

**“SISTER NANNY A ONE A WE,
BROTHER KOJO A ONE A WE,
BROTHER BOB MARLEY A ONE A WE...”
THE CONTINUITY OF BLACK
RESISTANCE IN JAMAICA**

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Although Jamaica does not take up much more space on a medium-sized world map than the size of a point, it acquires an eminent importance in the scientific “reasoning” about Black history and culture in general. The search for the causes of this phenomenon leads to idiosyncrasies of Afro-Jamaicans in their struggle for self-determination and self-fulfillment. Their incomparable decisive insubordination is implied in the different forms of resistance against outside domination.

This determination to resist unites, possibly even on various levels, the rebellious acts of slaves with the declared war of the Maroons, with the revolt under the leadership of Paul Bogle, the Marcus Garvey inspired beginnings of the Black Power Movement, the “cultural revolution” of Rastafari and the permanent attacks of the internationally successful medium “Reggae Music” against the evils inherited in post-colonial society.

Instead of constructing a rather vague and abstract epitome of an “Afro-Jamaican revolutionary type”, the perspective on Black resistance, its foundations and expressions, requires a differentiated approach in order to recognize the partially even antagonistic attitudes to Black resistance behind the common element that we might adequately call “rebellion of the personality”. Proceeding from the assumption that human behaviour is situated, i.e. dependent on the individual’s consideration of an actual situation, it does not seem reasonable to refer these only seemingly opposite ways of acting and reacting employed by Black people in the “New World” to the common categories of collaboration, accommodation or active and passive resistance. A long-time loyal slave could become a rebel or a runaway and later on a Maroon just because of a changed situation or maybe only a change in his or her consideration of the situation. Static scientific models which operate on the basis of antithetical categories like active-passive resistance or accommodation-rebellion are in danger of underrating the power of judgement of oppressed people and their selective and calculating abilities (Craton 1982:14).

The breaches in Black resistance against European domination can only be understood if we "return" the competence to judge, decide and act consciously to the enslaved individuals, who were treated as passive subjects or rather objects by colonial history. Unsatisfying as this might seem, because it cannot restore dignity to the victims of European oppression and ignorance, this scientific undertaking is necessary in order to shed light on the hidden parts of the past, or as Bob Marley might say, on half the story which has never been told. Cultural identity depends to a large part on the historical experiences that can provide the descendants of enslaved people with a tradition of determined resistance to be proud of and to use as a guideline for their own political and cultural action. Within this historical perspective, it is the continuous struggle that counts much more than the victories *per se*. But if we apply a reflective approach, the descriptive use of the term "continuity" needs to be defined even more restrictively in the context of Black resistance in the Caribbean.

Considering how many slave revolts have been betrayed by fellow Blacks, remaining loyal for whatever reason to their oppressor or rather, "downpressor"; how often runaways left the Maroon hideouts to lead the British soldiers to the villages of their former companions; or to choose a more recent topic, to which extent a small national elite cooperates with the foreign "investors" to its own advantage and to the disadvantage of "its people", it seems necessary to show more reservation in speaking of the "continuity of Black resistance". Strictly speaking, only the primary value of resistance can be interpreted as being continuous: the longing for freedom and self-determination. Very few could achieve this goal for themselves. But modifying the above argument, it is this (continued) existence of the above-mentioned primary value which is of more importance for the question of cultural identity than its realization or outspoken success.

Without intending to carry on the argumentation to absurdity, one could go so far as to conceive even acts of treachery as partial realizations of consideration and self-determination – though adverse to the intentions of freedom; the doctrine of the subhuman character of Black people lay at the core of the justification of slavery used and accepted by practically all European political and social powers (governments, churches and ordinary society members) for the juridical reification of the Black "labour force". Although this attempted reification failed exactly because of the resistance offered by the oppressed, the collaborators with the plantocracy proved the untenability of the reification of the enslaved Africans; things ("res") are neither able to collaborate nor to rebel. Both ways of "conduct" are based on conscious decisions, whether chosen under pressure or not.

On behalf of the Maroons, we can likewise speak of continuous resistance in a rather generalized sense. The peace treaties in the years

1738/39 not only brought an end to the 85-year-old guerilla war against the British administration and established the quasi-static independence of the Maroon nations, but also changed their political role fundamentally. Almost over night, they made the bitterest enemies the slavemaster society was ever challenged by into allies of the plantocracy in all internal and external conflicts – albeit under observation of a far-reaching autonomy on the side of the Maroons. Articles 6 and 7 in the peace treaty between the British negotiators John Guthrie and Francis Saddler and Captain Cudjoe (Kojo – until today revered as founder of the Maroon state and cultural hero by the Maroon descendants) state:

That the said captain Cudjoe and his successors, do use their best endeavours to take, kill, suppress, or destroy, either by themselves, or jointly with any other number of men commanded on that service by his excellency the governor or commander in chief for the time being, all rebels wheresoever they be throughout the island, unless they submit to the same terms of accommodation granted to captain Cudjoe, and his successors. [...] That in case this island is invaded by any foreign enemy, the said captain Cudjoe, and his successors herein after named or to be appointed, shall then, upon notice given, immediately to repair to any place the governor for the time being shall appoint, in order to repel the said invaders with his or her utmost force, and to submit to the orders of the commander in chief on that occasion. (PRO:CO 173/23, W.4; see HART 1985: 119).

As Kopytoff (1979:46) stated, the Maroons interpret the peace treaties as sacred charters or documentary evidence of their genesis as a “peaceful society” since then, which enabled them to organize themselves without being threatened with complete extinction at the hands of their former tormentors. The agreements guaranteed them the right to govern themselves and administer their own affairs, including jurisdiction. That is why they are kept as irrevocable charters, consecrated by the exchange of blood between the signers on each side. “While reinterpretations did occur, any attempt to tamper with the treaties themselves was seen as a direct threat to the Maroons’ corporate existence” (Kopytoff 1979:46). The Maroons conceive of the “critical” (in the sense of controversial) passages in no way as a sell-out of their ideals, or a betrayal of the Black liberation struggle, as some more radical Blacks argue today, but as the foundations of their stipulated freedom and self-determination. Until today they have managed to defend their autonomy – against all odds – not only on paper, but in socio-cultural reality; in 1989 they celebrated the 250th anniversary of the peace treaty. For this remarkable achievement it was necessary to give their potential enemies (after the colonial power the

“new-born” independent state Jamaica) the certainty of continued readiness to defend their once-gained rights. At the same time they had to resist culturally the more subtle inner colonization through the European values system, influencing them at a psychological level.

This uncompromising independent mentality, their refusal to subordinate themselves, made the Maroons into “symbolic figures” for Black resistance, in spite of their controversial alliance with the colonial authority. Marcus Garvey had ambivalent sentiments as well, concerning the historical change of roles by the Maroons, as his wife Amy Jacques Garvey (1974:29f.) mentioned:

Pa Garvey was a stocky man, muscular and strong. He was descendant from the Maroons, the African slaves who defied the English administrator and soldiers, fled to the hills and fought a guerilla war. [...] A treaty was signed, and the Maroons were given certain tax-free land areas and the right to govern themselves. In the 1655 slave rebellion the Maroons decoyed the brave rebel leader Paul Bogle and captured him for the English authorities; perhaps that was why Pa Garvey brooded so much as he looked back on the history of his people.

A few pages later, however, Mrs. Garvey (1974:33) describes the positive identification her husband had with the “Maroon militant myth”, based on historical facts:

The Maroon blood was stirring in his veins, and he felt that it was time for him to carry on the struggle for which the patriots of old had sacrificed.

Using metaphorical diction, Nettleford (1978:182f.) analyses the present day fundamentals of this struggle, relating it evidently to the heritage of the famous guerilla warriors in the history of Jamaica and other Caribbean islands:

The cultural dynamics of change must go hand in hand with the political and economic thrust in a tripartite assault on the enemies of freedom, independence and sovereignty. But while political, economic and cultural strategies must be deployed together in close alliance for what is at core a common struggle, each area of action must be seen to have its own intrinsic logic, methodology and vernacular. [...] For the struggle of which I speak is not a pitched battle designed for generals pouring out of stately military academies. It is the sort of struggle that requires the swampland genius and bush intelligence as well as the studied cunning and sophistication of the guerilla warrior.

It is therefore not astonishing that the founder of the Nyahbinghi Order in Jamaica, Leonard P. Howell, employed strategies and organizational structures otherwise known of the Maroons to administer the first large Rasta Community on an autonomous level. Rastafari translates Nyahbinghi with "death to Black and white downpressors": it implicates cultural resistance through spiritual warfare against Babylon, interpreted by the Rastafari philosophy as the system of "downpression" in its various historical and modern appearances. They use the term as a synonym for evil in general (cf. Zips 1988:283). Leonard P. Howell, whom the social scientist and Rastaman Jah Bones (1985:16) calls "giant in the annals of Rasta doctrine and livity", as well as "commanding general of the highest qualities", established Rastafari in Jamaica with the foundation of the Rasta Community "Pinnacle":

He and his brethren got hold of some land in the hill region of Sligoville near to Spanish Town in the parish of St. Catherine, not far from Kingston. It is reported that the Rasta commune, that Howell and his people built, was patterned on Maroon towns that are plentiful in Jamaica. Howell was very powerful and this caused him to gain the unreserved loyalty and respect of his comrades. For a living the people of the commune, which was later called Pinnacle, planted cash-crops, including ganja, tomatoes, yams, peas etc. Rasta life at Pinnacle had all or most of the Maroon characteristics. Pinnacle, as a communal village, was tightly organized on a communal basis. (Jah Bones 1985:17).

In giving these short examples from the social and cultural history of Jamaica, I have tried to elaborate the paradigmatic conditions underlying a meaningful use of the term "continuity of Black (Afro-Jamaican) resistance". This problem seems far from being purely academic, because the continuous active and creative response of Afro-Jamaicans and other Caribbean people (to foreign or internal oppression) in their struggle for dignity and freedom should be seen as fundamental for the perspective of cultural identity. To place it in the foreground of scientific, political and social discussion is to disrupt finally the obsolete stereotype of the passive and subordinate oppressed. The continuity of resistance expresses itself, within the consciousness of many Black people in Jamaica, in their shared readiness to resist against attempts of oppression, whether through religious, cultural, economic or political means. In the song *A One a We* (on the LP *Culture at work*; 1986) the Reggae group *CULTURE* confirms the spiritual bonds with Black people, who fought the same struggle for the rights of freedom and self-determination:

I and I keep fighting for the rights...
Shadrack, Meschack and Abendigo, A one a We

Messiah Marcus Garvey, A one a We
 Malcom X, as you know him, A one a We
 Man like Paul Bogle, the same one, A one a We...
 I and I keep fighting for the rights...
 A girl like Sister Nanny, A one a We
 A man like Brother Kojo, A one a We
 Man like President Tugman, A one a We
 Man like brother Bob Marley, A one a We
 But most of all to stand by our side as
 The King of Kings and Lord of Lords
 Emperor Haile I Selassie I, I and I
 I and I keep fighting for the rights...
 brought us down here on the plantation
 to work hard and feed everyone and when
 we no feed the old babylon them turn
 and call we wicked man
 I and I keep fighting for the rights...
 brought us from Africa to slave we
 whole time on the plantation and when
 the time for us to get pay they say
 go away you a old black man
 I and I keep fighting for the rights...

Conclusion

Culture's "Reggae Chant" is but one musical example of the continual efforts of Black artists in the African diaspora to stress the necessity of unity of the oppressed in their struggle for liberation. It is this historical and cultural unity on which various concepts of Black Nationalism, Pan-Africanism and Afro-Centrism are based. All of these ideologies embody strategies opposing the politics of white supremacy. At the time they transcend the category of resistance through their socio-political visions. The continuity of Black resistance in Jamaica (and the African diaspora in general) can be confirmed upon accurate study of historical sources. But in doing so, it is essential that the unrecorded acts, thoughts and perspectives of the Afro-Jamaican population be neither neglected nor denied.

Following are just a few examples of needed studies on the question of continuity: it is necessary to conduct research on the Jamaican and Caribbean predecessors of Marcus Garvey (see Clarke 1974:14 ff.), as well as to focus on the links between Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association and the potes of the Harlem Renaissance (see Kinfe 1991:100

ff.), or to ask for the ideological influences on Bob Marley and the Wailers (see Whitney/Hussey 1984). In addition to that, I suggest "reading" these documented interactions between outstanding individuals in the wider context of the communicative experiences, shared by a majority of Black people in resisting against the social conditions imposed upon them by means of European domination. For this interpretative approach, the Reggae title *A One a We* offers a metaphor; it places the achievements of leading personalities in the struggle for freedom within the continual readiness of the oppressed in "... fighting for their rights".

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