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Tracking Down The Marrons: Archaeo- Geography Of Marronage In The Caribbean
Abstract
As the Maroons escaped from enslavement into unknown and inaccessible environments, they relied on their mental maps developed through sequential exploration of those environments to establish and defend their settlements. Initially they would take advantage of the knowledge of the areas surrounding the plantations from which they escaped, explore them thoroughly and then, at the appropriate time, link their escape routes and locations to those mental maps that they had acquired. That knowledge would have helped them to develop networks of familiar pathways and landmarks along, and around which, they arranged their settlements. This paper suggests that knowledge of such pathways and strategic locations enabled the Maroons to effectively harness the resources of the rough terrain and harsh environmental conditions to claim their freedom firstly as a forest people developing a forest-based Maroon culture, which they later transformed into a river-based culture as they moved to settle along the major waterways after the peace treaties. Examples from Suriname are used to examine the process and significance of the contribution of the geographical factor in their successes. The paper also examines the speculation that the Maroon response to the geographical factors, observed through models based on such sequential explorations and a comparative analysis of the colonial and post-colonial experience, are crucial to our understanding of the development of Maroon settlement behavior patterns, spatial arrangements and the formation of Maroon heritage.

Introduction

The Geographical Context
Almost half of Suriname is lowland, the rest being hilly country with elevation of between 200 and 300 meters above sea level with occasional mountain ranges with isolated peaks rising in chains out of the hills. Suriname lies in one of the areas of the World’s heaviest rainfall and supports the thick tropical forest cut through by complex networks of rivers, ravines and creeks making it almost impossible to penetrate. In many places, the forest alternates with extensive plains or savannas, which are entirely different in appearance from those of the coastal region. The rivers are only navigable in the lower reaches, where they traverse the coastal plain, flowing through a number of gorges and rapids, tumbling now and again, down steep falls. These rivers vary continuously in breadth as they flow between crumbling granite walls passing through the thick gallery forests of the riverbanks. The speculation is that it is in these areas and on the ridges of the mountain ranges, and possibly in rock shelters and caves, that the Maroons found solace to establish the foundations of their heritage and the founding of their early strongholds and settlements to claim their freedom.

Definition and analysis of the trail

Tracing the Trail:
Maroon settlements have been identified in various parts of Suriname and may be organized in a hierarchy that could be used to define the expected evidence of cultural development along the trail formation of Maroon heritage. The process is defined by use of the following chronological categories: (a) Pre-peace treaty (before 1762); (b) Post peace-treaty (1762 -1840); (c) Post-emancipation (1840-1970s) (d) Post –independence sites (1970s onwards). It is the first two periods that will benefit a great deal from the archaeological fieldwork. It is within those first two stages of the chronological scheme that the earliest stages of the formation of Maroon settlements and culture in Suriname can be identified. This scheme has the potential of reasonably describing and explaining the formation and transformation of the Maroon culture among the various groups along trails constructed from evidence of oral traditions and ethnographic data. The three stages of
the development of Maroon heritage, discussed below, fall into the pre-treaty period (up to 1762), which defines the entire period of Maroon military struggle to eliminate slavery and the formation of their social system within a forest-based culture. It is expected that the process would be reflected in the sequence and patterns of placement of structural features within and around their settlements and in their associated political and other behavior patterns or lifestyle.

The next stage of the field plan was to place known or located sites in a chronological order using dates known for the time of their founding or in the absence of that, through oral traditions, or estimating their proximity to a plantation based on the assumption that the earlier Maroon hideouts were closer to the plantations than the later ones. Such arrangements would be used mainly for analytical purposes. Test implications would then guide data collection at each site. Using a flow chart or graphic scheme that defines the characteristics of each type of site in the process, can help speculate about the possible physical nature of the site, archaeological content, occupations or traditional industries and related products, food ways, social relationships and possibly material culture related to birth, death and other rites or customs as well as art and artistic traditions in the early period of the formation of their heritage. Predictions of the archaeological record would then help verify the location of each site along the trails in time and space through archaeological studies. Early maps of Suriname (de Lavaux 1737, Koeman 1973) provide us with some details about possible early Maroon zones as they relate to the plantations. Historical maps also provide information about the location of early sites that were in proximity of the plantations (Hoogbergen 1990) that could have been the sites which witnessed the earliest stages of Maroon flight to freedom. For more security the Maroons had to escape farther into the interior areas where they could not be readily detected or attacked, eventually establishing long-term settlements or strongholds.

**Framing the Interpretations**

Ethnographic, historical, survey and excavation data are brought together for the interpretations of the evidence for the sites. For example, it is known that names of plantations served as means of identification of escaped groups. It has been noted that “Runaway slaves from the plantation, La Paix, for example, called themselves La Paix ‘row’, which was later changed to ‘lapo lo’ in their language. The word ‘lo’, then has been used to identify corporate groups and the name of a matriclan (Hoogbergen 1990). Such social relationships appear to dictate the residential arrangements and related behavior patterns, as observed at the Maroon settlements of Accompong in Jamaica (Agorsah 1994, 1999). The resulting distribution can be recognized within and around Maroon settlements. I have referred to such patterns as resulting from the local rule (LR) of spatial behavior (Agorsah 1983, 1985, 1986).

**Explaining Clan Formation**

**The Local Rule (LR) model**

The Local Rule (LR) model is a proven interpretative framework that helps determine decisions made by small-scale traditional societies about the choice of location in land space either of the settlements or group or clan areas within the settlements and isolates different forms of spatial behavior that suggest different meanings or dynamics of interaction among people. It explains that, within a society or groups of societies, one or two local spatial patterns of behavior are expectable as far as choice of location, activities, settlement, or location of structures are concerned. The rules would be either positive and symmetric in nature or negative and asymmetric. In the former, arrows showing relationships between individuals or groups must go in both directions. For negative relationships, on the other hand, arrows must never go in both directions between any pair or groups of individuals (Agorsah 2001, Haviser 1999). Basically, the LR model explains that people locate themselves close to those to whom they have more intimate relationships or recognize as able to share the same geographical space without causing deviation from expected or desired goals.
In other words, the decision for human groups to locate in nearby areas constitutes an indication of closer relationship, while locating farther apart indicates negative relationship. To illustrate this: with no limiting factors, if individual A has a good relationship with individual B but not with individual C, according to the LR model individual A would be more likely to locate in the same geographical settlement space with B rather than C owing to the closer association between A and B (Agorsah 1983, 1986, 2003). Behaviorally, according to the model, the relationship between A and B is said to be positive, while that between A and C is considered to be negative. It is assumed, as in the case of West African and Caribbean case studies indicate, that in the view of the Maroons, landscape is not a thing that can be cut into pieces and sold as parcels. Further, it is not a piece of space within a larger spatial system. Rather, land is seen in terms of social relationships. The distribution maps of the settlements and the artifact distribution and patterning will be the main source of the empirical evidence for testing the model.

A conviction in this research is the consideration that traditional societies as part of their natural environment, are intimately linked with their land, territory or place. It is a social concept that requires first and foremost belonging to a societal unit. This fact is also observed among many small-scale societies of all sorts around the world (Lee 1969; Adams 1973, 1978; Yellen 1977; Perry 1999; Agorsah 1999). These relationships may change over time in a given situation. However, when any such relationship results in the location of permanent structural features as houses, storage facilities, burial grounds, and other fixed structures, they leave marks that cannot be altered with change in relationship. The structures or features thus become the symbols representing the relationship at a point in time. On the ground, the empirical evidence should indicate the formation of distinct areas of clusters of structures within a settlement or village, which may result in what are usually referred to as quarters (Posansky 1973b, 1976), clan (kabuno) areas, residence units (Hill 1968), or territories (Yellen 1977; Gould 1980, Kuper 1972). Although the result of the use of the LR model will not indicate changing patterns of land use in the general area of the sites, it could indicate the social dynamics that supported the Maroons as they struggled for freedom. It must be noted, as with models in Ethnoarchaeology, that the model is only a means to an end and not an end in itself as spatial relationships could change with changing conditions (Brown 1963, Flannery 2002, Klausner 1971).

Summary mathematical rules governing the social relations have been used that explain or have such spatial behavioral implications (Hillier, Leaman, Stansall and Bedford 1976; Leach 1976). According to the approach, when social relations are balanced a group can be characterized as either a single homogeneous unit (families or clans) or two opposing units (Cartwright and Harry 1977). The empirical implication of such models is that one should be able to take a sociogram and put all groups who “like” one another, as seen by their relationships, into one group and place all those who do not share common social resources into another. It implies, as does the LR model, that at any point in time we can dichotomize social behavior patterns into positive and negative. Using this approach one can argue that the main factor that would influence the individual choices of location in a settlement or geographical space would consist of social relationships.

The LR model and social behavior

The importance of these relationships has been emphasized by many now as in the past (Agorsah 1993; Flannery 1972, 2002; Perry 1999 and Haviser 1999). This model applies particularly to small family units or clans. This does not preclude the importance of natural resources. It does not necessarily mean that a group would locate there regardless of its relationships with other groups already there or who are likely to locate in the same area. An important point to note is that the LR model places emphasis on social resources, considered as, opportunities offered by social relationships and not the relationships per se. Such an emphasis is also in line with what may be described as a system of binary relations in which social groups are viewed in a network with mutual
role relations and sets of reciprocal expectations (Lorraine & White 1977; Leinhardt 1977). Such roles impose constraints on the behavior of individuals or groups that, in terms of the LR model, generate rules of spatial behavior for them.

The model will use ethnographic examples of modern settlements to set the parameters for studying the archaeological sites distributions and features upon the conviction and basic assumption that "past patterns set precedents for the future" (Klausner 1971). That is where it is possible to confirm continuity or otherwise of Maroon settlement development from forest culture to river culture. Explaining patterns of settlements should help to give a clearer meaning to Maroon behavior in the early stages of their formative process and along the trails of movements. According to historical information about Maroon settlement organization in Suriname:

"The huts of the Bush Negro villages stand next to each other in disorder... The ground is swept clean, cleared of weeds and here and there under a high shade tree, a small square is left open... The best huts are adorned with graceful woodcarving of interlaced volutes and arabesques; occasionally the shape of an animal or human is distinguishable" (Bruijning & Litchtveld 1957:44).

This and similar pieces of information are used as part of the predictions preceding the data collection. Not much architectural details are provided about the nature of the buildings or other structures of the Maroon settlements, especially for the first two stages of the process of escape, but the impression from some early records is that they would be placed according to the demands of their social networking and military contingencies. "the villages are crowded and the huts are magically protected from intruders but early pictures indicate extensive use of palm branches for roofing huts as well as for shadow roofing of boats."

According to modern Saramaka, the tradition of protecting certain trees such as the one locally called “kankantri” “lokisi” and dwumu, considered as very important culturally, spiritually and medicinally during the early settlements, continue today, as demonstrated by current taboos against their being cut down or destroyed. These trees, like the baobab trees in West Africa, usually mark ancient sites and are land-marks for identifying archaeological sites of the Saramaka and Matawai Maroons. In addition, by the use of the "azampau" a protective gate or entrance of palm and other tree branches in a Saramakan village provides protection against evil or people with evil intentions entering a settlement. This is an expected characteristic feature of any group of people living under insecure conditions as the Maroons did.

Reconstructing The Maroon Settlement Formation Process

Mental Maps

Escaping into the forest and surviving the conditions without resources, required prior knowledge of directions, danger spots and safety features of the environment such as caves, stop-gap hiding places and subsistence base. It is being suggested that the Maroons initially relied on the mental maps, which they developed on the plantations as they were moving or being moved from plantation to plantation or from farm to farm. In addition, they gained knowledge of the resources of the forest as they went through the sequential exploration of their surrounding environment. That knowledge, in addition to the lessons they would learn from the natives, who were being gradually displaced and pushed further south, would then help them realize the actual environmental conditions and to develop networks of familiar pathways and landmarks along, and around which, they would plan their escape. It is being suggested here that knowledge of such pathways and strategic locations enabled the Maroons to effectively harness the resources of the rough terrain and harsh environmental conditions, in a step-by-step process, to claim their freedom and establish the foundations of their
heritage and established their mental maps.

**The Escape Process: A Four Stage Model**

Plantations in Suriname were situated mainly in the coastal areas on rivers and backed into swamps and forests and were more inaccessible during the seasons of heavy rain. The harsh slavery life and farm and garden cultivation in forests near the plantation prepared the slaves for the difficult life after escape. Short periods of repeated escape (petit marronage), introduced the escapee to the first of four steps in the process, and hiding in locations close to the plantations. It is repeatedly mentioned that the Suriname Maroons preferred “desertion in small groups” or individually (Hoogbergen 1990:71), perhaps to avoid immediate detection. After a number of trial escapes, the areas in the vicinity of the plantation would offer alternative existence, at least, for short periods of time. In northeastern Suriname, several such hiding places or sites include Kosay, Nomerimi, Kromotibo, Pinnenburg, Kofi-hay, Buku and Holimi (Fig. 1). These early settlements served as temporary refuge for the runaways. It was also from these early locations that many of the raids were conducted against the plantations.

The second stage in the trail would be the first stage of the second escape, when the intention was not to return. Small groups would then escape further inland, sharing their knowledge that they had individually gained over time as a result of the short period escapes. They formed hamlets of small hideout villages. In Suriname these were referred to as “kibrikondres” meaning “hidden villages”. Owing to the temporary nature of these hideouts the Maroons would not invest in permanent site structure constructions but would invest in such items as small boats to move up and down the creeks and rivers, when safe to do so. These kibrikondres might have been the equivalent of the “mocambos” as described by Orser and Funari of the Brazilian Maroons (Orser 1992, 1994; Orser & Funari 1992). Learning survival strategies from the natives of the forest would also be crucial for the survival of the African escapees. Although still transitional and not too far from the plantations, the settlements offered more secure locations especially for other runaways, who would later venture out to join. Populations at such sites would be composed of escapees from different plantations. For example, in 1730 colonial military expeditions which captured the Maroon settlement of Claes (Kassi’s village) identified the Maroons as coming from more than eight plantations, including Providence, W ayapinicca, Inveija, W atervliet, Vier Kinderen, N ahameo, Guerahr d’O tan and Q umabo (See Price 1983:84). This speaks against any consideration that assumes Maroons of one village having a common place of origin from Africa, although this could occur in some isolated cases. The Saramakan site of Ponamakreek founded on the Kleine Saramacca in 1690 is an example of the heterogeneous nature of the Maroons at that site. It would appear, however, that leaders that founded the more permanent settlements of the third stage would begin to be identified alongside the social or familial relationships among them at this stage of the trail. It is suspected that, at that point, groups would begin to redefine their previous relationships and cultural origins, even if vaguely.

At stage three, therefore, we would speculate about almost fully-fledged settlements, and unlike the earlier initial settlements, farther inland or in very inaccessible areas and possibly in rock shelters or caves, where they would build more permanent features such as houses and stockades. Belonging to these were sites such as Claes (Kaasipumba) and Pedro founded in 1700 on the Suriname River and described as having 300 and 100 houses respectively, and Negro Will on the Commewijne River (Schiltkamp & De Schmidt 1973:312). The Saramakan settlement of Papa, which is said to have been established in 1731, was described as having 120 houses. In 1749 an expedition led by a Captain C reutz to Ponamakreek in the Saramacca River area reported 415 houses, which were probably destroyed (de Beet and Price 1982). Between 1760 and 1775 Maroon settlements of the group referred to as the Kwinti were located on the sand ridges of the swampy islands between the estuary of the Saramacca River, in an area that was of difficult accessibility, and the Atlantic Ocean. Their main village was Makakondre described to consist of 25 houses and two shrines. They are mentioned...
as having constructed rings of palisades around their villages in the same way that Maroons built palisades on the Serra da Bariga ridge in Brazil. Such means of protection of Maroon sites have been observed in other Maroon areas. For example, according to Landers (1992), when runaways from the Carolinas of USA arrived in northern Florida and built a settlement at Fort Augustine, it was a stone-walled fort and shelters with thatched huts described as "four square ... banked with earth, having a ditch without on all sides, lined round with prickly royal and has a well and house within and a look-out" (Landers 1992:15).

It has also been noted that the more permanent Maroon settlement in Brazil in the 1640's were "half a mile long (0.84 km) surrounded by a double stake fence with two entrances" (Orser 1992:14). Colonial records mention that in Suriname:

"For most of their villages lie upstream, safely entrenched behind the rapids and falls, on a rocky island or hidden part way in the jungle, with hardly visible path to the river bank" (Bruijning & Litchtveld 1957:46).

The final stage in the formation process is considered as a period of consolidation of groups in strongholds at more distant locations from plantations was strategic. They would locate on ridges and mountain areas such as the site of Kumako or in the upper reaches and source of streams, rivers or at confluences such as the site of Tuido on the Saramacca River or at locations with a single access entrance such as the sites of Sabana and Debabunu in the Ebatop area. Locations close to marshlands and along safe river channels such as along the Kleine Saramaka River were also common choices of location such as was in the case of the Paramaka. It is from these sites that the Maroons of Suriname began the formation of their Maroon culture. Compare Figure 1, which shows the distribution of pre-treaty Maroon sites, indicating that the sites were in areas away from the main water ways and in forest areas to Figure 2, which shows the Maroons relocating and clustering around the major water ways. The modern locations along the Suriname and Saramaka rivers which constitute the later stages of Suriname Maroon settlements provided the context for the development of river culture.

They were established or founded after the peace treaties of the 1760's. It is at these new sites along the major waterways that the transformation of Maroon culture from forest to river culture took place. Archaeological evidence should provide explanation for the changes that may have occurred until modern times. Material culture should also show some overlap resulting from the retention of the lifestyles while living at the sites in remote areas of the forest.

The Evidence So Far

Site Signatures

One of the main aspects of the most recent project trips has been to recreate the track of the Maroons. The trails represent different known families or clan groupings as known during post treaty oral traditions. The trails overlap in various places as the Maroons often returned to the same temporary sites several times, making the trail very complex. Reconstructing the trail indicates that certain families or groups kept returning to the same site, making it difficult to identify continuities and the movement from site to site. Reconstructing the pathways depicts complex maps. Oral traditions and historical records appear to identify the trails of some of the leaderships that eventually have also been used to identify the groups and their clan affiliation(s). As the sites along these trails are archaeologically identified, located and studied, it should be possible to establish more clearly defined directions of movements among the Maroon groups. Obviously, extending such trail definitions from the Saramaka to other Maroon groups would not be an easy task but that is one of the main ways of archaeologically re-defining the early stages of the formation of Maroon heritage in Suriname.

A fascinating aspect of the archaeology of Maroon heritage is that not finding certain types of evidence at a known site can be as good evidence as finding something. Since "home security" was the priority of a typical group of escapees, concealing evidence would have been one of the survival
At the site of Kumako (Fig. 3), one of the earliest of Saramakan sites, excavation revealed by its location on a ridge, its distance from the coastal plantation area. It is strategically located between the Ebaptop mountain and the headwaters of the Kleine Saramaka and appears to have belonged to the early part of the step three on the trail as described above, but probably was short-lived. Trees locally known as lokisi and dwumu abound at the site, confirming Maroon traditional belief in the cultural, medicinal and spiritual importance of those types of trees. Evidence of living floors but no house structures indicates possible use of hammocks as had been the practice among the natives of the forest. This further confirms that the site would have been short-lived. Artifacts, including ceramic and musket balls indicate military situation.

Tuido (Fig. 3), a much later site possibly dating to the end of the 19th century, on the other hand, is located much farther inland, with prohibitive distance and access, has clearly defined floors as well as mounds with hearth areas that appear to divide the site into group living areas. The site depicts a location to which several groups would have converged. Owing to its later foundation, Tuido also reveals clear floors with cooking clay hearths, lots of imported European artifacts such as green glass bottles, stoneware, and a wide variety of local ceramics. Different mound areas with hearths probably also represented group areas or quarters according to their family or clan relationships. The Tuido site, according to oral traditions, lasted until the early 20th century. Thus, while Kumako could be placed at the early part of the trail, Tuido would be placed toward the end of the trail. Evidence of spatial and artifact patterning and changes from the earlier (Kumako site) to the later (Tuido) and further observed patterning in modern settlements, such as Tutubuka, should help provide evidence of a continuum of settlement and cultural development that could explain the formation and transformation of Maroon heritage and culture. Although not yet finalized, it can be claimed that recent Maroon ceramics vessel types Fig. 4) could have constituted an aspect of the Maroon cultural paraphernalia established while in the process of transformation into the more stable river culture.

As indicated at the outset of the Maroon Heritage Research Project in Suriname, determining the locational and spatial transformations continues to constitute the main challenge of the project. Identifying social relationships, using comparative analysis of spatial regularities and artifact patterns at their modern and archaeological sites, heightens the challenge. Ultimately, it should be possible to reconstruct transformational relationships between the observed patterns and the functional adaptation and related cultural responses of the Maroons of Suriname through time.

Material remains at the sites will eventually help to define the category to which each site belongs in the chronological scheme. We should not be led into thinking that the present settlements of the Maroons along the rivers were the original sites and begin to build the formation of Maroon heritage around those locations only. This is one of the reasons why there is a continued argument that we do not yet know all that we need to know about the formation of Maroon heritage. This is where Archaeology will make a difference in the evidence.

Conclusions And Expectations

It is expected that, using the scheme of this research we will eventually be able to establish the gradual evolution of Maroon heritage into what oral historians and ethnographers report to us as today's Maroon culture. It is the conviction on the Maroon Heritage Research Project (MHRP) that, as the Maroons escaped from enslavement into unknown and inaccessible environments, they relied on their mental maps, which they developed through sequential exploration of those environments to establish and defend their settlements. Initially they would take advantage of the knowledge of the areas surrounding the plantations from which they escaped, explore them thoroughly and then, at the appropriate time, link their escape routes and locations to those mental maps. That knowledge probably would have helped them to develop networks of familiar pathways and landmarks, along
and around which, they arranged their settlements establishing the model of guerrilla lifestyle. (Edwards 1994). As we identify and locate sites and trace the trails and it is our hope that we will be able to establish a working framework that can be used to achieve our goals and which may also be useful for the Archaeology of Maroon heritage in other places (Agorsah 1997a & b, 1999, 2001). It is easy for one to be misled into thinking that the modern known Maroon sites, which cluster along the Suriname and the Saramaka rivers were the Maroon sites from the very beginning. Not at all. Maroon heritage in Suriname actually had its cradle from the earliest sites that are now forgotten and hidden in the forest and far into the interior. It is these sites that can give us evidence about the earliest formation and transformation of what we see with the Maroons at their post-peace treaty (post 1760) sites today. This additional dimension is what archaeology brings to the understanding of Maroon heritage in Suriname. The important thing about the project so far is the fact that the stage has been set for more major field seasons that can excavate and examine larger portions of the sites for the recovery of more artifacts for comparative analysis and also for confirming the specific locations of the sites. At this time we are certain of one thing: The Maroon trail to freedom appears to have been very rough indeed. Tracing it archaeologically is even rougher. Only a concerted and collaborative effort, including a closer look at such evidence as toponyms (Wekker 1976) and the ancient Maroon pathways, can help us trace it to the end. Where are the historians? Where are the linguists? Where are the anthropologists? Where are the geo-morphologists, geologists, soil scientists and archaeologists? And, finally, where are the funding agencies on which we can lean for help and support?

As mentioned earlier archaeological evidence should provide explanation for the changes that may have occurred to Maroon culture after they had moved to settle along the major rivers until modern times. Material culture should also show some overlap resulting from the retention of the lifestyles while living at the sites in remote areas of the forest. Most of the early settlements of the Maroons of Suriname, which were abandoned for new settlements along the more accessible waterway sites are, therefore, the sites where we have to look for evidence for the cradle of Maroon heritage. It is this observation that draws out attention to the need for the study of Maroon culture beyond oral traditions, ethnography and translations of Dutch documents, which seems to lead some scholars to erroneously conclude that the whole story has been told. The archaeological study so far demonstrates otherwise and emphasizes that we are just about to begin to unfold the true and authentic story of the development of Maroon heritage in Suriname.

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MATAWAI AND SARAMAKA MAROON SETTLEMENTS OF SURINAME

Early 20th-Century Maroon Ceramics—Suriname

Fig. 3

Fig. 4  [Courtesy Suriname National Museum]