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Unpacking Compositions

In *Les Arts des Maroons* (2005), Sally and Richard describe a scene in the village of Saamaka paramount chief *Gaama* Agbago in 1978. They tell us how the gaama offered to open his trunks full of clothing (gifts that his wives and lovers had given him over his 91-year lifetime), and share with them reminiscences, memories of the affects and bodies displayed in this reunion with the fabrics. Ethnographies cannot freeze experience, whether in its unstable temporality or through its translation into text. In recognition of Sally and Richard's contribution to Caribbean anthropology, whose writings defy any simple attempt at synthesis, I focus here on scenes that reveal the recollection and the use of artifacts that take on diverse uses and meanings.

As gifts received and exchanged in everyday and ritual situations, the lengths of cloth (known as *koosu* (among the Saamaka) or *pangi* (among the Ndyuka) that are sewn into clothing by Suriname Maroon women, actualizes distinct forms of expression—love, mourning, gratitude, friendship, respect, sadness, and beauty, and reflects cultural goals of artistic composition. Different things are said and done with objects made from cloth—adorning living bodies, wrapping dead bodies, and adorning sacred trees, masts, shrines, and other objects. They materialize intentionality and experience, projecting future memories of each human and other-than-human subjects, marking each person as an immeasurable inscription of sociality; they create singularity over time. Bringing together the meanings that Maroons give to these artifacts and the attention to different modes of existence mobilized by anthropology, we could say that in the Maroon worlds, *pangi*/*koosu* are "companion creatures," as if they were more than human extensions of objects, that they can re-enact and "unfold" life, provoking words, feelings and memories. *Koosu*/*pangi* are present along the paths paved by Maroon people: they perform and are made of "juxtapositions of colours" and "lines"; they connect disparate forms, times, histories, and landscapes (from Asindoopo, Cayenne, and Rotterdam to the shamanic worlds of the Saamaka time-traveller, Alexander Tooy—see Rich's *Travels with Tooy*).

Rich and Sally's ethnographic work on Guianese Maroons can also be taken as a unique corpus made up of extensions and movements that bring together ethnographic knowledge of Maroon lives in recursive inscriptions. In their writing, the textiles and persons,

the calabashes, the archival documents, and the obia made by the specialists, the woodcarvings shown in encounters or found in the workshops along the roads, the human rights reports, the colonial newspapers, and the primitive art catalogues intertwine. Thus, one of the ethnographic effects of the encounter with the *gaama* referred to above is to alert us to the ways of creating life—whether in the reactivation of affect that was momentarily contained in the cloths or even in the recognition of the weave that flows across the surface of the pieces, their inscriptions, embroideries, extensions, stylistic and material innovations—and materializing the existence of the *koosu*-sewn textile as a gift and counterpart of the Maroon person. This dimension explored in depth in Sally's writings on Maroon expressive arts, and the equivocations that emerge from their modes of circulation among non-Maroons as examples of "primitive art," is activated in the commentary about each *koosu* piece of clothing taken from the *gaama*'s trunk as well as the commentary of the many others, Maroon women and men, with whom the anthropologists interacted. The scene of the anthropologists observing the *gaama* and other interlocutors' movements of unfolding pieces of clothing as moments of revelation, infusing the ambient of many other presences, made me think about replicating the scene and speculating on its implications. When we celebrate, recognize, and recollect the many ways Richard and Sally's ethnography and reflections have transformed our understanding of the anthropology of the Caribbean, we may be, consciously or not, unfolding our own *koosu*/*pangi* too.

What if I myself were to make a written *pangi*, with threads woven from fragments, textures, and pigments—the material accumulation of experiences told from the lives of others? For example, I would try to recollect how Sally's knowledge of Saamaka women's use of textiles in *Co-Wives and Calabashes*, a pioneering ethnography that addressed debates in feminist anthropology in the 1980s—guided my understanding of my Cottica Ndyuka interlocutors' choices in my first Suriname field experiences in 2010.

Tresna, a resident of Moengo, in eastern Suriname, defined herself as a modern woman (*modeni fasi uma*) by questioning "traditional" values that were evoked in conflicts between men and women. But she always tried to be aware of the knowledge preserved by the men—her Ndyuka relatives from the Tapanahoni and Cottica villages and, above all, the Saamaka, like the father of her first son. On her countless trips to the local stores to buy fabric to make *pangi* for the girls in her *awasa* dance group, or to make bags and dresses for her handicrafts store, we talked about her choices and ways of reconciling knowledge from her own and her kinfolks' experiences in worlds in "friction."

In the same way as the debate mobilizing feminists and the theoretical shifts orbiting around gender at the time when *Co-Wives and Calabashes* was published, the world in which Tresna was born and learned about her Ndyuka relatives' back-and-forths between villages, refugee camps in French Guiana, and cities had changed. But the relationship between the making of gender and materiality among Maroons explored by Sally continued to direct my attention to difference, conflict, and the arts of creation when I was taught by Tresna about the agency of women and objects. My way of symbolically "unfolding *pangi*" continued to pay attention to gender relationships in the making and multiplying of people. With *pangi*, Tresna participates in the creation of Maroon girls and adolescents in a non-Maroon (*bakaa*) world. By dance movements, they communicate gender, adulthood, beauty, and ways of becoming Maroons, and they recreate traditional and new ties, knots, and wrappings with the textiles that cover their bodies. Recollecting *koosu*/*pangi* unfoldings is making compositions.

This and other compositions of recollections are possible only if we put aside, at least for the moment, notions such as collage, bricolage, and patchwork, and look for other crossings. For example, by activating the logics of elaboration, making, and exchange that accompany the existence of *koosu/pangi* in Maroon sociability, marked by care, an ethics of reciprocity, forms of ownership and property, ritual obligations, and correspondences bring relatives and affines together and set them apart. Even their use in funeral rituals, or when they are given names and produce an influx of buyers for Paramaribo's stores, thus generating a flow of standardization, does not imply repetition. Originality makes the *koosu*/*pangi* a unique weave of relationships that can be neither repeated nor replicated. They are the materialization of subjectification processes that differentiate people sharing the same territory or who are offspring of the same womb. *Koosu*/pangi make different flows of relationships. The endless stylistic reinventions produced by Maroon women inscribe perspectives of these relationships as redesigns of reticulated textile weaves; they make a kind of skin, external and foreign, brought from the *koosu* universe, transmuted into a covering for other skins—the bodies of humans, tree trunks, things received and offered—becoming a cover and a shelter for the living and fortune for the dead. The *koosu*/*pangi* not only envelop bodies but also insert them as differences in other worlds. They are compositions that open and closed, creating inseparabilities and crossings through the sinuosity of lines, refusing asymmetry but proposing overlapping reliefs and a gradient of tones.

As Sally has shown us, it is impossible to grasp the meaning of these textiles independently of the subjects who created and received them, offered them as gifts, and, in the future, will be wrapped by them. So, were we to imagine the collection of *koosu*/*pangi* donated to ethnographers throughout these movements, we could envision a triptych composition in which the weaves of ethnographic experiences reveal choices and positionalities located around at least three sets of elements. I wish to highlight these in turn.

In the first moment of representing a *koosu*/*pangi* as a triptych, I suggest that intellectual work can be taken as a confluence of "nodes" and "lines" with which the authors become entangled. When compared to a patchwork, these nodes or lines reveal only one side of the Maroon aesthetic, leaving out its ethical implications. In the scene of the 1978 meeting with the *gaama*, Sally and Richard open up new paths and interlocutions. We can see that the encounter with the artistic creations given to the *gaama* as personal gifts multiplied into new incursions. They move toward unveiling stories from his early days, hidden in the temporality and the territoriality of the villages. These textiles elicit conversations about the circumstances in which they were made and then given: the periods of women's menstrual seclusion, the disputes between cowives, the returns of husbands who migrated to the coast, and the presentation of gifts brought home from these trips—movements back and forth that affected anthropologists and how Saamaka knowledge allowed them to rethink some debates held in the *koosu* world. The decoration of a calabash is part of long-term processes of transformation or creolization; genderized practices and the innovation and creation of modern materiality are part of the everyday. Each return —like the encounter with the gaama—is also a fold, a ritornello, a retracing of paths, and a revelation of other dimensions of alterity.

In the second configuration of the triptych, the *pangi*/*koosu* as a legacy unfolds to reveal a style of anthropological knowledge that combines texts, emphases, and attention to the ways of constructing alterity present in language and the ethics of reciprocity and revenge among the Saamaka. Sally and Richard shared with us what they learned. Maroon historicity as a system of relationalities allows us to see how alliance imposes itself as a set of reciprocities that mobilize humans and other-than-humans from the First Times. Richard investigated the different layers and additions that permeate the commitments among *mati*, the preferred friends and relatives, the danger resulting from betrayal and the revenge produced in the form of a *kunu*, the vengeful spirit. At the same time, Sally developed a

reflection with structuralism: when and how reciprocity and alliance produce Maroon forms of sociality.

In this configuration of the triptych, it is essential to recognize what has seduced many of us, apprentice anthropologists, who have followed some of the same paths walked by Richard and Sally with the Guianese Maroons. Books like *First Time, Alabi's Word,* and *Co-Wives and Calabashes* allowed us to rethink classic themes, whether in the historiography of slavery or the anthropology of African American populations, but, above all, about the constitution of traditional societies composed of enslaved people and their descendants in Amazonian worlds. Thus, the perspectives that open up—which have yet to be truly explored—illuminate forms of relationship that go beyond human modes of existence and in which the modern divide between "nature" and "culture" must be ignored. These crossings are not limited to the approaches that make a sharp distinction between the anthropological models adopted to describe and understand African societies and those applied to traditional South American peoples. The ways of being Maroon women and men in the Guianese context express what Quilombola thinker Antônio Bispo dos Santos called "confluences": flows of knowledge and affects that emerge from the earth, overflow the bodies of a myriad of beings and return to the earth. The stories about the formation of clans in *First Time*, the narratives about war and the struggle against re-enslavement in *Alabi's World*, and, finally, the reproduction of women's lives and knowledge in *Co-Wives and Calabashes* are perspectives on the diverse modalities of these kinds of confluences.

In the third configuration of the *pangi* as a triptych, we see bindings, knots, and ways of using, unfolding, patching, and wrapping the fabrics. And, as Tim Ingold alerts us, a knot translates into an encounter or correspondence without reducing the parties involved. We might say that Sally and Richard's oeuvre combines ethnography and commitment with the Maroons' right to sovereignty in different ways and styles. In his memoir, Richard translates this approach in another way, describing how his career, alongside Sally, consisted of movements in and out of anthropology. This image is curiously apt when we compare it with the designs—both concave and convex—carved on calabashes by Saamaka women and (occasionally) men. For Richard, the inside and outside of anthropology translate into ways of combining activism and ethnographic writing that are affected by registers of fabulation, incorporating the Caribbean imagination, its characters and landscapes. An example of this combination or even modulation between commitment and ethnography, the state of being both inside and outside the discipline, is present in *Saamaka Dreaming*, a combination of the

two writing styles in which commitment to Maroon narrative styles, ethnic autonomy and traditional rights appear blended together. The book depicts not only how the two anthropologists acquired Maroon knowledge but also situations in which they sometimes witnessed conflicts provoked by their presence as *bakaa* (outsiders) in the village. It shows how the anthropologists were accepted as *bakaa* in the village and how the domestic life of Maroon women and men entailed being confronted with ordeals, confrontations, jealousies, work, and obligations imposed by non-kin and outsiders. It also meant limited access to places and knowledge, and only a mediated contact with Saamaka ontology. The book, which explores this asymmetry in detail and with faithful sincerity, seen from the viewpoint of daily life, is extremely rich in methodological insights and critical reflections on fieldwork politics.

In different ways, Sally and Richard have participated in distinct processes of knowledge creation with their Saamaka interlocutors. As in Richard's *Rainforest Warriors*, we are presented with two authors involved in different, non-comparable and unrelated experiences with gendered interlocutors, busy with their everyday problems and concerned with the presence and volition of the ancestors, gods and spirits. Like the stories told by a Saamaka authority unfolding *koosu*, the journey narrated in Richard and Sally's writings on Guianese Maroons is also a recollection of encounters unfolding into a multiplicity of forms—refusing subjection and pursuing ways of being free. Recollections of encounters of a woman anthropologist "going 'outside'" by keeping her distance from men and children during periods of menstrual seclusion in the village are combined with descriptions of a man "going inside," walking along hidden paths, secret rivers and creeks, protecting himself and his peers from taboos and spiritual effects. Both of them are dressed in clothing made from *koosu/pangi*.