

# From Reel-to-Reel to Printed Page: The Biography of a Transcription

Sally Price and Richard Price

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How to capture a multi-media community event—bristling with song, dance, esoteric allusions, double-entendres, critical interruptions, raucous joking, and veneration of a recently deceased kinsperson—and convey its substance and spirit to readers far away who understand none of the languages being used? A video recording, supplemented by English subtitles, might have gone pretty far. But for two young anthropologists in the Amazonian rain forest in the 1960s, the tools at hand were a Uher tape recorder spinning five-inch reels and a notebook.

After our return from the Saramaka village where we had been conducting field work, the reels lay silent. One set was in New Haven, where RP was finishing a dissertation on Saramaka social structure, and (a little later) another was on deposit in the Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University.<sup>1</sup> But within a few years, they came into play in connection with the 20-year-old son of a village headman who had begged us to bring him to the United States—“the land of opportunity,” he’d heard, where everything from education to job training was within reach. Never having had a chance to go to school (since there were no schools in the rain forest of Suriname where he grew up), Adiante Franszoon was bright, gregarious, enterprising, and fun to be with. So although we were skeptical about the chances of a non-literate person from such a distant culture dealing successfully with an environment of pervasive literacy, an unfamiliar language, a New England winter, and American racism, we rented an apartment with a second bedroom for him, bought our first TV set (with earphones so he could listen to English while we were otherwise engaged), sent him the go-ahead to travel north from Paramaribo, and greeted him as he emerged from customs at JFK, shivering from the December cold but ready for the adventure.

After a year of fast-track acclimatization (picking up English, learning to read and write, and eventually attending adult education classes) and a second spent in the Netherlands (since we, his sponsors in the U.S., had gone there on a postdoctoral fellowship), he returned with us to New Haven, where RP was taking up his first teaching job as an assistant professor at Yale. Adiante was still a resident member of our family (now including two young children), but with rapidly developing fluency and social ties, he was ready and eager to launch an independent life in the U.S. of A. That meant finding him some means of financial support.

The Uher reels (117 of them) were pulled out of storage and called into service thanks to a grant we received that would provide money for him to transcribe their contents. Adiante, a native speaker of the language(s) on the tapes and now able to commit words to paper, set to work, eventually penning several thousand notebook pages in his recently-mastered longhand, using a set of simple orthographic conventions that we worked out together.

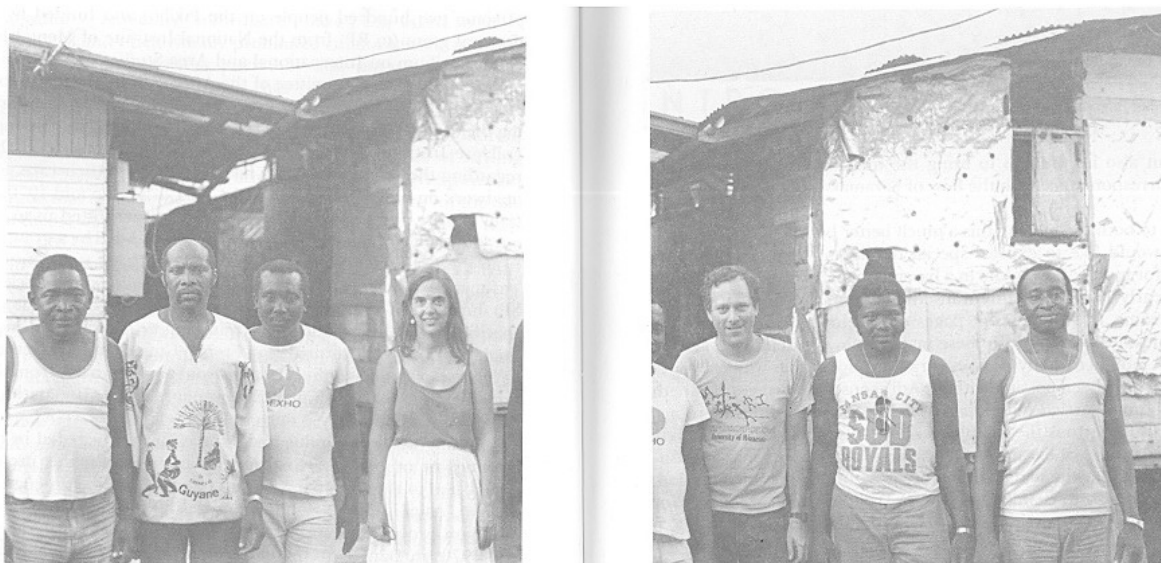
Not surprisingly, these voluminous transcriptions were highly provisional and filled with gaps, and there remained much to be done to work out a fully consistent

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<sup>1</sup> Collection #74-071-F ATL 14704-14715.

orthography, clarify the numerous indistinct passages, track down esoteric allusions, and more. Another grant came through in 1985, allowing us to bring the transcription closer to perfection and orthographic consistency through multiple re-listenings, and then to construct a provisional English translation.

In 1987, during a trip to French Guiana, we were extremely excited to find five men who had been present at the very wakes we'd recorded twenty years earlier, and had participated as performers. They had come to French Guiana to earn money at the Ariane missile launch base in Kourou, and were working at low-paid jobs in construction and maintenance of the space center. Coming home from work each afternoon during our stay, they sat with us listening to the recordings, repeating problematic passages over and over again, clarifying indistinct words, explaining elliptical allusions, and providing the fuller versions of the tale fragments that listeners frequently used to interrupt (as complement and compliment to) a full-scale tale in progress. We would bring the recorder, the watermelon, and the cold beer, and together we replayed those two long evenings devoted to strings of wonderful stories about the invention of polygyny, the discovery of drums, and the antics of a whole cast of characters from lecherous devils and mythical bush cows to Anansi the trickster spider and elephants from the faraway African past. These sessions, animated by five talented tale-tellers who had vivid memories of the original events, produced innumerable precisions and corrections in our transcriptions.

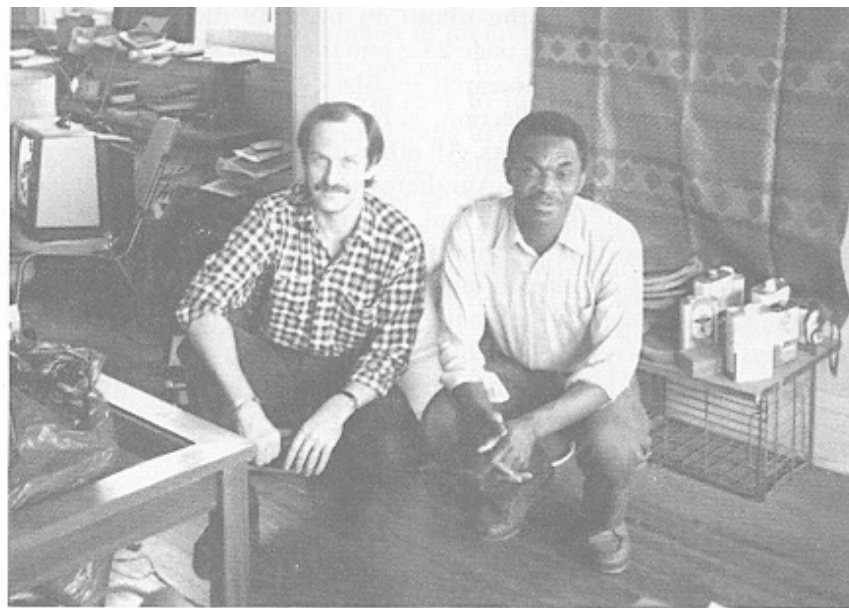


*Kourou, 1987. From left to right: Kasôlu, Antonísi, Amoida, SP, RP, Lodí, Sinéli*

The next step involved decisions about translation and presentation. Prompted by a conviction that Saramaka tales would make little sense outside the ethnographic setting in which they were told, we decided to present two wakes we'd recorded in (March and April) 1968 as fully "intact" as the printed page would allow. That is, rather than distilling tales into idealized story lines or grouping texts by analytical categories of one sort or another, we wanted to present seriatim everything that fell within the Uher's range—from a mother reprimanding her child for knocking over a lantern and people arguing about the right way to chorus a particular song, to a tale-teller excusing himself for some slip of the tongue or a listener announcing that she felt sleepy and was going to stay for only one more story. Each voice would be identified, and no guesses would be made for words drowned out by laughter. The end result was to be something like a post-facto script for a play.

The interactive nature of Saramaka speech and the performative aspect of tale-telling posed special challenges. Whether and how to retain the punctuation of a speaker's narrative by a "responder," often in rapid-fire phrase-by-phrase exchanges. How to communicate the dramatic use of mimicry in voice or accent (e.g., the nasalized speech of Anansi or the coyly innocent voice of an adolescent girl about to be gobbled up by a devil). How to signal the stylistically significant insertion of words from other languages when the entire text was being presented in English: one man who'd recently returned from a money-earning stint on the coast, for example, introduced sentences in Saramaccan with the Sranan-tongo "*wel*" that he had been using with his work bosses, and another performer took pains to explain the word and concept *vacantie* (Dutch "vacation") in adapting a story line he'd heard in French Creole while he was working in Cayenne. How to replicate word plays that simply didn't work in English. And how to render the lyrical utterances that contributed rhythmically and musically to songs, but had no specific "translation." Dennis Tedlock's Native American translations served as inspiration for some of our decisions and Dennis kindly offered helpful comments on a draft of our English text.

Another challenge was what to do with song and dance. The latter, we decided, had to be left to readers' imagination. For the songs, we leaned on the expertise of Kenneth Bilby, an accomplished ethnomusicologist who had spent years conducting research on Aluku Maroons in interior and coastal regions of French Guiana, and who generously agreed to provide musical transcriptions.



*Ken Bilby and Adiante Franszoon, Baltimore, 1990.*

When the project finally came into focus in the form of a book manuscript in 1990, general issues were addressed in a discursive introduction about forms of Saramaka speech, the nature of word plays, the conventions for tale-telling, and our own conventions for the English texts. More specific matters often called for end-notes. Song lyrics in non-standard Saramaccan were followed by explanatory commentary. Photos of the participants were designed to remind readers that particular personalities were behind the creative use of language in the tales. And thirty-odd pages were devoted to narrating the overall sequence of events that led from the death of each of the two villagers whose funeral rites were being celebrated through

purificatory rituals, prayers and libations, drumming, dancing, and feasting, the construction of a coffin, and other tasks designed to escort the deceased person from the land of the living to the land of the ancestors.

In 1991 the result was published by the University of Chicago Press under the title *Two Evenings in Saramaka*.<sup>2</sup> Although the bulk of the book consisted of the English-language texts, an appendix was provided for linguists and other readers interested in gaining some sense of the original transcription. The interlinear transcription/translation took the following form (beginning with the conventional opening for folktales—one person's "*Mató!*" answered by another's "*Tongoni!*":

**ADUÊNGI:**

*Mató!*

*Mató!*

**A MAN:**

*Tôngôni!*

*Tôngôni!*

**ADUÊNGI:**

*Wè da u saí dê. / íya /*

Well, there we were. / **THE MAN:** *íya /*

*Da u saí dê tééé dóu wán yúu tén. / íya /*

We were there once upon a time. / *íya /*

*Nôô hên wè da... Wán tatá dê gbóló. / íya /*

And, well... There was a man. / *íya /*

*Nôô hên wè a paí miú. / íya /*

And he had some children. / *íya /*

*A paí díí muyêè-miú. / íya /*

He had three daughters. / *íya /*

*A paí díí ómi-miú. / íya /*

And he had three sons. / *íya /*

[etc.]

We conclude this essay with the tale (in English translation) that was used for the appendix.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Price and Sally Price (with musical transcriptions by Kenneth M. Bilby), *Two Evenings in Saramaka*, Chicago, U of Chicago P, 1991. Passages are reprinted from pp. 218-243, 357 with the permission of the University of Chicago Press.

**ADUÊNGI:**

*Mató!*

**A MAN** [assuming the role of “responder”]:

*Tòngôni!*

**ADUÊNGI:**

Well, there we were. / **RESPONDER:** *íya* /

We were there once upon a time. / *íya* /

And, well... There was a man. / *íya* /

And he had some children. / *íya* /

He had three daughters. / *íya* /

And he had three sons. / *íya* /

Now the old man called Anáni from Akísiamáu... / *íya* /

Well, he has something he likes to say when tales are being told. / *íya* /

He says that in the old days, they would say that a father called Donú / *íya* /

had a son called Aduêngi. / *íya* /

**OTHERS:**

[quiet laughter]

**ADUÊNGI:**

That’s the way they told tales in the old days. / *íya* /

You’d give the name of the father who had the child. / *íya* /

But today all that sort of thing is getting lost. / *íya* /

We don’t know the people’s names any more. / *íya* /

So you just say that there was a father who had a child. / *íya* /

Ok, so there we were, and there was a man who had three daughters, / *íya* /

and he had three sons. / *íya* /

**SAKUÍMA:**

Who’s singing?

[Meaning: “Who’s going to cut into this tale with a tale fragment?” No one responds.]

**KASINDÓ:**

That’s like: “There was a woman who had a child.”

**A MAN:**

That makes six.

**ADUÊNGI:**

Correct. / *íya* /

Well, so there we were until the time came, and it came time for the old man to die. / *íya* /

So he called them, / *íya* /

got them together, and said, "Children..." (they replied) He said, "Well, I am going to die. /íya/

Well now, since I'm going to die... Well, I've called you here to ask you... /íya/

When I die, what do you plan to do for my funeral? /íya/

I want to know." /íya/

("yes" they said) The oldest one said, "Well..." The oldest boy /íya/

said, "Well Father..." /íya/

(he replied) He said, "Well, when you die..." /íya/

("yes" he said) He said, "There's only one thing that I'll be doing. /íya/

Nothing but crying. /íya/

I'll keep on crying, just wailing and wailing, until they bury you." /íya/

#### OTHERS:

[laughter]

#### ADUÊNGI:

("yes" he said) /íya/

The oldest daughter said, "Well, Father..." /íya/

(he replied) She said, "When you die now..." /íya/

She said, "The one thing I'm going to do is sing and dance, without stopping, /íya/

for your funeral." /íya/

The middle brother /íya/

said, "Well Father..." (he replied) He said, "When you die now..." ("yes" he said) "Well, I'll bury you with grave goods. /íya/

And I'll make your coffin /íya/

so it's really nice, and supply goods for your funeral, /íya/

just as many goods as you may need, /íya/

so that when you're dead, not a single person will come to your funeral /.../<sup>3</sup>  
without receiving at least a length of cloth from me." /íya/

#### SAKUÍMA:

He'll tie their bellies, *puaan*.

#### ADUÊNGI:

"That's how well I'll bury you." /íya/

The middle daughter said, "Well Father..." (he answered) She said, "When you are dead and still as can be here..." ("yes" he said) "I will help bury you. /íya/

I will help bury you with food. /íya/

<sup>3</sup> We indicate moments when a narrator pauses for a conventional response but the responder is silent by /.../.

Talk about food... Not a single person who comes here will leave hungry. / *íya* /  
 Every child... Every person, once they step ashore here, will have plenty to eat."  
 / *íya* /

He said, "Yes, Child, you're really helping to bury me." The very youngest daughter said, "Well, Father..." (he replied) She said, "When you die now..." ("yes" he said) "Every single man who slips into this village..." / *íya* /

**OTHERS** [who know what's coming next]:

[laughter]

**ADUÊNGI:**

("yes" he said) She said, "I'll be sure to screw him!"

**OTHERS:**

[exclamations and laughter]

**TÍANÊN:**

That person is really contributing well to the funeral!!

**KASINDÓ:**

She'll give it all she's got!

**TÍANÊN:**

Those people who helped out with goods didn't bury him all that well. But this one did it just right.

**OVERLAPPING VOICES:**

[wild laughter and animated discussion]

**KASINDÓ:**

That kind of contribution is really fine!

**ADUÊNGI:**

"Child..." (she answered) He said, "Yes, you're really helping to bury me well."  
 / *íya* /

The very youngest brother / *íya* /

said, "Well, Father..." (he replied) He said, "When you die now..." ("yes" he said)  
 "Well the thing known as Drum... / *íya* /

I keep hearing its name, / *íya* /

but, well, I don't know it firsthand. / *íya* /

But wherever Drum may be, / *íya* /

I'm going to go get it and bring it back to play at your funeral, play the *apínti* drum at the head of your coffin, even if it's not till the day they bury you, even if it's the seventh day of your funeral, I will absolutely play it at the head of your grave. / *íya* /

Because, well, the thing that's called *apínti*, I hear people saying that it's, well, that it's a really important thing in Bush Negro land. / *íya* /

So wherever *apínti* may be, I'll go find it and be SURE to play it at your head."  
 / *íya* /

("yes" he said) "That's the way that I'll help with your funeral." /*íya*/

"The very day that you die..." ("yes" he said) "I'll leave the preparations for your burial, /*íya*/

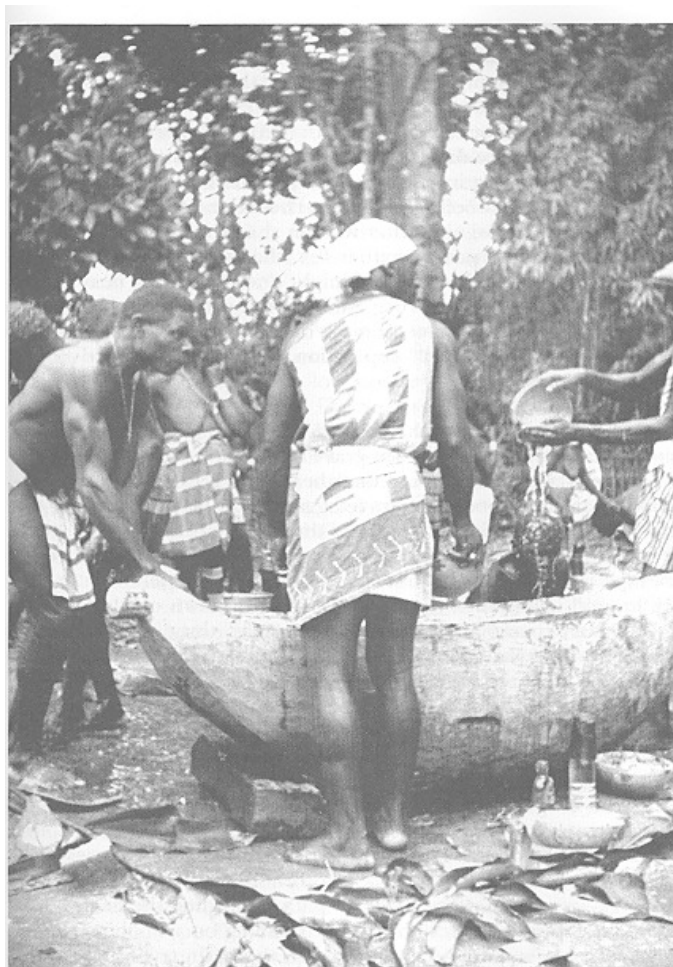
and I'll go off in search of the *apínti* until they're ready to bury you, and even if you've already been buried, I'll still play it at the head of your grave." /*íya*/

He said, "Yes, Son, you will really have contributed to my funeral, because, well, *apínti* is an important thing for us Bush Negroes." /*íya*/

Then three days went by and the old man died. /*íya*/

#### OTHERS:

[laughter and exclamations]



*Tioyé, Kasindó, and Aduêngi conducting a purificatory rite, 1968; in this photo, Agumiîi is being washed.*

#### ADUÊNGI:

The old man died,

SAKUÍMA [interrupting]:

Hadn't he been as good as dead already?

ADUÊNGI [simultaneous with Sakuíma's question]:



dead as could be. / *íya* /

And the person who said he would cry... / *íya* /

Well, he was crying so much that when you came there and tried to talk, nobody could hear what you were saying. / ... /

**OTHERS:**

[laughter]

**ADUÊNGI:**

And the person who said she would help by singing and dancing... / *íya* /

Well, she's playing and playing.

**OVERLAPPING VOICES:**

[indistinct comments]

**ADUÊNGI:**

She keeps singing until her throat gives out completely, and then she prepares an herbal mixture,

**A WOMAN** [interjecting helpfully]:

drinks it,

**ADUÊNGI** [without missing a beat]:

and is right back in there singing. / *íya* /

**AMÁKA** [speaking very deliberately, in contrast to Aduêngi's excited delivery]:

Well, Squirrel and Mouse were wrestling.

**ADUÊNGI:**

Right. How was it they were wrestling?

**AMÁKA:**

You know how they were wrestling?

**ADUÊNGI:**

No.

**AMÁKA** [singing]:



*Djeendjé ku Adumákaa, Djeendjé woli.*

*Djeendjé ku Adumákaa, Djeendjé woli.*

*Djeendjé ku Adumákaa, Djeendjé woli.*

[Roughly, “Squirrel versus Mouse, Squirrel tries to keep his balance.” *Adumákaa* (used in the song) and *Mafendjé* (used elsewhere in the tale fragment) are synonyms meaning Mouse; *woli* was explained to us as a defensive maneuver used in wrestling. For Saramakas, the point of the story is that smaller Mouse wins over bigger Squirrel.]

Mouse threw him in the air. Squirrel landed with a thud. Mouse pinned him.  
Squirrel grabbed Mouse. He threw him in the air. He landed right on his feet,  
*tjáálá! / .../*

**A YOUNG WOMAN** [laughing]:

Even though Squirrel’s so quick!

**SAKUÍMA:**

Mouse beat Squirrel.

**AMÁKA:**

Right. Go ahead with your story.

**ADUÊNGI:**

So that’s all. / *íya* /

The performing one is performing like nothing else. / *íya* /

The one who said she’d help by providing food... / *íya* /

Ohh, the day they came to wash the corpse there, every person in the village,  
every single one, ate so much they couldn’t take another bite. / *íya* /

**KASINDÓ:**

And while they were “playing” there, / **ADUÊNGI** [assuming the role of responder]: *íya* /

Father Anasi was his son-in-law. / *íya* /

It was his father-in-law who’d died there. / uh-huh /

He said, “Well, the most important thing to do to help at a father-in-law’s funeral, is to sing and dance,” so he went to perform at his father-in-law’s funeral.  
/ that’s right /

Well, he decided to make a private arrangement with someone who was off on the side there. / .../ Well, there was a certain bird there, and he decided to catch it and perform with it under his breechcloth. / *íya* /

Mm! The singing and dancing had been going on for quite a while there.

**A MAN:**

What kind of bird was it?

**KASINDÓ:**

Well, let’s just say it was a *pítawóyo* [a songbird].

**THE MAN:**

Mmm-hm.

**KASINDÓ:**

He just took it and slipped it discreetly into the inside of his breechcloth.

**SEVERAL WOMEN:**

[laughter]

**KASINDÓ:**

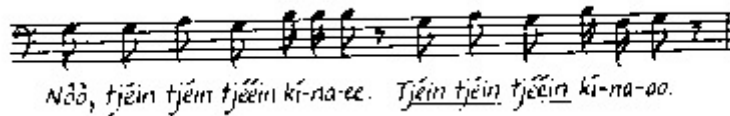
The singing and dancing went for a while, and then it got to be Anasi's turn to dance. /.../ So he leaped into the center. /.../ That's all, the little bird was right there inside his breechcloth:

**OTHERS:**

[laughter]

**KASINDÓ:**

.....



*Nôô, tjéin tjéin tjééin kína-ee.*

*Tjéin tjéin tjééin kína-oo.*

*Tjéin tjéin tjééin kína.*

*Tjéin tjéin tjééin kína-ee.*

*Tjéin tjéin tjééin kína-oo.*

*Tjéin tjéin tjééin.*

[While singing the bird's song (which is not translatable) Kasindó mimed Anasi's dance.]

Then people fell all over Anasi to congratulate him.

**WOMEN:**

[wild laughter, in the midst of which someone seems to have asked where the bird was]

**KASINDÓ:**

The bird? It'd already flown away.



*Kasindó, 1968*

**A MAN:**

And when he dances the next time, will the bird come back?

**KASINDÓ:**

Oh! What makes you think he could ever find it again?!

**OTHERS:**

[laughter]

**AGUMÍÍ:**

Hey, Bási! [Kasindó's nickname]

**KASINDÓ:**

What?

**AGUMÍÍ:**

Just when that, when that thing was singing inside Spider's breechcloth,  
/ **KASINDÓ** (as responder): *íya* /

well, the devil was right there, / mm-hm /

thinking about eating the child. / *íya* /

He came right up. / mm-hm /

He called out:



*Maanpáya-ee, Maanpáya-eee, m'Towêsinagooo.*

*Maanpáya-ee, maanpáya-eee, m'towêsinagooo.*

*M'zaukúnde-oo, gwôyòtòò. M'zaukúnde-oo, gwôyòtòò.*

*Madjaáfo m'péneni-ee.*

*Mi dânsi-oo m'péneni-ee.*

[The first two lines are what the boy sings (or plays on a horn) to taunt the devil, calling out his name, Maanpáya, as well as his insulting name, Towêsinagooo. The last three lines are not in normal Saramaccan—they seem to be partly Papá, partly Komantí—and we have not been able to translate them.]

He called out, “Zángana m'kolóbi, zángana m'koló. Now I can claim my victory, Kid.” He took his foot and stamped out the fire. / .../ Go right ahead.



*Agumiñi and her husband Dooté, 1968*

**OTHERS:**

[hooting, noise]

**ADUÊNGI:**

So that's all.

**KASINDÓ:**

You see?

**ADUÊNGI** [excitedly—a tone that continues into the tale itself]:

Yes, it's the women—I told you, they're the ones who know these things!

/ **ADUÊNGI'S RESPONDER:** *íya* /

So, nothing much. At that point, the one... the one in charge of the goods... / *íya* /  
well, all the people who came for the washing of the corpse...

**SAKUÍMA** [anticipating]:

He tied a cloth onto every belly.

**ADUÊNGI:**

He tied a cloth onto every one. / *íya* /

And he provided a hundred cloth sheets and a hundred hammocks. / *íya* /

The smaller cloths he gave were too numerous to count. / *íya* /

He made the coffin with... with cedarwood and brownheart mixed with canela,  
more beautiful than you can imagine. / *íya* /

**A WOMAN:**

And inserted some purpleheart too.

**ADUÊNGI:**

Right. [pausing a moment while others finish talking in the background] Ok! And  
at the same time, the person who said she would be screwing... / *íya* /

Well, her house was jam-packed. / *íya* /

All the men who came there were given a little pussy to enjoy (please excuse me,  
folks, but this is tale-telling that we're doing here).

**MANY VOICES:**

[laughter, comments]

**ADUÊNGI:**

A whorehouse if ever there was one! / .../ So that's all. / *íya* /

Now the one... the one who said he'd... that he'd go off to find Drum... / *íya* /

Well, once they'd washed the corpse, he was already out of sight. / *íya* /

He'd already gone. / *íya* /

So they were going ahead with the funeral. / *íya* /

They're going ahead with the funeral, on and on, and he was gone. / *íya* /

He went along for a while and then he took a parrot... [correcting himself] three  
parrot feathers, / *íya* /

three cowry shells, /*íya*/

and three balls of kaolin. /*íya*/

And he set out with them. /*íya*/

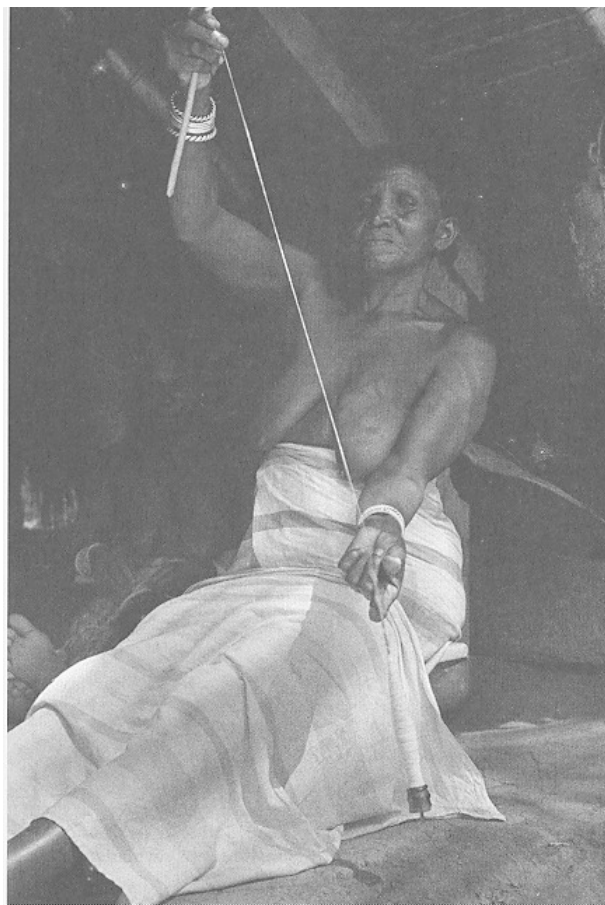
Then he went along until he came to a river. /*íya*/

Now when he got to the river, he sees an endless expanse of water, and there's no way for him to get across.

**TÍANÊN** [breaking in]:

You know when he saw the endless expanse there? / **ADUÊNGI** : *íya*/

Well, he met up with Monkey. /that's right/



*Tíanên, spinning cotton, 1968*

And Monkey called out, /true/

and said, "Well, we see people here who are good to eat, /that's right/

but we're not going to eat them." /certainly not/

He sang:



*Kizáán mi na kasúle záán-oo.*

*Kizáán mi na kasúle záán-oo.*

*Kizáán kó lúku a máwè.*

*Kizáán kizáán-ee.*

[The transcription of this song is somewhat problematic. The Saramakas we discussed this tale fragment with in 1986 and 1987 could not elucidate.]

Go right ahead.

**ADUÊNGI:**

Eh! My turtle foot is really short!<sup>4</sup>

**A WOMAN:**

Yes, it's short!

**ADUÊNGI:**

Well, so that's all. / **ADUÊNGI'S RESPONDER:** *íya* /

As he was gazing out at the void, he turned and looked. / *íya* /

He noticed something surfacing out there in the middle of the water. It came swimming, *dalala*, toward him and arrived at the sho... at the... at the mouth of the path, and it set its head out right there, and he saw that it was an enormous cayman. / *íya* /

It was as big as this house here. / *íya* /

The boy... the boy walks over till he comes right up to it. / ... / He went: "My Boat Saayé, greetings." (it answered "greetings, Boy") / *íya* / It said, "Boy, where are you going?" He said, "My Boat Saayé, take me across." / *íya* /

It said, "Where are you going?" He said, "I'm going to where the devils live to look for Drum." / *íya* /

It said, "Boy, you'll never get there." / *íya* /

He said, "Father, I can get there. / *íya* /

Take me across." / *íya* /

It said, "Yes, well, Boy..." (he replied) It said, "If I take you across, you must pay me." / *íya* /

<sup>4</sup> Aduêngi here compliments Tíanên's song by deprecating his own skills; compared with her, he sings as awkwardly as a turtle trying to dance on its stubby legs.



He said, "What will I pay you?" / *íya* /

It said, "Whatever you happen to have. / *íya* /

No matter how shoddy it may be... But you must pay me something. / *íya* /

I mean, you've got to give me some kind of a payment." / *íya* /

("yes" he said) He took one ball of kaolin, one parrot feather, and one cowry shell,  
/ *íya* /

and he gave them to it. / *íya* /

**SAKUÍMA:**

Uh oh! So it would ferry him over to the village.

**ADUÊNGI** [interrupting the end of Sakuíma's remark]:

So that's all. The boy climbed right onto the middle of the cayman's head, *gwébòò*,  
and said, "My Boat Saayé, cross me over." / *íya* /

It cut right through the water, *zalalalalalalalala*, and up onto the shore on the other  
side.

**TÍANÊN** [breaking in]:

At the very time it was cutting through the water, / **ADUÊNGI:** *íya* /

I was standing right there.

**ADUÊNGI:**

What did you see?

**TÍANÊN:**

It sang:



*Afúnguyani-ee, afúnguyani-ee, afúnguyani afuumá-ee.*

*Afúnguyani-ee, afúnguyani-ee, afúnguyani afuumá.*

*Éé-afuumá, ma di ya yéi-oo anáki kítoonya,*

*Toonya kii wanapú-éé, kíyoonya-éé.*

[The Saramakas who listened to our recording of this tale fragment were unable to elucidate at all, though Tíanên seems to be contributing a song sung by Cayman to Aduêngi's tale.]

It set him down at the landing, *zalala*. Go right on.

**ADUÊNGI:**

Oh! This thing is getting really sweet!

**A MAN:**

It's as sweet as...

**ADUÊNGI:**

Ok! / **ADUÊNGI'S RESPONDER:** *íya* /

It carried him, *zalala*, right up onto the bank, *gbabáu*. / ... / He said, "My Boat Saayé..." (it replied) He said, "The very day I get back, when I return back to this place, you've got to be here." / *íya* /

It said, "Child, don't panic, 'cause I've already taken your payment, so don't even bother to worry about it." / *íya* /

**A WOMAN:**

"I'll be there."

**ADUÊNGI:**

He went on. / ... /

**A MAN** [anticipating]:

Because he'll be running when he comes back to the river!

**ADUÊNGI:**

Yes.

**OTHERS:**

[laughter]

**ADUÊNGI:**

He kept on going for a long time.

**OTHER VOICES:**

[more remarks on how fast he'll be running]

**ADUÊNGI:**

Really. He went on until he got to a really enormous river. / *íya* /

Another cayman was there, just waiting. [Aduêngi pauses and then rattles off the rest of this segment in one breath.] He said, "My Boat Saayé, greetings," and it answered, "Greetings, Boy, where are you going?" and he said, "I'm going to

where the devils live to look for Drum," and it said, "Boy, You'll never get there." / *íya* /

He said, "My Boat Saayé, take me across," and it said, "If I take you across, you'll have to pay me." / *íya* /

He said, "What will I pay you?" and it said, "You'll pay me whatever you happen to have, that's what you'll give me, even if it's something very shoddy, you'll still give it to me."

**SAKUÍMA:**

Aren't the others busy with the funeral by now?

**ADUÊNGI:**

Back at the funeral there things are really heating up. / ... / All those things that we mentioned before, they're all in full swing.

**SAKUÍMA:**

Mm-hm.

**ADUÊNGI:**

All those things...

**SAKUÍMA** [interrupting]:

All the different ones...

**ADUÊNGI:**

But you know about all that.

**SAKUÍMA:**

Sure do!

**ADUÊNGI:**

All of them are back there, doing things.

**SAKUÍMA** [interrupting]:

Right! There's really a lot to do!<sup>5</sup>

**ADUÊNGI:**

[a phrase drowned out by Sakuíma's comment, and then:] That's all. / *íya* /

It took him across, *zaa*, and set him down, *gbagbaa*. / ... / He said, "My Boat Saayé..." (it replied) He said, "You've accepted a payment from me." / *íya* /

("yes" it said) "So the very day I get back here you must be ready to take me across, there can't be anything so important that it prevents you from taking me across" and it said, "Boy, don't panic." / *íya* /

He went on. / ... / He continued on and on until he got to a really enormous sea / *íya* /

that stretched as far as the eye could see. / *íya* /

<sup>5</sup> Note that this time Aduêngi does not mention what the payment was, perhaps because Sakuíma distracted him with her question about the funeral.

He looked out and saw the same thing again. It came up, *gbagbuu*. He greeted it. (it answered) It said, "Where are you going?" He said, "I'm going to where the devils live." It said, "Well, Boy..." (he replied) It said, "When you go to the devils' village..." ("yes" he said) "You'll arrive there and you'll see an enormous open-sided shed. / *íya* /

And the thing known as Drum... / *íya* /

Well, that whole place is crammed with them! / *íya* /

You'll see long-drums. / *íya* /

You'll see *mamá*-drums, you'll see *apíntis*, you'll see *agidás*, you'll see every kind of drum there is. / *íya* /

[in rapid, run-on speech] Now some will be calling, "Don't touch me! Don't touch me! Don't touch me!" And other ones will be calling, "Come grab me! Come grab me!" The one over here: "Come take me! Come take me!" The one over there: "Don't take me!" [drawing a quick breath] Now the one that's calling out, "Don't touch me!" ...that's the one you must be sure to take. / *íya* /

But the ones that are calling out, telling you to take them...if you take them, Boy, there'll be nothing I can do for you. / ... / But the one who's saying you mustn't take it, that you mustn't even touch it...that's the one you must be sure to take."

#### OVERLAPPING VOICES:

[laughter and comments]

#### ADUÊNGI:

"Ok," he said, "No problem." / ... / He said, "Well, no problem." He took the parrot feather and the cowry shell, / ... / and he put them on the cayman's head, gave them to it. / *íya* /

It carried him right across, *zalalalala*, and set him down.

#### SAKUÍMA:

The things he had were all used up.

#### ADUÊNGI:

Ohh! There was nothing at all left in his hands. [very rapidly] He said, "Well, my Boat Saayé..." (it replied) He said, "I've paid you, and you've accepted my payment." ("yes" it said) "When I come back, you've got to be here." It said, "Don't even bother to worry, Boy." / *íya* /

(he said ok) That boy there... Then the boy went up... He went up the hill to the top, and he got to *Bongóótu-písi*, *djaláa*.<sup>6</sup>

#### SAKUÍMA:

Right! He must have looked up and seen the open-sided shed up there.

ADUÊNGI [continuing over Sakuíma's last several words and still rushing his speech]:

<sup>6</sup> *Bongóótu-písi* is the part of the village of Dángogó on a hill, where we were all sitting at that very moment telling/listening to tales, in a large open-sided shed. (Bongóótu was the founder of Dángogó, ca. 1870.)

Right. And then he got there. And when he got there, he saw the drums all over the place. Some of them are calling out, "Come grab me! Come take me! Come take me!" Others are calling, "Don't take me! Don't take me! Don't..." Others are saying, "Come take me! Come take me! Come..." Ohhh! They're all talking at once in that place.

**SAKUÍMA:**

In that village, you couldn't tell what was what.

**ADUÊNGI:**

Not at all. The boy got there. He came up till he was very close, and he stood there completely still. They're calling out to him. They're calling out to him to tell him what to do. /.../ He goes up and one of them calls out, "Don't take me!" and when he reaches out to touch it, its shouting is so fierce that the boy gets scared. /.../ He said [reflectively]: "But my Boat Saayé told me that that's the one I should be sure to take, and I'm going to take it." So he went over, took it and untied it. Then the ones that had been saying "Come take me"... Well, scorpions! stinging ants! venomous lizards! poisonous snakes! and every imaginable dangerous thing was crawling all over them.

**KASINDÓ** [volunteering helpfully]:

And wasps.

**ADUÊNGI:**

Right. /.../ So that's all. He went and took the *apínti*, untied it, and set it on the ground. /.../ [in the voice of the boy, marveling at what he's found]: "Ah! The thing they call a..."

**TÍANÊN:**

And where were the people who lived in that village?

**ADUÊNGI:**

The people who lived in that village... Not a single one was there. They'd gone off. Because they used to go off and do blacksmiths' work for Great God until evening and then they'd come back. And then they'd play the drums. /.../ So, that's all. The boy untied the drum and set it down there. He took a stool and sat down. /.../ He looked at the drum there, he turned it all around to look at it, and said, "Yes, this thing is certainly beautiful!" Then he played it: "*tim! tim! tim!*" He heard:



*Kaadím, kaadím, mitóoliaa.*

*Kaadím, kaadím, mitóoliaa.*

*Sibámalé, sibámalé.*

*Kaadím, kaadím, mitóoliaa.*

The devils were out there and they said, "Help! We're dead! Someone has come to our village. Whoever's there, you've had it!"

**OTHERS:**

[exclamations]

**ADUÊNGI:**

The boy picked up the drum and ran. He ran till he was almost at the river, and then he set it down again.

**SAKUÍMA:**

That boy's really baaad!

**ADUÊNGI:**

He said, "This thing is just too sweet to resist. I'm going to play it just a little more." / .../ He played: "*tim, tim.*"

*Kaadím, kaadím, mitóoliaa.*

*Kaadím, kaadím, mitóoliaa.*

*Sibámalé, sibámalé.*

*Kaadím, kaadím, mitóoliaa.*

Oh! The devils were charging through the trees, falling all over themselves. / .../ Then when the boy got there, he said, "My Boat Saayé, here I am." It said, "Boy, I'm all ready." Nothing to it.

**SAKUÍMA:**

Ahh. He knows that once he gets across, he'll be ok.

**ADUÊNGI:**

So he said, "Well, Boy, since you're here, play a little for me to hear, because I keep hearing about Drum, and I'd like to hear what it sounds like too."

**SAKUÍMA:**

My god! This is getting to be too much for me!

**OTHERS:**

[laughter]

**ADUÊNGI:**

He said, "My Boat Saayé, take me across." It said, "No no, play the drum for me."

**OTHERS:**

[clucks of concern]

**ADUÊNGI:**

No problem, So he played for it. It really sang and then it stopped. The cayman said, "Ok, Boy, climb on." Now by that time, the devils weren't any farther than that landing just over there. / .../ Ohhh! The wind was coming up! It slipped into the water. / *íya* /

**A MAN:**

Hey! What's happened to the responses?!

**THE RESPONDER** [emphatically]:

ÍYA!

**OTHERS:**

[laughter]

**AGUMIÍ:**

He'd really gone to sleep!

**OVERLAPPING VOICES:**

[more comments]

**ADUÊNGI:**

It had set out into the water till it was right out in the middle, and there it was, bobbing gently in the water. / *íya* /

**KASINDÓ:**

Was it waiting for the devils?

**ADUÊNGI:**

Ohh! They all swarmed up. / *íya* /

They called out, "My Boat Saayé, sink!!" The boy said, "My Boat Saayé, don't sink, 'cause you've accepted a payment from me! Who can tell you to sink?!" The devils said, "Sink!" / *íya* /

One of them pulled out a tooth and flung it through the air. / *íya* /

It dried up all the water. My Boat Saayé said, "No, no, you can't stop me." / *íya* /

**OTHERS:**

[laughter and comments]

**ASABÔSI:**

That's the tooth known as "*Azángana mi kolóbi*"!

**ADUÊNGI:**

What did you call it?

**AGUMIÍ:**

The tooth he's pulling out is *Azángana mi kolóbi*, *azángana mi koló*.

[The exchange between Agumií and Asabôsi goes on simultaneously with that part of Kódji's tale fragment that precedes his song.]

**KÓDJI:**

Well, at the moment when it was saying "No, no," / **ADUÊNGI:** *íya* /  
well, I was there.

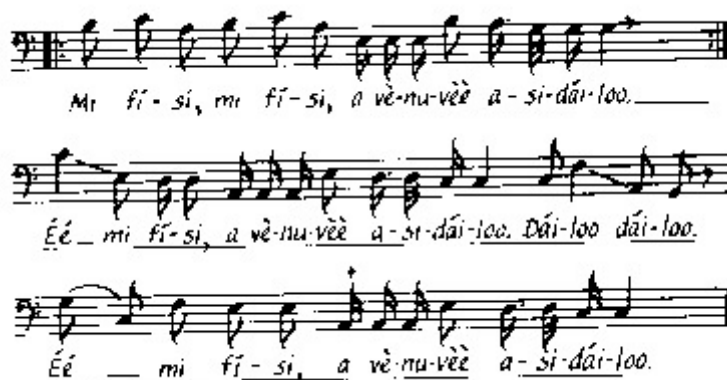
**SOMEONE:**

What did you see?

**KÓDJI:**

At that moment a woman had gone off with her child to do some fishdrugging,  
and she had caught herself a fish. /íya/

So there they were, and the fish pulled the boat and it dragged them down to the  
bottom. /íya/



*Mi físi, mi físi, a vènuvèè asidáíloo.*

*mi físi, mi físi, a vènuvèè asidáíloo.*

*Éé mi físi, a vènuvèè asidáíloo.*

*Dáíloo dáíloo.*

*Éé mi físi, a vènuvèè asidáíloo.*

[This is the song of the woman calling out to the fish, “My fish, my fish,” but we have no further explication.]

Go on with your story.

**SAKUÍMA:**

Your leg is as short as a turtle’s!

**ADUÊNGI:**

Ok. / **ADUÊNGI’S RESPONDER:** *íya* /

That’s all. Well, My Boat Saayé is taking the boy over to the other shore, *badaa*.

The devils are there on the bank, and they just don’t know what to do, and they’re doing all kinds of things, but all in vain. Breaking up their houses, burning the whole place down. /*íya*/

There’s nothing left there.

**KÓDJI:**

Couldn’t they jump in the water?

**ANOTHER MAN:**

That wouldn’t help.

**THIRD MAN:**

They’re stuck there.



**ADUÊNGI:**

Well, as this was happening, my Boat Saayé really wanted to sink! / *íya* /

Well, whatever the devils would tell it to do... Since they lived together there...

Whatever they would tell it to do, it would do. / *íya* /

But it had accepted a payment from the boy.

**TÍANÊN:**

It had accepted his payment because they had made an agreement.

**ADUÊNGI:**

Yeah. He says to it, "My Boat Saayé, you accepted my payment, so you can't sink." / *íya* /

**OTHERS:**

[laughter]

**ADUÊNGI:**

Ohh! Nothing to it, so the cayman came up on the other shore, and it said, "Boy, play for me." He played for it:

*Kaadím, kaadím, mitóoliaa.*

*Kaadím, kaadím, mitóoliaa.*

*Sibámalé, sibámalé.*

*Kaadím, kaadím, mitóoliaa.*

It said, "Yes, Boy, it's sweet. Go along." / *íya* /

Ohh! He went along till he got right up to another one. / *íya* /

He said, "My Boat Saayé, here I am," and it said, "Yes, well, play for me." He played for it, / *íya* /

and when he was done he went on. / *íya* /

It carried him smoothly and set him down on the shore. / *íya* /

**AGUMIÍ:**

Well, he said he was going to play the drum at the head of the grave. And he's on his way to play that drum.

**TÍANÊN:**

The head-of-the-coffin thing is what he'd gone looking for.

[Agumií and Tíanên's remarks here overlap with Aduêngi's next few phrases.]

**ADUÊNGI:**

Finally he got to the other one. He played for it, till he was done and he went on. / *íya* /

He continued along. He kept on going and going until...the very moment when they were taking the coffin outside, / .../ performing the ritual separations, sprinkling the kaolin for the separations. So that's all. The boy arrived. / .../ He said, "Everyone, I'm back." They said, "Ok, well, we're just going off for the burial." / *íya* /

He said, "Yes, well, let's do what we have to do. But listen to me." /íya/

He pulled the drum over and set it right at the head of the coffin, and then he played it. /íya/

*Kaadím, kaadím, mitóóliaa.*

*Kaadím, kaadím, mitóóliaa.*

*Sibámalé, sibámalé.*

*Kaadím, kaadím, mitóóliaa.*

They lifted the coffin up onto the bearers' heads. And so you see that the *apínti* came to stay, and every kind of drum in the world, 'cause the drum that the boy went to get, well, it became the drum for the whole world. /yes/

As a result, *apínti* for us Bush Negroes... If you play it, people hear the *apínti*, and you say, "Yes, such and such a thing is what it's saying." It was taken from the land of the devils, and if it hadn't been, we never would have had drums.

#### SAKUÍMA:

Right, let's all give thanks to the boy!

#### ADUÊNGI:

That's as far as my story goes.




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*Saramaka apínti drum.  
Sammlung Herskovits 1930, Hamburgisches  
Museum für Völkerkunde.*