

# The Scottish in Xaymaca

**Yu cyaan sidung pahn cow bak, ah cuss cow kin**

(Old Jamaican Proverb)

Through my practice I want my work to investigate the cultural and ritualistic similarities in Jamaican and Scottish heritage; moreover, the influence Scotland has had over Jamaica. I began researching the druids and pagan celebrations as they were not religious, but they believed in earth worship and the connections we have to our surroundings. I then looked at the Jamaican culture that included magic and other kinds of superstition and lore. I looked further into the Beltane Fire festival specifically as Beltane is known for its rituals around fertility rebirth and luck. This intrigued me as I am of the month of May which according to myths encyclopedia, I have domain over all living things. Not many matches were found surrounding similar cultural practices; I did notice the belief systems that operate as backbones of their respected communities. Reading up of Celtic myths and folklore I focused on the main characters of the Beltane ritual; the green man and the red queen. They symbolize the changing of the seasons and the bringing of new life. A young green man is present as a mate for the red queen who also serves as mother nature. My immediate family has a Matriarchal model, my mother being the head and great grandmother. This intrigues me as I had grown up in the presence of strong Jamaican women and had developed an idea of what the archetype mother was and how independent I should be in my own family. Not completely out of the norm for my family. I got married and had children young but with a Scottish man. This commitment was new to my family, (although previously mixed with Scottish further down the line of my nephew and his wife). Never less this felt different new and exciting. We now had British children of Scottish and Jamaican descent. As new as this was for both our families, I couldn't shake the notion this had been happening for time past. Were we walking the shoes previously left by our respective ancestors? I think a pilgrimage is needed.

We started with the annual journey up to Scotland to see the family. In the family home on the landing are two wooden carved busts of African women. My daughter Marceline was under the impression these ladies were indeed her mother. After much toddler conversation we decided yes! It's mummy. The moment did however get me thinking about the women who were taken as wives. Or the emigrants and exiles who took a fancy to the exotic. Research undertaken by others also tracing their Jamaican British history led me to some research on how descendants were produced for lack of a better phrase. I knew you can look up your family tree; many too know as a Caribbean our history is tarnished and completely eradicated in other parts. This adventurous story of a mixed slave child who seemed to only have slave status as her mother was a slave. As it was not written who the father was links were made to a Scottish overseer visiting around that period, and the

obvious record of a 'Mulatto' child raised the obvious that there was somewhere a mixing of nations. Though its not clear whether this was assault it was thought many slaves were treated badly including unwanted sexual contact and as healthcare was poor perpetrators knew the likelihood was the children would be miscarried, still born or simply not make it to their seventh birthday ergo no formal comparison could be made. Others such as Mr. James McLehose went to make his fortune in Jamaica as an attorney, after extreme embarrassment by his wife Agnes Craig they separated he took custody of their three children leaving her penniless. If you think these names sound familiar it's because she had an affair with The Robert Burns of Scotland. Burns made countless poems about her and even poetry under there pseudonyms Sylvander and Clarinda.

**I could suffer the lash of Misery  
eleven months in the year, were the twelfth to be  
composed of hours like yesternight. - You are the soul  
of my enjoyment all else is of the stuff of stocks & stones.-  
Sylvander  
(R.Burns Jan 1788)**

Although their affair may have never been consummated it was still considered one. Upon her return from Jamaica to possibly rekindle her marriage, she told Burns of how her husband wanted nothing to do with her and that he was quite happy with his Ebony woman and mahogany children! Distraught she never fully recovered as many other mothers slaves or otherwise felt as her kin was removed.

We then travelled to Peanmeanach in the Scottish Highlands with my partner, for a Beltane of our own. We wanted to participate in bringing in the spring and living of the land and sea like our forefathers a ritual with me representing the red queen with my Jack. The journey also served as a nod to the Scottish photographer and missionary James Johnston who in 1905 brought Jamaicans to Africa via Britain, leaving a few Jamaicans in Africa. From a layby we'd walked through the mountains to a little Bothy which would be our home for the night. I repeated the same questions that evening; what keeps bringing me to the mountains? Was there something in my blood? The nurture versus nature kept popping up too as if it was ingrained in my DNA to be upon the hills?

Over the years I'd never really felt the need to fully divulge into my history as I believed I was an anomaly destined to be married off and forgotten. Despite this and the fulfillment of the aforementioned self-proclaimed prophecy, I probed further into my mother's matriarchal lineage, and saw that in actual fact we were farmers of coffee and yams in the mountains of Manchester Jamaica. Ecstatic I was not a lost sheep I looked further into the Scottish influence on my nation.

Jamaica was initially captured by the Spanish in 1484 and enslavement and eradication of the native Arawak's lasted until 1655 when Jamaica was taken again by way of Invasion by the English away from the Spaniards. The first large group of Scottish settlers were prisoners of war from the Cromwellian wars and Jacobite Rebellions who were banished to the island to be indentured servants alongside African slaves from 1656.

Scotland's influence of Jamaica almost solely came from their role in the slave trade and colonization with much of the wealth coming from sugar plantations, cotton and tobacco. Although it was said the Scottish slave masters were by far the most ruthless; with life expectancy in the region of mere years, Scotland also played a major part in anti-slavery legislation by outlawing the ownership of personal slaves in Scotland in 1778. (Slavery finally abolished in the empire by 1833.) By 1796 the Scottish owned 30% of the estates in Jamaica, and funds raised went on to pay for schools and churches. Many of the plantation owners once they had made their fortunes; went back to Scotland and used their wealth to buy land and titles ect.

The textile industry saw massive growth for Scotland and Jamaica too! This came from linen imports to clothe slaves. Between 1765-95 around 62% of all linen produced in Scotland was sent on to the West Indies. At one point this was how lowland locals made money. It wasn't only a joint love for cool linens that historically links our people, but also a love of spirits. In the 1820s a distiller by the name of William Shand started distilling whiskey in Aberdeen after returning from his brothers' plantation where he'd been learning how to make rum; this experience significantly improved his whiskey making skills. I was noticing little coincidences in the story of my family, which highlighted the intertwining in our cultures; such as a Christian beliefs, invasions and reclamations and ways of life. (Lest we forget Scotland was attempted to be invaded and we were both under British rule).

After trawling through books and scrawling the net, I see the Scottish presence in Jamaica was no small feat. Many places in Jamaica because of this history have Scottish names such as Glasgow and Kilmarnock (spelt the same); what's probably more interesting is because many of the slave plantations were owed by mainly lowland scots, most notably Col. John Campbell of Inverness, these plantations were also given said names. Given this, I thought back to the last town we stopped in for supplies before we set off, Fort William which coincidentally was a slave plantation in Jamaica?

The Jamaican flag is one of the most well known in the world. On closer inspection one begins to notice the similarities with the Scottish flag. The two are one in the same. The flags are identical with only the colours being replaced. The only to flags that include Saltires. This is due to Rev. William McGhie of Scotland, who was friends with the Jamaican Prime Minister Alexander Bustamante who'd said the flag vertically striped green, black and gold flag was "unsatisfactory!". Rev McGhie approached Bustamante with a reworking of the Scottish flag stating "the flag should represent Jamaica's Christian roots, ergo a cross should be present". Regardless of the history many are still unaware of the flags' history and Scotland's involvement.

As well as the flag the Jamaican national dress is called the Bandana Costume, a red, white and maroon plaid like design is most noticeably Scottish tartan and an amalgamation of the African Kente. For the men the costume consists of black trousers and a shirt made from the fabric; and the women it's a full-length layered skirt with a lace hem per layer and a ruffled blouse with matching head tie with peaks out the back symbolizing marital status. Originally the slave owners were required to provide clothing for all slaves, this was to be sure slaves could be identified quickly. The Bandana cloth was used to clothe the slave that worked in the fields. It was made into dresses and pants and the famous head tie. The material was

imported in silk from India in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries but too expensive for the business of clothing slaves the owners thought. The British opted for the cheaper more viable option to copy the design in cotton. The national costume as we know it today may have come from a design from Beth Lenworth Forbes in 1953, to celebrate the history of our nation with a strong influence from 18<sup>th</sup> century European fashion is seen in the necklines, cinched waists and petticoats. Ms Louise Bennett- Coverley more sympathetically known as Miss Lou, was a dub-poet who famously reclaimed the outfit from darker times and gave Jamaicans pride over the costume. In recent times the dress is worn in celebrations such as independence and national holidays and as costume for Quadrille dance groups across the Caribbean. The Quadrille is a coupled ballroom dance, with roots during slavery. In Jamaica there are three versions; the ballroom or square version, origins of French and English contemporary which were meant to show off civilization and elegance. The Contra Quadrille is danced only to Mento music from beginning to end. Mento music is Jamaican folk music sounding like ska reggae. The camp style Quadrille also know as the long set formation is a afro Jamaican quadrille which incorporates African moves and gestures. The bandana has more recently caused a stir when dancehall artist Ishawna posted on her twitter:

"Mi nuh dress inna tablecloth like Miss Lou #RipMissLou."

Admittedly Ishawna is not new to the tabloids so her referring to the national costume as being nothing more than a tablecloth, her disrespect was noted.

So now I was finding out information past and present, it seemed we cannot escape our colonial past so easily especially when our history is being written by others. This train of thought led me to the works of Edward Long, and the history of Jamaica published in 1774. Edward was notorious for his studies and his notion that black people and white people are of different species despite being born on the island. Another tale is that of the first Campbell in Scotland (reference made by Edward Long 1774). As the story goes Col John Campbell arrived and settled in St. Elizabeth in 1700 on the west of the Island. Campbell was of a large family of the lowlands of Scotland and quickly upon his arrival began to make connections in the government and council. Campbell was known to be generous and have strong connections with Argyll back home allowing for trade relationships to be built. One of the main attractions to the Campbell colony in Jamaica was its reputation for prosperity directly as a result of changes taking place in the Scottish highlands in 1730's. the Highland clearings meant due to the rise in population and changes in farming clans were forced out and many shipped to North America and many to the Caribbean. The history does repeat itself. I read about the hardships faced but highland scots by the ruling English and empathise as a Jamaican. Many things led the Scottish to Jamaica, but it is apparent the weather, wellness, wealth and profit seemed to attract the businessmen to town.

With Jamaica playing such an important role in the economic growth of Scotland and so many links between the country mainly rooted in slavery there had to be love somewhere. There is a clear blending of cultures from dances to places, so why is no one talking about these histories? And where are all the babies? It would appear to me when Jamaicans and Scottish folk get together romantically things occur. I didn't want to negate slave women as some connections were consensual but little records exist. Instead I began with notable Jamaican Scots I knew of; these include Naomi Campbell super-model of Jamaican/ Jamaican-Chinese heritage. William Davidson and Robert Wedderburn of the Morant Bay

Rebellion in 1865, both of whom had Scottish fathers. We could not forget the Medal winning Sprinters Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce and Veronica Campbell-Brown. One of the more interesting natives would be one Mary Seacole born Grant of Kingston Jamaica; again, where my parents were born. Mary was born in 1805 to a Jamaican mother and her father was a Scottish soldier. If you are not familiar with the life of Mother Seacole, she was a Caribbean Florence Nightingale. Now you have an idea, she was apprenticed by her mother from a young age nursing soldiers in Jamaica before travelling the Islands adding to traditional nursing techniques with European methods. Seacole also travelled to Britain and volunteered to go out to the Crimea to offer her services. As if she'd not already faced life-long prejudice as a mixed, smart, Jamaican, woman, she was turned away by the war office; but Nightingale's efforts were hugely exaggerated by the media of the time, when really Seacole self-funded and made her own way to the physical front line to help soldiers.

The Jamaican Motto really is what it says on the tin: Out of Many, One People! We are a melting pot, a dynamic blending of cultures that give us our unique Jamaicanness. The motto reflects the ideology that no matter who tried to capture us we remain Jamaican, we adapt under the conquerors. It's also wise to note the original motto was 'Indus Uterque Serviet Uni' (The Indians twain shall serve one Lord) until it was changed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1962 as apparently it had no modern standing. So, who are us Jamaicans? The Indians, the Scottish the English, the Spanish, the Chinese? Who am I? Further investigation I find out more about my own. An exchange of stories has begun, old rituals revisited, and memory relived. I speak to my mother and we go over some of our history, or rather select pieces my mum deems not too personal, but she doesn't go into detail. She tells me of her journey she came on a plane in 65. She remembers the cold. It was cold. She had on Jamaican clothes and it was cold. My gran brought them [uncle Charles and mum] some jackets from the airport. Mum will be going back shortly. To say goodbye. Then she'll be back to the cold. It's mid-summer but for mum it will be still cold. I speak to Uncle Charles and he fills in some gaps, as he is a few years older than mum. Uncle validates my research and confirms tenuous connections and brings me up to date with current family affairs. We discussed the family names of Gaven and Johnson. Stories were exchanged of Jamaica our last visits and extended family. Names I'd seen in script were manifesting in my imagination, the dates and colloquialisms dance around my mind filling me in turn with pride and knowledge. My uncle was able to recall how my great grandmother referred to her mother as having "long straight Indian hair and was very proud of it!" The journey continued with my Granny Vashtie who too couldn't confirm any Scottish links apart from the Gaven being of Scottish and Irish on her father's side and Johnson and Williams on her mothers. My father told me of his mother (Granny Iris) and Her Cuban mother and Jamaican father who left to fight in WW1, but apart from the family name of Davis/ Lewis no other Scottish connections. Stories past down usually hold the answers, but what was I to do if no one knew?

Which brings me finally to decide how to approach this as a piece of work. A set of heirlooms? Possibly a legacy in box? A full research dossier? I'm not sure I've seen many images some of heartache some of confusion. A personal journey has begun, and a compulsion to discover my heritage and in turn legacy. If anything, untoward were to occur, what would I leave to my children, that could help them to understand who I was and

possibly contributing factors to my personality via our shared history. As of May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Scottish Parliament rejected a petition initiated by Flag up Scotland to include Jamaica as a priority country for international development, stating the government did not have the funds despite having an annual pot of £10million. It would seem Scotland have a lot to answer for by reparations of some kind for the wealth of their nation! They need to acknowledge and be held accountable for international bloodlines (legitimate and otherwise). Not forgetting the 80 or so Jamaican slaves who lived, died and even got baptized in Scotland at any given time during the Slave trade. Mostly unspoken; the bond between Jamaicans and Scots spans decades and our attractions to each other are laid in history.

My children are of British-Jamaican-Scottish-Irish- Cuban-west Indian- African and of course South American. I think we all are!

## Reference list

### Yu cyaan sidung pahn cow bak, ah cuss cow kin

**Translation:** You cannot sit on the back of the cow and curse the skin of the cow.

**Explanation:** We should not disparage others. Worse yet, we should never be ungrateful to, or disdainful of, those who help us.

(From the national Library of Jamaica)

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