

Creole languages and their uses: the example of colonial Suriname*

Natalie Zemon Davis

University of Toronto

Abstract

This article describes the sources for, and the origins and uses of, the creole languages in the Dutch colony of eighteenth-century Suriname – those created and spoken among slaves on the plantations, among the free black Maroons in the jungle villages and among the mixed population (freed/slave, Christian/Jewish, French/Dutch, etc.) of the town of Paramaribo. The rich sources derive especially from plantation managers and Moravian missionaries, at their best working with black or coloured collaborators. These creoles, both the English-based Sranan and the Portuguese-based Saramaccan, allowed generations of Africans and Surinamese-Africans of diverse background to discuss matters of family, health and religion, to tell stories, to establish intimacy and mount quarrels with each other, to consider relations with masters and settlers, to plot resistance and sometimes to construct a past history. The uses of the creole languages by settlers are described, including their limited employment for religious conversion. The article concludes with the Dutch and Sranan poems published in the seventeen-eighties by a Dutch settler married to a mulatto heiress, poems casting in doubt hierarchies of colour.

Caribbean creole languages are especially instructive for the historical study of communication. These creoles were created by people wrenched from their own language communities and by the children of such uprooted parents; by people eager to have a language in which to conduct their lives amidst a surrounding babel of tongues and in lands far away from those of their progenitors. They illustrate the ingenuity of human populations in difficult straits and the wide range of situations and subjects they wanted to be able to talk about in relatively short order.

Linguists took their time to decide that colonial creoles were not just ‘broken’ or ‘bastard’ or ‘aberrant’ versions of genuine languages, but were new languages in their own right and worthy of study. In that change of view, the Suriname creoles had a role to play. In 1829, when the British and Foreign Bible Society published a New Testament, translated by the Moravian Brethren missionaries into ‘Negro-English’, the Suriname English-based creole, it was immediately assailed by the *Edinburgh Christian Instructor* for ‘putting the broken English of the Negroes . . . into a written and permanent form . . . embody[ing] their barbarous, mixed, imperfect phrases’. Whereupon in 1830 the philologist William Greenfield, himself a biblical specialist and translator, published an answer showing that the Suriname creole was an autonomous ‘rule-governed’ language, with connections to both English and Dutch,

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but separate from them. He reminded critics that the origins of the Suriname creole were not that different from the origins of English, once held in contempt as ‘a barbarous jargon, neither good French nor pure Saxon’. And against those claiming that Africans lacked the ability to master the English language, Greenfield wrote, three years before the abolition of slavery in England: ‘The human mind is the same in every clime; and accordingly we find nearly the same process adopted in the formation of language in every country’.¹

Suriname creole languages also figured in the abundant work of the Austrian Hugo Schuchardt in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Celebrated as ‘the father of creole studies’, Schuchardt continued to undermine Eurocentric judgement of language:

When the [Suriname] Black . . . says ‘go-take-come’ (*go teki kom . . .*) for ‘fetch’, we regard it with astonishment as an African peculiarity, though [fetching] is actually a question of three distinct acts. The peculiarity is ours . . . Is it more natural to say ‘I have hunger’ [*j’ai faim*] than ‘hunger have me’ (. . . *hangri kisi mi*)?²

Schuchardt published eighteenth-century texts in both the Suriname English-based creole, now called Sranan, and the Suriname Portuguese-based creole, called Saramaccan, noting that there was overlap in words between the two and that both creoles were richly endowed with African words. Describing these and other Atlantic creoles, Schuchardt used two modes of explanation: certain practices, such as putting verbs at the front of a phrase or stringing them along in a series, he attributed to precise African practices (what the linguists now call ‘substrate influence’); other features found in all the creoles, such as using infinitives rather than inflected verb forms, he explained by ‘parallelism’, or what linguists now call ‘universal processes of creolization’.³

In the development of creole studies since the nineteen-thirties and their explosion in the last forty years, such modes of describing and explaining have been at the forefront of lively debate. Are the similar forms found in the Atlantic creoles to be explained solely by universal properties of language inborn in all of us (the ‘language bioprogram’, as a leading proponent, Derek Bickford, calls it)? Or are similarities in phonology and syntax to be explained by substrate influences, that is, influences from west African languages? Are creole languages created in a single generation by slave children who are born in the Americas and who take the pidgin of their displaced parents and turn it into a real ‘nativized’ language? Or are they rather created over several generations, with the influx of new speakers from Africa making a difference? The best current wisdom, some of it drawn from the study of the languages and demography of Suriname, combines these alternatives. Both language bioprogramme and west African substrate can play a part in the first emergence of a creole; and though the creole might ‘jell’ in a generation, it could acquire new features afterward

¹ J. A. Holm, *Pidgins and Creoles* (2 vols., Cambridge and New York, 1988), i. 21–2. William Greenfield’s book was entitled *A Defence of the Surinam Negro-English Version of the New Testament* (1830); a brief excerpt is given in the *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages* (hereafter *J.P.C.L.*), i (1986), 256–66.

² H. Schuchardt, *The Ethnography of Variation: Selected Writings on Pidgins and Creoles*, trans. T. L. Markey, introduction by D. Bickerton (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1979), p. xiv. On Schuchardt, see Holm, i. 29–35.

³ H. Schuchardt, ‘The language of the Saramaccans’, in Schuchardt, *Ethnography*, pp. 73–133, esp. pp. 99–102. Schuchardt’s study was first published as *Die Sprache der Saramakkaneer in Surinam* in the *Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam. Afdeling letterkunde*, new ser., xiv (Amsterdam, 1914), where his long essay introduces important 18th-century texts.

from the flood of arrivals from Africa, some of them children, who learned to speak it as a second language, and from other processes of language change.⁴

Suriname was an English colony from 1650 to 1667.⁵ The first settler population at its height was about 1,000 people, many of them coming from other English colonies in the Caribbean. The 2,000 slaves who worked their sugar plantations on the Suriname and Commewine rivers included Arawak Indians, but most of them were Africans, transported on Dutch slave boats especially from the Slave Coast and Loango. Purchased at the Paramaribo slave market or in some instances born on the plantations, these men, women and children spoke the Gbe and Bantu Kikongo languages to whatever compatriots they had, and in the early years used an English-based pidgin for intra- and inter-plantation communication. By 1667, when the Dutch acquired the colony, the pidgin was expanding into a creole with an English and west African lexicon. During the sixteen-seventies most of the English-owned slaves were taken from Suriname by their departing masters, but not before they had passed on their creole to a new generation of Africans purchased by the Dutch planters. Other recent arrivals from Africa learned the creole directly from those

⁴ Holm, ii, 61–8 sums up the debate between ‘universalists’ and ‘sub-stratists’ as it stood in 1988. That argument, as well as the debate between gradual versus one-generation theories of the genesis of creole languages, can also be followed in the pages of the *J.P.C.L.* (D. Bickerton, ‘Beyond *Roots*: the five-year test’, i (1986), 225–32, and ‘On the supposed “gradualness” of creole development’, vi (1991), 25–52; J. V. Singler, ‘Short note’, i (1986), 141–5; D. R. Craig, ‘Review of *Substrate versus universals in Creole genesis* . . .’, ed. Pieter Muysken and Norval Smith’, iv (1989), 146–52). The articles by Philip Baker in *J.P.C.L.* draw the best from these theories (‘Off target’, v (1990), 107–19; ‘Causes and effects’, vi (1991), 261–78). Baker prefers the word ‘jell’ rather than ‘crystallize’ in regard to the origin of creole languages so as to leave space for additions to a relatively formed language. A description of the alternate theories, prepared for specialists, can be found in *Pidgins and Creoles: an Introduction*, ed. J. Arends, P. Muysken and N. Smith (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, Pa., 1995), chs. 8–11. In regard to the Suriname creole languages, Jacques Arends has been the major proponent of a ‘gradualist’ view, pointing out that the Sranan copular system gets stabilized only in the late 18th century (J. Arends, *Syntactic Developments in Sranan: Creolization as a Gradual Process* (unpublished University of Nijmegen Ph.D. thesis, 1989; reviewed by Silvia Kouwenberg, *J.P.C.L.*, vi (1991), 127–33); J. Arends, ‘Introduction’, in *Early Suriname Creole Texts: a Collection of 18th-Century Sranan and Saramaccan Documents*, ed. J. Arends and M. Perl (Frankfurt and Madrid, 1995), pp. 23–57). Ingo Plag sums up the issues regarding creolization and, through a study of change in Sranan complementizers, supports the gradualist thesis (I. Plag, *Sentential Complementation in Sranan: on the Formation of an English-based Creole Language* (Tübingen, 1993), pp. 10–18, 145–62). In contrast, Norval Smith puts the Bickerton’s universalist and Arends’s gradualist views together in a convincing manner: creolization did occur in Suriname in a relatively short time span, but did not involve all the aspects or speech practices Bickerton claimed would occur in a single generation. Some of these changes, like those in the copular system, take place later while the language is ‘jelling’ (to use Baker’s phrase) or as usual processes of language change over time (N. Smith, *The Genesis of the Creole Languages of Suriname* (unpublished University of Amsterdam Ph.D. thesis, 1987); N. Smith, ‘Voodoo Chile: differential substrate effects in Saramaccan and Haitian’, in *Creolization and Contact*, ed. N. Smith and T. Veenstra (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, Pa., 2001), pp. 45–50). In addition to these works, the following collections provide important approaches to and/or sources on Caribbean creole languages and those of Suriname: *Creole Drum: an Anthology of Creole Literature in Surinam*, ed. J. Voorhoeve and U. M. Lichtveld, trans. V. A. February (1975); *The Early Stages of Creolization*, ed. J. Arends (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, Pa., 1995); *Spreading the Word: the Issue of Diffusion among the Atlantic Creoles*, ed. M. Huber and M. Parkvall (1999); *Atlas of the Languages of Suriname*, ed. E. B. Carlin and J. Arends (Leiden, 2002); F. Fernandez-Armesto, ‘El negerengels: la peripécia de un idioma criollo’, *Revista de Occidente*, cclxxxii (2004), 59–74.

⁵ A good introduction to the history of Suriname is still R. A. J. Van Lier, *Frontier Society: a Social Analysis of the History of Surinam* (The Hague, 1971). The sources for the social, demographic and economic history of colonial Suriname are extensive; for this article, I am focusing on sources directly relevant to the social history of the creole languages. For the emergence of the Suriname creoles in the last decades of the 17th century and the opening years of the 18th century, I am drawing especially upon J. Arends, ‘Demographic factors in the formation of Sranan’, in Arends, *Early Stages*, pp. 233–77; Smith, ‘Voodoo Chile’, pp. 46–64; J. Arends, ‘The history of the Surinamese creoles, i: a sociohistorical survey’, in Carlin and Arends, pp. 115–30; and N. Smith, ‘The history of the Surinamese creoles, ii: origin and differentiation’, in Carlin and Arends, pp. 131–52.

slaves and the slaves of English proprietors who stayed on. By around 1700 the language was known in Dutch as Neger Engels or Neger Engelsche.⁶ Not long after, it was also taken into the woods by runaway slaves, and became the language of the Djuka Maroons.

Meanwhile in these same decades, a second, related creole emerged in Suriname. In 1664–5 a group of Portuguese Jews won permission from the English to establish themselves in Suriname with all liberty to practice their religion.⁷ Families came from Amsterdam, nearby Cayenne and elsewhere, and in a spirit both entrepreneurial and eschatological (these are the years of the proclaimed Messiah Sabbatai Zevi), they set up sugar plantations part way up the Suriname River and established a village nearby, a New Jerusalem of their own. When the colony became Dutch, all their privileges were confirmed by the governor, and by 1680, the Jews of the Portuguese Nation (as they called themselves) owned about thirty plantations. On them, some 1,200 slaves were speaking to compatriots the same range of west African languages (Gbe, Kikongo and others) as on the Christian estates, but had developed for cross-plantation communication a creole with a Portuguese and African lexicon, and with many English words as well. By 1690, the first escapes from the Portuguese-Jewish plantations had occurred, and the Maroons who set themselves up near the Saramacca River carried this creole with them, to be used by other slaves who fled to them in the next decades. The language, when spoken on the plantations, came to be called Dju-tongo, the Jewish tongue, and when spoken in the bush, Saramaccan.⁸

The speakers of these creoles increased in number in Suriname over the course of the eighteenth century. In 1701, some 8,500 people of African origin were slaves on the plantations and perhaps 1,000 more had escaped to the forests. At the same time some 700 people of European origin were living in Paramaribo and on the plantations: Dutch, Portuguese-Jewish and even some German-Jewish families, Huguenots from France or other places of refuge after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and English.

By 1774, almost 60,000 people of African origin were living on the plantations, though because of a high mortality the number would soon sink to around 50,000 for the next decades. The majority of these men and women had crossed the Atlantic on a slaver, some still from Loango, many others from the Gold Coast and Windward Coast, bringing with them their Akan languages and other west African tongues. Native-born blacks were a minority among the slaves, but by the seventeen-seventies, if not well before, the word 'criolo' appears on the plantation inventories and the

⁶ 'Neger Engels', 'Sprak der Neger' in J. Herlein, *Beschryvinge van de Volk-Plantinge Zuriname* (Leeuwarden, 1718), p. 121; Arends and Perl, pp. 13, 73. 'Neeger Engels' in a letter from a militia officer to Governor Crommelin during slave uprisings, 5 March 1757 (*Opstand in Tempati, 1757–60*, ed. H. van den Bouwhuisen, R. de Bruin and G. Horoweg (Utrecht, 1988), p. 47). 'Neger-Engelsche Taal' in J. J. Hartsinck, *Beschryving van Guiana, or de Wilde Kust, in Zuid-America* (2 vols., Amsterdam, 1770; repr. Amsterdam, 1974), ii. 756. In all quotations from creole languages, I am following the exact spelling used in the 18th-century sources; transliterations vary, as the reader will see.

⁷ An introduction to the Jews in Suriname can be found in Van Lier, ch. 4: *The Jewish Nation in Surinam: Historical Essays*, ed. R. Cohen (Amsterdam, 1982); and R. Cohen, *Jews in Another Environment: Surinam in the Second Half of the 18th Century* (Leiden, 1991).

⁸ 'Djutongo is what the Negroes here call the Negro language mixed with Portuguese. The Saramaccan Negroes have Djutongo' (Christian Ludwig Schumann, 1783, quoted by Smith, 'History', p. 140). On the debate among linguists on the origins of the slaves on the Jewish plantations, see the essays in Huber and Parkvall, pp. 195–304.

word 'kreól' or 'crioool' is used in the Neger Engelsche tongue to indicate a person born in Suriname.⁹

While the slave population multiplied six- or seven-fold across the eighteenth century, the European settler population tripled – estimates in the seventeen-eighties are in the range of 2,000–3,000 people – and European languages increased as well. So prevalent was the French of Huguenots and Swiss soldiers that sermons in the Reformed Church were given regularly in both French and Dutch.¹⁰ In the streets of Paramaribo and in the great houses of certain plantations, one heard Swedish, German and English (and English with a Scottish burr). Jewish families made up a third of the settler population in 1787, according to David de Isaac Cohen Nassy, a descendant of one of the earliest Jewish planters: about 830 Jews of the 'Portuguese nation', who continued to speak Portuguese among themselves, and nearly 500 of the 'German nation', some of them coming from as far away as Poland, and speaking Yiddish to each other.¹¹

Finally, there were free people of African descent or part-African descent: over 5,000 Maroons living in the forest villages and speaking varieties of Neger Engelsche and Saramaccan at the end of the century; and between 650 and 1,000 free blacks, mulattos and other people of colour living in Paramaribo and elsewhere in the years 1787–95, whose languages will be discussed below.

Our sources for these creole languages in action in eighteenth-century Suriname are good, especially for Neger Engelsche, which, following the practice of linguists today, I will usually call Sranan. We have two Sranan–Dutch vocabulary or phrase books. One is brief, with only introductory phrases, inserted for 'the entertainment of the readers' into an extended description of Suriname by Jan Herlein, a young Dutch Huguenot who lived in the colony for several years until 1704. He reported what he had seen and heard, but also learned much from the governor, from a Paramaribo merchant and from a plantation manager on the Commewine River. Herlein worked over his notes, publishing his book only in 1718, long after his return to The Netherlands.¹²

⁹ Arends, 'Demographic factors', pp. 239–69; J. M. Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade 1600–1815* (Cambridge, 1990), ch. 10, esp. pp. 230–1, 250–2. The Hague, Algemeen Rijks Archief (hereafter A.R.A.), Sociëteit van Suriname (hereafter S.v.S.), 228 fo. 391v, census of 1701: 8,546 slaves, African and Indian (vast majority African) of which 1,193 are children under 12 (14%); 723 whites, of which 105 (15%) are children under 12. G. Oostindie, *Roosburg en Mon Bijou. Twee Surinaamse plantages, 1720–1870* (Dordrecht and Providence, 1989), pp. 95–9; A. van Stipriaan, *Surinaams Contrast: Roofbouw en overleven in een Caraïbische plantagekolonie 1750–1863* (Leiden, 1993), ch. 10. C. L. Schumann, *Samaracanisich Deutsches Wörter-Buch* (1778) (hereafter Schumann), in Schurchardt, *Sprache*, pp. 44–120, at p. 79: 'kreól'; J. A. Riemer, *Woerter-Buch Zur Erlernung der Saramakka Neger-Sprache* (hereafter Riemer), in Arends and Perl, pp. 251–374, at p. 308: 'kreól'; G. C. Weygandt, *Gemeenzaame Leerwyze om het Basterd of Neger-Engelsch op een gemakkelijcke Wyze te leeren Verstaan en Spreeken* (Paramaribo, 1798), p. 16: 'Crioool'.

¹⁰ Hartsinck, ii. 891.

¹¹ D. de I. C. Nassy, *Essai historique sur la Colonie de Surinam* (2 vols., Paramaribo, 1788) i. 85, ii. 39, note a, 82.

¹² Herlein, *Beschryvinge*. In his dedication to the directors of the Society of Suriname and to Paul van der Veen, Herlein says he had lived in Suriname during the time of van der Veen's role as governor (fo. *21r–v). Van der Veen served as governor of Suriname from 1695 to 1706, and indeed, we see 'Jan Herlin' returning from Suriname to Amsterdam on 27 July 1704 on the boat *Alexander* (A.R.A., S.v.S., 231 fo. 189r). By 1709, he was living in Leeuwarden in Friesland (Arends and Perl, p. 12), and it was in that town that his *Beschryvinge van de volksplantinge Zuriname* was published in 1718. While Herlein's book itself is rich in detail on many features of Suriname life, with vivid illustrations and an important and detailed map, only three pages are devoted to the 'Spraak des Negers' (pp. 121–3). Herlein's main contact on the plantations was Adriaan van Zwol, a young Dutch immigrant from Rhenen, who managed a plantation on the Commewine River (A.R.A., Oud archief Burgerlijke Stand Suriname (hereafter O.A.B.S.S.), 9, p. 152, marriage, Jan. 1704; available at Historische Database Suriname <http://www.nationaalarchief.nl/koloniaal_suriname/dbase_gereformeerden/introductie.htm> (hereafter H.D.S.) [accessed 12 Sept. 2008]). Arends reprints the Sranan and Dutch text, with his English translation, and gives an expert analysis of it (Arends and Perl, pp. 13–17, 73–5).

Another vocabulary, much fuller, was compiled in 1765–70 by Jean Nepveu as part of an unpublished revision of Herlein's entire book, which he thought was 'not up to much'. Nepveu was in good position to judge: a Dutch Huguenot who spent most of his life in Suriname, he had risen through a sequence of colonial offices to become deputy governor in 1756–7 and then governor of Suriname in 1769. The world of the slaves he knew as owner of five coffee plantations and of a sugar plantation with some 150 slaves on the Commewine River; the world of the Maroons from many inquiries into their raids and from sporadic peace negotiations with their leaders. In 1767, as he was writing his *Annotations* on Herlein's book, he took as his second wife a widow, herself an heiress to plantations and said to be the daughter of a wealthy free mulatto.¹³

Our most remarkable instruction book in 'Neeger Engels' (as its author called it) and Dutch was put together around 1763 by one Pieter van Dyk. He had spent years in Suriname, most likely as a plantation manager or as a 'white overseer' on the Commewine River, and published the *New and Unprecedented Instruction* in Amsterdam after his return to The Netherlands, patiently working with printers who had never set such a text in type before. Van Dyk dedicated the book to his friend Tepper (addressing him before the Dutch boats from Paramaribo had brought van Dyk news of Tepper's burial in August 1763 by the Lutheran church on the Commewine): with Tepper's thorough knowledge of Neeger Engels and of the life of a plantation manager, van Dyk hoped he would approve of the book. Writing for merchants and craftsmen in Suriname, and especially for plantation owners and managers so that they could 'understand the slaves and be understood by them', van Dyk included extended vocabulary and dialogues and a fascinating play set on a plantation.¹⁴

Some years later two missionaries of the Moravian Brethren in Suriname prepared manuscript dictionaries showing word use and grammar for their fellow

¹³ J. Nepveu, 'Op de Neeger-Engelsche zaemenspraaken Remarques en bijvoegels', in *Annotatien op de Surinaamsche Beschrijvinge van Ao 1718* (1770), reproduced by Arends in Sranan, Dutch and English translation in Arends and Perl, pp. 77–91. On the existence of other manuscripts and the linguistic features of the text, see Arends and Perl, pp. 18–19, 23–40. Nepveu was born in Amsterdam in 1719, came to Suriname as a teenager, became secretary to the Suriname courts of policy and civil justice in 1751, a fiscal officer of the colony in 1754, deputy governor in 1756–7, and governor from 1769 to his death in 1779 (Hartsinck, ii. 895–6; Nassy, ii. 101–2, 106–7, 111; van Stripiaan, pp. 39–40, 50–1, 157–8). On Nepveu's involvement in investigating slave uprisings and negotiating with the Maroons, see *Opstand*, pp. 17–20, 27–8, 56–66. On his Commewine sugar plantation, Appecappe, and his coffee plantations, see A.R.A., Suriname Oud Notarieel Archief (hereafter S.O.N.A.), 691 fo. 537, 242 fo. 685; available at Geschiedenis van de Plantages <<http://nationaalarchief.sr/geschiedenis/plantages/>> (hereafter S.G.P.) [accessed 12 Sept. 2008] and van Stripiaan, p. 157. In 1767, he married his second wife Elizabeth Buys, widow of Isaac Stolkert (A.R.A., O.A.B.S.S., 36, p. 34 (H.D.S.)). Elizabeth's mother, Anne Julien, was described as 'een oude mulattin' by Governor Mauricius when in 1750, widowed from Hendrik Buys, she married her plantation manager (C. McLeod, *Elisabeth Samson. Een Vrije Zwarte Vrouw in het Achttiende-eeuwse Suriname* (Schoorl, 1996), pp. 29–30).

¹⁴ P. van Dyk, *Nieuwe en Noot Bevoorens Geziene Onderwyzinge in het Bastert Engels, of Neeger Engels* (Amsterdam: Widow of Jacobus van Egmont, n.d.), in Arends and Perl, pp. 93–5. Drawing from evidence of the publishing years of the Widow van Egmont and of the first printed notice of van Dyk's book, Arends argues for a publication date of about 1765 (Arends and Perl, pp. 20–1); my evidence about the date of death of the dedicatee of the book confirms Arends's proposed date. I have as yet been unable to locate Pieter van Dyk on a specific plantation, though it is of interest that in 1752 a 'Gilles' van Dyk was the manager of Jan Nepveu's sugar plantation, Appecappe (A.R.A., S.O.N.A., 691 fo. 537 (S.G.P.)). Van Dyk's friend Tepper seems to be Coenraad Tepper, who died and was given a Lutheran burial in 1763 (A.R.A., O.A.B.S.S., 25, p. 169 (H.D.S.)). Van Dyk's instruction book is reproduced in Sranan and Dutch with English translation in Arends and Perl, pp. 93–239; Arends's linguistic analysis of the text is on pp. 40–57. Van Dyk entitled his play *Het Leeven en Bedryf van een Surinaamsze Directeur, met de Slaaven, op een Koffi-Plantagie*.

Herrenhuter there. Christian Ludwig Schumann began the process in 1778 with a dictionary in Saramaccan and German. Born in 1749 to a Moravian missionary in neighbouring Berbice, Schumann spent his boyhood and young adult years in Germany, returned to the Herrenhuter settlements in Suriname in late 1776, and immediately plunged into learning ‘Negersprache’, first in Paramaribo and then at the mission at Bambey, far south on the Suriname River near Saramacca settlements. He could practice his Saramaccan on his two Bambey household slaves, a man and a woman, but especially he worked on his dictionary with the aid of the remarkable Johannes Arrabini, as the Saramacca tribal chief Alabi was called after his baptism in 1771.

Alabi was also a major resource for Brother Johannes Andreas Riemer, who put together a Saramaccan-German dictionary during a brief stay two years later: ‘the baptized Negro captain Johannes Arrabini [was] of invaluable service to me, on a daily even an hourly basis.’ While the inexperienced Riemer found Saramaccan ‘poor in words’, the learned Schumann delighted in ‘the vast quantity of unchanged Latin words’ he found in the language, explaining their presence by the fact that these ‘Free Blacks’ (that is, Maroons) were the descendants of the runaway slaves of the Portuguese Jews. Before Schumann returned to Germany in 1783 he also compiled a Sranan and German dictionary, and included some words with a Portuguese lexicon drawn from Dju-tongo.¹⁵

Yet another Sranan-Dutch language manual appeared in 1798, composed by G. C. Weygandt and now printed in Paramaribo itself. Its author may have been related to the Weygandts among the Moravians in Pennsylvania, a community with many ties to the Suriname Brethren, but his *Familiar Lessons* was directed simply to those wanting to manage their slaves better and to merchants coming to trade in Suriname. Weygandt drew on van Dyk’s earlier book, but he surely received guidance also from his free mulatto concubine, the seamstress Dressje van Princes van Heel, with whom he lived in a small household in Paramaribo, together with their children, Dressje’s free black mother, and a black slave housemaid. Not surprisingly, his book was intended to illustrate the difference between the Neger Engelsche spoken on the river estates and that now spoken in the town of Paramaribo.¹⁶

But these teaching and reference texts do not exhaust our sources. Phrases in creole are found in the government records of Suriname as the policy court investigated quarrels and ruckuses among the slaves; in the letters and diaries of the Moravian missionaries; and in travellers’ accounts, such as the famous *Narrative* of John Gabriel

¹⁵ F. Staehelin, *Die Mission der Brüdergemeine in Suriname und Berbice im achtzehnten Jahrhundert* (3 vols., Paramaribo, 1913), on C. L. Schumann (ii, pt. 2, 92; iii, pt. 1, 248, 256–56, 306–7, 329, 335, 347–53, 357, 402); on J. A. Riemer (iii, pt. 1, 404; iii, pt. 2, 211–18, 260–1). On Alabi (Johannes Arrabini) and the Moravians, see the excellent R. Price, *Alabi’s World* (Baltimore, Md., 1990), esp. chs. 5–7. Schumann; commentary by Arends in Carlin and Arends, pp. 192–4. Riemer; commentary by Perl, pp. 243–50. Perl’s dating of the manuscript as 1779 is not possible, however; Riemer arrived in Bambey only on 30 Dec. 1779, and describes his work with Alabi later in the winter of 1780. Schumann’s *Neger-Englisches Wörterbuch* is discussed by Arends in Arends and Perl, pp. 40–56 and Smith, ‘History’, p. 141.

¹⁶ Weygandt, fo. *2r–v. In the 1730s, one Cornelius Weygandt came from Germany to Germantown, Pennsylvania, where he, his wife and children were very active in the Moravian community. Weygandt’s Paramaribo household is described in The National Archives of the U.K.: Public Record Office, CO 178/18, no. 198. The copy of Weygandt’s book in the Bibliothek of the Suriname Museum has the signature H. Kamerling on its title-page. This is Hendrik Kamerling (1788–1854) who arrived in Suriname with his wife in 1815 and bought Weygandt’s book to help him learn Sranan. Kamerling eventually became owner of the sugar plantation Fairfield on the Commewine River (S.G.P., Fayerfield aan de Commewijnerivier).

Stedman of his years in Suriname in the seventeen-seventies.¹⁷ And finally, poetry began to be written in Sranan and published in Paramaribo.

Let us start with the plantations, where slaves newly arrived from Africa would gradually learn Sranan or Dju-tongo. The *bassia*, or black overseer, was too busy to take on this task of instruction; the teachers were older men and women, well-established among the slaves, perhaps locally born if there were any. The newcomer would be relieved to find some words reminiscent of those spoken back home: so *bakra* (white person, in Sranan and Dju-tongo, and in other creoles) would be familiar to a speaker of the Efik/Ibibio language east of the Niger delta. Certain English-based Sranan words loomed large as presaging relations into which the newcomer might hope one day to enter: *wyfie*, *man* (for husband). ‘Mi habi man’ (‘I have a husband’) a woman says to a lecherous estate manager who orders her to his bed in van Dyk’s play.

The *negere* or *ningre hosso*, palm-leaf covered houses for the blacks, were important settings for the spread of the creole.¹⁸ So, too, were the sites for dance, healing and religious practice. Drumming was central to all these events, communicating without words to all the slaves on the plantation, on plantations nearby, and to the gods. The dances, *baljares*, were syncretic forms, and each had its creole name: the *banja*, usually performed for ancestral spirits; the *soesa*, a dance where men competed in stepping and stamping; and the important *Winti* dance (*Winti* from wind) or *Winti Pre* (play), where women virtuosi were possessed by their gods and, under their influence, uttered prophecies, warnings and instructions in Sranan or Dju-tongo. (Sometimes they urged listeners to rise up against their master, burn the plantation, and escape to the Maroons.) All the gods had their names or varieties of names in creole. The superior high god, the *gado na tapu*, the god above all, was Anana Jankumpani, a name carried over from Africa. The names of gods of the lower pantheons were adjusted to the air, waters and earth of Suriname (and perhaps to the spirits of the local Caribs and Arawaks as well). *Watra mama*, the goddess of water, was so appreciated that her name leaked to the *bakra*, the white folk, who vainly tried to prohibit dances in her honour.¹⁹

Older people skilled in communicating with the gods were given the honorific title of Gran Tata and Gran Mama, while a great sacred leader, diviner and healer was named Lukuman or Loekeman – ‘the man who sees’. The most celebrated in the

¹⁷ M. van den Berg and J. Arends, ‘Court records as a source of authentic early Sranan’, in *Creoles, Contact and Language Change: Linguistics and Social Implications*, ed. G. Escure and A. Schwegler (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, Pa., 2004), pp. 21–4. Staehelin, iii, pt. 2, 261; ‘Maroon letters from Saramaka’, in Arends and Perl, pp. 383–7. J. G. Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam, Transcribed for the First Time from the Original 1790 Manuscript*, ed. R. Price and S. Price (Baltimore, Md., 1988) (hereafter Stedman (1790)), pp. 515–16; J. G. Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (2 vols., 1796), ii. 257–9.

¹⁸ Nepveu, pp. 81 (‘Weiffie’), 84, 91; van Dyk, pp. 106 (‘Wyfie’), 126, 165, 186, 200; Schumann, pp. 50, 52, 71, 92; Riemer, pp. 259, 294, 321, 329; Weygandt, pp. 18, 23, 24–5. In modern Sranan, the word for wife is *wefi* (*Woordenlijst van het Sranan-Tongo: Glossary of the Suriname Vernacular* (Paramaribo, 1961), p. 74). Van Stripiaan, p. 361; A. Bruyn, ‘The structure of the Surinamese creoles’, in Carlin and Arends, p. 167.

¹⁹ Schumann, pp. 51, 66, 98, 115; Riemer, pp. 260, 367, 339. Stedman (1790), pp. 537–40. Hartsinck, ii. 902–3, 907–8. *Plakaten, Ordonnantien en andere Wetten uitgevaardigd in Suriname 1667–1816*, ed. J. T de Smidt and T. van der Lee (2 vols., Amsterdam, 1973), i. 663, no. 553; ii. 896, no. 766. A. Blom, *Verhandeling van den landbouw in de Colonie Suriname* (Amsterdam, 1787), pp. 332–4. Voorhoeve and Lichtveld, pp. 17–18, 51. M. J. Herskovits and F. S. Herskovits, *Suriname Folk-lore* (New York, 1936), pp. 61–82. C. J. Wooding, *Evolving Culture: a Cross-Cultural Study of Suriname, West Africa and the Caribbean* (Washington, D.C., 1981), pp. 147–9, ch. 5. G. Wekker, *The Politics of Passion: Women’s Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora* (New York, 2006), pp. 42, 90–5.

eighteenth century was the African-born Granman Quassie, who moved from plantation to plantation healing and divining, one of the many channels by which Sranan flowed among the slaves.²⁰

Meanwhile, all the local plants necessary for health and healing had their names, here surely with input from the Carib and Arawak healers. Indeed, the naturalist Maria Sibylla Merian had already heard some of these terms from slaves during her visit to Suriname in 1699–1701: for instance, a thistly plant, whose fruit was eaten by both humans and birds, was identified to her as *maccai*, or *maka*, as it is transliterated in later Sranan vocabularies and is found to this day in Surinamese healing manuals.²¹ Over the decades the language to describe procedures and uses evolved so that techniques could be passed from healing man or woman to successor. Poisonous plants, plants with *wissi*, had their names as well; the *wissiman* was the feared specialist in their harmful use, among his other acts of sorcery. Rituals emerged in which a friend took a sip from a drink – *pulu wissi*, pulling out the poison – before offering it to a friend. Without that happening, the friend might remark, ‘Mi no sa bebeh di sopi wandagga, effi ju no pulu wissi bevo’ (‘I’m not going to drink this rum if you don’t pull the poison from it first’, that is, if you don’t sip from it first).²²

On a higher level, theological language developed in which the older generation could instruct the young in the complexities of magical practice and the nature and destiny of human souls. Here several of the key words were of African origin, and thus easier for newcomers to acquire. An *obia* was not just the simple amulet of European description, it had a delicate relation to a certain god and must be handled accordingly. Similarly, the power of the *kandu* – a special object hung or placed so as to keep people away from a site or a house – was not innate to the rocks or sugarcane or whatever material of which the *kandu* was fashioned, but lay rather in its relation to spirits. Thus, a person was frightened by the threat ‘kandu tann go kishi ju’ (‘the *kandu* is waiting to get you’).²³

Early in life fathers and mothers had to teach their young about family spiritual matters. Each person was linked with a specific god – a *nem ziki gado* – through parents and ancestors. Far from their ancestral spirits in the burial grounds of Africa, first-generation ‘salt-water blacks’ (‘sautoewatra Soema’) in Suriname improvised a connection with those spirits for the two parts of the human soul, the *jejee* and the *jorka*. Defined in the European creole dictionaries as simply ‘spirit’ or ‘ghost’, these words were enlarged upon by parents in Sranan and Dju-tongo. The *jejee*, situated in the heart, was the contact channel with the ancestral god (the *nem ziki gado*) during one’s lifetime; when the body was properly buried, the *jejee* would return to the *nem ziki gado* wherever it was. ‘Korbuy, mi de go dede, mi de go na mi nem ziki gado’ (‘Good-bye, I am dying, I am going to my namesake god’) is a final adieu. Or at the

²⁰ Hartsinck, ii. 904; Nepveu, p. 90; Schumann, p. 85; Riemer, p. 317. On Quassie, see Staehelin, iii, pt. 1, 118; Nassy, ii. 71–4; Stedman (1790), pp. 581–4; F. Dragtenstein, ‘*Trouw aan de Blanken*’: *Quassie van Nieuw Timotibo, twist en strijd in de 18de eeuw in Suriname* (Amsterdam, 2004), pp. 31–4.

²¹ M. S. Merian, *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium* (Amsterdam, n.d. [1705]), fig. 6; N. Z. Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three 17th Century Lives* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), pp. 175–7, 185. Schumann, p. 85; Riemer, p. 318; Stedman (1790), p. 494; Weygandt, p. 37; H. J. M. Stephen, *Geneeskruiden van Suriname. Hun toepassing in de volksgeneeskunde en in de magie* (Amsterdam, n.d.), pp. 54, 64–65a. Also, Stedman (1790), p. 494: ‘Snakee Weeree Weeree . . . a sovereign remedy in fevers’; Stephen, pp. 64–5: ‘Sneki wiwi ri’.

²² Nepveu, p. 88; Schumann, p. 115; Riemer, p. 367; Stedman (1790), p. 525. Hersovitz and Herskovitz, pp. 103–5; Wooding, pp. 115–18; Price, *Alabi’s World*, pp. 159, 373.

²³ Schumann, pp. 75, 93; Riemer, pp. 301, 330; Stedman (1790), pp. 392, 426, 582. Wooding, pp. 91–2.

funeral, a well-wisher addresses the dead: ‘Goodnight, sister. Travel well . . . Farewell, my namesake God will help you’ (‘Konetti ziza. Wakke bon . . . Korbuy mi nem ziki gado za helpi joe’). Once dead, the other part of the soul, the *jorka*, returned to the living as a ghost, and like other ancestral spirits, gave assistance, haunted, and possessed a living family member.²⁴

Death was an important occasion for storytelling, both on the plantations and among the Maroons. Stories were told before the burial to keep the soul entertained until its departure and then on ceremonial occasions after the funeral. Anansi, the great African spider-trickster, creator and subject of stories, was alive and well in eighteenth-century Suriname.²⁵ Though we have no Anansitori recorded at that time, two examples collected in the twentieth century have direct links with the earlier period and suggest the themes and narrative power of the creoles. The first tale, told in Sranan, is set on the plantation Success, an actual estate on the Cottica River in the mid eighteenth century. There an old slave couple, too enfeebled to work, have been left by the heartless master to fend for themselves. One of their two sons is indifferent to their fate: ‘Yu grani kaba, yo no kan dede?’ (‘You’re old already. Can’t you just die?’). The younger son, Adjuku, gets food for them and builds them a hut in the bush. Sent on a quest by his father, Adjuku is helped by a spirit in the form of a raccoon, and is then given the power to resist the master’s punishments. So endowed, Adjuku sits in the cane field for a week, smoking his pipe and doing no work. The owner orders the overseer to beat him, but when the strokes rain on his back, they are felt not by the slave, but by the owner and his concubine. Adjuku calls for more strokes, ‘Saka tetey gi mi’, until the owner faints. When the owner then tries to shoot Adjuku while he is picking coconuts, the bullets will not obey: ‘Gransmasra, teki den kugru fu yu dya baka’ (‘Master, take these bullets of yours back’), Adjuku shouts. The story ends with Success plantation slaves dancing a *soesa* and singing a victory song.²⁶

The second example, told in Saramaccan to Richard Price by elder historians of the Matjáus clan, is a narrative of *fési tem*, first or front time, the period from the late seventeenth century, when the first Maroon escapes took place, to 1762, when the Suriname government made peace with the Saramacca and recognized them as a free people. Price’s published version is a translation, with only occasional words and phrases in Saramaccan, and he has given chronological ordering to recitals made to him often in response to thematic questions. But it shows the extraordinarily rich data carried by the Saramaccan oral tradition over the centuries – with details on ill-treatment

²⁴ Staehelin, i. 91; van Dyk, p. 237; Hartsinck, pp. 911–12; Schumann, p. 73; Riemer, pp. 298, 329; Stedman (1790), p. 516; Riemer, pp. 298, 329; Weygandt, pp. 12–13, 16. Wooding, ch. 4; Wekker, pp. 21, 95–9, 104; R. Price, *First Time: the Historical Vision of an Afro-American People* (Baltimore, Md., 1983), p. 45; Price, *Alabi’s World*, pp. 86, 309–10. Wooding gives the word *kra* rather than *jejee* for the part of the human soul that returns to the *nem ziki gado*; Price gives *akáa*; Wekker gives both *kra* and *yeye*; the 1961 *Woordenlijst* gives both *kra* (personal ghost) and *jeje* (ghost). In the 18th-century vocabularies that I have, Schumann gives only *jeje* (spirit, ghost, shadow) and Weygandt *jejee* (spirit, ghost), and I have not as yet come across the word *kra* with these meanings. Though *akra* or ‘*kra* is the Twi word for soul (Herskovitz and Herskovitz, p. 44, n. 1), Schumann, p. 47 and Riemer, p. 254 both define *akra* as ‘pancake.’

²⁵ Hartsinck, i. 902; Riemer, p. 252; Stedman (1790), p. 516; Weygandt, p. 40. On storytelling among slaves and Maroons in Suriname, see Herskovitz and Herskovitz, pp. 114–48, followed by many stories collected in the 1930s; Voorhoeve and Lichtveld, pp. 76–9; R. Price and S. Price, *Two Evenings in Saramaka* (Chicago, Ill., 1991), pp. 1–37.

²⁶ ‘Basya Adyuku koni: the juju of Basya Ajuku’, in Voorhoeve and Lichtveld, pp. 81–102. The plantation Goed Succes on the Commewine River appears on the map of A. de Lavaux, made about 1767.

on plantations, escapes and attacks, the assistance of gods and *obia*, quarrels for precedence and land among different Saramaccan leaders and clans, battles with the colonial troops and peace negotiations. The text ends with 200-year-old songs of rejoicing: ‘Hondoo, hondoo . . . Fri ko, fri ko’ (‘Joy, joy, peace has come, freedom has come’).²⁷

In both of these narrative examples, conflicts are described *among* slaves and Maroons as well as between them and European masters. Up till now, we have especially looked at the integrative functions of the Suriname creoles, but as the *wissiman* and the poison drink indicate, troubles and quarrels also brewed on the plantations and in the forest villages. Words from Sranan and Dju-tongo suggest the sore points: *mombi* (a word perhaps of Carib origin) for a stingy person; *gongossaman* for a hypocrite; *kongroman* for a malicious and cunning person. All kinds of insults were available: ‘Jou no man’ (‘You’re not a man’; that is, you are a coward, you do not have the courage), so said a slave challenging another in 1707 to complain to the plantation manager who had smashed his canoe. The female sexual organ was used for stronger ridicule.²⁸

Certain situations could breed trouble. In 1757 a slave revolt began on a plantation called La Paix, ‘peace’, near the headwaters of the Commewine, because the owner wanted to transfer the slaves to another of his plantations downstream: the slaves feared they would be killed by poison or bad magic, like the last batch of transferees.²⁹ In the seventeen-sixties to seventeen-eighties, slaves on a few non-Jewish plantations picked up an insult already current among their masters and long used in anti-Semitic slang, especially against German Jews in The Netherlands. Jews were ‘Smous’; their slaves were, in Dutch, ‘Smouse Neegers’. In 1782, Isaac Robles de Medina protested to the policy court about the insolent attacks in Neger Engelsche of some slaves against his own blacks. The assailants knocked off their hats and then shouted loudly, ‘Smous, Smous’.³⁰

Sranan and Dju-tongo were also central to the communication between slaves and masters, Africans and Europeans. On the plantations, the population of free persons was small. As for the proprietors, all the Jewish owners and the majority of Christian owners were still residing in Suriname through most of the eighteenth century. The owner and his or her spouse and children usually lived in the great house for part of the time. Some owners remained there all year long, and actually managed their own estate. Other families owned more than one plantation, and many proprietors also had a house in Paramaribo (and for the Jews also in Jews Savannah), where they dwelled from time to time with their domestic and other skilled slaves. Always present on the plantation was the Directeur (*driktoro* or just *masra* in creole), that is, the estate manager, with a wife if he had one, or a concubine, who was a slave or free woman of colour. Under the manager’s direction, a white overseer (a *bakra bassia*) kept the

²⁷ Price, *First Time*, pp. 178–80.

²⁸ Schumann, pp. 67, 78; Riemer, pp. 287, 306, 325. Van den Berg and Arends, p. 25.

²⁹ Hartsinck, ii. 778. W. Hoogbergen, ‘The history of the Suriname Maroons’, in *Resistance and Rebellion in Suriname: Old and New*, ed. G. Brana-Shute (Williamsburg, Va., 1990), p. 77.

³⁰ Nassy, i. 156; A.R.A., Raad van Politie (hereafter R.v.R.), Processen, 841 fos. 121v–124r. An example of the anti-Semitic use of ‘Smous’ in The Netherlands is C. Lonius [pseudonym of Joan Wilhem Claus van Laar], *Den Bedrieger bedrogen of den gerangen Smous* (3 vols., Amsterdam, 1737–40); the text, composed in dialogue form, especially focuses on the commercial practices and accent of German Jews. On the possible etymology and meanings of the word, see *Woordenboek der Nederlandse Taal* (29 vols., The Hague, 1882–1998), xiv, cols. 2209–11. I am grateful to Lotte van de Pol and Ann Goldgar for assistance here.

plantation's daily records and dealt with the black overseer, carpenters, coopers, sugar boilers and field hands. A senior slave woman gave guidance to the housemaids, cooks, seamstresses and washerwomen, and was herself supervised by the wife (*missi*) of the proprietor or manager.³¹

Of this group, the white overseer had to have mastery of Sranan or Dju-tongo, and the estate manager and any proprietor who managed his own estate had to be at least conversant in creole. Indeed, van Dyk's Sranan instructional manual was precisely intended to improve the capabilities of plantation managers, to condemn their cruelties and abuses, and to show them a path 'to make [themselves] feared and loved and to be just to the slaves'.³² As for owners and their spouses, some knowledge of the creole was needed if only to give directions on the tent-boats, in which six or eight slaves rowed them up and down the rivers, or to tell the cook what to make for dinner, or to lead a patrol of armed slaves and carriers into the woods in pursuit of runaway slaves or attacking Maroons. Slaves were not necessarily reluctant to go on these search missions: sometimes unwelcome Maroons had kidnapped their women from the plantation; even more, patrols uncovered trails to Maroon villages, and slaves might one day need that trail to escape themselves.

Events in 1757–9 illustrate the surprising direction such collaboration could take. The master of an upper Commewine lumber plantation had taught his slave Boston to read and write. When the plantation rose up in 1757 together with others nearby, Boston was one of those leading the slaves to join the Djuka Maroons in the forests and himself composed letters in Dutch and Neger Engelsche to the pursuing militia men, proposing terms for peace negotiation and signing one in English 'yours [*sic*] humble friend capiteyn Boston'. Negotiations finally began, the Suriname captains trying frantically to improve their Sranan, and in 1759 a peace treaty was signed with the Djukas.³³

To return to the plantation, most of the instructional examples that we have of conversations between slave and free take place at the big house (*dan gran Hosse*), including van Dyk's play about a cruel and lecherous director. Slaves are being asked why the coffee is taking so long ('O pleesie da Coffi dé tam fo langa') or to give a clean shirt ('Gimi krien hempie') or are telling the master that they have been taken with a strong fever ('Masra mie dan nanga wan tranga koorsoe') and being told to go to the sick house ('go na siekiehoso').³⁴

The slaves were, indeed, sensitive to the etiquette of interactions between slave and master but also between slave and slave. So the Herrenhuter missionary Christian Schumann, a very good listener, reports:

If blacks request something from another black, they say: *tangitangi, mi hatti-lobbi, mi bossi ju futu, du mi da plessiri* ('thank you, thank you, my dear beloved, I kiss your feet, do me that favor!'). If blacks request something from a white, they say: *grangtangi vo Massra, effi Massra plís va gi mi datti* ('many thanks, Master, would you please give me that?')³⁵

In van Dyk's play, when the slaves finally meet together to take action against their outrageous *Drikoro*, they address each other as 'mastra neger' ('master blacks'; or

³¹ Herlein, p. 74; Nepveu, p. 89; van Dyk, pp. 205–6; Schumann, p. 87; Riemer, p. 322; Weygandt, pp. 131, 136.

³² Van Dyk, p. 95.

³³ Hartsinck, ii. 779; *Opstand*, pp. 22–9, 47, 49, 112–13. Hoogbergen, pp. 77–8.

³⁴ Van Dyk, pp. 133, 161; Weygandt, pp. 125–6.

³⁵ Schumann, *Neger-Englisches Wörterbuch*, quoted in Arends and Perl, p. 16.

‘master slaves’), the polite form of slave address on the plantation. Stedman, too, noted the courtesy with which male slaves greeted each other, shaking hands in a special fashion, bowing, saying ‘How dee Matee’ (‘hodi mati’).³⁶

Other instances of communication between slave and free went beyond instrumental exchange. The learned Portuguese Jew David Nassy spoke appreciatively of the beauty of the German Jewish women in Suriname, but shook his head over their spending all day ‘chattering in Neger Englesche with their black female slaves, women and girls’.³⁷ (One suspects here that Yiddish words were mixed in with the Sranan.) Such female sociability in Sranan and Dju-tongo went on in some other Suriname great houses and Paramaribo parlours as well. When the visiting soldier John Stedman described the language ‘spoke by the Black People’ as ‘so sweet and sonorous that even amongst the genteelst European companies, nothing else is spoke in Surinam’,³⁸ he was surely exaggerating for the colony at large, but may well have been thinking of the elderly widow Elisabeth Danforth, with whom he often dined and to whom he sold his slave lover Joanna. Born in Suriname of English parents, and owner of several large plantations, Danforth had outlived a Dutch-speaking husband and a Huguenot husband from Berlin, and spent her late years mostly in Paramaribo. Surrounded by her house slaves, whose children she took to be baptized at the Reformed Church and whom she manumitted from time to time with phrases like ‘my dearly loved slave Désirée’,³⁹ Danforth sounds like the kind of woman who conversed with her slaves in Sranan.

Intimate relations between European men and slave women of African origin were also carried on in creole. First of all there are the rapes or coerced sex forced upon married women and adolescent girls on the plantation, evoked terrifyingly in van Dyk’s play. When ordered by the estate manager to come to his bed, Filida laments ‘what evil falls on my head’ (‘hoe fa ogeri fadom na mi hede’). When she tries to refuse (‘Ke mastra, mi no kan doe’) as her Cormantine husband will kill himself, the manager says he will whip the husband and threatens her as well. After the sex, the husband commits suicide, Filida shouts at the manager, ‘you killed my husband so as to have me as your whore’ (‘joe kili mi man fo da hedi mi trom zoeta’), and escapes from the plantation.⁴⁰

But there were also some long-term relations of a different character. Joanna’s mother Seerie, a black woman born in Suriname, became the concubine of a young Dutchman, Anthony Tielenius Kruythoff, the unmarried manager of the Commewine sugar plantation on which Seerie, her parents, sisters and brother were all the slaves of an absentee owner. Their intimacy lasted for twenty years, during which time Seerie bore Anthony five children. Though he taught her some Dutch, Sranan was their main language of communication, a situation with important consequences for life on the plantation. Similarly, Johan Friedrich Knoffel, who came to Suriname as a young man from Königsberg and never married, had an enduring relation with

³⁶ Van Dyk, pp. 205–6. Arends translates ‘mastra negerii’ as ‘master slaves’. It is surely true that owners and managers often called their slaves simply ‘blacks’ – ‘my blacks’ – and the word ‘negerii’ could have had that added resonance for the slaves themselves. But the word ‘negerii’ was used to mean fellow blacks (Stedman (1790), p. 541n.). For similar marks of respect in English among slaves in the American south, see P. D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the 18th-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1998), p. 474.

³⁷ Nassy, ii. 60.

³⁸ Stedman (1790), pp. 515–16.

³⁹ A.R.A., R.v.R., 417, p. 200.

⁴⁰ Van Dyk, pp. 184, 189, 198.

Grietje, a slave on his Commewine coffee plantation Frederiksdorp. Sranan would have been the primary language in which they talked of their two mulatto daughters and their daily life. When Knoffel died in 1760, he freed his daughters and bequeathed them Frederiksdorp and its twenty-eight slaves. Concubines with the status of Seerie and Grietje were often addressed with the creole term *Sisi*.⁴¹

What of religion? Was it an arena for communication between Africans and Europeans, and if so, in what language? Here the story is quite uneven. Though practitioners of *Winti* might answer questions of curious Europeans about their gods, they were not going to spill any secrets. As for the Reformed religion, there was real resistance from Suriname Christians to any large-scale conversion efforts among slaves throughout the eighteenth century. In 1731, a flamboyant young preacher, Jan Willem Kals, had arrived from The Netherlands eager to convert the Caribs and Arawaks and the African slaves using his Dutch tongue. He actually met one slave woman, Isabella, who could speak Dutch and whose master had encouraged her conversion. But apart from the linguistic impracticality of his scheme, Kals faced opposition from the other Protestant ministers and especially from plantation owners, who feared that conversion would make their blacks uppity and dissatisfied with slavery. Kals was soon sent back to The Netherlands, and for decades white overseers were heard telling their slaves in Sranan that blacks had been created for the devil and to plant coffee and sugar cane, and that 'the [Christian] God was just for white people'.⁴²

Reformed and Lutheran conversion occurred but was limited to the exceptional slave, one of those slated for eventual manumission. So Johan Friedrich Knoffel had the older of his two mulatto daughters baptized in the Lutheran Church as Johanna Cornelia van Frederiksdorp a few months before he manumitted her. Owners may have initiated some preliminary Christian instruction in Sranan, but any freed slave who wanted to go beyond baptism and become an actual member, a *lidmaat*, of the Reformed Church would have to demonstrate that he or she could understand sermons in Dutch or French.⁴³

The Moravian Brethren took a different tack. Only a few years after their arrival in Suriname in 1735, they realized they must get a grasp of Indian languages and Neger Engelsche, and, once they began to preach to the Maroons in the seventeenth-sixties, of Saramaccan as well. David Nassy listened to their sermons one day in Paramaribo and found it 'very curious' and yet 'admirable' how the preacher managed to use 'Negre-anglois, the jargon of this land, with no rule or order' to explain bible passages, the Eucharist and other dogmas.⁴⁴ In fact, only a few Christian proprietors would let the Brethren onto their estates, despite all assurance that baptism did not require subsequent manumission. The Brethren's success was among the Saramacca Maroons, where they had a few notable converts, such as the great Alabi, Captain

⁴¹ I am giving extensive treatment to the relation of Seerie and Kruiythoff in my forthcoming study *Braided Histories: Slavery and Sociability in Colonial Suriname*. On Johan Friedrich Knoffel, Grietje and their daughters, see the entry for the plantation Johan en Margaretha on the lower Commewine in S.G.P. and A.R.A., O.A.B.S.S., 3, p. 172 (H.D.S.).

⁴² J. M. van der Linde, *Jan Willem Kals, 1700–81. Leraar der hervormden advocaat van indiaan en neger* (Kampen, 1987), pp. 20–86; Isabella talked to him 'met goede Neder-Duytsche' (p. 63). Staehelin, iii, pt. 1, 97.

⁴³ On owners' inattention to Christian education even among slaves for whom manumission was requested from the court of policy, see R. Brana-Shute, 'The manumission of slaves in Suriname, 1760–1828' (unpublished University of Michigan Ph.D. thesis, 1985), pp. 255–64.

⁴⁴ Nassy, ii, 25.

Johannes Albini, *matu kreól* (bush creol), third- or fourth-generation Saramaccan, and, as we have seen, collaborator on the Saramaccan dictionaries. Saramaccan boys were also taught to read and write, and Brother Kersten rejoiced in 1768 when young Skipio had an injured foot and penned on his tablet, 'Jesus meki mi foette kom boen' ('Jesus, make my foot be healed').⁴⁵

The Portuguese Jewish case was different once again. Many Jewish practices seeped into plantation custom by the rhythm of everyday life, accompanied by directions in Dju-tongo: the keeping of the Jewish holidays, Kosher food preparation at the big house, slave assistance at the Mikvah bath and the house of the dead and the like. The children born to slave women and Portuguese Jewish men were always given biblical names and the boys circumcised; eventually they were manumitted, purified in the bath of conversion, and pronounced fully Jewish. The requests for the manumission of such slaves, submitted by Jewish masters to the policy court with names such as Moses, Ismael, Temma and Simcha, specify that they have been 'instructed in the Jewish religion'.

The language of that more formal instruction seems to have been mostly Portuguese, and for the boys and men Hebrew as well. The school at Jews Savannah, the Hets-Haim, had a substantial library of Hebrew books; the community wished that lessons be given there in the three languages of Portuguese, Dutch and Hebrew, and we find at least a Hebrew teacher and an instructor in reading and writing Portuguese on the payroll. With his disdain for creole 'jargon', David Nassy, a leading member of the Jewish governing board, would have encouraged owners to prepare their slaves for conversion in Portuguese. Whatever the case, we find well-expressed texts in Portuguese written and signed by recently manumitted Jewish men in 1790, protesting at their second-class seating arrangements at the synagogue and their exclusion from honorific prayer recital at the bimah.⁴⁶

Though some free blacks and free people of colour had plantations, many of them lived in Paramaribo, working as artisans, seamstresses and trades people, with a few slaves of their own. Here, in this multilingual world, the creole had some distinctive words and forms, and was called *fotto tongo* (*fotto* being the Sranan word for Paramaribo), to distinguish it from the *nengre tongo* spoken on the rivers. For some free blacks, the creole was virtually their only language: about a third of the many wills I have seen made by free blacks and persons of colour were given orally in Sranan, written by the notary in Dutch, and then translated orally back into Sranan before the notary could sign them.⁴⁷ *Fotto tongo* was heard in many settings: at the market and at the stalls lining Keyser Straat and Waagen Weg; among the entourage

⁴⁵ Staehelin, iii, pt. 1, 90. Price, *Alabi's World*, p. 97.

⁴⁶ A.R.A., R.v.R., Requeten, 417, p. 64. A.R.A., Archief der Nederlands-Portugees-Israelitische gemeente in Suriname (hereafter A.N.P.I.G.), 25 (1738 collection of Hebrew books in the library of the Hets-Haim); 87 (signed documents of 28 Apr. and 12 July 1790); 114, pt. 4, sect. 2 (Hascamoth of 1789, recommending schoolmasters in Hebrew, Portuguese and Dutch); 190-1 (includes payments to the 'Raby da Escola Hebraica' and the 'Mestre da Escola de Escrever' (1788, 1789)). On the status of the 'Jews of colour' in the Portuguese-Jewish congregation, see Cohen, pp. 156-72; J. Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge, 2004), ch. 9; and A. Ben-Ur, 'A matriarchal matter: slavery, conversion, and upward mobility in Suriname's Jewish community', in *Atlantic Diasporas: Jews, Conversos and Crypto-Jews in the Age of Mercantilism, 1500-1800*, ed. R. L. Kagan and P. D. Morgan (Baltimore, Md., 2009). I am dealing with these matters also in *Braided Histories*.

⁴⁷ Schumann, pp. 64-5; Riemer, p. 282. For examples of wills of free blacks or mulattos requiring translation from Dutch into Neger Engelsche, see A.R.A., S.O.N.A., wills, 66, no. 42; 69, p. 146; 70 fos. 107r-108r; 683, p. 280.

of slaves accompanying their master or mistress to market, church or synagogue; among the free mulatto men mustering for their burgher militia unit; and at the balls of free mulattos, which John Gabriel Stedman attended, finding ‘the music, lights, country dances, supper and above all the dresses . . . superb’.⁴⁸

A good number of free blacks and people of colour spoke Dutch and/or French and Portuguese, and among them were go-betweens, specialists in translation. Thus, in the last decades of the eighteenth century, the free mulatto Abraham Sigismundus Comvalius, baptized as an adult into the Reformed Church, regularly served notaries who needed a translator from Sranan into Dutch. Sometimes the *bakra* Daniel Fernandez did the same, when he was not busy as a circumciser or Mogul for the Portuguese-Jewish congregation; by around 1800 Fernandez was also the sworn translator for Neger Engelsche for the colonial government. Meanwhile in 1794 the mulatto school teacher J. L. van der Tooren set up evening courses in reading, writing, arithmetic and geography for men and women of colour.⁴⁹

Van der Tooren announced his classes in the *Surinaamse Courant*, the Dutch-language newspaper founded in the colony once printing presses had been established there in 1774. Public life flowered in Paramaribo in the last quarter of the century, with two newspapers in Dutch, and a brief effort in German; with the opening of public libraries; with two theatres performing in Dutch (one run by Christians and open only to Christians, the other – much praised by visitors – run by Jews and open to everyone); and with learned societies with mixed religious membership holding meetings on literary, philosophical and scientific matters.⁵⁰ Sranan, *fotto tongo*, did have one role in public performance, however, connected with Du associations set up by slaves. The event in Paramaribo was known as *Bigie Du*, the Big Do. Gorgeously dressed performers sang and danced a story before an audience of slaves and free people of colour (and before enough white people so that in the early nineteenth century the government tried to ban the Du, as usual without success).⁵¹

Perhaps the most interesting fruit of this crossing of languages and peoples in late eighteenth-century Suriname was the publication of poems in Dutch and Sranan which looked at black and white relations from the point of view of a woman of colour. The writer Hendrik Schouten had come from Amsterdam to Suriname as a young man. In 1772, he married the mulatto Suzanna Johanna Hansen, daughter of a free black woman who had lived for many years in concubinage with a white plantation owner. Suzanna was also the great niece of Elisabeth Samson, a wealthy plantation owner who had fought all the way to the high court in Amsterdam for her right as a free black Christian to marry a white Christian. Hendrik and Suzanna stayed in close touch with Suzanna’s black relatives: while Suzanna’s brother, Philip Samuel Hansen, was off getting a law degree at the University of Leiden, the couple invited

⁴⁸ Stedman (1790), p. 465.

⁴⁹ A.R.A., S.O.N.A., wills, 66, no. 42; 69, p. 146; 70 fos. 107r–108r; 683, pp. 280, 306–7, 380. T.N.A.: P.R.O., WO 1/146, p. 438. A.R.A., A.N.P.I.G., 417 (birth and circumcision records), Daniel Fernandez serves as a mogul in 1804 and afterward. Details of the Reformed baptism of the adult (‘bejaard’) Abraham Sigismundus Comvalius, 31 March 1776, are in A.R.A., O.A.B.S.S. (H.D.S.); and of the four children born to him and the free ‘carboegee’ (that is, the daughter of a black and a mulatto) Maria Steeven in A.R.A., O.A.B.S.S., 10, pp. 149, 176, 205 (H.D.S.). *Saturdaysche Courant*, 24 May 1794, advertisement of De Lands-Schoolmeester J. L. van der Tooren.

⁵⁰ On this flowering of cultural life, especially after 1770, see Nassy, ii. 77–85; and M. van Kempen, *Een Geschiedenis van de Surinaamse Literatuur* (2 vols., Breda, 2003), i. 254–95.

⁵¹ Nassy, ii. 38; Voorhoeve and Lichtveld, pp. 15–17; Schumann, pp. 53, 61.

Suzanna's great-aunt Nanoe to be godmother to daughters named after her and the late Elisabeth.⁵²

Several years later, Schouten helped to found the Society of the Suriname Friends of Letters; his mulatto brother-in-law, now back in Suriname as a jurist, was a member, along with the learned Jew David Nassy, the local publisher Poppelmann, and a good number of Suriname worthies.⁵³ For four years in the seventeen-eighties, the Society brought out a volume of poems and essays in Dutch. Schouten published first a poem in Dutch entitled 'The Yellow Wife' ('De Geele Vrouw'). She is a woman of virtue, of intellect, of cheerful spirit, delightful at the clavichord. Her house is clean, her kitchen to be praised, her gifts to the needy abundant. Why then is she the target of scorn, slander and envy? 'Oh . . . my tongue is numb to say the frightening word . . . The good wife ('die brave Vrouw') in place of being White was Yellow.'⁵⁴

Schouten's other poem, 'A Household Quarrel', had more literary daring, for it had alternate lines in Dutch and Sranan, with an a/b, a/b rhyme scheme, the first use of the creole in published verse. A Dutch master is arguing with his concubine-slave, starting with the usual questions about where is his coffee and what will be had for dinner. She answers in Sranan sharply from the beginning. 'I tell you I will know it now', he says. 'And I tell you don't yell at me' ('Mie takki jou no balie mie'), she answers. He threatens to beat her; 'May the devil beat you, too', she answers. 'Now you bark in Neeger Engelsch', he says. 'You're a true scoundrel', she snaps, putting the word for scoundrel into Dutch. When he reminds her he has 'reins in hand', she says, 'Shit on such a white man' ('Kaka vo soe wan Bakker'). 'Who could control that woman?', he asks, 'it's easier to break steel swords'. 'You won't break me today' ('Jou no fa broke mie ti dee'). And their final exchange: 'She'll fear neither devil nor hell'; 'That's why we'll separate', she retorts.⁵⁵

With his wrongly scorned mulatto wife and this Sranan-talking black slave-concubine, who refuses communication with a master who yells and whips, Hendrik Schouten challenged both the colour ranking of his day and the establishment of domestic relations within the frame of slavery rather than that of free marriage. The issues are still alive in our own time.

⁵² McLeod, pp. 44–7, 92–108, 122–5. *Album Studiosorum Academiae Lugduno Batavae MDLXXV–MDCCCLXXV*, ed. G. Du Rieu (The Hague, 1875), p. 1121; Philippus Samuel Hanssen Surinamensis, age 25, enrolls in Law, May 1776. A.R.A., O.A.B.S.S., 2, p. 23; 10, p. 35.

⁵³ *Letterkundige uitspanningen van het Genootschap de Surinaamsche Lettervrienden* (4 vols., Paramaribo (W. H. Poppelmann), 1785–7); Mr. P. S. Hansen and D. I. Cohen Nassy listed among members in vol. ii.

⁵⁴ *Letterkundige*, ii. 22: Hendrik Schouten, 'De Geele Vrouw'.

⁵⁵ *Letterkundige*, ii. 33–7: Hendrik Schouten, 'Een Huishoudelyke Twist'; Voorhoeve and Lichtveld, pp. 286–8.