R. Price

Maroons in Suriname and Guyane: how many and where

In: New West Indian Guide/ Nieuwe West-Indische Gids 76 (2002), no: 1/2, Leiden, 81-88

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

RICHARD PRICE

MAROONS IN SURINAME AND GUYANE: HOW MANY AND WHERE

While conducting research with Sally Price for a book (R. & S. Price 2002) about Maroons in Guyane (French Guiana) – all of whom have recent or ancestral roots in Suriname – I have come to realize that the Maroon population figures routinely used in the scholarly and popular literature are considerably out of date, for both Suriname and Guyane, as well as for the Maroon diaspora in the Netherlands.¹ This brief essay is intended to provide new estimates, some of which have startling implications.

In the literature on Suriname, there has been a long-standing tradition of keeping population figures for the Saramaka and Ndyuka at rough parity, those for the Matawai, Paramaka, and Aluku at (a very much smaller) rough parity, and those for the Kwinti much smaller still. Without reviewing here the history of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century estimates (by soldiers, planters, colonial administrators, and others), I can report that by 1900, there was general agreement on the population sizes at that time: approximately 4,000 Ndyuka, 4,000 Saramaka, 600 Matawai, 400 Aluku, 400 Paramaka, and 200

1. I wish to thank the following friends and colleagues who generously shared their knowledge and experience by criticizing drafts of this paper and contributing key information and insights: Chris de Beet and Miriam Sterman (who provided Matawai numbers and geographical distributions), Ken Bilby (who provided comments on Aluku numbers and on intermarriage), Wim Hoogbergen (who provided general comments), Jean Hurault (who sent me his recent study of upriver Aluku demography), Fergus MacKay (who commented on the deteriorating health situation in the interior of Suriname and its effects on demography), Gert Oostindie (who provided general criticisms), André Pakosie and Thomas Polimé (who each provided data on Ndyuka numbers and distributions in Suriname and the Netherlands), and Bonno Thoden van Velzen (who provided detailed figures and distributions for Ndyukas in the Suriname interior, and made numerous helpful comments). The field research that undergirds many of the data presented here was carried out jointly with Sally Price, who also carefully criticized the text. The final synthesis and analysis is, of course, nobody's responsibility but my own.

Kwinti – a total of 9,600 Maroons. By the end of the 1960s, a combination of the first extensive anthropological fieldwork with these populations, the first (however flawed) Suriname government census of the interior, and other data produced a new consensus: Saramakas and Ndyukas were each said to number 15,000-20,000, Matawais, Alukus, and Paramakas each about 2,000, and the Kwintis less than 500 – a total of 36,500-46,500 Maroons (see R. Price 1976:3-4). Since that time, scholars have gradually adjusted these figures by modest increments (usually after corresponding with one another, which meant that the estimates were not independent). By the 1990s, the scholarly consensus was that Saramakas and Ndyukas each numbered 24,000, Matawais, Alukus, and Paramakas each 2,000-2,500, and the Kwintis 500 – a total of some 55,000 Maroons (see, for example, the summaries in Scholtens 1994:10-11 and in S. & R. Price 1999:19). My current research suggests that these figures now require significant modification, including a more-than-doubling of the total population of Maroons.²

The table summarizes my current understandings. The remainder of the article provides supporting evidence, analysis, and sources, as well as brief discussion of the implications of these upward revisions.

	Suriname "interior"	Paramaribo	F.G. interior	F.G. coast	Netherlands	Total
Ndyukas	24,000	8,000	3,000	11,000	4,500	50,500
Saramakas	25,000	7,000	–	14,500	4,000	50,500
Alukus	–	–	3,900	2,000	100	6,000
Paramakas	2,300	500	500	2,300	400	6,000
Matawais	1,000	2,900	–	–	100	4,000
Kwintis	170	400	–	–	30	600
Total	52,470	18,800	7,400	29,800	9,130	117,600

N.B.: For the Ndyuka, "Suriname 'interior'" includes both the Tapanahoni/Lawa and the Cottica regions, with the population divided almost exactly evenly between the two. For the Saramaka, "Suriname 'interior'" includes villages both above and below the lake. In addition to sites listed in the table, a growing number of Maroons – perhaps several hundred – now reside in the United States, principally in Los Angeles, New York, Miami, and Boston, and a small number of Alukus reside in metropolitan France.

2. I cannot deal adequately here with the growing incidence of intermarriage among groups, and its eventual consequences for identity and ethnicity. For purposes of this essay, I am considering only children with two Maroon parents to be Maroons and assuming that such children choose one or another primary Maroon identity (Aluku or Saramaka or Ndyuka, for example). As early as the 1970s, De Beet and Sterman remarked on the occurrence of intermarriage among Matawai migrants in Paramaribo, finding that a significant proportion married non-Matawais – most often Saramakas (1982:464-67). Bilby's survey of 547 Aluku marriages in the 1980s found that while only 4 percent involved non-

In Suriname, the 1960s and 1970s saw vigorous growth in the Maroon populations, as hospitals and clinics proliferated in the interior and infant mortality declined. During these years, rates of natural increase (natality minus mortality) were measured at 2 percent for the Matawai (De Beet & Sterman 1981:398), and there is reason to believe that even higher rates prevailed among the other groups.³ By 1980, large numbers of Maroons – “almost half of the Matawai population” (De Beet & Sterman 1981:427) plus significant numbers of Saramakas, Ndyukas, and Paramakas – had settled in and around Paramaribo, and several thousand additional Maroons, including a large number of Western-educated Saramaka Christians from the village of Ganzee, had already moved to the Netherlands.

But it was the Suriname civil war (1986-92) and its aftermath that most directly affected Maroon demography during the second half of the twentieth century. Not only did the war displace at least 10,000 Maroons (mainly Cottica Ndyukas), but it closed clinics and hospitals throughout the interior and led to a still-unquantified but clearly significant rise in mortality at all ages. It also accelerated out-migration from Maroon villages all over the interior toward Paramaribo, the coast of Guyane, and the Netherlands. Leaving aside the devastating human and social costs of the war, and the growing impoverishment of Suriname Maroon populations in general, it is clear that since the 1980s, deteriorating social, economic, and medical conditions have led to a demographic stagnation among those Maroons who have remained in the interior of Suriname. Since the end of the war, mining and forestry projects have blighted the physical environment (encouraging, for example, mosquito development) and the social environment (bringing prostitution and AIDS). In the Suriname interior, the rate of malaria is now the highest in all of

Maroons, fully 25 percent involved non-Aluku (but still-Maroon) spouses – roughly, 16 percent Ndyukas, 4 percent Paramaka, 4 percent Saramaka, 1 percent Matawai, and a single union with a Kwinti (Bilby 1990:621). Today in Guyane (as in Paramaribo and the Netherlands) such intermarriage is increasing. For the first time, for example, a small number of Saramaka women are marrying Aluku or Ndyuka men (marriages between Saramaka men and other Maroon women have been common for decades).

3. During the 1960s and 1970s, Saramaka and Ndyuka societies were more economically stable than Matawai, and had considerably less out-migration. Our own field data on Saramaka reproductive histories from the period suggests a higher rate of increase than for the Matawai – closer, perhaps, to 3 percent. (As we will see below, rates higher than 4 percent are now common among Maroons living in Guyane.) In general, the major encouragements to Maroon demographic increase would seem to be economic stability or growth, access to health care facilities, and a controlled disease environment – the precise opposite of what has actually happened in the wake of the 1980s civil war and recent mining/forestry incursions, which have brought AIDS and rampant malaria. In retrospect, the 1960s and 1970s were, for the Ndyuka and Saramaka (and probably the Paramaka), a privileged moment of rapid demographic expansion.

South America and HIV infection is said to be in the upper 20 percent range.⁴ At the same time, population growth among the 55 percent of Maroons who live outside the Suriname “interior” has, as we shall see, been soaring.

The Maroon population in the Netherlands, which had consisted largely of Western educated families, jumped as a result of the civil war, and many of those living there today are illegal immigrants (making population estimates especially difficult). Ndyukas and Saramakas clearly predominate, with the largest concentrations in Amsterdam Zuid-Oost, Tilburg, Rotterdam, Utrecht, Zeist, Den Haag, and Almere. I estimate conservatively that some 8 percent of all Maroons (more than 9,000 people) now live in the Netherlands; some of my correspondents (see note 1) would put the actual figures at closer to 13 percent (15,000 people).

Across the border in Guyane, the past two decades have witnessed a demographic explosion among Maroons. To a large extent, this has been masked from public view by the large number of other “problems” recently experienced by the inhabitants of this special corner of overseas France – rapid but highly artificial economic development, massive illegal immigration of Brazilians, Haitians, and others, and soaring crime rates. Though there is vague awareness of a recent increase in the Maroon presence, few Guyanais have any idea of its scale. Christiane Taubira-Delannon, *députée* from Guyane to the French National Assembly, recently expressed the official consensus: “The Maroon communities [in Guyane], divided among Bonis (Alukus), Ndyukas, Paramakas, and Saramakas, now number 7,000 people” (2000:41).⁵

Combining official 1999 census data with our field investigations of 2000, 2001, and 2002, I estimate that there are some 37,200 Maroons living in Guyane (with my low-end estimate at 33,000 and high-end at 42,000). That is, I believe that there are in Guyane today some 2,800 Paramakas, 5,900 Alukus, 14,000 Ndyukas, and 14,500 Saramakas – which means that Maroons now constitute well over 20 percent of the population of the *département* (a larger proportion even than Haitians or Brazilians). Because French law does not permit counting by “ethnic groups,” data on Maroons must be inferred indirectly from other statistics or estimated “on the ground” – both of which strategies I have followed. The fact that a very large proportion of Maroons in Guyane are illegals further complicates the task. I am convinced

4. Hoogbergen, Kruijt & Polimé 2001:120, personal communications from medical personnel in Guyane and Suriname, Mohamed Rakieb Khudabux 2001, Address by the Minister of Health of the Republic of Suriname, on the occasion of the Twenty-sixth Special Session of the [U.N.] General Assembly on HIV/AIDS, New York, June 25-27, 2001. See also Kambel & MacKay 1999, R. & S. Price 2001.

5. Similarly, a recent article in *Libération* estimated the number of Maroons in Guyane at 4,000 (Une histoire. Les noirs marrons: Sans papiers français, August 4, 1999).

that a large proportion of the Saramakas and Paramakas and a significant proportion of the Ndyukas residing in Guyane, particularly those living in clandestinity, were not counted by the 1999 French census (INSEE 2000c:20), which did count nearly 18,000 "Surinamiens" (non-French who were born in Suriname) – perhaps 16,000 of whom would be Maroons. If its count of the "French" population included the 6,000 Alukus and, say, 2,000 other Maroons (Ndyukas, Paramakas, and Saramakas) who were born or naturalized citizens, that would still leave about 10,000 Maroons not counted in the official tally.

The 1999 official census of Guyane gives natality and mortality rates commune by commune. The rate of natural increase during 1990-99 for the communes with the highest proportions of Maroons – Apatou (an Aluku-controlled commune), Grand-Santi (a largely Ndyuka commune), Maripasoula (which includes many Alukus), and Saint-Laurent (which is now majority Maroon) – are all on the order of 4.2 percent (INSEE 2000a:12-13), a remarkably robust growth rate.⁶ For purposes of comparison, note that the (considerably lower) all-Guyane rate of natural increase – 2.7 percent – is considered to be "one of the highest in South America and the Caribbean" (INSEE 2000b:30).

Alukus, almost all of whom are French citizens by birthright and benefit from medical care, *allocations familiales*, retirement benefits, and other social services, are the most privileged Maroon group in Guyane. I estimate that they have grown from a population of 2,500 in 1980 to a population of some 6,000 in 2001 – in line with a natural increase of 4.2 percent.⁷

As a working hypothesis, I am assuming that since the Suriname civil war, approximately half of the Paramaka population has been living in Guyane while half remains in Suriname. Because of particularly heavy gold mining in Paramaka territory, that society is currently in considerable flux. (My estimate of 6,000 Paramakas may be on the high side, but not by more than 1,000 – if we increased the Guyane half of the 1980 population of 2,500 by an annual rate of 4.2 percent and held the Suriname half at a putative 1.5 percent annual increase, the current total figure would stand at some 5,000 people.) Those

6. The commune of Papaïchton, which encompasses all of the "traditional" Aluku villages, was measured by the census as having a natural increase rate of only 1.3 percent, far below the all-Guyane norm of 2.7 percent (INSEE 2000a:12). More careful analysis by Jean Hurault (1999:82), however, allows us to correct this figure to 3.5 percent – much closer to that of other heavily-Maroon communes in Guyane.

7. The 1999 census shows the commune of Apatou with a population of 3,637 (including 2,177 non-French – that is, Paramakas, Ndyukas, Haitians, and others), suggesting perhaps 1,000 Alukus; Papaïchton at 1,652 (with 145 non-French), suggesting as many as 1,500 Alukus; and Maripasoula 3,652 (with 804 non-French) suggesting another 1,500 Alukus – giving a total Aluku population in the interior of the country of some 4,000, with the other 2,000 dispersed among the coastal towns, particularly Saint-Laurent and Cayenne (INSEE 2000c:28).

Paramakas who live in Guyane remain largely in the communes of Apatou (which is directly across the Marowijne River from Paramaka territory) and, particularly, in Saint-Laurent. There has long been a Paramaka presence (which I estimate at 500) in and around Paramaribo, and, by all accounts, the several-hundred-strong community of Paramakas in the Netherlands continues to grow.

The task of estimating the Ndyuka and Saramaka populations in Guyane is more complex. The Ndyuka have three foci in Guyane. One is the heavily-Ndyuka commune of Grand-Santi (official population ca. 3,000), created in 1993 just across from the mouth of the Tapanahoni, which has a Ndyuka mayor and is a genuine beachhead for Tapanahoni Ndyukas, especially for getting French residence papers. Another is the community of Charvein in the commune of Mana, where some 1,200 Cottica Ndyukas, taken in by the mayor of Mana at the end of the civil war, continue to receive significant numbers of new clandestine refugees from Suriname almost on a weekly basis; today, Charvein numbers some 1,600 people, to whom must be added another 400 who live in Mana at CD8. Finally, in the commune of Saint-Laurent (official population ca. 20,000, though our observations on the ground suggest that the figure should be significantly higher), Ndyukas, most without French residence papers, are clearly the largest single population group today and number some 7,000. And there are another 2,000 or so Ndyukas divided between Kourou and Cayenne or scattered elsewhere in Guyane.

Saramakas, who have the longest tradition of residence in Guyane of any Maroons except Alukus, are the most invisible of the major groups today, living largely without French residence papers and doing their best to keep out of the way of authorities. Very few remain in the large communities that Saramaka men built a century ago on the Oyapok River (where they still have an official "captain") and the Approuague. But over the past few years, they have invaded the region of Cayenne in force – men, women, and children – and their families are growing rapidly; my estimates put their total numbers in and around the capital at 4,250. In the "Space City" of Kourou, where Saramakas have provided the major share of wage labor since its construction in the 1960s, the most recent census of Saramakas living in the "Village Saramaka," made in 1992, showed 2,500 – fully five times the count of a decade earlier (Péaud n.d.:31); I estimate their numbers in and around Kourou today at 4,000. Some 1,000 Saramakas live in settlements, often hidden from the road, strung out along the main highway between Iracoubo and Saint-Laurent. The very great majority do not have French residence papers, though many have lived in Guyane for twenty years or more. Some 500 Saramakas, most of whom arrived during the last ten to fifteen years, reside along the Route de Mana, where large numbers of the men sell woodcarvings to tourists. In and around the town of Saint-Laurent, there are another 4,000

Saramakas, the men working as restaurant cooks or in other black-market employment, doing odd jobs, or making and selling woodcarvings, the women cleaning homes or offices or taking care of their own burgeoning families. And there are another 750 or so Saramakas scattered through the other communes of Guyane, from Saint-Georges de l'Oyapok through Sinnamary and Mana to Maripasoula.

These data and analyses deserve recapitulation, as many of the conclusions run counter to the "common sense" that was forged in an earlier period. Only one-third of all Maroons still live in the Suriname interior (that is, either in "traditional" or in 1960s "*transmigratie*" villages). More than a quarter live in and around Paramaribo or in the Cottica/Moengo coastal strip. At least 8 percent live in the Netherlands. And nearly a third live in Guyane. Now that Maroon women as well as men routinely migrate, work, and conduct their everyday lives in Guyane, with access to excellent healthcare and educational facilities (even for many of those without residence papers), birthrates among this extremely young population are skyrocketing. Indeed, if Suriname continues to stagnate economically and continues to neglect the social and economic needs of its Maroon populations, it may not be too many years before there are as many Maroons in Guyane as in Suriname.

REFERENCES

- BEET, CHRIS DE & MIRIAM STERMAN, 1981. *People in Between: The Matawai Maroons of Suriname*. Meppel: Krips Repro.
- BILBY, KENNETH M., 1990. The Remaking of the Aluku: Culture, Politics, and Maroon Ethnicity in French South America. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore MD.
- HOOGBERGEN, WIM, DIRK KRUIJT & THOMAS POLIMÉ, 2001. Goud en Brazilianen. *Oso* 20:109-27.
- HURAUULT, JEAN, 1999. Enquêtes démographiques chez les Aluku (Boni) de la commune de Papaïchton (Guyane Française), 1956-1958 et 1989-1998. [extrait de *Avenir des peuples des forêts tropicales*, Volume régional Caraïbes, edited by Pierre Grenand and Françoise Grenand, Brussels.]
- INSEE, 2000a. *Évolutions démographiques 1982-1990-1999: Données définitives*. 973 Guyane. Paris: INSEE.
- , 2000b. *Tableaux économiques régionaux de la Guyane*. Paris: INSEE.
- , 2000c. *Tableaux références et analyses: Exploitation principale*. 973 Guyane. Paris: INSEE.

KAMBEL, ELLEN-ROSE & FERGUS MACKAY, 1999. *The Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Maroons in Suriname*. Moreton-in-Marsh, U.K.: The Forest Peoples Programme; Copenhagen: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs.

PÉAUD, CAROL, n.d. *Art et sculpture Noirs Marrons: Artisanat, mobilier, habitat*. Kourou: s.n..

PRICE, RICHARD, 1976. *The Guiana Maroons: A Historical and Bibliographical Introduction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

— & SALLY PRICE, 2001. Maroons under Assault: Suriname and French Guiana. *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 25(4):38-45.

—, 2002. *Les Marrons en Guyane*. Châteauneuf-le-Rouge: Vents d'ailleurs.

PRICE, SALLY & RICHARD PRICE, 1999. *Maroon Arts: Cultural Vitality in the African Diaspora*. Beacon Press: Boston.

SCHOLTENS, BEN, 1994. *Bosnegers en overheid in Suriname: De ontwikkeling van de politieke verhouding 1651-1992*. Paramaribo: Afdeling Cultuurstudies/Minov.

TAUBIRA-DELANNON, CHRISTIANE, 2000. *L'or en Guyane: Éclats et artifices*. Rapport à Monsieur le Premier Ministre.

RICHARD PRICE
Anse Chaudière
97217 Anses d'Arlet
Martinique
<rixsal@wm.edu>