K. Bilby

The treacherous feast: a Jamaican Maroon historical myth

In: Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 140 (1984), no: 1, Leiden, 1-31

This PDF-file was downloaded from <http://www.kitlv-journals.nl>

KENNETH M. BILBY

THE TREACHEROUS FEAST: A JAMAICAN MAROON HISTORICAL MYTH¹

On June 6, 1796, an entire community of black Jamaicans, numbering nearly 600, set sail reluctantly from Port Royal, en route to Halifax, where an uncertain future awaited them. The voyage was not of their own making. Victims of British deceit during the protracted conflict which has come to be known as the "Second Maroon War", these people had been thrust into the realization of their own worst fears.

The Trelawny Maroons, as they were called, were the descendants of rebel slaves who had escaped into the interior, formed their own communities, and finally, completed peace treaties with the British colonial government in 1739. After rebelling again in 1795, the Trelawnys had eventually surrendered to the British, on the condition that they would not be removed from the island. The plantocratic government, however, had found it possible, once its mission was accomplished, to justify on technical grounds an egregious violation of the good faith on which the Maroons had surrendered. Putting the finishing touch to a military campaign distinguished by continual episodes of treachery, the British had decided to punish their vanquished enemy by doing precisely what they had earlier promised not to do: deporting them en masse from the island.

As is well known, the Trelawny Maroons were finally brought, as a result of this decision, to Nova Scotia, where they spent a few unhappy years. After numerous complaints, they were removed to what was to be their final destination, Sierra Leone, where their descendants live today.²

When the Trelawnys departed Jamaica in 1796 they left behind them a number of other Maroon communities with histories similar to

KENNETH M. BILBY, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Anthropology at The Johns Hopkins University, who obtained his M.A. in Anthropology from Wesleyan University, is interested primarily in ethnohistory, ethnicity and ethnomusicology. His two most important publications are 'The Kromanti Dance of the Windward Maroons of Jamaica', *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 55(1/2): 52-101, 1981; and *Music of the Maroons of Jamaica*, New York: Folkways, 1981. Mr. Bilby may be contacted at the Department of Anthropology, The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD 21218, U.S.A.

their own. Together with their sister community, Accompong, the Trelawny Maroons had comprised the large western group known as the "Leeward Maroons"; in the east were the "Windward Maroon" communities — Moore Town, Charles Town, and Scott's Hall — whose ancestors had completed a treaty with the British in 1739 nearly identical to that negotiated by the western Maroons. Although there had been a feeling of close connection shared by all communities prior to the disturbances of 1795, none of the other communities were to join the Trelawnys in their rebellion; in fact, the Accompong Maroons sided with the British, while the eastern Maroons remained uninvolved in the fighting.³ All Maroons, however, were deeply affected by the climate of crisis engendered by the Trelawny Town rebellion.

The dramatic events of 1795-6 have attracted the attention of many historians, who have tended to concentrate on the Leeward Maroons (who, after all, were most directly involved) — often to the neglect of their Windward counterparts in the eastern Blue Mountains. For this reason, and a number of others, the story of the Leeward Maroons continues to be the better known of the two, and when most people today think of contemporary Maroons, they think only of the descendants of those Leeward Maroons who remained in the island, who today live in the western community of Accompong. I was therefore interested to find, while doing ethnographic work among the eastern Maroons during 1977-8, that *they* had much to say about the Maroon past.⁴

Among the oral traditions I encountered while living with the Windward Maroons of Moore Town was one particularly poignant story about a monumental act of treachery perpetrated by the British against the Maroons of an earlier generation. Only after having collected several versions of this story did I realize that it was directly related to the events of 1795-6. This amounted to a major revelation. The legend which had been passed on to me suddenly acquired a host of new meanings. Most importantly, I now understood that the texts I had gathered formed an interrelated set of historical fragments; and that these contained a *Maroon* perspective on what constitutes not only a crucial period of the Maroon past, but also an important chapter in British colonial history.

Most writers on Jamaican Maroon history have operated under the apparent assumption that the descendants of the people about whom they teach us have little, if anything, to contribute to an understanding of their own collective past. As has so often happened to peoples whose historical recollections fall outside of the Western historiographic tradition, present-day Maroons have been relegated prematurely to the realm of the "history-less". The assumption has most often been — sometimes spoken and sometimes not — that the Jamaican Maroons have more or less "lost" their past, owing to their non-literate

Figure 1. Map of Jamaica showing Parish boundaries and locations of the major Maroon settlements.

status up until recent times; that they have become severed from the "true" reality lived by their distant ancestors.⁵ Thus, the retrieval of this reality, as well as the interpretation of its significance for understanding the present, has usually been seen as the exclusive task of trained historians working with written documents.

Several scholars, working with oral traditions from different areas of the world, have recently been challenging such notions.⁶ Richard Price's work with the Saramaka Maroons of Suriname (Price 1979a, 1983) is especially relevant here. The Saramaka, like the Jamaican Maroons, are descended from African slaves who escaped from plantations during the 17th and early 18th centuries and formed their own societies in the wilderness. Price has shown, through his sensitive treatment of oral traditions, that the Saramaka, far from being a people without a sense of the past, consciously preserve, cherish, and protect historical knowledge, much of which is held highly sacred by them. Moreover, Saramaka historians pursue their work according to a set of canons which, though based on the use of oral sources, is arguably no less rigorous than that adhered to by Western historians using written documents. When matched with contemporary written documents, these Saramaka oral traditions show themselves to be remarkably accurate, often down to small details; and beyond this, they provide differences of interpretation against which the slanted, perspective of colonial records can be balanced.

The primary aim of this paper is to show that present-day Jamaican Maroons, like their counterparts in Suriname, have much of interest to say about their past, and that our understanding of their history stands to be significantly enriched if we should decide to listen to them. For there exist also in Jamaican Maroon oral traditions, I believe, the outlines of a distinctive native perspective — an echo of earlier Maroon views, as it were — which is not fully recoverable from the partisan British accounts which have come down to us in written form. By perusing that part of the "intimate culture" of the Maroons concerned with the distant past, we may achieve a fuller, more honest picture of that past — a picture alive with human emotions and attitudes rooted in the society of another time, yet belonging very much to the present as well.⁷ With this in view, I present the following interpretation of a specific Maroon historical tradition, and make an attempt to place it in a perspective which speaks both to those who helped give birth to it nearly two centuries ago, and to their successors, who have passed it on and invested it with life down to the present.

The Story of the Treacherous Feast

In late 1977 I recorded the following text, given to me in passing,

during a conversation with a Maroon ritual specialist in the Windward community of Moore Town:

o dina mo-, o moko braiam
o dina mo-, o moko braiam
o kil wi konsonkonso
ki babina si-eh
o dina mo-, o moko braiam
o dina mo-, o moko braiam

All right. You know the meaning of that song now? When Bakra [the white man] called the Maroons to go make peace, Bakra had a Bongo [African] man to make handcuffs and shackles, to catch the Maroons when they came there, to handcuff and shackle them. So they made a hell-deserving big house with trap doors. As soon as all the Maroons got in there, they would just draw them down and trap all the Maroons inside. And when the Maroons drew nearby — at that time, they had decided that everybody was going to make peace now — and when they drew nearby they heard the Bongo man pick up the iron. He had two pieces of iron. [Laughs, and recites a Kromanti ritual phrase:] 'Doko sheri, boy! Bahimba, bahimba, o bahimba dinto-eh!' [Blows some rum on himself, a ritual gesture.] He took up the two pieces of iron. At that time, it had been seven years since Bakra had put him there to make handcuffs and shackles to catch the Maroons. And Bakra sent and called the Maroons now to come to the feast. And the Bongo man was still there now, making his handcuffs and shackles. And when the Bongo man turned and looked, and saw the Maroons coming, he threw his song. Well he had his things that he was making. But he had two pieces of iron, and was playing the tune now to let the Maroons hear and know what was going on. And when he saw a Maroon coming, he took up his iron!⁸

o dena mo-, o moko braiam
o dena mo-, o moko braiam
o kil wi konsonkonso
ki babina sin-eh
o dina mo-, o moko braiam⁹

You know what he said? He *told* the Maroons that it had been *seven years* since Bakra had put him there to make handcuffs and shackles to catch them. So this same Maroon man who had been getting in, he got up. And he listened to what the Bongo man was saying. And when the Bongo man found that the Maroon was taking it in, he went back and played it sweeter still.

o dena mo-, o moko braiam
o dena mo-, o moko braiam
o dena mo-, o moko braiam

It was the Bongo man now throwing the song and giving it to the Maroon man. It was the Bongo man who had made the handcuffs and shackles to give to Bakra to catch the Maroons. So

when he saw the Maroons there now, he *threw* his song! And at that time, the Bakra man was there now, but he didn't know *what* he [the Bongo man] was saying to the Maroon man. And, they say, boy, when he threw the song, the same Maroon man who had been getting in, he drew back out. And the other Maroons who had been getting in, they drew back out. And when he realized it, *all* were gone! Some turned this way, some turned that way. Some turned to all parts of the world. And Bakra was never able to catch *one* of them. That is the reason why he threw that song there.

o dina mo-, o moko braiam

My father told me about it, and higher people too. It is history. (Moore Town, November, 1977.)¹⁰

This was the first time I had heard this story. I remember that it made a strong impression upon me. It seemed to me at the time that the story carried some message of fundamental importance; its telling had been suffused by deep emotion and punctuated by precautionary ritual pronouncements. But the key events in the narrative remained a mystery to me. What occasion had prompted the whites to invite the Maroons to a peace-making feast? And why did the whites wish to entrap and imprison the Maroons? Whether or not the story had some actual historical referent, it seemed to me at the time that a number of important pieces were missing.

The song that appears in the foregoing text belongs to the repertoire of ritual songs performed in the traditional Maroon ceremony of Kromanti Play. It is thus known by most older Maroons, and is sung often; many of those familiar with the song possess bits of knowledge concerning the story of the treacherous feast. Thus, during subsequent months I was to hear several other fragmentary versions of this story. Nonetheless, questioning about either the song or the story associated with it provided little further illumination. Because the song belongs to the most powerful category of Maroon Kromanti songs (known as "Country") — the group of songs that draw on the tremendous power of the earliest ancestors — it could not be treated lightly. The esoteric knowledge preserved in these songs is subject to strict canons of secrecy, and non-Maroons who wish to learn about such things must exercise caution, respect, and above all, patience. Under the circumstances, I was required most of the time to listen and expected not to ask; the sort of knowledge I sought was to be imparted only when the giver felt the time was right.¹¹

In spite of these barriers, I was able, by the end of my field trip, to record on tape fourteen variants of the story of the treacherous feast (two of them narrated by the same informant on different occasions); a number of other versions were recorded by hand. And there were several times when I heard passing reference made to this

story in the course of informal conversations between Maroons, always to underscore some point or other. Although there was substantial agreement between most of the texts I collected in their general outlines, there was also a good deal of disagreement with regard to particular details.¹² At first, this led me to discount the value of these texts as historical narrative, and to treat them instead merely as variants of a single "myth", in the common anthropological sense — i.e., as a charter serving to legitimize some aspect of Maroon social life.

After repeated exposure to the story of the treacherous feast, I finally began to receive clues to an actual historical occurrence with which it seemed to have some connection. One of the first texts which established such a link to my satisfaction follows below:

One time Bakra said, well, all right, he was going to let the Maroons have a feast and get something to eat. That meant that everybody would be coming all at one time. It was something like an apology. So when the Maroons were on the ship where the feast was to be held, one of them said he wanted some tobacco. So when he went around to get it, he heard a blacksmith knocking his iron. He was listening, but he didn't know what the blacksmith was saying with his knocking. So he turned back. He said, 'Honku' [Uncle] ... He said, 'When I went over there I heard this man knocking'. But when he had heard the man knocking that thing like that, he didn't know what the man was saying with it. So he said to his uncle, 'It would be better if you went and listened'. The uncle said, 'Yes'. So when he went and he heard the thing being knocked, he stood up. As the blacksmith was knocking it, he was telling him that Bakra was going to carry them away. Bakra was going to carry them away. When the uncle returned he couldn't talk to them and tell them, 'Did you know that Bakra is going to carry us away?' Everybody was talking, everybody was talking. But when they looked, they saw that it was true. Well, the Moore Town Maroons pulled back, the Charles Town Maroons turned back, the Accompong Maroons turned back ... but the Kojo's Town Maroons *liked food*, they enjoyed food too much. You know how Maroons enjoy food. It was food that they wanted. They were too greedy, they liked to eat too much. So Kojo's Town was broken! So no Maroons live there now. (Moore Town, June 25, 1978.)

The "Kojo's Town" in this text is none other than the aforementioned "Trelawny Town" of the Leeward Maroons, whose inhabitants rebelled against the government in 1795 and were forcibly deported in 1796. (Kojo — spelled "Cudjoe" in the British literature — was the great leader of the Leeward Maroons during the early and mid-eighteenth century; the town in which he resided had been named

after him, and continued to be known to the Maroons themselves as "Kojo's Town", even after the British renamed it "Trelawny Town" following the treaty of 1739.) When the storyteller quoted above states that "Kojo's Town was broken", owing to the failure of its residents to heed the warnings of the blacksmith, and that therefore "no Maroons live there now", he leaves little doubt as to the historical period to which the story refers. What we have here — as I realized when I first heard this version of the story — is an encapsulated Windward Maroon view of the events surrounding the removal of the Trelawny Maroons from the island in 1796.¹³

The day after I collected the above text, I recorded yet another variant of the story, which in spite of minor differences of detail, confirmed that this tradition of the treacherous feast was related to the Maroon rebellion of 1795-6. The first few sentences of this latter variant, presented in full below, make this abundantly clear:

They took away a part of Kojo's people to Nova Scotia. And then, now, they were trying to take Nanny's people.¹⁴ Right? They *invited* them. I mean, the English invited the Maroons of Nanny Town to . . . I guess you'd call it a fort, near Kingston. So when they went there, they didn't know what was going on. They had invited them to a feast. But when they went there they heard this Bongo man. I mean, the Bongo man *knew* what the problem was. He was there making the handcuffs. And then it was he who signalled the Maroons, and let the Maroons know that it was bad for them. And then they never entered. They retreated. He had played the iron, in his own Country [African language]. It was both in his Country and the Maroon Country, because the Maroons knew. You understand. The Maroons were able to know about the song, and the meaning. He was singing [speaks the words]: 'o ena mo, moko braiam . . . o ena mo, moko braiam . . . ki konsonkonso . . . ki bobo sef . . . anyu ani-oh, yo yani-eh, yoyandi kofi-oh, yoyani-oh . . . o tikyandi kofi, ki kwako debra . . . ani-oh, yo yani-eh'. So they realized. Because the Bongo knew *all* about it. And they retreated. They turned back. They scattered in the woods. (Moore Town, June 26, 1978.)

All three of the above texts, as well as the other variants I collected, agree on at least one fundamental matter: that the Windward Maroons of a previous generation once very nearly lost their freedom, and perhaps their lives, because they had been too ready to trust the whites with whom they had earlier allied themselves. According to the Maroon view, the British, even though they had "honorably" completed two peace treaties with the Maroons in 1739, proved themselves during this later period capable of the worst kind of treachery: the calculated betrayal of trust. This theme — the abuse of trust, for evil ends — is

central to all versions of the story that I encountered. The general lesson here is obvious enough: that one must never carry trust too far; one must constantly be on one's guard in situations involving a lowering of defenses, for the kindest act may conceal the wickedest of motives.¹⁵

That the events of 1795-6 have left such an enduring and emotionally potent mark on present-day oral traditions indicates, for one thing, that these events loomed very large in the lives of those who experienced them. Given the importance of this turbulent period from both a Maroon and British colonial perspective, it would seem that a glance at contemporary written documentary sources would be profitable. It should be possible thereby to see the extent to which present-day Maroon perceptions match the "reality" reported by writers at the time. Is the general Maroon interpretation, with its emphasis on British duplicity and betrayal, an exaggeration? Or can it be shown — by reading between the lines, when necessary — that the Maroon perspective is based on historical "truth", albeit focused through a Maroon lens? The following treatment of written documentary materials is intended to offer some answers to these questions, and to make some sense of this Maroon interpretation.

The Rebellion of 1795: The Documentary Record

Let us begin with a summary of the events leading to the initial outbreak of hostilities with the Trelawny Maroons in 1795. In July of that year, the Trelawnys drove their government-appointed superintendent out of their town, warning him not to return, and threatening to attack the neighboring plantations should a list of grievances they had compiled not be attended to. Among their complaints were the following: that their treaty had been infringed by the magistrates of Montego Bay, who had had two Maroons whipped illegally by a slave, in punishment for a theft of which they had been found guilty; that the lands originally granted them were no longer sufficient for their subsistence needs; and that their current superintendent, whom they wanted removed from his post, was not performing his job to their satisfaction.

The recently installed Lieutenant-Governor of Jamaica, Lord Balcarres, reacted swiftly to the news of Maroon insubordination, preparing for military action. In the ensuing days, however, things seemed to calm down. The Trelawny Maroons received notice that their Maroon neighbors in Accompong would not support them should they decide to rebel. For this reason, and others, the Trelawnys backed down on their threats and made known to the whites that they were willing to work toward a peaceful settlement, and to make amends for their previous rashness. By July 26, the situation appeared

to be under control; their superintendent had been temporarily recalled, and the Trelawny Maroons now manifested a peaceful disposition. Around this time, Balcarres sent an order to the Trelawnys, requesting that they send a delegation composed of their chief officers to Spanish Town by July 31, so as to make an oath of submission. The governor's order arrived late, making it impossible for the Trelawny delegates to reach their destination by the specified date; but nonetheless "the Maroon captains came down as speedily as possible, and proceeded on their way to the Capital" (Dallas 1803: 167).

In the meantime, exaggerated rumors were circulating, to the effect that French revolutionaries and their sympathizers had infiltrated the island and were conspiring with the Maroons to overthrow the government. Martial law was thus suddenly put into effect on August 3, before the Trelawny Town delegation had had a chance to reach the capital and declare allegiance to the government. Balcarres, having already come to the conclusion that the Maroons were determined to rebel, immediately ordered troops to the troubled area, and himself set off for Montego Bay on August 4. Meanwhile,

the six Maroon captains, having provided themselves with regular passports from General Palmer, were proceeding on their way to Spanish Town, to make their submission. On their arrival at Landovery, in the neighborhood of St. Ann's Bay... they were stopped, notwithstanding their passports, and secured by the commanding officer of the militia, to wait the pleasure of the Governor; who, on their being brought before him in his way through St. Ann's, on the fifth of August, ordered them into irons. (Dallas 1803:172.)

Three days later, Balcarres sent a message to the Trelawnys, informing them that their town was surrounded by troops, and commanding every Maroon capable of bearing arms to appear before him at Montego Bay on August 12, "to submit themselves to his Majesty's mercy" (Dallas 1803:173). By this time, the Trelawnys had received intelligence of the harsh treatment given their six captains. The news caused great distress, and led to a division among the Maroons. The older people leaned toward making an immediate oath of submission, while the younger Maroons "urged the breach of faith in the detention of the six Captains as a reason to believe that none would be observed to themselves, and to dread the Governor's intention towards them" (Dallas 1803:176). On August 11, thirty-one Maroons, including their chief, Montague, left Trelawny Town and surrendered their arms to Lord Balcarres. Several in this group expressed the conviction that many of those who had remained behind also desired to give themselves up, but were afraid of the treatment they would

receive at the hands of the governor. Their fears were not unfounded, as the following passage makes plain:

...unfortunately the reception of old Montague and his companions was not such as they expected. They were all, old Montague excepted, bound with their hands behind, and on the 13th sent into confinement at Montego Bay; one of them, exasperated at his disappointment, having previously put an end to his existence by ripping out his bowels. (Dallas 1803:181.)

Showing remarkable lack of insight, Balcarres decided, on the same day that the thirty-one had surrendered, to release two of them, in the hope that they would return to Trelawny Town and persuade the remaining Maroons to surrender also. However, once the Trelawnys learned of how those who had already surrendered had been handled, they immediately set fire to their own village, and retreated into the woods, resolved to do battle. The last door to reconciliation was now closed. The "Second Maroon War", a costly series of skirmishes which was to drag on for several months, had begun.

One may well wonder how the eastern Maroons reacted to all of these events. The evidence to be gained from an examination of the written record is quite telling. One thing we know is that Lord Balcarres, from the very first, was highly suspicious of the Windward Maroons, and feared that they would come to the assistance of the Trelawnys were a serious conflict to erupt in the western part of the island. In fact, one reason Balcarres had so hastily imprisoned the six Trelawny captains on their way to see him at Spanish Town was that he believed "that they were really on their way to form an alliance with the Maroons who lived in the Blue Mountains" (Furness 1965:38).

Soon after detaining the six Trelawnys who had set out to make peace with him, Balcarres sent messages to the Windward Maroons, ordering them, as he had the Trelawny delegation, to appear before him in Kingston, so as to assure him of their loyalty. Judging from the written fragments that have come down to us, the Windwards were hardly enthusiastic about the governor's "invitation". News of the treatment received by the Trelawny delegations must have spread rapidly, adding fuel to the already-aroused fears of the eastern Maroons. Shortly after ordering the Maroons to make an appearance, Balcarres received a letter from Charles Douglas, the superintendent at Moore Town, informing him that the Maroons at his post were refusing to obey the order. Douglas was shocked, for the night before they had seemed ready to go down to see the governor; suddenly, however, they had had a change of mind, according to Douglas, "as they were informed they were to be secured and sent off the Country". By this time, a few of the Charles Town Maroons, in compliance with Balcarres' command, had already reached Kingston. Perhaps the Moore

Town Maroons had received intelligence from them during the night, to the effect that the governor was planning to betray them; for the Moore Town people insisted to Douglas that someone had told them that the governor's real intention was to get them all to Kingston, secure them, and send them off the island. Whether or not this warning came from Charles Town can only be conjectured, but in any case, the Moore Town Maroons indicated to Douglas that they would consider obeying the governor's orders only after those Charles Town people in Kingston had safely returned home.¹⁶

Balcarres reacted to this situation in a letter to the Duke of Portland, dated September 29:

... all the Maroons to Windward expressly refuse to obey my orders to come in — This may be owing to Fear, But it may be ascribed to a very different cause — the Mooretown Maroons, who are a very warlike tribe of them, have declared, that they not only will not come in, but if the Charlestown Maroons go into Rebellion that they will join them; the converse of the Proposition may be nearly admitted, that if the Mooretown Maroons go into Rebellion that the Charlestown Maroons will join them... The general opinion here is that the Windward Maroons are solely actuated by Fear, I hope they are correct in their Judgement, my Faith is not up to theirs, & much distrust hangs upon my mind — Six Charlestown Maroons out of 62 attended me this Day according to my orders, I gave them Presents, & said everything to remove their Fears... (P.R.O.: C.O. 137, 95:186.)

A day later, Balcarres wrote a letter to Douglas in Moore Town, in which he tried to dispel the fears of the Maroons there. The tone of this letter, which was meant to be read to the Maroons, contrasts interestingly with that of the one quoted above:

I am much grieved to Find that some villains have been conveying most False reports into the ears of the Moore-town Maroons. My king is the Father of all good and loyal Maroons, and he has sent me here to give them protection. The Moore-town Maroons have deserved and obtained my thanks for their quiet and orderly behaviour. — How is it possible that they can believe that I am their enemy, when I have declared myself their Friend? — When I speak, they hear the speech of the King: If they are afraid, let them stay where they are, until their Fears are past, and then come to me; but if they come now, I shall be very happy to see them. (Crawford 1840:78.)

On the same day, the governor wrote to the Duke of Portland, telling him of the fears of the Maroons:

The Emissaries of the Enemy are now working upon these Fears,

& try to persuade them that I am sent over to extirpate them all. If they are so impressed, I hope the steps I took yesterday may remove those Terrors, as I appropriated handsome Presents for all the Charlestown People, who seemed astonished at finding I treated them kindly & shewed them the presents designed for their Comrades, if they had presented themselves. If they do not come in now to receive these Presents, the Rebellion may extend itself to Windward. (P.R.O.: 137, 95:188.)

Balcarres' attempts to allay the fears of the Windward Maroons met with little success. In spite of all his enticements, none of the Windwards — including the few from Charles Town through whom he had hoped to win the trust of the others — were to venture forth at this time from their mountain strongholds. On the contrary, they quickly went into hiding in the forest. "The Maroons to Windward are in a state of inactive Rebellion", wrote Lord Balcarres to Portland on October 4. "They refuse to obey any order from me: they stop People on the Roads: they have out their Centinels: they have bought Gun-Powder, and have built their huts in the heart of the Blue Mountains." (P.R.O.: C.O. 137, 95:201.) That this "inactive rebellion" was essentially a defensive maneuver is indicated by a further statement by Balcarres: "If we do not attack them, it is, however, understood they will not attack us; and, should the Trelawny Maroons succeed, every thing to Windward may be in the worst situation." (P.R.O.: C.O. 137, 95:201.) Three days later, Balcarres wrote, again to the Duke of Portland, that "the Maroons to Windward are lying by waiting for Events which will not happen" (P.R.O.: C.O. 137, 95:217). On October 27, he informed Portland that the Windward Maroons remained "quiet, altho' they remain sullenly in their own district" (P.R.O.: C.O. 137, 96:14). And indeed, this was the way things were to stay for the next few months, the Windward Maroons and the government having reached a delicate standoff.

Let us return now briefly to the Trelawny rebels in the west, who were by this time openly at war, and thus were to continue to be of central concern to Balcarres. After the conflict had taken a turn for the worse in late August, and the Trelawnys had retreated into the woods, there followed a series of clashes, in which the British forces suffered heavy casualties. Balcarres had grossly underestimated his enemy. The terrain and the brilliant guerilla tactics of the Maroons were proving too much for the government troops. By December 1795 both sides were growing weary, and peace talks were initiated. On the 21st of that month a treaty was negotiated by the Maroons and the British commander in the field, Major-General George Walpole. The treaty, as written, included three provisions: that the Maroons would beg pardon on their knees; that they would agree to resettle on whatever lands the government decided upon; and that they would

give up any runaway slaves who had joined them. However, there was another provision — a “secret article” — which did not go into writing at the time, but was of utmost concern to the Maroons. On December 25, in a private letter to Governor Balcarres, General Walpole wrote: “I was obliged to accede on my *oath*; I promised a secret article, that they should not be sent off the island” (Walpole, in Edwards 1796:15).

Walpole’s treaty was received by the governor and the House of Assembly with mixed feelings. It was not an easy thing for a governor who had originally predicted the defeat of the Trelawny Maroons within a number of days to admit to failure; to resort to the pen rather than the sword, as Balcarres’ commanding officer in the field had done, was to admit that the Maroons could not be conquered. On December 24, the evening after he had received notice of the treaty, the governor called a meeting of select members of the Council and House of Assembly and laid before them the terms upon which Walpole had agreed with the Maroons. This “little but select Council”, as Balcarres referred to it, debated the issue of whether or not the treaty should be ratified. In a letter to the attorney general of Jamaica, dated December 26, Balcarres summarized the arguments put forth that night. Those who supported ratification emphasized that General Walpole had *already* acceded on his oath. Aside from this, they argued, crop time was approaching and a continued state of war would have led to great losses. Most important was their insistence to the governor

that, the nature & Conduct of our Internal Enemy was not to be disregarded; that they had manifested great Fortitude, great Generalship; and preserved a secrecy in their manoeuvres unparalleled among European Soldiery. That, the Velocity of their Movements, & Knowledge of the Grounds was so superior to ours, as to make them be considered as unconquerable... (P.R.O.: C.O. 137, 96:65).

Since it was generally felt that the Trelawnys would never agree to an unconditional surrender, and it had proven impossible to crush them with force, the only alternative seemed to be to treat with them, as had been done with their predecessors in 1739. Walpole’s initiative provided the government with just such an option.

On the other hand, those who opposed ratification pointed out that if the Trelawny rebels were to go without punishment, this would represent a “dangerous lesson” to the plantation slaves. Furthermore, the government had expended much “Blood and Treasure” in the campaign against the Maroons, all of which would have been to no avail if the treaty were ratified. Finally, there had been indications that the Trelawnys were so terrified of being hunted down by the ferocious hounds which had recently been imported into the island for

use against them that they might now be induced to surrender, on terms more favorable to the government. Those taking this position, including the governor himself, objected to Walpole's "secret article" guaranteeing that the Maroons would not be transported off the island; and they felt that "it would be very unwise, & puerile on our part to grant such Terms" (P.R.O.: C.O. 137, 96:66).

Those present voted on the issue, six for acceding to the treaty, five against it, and two abstaining. The treaty was thus formally ratified, but Balcarres was not content to let it rest at that. In the same letter, he went on to say:

So close a Division, rendered it possible for me to consider the Resolution as the Sense of the Country . . . it appears to me that present Safety & Distant Danger is preferable to immediate Danger & Distant Safety; I must, therefore, secure the Persons of the Rebels by any Means that may present themselves. If I neglect this opportunity, it may not recur. — Under such Idea, I have resolv'd to accede to the Terms, but I can only look upon them, when carried into Effect as Preliminary; because I feel, that if I stop there, I shall not have done the Business either to my own satisfaction, or that of the Country in General. (P.R.O.: C.O. 137, 96:67-68.)

Clearly, Balcarres was leaving the way open to do whatever he wanted with the Maroons, once they had come in and laid down their arms. He felt that they would always remain a threat, if allowed to stay in Jamaica, and he was determined to rid the island of them. His comment above shows that he must have viewed the treaty then in much the same light as he did roughly a month later, when he wrote to the Duke of Portland, in an undated letter: "I hold the Treaty signed by Major General Walpole on the one part, Col. Montague James, the Chief of the Maroons on the other part & ratified by me absolutely as nothing" (P.R.O.: C.O. 137, 96:112).

Satisfied with this new development, which would allow him to bring in the Trelawnys without further losses to the island, Balcarres turned once again to the matter of the Windward Maroons. In the same letter of December 26 to the attorney general, cited several times above, Governor Balcarres outlined — with astonishing candor — a scheme he had developed to dispose of the Windwards. I quote this section of the letter at length, for it reveals in no uncertain terms that the fears of the Windward Maroons with regard to the governor's intentions towards them — fears which had first surfaced three months earlier — were not far off the mark:

. . . the Maroons to Windward also require a severe check; but . . . to take any step which might tend to unite those Maroons in actual Rebellion, would be risking too much . . . the Charles

town Maroons, altho' they have disobeyed my order to come in a Body to Kingston, did, notwithstanding, come in by small & detached parties . . . they are an infinitely more docile & softer people than those of Trelawny-Town . . . the Nanny-Town-Maroons [i.e., those at Moore Town] are closely connected in Relationship with the Trelawny . . . they resolutely disobeyed my orders . . . they did not come in, either in a Body as they were commanded, or in Parties; and sullenly rejected the bounty of the Assembly . . . they have openly declared, if the Charlestown Maroons would go into Rebellion they would join them, regardless of the Causes of that Rebellion . . . they have actually built Huts out of their own district, within the range of the Blue Mountains, a Country of immense strength; as if preparing for Hostilities, either in the event of the Trelawny Maroons proving successful, or of a Rebellion taking place among those of Charlestown . . . we ought to avail ourselves of the Impression made on the Minds of the Maroons by the arrival of the Spanish Dogs & Chasseurs . . . Supposing the surrender of the Trelawny Maroons compleated, I mean to act in this Way . . . to re-embark the Dogs in Mr. Atkinson's Vessel, & to send her up to Anotto Bay [a port on the northeastern coast of the island, close to the Windward Maroon towns]. To summon the Charlestown Maroons to come in a Body to Kingston, in compliance with my former order, which must be obeyed. Mr. Shirley [a colonel serving under Balcarres?] to give them private assurances, as if from himself, that they may depend upon not being touch'd; that he is certain I will only speak to them & send them home; but that he knows I am as obstinate as a Mule, & that altho' he has great Weight with me, he is afraid that I will let loose the Dogs upon them; but that he also knows I have a great deal of mildness, provided I am not cross'd; & that he further knows my wish is to make Friends of them, & not to make War upon them . . . That altho' he answers for all this, yet as I am very proud & will give no assurances, they must rely only upon him . . . There is the strongest Presumption to suppose that all this will go well. — After this Body is dismissed, the Nanny Town People will fall into the snare — they will come down in Full Expectation that they are complying with an obstinate Whim of the Commander in Chief. — I will secure them, & they shall share exactly the fate of the Trelawny Maroons . . . By effecting this, the Maroon Power is assuredly at an end, whether they are sent out of the Island, or established in it, under certain Regulations. (P.R.O.: C.O. 137, 96:68, 69.)¹⁷

For one reason or another, Balcarres seems never to have acted on this treacherous plan of his — or at least there is no record of its actual implementation. Perhaps the governor was in the end sufficiently discouraged by the attorney general, with whom he had shared his scheme in the above letter; when the latter responded two days later,

on December 28, he attempted to dissuade Balcarres from carrying out his design.¹⁸ The attorney general's letter throws some light as well on the careerist ambitions motivating the governor's overzealous behavior throughout the entire crisis:

I think the Plan respecting the Windward Maroons rather ticklish and dangerous — should Mr. Shirley fail in the attempt, and the Charles Town Maroons disobey your orders after your defeating the Maroons to Leeward, and those orders shou'd not be enforced, a great loss of Dignity wou'd be the Consequence and the Example wou'd be pernicious, on the contrary to compel obedience by means of Hostility wou'd be exposing that part of the Island to the same danger & disagreeable Warfare, which has been experienced in Cornwall [i.e., the Leeward part of the island], without adverting to the heavy expences, which must be the consequence of such a Measure — It seems to me that if your Lordship can effectually humble the Trelawny Maroons, you will have atchieved [sic] a great deal for the Country; and may retire with Laurels, without encountering the risque of further Measures. (P.R.O.: C.O. 137, 96:61, 62.)

Balcarres' response to the attorney general, dated December 31, shows that he was loath to give up his plan. In the meantime, the picture had been complicated considerably by the news that ten Maroons from "Nanny Town" (i.e., Moore Town) had ostensibly visited the Trelawny rebels a week before Christmas, and had urged them not to give up the fight, before returning to the Blue Mountains (P.R.O.: C.O. 137, 96:73, 74). Balcarres' letter to the attorney general is particularly interesting because of its mention of an apparently strained meeting between a group of Charles Town Maroons and himself on December 23:

... that my arguments respecting Nanny Town Maroons are not overstrained, is fully proved by the inclosed Evidence [regarding the visit of the Nanny Town Maroons to the Trelawnys]. I as little liked the Visit to me in Spanish Town two days before Christmas of a Detachment of the Charles-Town Maroons, as I do the visit of the Nanny Town Maroons to the Rebel Maroons of Trelawny — Let us hope the best, but do not let us shut our eyes against the Possibility of an Insurrection of the Windward Maroons. I am determined to do nothing that will risk the safety of this Island ... (P.R.O.: C.O. 137, 96:71.)

Whether or not this unexpected visit by a number of Charles Town Maroons was in any way connected with Balcarres' devious plan we cannot know. It is significant, though, that these Maroons were in the vicinity of the capital shortly before the governor communicated his scheme to the attorney general. Although there is no proof one way

or the other, it is entirely possible that intelligence of Balcarres' current stratagem was leaked to them through some channel — whether a slave informer, or one of the several planters or other whites sympathetic to the Maroons — while they were still in town.

If Balcarres ever did proceed in secret with his plan, it is certain that the Windward Maroons did not take the bait. For in an undated letter probably written in early February of 1796, Balcarres told the Duke of Portland: "The Maroons to Windward have absolutely refused to obey any orders from me, and they have remained inactive" (P.R.O.: C.O. 137, 96:111). The governor complained to Portland yet again, in a letter of February 15, 1796: "The Maroons to Windward still obstinately refuse to obey any orders. I believe they are actuated by their Fears of being laid hold of & sent off the Country" (P.R.O.: C.O. 137, 96:113).¹⁹ By this time, there are indications in Balcarres' correspondence that he no longer felt the need to resort to trickery, and was planning instead to effect the submission of the Windward Maroons "by negotiation" (P.R.O.: C.O. 137, 96:111).

Meanwhile the Trelawny rebels to the west had begun to turn themselves in, one by one, and Walpole assured the governor that they would all be in before long. Confident of his "victory" over the Trelawnys, Balcarres opted to take a gentler stance toward the Windward Maroons, rather than risk another full-scale rebellion in the eastern part of the island. Although he had felt at first that their behavior deserved "to be treated with the utmost severity", he later changed his mind, deciding that "the disobedience of the said maroons did not proceed from any wicked intent, but was occasioned by the alarming reports of evil-designing persons operating upon their minds" (Journals of the Assembly of Jamaica 1805:476). In a sudden burst of magnanimity, Balcarres declared that he would be satisfied if the Charles Town Maroons would make a "submission upon their knees, together with a solemn declaration that their disobedience proceeded from no evil design, but solely from fear and apprehension" (Journals of the Assembly of Jamaica 1805:476).

On March 18, 1796 — by which time all but a handful of the Trelawny rebels had surrendered — the Charles Town Maroons made their oath of submission and swore allegiance to King George III, thereby averting the wrath of Balcarres. This time, however, they had not been ordered to appear before the governor. Perhaps sensing that their "fear and apprehension" had not yet faded, Balcarres was satisfied to send three appointed commissioners to *them* at Charles Town, to act as witnesses to their oath of submission. Not having been pressed into a vulnerable position this time, the Maroons were most cooperative, as can be seen in the long and detailed description of their submission printed in the Journals of the Assembly of Jamaica (1805: 476). The Moore Town Maroons may have been dealt with similarly

by Governor Balcarres, but I have not found any record of an oath of submission made by them. At any rate, the return of the governor's commission from Charles Town seems to have signalled the end of the Windward crisis.²⁰

To complete the story, we must return to the Trelawny Maroons, and go back to the time — December 21, to be precise — when Walpole signed the treaty with them. Shortly after this, the Maroons began to drift in to Walpole's post. Some, however, seemed suspicious. Walpole wrote Balcarres on December 28:

They seem determined to be sure that no infringement of the treaty will ensue; I read the ratification to three of them, and your lordship's letter, assuring them, that whatever might be the future disposal of them, that they would be a free people (Walpole in Edwards 1796:15).

Walpole's reassurances were not completely effective, judging by the reluctance of the remaining Maroons to turn themselves in. January 1 had been set as the date by which all Maroons were to be in and accounted for, but one week later, most of them were still in hiding. Unable to trust the British, they refused to risk more than a few men and women at a time. In a letter of January 8 to Balcarres, Walpole complained of the poor turn-out:

...this is owing solely to distrust: Each is desirous that his neighbour should try the white faith first; and when one is satisfied, the way is, that he returns and brings back most of his family (Walpole, in Edwards 1796:22).

The fears of the Maroons contributed to an unfortunate prolongation of the conflict, and although small parties continued gradually to come in, the last stragglers remained in the woods until mid-March. This course of events later provided the governor and the House of Assembly with a convenient way of "honorably" getting around Walpole's promise to the Trelawnys that they would not be removed from the island — a promise which, as we have seen, Balcarres had never really intended to keep. When Walpole received intimations in March that plans were afoot to deport the Maroons, he offered his resignation to Governor Balcarres in a private letter. The following passage from this letter gives a fair idea of the Maroon perception of the treaty:

For some days past, I have been in a state of considerable uneasiness at a report, which seems to gain ground, that the legislature mean to infringe the capitulation accepted by me and ratified by your lordship.

My lord, to be plain with you, it was through my means alone that the maroons were induced to surrender, from a reliance

which they had in my word, from a conviction impressed upon them by me that the white people would never break their faith.

All these things strongly call upon me, as the instrumental agent in this business, to see a due observance of the terms, or, in case of violation, to resign my command; and if that should not be accepted, to declare the facts to the world, and to leave them to judge how far I ought or ought not to be implicated in the guilt and infamy of such a proceeding. (Walpole, in Edwards 1796: 83.)

The rest of the story is well-known to Jamaican historians. A "secret committee" was appointed by the government to decide the fate of the Trelawny Maroons, who were now safely in detention. It was decided by the committee that the Trelawnys had failed to comply with two of the treaty's terms — first, most of them had not surrendered themselves before the January 1 deadline (the fact that Walpole had continued, with Balcarres' knowledge, to promise them amnesty up until March was ignored); second, they had supposedly not turned in those runaway slaves that had joined them.²¹ Much to Walpole's dismay, these were deemed sufficient grounds for deportation. The "Second Maroon War" thus came to its ironic finale, and the Trelawny prisoners prepared for the worst. To the Trelawnys, who had just fallen victim to the *third* and most flagrant breach of faith by the whites since the conflict had begun, the decision to deport them must have seemed near the limits of human depravity; to the Windward Maroons in the east, who had once predicted that treating with the wrathful governor would have meant a similar fate for themselves, it must have seemed prophecy fulfilled.

A few months later, the entire community of Trelawny Maroons embarked from Port Royal for Halifax. All but a handful of them were never again to see Jamaica. The unwilling departure of the Trelawnys must have made a strong impression upon the Windward Maroons who remained behind, for their descendants still commemorate it in song:

gone-oh, Maroon gone-eh
gone-oh, Maroon gone-eh
ma, me yeri war a Cholan
me cry out hooray
Maroon de ya
we no gone home-eh

wish you well-oh, Maroon, wish you well-eh
wish you well-oh, Maroon, wish you well-eh
ma, me yeri war a Cholan
me cry out hooray
Maroon de ya
we no gone home-eh

fare thee well-oh, Maroon, fare thee well-oh
fare thee well-oh, Maroon, fare thee well-eh
dem raise war a St. James
fe cry out hooray
but Maroon de ya
we no gone home yet-eh
(Moore Town, December 23, 1977).²²

History and Myth: The Maroon Perspective

... I must not omit to say, that the principal men among the Maroons have ever denied that they voluntarily entered into a rebellion against the authority of the Government, declaring they were forced into hostilities on a principle of self-preservation, being persuaded, from the subsequent conduct of the white people, that their destruction was determined (Dallas 1803:148).

When viewing the Maroon tradition of the treacherous feast alongside the British record of the 1795 rebellion, one senses a complicated correspondence between them; the fit is far from precise, but a feeling of unmistakable familiarity arises from a comparison of the Maroon story and the written record. There are few specific details that can readily be matched from one to the other, and thus the strict "factuality" of the story of the treacherous feast (not to mention the written record) may certainly be held in doubt. We do not know, for instance — and will probably never know for sure — whether an actual "blacksmith" once warned the Maroons in a common African language of some impending danger, either in 1795 or at some other point in Jamaican history. Nor do we know whether or not a trap was ever really laid for the Maroons in the guise of an honorary feast.²³ What we do know is that Governor Balcarres, at the very least, did *consider* setting a "snare" — in his own words — for the Windward Maroons. Although it is not known whether his "friendly" invitation to the Maroons was to include a feast, the governor and House of Assembly *did* try to win their trust by bestowing gifts and offering "bounties" to them. The record shows, furthermore, that all of Balcarres' efforts to bring the Windwards into his net — whether by blustering commands or deceitful overtures of friendship — were to fail; for the Maroons, either through guesswork or an intelligence network, had correctly anticipated his intentions. That this set of events bears a very striking resemblance to the tale of betrayal told by present-day descendants of these people cannot be denied.

Just as important as this, I believe, is a consideration of the validity of the *general* historical interpretation contained within the story of the treacherous feast. Although any given part of the Maroon story might have been drawn from actual occurrences in the past, the core theme — the ceremonious decoying of the Maroons into a hidden trap

— seems to have become over time a sort of generalized emblem of British perfidy. In essence, it could be made to represent equally well *any* of the numerous occasions on which the British governor actually did betray the trust of the Trelawny Maroons in 1795-6 — the incarceration of the original peace-making delegation; the shackling and confinement of the thirty-one who surrendered before the deadline in August; or the final broken promise, and forced deportation. On this general level, the “historical accuracy” of the Maroon perspective appears unquestionable, and provides us with a useful antidote to the tendency in most British accounts to downplay the less flattering aspects of the British performance during this period.²⁴

But it is also clear that the story of the treacherous feast has taken on “mythic” proportions; if it is history, it is *living* history. To Maroons today, the story carries as profound a message as it would have in 1800. It is, in one respect, a vehicle which has helped to transmit basic moral precepts across several generations. In Moore Town, where I worked, “the treacherous feast” is without a doubt one of the most commonly recited oral traditions, and is regarded as one of the most important — second, perhaps, only to the story of the original peace treaty of 1739.²⁵ Its importance lies partly in its expression of a moral axiom fundamental to the traditional Maroon ethos: that one must never place complete trust in another. Even in the presence of one’s most trusted friends, one must never let down his guard all the way. Although this injunction takes on a special urgency when applied to non-Maroons, both white and black, it also guides interpersonal relations *within* the Maroon community.²⁶

This cautionary principle, and the ethos of which it is a part, reflect a fear, still very much alive among more traditional Maroons, that the past may repeat itself. The anguish of the Trelawny Maroons over the thought of deportation in 1795 must have sprung in part from the belief that they would be sold as slaves once they had reached foreign shores.²⁷ This fear of re-enslavement lies also at the foundation of the story of the treacherous feast, as is made explicit in the following excerpt from another of the texts I collected:

hanamo moko braiam
 hanamo moko braiam
 a mi kil konsonkonso
 hanamo moko braiam

That means to say, *when* he sang now, the rest of the people heard the song now, and they didn’t come. Because if they had come then, they would have caught them and made them slaves. But he beat the iron now and called them, and told them, don’t come near, because the white man wanted to catch them and make them slaves. And they turned back. (Kent, near Moore Town, June 1, 1978.)

The determination to prevent a return to the days of slavery — either literally or figuratively — is one of the primary driving forces behind the traditional Maroon ethos. It is this which is at the heart of the “treacherous feast”, and so many more of the Maroon oral traditions which have been carried down to the present. And it is this which once prompted a Maroon oral historian to confide to me at the end of a taping session:

What the white man says, even today, is not what he means at all, whether you want to believe me or not. If a white man comes here and wants to know something from you — and when I say ‘white man’ I mean the government — what he says to you is not what he means. He wants to defeat you, to take you and make you a slave. (Comfort Castle, near Moore Town, September 6, 1978.)

The continuing centrality of this idea in traditional Maroon thought offers eminent testimony to the powerful force that key historical events are capable of exerting in the shaping of cultural ideology.²⁸ The traditional Maroon ethos is nothing if not an interpretive response to a past which still resonates through the words of Maroon storytellers.

The story of the treacherous feast, for its part, helps to keep the ethos alive. Yet, its significance is greater than this. For it reminds us that the understanding of complex historical events can be enhanced by going, when possible, beyond the “facts” as frozen on paper. In the Jamaican Maroon case, there is a whole untapped domain — a realm of ideas, values, and attitudes of considerable historical depth — which awaits the patient researcher. Until this indigenous body of orally transmitted knowledge is given recognition, the study of Maroon history will continue to fall short of its potential.

NOTES

- 1 An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Seminar in Atlantic History and Culture at The Johns Hopkins University, February 9, 1982. Substantial revisions were made after additional research was carried out at the Public Record Office in London during September 1982. I am grateful for the comments of the participants in the Atlantic Seminar, particularly those of David Cohen, Philip Curtin, Gertrude Fraser, Eugene Galbraith, Emily Martin, Sidney Mintz and Katherine Verdery. I would like to convey special thanks to Richard Price, whose ideas and suggestions have contributed to this paper from its very inception. Finally, I owe a special debt to Barbara Kopytoff for her encouragement and generous sharing of information; if she had not directed me to the proper archival sources, I might never have found some of the more important original documents which I quote in this paper, several of which were first located by her. Although I am glad to be able to acknowledge all the help I have received, responsibility for the final version, of course, remains my own.
- 2 For discussions of the Maroons in Nova Scotia and, later on, Sierra Leone, see Brymner (1895), Dallas (1803), Fyfe (1962), Hamilton (1890), Schafer

- (1973). For general background on the disturbances of 1795-6, see Dallas (1803), Edwards (1796), Furness (1965), Crawford (1840), Robinson (1969), Schafer (1973).
- 3 At one point, in a letter of September 30, 1795 (P.R.O.: C.O. 137, 95:188), the Jamaican governor claimed to have received a report that a number of Maroons from Scott's Hall had joined the Trelawny Maroons in their fight; but this seems never to have been proven, one way or the other.
 - 4 The oral traditions appearing in this paper were gathered while I was conducting fieldwork among the Maroons of Moore Town, from October 1977 to December 1978. This research was supported by a Fellowship from the Organization of American States. Those Maroons who shared these traditions with me wished to remain anonymous; however, I would like to express my deep appreciation for their kind contribution. My field research was later supplemented by archival work in the Public Record Office, London, during September 1982. Materials from the Public Record Office which I have cited are indicated, in parentheses, by "P.R.O.", followed by "C.O. 137" (Colonial Office Series No. 137), and further followed by the volume number and, finally, the individual document number.
 - 5 Carey Robinson (1969:156), typifying this attitude, states: "The Maroon community was not a literate community but a martial one; and its proud records were compiled by others".
 - 6 For an early discussion of the usefulness of oral traditions, see Vansina (1965). Two other works in this vein which I have found particularly stimulating are Cohen (1977) and Rosaldo (1980). Craton (1977) deals specifically with the possibilities for oral history research in rural Jamaica, and offers several interesting insights, though I believe his conclusions are overly pessimistic — particularly if applied to the Maroon communities. Barbara Kopytoff deserves mention as one scholar working with Jamaican Maroons who has been sensitive to oral traditions, although she has made only very limited use of them. See Kopytoff (1973; 1979). Richard Hart is another author who has made occasional use of Jamaican Maroon oral traditions (see Hart 1950).
 - 7 The phrase "intimate culture" is taken from A. L. Epstein (1978:112).
 - 8 The "iron" is another name for the *adawo*, a percussion instrument used in Kromanti dance, which usually consists of the blade of a machete and a nail, or other small piece of metal. Almost any metal object can be adapted and used as the *adawo*, so long as it resonates sufficiently. The *adawo* is known for its paralinguistic capabilities; it is said that a good player can "speak" Kromanti language with it. In the story of the treacherous feast, the understanding is that the blacksmith who saves the Maroons does so by "speaking" to them with his anvil, using it as if it were an *adawo*.
 - 9 I am unable to offer a translation for this song, except for the word "konsonkonso", which was glossed by most Maroon ritual specialists as either "handcuffs" or "jail". It is safe to say that this word is derived from the West African language, Twi, "nkonsonkonson", meaning "chain, fetters" (Christaller 1933:253).
 - 10 Most Maroon oral traditions carry more than one message. This text is no exception. It should be noted that one of the several important messages carried within it — which will not be emphasized in this paper — has to do with the purported ethnic background of the blacksmith. In this version of the story, and several others, the blacksmith is portrayed as a "Bongo man", meaning in this instance not only an African, but also a member of the same "nation" as those people who today practise the Afro-Jamaican religion known as Kumina. That he was able to communicate with the Maroons in a shared African language is today invoked as "proof" that the

Maroon and Kumina "nations" are closely related. We see, then, how Maroon oral traditions may be reworked and applied toward particular ends in the present. In other variants of the story, the blacksmith is sometimes portrayed as a Maroon living in town. See Bilby (1979:140-150; 1981:81-88). All texts and direct quotes from Jamaican informants in this paper have been translated from Jamaican Creole to standard English.

- 11 For a discussion of Kromanti Play and the canons of secrecy attached to it, see Bilby (1981).
- 12 A very interesting, but somewhat idiosyncratic, version of the story of the treacherous feast (complete with the associated Kromanti song) is to be found in an as yet unpublished manuscript by the Colonel of the Moore Town Maroons, C. L. G. Harris (n.d.:70-74). I did not see this section of the Colonel's manuscript until some time after I had made the connection for myself between the treacherous feast and the events of 1795-6; if I had seen it earlier, it would have saved me a lot of work, for Colonel Harris himself makes this connection in his manuscript. Not only does he mention Lord Balcarres (the Jamaican governor at the time) by name, but he dates the events as having taken place in 1800 (a few years too late, by my reckoning); he does not explain in the manuscript how he arrived at the name of the governor or the date. During my work, I never encountered another Maroon who knew the name Balcarres (although one or two connected the tradition mistakenly to Governor Eyre); most people had no idea of what the governor's name even *might* have been during the period when the events they related were supposed to have taken place. And not a single person other than the Colonel was able to place the tradition within a time frame more specific than "when the Kojo's Town Maroons were taken away", or "after the treaty, but during slavery time". The specificity of the information in Colonel Harris' account (which is a highly elaborated, but most entertaining version) may have something to do with the fact that he has read a number of historical works on the Maroons, among them Bryan Edwards' 1796 volume, which is concerned primarily with the "Second Maroon War". Colonel Harris was the only Moore Town Maroon I could find who had read — or even heard of, by name — the book by Edwards, or any of the other historical tracts written about the Maroons (many of my older informants were not literate, or only barely so). Remarkable as it may seem, and although I made a habit of carefully questioning people about this, and checking for possible "contamination" from written sources, I still could find no such examples apart from Colonel Harris (who, it should be mentioned, has achieved a standard of formal education far exceeding that of most Maroons living in the community). Perhaps this helps to explain the discrepancy between his account — as far as these detail go — and all the other versions of the story I collected. I am grateful to Colonel Harris for making his manuscript available to me after I returned from the field.
- 13 In three of the fourteen texts I collected, the narrators relate the story to the period of the Morant Bay rebellion (1865), and in two of these cases, reference is made to Governor Eyre, who was the Jamaican governor at the time of that rebellion. What seems to have happened here is that in each case a number of events from separate periods have been confused and compressed into a single text. This is indicated by the fact that the storyteller who mentioned Eyre (in two different texts) referred to him as follows: "When they made the peace with the governor, it was Governor Eyre. It was after he had caused the Kojo's Town Maroons to go away." If this text is to be treated literally, then we have to conclude that the narrator is confusing Governor Eyre with Governor Balcarres, the latter being the one responsible for the deportation of the "Kojo's Town Maroons".

- 14 "Nanny's people" refers to the Windward Maroons. Nanny was the great spiritual leader of the Windward Maroons during the 1730's. Today she plays a greater part in Windward oral traditions than any other single figure, and she is now a Jamaican National Hero. Nanny Town, named after her, was the main early Windward Maroon settlement, until its destruction by the British in the 1730's.

This text is interesting in that it explicitly mentions Nova Scotia. This need not lead to assumptions of "contamination" from written sources. In the first place, those Maroons who remained in Jamaica after the deportation of the Trelawnys in 1796 were not isolated from events in the rest of the island, including Kingston, and there is no reason to think that they would not have heard about the destination point chosen for the Trelawny Maroons by the government. In the second place, a small number of Trelawny Maroons and their descendants did eventually return from their final destination at Freetown, Sierra Leone, to Jamaica. According to Schafer (1973:210), "some returned in the 1830's and 1840's and were re-integrated into the remaining Maroon villages". Schuler (1980:16) states that a total of sixty-four Maroons sailed from Freetown to Jamaica on the vessel, the *Hector*, in 1841; and a few other Maroons made the voyage later, on other ships (Schuler 1980:112). Certainly, these repatriating Maroons must have had many tales to tell upon their arrival, some forty years after they and/or their parents had been deported from the island.

- 15 At the same time, the story carries the lesson that trust is sometimes essential — as when the Maroons put their trust in the blacksmith whose message saves them. Nevertheless, the primary emphasis is upon the maintenance of extreme caution in situations requiring the placing of trust in others.
- 16 This letter from Douglas is summarized, and parts of it quoted, in a personal communication from Barbara Kopytoff, July 8, 1982.
- 17 Part of this letter has been published previously in *Lives of the Lindsays* (Crawford 1840:117-120), a multi-volume tome eulogizing the lives of several members of the illustrious family to which Governor Balcarres belonged. The published version of the letter, however, was edited in such a way as to prevent any allegations of perfidy being directed against the corrupt governor. All of the important sections I have quoted above — damning as they are — were expurgated from the published version, a fact which in itself is tantamount to an admission of Balcarres' guilt on the part of the editor. This is especially so, since the edited letter appears in the middle of a volume of correspondence regarding the rebellion of 1796 which is otherwise quite complete. If a handwritten copy of Balcarres' letter had not been preserved by the Colonial Office, this most indicting piece of evidence might have been forever lost.
- 18 The eventual response of the British colonial secretary to Balcarres' problems with the Windward Maroons was so vague as to allow of almost any interpretation: "Whenever the subjection of the Maroons to Leeward shall be completed, it is to be hoped that those to Windward may be materially influenced by it, and that it's effects may extend to the Maroons of Nanny Town, whose conduct has certainly shewn too many symptoms of disaffection, not to warrant a strong suspicion of their designs" (P.R.O.: C.O. 137, 96:100). In any case, this dispatch is dated March 3, 1796, and thus would not have reached Balcarres until after the crisis had already ended, both to Leeward and Windward.
- 19 A few of the texts I collected in Moore Town end with an interesting detail which might have some significance here. In one case, the story was ended as follows: "When [the Major of the Maroons] got back to Moore Town

[from Kingston], he sent a message to the governor. He said, 'When a lion is asleep, you mustn't play with his tail, because he has *one* gray hair on his head to tell him something. And if you wake him, and you make his gray hair stand up . . . that will be for you'" (Moore Town, June 25, 1978). Another man told it this way: "When the governor realized it, in the morning, there was not even one Maroon in Kingston. Every bit of them were in Moore Town. Well, when they reached Moore Town, they sent back a telegram [sic] to [the governor] and said, 'When a lion is asleep, you mustn't play with his tail. For every gray hair in his head tells him something.' And they never troubled Moore Town again, until today" (Moore Town, September 10, 1978).

- 20 That relations between Moore Town and the government remained somewhat tense for several years is indicated by the fact that the Maroons of this community were not re-admitted to "party duty" (patrolling for escaped slaves, for pay) until 1804, when they petitioned for permission to resume this practice, and promised their loyalty in the future (Kopytoff 1973:170).
- 21 According to Schafer (1973:301), "Walpole's field officers claimed that all the runaways had been identified". Walpole himself told Balcarres in several letters that the Trelawnys had adhered to all terms of the treaty, including the turning in of all the runaways who had joined them. Some writers have questioned the motives behind Walpole's protests against the breaking of the treaty. It seems to me, however, that his sincerity cannot be questioned. In a letter of April 21, 1796, Walpole wrote that he was protesting the decision to deport the Trelawnys "to Obviate every Appearance of Intentional treachery on my part toward the Maroons" (P.R.O.: C.O. 137, 97:119). On May 16 of that year he wrote defensively to Balcarres: "I have discharged my duty and have now thank God as far as regards the Maroons not any thing to upbraid myself with. It is not my Fault that public Faith has not been kept" (P.R.O.: C.O. 137, 97:126). One must conclude that Walpole was used as a tool by Balcarres, which allowed the latter to effect his desired ends without having to accept personal responsibility. As late as the 1830's, Walpole, now living in England, was still making petitions on behalf of the Maroons in Sierra Leone who wished to return to Jamaica (P.R.O.: C.O. 142, 33).
- 22 The song may be translated roughly as follows:
gone, the Maroons have gone
gone, the Maroons have gone
ma, I heard of war at Trelawny
I cried out hooray
the Maroons [i.e., the Windward ones] are here
we haven's gone home

wish you well, Maroons, wish you well
wish you well, Maroons, wish you well
ma, I heard of war at Trelawny
I cried out hooray
the Maroons are here
we haven't gone home

fare thee well, Maroons, fare thee well
fare thee well, Maroons, fare thee well
they raised war in St. James [i.e., the parish in which the
Trelawnys were located]
to cry out hooray
but the Maroons are here
we haven't gone home yet.

- 23 In any case, the Maroons were commonly feasted by the government in payment for their services in quelling slave insurrections, and the like. This continued through the nineteenth century. For instance, after they had helped suppress the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865, Governor Eyre "had the Maroons under Colonel Fyfe brought to Kingston, publicly banqueted and filled with hogsflesh and rum" (Olivier 1933:262). More important than whether or not such a feast was ever actually planned during the rebellion, however, may be the symbolic potency of this detail from the story. The acts of sharing food and eating together are almost everywhere tied with notions of amity and trust, and are used in many societies as symbolic expressions of positive social relations. For present-day Maroons, the idea that a *feast* was used (or rather, abused) to lure their ancestors into a trap serves to underscore the enormity of the treachery displayed by the government at the time. I am grateful to Sidney Mintz for reminding me of this point.
- 24 The Russian anthropologist A. D. Dridzo has advanced an interesting theory to the effect that the conflict of 1795 was purposefully provoked by an influential group of Jamaican planters, in order to affect the internal policies of Great Britain so as to advance their own interests. See Dridzo (1972: 21-25) for this involved and complicated argument. The theory is not at all incompatible with the insistence of the conquered Maroons in 1796 that the war was not of their making, and had been a matter of "self-preservation" for them. Nor does it conflict with the general perspective — with its emphasis on betrayal — preserved in the story of the treacherous feast. One British writer who would have agreed with the general perspective contained in the story of the treacherous feast was a Mr. Taylor, who in the 1830's was appointed to conduct an impartial inquiry into the claims of the Maroons now living in Sierra Leone, presented to the British authorities by General Walpole. After poring over the official documents related to the rebellion of 1795, including all the correspondence between Walpole and Balcarres, Taylor concluded as follows: "For myself as far as I can form a judgement, looking to the whole course of proceeding in respect to the Maroons, — the seizure of the six Chiefs, — the imprisonment of the 31 on the 11th of August and the final deportation of the entire Tribe, — I confess I can think nothing else of it than that it began continued and ended in treachery" (P.R.O.: C.O. 142, 33). In spite of this conclusion, the petition of the Maroons requesting a return passage from Sierra Leone to Jamaica was never granted by the British government. A few Maroons, however, did return later to Jamaica as recruited laborers, as noted earlier.
- 25 For an interesting discussion of the peace treaty as a Maroon "sacred charter", see Kopytoff (1979). That the story of the treacherous feast has long occupied such an important place in Maroon oral tradition is confirmed by the fact that it is mentioned — and is the *only* Maroon story mentioned — by Martha Beckwith in her study *Black Roadways* (1929). In the 1920's, Beckwith heard a version of the story from a Moore Town Maroon, and in her book summarized it as follows: "The story runs that a captive Maroon working at a blacksmith's anvil saw some of his fellows landing from a boat and hammered out a warning" (Beckwith 1929:193). Unfortunately, she has left us no more of a record than this. Interestingly enough, there is a related oral tradition in the present-day Leeward Maroon community of Accompong Town. Some Maroons there say that the government got the cooperation of the Maroons to board the ships in the harbor to take them to Nova Scotia by telling them there was a feast on board (or giving them the feast on board), and then sailed away with them (Barbara Kopytoff, personal communication, July 8, 1982). A few

of the texts I collected in Moore Town also state that the feast intended for the Windward Maroons was to take place not in a fort, but rather on a ship docked in the harbor — the plan being to sail off with them after they had all passed out from the liquor.

- 26 For a more detailed discussion of this aspect of the Maroon ethos, from a different angle, see Bilby (1981:76-77).

- 27 A fear of deportation apparently had been felt by Maroons long before the disturbances of 1795. In April 1774, for instance, the Windward Maroons were suddenly seized "with an apprehension that a plan was in agitation to carry them off the island" (Dallas 1803:129) — "from what cause is uncertain", says Dallas (1803:129). This led to a series of insubordinate actions on the part of several Maroons which nearly caused a major confrontation between them and the government. To the Maroons at this time, it must have been painfully apparent that deportation would have removed them from the jurisdiction of the treaties which protected their rights as a free people; from this point of view, re-enslavement must have seemed but a slight leap away.

Balcarres himself was well aware of what deportation meant to the Maroons, as well as the plantation slaves it was often used to threaten. In the same letter of December 26 in which he unveiled his unscrupulous scheme, he wrote of the Trelawny Maroons: "It was not to be expected that they would surrender under fears of transportation, to be sold to the Spaniards, & doom'd to work in the Mines; the usual Terrors held out to Negroes, as concomitant with the State of Transportation" (P.R.O.: C.O. 137, 96:66).

- 28 Readers who are familiar with Richard Price's work on Saramaka oral traditions will notice my heavy debt to his paper on "Kwasimukamba's Gambit" (Price 1979a). That the present paper contains a number of structural and stylistic similarities to Dr. Price's paper on Saramaka traditions can be explained by the fact that it was directly inspired by it. Likewise, my description of a fundamental principle among the Jamaican Maroons — the determination to prevent a return to the horror that was slavery — owes more than a little to Dr. Price's work on the historical traditions of the Saramaka Maroons. When I first read of the central position of this belief — the belief that, unless guarded against, "those times shall come again" (see Price 1979a; Price 1983) — in the Saramaka moral system, I was instantly struck by the Jamaican Maroon parallels. Similarities such as those found in the ideological systems of the Jamaican and Saramaka Maroons indicate, as Dr. Price has suggested in a more general context (see Price 1979b), that serious comparative work on Maroons in different parts of the Americas promises to lead to valuable new insights into the nature of the societies and cultures they formed.

For those readers who may find it hard to believe that there live in the mountains of Jamaica a large number of people who still regard a return to slavery — in the literal sense — as a very real and dreaded possibility: let them be assured that the Maroon past cannot so easily be erased. It will continue to live on, under the surface, for some time to come.

REFERENCES CITED

Beckwith, Martha Warren

1929 *Black Roadways; A study of Jamaican folk life*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Bilby, Kenneth M.

1979 *Partisan spirits; ritual interaction and Maroon identity in eastern Jamaica*, unpublished M.A. Thesis, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut.

1981 'The Kromanti Dance of the Windward Maroons of Jamaica', *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 55(1/2):52-101.

Brymner, D.

1895 'The Jamaica Maroons; how they came to Nova Scotia — how they left it', *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada* (Second Series) 1:81-90.

Christaller, Rev. J. G.

1933 *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante language, called Tshi (Twi)*, Basel: Basel Evangelical Missionary Society.

Cohen, David William

1977 *Womunafu's Bunafu; a study of authority in a nineteenth-century African community*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Craton, Michael

1977 'Perceptions of Slavery; A Preliminary Excursion into the Possibilities of Oral History in Rural Jamaica', in: Ann M. Pescatello (ed.), *Old Roots in new lands; historical and anthropological perspectives on black experiences in the Americas*, pp. 263-83, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

Crawford, A. W. C. Lindsay

1840 *Lives of the Lindsays*, volume 3, London: Wigan.

Dallas, Robert Charles

1803 *History of the Maroons*, volume I, London: T. N. Longman and O. Rees.

Dridzo, Abraham Dividovitch

1972 'The origin of the Second Maroon War 1795-1796; a planter's conspiracy?', translated from Russian by Alex Gradussov, *Jamaica Journal* 6(1):21-55.

Edwards, Bryan (ed.)

1796 *The proceedings of the Governor and Assembly of Jamaica, in regard to the Maroon Negroes*, London: John Stockdale.

Epstein, A. L.

1978 *Ethos and identity*, London: Tavistock.

Furness, A. E.

1965 'The Maroon War of 1795', *The Jamaican Historical Review* 5(2):30-49.

Fyfe, Christopher

1962 *A history of Sierra Leone*, London: Oxford University Press.

Hamilton, J. C.

1890 'The Maroons of Jamaica and Nova Scotia', *Proceedings of the Canadian Institute* (Third Series) 7:260-69.

Harris, C. L. G.

n.d. *The Maroons of Moore Town; a Colonel speaks*, unpublished manuscript, 229 pp.

Hart, Richard

1950 'Cudjoe and the First Maroon War in Jamaica', *Caribbean Historical Review* 1(1):46-79.

Journals

1805 *Journals of the Assembly of Jamaica*, volume 9, Jamaica.

Kopytoff, Barbara Klamon

1973 *The Maroons of Jamaica; an ethnohistorical study of incomplete politics, 1655-1905*, unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

Kopytoff, Barbara Klamon

1979 'Colonial treaty as sacred charter of the Jamaican Maroons', *Ethno-history* 26(1):45-64.

Olivier, Sydney

1933 *The myth of Governor Eyre*, London: Leonard and Virginia Woolf.

Price, Richard

1979a 'Kwasimukamba's gambit', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 135:151-169.

1979b *Maroon societies*, second edition (ed. by R. Price), Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press.

1983 *First-Time; the historical vision of an Afro-American people*, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Robinson, Carey

1969 *The fighting Maroons of Jamaica*, Kingston, Jamaica: William Collins and Sangster, Ltd.

Rosaldo, Renato

1980 *Ilongot headhunting, 1883-1974; a study in society and history*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Schafer, Daniel Lee

1973 *The Maroons of Jamaica; African slave rebels in the Caribbean*, unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Minnesota.

Schuler, Monica

1980 'Alas, alas, Kongo'; *a social history of indentured African immigration into Jamaica, 1841-1865*, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Vansina, Jan

1965 *Oral tradition; a study in historical methodology* (translated by H. M. Wright), Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.