

Werner Zips, *Black Rebels. African Caribbean Freedom Fighters in Jamaica*, Princeton: Markus Wiener, Kingston: Ian Randle, 1999 ISBN 1-55876-213-2. Translated from German by Shelley L. Frisch, Foreword by Franklin W. Knight, xii + 292 pages (paper).

Reviewer: *Robbyn Seller*
McGill University

Black Rebels is a treatise on Jamaica's Maroon populations, descendents of African slaves who defied colonial rule and refused to espouse slavery, choosing instead to create settlements high in the mountainous interior and to resist capture at all costs. Zips traces the development of Maroon society from the time of slavery, through wars with British military and the signing of peace treaties that ensured Maroon autonomy, the abolition of slavery, up to the current period. The book presents the Maroons as vibrant and conscious agents of their own fate, emphasizing their resistance to colonial forces and highlighting the continued efforts of original Maroons and their descendents to forge and uphold Maroon society and its cultural and political identity. Throughout, the author stresses the interdependency of the different facets of Jamaican society all through Jamaican colonial history. He also reflects on recent Jamaican resistance and its expressions—from Marcus Garvey to Rastafarianism—and their link to Black resistance movements worldwide.

Zips' discussion of Maroons begins with an historical overview of the colonial Caribbean and the conditions of slavery. The author underscores the systematic and cruel nature of the suppression of all elements of African culture by European colonists, introducing a polemic with the historical literature on the Caribbean, especially with respect to resistance. In doing so, Zips glosses over important ideological, political, legal, historical and other divergences that developed among the Spanish, British, French, Dutch and Danish colonies, so finely documented in the historical works he cites. The author is perhaps a little too enthusiastic in rallying to the cause of the unwitting victims of European expansion and to legitimize their resistance that he draws on particular histories as though they applied to the whole of the Caribbean region.

Even so, while this approach minimizes specific references to Jamaica as well as to differences in time periods, especially in the first section, Zips goes on to develop a comparative and critical reading of existing historical works with respect to their depictions of resistance. Here he draws on similar cases, notably that of the Saramaka, researched by Richard Price (especially 1983), in conjunction with his interviews with present-day Jamaican Maroons. While Zips eschews any in-depth theoretical discussion of resistance, he contends that the simple division of resistance into passive and active forms is inadequate to describe the multiple modes and strategies employed by slaves to challenge colonial domination. The use of poison by house slaves against their masters; the covert development and maintenance of distinct cultural forms, especially obeah (a form of witchcraft); abortion and infanticide; the deliberate re-opening of wounds to inhibit

work; and open revolt and rebellion are cited to illustrate the complexity of slave resistance. In this way, Zips contends that there is no ethical distinction to be made between the resistance strategies of slaves who remained on plantations and those who fled, arguing against those who saw slave behaviour as submissive rather than subversive. At the same time, this perspective of all forms of resistance as being on equal footing allows Zips to justify the Maroon signing of the peace treaties, often seen in a negative light and portrayed as a "sell-out"—the ultimate in betrayal of those Africans and their descendents who remained on the plantations.

Zips calls his comparative approach to existing historical works speculative, contending that a history of the Maroons based on written documents alone lends too much credence to their colonial bias, leaving him with a choice between silence and speculation—he says he chooses the latter. He finds the existence of "historical, comparative data and well-known comparative socio-cultural structures and cultural-ecological facts make a particular 'free' interpretation of a set of evidence or course of an event more plausible than one based solely on the written sources" (p. 71). Here, however, one may wonder whether this statement stands simply as a justification for his reliance on the research of others, rather than on his own, to make inferences about the case of the Maroons of Accompong.

Nevertheless, Zips skilfully elaborates a sympathetic and detailed portrayal of Maroon efforts to create a viable society. He depicts how the physical environment, Maroon African cultural heritage, as well as social and political circumstances combined to allow Maroons to survive attacks from the British and to form durable communities. Driven as fugitives into the high mountainous rainforest, he explains, the Maroons were forced to learn to thrive in less than favourable conditions. The forest afforded them means of both subsistence and resistance, as they engaged it for their food, cover, security, and as their ally in the war against the British. This continued for 85 years until the signing of the peace treaties in 1738-39, which, he argues, were, and still are, pivotal to the continuing survival of Maroon society.

The peace treaties originally provided Maroons the assurance of political autonomy and freedom from slavery in exchange for service to the British crown. For Zips, the ratification of the treaties as an act of self-preservation (and thus resistance to slavery) was warranted by the sociocultural constraints on the settlements, especially the burden that continuous fighting placed on women for the economic maintenance of the communities. The peace treaties, Zips contends, are now not only legal documents that ensure Maroon freedom, relative political autonomy, and access to communal lands, they are also "sacrosanct" (p. 240). They stand as founding documents that tie them to a common history, to ancestors, and from which their existence today as a group derives.

In this regard, Zips underscores the importance of the past to contemporary Maroons in the maintenance of their cultural identity and social and political unity. Drawing on interviews

with Maroons in Accompong, on the leeward side of the island, and Barrett's (1979) work with the Windward Maroons, he describes how links to ancestors are maintained through spiritual practices in which mediums become possessed by original Maroons. The ancestors are a vital part of today's Maroon society, and are consulted before any decision is made or knowledge transmitted. Zips, following Barrett, links these politico-religious practices of the Maroons to their African heritage, possibly Akan-speaking peoples such as the Ashanti, and shows similarities between the two groups of Maroons. For the Accompong Maroons, the original Maroon ancestors were a brother and sister who split up and founded different settlements. Kojo is the founding ancestor of Accompong, and his sister, Nanny, of the Windward Maroons. Both, Zips points out, while once considered the worst rebels of colonial Jamaica, are now revered as national heroes and symbols of freedom.

Despite the autonomy conferred upon them, Zips acknowledges that the Maroons' economic situation has always been highly dependent on the changing political climate in Jamaica. Prior to the ratification of the treaties, Maroons supplemented their subsistence economy with the spoils of raids on plantations; afterwards, with compensation from the British for military service and the sale of produce. With the abolition of slavery, these two sources of income dwindled, and freed slaves successfully competed with them in a free market. Today's Maroons are marginalized, and find themselves in a difficult economic position, notwithstanding their symbolic importance to Jamaican national identity. While they are able to exercise a form of self-government and hold their land communally since the ratification of the treaties, conversely, their access to government funds and representation in government is difficult. This, combined with their remote location, has resulted in lagging development of infrastructure and subsequently difficult and costly access to markets to sell their produce. The cultivation of marijuana, Zips maintains, has been a lucrative alternative for some Maroons, but this only reinforces their opposition to the state as they resist attempts by police to enter their territory.

In his final chapter, Zips shifts his discussion to that of Black resistance in the 20th century, tying it to the colonial era and the Maroons, beginning with Marcus Garvey. He situates Garvey as the link between colonial history, the Maroons and the struggle of Blacks all over the world. Garvey, of Maroon descent, is presented as a pioneer of the Black Power movement and Rastafari philosophy. Garvey founded the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914 in Kingston, and in New York in 1917, with the mandate of creating worldwide black unity. While the UNIA eventually died out, Zips argues that the roots of resistance movements such as Black Power in the United States headed by Malcolm X are to be found in the UNIA, Garvey, and his Maroon background.

Zips' openly partisan approach in *Black Rebels* depicts the Maroons of Jamaica as the emblem par excellence of Black resistance because their very existence as a society, now as in the past, rests upon their continuing drive to maintain their autonomy against all odds. Even though much of the book is

devoted to revisiting existing historical works, either to present the colonial background or to discuss resistance, Zips succeeds in crafting a multifaceted and well-contextualized rendition of Maroon struggles and the development and maintenance of their political and cultural identity. This book certainly engages the reader with its descriptive and interpretive rather than theoretical approach, and will interest both the informed and the novice reader in the field of Caribbean studies. Just the same, I would have enjoyed reading more original case-specific historical and ethnographic material woven into the comparative framework of the book.

References

Barrett, Leonard E.

1979 *The Sun and the Drum. African Roots in Jamaican Folk Traditions*, Kingston: Sangsters.

Price, Richard

1983 *First-Time. The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Gilbert Herdt, *Sambia Sexual Culture: Essays from the Field*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999, xi + 327 pages.

Reviewer: *Andrew P. Lyons*
Wilfrid Laurier University

Twenty years have now passed since the publication of *Guardians of the Flutes* which was arguably the best ethnographic examination of sexuality since Malinowski's *Sexual Life of Savages*. Gilbert Herdt returned to New Guinea several times until 1993 when a nearly fatal bout of malaria led him to curtail his visits. This volume draws on those later field trips. Herdt re-examines and develops themes which he first discussed in *Guardians*. He also discusses the significance of his work not only for social anthropology but also for the Gay Liberation Movement. All of the nine essays in the volume originally appeared elsewhere and most readers will have read a few of them already. However, they fit very well together, and the author has contributed an excellent theoretical introduction. Readers unacquainted with Herdt's ethnography should note that it describes a population which prescribed homoerotic fellatio as a necessary part of male social development. There was no sexual play in the period prior to initiation. Prepubertal youths in the first stages of initiation were fellators; adolescents in the third stage of initiation were fellated by the younger boys. Marriage to females occurred at the end of the initiation cycle. These customs reflected a system of thought in which mature male sexuality was tenuously achieved and always threatened by feminine, specifically menstrual pollution. An adequate supply of sperm was stored in the growing boy as a result of fellation. The receipt of sperm in heterosexual intercourse enabled women to produce breast milk.