M. Strobel

At home with a prospector in French Guiana: a sketch

In: New West Indian Guide/ Nieuwe West-Indische Gids 63 (1989), no: 3/4, Leiden, 223-236

This PDF-file was downloaded from <http://www.kitlv-journals.nl>

MICHELE BAJ STROBEL

AT HOME WITH A PROSPECTOR IN FRENCH GUIANA:
A SKETCH¹

Thursday, September 16, 1982. Woke up well rested, thanks be to God, said my prayers, drank my coffee, went to my *bati* (garden), felled some trees. Worked hard till 2 o'clock. Back to the village, made myself something to eat, then did some little chores around the house. In the evening, some weeding and a visit to Richard's, joking around with him and Jojo. Came home at 9, ate, said my prayers, and then to bed.

For many years, Derik Pinel has jotted down his daily activities in small school notebooks. The seasons pass but his daily routine repeats itself untiringly, through the grace of God. Only recently, during one of my stays in French Guiana (conducting fieldwork among the Creole population), did he share his notebooks with me. Might he have wanted to make me understand that my view of his world was incomplete and that if I were ever to grasp the texture of his day-to-day life, it would have to be through his own accounts? In any case, his notes have served to complement my own and to contribute meaningfully to my goal of preserving something of the memory of Guiana's last gold prospectors and their way of life.

The Maroni River basin is inhabited by three populations – Creoles, Maroons, and Amerindians – each of which keeps largely to itself.² Although all three groups share the same natural environment, each one's way of life is distinctive.

THE MARONI CREOLES

Despite having settled along the Maroni nearly a century ago, the Creoles

of the French Guiana hinterland are still a shifting population, with no strong sense of attachment to a particular community. Comprised mainly of St. Lucians, most of the Creoles of the interior were forced to leave once the gold deposits had been depleted, since there was no means of livelihood other than prospecting. In general a solitary occupation, prospecting reinforced these immigrants' dispersal and isolation. Once poor farmers in St. Lucia, they now found themselves split into tiny groups, confronting an ecosystem with which they had no experience. By the time the St. Lucians arrived in the mining centers of the interior (particularly, Benzdorp, downstream from Maripasoula), gold extraction had become mainly an individualistic pursuit, reinforcing the pattern of emigration from St. Lucia, which had been largely solitary.

The first wave of West Indian emigrants arrived in French Guiana around 1880-90. In their homeland, these people had belonged to the most disadvantaged sector – sugar workers, day laborers, and the unemployed. In 1936, 85 per cent of the 4,400 miners in the interior of French Guiana were British West Indians. Today, when St. Lucians in Maripasoula are asked about why they came to Guiana, they assert that there was no work at home and that in order to survive they simply had to leave. Some only came to French Guiana after having been seasonal workers in various Caribbean islands – Guadeloupe, St. Vincent, Trinidad, or the Dominican Republic. Between 1938 and 1948, there was a massive influx of St. Lucians into the Inini-Tampok region. But by 1945, when Maripasoula was set up as a French administrative center, the whole region's population numbered no more than 952, and the village itself counted only 48. The great majority of the immigrants had by then already returned home, and those who remained were going off to establish villages and isolated homesteads, particularly along the gold creeks of the Great Inini, Waki, and Tampok rivers, under a special statute accorded the Territory of Inini.³ Certain villages, such as Maraudeur, Dorlin, and La Greve, were almost entirely peopled by St. Lucians. Wherever gold was exploited, miners had to feed themselves by growing crops on land cleared in the forest. These villagers obtained their other necessities from river traders who peddled their wares from St. Laurent to the villages upstream. Such villages served as a base for the prospectors but provided them little sense of community. And this is why, after the decline of the gold market, the onset of World War II, and the gradual depletion of the gold deposits, the miners abandoned them – either for the coast or for the new administrative centers such as Maripasoula.

In 1976, there were 139 Creoles in Maripasoula, nearly half of whom were over 50 years old. For most St. Lucians in French Guiana, Maripasoula

represented a relatively stable stop after a prolonged period of moving among the various gold-mining centers scattered along the upstream creeks. Although contact with the French administration was strictly on an individual basis, there was a strong sense of belonging to a distinct group. In effect, the administrative center served as a kind of relay station between the hinterland and the coast, an anchorage for various relatively mobile populations. On the one hand, young Creole men and women, whose fathers were gold prospectors, found jobs in Maripasoula, in the tertiary sector. On the other hand, there were a number of Boni Maroons, who came to Maripasoula to seek similar work, get health care, and engage in trade.

In 1982, the entire *commune* of Maripasoula, including its outlying Indian villages, had 1,007 inhabitants. The ethnic breakdown was: Creoles, 154; Boni Maroons, 476; Djuka Maroons, 30; Wayana Indians, 288; Europeans, 30; others (mainly, Brazilians and Haitians), 29.⁴ In Creole conceptual topography, the Boni live on the fringes of the *commune* of Maripasoula, "way up there," while the Wayana live even further away, being everywhere "in the far off." The Indians have their own territory; the rain forest is their domain. The Wayanas only "come down" to Maripasoula long enough to fill up their outboard-motor gas tanks, take part in village *fêtes*, or to sell fish.

Although this small community is an administrative center, its inhabitants split it into two areas conceptually. The higher part, known as "the Mountain," is inhabited by the Boni, whose traditional villages are Agode, Kotika, Assissi, Loka, Papaiston, Kormontibo, Lape, and L'Enfant Perdu; the lower part, called "the Savannah," is for the most part inhabited by Creoles and Europeans. It is there that the post office and town hall are located, as well as the church, which is off by the river bank.

The former prospectors in Maripasoula are those who were unable to return to St. Lucia. After the gold rush had ended, the "losers" felt they could not return to their island home without the coveted treasure. Their retreat to the interior villages of French Guiana was seen by them as something they were forced to do. When they discuss their current situation, they stress two things: their common identity, forged in a shared past as gold prospectors and forest trekkers, and their insular origin. Before this retreat, they had no permanent or stable ties to a village. Each time they moved and scattered, they would join up with others elsewhere. At every Creole settlement in the interior, miners would meet up with people born in the St. Lucian towns of Vieux Fort, Gros Ilet, and Micoud. The *fêtes* of "the Rose" and "the Daisy", with their dances and their public offerings of gold, served to revive the prospectors' old ties, but this would last only for a brief season. Today, the whole network of rivers and creeks

is dotted with abandoned landing places; former settlements, now overrun by vegetation, show hardly a trace of having once been thriving centers, except for their cemeteries and occasional Dutch gin bottles. Today, the last gold prospectors' nostalgia for life in the rain forest complements that for their island of birth. The rain forest allowed this mobile community to pursue insularity and in a sense, the dense, vast vegetation may have replaced for them the ocean's immensity. Yet their island of birth, so often mentioned and evoked, remains the ultimate determinant of their identity. These Creole St. Lucians remain in their own minds subjects of Her Britannic Majesty – as they themselves say, "*Neg angle apre bondye.*"

THE TRAVELS OF DERIK PINEL

Born in 1920 in Micoud, a town on the Atlantic coast of St. Lucia, Derik Pinel's departure for South America, at age 16, was due to his mother's decision to go and live with her brother who was already in French Guiana. He went back only once to St. Lucia, for a month's stay. In talking about this trip, he showed me five postcards that he keeps as precious souvenirs. He has no letters or pictures of either friends or family on the island. In French Guiana, he first settled in St. Georges de l'Oyapock, then in Regina; he next worked in the Comte region. Beginning in 1950 when he was thirty, he worked in various mining centers along the upper Maroni: Bois Blanc, Grigel, and Maraudeur. In 1956, after spending two years in Dorlin (Little Inini), he settled in Maripasoula, which at the time had 56 inhabitants. He chose to live in the town itself for, although he was employed at the Benzdorp mine, the administration and weather station also gave him occasional work.

Derik Pinel considers himself a prospector and farmer. He farms a plot of land to the southwest of Maripasoula, in a productive growing area, and works alone as a gold prospector on the Maxime Creek, near the mouth of the Inini River. He leaves for his prospecting site Monday morning and returns Saturday night, paddling for half a day each way. He has built himself a hut there, but his real home is in Maripasoula – a stable base from which he organizes his other activities. Apart from trips to his plot of land in the forest and his work site near the creek, Derik Pinel rarely travels. Although he has had conjugal relations with five different women, he now lives alone; all six of his children are either in St. Laurent or Cayenne. The alternation between his two main activities, gold prospecting and farming, is flexible. His enjoyment of treks away from the village is balanced by his taste for sedentary life within his domestic

space. He hunts only in the daytime, like most other Creoles; the Boni and Wayana prefer to hunt at night. This hunting is linked to the protection of his garden, since he kills and eats mainly those animals that destroy the crops (agouti, small rodents, and so on). He fishes and hunts on Saturday afternoons, on his way back from the Maxime Creek worksite.

If we consider his allocation of time, the diversity of his activities, and the distances he travels, it becomes clear that Derik Pinel has a strong preference for prospecting. He complains frequently about not having more time for gold seeking. Farming his plot of land demands long stretches of time. And although hunting and fishing provide him with valuable food, he sees these as purely supplementary activities, carried out only on his way to do something else. Household activities, including leisure, are viewed as time fillers. Living alone, he does all his own cooking and laundry. During our conversations I often had the impression that something about his planning of activities was escaping me. For example, he would leave for his plot of land at a time when he had planned to go to the creek. The extreme individualism of his daily life allows him to be spontaneous in his activities.

An early riser, Derik Pinel begins his day, when at home, by saying a prayer at his personal altar. After a breakfast of *kwak* (roasted cassava flour) and coffee, he leaves the house around 8:30 for his field, with a shoulder bag, a machete, and a shotgun. He returns between three and four o'clock and prepares his lunch: *kwak*, rice, and meat or fish with sauce. Often he eats leftovers from the previous night. Towards evening, he shells corn, meets with friends, and sometimes serves as a barber. Occasionally he weaves vegetable fiber hats or knapsacks, which he sells to passing tourists. He normally goes to bed around ten o'clock, after having eaten alone and chatted with some neighbors. The community comes together only at *fetes*. On such occasions Derik Pinel goes to the village dances and helps put up the stands and shelters for the vendors.

HIS FIELD AND ITS UPKEEP

Since the age of 21, Derik Pinel has always prepared at least one new field a year; some years, he clears two or three. His smallest is about 50 ares, the largest 1-1/2 hectares. In 1983, he was farming a field located four kilometers from the village, bordered by those of other farmers. Like all Creoles, he was practicing a system of slash-and-burn farming. Each year he clears and plants a new section of primary forest; at the same time he continues to harvest crops from fields he had cleared up to three

years earlier. Other than occasional help in felling trees, he does all the burning, planting, and weeding himself. The produce is his alone and it supplies him with the bulk of his food.

Derik Pinel likes his field to be well delineated, with clear-cut angles. The best land, he says, is flat, but when an area is slightly sloping, he uses it to advantage by planting dasheen, which grows better in places where there is constant humidity and small running creeks. Each year, when he explores for a new field site, he checks the condition of the soil. If it is soft and black, it is good. Favorable farming areas are also identified by the kinds of trees that grow there, such as balata, cedar, kapoc, and wacapou. Preparing the land takes place in the dry season, between August and early November. Derik Pinel consults with the farmers who have adjacent fields and sometimes they fell the trees together. In such a case, after collectively clearing the land, individual plots are distributed, with their boundaries marked by rows of sugar cane or by banana trees. Begun in early September, the felling of trees is carried out with no special ritual. In order to gain access to the trunks, they first cut down vines and tall weeds with machetes. They use axes to fell the trees, and when several trees stand close together, one of them is felled in such a way that it brings down the others with it. It takes about fifteen days of work, from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., to clear the field completely.

About a month after the trees have been felled, Derik Pinel sets fire to his field, producing ashes to fertilize the crops. He does this during the hottest hours of the day to accelerate burning, setting fires in different places with the aim of "cleaning and heating up the soil." If the burning is incomplete, he makes a *bukan* or pile of slowly burning branches and uses the concentrated ashes as fertilizer for banana trees. Four or five days after burning, when the ashes have barely cooled, he sows the first seeds (which have been kept in his kitchen from preceding harvests): watermelon, cucumber, and okra. The slope of a field influences the placement of plants, but no other patterning is apparent. The time of sowing is based on the phases of the moon. All of Maripasoula's Creoles follow the lunar calendar, unlike the Wayana and Boni. They say that everything that grows above the soil should be planted two days before the full moon, while anything that grows underground should be planted between the full moon and the last days of the waning moon. The planting period can last until the end of December; the entire area that was burned is sown. By this time, the watermelons and cucumbers have already begun to yield. From January to March, the plot of land requires several weedings; these are carried out with a machete and the weeds are left on the ground. Unlike the Boni, Creoles never do weeding by hand. By the end of July,

yams, sweet potatoes, and other root crops can be harvested. Henceforth, the garden produces continuously. For example, cassava planted a year and a half earlier is still actively harvested. The cultivated field is in effect a granary, a reservoir for future harvesting, to be exploited according to the needs and tastes of the moment. There is never any hurry to harvest, and harvesting is carried out simultaneously with other activities – weeding, protection from predators, and so on.

The cultivated field is at once the focus of subsistence, the source of raw materials for social exchange, and the locus of central Creole values. The management of a field remains an individualistic enterprise. The produce is rarely shared with others and is often even left in the field unharvested. From a certain perspective, it may seem surprising that a field so vast and with so many different kinds of crops supplies only one person. Derik Pinel claims that he would be able to feed sixty people with what he grows. But because all the farmers harvest similar crops at the same time, it is difficult for him to dispose of the surplus. And the absence of a market and means of transporting the produce to the coast make this surplus growing even less justified in purely economic terms. But the attitude of Creole farmers reflects a more general propensity for accumulation, which applies to the size of the fields, the number of fields simultaneously cultivated, the number of crops, and the varieties of any one crop. There seems to be a decided desire to accumulate and amass, stemming in part from a fear of shortages, which can be offset only by a kind of ostentatious overproduction run wild.

There is no collective effort involved in either the production or the handling of crops, nor are there agricultural fairs, festivals, or markets of any sort. But even with production and accumulation an individual matter, consumption and distribution could be handled collectively, as was once the case for gold. Every prospector recalls with nostalgia the festive times when cartridges loaded with pellets of gold were fired into the air by men whose community ties lasted only from the discovery of gold at a particular site until its depletion.⁵ But subsistence farming seems to have been unsuccessful in doing what gold prospecting did for a time – creating meaningful, if short-lived, communities. Today, for the last surviving prospectors, the collective pattern of consumption and distribution is a thing of the past. All that remains is the desire to accumulate, without any organized means to absorb the surplus. Production has become an end in itself, a way of showing what one is capable of doing; the ideal is to keep producing even if half of the crop rots in the ground. “*Lo-a toune dachin*.” (“Gold has been replaced by root crops”), people say bitterly.

THE HOUSE AND ITS GARDENS

Within the Creole universe, the house and its surrounding garden (*jaden bokay*) are contrasted with the forest and its provision grounds (*viv te*). The house and its plants are intimately linked, and the plants are quite different from those off in the fields. While vegetables are the main crops in the fields, the flora around the house consists essentially of fruit trees and decorative plants. Derik Pinel chose to locate his house in the lower part of the village, near the main crossroads. Before, the area had been nothing but forest; everything had to be cleared with machete and axe. It is in the house that produce from the fields, as well as hunting and fishing kills, is stored and processed. It is there, too, that gold is melted down, weighed, and stored. And it is in the village that social relationships among neighbors are formed and played out.

The front of the house is clearly visible, in contrast to the sides, which are hidden by dense plant growth. Stretching around the front and one side is a porch. Set slightly back from the street, the front of the house appears open, accessible and hospitable. The five steps in front lead to the porch. But as soon as one crosses the threshold, one enters a different environment, in which the surrounding plant growth mutes the sunlight. The resemblance between house and garden is striking; just as there is a profusion of plant life outside, there is an accumulation of domestic objects, furniture, and dishes inside. Both would seem to reflect the same tendency to amass things in cluttered profusion.

Derik Pinel first built the house over a period of four months in 1962; it consisted of panels with a roof-support made of tightly woven vines and covered with *way* leaves. In 1968, he solidified the walls and put on a corrugated metal roof, doing all the work himself. His explicit goal was for the house to be "just the way it was designed in my head"; he used no written plan or blueprint. He also denied that it followed a St. Lucian model. It does indeed seem larger and more spacious than the houses of his native village, which are lined up in rows, one right next to the other, and devoid of surrounding gardens. In addition to doing all the construction work, carpentry, cabinetry, roofing, and painting, he also made the furniture: tables, chairs, stools, cots, and shelves, except for two metal frame beds. In talking about it, he expressed regret that others did not ask him to do this sort of work for them more often. Each room has one or several beds, even though his visitors rarely stay overnight. In terms of sharing his house with a woman, he said, "I have always lived alone. For thirteen years I have been alone. I lived with a woman and her two children for five years, but it didn't work out. They are now

in Cayenne. I lived with the mother of another son for three months, but I really can't say I've ever had a family life, neither here nor in fact anywhere else."

The front yard with its pleasant, decorative garden, is where Derik Pinel meets with friends and neighbors. This hospitable area is unique to the Creoles of Maripasoula and its outlying areas; neither the Boni nor the Wayana have frontyard gardens. The front porch is more like a storeroom than a place for relaxing with friends. It is cluttered with all kinds of things: cartons, sacks, empty bottles, old tin pans, a corn grinder, and so on. In contrast, the flower garden is pleasant and inviting, a profusion of hibiscus bushes, frangipangis, various crotons, some cannas, and other bushes. On either side of the steps are garden patches, outlined by bottles stuck in the ground, where various predominately yellow and violet flowers grow. This ornamental arrangement seems to be purposeful. Along the edges of the porch Derik Pinel has placed enamel basins and tin cans with plants growing in them.

The most common medicinal plants also grow below the porch, within reach of anyone from the outside. Derik Pinel says that he did not plant them, that they "grew all by themselves," and that they belong to everyone. He knows each one by name: *chardon beni*, *the-pays*, *pied-poule*, and so forth. The presence of these medicinal plants helps us understand the role of the "decorative" plants, for their ornamental function is complemented by a protective one; "these plants chase away evil spirits." Apart from the bushes, there is no barrier between street and frontyard. The category of "decorative plants" thus includes both those that are medicinal and those that are considered to offer protection against supernatural dangers.

To protect one's house, you must go to a crossroads, look to the right, then to the left, make a cross in the middle of the intersection, then go back home, make a cross behind the door, as well as near the window of your bedroom, make a cross on your broomstick, turn it upside down, then leave it like that for three days before using it.

The rear of the house is surrounded by fruit trees; this part of the garden shares the feeling of intimacy that exists in the house's interior. All of the light that enters the house is filtered through its leaves. This garden and the house are intertwined rather than each being a distinct entity. The back garden is both a planted area and a kind of scrap yard, with piles of old boards, pieces of building materials, empty crates, and other objects left haphazardly among the fallen, rotting fruits. These scraps of materials and the ground vegetation seem almost to be vying for space.

The image of an insular dwelling is recognized by its owner, who compares his house to Noah's ark because "everything grows well there and there is everything that one could need."

What struck me most about the garden and house was the owner's disinclination to disturb anything, his insistence on leaving everything to take on its own pattern without intervention. Planted several years before the house was built, Derik Pinel's garden grows without any upkeep, trimming, or fertilizer. He has always been content to pick whatever happens to grow. This way of using the garden is based on an idea of exploiting those fruits that, with God's help, grow there. The result is a baroque, undisciplined profusion, characterized by its density and excess. I present here a diagram showing the locations of the principal trees.

Derik Pinel's house and location of his fruit trees

The basic difference between the two gardens is that the one in front is exposed to the sun. It is there that the various exchanges take place (of greetings, news, and objects), that he observes passing street life, and that he engages in activities such as fiber-weaving. It is also there that medicinal and decorative plants constitute, as we have already seen, both

a protection and an effective link between outsiders and the lived habitat. The medicinal plants in fact benefit others, establishing reciprocal relationships since, in the Creole view, healing should always take place in the context of social relationships – “one should never heal oneself.”

THE HOUSE

The front door leads to the main room which serves as both living and dining room, with a table and chairs in the center. This living space is an extension of the front of the house and is lit in part by light coming through it. A few pieces of furniture are ranged along the walls of the room. The floor is made of boards and there is no ceiling to hide the roof beams. This room leads into a guest room and, via a hallway, to the bedroom and kitchen. The kitchen has several shelves where dishes, pots, and pans are displayed. The wooden sink – a kind of overhanging crate – extends past the wall and drains into the garden. Nearby is a two-burner charcoal stove made of concrete, as well as some tables and benches piled high with jars, scales, and various recipients. Produce from the field is stored under the main table; the machete is always placed near the door. There is a certain unhealthy air about the place: the boards around the sink are mouldy and slippery, as are the steps leading to the garden, and the chickens often go up and down the steps pecking at grains of rice or corn. At the opposite end of the kitchen there is a small hallway that leads to the most private part of the house, the “chapel.” It is hardly ever light there, as the window is always kept shut. Inside, two partitions close off a small space, like a closet, with a multi-colored curtain made from plastic ribbons hanging in the entrance. This chapel contains an altar – a high table holding several statuettes, some artificial flowers, prayer books, notebooks, and a large candle-holder. It is in this alcove that Derik Pinel reads a prayer each morning and evening. A candle stays lit during the prayer and on certain special days – Fridays to celebrate the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Sundays in celebration of the Holy Trinity, and Mondays for the Holy Spirit. The other protective saints are represented by figurines – St. Joseph, “patron of carpenters and all those who work with wood”; St. Anthony, “protector of material riches, especially gold”; and St. Christopher, “protector of all those who travel on the river.” Other statuettes, tablemats, and candles help to create a spiritual space. The alcove effectively reflects the individualistic nature of Derik Pinel’s worship.

The bedroom, which adjoins the chapel, contains some shelves, a bed, and a bedside table. It opens directly onto the shower, with its buckets

and laundry. From there, a few steps lead into the garden, with its chicken coop and outhouse.

The principle that we glossed as “accumulation” – a mass of clutter and profusion – applies to the outdoor spaces of field and garden as well as to the rooms of the house. And it extends to other areas of life as well. One could argue that the Creole’s favorite meal reflects the same aesthetic – a plate heaped with rice or *kwak*, fish or meat in sauce, dasheen, bananas, sweet potatoes, and kidney beans, all vying for space. Similarly, it is the jumble of saints on the domestic altar who collectively provide succor. Nonetheless, this principle of accumulation is not related to any collective or communitarian ideal. Derik Pinel’s life – like that of other Creole prospectors – is marked by a determined individualism. And his lived environment, as we have seen, also reflects a decided disinclination to manipulate the interior or exterior space.

Derik Pinel’s house and garden share a number of features with certain insular Caribbean environments: shingled roofs, handcarved decorations and friezes, beds made of boards, and the arrangement of flowering plants. However, the parallels are less striking than the differences. In terms of size, French Guiana Creole houses are vast, spacious, and often built on piles as high as 1.5 meters. The houses, aligned regularly within the village, are characteristically surrounded by a plant perimeter consisting of a wide variety of species. And the settlement pattern of Creole houses and stores, strung along a river bank, with their extensive kitchen sinks, are reminiscent of the Caboclo settlements that dot the shores of Amazonian tributaries in Northern Brazil. It would seem that the Amazonian environment has given St. Lucian immigrants a new concept of space and movement.

In fact, the entire organization of Creole activities, even more than the habitat itself, is characteristically Amazonian. The layout of the fields, the techniques of slash and burn, and even the crops that are planted, emerge from this Amerindian universe, which the Creoles have drawn upon and interpreted in their own way.

To live in Maripasoula is to be part of a broader pattern that exists all up and down the river – small, split up communities that are uncertain about their present status, without a deep, common past, and confronting rather than joining together with one another. For gold prospectors, constantly in pursuit of new sites to exploit, the quest itself often became the focal point of their lives, and all landscapes became equally familiar and unfamiliar. But at the same time, their attachment to a particular house, built with their own hands, was very real. Moving among the placers,

the forest gardens, and the house, French Guiana's last prospectors have developed a special rhythm of life.

Friday morning, December 11, 1982. Woke up rested, thanks be to God. Said my prayers, drank my coffee, and got ready to leave for work. I thought that, God willing, this might be one of the last days of gold work for the year. I worked well yesterday and put away the tools. On the way home caught two fish. Arrived in camp, heated the gold: 8 grams. Not so good but, since there isn't much left, it's all right. In two weeks, got 14 grams. I'm going to the field to prepare the earth for planting. I had to leave off working because of the rains. In the evening, I cooked dinner, took a shower, went up to Constant's, prepared some vines for ropes, said my prayers, and then to sleep.

NOTES

1. This sketch of a man and his lived environment is intended as an antidote to recent books such as *Caribbean Style* (Slesin et al. 1985, reviewed in vol. 61, pp. 90-91, of this journal), in which peoples' homes tend to be abstracted from their presence in them, and in which a focus on the rich and famous crowds out the lifeways of the great bulk of Caribbean people.
2. The Maroni region was inhabited only by Amerindians – Wayana (Carib) and Emerillons (Tupi) – until the last quarter of the 18th century, when some 300 Aluku (Boni) Maroons settled along the Lawa River. In 1870, there was an influx of people from the coast – French Guianese Creoles, West Indians, and a few Europeans – who came up the river in search of gold. The height of this movement was in 1901 when gold deposits were discovered in the Inini region (Lasserre, Grenand et al. 1979: Plate 20).
3. Founded in 1930 and placed under the authority of a governor, this Territory granted a de facto autonomy to the "tribal" Amerindian and Maroon populations. In 1968, this special legislation was eliminated when all of French Guiana became a Department d'Outre-Mer.
4. These figures were furnished by the Ministère de l'Agriculture, Service Centrale des Enquetes et Etudes Statistiques, Paris (1975), and D.D.A., Service Statistiques, Cayenne (March 1982).
5. The perceived correlation between the abundance of gold and the communities that have grown up around it is deeply entrenched in the prospectors' way of thought. They are convinced that the only reason gold might ever disappear from the face of the earth would be if there were no more men in the forest to pursue it.

REFERENCES

- LASSERRE, GUY, PIERRE GRELAND, et al., 1979. *Atlas de Guyane*. Paris: CNRS-ORSTOM.
- SLESIN, SUZANNE, STAFFORD CLIFF, JACK BERTHELOT, MARTINE GAUME, & DANIEL ROZENSZTROCH, 1985. *Caribbean style*. New York: Clarkson N. Potter.

MICHELE BAJ STROBEL

Krech Karayib

27, Allée des Perruches, 97200 Fort de France, Martinique