

CHANGING ATTITUDES. POLITICS OF MAROONS VERSUS POLITICS OF THE GOVERNMENT IN SURINAM

Silvia W. de Groot (Amsterdam)

Relations between maroons and colonial government in Surinam have had constant as well as changing features (De Groot 1982a). In their dealings with each other these features caused different policies, and attitudes.

Not only their relationship towards each other influenced policy, but also specific circumstances within each community played a part, depending on whether these situations were brought about by internal or by external factors.

In this paper I wish to unravel the changing attitudes of each group with respect to each other, based on their relationship and circumstances.

The setting, the colony and its society

THE COLONY

From 1650 on, Surinam developed into a plantation colony, based on a system of slave labour, until 1667 under English and thereafter under Dutch authority. Until 1795 Surinam was owned by the Chartered Society, a triumvirate consisting of the Dutch West Indian Company, the City of Amsterdam and Cornelis van Aerssen van Sommelsdijk, who together administered the colony under supervision of the States General. Until 1816 government was enforced by a governor, a Political Council and a Council of Justice.

From 1799 to 1814 Surinam was a British protectorate. The system of administration was replaced in 1838, and again in 1865, 1937 and 1954, until independence in 1975.

In the 17th and 18th century two groups mainly wanted to profit by the country: namely the Directors of the Chartered Society and the plantation owners. In spite of their often conflicting interests, an unstable equilibrium was maintained and great fortunes were made by both for more than a century.

From the end of the eighteenth century onwards the colony fared badly after a period of prosperity. The causes were: the maroon guerilla wars,

the growing absenteeism of plantation owners, the raising of exorbitant loans, a crisis on the Amsterdam exchange, the French Revolution, the Napoleonic wars, the prohibition of slave trade and, in 1863, the abolition of slavery.

THE PLANTATION AND THE SLAVES

The number of slaves imported from West Africa into Surinam is estimated to have been between 300,000 and 350,000. The plantation owner was confronted by a slave population outnumbering the whites by 25 to 1 in 1738, 15 to 1 in 1786 and 6 to 1 in 1830. Especially in the eighteenth century the owner lived in a constant fear of slave uprisings and that was far from groundless. The slaves were mostly hostile, either overtly or covertly, as their masters, subject to great tensions, resorted to arbitrary treatment and atrocities.

The reactions of the slaves were manifold and had a number of causes, which can be put in the following points:

- The uprooting and the transfer from Africa to America caused feelings of shock, isolation, and homesickness;
- Their rightless position in the plantation system;
- The maltreatment by the masters (i.e. inhuman working conditions and inhuman punishments).

Their reactions can be classified as: adaptation, passive resistance, open resistance, "small" marronage, revolt and marronage. Adaptation was difficult, gradual and usually a process of long duration during which the plantation system was accepted and in which the establishing of family relationship and kinship were important factors; passive resistance consisted mainly in pretending illness, or dodging work; open resistance manifested itself in sabotage, poisoning, selfmutilation, conspiracy; "small" marronage in temporarily leaving the plantation to avoid punishment, to visit a wife or kinsman on another plantation or to assist religious gatherings. Revolts and marronage occurred mostly on one or two plantations at a time. The slaves in Surinam never united to carry out a large-scale rising.

If these revolts were not quelled, they often resulted in looting and setting fire to the plantation and killing master and staff, and running away to join the existing groups of maroons (De Groot 1984).

Eighteenth century: guerilla warfare

POLICY OF THE COLONISTS

The running away of slaves was already reported since 1650 and when Indian slaves were used these also escaped into the forests or up the rivers (the Surinam, the Saramaka and the Coppename river). Both Negroes and Indians harrassed the plantations. During this period a group of maroons, who had settled at Para Creek and later on the Coppename river, already numbered several hundred.

Governor van Sommelsdijk who arrived in Suriname in 1683 made peace with the Indians as well as with a group of maroons of whom no more was heard afterwards. But the number of slaves who took to freedom mounted, thus heightening the unrest in the colony. After a rising in 1690 on a Jewish plantation, in the course of which the owner was killed and all the slaves escaped into the forest, the colony was forced to conceive of a more effective policy to check the loss of valuable slaves and plunder of plantations by the maroons. Many attempts were made. During the governorship of Van Sommelsdijk an armed civilian guard had been formed, consisting of eleven companies (one of which was Jewish). It undertook patrols against maroons, but without much success, so that from 1730 onwards soldiers were also used. the penalties for running away were made more severe: after 1721 it was punished by death. The reward for the capturing of maroons was regularly increased: in 1685 it was 5 florins, in 1698, 25 and later still 50. But all these measures proved unavailing and the number of slaves joining the maroons kept increasing, especially after 1712, when panic broke out amongst the colonists during an invasion by the French Admiral Jacques Cassard which caused them to send their wives and children, accompanied by their slaves, into the forest. The women and children returned, but a large number of slaves chose to stay away and join the existing groups. At that time there were about 400 plantations, about 50,000 slaves and 2,000 whites. More than 10% of the slaves had run away. In 1730, after the plantations had suffered many attacks, a number of expeditions were undertaken, which resulted in the discovery and destruction of two notorious maroon villages on the Saramaka river. However, Governor Mauricius, who came to Surinam in 1742, declared that the expeditions had not the intended effect, and had done more damage than good. They increased the selfconfidence not only of the runaways, but also of the slaves and made the paths through the forest, leading to the Maroons known to them.

Accordingly he decided to change the policy of the colony and in 1749 he examined the possibility of negotiating with the maroons and making peace with them (as Van Sommelsdijk had done in 1684 and as the English

had done with the maroons in Jamaica in 1739 where the colonists had been exposed to the same dangers).

POLICY OF THE MAROONS

Once the slave's decision to become a maroon had been taken, it was necessary to organize the escape. Usually the routes to be taken were known, because the existing maroon groups kept furtive contacts with the slaves of the plantations. This meant that often fellow slaves and kinsmen were reunited. Although new maroons were accepted by the existing groups they were nevertheless put to a harsh test. The men had to prove to be reliable, had to be initiated in guerilla warfare and both men and women had to learn to conform to the stern rules of a group under wartime stress and authoritative military leadership with stringent religious and moral codes.

The maroons developed their specific fighting tactics (which, under similar circumstances, proved to be the same as in other areas of the Americas). They attacked plantations out of necessity: they needed weapons, women and implements to survive. Acts of revenge on their former masters sometimes led to bloodshed, arson and murder. In the forest they kept on the move if they were pursued by the military expeditions, which was often the case. They avoided fighting in open fields, maintained a network of spies and look-outs and were hardly ever surprised by the whites, who were unused to this kind of tropical warfare and hampered by their often very large train of bearers. They were clever at luring patrols into ambushes, preferably in the marshes and, being good shots, seldom wasted their powder. Whenever they built villages they reinforced them with pallisades and often situated them in almost inaccessible places, with secret entrances. They made the best out of the fact that they were by far outnumbered by the enemy, by attacking in small parties and withdrawing quickly. There was very little contact between the different maroon groups. The area each particular group chose to move to, often depended on where the plantation, from which they had come, was situated and on tribal ties and other relationships with already existing nuclei of maroons. In order to survive each group needed a relatively large area, where they could roam about easily with the possibility of moving their plots under horticulture, should a village come under attack and where the hunting and fishing grounds were adequate.

PEACE SETTLEMENTS

As we saw above Governor Mauricius decided to force the maroons to open peace negotiations by means of a huge expedition, in spite of the

opposition of the members of the council, who did not see the good of making peace at all and shrank from the expenses of the expedition.

Three major groups of maroons had by now formed: one called the Saramakas living upstream on the Suriname river, one called Matuaris, living on the Saramaka river and another called the Djukas, living upstream on a tributary of the Marowijne, called Djuka creek. The choice fell on the Saramakas and an expedition with 1,000 soldiers was sent. Contact was made with their Chief Adu, negotiations were successful and the peace was based on the treaty of 1739 made with the maroons in Jamaica. Ratification was to have taken place after a due amount of presents had been sent to the maroons. These presents were sent, but since the reluctant Council considered military convoys too expensive, only a few whites and bearers made the trip. The group was attacked and all were massacred. Chief Adu, waiting in vain and assuming that the negotiations were a ruse, resumed guerilla activities and plantations were attacked as before.

Only ten years later a new attempt was made. Now, however, it was another group, the Djukas, who themselves made overtures by leaving leaflets on attacked plantations expressing their willingness to negotiate. The colonists adopted a more cautious policy and contacted the maroons, by first sending two slaves trusted by both parties and then a peaceful expedition. After long palavers the peace treaty came about in 1760, formulated again in the same way as the one in Jamaica. Now the Saramakas and the Matuaris at their own wishes followed suite and peace was concluded also with them two years later. Maroons as well as colonists rejoiced but not for long; from 1765 until 1793 a fierce guerilla war was fought by a newly formed group: the Bonis, named after their leader Boni. They attacked scores of plantations and had their strongholds in the marshes and forests surrounding the plantation area of the Commewyne and Cottica rivers near the coast. Their skilled warfare compelled the colonists to build a system of connecting military posts encircling the plantations and to ask help from the mother country in the form of an expeditionary army. This army (1,200 men, with the help of a corps of Black Chasseurs of 300 men (De Groot 1988), succeeded in 1776 after heavy fighting and heavy losses in driving the Bonis over the frontier river, the Marowijne, into French Guyana. Peace was never made with them and they continued to bother the colony intermittently until 1793. The final blow to their fighting spirit was given by their fellowblacks the Djukas, who turned against them after having been their allies: the Bonis had moved up river and the Djukas felt that their free pathway to the coastal area was being threatened, and moreover, they were being set up against the Bonis by a sly colonialist policy of playing the two groups off against each other. The Paramount Chief of the Djukas mounted a

campaign against the Bonis and killed their old leader Boni as well as some of his warchiefs in 1793 (De Groot 1975, 1982b; Hoogbergen 1990).

Nineteenth century: adjustments and new attitudes

MAROON SOCIETIES

The peace-settlements gave the maroons the opportunity to change from guerilla fighters into peaceful communities. They could now live in permanent settlements, develop their rules for kinship relations and political hierarchies and evolve religious and moral codes and ensure their means of existence.

Although the Surinam maroons date the beginnings of their oral tradition from their struggle for freedom, they are keenly aware of the fact that Africa is the land of their forefathers. In their cultural pattern which consists of an amalgamation of various elements, those of African origins play a most important role.

STATE WITHIN A STATE

The peace treaties allowed the maroons a fair amount of autonomy. Apart from the stipulation, which often was a cause of friction, that they were to deliver new runaways or help to hunt them down for, or together with the colonists, they formed what usually was called a "state within a state".

Relationships between maroons and government remained strained. A historically grown distrust, conditioned by their past as slaves, their long struggle to gain independence and the fear that their hardearned liberty could be endangered if they were to yield to government proposals, pervaded their contacts with western civilisation. Nevertheless they had — and still have — a keen appreciation of the western technological achievements and knowledge, but they definitely do not regard their own accomplishments as inferior. Even though they are not prepared to sacrifice their independent existence and culture, they are not averse to learning ways of furthering their well-being within their own community. Clearly the maroons and the coastal society differed in attitudes and opinions towards each other. These differences have been conditioned amongst other things by attitudes towards the peace treaties: the maroons were convinced that it was they who had initiated peace negotiations and that they had never been defeated. The whites on the other hand claimed that they had enforced peace on the maroons by retaliating. According to the maroons the peace treaties regulated freedom and autonomy within their own region. The whites considered the benefit of the treaties to be the prevention of renewed attacks and the diminishing of new maroons. The

maroons considered that the large amount of presents which was sent to them regularly, was part and parcel of the treaty. The government however regarded them to be a special favour. The maroons feared that the whites would renew hostilities and that they (the maroons) would be recaptured as slaves; the colonists feared that the maroons, either single or together, would renew guerilla activities and thus ruin the colony. These convictions, together with feelings of pride and prestige, made giving in and compromise difficult. The ambivalent attitudes of both parties influenced attitudes whenever the circumstances changed.

POLICIES OF ISOLATION AND INTEGRATION

Efforts to stress isolation from or integration in the plantation colony of the maroons changed several times from 1650 onwards. I have divided these changing policies into the following periods.

- From 1650 to 1793 guerilla war waged intermittently. While the maroons sought to live in freedom, by hiding deep in the forest, and occasionally attacking plantations, the colonists sent patrols and armies in order to get their property back or to destroy the maroons. This was a special kind of contact that can be considered to be a policy of isolation on the part of the maroons and of integration on the part of the colonists.
- From 1793 to 1835, after the last group of maroons ceased to bother the colony, both parties were content, where possible, to lead a separate existence. They maintained this policy, apart from occasions when parties of maroons, whose numbers were determined by the peace treaty, came to the plantation areas to smuggle or sell their products, mainly wood, for food and implements. They returned to their regions as soon as business was completed.
- From 1835 to 1856 several changes in the circumstances of both occurred. Slowly the maroon population started to grow. Their precarious balance of existence was often disturbed, and in times of want bigger groups came to the plantations for supplementary provision. Fear of renewed hostilities was diminishing. Slave trade had been prohibited and the lack of supplies forced the plantation owners to be more careful with their slaves than before. Marronage diminished. In 1835, 1837 and 1838 new clauses were inserted in the old treaties, which gave the maroons more freedom to move — in number as well as in space. Many of them used this freedom to come down the rivers with wood to trade or to smuggle with the slaves of the plantations. Efforts of the government, first to regulate the trade by enforcing a pass system, then to concentrate

the maroons in special areas in order to keep them under control were to no avail, and only strained relationships.

- From 1856 to 1863 the colony, confronted with the failure of its policy and with a new important development, namely the irreversible process leading to abolition of slavery, now decided to change its policy towards the maroons decisively, realizing that in view of the dreaded shortage of manpower they needed to take measures. They initiated a policy to use the untapped source of maroons and draw them into the plantation economy. The treaty regulations of 1760 and 1835 were changed in 1856 and the maroons were given complete freedom to move. Their paramount Chiefs were now paid a salary and the sending of presents was abandoned. Parties of government-officials were sent to the different maroon groups to convince them of the advantages of trading with, and working for the colony. The maroons however were reluctant to come, because they knew from experience that the self-interested whites stood most to gain from this, and they decided only to act in accordance with it if their own purpose could be served. They refused to return to the plantations as labourers (De Groot 1977).
- From 1863 to well after the turn of the century the maroons were very much left to their own devices. They continued to grow in numbers, traded with the coastal area, carried freight up and down the fast flowing, rock strewn rivers, were involved in jobs as lumberjacks, and indulged in other temporary work such as balata bleeding, and migrated for shorter or longer periods to the coastal areas. The colony lost interest in them, as they were involved in handling immigrants from Asia who were to save their remaining plantations from complete desintegration.

Twentieth century: modernization

DEVELOPMENT POLICIES OF THE GOVERNMENT

The Netherlands' political policy of the early 1900's called "Ethical system" was aimed at the economic and social advancement of the colonial population by means of education, improved medical services and agricultural methods and by carrying out public works. The effort to improve Surinam's economic situation was linked to the other country's long term aim at curtailing her own expenditure. In view of this policy attention in Surinam was once again drawn to the isolated groups of maroons: they were of no productive value to the colony, they lived according to their own political and religious codes, evade administrative jurisdiction and,

in short, one had no hold on them. All this had to be changed, for their sake and that of the colony, and while promoting their welfare, the discharge of a "moral debt" towards a neglected group would give ethical satisfaction. These considerations gave rise to the proposal to appoint an administrative official (called "postholder"), to give elementary, secular education as well as agricultural guidance and simple medical aid to one of the maroon societies: the Djukas, now living along another tributary of the Marowynne river: the Tapanahoni. This "development project" *avant la lettre* failed. Some reasons for this are given below.

The government labelled the enterprise as an experiment. This meant that there was little continuity: financial provision was to be made once a year and the amount determined by short term success or failure. The government's inadequate knowledge of the situation inland resulted in wrong instructions and ineffective advice to the executer of the project. The Djuka community resented the whole plan as they had not been told about it beforehand and certainly had not been consulted.

The postholder took the task upon him single-handed. In spite of his dedication the scope of the project was too large for one man. He knew the Djuka society well and felt sympathy for them. Nevertheless his position and feelings were ambivalent: he anticipated the same material results as his employers although he laid more stress on the moral side of the work. Preference was given to non-Christian education because the attempts made by Moravian Brothers had failed. Although the postholder praised the high moral standards of the Djukas, he found their religious practices abhorrent. He regarded western civilization as being inseparable from Christianity and thought that by a "backdoor policy" as he called it, the Djukas would come to adopt Christianity as a natural course of event (De Groot 1969).

REACTIONS OF THE MAROONS

As we have seen, the Djukas had mixed feelings towards western civilization. They had become even more convinced that the balance of political and religious power within their society would be upset, should they fall in with the proposed development project. Although the Paramount Chief and High Priest are the personification of power one cannot speak of an autocratic system. Administrative as well as religious organizations have to exercise their power on basis of dependence connections. Political manoeuvring is useful in the wielding of power. If the colonial administration is drawn into these manoeuvres than it is looked upon as "intriguing with the whites" and is closely related to treason (Thoden van Velzen 1966). The activities of the postholder often gave rise to resistance among the

Djukas, for he sometimes played one person or faction against the other while asking for help, thus upsetting the precarious balance.

The religious system of the maroon society is aimed at giving protection against supernatural dangers. Any encroachment upon this system can have harmful results for the individual as well as for the community (Van Wetering 1973, 1975; Thoden van Velzen/van Wetering 1988). The fear that the ultimate intention of the development project was to overthrow this religious system was not removed by the project agent who, as we saw, himself followed an insidious "backdoor" policy.

The project, started in 1919, was discontinued in 1925 by the government and the postholder was recalled. The lack of success — naturally — blamed on the executor of the project and on the Djuka community. The latter, the government felt, had sabotaged any measure adopted to improve their welfare and had not shown any appreciation of the government's good intentions.

MIGRATION POLICIES

We have seen that the maroons gradually got more and more used to taking shorter or longer trips to the coastal area in order to earn money by trading, river-transport, and lumberjacking. During the turn of the century a minor, but intensive goldrush occurred in the frontier area between French Guyana and Surinam. Many maroons served as carriers of freight and labourers for the treasure hunters who had rushed to the area. This opportunity for earning money soon dwindled to nothing together with the yield of gold from the placers.

Up to World War II the maroons were affected more or less in the same way by this migration policy. The men left their village for varying periods in order to earn enough to buy provisions in the city before returning home and sharing them between their wives and relatives; they performed their duties in their community and started out on the next journey (Price 1975).

After 1945 this pattern changed in some respects. Migrating became much more intensive. Many more maroons got involved in the money and labour economy of the coastal area. Although they still are mainly unskilled, the variety of possibilities has grown. As a result of a comprehensive development plan for Surinam, they could find work in the constructions of airfields, roads, in mining (bauxite) and the building of a hydroelectric dam. In spite however of the time spent working alongside people other than their kinsmen, the maroons do not seem to integrate in the multiracial coastal society. They keep very much to themselves, do not mix with other groups not even with other maroons groups. Integration through marrying a creole girl is rare. Even if a maroon does

decide to stay and live in these new surroundings he will frequent mostly kinsmen, will not break habits which have been formed by his religion and culture and stay in contact with his homestead. Only recently a small number of them have received a western education. It must be said that the government and the people of the coastal area are reluctant in giving the maroons any special treatment or consideration. Housing conditions such as the government's special guesthouses for maroons are very poor indeed. They therefore prefer to rent cabins in the backyards of landlords who profit exceedingly from this set-up. Housing conditions are poor also here, and rents are relatively high, but the maroons feel free to move and can choose with whom they want to share their tiny rooms.

Their labour is appreciated rather highly, but that does not mean that they are treated better or even on a level with their co-workers. They have up to this day been considered as "heathen" unkempt, boorish, uneducated "bushnegroes". There is on the other hand also a good deal of romanticizing about them: intellectual creoles, looking for identity, find in their heroic history a source of pride. Moreover, the creoles hold the maroon magic in awe, even though, or because, it resembles their own syncretized religious beliefs.

Migration to the coastal area in such mounting numbers as has occurred in the last years, has consequences for those staying behind: shortage of manpower for building houses and boats, clearing agricultural plots, performing religious and political duties. The birthrate is falling and the structure of their society is threatened. This again encourages emigration.

The coastal area which already is suffering from a high rate of unemployment has little to offer and more often than not the maroons live in miserable conditions. In 1975 the government considered a new policy. In order to clear the city and its surroundings of some of its poor, they drew up a plan which features building welfare centres in the interior. In these centres, focussed on growing oil palms and producing and selling the oil, and provided with attractive modern facilities, they hoped to induce those maroons who live in their own region to stay there, and those who have migrated to come back. This severely criticized plan never came to life. Many plans, products of governmental policies, have failed for a multitude of reasons as we have seen above. Only if the maroons can be firmly convinced that their marginal society will really profit from the project — and it is not easy to convince them of the benefits of profound changes — will they be persuaded to take the risk of participating in it. Only then has such a project any chance of success. The maroons are hardworking, clever, cooperative and inventive people if they believe in a cause and are given the correct tools.

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Population of Surinam in History

TABLE 1.

Year	Slaves	Whites	Plantations
1668	714 (men)	2,100	400
1738	57,000	2,100	400
1786	50,000	3,350	500
1791	53,000	3,300	591
1830	53,000	8,500	451
1863	33,600	16,500	162

TABLE 2.

Year	Maroons	Indians	Manumitted	Former slaves
1863	8,000	2,000	5,600	33,600

Year	Maroons	Indians	Coastal People	Total population
1924	18,163	2,580	112,800	133,543
1964	27,698	7,287	289,226	324,211
1971	39,500	10,200	333,500	383,200

TABLE 3.

	1964 census		1971 census	
Creoles	114,961	36%	118,000	31%
Hindustani	112,633	35%	143,000	37%
Indonesian	48,463	15%	58,000	15%
Chinese	5,339	1.7%	6,400	2%
European	4,293	1.3%	4,000	1%
Maroons	27,698	9%	39,500	10%
Indians	7,287	2.3%	10,200	3%
Others	3,627	1.1%	5,100	1%
Total	324,211	100%	383,200	100%

TABLE 4.

Maroons	1964 census		1971 census
Djuka	14,597	53%	—
Saramacca	8,872	32%	—
Paramaca	1,632	6%	—
Matuari	1,391	5%	—
Boni (Surinamese)*	279	1%	—
Kwinti	117	0.5%	—
Others	820	2%	—
Total	27,698	100%	39,500

*Boni (French) \pm 3,000