

The Influences and Roles of Vodou and Marronage in the Haitian Revolution and Early Independent Haiti

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Minor in Humanistic Studies and Classical Studies

The Influences and Roles of Vodou and Marronage in the Haitian Revolution and Early Independent Haiti

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the influences and roles of Vodou and marronage in the Haitian Revolution and early independent Haiti. The first chapter explores the prevalence of Vodou and marronage in the motivational Bois Caïman ceremony and the 1791 slave insurrection that sparked the beginning of the Haitian Revolution. The second chapter highlights the influence of African military techniques and organization in addition to maroon band tactics and organization on insurgent bands in the 1791 slave insurrection and afterward as the Revolution progressed. It also depicts how Vodou rites and rituals continued to be used by insurgents to motivate them before a battle and intimidate their enemies. The third chapter emphasizes the ongoing importance of Vodou and marronage as means of mass resistance to the new plantation labor regimes established on the island after 1793. Once Haiti gained its independence, the maroon-like independent farming lifestyle for self-sustenance merged into the rural egalitarian agricultural society known as the lakou, through which former slaves expressed their maroon and African ancestral ties. The lakou became the way the Haitian peasantry was able to become small-scale independent landowners focused on self-sustenance farming within a communal setting. Over the course of the Haitian Revolution and beyond, Vodou and marronage were used by slaves and then insurgents and laborers, to resist slavery, reoccurring plantation labor systems, and to reconstruct their desired maroon-like and African-influenced lifestyle in the lakou system.

Dedication

Für meine Oma.

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Danke an meine Mutter und Familie die mich in den letzten vier Jahren immer Unterstützt haben.

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1. Introduction

In the years leading up to the Haitian Revolution, Saint Domingue under French colonial rule was prospering economically and was regarded as the Pearl of the Antilles. Saint Domingue was situated in the eastern portion of the island of Hispaniola and had been controlled by the French since 1659. In the western portion of Hispaniola was Santo Domingo which was controlled by the Spanish. Saint Domingue, like many other colonial colonies in the Caribbean, profited the most economically from the export of cash crops. By 1789, “the north was most intensively cultivated, numbering 2,009 coffee, 443 indigo, 288 sugar, 66 cotton, and 7 cacao plantations,” while the south “had 903 indigo, 297 coffee, 191 sugar, 182 cotton, and 40 cacao plantations.”¹ Behind this wealth was the grim picture of plantation slavery. In Saint Domingue, slaves were the primary form of monetary investment, and towards the end of the French colonial rule, the “combined value was more than three times that of all the colony’s lands and buildings” for slaves.² With slaves responsible for the cultivation and production of crops, they were vital as they made up the backbone of Saint Domingue’s economic prosperity and without them, it would have come tumbling down.

The social structure of Saint Domingue was heavily divided, especially amongst slaves. After arriving in Saint Domingue from Africa through the slave trade, slaves were designated to

¹ Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française del 'isle Saint-Domingue*, ed. Blanche Maurel and Étienne Taillemite (Paris: Société de l’Histoire des Colonies Françaises, Librairie Larose, 1958), 119-120, 723, 1165, quoted in Wim Klooster, “From Prize Colony to Black Independence: The Revolution in Haiti,” in *Revolutions in the Atlantic World: A Comparative History*, New Edition (New York: NYU Press, 2018), 91.

² Robert Louis Stein, *The French Sugar Business in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 45, quoted in Klooster, “From Prize Colony to Black Independence,” 98.

certain positions on the plantations, such as drivers, coachmen, fieldhands, or domestic workers.³ As the years wore on and thousands more slaves were imported by the French, slaves came to make up most of the population and were increasingly categorized depending on their place of birth. They were either African-born or Creole, meaning they had been born on the island. However, it is important to note that the term creole also applied to whites born on the island. African-born slaves greatly surpassed Creole slaves in number on many plantations, except on sugar plantations where they were practically even in number.⁴ The relationship between the African-born and Creole slaves was “often tense, as creoles looked down upon newly arriving Africans with whom they felt no affinity.”⁵ African-born slaves were typically relegated to fieldhand positions because they were viewed as less preferable due to language and cultural barriers, therefore, they were made to bear the brunt of the manual labor workload in the plantation fields, endured harsher punishment, and lived on the plantation property away from the other estates in their own poor little villages.⁶ Creoles, instead, were preferred for domestic work and elite positions, especially drivers, on plantations.⁷

The lives of the enslaved were dictated by the Code Noir which had been implemented by French King Louis XIV in 1658. According to the Code Noir, slaves were property, and their owners were responsible for providing food and clothing, and were not supposed to torture them, but could still punish and treat them as they desired.⁸ But it is important to preface that the Code

³ Jayne Boisvert, “Colonial Hell and Female Slave Resistance in Saint-Domingue,” *Journal of Haitian Studies* 7, no.1 (2001): 61. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41715082>.

⁴ David P. Geggus, “Slave and Free Colored Women in Saint Domingue,” in Gaspar and Hine, *More Than Chattel*, 259–278: 260, cited in Klooster, “From Prize Colony to Black Independence,” 99.

⁵ Klooster, 99.

⁶ Klooster, 98.

⁷ Moreau de Saint-Méry, “On ‘Race’ in Saint Domingue,” trans. John Garrigus, excerpted from *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l’isle Saint-Domingue*. 3 vols (Philadelphia, 1797).

⁸ Robert Stein, “Revolution, Land Reform, and Plantation Discipline in Saint Domingue,” *Revista de Historia de América*, no. 96 (1983): 175, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20139511>.

Noir was unevenly and selectively enforced and adhered to by both slave owners and the enslaved themselves. Nonetheless, the Code Noir did indeed have some relevance to the daily life in Saint Domingue. For instance, on the sugar plantations, slaves labored from daybreak to dawn, with only a pause for lunch.⁹ The daily working and living conditions on plantations were so brutal that the life of a slave after arriving in Saint Domingue was estimated as “never more than ten years.”¹⁰ Slaves were only spared work on Sundays and were able to then spend time cultivating their own small gardens for self-sustenance.¹¹

The Code Noir was also meant to dictate the religious beliefs of the enslaved, but it often failed to do so. According to the Code Noir all slaves had to be “baptized and instructed in the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman religion” and shortly after their arrival in Saint Domingue as planters who purchased arriving slaves had to “inform the Governor and Intendant of the said islands within a week at the latest or face a discretionary fine.”¹² The Code Noir went on to “forbid any public exercise of any religion other than the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman” and any “offenders [would] be punished as rebels and disobedient to our orders.”¹³ However, African-born slaves brought their religious practices with them from their homelands. According to Alfred Métraux, Vodou also spelled Voodoo, mainly comes from to the West African regions of the Gulf of Benin (the “Slave Coast”), The Kingdom of Kongo, Angola, the Kingdom of Dahomey, Senegal, and the Gulf of Guinea.¹⁴ Vodou in simplest terms is a polytheistic religion

⁹ Klooster "From Prize Colony to Black Independence," 98.

¹⁰ Alfred Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*, Translated by Hugo Charteris (Normanby Press, 2016), chap. 1, Kindle.

¹¹ Klooster "From Prize Colony to Black Independence," 98.

¹² *Le Code Noir ou recueil des reglements rendus jusqu'a present* (Paris: Prault, 1767) [1980 reprd. By the Societé, d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe], translated by John Garrigus, <https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/1205/2016/02/code-noir.pdf>.

¹³ *Le Code Noir ou recueil des reglements rendus jusqu'a present* (Paris: Prault, 1767) [1980 reprd. By the Societé, d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe], translated by John Garrigus, <https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/1205/2016/02/code-noir.pdf>.

¹⁴ Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*, chap.1.

with a pantheon of gods or Loa.¹⁵ And as a result of its cultural diversity the Vodou pantheon contains divine classifications according to tribe and region such as “the Nago gods, Siniga (Senegalese), Anmine (minas), Ibo, [K]ongo and Wangol (Angolese) gods.”¹⁶ Yet, the varying ethnic groups of West Africa had similar “religious systems” and when interacting with one another in Saint Domingue after arriving as slaves, they had minimal trouble “combining their respective traditions to build up a new syncretic religion,” i.e., what would become Haitian Vodou.¹⁷ The practice of the Vodou religion typically involves the ritual of animal sacrifice, offerings, spiritual possession, and dance. The “servants of the Loa are called the “hunsis” and “the priest is the hungan.”¹⁸ Some of the objects involved in rituals include “pots, pitchers, a sacred rattle, holy emblems, and [a] drum” and sacred objects colonists referred to as “fetishes.”¹⁹ To outsiders like the colonial French, Vodou could easily be written off and condemned as witchcraft or heresy.²⁰ Still, to the enslaved practicing Vodou went directly against French colonial rule and would have, just like other religions, uplifted their spirits, brought them together, and helped them survive daily life by clinging to their old identities.

To combat the practice of Vodou rites and rituals, the colonial police issued “decrees forbidding Blacks to gather at funerals, and [prohibited] the sale of charms and macandals (amulets).”²¹ Additionally, the Code Noir forbade secretive meetings possibly involving Vodou rites, and rituals amongst slaves from different plantations were also prohibited, especially those

¹⁵ Métraux, chap. 1.

¹⁶ Métraux, chap. 1

¹⁷ Métraux, chap. 1

¹⁸ Métraux, chap. 1

¹⁹ Métraux, chap. 1

²⁰ Gabriel Debien, “Night-time Slave Meetings in Saint-Domingue (La Marmelade, 1786).”

²¹ Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*, chap.1.

taking place at night.²² The punishment was corporal: whipping or branding of the fleur de Lys and in extreme circumstances death if deemed necessary by judges.²³ Any masters who “permitted or tolerated such assemblies” were to be “condemned in their own and private name to pay for all the damage that will have been done to their neighbors by these said assemblies” and pay “a fine of 10 ecus for the first time and double repeat offenses.”²⁴ Despite these restrictions, slaves managed to hold forbidden meetings with Vodou ceremonies, specifically ritual dances “during limited rest hours, on holidays, or at weekend markets.”²⁵ It is “rare to find documents on the nocturnal comings and goings of the slaves, or on their meetings” since “these gatherings needed to be secret” to avoid punishment.²⁶ Furthermore, if colonists knew about these meetings, few colonists would discuss them, and some colonists even thought that these meetings were not dangerous enough to try and intervene or stop them.²⁷ It makes sense that plantation owners would not want to risk upsetting a bunch of their slaves over something so meager as religious rites, especially when economic profit and productivity would be on the line. The productivity of their slaves was a safety valve for slave owners; this productivity not only ensured economic profit but helped limit the fear of uprisings. If an uprising was to occur, the number of slaves compared to the owner presented an obvious power imbalance - therefore owners perhaps thought it better to ignore these rituals for their own safety.

²² *Le Code Noir ou recueil des reglements rendus jusqu'a present* (Paris: Prault, 1767) [1980 reprd. by the Societé, d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe], translated by John Garrigus, <https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/1205/2016/02/code-noir.pdf>.

²³ *Le Code Noir*.

²⁴ *Le Code Noir*.

²⁵ Crystal Nicole Eddins, “Runaways, Repertoires, and Repression: Marronnage and the Haitian Revolution, 1766–1791,” *Journal of Haitian Studies* 25, no. 1 (2019): 10, doi:10.2307/26790801.

²⁶ Gabriel Debien, “Night-time Slave Meetings in Saint-Domingue (La Marmelade, 1786),” translated from *Annales historiques de la revolution francaise* 44, (April-June 1972): 273-284, by John Garrigus, edited for the web by Sue Peabody. <https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/1205/2016/02/voodoo.pdf>.

²⁷ David Patrick Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 73, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Similarly, in response to their living and working conditions, slaves often committed acts of daily resistance. The first means of resistance utilized by slaves was suicide, which typically took place “aboard slave ships” during the middle passage to Saint Domingue.²⁸ And after being “sold and introduced into the plantation system, slaves continued to resist individually and collectively by means of suicide.”²⁹ However, slaves also used tactics of non-cooperation along with abortion and infanticide, poisonings, and small-scale uprisings or acts of aggression against masters and overseers.³⁰ Typical acts of non-cooperation included only pretending to complete tasks, slowly completing assigned tasks, or faking illness to get out of work, therefore, sabotaging productivity.³¹ These acts of daily resistance were not about escaping slavery, rather they were meant to undermine the slave plantation labor system. Like in the case of religious resistance, attempting to reprimand all the slaves who committed these daily acts of resistance would not have been smart. Given their numbers, slaves could quickly stop production and easily overtake the master and his estate.

The most notable and frequent act of resistance in Saint Domingue’s history was marronage.³² The term marronage simply refers to a slave running away from their assigned estate or plantation. There are two forms of marronage: petit (small) and grand (big). Petit marronage refers to slaves being absent from their plantations for approximately two to three days to a week and was regarded by owners as laziness rather than attempted abandonment of the plantation.³³ Maroons committing petit marronage did not stray too far from their plantations and

²⁸ Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 47.

²⁹ Fick, 47.

³⁰ Boisvert, “Colonial Hell and Female Slave Resistance in Saint-Domingue,” 64; Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 47.

³¹ Boisvert, “Colonial Hell and Female Slave Resistance in Saint-Domingue,” 65

³² Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 49.

³³ Gabriel Debien, “Marronage in the French Caribbean,” in Richard Price, *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 110.

stayed on its fringes or “hid in the house of a relative of a friend from a neighboring plantation.”³⁴ They stole “small amounts of food and [committed] minor thefts” to sustain themselves in the meantime. They also traded these stolen items along with fish and game with slaves “for manioc, peas, and vegetables.”³⁵ Sometimes they were even successfully able to work as disguised freemen in towns for a few days at a time.³⁶ Compared to the acts of daily resistance mentioned above, petit marronage resembled something more akin to striking and undermining the productivity on the plantation, rather than running away for good.

Instead, grand marronage meant running away from a plantation with no intention of coming back, usually this was done alone or in small groups.³⁷ Some maroons lived in isolation for extended periods of time, “but others more or less quickly formed bands under the direction of a chief, or joined a band that was already established.”³⁸ Bands comprised mainly of escaped African-born slaves were situated in the remote areas of hills or mountains to attract less attention and limit the risk of being caught.³⁹ Maroons frequently raided plantations for supplies and stole livestock in an organized manner.⁴⁰ Consequently, mounted police were often sent after them as were, on other occasions, the militia or troops.⁴¹ If maroons were caught the Code Noir determined that those who were missing for a month “had their ears cut off and were branded on one shoulder.”⁴² And “repeat offenders had their hamstrings cut and were branded on one

³⁴ Debien, “Marronage in the French Caribbean,” 111.

³⁵ Debien, 111.

³⁶ Debien, 111.

³⁷ Debien, 107.

³⁸ Debien, 107.

³⁹ Debien, 107.

⁴⁰ Debien, 107.

⁴¹ Debien, 107.

⁴² Klooster, “From Prize Colony to Black Independence,” 99.

shoulder” and if caught after a third attempt they were executed.⁴³ Despite the consequences they faced if caught, maroon bands were well known on the island. In the South, the maroons of le Maniel had existed since the end of the seventeenth century.⁴⁴ Situated near the southwest mountains known as Bahoruco, they established their own series of villages, pillaged nearby plantations, set up their own outposts to protect themselves, and obtained arms through trade with the Spanish.⁴⁵ They successfully established an existence for themselves outside the confinement of slavery. Maroon bands, like le Maniel, represent a complete abandonment of slavery and the plantation labor system. Maroons did not just want “an escape from slave society, but the destruction of slavery and hence the transformation of that society.”⁴⁶

The relationship between Vodou and marronage and the Haitian Revolution has long presented a perplexing problem for many scholars and historians. Many of these perplexities stem from the lack of available primary sources concerning the influence of both Vodou and marronage on the Haitian Revolution. Currently there is only a select bibliography of primary sources available, and they are written from French perspectives and were not published until after the Haitian Revolution had already concluded. The main voices of the Haitian Revolution that are missing belong to the enslaved population of the island. The majority were illiterate or did not have the opportunity to leave many written records that could be preserved.

Consequently, historians have had to attempt to fill the many gaps; on these topics, historians

⁴³ Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 49– 57. Moreau de Saint- Méry, *Description*, 1131– 1135. Moitt, “Slave Women and Resistance in the French Caribbean,” in Gaspar and Hine, *More Than Chattel*, 239– 258: 246– 247. For a book-length study of the maroons, see Jean Fouchard, *The Haitian Maroons: Liberty or Death*, trans. A. Faulkner Watts, preface by C. L. R. James (New York: E. W. Blyden Press, 1981), quoted in Klooster, “From Prize Colony to Black Independence,” 98.

⁴⁴ Yvan Debbasch, “Le Maniel: Further Notes,” in Richard Price, *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 143.

⁴⁵ M.L.E. Moreau De Saint- Méry, “The Border Maroons of Saint-Domingue: Le Maniel,” in Price, *Maroon Societies*, 141.

mainly base their research and analysis on each other's work, along with the limited primary sources available. Some historians have tended to approach the topics of Vodou and marronage in the Haitian Revolution with a more skeptical approach and others have instead remained certain of their involvement. This skeptical approach taken by some historians involves greater hesitancy in accepting the more popular claims regarding the importance of Vodou and/or marronage; they remain less convinced but rarely fully deny the existence and utilization of Vodou and marronage in the Revolution. Meanwhile, other historians have continued to remain confident of Vodou and marronage's involvement in the Revolution, thus accepting the more traditional belief of their influence.

Historian Carolyn Fick's book, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below*, first published in 1990, provides an example of an approach that emphasizes the importance of Vodou and marronage in the Haitian Revolution. Fick utilizes a doing history from below approach where she aims at focusing her attention on cultural and social history, resulting in a persuasive narrative of the importance of Vodou and marronage in specific instances in the Haitian Revolution. In this, she analyzes the events of the Haitian Revolution by following the nationalized narrative that is commonly presented in modern Haiti. However, she can be a bit too enthusiastic in her approach and appears to run the risk of possibly embellishing their importance. Contrarily, historian David Patrick Geggus' book *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, published in 2002, offered a new and much more skeptical approach to Vodou and the accuracy of the idea of the involvement of maroons. It is not that Geggus does not believe Vodou or marronage existed, rather that since the available material we have about their prevalence is so vague that we should not be so quick to jump to decisive conclusions about their exact roles and influences.

Over the past few years, there has been an increasing deal of interesting scholarly material on the topics of Vodou, marronage, and the Haitian Revolution in general. Most importantly, in 2019, historian Johnhenry Gonzalez released his book *Maroon Nation: A History of Revolutionary Haiti*. Gonzalez constructs a new narrative that stressed the importance of Vodou and marronage in not only the Haitian revolution but also the construction of early independent Haitian society. Gonzalez highlights how slaves' ideas about land ownership and land use, survived throughout the Revolution through marronage, and the socioeconomic model of maroon communities went on to shape the life of the early Haitian peasantry through the system of the Lakou. In this thesis, I will be following Fick's doing history from below approach, exploring key moments of what was happening on the ground during the Haitian Revolution and shortly after Haitian independence in relation to Vodou and marronage. I will also examine, similarly to Gonzalez, the influences of marronage and Vodou, and how they served as means of resistance to slavery and maintenance of African identity for the enslaved masses during the Haitian Revolution and for Haitian peasants within the Lakou in the aftermath of independence.

The first chapter discusses the involvement of Vodou and marronage in the Bois Caïman ceremony and the 1791 slave insurrection. It is difficult to conclude to what exact extent both were involved in the ceremony or the insurrection, nonetheless, there is enough reason to suggest they played important roles. Between the aspects of Vodou ritual linked to the Bois Caïman ceremony and the insurrection, along with the influence of marronage in their organization, both Vodou and marronage appear to have helped jumpstart the Haitian Revolution. The second chapter focuses on the influence of African military techniques and organization as well as maroon band tactics and organization on insurgent bands during and after the 1791 slave

insurrection. Many insurgents had military experience in Africa before becoming slaves and by later adopting maroon tactics, they stood a greater chance of winning in battle against the colonial troops and others. Vodou rites continued to be used prior to battle to motivate insurgents and frighten colonial troops. The third and final chapter highlights the influence of marronage and Vodou as means of resistance during the later years of the revolution as new regimes attempted to establish new structures for plantation labor from 1793 forward. Notably, after Haiti became independent, the lifestyle of maroons manifested itself in the formation of the rural egalitarian agricultural society of the lakou by former slaves. Therefore, considering the larger picture, there is reason to suggest that Vodou and marronage played key roles in the repeating cycle of mass resistance to slavery and new plantation labor systems during the Haitian Revolution and were fundamental in shaping the development of the lakou system in early independent Haiti.

2. The Bois Caïman Ceremony and the 1791 Slave Insurrection

The month of August in 1791 marked the beginning of the Haitian Revolution with the momentous slave insurrection that began in the northern plain of Saint Domingue. Before the outbreak of this insurrection, a mysterious Vodou ceremony, later known as Bois Caïman, reportedly occurred. The details of both the ceremony and insurrection are difficult to discern, especially concerning the participants and their actions, due to limited primary sources and documentation. Thus, there has been much scholarly debate concerning the involvement of Vodou and marronage in the Bois Caïman ceremony and the 1791 slave insurrection. However, given the available scholarship and material, there is sufficient reason to suggest that both Vodou and marronage played significant and potentially intersecting roles in the Bois Caïman ceremony and 1791 slave insurrection.

Vodou Ritual in the Bois Caïman Ceremony

Since the end of the Haitian Revolution, the elusive Bois Caïman ceremony has been either regarded by historians as fact, fiction, or as something entirely in between. Likewise, the timeline of the days leading up to the ceremony has remained ambiguous, with historians offering several interpretations of when events occurred due to confusion of the calendar and order of local events. Surviving written accounts of the ceremony all seem to have been published after the Haitian Revolution. These reports came from outside perspectives, meaning that none of the authors were slaves who supposedly participated in the ceremony. Instead, they

were self-proclaimed outside eyewitnesses, or they recorded accounts from slaves' post-insurrection or revolution. Therefore, the existence and details of the ceremony are easily questioned. However, by overlaying and intertwining the available existing scholarship with the main primary account, a better understanding of the role of Vodou during the ceremony can be obtained. From the existing scholarship, we can conclude that the ceremony most likely did occur and that there were elements connected to Vodou within it.

First and foremost, it is important to state that there are very few contemporary archival and first-hand accounts that describe the ceremony in detail. Only four main narrations of the Bois Caïman ceremony are typically referenced today. Of these four narrations, only three have been published – one French and two Haitian which allegedly derive from eyewitness accounts.⁴⁶ The primary narration comes from French colonist doctor Antoine Dalmas, who lived in the Plaine du Nord during the time of the insurrection and used the interrogations of three separate slave conspirers to reconstruct what happened in the insurrection.⁴⁷ Dalmas appears to have used their testimonies which most likely mentioned the Bois Caïman ceremony to construct his final report that was published in 1814. Still, information obtained from the interrogations of the slave conspirators could be seen as problematic given that the information they relayed might have purposefully been falsified or perhaps misinterpreted by the interrogator(s). Meanwhile, the two Haitian narratives come from politician and poet Hérard Dumesle's *Voyage dans le nord d'Haïti* and author Célingy Ardouin's *Estudes sur l'histoire d'Haïti*. Their narratives were published in 1824 and 1865 respectively. Notably, unlike Dalmas' narrative, there is a substantial time gap between the end of the Haitian Revolution and these dates of publication, which leaves a greater

⁴⁶ David Patrick Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 82, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁴⁷ Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, 82.

margin for fabricated information. Yet, Dumesle and Ardouin did use firsthand testimonies to construct their narratives and despite the said time gap of the publication dates, it is important to note that those whom they interviewed would have most likely still been alive at the time of publication meaning that their testimonies were most likely not fabricated. But there is still room for error as memory itself is a strange thing, as memories change or shift depending on the context in which they are recalled. Also, whether these recollections were told as tales or kept as oral histories meant that they could have been adapted over time to fit the needs and concerns of the communities who kept them. The fourth narrative belongs to the oral traditions recorded by Étienne Charlier, published even later in 1954. He received information from the grandson of Vodou priestess Cécile Fatiman who was believed to have been present at the ceremony, but there is a lack of overall assurance for the accuracy of this claim.⁴⁸ Charlier only partially confirmed that Fatiman was involved in the ceremony through reports made by her descendants, but this still does not fully solidify any other details about the ceremony. From these perspectives, the one that scholars appear to rely on the most is Dalmas', as he was the first to be published, and usually thought of as the most credible. The details of the ceremony were different depending on who described it, just as is the case for other documentation throughout history. However, this does not mean that the ceremony never occurred altogether. Especially, since Vodou ceremonies, despite having been conducted in private, were not completely unknown to white outsiders.⁴⁹ While these main narrations of the Bois Caïman ceremony indeed have shortcomings, they cannot be altogether disregarded, and neither can the legitimacy of its occurrence.

⁴⁸ È. Charlier, *Aperçu sur la formation historique de la nation haïtienne* (Port-au-Prince: Presses Libres, 1954), 49, quoted in Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, 82.

⁴⁹ Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 94.

Before the insurrection broke out, slaves were believed to have congregated together at night in a desolate forested area named Le Cayman, located between the Choiseul and Dustou plantations in the Plaine de Nord parish on the Northern Province of the island.⁵⁰ Hence, the name for the Bois Caïman ceremony links back directly to this location. On the night of August 21, an estimated two hundred slaves of various statuses gathered here against the eerie backdrop of a stormy night filled with thunder and lightning, strong winds, and rain.⁵¹ The figure at the center of the ceremony was an African-born slave named Dutty Boukman who was a driver and coachman, but who many scholars also believe was a religious leader or “voodoo priest” who would later play a larger role in leading the insurrection.⁵² Once the ceremony began Boukman was assisted by a mambo, a Vodou priestess identified as Cécile Fatiman by nineteenth-century family papers; she fit the description of the green-eyed mulatto women with long hair provided by Dalmas.⁵³ Once the ceremony began, there was the notable sacrifice of a black pig, which according to Dalmas was “surrounded with fetishes” and was made to be “sacrificed to the all-powerful spirit of the black race.”⁵⁴ He also reported that after the pig had been sacrificed, the slaves in attendance each drank its blood and used cut hair from the pig's fur to place inside their amulets as a means of protection.⁵⁵ Next, Boukman and his fellow conspirators took a blood oath to secure the secrecy of this gathering and confirm their plan to begin the insurrection the next night. Simultaneously, the slaves would have been swearing an oath of revenge that would prompt them to remain loyal and participate in the insurrection, for if anyone were to back out or

⁵⁰ Antoine Dalmas, *Histoire de la révolution de Saint-Domingue* (Paris, 1814), 1:117, quoted in Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* 85.

⁵¹ Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 93.

⁵² Fick, 94; Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 99, <https://hdl-handle-net.jcu.idm.oclc.org/2027/heh.31944>. EPUB.

⁵³ Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 93.

⁵⁴ Dalmas, *Histoire de la révolution de Saint-Domingue*, (Paris 1814), 1:116-117, quoted in Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, 88.

⁵⁵ Geggus, 88.

betray their plan they would surely be killed in return.⁵⁶ With the Vodou ritual of a blood oath and the swearing of the slaves to secrecy, it becomes clearer why there would be a lack of first-hand accounts of the ceremony as the participants would have been less willing to disclose the details. Hence the details remain sparse and questionable.

Towards the end of the ceremony, Boukman reportedly chanted the words: “‘Coute la liberte li pale man Couer nous tous’ meaning, ‘listen to the voice of liberty which speaks in the hearts of all of us’” as a repeated refrain.⁵⁷ These words would have been designed to serve as an invocation to protect them against their oppressors and serve as a call to arms for the next night.⁵⁸ Of course, as Geggus suggests, these words might not have belonged to Boukman at all, but rather were the words added by Dumesle to narrate his account of the ceremony as he saw fit.⁵⁹ However, this does not mean that Boukman never performed any sort of chant to bind together and inspire the participants. In turn, the blood oath involved in this Vodou ceremony seems much more likely to have occurred given that animal sacrifice was common in other Vodou rites and ceremonial practices. The blood oath would have helped represent a physical and a spiritual bond between the participants and motivate them to go through with their insurrection. Between the sacrifice of the pig, the blood oath, and Boukman’s leadership, participating slaves might have been put at ease for what was about to transpire. There must have been much hesitation for what they were about to do, given that previous attempts at insurrection like that of Vincent Ogé only a year prior had ended in failure and execution. Therefore, the Bois Caïman ceremony, as a religious Vodou ritual, would have acted as a motivational event and

⁵⁶ Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 94.

⁵⁷ “Notice historique sur la communauté des religieuses filles de Notre-Dame du Cap Français (Saint-Domingue) fondée en 1733,” *Lettre annuelle de l’Orde de Notre Dame* (Bordeaux: Imp. B Coussan et F. Constalet, 1889), 204-205, quoted in Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 93.

⁵⁸ Fick, 93.

⁵⁹ Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, 89.

represented the rebels' hope in the fight for what they desired to achieve through the subsequent insurrection: an end to slavery.

There are other historians who instead argue that either the details have been too heavily romanticized or even that the Bois Caïman ceremony did not take place. Already, prior to the Bois Caïman ceremony, there were other ceremonies with animal sacrifices that took place.⁶⁰ Yet, these other ceremonies must have been less important compared to Bois Caïman, especially given the proximity of Bois Caïman to the insurrection.⁶¹ This is not to say that these other ceremonies lacked significance altogether, but rather in comparison, the Bois Caiman ceremony might have been connected more closely with the resistance that would come to the fore in the insurrection. These other ceremonies were likely more ordinary ones, meaning that they generally allowed slaves to organize themselves to practice their faith rather than conspire to organize an insurrection. Slaves' regular participation in Vodou ceremonies would have nonetheless been a form of resistance to their circumstances as they held on to traditions for spiritual guidance and strength. Regardless of all the possibly romanticized details, the Bois Caïman ceremony must have served a greater purpose of organizing the masses to revolt. Moreover, given that other Vodou ceremonies were held regularly, the sheer chance that the Bois Caïman ceremony occurred becomes much more probable and unsurprising.

Some historians have suggested that the ceremony has been confused with the previous meeting at Lenormand de Mézy estate on a sugar plantation in Plaine du Nord that was held on August 14. The Lenormand de Mézy meeting was held and attended by elite members of the enslaved such as drivers and coachmen from approximately one hundred neighboring

⁶⁰ Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 102; Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, 72.

⁶¹ Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 102.

plantations.⁶² It was here that the plan for the insurrection was discussed and coordinated. The meeting participants set the date for the night of August 22nd, at a given signal, plantations were to be consecutively set alight one by one.⁶³ This date appears to have been chosen because on the morning of August 23, there was a flag-blessing ceremony scheduled in the city of Le Cap, thus the military and whites would have been distracted with the festivities and not been prepared to face the insurgents; they would have more easily been caught off guard.⁶⁴ This meeting may have also featured a Vodou ceremony or ritual, but the separate Bois Caïman ceremony could have easily occurred as well within the next week, closer to the date of the insurrection to serve as the last motivational meeting prior to the insurrection. It appears more likely that these two meetings were held separately for different purposes and audiences. The Lenormand de Mézy meeting was held by members of the elite slaves, mostly creoles, who would have been more appropriate to conduct planning as they would have likely had more knowledge and information of events in Le Cap. In turn, the Bois Caïman ceremony would have then served as the final step to physically and spiritually rally the more numerous African born for the insurrection.

All in all, considering the secrecy surrounding the ceremony and its elements of the Vodou ritual does not take away from the likelihood that it occurred and was utilized by slaves as a motivator to carry out the insurrection. Despite the speculation surrounding the Bois Caïman ceremony, there is still more reason to suggest that the Vodou ritual was performed. It had considerable importance in organizing the slaves by spiritually convincing them to physically carry out the insurrection. Also, while the details of the Bois Caïman ceremony remain disputed, it appears to have been a strong spiritual influence in the minds of the slaves, and it would have

⁶² Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, 85.

⁶³ Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 91.

⁶⁴ Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, 88.

brought them a sense of momentary tranquility and motivational hope that they would be able to be free from the chains of slavery in Saint Domingue.

Maroon Involvement in the Bois Caïman Ceremony

At first glance, the participation of maroons at the Bois Caïman ceremony is even more unclear. Petit marronage was likely committed by the slaves who chose to attend the ceremony. Those in attendance most likely had left their plantations that night for several hours or over into the next night when the insurrection finally broke out. This would suggest that participants in the ceremony were committing petit marronage, since they were away from their plantations for only a few hours unauthorized.⁶⁵ It is important to mention that there were other opportunities for slaves to have met briefly and communicated, for example, on their journeys “to provision grounds, and at Sunday markets, at weekend festivities, and at other Vodou ceremonies” which did not require committing petit marronage.⁶⁶

The chance that maroons from northern mountainous areas who committed Grand marronage and fled their plantations years ago participated in the Bois Caïman ceremony is a bit farfetched. It seems unlikely that maroons from bands in the north would have made the journey to attend the ceremony and risk being caught. Rather it appears more logical to suggest that they might have waited for the insurrection to break out before making any decision to join in. Still, one cannot confirm if or how exactly any information traveled between slaves and maroons; news might have gotten out ahead of time and perhaps led them to make an appearance at the ceremony.

⁶⁵ Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 14.

⁶⁶ Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, 73.

The presence of maroons in the northern terrain of Saint Domingue was well known, with maroons having left their plantations either alone or in groups to flee to remote areas of the north or to the Spanish portion of the island as a form of resistance during the decades prior to the insurrection.⁶⁷ However, the chances that they participated directly in the Bois Caïman ceremony which was for the enslaved African-born audience is slim, especially, since as previously mentioned the planning that occurred a week prior to the ceremony at Lenormand de Mézy estate was done by members of the plantation slave elite. Therefore, if the planning was taken care of by members of the slave elite and only approximately 200 slaves gathered at the ceremony, including the leader, the driver, and coachman Boukman, this suggests that this was a confidential conspiracy with interactions between creoles and local African born only.⁶⁸ Also, with the mandatory secrecy of the ceremony, African-born slaves probably would not want to risk any further potential of their plans being revealed prior to the insurrection by including people from a more external group. For the African-born the ceremony was the spiritual step to the physical resistance of the insurrection; this was their time to resist directly, while maroons in the north had already made such decisions. Hence, the possibility that maroons, specifically slaves who committed grand marronage, were present at the Bois Caïman ceremony seems doubtful, while probably the idea that members of the enslaved African-born were committing petit marronage to attend seems more promising. Nonetheless, the complete rejection of the involvement of marronage at either the petit or grand level cannot be fully dismissed. In sum, the possibility that either petit or grand marronage were intrinsic in the Bois Caïman remains open for debate.

⁶⁷ Jayne Boisvert, "Colonial Hell and Female Slave Resistance in Saint-Domingue," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 7, no. 1 (2001): 68, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41715082>.

⁶⁸ Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, 73.

Maroon Involvement in the 1791 Slave Insurrection

On August 16, there was a false alarm raised by slaves at the Chabaud estate for the insurrection to begin. These slaves were discovered trying to set fire to a building, one slave was captured, interrogated, and confessed several names of the elite slave conspirators who gathered and formulated their plan at Lenormand de Mézy.⁶⁹ This confession resulted in the municipal authorities warning surrounding plantation owners to be on intense alert for suspicious slave activity, while the owner of the Flaville Plantation was advised to question the named slaves who belonged to him. The Flaville owner remained adamant that these charges were false and that his slaves would not dare to attempt such a thing, so the suspected slaves were successfully able to deny any connection to this plan.⁷⁰ A few days later, more slaves had been captured, resulting in confessions causing more alarm amongst the white population, but it was much too late, for the insurrection was impending.⁷¹ Despite the close call of this false alarm that would have spoiled their plans, the insurrection date remained in place.

Once the night of August 22nd arrived, insurgent slaves caused mass destruction by setting fires across several plantations in the Plaine du Nord parish. The slaves at the Flaville-Turpin estate in Acul were the first to move, they deserted the plantation to join Boukman at the Clément plantation.⁷² Then they marched onwards to the Temes estate and Noé plantation; they successfully increased their numbers and armed themselves with guns, torches, sabers, and other substitute weapons, going from plantation to plantation setting fire to the sugarcane fields and

⁶⁹ Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 95.

⁷⁰ Fick, 96.

⁷¹ Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, 85.

⁷² Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 96.

killing any whites they came across.⁷³ By the early morning hours, they had continued west to Acul and Limbé to attack Port-Margot while setting fire to and destroying more sugarcane fields, plantation estates, as well as sugar mills, tools, storage bins full of sugar, and manufacturing equipment in addition to slave quarters.⁷⁴ Insurgents destroyed anything in their path that connected them to slavery and the time of their lives spent living in subservience to whites.

There is also reason to propose that there was also maroon involvement after the outbreak of the insurrection. Technically the participants at the Bois Caïman ceremony committed petit marronage to attend, however, as they participated in the insurrection, they would have gone a step further and committed grand marronage – it was clear that they would not be returning to their plantations anytime soon.⁷⁵ There is also the possibility that as the insurrection wore on that these slaves committing originally committing petit marronage went on to join armed maroon bands to continue fighting and perpetuating violence against whites.⁷⁶ Thus, petit marronage would have been one of the first steps in the mobilization of insurgents as they went on to commit marronage on the grand scale and could have later interacted with maroon bands.⁷⁷ However, there could have also been some connections to the maroon communities in the northern mountains. For instance, at the time of the insurrection, there were several more newspaper articles detailing reports made by plantation owners of runaway slaves.⁷⁸ These runaway slaves most likely fled to join maroons in the northern mountains given their closer proximity. Albeit even with these reports, there is no way to fully correlate the sheer number of

⁷³ Fick, 96-97.

⁷⁴ Fick, 97.

⁷⁵ Fick, 106.

⁷⁶ Fick, 106.

⁷⁷ Crystal Nicole Eddins, “Runaways, Repertoires, and Repression: Marronage and the Haitian Revolution, 1766-1791,” *Journal of Haitian Studies* 25, no. 1 (2019): 27, doi:10.2307/26790801.

⁷⁸ Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, 72.

runaway slaves in the northern plain with maroon bands in the northern mountains.⁷⁹ Still, in comparison to other portions of the island, the northern plain had remained more active in maroon activity, despite this activity having been much smaller than has often been made out to. According to Geggus, in 1786 and 1787 the governor reported that marronage had been on the decline but there was remaining activity by small fugitive groups in the northern mountains.⁸⁰ A decrease in maroon band population does not mean that they simply went extinct and could not have joined the insurrection as they got wind of it, or these reports might have been miscalculated or forged. The more frequent newspaper reports and the inability to presume that maroon communities were uncommon at the time of the insurrection might mean that there was a decent chance for the increased involvement of maroons as the insurrection swept across a greater expanse of the northern plain in the coming days.

As the insurrection gained momentum and spread across the island and gave way to a large-scale revolution, the presence and influence of maroons becomes clearer. It is more likely that maroons might not have been involved in the planning or beginning days of the insurrection, but eventually, their presence was indeed more noticeable, particularly in military organization and fighting strategies and techniques. Many maroon bands favored the utilization of guerilla warfare, and separate insurgents inspired by this strategy would implement it as they formed their own militant bands.⁸¹ A number of these maroon fighting and organizational tactics specifically mirrored the fighting styles of the Kingdom of Kongo where many slaves had been imported from during the decades prior to this insurrection.⁸² Of course, both maroon bands and

⁷⁹ Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, 71.

⁸⁰ Geggus, 71.

⁸¹ Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 23; Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 100.

⁸² John K. Thornton, "‘I Am the Subject of the King of Congo’: African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution." *Journal of World History* 4, no. 2 (1993): 183, 186-189. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20078560>.

later formed insurgent groups consisted of men with a distinctly African military background and knowledge, yet there most likely were interactions that led to this more discernable overlap.⁸³ While in contact with maroon bands, insurgents could have picked up and then implemented their strategies and tactics for battle. With the connection between fighting, styles and organization used heavily by African-born maroons being implemented by forming insurgent slave groups, maroon involvement in the later phase of the insurrection is logical. Moreover, maroon groups could have simply participated solely on their own, once the news of the insurgency reached their remote camps, they easily could have joined in to participate. Indeed, if the involvement of maroons during the initial days and planning of the insurrection is harder to prove, afterward as the insurrection gained to support their influence is highlighted in the formation, organization, and battle tactics of insurgent bands, as will be explored further in the next chapter.

Vodou Elements in the 1791 Slave Insurrection

Meanwhile, the proximity between the Bois Caïman ceremony and the insurrection having only occurred one night apart suggests that there was a more distinct relationship between Vodou and the insurrection. Elements of the Vodou religion were also carried over in other recognizable ways during the insurrection. As previously mentioned, according to Dalmas' description, the hair had been taken from the sacrificed pig at the ceremony and placed in amulets.⁸⁴ If this is true, then these amulets must have then been worn by the slaves who participated in the insurrection, which provides a tie back to the ceremony but also connects back

⁸³ Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 109-110; Eddins. "Runaways, Repertoires, and Repression," 26-27.

⁸⁴ Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, 88.

to the Vodou religion itself. As the insurrection wore on, so did fighting and it became more apparent that the insurgents were not going to relent. A few weeks after the outbreak the capture of an insurgent by white soldiers occurred.⁸⁵ They searched his body postmortem, and found a small sack of hair, along with some “herbs and bits of bone”; this was what they determined to be a fetish.⁸⁶ The hair found in this sack might have belonged to the pig sacrificed at the ceremony, or perhaps it could have belonged to another pig from another sacrifice at a ceremony that occurred around the same time. The fetish and how it was kept on the insurgent’s body support the idea that it had been used as a form of protection during the insurrection against colonial white soldiers and other whites who supported slavery and attempted to quell the insurrection.

During the first days of the insurrection, it was reported that insurgents were spotted dancing and heard chanting the words “Eh! Eh! Mbumba” from an African Vodou invocation that had originated from the mid-eighteenth century on the island.⁸⁷ This invocation was made to the serpent Mbumba and acted as a “call for protection against the dreaded forces that had enslaved them.”⁸⁸ Through the use of amulets, fetishes, and invocations, the Vodou religion served to motivate insurgent slaves and offered them a sense of protection and security like other religions indeed do. Altogether, the recurring use of Vodou by insurgents implies that it was of spiritual importance to their cause. The close association between the insurrection and the involvement of Vodou elements by insurgents may even be considered as a reflection of the true

⁸⁵ Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 102.

⁸⁶ In Althéa de Peuch Parham, trans. and ed., *My Odyssey: Experiences of a Young Refugee from Two Revolutions, By a Creole of Saint-Domingue* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959), 32-34, quoted in Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 111.

⁸⁷ Fick, 104; “Notice historique sur la communauté des religieuses filles de Notre-Dame du Cap Français (Saint-Domingue) fondée en 1733,” *Lettre annuelle de l’Orde de Notre Dame* (Bordeaux: Imp. B Coussan et F. Constalet, 1889), 204-205, quoted in Fick, 104.

⁸⁸ Fick, 104.

spirit of the insurrection.⁸⁹ Certainly, the idea that only Vodou could have alone helped influence the insurrection is too rigid, there had to have been other factors influencing its outbreak and motivating the insurgent slaves as well.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, Vodou appears to be one of the main influences for and throughout the insurrection, at least from a spiritual standpoint.

Conclusion

Overall, despite differing historical perceptions along with sparse material documenting both events, there is enough discernible reason to suggest that Vodou and marronage were inherently involved in the Bois Caïman ceremony and the 1791 slave insurrection. While it is hard to definitively conclude how exactly Vodou and marronage were involved in either the ceremony or the insurrection, that does not mean that they were entirely nonexistent. Also, this is not to suggest that the insurrection would never have occurred without the involvement of either Vodou or marronage, but perhaps things might have developed and been executed differently. From what can be gathered, Vodou and marronage as individual means of resistance may have significantly intersected with Vodou serving as the spiritual tie and marronage a more physical one that would later progress into greater slave resistance as the insurrection grew. Between the aspects of Vodou ritual that reportedly occurred at the ceremony and during the insurrection which inspired the slaves, along with the potential utilization and influence of marronage in planning and organization, these two elements appear to have helped prompt the immediate first steps that mark the beginning of the Haitian Revolution. More regarding the roles and long-

⁸⁹ Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 104.

⁹⁰ Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, 76.

lasting effects that Vodou and marronage would have throughout the bulk of the Revolution will be discussed in the next chapter.

3. Maroon Tactics and the Organization of Insurgents

In the days following the 1791 slave insurrection, insurgents organized themselves into distinct groups or bands with individual leaders. This initial organization of insurgents has significant overlap with African military techniques and strategies as well as those of maroon bands, particularly in the northern plain. Still, the extent to which maroon bands from the north were involved in direct participation in the revolution remains more complex and up for debate. As for the presence of Vodou, there is no reason to assume that it simply disappeared after the initial slave insurrection, rather, Vodou rites remained an intrinsic part of religious life and battle tactics amongst insurgents.

African Influences on Insurgent Organization

After the immediate days of the 1791 insurrection, connections between African-born military traditions and the organizational techniques utilized by many insurgents became clear. Already by the end of August, there had been a great organization of insurgents into bands as they reached Le Cap. In fact, this organization was so significant that it was reported that by August 23rd they were approximately only “2,000 strong” but on August 27th the number of insurgents was “reckoned 10,000 strong, divided into 3 armies” with most having been “well armed’ though the rest were ‘almost without arms.’”⁹¹ Armed insurgents generally divided themselves into “roving rebel bands” as thousands of non-participating slaves were now free to

⁹¹ *Philadelphia General Advertiser*, October 10, 1791, quoted in Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 97.

move about “in a newly lawless landscape.”⁹² The slaves that made up the majority of the insurgent numbers, particularly in the northern plain, were African born with connections to the Kingdom of Kongo. Prior to their enslavement in Saint Domingue, many Kongolese men had been enlisted and served in the military, as West African kingdoms were constantly at war internally or with one another.⁹³ For example, the Kongo Civil Wars in 1665-1709 and several other episodes of political-military conflicts occurring well into the late eighteenth century were deeply rooted in Kongolese history as there were frequent disputes over rulership and succession.⁹⁴ These civil wars and political-military conflicts often resulted in hostages and prisoners being taken from one group by another.⁹⁵ Therefore, many insurgents with Congolese backgrounds who ended up enslaved in Saint Domingue were previously captured by an enemy kingdom’s military or slave raiders who sold them to the French.⁹⁶ Thus, given their previous military experience in Africa it makes sense that they would employ similar organizational and battle tactics and strategies when engaging with the colonial French and other rebel groups. Their previous experience might also have influenced or explained their willingness to participate in the Revolution because laboring as fieldhands might not have come naturally to them, while fighting would have.⁹⁷

Notably, the military techniques utilized by the insurgents were comparable to the styles used by the Kongolese military. One noticeable distinction is the “spontaneous” forming of

⁹² Johnhenry Gonzalez, *Maroon Nation: A History of Revolutionary Haiti* (United Kingdom: Yale University Press, 2019), 59-60.

⁹³ John K. Thornton, “African Soldiers in the Haitian Revolution,” in Hilary Beckels and Verene Shepherd. *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World: A Student Reader* (Kingston Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2000), 934.

⁹⁴ Thornton, “African Soldiers in the Haitian Revolution,” 934.

⁹⁵ Thornton, 934.

⁹⁶ Thornton, 934.

⁹⁷ Thornton, 934.

“bands” in the period between August and November in 1791.⁹⁸ The American onlookers' Captain Bickford and Mr. Harrington noted that initially, insurgents attacked in a sporadic, disorganized manner, with “the instruments of their labour’ but as time went on, they began to come in ‘regular bodies’ and were now bearing muskets and swords.”⁹⁹ These insurgent bands reflected the organization of African armies, specifically the Kongolese, as they were assembled under a single leader and did not prefer to fight by using the bayonet of a musket for close-range combat, instead employing “personal weapons, especially swords and axes in close fighting, as well as shields.”¹⁰⁰ However, later it appears that the Kongolese bands in Saint Domingue went on to adopt the use of firearms and artillery with “dozens of guns and other field pieces being used by the rebels in the early engagements.”¹⁰¹ Adopting the use of firearms would have allowed insurgents to more effectively fight against colonial French forces who would have been more familiar with these weapons. And continuing to fight in bands would remain familiar to them and could be used to their advantage. Fighting in bands or platoons and utilizing their native warfare techniques would prove to be intimidating and alarming to the colonial French, as they might have been more easily caught off-guard. For instance, a northern planter recounted his observations of the military organization and techniques that appear a bit like those of the Kongolese. He recounted that

⁹⁸ Thornton, 937.

⁹⁹ Captain Bickford and Mr. Harrington, *Boston Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser*, 23, 1201, 3 November 1791, quoted in Thornton “African Soldiers in the Haitian Revolution,” 937.

¹⁰⁰ Thornton, “African Soldiers in the Haitian Revolution,” 938.

¹⁰¹ Diary of French militiaman, 27 August 1791, printed in *Philadelphia General Advertiser* no. 321 (10 October 1791), quoted in Thornton “African Soldiers in the Haitian Revolution,” 941; Archbishop Dalzel, *The History of Dahomey: an inland kingdom of Africa: compiled from authentic memoirs* (London, 1793, reprinted with introduction by J.D. Fage, London, 1967), 169 quoted in Thornton “African Soldiers in the Haitian Revolution,” 941.

“Their [military] undertakings had something truly frightening about them simply in the way they drew up and began an attack. They never fought out in the open or bunched together – a thousand blacks would never confront a hundred whites in open country...They distributed their troops by platoons in all the overgrown places, so that they seemed six times more numerous than they really were.”¹⁰²

Utilizing the fighting techniques that were familiar to them and adapting to the changing military environment would have increased their success and helped increase intimidation of the colonial French as they would not have known what to expect, especially since their military structure was vastly different. Compared to the more systematized and standardized French military formation of actual army divisions, the multiple insurgent bands that emerged to combat them would result in more chaos that would work to their advantage.

On the other hand, Thornton points out that there is much debate about whether this prior experience that soldiers turned slaves then turned insurgents was responsible for the success of the Haitian Revolution.¹⁰³ Some scholars suggest that instead of a heavy Kongolese influence on insurgent bands and their use of artillery might have come from “European deserters or mulattos with military experience” who decided to serve in the insurgent bands.¹⁰⁴ Yet, from what can be gathered, it does appear that the influence of Kongolese fighting techniques and military organization has a decent amount of merit and therefore was highly impactful in the success that insurgents had post insurrection.

¹⁰² Jean-Baptiste Laplace, *Histoire des désastres de Saint-Domingue* (Paris, 1795), 192-23,213 in Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution*, 94.

¹⁰³ Thornton, “African Soldiers in the Haitian Revolution,” 936.

¹⁰⁴ Thornton, 941.

Maroon Influences on Insurgent Organization

Similarities between maroon fighting techniques and those of the African-born insurgent bands suggest probable interaction. Throughout the first few months after the insurrection insurgents “continued to defend their positions across the province through tactical guerilla warfare” and “retreated into the hills when it was to their advantage, organized their forces for counter attacks, and often continued to burn and ravage the nearby plantations in reprisal.”¹⁰⁵Retreating to the hills or hiding in remote areas to then wait and carry out sporadic attacks is reminiscent of the actions of maroon societies in the northern mountains prior to the insurrection. Perhaps insurgents had decided to follow the successful techniques used by maroons to sustain themselves. For instance, when it came to the typical characteristics of attacks and guerilla warfare, one general reported that ““insurgents established themselves nearly everywhere on the lower cliffs and on the slopes of high mountains to be within better range of their incursions into the plains, and to keep the rear well protected’ by staying close to ‘inaccessible summits or gorges that they were perfectly familiar with.’”¹⁰⁶ Staying close to bases near the mountains indicates the likelihood that insurgents would have come into contact and communicated with maroons, as these geographical areas would have been more familiar to maroon bands. It is reported that insurgents ““established communication links between their positions in such a way that they were able mutually to come to each other’s aid whenever we particularly attacked them. They have surveillance posts and designed rendezvous positions.””¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, to compensate for their possible lack of weapons they crafted ““camouflaged traps, fabricated poisoned arrows, feigned cease-fires to lure the enemy to ambush, disguised tree

¹⁰⁵ Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 109.

¹⁰⁶ Laurent, *Chaînes*, 28, quoted in Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 110.

¹⁰⁷ Laurent, *Chaînes*, 28.

trunks as cannons, and threw obstructions of one kind or another into the roads to hamper advancing troops.”¹⁰⁸ Fick affirms that these “were maroon tactics, and they were utilized and refined in much the same way by maroons in other Caribbean colonies where resistance had turned to actual warfare.”¹⁰⁹ As mentioned above, European armies used the more precise formation of regiments when in combat or war, yet these slave bands often faced “interband rivalry” and frequent separation under the guidance of “individual leaders.”¹¹⁰ Between the fighting styles and the leadership, it is fair to argue that insurgents did follow a similar overall organization and societal structure of maroon bands. Moreover, it appears that the utilization of maroon tactics did converge with that of insurgent bands, many of whom would have already had African military backgrounds or spent time as maroons since most were typically African-born, thus providing enhanced experience and awareness of techniques that would help them be successful as the insurrection turned into a full-scale revolution.

Direct Involvement of Maroons

The direct involvement of maroons as the insurrection bled into a revolution is less clear. As insurgent numbers grew their categorization appeared to have become much broader and overshadowed as armies went on to be formed under specific individual leaders, such as Generals Georges Biassou and Jean- Francios who formed an alliance with the Spanish Crown in the autumn of 1791.¹¹¹ Contrarily, it appears that maroon bands, while perhaps having been in

¹⁰⁸ Laurent, *Chaînes*, 28.

¹⁰⁹ Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 110.

¹¹⁰ Fick, 111.

¹¹¹ Gonzalez, *Maroon Nation*, 60-61; Jane G. Landers, “Rebellion and Royalism in Spanish Florida: The French Revolution on Spain’s Northern Colonial Frontier,” in *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean*, edited by David Barry Gaspar and David Patrick Geggus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 161-63, quoted in Johnhenry Gonzalez, *Maroon Nation*, 61.

contact with, encountered, or assisted insurgents, most likely did not come to actively fight alongside them as it is possible that maroons were not supportive of or interested in trying to bring an end to slavery.¹¹² With no clear end in sight for the chaos that was ensuing on the ground, maroons might have felt more comfortable and secure knowing that they were less likely to undergo any forced changes to their lifestyle and communities; they importantly were more likely to be left alone to their own devices. For example, the maroons of le Maniel near the southern border close to Spanish Santo Domingo are argued to have been “too fond of their independence simply to join the ranks of insurgence”, so “much of the time, they remained aloof from the conflict, or when they joined it, they always stayed somewhat on the fringes.”¹¹³ It makes sense that the maroons of le Maniel would have been disinterested in the conflict for independence and an end to slavery since they had already essentially freed themselves long ago. Simply, their fight or goals would not have been the same as the insurgents. However, this does not limit all potential interaction between the maroons of le Maniel and insurgents; this can also be surmised for other prominent maroon bands as well. Le Maniel attracted runaway slaves from French Saint Domingue and was tolerated by the nearby Spanish who frequently supplied them with weapons and exchanged information that then could have ended up with insurgents.¹¹⁴ All in all, direct maroon involvement is less likely to have occurred, and if it did occur it would have been limited. Still, interactions between maroons and insurgents must have taken place given the similarities in organization and fighting techniques.

¹¹² Thomas O. Ott, *The Haitian Revolution, 1789-1804* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973), 18-19.

¹¹³ Yvan Debbasch, “Le Maniel: Further Notes” in Richard Price, *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 143.

¹¹⁴ Debbasch, “Le Maniel: Further Notes,” 144.

The Continued Use of Vodou

Meanwhile, Vodou continued to be important to insurgents, particularly via religious rites they frequently used prior to and during battles. There are numerous accounts and mentions of distinct elements connected to Vodou rituals being utilized in the attacks made by insurgent bands. Captain Bickford and Mr. Harrington reported that while insurgent bands would march and attack, they would sing music related to their African roots.¹¹⁵ One bystander reported that occasionally when insurgent bands were approaching, they did so in utter silence, so the only noises heard were the ““incantations of their sorcerers.””¹¹⁶ Yet it appears that loud noise made by insurgent bands upon their approach and attack was more commonplace. For instance, the same northern plantation owner cited above witnessed the following:

“...they would advance making a terrible noise at first, proceeded by a large number of women and children singing and screaming in a chorus...A weak man, already intimidated by this apparent multitude of enemies was even more so by their enemy when they could... During these maneuvers, which were carried out amidst an imposing silence, solitary sorcerers could be heard singing and dancing and writhing like demons; they would cast spells to ensure the success of the attack, and often they would advance within gunshot range, confident that the enemy couldn't reach them and to convince the blacks of the power of their charms. Attacks used to begin with yells and screams that themselves alone could scare a weak man.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ “San Domingo Disturbances,” *Boston Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser* 23, no 1199 (20 October 1791) Diary of French militiaman, 27 August 1791, printed in *Philadelphia General Advertiser* no. 321 (10 October 1791), quoted in Thornton, “African Soldiers in the Haitian Revolution,” 941.

¹¹⁶ Étienne Descourtillz, *Historie des désastres de Sainte Domingue* (Paris, An III [1795]), 192, quoted in Thornton, “African Soldiers in the Haitian Revolution,” 941.

¹¹⁷ Laplace, *Historie des désastres de Saint-Domingue*, 192-23,213 in Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution*, 94-95.

The act of performing songs and dancing as well as completing invocations would have been an uplifting tactic prior to battle, it would have helped signify their desire for protection by the Iwa and the desire to be victorious. Similarly to other religions, such as Christianity, prayer, song, or invocation before a moment of life or death was not unfamiliar. These noises would have been frightening to white colonists as they were unfamiliar with the true nature or meaning of Vodou practices used by the enslaved. Moreover, as mentioned in the last chapter, in the weeks following the insurrection, an insurgent was captured and it was reported that he wore an amulet ““on his chest he had a little sack of hair, herbs, bits of bone, which they [called] a fetish.””¹¹⁸ He was likely not a singular case. The wearing of protective amulets probably remained commonplace for insurgents after the 1791 insurrection, and they went on wearing said amulets and practicing rituals like performing songs and invocations before a battle as a means of protection and victory over their enemies. Altogether, Vodou rites continued to serve insurgents on both an individual and group level, whether that was with songs and dance or amulets for protection, as the conflict continued to evolve into a revolution.

Conclusion

The evident influence of African military techniques and organization in combination with maroon band tactics and organization seems to suggest that both were fundamental in the success of insurgent bands during and after the insurrection. African military experience amongst insurgents would have greatly benefited them in their ability to throw off and defeat French

¹¹⁸ Althéa de Peuch Parham, trans. and ed., *My Odyssey: Experiences of a Young Refugee from Two Revolutions, By a Creole of Saint-Domingue* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959), 32-34, quoted in Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 111.

troops. Adapting maroon band fighting and organizational techniques would have only further enhanced their effectiveness in battle. Simultaneously, Vodou rites continued to carry heavy significance in uplifting and connecting the insurgents, while also intimidating the French before participating in a battle. Overall, it is not one hundred percent clear how active maroon bands were during the initial months after the insurrection, yet this would become more transparent as larger armies formed and attempts at reestablishing the plantation labor system were made during the Revolution.

4. Plantation Labor and the Emergence of the Lakou

Between 1793 and 1794 universal emancipation and the abolishment of slavery were passed in Saint Domingue by French civil commissioners Etienne Polverel and Leger- Felicite Sonthonax. Under Polverel and Sonthonax, the previous slave labor plantation system was reformed, but still depended on former slaves, now termed laborers, to work the land. In 1800, after he rose and consolidated his power in Saint Domingue, Toussaint Louverture passed a similar labor decree. This labor decree ordered laborers to remain on and work on the plantation land with the goal of returning to a prosperous export-based economy. In these two new plantation labor systems, the language used to describe the situation and rules were reformed. Still, the restrictions now placed on laborers closely resembled life during slavery. Consequently, during these different periods of leadership, former slaves turned to both petit and grand marronage as well as maroon-like ways of living to avoid laboring on land that they could not own for themselves. Finally, when Saint Domingue became Independent Haiti, eventually independent land ownership in a communal setting that closely resembled maroon communities emerged. This new system came to be known as the lakou. Within the lakou there was an open expression of Vodou religious rites and symbolism and the lakou would go on to be the desired lifestyle of the Haitian peasantry as it linked back to their maroon and African heritage.

Previous Resistance in the South and Le Platon

Notably, in other parts of the island order had already largely broken down, and although there was less whole-scale rebellion compared to the north, a pattern of resistance was steadily emerging. One good example of this pattern of resistance can be seen in the Southern Province with Le Platon. In April 1792, prior to the official granting of universal emancipation, free coloreds were granted civil rights by French law. However, slaves who had fought alongside the free coloreds as auxiliaries, based on the promise of freedom, were instead ordered to abandon their weapons and go back to their respective plantations.¹¹⁹ Some slaves in the South instead defied these orders and decided to keep their weapons and organized themselves into “encampments in the mountainous region known as Platons.”¹²⁰ They did not “attempt to negotiate the abolition of slavery as a political and economic institution, but rather worked pragmatically by increments to gain for themselves that which might be feasible at each stage.”¹²¹ These slaves demanded that they only have three working days in a week and that the use of the whip as punishment be removed.¹²² Then they demanded the “emancipation and freedom for several hundred of their leaders” which colonial authorities absolutely rejected, similarly to how they had done in the north.¹²³ Their demands were only met once a “badly-organized expedition led by general Blanchelande to defeat and dislodge them at Platons failed.”¹²⁴ After negotiations were concluded, the rebels affirmed that they would have their “territorial rights to the land they occupied, calling it the Kingdom of Platons,” otherwise known

¹¹⁹ Carolyn E. Fick, “Dilemmas of Emancipation: From the Saint Domingue Insurrections of 1791 to the Emerging Haitian State.” *History Workshop Journal*, no. 46 (1998): 8, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4289578>.

¹²⁰ Fick, “Dilemmas of Emancipation,” 8.

¹²¹ Fick, 8.

¹²² Fick, 8.

¹²³ Fick, 8.

¹²⁴ Fick, 8.

as le Platon.¹²⁵ Contrarily, approximately half of the seven hundred slaves accepted the offer of their freedom in return for service in the police force that would watch over the plantations.¹²⁶ Approximately twelve thousand, however, decided to reside in the mountains; many slaves from nearby plantations ran away to join them.¹²⁷

In the mountains, communities consisted not only of “military encampments and outposts, but whole families and kin” who planned to rebuild their lives as they built homes, planted crops, and gathered food for themselves.¹²⁸ Meanwhile, on the plantation land where the previous owners had fled and “surveillance was lacking”, many slaves had “expanded their kitchen garden and began cultivating portions of the plantation land as if it belonged to them.”¹²⁹ For instance, they had “gathered uncultivated products of the land, such as wood for their fires and fodder for their pigs; and helped themselves to plantation rations, freely using plantation draft animals and mules to take their surplus or stolen goods to market.”¹³⁰ These settlements with self-sustenance farming closely resemble that of typical maroon communities. These actions exemplify how determined slaves were to have some semblance of ownership of the land, whether that was via the established maroon communities in the mountains or repurposing the land of deserted plantations where they farmed in communities for self-sustenance. The case of Le Platon and other mountainous communities coincided with the broader pattern of resistance that would be used throughout the island in the coming years as the slave plantation labor regime was transformed into a reformed plantation labor regime.

¹²⁵ Fick, 8.

¹²⁶ Fick, 8.

¹²⁷ Fick, 8.

¹²⁸ Fick, 8.

¹²⁹ Fick, 9.

¹³⁰ Fick, 9.

Responses to Universal Emancipation and Resistance to Plantation Labor

In 1793, universal emancipation was granted, and slavery was abolished. Yet by 1794, another plantation labor regime was put in place by the French Civil Commissioners Etienne Polverel and Leger- Felicite Sonthonax. Polverel was placed in charge of the South, whereas Sonthonax controlled of the North.¹³¹ Both had to find a solution to organize the “hundreds of thousands of newly freed laborers to continue working on the plantations” for the economy’s sake.¹³² Hence, they established a new work code that was regulated directly by the French government.¹³³ Sonthonax proposed a new system of “sharecropping by quarters” where “plantation laborers, or cultivateurs, were entitled to be paid one-quarter of the revenue from the sale of a plantation’s sugar crop or coffee crop.”¹³⁴ Another quarter was given as tax to the state, and the leftover half was given to the plantation owner or was divided between the absentee owner and the manager left in charge in his stead.¹³⁵ These new cultivateurs were forbidden from leaving their assigned plantations without being granted permission; those who did leave were now considered to be “vagabonds.”¹³⁶ The term vagabond now replaced that of maroon and carried more derogatory and criminal connotations with it. Plantation laborers were no longer regarded as slaves but were still required to work on the land just as they had done before. They now found themselves working six-day weeks and their kitchen gardens were reduced to the sizes they were under slavery.¹³⁷ Thus, the plantation labor system was essentially the same as it was prior to the abolition of slavery. Laborers were once again forced to work the majority of the

¹³¹ Fick, 9.

¹³² Gonzalez, *Maroon Nation*, 66.

¹³³ Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 169.

¹³⁴ Gonzalez, *Maroon Nation*, 66.

¹³⁵ Gonzalez, 66.

¹³⁶ Gonzalez, 66.

¹³⁷ Fick, “Dilemmas of Emancipation, 10.

week, were discouraged from leaving the plantations and had no significant amount of land for themselves. What they wanted and what they got under this new labor system were two completely different things. If they had had it their way, they would have been able to remain on former plantations and cultivate the land for their own crops. Their model of freedom “would entail individual proprietorship of the land in small holdings based on subsistence agriculture and crop production for local, not export, markets.”¹³⁸ Notably, this dream model of labor closely resembled that of the maroon communities in the mountains, signifying that the maroons had created the socio-economic situation that was desired by the laborers.

In response to the new work code, many laborers reacted similarly to how they had under slavery by finding ways to resist. With no opportunity to cultivate their own land, laborers frequently stole plantation rations, divided them up, and then sold any surplus; they got away with this by remaining tight-lipped and “[covering] up for one another.”¹³⁹ Therefore, their sense of community remained heavily intact. Some would refuse to work by “[arriving] in the fields late in the morning and [subsequently quitting] early in the evening.”¹⁴⁰ And, when they did in fact work, they made sure their work was spitefully poor and fruitless; they often destroyed the sugar cane they were told to cultivate.¹⁴¹ Alternatively, others resisted by committing marronage, now referred to as vagrancy.¹⁴² They would constantly desert their assigned plantations and go to another one where the workload might have been less strenuous, or they deserted their assigned plantation for another one to reunite with their friends or “hide out and not work at all.”¹⁴³

¹³⁸ Fick, 10.

¹³⁹ Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 176.

¹⁴⁰ Fick, 169-170.

¹⁴¹ Fick, 170-173.

¹⁴² Fick, 170.

¹⁴³ AN, DXXXV 41, 404. Registre d’ordres et decisions, petite habitation O’Sheill, 16, 24 fév.; 12, 17, 20, 21, 27 mars 1794; DXXXV 44, 421. Sonthonax à Lachapelle, petite habitation O’Sheill, 24 fév 1794. Sonthonax à Boury, petite

Others, “sought refuge in the military camps in the hills and mountainous areas where they could be sheltered by their black comrades in the legion.”¹⁴⁴ Fundamentally they were either committing petit marronage or grand marronage, even though it was now defined as vagrancy, to escape from their labor duties on their assignment plantations. Again, there is a similar and important utilization of marronage as a form of resistance as it transcended the pre-revolutionary period and continued to be used to oppose the new labor system that resembled slavery.

In both the example of le Platon prior to emancipation and that of the actions of laborers after the new work code of Polverel and Sonthonax, marronage remained a constant form of resistance. Marronage was a prominent way to showcase their unwillingness to return to full-scale plantation labor. It also depicted their unwillingness to accept that they would not be landowners. This would continue to be a reoccurring theme under the rule of Toussaint Louverture.

Toussaint Louverture’s Reformed Plantation Labor

Before Louverture assumed power, the situation in Saint Domingue grew more confusing and tumultuous by the minute with the additional involvement of the British and Spanish and internal conflicts. As Louverture became a more prominent French military figure and helped defeat the Spanish and the British by 1798, political power in Saint Domingue was open to

habitation O’Sheill, 9 mars 1794. Sonthonax à Baulos, petite habitation O’Sheill, 11 mars 1794; DXXV 22, 226. Beauregard, commandant militaire à Etienne Polverel, commissaire civil, Cavallion, 2 avril 1794; DXXV 37, 373. Thiveruy, gérant de l’habitation Labiche et Dunezac au commissaire civil, au Fond, 20 mars 1794; DXXV 37, 374. Attestations of concierge, les Cayes prison, les Cayes, 28 March 1794. Petit, commandant militaire à Polverel, commissaire civil, Camp Périn, 25 mars 1794. Salomon, commandant militaire à Polverel, commissaire civil, les Cayes, 30 mars 1794. Poulain, économiste-gérant de la deuxième habitation Laborde à E. Polverel, deuxième habitation Laborde, 23 mars 1794, cited in Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 173.

¹⁴⁴ Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 173.

anyone for the taking.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, by 1798, Louverture gained full control over Saint Domingue and established another reformed plantation labor system. It soon became clear that Louverture's main goal was a solid economy for the island based on the exporting of cash crops. Hence it is unsurprising that he "[defended] the rights of landowners and [enforced] a regime of compulsory labor on the plantations."¹⁴⁶ By 1800 Louverture's rule was fully cemented, and he enacted his Labor Decree. According to the Labor Decree:

"...field-negroes are forbidden to quit their respective plantations without a lawful punishment. This is by no means attended to, since they change their place of labour as they please, go to and fro, and pay not the least attention to agriculture, though the only means of furnishing sustenance to the military, their protectors. They even conceal themselves in towns, in villages, and mountains, where, allured by the enemies of good order, they live by plunder, and in a state of open hostility to society."¹⁴⁷

Article 3 continues as follows:

"All field-labourers, men and women, now in a state of idleness, living in towns, villages, and on other plantations than those to which they belong, with an intention to evade work, even those of both sexes who have not been employed in field labour since the revolution, are required to return immediately to their respective plantations...All those who shall be found in contravention hereto, shall be instantly arrested, and if they are found guilty shall be drafted into one of the regiments of the army...[L]iberty cannot exist without industry."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Fick, "Dilemmas of Emancipation," 10.

¹⁴⁶ Gonzalez, *Maroon Nation*, 67.

¹⁴⁷ *Supplement to the Royal Gazette* [Jamaica], 22:47 [15 Nov. 1800], in Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution*, 153.

¹⁴⁸ *Supplement to the Royal Gazette* [Jamaica], 22:47 [15 Nov. 1800], in Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution*, 154.

Notably, in his Labor Decree Louverture explicitly calls out laborers who committed marronage and orders them to return to their plantations. He outright condemns their methods for avoiding plantation work and insisted that such behavior had to end for any order to be reinstated on the island. Like his predecessors, Louverture made the acquisition of land impossible for those forced to work as laborers, leaving them to remain stuck within a plantation system. In sum, Louverture imposed another form of plantation slavery with new stipulations. Former slaves once again “had no practical access to individual landholding and, in this sense, no tangible evidence of their freedom.”¹⁴⁹

Still, the mass of laborers in Saint Domingue remained determined to farm their own land for subsistence and resisted relentlessly, partly through marronage. Marronage again became a response to the “persistence of forced labor under Louverture”; his new labor code “engendered further marronage and servile rebellion.”¹⁵⁰ Former slaves turned laborers did not forget “how to escape, set fire to cane fields, or take up arms.”¹⁵¹ Moreover, “without the harsh constraints and physical punishments” that previously existed during slavery, laborers “would spend more time on their own kitchen gardens than at the plantation; they were often errant, and their work, when they did perform it, was slack and unproductive.”¹⁵² And soon, mass resistance gave way to the “rapid formation, or reemergence, of massive maroon bands and strong centers of aggressive, armed rebellion characterized the resistance of the blacks in the North, from the island of Tortuga across to the entire North Plain region.”¹⁵³ This resurgence of maroon bands and armed rebels in the north provoked similar responses in the South as well as “the creation of

¹⁴⁹ Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 207-208.

¹⁵⁰ Gonzalez, *Maroon Nation*, 69.

¹⁵¹ Gonzalez, 69.

¹⁵² Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 208.

¹⁵³ Fick, 215.

a network of resistance, whose aim it was to proselytize, to gather additional recruits and supporters, to call meetings and assemblies, and to devise plans of actions.”¹⁵⁴ According to Robert Fatton, there is reason to believe that ““there were more maroons in many districts in 1800 than under the period of colonial slavery.””¹⁵⁵ It is not surprising that laborers turned to marronage to emphasize their unwillingness to work on plantations, just as they had done in pre-revolutionary Saint Domingue.

Thus, while Louverture’s new labor code was meant to organize laborers to yield substantial crops for economic profit and was partly successful, in doing so at the mass social level it produced much discontent leading to recurrent episodes of marronage. He attempted to maintain the plantation labor system by “preventing former slaves from acquiring small farms” because “he knew full well that laborers who had the option of becoming independent proprietors would never again return to work on a plantation.”¹⁵⁶ More generally, the longer-term “breakdown of the colonial order” allowed “thousands of former slaves to escape and begin settling [in] many mountainous and sparsely populated parts of the island.”¹⁵⁷ The endeavors to return plantation labor were met with marronage and resistance from laborers as they remained frustrated with the inability to own land and use it as they desired.

In the fall of 1801, Louverture’s nephew, General Moïse Louverture, led a new revolt where the “sugarcane fields on the northern plain once again went up in flames as plantation laborers launched a rebellion reminiscent of the August 1791 uprising.”¹⁵⁸ Moïse and the several

¹⁵⁴ Fick, 215.

¹⁵⁵ Robert Fatton, *The Roots of Haitian Despotism* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2007), 104, quoted in Gonzalez, *Maroon Nation*, 69.

¹⁵⁶ Gonzalez, 80.

¹⁵⁷ Gonzalez, 69.

¹⁵⁸ Gonzalez, 69.

hundred rebels who joined in this revolt were caught and executed.¹⁵⁹ From that point on, Louverture's popularity appears to have declined, and following Napoleon Bonaparte's Coup d'état in 1802 and the 1802 arrival of Charles Leclerc and his expedition under the orders of Bonaparte, Louverture's reign soon came crashing down.¹⁶⁰ After the arrival of the French, it became clear that the threat to return to the plantation slavery system was on the horizon. Shortly after his arrival Leclerc removed Louverture from Saint Domingue and ordered him back to France as a prisoner. He later tried to force laborers to return to their plantations. On the ground, utter chaos and confusion broke out amongst the laborers. The plantations went up in smoke as "thousands of common laborers and soldiers did not go along with Louverture's decision to surrender, and independent armed bands of former slaves continued to seek refuge in the mountains."¹⁶¹ Laborers again turned to destroying the plantations and committing marronage; these tactics appeared to represent a constant revolving door of resistance to enforced plantation labor altogether. Revolutionary generals Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Henri Christophe eventually picked up the pieces to defend the island from the French after Louverture was arrested and sent back to France, where he died in 1803.¹⁶² In 1804, the French were defeated and removed from the island and Dessalines became the emperor of newly independent Haiti until 1806.

¹⁵⁹ Gonzalez, 71.

¹⁶⁰ Fick, "Dilemmas of Emancipation," 13.

¹⁶¹ Gonzalez, 72.

¹⁶² Fick, "Dilemmas of Emancipation," 13.

The Lakou System and Haitian Peasantry

Dessalines was murdered in 1806. Afterwards Haiti was divided into two territories, the northern kingdom under the rule of Henri Christophe and the southern republic under Alexandre Pétion, only to be reunited under Jean-Pierre Boyer in 1821. Notably, in united Haiti under Boyer's republican regime "forced labor on the plantations had fully given way to smaller-scale systems of independent farming, sharecropping, and domestic servitude."¹⁶³ With this political, social, and economic backdrop, a new system for organizing labor mirroring that of maroon communities emerged amongst rural Haitian peasants. This new system was called the lakou; the term comes from the French words "la cour" meaning "courtyard" and "refers to a group of houses – sometimes including a dozen or more structures, and usually allowed by an extended family – gathered around a common yard."¹⁶⁴ Instead of spending their days laboring to benefit the new nation-states' government institutions, most of the Haitian masses developed this lakou system to promote their desired economic and cultural traditions.¹⁶⁵ The lakou system also prompted every member to have "equal access to dignity and individual freedom."¹⁶⁶ Since the rural Haitian masses were not able to alter the national political and economic systems, they formed "an egalitarian system without a state."¹⁶⁷ The lakou became responsible for the social and economic organization of the rural masses through an egalitarianism based on "land ownership arrangements" and "family relationships."¹⁶⁸ Within the lakou each person or their family owned the land they lived on, and its cultivation supplied them with "basic necessities by

¹⁶³ Gonzalez, *Maroon Nation*, 47.

¹⁶⁴ Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2012), 107.

¹⁶⁵ Gonzalez, *Maroon Nation*, 44.

¹⁶⁶ Dubois, *Haiti*, 107.

¹⁶⁷ Dubois, 108.

¹⁶⁸ Dubois, 108.

growing food and raising livestock for their own consumption and for sale in local markets; they also grew export crops, such as coffee, in order to buy imported consumer goods such as clothes and tools.”¹⁶⁹ This did not mean that these individuals or their families were isolated on their plots of land, rather the lakou often facilitated “forms of communal assistance and exchange - relatives and neighbors might join together to help out with large harvests or the building of a house.”¹⁷⁰ Therefore, the lakou system closely revolved around the individual and their families within the network of other neighboring families.¹⁷¹ The lakou, similarly to maroon communities represented and embodied the meaning of living in a community but working and managing the land for oneself, as one pleased without the influence of the state hovering over them. Thus, the lakou symbolizes a return to the dynamics prevalent in maroon communities; it represents a modeled copy of maroon societies and their views of labor and land ownership.

While poverty remained common amongst members of the lakou system, the lakou system involved important efforts to maintain peace and their social and economic control over land. Maintaining peace amongst its members was challenging because of poverty and instances where members expressed “intense individualism” over their property.¹⁷² Subsequently, many lakou communities under the guidance of their leaders, mainly their family patriarchs, created boundaries, typically in the form of “living fences” of cacti to keep livestock from damaging any neighboring yards.¹⁷³ Many communities settled near a “network of small paths with a few large common roads” to have access to their yards and houses while keeping enough room to plant and stay away from dangers outside.¹⁷⁴ There was the chance to have their individual

¹⁶⁹ Dubois, 108.

¹⁷⁰ Dubois, 108.

¹⁷¹ Dubois, 108.

¹⁷² Dubois, 110.

¹⁷³ Dubois, 110.

¹⁷⁴ Dubois, 110.

freedom and aspirations, but they also had to work together as a community to successfully maintain the egalitarian lakou system. Just as maroons did with individual subsistence farming, they also lived in a communal setting in a separate hidden location. This desire to have communal life but simultaneously remain autonomous with their land reflects the ideals of the maroons.

Meanwhile, Vodou rituals and rites continued to be observed within the lakou system. For example, along with the regular observation of rituals and rites, “each lakou included a set of family tombs, allowing residents of the countryside to do something that had been difficult if not impossible under slavery itself.”¹⁷⁵ They were now able to “keep and maintain a cemetery, paying respects to the dead and through them honoring more distant ancestors in Africa.”¹⁷⁶ In Vodou the connection to ancestors was greatly important, as deceased family members were believed to be connected to the pantheon of the Iwa.¹⁷⁷ The tombs represented a way to connect with their ancestors as well as served as a reminder of their family origins and highlighted each person’s responsibility to the lakou land and community.¹⁷⁸ Within the lakou, the practice of Vodou would have served as another way to keep the community joined together; Vodou would have helped merge the individual and communal elements of the lakou together. By engaging in rites and rituals and maintaining a close bond with their ancestors, the lakou consistently inspired them to remain together and most importantly continue overseeing the land by cultivating for self-sustenance as the years wore on.

¹⁷⁵ Dubois, 111.

¹⁷⁶ Dubois, 111.

¹⁷⁷ Dubois, 111.

¹⁷⁸ Dubois, 111.

Through the lakou system, the Haitian peasantry was able to survive. They were able to keep practicing their faith and revert to a system of landowning and cultivating that closely resembled both African and maroon communities. It is through the lakou system and its subsequent effect on the Haitian peasantry which prospered in early independent Haiti, that one can closely see the link to maroon lifestyle and maroon community structure observed throughout the revolution. The lakou might not have greatly facilitated the wealth of the Haitian state economy, but it did allow for control to be given back to former slaves and former laborers who now made up the Haitian peasantry.

Conclusion

All in all, by observing the similarities of resistance via marronage during the revolution all the way up until the formation of independent Haiti, it becomes clear that former slaves would not allow plantation slavery to continue. Marronage transformed from a popular form of resistance under the oppressive rule of the French to a way of contesting Toussaint Louverture's plantation labor system to the later formation of the new rural egalitarian agricultural society of the lakou. After Haiti gained its independence, the ideas of land ownership and independent labor carried over from maroon communities into the formation of the lakou. The rural masses were able to adopt a similar lifestyle to fit their unchanged agendas of becoming small independent landowners and farming for self-sustenance. The lakou system became the embodiment of former slaves and laborers fulfilling their lifelong aims and returning to a lifestyle that echoed the ties they had not only to maroons, but to their African ancestors as well.

5. Conclusions

In examining the course of the Haitian Revolution from the ground up, it is evident that Vodou and marronage were critical to the cycles of mass resistance to slavery and plantation labor. They also impacted the construction of the lakou system in early independent Haiti. From the beginning of the Bois Caïman ceremony and the 1791 slave insurrection, Vodou and marronage served as means for slaves to organize and unify themselves as they began overthrowing the slave plantation labor system. Then as the insurrection turned into a revolution, the notable African - mainly Kongolese - heritage and culture of slaves who were now insurgents along with their previous experience as soldiers in their homelands mingled with similar strategies and tactics of maroon societies to intimidate and defeat the colonial French. It is unclear if maroon societies explicitly joined in with insurgents, but there is a greater chance that they did interact with one another due to the overlap in the fighting techniques and tactics used. Meanwhile, Vodou rites continued to hold a special place and significance in inspiring and bringing together insurgents before a battle. Next, following universal emancipation in 1793, first Polverel and Sonthonax, and later Toussaint Louverture attempted to implement a return to plantation labor to rescue the island's economy. Each attempt was met with active resistance by laborers as they desired, like maroons, to become independent landowners and farm for self-sustenance. Laborers once again used petit marronage as a means of resisting daily work and continued to cultivate their own small gardens on the plantation estates. Once Haitian independence was reached, former laborers, now peasants established the lakou system which embodied their desired maroon-like and African-influenced way of life. The lakou system

allowed the Haitian peasantry to farm for self-sustenance on their individual plots of land while living within a community where they could collectively interact and engage with one another as they saw fit through small trade and the continued religious practice of Vodou.

Altogether, it is difficult to foresee what might have occurred if not for the roles and influences of Vodou and marronage in the cycle of resistance that characterized the Haitian Revolution and later socio-economic developments of early independent Haiti from below. And while Vodou and marronage already existed as means of opposition to slavery and the plantation labor system in pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue, it is remarkable how they shaped the outcome of the first-ever successful slave revolt turned revolution. As slaves became insurgents and then laborers and, finally, peasants, Vodou and marronage assisted them in destroying the plantation labor regime and creating the foundations for their desired way of life, thus altering the course of Haitian history and the Atlantic world forever.

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