Marronage in Ay-ti, land of mountains (1766-1791)

Those whose boldness of spirit found slavery intolerable and refused to evade it by committing suicide, would fly to the woods and mountains and form bands of free men–Maroons. They fortified their fastnesses with palisades and ditches.

...worked on the land, and, like revolutionary peasants everywhere, they aimed at the extermination of their oppressors. But working and living together in gangs of hundreds in the huge sugar factories which cover the North Plain, they were closer to a modern proletariat than any group of workers in existence at the time, and the rising was therefore, a thoroughly prepared and organized mass movement.
(C.L.R James, *Black Jacobins* 17, 85)

The Maroons therefore constituted themselves as a group in a dialectical response to the capitalist plantation system whose imperative was to reduce them to units of labor power–to dehumanize them. Their recreation of a culture and a religion in which their gods could sustain and affirm their humanity was a central moment of their struggle to rehumanize themselves.
(Sylvia Wynter, *Black Metamorphosis* 73-74)

Marronage refers to the many ways people who were enslaved sought to practice freedom and the histories of their running away to form communities and create new forms of social relations while negotiating their self-determination with the colonists. In San Domingo (Haiti today), thousands of Maroons had organized revolts and fought for their freedom hundreds of years before the revolution. This map, based on a dataset of nearly 12,900 individual records of Maroons in colonial Haiti's newspaper advertisements, is part of their story.

Repeating escapes was a common strategy that fueled the subsequent Haitian revolution as it helped the formation of **solidarity** among Maroons from different ethnic groups and prepared them for escapes in larger number.

Passing as a free person of color and appropriating goods were the two most common methods. Cross-dressing, **women disguising themselves as men**, was a part of women's passing strategy (records found in Grande Riviere du Nord).

Rivers and other waterways formed indispensible escape routes for Maroons in this region.

The longest escape on record was that of **a 30-year-old Creole woman and her two sons**, 780 weeks (15 years) in Leogane. The southwest region has a higher rate of armed revolts and longer period of escape. Anse-a-Galets and Petit Trou de Nippes have the highest average duration of freedom at 226 and 195 weeks, respectively.

A multi-ethnic group of 16 Maroons escaped the Vedel's plantation on August 16, 1788, during a hurricane, **cultivated their own land** in the mountains of Cayes-Jacmel, and traded with the Spanish and nearby Maroons for provision. They also aided the subsequent escapes of other Maroons.

Port-Salut was a site of revolts in large number. In January 1791, armed with guns, machetes, sticks, and other handheld weapons, Maroons demanded **three free days** per week.

LA TORTUE
MOLE SAINT NICOLAS
JEAN RABEL
PORT-DE-PAIX
SAINT-LOUIS DU NORD
BORGNE
PORT-MARGOT
CAP-HAITIEN
QUARTIER MORIN
TERRIER ROUGE
BOMBARDOPOLIS
GROS MORNE
LIMBE
PLAINE DU NORD
LIMONADE
FORT-LIBERTE
ACUL DU NORD
TROU DU NORD
GRANDE RIVIERE DU NORD
QUANAMINTHE
GONAIVES
MARMELADE
DONDON
VALLIERES
PETITE RIVIERE DE L'ARTIBONITE
SAINT-MARC
VERRETTES
ANSE-A-GALETS
ARCAHAIE
MIREBALAIS
JEREMIE
DAME MARIE
PETIT TROU DE NIPPES
ANSE-A-VEAU
PETITE RIVIERE DE NIPPES
PORT-AU-PRINCE
CROIX-DES-BOUQUETS
PETION-VILLE
FOND DES NEGRES
PETIT GOAVE
GRAND-GOAVE
LEOGANE
TIBURON
CAVAILLON
PORT-A-PIMENT
SAINT LOUIS DU SUD
AQUIN
COTEAUX
LES CAYES
JACMEL
CAYES-JACMEL
BAINET
TORBECK
PORT-SALUT

Average duration of freedom by location
52 weeks

Method of marronage, 1 dot = 1 person
- taking arms
- appropriating goods
- passing as a free person of color
- repeating escape

River

N
10 kilometers

Projected coordinate system: Albers Conic Equal Area | Central meridian: 73.0 W | Parallel line 1: 18.50N | Parallel line 2: 19.50N.
Marronage data sourced from https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/R7YSRB. Raster created via elevation data via Eduard https://edu-ard.earth. River lines and administrative data from https://www.gvsu.edu/haitiwater/links-to-gis-data-for-haiti-9.htm.
Map created by Nguyễn T. Thuỳ-Trang | 12 December 2023.