

The Maroons of Jamaica

The Good, the Bad, and the Forgotten:

A Journey through their History and their Ethnic Identity Formation

“The Maroons, by their daily struggle for freedom, forged for themselves an identity according to which they judge themselves. If that struggle and identity are not understood then any judgment of them is not valid.”

~Inscription in the Charles Town Maroon museum

Brittany Lynk

Anthropology Senior Seminar

Professor Arjun Guneratne

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Introduction

Who are the Maroons?

Dear Cudjoe: I am on my way to Jamaica for the first time and I've been reading in my Jamaica guide that there is something called a Maroon Festival on January 6, which happens to be your birthday. I usually like festivals and I think I might want to go, but I don't have anything maroon to wear. My initial thought was since I'm a tourist I would still be okay if I wore another color, but being that it says "Maroon" in the name of the festival, I don't want to risk it. What do you suggest?

—Blue about Maroon Festival in Bethany, Minnesota

Cudjoe says: Maroon doesn't refer to the color. Maroons today are descendants of the freedom fighters during times of slavery on the island, from the early 1500s to the mid 1800s. There was little formation of Maroon communities in Jamaica until 1655, when the British took control of the island. Prior to the Brits, Spaniards ruled the island, after Christopher Columbus claimed it. During those early years, there are a few accounts of the Arawak Indians, the original inhabitants of the island, forming "Maroon" communities in the mountains to escape the mass genocide of their people. However, the term "Maroon," as it is used to describe the "fugitive slaves from plantations in the New World," did not begin to be used in Jamaica until around 1670 (Campbell 1988:1). The word is thought to have originally come from the Spanish word *cimarrón*, generally meaning "wild" in reference to an animal. It is now primarily used to describe people like my ancestors, my descendants, and me—Afro-American/Caribbean runaway slaves/fugitives/"wild negroes."

Interestingly enough, Maroon communities sprouted up all over the Caribbean and even some places in the United States. A number of the original Maroon communities still exist today, which includes four in Jamaica: Accompong, Charles Town, Moore Town, and Scotts Hall. Accompong is the only community remaining of the Leeward Maroons on the western side of the island. It is where the festival will be held.

So, there is no need to wear maroon to the festival. Go in some comfortable shorts and take in the beauty of the experience. And, yes, it is my birthday. I'll be something like 320 this year!

Jamaican Maroons, in the beginning, were not Maroons as we know them today. They were just *individuals* trying to escape the future of slavery waiting for them in Jamaica. Their response was to get as far away from the colonial pawns and slave owners as possible, and so escaped into the mountains and the cockpits on the island to resist enslavement. The cockpits are located on the western side of the island and are described as uncharted, impenetrable, and rugged hills, which some early Maroons chose to make their home. The eastern side of the island is where the mountains are located. These early runaways formed groups, and combined their efforts to fight against their oppressors, which were first the Spanish and later the British. Under the Spanish, there was a much lower rate of escaping, as there were not many slaves and conditions between slave and master were more equal. When the British came to dominate, everything changed, with unprecedented numbers of runaways, joining or creating Maroon groups.

It is unknown whether Maroons had a name to describe themselves before they were given the title of "Maroons." After 1670, 15 years following British domination, an identity began forming around the new title as well as the informal adoption of social rules, regulations, and ways of being a Maroon—culture formation was in progress. With time, Maroons came to see themselves as an ethnic group. Since then, many events have occurred in both Maroon and Jamaican history that have had an effect on Maroons and their identity.

As an outsider, I do not wish to challenge the beliefs Maroons hold about themselves and the identities they believe to define them. It is in those invalid judgments where they feel most misunderstood, as expressed in the opening quote. However, I do hope to take what I was told by my informants to better understand the position they take, especially surrounding their ethnic identity. "Identity is perhaps one of the most highly-contested and theoretically-complex concepts to understand when seeking to fuse the conceptual with the lived experiences of people. Identity cannot be described, explained, or categorized," (2005:65) writes David Gilbert. Yet, an attempt shall be made.

The paper will focus on the journey of the Maroons of Jamaica—how they have come to understand and navigate their ethnicity, and why they still claim a separate identity in the context of also being Jamaican. It will also point to some reasons Maroon culture is deteriorating after more than 350 years of existence, and will discuss the current initiatives being taken in various Maroon communities to restore a sense of Maroon identity and pride in a unique history. The Maroons have gone through a number of events that have formed how they see themselves. They have also responded to events that occur in their history in ways causing outsiders to both praise and vilify them, sometimes simultaneously. This paper will also incorporate outsiders' perceptions of the Maroons through their historical journey and their ethnic identity formation.

Literature Review

A Look at Ethnicity

In Jamaica, ethnicity is somewhat of a neglected concept in the minds of the people. There is not a real sense of having ethnic roots. Instead other ways to identify or be identified, such as class and skin color, have taken on great importance. Scholarship around the class and skin color value system that plays out in Jamaica is extensive, while the deeper issue of ethnicity and ethnic affiliation takes back stage. Instead of identifying by an ethnic group, people identify with the nation as Jamaican, whose motto is, “Out of Many, One People.”

This does not dismiss a discussion on ethnicity, however, especially in the case of the Maroons. The Maroons see themselves as having a distinct ethnic identity from the many Jamaicans who all claim to be one people. Ethnicity has been a word that social anthropologists have been using more and more since the 1950s, and slowly has made its way into other disciplines as well as the broader society. Frederick Barth was one of the first to use and re-define an ethnic group. He refuted the long-held anthropological reasoning that people have an “essential” culture built in to their biological make-up. He instead took a stance of ethnic groups as culture-bearing units to which people ascribe, reflecting “external circumstances to which actors must accommodate themselves” (Barth 1969:12). He holds to the view that ethnic groups are a form of social organization.

Barth's ideas led to a major shift in how ethnicity and ethnic groups were understood. He popularized the idea of ethnicity as a product of social circumstances and construction, going against the idea of ethnicity as primordial. Both arguments are still in existence today and play

an interesting role in the case of the Maroons. Ethnicity as primordial essentializes a person's ethnicity as unchanging, natural, and biologically determined; "defined by the metaphor of blood" (Guneratne 2002:14). Social construction recognizes the flexibility of ethnicity in giving credit to historical events and other forces at play in shaping and forming a people. Barbara Kopytoff, one of the major voices in Maroon scholarship, has been the only scholar to directly attempt to explain Maroon ethnicity. She takes a social constructionist view, saying, "ethnic identity should be seen here [in the case of the Maroons] as a linking principle rather than a fixed attribute" (1976:35). Culture and identity are always changing, in accordance with her statement, but following the signing of the treaty of 1738-39, Maroon ethnic identity became more fixed. Supporting Kopytoff and how the Maroons understand themselves, Arjun Guneratne argues in his book, *Many Tongues, One People*, that "ethnicity is contingent upon historical circumstances in which it develops, and it is therefore not primordial and enduring, but rather always changing (2002:3).

One of my informants explained to me that by the time the peace treaty was signed with the British in 1739, a new Maroon ethnicity had been created. This ethnicity has been passed down in blood, and even determines in which cemetery one can be buried in the Maroon towns. (Lumsden 2005). Trying to understand how Maroons see their sense of identity could easily result in confusion, for they understand their ethnicity to be passed down through the blood, while at the same time it is unquestionably a constructed ethnicity. A consequence of holding the former view of primordialism is that with each generation, the ethnic ties become fractioned and closer to dying out. The problem with holding the latter view of social constructionism is that it is seen to carry less validity in a legal sense, making it harder to make a claim for continued longevity of the group. This is particularly poignant for Maroons who live on communal land and still reap benefits of the peace treaty that gained them independence in 1739, exempting them from paying taxes among other things. So, in order to navigate a position of sustaining a presence, Maroon understanding of their ethnicity has pulled from both opposing ideas around the issue.

Class and Skin Tone Valuation

Discussions, books, articles, and quotes about the correlation and relationship between class, or socioeconomic status, and skin tone and its resultant hierarchy are far too numerous to

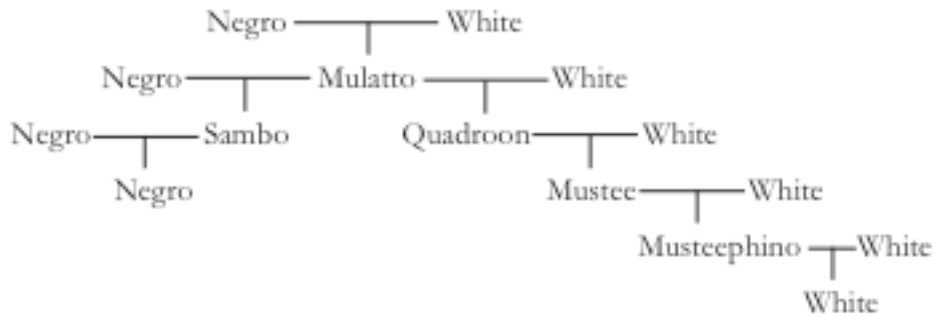
mention. Throughout Jamaica's history, a greater value has been placed on people with lighter skin and more "white" features, which is a common theme across the globe. However, in Jamaica, this class-color distinction has played a much more prominent role in assigning people value, which stemmed directly from the way the system of slavery was established and implemented on the island. A number of authors contribute to this discussion, notably Rex Nettleford (1965, 1972, 1979), Abigail Bakan (1990), and Raymond Smith (1988), among others.

Nettleford is the most well-known Jamaican author to tackle the issue of Jamaican identity in books such as *Caribbean Cultural Identity* and *Identity, Race and Protest in Jamaica*. Taking its history into account, he looks at how "race" still plays a role, saying, "In Jamaica the blacks are not regarded as the desirable symbol for national identity. The fact is that we are still enslaved in the social structure born of the plantation system in which things African, including African traits, are devalued and primacy is given to European values" (Nettleford 1973:54). In the quest for creating national unity, "a high sense of self-interest and survival" take over and each group creates for themselves an adaptation that works (Nettleford 1979:1). He comments on the "multi-racialism" of Jamaica, as seen by the outside, and the idealization of people of mixed heritages. With this idealization, being black, again, takes back stage (Nettleford 1973:42-43). Additionally, Nettleford discusses at length how the people of Jamaica have rejected the idea of having a "race" problem, preferentially labeling it a class problem, which ironically correlates to phenotypical characteristics of people, in which the lighter the skin, the higher the class. "People are not Black solely on the grounds of their color. Such terms as 'black' and 'white' still carry values of one sort or another tying the concept of race to a compound of variable ranging from place of origin and levels of cultural achievement to the ...level of economic wealth and educational attainment" (Nettleford 1972:14).

Racism in Jamaica is a problem, though, even if masked by class. This problem contributes greatly to the class-color value system in play. Bakan lays out racism as "the ideologically constructed view that the white race is physically, morally, intellectually, and culturally superior to the black race...[which] further justifies and reinforces relations of class domination or exploitation" (Bakan 1990:6). She also notes that the combination of racism and class-value are so tightly woven together in Jamaican society that they can only be understood next to the other. "From the time of the institution of slavery, the ideology of racism was

encouraged and legitimized by the colonial powers and those who supported colonial rule. The physical characteristics of the black African were ‘held to be the first and the lasting badge of his inferiority’” (Bakan 1990:6).

As integration of the “races” occurred on the plantations and the island, an in-depth system was formed to label those of mixed descent with terms such as mulatto, sambo, quadroon, mustee, and musteephino, as shown below (reproduced from Smith 1988:84).



With each different level of classification came different rights and responsibilities, both during colonial times and today. Just as the closer to “white” one became, the more valued they became, the closer to “negro” one became, the further they found themselves from the big house, resources, respect, and value. As quoted by Norris, “In Jamaica’s version of racism, black and white are not so much skin colours as attitudes” (1962:64). It is clear that the system of labeling people by color was highly developed and instilled in the population, still manifesting itself today by favoring people closer to the bottom right of the definition chart. Each label mentioned above carries a role to follow, which adds a socio-cultural element to the equation of analysis, complicating how Jamaican society has been formed, and how it responds and reacts today, favoring Eurocentrism in a number of facets.

Looking at the Maroons, there was not much white infusion, or even a strong influence of Eurocentric values, for that matter, in the formative years of the group. The group was composed primarily of what would be considered “negroes,” “mulattos,” and “sambos,” with the occasional “quadroon.” Using any combination of mixing over time will create a group of “negroes.” Apart from becoming homogeneous in some ways, the Maroons have largely been able to avoid the social distinctions established to rule Jamaican society in major and minor ways, and have instead embraced their African connections, building up a morale that places themselves on the same value plane as any group of white people. These matters of Maroon Afro-centricity will be discussed in greater depth in the paper.

Theoretical Approach and Methodology

My theoretical approach to the topic is historical, following the journey of Maroon identity formation, as well as providing substantial historical background on the Maroons and their war history, which is a fundamental element in the creation of their identity. This paper stems from an earlier research project with a significant field work component. Out of that project, a newspaper was created titled, “The Maroon Observer,” with sections such as Current News, Historical Review, Obituaries, Editorials, and a Spotlight. It was heavily library researched, with ethnographic interviews taking place over the period of January 6-16, 2005, in Jamaica with a handful of people, notably the Colonel of Charles Town, Frank Lumsden; a professor of History well versed in Maroon history, Dr. Joy Lumsden; and a number of Jamaicans from all walks of life. Had more time and more contact involving formal interviews been available, a clearer, more comprehensive understanding would be presented.

I have been very interested in the Maroons since I first heard about them in 2004, which inspired me to venture into their world and attempt to understand the culture, the historical understanding, and the positioning of the Maroons from an insider’s perspective. As much as I was intrigued and interested in Maroons before meeting any, I was taken aback by how much more satisfaction was generated after meeting them. It is from this journey that I recognize the bias present in my work. With the objective opinion on the Maroons offered by Joy Lumsden, I was given a better understanding of how outsiders can understand and present a history that is not, by right, their own.

To Claim Maroon Identity or Not to Claim: That is the Question

Today, identifying as Maroon is seen as a more fluid understanding of common heritage and common experience as descendants of freedom fighters who caused the British to surrender. In 1738-39 the British offered peace treaties to the various Maroon communities, some say proclaiming defeat after incurring so many losses on account of the Maroons. These treaties gave the Maroons independence, while keeping all other black people on the island enslaved, as well as pulling the Maroons into the act of capturing newly escaped slaves. It would be nearly 70 years before the British abolished slavery in 1807 and almost 160 years *more* until Jamaica was granted its independence. The Maroons had, indeed, achieved something noteworthy.

Yet, the Maroons of Jamaica find themselves in a number of contradictory positions. They are both Jamaican and Maroon. They are both the island's original freedom fighters as well as being seen as traitors by some for being the oppressor's pawns. They are Afrocentric in a largely Eurocentric country. The elders are knowledgeable about their past, but with the passing of time, the younger generation is obtaining less and less critical cultural knowledge. The Maroons are in a critical time in their history—they must revive their spirit or else risk fading away after only 350 years of existence, detaching from the considerable energy and bloodshed invested into their social creation. In attempting to revive the spirit, many questions come up around identity, ethnicity, ties to Africa, and what it means to be a Maroon.

Building Blocks for Ethnic Affiliation: Bulhan's Model

Ethnic identity, I will argue, was created through and between the three major forms of identity development identified by H. A. Bulhan, with some modifications. The three stages that individuals and groups can find themselves in are capitulation, revitalization, or radicalization—read: damage, pride, or synthesis.

The first stage of “capitulation” involves becoming alienated from oneself and being assimilated into the dominant culture with a particular denunciation of one's own culture, otherwise known as the “mark of oppression” (Foster 2004:137). Here is where the modification comes: The Maroons never had to capitulate to the British because they removed themselves from the dominant culture and created their own. However, damage of other sorts was done—from capture to the middle passage and in some cases a period of time spent enslaved.

The second stage of “revitalization,” in which people give new life and energy to reconnecting to their identity is a stage Maroons are moving in and out of continually.

The third and last stage Bulhan mentions is that of “radicalization,” or the synthesis of a group of people with “unambiguous commitment to radical change” (Foster 2004:137). Especially in the years of colonial domination, Maroons were completely committed to radical change, and were quite effective in creating that change. These three stages contributing to identity development can be experienced by groups of people or individuals, but will play out differently depending on group dynamics and goals. As stages, they can occur in individuals or in generations of people, or even both (Hook 2004:587).

Radicalization among the Maroons was going on for quite a lengthy period of time. The First Maroon War is generally thought of as occurring between 1720 and 1739, with a peace treaty bringing it to an end. However, from the very beginning of British colonial power on the island in 1655, rebellion was a routine event. There were 85 years of revolts and raiding, runaways and ruckus. And really, why wouldn't there be?

Historical Analysis of the First Maroon War

Orlando Patterson (1996), a leading sociologist from Jamaica, put together a hypothesis explaining why the First Maroon War occurred. He lays out seven preconditions that increase the incidence of slave revolts. Following each is what the conditions in Jamaica during the time period of 1655-1739. This war also contributed greatly to a more profound identification with the group for Maroons.

1. "Where the slave population greatly outnumbers that of the master class."

In Jamaica, the ratio rose as high as 10:1, favoring the slaves. A small attempt by the government to curb this was to bring in indentured laborers.

2. "Where the ratio of local to foreign-born slaves is low."

The more slaves who are not born into a system of slavery where it is all they know, the more likely they are to want to get out of the system. In Jamaica, about 4 out of 5 slaves were born in Africa and had no interest in being a slave.

3. "Where the imported slaves, or a significant section of them, are of common ethnic origin."

The English tended to favor Coromantees from the Gold Coast of Africa, of Akan-speaking origins, contributing to over half of the slave population in Jamaica. They were stereotyped to be hard workers, and probably were, as expansion and conquest were taking place on the home front during this period of time, employing their strong military traditions.

4. "Where geographical conditions favor guerrilla warfare."

There is no doubt Jamaica was prime territory for this condition to be covered, with the cockpits in the west and the Blue Mountains in the east.

5. "Where there is a high incidence of absentee ownership."

Jamaica's plantation owners often lived elsewhere, putting the estate in the hands of overseers, who had little interest in taking unnecessary risks to protect the estate or the slaves.

6. “Where the economy is dominated by large-scale, monopolistic enterprise.”

In this situation, each slave becomes less important, leading to more brutality and apathy regarding the loss of slaves. The rules of supply and demand play out nicely—supply of slaves is high, so importance becomes low.

7. “Where there is weak cultural cohesiveness, reinforced by a high [male: female] sex ratio among the ruling population.”

Seemingly a continual theme, there were also few women among the master class. This created an unbalanced society, somewhat void of cultural institutions, namely the family. This hurt both the ruling class by not having any unity or cultural cohesion of which to stand on as a means of power, and the slaves by not having any cultural form or structure to situate themselves in, adding to their total sense of meaninglessness (Patterson 1996:280-288).

And so it went, with slave revolt after slave revolt. It was around 1720 that things really began to heat up. Cudjoe, a Maroon leader, was gaining in power among the Leeward Maroons, creating a united front and building cultural cohesion among his group. Quao and Nanny were holding together parts of the Windward Maroons, though they never joined together under one leader as did their counterparts (Campbell 1988:49). From 1720, both sides fought hard, which included raiding plantations, going on quests to search out the enemy, importing dogs and Native Americans from other countries, and torturing and killing opposing forces at first chance. Between the years of 1732 and 1739 when the peace treaties were signed, many efforts were made by the British to overpower the Maroons, but their effective and astounding guerilla tactics sustained their existence.

Revisiting Patterson’s hypothesis, we see clear preconditions very well met in Jamaica to build and sustain the First Maroon War. Perhaps if peace had not been made, the British would have found a way to obtain the upper hand, and maybe not. Lieutenant Philip Thicknesse, of the British army, once said, “All the regular troops in Europe could not have conquered the Wild Negroes by force of arms; and if Mr. Trelawny [the governor] had not wisely given them what they contended for Liberty, they would, in all probability have been, at this day, masters of the whole country” (Robinson 1993:119).

Perhaps. But one thing is for sure: War and its subsequent victories were critical to the formation and strength of Maroon identity.

Multiple Maroon Identities

Even before disunity in Maroon communities began to occur, Maroon identity and ethnicity was beginning to hold a much less fluid meaning (Kopytoff 1973:56). Once Maroons attained their independence, what it meant to be a Maroon became a conflicted idea. Previously Maroons had always been held in a romantic light of being freedom fighters, but when they started putting down rebellions and returning new runaways, the Maroons were accused of being traitors. Maroons found themselves in a sticky situation. Over their history, all the seemingly insignificant decisions that were made contributed to the grand result of an agreement mandating them to ironically suppress those people with the same goals as they had—to be free.

Maroons as Freedom Fighters?

Founded on the idea of being winners, as many ethnic groups build themselves on, the Maroons accentuate their victories to glorify their past and validate their present. The widely held romanticized view of Maroons as freedom fighters does not appeal to Dr. Lumsden, a Jamaican historian, nor does the idea of Maroons being traitors. She sees the Maroons as working specifically for their own freedom. They were not fighting an ideological battle of Black oppression from White powers present in their lives. They were merely getting away from a horrible situation in hopes of gaining personal freedom. A form of institution or community then formed around a common goal for each person's self-interest, the goal being freedom and autonomy. Once in larger groups, they had more power and possibility for survival and success. In an article entitled, "Alliance and Competition: Four Case Studies of Maroon-European Relations," Scott Parris writes, "When opportunities presented themselves to side with one European nation against another [or any person or group of people for that matter], the fugitive black groups were not slow to weigh the costs and benefits of alliance-making" (1981:176). That can help explain the different events in Maroon history.

When the Spanish were on the island, the plantation system was not very well developed, so the slaves just left when they could. Also when the English took over the island and brought in slaves, some slaves would escape at their first opportunity. It is a natural tendency to be drawn to people from a similar background, so it is not surprising that the slaves from the Akan region of the Gold Coast banded together recreating what they knew politically, socially, and economically. Being from the coast of Africa, doing business with Europeans was not new to

them. Making deals and signing treaties were business ventures that carried benefits of interest. And if and when they made the decision to do business with the Europeans, they followed through. After years of fighting with the British, the Maroons were offered the peace treaty, in which they saw many benefits, so they signed. However, the treaty required the Maroons to return any runaways, which is what now creates many problems for people who look at the Maroons as freedom fighters struggling for Black liberation, making it seem as if they are somehow selling out.

Maroons as Traitors?

Many accusations are made against the Maroons, charging them with being sell-outs and traitors. One such comment was made saying, “Di Maroon dem a weh traitor, dem lef di rest a di slave dem fi suffer, sign treaty wid di white man dem and tun round help dem hunt runaway slaves” (Silvera 2002). (The Maroons were traitors, leaving the rest of the slaves to suffer, signing a treaty with the white man, turning around and helping them hunt runaway slaves.) Dr. Lumsden thinks that people need to try to understand the Maroons in context of the time period and in their own terms. It cannot be explained from a present day context because there are so many different factors in play. “The Maroons’ support of the British government for more than a century, from 1738 to 1865, has caused much debate, since they have often been identified as freedom fighters on account of their struggles against the Colonial Government in Jamaica before the treaties of 1738-9. ... However, the Maroons’ almost totally consistent fulfillment of their treaty obligations has made it difficult, if not impossible, for advocates of a freedom fighter hypothesis to explain and justify Maroon actions during the greater part of their history” (Lumsden 2002:469).

An example of this is Tacky’s Revolt. Tacky’s Revolt began on Easter Sunday of 1760, described as “one of the most well-planned, well-organized and widespread slave rebellions of the island” (Campbell 1988:154). Tacky was a Coromantee leader, who wanted to make the island into a free black society following Akan tradition. The uprising started in St. Mary, with Tacky and a small group of slaves killing their overseers. It then spread, leading to five months of fighting, over £10,000 in damages, and the loss of at least 1,000 blacks and 60 whites (Campbell 1988:157). The Maroons were ordered to follow through on their end of the treaty, capturing and killing any runaway they could find, inclusive of a reward. They did this well, with a Maroon marksman

taking Tacky down and ultimately ending the rebellion. However, credit is due to a certain party of Maroons, for after being ordered to pursue the rebels and bring back prisoners or evidence of killings, brought back a number of human ears, being rewarded accordingly. It was not discovered until much later that the ears had been cut off from rebels slain in previous battles (Edwards 1996:243). Nonetheless, that party of Maroons and the Maroons who killed Tacky fell under the same label, polarizing opinions on the Maroons while giving people little leeway to take individuality into consideration.

The paradox in it all, then, is that the freedom fighting Maroons were the ones responsible for killing the leaders of rebellions and other slaves fighting for their freedom. The inspirations of the rebel leaders were the Maroons, however the poached had turned gamekeeper and the inspiration had turned deadly. It is undeniable that the Maroons were part of the prohibitory force against a successful rebellion.

Additionally, though not extensively written about, are cases of Maroons keeping their own slaves in small numbers. Conditions are not commented upon, and the number of slaves held was never very many (112 in 1832), but some evidence is there (Higman 1995:47).

Blame has become a big issue that needs to be eliminated, getting rid of the dichotomy of Maroons as heroes or traitors, without any in between option. The Maroons always valued themselves to be as good as the Whites and expected to be met as equals and treated fairly in coming to a term agreement. They even felt superior to the rest of the black population, because they were being proactive in fighting for their freedom. Over 100 years after signing the peace treaty, an act was passed in 1842 placing the Maroons “on the same legal footing as all other British subjects in Jamaica.” They were not prepared “to accept that they had now become...like the rest of the White, Coloured and Black population, including the newly freed slaves. They still considered themselves to be a special people, with a distinct relationship with the British authorities” (Lumsden 2002:469-70). Dr. Lumsden’s article on the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865, led by Paul Bogle, gives the impression that for the Maroons this was an opportunity to reestablish their special status with the British, remaining loyal and helping put down the rebellion. They also “had no commonality of interests with the people Bogle represented, and saw no advantage in allying with them” (Lumsden 2002:486). However, as mentioned earlier, there were times where, if a cost benefit analysis proved favorable, alliances were made with slaves.

In many ways, things have changed for the Maroons. Although they still live on the land granted to them by the British government and do not have to pay taxes, Jamaica is now an independent country that Britain no longer controls, so there is little to no benefit to holding special status with the Brits.

Maroon Ethnicity

Ethnicity, as discussed previously, has generally taken the two tracks of either being primordial or socially constructed. Maroons are unique in that they understand their ethnicity to be partially primordial and partially socially constructed.

Looking back to before Maroons had such a label or a title, the people who composed the group were those who made the decision to run away. The “escapees” or “rebels” were not all from the same place, did not all speak the same language or even similar languages, and did not run away in groups with the intent to mobilize. It just organically happened, and there was a great deal of compromise and work that went into creating an environment and eventually a system and culture to incorporate all the members and the new runaways that were, before the treaty, joining the group on a fairly regular basis.

Clearly, being Maroon was not an identity most people were born with. It was a created identity—socially constructed over time in response to the historical events that occurred and the individual decisions that were made. Maroon ethnicity to a Maroon, though, was much more than a socially constructed identity; it was seen also as something passed through the blood. This metaphor of blood is a strong definition of a biological connection, and a following of the primordial stance. Yet by recognizing the beginnings of the group, the idea of Maroon ethnicity as socially constructed also carries validity.

Why?

Claiming Ethnic Affiliation

I have formulated the following two hypotheses to respond to the question of why Maroons understand their ethnicity the way they do are identical to the reasons I have deduced as to why Maroons still claim a separate identity apart from being Jamaican. These are:

1. Maroons still reap benefits from the peace treaties they signed, which gave them independence in 1739.

2. Maroons see themselves as historically and culturally superior to “regular” Jamaicans, claiming a history of victory and freedom fighting, placing their roots much more in Africa than in Europe or even Jamaica.

Benefits from the Treaty

Maroons are still exempt from paying taxes to the Jamaican government, as was agreed upon in their 1739 treaty. They also still have communal land ownership in the certain parts of the country that have been given to different Maroon groups. To justify continuance of the treaty terms, Maroons have had to maintain the idea that there is a distinct difference between a Maroon and a non-Maroon. To say Maroon-ness runs in the blood creates a seemingly objective understanding that is hard to challenge. If their ethnicity is held to be socially constructed, it is easier for it to be written off and to be seen as something that can also be *unconstructed*. This could potentially lead the government’s inclusion of Maroons in all the laws of the land. Claiming both types of ethnic affiliation covers all grounds for them in this case.

Before the First Maroon War, there was a “ flexible sense of a common heritage, the redefinition of ethnic identity, [and] the creation of a common culture out of disparate materials...[allowing] Jamaican Maroons to overcome the cultural differences that various local communities had developed, and to integrate their societies around a more generalized Maroon ethnicity” (Kopytoff 1976:37). It was the treaty that played an important role in securing a special ethnicity by closing off “membership of the Maroon societies, thus insuring that in time they would become entirely Creole...making them unique, further [enhancing] their developing ethnicity” (Kopytoff 1976:46).

Cultural and Historical Superiority

As fighters and active agents against the system of oppression in which they found themselves, Maroons have stuck to the primordial argument to explain their inborn propensity to fight the system. They have elevated their status above those slaves who were seen as passive, remaining enslaved on the plantations. The quest for understanding Maroon identity begins from the landing of the first slave ship on the island of Jamaica. The events that followed would comfortably position the Maroons as different, special, unique—something to which the

plantation slaves could aspire. Early Maroons thought themselves to be a completely different type of person, with active versus passive genes when it came to demanding their freedom.

This extreme view of the passivity of slaves held by some Maroons, in trying to better understand who they are, how they differ, and why they are in some way better than regular Jamaicans, is an exaggerated understanding of what life was like on the plantation. Though there were passive slaves, there were also slaves constantly rebelling (Zips 1999:31). In more recent years, accurate history is not really known or available, so after the fact information has been idealized to show Maroons being superior.

An interesting anecdote to this, particular to Jamaica, is that when slaves were being brought over to the Caribbean, the most troublesome ones were dropped off in Jamaica first so as not to cause more upheaval on the boats, and the others were then carried to other islands, which contributes to the considerable resistance movements seen among the Maroons and other groups in Jamaica (Dawes 2006).

Claiming a Unique Identity

Although Maroons are located on the island of Jamaica, they may or may not label themselves as Jamaican. If they do, they would choose to identify first as Maroons. There could be any number of personal reasons why a person would choose to identify either way, but the two hypotheses—identical to those used to explain why Maroons understand their ethnicity the way they do—are explored below.

Benefits of the Treaty

Maroons are located in only four towns on the island. These four towns are specifically set aside for Maroons. These towns have historical significance in Maroon history and are viewed as sacred land. Maroons see this land as their right and as a symbol of their unique heritage. Maroons see themselves as having a distinct identity, but they “do not see themselves as being a nation state all to themselves; they will not live to the exclusion of the Jamaican society. Being relatively isolated from everyday Jamaican culture leads to the continued strength of Maroon culture and the possibility for it to endure.

Cultural and Historical Superiority

In the case of claiming a separate identity, though Maroons see their ethnicity playing a role in what it means to be Maroon, they tend to feel much more rooted in Africa than do Jamaicans. This is especially understood and demonstrated both by their continued use of African language as well as their political systems, carrying remnants of their home cultures that have evolved over time, space, and place. Jamaica, though many Jamaicans would not like to admit it, has unintentionally become assimilated over time to a Eurocentric view of life—with the exception of the Rastafarians, who are those “who never will relinquish the fact that [they are] an African” (Nettleford 1972:41). Rastafarians believe strongly in “chanting down Babylon,” the oppressive powers of the past and present, as well as repatriation to the Continent. “To the Rastafarians who are black Jamaicans, multi-racial Jamaica becomes the Babylon which holds them in the captivity of a protracted diaspora. Here there is...only oppression and suffering at the hands of imperialist Europeans and ‘their derivatives’” (Nettleford 1972:41). Through Jamaica’s history of slavery and the resultant creolization and intermixing of people from different places, a skin tone hierarchy has been established, where “color in Jamaica is as much of an articulation of social standing as wealth” (Dawes 2006).

The Maroons have largely been able to avoid Jamaican social politics around skin tone and instead remain rooted in the idea of being deeply connected to the Continent. With the hailing in of Marcus Garvey, Rastafarianism, and other black power movements, Maroons more recently have not felt the need to change. Marcus Garvey, claiming Maroon heritage, preached Pan-African messages of self-reliance, self-rule, black power, pride, and liberation, as well as attempted to lead a literal “Back to Africa” movement (Zips 1999:221). Maroons have subsequently been validated in their stance. But the rest of Jamaica, and the greater world to a lesser degree, is still inclined to assign someone a degree of value according to their skin tone, which in turn contributes to both a person’s social standing and their economic situation.

Rooted in Africa: Continuities from the Continent

Without being forced to assimilate, Maroons were able to actively nurture the ties that remain to the Continent, at the same time integrating objects, symbolism, and ritual from their original cultures to creatively establish a merged system of seemingly disparate elements. Even today a form of Twi, a Ghanaian language, is still in use for business proceedings in Maroon

communities. On the plantation, slaves were forced to learn a form of pidgin English for communication purposes, which was a form of what is now known as Patois, with a mix of English and African words. Maroons also still use the abeng, which became a quintessential object in the success of the Maroons over the British. The abeng is cow's horn whose sound could travel for miles, which allowed the Maroons to be in contact with each other. The British found its sound "hideous and terrible," so the Maroons exploited its use, "blowing it continuously when the parties were close to the towns, thus creating confusion among the soldiers (Campbell 1988:48). It is used today for Maroon ceremonies and celebrations. It became an asset for the Maroons to be more Afro-centric during the colonial days, and today is more of a comfort and tradition to maintain. Continuing a strong connection to Africa has been a defining part of Maroon identity.

There were even a number of Maroons who unintentionally made their way to Africa. A group of Maroons had the unfortunate experience of being deceived after signing a peace agreement ending the Second Maroon War, resulting in deportation to Nova Scotia and eventually on to Sierra Leone.

Second Maroon War

July 1795 marks the month that triggered it all. Two Trelawny Town Maroons killed two hogs, and as punishment were flogged in the middle of town, supposedly by two slaves that had previously been returned under the action of the Maroons. This horribly humiliated the Maroon community and an uprising ensued (Campbell 1988:210-1).

Governor Lord Balcarres led the colonial forces, rather unsuccessfully for a couple months, incurring huge losses as he pretentiously ran a campaign of circling around the Maroons. Maroons, being Maroons, easily slipped through the troops at leisure. Under Balcarres, many of the great British commanders fell, including Colonel William Fitch, who was highly revered (Carey 1997:173-7). Many men were also lost under Balcarres and very few, if any, Maroons perished under the European military strategies employed. Colonel George Walpole took Fitch's position and due to a discouraged Balcarres was given a great deal of command over the offensive campaign, which became one of cutting off water supplies and running a starvation offensive (Schafer 1973:190). Over the next four months, Walpole trained his men to fight in a similar way to the Maroons, decreasing the number of deaths incurred.

Nearly uninterrupted fighting continued for three months under Walpole, with many losses. Higher rewards were being given for the kill or capture of Maroons, making it obvious that the Brits were having a hard time taking them down (Carey 1997:187). Finally around mid-December, Walpole was being pressured to make peace. The Maroons were running very low on provisions and so, trusting Walpole, agreed to peace around December 19, under four terms, the last being a promise that they would not be deported from Jamaica (Carey 1997:232-3). Balcarres, however, had plans of his own. Once most of the Trelawny Maroons had submitted, he announced deportation to Halifax, Nova Scotia in May 1796. Violating the treaty, Walpole was very upset and resigned his position, angering the Assembly, who was granting him great honors (Schafer 1973:198-9).

Although only a brief five-month war, the Second Maroon War consisted of 20 actions involving nearly 5,000 troops, over 30% of them highly-trained professional soldiers, supported by Mosquito Indians and savage Cuban hunting dogs, going against less than 300 Trelawny Maroon Warriors (Carey 1997:200). With very few slaves coming to their aid, and the Accompong Maroons actually going against them, the Trelawny Maroons fought alone, under some great leaders by the names of Johnson, Smith, Charles Shaw, James Palmer and Leonard Parkinson, the last two of which Walpole said, "If [they] alone had decided not to cooperate with the authorities, the country could not defeat them" (Campbell 1988:234).

When the Trelawny Town Maroons were moved from Jamaica in 1796, their first stop was Nova Scotia, Canada. Cold climates for most of the year led to the inability to work the fields and the opportunity for the governor to require Christian education in hopes of conversion. They generally resisted, irritating the local religious leaders (Carey 1997:261-2). When it came time for planting, they again caused irritation to the Canadians and Jamaican government at home, refusing to become indentured servants as well as not becoming self-sufficient, which was costing both governments large sums of money. Indentured servitude would have "[tarnished] their heritage," and self-sufficiency was not possible with such cold weather climates and such a short growing season (Carey 1997:263-4). And so it was eventually decided to send them to Sierra Leone, a West African country no European power really controlled. It was originally composed of small independent kingdoms. Traders were welcome to be protected by those independent kingdoms if they brought it wanted or needed goods (Carey 1997:268).

In 1880, 550 Maroons arrived in Sierra Leone, bringing their skills of guerilla warfare to assist the government against various rebellions. Everyone was very impressed by their great skills, which earned them their citizenship. They were described as being “active and intrepid, prodigal of their lives, confident of their strength, proud of the character of their body (community), and fond, though not jealous of their heritage” (Carey 1997:269). This success, however, led to hatred by others, both locals and other groups brought in to settle there. Nonetheless, the Maroons stuck together, eventually resettling in Freetown. In 1810, they made up nearly half of Freetown’s population (807 of 1,917 people). They created an enclave with an independently run governmental system, complete with jurymen and constables. Jobs ranged from a laborer to a lawyer, and the Maroons did them all, some rising to high positions in Sierra Leone (Schafer 1973:204-7).

Deterioration of Maroon Identity

Today, the Maroons are in a bit of a quandry, as the amount of Maroon blood diminishes with each passing generation. Because ethnicity is passed through the blood and the only way to be Maroon is to have a Maroon parent, the group could someday be put on the endangered ethnic groups lists. Exacerbating the situation is the gradual deterioration of interest in the Maroon culture for the younger generations of Maroons. The glory and connection to the past has become largely concentrated in the community elders, and it will take a refocusing of energy to instill in the youth what it means to be a Maroon and the history that goes along with it.

Economically, it is extremely hard to remain in Maroon towns. There is little work, a high unemployment rate, with waxing and waning levels of morale. As mentioned before, Maroons still live under the terms of the peace treaty, exempting them from paying taxes. This sounds positive, but the downside is the government then has felt no need to provide any services to Maroon communities, resulting in the towns being relatively cut off from the rest of the country. This eases the effort to hold on to the culture and identity, but makes it extremely difficult to envision a positive situation for the continuation of the Maroons.

Without having to claim a Jamaican identity before a Maroon identity, Maroons want greater access to more resources in order to sustain their position and lifestyle in Jamaica’s larger system. Part of the problem is that Maroons, by virtue of their past, established themselves in the most inhospitable locations on the island, leading to further problems for access to service and

expectation for improvement, especially on the part of the government. Currently, there is somewhat reliable cell phone reception in most of the towns.

Lack of knowledge about the Maroons from the greater Jamaican population also leads to lack of immediacy in responding to Maroon needs because there is not any kind of awareness among the Jamaican population. When posing the question, “Tell me everything you know about the Maroons” to a number of Jamaicans, I was greeted with such responses as, “Nothing basically. It’s really sad,” “I don’t know anything except that I’m related to them,” and “Maybe you should talk to my relatives who know about that stuff. We never learned much about them.”

I was very surprised to hear that the general Jamaican population of my peers knew so little about the Maroons, who have such a rich and interesting history. In Jamaica’s educational system, West Indian history is taught in first form, which is equivalent to seventh grade. This may be the last time people learn anything about the Maroons unless they opt to take West Indian and English history taught together in fifth and sixth form (eleventh and twelfth grade) as electives. Even still, I have been told that the English history is emphasized more heavily. So for many, first form is the end.

The outlook was not always so glum, as there were a few people with profound insights into the Maroons. There were also a number of people who initially claimed to know nothing, but after further inquisition were able to recollect some fairly accurate information learned years ago. I have created two “Top 3” lists of things known about the Maroons and things misunderstood about the Maroons that I gathered in my questionings.

Top 3 things known about the Maroons

1. Nanny was one of their leaders.

As a formally recognized Jamaican National Hero, Nanny is well-known in connection with the Maroons. However, general knowledge about her consists of her use of obeah, a religion involving sorcery that was originally practiced in Africa, and her ability to catch bullets in her butt and shoot them back out at the British. Nanny’s actual existence is debated, as some believe she is a composite character given the positive attributes of a number of different women. When I mentioned this to a person I was questioning, she was shocked saying, “Oh, I’m crushed that Nanny [might not be] real. No one’s told me anything differently ’til now.” And this ambiguous

nature of Nanny seems to contribute to the sparse and vague knowledge of the Maroons in general, creating them to be mystical, imaginary characters with an unbelievable history.

2. Cudjoe signed a peace treaty with the British.

Cudjoe is one of the second-most recognized Maroon names, famous for his iron fist leadership and his signing of the peace treaty with the British in 1738. The general population looks him upon with great respect

3. Accompong is a Maroon town.

This is the largest Jamaican Maroon town, located in the parish of St. Elizabeth on the leeward, or western, side of the island. It is most commonly known by the general population because of its size and history. It has been around the longest and carries the name of a great Maroon. There is a monument in the center of Accompong Town dedicated to Cudjoe. Also, the signing of the peace treaty occurred relatively close to Accompong Town.

Top 3 things misunderstood about the Maroons

1. Maroons are not primitive people who live in the bush.

The Maroons do live in areas considered “country,” but are not primitive. Both Accompong and Charles Town have full cell phone service, connecting its inhabitants to the rest of the world. Although the roads to Maroon towns are sometimes erratic, curvy, and in rough terrain, the towns are generally accessible. They are also aiming to become bigger tourist attractions in the coming years.

2. Maroons were not all slaves.

Even though many Maroons were runaway slaves, it is not true that all Maroons were once slaves. There are a number of Maroons who ran away straight after passing through the middle passage, as well as a few groups of intended slaves who were shipwrecked and all went into the mountains or the cockpits.

3. Sam Sharpe, Tacky, and Paul Bogle were not Maroons.

These three men were often mentioned as being Maroons, but they were in fact leaders of slave rebellions that the Maroons assisted in putting down.

Through proactivity on the part of some Maroon towns, knowledge about the Maroons will continue to increase.

Current Initiatives

Across the island, the Maroon towns are making a concerted effort to reconnect with their history and involve the youth in the process. They are also trying to open up their towns to tourism, both domestic and international. The reasons for this are many, from creating more jobs in the towns to raising awareness about who the Maroons are, as well as creating an opportunity for the young people to become involved, contribute, and feel responsible for the growth and development of the community. These movements will also expectantly diminish the current out-migration to the other parts of the island.

All four Maroon towns are actively getting on board the tourist bus, with Accompong in the west plunging forward with the creation of the Accompong Town Maroon Foundation, launched January 6, 2005. Colonel Sidney Peddie said, “My dream is that Accompong will become the most sought-after tourist attraction in the Caribbean” (Hepburn 2005). There are many benefits to this, including employment opportunities and the chance to inform more people about the Maroons. Nothing comes without a cost, however. Dr. Lumsden, the sister-in-law of Charles Town Colonel Frank Lumsden writes, “If the Maroons of Charles Town and other Maroon communities decide to go ahead into business-like exploitation of their heritage for their economic benefit, they will, I think, have to give up something of their perception of themselves as a distinct and special section of the Jamaican population. The paradox is that in making use of their past, they will have to objectivize [*sic*] it, therefore putting themselves in the same position as any other student or observer of Maroon history” (Lumsden 1996:19). It is true that one walks a thin line when trying to create a tourist attraction as well as preserve a way of life, but for the Maroons, this is becoming a necessary path to take, and one they are taking with excitement and dedication. I think the outcome will be rewarding.

Charles Town has been the most active Maroon town in Jamaica to try to restore an interest in being Maroon and generating an interest in the outside community about Maroons. Colonel Frank Lumsden and his brother Keith have put tremendous effort into the creation of the first-ever Maroon museum and asafu yard, or dancing ground, for a variety of activities and performances, to highlight their past. This museum not only acts as a cultural center for tourists and Maroons alike, but also serves as a community gathering space and small library, complete with a computer. It is also a community art project, involving the adults in the creation of something they can proudly feel represents them.

The children are seen as an important part of the community and are allowed to actively participate in community gatherings and ceremonies, including the blowing of the abeng, a very sacred duty. Traditional dance and drumming are passed down through the generations. A bigger effort is now being made to continue passing down the language used by the ancestors, based off Twi, which comes from Ghana. Twi is currently used only for rituals and ceremonies, as well as carrying out business (Lumsden and Douglas 2005).

I was very impressed by the efforts being made for the dual purpose of reviving the Maroon spirit and providing employment through tourism. Uncle Frank showed me a map of the future plans of the area, which included hiking trails along some historical paths, making use of some of the area's beautiful views. These trails will allow for the use of tour guides, helping with the unemployment that plagues the community (Davis 2004).

Conclusion

Throughout their history, the Maroons of Jamaica have gone through a number of stages in the minds of Jamaicans and others: first praised, then vilified, and eventually overlooked. "Freedom fighters" to some, "traitors" to a few, "who?" to many today, the Maroons have had to interact with history in the most productive way to implement their goal—freedom. This paper has engaged their journey, discussed their position in the greater island, and explored their formation of a distinct ethnic identity.

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