do not appear to find the possibility objectionable. The Paramacca are dimly remembered relatives, and would surely be welcomed if they visited Kwinti land.

Outside of their legal ties to the Matuari, the Kwinti have no customary relationship with any other tribe. There is no intertribal trade, and no ritual or religious cooperation. There is no acknowledgement of dependence on any outside agency other than the government. And they feel, with some justification, that it forgets them too often. Medical aid is too far away, and the doctor visits too seldom to be able to prevent the epidemics they fear. When in 1970 the government sent the five tribal Granmans on a well-publicized tour of Ghana and other West-African countries, the Kwinti head-captain was not invited, which reminded them of their second-class status. And they feel that the District Commissioners do not visit them often enough to keep a check on the excesses of their own chiefs.

Internal Affairs

In Paramaribo we found few black tribesmen who had heard of the Kwinti. Those who had, stereotyped them as a noisy, argumentative people with beautiful fat women, and men who hunt and fish all the time. There is something to say for this assessment, although most Kwinti women are not particularly obese. Many Kwinti converse in startlingly loud voices, and their terminology for that behavior indicates that it is an admired trait to '*taka trangga*', to 'talk strong'. Until we became used to their volume level, I would sometimes investigate a tumult of thundering voices on the other side of the village, only to find a few people engaged in horseplay, or even working together amicably. Often, however, such verbal explosions accompany — or escalate into — quarreling, an activity of which the Kwinti appear to be inordinately fond.

Legend and history reflect the fact that this culture lacks adequate mechanisms for conflict resolution (see part I). Altercations

between their ancestors and those of the Paramacca resulted in a schism between the two groups. Later, the Kwinti divided over the problem of whether they should join the Matuari, and one group stayed behind in the jungle. Still later, the Kwinti quarreled with the Matuari and separated. Then the Saramacca River Kwinti split up, and Alamu took his followers to the Coppename. In Coppencrissie they argued over the legitimacy of Alamu's leadership, which resulted in another division as one group of his relatives shunned him by moving to Kaaimanston, and others colonized Bitagron, the garden plot of one of Alamu's brothers-in-law. After his death, these two villages in turn wrangled over such matters as the fact that Kaaimanston became the seat of church and school, which led Bitagron to reject the Protestant faith and turn to Catholicism.

In the fashion typical of horticultural societies, Kwinti culture provides individuals with equal access to economic resources, while rigidly controlling the access to certain high-status positions. The most important of these is the position of head-captain, chief of the Coppename Kwinti. This status is the source of a severe threat to the fragile harmony which presently exists between the populations of Bitagron and Kaaimanston. There are now three contenders for the office. The incumbent *bedekabiten* is very old, his authority is waning, and he is being manipulated by the two contenders in Bitagron. The resulting tension must last until a new chief has been legitimated by the Surinam government. But at that time, if history is a guide, strife among the followers of the three contenders may very well result in a new division of the population.

Although succession is often a problem in Bush Negro politics, the Kwinti dilemma is unusual. Basically there are two models for the inheritance of office: that of the Djuka, where the successor must belong to the next generation and preferably to a different matriline of the ruling clan than his predecessor (Köbben 1967, p. 23), and that of the Saramacca, among whom succession rights reside not only in one clan but in one lineage (Herskovits 1928, p. 722; Price 1969, p. 207-217). The Kwinti follow the Djuka model, which means that each of the lineages descending from Alamu's sisters (see Figure) has its turn in providing a leader. Unfortunately, and unlike all the other Bush Negro tribes, the Kwinti do not have a Granman or paramount chief, but a head-captain, a sort of territorial sub-chief. Theoretically if not in practice, the head-captain is subservient to the Granman of the Matuari. The actual position of head-captain is reserved for cer-

tain individuals in Kaaïmanston. The present occupant of the office, Afiti, from the line of Ma Kéembi, moved to Bitagron long ago, because his wife wanted to be near her own relatives. As much among these tribesmen as among the highest echelons of a Western bureaucracy, however, the organizational tenet holds that once an office has been created, it cannot be nullified. Consequently, if the incumbent head-captain were to be promoted to full Granmanship, or if a Bitagron successor were to be so treated, then the position of head-captain would legally return to Kaaïmanston. In that case, Bitagron would have both a village captain and a tribal paramount chief, while Kaaïmanston would have both a village captain and a head-captain who would still technically be able to use his traditional loyalty to the Matuari Granman as a lever against the new Kwinti Granman. No better device for dividing this small society can be imagined.

The problem is further compounded by the fact that although each of Alamu's sisters has had a ruling decendant (see Figure), Paka, the third chief, died before he was formally invested by the Governor. The Surinam government thereupon refused to appoint a Kwinti Granman, but accepted Afiti as a head-captain. Debate now rages among the villagers as to whether Ma Sofia's line has really had its turn at the chieftaincy. If it has (because *Paka* was elected and *did* serve even if it was only for a year), then the mantle must go to Ma Christina's progeny, which has already been represented in the second chief, Marcus Mentor. If it has not (because Paka was never legitimated by the Governor, never drew the traditional salary, but in fact was only an 'acting' leader), then one of Ma Sofia's many descendants is due for the honor. The debate is puzzling since Ma Christina's matrilineage technically ended with her death (see Figure)!

Even if these problems were solved, there would be little chance of the Coppenam Kwinti getting a true Granman unless they could be permanently dissociated from their relatives among the Matuari. The Surinam government, which retains the right to legitimate a Granman, is not likely to exchange the political problems in this small group for disorganization in a much larger one. The separate status of the Pakka Pakka Kwinti means that if the Coppenam Kwinti became independent, the problems outlined in the previous paragraph would be shifted to the Saracca River, upsetting the relationship between the Kwinti there and the much more numerous — and economically much more important — Matuari.

Nevertheless, the importance of the Bush Negroes to the development and exploitation of the resources in Surinam's vast jungles is such that the government will not be able to ignore the problems of chieftaincy on the Coppename. One solution would be the adoption of the Pakka Pakka people into the Matuari tribe as a separate clan. Although precedents for such a change in status occur in Bush Negro history, the example of the Poligudu — who joined the Djuka in the early 1800's (Wong 1938, p. 315-316) — attests that they are not particularly successful. Research on the Saramacca River is needed before such a move could seriously be suggested.

It has been proposed that the next chief of the Coppename Kwinti should be given a new title, one which would indicate a status higher than head-captain, but lower than Granman. This would be a stopgap measure at best, since it continues to imply Kwinti subservience to the Matuari Granman. Even if the question of Matuari control could be resolved, it would not change the problems of intra-tribal conflict. A new position would merely create another stage in the tribe's 'ruling hierarchy', and the potential for conflicting loyalties to New Chief, head-captain, village captains, and *basias* could very likely destroy the Kwinti.

A more practical solution is available within the government's prerogatives. It requires only an explicit interpretation of existing conditions. The whole of Matuari territory lies within District Brokopondo. The inhabited Coppename is part of District Saramacca. The populations of the Kwinti and the Matuari are thus administered by different District Commissioners. In the past, this has minimized any possibility for friction between the Coppename Kwinti and the Matuari. It also means that the Pakka Pakka Kwinti and their western relatives belong to different governmental units. The Granmans of the Bush Negro tribes are formally invested (that is to say, legitimated) by the Governor himself. But when they deal with the government, it is represented by the District Commissioner. In fact, then, the Governor delegates his authority quite directly to the District Commissioner. If this practice were formalized by making Granmans immediately accountable to the District Commissioner, then the new organizational tenet would be that any culturally and politically distinct tribal group is to be represented by a Granman who is directly responsible to the Commissioner of the District in which he resides. At that time, the Coppename Kwinti's anomalous position of head-captain could be eliminated by promoting the

incumbent to Granman status. This would solve the problem of succession to head-captaincy for the Coppename Kwinti, without affecting the traditional authority of the Matuari Granman over the black tribesmen within District Brokopondo. In the absence of fieldwork data, it is impossible, of course, to predict the reaction which a Coppename Granmanship would produce in the Pakka Pakka Kwinti.

Clan and Lineage

A contributing factor to the problems of Kwinti succession is the absence of clans in this society. Kwinti below the age of 60 cannot say with certainty to which *lo* they belong, and few below the age of 45 even know the names of the Kwinti clans. In this they are unique, for the clan is more or less central to the social organization of all the other tribes.

There are two views regarding clanship among the Kwinti. One, held by the majority, is that all Coppename Kwinti belong to the clan of Alamu, and that therefore succession rights should be attached to the lineage, the *bée*. Adherents to this view emphasize that all the people of Kaaimanston and Bitagron descend from Alamu's sisters Ma Christina, Ma Sofia, and Ma Kéembe. (His fourth sister, Ma Fani, "never left the bush, and no one knows if she had children".) The Kwinti are not clear about whether Alamu himself had children, nor about whether he was accompanied to the Coppename by men other than his brothers-in-law. The attitude is that, in any case, all these people soon intermarried. In that sense, there should be either three matrilineal — named after Alamu's sisters — or one clan with three lineages based ultimately upon relationship to Alamu.

The alternate view is held — sometimes simultaneously — by a few elders who claim that there are three clans, and that these are not related to Alamu. In support of this contention they point out that there are three kunu houses in Bitagron, one for each clan. In every other Bush Negro society this would be irrefutable logic, for indeed each clan must have a private place to deal with its curse-load. However, repeatedly *four* clan names were elicited from our informants as terms for the ancestors of the Kwinti: Koffimakka, (An)Yantigoni-*nengge*, Chyamba-*nengge*, and Mendé. These are the names for the original groups of salt-water

slaves who ran away together, and descendants of each of these clans were supposedly among the companions of Alamu. Still, there are indeed only three kunu houses in Bitagron, and one of these is reserved for the people of Kaaïmanston! Genealogies show that every lineage in Bitagron has representatives in Kaaïmanston, and *vice versa*, so the ancient clans have not split territorially.

Furthermore, there are a number of puzzling descent lines such as that of the old woman Sangrita, the sister of *Basia* Timo of Bitagron. She belongs to the Chyamba-*lo*, but both her daughters are members of the Yantigoni-*nengge*. There is no explanation for this breach in matrilineality except: "It often happens that people are of a different *lo* than their mothers." When I pointed out the oddness of this, it was suggested by several villagers that "maybe it is the father's fault." If the system is truly matrilineal, as all other known Bush Negro societies are, and as the Kwinti claim to be, then that 'explanation' is invalid. However, one is reminded of the fact that traces of patrilineality have been reported in the organizations of the other tribes (Herskovits 1928, p. 717; van Lier 1940, p. 204; Hurault 1961, p. 32-33; Köbben 1968, p. 60-61, *et al.*). It is possible that the patrilineal principle is welcomed by the Kwinti because it opens up the competition for chieftancy, which at present is limited to sons of Ma Sophia's two daughters' daughters.

This deviation from the organizational model expected in a Bush Negro society leads me to believe that the Coppename Kwinti occupy a temporary and unstable stage between two clan nomenclatures. They have already lost almost all memory of the clans their ancestors belonged to when they met the Matuari. These organizations have been functionally replaced by nameless lineages based upon presumed descent from Alamu's mother, a person whose very name has been forgotten. Recall of exact individual links to Alamu is fading at the same time that relationship to this culture hero has become universal. It seems likely, therefore, that new clans will emerge whose (mythical?) founders will be Alamu's sisters.

The primary reason for this interpretation is the Kwinti tendency to emulate the non-Christian tribes, that is, to become increasingly 'Bush-Negroid' in culture. Clans are important elements in the organization of the Djuka and the Saramacca, and Djuka especially are important to the Kwinti not only as needed population, but as holders of ritual offices. Should the Kwinti

population increase sufficiently, the need for further organization is likely to turn the clan concept into a reality again.

Marital Relations

Only two traits distinguish Kwinti family relations from those of the other Bush Negro tribes: Tolerance of adultery, and what I shall call 'territorial monogamy'.

Technically, the Kwinti claim to be monogamous ("We are Christians!"), but some of their notables admit to having one wife in town and one in the village. They assured me that this was not a breach of the rules, since they had only one wife in each place, and needed to travel a great deal, "and a man needs his woman." Hence they feel themselves to be monogamous in two places. Once, when the village wife of one of these men became ill, we took her to the house of the city wife, where she stayed for several weeks. Her husband in Bitagron sometimes mentioned the possibility in bringing his town wife to the village, but nothing came of it during our stay.

According to the literature, in all the other tribes the acknowledged fact of female adultery must always result in divorce (there are no data yet on the Matuari). This is definitely not true for the Kwinti. Genealogies indicate that many Kwinti women have borne children out of wedlock but that they are still married to the men who fathered their first child. This is evidenced in the surnames of siblings, some of whom are named after different fathers while others carry only the name of the mother.

The Kwinti, being Christians and within the sphere of the government's influence, dutifully register their children's births. During the last two or three generations they have all adopted surnames (usually Dutch) which theoretically descend patrilineally. However, a Kwinti male retains the right to 'acknowledge' his child, and without his express permission no woman may register a baby under his surname. If a husband does not believe himself to be the progenitor of his wife's offspring, he can refuse to acknowledge it. Her paramour, if she had one, may or may not allow her to use his surname. If the infant does not have the right to a father's surname, it will receive its mother's.

The child is not handicapped in any case, since its support and allegiance are always a function of its mother's kingroup. 'Illegitimacy' does not exist as a Kwinti concept, and there seems to be no embarrassment about admitting that one's children have different fathers. Furthermore, there are cases where all the siblings

in some very large families carry the mothers' surnames. It is not known whether this implies a straightforward rejection of the patrilineal principle by their mother, or their father, or whether it indicates doubts regarding paternity. More interesting is the fact that some siblings have three different surnames, even though their mother was never divorced, and the oldest and youngest siblings carry the surname of the mother's husband. In the other tribes, such evidence of 'unfaithfulness' would have resulted in divorce.

Several factors appear to be involved in this unusual sexual tolerance. The tribal population is so small that a high turnover in marital partners would soon exhaust the supply (this may also be reflected in the marriages of some men to much older women). The tribe's putative Christianity severely limits the possibility of divorce. Then too, both sexes indulge their curiosity or wanderlust in lengthy separations as a husband 'seeks work' or a wife 'goes to the doctor'. Certainly the Kwinti males willingly admit having fathered children outside of their territory: my main informant named six, two of which he 'acknowledged' and supported to some extent. Equally certain: one woman who visited outside of the village later gave birth to a half-Amerindian child. The Kwinti love children, and families with ten or twelve are not uncommon. The potential conflict between responsibilities for one's offspring and the lure of romance has been resolved here by minimizing both the exclusiveness of the marriage bond, and the unfairness of the double standard.

This does not at all mean that licentiousness is rife on the Copename. On the contrary, adult relations between the sexes can only be described as 'proper'. Even the behavior of dancing and drinking teen-agers is almost unfailingly decorous by Western standards, and flirting is done so covertly as to be almost indiscernible to an outsider. The traditional penalty for infidelity may have been lost, but the customary sanctions of gossip and ridicule retain sufficient force in this small society to maintain propriety.

RELIGION

Although the Kwinti are emphatic about being Christians, in actual practice they increasingly follow the traditions shared by the unconverted Bush Negro tribes.

Christianity

As 'Coppencrissie', the name of their first village, attests, the Kwinti were converted to Christianity before they reached the Coppename. The Matuari had introduced them to the teachings of the Evangelical Brethren Society (the EBG). Traditionally, they are thus Protestants. Every Sunday, the EBG missionary-teacher at Kaaimanston holds church meetings there which are well attended by the locals and by a handful of people who travel there from Bitagron. However, the population of Kaaimanston accounts for less than a fifth of the tribe, and is shrinking. Only on rare ceremonial occasions such as Emancipation Day (July 1) is a church meeting held in Bitagron.

Technically, this larger village is Roman Catholic. A priest visits it every six to eight weeks on his circuit of Amerindian and Bush Negro villages. Mass is usually attended by some 25-40 people, about as many as attend church in Kaaimanston. Great store is set by baptismal ceremonies, and the priest is expected to pray over the graves of people who died during his absence.

The *Meester* (Dutch and Kwinti for Master or Teacher) in Kaaimanston is himself a Bush Negro, born in one of the Saramaccan villages which Lake Brokopondo drowned. His wife, a trained nurse, is a City Creole. While he explicitly acknowledges the efficacy of many native practices and beliefs, he feels that any adherence to the old religion is dangerous and intolerable. As much because of the Kwinti's need for the school as for any theological considerations, the Meester and his predecessors have been able to eliminate from Kaaimanston such outward signs of paganism as *fragatikis* (prayer poles for ancestor worship) and shrines to the various supernaturals.

In Bitagron, the philosophy of the young Dutch priest leaves room for spiritual alternatives. Although he in no way acknowledges or encourages the tenets of the old religion, he is tolerant of it as a source of comfort which helps the Kwinti endure until the day when they will be ready for the greater sophistication of true Christian faith.

Native Polytheism

It appears that the differences between the clerics are being exploited to strengthen the traditional polytheistic belief system.

In Bitagron, the old religion is abundantly evident. There is a large sanctuary where the Kwinti can worship the ancestors and the Supreme Being, and where two carry-oracles are available to divine the reasons and remedies for illness and other problems. There are three kunu houses, and two Kromanti huts where warrior spirits take possession of their mediums. There are several *fragatiki* in the village, and near the landing stands a shrine to the *Mamagron*, the earth diety who protects a village and its people. Possession is a common occurrence.

The existence of kunu, a hereditary curse which is capable of exterminating whole matrilineages, is accepted throughout the Bush Negro culture area in principle and fact. In Kwinti *kondre* (country, land) it is also ubiquitous. Because the Protestant mission has forbidden them in Kaaïmanston, the only overt kunu houses are in Bitagron, where one is reserved for the exclusive use of the people of Kaaïmanston. Nevertheless, during my last day on the Coppename I learned that there are in fact three *secret* kunu houses in Kaaïmanston. These are kept hidden from the Meester — who no doubt suspects their existence — and used only in dire emergencies. (Similarly, Kaaïmanston still has a secret *fragatiki* which has been camouflaged so as not to draw the Meester's ire.) Kunu is simply too dangerous to be ignored, especially by the Kwinti, for they suspect that the whole tribe is subject to a particularly virulent kunu unleashed through the ancestors' mistreatment of Alamu. During our stay, a different kunu was set on the people of Bitagron by the *Mamagron*, who felt that he had been ignored too long. By the time that disaster had been averted, most of the children and many of the adults in the village were stricken with illness. Resolution of the problem was evidenced when the villagers were treated with *obia* baths, backed — where necessary — with trips to the hospital.

The term *obia* has a variety of referents in Kwinti. It may designate a person who is possessed ('René is *obia* for a Kromanti'), a charm or amulet (nowadays these are more often seen on hunting dogs than on people), but most commonly it refers to magico-religious treatments. The latter category is dominated by *wassi obia* washing cures which consist of mixtures of twisted and crushed leaves, varieties of water (creek, river, puddle, swamp, rainbarrel, stump, brackish, etc.), and *kréti*, the white clay which in other tribes is usually called *pemba*. *Wassi obias* are true panacea. We have seen them applied to conditions ranging from the common cold to leprosy, from the blessing of a new canoe to the preserva-

tion of laborers from accidental death. Unless one is willing to exaggerate their surface similarity to the rite of baptism, the *wassi obias* have no relationship to Christianity, but are an element of the native tradition.

Alone among all the tribes, the Kwinti do not fear *wisi* (witchcraft) in their own territory. This happy state of affairs results from a pact which Alamu and his companions made with the Supreme Being. Since there were no other people on the Coppename, the Kwinti there would not be subject to *wisi* unless they practiced it themselves. They swore that they and all their descendants would refrain from witchcraft forever. In exchange, God promised them that He would promptly kill any person who attempted the vile practice. Consequently, the *wisi* concept of the Kwinti is different from that of the other Bush Negroes. They do believe in it, however, and fear the evil rampant in other tribal areas — especially in Matuari territory. But among themselves, witchcraft accusations are leveled only against strangers, and mere physical survival attests the accused's innocence. Also unlike the Djuka and other tribes, the Kwinti do not have 'post-mortems' to determine whether their newly-deceased relatives might have been guilty of sorcery. Theoretically, a villager could have been killed by the ancestors or by the Great Deity Himself as a punishment for attempted witchcraft, but the Kwinti do not believe that their relatives would be fools enough to take such a foredoomed risk.

Oracles are typical throughout Bush Negro culture, and the ones observed in Bitagron operated in the standard fashion described by Thoden van Velzen (1966, p. 122-123) for the Djuka. We witnessed three carry-oracles. Two live separately, each in its own hut, in the Sanctuary. The third was a kunu oracle and was housed in the village proper. It is not known how many other carry oracles there are, but the probability is that each of the other two kunu houses in Bitagron contains one.

Medium-oracles are persons who are infused by the spirit of some Supernatural, and who can therefore give advice with divine guidance. We witnessed half a dozen occasions in which possessed men or women were interrogated about illness, accidents, or other problems.

Kwinti oracularity is thus of the standard Bush Negro variety. What makes it worthy of special attention is the fact that in *each* of the score or more of these rituals which we witnessed, one man always played a central role. He is a Djuka. Furthermore, only one

other man always occupied an important ceremonial position in all the rituals (except for some which occurred while he was visiting the city). This man is a Saramacca. Otherwise there was no one in Kwinti land who was involved in ceremonies on a regular basis. One or another of the basias and captains usually attends the major functions, but the people who go to the Sanctuary, or who ask advice of a medium, are persons who are directly involved as patients or as supplicants. Thus, in these oracular rituals the relationship of the native Kwinti to the two 'immigrants' approximates that of a congregation to its clergy: this Djuka and this Saramacca minister to the spiritual needs of the Kwinti.

For various reasons I believe the ministry of the native religion to be gaining ascendancy over those of its competitors. The God of the Christians, especially as he is represented by the EBG, is a jealous God. But His demand for exclusive worship cannot be obeyed in the Suriname jungle because it ignores the mortal threat of kunu.

The Meester, who was raised in a Bush Negro society, accepts the reality of the traditional religious concepts including kunu. Nevertheless, he feels that the old beliefs are dangerous, and that they must be surrendered in exchange for the monotheism of Christ. As a result of his insistence that the other Supernaturals be forsaken, the Meester suffers from an increasing lack of Kwinti trust. This is evidenced also by the fact that they avoid the medical services offered by his wife. They preferred asking a self-confessed incompetent such as the ethnographer to treat their ills and bind their wounds, to availing themselves of the many medicines and the knowledge available through her.

An alternative explanation is possible. Since I lived in Bitagron, I served as a First Aid station there. Also, I willingly dispensed aspirins and other common analgesics. Such 'treatments' were painless, and helped establish a relationship which functionally reduced the ambiguity of my presence in the village. Finally, being utterly ignorant in medical expertise, I did not tend to recognize the hypochondriacs. This must have added to my popularity. Nevertheless, we noted time and again that Bitagron Kwinti would sooner take the 180 km trip to Paramaribo than the 30-minute boatride to Kaaianston.

Whenever trouble strikes or someone falls ill, the Kaaianston Kwinti journey to Bitagron to ask for supernatural aid and to be treated with *wassi obia*. More and more individuals leave Kaaianston to settle in Bitagron, and it must be assumed that religion is one of the reasons for that exodus. The Protestant mission-

nary is painfully aware of this resistance to his work, but powerless to change it.

This decline of the influence of the EBG is in no way a gain for Catholicism. In fact, few of the people of Bitagron are baptized Catholics. The Kwinti value education, and because the school is run by the Meester, most children in the past were baptized Protestant even though their parents claimed membership in the Catholic church. Most of the time there is no representative of organized Christianity in the village: the Meester is busy in Kaaimanston, and the Father visits but a few days every two months. Into this vacuum are drawn people with skills in the old religion: non-Kwinti Bush Negroes. Since they are always physically present in the village — as spouses of native Kwinti — their influence in everyday life has long surpassed that of the Christian missionaries. There is no need to postulate that the unconverted tribes are sending missionaries of their own, to proselytize for the souls of the Kwinti. Nor is there any reason to believe that the removal of the present 'heathens' from Bitagron would change the *status quo*. The fact would remain that there is a psychological need which, under the present circumstances, can only be satisfied by Bush Negro supernaturalism. Where that need conflicts with the tenets of Christianity, either Christianity is ignored, or it is reinterpreted. I suspect that the Kwinti themselves are already able to perform the rituals demanded in the traditional ceremonies, and that they will do so if it becomes necessary.

The future course of Kwinti ideological development is unpredictable. Clearly, present religious belief and ritual are part Christian, part native polytheism, and no clear lines of demarcation separate the areas borrowed from each of the contributory systems. The terms for the Supreme Being are many: *Gadu* for the Christian Creator, *Massa Gadu* for the reigning deity of the Djuka pantheons, and *Gran Gado* for the Saramacca's. In many ceremonies and in everyday life, however, the terms are used interchangeably. *Dopu*, a term for the Christian act of baptism, is also applied to a number of ritual events in which bottled beer — the holy water of the Kwinti — is squirted on persons seeking supernatural aid or guidance.

The effect of missionaries, education, and closer contact with the people of the coastal regions may orient the Kwinti towards a more 'standard' form of Christianity. On the other hand, there is considerable support for the contention that the religion of the unconverted tribes is making inroads in Kwinti theology. But it is

also possible that the Kwinti are developing an increasingly complex local syncretism. It will require detailed long-term observation to determine the actual direction of culture change. Meanwhile, it is obvious that the odds favor continued syncretism.

There are other religious alternatives in Surinam which may complicate the future development of the Kwinti creed. Mohammedanism and Hinduism are obvious examples. More immediately there is Winti, the religion of many Creoles in the lower economic and educational levels, just those people with which migrating tribesmen are most likely to associate. Winti religion (Wooding 1972) has obvious attractions because it stems from the same African roots as the faith of the non-Christian tribes, and because it uses many of the same terms and concepts. However, among the Creoles 'kunu' means something quite different than it does to the tribesmen, and Winti involves practices which to the Kwinti are witchcraft. It is thus improbable that the Kwinti — or any other tribe — would embrace the Winti creed. Yet, some diffusion between these two Afro-American religions is likely.

There is no likelihood that the Kwinti (or any other black tribe) will soon become typical Christians. The roots of Christianity have not penetrated very deeply into any Bush Negro culture because Western theology fails to deal with the unique psycho-cultural trait of these societies: the threat of kunu. That threat means that there can be no true conversion in the bush. Either the adopted Christian religion is amended with a 'specific' against the hereditary mortal curse, or else Christian converts must leave the bush for an environment in which kunu plays no role. Within the jungle, where kunu is a self-evident reality, exclusive acceptance of a Western monotheistic dogma is impossible. It will remain impossible unless the Westernization of the ideologies of the tribes is balanced by compensatory adjustments in the other aspects of their cultures. In other words, only if Bush Negro societies became typically Western could they have typically Western belief systems.

(To be concluded.)