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A Quest for Dignity: Colored Women's Anti-Slavery Resistance in the Eighteenth-Century British Jamaica and the Reconceptualization of Human Rights

Yuwie (Ada) Liu '20

In 1800, the twelve years old Bermuda born slave, Mary Prince, learned that her master, Mr. Williams, would sell her to Captain I. The forced family separation triggered great sorrow. However, not long after Prince arrived in Captain I's house at the Spanish Point of Bermuda, she befriended another domestic slave, Hetty, who provided her food and bedding. "The only friendly face I have yet seen," Prince recalled.¹ This specific example from the broader British Caribbean empire echoed the Jamaican colored women's inconsistent claims for their humanities. Even while living under the cruelest of suppression, people still built connections and took care of each other. The society where these women lived was British Jamaica. From the eighteenth century until the 1834 emancipation, the island transformed from a lagged-behind frontier into the largest colony developed by the British during the mercantilist period.² It had roughly one thousand sugar-growing estates in 1755. Eighty-nine percent of Jamaica's 1770 economic output were sugar, rum, and molasses.³ Such great economic prosperity was impossible without the exploitation of the black slaves. Thus, in 1793, about eighty percent of the slaves were bonded to plantations, and fifty-eight percent of them were on sugar-growing estates.⁴ The working and living conditions for these slaves were horrific. They endured chattel property legal status, difficult access to manumission, limited occupational mobility, prolonged and repetitive drudgeries, and punishments and solitary confinement.⁵

I argue that the slave, fugitive, and maroon women of Jamaica despite all such constraints continually asserted their humanity and will to survive. They also found ways to exercise agency in a system that otherwise treated them as a disposed object. Many slave women feigned sickness to escape exploitative work conditions in the plantations; others used insulting languages to express their disobedience against the imposed racial hierarchy. Such every form of resistance suggests women despite being denied all basic rights still wrested some freedom and dignity in their lives. Similarly, fugitive women disguised as vendors attained periodic freedom, mobility, economic independence, and family reunion through relative's harborage, a community survival strategy derived from the African kinship system. Jamaican maroon women also reclaimed cultural identity and community status by fighting for autonomy. Recognizing Jamaican women's conception of rights and their means towards attaining those allows us to reconstruct the contemporary understanding of Human Rights ideology. The enslaved Jamaican beyond participating in the quotidian form of resistance also built community bonds and organized the armed campaigns for self-rule.

Historians, who have written on the anti-slavery movement in Jamaica have not fully recognized the everyday form of resistance that women of color participated in. Much of the scholarship prior to 1970s

emphasized the leadership of black men in open slave and maroon rebellions, such as, Cudjoe and Quao of the First Maroon War and Tacky of the 1760 Coromantines (Akans) rebellion. Those narratives portrayed the black women as traitors passing key information of the impending rebellions to the government in exchange for freedom or bounty.⁶ Similar misogynistic view held “mulatto,” or mixed-race mistress, responsible for enforcing racial hierarchy and suppressing the enslaved.⁷ The problem is these earlier histories drew exclusively on traveler’ accounts and planters’ journals from the eighteenth and nineteenth-century that often presented black Jamaican women as drudges and fecund reproducers.

In the wake of the second wave of feminism, new generation of scholars challenged these earlier racist and misogynistic interpretations. One of the prominent works of this new genre by Lucille Mathurin Mair presented the militant image of the rebel women. She highlighted female leaders like Nanny of the Windward Maroons and Cubah Queen of the Coromantins and restored women as equally important historical actors in Jamaican history. Mair emphasized the participation of black women and men both during the armed rebellions and in every-day resistance. In *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655-1844*, Mair incorporated studies of the West African culture and used them to rationalize her incorporation of black women into the African community’s anti-slavery activism and later the Jamaican nationalist movement. Similarly, Barbara Bush in *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838* offered interesting insights on the black women’s labor and their relationships with other groups. Building on the works of Mair and Bush, I argue that the black women of Jamaica not only participated in various anti-slavery efforts but also evoked the contemporary audience to see alternative narratives of the Human Rights stories with different means, conceptions, and participators.

Firstly, the British Jamaican plantation system assigned the black women social roles as producer and reproducer based on their gendered physicality. As a result, the exhaustive cane field works, and the domestic drudgeries abused the black women’s rights and dignities on a daily basis. During the 1660s to 1680s, Jamaica had a moving frontier and suffered from a shortage of capital and laborers. The sex ratio was much balanced and women’s major work was weeding, comparatively less demanding labor. Also, the presence of white servants made the black women’s stoical status less degraded.⁸ The hierarchical division of the plantation labor was increasingly gendered and racialized as Jamaica expanded the quantities of sugar plantations.⁹ The 1789 Jamaica Assembly and Council’s report on the slave population showed that there were 140,000 men and 110,000 women, a male excess of 30,000.¹⁰ Large numbers of adult men were desired for sturdy labor for clearing up new lands. Meanwhile, the white servant population gradually declined because many of them migrated or moved upward in society as small plantation owners. Therefore, the estate owners trained the black men to be operators for semi-industrial sugar mills and artisans on the estates.¹¹ The black women, although relatively small in population, became the chief field labors, partly due to the prevailing European stereotype that viewed them as ‘drudge’ in polygynous marriage. Therefore, it was considered rational to let the black women dig holes for canes, hoeing, and weeding.¹²

However, it was the female field workers who suffered the most by being restricted at the bottom of the social rank. The percentage of male to female field workers on the absentee planter and the Lord Mayor of London, William Beckford, in 1780 demonstrated the large percentage of female participation. Counting all eight estates slave population in Clarendon, 143 out of 479 male slaves were field workers and occupied 29.2 percent of the total male slave population. But 263 out of 458 female slaves also worked in the field, which counted for 57.4 percent of the total female slave population.¹³ Given the high numbers of black women who worked in the field under severe conditions, their suffering became more common and dehumanizing. During the crop time (October to March), the field slaves worked from sun-up to sunset for 12 hours with little time for their own. The extended night-work further depleted their energies.¹⁴ According to Barry W. Higman's demographic survey, the hard labor, the unhygienic conditions, suicides, accidents, endemic and venereal diseases, arbitrary punishments, and famine produced the highest slave mortality and lowest slave birth rate in Jamaica.¹⁵ The exhausting labor reduced female field workers' individuality into mere capital stocks. It was clear that the lucrative sugar plantation economy posed a high hazard on black women's lives, as it was a detriment to their physical health and their human dignity.

Living under the systematic racism, gender discrimination, and terror, the black women of Jamaica asserted their humanity and rights using day-to-day resistance tactics. Developed by the second wave of feminist historians, this focus on women's every day resistance challenged the traditional understanding of black people as passive historical actors. Earlier generations of scholars had interpreted women's noncooperation in work as idleness, thus necessitating the harsh discipline of a white man. For example, A.C. Carmichael was the wife of a Scottish planter; she spent the first half of the 1820s in St. Vincent and Trinidad.¹⁶ Carmichael criticized the metropolitan abolitionists for betraying the Caribbean slaveholders, the major contributors of the British's wealth.¹⁷ As a pro-slavery Christian, she argued that slavery was a civilizing program that cultivated savage Africans into industrious, civil, loyal servants.¹⁸

Reading between the lines of her journal, rich information about the Caribbean women's enslaved life and their subversion of the colonial racial hierarchy. For example, Carmichael complained about the female domestic slaves, for they were the most "discontented, unmanageable, and idle."¹⁹ It frustrated her that it took three able-bodied black women six full days to wash fourteen dozen clothes, a typical amount for one family. According to her they also used up twice the quantity of soap, blue, and starch out of "carelessness." She also listed a number of missing clothes, textiles, tableware, and handle holders, which she believed her black domestic servants had stolen.²⁰ What she viewed as idleness was a form of resistance against the system that dehumanized them. Even if such subversive actions were transient, their existence indicates that the Jamaican women did not passively submit to the racial hierarchy. They frequently contested the legitimacy of slavery as an institution and exercised their individual agency.

The micro-level resistance methods varied in many ways. Some were passively aggressive, when they feigned sickness, and others were actively aggressive, when the women did not hold back from using

insulting language against those who exploited them. Matthew Lewis, a British estate owner in Jamaica, recorded an incident of a slave woman's subtle withdrawal of labor in 1812. Forty-five women, one-fifth of the slave labor on Lewis' property, went to the hospital on a single Saturday. According to the attending nurse, only seven women had real medical issues, and the rest were feigning sickness.²¹ Lewis noted the repetitiveness of such behavior. On Sunday morning, some went back to the field for a couple of days. But on Wednesday, many complained about pains, withdrew from work and visited the hospital again.²² These women by faking illness were sabotaging work. Some women openly disobeyed their masters through aggressive language. According to the Port Royal Slave Courts, between 1819 and 1834 forty-two out of the 150 cases involved language offenses. The records described these as "indecent," "scandalous," "outrageous," "insulting," "abusive," "threatening," and directed against the white and free people of color.²³ In one specific example, Betty of the Round Hill estate was tried in April 1820 for her "rudely" and "contemptuously" behavior towards the overseers. She received four month's confinement with hard labor.²⁴ In conclusion, the habitual nature of women's active and passive behaviors illustrate their agency and consciousness to somewhat alleviate their exploited status. Therefore, valuing women's self-assertion of their humanity can expand our understanding of the ideas of Human Rights outside the paradigm of the big revolutions emanating out of Europe.

Other than individual actions in relation to their owners in slave society, enslaved Jamaican women also claimed rights through their familial and cultural interactions. On the one hand, by practicing cultural and community roles, enslaved women-built connections with community members by running away and engaging in armed rebellions. On the other, the tight-knit African community offered women crucial emotional support to in the midst of the dehumanizing impact of slavery. Thus, the individual's struggle for rights and freedom was indispensable to one's embracing of inherited culture value, which should be regarded as valid Human Rights concepts.

Thereafter, it was important to highlight the African cultural identities that Jamaican women reaffirmed in daily life and resistances. According to Mair, one of the fundamental African cultural principles was ancestor veneration. Blood was the life force, and through the kinship tie, the dead, living, and unborn were linked together. Thus, the kinship web became the core concept of many spiritual beliefs and social structures. Woman was the center of the web as her reproduction function secured the community's continuation in the future.²⁵ In Africa, motherhood marked the transition to female adulthood. Mair argues that "puberty rites celebrated the girl's physical readiness for childbearing, for fertility was her greatest gift."²⁶ Similarly, in Guinea, a pregnant woman was greatly respected by her husband, who would make offers to the deities to obtain a safe delivery of the child. The slave demographic from the early eighteenth century shows that the African women of Jamaica inherited the cultural awareness of their maternal duties before they left their birthplace. The Slave Act of 1696 codified the status of African as permanent chattel, and the term Negro was invariably identified with slave now.²⁷ Meanwhile, demands for sturdy workforce for turning frontiers into sugar fields led to age

limits on imported slaves to between sixteen and forty years of age. As a result, the majority of the young female adults in Jamaica in the eighteenth century had already passed puberty rites. Thereby, they were better equipped to preserve cultural and ethnic integrity in a foreign land.²⁸

Besides motherhood, the whole concept of being “the supporter of life” also ascribed African women the food provision and preparation obligations for her husband and children. According to Mair, the tasks of cultivating the lands, weaving, potting clay, and trading were not so much exploitation of the female labor, but were divisions of domestic duties and ritual roles between the sexes.²⁹ An exceptional amount of food and tools not only guaranteed the survival of the family unit but also proved that the community structure and the corresponding cosmology were practical. Thus, African women’s cultural roles strengthened her ties with family, the direct benefits of her care, and uplifted her social status.

Even though the slavery interrupted the traditional gendered division of labor, the colored women of Jamaica continued to embody the strong will to survive as a family unit through performing domestic tasks. Jamaican masters gave their slaves provision plots for their maintenance out of economic concerns. Historian Edward Long, argues that providing two shillings and sixpence currency per week for each slave was too costly.³⁰ According to the St George General Slave Court, between 1822-1831, women “worked just as much on their provision grounds as men, frequently as part of a family enterprise.... they often unite their grounds and conjointly labor for themselves and families, till the children arrive at a certain age, when they must provide for themselves.”³¹ Furthermore, a 1788 official document of the St Jago de la Vega parish noticed that women showed a level of “exertion which was seldom obvious in the master’s work.” Women’s diligent works in her plots were only possible after intentionally saving energies during the 12-hour long labor. Thus, women’s intended “idleness” in the fields was strategically used to preserve family’s survival and affirm community status within African culture structure.

Furthermore, the “market marronage” phenomenon suggests that the consciously preserved African kinship ties facilitated the fugitive women’s access to potential economic independence and free mobility. Jamaica depended on the slaves’ production and exchanging of staple foods and tools to reduce the slave owners’ cost of owning slaves. This dependency facilitated the transgressive characteristics in the urban public markets. In 1792 the colonial assembly legally sanctioned the internal marketing system. It exempted individuals who carried firewood, grass, fruit, provisions, small stock, and other goods which they may lawfully sell.³² Although both sexes cultivated on the provision grounds, the colored women dominated trade and sale. As a result, fugitive women had a strategic advantage when running to the market because of the gender-based economic roles under slavery. The mixture of vendors and other lawfully employed skilled laborers, such as washerwomen and seamstress, in urban centers made it hard to distinguish the fugitive traders from legally enslaved market women and free vendors of color.³³ The demographic diversity of women outnumbering men in urban centers provided cover for runaway “higgler”.

It is thus no surprise that many enslaved women sought refuge in the internal marketing system to escape the drudgery of bondage. For example, in October 1816, Mary Williams and her daughter, Sarah Gordon, ran away from their owner, Pauline Cherest. Eighteen months later, Cherest posted a runaway advertisement in the *Royal Gazette*, which described Williams as a perpetual runaway and a “noted higgler” in Spanish Town, Kingston. Williams utilized the internal market economy for her family’s pursuits of freedom. Her skill as a vendor covered the illicit identity and sustained her provisional freedom, economic independence, and connection with family members.³⁴ Some fugitive women enjoyed great mobility. In 1820, an enslaved woman named Cuba was seen vending goods in Annotto Bay, Buff Bay, and Charles Town. But her journey through the forest mountains to the northeastern coast was full of hazards. She might have been captured by white vigilantes or the Charles Town Maroons.³⁵ Therefore, besides her skill of hawking goods at the urban markets, Cuba’s passing as a free person depended on her knowledge of hiding places and safe roads, which she might have acquired, using kinship relations and other existing networks among the enslaved.

Multiple slave advertisements indicated that the African kinship system generated a benevolent system of mutual help among the enslaved, through which many slaves achieved periodic or permanent freedom. For example, the *Royal Gazette* from 1820 stated that the fugitive Sarah Nailor had been seen selling goods in the cities of Halfway-Tree and Wherry-Wharf. Her master, J.H. de Cordova, claimed that she was being harbored by her urban free relatives. Moreover, Cordova revealed that she was also well-known in the parish of Vere, and had an enslaved husband on the Exeter Estate.³⁶ Nailor’s success as a market maroon who moved across regions depended on her relative’s and husband’s harborages. All this suggests a robust African community, with members all over the island, encouraging reunions with relatives, lovers, and friends. Other cases proved that the kinship networks motivated fugitive women to use her resources to protect other runaways. An advertisement from 1821 stated that Mary Bowen, a well-known “higgler” in Saint George’s and Saint Mary’s Parishes, ran away from Kingston. Her owner suspected that she was harbored by her mother, who had been transported off the island but now returned as a disguised free higgler in St. Andrew’s parish.³⁷ This shows once again that Africans valued lineage and the kinship structure as the crucial force that connected scattered members, and motivated them to repeatedly become seekers, the fugitives, and providers, the receiving agents to help the wider community. In practicing African cultural values, colored women achieved not only personal freedom but also solidified the family network, and helped other black members to obtain their rights. Since individual gains and community benefits were closely interlinked, the list of Human Rights should include one’s undertaking of a cultural role. And the means to obtain rights should contain strengthening community ties.

In addition to the African kinship value, the West African origin of women’s involvement in rebellion and community affairs, elderly veneration, and ritual practice associated with “obeah” fueled the maroon uprisings in the early 18th century. Jamaican women were both combatants and rebel leaders.

During the rebellion, they not only found cultural belonging and community status but also applied their capabilities to establish an independent maroon society, thus securing freedom and dignity of all the members. This mutual empowerment between the individual and community, through the mediation of culture, in the time of open rebellion was a powerful statement of the Jamaican Maroon women's humanity. Thus, facing the oppressor's hegemony, the group's assertion of self-determination was one of the strategies to obtain Human Rights.

Slave women's names are rarely found in the official records of slave uprising and conspiracies. But the absence is not proof that women played no role in such rebellions. The second-wave feminist historian, Barbara Bush, has argued that the invisibility of the rebel women in the records is due to the cultural bias of the British officials.³⁸ But, being attuned to the West African cultural heritage can help historians to understand Jamaican women's co-participation of armed rebellions and to challenge traditional narrative of women as passive non- or as traitors. According to Bush, there is not enough source that confirm that female informants voluntarily betrayed their fellow slaves more frequently than colored men.³⁹

The Jamaican slaves came from diverse African ethnic groups: Coromantines (Akan,) Ibgos, Congo, Papaws, Chambas, Bandas, and Mandingos.⁴⁰ Ethnic groups like Akan and Ibgos have women taking the social roles of armed combatants and communal affair speakers. Olaudah Equiano was a freed Igbo slave who advocated for abolition in Britain. In his 1789 autobiography, he remarked that once a group attacked his village, he saw that his mother and many other women and men on both sides were 'armed with a broadsword.'⁴¹ British Captain John Adams confirmed Equiano's description of female combatants in his 1822 voyage journal. Adams stated that the 'Ibibios' (Ibgo) women were as 'equally mischievous and ferocious' as men in the early nineteenth century. Ibgo women also actively participated in the shipboard insurrections at the Bight of Biafra on the West African coast.⁴²

Along with the female participation in communal resistance against the intruders, some women, especially the elders, played an important part in the village affairs. Mid-twentieth century anthropologist, Daryl Forde, studied the kinship and marriage system of the matrilineal Ashanti, a subgroup of Akan. He observed that there was a high degree of equal participation of both genders on matters of state affairs. Moreover, it was a senior woman, the *obaa panin*, who always assisted the head of the lineage.⁴³ Both men and women attained higher status as they aged. Under the ancestor worship belief system, elders became the living evidence of the ancestral spirits. Therefore, old female headmen or village consultants assumed such reverent roles due to their wisdom.⁴⁴ In the cultural context of West Africa, Jamaican women slaves were willing to engage in armed confrontations, sometimes with clear political goals, with the whites.

Before investigating the roles of Jamaican women during the Maroon rebellion, it is important to understand these revolts' aim of seeking to revive the African kingdoms. According to Schuler, the Maroon community was composed of fugitive slaves living on the rugged and arboreal back countries

of Caribbean colonies. Their frequent raiding of plantations and armed rebellions greatly threatened the imperial authority. The fact that each Maroon community was organized around a single ethnicity greatly influenced their rebellion goals.⁴⁵ During the eighteenth century, the African-born slaves outnumbered the Creoles owing to the low birth-rate on plantations and the large importation of Africans. For example, Jamaica imported 10,223 Africans in 1764 and 16,760 from January 1765 to July 1766.⁴⁶ The Jamaican maroons were largely African-born Akans. The Akan went through an intensive and extensive state-building period throughout the eighteenth-century, such as the growth of the Ashanti Federation in modern-day Ghana. Thus, the African-born Akans of Jamaica inherited strong ethnic pride and the will to build an independent community with Akan cultural values.⁴⁷ For example, a failed rebellion collaboration between the Akan slaves and African-born maroons in 1765 revealed their desire to create the Akan Jamaica. According to the testimonies, the maroons expected to get the wooded and uncultivated country for hog hunting where the ex-slaves would have the lands with cattle and sheep. And the maroons planned to join the rebel slaves because they wanted more Coromantees (Akans) to be free and to render them more formidable in the eyes of white inhabitants.⁴⁸ Despite the fact that the African-born maroons and the creolized slaves envisioned freedom differently, the rebellion was the product of the careful calculation to attain goals like, revering African norms, forming ethnic solidarity, and establishing sovereignty.

Admittedly, sources that relate to Jamaican women's direct involvement with violence are lacking. However, maroon women were equally dedicated to the communal resistance by enduring guerilla war hardships and even assuming leadership. Robert C. Dallas stated that in 1734 during the First Maroon War, the Windward Maroons of the Portland parish temporarily retreated from their main town, called Nanny town, and made a long march to join the Leeward Maroons. The three hundred men, women, and children marched 100 miles over densely wooded and steep mountains. When the British sent out parties to "disperse and destroy" them, the marchers 'fought and forced their way on' to the destination successively. Yet the alliance failed because the Leeward Maroons had already planned to sign a coexistence plan with the English. In 1737 the party made its hazardous way back to the Nanny town.⁴⁹ The long march showed characteristics of guerilla warfare, like prolonged combat periods and uncertainty about the future situation. However, united by the shared ethnic and cultural value, men and women of the Windward Maroons showed courage, discipline, unflinching conviction, and physical hardiness. It was everyone's commitment to communal survival that enabled a minority group to subvert imperial domination openly.

Furthermore, the Queen Cubah of the 1760 slave rebellions indicates the existence of the female political leadership. According to Long, the Coromantines (Akans) had raised Cuba to the rank of royalty and dubbed her Queen of Kingston. She sat under a canopy and wore a robe on her shoulders with a crown on her head. And when the British seized "Her Majesty," they ordered transportation.⁵⁰ Since only the intransigent troublemakers were transported to penal islands, like Nova Scotia, Cubah

was not merely a symbolic figurehead. As a result, Queen Cubah and women of the Windward Maroons proved that the means to obtain one's rights and dignity lied on their contribution to the ethnic community's independence in a culturally endorsed way.

In addition to the African female combatant tribal tradition, the obeah spiritual belief and practice also created prominent female leadership in Jamaican Maroon rebellions. American Jesuit missionary and ethnologist Joseph J. Williams stated that the term and practice of "obeah" came from the Akan (Twi) word *obayifo*, which means a witch. Kwasi Konadu, has recently argued that "obeah" comes from the Twi word *bayi*. It means the neutral force used by the *obayifo*. It implies a much more neutral meaning of obeah.⁵¹ The contemporary understanding of obeah as African witchcraft, which caused malicious harm, like revengeful poisoning, was a result of two factors: European division of the supernatural elements between good and evil and the Jamaican government's legal suppression of anti-slavery insurgency in the Act of 1760.⁵² For Africans, obeah was just one name which represented a complex spiritual system, perpetuating the whole aspect of life. According to Diana Paton, Africans universally understood that the dead, in the form of ancestors and spirits, affected the life of living humans daily. Thus, they need to be respected and taken care of. Living in a spiritually dangerous world, people can be protected or harmed by the spirit.⁵³ So it was the duty of ritual specialists to help people dealing with problems that affected both their bodily health and relationship with the spirit world. Spiritual rituals that perform blessing, healing, and attack function were conducted according to different situations. And many times, powerful substances usually translated into "poison," were used to restore balance. These specialists also advised political leaders on the auspicious time for starting wars.⁵⁴ Although people who possessed knowledge of the spiritual world lost reputation by providing inefficient suggestions, it was undeniable that obeah men and women attained high reverence for their jobs of keeping the community function along with the cycle of life, just like cultivation and marriage did.

The Jamaican Maroon rebellions demonstrated a strong political resonance and female participation of the African spiritual ritual, objects, and specialists in the name of obeah. The obeah practitioner, Nanny of the Windward Maroons, was a charismatic rebel leader during the First Maroon War. According to Thickness, Nanny blessed combatants and advised the war chief, Quao, on the auspicious time to carry out attacks.⁵⁵ The spiritual protection was an important part of the Windward Maroon fighting strategy. It not only bestowed the colonial revolt and Akan rationale but also assembled all the Maroon members under the resistant moral. Not to say that Nanny showcased her magic power to consolidate her priestess status and boosted charisma in the community. Nanny told fifty soldiers to load their guns and then to fire on her. She folded back her hands between her legs, catching the fifty shots. This is *Nantucompong*, Nanny takes her back to catch the balls.⁵⁶ Also, Nanny's military command and determination to carry out the fight indicated her genuine political leadership. She used horn (Abeng) and African talking drums to direct the guerillas across mountains and valleys. She also

ordered women to burn the towns if the attacking party was too strong, another guerilla tactic to avoid heavy casualty.⁵⁷ When the Leeward Maroons in the west accepted a peace treaty in 1739, Nanny showed her determination to carry on the fight. She ordered the execution of the white courier who brought her news of the truce.⁵⁸ Nanny's leadership continued after the truce. The Windward Maroons split into two groups. One group went with Quao to Crawford Town and another went to the New Nanny Town. In 1740, Nanny ruled on 500 acres of land in the Portland parish. Their free blacks aimed to reconstruct their African cultural patterns even in exile.⁵⁹ Nanny's legend indicates that the obeah practitioner was at the heart of the community's resistance. Thus, the Obeah practice, when actively carried out by its traditional believers, expressed the comprehensiveness of the African belief system, its flexibility to adapt to social changes, and its ability to empower women and give hope to the maroon community on winning the human struggle. As a result, Nanny's leadership during the Windward Maroon's rebellion made a clear argument that one's practicing of spiritual belief was part of seeking Human Rights. And the ethnic group's claiming for self-rule was a powerful strategy to realize Human Rights for its members.

The contemporary society regards Human Rights as a post-WWII idea, with the Enlightenment philosophies and American and French Revolution legacies serving as its fundamental principles. However, Makan Mutua points out that the western countries used the self-endorsed Human Rights argument for intervening in Third World countries' local politics, alienated native cultures, and extracted profits.⁶⁰ Not only the on-going dehumanizing practices, such as the female genital mutilation, were not adequately addressed, but the Human Rights accusations also made the local population reject their native cultures and shame the sovereign states.⁶¹ Therefore, we need a new perspective on Human Rights to bring practical solutions to combating individual cases of rights violations. Incorporating the holistic view of the Third World people's culture and history is the first step toward reexamining the popular understanding of Human Rights. The colored women of British Jamaica, between the eighteenth century to 1834, demonstrated various forms of anti-slavery resistances and expanded the Human Rights concepts and ways to obtain them. Individual enslaved women in plantation repetitively expressed discontent against their dehumanized status through micro-level resistances. Other female fugitives, under the disguise of market vendors, achieved months-long freedom, economic independence, and kinship bond through taking relatives' harborages. Moreover, the maroon women gained communal status and cultural belonging by practicing cultural roles and contributing to the community's fight for autonomy. Hence, historicizing the Human Rights perspective shows that the individual's temporary assertion of humanity and grasping over cultural identity like spiritual roles in the community were essential components of Human Rights. And the tactics to obtain these rights contained not only one's micro-level resistance but also forming connections and participating in the group campaign for self-rule.

Hence, the Human Rights concept and ways of reclaiming them continually evolve due to time, culture, gender, class, and race. Such a novel understanding of the flexibility of Human Rights enables historians to explore more incidents of rights claiming, outside the legal timeframe of British slavery. For example, free black men and women of 156 Jamaican estates went on strike for full emancipation on August 4, three days after the parliament abolished slavery.⁶² They argued that the colonial authority disobeyed the king's will by passing the apprenticeship system, a forced working plan that bound black people to their former masters' estates for four to six years without payment.⁶³ Thus, the new Human Rights perspective reconstructs Jamaican history, with the colored women as its protagonists and their struggles for justice as the main storyline. Such a study connects the past, present, and future through developing the tradition of Jamaican colored women practicing Human Rights on their own terms. Furthermore, this tradition empowers contemporary Jamaican colored women, categorizes more cases of injustices as Human Rights violations, and advocates that the solving process be carried out by its local Human Rights agencies within the cultural and social contexts.

Footnotes:

¹ Mary Prince and Sara Salih, *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 14.

² Michael Craton, *Empire Enslavement and Freedom in the Caribbean* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1997), 162.

³ Craton, 163.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 166, 169-170.

⁶ Beckles, 157.

⁷ Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838* (Heinemann Publishers, 1990), 3.

⁸ Lucille Mathurin Mair, Hilary Beckles, and Verene Shepherd, *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655-1844* (University of the West Indies Press, 2006), 72.

⁹ Mair, Beckles, and Shepherd, 75.

¹⁰ Philip Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 160, as excerpted in Lucille Mathurine, Mair, Hilary Beckles, and Verene Shepherd, *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655-1844* (University of the West Indies Press, 2006), 192.

¹¹ Mair, Beckles, and Shepherd, 75.

¹² Bush, 33.

¹³ Colonial Office (CO) 107/43, Public Record Office, London, as excerpted in Lucille Mathurine, Mair, Hilary Beckles, and Verene Shepherd, *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655-1844* (University of the West Indies Press, 2006), 192.

¹⁴ Bush, 38.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Beckles, 106.

¹⁷ Ibid., 107.

¹⁸ Ibid., 110.

¹⁹ Mrs A.C. Carmichael, *Domestic Manners: and Social Conditions of the White, Coloured and Negro Populations of the West Indies*, vol. 1 (London: Whittaker, 1834), 118.

²⁰ Carmichael, 119.

²¹ Matthew Gregory Lewis, *Journal of a West Indian Proprietor Kept during a Residence in the Island of Jamaica* (London: J. Murray, 1834), 139, as excerpted in Lucille Mathurine, Mair, Hilary Beckles, and Verene Shepherd, *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655-1844* (University of the West Indies Press, 2006), 239.

²² Lewis, 140, as excerpted in Mair, Beckles, and Shepherd, 240.

²³ Port Royal Slave Trails, 1819-34, as excerpt in Lucille Mathurin Mair, Hilary Beckles, and Verene Shepherd, *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655-1844* (University of the West Indies Press, 2006), 235.

²⁴ Port Royal Slave Trails, 1832, as excerpt in Mair, Beckles, and Shepherd, 235; evidence of the exact aggressive words was scared, but a similar attitude of ridiculing the whites could be found from songs that women sang in the fields. William Beckford recorded women's exposure to the frailties of a white man named Buckra. "New-come buckra, he get sick, he tak fever, he be die, he be die, new-come buckra. Hi! De Buckra, hi! You sabby what for he da cross de sea, wid him long white face and him twinkling yeye, he lub, make lub, as he preach to we, he fall on his knees, but he pray for me". See Cynic. A Williams, *Tour Through the Island of Jamaica, From the Western to the Eastern End, in the Year 1832*, 2nd Edition (London: T. Hurst, E. Chance and Co., 1827), 297, as excerpted in Lucille Mathurine, Mair, Hilary Beckles, and Verene Shepherd, *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655-1844* (University of the West Indies Press, 2006), 236.

²⁵ Mair, Beckles, and Shepherd, 49.

²⁶ Ibid., 48.

²⁷ Ibid., 73.

²⁸ Mair, Beckles, and Shepherd, 74.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica: Or, General Survey of the Ancient and Modern State of That Island: With Reflections on Its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws, and Government*, vol.2 (London: T. Lownudes, 1774), 437, as excerpted in Lucille Mathurine, Mair, Hilary Beckles, and Verene Shepherd, *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655-1844* (University of the West Indies Press, 2006), 259.

³¹ St George General Slave Court, 1822-1831, as excerpted in Lucille Mathurine, Mair, Hilary Beckles, and Verene Shepherd, *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655-1844* (University of the West Indies Press, 2006), 259.

³² Shauna J. Sweeney, "Market Marronage: Fugitive Women and the Internal Marketing System in Jamaica, 1781–1834," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (2019): 206.

³³ Ibid., 207.

³⁴ *Royal Gazette*, May 1, 1818, Colonial Office (CO) 141/11, National Archives of the United Kingdom (NA), as excerpted in Shauna J. Sweeney, "Market Marronage: Fugitive Women and the Internal Marketing System in Jamaica, 1781–1834," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (2019): 197.

³⁵ *Royal Gazette*, April 7, 1820, Colonial Office (CO) 141/15, National Archives of the United Kingdom (NA), as excerpted in Shauna J. Sweeney, "Market Marronage: Fugitive Women and the Internal Marketing System in Jamaica, 1781–1834," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (2019): 198.

³⁶ *Royal Gazette*, June 10, 1820, Colonial Office (CO) 141/15, National Archives of the United Kingdom (NA), as excerpted in Shauna J. Sweeney, "Market Marronage: Fugitive Women and the Internal Marketing System in Jamaica,

1781–1834,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (2019): 219.

³⁷ *Royal Gazette*, Feb. 10, 1821, Colonial Office (CO) 141/17, National Archives of the United Kingdom (NA), as excerpted in Shauna J. Sweeney, “Market Marronage: Fugitive Women and the Internal Marketing System in Jamaica, 1781–1834,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (2019): 211.

³⁸ Bush, 67. According to Bush, the ideal middle-class European women of the eighteenth-century were passive and physically weak, barred from political and military activities, the “men’s business.”

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Craton, 174.

⁴¹ Olaudah Equiano, *Equiano’s Travel-bis Autobiography: The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, abridged and ed. by Paul Edwards (London, 1967), 173, first Published 1789, as excerpted in Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838* (Heinemann Publishers, 1990), 68.

⁴² John Adams, *Sketches Taken During Ten Voyages to Africa Between the Years 1786 and 1800* (London, 1822), as excerpted in Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838* (Heinemann Publishers, 1990), 68.

⁴³ Daryl Forde, “Kinship and Marriage Among the Matrilineal Ashanti,” in A. Radcliffe-Brown and D. Forde, eds, 1956, as excerpted in Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838* (Heinemann Publishers, 1990), 68.

⁴⁴ Mair, Beckles, and Shepherd, 51.

⁴⁵ Monica Schuler, “Ethnic Slave Rebellions in the Caribbean and the Guianas,” *Journal of Social History* 3, no. 4 (1970): 376.

⁴⁶ Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica: Or, General Survey of the Ancient and Modern State of That Island: With Reflections on Its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws, and Government, vol.2* (London: T. Lownudes, 1774), 442, as excerpted in Monica Schuler, “Ethnic Slave Rebellions in the Caribbean and the Guianas,” *Journal of Social History* 3, no. 4 (1970): 380.

⁴⁷ Schuler, 383.

⁴⁸ Long, as excerpted in Schuler, 378.

⁴⁹ Dallas, Robert Charles, 1754-1824. *The History of the Maroons: From Their Origin to the Establishment of Their Chief Tribe At Sierra Leone, Including the Expedition to Cuba, for the Purpose of Procuring Spanish Chasseurs; And the State of the Island of Jamaica for the Last Ten Years: With a Succinct History of the Island Previous to That Period...* London: T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1803, as excerpted in Lucille Mathurine, Mair, Hilary Beckles, and Verene Shepherd. *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655-1844*. University of the West Indies Press, 2006, 63.

⁵⁰ Long, as excerpted in Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838* (Heinemann Publishers, 1990), 72.

⁵¹ Diana Paton, *The Cultural Politics of Obeah, Religion, Colonialism and Modernity in the Caribbean World* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 28.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Phillip Thicknesse, *Memoirs and Anecdotes of P. Thicknesse: late Lieutenant Governor of Land Guard Fort, and unfortunately father to George Touchet, Baron Audley* (Dublin: Printed by Graisberry and Campbell for William Jones, 1790), 121, as excerpt in Lucille Mathurin Mair, Hilary Beckles, and Verene Shepherd, *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655-1844*. University of the West Indies Press, 2006, 64.

⁵⁶ Joseph J. Williams, “The Maroons of Jamaica,” *Anthropological Series of the Boston College Graduate School*, vol. 3, no. 4 (Chestnut Hill, Mass.: Boston College Press, 1938), as excerpted in Lucille Mathurine, Mair, Hilary Beckles, and Verene

Shepherd. *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655-1844*. University of the West Indies Press, 2006, 64.

⁵⁷ Thicknesse, 114-118, as excerpted in Mair, Beckles, and Shepherd, 64.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Makau Mutua, "Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights," *Harvard International Law Journal* 24, no. 1 (2001): 223.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁶² Gad Heuman, "Riots and Resistance in the Caribbean at the Moment of Freedom," *Slavery & Abolition* 21, no. 2 (August 2000): 138.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 135, 144.