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## **Maroon Indigenous Women Circle, Jamaica: Historical Recurrences from Indigenous Women's Perspectives**

By Gaama Gloria "MaMa G" Simms<sup>1</sup>  
Paramount Queen of the Maroons, Jamaica

\*Editor's note: We have minimally edited the following essay in an effort to maintain the voice, cadence and phrasing of Gaama Gloria "Mama G", Paramount Queen of the Maroons as she narrated this story. She is of both written and oral tradition. Here we attempt to combine the two in a *literary orality*: her writing reflects her speaking style. The essay's topic headings, which the author inserted, help to organize the story and ideas she shares here, but also indicate features of the oral tradition in their repetitive nature, underscoring the importance of returning themes.

### **Historical Recurrences**

As indigenous women we want to firmly defend that history is revisited with similar events from time to time: Why? Because history is first and foremost daily experiences, which, after a period of time became history. So goes the term "History in the making." Our facts are based on two cases that we witness: first, we give thanks for recognizing universal/scientific happenings, and second, we are grateful for the fact that we can now illustrate and practically, help others to reap the benefits of our knowledge.

### **Brief History of Jamaica**

Jamaica is an island situated in the Caribbean Sea; it is 144 square miles. It is part of the CARICOM community. Jamaica boasts a rich history of slavery and resistance. The island was occupied by Tainos and Africans, who live together peacefully and they called the island "Xaymaca" meaning "land of wood and water." The African foreparents would travel from the Motherland of Africa in small locally made ships/canoes trading their merchandise. Because many Africans are skilled artisans, they would also bring products of their villagers, among the Native Indians so they could experience fair trading in the form of bartering and otherwise. They would also camp for long periods to source raw materials that were scarce in their region and inter-marriage became common among these two indigenous nation.

Pirates and buccaneers made the island their haven of rest, in Port Royal, so that they could hijack the African merchandiser/traders. They stole their goods/stocks (including various items made from gold), captured and sold them as stock into the Slave Trade.

As the history is told, Christopher Columbus, a Spaniard came here, and it was a new land for him, but for centuries it was the native home of the Taino Indians and Africans, sharing their culture and living in peace and free will, the Spaniards eventually enslaved some of them. The Taino, not used to this now regulated life of suffering hard work, suffered many diseases and after

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a period many of them died, some who remain migrated to the island to Puerto Rico, leaving the island to their Maroon family.<sup>2</sup>

In 1655 the English invaded Jamaica and defeated the Spaniards. This resulted in them releasing their slaves, who run into the mountain with their Native Indian bothers, these African along with those who become known as the Maroons.

The English came with the Transatlantic Slave Trade; in those days this trade rapidly grew into a vibrant economic tool, the journey was known as “Middle Passage” liken to a rebirth into suffering and death; it was an inhumane situation.

The enslaved became so unhappy with their status, so this naturally made them very rebellious; Jamaica history bears documentation of several rebellions. In Jamaica there are three groups of people that are referred to as indigenous, the Maroon, Rastafari and Revivalist, the Maroon been the original from while the other latter emerges from; this make the Maroon the “Grandmother of all” indigenous cultures in Jamaica.

### **Story of Two Historical Recurrences: Becoming a Gaama**

Let me go ahead and tell two stories of history repeating itself in this time, the first story goes like this: December 28th. 2013. I was invited to Suriname by the Maroon Women’s Network, and the experience was awesome--the cultural connection to Africa is so outstanding. I was in awe most of the time. I spent four weeks there travelling all over the country; I was there to attend a conference “*Grand Kutu*” as they called it in their Maroon language. At the conference we signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with Suriname Maroon women and the Merikin Maroons based in Trinidad and Tobago, as it is protocol to visit a Gaaman (Paramount King, who held the ultimate authority over all Chiefs) for him to approve and advise. We travel for one day on boat up the Surinamese River to Samacka Maroon Village; while there I was honored ceremonially with the honorable title of “Gaama” (Paramount Queen). It was an historical occasion , because even though Suriname has over 60 women chiefs, this title has never been given to a woman before; I became the first female Gaama, and was later installed June 22nd, 2014, at the Maroon International Conference in Charles Town, by Gaama from Suriname when the government send a delegation of seven people, consisting of Ambassador (interpreter) Her Excellency Fidelia Graand Galon, government workers and traditional leaders and drum master, along with my stools and other gifts.

Maroons of Jamaica are the original custodians of the African/Jamaican Culture. This charge had been bestowed on them by the Taino Native Indians of Jamaica when they shared cultures and a fellowship of brotherhood/sisterhood during the days of resistance, reinforced when Taino cultural activist Vanessa Inurit of the Taino Tribe now based in Puerto Rico, visited Jamaica and toured numerous geographical regions throughout the island such as caves, burial spots, excavated spots, and the National Archives that exhibit artifacts of their once presence.

Queen Nanny used to be the chieftainess of Charles Town and Quao was her Captain; it was Captain Quao who signed the Treaty of 1739 with the British, so every year those in the village and Maroons across Jamaica and overseas visit and celebrate June 23rd, “Quao Day” at our annual International Maroon Conference. So June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2016, Cultural Activist, Chief/Spiritual Leader and Elder of the Taino Nation, Vanessa Inurit, based in Puerto Rico, paid an official cultural visit to our “Quao Day” celebration, bearing original Tribal Prayer Staff of her Taino Nation. While

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<sup>2</sup> Editor’s note: There is increasing evidence that Tainos and Maroons intermarried, shared strategies of resistance and collaborated in survival. Today, descendants of those communities are beginning to speak out and assert their joint Taino and African identity. <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20140705/lead/lead5.html>.

she was here visiting sacred sites, orders was given to the Shrine of Nana Afufiyea (initiated African Priest of Akan Culture--Jamaica) to prepare a sacred prayer staff to represent Jamaica's indigenous people; this prayer staff was taken to all the sacred sites and prayers were invoked into it from various elders.

This prayer staff of Jamaica along with the Tribal prayer staff of the Taino were reconnected together on Quao Day in Charles Town, to renew charges left on us Maroons by the Taino, when they left "Xayamaca" their native land to us (Maroons) when they left for Puerto Rico, approximately 300 years ago.

### **Historical Recurrences**

History is recorded events that have significant and useful knowledge and principles that we can examine, study and gain direction from; it can help us not to make the same mistakes twice, bring better understanding of consequences of actions and reactions. History helps us to gain insight in how we think, act, and react in certain situations.

These two events we liken to what is called historical recurrences: the repetition of similar event in history. Whenever a species is suppressed or repressed in order to survive, they have adapted and improvised within their surrounding environments, using means necessary to survive, and after a period of time evolution took place through a natural selection of the fittest of the fit; at the same time this process affects social, cultural, and biological phenomenon.

Our ancestors, some who were enslaved, who eventually ran away from the plantations and slavery itself and became known as "Maroons" were heavily suppressed by the authoritarian system of Transatlantic Slave Trade, their free will was curtailed and tightly regulated so that their very thoughts became their biggest enemies; thinking for themselves was now senseless, and they were forced to see themselves as less than human Being.

Because it is a fact that we carried the imprints of our parents; therefore, we are the continuity of them living, their rebirth, we were created to reenact their lives but we can and should deal with this continuity by using discretion to create a beneficial act that will appease even the worst mistake made and bring benefit to humanity.

Every day lessons or life lessons are the primary feeder of history, it is the same information that become history after a matter of time. It is our responsibility to learn from each lessons however tough they may be. The universe is based on a circular form of ruling, everything that goes around come back a round, history will recur, just like the sun and moon, history rotates whenever earthly rulers and systems incline and intend to repress humanity; then relevant history will revisit to guide us to a better pathway of new growth, but because the reenactment, it seems so tough, so impossible especially in these modern days of luxuries. It is the bad experiences of history when they are revisited that bring new insights to the nature of humanity.

If the repression remains the same or gets worse then relevant historical events will be revisited in an even more difficult scenario of the same history, like an echo in form or habit, and will repeatedly recur like the sun every day, until we learn completely what it is we must learn from this. And the greatest reason for history recurring is to let us become aware that history is spent time, but we can control our response in the present and future time to come.

## **Indigenous women of Jamaica**

Jamaica is a melting pot, but the African community in Jamaica has been struggling for many years under severe suppression in every aspect of their lives, but in spite of this, they were the primary resistance tool during the active days of slavery, and continue after and onward to pass on their traditional values and customs to present generations, and to those yet to come.

This is the daily life style of our matriarchial governance and this is history: indigenous women in Jamaica live a role model lifestyle to redirect African people to a real image of compassionate family life, a unit that was totally intentionally destroyed in slavery. Women are producers of off-springs, and food products; it is the women who maintain law and order in the home and community, and sometimes are called in to other homes in the community to settle domestic disputes. They give advice and counsel.

In the Maroon cultures women have little or no authority over lands, and for anything to do with lands, they would have to seek permission from the chief colonels who are all men. In 2009 I started the Maroon Indigenous Women Circle after sitting as the only female among all the Maroons Colonels in Jamaica on the Maroon Secretariat, to give indigenous women a voice. This circle also connects and contains Rastafari women and just about any roots women regardless of labels or whatever subliminal boundaries, working with non-indigenous women and community, to build compassionate families, communities, and nations.

In this Moon of newness, in this era we experience the recurring of history. so it was in the beginning, so it is right now, in this circle of space and time, our ancestors revisited in the feminine form to reform the errors and flaws, caused from the lack of knowledge at the time of the language that they signed in, we as indigenous people, especially our women who learn the pangs of warfare have evolved, through various adaptations and now rise to a heights of Peace Revolutionists.

As indigenous women we are well aware of our role, duties and responsibilities not just to ourselves, families and communities but to our nation and humanity as a whole, and to our environment. We are willing and made able through our life of adversity to help others recognize and know how to reap benefits from recurring history. As the feminine energies have great knowledge in cycles, as she is the reflection of the moon and mother earth, time and space will always surrender.