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# Queen Nanny, a Case study for Cultural Heritage Tourism: The Archaeology of Memory and Identity

Lacy Risner

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**Queen Nanny, a Case study for Cultural Heritage Tourism: The Archaeology of Memory and Identity**

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**LBA 438**

**December 8, 2019**

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**Purpose**

This paper is meant to provide a review of Maroon culture and its foundations in the legends of Queen Nanny, as a resource for future Cultural Heritage development plans. A quotation from the anthropologist Kofi Agorsah describes what makes Maroons so special: "Before any known struggles for independence in the New World, Maroon communities had developed strong ideas and strategies of self-sufficiency, self-help, and self-reliance and fought with great skill and courage for the right to self-determination" (Agorsah 1995; xiv). A burgeoning sector of authentic Maroon culture tourist experiences is developing; for examples see this video from the Vagabond brothers about Maroons: https://youtu.be/LJfVfH09SK8 and this Facebook profile for Kromanti tourist experiences; https://www.facebook.com/KromantiExperienceTours/.

The research in this paper is based on information available in published sources, online YouTube videos of Maroons sharing their culture, and through a select group of Jamaican contacts. While my contacts may celebrate the idea of becoming tour guides for those who want to learn their heritage, some Maroons and their communities may not want to entertain certain types of tourist development or any development at all. This research project is intended to provide a foundation of knowledge of the Maroon culture and its evolution to the modern day, through the legends of one of their most prominent founders, Queen Nanny, as an aid for those who want to educate themselves before approaching community leaders about tourism development.

Tourism is a growing source of income for people in Jamaica (World Bank 2004). Most investments in Jamaica have promoted its beautiful beaches and created western-style resorts

catering to the desires and tastes of international tourists. Recent research has indicated that tourist industries need to conduct social and environmental impact analyses before any development begins (Chambers 2010: Rist 2010). The consequences that many cultures face when they have to commoditize their traditions to make a living sometimes causes them to sacrifice their heritage. Many tourist endeavors are harmful to the environment, such as the jungle theme park in Northern Guatemala which threatens the conservation efforts of the Maya Biosphere Reserve (Jungle Theme Park 2019). Tourism is a powerful mechanism of change for environments and cultures and needs to be handled with careful planning and equal partnerships between locals and developers.

**Authenticity, Public Archaeology, and Tourism**

In Cultural Heritage Tourism, authenticity is a highly debated topic. One author explains that many tourists prefer the fake and contrived "McDisneyization" of cultures (Chambers 2010:22), such as non-Mayan women dressing in traditional Mayan dress at the airport in Guatemala. Actual Mayan women state that they appreciate these pretenders because they function as promoters for the sale of Mayan handi-crafts (Little 2019:6). Additionally, the Mayan women state that their character and their sexuality is too potent for the average tourist. "Having a ladina (non-Mayan Woman) dressed as a Mayan Woman helped ease tourists into the differences they would encounter when they actually met real Maya women" (Little 2019: 6).

Public Archaeology provides a platform for discussions with descendant communities who want tourist development to determine how they want their ancestral history represented as part of a tourist attraction. Archaeologists have collaborated with descendant communities to establish a recorded history of the Jamaican Maroons (Brathwaite 1977; Bilby 2008; Agorsah

1995; Maroon Heritage Project 2018). With that history Jamaican Maroons can choose which parts of their heritage they want to share. Like the Mayan women who utilize the tourist industry in Guatemala, the Jamaican descendants recognize that what tourists are allowed to see and understand can be limited. Unlike the Mayan women Jamaican Maroons will have the ultimate decision on how their culture is portrayed.

The consequences of representing false or sensitive information should be discussed fully with Maroon elders and descendant community members. However, many Jamaicans and Maroon elders are already aware of the power of misunderstandings and have used them to protect their culture. Kenneth Bilby, an anthropologist who spent 6 months with the Maroons in 1977, notes that some Maroons tell opposing stories on purpose, to divert outsiders from the truth (2008: 368-377). Another example of misinformation in Maroon history is the naming of Moore Town, which is the present-day name for Nanny Town. Maroon Colonel C. L. G. Harris explains in a chapter of Agorsah's *Maroon Heritage*, that the Grand Chieftainess, Queen Nanny, was reported to have asked for "more land"; the surveyor mistook that as the new name for the town and documented it as "more town," which became Moore Town ("Land Patent to Nanny, 1740, Patent Vol. 22, Folio 15B").

**Methods**

In the article, "Maroon Archaeology is Public Archaeology," White (2010) emphasizes the importance of working with the descendant Maroon communities. The sources in this paper are from scholars including Bilby and Agorsah who have collaborated with Maroon descendants, or are Jamaican born scholars and writers, like Carolyn Cooper, Mavis Campbell, and Cheryl White. Kamau Brathwaite was born in Barbados but spent three years with the Maroons starting

in 1997. Karla Gottlieb's *The Mother of us All* is utilized because she presents multiple modern perspectives on the various renditions of Queen Nanny's oral histories. Jessica Krug is a History professor who specializes in the African Diaspora.

Because the majority of Maroon Heritage is based on ethnographic works like Bilby's *True Born Maroons* and Agorsah's "Maroon Heritage: Archaeological Ethnographic and Historical Perspectives," this paper cross-examines the oral histories with colonial documents and the available artifacts to provide the broadest picture of Queen Nanny's importance within Maroon culture.

**Evidence**

In the 1970's, Colonel Harris, of Moore Town, formerly Nanny Town, held presentations at the Jamaican Senate to persuade the then Prime Minister, Michael Manley, to order research to be conducted on Nanny (Agorsah 1995). Because of the dedication of Colonel Harris, Queen Nanny became a national hero. This research was spearheaded by Brathwaite, from the University of the West Indies. He based the authentication of Queen Nanny on three major written accounts: *Thickness, Memoirs and Anecdotes* (1788), Edward Long's *History of Jamaica* (1774), and R.C. Dallas' *History of Maroons* (1803). Brathwaite states that *Thickness* is the only one based on actual contact (1977:5). He also emphasizes the biased nature of these accounts, that the exaggerated legends of Queen Nanny are documented in these sources, such as her catching bullets with her buttocks and firing them back at the British.

The Maroon museum in Accompong Jamaica has a blunderbuss that could have been Queen Nanny's (Accompong Museum). Agorsah conducted excavations at the Maroon towns of Nanny Town (Moore Town) and Accompong Town. At Nanny Town there were 3 phases: (1) The Taino phase, which includes terracotta figurines and highly fired thinly walled earthenware ceramics, (2) The Maroon phase, which consists of grinding stones, imported ceramics, kaolin pipe bowls and stems, musket balls, metal debris from gun barrels, green and clear glass, medicine and alcohol bottles and a Spanish coin dated 1688, (3) the British phase, which is distinguished by concrete structures. In Accompong, Agorsah found three cowrie shells near the grave of Kudjo, who is believed to be Nanny's brother (1995). Further evidence of Queen Nanny is limited to observations recorded by colonials, oral histories of Jamaican descendants, and artifacts like these that either lack provenience or definitive connections to Queen Nanny.

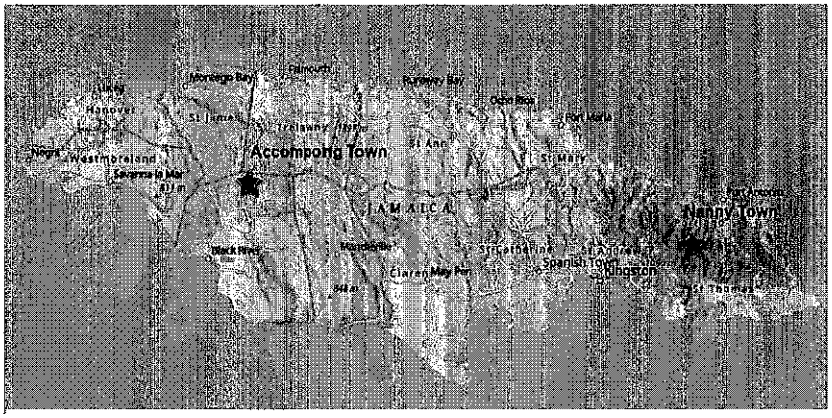


**Figure 1:** *Maroon towns of Accompong and Nanny town in Jamaica*

**Who is Queen Nanny?**

Queen Nanny is the only female national hero in Jamaica. Today, Nanny is remembered in numerous legends and oral histories. In those stories she is presented as a Kromanti warrior, an Ashanti Princess, a Queen Mother, an Obeah of African healing traditions, a Taino farmer, and a Maroon military general (Bilby 2008; Brathwaite 1976; Gottlieb 2000). Agorsah states that there might have been more than one Nanny. However, the one associated with Nanny Town

"epitomizes the true spirit and role of the Caribbean woman in the fight for freedom and human dignity" (Agorsah 1995: xvi). Documentation of Queen Nanny's life is contested and shrouded in mystery. Yet, that is part of what makes her memory so powerful. Was she royalty sent to free her brothers and sisters? Did she have slaves herself? Was she first enslaved and then escaped to become a freedom fighter? The roles ascribed to her in this paper demonstrate the broad range of identities, which reflect her relatability and popularity as a national icon.

Just as she did in life, Queen Nanny's memory gives a face to people whose names have been erased from history. In a way, her complex and broad character acts as a place holder for all the nameless and faceless heroes who stood against the inhumanity of slavery. Carolyn Cooper, a Jamaican-born Literary and Cultural Studies professor at the University of the West Indies, states that "Nanny is the prototype of all less celebrated, unnamed Maroon women who excelled at both the domestic arts of nurturance and the military arts of survival" (Agorsah 1995: xvii). It is fitting that her memory encompasses other heroic women whose names were not recorded. The unknown characteristics surrounding Queen Nanny allow individuals to see themselves in her image, creating a collective identification with all those who fought and continue to fight for the right to an independent life.

**Brief History of Jamaica**

Recent archaeological excavations at the site of White Marl in Jamaica have revealed Taino occupation dating to over 1,000 years ago (UWI 2018 field school report). Colonial documents supported by material remains date Spanish arrival almost 500 years later, in 1493 (Agorsah 1991:2; Campbell 1988:14; Hofman 2018). The Spanish enslaved the Taino and Africans, but many rebelled and escaped to the interior of the island forming the foundations of

the Maroon culture (Agorsah 1995; Bilby 2008; Braithwaite 1976:7). When the British arrived in 1655, their colonial administration transformed the island's economy to one based primarily on sugar cane production; enslaved indigenous Taino and African populations provided the labor for the emergent plantation system. In the early 1700's, legends began to emerge about an African woman named Queen Nanny who had magical abilities that allowed her to predict and outmaneuver the British troops (Gottlieb 2000:79-87; Braithwaite 1976:17).

Queen Nanny's legends inspired and emboldened enslaved communities across the island to rebel and join her. Today her face is on the $500 Jamaican note, demonstrating the endurance her memory has within Jamaican culture. That endurance is attributable to the solidarity that Queen Nanny's collective memory creates in those who tell her story. Collective memory in this sense "contemplates memory as a reservoir of models and concepts that societies draw upon as they reorganize to avoid or recover from collapse" (Pool & Loughlin 2017).

**Significance**

Until recently, the Jamaican people have been divided by their history: Maroon Jamaicans and non-Maroon Jamaicans. This division is illustrated in the oral histories of Queen Nanny's sister Sekesu, who was believed to have been the mother of all those who remained enslaved until the abolition of slavery in 1834 (The National Archives 2006), while Queen Nanny was the mother of the Maroons (Gottlieb 2000; Bilby 1985, 2008). The "Gaza vs Gully" music hall artist conflict that erupted in 2009 is an example of how that division can manifest in the present day. Gaza is the nickname of a deejay named Vybz Kartel, who represented fans in

the working-class rural communities, while Gully is the nickname for a deejay named Mavado who represented fans in the poverty-stricken shacks in Kingston (Gould-Taylor 2016). After violence erupted between Gaza and Gully fans, the reggae artists made a public appearance as friends to lessen the violence. For a more detailed explanation see this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3JRcij3FxEk.

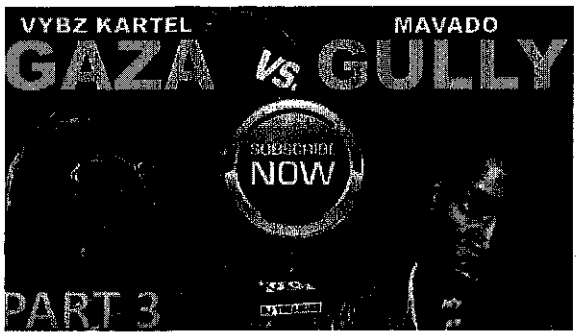


**Figure 2:** *Example of the promotion that facilitated conflict between the deejays*

Karla Gottlieb's *Mother of Us All* discusses how the descendants of Granny Sekesu felt betrayed after the treaty of 1739, when Maroons were enlisted to capture runaway slaves. Despite the opposition and betrayal in Queen Nanny's and subsequently Jamaica's history, Gottlieb chose to title her study *Mother of Us All* in order to reinforce the idea that Jamaicans share a singular ancestral identity. Attempts to reunite all Jamaicans under the identification of Maroon culture has been building since at least 1985, when a Jamaican government cultural officer told a *National Geographic* reporter, "in a sense, all Jamaicans, all of us, are Maroons" (Cobb 1985: 132).

In Bilby's documentation of Maroon culture, he notes that in 1977 Maroon or Kromanti traditions were so secretive that no outsider, not even other Jamaicans, were allowed to witness certain traditions. This secrecy was a necessary part of Maroon survival; during the colonial era, the structure of Maroon culture was built upon coding messages in the sounds of horns, drums, dance movements, and their Akan derived language, Kromanti (Bilby 1981; 88-90). Bilby recognized a shift toward becoming more open to sharing their Kromanti traditions with others

(Bilby 2008; https://youtu.be/nkFhFADkIY8; Vagabond Brother's video; the Kromanti experience).

**Maroon "Chieftainess" or "Nanny"**

The legends say Nanny fought 100 men, all on her own, leaving only one alive to tell the tale. She is said to have been able to hide in plain sight and boil water without fire. Her deep connections with the ancestors were believed to help keep her and the Maroons safe (Gottlieb 2000: 67-78). The organizational structure that Queen Nanny provided the Maroon communities is said to have derived from her Ashanti roots (Bilby 2008; Brathwaite 1976). Organizational culture is defined as "a pattern of shared basic assumptions invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, is to be taught to the new members of the group as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (Schein 1988: 313). Oral histories claim that Nanny used lessons she learned from her Ashanti ancestors and applied them to military campaigns and the organizational structure of the Maroons. The ability to adapt ancient practices to contemporary problems in innovative ways is part of the legend of the Maroons, and Queen Nanny is credited with the success of the Maroons and the secretiveness that has characterized their culture.

**Akan Princess**

In 2016, the descendants of the Maroons in Accompong, Jamaica, and the Ashanti clan in Ghana, Africa, reunited to honor their African roots (Historical Meeting 2016). In the comments below an article on this event, the origins of Queen Nanny's lineage are discussed. Dr. Christina

Sinclair, who identifies herself as the great (3X) grandniece of Queen Nanny of the Akan Maroons, wrote that "Queen Nanny and here five brothers of the Oyoko Hawk Clan represent the ancient Akan's of Genesis 36:27 and it is our God given mandate as per our ancient traditions to find and free our brothers and sisters no matter where they are or how long it takes" (see Genesis 15:13-16). A response from the Akan Branch of the ACKF, by HM secretary Pr. Kafui, suggests that Dr. Sinclair use her grandmother's house name, Nana Akosuah II.

These connections and the use of biblical text as evidence add another layer of complexity. Brathwaite states that in 1822 literacy was promoted in slave communities by British and Spanish missionaries, which led to the amalgamation of Christianity and African traditions in the form of Black churches (2008: 20-21). Bilby notes that Kromanti dance and more traditional African practices coexisted or were adapted, alongside Christian influenced worship, without conflict (1981: 54). The Terror Management Theory provides an explanation for the imperialist imposition of Christianity onto other cultures through oppression and discrimination: "all human motives are ultimately derived from a biologically based instinct for self-preservation through the creation and maintenance of a specific culture, which serves to minimize the terror (of life) by providing a shared symbolic context that imbues the universe with order, meaning, stability, and permanence" (Solomon 1991). In order to manage the chaos and terror inherent in life, Christianity was used as an anxiety buffer system. In order to maintain order and balance, Christianity was imposed on any ideology that contradicted it. The descendant African communities in Jamaica, being more flexible in their organizational culture, adapted Christianity as a way to assimilate to the European definition of order and balance.

**Obeah and Queen Mother**

Jessica Krug uses references from Bilby and Jerome Handler who suggest that the term obeah originates in the Niger Delta among the Igbo speaking people. The term is a compound of "di," meaning "husband," or "adept," or "master," and "abia," meaning "knowledge and wisdom" (2014: 7). In Handler's article "Slave medicine and Obeah in Barbados, circa 1650," he notes that the term obeah became a catch all phrase for African practices. Over time the term became associated with witchcraft and socially negative supernatural powers.

African derived healing traditions like those used in Jamaica manage aliments through venerating and connecting with ancestral spirits, in combination with herbal remedies. It is in the rituals of Kromanti dance or Kromanti play that these sacred spirits can be invoked by specific movements, drum beats, and chants (Bilby 1981: 55). Queen Nanny is a "total person" (Brathwaite 1976: 15), similar to European notions of the Renaissance man or woman, which encompasses what it means to be an obeah. Obeah in this context refers to the use of herbs, dance, song, and chanting to maintain the total balance of mental, physical, and spiritual health among community members. Maroons today refer to obeah traditions as "science" (Bilby 1981: 80).

The Queen Mother is a term used in West African matrilineal societies. It functions as an advisory role for the King, however, in times of crisis a Queen Mother has the authority to take control of the kingdom (Brathwaite 1976). The Queen Mother has an important role and physical presence in Akan traditions in the Ashanti kingdom and plays a mythical role in the origin stories of humanity and of specific cultures, including the Afro-descendant Maroons. Gottlieb states that "for maroons, Queen Nanny is more than a mere leader or Queen; in keeping with the Ashanti

Traditions, she has become what is known as a 'first mother,' an ancestral queen who is seen as the mother of all her people" (2000: 20).

**Taino Roots and Extinction Myths**

The Taino and African Maroons who first rebelled against the Spanish slave holders began building a foundation of knowledge of the Jamaican landscape that later warriors like Queen Nanny are said to have used to gain the upper hand against the colonial oppressors. That foundation of knowledge included methods to cultivate the rugged interior of the island. Research conducted in the Dominican Republic gives some insight into what could have been similar interaction between the indigenous Taino and the Spanish colonials in Jamaica during the 1500s. Guitar's research (2002) suggests that many Spanish colonials took Taino wives, but did not report the practice. She also notes that Taino wives would publicly perform the customs of Spanish women, but in the home they still prepared and stored food traditional to their culture of origin and told their children the oral histories of their ancestors. In this way food and bed time stories have preserved the Taino tradition in the Dominican Republic and Cuba, and we can speculate that this pattern was comparable to Jamaica. DNA tests were performed in the Dominican Republic finding that 61.1% of those surveyed had mitochondrial DNA of indigenous origin, demonstrating biological continuity of Taino culture in modern day societies (Guitar 2002).

**Kromanti Warrior**

Queen Nanny is referred to as a Kromanti warrior (Gabriel 2004; Krug 2004; Bilby 2008). The following quotation from Carey Robinson, a popular Jamaican journalist,

encapsulates what it meant to be a Kromanti warrior during the colonial era: "Many of the captives came from war-like tribes, which were called 'Coromantins' by Europeans. They were described as fierce, bold, proud and courageous; possessing 'an elevation of soul, which prompts them to enterprises of difficulty and danger, and enables them to meet death, in its most horrid shape, without flinching;' despite their dangerous reputation, the British planters preferred Coromantins because of their strength and ability to work hard" (1994:89). Many of the Africans who became known as Kromanti warriors, such as Queen Nanny, did not all come from the same place. The term Kromanti is another complex, yet crucial link in Queen Nanny's history.

**Kromanti Language**

Kromanti is the name of the Maroon language. The ceremonies performed to connect with the Maroon ancestors are known as Kromanti play or Kromanti dance. The linguistic patterns of the Jamaican Kromanti have similarities to languages in West Africa. Scholars (Bilby 1981, 2008; Krug 2014) suggest that it generally resembles Twi, which is from the vast Akan-speaking Ashanti clan. Recently, there has been concern in some communities of the endangered nature of the Kromanti language. A Kromanti elder discusses these concerns in a video produced by The Jamaican Language Unit and sponsored by UNESCO (at 3 minutes 38 seconds https://youtu.be/0InzLEP5qFw).

**Fort Kormantse**

During the 1630s the British wanted to build a lodge in the Historic town of Kormantse in Ghana, Africa. Due to the conflict that came with the slave trade, the town of Kormantse refused to let the British build the lodge or use the town as a port (Agorsah 2014: 98). As a result, the

British built a fort in the nearby town Abandze and called it Fort Kormantse, When the Dutch conquered it in 1655, it was renamed Fort Amsterdam. Bilby notes that many Maroons from different locations in Jamaica refer to Kromanti as home (1981; 2008). Agorsah suggests that since at least 20% of enslaved Africans traveled through the Fort near Kormantse it became a beacon, as the last place the enslaved Africans saw of their homeland.

**Ambush at Kormantse**

Jessica Krug discusses the use of Kromanti in conjunction with Maroons, oaths, betrayals, and resistance. Her article "Social Dismemberment, Social (Re)Membering: Obeah Idioms, Kromanti Identities and the Trans-Atlantic Politics of Memory, c. 1675–Present" connects an Ashanti strategy for coping with the beheading of the political head of the Asante state in 1717 to oath-taking strategies employed by Maroons to rebuild their community (2014: 1). An excerpt from an English slave trader, T. E. Bowdich, briefly describes a potential ambush

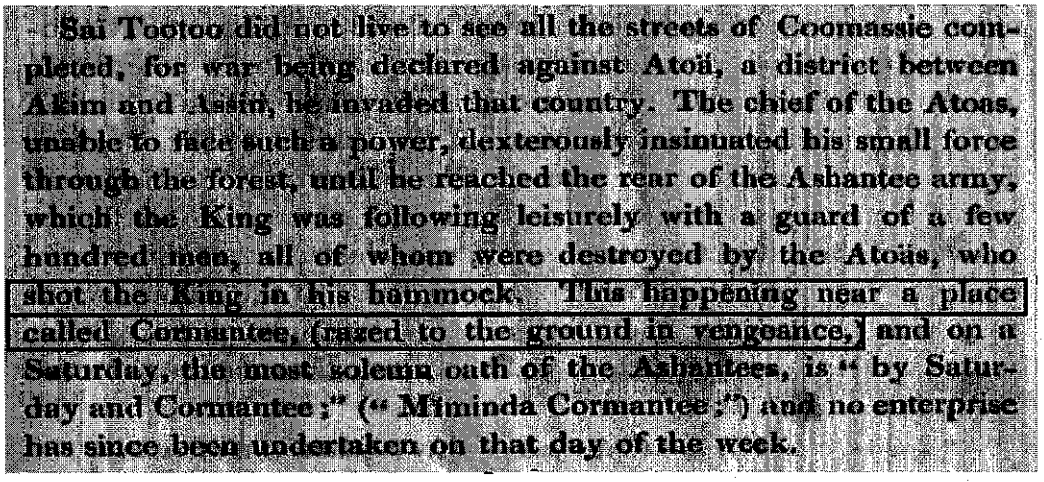
Sai Tootoo did not live to see all the streets of Coomassie completed, for war being declared against Atoii, a district between Akim and Assin, he invaded that country. The chief of the Atous, unable to face such a power, dexterously insinuated his small force through the forest, until he reached the rear of the Ashantee army, which the King was following leisurely with a guard of a few hundred men, all of whom were destroyed by the Atoüs, who shot the King in his hammock. This happening near a place called Cormantee, (razed to the ground in vengeance,) and on a Saturday, the most solemn oath of the Ashantees, is " by Saturday and Cormantee ;" (" Miminda Cormantee ;") and no enterprise has since been undertaken on that day of the week.

**Figure 3:** *Image from: Bowdich, T. E. "Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee." London, 1819: 232*

on the Ashanti clan. Krug suggests that the Kromanti oath originated after the Asante clan's leader was killed and his body never recovered. In their grief the Asante clan took revenge on the nearby town Kormantse.

The most compelling aspect of Krug's arguments is the idea that the Ashanti clan chose to remember the betrayal in place of the loss of their leader and his body. It was forbidden to speak of the event from that point forward (2004, 2014). Krug argues that "the 'Kromanti' identity associated with all of the major revolts, rebellions and maroon societies in the British- and Dutch-colonized eighteenth-century Americas reflected not a 'retention' or 'transfer' of an African identity to the Americas, but rather the application of a particular, historically situated African logic to the political struggles for freedom by diverse Africans and their descendants in eighteenth century Jamaica" (2014: 540).

**Kromanti Play**

Kromanti play is the Maroon tradition of allowing ancestral spirits to use a physical body to impart ancient wisdom and healing for the benefit of the individual seeking aid or for the community in general. Bilby recounts his first encounter with Kromanti play: when a non-Maroon Jamaican woman sought the healing aid of the Maroon ancestors, she was instructed not to flinch as the ancient spirits were invoked to test her. The play part involves the spirit feigning a violent assault with a machete, erratic gestures, and Kromanti chants and screams. After the spirit sees that the person is not going to flinch, its gestures slow and the Kromanti speech is more relaxed (2008: 16). In the case of the non-Maroon woman, after this and several more trials, the woman was granted the aid she came for.

**Conclusion**

The various roles that Queen Nanny is associated with feature her adamant pursuit of an independent life for herself and her Maroons. Whether she is catching bullets or teaching the

Maroons how to hide in plain sight, Queen Nanny's legends illustrate the affection and respect that modern Jamaicans have for this historical icon. The threat of changing climates, economies, and environments, highlights the need to teach the next generation tactics of resiliency and adaptation, qualities represented in the Queen Nanny myths. The social movements of the African Renaissance, the 100-year anniversary of Women's rights, and the amalgamation of ethnic traditions into western cultures, indicate that the time is ripe for investments in the preservation and study of resilient cultures.

Jamaica has experienced many development plans. However, as top down approaches, they have historically failed. Involving local communities and descendants in development plans to set goals is crucial for the development of cultural heritage tourism in Maroon communities (Rist 2014; Chambers 2010; Blaser 2010; White 2010). The annual Maroon festival in Accompong, on January 6th, is a locus of potential success for authentic tourist experiences centered on ancient Maroon traditions, as well as a platform to get to know community members and their opinions on cultural heritage tourism. This annual celebration involves a ritual procession from the peace cave where Maroons signed the treaty with the British in 1739, gaining sovereignty 95 years before the abolition of slavery, to the Kindah Tree, a 200-year-old mango tree.

**Figure 4**: *The Procession during the Festival*

**Figure 5:** *Gathering under the Kindah tree*

Engaging Maroons who already participate in tourism-oriented elements of the festival in conversations on expanding Cultural Heritage Tourism may be a practical step in augmenting the tourism industry in Jamaica. Despite the contradictions and lack of data that surround Queen Nanny's legacy, the complex oral histories, cultural adaptations, and even the secrecy inherent in Maroon culture, make her legend intriguing for those who are interested in Cultural Heritage Tourism. Before colonial contact the majority of history was predicated on storytelling, which depends on human memory and motives. There is an old Kromanti saying "tell some and leave some." Bilby interprets this phrase to mean that we want to keep some parts of our lives and cultures to ourselves, whether it is for the protection of the culture as a whole or for individual privacy. This paper is compiled solely from information that has been freely given by Maroons, however, it is not a complete history of Queen Nanny or the Maroons. There is much more to learn and observe in person and from the Maroons themselves. The Kromanti saying implies that acquiring knowledge is sacred and should be treasured as a life-long experience.

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