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Aleke: New Music and New Identities in the Guianas

On the northeastern coast of South America in Suriname and French Guiana, live six Maroon peoples—the Saramaka, Ndyuka, Paramaka, Aluku, Matawai, and Kwinti. Descended from enslaved Africans who escaped Dutch plantations during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, until recently they have remained relatively isolated in the interior rain forests.

When Melville Herskovits made his first field trip to the Saramaka Maroon territory in 1928, the Surinamese Maroons were recognized as the custodians of the most African cultures and musics to have survived in the Americas (Herskovits and Herskovits 1934; Herskovits and Herskovits 1936; Kolinski 1936). The same is still largely true today. The profoundly African musics encountered by Herskovits and other visitors of that era—genres such as *sékèti*, *awasa*, *susa*, *papa*, and *kumanti*—are still very much alive, and remain as indispensable as ever to the social contexts and events with which they are associated.

But much has changed since the 1920s in music as in other spheres. Among the newer musical developments is a hybrid genre known as *aleke*, which emerged but a few decades ago and has since risen to become the most popular Maroon music among the young. *Aleke* is an intriguing example of a music that cannot be neatly categorized as either “traditional” or “popular,” but rather is situated at the intersection of the two.

Maroon musical traditions in general, like other aspects of Maroon culture, have always shown a remarkable degree of internal dynamism (Price and Price 1980; Price and Price 1999, 237–308). But *aleke* has been especially dynamic. As a style born out of interaction between Maroons and non-Maroons, it has always occupied an ambiguous, borderline social space, and has been more open than most styles to conscious experimentation and change. It has always been primarily a music for the young. Over the

years it has come to embody and express a number of opposing themes in contemporary Maroon social life—tradition versus modernity; continuity versus change; young versus old; inside versus outside; cultural similarity versus cultural difference. Because of its ability to mediate and bridge these oppositions, aleke has been particularly sensitive to shifts in social boundaries, and has often served as a vehicle for the expression of new forms of identity.

In this article I will briefly describe some of the different settings with which aleke has been associated, and some of the different ways in which it has been implicated over time in processes of identity formation. I will begin by briefly sketching the circumstances surrounding the emergence of this new Maroon music, and will move from there to a discussion of the transitions it has undergone.¹

The Origins and Growth of *Aleke*

In the late nineteenth century, when gold was first discovered in the interior of French Guiana and Suriname, large numbers of gold prospectors arrived in the Ndyuka and Aluku (Boni) territories; on the heels of the gold rush came a further influx of balata bleeders. Among these migrant laborers were many African-descended Creoles from the Lesser Antilles, coastal Suriname, and neighboring French Guiana. As part of a pattern of exchanges that developed out of this encounter, the Creole prospectors welcomed Maroons to their nightly festivities, which often featured Creole drumming and dance styles such as *kawina*, *ladja*, and *cassé-cô* (Ijzermans 1987, 50–2, 57–8).² Since these Creole styles were derived in part from African sources, they were not entirely foreign to Maroon ears, and Maroon drummers were quick to learn them. Some Maroons also tried their hands at the European novelties introduced by Creoles, such as the clarinet and concertina. These musical exchanges continued into the next century.³

The paths of development leading from these early musical encounters to the aleke phenomenon of today, and the various stylistic transformations entailed, were complex and convoluted. Present-day oral accounts of how this process occurred vary considerably, although there is general agreement on certain details.⁴ It is known that the Cottica River area was an important early center of activity, and that it played a vital role in the creation of new, Creole-influenced Ndyuka musical genres, some of which later spread to the Marowijne, Tapanahoni, and Lawa Rivers. Among the new, mixed dance and music styles that appear to have arisen in this region during the first half of the twentieth century were *lama* or *lamba* (a fusion of Creole *kawina* with certain traditional Ndyuka elements), and *maselo*⁵ (another hybrid genre, inspired in part by Dutch and U.S. military marching music). By mid-century, elements from these and various related

genres had coalesced and metamorphosed into a new style of song and dance known as *loonsei*.⁶

By the 1960s *loonsei* had spread to the neighboring Paramaka and Aluku Maroons. *Loonsei* was particularly popular among the young, who seized the opportunity presented by this latest musical fad to invent new dance movements, compose new melodies, and improvise new topical songs (Franson n.d.).

During the 1950s and 1960s, the many young Maroons who migrated to coastal areas in search of work carried *loonsei* with them. Creole workers migrating from the coastal area to the Ndyuka territory also encountered *loonsei* there. As a secular music of mixed parentage, *loonsei* was particularly well suited to recreational contexts that included fellow workers from other ethnic groups. One such fellow laborer, a Creole man named Alexander, had made a habit of joining his Ndyuka co-workers in their leisure-time music-making.⁷ A drummer and dancer trained in the coastal Afro-Surinamese musical tradition which includes *kawina*, Alexander helped to create a new Maroon-Creole blend that bore his unique signature. This Creole man's panache as a performer so impressed his Ndyuka friends that they named the new style "Alexander" in his honor. Since the Ndyuka language lacks consonant clusters, "Alexander" was rendered as "Alékesánda." Later, "Alékesánda" was abbreviated to "Aleke," the name the style has borne ever since.⁸

More and more Ndyuka musicians learned to play the new hybrid, and before long *aleke* had supplanted *loonsei* as the latest fashion. In the Ndyuka villages of the interior, the new style was gradually incorporated into traditional funeral ceremonies, where it was usually performed just before dawn, sometimes following (or even replacing) the traditional *awasa* music normally reserved for that portion of the ceremony.⁹ But it was also played freely for impromptu recreational gatherings, and for various festive occasions. *Aleke*, like *loonsei* before it, soon spread to the Ndyukas' Maroon neighbors, the Paramaka and Aluku, and before long could be heard in Maroon villages all along the Marowijne, Tapanahoni, and Lawa rivers.

Maroons who had settled permanently in the coastal area also embraced the new style, introducing a number of striking innovations of their own. Whereas *aleke* had originally been played on the traditional *apinti* drums used to accompany most other Ndyuka styles, by the late 1970s, drummers in the coastal region had invented an entirely new instrument, the "aleke drum" (*aleke doon*). In contrast to the traditional *apinti* drum, which is a squat, compact instrument designed to be played while sitting, the *aleke* drum, when placed on its special stand, rises to a height of three or more feet, and is always played in standing position. This new type of drum was based in part on the conga drum—an instrument which, though ultimately of Afro-Cuban origin, had by the 1970s become a standard feature of Latin and Caribbean dance bands (and was often to be seen in jazz, rhythm and



Photo 1. “Reindigenized” aleke drum, painted with traditional Aluku Maroon designs, Komontibo, French Guiana, 1995. Photo by K. Bilby.

blues, and rock bands as well). It is said that the design was intended not only to relieve the tired backs of aleke drummers who had previously had to stoop over for prolonged periods while playing the short apinti drums in a semi-standing position, but to express the feeling among the current generation of coastal aleke players that the new style was more “modern” than previous ones.¹⁰

In the hands of the town dwellers, thus, aleke was transformed into a self-conscious emblem of modernity. The distinctive long drums, which were unlike anything that had come before, were painted with flashy new designs (some of which reflected urban popular youth culture).¹¹ Aleke vocalists were given microphones and patched into amplified sound systems. An important new instrument, modeled after the Western drum kit, was added to the typical three-drum aleke ensemble. Called the *dya*s (from the North American word “jazz”), it consisted of a large home-made bass drum, played with a padded stick, along with one or more cymbals and a high-hat.¹² The *dya*s came to play a very prominent role in the new version of aleke. Like the conga-inspired long drums, it served as a symbol of modernity (clearly related as it was to the “traps,” or drum kit, that had spread from the U.S. jazz bands of the 1920s to the rest of the world).



Photo 2. Ndyuka Maroon *aleke* drum belonging to the band Sapatia, Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni, French Guiana, 1989. Photo by K. Bilby.

In the coastal towns, aleke not only functioned as a form of entertainment, but provided the impetus and framework for a new type of cooperative organization. Musicians living and working in the same neighborhoods began to form stable bands, and pooled ideas and resources to try and enhance their reputations. Some bands relied on patronage. At least two well-known aleke bands were formed by young Ndyuka men employed in the bauxite industry in the coastal region. Members of both groups approached their employers with requests for monetary contributions toward the purchase of a new set of microphones and amplifiers. When their requests were granted, the bands named themselves in honor of their patrons—one group christening itself the Sarco Boys (after Grassalco [Grasshopper Aluminum Company], the state-operated Surinamese mining company), and the other calling itself the Alcoa Boys (in reference to the North American aluminum giant, Alcoa, and its local subsidiary, Suralco).

In most cases, however, aleke bands relied on the resources of their own members. In Paramaribo and Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni, a coastal French Guianese border town with a large Maroon population, aleke enthusiasts came together to form voluntary associations (Bilby 1990c).

Governed by hierarchies of officers bearing creolized Dutch titles, such as *foosete* (“president,” from *voorzitter*), *ondoo-foosete* (“vice-president,” from *ondervoorzitter*), and *penemeister* (“treasurer,” from *penningmeester*), these associations and bands were at first made up exclusively of Ndyuka individuals from the same *lo* (matriclan). Certain aleke bands, such as Kompanyero, were even named after the specific upriver villages or clans to which their members belonged.¹³ Before long, individuals from different Ndyuka villages, or even different Maroon ethnic groups such as the Paramaka and the Aluku, started coming together to form new groups. These mixed bands were typically given self-consciously “modern” names, such as “Superstar” or “Africa”—names which made no reference to a specific ethnic background (Bilby 1990b).

The new aleke music created by young Maroons in the shared urban spaces of coastal Suriname and French Guiana reflected the wide range of new influences surrounding them, both in lyrics and sound. By the early 1980s, for instance, a new rhythm had been introduced from imported North American records, leading to the development of a new sub-style of aleke drumming called *fonki* (funky). Throughout the 1980s, singers experimented freely with Pentecostal church melodies, French Antillean carnival tunes, or Surinamese kaseko rhythms. Drummers stripped down the rhythms they heard on imported Jamaican reggae records and transferred them to the drums and percussion of aleke, coming up with something that sounded like a Rastafarian Nyabinghi beat, over which they chanted revamped Bob Marley or Black Uhuru songs (Bilby 1990a, 112–13). The latter eventually developed into a sub-style known as reggae-aleke (Bilby 1999, 286). Innovations like these followed one after the other, confirming aleke’s status as a thoroughly up-to-date music in synch with rapidly changing times.

By the late 1980s, aleke had been discovered by local music entrepreneurs, who immediately began to record and package the new sound for local consumption.¹⁴ Today studio recordings by many of the leading aleke bands are available on cassette from Disco Amigo, Suriname’s main music store, and from a number of other outlets in the capital city.¹⁵

The Shifting Social Identity of *Aleke*

The shifts in social identification that accompanied the musical developments described above may be summarized as follows. Aleke began as the music of young Ndyuka Maroons, some of whom spent part of the year living and working outside their territory, but maintained close ties to their traditional villages. In the early days, it was often performed in traditional contexts alongside older Ndyuka styles such as awasa, songe, and susa, and like other borrowings or innovations before it, was eventually

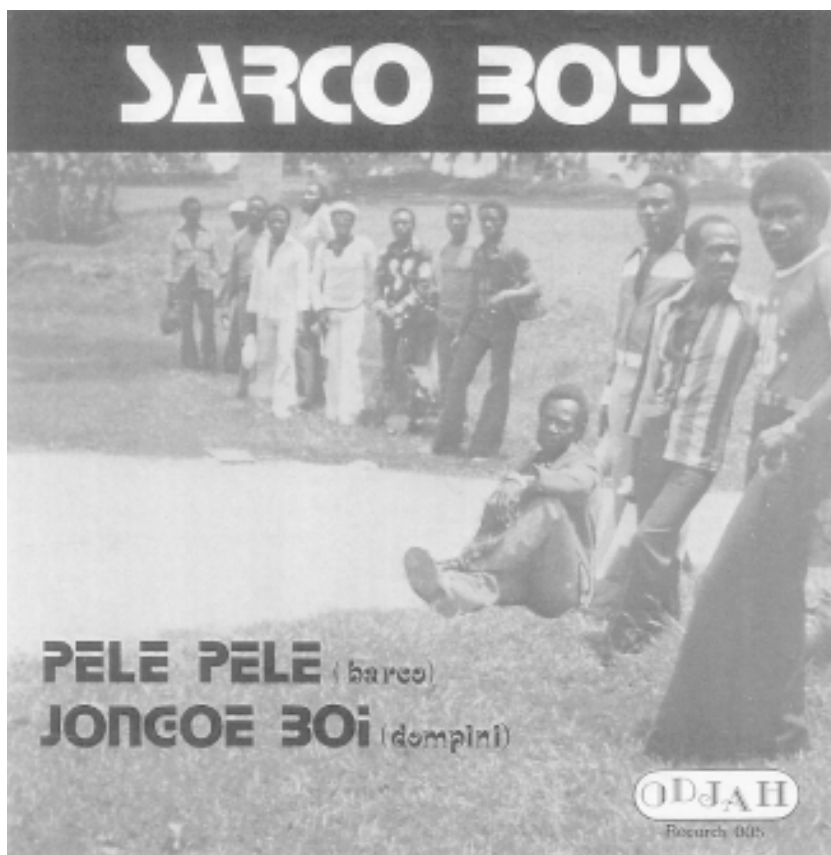


Photo 3. Jacket of first commercial *aleke* recording, a 45 rpm 7" record by the Sarco Boys, Paramaribo, 1980. Courtesy of Paul Abena.

incorporated into these contexts. Thus “traditionalized,” it retained its special association with the young, and continued to serve as a vehicle of generational identity.

Next it spread to the Paramaka and Aluku people, whose musical cultures overlap to a great extent with that of the Ndyuka. These neighboring Maroon peoples likewise “traditionalized” and indigenized *aleke*, incorporating it into similar social contexts, such as funeral dances, while maintaining its association with the young.

The next major development was spurred by younger Ndyuka Maroons living on the coast, who fashioned *aleke* into an expression of their identity as “modern” town dwellers. They transformed the ensemble of instruments on which the style was played, modified elements of the music, experimented with other popular styles, and rallied around their new musical creation, using it as the basis for the establishment of new voluntary

associations. At first these associations and their music were narrowly linked to the identities of specific Ndyuka clans, but over time expanded to include members of other villages, clans, and ethnic groups. In the polyethnic coastal setting, the new aleke eventually came to serve (in certain contexts) as an expression of pan-Maroon identity, embracing all three eastern Maroon groups, the Ndyuka, Paramaka, and Aluku.

Next, this new form of aleke was brought back upriver to the traditional villages of the Ndyuka, Paramaka, and Aluku, where it was adopted and made to serve as yet another local expression of generational identity.

Finally, aleke in its newest version became a recorded music. Having entered the Paramaribo studios and the local market, aleke's claim to modernity is now sealed. Its transformation into a form of popular music sold on cassettes alongside other contrasting styles has heightened the potential for its use as an expression of Maroon identity—whether Ndyuka, broader eastern Maroon, or pan-Maroon identity.

It is necessary to point out that these shifting linkages between musical style and social identity are not mutually exclusive; new developments in aleke have not canceled out the ones that preceded them. Rather, the succession of musical and social transitions aleke has passed through over the years has resulted in a series of overlapping potentials for identification that continue to be realized variously in different contexts.

I became aware of this variability while carrying out fieldwork in several different parts of French Guiana and Suriname during the 1980s and 1990s. As I moved between different contexts, it quickly became apparent to me that newer forms of aleke co-existed with older ones, and that even the same forms could have varying significance for Maroons living in different places. In the upriver Aluku Maroon villages where I worked in the 1980s, aleke in the old style could still be heard at late-night funeral ceremonies, played on the traditional apinti drums, and danced in ring formation (Bilby 1989b).¹⁶ But in some of the same villages, there also existed young aleke bands who played the modern long drums and the dyas, and who performed for recreational events at which couples danced Western-style in a close embrace.¹⁷ Given this kind of variation, aleke is perhaps better described as a *stylistic continuum* than as a style per se.

It is this broad continuum of stylistic possibilities, all subsumed under a single category called “aleke,” that makes this new music so eminently adaptable to shifts in the social and political terrain. The existence of such a continuum means that, in making statements about identity, aleke performers are able to draw from a repertoire of older and newer stylistic features, some of which are ethnically specific and others shared by all three eastern Maroon peoples. The older and newer ends of the stylistic continuum, one considered “traditional” and the other “modern,” represent potentials that can be called upon to express different levels of identification as the need or motivation arises. Emphasis on the older end of the



Photo 4. Dyas player with Ndyuka Maroon aleke band Sapatia, Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni, French Guiana, 1989. Photo by K. Bilby.

continuum tends to complement an inward-looking perspective, while the selection of stylistic features from the newer end of the continuum is more compatible with an outward-looking stance. Part of what is so interesting about this continuum is that features from opposite ends can be combined in such a way as to mediate very effectively between notions of “tradition” and “modernity.” Interestingly, the stylistic continuum of aleke has continued to expand at both ends, on the traditional, ethnic-specific side incorporating influences from historically deep Maroon styles such as awasa and kumanti, and on the modern, more general side borrowing from Surinamese kaseko and other recent forms of Caribbean and Afro-American popular music.¹⁸

This built-in variability helps to account for aleke’s chameleon-like ability to take on and express a range of different identities. Among the Aluku Maroons living in the interior of French Guiana, for example, aleke has come to serve as an assertive expression of their specific ethnic and cultural identity as Alukus, challenged in recent years by the assimilationist policies of the French overseas department within which their territory is located (Bilby 1989a; 1990b). In contrast, among the many Maroon emigrants from different groups living alongside one another in the polyethnic

coastal town of Saint-Laurent, aleke has become an expression of pan-Maroon solidarity in the face of an often hostile and discriminatory larger society (Bilby 1990c). And for young Ndyuka Maroons based in the capital of Paramaribo, as well as those who have remained in the forest, aleke has become a privileged site for the mediation of older versus newer concepts of identity as the Ndyuka redefine themselves as a people within the young republic of Suriname.

The latest development has brought aleke across the Atlantic Ocean to the Netherlands. By the early 1990s, a number of Dutch cities already had aleke bands and associations of their own, formed by Ndyuka immigrants.¹⁹ Some of these Dutch-based bands have begun to market their music on compact discs (in addition to cassettes), and aleke is now being promoted and disseminated in the metropolis in a variety of other ways as well.²⁰ In the Dutch context, aleke, along with a number of other Ndyuka cultural diacritics, has been seized upon, not only as an ethnic marker, but as a focus for cultural revitalization, and a tool for resisting cultural assimilation. This recent development is nicely captured in the lyrics of one of the signature songs of the aleke band Kamina, whose home base is in the Dutch city of Breda:

wi na Kamina uman
 CHORUS: u á e biibi bakaa libi moo
 ma na bakaa libi dalai wi-ee
 CHORUS: dalai-ee

[we're the women of Kamina
 CHORUS: we no longer have faith in foreigners'/
 Dutch/white peoples' way of life
 but the foreigners'/Dutch/white peoples' way of life
 has distracted (literally, "turned") us
 CHORUS: distracted us]²¹

Considering aleke's humble beginnings in a few specific Ndyuka villages and performing contexts around the middle of the twentieth century, it is remarkable how its influence has expanded over time. As we have seen, this genre is today associated with a wide variety of geographical locations, social identities, and stylistic permutations and influences. Indeed, the influence of aleke goes beyond the various social contexts briefly summarized above. Aleke festivals or tournaments are now held annually in Suriname, French Guiana, and the Netherlands.²² Moreover, the influence of aleke is pervasive in Surinamese urban popular music, both in Suriname and the Netherlands. While this influence is most obvious in the hybrid pop style fittingly known as aleke-kaseko (played by bands such as Yakki Famiri), it can be heard in more subtle forms as well, cross-cutting various other genres, such as kawina, kaskawi, and numerous recent variants of kaseko. That this influence has been so pervasive is really not

surprising, for many of the musicians who can be heard on the latest kawina and kaseko recordings actually grew up playing, or at least hearing, aleke in urban neighborhoods where young Maroons and Creoles lived alongside one another and sometimes mingled (Bilby 1998, 148–50).

In closing, I would like to suggest that the resilience of aleke, like that of other musics located at the intersection of the traditional and the popular, stems from its makers' implicit understanding that continuity and change are dialectically related processes, in music as in life. Unlike those who opt for rigid purism, most aleke performers sense that music can be transformed without losing its soul, for what gives music life is its ongoing relationship with the ever evolving social universe from which it derives its meaning. Aleke is but one of an increasing number of musics in our rapidly changing world that bear out a dictum I occasionally heard expressed by young Maroons: "In order to thrive, a tree needs both its roots and its branches."

Notes

1. An earlier version of this article was presented at the annual meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Chapter of the Society for Ethnomusicology held in Washington, D.C., in April 1993. The present version draws on ethnographic fieldwork in Paramaribo, Suriname (1991, 1995), in various locations along the border of Suriname and French Guiana (1983–87, 1991, 1995), and in the Netherlands (1982, 1994). I would like to express my thanks to André Pakosie, Thomas Polimé, and Ineke van Wetering for their ongoing help in keeping me abreast of recent trends in aleke, particularly those occurring in the Netherlands.
2. "Creole" here refers to a combination of Antilleans (St. Lucians, Dominicans, Martinicans, Barbadians, etc.), French Guianese Creoles, and coastal Surinamese, as well as the varied assortment of music and dance styles they brought with them. (*Kawina*, for instance, was identified primarily with Surinamese Creoles, while *ladja* was originally associated with Martinican Creoles, and *cassé-cô* with French Guianese Creoles.)
3. During my fieldwork along the Lawa and Marowijne rivers in the 1980s, I met several Aluku and Ndyuka individuals who had participated in such Creole dances (featuring styles such as French Guianese *cassé-cô*) in both Suriname and French Guiana in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. Among them were a number of drummers who had learned how to play the popular Creole drumming styles of the day; others had experimented with European instruments such as the clarinet.
4. The following summary of the origins and development of aleke is based on information found in Pakosie (1999), the best published overview of the history of aleke to date, as well as my own extensive

discussions and interviews with aleke players (and also with individuals involved in the recording and promotion of aleke and other forms of Surinamese popular music) in various locations in French Guiana, Suriname, and the Netherlands, beginning in the early 1980s and continuing through the 1990s. Among those I interviewed, and to whom I would like to express my gratitude, are Paul Abena, Rudolf Anaje, Wilfred Blakaman, Basia Fandeiki, Miefi Moese, Paul Neman, Johannes Pinas, Marcus Pinas, and Wilfred Sampson.

5. From Dutch, *marcheren*.
6. According to André Pakosie's informants, the genre that came to be known as *loonsei* began in the Cottica River area, and spread from there to the lower Marowijne, and, finally, the Tapanahoni; this early form of loonsei is said to have been based largely on Surinamese Creole kawina music (Pakosie 1999, 3–4). However, according to Basia Fandeiki and other informants in Diitabiki (in an interview conducted by the author on 9 December 1991), loonsei was introduced to the Tapanahoni by the *winti* (god) called Tata Amanfu. It is said that one of Tata Amanfu's mediums, Da Akoomiati of Sanbendumi, would perform loonsei songs in French Creole when possessed, thus launching this new style in the upriver area. According to this view, then, it was the French Creole influence from neighboring French Guiana, rather than the Creole influence emanating from coastal Suriname, that was predominant in the Tapanahoni area during this period.
7. Pakosie (1999, 6) gives this man's full name as Alexander Grandisson. According to one source (Anonymous n.d., 1), it is possible to pinpoint the exact year in which Alexander/Aleke traveled from Paramaribo to the interior and made the contributions that led to the birth of the new mixture of kawina and loonsei that was eventually to bear his name. The year given by this source is 1958.
8. Pakosie (1999, 6) points out that there was also a Ndyuka singer and dancer named Aleke, from the village of Malobi, who, some years after the original Aleke (Alexander), similarly achieved fame as an aleke performer. Because of this, his persona also continues to be associated with this music and dance genre. Several of my Ndyuka and Aluku informants confirmed the existence of this later Ndyuka practitioner of aleke (who was generally known as Ba Aleke), and some claimed to be personally acquainted with him. In some oral accounts, this Ndyuka performer and his Creole predecessor and namesake are fused into a single person.
9. According to several informants, an important function of aleke music and dancing in the context of death rites is to *puu a tyali* (remove the sadness). This is one of the ways in which it demonstrates continuity with loonsei.

10. According to aleke producer Paul Abena (in an interview conducted in Paramaribo on 6 November 1995), the transition to the long drums occurred in the 1970s, and must be credited to a young Ndyuka man named Afudini, who at the time was a member of the Sarco Boys. (The Sarco Boys first came together to form a band in 1976.) Abena claims to remember in detail the circumstances surrounding the introduction of this new type of drum.
11. More recently there has been a trend toward reindigenization of the patterns painted on aleke drums. Many of these drums are now painted in a style basically the same as that traditionally used on Ndyuka (as well as Aluku and Paramaka) houses, boats, and paddles. See Price and Price (1980).
12. According to André Mosis (cited in Pakosie [1999, 12]), coastal Ndyuka musicians call the high-hat *akamitikifutu*. Aluku musicians, however, as well as at least some upriver Ndyuka musicians, refer to this instrument as *tapu patu*.
13. “Kompanyero” is the result of the band members’ playful attempt at creating a hispanicized version of the name of their matriclan, *Kompai*.
14. The first commercial aleke recording was actually released way back in 1980. This 45-rpm record (Odjah Records 005, Paramaribo) was by the Sarco Boys, and featured two songs, “Pele Pele” and “Jongoe Boi.” The session, which took place at Ventu Studios, was produced by Paul Abena, a young Ndyuka who hosted a radio show aimed at Maroons living in Paramaribo. Abena went on to become a major producer of aleke cassettes, founding a label that he named Koyeba’s Sound (after his radio show, also called Koyeba). (The name is derived from the Ndyuka phrase, “*kon yee, ba*,” meaning “please listen.”) After this initial recording, there was a long hiatus, during which only a handful of aleke releases appeared (the most prominent being one by the Labi Boys). Not until the early 1990s was there a sudden flood of aleke releases on cassette, which continued through the decade. In addition to those put out by the Disco Amigo label, dozens of aleke cassettes were released by Koyeba’s Sound. Later in the decade, a few bands began to release compact discs, a trend that was helped along by the increasing movement of aleke musicians between Suriname and the Netherlands.
15. Aleke cassettes are also sold from smaller shops and makeshift stalls in various parts of the city (and are also sometimes offered by mobile vendors who walk down the street carrying them in bags or boxes). There is also a well-stocked (though unmarked) little shop specializing in aleke located alongside the city’s main market; known to its primarily Ndyuka customers as “Zusbena,” it is run by a sister of aleke producer Paul Abena.

16. It should be mentioned that in Aluku, and in some Ndyuka areas as well, it is still possible to find a traditional apinti drum or two being played as part of a new-style aleke ensemble, alongside the long drums and dyas. In some cases, a wooden stand is used to bring the apinti up to the same height as the long drums, so that it too can be played while the player stands up straight.
17. Pakosie (1999, 3) points out that couple dancing (involving close contact between partners) was “taboo” in traditional Maroon societies until the 1970s. At the end of that decade and continuing into the early 1980s, such dancing gradually became more acceptable, whether to the sounds of imported recordings (in styles such as kaseko and reggae) or the rhythms of aleke. The short entry on aleke in the *Encyclopedie van Suriname*, describing the style as it was in the mid-1970s, confirms that it was still performed primarily as a circle dance at that time, stating that “the participants dance in a ring, behind and next to each other, with small foot movements from outside to inside” (Bruijning and Voorhoeve 1977, 20; my translation).
18. This process shows no signs of slowing down. For instance, while attending a funeral ceremony in the upriver Aluku village of Komontibo in 1995, I noticed that the instruments of new-style aleke (in this case, three of the conga-like long drums and a dyas set) were being incorporated into certain sections of the traditional *tuka* dancing that takes place around the body of the deceased before burial; the music for these sections of the dance involved a fusion of “modern” aleke rhythms and traditional *tuka* drumming styles. (In other parts of the same ceremony, the older style of *tuka* was also played in its “pure” form, using the traditional drums.) At the other end of the continuum, one can cite various recent popular aleke recordings that experiment with everything from Brazilian samba-style drumming and Jamaican reggae rhythms to James Brown imitations and Sarnami (a local Surinamese dialect of Hindi) lyrics (Bilby 1999, 290). And one must not forget the strong aleke influence exerted on recent electric pop hybrids such as *kaskawi* or the new variant of *kaseko* known as *aleke-kaseko* (pioneered by the mixed Ndyuka-Creole band Yakki Famiri in the early 1990s).
19. The first aleke band based in the Netherlands is said to have been Wisani, formed in 1991 (Anonymous n.d., 8). Since then, a number of others have come into existence, such as Agi Piisii, Kamina, and Switi-Libi.
20. A video titled *Aleke-Sound*, for instance, has been produced for the local market by André Pakosie (ARMP Production, 1997); the video features the bands Tyotyopokina and Bigiten, taped during a visit to the Netherlands. Among the commercial aleke recordings that have been released on compact disc in the Netherlands are: *Skoro Bangi*, by Bigi Ting (Bigiten) (EMF Records, 1995); *King of Alekke: Fonsje Meets*

- Seke* (Stemra F6674, n.d.); *Wi Kong Bari Odi*, by Switi-Libi (Stemra DPCD 2349, n.d.); and *Europees Systeem*, by Agi Piisii (Sjah 6010, 1998).
21. Transcribed from a recording I made in Breda on 17 July 1994. These lyrics (in which the singers identify themselves as “the women of Kamina”) point to the fact that gender constitutes another important dimension of social identity for which aleke has become a means of expression and a site of negotiation. This is a question that has yet to be examined in detail.
 22. In the early 1990s, an organization called Young Rhythm began to sponsor an annual aleke festival and competition in Paramaribo. More recently, similar events have been organized in Utrecht and other Dutch cities. Yet other aleke competitions have been held in Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni in French Guiana—a development that has begun to attract some attention in the French press, where such festivals tend to be treated as a part of the larger “world music” phenomenon (see, for example, Lee 1998a; Lee 1998b).

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