

Living Maroon Knowledge

Picking Sense Out of Nonsense

di innocent an di fool could paas fi twin . . .
 wan ting set di two a dem far apawt dow
 di innocent wi hawbah dout
 check tings out
 an maybe fine out . . .

—Linton Kwesi Johnson, “Sense outta Nansense” (1991: 50)

I arrived in Moore Town in October 1977, a young graduate student barely a year out of college. I was interested in exploring the significance of interactions between Maroons and people from outside their communities when they participated in one another’s religious ceremonies; the little that had been written on the subject suggested that this might be a sphere particularly rich in symbolic expressions of ethnic identity (Hurston 1938: 70–74; Moore 1953: 65–68, 139–143; Hogg 1960). I also had ethnomusicological interests and hoped to undertake a parallel study of Maroon musical traditions. Having dutifully prepared by reading every piece of writing on contemporary Jamaican Maroons I could find, anthropological and other, I entered the field well aware of the Maroons’ reputation for guardedness. Nonetheless, I was unprepared for what followed.

Within days of arriving, I had been set straight. In the most friendly and sympathetic terms, I was disabused of my misguided notions. As a non-Maroon and a white person, I was politely informed, I would never be admitted to a true Maroon “Play,” for such ceremonies were closed to outsiders, for whom they posed grave dangers; nor could I hope to participate in the kinds of Maroon musical events that interested me the most, for were I to try to learn how to play the Maroon Kromanti drums, not only would I sicken and eventually die, but I would also expose any Maroon foolish enough to agree to teach me to severe spiritual sanctions. I was welcome, however, to remain and learn about the routines of daily life in the community, and about “Maroon history”—history of the kind that had long been packaged for presentation to interested outsiders, including the handful of anthropologists who had preceded me.

Rather than giving in to my initial impulse to abandon the entire project, I stayed on and decided to adjust my plans to the uncomfortable realities confronting me, and to follow whatever leads might present themselves. What else could

one do? Determined not to go against the wishes of those who had graciously accepted my presence, yet wondering about the limits of knowledge acquisition for an outsider such as myself, I spent the following weeks feeling out the possibilities for respectful compromise. More quickly than I expected, I made the acquaintance of a number of practitioners of the Maroon spiritual tradition known as Kromanti and, following their cues, embarked upon the uncertain balancing act that led to the collection of texts presented here.

Through these first Kromanti contacts, I discovered that the acquisition of knowledge about their craft, even for Maroons learning their way in the tradition, was a gradual, incremental process of testing and evasion, an ongoing exercise in dodging stabs at information gathering and parrying with partial revelations. The fact that, at first, I seemed more interested in relations between Maroons and non-Maroons who might encounter one another in shared religious contexts than in Maroon ritual practice itself often irritated my initial “informants” and perhaps spurred them into a deeper engagement with the enigma with which I must have presented them. Why, after all, would one care more about how Kromanti healers and their non-Maroon patients behaved toward one another than about the historical basis and present-day efficacy of the unique spiritual power that had brought these representatives of two different Jamaican “nations” together in such ceremonies? It was clearly this power itself that really mattered. My first misdirected gropings were useful nonetheless, in that they revealed that I was not the first *obroni* (non-Maroon) who had sought such sensitive knowledge. Against the odds, I learned, a small number of non-Maroons had actually achieved the ability to work with the Kromanti power that flowed from the Maroon ancestors—though none of these, unlike myself, had come from outside Jamaica,

It was not long before I realized that my project would be transformed into something rather different from what I had imagined. The Kromanti practitioners who had decided, after careful consultation with their personal spirits, to work with me would brook no further irregularities on my part. They would do most of the talking, and only when the time was right; I would do only as much asking as they permitted. They would guide me safely through the rigorous and dangerous process of acquiring knowledge, and they, not I, would set the terms of this joint endeavor.¹ Little by little, often through hints and circuitous allusions, they dispensed fragments of knowledge that could eventually be pieced together into a larger picture—usually only after I had satisfied them that I was already part of the way there. When a number of them suddenly decided that I would become an “apprentice” and would complete the process through which a Kromanti neophyte receives the gift of a *pakit* (a Maroon personal spirit), I was given no option but to accept.

This was not ethnography quite as I had imagined it. The knowledge produced by this enterprise would be guided less by my searching questions and my active pursuit of answers through observation and listening than by the concerns and

demands of the mediums and spirits who, whether I liked it or not, increasingly insinuated themselves into my consciousness, eventually placing themselves at the heart of my project. Without their willing cooperation, after all, there was little hope of learning anything of substance about the questions that had brought me to Moore Town in the first place. The field journal I kept during this period reveals very clearly my growing awareness that the process of acquiring knowledge in this setting, where secrecy and defensive posturing governed almost all exchanges of information between Maroons and outsiders, would mean relinquishing much of the control I had expected to exercise as an ethnographer. These musings to myself also give some idea of the kinds of obstacles that had to be overcome, and the special measures that had to be taken, before the narratives presented in this book—especially those felt to contain more sensitive information—could emerge.

About a month after I arrived in Moore Town, one of the friendlier residents pulled me aside for a private word of advice, setting the tone for the months ahead. I noted in my journal that “He emphasized to me over and over again that people here are going to dodge me, that many people would feel strange or bad if they saw somebody teaching me Maroon things.” I had already figured out that while many “Maroon things” could not be discussed openly, some of these could nonetheless, under the proper conditions, be broached in private. “This whole issue of secrecy,” I wrote in my journal a few days later, “is something which has become more and more evident in the past few weeks.” Over the next few days, I frequently bemoaned the difficulties I was having in attempting to elicit information, despite the willingness of a few Kromanti specialists to sit down and talk with me: “If I’m lucky, a two or three hour interview might yield a couple of Kromanti words, and a few small points of knowledge concerning Maroon Science. Every step of the way there is interruption—to appease the spirits by blowing rum and talking, or to warn me of the dangers in proceeding recklessly while learning of Maroon things.” Another entry suggests the tenor of a typical “session” with a “cooperating” Kromanti specialist at this stage in my work:

The visit was an exhausting one; it really lasted about five hours, most of that time being spent in listening to “jokes” and “reasoning” . . . As far as direct work goes, it was amazing how little could be accomplished in that stretch of time. In order to get anywhere, I have to beat around a thousand bushes; Ba Will seems to revel in the cryptic, and it is not hard to get steered off course as he leads you into a rhetorical labyrinth. Most things must be hinted at, rather than said outright, and so the patient researcher gets snagged in a taxing guessing game.

I continued to stumble along in this fashion, gradually becoming more attuned to the protective ethos that served both to restrict “dangerous” knowledge, and to make possible its “safe” transmission over time. At the same time, in an attempt to reassert some control over my project, and in the interest of ethno-

graphic breadth, I began to seek out a number of other Kromanti practitioners I had heard about. By enlarging my circle of “informants,” I thought, and thereby avoiding reliance on only two or three specialists, I might eventually achieve a more representative picture of the social interactions and processes that interested me.

Before long, the demands of working independently, and confidentially, with several individual Kromanti specialists who lived fairly far apart had become all-consuming. They and their spirits dictated the times and places we would meet; I was expected to comply with their edicts without question (although I was able to negotiate some personal maneuvering room, within limits). My nights were now filled with private meetings and ceremonies, while the daylight hours were still devoted to observing and participating in the daily round; less and less time was available for sleep. Mine were not the only expectations upset by this mode of performing ethnography:

It seems that my nocturnal wanderings are causing a certain amount of displeasure here on the home front. Miss Liza [in whose house I was renting a room] has been comparing my behavior to that of previous researchers here. *They* did most of *their* visiting to the Colonel [leader of the Maroons] and his family, and individuals directly recommended by them; this way, it was ensured that they dealt only with “decent” people. And they kept reasonable hours, they weren’t out and about every night at midnight; they visited people at their homes in the morning or afternoon, and retired early for quiet evenings. Reports are that people (“decent people”) are wondering about my shadowy late-night presence along the roads, unaccompanied and unafraid. Is that the way to go about studying history?

According to those with whom I was keeping these nocturnal appointments, this was precisely the way—and the only way—to gain exposure to a history that was inseparable from the ancestral powers that had been kept alive by Kromanti practitioners.

Nearly four months into my field trip I was finally allowed to stay through the entire night at a Kromanti ceremony, and a new path into the Maroon past opened up before me.² Through my direct contact with possessing spirits who had come to heal the afflictions of visiting patients (both Maroon and non-Maroon), I was introduced to Maroons who had lived and died in the past. Although hardly conducive to orderly data-gathering, these agitated late-night encounters with possessed mediums nonetheless taught me much about the Maroon past. One such confrontation that I recorded in my journal relatively late in my stay was more or less typical. I was being introduced to yet one more spirit who had never met me, and who, as always, was enraged by the “smell” of unfamiliar *obroni* “blood”:

Baba again took his protective post in front of me, while the Grandy [a Kromanti dancer, in this case a man, possessed by the spirit of a female

Maroon ancestor] went through the motions of Maroon threat. Calling for the afana [machete], she raised it up in the air and yelled at Ba Zeke and Baba to let her through to me (calling me “backra”). Ba Zeke and Baba begged for me, while she stooped down and moved from side to side, as if looking for an unguarded space through which to thrust the machete. Meanwhile, Boysie went through the motions of blowing her with rum, and offering her a drink. When she eventually cooled down somewhat, she called me out to her. I was made to stand up straight, shoulders back, while she thrust the point of the machete into my solar plexus, not quite hard enough to break the skin. Then she took my arm and made as if to slice it. She put it down for a minute, and looked me in the eye, and raised it up again, putting the sharp side to my neck. Sliding it back and forth, she applied a fair amount of pressure, and for a moment I started to get seriously worried, as the well-sharpened cold steel grazed back and forth across my jugular vein. I don’t think much more pressure would have been required to make a cut.

While never losing sight of my own objectives, I had been led (at my own request) into a spiritual world in which my own priorities began to diminish in significance. Try as I might, I was unable to persuade some of my Kromanti teachers that I was in this for purely “academic” reasons—that the anticipated thesis and university degree could be the true ends of all this seeking after knowledge. They knew better. Some months earlier, Ba Uriah, one of the oldest and most respected Kromanti specialists in Moore Town, had already remonstrated with me on this point:

Ba Uriah was cryptic today, he denied knowledge of Maroon nations, and he advised me to leave the drums alone, as they involved Science [Kromanti power], which I can’t manage. They involve “calling duppies.” I said I was interested in learning how to play the drums, and in learning *about* Science, but not in *using* it, in making it operate. I just wanted to know purely out of interest. I tried to explain the University’s quest for knowledge. But Ba Uriah replied (very logically) that if you learn about Maroon Science, you must *use* it, it simply *has* to be used.

Within a few months, three of my Kromanti “informants” had independently presented me with ultimatums (and more were soon to follow): the time had come for me to risk the dangers of working with Maroon spirits myself. The first to press me in this direction was a fearless *fete-man* (Kromanti dancer) I shall call Ba James, who was “getting a wee bit impatient with my questions, as he contends that I will receive *all* the answers once I obtain my *pakit* [personal Maroon spirit]. My *pakit* will give me all the knowledge (of Maroons) I will ever need, so why do I waste my time on questioning him on details? Once he cleanses me with fowl blood, he insists, he will never tell me another thing about the Maroons, for it will all be revealed to me in my dreams soon thereafter.” Next came Ba Will, a

particularly intense Kromanti practitioner, who one night suddenly “asked me if I would like to drop with a spirit. I questioned whether it would be possible for a backra’s head to turn with a Maroon spirit. ‘You woulda like to bet?’ he asked. He asked what kind of blood we use in my country, and then told me that I must come back the next night with a fowl—he had decided to provide me with protection for the rest of my stay here.” Some weeks later, Ba John, who was as accomplished a Kromanti dancer as he was a hunter of wild hog, similarly “informed me that from now on we are not going to waste time on instruction purely from his mouth; he had decided to go through the operations that will allow me to learn directly from spirits, in my dreams. After going through all the motions, I will immediately begin to receive teaching in my dreams. I am to come to him periodically to relate these dreams, which he will ‘interpret’ for me. There’s no postponing this. He’s adamant: the time is now. In order to learn anything further in safety, I have to submit to this treatment.”

So, reluctantly, and with considerable ambivalence, I became a formal “apprentice” to these (and later on, a number of other) Kromanti specialists. Under their guidance, and from my highly unusual, indeed unprecedented, subject position (being not only a non-Maroon, but also a non-Jamaican and a *bakra* [white person]), I plunged into an exploration of what it means to become a Maroon *fete-man*, a practicing Kromanti specialist.³ I consorted with more and more of these Maroon spirit workers, living and dead, as well as the spirits they worked with, embodied both in living mediums and in dreams. To my surprise, my sleeping hours were increasingly populated with strange presences that my teachers welcomed knowingly—wispy, luminous creatures that soared through the air or slithered across the ground with amazing stealth, as well as old-time Maroon men and women who delighted in wingless flight, and who seemed to enjoy making my own body levitate while I looked on helplessly. These experiments in becoming a *pakit-man* (one who controls a personal Maroon spirit) were both exhilarating and unnerving. As I followed the instructions of my teachers and carried out the procedures they gradually revealed and explained to me, we continued at the same time to engage in lengthy conversations about “Maroon things,” during which I gingerly and uneasily raised questions of my own. Sometimes these interventions on my part were tolerated, sometimes not. Over time the presence of my tape recorder became more acceptable, and I was allowed to keep it turned on much of the time.

Working in this way, late into the night and away from the crowd, certainly had its advantages. Learning privately from individual specialists spread out in several locations, who could not possibly all be in regular contact with one another, gave me the sense that I had some control over a challenging ethnographic setting, since I could (with appropriate circumspection and an insistence on maintaining the anonymity of sources) bring up and attempt to account for contradictions in the various teachings I was receiving. The reliability of “data” acquired in this setting remained a constant concern, for throughout my stay, I

was presented with disquieting reminders of the suspect nature of all “facts” communicated by Maroons, as in the following typical piece of advice, offered in passing:

Trevor told me that things in Moore Town tend to operate this way: certain of the more concerned individuals in the community will approach him after seeing the two of us chatting together, and they will want to know just what information he has been divulging. They will admonish him not to give me any “secrets.” And sometimes they will go so far as to connive and reach a consensus on certain standardized falsities that shall be given to me as facts. For instance, they might all agree that I am to be told that *yarifo* [a Kromanti word that denotes “sick,” “dead,” or “kill”] means “fowl,” and then perpetuate this fallacy as long as possible in the future.

While helping me to reduce the troubling uncertainties caused by such evasive maneuvering (something with which, as I was to find, all Kromanti specialists must themselves contend when seeking knowledge), this way of working took its toll. Moving between these various teachers and attempting to meet their sometimes conflicting demands was exhausting. My schedule was clearly becoming too full; sleep deprivation was slowing me down and contributing to emotional strain. Protecting the privacy of each of these individual Kromanti specialists while also attempting to participate in the day-to-day life of the community sometimes meant walking an emotional tightrope.

In a sense, I moved between two worlds, one nocturnal and the other diurnal, each breeding its own anxieties. Inhabiting my nights were the Kromanti practitioners (most of them elders) who, only after great hesitation, had agreed to cooperate with me in relationships that, no matter how respectful and mutually satisfying they might become, would always retain a degree of uncertainty, suspicion, and danger. (In a typical aside recorded in my field notes, one *fete-man* with whom I had become close expressed his lingering doubts about what we were doing, wondering out loud whether, as some in the community had repeatedly warned, “when I leave Moore Town, everyone can expect a *bomb* to fall sometime soon.”) These nighttime meetings with secretive and wary elders alternated with days (and occasional “nights off”) spent largely among my own age-mates, the “youths” of Moore Town (young men into their twenties), who had suspicions of their own. Many of this generation had been politicized by their contact with Rasta ideology, and their frequent warnings about what would befall me if I turned out to be tainted by the sins of the Babylonian oppressor added to the psychological pressure. Even as I enjoyed the companionship of these “youths”—with whom I empathized, and whose cultural and musical lives were as interesting to me as those of their elders—I was put on edge by their constant reminders that they were keeping close tabs on my movements and intentions. (At one point, a Maroon who lived near me related to me the details of a casual conversation I had had with another Maroon in a different part of Moore Town

three months earlier—lending credence to the Jamaican saying, “bush have ears.”) In the angst-filled waning years of Michael Manley’s second term, there was considerable (and warranted) fear of covert operations and destabilization efforts supported by the U.S. government; this was as true of Moore Town—which had an active branch of the PNPYO (People’s National Party Youth Organisation)—as it was of other parts of Jamaica. Not surprisingly, I was frequently accused of spying for the CIA, and my attempts at tension-relieving jokes and friendly repartee when confronted with such accusations did little to allay the suspicions of some of these younger Maroons. There was no way to separate these personally felt tensions from the larger sense of apprehension that hung in the air at the time. As poet Kwame Dawes (2002: 260) remembers, the 1970s, for many in Jamaica, “seemed like the period leading to the end times of the apocalypse.”

Eventually, it was too much to handle. Gradually, I decided not to complete my training in Kromanti spirit working, realizing that I was not prepared to cross that experiential divide—not only because of what seemed to me my increasingly precarious position, but also because I had come to the conclusion that it was not my destiny, nor my honest desire, to become a full-fledged *obroni* practitioner of Kromanti. The thought of crossing over and vanishing à la Carlos Castaneda into an alternate reality on the cusp of actuality and allegory had little appeal for me. Once again to my surprise, most of my Kromanti teachers did not press me any further; rather, they gradually adjusted to a redefined relationship closer to the one I had originally envisioned. Now that I had already been introduced to the rudiments of the Kromanti tradition, and a number of their spirits had become well acquainted with me, we could continue our balancing act without any clear resolution; sooner or later things might come to a head, but for the moment we could continue talking. (I suspect that at least some of those to whom I was apprenticed knew all along that my commitment might waver during the final stage of training; perhaps they had designed these apprenticeships from the outset as yet one more kind of test.) In this resituated mode, we continued our private conversations, many of which centered on the Maroon past, until my departure from Jamaica some months later.

When I returned for a short visit a few years after this, in 1982, not only was I able to pick up where I had left off, but I also found that the pace of work was now much faster. And as I made further brief visits during the 1990s, I noticed that my conversations with these Kromanti specialists, as well as other Maroons, progressively became less fraught with distrust and apprehension. With the passing of years (and the knowledge that I had indeed completed a thesis and a university degree), my presence and my ongoing project had become less of an enigma. My explanation that I was planning eventually to write a book about what I was learning was now accepted more or less at face value. When I approached a number of Kromanti practitioners in the Moore Town area that I hadn’t known before and asked if they too would contribute to this book, most

of them responded favorably. In working with these new acquaintances, I found that the knowledge I had built up over the years allowed me quickly to bypass many of the defensive barriers I had faced during my first stay in Moore Town in 1977–78 (and also, to a much lesser extent, during my brief visits to the other Maroon communities of Scot’s Hall, Charles Town, and Accompong during that same period).⁴

The question remains: why were my intrusions into this sacred domain of protected, highly sensitive knowledge tolerated to the extent they were? I am convinced that my youthful openness and uncertainty—my apparent humility and my readiness to relinquish control and be guided by those who, after all, were not only older than I, but also knowledgeable in ways that I could scarcely imagine—played a large part in my eventual acceptance into this closed world. Yet, at the same time, without the tenacity I showed in periodically testing the limits of what I might learn, I probably would not have gotten very far. Over time, the Kromanti specialists revealed, as part of their teachings, that both great patience and strong ambition are essential ingredients in the process of becoming a *sabi-man* (a person of knowledge) in the Kromanti tradition. Taking my cues from elders who had themselves worked hard to acquire their knowledge, I pushed from time to time for new clues and further revelations; but I never pushed harder than what I came to understand was appropriate to the situation at hand. As my esoteric knowledge grew and my ability to hold my own in this intricate dance of intimation and evasion improved, I clearly earned the respect of these elders. Most importantly, after being scrutinized and tested for months, I proved myself worthy of their trust.

In deciding now to make some of this esoteric knowledge available to a larger audience in the form of a book, I face a number of difficult questions. Does publication of knowledge that has traditionally been carefully concealed constitute a violation of trust? From the outset, I was open with those who worked with me about my plans eventually to publish the results. They responded with typical indirection. Even the most guarded of the *fete-man* who cooperated with me seemed to take the position that an individual who has the wherewithal to surmount obstacles and gain sensitive knowledge has the right to dispose of it as he or she sees fit. In the end, it is his or her responsibility to use such knowledge wisely and appropriately—which means, among other things, not placing it in the hands of those foolish enough not to recognize its value, or those unworthy of trust, who might one day turn such knowledge against the one who imparted it. From the point of view of these Kromanti practitioners, the protective ethos surrounding this esoteric knowledge (which forms the subject of chapter 11) would likely suffice to keep out those undeserving of such knowledge; the sanctions imposed by watchful Maroon spirits would do the rest. If I myself were to abuse such knowledge, the risks would be my own. In any case, I was rarely told outright that I should not write about or publish what I had learned; that decision would have to be mine alone.⁵ Nonetheless, as I began to think more about the

shape that a book about these teachings might take, I realized that the somewhat ambiguous common understanding we had reached on this question would not do, for I wished to use these individuals' own words. With this in mind, during subsequent trips to Moore Town and other Maroon communities, while taping further conversations, I explicitly requested and received permission to publish verbatim all of the segments of taped narratives or interviews that appear in this book (including retroactive permissions for those recorded in 1977–78). I also eventually obtained permission to use the names and images of those whose words are reproduced herein—something that would have been unthinkable when this project first began to take shape in the late 1970s (since, at that time, most of these individuals were firm in their desire for total anonymity).

Even with these permissions in hand, my decision to publish these Maroon texts raises questions that are difficult, if not impossible, to resolve with any finality. The moral dilemma faced by Richard Price in thinking about whether or not to make public the once private (and highly sensitive) knowledge of Saramaka Maroon oral historians is not much different from the one confronting me here:

There is the basic question of whether the publication of information that gains its symbolic power in part by being secret does not vitiate the very meaning of that information. Does publication of these stories, these very special symbols, fundamentally diminish their value and meaning? While a Saramaka elder always tells *First-Time* selectively, and carefully chooses his recipients, the publication of a book by its very nature deprives its author of control (except perhaps via the language in which it appears) over its audience. . . . Consider the name of the great Majtáú hero, Lánu, of whom it is said, “His name must never be spoken.” Should it appear in this book? . . . I would want to urge outsiders (whether they are Surinamers, Dutch, Americans, or whatever) who in the course of their work or leisure come into contact with Saramakas to respect the special “unspeakable” status of this knowledge. . . . When Tebíni, for example, concluded that Lánu’s name could be published, it was certainly on the assumption that it would not be spoken in Saramaka any more frequently than it is today. Very generously, he assumed that readers would share my own verbal discretion. (Price 1983: 23–24)

A mere decade after Price published these ruminations (along with a large amount of previously “secret” Saramaka information), a glossy history of Suriname intended for general consumption appeared in the Netherlands. Not only does the “unspeakable” name of Lánu figure prominently in this book’s section on “Bush Negro history,” but so do a number of other names of first-time Saramaka persons or spirits that should not be mentioned casually (Wíí, Ayakô, Wámba, and others)—along with substantial portions of some of the highly sensitive Saramaka texts originally made available to the public in Price’s *First-Time*,

here translated into Dutch (Bakker et al. 1993: 74–75). Conspicuously absent from these republished versions of Saramaka oral traditions are Price’s heartfelt pleas to his readers to treat this knowledge with appropriate care and respect; like any other published information, this sacred Saramaka knowledge, as Price anticipated, is now in open circulation and beyond his or anyone else’s control. And because of Price’s original publication, it is certain that Saramakas, whether living in the interior of Suriname, in the capital of Paramaribo, or in Dutch cities such as Amsterdam and Rotterdam, will encounter this once-restricted knowledge (if they haven’t already) in forms and contexts for which it was never intended.

Because of similar concerns, I have held off publishing much of the information in the present book some two and a half decades—permissions to do so notwithstanding. A number of considerations inform my decision to go ahead with publication at this point. As in the Saramaka case, Jamaican Maroons have become increasingly aware that much of their treasured orally transmitted knowledge of their past is at risk of being lost forever. The very controls that have traditionally prevented such knowledge from passing into the wrong hands now threaten to cut off future generations of Maroons from their ancestral heritage; preoccupied with new concerns and priorities, most younger Maroons seem unwilling to submit to the rigorous training and testing through which such knowledge is gradually accumulated. Those young Maroons who do express an interest in acquiring such knowledge complain—as younger generations of Maroons long have—that their elders mercilessly “dodge” their efforts to learn; their elders retort that the young no longer display the patience or perseverance, not to mention the respect, that demonstrates such critical knowledge can be entrusted to a new learner. The traditional Maroon caution toward the rashness of youth—the fear that the young, once possessed of such knowledge, will all too readily sell out their own people—remains strong. The Maroons may in fact have reached a crossroads; for the first time in their history, the elders may truly be prepared to go to the grave with the greater part of their secrets kept to themselves.

In recent years, the leaders of the various Maroon communities have begun to give serious thought to this quandary. Interviewed by a journalist in 1984, Colonel C.L.G. Harris of Moore Town expressed his growing concern at the rapid loss of orally transmitted knowledge in his community. “The Colonel, asked what would be the true record of the Maroons, if steps were not taken to document what was known of their past by the lettered of their group, declared that the future was not only uncertain, ‘but that it bothers me very much.’ For in 40 to 50 years hence, it was possible that, the legendary, indomitable courage determination and spirit of the Maroons might be lost if documentation of their past is now neglected and kept out of focus.”⁶ I would like to think that the present book makes a worthy contribution to the goal of recording a significant portion of this past before it is lost. In fact, it was with Colonel Harris’s authorization that I carried out my work in Moore Town. Even now I marvel at the fact that the

Colonel allowed a young, still-green anthropologist such freedom of movement in his community; during our many conversations, he never once interrogated me in detail about my investigations, though he must have had qualms about the unusual manner in which I was proceeding, and no doubt from time to time had to contend with suspicious gossip about my late-night wanderings and the nature of those activities of mine that were not carried out in the open. Understanding what I had come for, he left me to find my own way. I remain grateful to him, and to his council, and I hope that this book bears out the trust they placed in me.

Some would say that any lingering doubts about the appropriateness of publishing such materials are misplaced, given the changes that have occurred since I began working in Moore Town. Whereas in 1977 the sacred Kromanti drums were almost never allowed outside of Maroon communities, and the associated music and dance, with only a few exceptions, were not performed in the presence of outsiders, over the intervening years performances by visiting groups of Maroon musicians and dancers have become quite common in Kingston and other parts of the island. A portion of the Kromanti musical repertoire is now regularly heard by non-Maroons, whether at outside heritage festivals or during the annual commemorations of the Maroon heritage in the various Maroon communities. Jamaican Maroon performing troupes have traveled to the United States and Europe several times. (The commodification of Maroon culture has advanced farthest in Accompong, where an organized performing group regularly puts on shows of “traditional Maroon music and dance” for tourists bused in from coastal resorts.) Generally speaking, Maroon oral traditions are shared much more readily with outsiders than was the case when I began my work (though this is certainly not to say that “dodging” no longer occurs). The boundaries separating sensitive from less sensitive knowledge seem to be expanding. Some Kromanti terms and meanings that were once highly restricted, for instance, are now divulged to the curious—whether non-Maroon visitors or young Maroons looking for a quick fix of “Maroon culture”—with scarcely a second thought. For better or worse, there is a clear trend toward increasing openness. Maroons themselves seem to be revising their views about how much of their “intimate culture” must remain hidden. In view of all this, the unsettling questions about publication raised above might, at least to some, appear superfluous.

In the final analysis, the pros of publication would seem to outweigh the cons (and this seems to be borne out by Price’s *First-Time*, which has been received with much enthusiasm and appreciation by Saramakas themselves). Those Maroons who shared their knowledge with me have themselves given their consent (and to withhold publication any longer would be to do them a disservice). Indeed, the larger goal of this book is one with which, I believe, all the Maroons who contributed would agree. In recording a substantial portion of the Maroons’ knowledge of their own past in this form, a clear picture emerges of a people whose distinctive values and way of life remain very much alive beneath the

visible surface—and whose right to maintain these should be respected. The very organization of this book is intended to reflect the fundamental understandings and values underlying this demonstrably separate Maroon identity. Each chapter centers on a basic theme constitutive, in part, of this distinct Maroon identity; the particular narratives and other oral expressions that are grouped together in chapters effectively embody or illustrate these central themes.

It was through my gradual and repeated exposure to these narratives that I came to understand that my project was evolving into something considerably larger than what I had originally intended; what I was moving toward, in fact, was an ethnography of identity. My understandings of the fundamental components of this identity, discussed in chapter introductions and occasional digressions, are based not only on the narratives themselves and the elucidations provided by narrators, but also on countless other conversations, formal and informal, with Kromanti specialists and other Maroons over the years. It is my sense that even those secretive *fete-man* who steered me into apprenticeships that I failed to complete eventually came to recognize that what we were working toward was what I am now calling an ethnography of identity—understood by them as a means of validating this identity to the outside world; this helps to explain their willingness to continue cooperating after I had revised the terms of our relationships, as well as their eventually granting permission to publish their words.

In fact, from one point of view, I have little choice *but* to go ahead with publication. Not only those with whom I worked, but also the spirits they consulted, were left with the expectation that this book would eventually see the light of day. (Many of these Kromanti practitioners, I am sad to say, have since joined the ancestors, before I could present them with a copy of the finished work.) In one of my last taped conversations with a *fete-man* who contributed many of the texts in this book, it became clear that the time had come to stop gathering words and to start putting them on paper. “Me naa give you nothing more, sah, ina de book,” he suddenly declared. “De people [i.e., the ancestral spirits] cry out. Dem people *cry out*, dem say, ‘bwai, it is finish!’” And so it is.

Both those Maroon friends who are alive and those who have “cut loose” (quit their physical bodies) can rest assured that much of what they confided to me does not appear in this finished book. For in keeping with their teachings, I reveal here only a part of what I was privileged to learn; some I must keep for myself. And the reader will surely understand that my Maroon teachers also withheld from me, so as to keep for themselves, much of what they knew. What is published here thus represents but a fraction of the distinctive knowledge of the Maroon past that still exists in Maroon communities. To invoke an expression that is usually associated with Rastafarian dialectics but resonates equally with Maroons: “the half remains untold”—and properly so.

Then as Now: The Art of Differing

Today, this feeling of “Maroon ethnicity” is as strong as it was during the years when they boldly resisted the British, even if aspects of their cultural distinctiveness have been lost through the passage of time and continual interaction with the larger society.

—Beverley Hall-Alleyne (1982: 11–12)

Today, it is not immediately obvious to people from outside Jamaica, and even to many insiders, how different the Maroons were or are from other communities.

—Colonel C.L.G. Harris (1994: 36–37)

It is a fairly typical night in this yard about a mile from the center of Moore Town—typical except for the presence of a foreign anthropologist in the thatched bamboo dancing booth. He is not the only *obroni* here, however. Also present is a visiting *yarifo* (sick person), a middle-aged Jamaican woman from a different part of the island, along with her three children. It is two o’clock in the morning, and for much of the night both anthropologist and patient have been sequestered for their own safety in a house nearby. They had dozed off, only to be startled awake by a loud crashing noise against the wall, followed by the incomprehensible rantings of a high-pitched voice. All of a sudden, the blade of a machete had jerked through the open window next to them, blindly chopping and stabbing as another voice outside begged the wielder to show mercy to the *obroni* intruders inside. After a while, things had gotten quieter again, but it had been impossible to go back to sleep after this alarming encounter with a disembodied machete.

Another hour has gone by, and the woman is now outside, standing in a corner of the booth, where she has been left alone by the Maroon protector assigned to her. Before leaving her side, the protector had sternly warned her not to run, not even to flinch, no matter what might happen. Her back is against a wooden post. A Kromanti dancer with head wrapped in cloth—a *fete-man* whose body is temporarily inhabited by the spirit of a Maroon ancestor—races toward her with *afana* (machete) raised. Screaming out unintelligible curses, the *fete-man* frantically swings his machete, splintering the post just above the woman’s head, and sending chips flying. The woman does as told, keeping her eyes to the ground and remaining motionless. The movements of the enraged *fete-man* gradually become more subdued. The choreography now seems graceful and controlled. He points the machete at her, freezing for a moment, then pulls at her clothing and threatens to cut off a piece of it. He puts the blade to her wrists and upper arms, applying just enough pressure to leave marks. He backs off, as if retreating, then suddenly spins around and throws the machete at her feet like a dagger. The tip buries itself in the ground, and the handle sways to and fro. The drama is far from over; the ailing visitor will have to endure several other trials before being granted access to the healing powers for which she has come.

Since her children, like her, possess no “Maroon blood,” they too must be inducted into this dance of difference. Even the youngest boy must undergo an ordeal. The *fete-man* calls for *timbambu* (fire). His assistant, the *kwatamassa*, comes running over from a nearby cookhouse, where he has been fanning a tremendous blaze. The *kwatamassa* holds out two reddish orange embers. The possessed dancer seizes them and resumes his dance, waving them in the air and sending forth a spectacular shower of sparks. As he moves out of the lamplight into the darkness, the two embers become independent beacons creating a trailing maze of light against the black background. The body of the *fete-man* is now no more visible than the spirit possessing him. The youngest *obroni* boy faces the fire on his own. The dancer rapidly passes the embers over and around the boy’s head and arms, and then holds one of the red-hot tips to the boy’s skin for a brief moment. Though obviously nervous, the boy hardly moves. There are no burns.

Animating this drama are the strains of Kromanti drumming and song—a flowing, ever-changing acoustic accompaniment that is as unfamiliar to the visitors as any other aspect of the ceremony. Not only this music, but the odd, mostly unintelligible Maroon creole spoken by the possessed mediums, the mysterious (and entirely unintelligible) shouted invocations in Kromanti language, the pungent smell of herbal remedies compounded on the spot, the objects used for divination, the intricate Kromanti ritual motions and gestures that Maroons call *busubrandi*—all are new and strange to the visiting *obroni* patient. Any doubts she might have harbored about whether Maroons really are significantly different from other Jamaicans have by now disappeared.

For the Maroon participants themselves, this ceremony, called Kromanti Play, also provides abundant evidence of difference. Much like the ceremony known as Nyabingi in the Rastafarian tradition, “where the symbolic boundaries of the sacred and definitions of insiders and outsiders are maintained at their highest level” (Homiak 1999: 97; 1985: 386), Kromanti Play constitutes the most powerful symbolic expression in Maroon life of the cosmological principle dividing inside from outside, *Yenkunkun* (Maroon) from *obroni* (non-Maroon). Concentrated within Kromanti ceremonies are many of the most potent symbols of Maroon identity and the warrior past in which it is rooted. The *afana* (“sword,” i.e., machete) and *jonga* (spear), the medicinal herbs once used to close and heal the wounds of battle, the invocational music and language of the Maroon ancestors, indeed, the embodied ancestors themselves, are integral components of Kromanti Play. Whether or not visiting *obroni* happen to be present at a particular ceremony, these markers of Maroon identity point to an opposed identity, a bordering Other, even as they symbolize the collective Self; they are in part signs of difference—an essentialized difference that is dramatically enforced by the enraged spirits of ancestors whenever a visitor of a “different blood” (almost always a non-Maroon Jamaican of African descent) intrudes upon this sacred space (Bilby 1981). Maroon participants in Kromanti Play carry these complex

images of opposed identities (*Yenkunkun* versus *obroni*)—this ideological residue of a past process of dual ethnogenesis (Bilby 1984b)—with them when they venture out to *obroni pre* (“*obroni* places”: the outside, non-Maroon world).

Consider the artful manipulation of these symbols when we shift our view to a setting in which the Maroon actors are hidden Others in a world of strangers, rather than known persons performing familiar roles in their own territory. We are now in Port Antonio, the capital of Portland parish, and the nearest town of any size to Moore Town. Two Moore Town Maroons are making their way down William Street, a bustling side road adjoining the town square and marketplace. The narrow street is lined with restaurants and rum shops; Jamaican dancehall music comes pounding out. It is a Saturday afternoon—market day—and the town is swollen with visitors from the surrounding countryside. The throngs of pedestrians weave their way around the cars and trucks parked haphazardly along the sides. Competition for space has brought traffic to a standstill. The two Maroons walking down the street recognize another man from Moore Town in the crowd. They call him over, inviting him for a drink in a bar just ahead.

When the three enter the busy saloon, few heads turn; there is nothing about them to suggest anything out of the ordinary. They could be from any of the dozens of rural villages and districts represented among Port Antonio’s swarming foot traffic on this particular day. One of the three is a *fete-man*, a Kromanti ritual specialist and healer, but the other patrons of the bar have no way of knowing this (indeed no one else in the bar even knows what a *fete-man* is). When the three Maroons receive their drinks, each tips his glass and pours a small libation on the ground before taking a sip—a gesture that is familiar to many Jamaicans, and draws no special attention in this context. They drink and chat for awhile, without incident. By the time they are on their third round, however, their conversation has become more lively; as they get more excited, they begin to occupy a larger space, and to talk more loudly. The *fete-man* raises his glass and pours another offering, this time with a dramatic flourish, while intoning the words, “bigi pripri, luku ye, na insa mi e ji unu. . . tere wi de a obroni prandes, so no mek no ogri kon naki dem nyuman ye. . . na suma fi Braka Ruba!” (old ones, look, I’m giving you some rum. . . today we’re in a non-Maroon place, so don’t let any evil befall these fellows. . . they are Moore Town people!). One of his drinking buddies responds, in a taut, raspy voice, “honti yu se, ba?!” (what did you say, brother?). The *fete-man* shoots back at him, “ha-ha-ha, bwai!. . . arik mi gudufa!. . . mi aksi di bigi suma dem fi waka na obroni pre wid wi, no mek no ogi kon chobl wi!” (ha-ha-ha, boy! [uttered with a menacing-sounding cackle]. . . listen to me carefully!. . . I asked the older people to walk with us in this non-Maroon place, and to keep any evil from troubling us!). The three Maroon men continue excitedly to trade comments in this private language, a Maroon creole that is normally reserved for communications between the living and the dead during Kromanti ceremonies.⁷

In walks another stranger, who has been standing just outside the entrance to the bar, paying close attention. The man looks vaguely familiar to the *fete-man*; he is sure he has seen him somewhere before. “Yenkunkun?!” (are you a Maroon?), the stranger suddenly shouts at the trio of Maroons. There is an awkward silence. The *fete-man* fixes his gaze upon the stranger, glaring at him for a long moment without blinking. Unfazed, the stranger takes another step toward him, and the crowd moves back. “Yenkunkun?!” he repeats, more insistently. “Shref-shref!” (the same as you!), shouts the *fete-man*, and they clasp hands. “Nyuman, onti yu prandes?” (Man, where is your home?) The stranger answers, “na Mashazal mi libi!” (I live in Comfort Castle).⁸ “Ha-ha-ha, bwai! Na Yenkunkun pre fi turu!” (Ha-ha-ha, boy! That’s a true Maroon place!)

The stranger from Comfort Castle—a branch settlement of Maroons located a few miles from Moore Town, on the other side of the Rio Grande—joins his fellow Maroons for a drink. The four now occupy center stage; all eyes are on them. The *fete-man* stands up and begins to “cut language” in a sharp, strangely emphatic tone of voice: “O Yankipong Asasi, o Kembe Kuku, o Tata Nyami, o Nyami ara! Mi bimbroni, mi bimbasi, o nangka nangka, o se din kamisho, o kamadi, o din kamadu!” Whereas some of the bystanders might have caught the meaning of a word or two of the Maroon creole spoken earlier, this new stream of invocational language, delivered even more forcefully, is totally unintelligible; unlike the old Maroon creole, the sacred Kromanti tongue has virtually no connection to English. Not to be outdone, the man from Comfort Castle comes back with a shouted Kromanti torrent of his own: “O Yankipong jo Asasi, Kembe Tutu Nyami, o wusu, o baimbaimba, o titei tei, titei tei, o bo swau, da mi fa jo wizi, amba-ee! O woondu woondu o woondu koko, da mi fa, da mi fa jo wizi, o baimba no bigi insho, o titei tei, titei titei tei, titei titei bo swau, wengkini wengkini wengkini, bobosi o wengkeni, obroni o wengkini, amba-ee!”

The *fete-man* appears to be agitated. He shifts his weight from foot to foot, looking as if he might lose balance. Suddenly he “throws” a Kromanti song:

o kumfu nyaba-ee, yo-ee
 poor nanabeti, yo-ee
 kumfu nyaba-ee, yo-ee
 bin a nyaba-ee, yo-ee
 poor nanabeti, yo-ee

As he sings, he crosses one leg over the other and kicks backward, sending his body into a staggering pirouette—a typical Kromanti dance move—then arches his shoulders and gracefully flaps his arms, performing an abbreviated facsimile of the dance of the *opete* (vulture), the animal form preferred by his own personal spirit. “Nyuman!” he blurts out. “Kon ye!” (come here!). One by one, his Maroon companions come forward. Taking their hands and holding them up high, he spins the men around, guiding them down into a crouching position and

stepping over them, thus clearing them of evil. He launches into another Kromanti song, but one of the other Moore Town men discourages him from going any further: “No, ba! Kesu, kesu!” (No, brother! Sit down, sit down!).

Energized by the display of Kromanti gestures, the man from Comfort Castle—speaking “normal” Jamaican Creole, which the watching bystanders all understand—enthusiastically tells his new acquaintances of a great spirit worker he had once known, a Kromanti dancer from his community who could pierce his body with a machete and instantly heal the wound. Unimpressed, the Moore Town *fete-man* boasts that he himself is much stronger than this and could easily outdo such common spiritual feats. Belligerently, he informs the Maroon from Comfort Castle that the man he sees before him is a true Chankofi, a Maroon from Moore Town, a man who is afraid of *no one*, a man who will stand up to *anybody*. The two begin to “chop language” again, vying with one another to see who can produce the longest and most potent Kromanti invocation. Both men know that they should refrain from such gratuitous displays of Kromanti language—that spirits should not be summoned without reason—but they keep up the barrage anyway. Before things can get out of hand, one of the other Moore Town men intercedes, shouting out, “kesu, kesu!. . . chamu chamu!” (sit down, sit down! . . . be quiet!). With these cautionary words (*chamu chamu* being kind of a code that non-Maroons are present, that care should be taken not to reveal too much), the Maroon carousers retire to the counter for another drink and settle back down into a quiet conversation. When the others leave, the *fete-man* stays behind and nurses his drink a while longer, waiting to be approached by any in the crowd whose problems might be “heavy” enough to require the unique healing powers for which Maroons are renowned. In this way (as well as by word of mouth), the *fete-man* adds to his *obroni* clientele.

In more or less random encounters such as these, Maroons routinely give visible (or audible) expression to a sense of identity that normally remains hidden from the Others with whom they daily interact—at the same time furnishing inarguable “proof” that Maroons are, despite surface appearances, substantially different from these Others. These performances of Maroon identity represent momentary unveilings of “objective” (that is to say, observable) aspects of an intimate culture—a shared body of distinctive knowledge—that lives in the minds of Maroons not only through the practice of Kromanti Play, but also, and just as importantly, through the kinds of narratives and other oral expressions presented in this book. In a sense, the knowledge transmitted through such narratives is embodied and made “real” through these ritual performances of identity, whether in the institutionalized context of Kromanti Play, or during chance encounters while traveling or living among *obroni*.

Like the private narratives of the *fete-man*, these public performances of Maroon identity are rich in symbols that bridge past and present. The role of these symbols in instilling and replenishing historical consciousness (not to mention imbuing this with an affective charge) is not to be underestimated. Paul

Connerton has given special attention to the close connection between ritual performance and “cultural memory.” His “ritual action” (Connerton 1989, 44–45)—what I prefer, for present purposes, to call “ritual *interaction*” (Bilby 1979)—is a type of stylized, stereotyped, and to some extent, repetitive symbolic behavior that is not merely expressive, but also serves a mnemonic function. Such performative behavior need not be limited to temporally or spatially fixed contexts. It is, rather, a potentiality that may be activated anywhere, at any time, given the proper circumstances (Bilby 1979: 107–11; 1999b: 319–22). The ritual behavior of Maroons in such circumstances powerfully encapsulates, through symbolic means, a past that is felt to be alive in the present. Performances of distinctive music and language(s) identified with the ancestors, for instance, clearly and dramatically demonstrate this continuity between living and dead, present and past. But equally important to this equation, as Connerton argues, are bodily practices—the culturally specific postures, gestures, and movements of performers. The large repertoire of dance movements and other gestures associated with ancestral spiritual power on which a knowledgeable Maroon can draw (obvious examples being the institutionalized gestures of threat, or the “dance of the vulture” and the spinning and stepping over described above) constitute a kind of “mnemonics of the body” (Connerton 1989: 74), a repository of performative symbols through which an important portion of the Maroon community’s “cultural memory” is mimetically reenacted and transmitted. Most of these Maroon bodily practices—these performative rites—are rooted in Kromanti Play. It is in that ceremonial context that they find their purest expression, when possessed Kromanti dancers, literally embodying specific ancestors, exemplify distinctive Maroon behavior. Such symbolic behavior can occur, as well, in the most mundane settings—for instance, on a bus or taxi traveling from Port Antonio, when a *fete-man* in an argument with another passenger might conspicuously engage in one variant of the Maroon behavior called “rubbing trash,” suddenly pulling from his pocket a handful of crushed herbs, and performing threatening Kromanti gestures that he has repeated, and seen performed by others, countless times in the past. Such defensive maneuvering in random contexts is common in areas surrounding the Maroon communities (Bilby 1979: 106).

As Connerton (1989: 44) rightly suggests, performative rites of this kind “are not limited in their effect to the ritual occasion,” for “whatever is demonstrated in rites permeates also non-ritual behaviour and mentality.” As we shall see, the “knowledge” embodied in these ritual performances constitutes but a very small portion of the distinctive cultural knowledge retained by Maroons, the greater part of which is actually kept alive through verbal narratives about the past. But these performative rites—these ritual interactions—are important nonetheless; it is precisely through such sporadic displays of symbolic behavior that those whom Maroons call *obroni* are able to catch fleeting glimpses of genuine cultural difference (Bilby 1979: 73–203)—a difference that remains invisible most of the time,

residing as it does in that hidden body of sacred knowledge constituted through Maroon narratives.

Against All Odds

Many hundreds of them [escaped slaves in Jamaica] have at different times run to the Mountains . . . which I imagine they would not have done, but for the Cruelty of their Usage, because they subsist very hard and with Danger . . . if the Negro be brought in a Prisoner, he is tormented and burnt alive.

—John Atkins (1735: 245)

There is an unavoidable tension in this book between the narrow specificity of the Jamaican Maroon story, as told by Maroons themselves, and the broader narratives of resistance and struggle that extend the significance of the Maroons' heroic history beyond the confines of time and place. As a product of culturally focused encounters with present-day Maroons, the present work speaks primarily of difference. Many, if not most, Maroons continue to view their past as not only sacred, but unique. And, for reasons discussed at length in the next chapter, they have found it increasingly necessary to stress the distinctiveness of this history in asserting a separate identity within the larger Jamaican society. Almost every Maroon narrative in this book contains the assumption, whether unspoken or stated outright, that the Maroons possess a history not shared by other Jamaicans—or, for that matter, by any other people in the world.

Yet, there is also a grand narrative here—a larger, more inclusive story that is just as true and meaningful as the private narratives of difference through which contemporary Maroons reproduce their continuing sense of singularity. It is, in a word, a narrative of survival. For the Maroon epic, whatever else it may be, is clearly a story of survival against tremendous odds.

It is in this sense that the Jamaican Maroon epic “belongs” to a larger public—the same public to whom Jamaica's most famous son, Bob Marley, spoke when naming one of his last and most compelling albums *Black Survival*.⁹ The armed struggle of the Maroons to ensure individual and group survival is exceptional only in that it represents one of the more glaring of the many ways, large and small, in which enslaved Africans and their descendants managed to endure and challenge systematic, racialized oppression on a scale never before known. Ideologues and apologists for such systems have always been inconvenienced by the difficulty of reconciling the undeniable reality of such spectacular acts of resistance with their way of thinking. But today it is widely recognized that strategies for survival can take myriad forms, some much more subtle than others.¹⁰ The military successes of the Maroons can now be seen as but one point on a continuum of strategic actions designed to counter the gradual annihilation of both spirit and body that was central to the logic of chattel slavery. This saga of endur-

ance in the face of overwhelming odds, one might argue, belongs to the entire African diaspora—if not all of humanity.

It is this dimension of the epic Maroon past, I would argue, that transcends the historical contradictions and ideological divisions that, even today, continue to produce friction between Maroons and their fellow countrymen in Jamaica. As distasteful as certain aspects of the Maroon past might seem to those with the privilege of hindsight, it is well to remember that the actions of the historical Maroons, like those of a great many other Jamaicans, were calculated, under extreme circumstances, to ensure the survival of those they had come to identify as their own. More than two centuries later, their descendants—who have managed to maintain a distinct identity to the present—continue to be preoccupied with the question of survival. For them, there is no contradiction in the idea that they might remain in some ways apart, even while participating in larger narratives of black resistance and survival. The paradox, rather, is to be found in the notion that the continuing existence of distinct Maroon communities with histories of their own might somehow be incompatible with such larger narratives; or in the kind of thinking that sees preservation of a valued “heritage” as more important than the survival of those who have collectively preserved it. Many of today’s Maroons have continued to resist such hegemonic ideas, by cherishing and privately narrating their own pasts as they see fit. And, as I hope this book shows, it is largely because of this private culture of remembrance that they remain, against all odds, among history’s survivors.