

THE AKAN DIASPORA IN THE AMERICAS

A DIÁSPORA AKAN NAS AMÉRICAS

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Resumo

Este artigo objetiva discutir um conjunto de temas relacionados com as questões sobre como pequenos contingentes de homens e mulheres Akan, advindos da antiga Costa do Ouro (atual Gana) moldaram o curso de várias sociedades escravistas nas Américas. Os Akans trouxeram consigo experiências que foram postas em prática, desembocando em temas diaspóricos de maroonage, resistência e liberdade. A experiência Akan demonstra, no entanto, que a liberdade não significava ausência de escravidão e resistência à escravização via maroonage, e isto não se traduziu em liberdades sem restrições. Os Akans implicados nestes temas são também responsáveis pela construção de sociedades que co-existiram em regimes escravistas, complexificando as questões em torno dos movimentos de resistência e liberdade que, às vezes, assumiram a forma de maroonage. Por outro lado, através de sociedades escravistas distantes e durante todo o final do século XVII e XVIII, alguns Akan foram mais longe do que os maroonage: eles previram a derrubada completa dessas sociedades draconianas de importação europeia com aqueles de sua própria criação e baseado em sua própria fundação cultural. Desta forma, os Akans contribuíram com uma perspectiva significativa sobre os significados múltiplos e inconsistentes de liberdade.

Palavras chave: Akans; Costa do Ouro; Maroonage; Diáspora; Escravidão.

Abstract

This article examines how small contingents of Akan men and women from the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana) shaped the course of multiple slave societies in the Americas. Focusing on the diasporic themes of maroonage, resistance, and freedom, the Akan demonstrate that freedom was not the absence of slavery, and resistance to enslavement or maroonage did not translate into unfettered freedoms. Across distant slave societies throughout the late seventeenth and eighteenth century, the Akan also envisioned a complete overthrow of those slave societies with ones of their own making based on

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core cultural understandings. This way, the Akan contribute a significant perspective on the manifold and inconsistent meanings of freedom shaped by African and diasporic exigencies.

Keywords: Akans; Gold Coast; Maroonage; Diaspora; Slavery.

Elsewhere, I have written about the Akan diaspora in the Americas in much detail (KONADU, 2010). Here, I will confine myself to a set of related themes through which relatively small contingents of Akan persons shaped the course of multiple slave societies in the Americas and through one of the significant ways their diasporic experience is most intelligible. In so doing, these Akan speakers and culture bearers brought into sharp relief the ubiquitous diasporic themes of maroonage, resistance, and freedom—themes all made possible by the process of and institutions that flowed from transatlantic slaving. However, freedom (and the pursuit of it) was not the absence of slavery, and resistance to enslavement via maroonage did not translate into unfettered freedoms either. On the one hand, the Akan and their progeny complicated these themes, for co-existence within neo-European societies circumscribed the aforementioned human actions, and so maroons, for instance, lived on the periphery of colonial society yet depended on it for concessions and provisions in ways other freedom seekers carved out contested socio-political spaces within society's laws and limits. On the other hand, across distant slave societies and throughout the late seventeenth and eighteenth century, some Akan went further than maroonage: they envisioned a complete overthrow of those draconian societies of European import with ones of their own making and based on foundational cultural understandings. This way, they contribute a significant perspective on the manifold and inconsistent mean-

ings of freedom—the supposed converse of enslavement—in our ongoing study a composite and variegated experience shaped by African and diasporic exigencies. These issues associated with matters of freedom, as revealed by the Akan experience, will be the central part of this essay.

Part I: Setup

The term “Akan” is used in this essay to refer to a composite culture forged by West African forest settlers over several millennia and between the Bandama and Volta Rivers in much of present-day Ghana, and which came to be defined by a shared language, ethos, calendrical system, spirituality, sedentary agrarianism, and socio-political order (KONADU, 2010). Though there is evidence of specific cultural contact and transformation and one could always argue this point, the Akan have experienced broadly significant cultural continuity amidst equally significant technological and socio-political change—as revealed by the documentary, linguistic, and archeological record—between the fifteenth and twentieth century (DE CORSE, 2001; KONADU, 2010). Through Akan speakers and culture bearers, this continuity and its permutations would reach the Americas, stubbornly informing notions of social practice, belonging and community, and identity. In matrilineal Akan societies, one must be born of an Akan mother, speak *Twi kasa kronkron* (“sacred” Twi [Akan] language), be well-grounded in the core self-understandings that structured Akan thought and social practice to

be considered an *☼kani ba* (“a child of the Akan”). These are indigenous criteria of identity making, rather than reified notions of being Akan or African, and, of course, alterations to these criteria would be expected in the Americas due to the sheer terror of forced relocation and the abnormality of racialized captivity.

One of the most fascinating parts of the Akan diasporic case, and why a formidable argument can be made on behalf of its cultural tenancy, is that the dislocating powers of transatlantic slavery was matched by a perseverance in Akan language use, socio-political organization, naming patterns, spiritual practice, and in an Akan-based identity. Take the case of captive individuals implicated in a supposedly planned revolt against the slavocracy in early eighteenth century Antigua. Historians and white planters in Antigua referred to the supposed ringleader of this 1736 “slave conspiracy” as “Court” and a “Coromantee,” a European slaving trademark through which Akan and “Akanized” individuals were ascribed in British and Dutch America. In 1736 and in affirming the slaving trademark, Governor Mathew of Antigua wrote quite unambiguously, “those born on the Gold Coast [are] whom *we* style coromantees.”¹

To his name, the alleged ringleader and his Akan-based community and even judges in the court case which followed, however, called him(self) Kwaku Takyi. Akan names, such as Kwaku, follow the seven-day week with male and female “soul day names” (*kradin*): Monday (Kwadwo, Adowa), Tuesday (Kwabena, Abena), Wednesday (Kwaku, Akua), Thursday (Yaw/Kwao, Yaa/Aba),

Friday (Kofi, Afia/Afua), Saturday (Kwame/Kwamena, Amma/Amba), and Sunday (Kwasi, Akosua/Esi). Though Kwaku Takyi was a notable among the enslaved, other Akan persons who left an historical footprint and of the lower orders of society also confound the historians’ claim that individuals such as Quashee (Kwasi) was a “Creole” and “[recruited] into the plot as a Creole,” since he did not speak Akan nor was he born on the Gold Coast (GASPAR, 1985, p. 239). The evidence of Quashee’s biography, in that his mother was Akan, however, endorses his claim that by virtue of having an Akan mother, he or any other offspring was born culturally Akan since Akan identity and belonging to a matrilineal family (*abusua*) came only through the blood (*mogya*) of the mother (☼*na*).² Quashee had made this exact assertion. The implication is that Akan-based identity and ontology did not simply factor into, but rather was central to the broader equation of diasporic experiences on one hand and the Akan’s African history and grounding on the other.

The Akan were also very much aware of who they were on the Gold Coast littoral and to the forest fringe at 8 degrees north latitude, and engaged the peoples and places of the Americas through their foundational self-understandings. Though cultural authentication as an Akan did not always follow the matrilineal principle in the Americas—in that a key criterion of Akan personhood presupposed birth through an Akan mother—it was more the case that Akan (descended) fathers who married or fathered children with non-Akan women gave their children Akan names. One example of this scenario involves Paul Cuffee, the well-known African-descended maritime entrepreneur. Though Cuffee’s mother was born

1 The National Archives at Kew (TNA): Public Record Office (PRO), Colonial Office (CO) 152/22, Report to Governor Mathew of an enquiry into the negro conspiracy, Antigua, 30 December 1736, fol. 311.

2 TNA: PRO, CO 9/10, fol. 66.

in North America, his father was reportedly an Akan captured on the Gold Coast and later enslaved and remembered as Kofi—the source of the family name Cuffee. The Akan used two names (i.e., a “day” and family name) and since a “day name” could be used as a family name (e.g., Kwaku Kwao), Paul Cuffee’s naming takes on added significance for the family name is usually given by the father and it is accordingly called *agyadin*, “father’s name.”

The distinctly patterned naming system of the Akan and the characteristics embodied in each name took root and flourished as a resource for carving out contested space for a culture and an identity of a non-Islamic and Judeo-Christian origin. This identity, as it left its homeland, was largely unaffected by Islam and Christianity up until the late nineteenth century. One of the key reasons for this state of affairs is that Akan societies were built on spiritual agencies (e.g., *abosom*, *nsamanfo* [“ancestors”]), emblems (e.g., *adinkra* symbols, funerary/*kente* cloth, political regalia linked to statecraft), and objects (e.g., sacred swords, stools, ritual paraphernalia). Those agencies functioned as facilitators of the social and natural order, and shaped the cultural self-understandings, settlements, and the Akan polities as sources of identification and belonging on the Gold Coast and certainly across the sea.

As with Islam, the Akan thwarted efforts at Christianization for their social orders were facilitated by a spiritual culture attentive to the *abosom* and structured toward local and regional commerce. Where European commerce and commodification and Akan (spiritual) culture were at odds, the apparent contradictions were, in fact, accurate reflections of those encounters and the Akan response to them in the Americas. As the cases to follow will show, the Akan and

their progeny envisioned an ongoing dialogue with and, at life’s terminus, a spiritual return to their homeland via the idea of *asamando* (“where the ancestors dwell”). In the Akan homeland, all efforts were made to secure the body of a deceased cultural member within reasonable distance. Beyond this boundary of reason, of which the Americas marked a great temporal distance from home, the Akan conceded to its logic and perhaps it was this idea that compelled a “spiritual home-going” through appropriate ritual paraphernalia, spiritual adepts, and ceremonials. What was critical here was not necessarily a connection to (a foreign) land but to ancestors and spiritual agencies that could facilitate entry to *asamando*, an ancestral world reached by crossing a body of water. In *asamando* and through the *abosom* (“spiritual agents”), cultural knowledge of historical, spiritual, and pragmatic value was archived, retrieved, shaped, and re-used. In short, it should not all be surprising that the Akan interacted with Arab-Islamic and European-Christian forces for centuries in West Africa, but never became Islamic or Christian (until the twentieth century with resistance) and remained so in the Americas, especially in Maroon and some plantation-based communities throughout the British, Danish, Dutch, and North American colonies.

Part II: Confrontations

In 1675, Britain’s most populous and wealthiest colony, Barbados, held its breath as the alleged Akan-led “grand conspiracy” to revolt unfolded. An official account published in 1676 claimed the conspiracy had been in the works for three years and was the work of “Cormantee or Gold-Cost [sic] Negro’s” and its aim was to install a “King, one Coffee [Kofi] an Ancient Gold-Cost [sic] Negro,

who should have been Crowned the 12th of June last past in a Chair of State exquisitely wrought and Carved after their Mode; with Bowes and Arrows to be likewise carried in State before his Majesty.³ Trumpets were to be made of Elephants teeth, gourds sounded on several hills to announce their “general rising,” followed by burning the sugar cane fields and the conspirators cutting the throats of their white captors. These activities, the account continues, were to be preceded by sacred oaths and a political plan of action (the “grand design”) on how to manage the post-insurrection colony based upon the ideational (centralized politics), spiritual (oaths and rituals), and material (wooden stool as symbol of leadership) culture of Akan polities. We can be assured “Coromantee” referred to a sizable Akan presence with an average of 40 percent of the Africans imported to Barbados originating in the Gold Coast between the 1650s and 1710s and an historical aggregate of at least 136,000 Africans from the Gold Coast. Indeed, Africans from the Gold Coast were seemingly preferred, for “The negroes most in demand at Barbados, are the Gold Coast, or, as they call them Cormantines,” wrote officials to the Royal African Company in 1692 or 1693 (DONNAN, 1930, vol. 01, p. 391).

An actual plot, however, seems doubtful, though not improbable, for the “conspiracy” and the false “Tryal at a Court” was based on the bold talk of a “Young Cormantee Negro” indirectly overheard and reported by another enslaved African, Anna, to her owner. After that “Cormantee Negro” implicated several others (of what is uncertain), the hunt was as shift as the executions—17 initially

burnt alive and beheaded, and then 25 more executed, perhaps including Coffee, though we know nothing about him. Many probably maintained their innocence, including the five who hung themselves, and in one courageous moment where confessions were sought from “one of those that were burned alive [while] being chained at the stake,” another chained “Cormantee” named Tony insisted, “are there not enough of our Country-men killed already?”⁴ The former, who was not named, “would not speak one word more” thereafter. In the end, we gain some insights into the Akan experience in the early Americas, but at the expense of the more than one hundred individuals implicated, the close to fifty persons executed, and the few that committed suicide on account of a conspiracy that might not have been. Though suicide in this context would have been honorable in Akan eyes, this occasion, whether real or fictive, was an anomaly which perhaps made white planters, numbering over 20,000, pay more attention to safeguarding against the scale or success of future revolts via a range of legal restrictions. In fact, after the alleged plot of 1675, there were a few revolts in the history of Barbados with almost all occurring the second half of the seventeenth century (HANDLER, 1982).

Overall, Barbados did not “experience any truly successful slave revolt, most likely because it was too small and lacked an interior that would sustain a Maroon colony and guerrilla warfare” (SUNDQUIST, 2005, p. 293).⁵ To this, a locust plague, major

3 Anon., *Great Newes from the Barbadoes or, A True and Faithful Account of the Grand Conspiracy of The Negroes against the English* (London: L. Curtis, 1676), 9. See also (HANDLER, 1982, p. 13-19).

4 *Great Newes from the Barbadoes*, 12.

5 One example of such few revolts was the alleged conspiracy in 1692. Though sharing some structural elements with the 1675 plot and some fanciful details, see the very brief account in Narcissus Luttrell, *A Brief, But Most True Relation of the Late Barbarous and Bloody Plot of the Negro's in the Island of Barbado's...* (London: George Croom, 1692).

hurricanes, and droughts in the 1660s with another hurricane in 1675 were additional factors, along with only 3,200-recorded Africans from the Gold Coast imported between 1641 and 1670 and merely 1,400 for the years 1671-1675. Taken together, the small number of imported Akan peoples, a series of natural disasters, the small numbers but fear of enslaved Amerindians, the large white settler population and the consolidation of valuable land by elite planters, a booming sugar industry until about 1720, and a militia assembled to control the enslaved all made an Akan-led plot unlikely. Even if attempted, these factors would have greatly mitigated a successful revolt. Rare accounts from those exported through Gold Coast ports, as in the case of James Gronniosaw of Bornu, tell us very little about the Akan or Gold Coast experience in seventeenth or early eighteenth century Barbados where Gronniosaw arrived briefly on a Dutch slave vessel in the 1720s before being purchased and transshipped to New York.⁶ As Barbados lost its standing as the leading sugar-producing colony in the British Caribbean in the 1720s, New York City had just experienced an Akan-led revolt that, unlike Barbados in 1675, was real in its execution and in the backlash that immediately followed.

On 1 or 6 April 1712, about twenty-three armed Africans gathered at midnight with

guns and hatchets and Cuffee (Kofi) and John set ablaze a building in the middle of town, precisely their owner's outhouse in the East Ward of New York City.⁷ As the fire spread, Africans and white colonists engaged in a confrontation that left at least 9 whites dead and 6 wounded. The colonial militia responded and captured 27 Africans. About 21 Africans were executed (e.g., hung, burnt alive, beheaded and left as deterrents), 6 committed suicide (e.g., shot themselves or cut their throats), and about 12 others were not indicted or acquitted, including Cuffee (Kofi) who was sentenced to be hung but pardoned by Governor Hunter on account of insufficient evidence.⁸ Cuffee, who was a key witness on behalf of city officials, shared a conversely different fate than his fellow Akan defendants. Though Quashi (Kwasi) and Amba (Amma) were part of the small cohort that received acquittals, the likes of Quasi (Kwasi) and Quacko (Kwaku) were hung and Quaco (Kwaku) was "burnt with fire until his bo[dy] dead and consumed."⁹

Interestingly enough, there is no evidence in the trial records of any confessions made

6 James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince, as Related by Himself* (Bath: W. Gye, 1770), 10. In other accounts of likely Akan captives in Barbados, there is an impoverishment of useful information about their experiences there or about their homeland. See, for instance, *The Royal African: or, Memoirs of the Young Prince of Annamaboe...* (London: W. Reeve, 1750), a biography of Prince William Anshah Sessarahoo who was enslaved in Barbados from 1744 to 1748.

7 One account of the revolt, which follows the general course of events, is by Governor Robert Hunter, who was royal governor of New York and New Jersey between 1710 and 1719. For Hunter's account, see E. B. O'Callaghan and Berthold Fernow, eds., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York* (15 vols., Albany: Weed, Parsons and Company, 1856-87), 5: 341-42. See also Court of General and Quarter Sessions of the Peace, 1691 – 1731, and New York Supreme Court of Judicature Minute Book, 6 June 1710 – 5 June 1714 (engrossed), New York City County Clerk Archives, New York.

8 O'Callaghan and Fernow, *Documents*, 5: 342; Court of General and Quarter Sessions of the Peace, 1691 – 1731, p. 221, 227r; Kenneth Scott, "The Slave Insurrection in New York in 1712," *New York Historical Society Quarterly* 45 (1961): 63; Foote, *Black and White Manhattan*, 130-38.

9 Court of General and Quarter Sessions of the Peace, 1691 – 1731, pp. 213, 215-19, 221, 227.

by those accused and eventually executed. We can be certain some were “Condemned on Slender Evidence in the heat of Peoples resentment,” as argued by an eyewitness, who heard one of the accused “declare his Innocency [sic] with his dying breath” and “exhorted [another named Robin] to Confession” while hanging for three days in chains.¹⁰ That eyewitness, the Rev. John Sharpe of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, saw some or all of the revolt and reported, “some Negro Slaves here of the Nations of Cormantee & Pappa [Popo] plotted to destroy all the White[s] in order to obtain their freedom.”¹¹ The “Cormantee & Pappa,” incorrectly called “sub-division[s] of the Akan” by Thelma Foote, did not represent actual peoples but rather European trademarks for a coastal town (Kormantin) and a polity (“Popo”), respectively, from which largely Akan and contiguous peoples embarked for the Americas.¹² Sharpe claimed the group met on March 25 and engaged in a secret blood oath by “Sucking the blood of each Others hands, and to make them invulnerable as they believed a free negroe who pretends socery [sic] gave them powder to rub on their cloths [sic],” and with little Christianization among the enslaved he suspected no more than 10 percent attended church school.¹³ Indeed, many enslaved Africans and Akan persons in and around New York City were non-Christian,

bi- and multilingual in African and European languages, skilled workers, and worked or lived in close proximity to “freed” Africans. The close to 200 Gold Coast Africans that arrived in New York between 1710 and 1712 and, in consideration of the role played by Cuffee and other Akan participants and Sharpe’s claim of a “Cormantee” plot, the Akan certainly did provide leadership to the 1712 revolt, in spite of their amazingly small numbers.

The 1712 revolt is less complicated since it, according to the records, actually occurred. But this is no certainly for there was no “official report” produced, no evidence of trial records or questions put the accused in the court transcripts, and very little evidence—John Sharpe’s letter notwithstanding—actually exists to convincingly say there was a revolt in 1712. Nonetheless, these issues raise more serious questions about the alleged 1741 New York conspiracy because no revolt occurred and this conspiracy shared much in common with the 1675 Barbados conspiracy, the alleged 1736 Antigua conspiracy, the alleged 1759 St. Croix conspiracy, and even the well publicized 1822 Denmark (Vesey) conspiracy to revolt in Charleston, South Carolina. We have already discussed the “grand conspiracy” in Barbados, and we will address the same for Antigua and St. Croix. As we will see further, these cases and the Denmark conspiracy to revolt in Charleston differed little, and, taken together, reveals much about the alleged 1741 New York conspiracy with Akan (descended) persons implicated. In the Denmark case, Quash (Kwasi) Harleston, “a free black man,” was among those imprisoned but acquitted—unlike Denmark, who was hung—“for their guilt not being fully proved” while they maintained their innocence. Denmark also maintained his innocence, but he

10 Roswell R. Hoes, “The Negro Plot of 1712,” *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record* 21 (1890): 163; Court of General and Quarter Sessions of the Peace, 1691 – 1731, New York City County Clerk Archives, New York, p. 212.

11 Hoes, “Negro Plot,” 162.

12 Foote, *Black and White Manhattan*, 133, and esp. 134-39, for a perspective on the Akan role and aim in the 1712 revolt. See also Graham Russell Hodges, *Roots and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 65.

13 Hoes, “Negro Plot,” 162-63.

and others implicated on coerced testimony were executed and some, including the “free black man” Quash (Kwasi), were sent out of the country.¹⁴ Cuffy (Kofi), another Akan-named individual, was also arrested for his involvement in the alleged Denmark-led conspiracy, but he too was discharged because of insufficient testimony against him.¹⁵ The uneven fates of Cuffy, Quash, and Denmark points to the very problematic of discerning what and when is a conspiracy a conspiracy to revolt and a re-thinking of the nature of revolts and conspiracies thereof in the resistance to enslavement literature. This way, we can begin to discern the courage of liberation seekers (however they conceived freedom) and the likes of Denmark who protested their innocence without confession from the incrimination of those who confessed and accused others as ways to escape execution or banishment in the face of white hysteria. As was true for challenges to hegemony in colonial New York in 1712 and 1741, the same kinds of actors and plot appeared in the Danish colonies in 1733 and 1759.

The population in the Danish colonies included newly arrived Africans, those born or with long residence in the colony, those in maroon communities, “free” but landless individuals from outside the colony, and those manumitted. This social configuration was a key source of white anxiety given the imbalance between the number of enslaved Africans and the number of freed persons of African descent. The ruthless “slave code” of 1733 promulgated by Governor Philip Gardelin sought to address that imbalance, but it, including a series of natural calamities

resulting in famine and starvation, contributed to the St. John revolt of 1733. As more and more Africans marooned in the forest interior to escape the famine and avoid capture, their presence created additional anxiety and pains for planters, but not enough to prepare the latter for what began around 3 o’clock in the morning on 23 November 1733. The first and most successful enslaved revolt in the Danish colonies occurred on the island of St. John. In 1733, “Amina” or “Mina” (Akan) from the Gold Coast revolted and ruled St. John for several months before French forces came to the aid of Danish planters. Whereas the Danish, Spanish, French, and Portuguese employed “Amina” or “Mina” as slaving trademarks for Akan (or Gold Coast peoples) destined for or residing in the Americas, the kindred trademark of “Coromantee” was a British and Dutch brand name—shorthand for the Akan well into the nineteenth century.¹⁶

16 On “Mina” and “Coromantee,” and their provenance, see A. Teixeira da Mota and P.E.H. Hair, *East of Mina: Afro-European Relations on the Gold Coast in the 1550s and 1560s, an Essay with supporting documents* (Madison: African Studies Program, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1988); Robin Law, “Ethnicities of Enslaved Africans in the Diaspora: On the Meanings of “Mina” (Again),” *History in Africa* 32 (2005): 251, 264; P.E.H. Hair, “Black African Slaves at Valencia, 1482-1516: An Onomastic Inquiry,” *History in Africa*, 7 (1980): 119-131; Alonso de Sandoval, *Un Tratado sobre la Esclavitud*, ed. Enriqueta Vila Vilar (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1987), 65; John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 184-93; P.E.H. Hair et al., eds., *Barbot on Guinea: The Writings of Jean Barbot on West Africa, 1678-1712* (2 vols.: London: The Hakluyt Society, 1992), 2: 382, 789-90; Manuel Moreno Fraginals, “Africa in Cuba: A Quantitative Analysis of the African Populations in the Island of Cuba,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 292, 1 (1977): 187-201; Kent Russel Lohse, *Africans and their Descendants in Colonial Costa Rica, 1600-1750* (PhD Diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2005), 53, 58, 62, 64-65, 84; Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents*

14 Lionel H. Kennedy and Thomas Parker, *An Official Report on the Trials of Sundry Negroes, Charged with an Attempt to Raise an Insurrection in the State of South-Carolina* (Charleston: James R. Schenck, 1822), 186.

15 Kennedy and Parker, *An Official Report*, 187.

Between November 1733 and June 1734, largely Akan insurgents originally from Akwamu, an Akan polity, in addition to Gã-Adangme participants, sought to overthrow the white planter regime and establish a polity of their own with the Akan as perhaps the new planters.¹⁷ In the wake Akwamu's collapse in 1730, a pool of enslavable peoples became available, and the uprisings by oppositional forces and allied neighboring polities led to the capture and exportation of Akwamu citizens. A large number of the insurrectionists were newly arrived from the Gold Coast and specifically Akwamu, and these Akan persons were skilled in fire-arm use and Akan statecraft, remembered the structure and the fall of their polity in the Akan homeland, and likely sought to recreate it. One of the principal leaders was Jama or Gyamma—*birɔmpɔn*, member

of the Akwamu royal court, and commander in the Akwamu army. Jama (Gyamma) was a servant of Akwamuhene Ansa Kwao and had his own account with the Danish at fort Christiansborg. He, along with others, probably arrived in the Danish Caribbean on board the *Laarurg Galley*, which embarked with 443 captives, including 82 from Christiansborg, and disembarked with 242 or 250 in May 1733.¹⁸ The 82 from Christiansborg would have included a tightly knit group, and Jama, as the leader of the revolt and the architect of an impending Akan-based polity, would have been well-positioned with an appropriate set of skills to lead.

The goal held by these insurrectionists, however, was to replace the existing slave society with one of their own in which the sugar-cotton economy of the former was to remain intact, and with the killing or driving out of the white planters. The revolt extended to other Danish colonies through a network of "Amina" forces on those islands and the political outcome, if successful, would have mirrored the Akan confederation structure of allied polities.¹⁹ An ambitious plan indeed! However, not even that vision and an "Amina" network, or their defeat of Danish and British forces, would forestall their lack of firearms, ammunition, and the surprising absence of support from diverse segments of the enslaved and "free" community. Almost none of the formerly enslaved population and few Maroons joined the insurrection, and only 10 to 30 percent of the enslaved population actually participated in the revolt.²⁰ French forces soon came to the

Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America (4 vols.: Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1930), 1: 301-02, 391; Manuel Nunes Pereira, *A Casa das Minas: Contribuição ao estudo das sobrevivências do culto dos Voduns, do Panteão daomeano, no Estado do Maranhão, Brasil* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1979); Sérgio Ferretti, *Querebentam de Zomodonu: Etnografia da Casa das Minas* (São Luis: Universidade Federal do Maranhão, 1986).

17 Pierre J. Pannet, *Report on the Execrable Conspiracy Carried Out by the Amina Negroes on the Danish Island of St. Jan in America, 1733*, trans. and eds. Aimery P. Caron and Arnold R. Highfield (Christiansted, St. Croix: Antilles Press, 1984), 17; C.G.A. Oldendorp, *A Caribbean Mission*, ed., Johann Jakob Bossard, trans., Arnold R. Highfield and Vladimir Barac (Ann Arbor, MI: Karoma Publishers, 1987), 235-36; Westergaard, *Danish West Indies*, 166-78; John P. Knox, *A Historical Account of St. Thomas* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1852), 71-77; Ray A. Kea, "When I die, I Shall Return to My Own Land": An 'Amina' Slave Rebellion in the Danish West Indies, 1733-1734," in *The Cloth of Many Colored Silks: Papers on History and Society, Ghanaian and Islamic in Honor of Ivor Wilks*, eds., John Hunwicks and Nancy Lawler (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 160; John L. Anderson's *Night of the Silent Drums* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975).

18 On Jama and the *Laarurg Galley*, see Ole Justesen, ed., *Danish Sources for the History of Ghana, 1657-1754* (2 vols.: Copenhagen: The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, 2005), 1: 338, 424, 444, 470.

19 Pannet, *Conspiracy*, 17; Oldendorp, *Caribbean Mission*, 235.

20 Kea, "When I die," 171-72; Leif Svalesen, *The*

aid of Danish planters and restored planter rule in June 1734. Almost all the leaders and a number of other insurrectionists committed suicide and, in their mind and spirit, returned to *asamando* (“where the ancestors dwell”), with the appropriate cultural expression, “when I die, I shall return to my own land.”²¹ For members of the counter-hegemonic group, this expression of defiance cemented their power over temporal life and simultaneously disempowered the planters who would have tortured and slowly killed, infringing on the transmigration of the spirit/soul headed to *asamando*. It may seem an odd notion of victory and defiance in death, suicide in Akan culture was not an act of cowardice but rather an acceptable act having fought valiantly in war or having to remove dishonor and ridicule; otherwise, the spirit of that person was debarred from *asamando*. A small group marooned for several months until they surrendered to authorities based on a promise of pardon. Most of these returnees were tortured, burnt at the stake, or sawed in half; their leader, Aquashie (Akwasi), was decapitated.²² In the midst of disbelief and revenge, the whites on St. John and the other islands remained ambiguous but fearful of the “Amina,” who were, in their minds, the “most unruly and barbaric,” “unfaithful and warlike,” “so wicked and lazy,” and yet the “strongest of all the Negroes” with “witch doctors among them who are so powerful.”²³

Slave Ship Fredensborg (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 199.

21 Kea, “When I die,” 189.

22 *Ibid.*, 187.

23 Johan Lorentz Carstens, St. Thomas slaveholder who left the island in 1739 and wrote *En Almindelig Beskrivelse om Alle de Danske*, in *The Kamina Folk: Slavery and Slave Life in the Danish West Indies*, eds. George F. Tyson and Arnold R. Highfield (U.S. Virgin Islands: Virgin Islands Humanities Council, 1994), 7. Waldermar Westergaard was also convinced, “the El Mina ne-

The 1733 insurrection was not only the first revolt in the Danish Caribbean but also the first successful revolt—albeit limited to six months—by captives African against white colonists, and that historical moment predated the North American and the Haitian revolution—both of which based their revolts on principles similar to the St. John’s insurrection. Unlike the Haitian revolt or the late eighteenth century revolts in Grenada and St. Vincent, the Akan of St. John sought to preserve the mechanisms of production rather than destroy the sugar estates in order economically suffocate enslavement and those who held the Africans under captivity. But like newly independent Haiti, where its revolutionary leaders debated the re-enslavement of some of the newly emancipated, the Akan insurrectionists, like all counter-hegemonic movements, had to grapple with the pragmatics of ruling a post-colonial society and the divisions that existed prior and during the 1733 revolt. In the wake of the St. John revolt, planter repression followed as it did elsewhere in the Americas, but the ownership of the colonies was transferred to the Danish monarchy in 1755. Deep anxieties among the planters remained, and no doubt still inflamed by the 1733 St. John revolt, and these fears led to the sheer brutality employed by planters in alleged 1759 Akan uprising based on rumors and “confessions” gathered through torture. Of the 89 Africans accused of conspiracy to revolt, 58 were acquitted, 10 were sent out of the colonies, 7 escaped and remained at-large, and the rest were hung, strangled, burnt alive, and gibbeted. Indeed, large numbers of Akan persons were implicated in the successful St. John uprising in 1733 as well as the so-called 1759 conspiracy, where

groes,” the source of the term “Amina,” were “liable to grow violently mutinous.” See Westergaard, *Danish West Indies*, 44.

it seemed, in this instance and in others throughout the Americas, perceptions of the Akan were reified in the minds of planters and colonial officials that made them false targets for real or imagined agency.²⁴

The alleged plot of 1759 to burn the plantations and kill the whites during the Christmas holiday unraveled from an argument between Cudjo (Kwadwo) of Søren Bagger's sugar plantation in Prince's Quarter and two white men, Benjamin Bear and Peter Hyde, wherein Cudjo threatened to kill Peter Hyde. Bear and Hyde inform Merrik Turnbull, the Burgher Lieutenant and a planter in King's Quarter, who told the captain of the town, Major de Nully, who in turn informed the governor. The "conspirators" were swiftly rounded up, testimony of several enslaved Africans who heard Cudjo's remarks, and the voluntary testimony of Cudjo's brother, Quamina (Kwamena), sealed Cudjo's fate.²⁵ According to Quamina's testimony, Cudjo planned the uprising; Cudjo, however, named William Davis, a "free negro," as the one who proposed the idea. The "trial" judge Engelbret Hesselberg, however, thought the real leader was Qvau (Kwao) or Quaco (Kwaku), whom had witnessed the 1736 Antigua conspiracy and whose father

was hung in its aftermath because of his testimony—in order to save his own life. Of those executed, a few confessed but most did not while being hung, strangled, burnt alive, or gibbeted.²⁶ William Davis confessed but "cut his own throat" before execution, Cudjo also confessed and was "burned alive," "Prince Qvakoe" (Kwaku) was broken on the wheel, and Qvau or Quaco "confessed nothing" and lived for 42 hours in "a gibbet or iron cage." Qvau, "Prince Qvakoe" (Kwaku), and Cudjo were implicated as the principal leaders of the suspected, though not improbable, revolt. Since Qvau or Quaco was banished from Antigua—probably traveling with planters who relocated to St. Croix after the alleged 1736 Antigua conspiracy—it is more likely he would have designed the uprising, if there was one, based on the kind of Akan statecraft, oaths, and culture practices disclosed through the alleged Antigua conspiracy.²⁷

In ways similar to the alleged Barbados plot of 1675 and associated conspiracies and insurrections in the Danish colonies, the supposed 1736 conspiracy to revolt in Antigua and its aftermath provides another instance where Akan persons exposed the limits of freedom seeking and the historians who have built their careers on what Philip Morgan calls "conspiracy scares."²⁸ The conspiracy to revolt of 1736 also reveal much about strategies of forging operational uni-

24 Neville A. T. Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies: St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix*, ed., B. W. Higman (Kingston: The University of the West Indies Press, 1994), 70-71; see also Isidor Paiewonsky, *Eyewitness Accounts of Slavery in the Danish West Indies* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989).

25 These events are based on the written account of one of the "trial" judges, Engelbret Hesselberg, and translated by Waldemar Westergaard in "Account of the Negro Rebellion on St. Croix, Danish West Indies, 1759," *Journal of Negro History* 11, no. 1 (1926): 53-56. See also Waldemar Westergaard, "A St. Croix Map of 1766: With a Note on its Significance in West Indian Plantation Economy," *Journal of Negro History* 23, no. 2 (1938): 225-27 for names and properties of principal white officials involved in the alleged 1759 conspiracy.

26 Westergaard, "Account of the Negro Rebellion," 58-61.

27 According to Hesselberg's account, "Prince Qvakoe" witnessed an oath wherein two of the key actors "cut themselves in the finger in his presence, mixed the blood with earth and water, and drank it with the assurance [to each other] that they would not confess to the conspiracy no matter what pain they were subjected to." See Westergaard, "Account of the Negro Rebellion," 57.

28 Philip D. Morgan, "Conspiracy Scares," *William and Mary Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2002): 159-66.

ty using African cultural ideas and against the lack of broad support among distinct segments of the enslaved and freed population. The locus of this conspiracy was the capital of St. John's, an urban setting where those segments interacted with a greater cross-section of individuals via their profession.²⁹ A number of Akan persons—Secundi (Sekondi), Cuffy (Kofi), Cudjoe (Kwadwo), and Quashee Cumma (Kwasi Kuma)—were mobile and had access to arms and other resources, a few had some wealth given the magnitude of their feasts and celebrations, and, from one colonist's perspective, were “intelligent negroes, most of them tradesmen, as carpenters, coopers, and masons.”³⁰

Much like the 1733 Akan-led revolt in the Danish colony of St. John, the alleged plot of 1736 germinated as the brainchild of an Akan-led community that enstooled as “king” an individual named Court (Kwaku Takyi). This community of a few hundred was implicated in planning to blow up a ballroom where a coronation ceremony for the British crown was to be held and with much of the slavocracy in attendance.³¹ This plot, like the alleged Barbados conspiracy of 1675, is both questionable in its existence and the extent of its design, yet not implausible for the very same reasons. Historians like John Thornton argue the so-called *ikem* or “shield ceremony” in which Court was

made “king” and which Antiguan officials and several other historians interpreted as a declaration of war was actually an ennobling ceremony disguised as a coronation.³² Philip Morgan, who relies on Thornton's interpretation, is also convinced the Antigua judges misinterpreted the “shield dance.”³³ David Gaspar claims there was an *actual* plot, arguing the “*ikem* dance” was “in fact Akan ceremonial that prepared participants for war against the whites.”³⁴ Gaspar's account demonstrates, however, the Barbados and Antigua cases are too similar in their origin and outcomes to simply say there would have been a revolt by the supposed “conspirators” in question.

In the Antigua trial records, there are only a few omnipresent and key witnesses, the testimony of the accused and those trying to avoid torture or execution are inconsistent, and there were disputes about confessing to the magistrates and spies in the prisons where the accused were held.³⁵ For Thornton and Morgan, an ennobling ceremony might be one interpretation resting squarely on the so-called “shield dance,” but there is another view. Thornton relied on Dutch merchant Willem Bosman's account of a

29 TNA: PRO, CO 9/10, Antigua Council Minutes, “Negro's Conspiracy,” fols. 40-91; *Narrative of the Intended Conspiracy of the Negroes at Antigua* (Dulbin: R. Reilly, 1737), 20-23; David Barry Gaspar, *Bondmen and Rebel: A Study of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua with Implications for Colonial British America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 30-35. See also the correspondences in TNA: PRO, CO 152/22-23.

30 Anon., *Antigua and the Antiguans...* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1844), 2: 25.

31 TNA: PRO, CO 9/10, fols. 75-76; *Narrative of the Intended Conspiracy*, 8; Gaspar, *Bondmen and Rebel*, 22.

32 John Thornton, “War, the State, and Religious Norms in “Coromantee” Thought: The Ideology of an African American Nation,” in *Possible Pasts: Becoming Colonial in Early America*, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 195.

33 Philip D. Morgan, “Conspiracy Scares,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 59, no. 1. (2002): 165.

34 Gaspar, *Bondmen and Rebel*, 9, 249; see also David Barry Gaspar, “The Antigua Slave Conspiracy of 1736: A Case Study of the Origins of Collective Resistance,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1978): 308-23.

35 TNA: PRO, CO 9/10, fols. 65-66; *Narrative of the Intended Conspiracy*, 5. On the 1712 New York revolt, see Kenneth Scott, “The Slave Insurrection in New York in 1712,” *New York Historical Society Quarterly* 45 (1961): 53; New York Supreme Court of Judicature Minute Book, 6 June 1710 – 5 June 1714 (engrossed), New York City County Clerk Archives, New York.

ceremony that conveyed “nobility” among “commoners,” but Bosman does not provide an Akan name for this “ennobling” ceremony, though the judges in Antigua recorded a specific ceremony called the “ikem” dance. Thornton argued Court or Kwaku Takyi was ennobled because of his riches, but if Bosman concluded those who possessed “the greatest *Riches* receive[d] also the greatest *Honour* without *Nobility* being mixed in it to the least,” then why an ennobling ceremony for one of the richest enslaved persons in Antigua?³⁶ Certainly, one could become wealthy and wield some political power in Antigua or the Akan homeland, however, *wonya wo ho a, wonyɔ dehye!* (“if you become rich, you will not be a ‘royal’”).

Certainly, the alleged Akan conspirators, women and men, were involved in oaths and in rituals held at gravesites and by silk cotton trees. Similar rites that connected imperatives of the temporal world with resources of the spiritual one were also present in the supposed Akan-led plot on St. Croix in 1759, but there was no revolt or real conspiracy. The oath ceremony performed in Antigua involved “drinking the *abosom*” (*yɔnnom abosom*, “we should drink *abosom*”), that is, oath was a process of initiation and solidarity before witnesses that included spiritual entities such as the *abosom* and to whom one would be accountable. However, such oaths were used in non-militarized contexts in

order to integrate “strangers” into relatively sovereign communities and this was certainly the case for Akan persons who formed or joined Maroon societies in Suriname, French Guiana, and Jamaica. Thus, the oath ceremony preceding Court’s enstoolment and him sitting in state would appear to be a diasporic version of the annual *odwira* festival that marked the harvest season, the start of the indigenous Akan New Year, and a time to install or enstool a new community leader for some Gold Coast polities.

In those polities, potential leaders were chosen from a matrilineal group of “king makers” of whose clan the person was a part. Upon approval the candidate had to make a sacred oath to his community, the ancestors (of whose land he became custodian), and the *abosom* with attendant ritual sacrifices before assuming office for several days. Court was chosen by a community of Akan peoples and he consulted Quawcoo (Kwaku) the “Old Oby [*obeah*] Man” on the finer points of these process and wherein Quawcoo made sacrifices for Court, showed him how to use the “Ikem” (*kyɔm*, “shield”), a ceremonial sword made of a wooden cutlass, and an “Oben” (*abɔn*, “horn”) made of ivory.³⁷ Indeed, when it came to Court’s installation, the “Language and Ceremonies used at it [was] all [in] Coramantine [read: Akan]” among a large, diverse crowd of (diasporic) Africans and whites.³⁸ This was relatively no different from the *odwira* that Thomas Bowdich witnessed in 1817 among the Asante wherein the Asante sought to “unite the various nations by a common festival” that hosted Akan and non-Akan peoples from tributary and visiting polities, but the “Language and Ceremonies” were in Akan in spite of the di-

36 *Narrative of the Intended Conspiracy*, 4; Willem Bosman, *Naauwkeurige Beschryving van de Guinese Goud-, Tand- en Slave-Kust* (1704), translated as *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* (London: J. Knapton, 1705), 132, 135. Bosman focus on Axim was explicit: “I shall content myself with describing that [i.e., Axim] only.” See also Ray Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Polities in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 101-05; Albert van Dantzig, “English Bosman and Dutch Bosman: A Comparison of the Texts, II,” *History in Africa* 3 (1976): 118.

37 TNA: PRO, CO 9/10, fol. 91.

38 *Narrative of the Intended Conspiracy*, 6, 9.

verse audience.³⁹ Court's consultations with Quawcoo, his spiritual and political advisor, and the design and timing of the so-called "coronation," including the rituals and preparations in material culture, could not have better matched an *odwira*-like event. One undeniable implication of the Antigua case is quite clear. When we read (diasporic) African peoples experiences against their culture history and core self-understandings and against the incomplete documentary evidence, we are better able to discern conspiracy from ceremony, plot from panic, and real agency from white anxiety. In so doing, we rightly memorialize the real defiance and challenges to hegemony and the nuances of freedom seeking, as was the case in late eighteenth century Berbice.

Between 1763 and 1764, one of the largest enslaved revolts in the Americas seized the sugar colony of Berbice wherein almost the entire enslaved population took control of the colony under the leadership of Coffy (Kofi) in ways very similar to the 1733 Akan-led revolt in the Danish colony of St. John. In 1762, the Dutch colony had approximately 125 plantations and a population of about 5,000–3,833 enslaved Africans, 346 Europeans, 244 enslaved Amerindian, and remainder were enslaved persons, workers, and officials of the Berbice Company.⁴⁰ If a disease epidemic, food shortage, and rumors of revolt based on the intensely brutal

treatment of the enslaved were not enough for Governor Wolfert Hoogenheim, his relatively new administration was welcomed by the gravity of a revolt that erupted on the Magdalenburg plantation on 23 February 1763 at the end of the short rainy season.⁴¹ The plantation was on the western part of the Canje River and soon others followed in revolt, including plantations on the upper part of the Berbice River with close to 4,000 individuals wielding 600 guns under the leadership of an Africa-born cooper named Coffy (Kofi).

During the first week of March, the freedom seekers killed 60 or more whites at the Peereboom company plantation and continued on that path, while Dutch officials in Essequibo and Demerara (south of Berbice) mustered large contingents of Amerindian forces to prevent the revolt from extending into their respective colonies rather than assist their colonial counterparts in Berbice.⁴² As some reinforcements from St. Eustatius came between March and May (part of the long rainy season), reports of internal conflict among the freedom seekers circulated: alleged disagreements between the Africa-born and Berbice-born captives about tactics and leadership. Coffy and his leadership core sought to create a sovereign polity based upon Akan statecraft and demanded or attempted to negotiate a cession from the entire colony with Governor Hoogenheim.

39 T.E. Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (London: J. Murray, 1819), 256. See also T. C. McCaskie, "Time and Calendar in Nineteenth-Century Asante: An Exploratory Essay," *History in Africa* 7 (1980): 179-200; idem, *State and Society in pre-colonial Asante* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 145; Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 112.

40 Barbara L. Blair, "Wolfert Simon van Hoogenheim in the Berbice Slave Revolt of 1763-1764," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-en Volkenkunde* 140, no. 1 (1984): 60-61.

41 Governor W. S. van Hoogenheim's journal of "the revolution of the Negro slaves" began on February 28, but his alarm was no different than a colony full of frightened and powerless whites of a few days earlier. See the *Journal of W. S. van Hoogenheim, 28 Feb. 1763 – 31 December 1764*, trans. Barbara L. Blair, unpublished manuscript, University of Guyana Library, 1973, pp. 1-11. I am grateful to Hetty London and Gloria Cummings for a copy of this document.

42 Blair, "Slave Revolt," 63-64; James Rodway, *Guiana: British, Dutch, and French* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), 96-97.

Though similar in its ultimate aim, this act was unlike the strategy pursued in the St. John case and it, consequently, proved fatal as Coffy was now faced with internal dissent and strife and inventive excuses used by Governor Hoogenheim to stall the revolt via a chain of correspondences.⁴³ Like a confluence of the St. John revolt and the alleged plots by Denmark of South Carolina and Kwaku Takyi (Court) of Antigua, Coffy proposed a division of the colony into an independent African confederation of distinct cultural groups in the south—consistent with the phenomenon of Akan confederations on the Gold Coast—and a colony of enslaved peoples ruled by Dutch planters positioned in the north.⁴⁴ Thus, on one hand, there was the quest for a polity based upon operational unity among distinct groups and interests who shared, at least, the common value for freedom and self-rule and, on the other hand, support for freedom for some and un-freedom and exploitation for others in contiguous yet smaller colonies. To be sure, this vision turns conventional notions of freedom on their heads.

What happened next is murky. Some accounts note a split in the leadership between two Africa-born groups: the “Delmina” (Akan) led by Coffy and the “Angola-Congo” led by Atta disposed Coffy and his followers. Others note that a rival “Coromantee” leader under Coffy, Akra or Akara, pushed for all-out war and without compromise in response to Coffy’s proposal. In either case, treachery and internal strife took its course and the rebellion fell apart from within or shortly after a year of the revolt, which allowed for Dutch military reinforcements.⁴⁵

43 Journal of van Hoogenheim, 48-49.

44 Journal of van Hoogenheim, 47.

45 John Gabriel Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam (1790)*, eds. Richard Price and Sally Price (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University

Coffy committed suicide—thus allowing him to return home or to *asamando*—and the Dutch military forces overwhelmed the other leaders and participants. The fractured group led by Atta was less cohesive than under Coffy’s leadership and though Coffy’s group had stored enough food through an effective division of labor, this was not the case for Atta and others who faced a long rainy season, food scarcity, and an ongoing disease epidemic. As further Dutch reinforcements arrived in November, a number of the insurrectionists had already surrendered because of colonial appeals of fair treatment, illness, and starvation. By February 1764, the end of the short rainy season, over a thousand voluntarily ended their resistance and approximately 2,600 were recaptured and kept alive. A total of 124 were hung, broken on the rack, burnt at the stake, and put to death by slow fire, and most of these were suspected ringleaders which the “famous Captain Boobie and another (Quaco [Kwaku])” had helped to retrieve.⁴⁶ Atta, the “chief captain” of the fractured group, was put to death by slow fire and after being pinched with “red hot pinchers,” he “owned his crimes and often prayed to God and the Governor... He gave terrible cries and seemed more sensitive of pain than all the others, but in general they showed so little concern, were so little moved.”⁴⁷

In the end, Atta blamed some of the

Press, 1988), 76-77; Sundquist, *Strangers in the Land*, 294; Cornelis Goslinga, *A Short History of the Netherlands Antilles and Surinam* (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 117.

46 Koninklijk Huisarchief (Dutch Royal House Archives), The Hague, no. G2/54/Ib, Letter of Robert Douglas to Earl Bentinck 25 May 1764, fol. 3. I am grateful archivist L. J. A. Pennings for a copy of this letter.

47 Robert Douglas to Earl Bentinck, fol. 2. Douglas named “Acabre” as “the Chief of the Congo Negroes (Cannibals),” but his fate, as of Douglas’s writing, was yet to be decided.

planters for their “cruelty and inhumane treatment” as the cause of the revolt. Akara and Gousari, two former leaders under Coffy, were part of the group which surrendered and they offered their services as scouts and “rebel” catchers, eventually earning pardons each and serving in the colonial army of Suriname to fight against the Maroons. For those many thousands who participated in the Coffy-led revolt and now found themselves returned to captivity, and left with the incomplete memory of a potentially and fully successful overthrow of the Berbice plantocracy, life must have been tense, painful, and bitter in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. This may not have been the case for new and incoming Africans into to the colony, but “new negroe” or not Akan men and women continued to appear in newspaper advertisements for runaways in the first decade of the nineteenth century when Berbice, Essequibo, and Demerara formed British Guiana.⁴⁸ The inhumane treatment that Atta held responsible for the Coffy-led revolt of 1763 did not end after Coffy’s suicide nor after the above women and men seized their opportunities and pursued a course, though on a smaller scale, fitting to Coffy’s memory. Though we do not know with any certainty the role of Maroons and maroonage in the 1763 Coffy-led revolt, we do know of their participation or absence in the case of the St. John revolt and revolts in Jamaica, among other places.

Three years before the revolt in Berbice, a thousand or more enslaved “Coromantee” under the leadership of Tacky or Takyi killed

sixty whites and engaged in a “reign of terror” during a rebellion that reportedly employed “obi” (*obeah*) through elder “Coromantee” in the Jamaican parish of St. Mary.⁴⁹ Tacky’s revolt was part of an island-wide phenomenon with similar uprisings in other parishes. Yet, as irony and history would have it, the Maroons of Scotts Hall were the ones who hunted and killed the freedom-seeking Tacky—some of these Maroons were Akan as well—and thus ended the revolt. Though, here, the Maroons were also joined by enslaved “Coromantee” such as Cuafee (Kofi) and Quaco (Kwaku), both of whom were “set free paid £5 and £5 a year hereafter for being loyal in [the] slave rebellion” of 1760.⁵⁰ Thus, Akan or “Coromantee” persons inhabiting a world regulated by the rhythm of a plantation or a Maroon society were rewarded for their loyalty to whites and the plantocracy. What might appear as a surprising act of betrayal was, in fact, the outcome of a treaty between the Maroons and the colonial authorities and one of its clauses included the return of all Africans who attempted to become maroons themselves or threaten the state via revolt. These clauses were largely upheld since the Maroons feared deportation.⁵¹ What is not surprising was that many

49 Bryan Edwards, Jamaican planter and historian, wrote that Gold Coast Africans were known as “Koromantees” in the British Caribbean and claimed Tacky was a “Chief in Guiney” and had used “obeah” by an elder “Koromantee in his rebellion. See Edwards, *History*, 2: 59, 113.

50 Cuafee and Quaco were 2 of 17 emancipated by an act of the Jamaica Assembly for their loyalty. See TNA: PRO, CO 139/21, no. 25, 18 December 1760. Douglass Hall notes that another rebellion in St. Mary led by enslaved “Coromantee” in 1765 was planned by quelled. In 1767, another Cuafee betrayed a conspiracy or “slave rebellion.” See TNA: PRO, CO 139/23, no. 113, “Act to free two Negro men slaves and compensate their owner...” 21 December 1767.

51 Among other benefits of the treaty, the Maroons of Trelawny Town were granted about 1,500 acres of land in 1739 in the Parish of St. James.

48 *Essequibo and Demerary Gazette* 2, no. 216, 14 February 1807; *Essequibo and Demerary Royal Gazette* 2, nos. 61, 63-66, 28 February – 4 April 1807; *Essequibo and Demerary Royal Gazette* 2, nos. 65, 28 March 1807; *Essequibo and Demerary Royal Gazette* 2, nos. 53-54, 56-58, 60-61, 89, 3 - 31 January, 28 February, 12 September 1807.

of the leaders of the Tacky rebellion were *obeah* practitioners and this confluence of spiritualists and political strategy was also the case in the alleged Akan-led plot of Antigua in 1736 (e.g., Coromantee Quawcoo, Caesar, and John “Obiah”), revolts in Guyana, and elsewhere.⁵² Indeed, Jamaica hardly went a decade without a serious revolt that threatened the slave society throughout much of its history—for instance, Cuffee’s yearlong rebellion in 1685-86 and another Cuffee-led Maroon attack against slavery in the 1720s. (Spiritual traditions such as *obeah* and Kumina played integral roles in the planning and execution of many insurrections, though *obeah* is distinct from a Kumina that was introduced to nineteenth century Jamaica by “liberated” Central Africans).⁵³ Decades after the British legally terminated slavery in its colonies, the 1865 Morant Bay rebellion led by Paul Bogle in the sugar-producing parish of St. Thomas erupted. The highly organized Morant Bay uprising sought to redress to social injustices of the Jamaican authorities and not the

Queen of England, but Bogle’s ambivalence toward the British authorities in Jamaica and in Britain and his attempt to enlist the support of the Maroons became a large part of the uprising’s failure.⁵⁴ Like Tacky’s revolt, it too was brutally suppressed by the colonial army with significant Maroon assistance.⁵⁵

One can argue that the Maroons, since signing treaties with the British colonial authorities in 1738-39, were more traitors than liberators for their complicity with the clauses of those treaties, and that their memory or legacy as freedom fighters is questionable in light of all the revolts and runaways they helped to suppress. This is not to suggest Maroon history, accumulated knowledge, and sovereignty (for them) is insignificant, but rather that the well-known January sixth Accompong celebration that commemorates Cudjoe’s (Kwadwo) birthday and the treaty of 1738-39 is ironic for the very treaty that Maroons ascribed a key role in the consolidation of their identity as Maroons also marked the social death of many would-be Maroons and sovereign-seekers reduced to residues of the memory and many of whose names might have been etched among the national heroes of Jamaica. Maroons in Accompong and elsewhere, including Nanny, did not view the 1738-39 treaty with reverence and the strategic and ideological issue this caused during the 1740s must have been substantial for Cudjoe had some Maroons and a number of enslaved “Coromantees” executed for their attempted coup.⁵⁶ The ideological fallout between Cudjoe and other Maroons over the signing of the treaty in 1738-39 had important cultural and institu-

For the text of the treaty, see Mavis C. Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica, 1655-1796: A History of Resistance, Collaboration & Betrayal* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990), 126-28.

52 On *obeah* from the perspective of a Jamaican planter, see Matthew Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, ed. Judith Terry (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 190-94.

53 On *obeah*, Myalism, Kumina, and other African-centered spiritual traditions in Jamaica, see Dianne M. Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey: African Dimensions of the Jamaican Religious Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), and Lewis, *West India Proprietor*, 84-93, 220, 222-23, 286. On Kumina and its Bakongo roots in Jamaica, see Maureen Warner Lewis, *The Nkuyu: Spirit Messengers of the Kumina* (Mona, Kingston: Savacou Publications, 1977); Kenneth Bilby and Fu-Kiau Bunseki, *Kumina: A Kongo-Based Tradition in the New World* (Brussels: Centre d’étude et de Documentation Africaines, 1983); Myrna Dolores Bain, *Kumina: A Field Study of Cultural Resistance in Jamaica* (New York: Author, 1985).

54 Gad Heuman, *“The Killing Time”: The Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 19, 21, 87, 91, 184.

55 See Lewis, *West India Proprietor*, 143-44.

56 Campbell, *The Maroons*, 252.

tional consequences into the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

Among the Accompong Maroons, and perhaps elsewhere, the signing of its 1738-39 treaty with the British stymied culture transmission, for subsequent Westernization, missionary activity, dependency, and a British resident monitoring on-site Maroon behavior became the order of the day. This arrangement for Accompong was not unlike the Maroons of Suriname, but the critical difference is that the latter signed their treaties in the 1760s and had at least another generation or two to institutionalize and protect its composite culture. The evidence for this argument can be found in the sharp erosion of African-based Maroon culture, institutions, and spirituality in places like Accompong on one hand, and the contested but continued vibrancy of the same in Suriname, on the other.⁵⁷ The Accompany Maroons, in a memorandum of 1938, provided a précis of its history in their request for development aid from the British government, a request rooted in a dependency and buttressed by their acknowledged service to the British colonists “in time of rebellion” and for putting down “the Morant Bay rebellion by capturing Paul Bogle.”⁵⁸ Such efforts in service of the British did not help the Maroons for, as Mavis Campbell argues, by the 1790s a significant amount of enslaved African had grave misgivings about these and others Maroons, and in the Trelawny Town

war against the British plantocracy the Trelawny Maroon’s closest allies sided with the colonial authorities and the enslaved. The support in supplies and human resources received by the Maroons in earlier times was no more.⁵⁹ Thus, the Maroon plea for development aid (e.g., paved roads, medical aid) from the British is telling for that memorandum ended, ironically, with the idea that “the Maroons are... good citizens,” a puzzling contrast to their continuous and adamant claims of a separate and “free” identity outside of the then colony and the current Jamaican nation-state.

Part III: Resolution

A reading of Akan-based politics and culture in the Americas reveal the Akan were Maroons delimited by an uneasy co-existence with European colonists and enslaved or emancipated peoples alike, insurrectionists who overthrew the plantocracy in partial success, runaways, real and fictive conspirators, skilled laborers, and individuals situated between levels of emancipation and brutal enslavement. The Akan case shows that emancipation—partial, varied, and contested—did not end, but rather reorganized the unequal power and labor relations within spheres of enslavement, and that resistance and revolts did not necessarily (seek to) end enslavement but exposed its bankruptcy and inability to control uncontrollable people. The thematic identities for the Akan in Danish and Dutch America were also true for the British America where Akan-based maroonage, culture, kinship, spiritual-healing practices, and their counter-hegemonic movements left indelible marks on colonial and post-colonial societies. The ability of the Akan to influence the course of their

57 See Konadu, *Akan Diaspora*, esp. chaps. 4 and 5.

58 TNA: PRO, CO 950/167, Memorandum of Evidence from Accompong Maroons to [West India] Royal Commission, 1938. H. A. Rowe was removed in the 1940s from the position of “Colonel” followed by a crisis in leadership. The signatories and apparent political order in Accompong were the Colonel, Captain, Major, and Lieutenant, and this order reflect changes in the official heads of these Maroons for the original group leader was the Captain, which changed to Colonel and then to Chief in recent years.

59 Campbell, *The Maroons*, 251.

lives and neo-European colonial societies has made some of them national symbols of leadership. Undoubtedly, the Akan consistently and in far reaching ways contributed, well beyond their sheer numbers, to a fuller understanding of maroonage, resistance, freedom, and the forging of polities based on indigenous sets of African knowledge and the exigencies of diaspora. In fact, the sustained and variegated force of Akan defiance and challenge to hegemony extended the cumulative cost of transatlantic slaving and led to its termination and permutations, and the prevention of at least another million Africans from exportation.⁶⁰

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⁶⁰ Stephen D. Behrendt, David Eltis, and David Richardson, "The Costs of Coercion: African Agency in the Pre-Modern Atlantic World," *Economic History Review* 54, no. 3 (2001): 464-67, 472-73.