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Champagne Taste on a Mauby Pocket: The Socioenvironmental History of Mauby in Barbados

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Champagne Taste on a Mauby Pocket:

The Socioenvironmental History of Mauby in Barbados

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Dedicated in Memory of

- Martina Alleyne -

Beloved Scholar, Mentor, and Friend
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Introduction

In her essay entitled *The Scope and Aims of Ethnobotany in a Developing World*, Janis Alcorn defines modern ethnobotany as “the study of plant-human interrelationships embedded in dynamic ecosystems of natural and social components ... [which are] shaped by history, by physical and social environments, and by the inherent qualities of the plants themselves” (Alcorn 1995). This definition does well to highlight the interdisciplinary nature of socioenvironmental research. Ethnobotany not only concerns itself with the documentation of plant use and plant management, but also with the diachronic exploration of the ecosystems in which plant-human interaction takes place.

For such a multifaceted endeavor, it remains necessary to integrate data from various disciplines. Placed in the context of applied ethnobotany, the marriage of geological, botanical, pharmacological, and sociocultural inquiries may lead to the development of new commercial and medicinal products, the domestication or cultivation of new species, or the implementation of sustainable agricultural systems (Cunningham 2002). Still, naturalists wrote about medicinal and edible plants long before John Harshberger coined the term *ethnobotany* (Ford 1994). Pliny the Elder, a Roman naturalist and philosopher, included in his encyclopedia of natural history entire sections dedicated to medicinal plants and the drugs and foods derived from them (Pliny 1991). Today, a rich supply of historical texts describes medicinal plant use and provides insight into the systematic changes of plant communities over time, thus allowing researchers to explore the evolution of human-plant interaction. Additionally, it remains important to understand how ethnobotanical research connects with various other contemporary theories and how ethnobotanical research can incorporate these theoretical
approaches in order to engage both the public and academic sectors in meaningful socioenvironmental dialogue.

**Introducing Mauby**

The following thesis discusses the socioenvironmental history of mauby, a contemporary herbal drink consumed throughout the Caribbean. In doing so, it distinguishes between mauby, the contemporary beverage itself, derived primarily from the bark of the mauby tree (*Colubrina elliptica*), and mobbie, an antecedent made from the sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*). While the names “mauby” and “mobbie” represent only a couple of the vernacular names and spellings, establishing lexical continuity throughout the paper remains vital to the clear dissemination of information and ideas. The decision to use these particular spellings stems largely from observations made while reviewing literary sources. Though variations in spelling exist within historic texts – mabi, mobbee,obby, etc. – “mobbie” occurs among the spellings most frequently utilized by colonial writers. It is also the spelling employed by Richard Ligon, whose description of mobbie in the mid-seventeenth century exists as the most well-known account of the historic drink. The decision to use “mauby” rather than “mabi” or some other modern variant was decidedly easier to make. The global market increasingly recognizes mauby, as well as this particular spelling, as the bark-derived drink popular in Barbados and other Caribbean nations. Linguistically, “mauby” seems to translate as the English spelling, while sources seem to indicate that “mabi” and “mavi” refer to French or Spanish usages (J. Allsopp 2003). As the national language of Barbados is English, “mauby” appears to be the obvious choice when discussing the drink’s history on the island. Finally, “mauby” will also be used to denote cases which refer to the drink’s history and identity as a
whole. Since people still consume mauby today, it makes sense to relate its general history to its modern identity.

The herbal constituents of both mauby and mobbie are largely similar. Both drinks are based on one specific ingredient – mauby bark and the sweet potato, respectively – while additions to mobbie, such as ginger root and hog plums, enhance flavors in much the same way that spices, such as cinnamon and allspice, and oranges affect the taste of mauby. On a medicinal level, ginger, cinnamon, and allspice function as digestive aids, helping to alleviate indigestion and other gastrointestinal pains. Furthermore, all three herbs are well-known antimicrobials and antifungals. It is not clear whether or not Barbadian colonists considered mobbie to be a diet drink, though the additions of cinnamon, allspice, and other herbal ingredients to mauby certainly contribute to its identity as a health-promoting, herbal beverage.

Through a diachronic and holistic exploration of mauby’s relationship with Barbados’s sociopolitical and economic climate, it becomes apparent that the histories of mauby and Barbados are closely intertwined, each influencing the other in various ways. Historically, the presence of mauby represents periods of uncertainty. Mauby existed when British and African colonists were forced to assimilate aspects of Carib culture into their own sociocultural pathways, when large quantities of Barbadians emigrated to other Caribbean islands and to England, and most recently, when Barbados achieved political autonomy. Both Barbados’s social and natural landscapes changed as *Ipomoea batatas*, the sweet potato – integral in the production of historic mobbie – found in the colonists an effortless conduit for reproduction. Conversely, the colonists contently consumed their newfound, cheap substitute for English beer
– a substitute that allowed them to more thoroughly recreate British social conditions. This mutualistic relationship persisted for several centuries, undergoing various, and sometimes significant, changes until arriving where it exists today – an icon of Barbados’s cultural heritage. By exploring the social history of mauby – its Amerindian origin, its connections to the interrelationship between people and the environment, its significant roles in Caribbean (especially Barbadian) culture, and its functional parallels within other cultures – it becomes apparent that changes in mauby production, distribution, and consumption (usually as a result of globalization) parallel transformations in Barbadian social identity.

**Introducing Theoretical Concepts**

Teams of experts, rather than individuals, remain best suited to explore the broad range of theoretical concepts necessary for socioenvironmental research, which tends to be largely interdisciplinary in nature. Indeed, there exists a certain difficulty when trying to concisely explore the holistic development of human-environment interrelationships. Rather than simply following the development of anthropological theory, one must also consider environmental theories and social theories – not to mention concepts important to geology, economics, and countless other subjects. As theoretical paradigms, historical ecology and social identity theory do well to incorporate ideas from several of these disciplines.

In his introduction to the book *Advances in Historical Ecology*, William Balée posits that “historical ecology itself is not...a method, except *sensu lato*, but rather a way of understanding phenomena” (Balée 1998). Though not explicitly stated in the literature, social identity and self-categorization theories also follow this line of reasoning. Focusing on diachronic and symbolic processes, historical ecologists and social identity theorists observe social and natural
processes, collecting and interpreting historical and contemporary data in order to better understand anthropogenic phenomena. Rather than attempting to discern new methodologies for socioenvironmental studies, the following research operates according to the scientific method, employing the tenets of historical ecology and social identity theory to develop research questions, analyze data, and frame hypotheses.

The ethnobotanical investigation of mauby – a centuries-old herbal drink native to the Caribbean region – benefits greatly from the theoretical perspectives of historical ecology, social identity theory, and self categorization theory. Similarly, historical ecology and the two social theories benefit greatly from each other, the former drawing from the social theories’ propensity to discuss conflict (and therefore how it may or may not influence landscape) and the latter from historical ecology’s exploration of diachronic relationships, rather than specific moments of identity formation. Indeed, the relationship between these theories appears even stronger when considering the strong historic relationship between the environment and the identity of social and political groups.

**Historical Ecology**

Carole Crumley, one of historical ecology’s greatest proponents, states that “no spot on the earth is unaffected by humans” (C. L. Crumley 1994). This simple phrase marks the foundation of theoretical paradigms that seek to understand the connection between humankind and the environment. Drawing in part from materialism, cultural ecology, and evolutionary ecology, historical ecology offers a unique viewpoint with which to explore the juxtaposition of culture and nature. It exhibits no unique methodological concepts and, rather
than striving to become an independent field, persists as a junction between anthropology and ecology.

Despite its obvious relationship to various theoretical frameworks, historical ecology remains distinctly inimitable. While Marx and other materialists investigated the “relationships between people and economic resources in state societies,” (Balée 1998) historical ecologists view the human-environment relationship in several contexts (temporal, spatial, cultural, biological) regardless of their association with political and economic entities. Marvin Harris’s theory of cultural materialism exhibits stronger ties to historical ecology, seeking to explain how sociocultural aspects of humanity are caused by problems and obstacles inherent to human nature. These hindrances, while certainly material in nature, are often part of society’s natural environment rather than its anthropogenic environment. Still, cultural materialists posit that human-environment relationships are evolutionary in nature (that is, sociocultural and environmental modes of production and reproduction evolve together, over time) (Balée 1998), while historical ecology suggests that such relationships are historical and ecological — changing and developing over time as warranted by unique and constantly occurring human-environment dialogues. These dialogues do not always build off of previous dialogues, which would be the case with an evolutionary relationship, but are more fluid in organization.

Perhaps most pertinent to the development of historical ecology, however, was Julian Steward’s introduction of cultural ecology. Cultural ecology places a strong emphasis on a scientific approach to studying human-environment relationships. This largely results from the model’s strong propensity to subscribe to environmental determinism, which professes that society’s physical environment, rather than its social environment, determines culture.
Furthermore, cultural ecologists seek to understand the tools and methods used by people to exploit nature, ultimately hoping to better comprehend the accumulation of wealth and power. Though similar in appearance to cultural ecology, historical ecology steps away from environmental determinism, instead favoring the idea that people and the environment exist in a co-dependent dialogue. While some historical ecologists may look specifically at technology and wealth, in general they tend to take a more holistic approach, preferring to consider a spectrum of interacting relationships rather than focusing on a sole point of interest.

Within the framework of historical ecology, people and their environments interact in a constant and dynamic dialogue – sometimes positive, sometimes negative, but always reciprocal. The identity of mauby cannot be wholly understood without considering these relationships and the beverage’s development over time. Indeed, mauby’s history is quite diverse, involving the entirety of Barbados’s social spectrum. To identify the drink solely on a specific segment of its history would mean ignoring the myriad of unique relationships that existed at other points in time. As herbal beverages are human constructs which require natural inputs, it remains important to understand the environments and social settings which incorporate the drinks’ botanic components.

**Social Identity Theory**

At their most basic descriptions, social identity theory and self categorization theory attempt to explain the interrelation between individuals and social groups. Specifically, the theories focus on the “origins of social identity” and the “cognitive or motivational factors…that lead a group member to endorse or disavow an existing group membership” (Huddy 2001). Additionally, Turner et al. note that self-categorization theory is a cognitive extension of Tajfel’s
conceptualization of social identity, concentrating more on the categorization of an individual by that individual, rather than the functions of ingroup bias or intergroup discrimination (Turner, et al. 1987).

Common to both theories, and perhaps most important to the relationship between mauby and Barbadian identity, is the concept that the “categorization of everyday objects can be extended to explain the categorization of people” (Huddy 2001). The characterization of more specific objects, such as imported goods, prestige goods, and low income goods – to iterate a few distinctions – correlates very strongly to the characterization of the groups that possess and utilize these objects. This makes sense, as groups and individuals are more likely to want to identify with items and features that are associated with positive attributes. Depictions of historic mobbie and contemporary mauby support the claim that the classifications of everyday objects may be extended to social groups. In the early stages of the colonization of Barbados, mobbie’s similarities to small beer in England (Hughes 1750) comforted the British colonists. The presence of lightly alcoholic beverages relieved the anxieties of finding or making other potable beverages. It also enabled the colonists to more closely recreate British social (especially drinking) customs, thereby affirming the settlers’ affiliation as men and women of England.

Modern mauby, too, characterizes certain contemporary social groups. While a pan-Caribbean beverage, mauby remains closely associated with Barbados. Several varieties of mauby syrup – available on a global scale via internet store fronts – come from Barbadian companies, a fact which encourages many consumers to associate the beverage with its Barbadian producers. Historically speaking, the individuals most associated with contemporary
mauby are the mauby women of the early to mid-twentieth century. These women were prominent figures in the urban and plantation landscapes of twentieth century Barbados, peddling large containers of mauby for miles upon miles and serving the cool, refreshing drink to customer after customer. So prevalent were the mauby women that they became the subjects of poems and folksongs. Recreations of their balancing act stand tall, immortalized in photos and heritage museums. Today, homemade mauby can be frequently found in the residences of those who can remember the days of the mauby women. Families keen on preserving tradition still boil mauby bark, sweetening the bitter decoction until it tastes just right. Many Barbadians, however, simply purchase any number of mauby syrups, mixing water and sugary syrup to quickly obtain the desired flavor. Much of the country’s youth, from the ages of primary school through those in universities, prefer the sweeter and more time-efficient mauby syrup, while the same children’s grandparents maintain that nothing beats a cool glass of boiled mauby bark.

The characteristics of mobbie and mauby – whether viewed as a Carib beverage, a drink for the gentry or servants, and a replacement for small beer, or as a cultural icon, a symbol of bygone days, and a product of omnipresent globalization – operate equally as indicators of the groups that consume the beverages. The presence of mauby allows groups to exclude those who do not drink mauby and to identify with those who drink it regularly. Subgroups appear in response to whether or not groups include those who prepare mauby traditionally or those who utilize the syrup. Historically, mobbie acted as an agent of social identity in much the same manner, its unassuming characteristics enhancing and dissolving group borders. So long as its consumption was a positive action, mobbie was incorporated into the upper class’s cultural system. For some time, too, the sheer number of sweet potatoes allowed colonists to serve
mobbie to guests and servants alike. As soon as it was viewed as primitive and cheap, however, the gentry washed their hands of it, forcing it upon their slaves and servants – a cheap drink with which to feed an innumerable workforce.

The Socioenvironmental History of Mobbie

Etymology of Mobbie

While the definitive origin of mobbie remains uncertain, it is probable that British colonists on Barbados acquired knowledge of the drink via their interactions with the region’s Amerindian population. Shortly after colonization, Henry Powell – captain of the ship which brought Barbados’s first British settlers to the island – traveled to the Essequibo River in Guyana. He returned to Barbados with supplies and thirty Essequibo Arawaks (Gmelch 1996). Thirty years later, in his 1657 publication of A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes, Richard Ligon notes that British planters used Amerindian women to make “mobbie”, a fermented beverage procured from sweet potatoes (Ligon 1657), which closely resembles the contemporary sweet potato beers of northern South America (Handler, 1977). The word “mobbie”, then, most likely exists as a derivative of mâ’bi, the Carib word for a variety of red sweet potato, or mabi, the common term for an edible tuber (F. H. Smith 2005). In either case, the word almost certainly entered the Barbadian lexicon through the introduction of mabi-miti (J. Allsopp 2003), a sweet potato-based beverage consumed by the Carib Indians and recorded by French traveler Charles de Rochefort as their “most common” drink (Rochefort 1666).

Verifying that sweet potatoes were present in seventeenth century Barbadian food pathways, Ligon’s description of red and white varieties of sweet potatoes further supports the notion of a Carib Indian origin. That mobbie may be white or “red like Claret-wine” (Ligon 1657)
demonstrates that both the white sweet potato and the red sweet potato, the Carib mâ’bi, were clearly used in the production of the beverage.

Though a Carib origin is the most probable, other possible sources cannot be completely ignored, however specious they may seem. Volpato and Godínez suggest that “mabi” is a Haitian creolization of the French ma bière, or “my beer” (Volpato and Godínez 2004). In their case study, the claim refers to the origins of contemporary mauby, made from the bark of the mauby tree. Since mobbie existed before the official French colonization of Saint-Domingue in 1659, and the name “mauby” most likely developed as a continuation of “mobbie”, the creolization theory appears rather unsound. The beer-like qualities of mauby (whether historic, or the fermented contemporary versions) seem to lend some credibility to the creolization theory, but it is more likely that the arrival of mauby in Barbados occurred independently of an exclusively Haitian exchange – especially given that the drink exists in several other Caribbean locales. That the two beverages share a common name, but have different herbal constituents, indicates the possibility of two independent drinks with independent social meanings that eventually converged, resulting in the simple, functional replacement of mobbie by mauby at a time when the former started to become too scarce.

**Ethnobotanical Survey of Ipomoea batatas**

Contrary to popular belief, the sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*) is not a type of potato (Solanaceae family) at all, but rather is a member of Convolvulaceae (the Morning Glory family), a family comprised of approximately 1,650 species of mostly herbaceous vines (Watson and Dallwitz 1992 onwards). Native to the tropical Americas, scientists believe that *I. batatas* originated somewhere in southern Central America or northwestern South America, spreading
throughout the world via various cultural exchanges. Characterized by a long running vine with lateral stem-branches, the sweet potato exhibits white or purple flowers which resemble those of its relative, the Morning Glory (Duke 1983). Unlike the potato, which is a stem tuber (a thickened stem), the sweet potato itself is a storage root. While *I. batatas* seeds do exist, the plant is usually cultivated via vegetative propagation (CGIAR 2005).

Throughout the world, people consider the sweet potato to be a staple food item. Consequently, nearly every language has a word for the edible root. Most of these common names seem to involve either a morpheme that designates sweetness, an adaptation of the word *batata* (an Amerindian name for the sweet potato), or both. In the United States, two varieties predominate. The United States food ethos distinguishes between “sweet potato”, which most often refers to a mealy, yellow variety, and “yam”, which are not true yams (genus *Dioscorea*) but are rather an orange variety of sweet potato (Gibson 1999). In Barbados, the former exists in abundance. Historic descriptions of a red variety of sweet potato could refer to the orange variety popular in the United States, or might signify another varietal.

Consumers of *Ipomoea batatas* most frequently utilize it as a food source. Yellow and orange pigmentation, common to many varietals, indicates the presence of carotenoids, which in turn provide a rich source of vitamins A and C. In some cases, these pigments are even exploited to dyes for cloth (Verrill 1937). Furthermore, a high starch content and reasonably high amount of glucose, combined with the minerals stored in the edible root itself, make for a very nutritious meal. In addition to the sweet potato’s obvious role as a staple food crop among human populations, communities also regularly feed the plant to livestock (Duke 1983). A rich folk medicine culture surrounds the sweet potato as well. A decoction of the leaves is
reported to heal tumors in the mouth and throat, while the sweet potato itself possesses countless potential cures, a folk remedy for everything from asthma and bug bites, to splenosis and fevers (Duke 1983).

The Popularization of Mobbie

Mobbie became a staple beverage shortly after it was introduced to Barbadian colonists. In much of the same way that Anglo-Americans in colonial Virginia struggled with the production of beer and wine – the ingredients were too expensive, knowledge of the involved processes was limited, and the climate was too hot for production – British settlers in Barbados were forced to forego familiar foods and agricultural practices, exchanging them for crops and methods that fared better in tropical climates. Adopting new beverages would have been of the utmost importance, as the medical knowledge of the period instructed that, in order to preserve the correct balance of bodily humors (black bile, yellow bile, phlegm, and blood), one must consume a lot of liquid in hot weather. Drinks such as sack and aquavitae – a dry, sweet wine and a distilled wine, respectively – were said to preserve health, while water weakened the body (Kupperman, 1984). That alcohol transmits few (if any) water-borne illnesses and provided a much needed boost to the colonists’ caloric intake may have had some influence on these practices.

Accordingly, it is probable that the first colonists to regularly consume mobbie belonged to the upper classes of society, as they would have possessed the resources to ensure their own health. In 1652, Heinrich Von Uchteritz, a German indentured servant in Barbados, notes that “The gentry make a drink from the [sweet] potato root” while “The slaves, however, drink only common water with sugar and lemon juice” (Gunkel and Handler, 1969). Two years later,
Father Antoine Biet, a French priest, writes about the fine dining of the Barbadian elite. He records that “They present whatever drink one wants” and that “sweetened Mauby [is available] for those who do not want wine” (Handler, 1966). In contrast to these drinking patterns, Richard Ligon writes that the governor of Barbados, Philip Bell, considers mobbie an “unwholesome” beverage. He also notes that the servants drink “nothing but mobbie”, and while he suggests that at the time, slaves only drink “fair water”, they also eventually incorporated mobbie into their diet (Ligon 1657). Ligon’s account is the first that describes mobbie consumption as an action that occurs across the social spectrum – an element that will continue to define the beverage long after it undergoes significant cultural changes.

As Barbadian colonists slowly grew to better understand their new home, they began to manipulate their landscape. Barbados’s commercial and agricultural endeavors increased in productivity. Large quantities of [sweet] potatoes could be bought in “whole wagon loads...for nothing” (Handler, 1977). Sweet potato-based rations would have been a cheap way to provide for the growing enslaved population. By the early eighteenth century, visitors recognized mobbie, “brewed with [sweet] Potatoes, Water, and Sugar”, as the chief beverage of servants and slaves (Oldmixon 1708). With the colony’s growing wealth came an influx of exotic, more “refined” beverages. Domestic alcoholic drinks such as rum entered mainstream use while still other beverages were imported from abroad. As the island’s commercial and agricultural accomplishments yielded more lucrative results, mobbie likely became less of a novelty item among the rich and more of a cheap, local, and regional commodity that could be used to supplement the diets of the indentured and enslaved populations. In 1742, American traveler John Smith notes that “[the wealthiest inhabitants’] chief drink is [rum] Punch” and simply lists Mobbie among “several other sorts” of drinks (J. Smith 1941-42). The nonchalant reference to
mobbie and “several other sorts” of drinks could be in part due to a series of beetle infestations in 1734 and 1735 that destroyed much of the island’s produce – especially sweet potatoes – and thereby significantly reduced the prevalence of mobbie and other beverages made from local fruits and vegetables. Despite agricultural setbacks, as distilled spirits became increasingly associated with wealth and status, the process of large-scale distillation reached new heights of popularity. The advent of the industrial still quickly overshadowed the more “primitive” methods of mobbie production, and the number of literary references to mobbie began to decline, replaced by descriptions of rum and other liquors. Though undoubtedly of the worst quality, a dram of rum even became “the most acceptable Present that can be [given to slaves]” so as to “hearten them at their work” (Oldmixon 1708).

Around the same time, the reverend Griffith Hughes also writes of mobbie, describing it as “a Sort of cool Drink, answering to small Beer in England” (Hughes 1750). Hughes is not the only writer to compare new world beverages to small beer. Many other authors also utilize the comparison when wishing to describe favorable Caribbean drinks. Small beer – that is, beer with a low alcohol content – appeared in every eighteenth century English household. Every demographic – the rich and the poor, women and men, old and the young – consumed large quantities of ciders, ales, and nearly non-alcoholic beers. This was especially true in England’s North American colonies, where water was deemed unfit for drinking. In her paper on gender studies and alcohol production in Virginia and England, Sarah Hand Meacham comments on “…the anomalous nature of the early Chesapeake [where] production of alcoholic beverages in the region in the eighteenth century increasingly resembled that of sixteenth-century England, with women making unhopped ale and cider” (Meacham 2003) As another New World colony, Barbados’s systems of production would have been similarly behind the times.
**Mobbie Production**

When viewing the recipes for mobbie, it becomes very clear that the historic beverage is the precursor to contemporary sweet potato wines. According to a wine recipe guide published by the Barbados Agricultural Development Corporation in 1977, the ingredients of sweet potato wine consist of sweet potatoes, oranges, ginger root, lemons, and sugar. These ingredients bear an undeniable resemblance to those of mobbie. Additionally, while the historic sketches of mobbie neglect to mention oranges as an ingredient, oranges are frequently used when making contemporary mauby. Such a similarity might suggest a link between mauby and mobbie, or it may simply convey that oranges are a commonly used ingredient in Caribbean cuisine.

Ligon provides the most thorough description of the methods used to make mobbie. The sweet potatoes are placed “in a tub of water” and scrubbed “up and down; till they are washt \[sic\] clean”. Next, they are to be “put into a large iron or brass pot ... and put to them as much water, as will only cover a quarter part of them.” A piece of cloth is placed over the pot to trap steam, and a small fire is lit to soften the sweet potatoes. Once soft, the sweet potatoes are mashed in water and left for a couple hours “till the water has drawn and suckt \[sic\] out all the spirit of the roots.” Strained into a jar, the beverage ferments for a day, at which point “tis fit to be drunk” (Ligon 1657). Most accounts follow Ligon’s methodology, with occasional and minor alterations. Felix Christian Spörri, a Swiss medical doctor who visited Barbados in 1661, writes that the mashed sweet potato pulp “is sweetened with molasses or sugar juice ... [and] a bit of ginger is hung into the drink” as it ferments (Gunkel and Handler 1969b). In other cases, individuals sweeten the drink with sugar and lemon juice (Gunkel and Handler 1969a) or the fruit of *Spondias mombin* (Rochefort 1666), known colloquially as the hog plum or mombin.
In certain situations, the manner by which mobbie was produced may have negatively affected individuals’ health, manifesting itself primarily in the form of gastro-intestinal pain – a possible indicator of lead poisoning. Symptoms of lead poisoning, also known as plumbism, are significant and diverse. In children, neurological damage results in behavioral disorders and an impaired ability to learn. Physically, a child might complain of abdominal pain, headaches, and grogginess. Mild lead poisoning in adults results in constipation, abdominal pain, appetite loss, nausea and vomiting. Lead’s ability to slow electrical conduction results in sensory loss and weakness via the disruption of electrical impulses (Needleman 1997). High levels of lead poisoning result in comas and death.

Lead-contaminated foods and beverages are more often consequences of production techniques rather than polluted water or contaminated ingredients. In ancient Rome, and up through the 17th century, for example, vinification practices included adding a leaded sugar to counter the wine’s acidic properties (Corn 1975). Until recently, machines involved in food production often had lead or lead-lined parts which would leach contaminants. Manufacturers often sealed or glazed storage containers with lead-based products.

An interesting study of the skeletal remains of enslaved peoples in Barbados highlights complaints by New World colonists of the “dry bellyache,” a form of lead poisoning. Handler and Corruccini’s study states that chronic exposure to lead exceeds the manageable limits of the body’s natural purging system and results in an accumulation of lead in bone. As a result, a trace mineral analysis method can be used to measure the lead levels in surviving skeletal remains. The results of the analysis was striking – the mean bone lead content of 48 individuals was close to 118 parts per million, a number comparable to lead-poisoned Roman communities and three-to-four times higher than mainland slave populations (Handler and Corruccini 1986).
Since slaves would have used non-glazed earthenware vessels rather than lead-lined plates and bowls, Handler looks elsewhere for the source of lead. He determines that the rum processing and distilling procedures included lead pipes and cisterns, and that the heating process and the acid-like properties of the alcohol further dissolved the lead, thus converting it into a form which was more readily absorbed by the human body. Because it was cheap and distilled on site, the plantation slaves would have consumed copious amounts of the drink, often still hot, when the lead still had not yet settled.

Reverend Griffith Hughes writes that “Distillers of Rum, and Boilers of Sugar, and Overseers, were chiefly subject to [dry bellyache]; the first (who are generally of the poorer Sort), from immoderately drinking new hot Rum; the second and third from taking Cold, after sweating in the Boiling Houses, and drinking very strong Punch, or almost as strong Cowow or Mobby” (Hughes 1750). Punch, as described by Felix Christian Spörri, is a combination of water and lemon juice, sweetened with sugar, to which rum is added to taste (Gunkel and Handler 1969b). Cowow, on the other hand, was deemed a “simpler” alcoholic drink and was made from fermented sugar cane (F. H. Smith 2005). While lead certainly contaminated the rum used to make punch, mobby and cowow may have also been toxic, though it remains unclear as to the exact pathways of contamination. With such a close proximity to distillation equipment, individuals might have used some of the same containers to produce mbbie and cowow as they used to produce rum. If this was the case, it is most likely that older, retired containers – containers that had been exposed to significant quantities of lead – would have been utilized instead of newer containers. The boiling of mauby in these containers would have facilitated lead contamination in the drink. If leaden mbbie was not a result of production practices, then there is a chance that the “boilers of sugar” and overseers – who were considered to be of
higher social statuses than “distillers of rum” – had access to lead-lined cups, bowls, utensils, or storage containers.

Unhopped drinks, often made with molasses and water, were produced by Virginian women in the comforts of their own homes. Since English society had grown accustomed to women producing small beer, ales, and ciders, it stands to reason that the production of mobbie by Carib women would have not been seen as completely foreign. By conceptualizing mobbie as another “unhopped ale”, colonists could have easily incorporated it into their diet.

Conversely, other traditional Amerindian beverages were not received nearly as positively. Some authors, for instance, considered *ouicōu* – a beverage made of cassava that is first chewed and then left in water to ferment and be boiled – to be a higher quality drink than mobbie (Rochefort 1666). That the presence, production and consumption of *ouicōu* is not nearly as well recorded as that of mobbie suggests that it was not anywhere near as popular as the sweet potato beverage. The idea of mastication as a step of beverage production certainly struck the colonists as primitive and barbaric and prevented *ouicōu* from achieving the same widespread popularity within the European colonies. As the brewing of mobbie required no such steps and seemed to be nothing other than a sweet potato beer, colonists appeared to view it more favorably.

The largest debate that surrounds the production and consumption of mobbie concerns its shelf life. Ligon suggests the drink will last “four or five dayes [sic] good” if kept in “small casks”, while other sources contest that it must be produced as often as twice daily or risk going stale (J. Handler 1977). Spörri, with yet another take, states that mobbie keeps for as long as five or six weeks before going bad (Gunkel and Handler 1969b). As heat proves to be a
significant factor in the preservation of food, mobbie’s variable shelf life could be easily attributed to the conditions in which it was kept.

Families with cool cellars would have certainly been able to preserve mobbie for longer periods of time, as opposed to those who had no means of safely conserving food. These families, however, tended to be middle or upper class. It is possible, then, that mobbie – by virtue of its shelf life and the conditions in which it was stored – acted as a marker by which individuals could identify social groups. Due to inadequate storage spaces, poorer individuals would have been forced to produce mobbie more frequently. Poorer communities, then, may have bonded over the semi-weekly, or even daily, production of mobbie. Families may have shared larger quantities of mobbie so as to ensure its consumption before spoiling. Conversely, wealthy families may have recognized each others’ status based on the presence of climate controlled storage spaces and how well those spaces were stocked. A family who could produce and save several months worth of mobbie and other foodstuffs could focus the rest of their time on operating a store front or other business, thus maintaining a steady income or even securing a notable profit. While it is certainly a stretch to suggest that individuals excluded or included group members specifically based on their ability to store mobbie, the exclusion or inclusion of group members based on property (and by extension, the ability to store food and supplies) is not a foreign concept.

**Mobbie’s Decline**

When personal supplies of alcohol ran out, families turned to the more expensive distilled beverages available from the surplus stores of wealthier planters or, as a last resort, they began to purchase imported goods. The evidence of rum punch and Madeira wine’s elevated statuses and the acknowledgement of mobbie as a common, working class beverage –
coupled with the report of the sweet potato-beetle infestation in 1734 and 1735 – clearly illustrates the scenes leading to mobbie’s decline in prestige during the mid-Eighteenth century. This shift in mobbie’s social status also marks the beginning of mobbie’s shift in identity.

During a residence in Barbados in 1820, naval surgeon John Augustine Waller observed that Madeira wine “[is] the common beverage of all who can procure it” and, in general, “is the ordinary drink in all the English colonies” (Waller 1820). Not once does Waller mention Mobbie in his descriptions of Barbados’s food and drink, though sweet potatoes are mentioned as a breakfast staple. This may be largely a result of another sweet potato plague – this time of worms. The 1812 volcanic eruption of St. Vincent’s Soufrière covered Barbados in dust, at which point farmers at Black Rock (in St. Michael Parish) noticed a “very small wire worm that enters the [sweet potato] Root itself, [and then] eats and rots it.” Expanding upon this entry, Nathan Lucas continues to note that “many person ceased to cultivate the [sweet] Potatoe at all” and that even in 1825, thirteen years after the eruption, “the pestilence … [was] not totally gone” (Lucas 1825). With the sudden dearth of sweet potatoes, Barbadians were forced to utilize new, alternative foodstuffs. What few sweet potatoes were left were almost certainly used as food, rather than mashed and fermented to make mobbie. These were probably purchased by the upper class, as the sudden drop in supply would have caused local prices to increase substantially. Thus, at the doorstep of emancipation, a swarm of sweet potato-worms simultaneously set the stage for mobbie’s final disappearing act and the emergence of mauby, the popular bark decoction that remains well-known throughout Barbados and the Caribbean region today.
The decline of mobbie in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries exhibits an interesting relationship to the advent of Barbadian emancipation. While the sweet potato epidemic utterly destroyed the principle ingredient of mobbie – and thus contributed to a critical change in the drink’s composition – it also placed a significant stress on the island’s sociopolitical climate. The presence of sweet potatoes was of paramount importance to the plantation owners and other members of the upper class, who used the plentiful tuber to provide an adequate supply of food for the enslaved and servant populations. The loss of this particularly significant crop, then, may have been a contributing factor in the abolishment of slavery. With social unrest peaking, the loss of the sweet potato and subsequent inability to cheaply feed innumerable people would have proved too much for the planters. In an effort to cut losses rather than finding a more expensive alternative to the sweet potato, the plantation owners moved one step closer to granting emancipation.

As the prestige of mobbie decreased, replaced almost completely by rum and other distilled and imported beverages, planters became increasingly dependent on the processes of distillation. Plantation owners tasked slaves and servants with the maintenance of the stills, which required significantly more skill and specialized knowledge than mobbie production. The production of alcoholic beverages usually coincides with a need for specialized labor. As the processes of production increase in intricacy, the number of specialized laborers needed to produce a unit of alcohol increases as well. While the production of mobbie generally occurred in the hands of women, the process was decidedly simple. If a situation arose where the usual providers were unavailable, other individuals would almost certainly stand in.
As was the case with many slave-based societies, the enslaved population of Barbados was instrumental in the well-being of the colony. The upper class’s dependency on the prestige and capital generated from distilling operations led them to become increasingly dependent on the slaves who ran those operations. In previous years, the gentry were not nearly as dependent on the production of mobbie, which, when compared to rum and other distilled beverages, was much less a part of the social stratification of the Barbadian population. Consumed domestically (rather than being exported) and distributed in a more egalitarian manner, mobbie did little for a planter’s global and regional prestige. Indeed, after the mid-seventeenth century, mobbie had become such a common occurrence that it provided little local prestige as well. Fading into a background of local markets and domestic production and consumption, mobbie had ceded its role in Barbadian society to distilled spirits. In turn, the production and consumption of these more industrialized liquors resulted in an increase in the amount of power held by enslaved peoples, ultimately culminating in the emancipation of slaves and the disruption of Barbados’s slave-based sociopolitical and economic systems.

The Socioenvironmental History of Mauby

The history of contemporary mauby in Barbados is not nearly as well illuminated as that of sweet potato mobbie. *Colubrina elliptica* – the shrub-like tree whose bark is most commonly used to make mauby – is not native to Barbadian soil. Instead, consumers import it from Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Martinique, and other neighboring islands. In fact, the mauby tree does not naturally on Barbados at all and exists only through the efforts of patient horticulturalists. Still, mauby remains an icon of Barbadian society, a domestically-produced herbal beverage derived from an imported ingredient. Hard as it is to accurately trace the
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history of this important herbal tea (the literature is next to non-existent), its development as a staple beverage can be better understood through the examination of the social conditions that existed during its alleged emergence.

The abolition of slavery in 1834 led to an apprenticeship period of four years, during which time newly freed men and women worked long hours so that plantation owners might provide rudimentary housing for the formerly enslaved and their families. Salaries were negligible, if present at all. Coincidentally, the post-apprenticeship period, beginning in 1838, coincided with a fairly large economic depression. A French naval officer who visited Barbados during this period explains that “the prosperity of the former slave colonies [is characterized by] the exorbitant price of colonial produce on the English markets.” He continues, commenting that “Forced as the rural worker is to live off foodstuffs imported into the colony, his wage is a small thing when compared to his needs...” (Gobert and Handler 1979). The crippled colonial economy and the propensity of Barbadians to consume imported goods are two factors that may have led to the introduction and assimilation of mauby as a national beverage. However, the drink’s extremely bitter taste and seemingly humble origins would have deterred anyone who had the means to purchase coffee or English tea, which were revered in England. As a result, the cheap, local markets probably sold mauby, while the larger colonial markets focused on British and American imports.

Unlike its predecessor, the introduction of mauby to Barbados most likely began with the lower classes of society. The imported bark, arriving in Bridgetown harbor, would have been picked up by hucksters, thereby initially bypassing the major markets. Steeped like a tea, mauby was dark and bitter like coffee, and for those who could not afford coffee and English
tea, it would have been the perfect substitute. As the earliest accounts of mauby define it as an alcoholic beverage, it is probable that mauby arose as an alternative for sweet potato mobbie. Indeed, many communities throughout the Caribbean still ferment mauby. This substitution would certainly explain the similarities in nomenclature and would have most likely occurred at the end of the slavery era, when mobbie had all but disappeared entirely. Considering that ice and other cooling mechanisms during the nineteenth century were expensive, it is probable that mauby was first consumed hot or as a fermented beverage at room temperature, which further strengthens its resemblance to coffee, tea, and the similarly-named mobbie. That *Colubrina arborescens* – a close relative of *Colubrina elliptica* and a Barbadian native which is often used as a substitute for *C. elliptica* when producing Mauby – still bears the common names of “Wild Coffee” and “Coffee Colubrina” serves as testament to the perceived similarities between Mauby and coffee (Seaforth and Tikasingh n.d.).

**Ethnobotanical Survey of Colubrina spp.**

*Colubrina* is a member of the Rhamnaceae (Buckthorn) family, which consists of between 600-900 species of small trees, shrubs, and woody vines, usually characterized by alternating leaves and small, perfect flowers – that is, flowers with both pistils and stamens. The fruit usually occurs as a drupe (a fleshy fruit with a pit, like a peach) or as a schizocarpic capsule (a fruit that dries and splits into multiple parts, like a winged maple pod). The family grows in tropical and subtropical climates and exists in both the northern and southern hemispheres (Howard 1989).
Mauby Leaves (*Colubrina elliptica*), Courtesy of Newlands Greenidge

Mauby Tree (*Colubrina elliptica*), Courtesy of Newlands Greenidge
While people most commonly utilize the bark of *Colubrina elliptica* in mauby production, sources also frequently cite *Colubrina arborescens* as a substitute (J. Allsopp 2003). Both *Colubrina* species are small, shrublike trees with small, inconspicuous white flowers and shiny black seeds, and though native to the Caribbean region, are labeled as endangered species within the United States (both species can be found as far north as Florida) (Howard 1989). Barbadian consumers and companies import mauby bark (*Colubrina elliptica*) – which is boiled to make mauby – from Haiti, the Dominican Republic, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent. *Colubrina arborescens*, on the other hand, is native to Barbados (Fraser, et al. 1990). Locally-collected specimens of *C. arborescens* can be found in the herbarium at the University of the West Indies’s Cave Hill campus. Despite the domestic presence of *C. arborescens* and its potential as a substitute for *C. elliptica*, most Barbadians still recognize mauby bark to be an imported good.
Those familiar with the genus *Colubrina* often refer to *C. arborescens* as ironwood or snakewood, due to its extremely hard sapwood and often serpent-like trunk, respectively (Austin 2004). However, the existing common names run far more varied than just these. Several of its names, like coffee colubrina, indicate ethnobotanical uses. Soap tree and soapwood refer to the plant’s use as a substitute for soap (Howard 1989). Saponins, which are responsible for the *Colubrina*’s lathering (or foaming) effect, also impart a bitter taste, which results in another vernacular name – bitter wood (Austin 2004). It is also known occasionally as greenheart, because of its green heartwood, and black bead tree, for its shiny black seeds, which are fashioned into beads for jewelry (Schomburgk 1848).

Compared to *C. arborescens*, *C. elliptica* seems to have far fewer uses. The evidence for this, too, becomes apparent when exploring the range of common names attributed to the plant. In his book *Florida Ethnobotany*, Austin focuses on a diachronic, etymological study of common plant names and how they relate to ethnobotanical uses. When discussing *Colubrina elliptica*, he notes that “Everything we know about [the name *mabi* and its variants] indicates a Caribbean origin, and it is a Taino word. A comparison with other Arawakan words is instructive. For example, ‘remedy or medicine’ in Arawak is *ibihi*, and in Karina, the Caribbean language spoken in Suriname, it is *e:pit*. In Island-Carib, medicine is *ibie*. All those words are close enough to *mabi* that they could be cognates” (Austin 2004). The name mauby, then, certainly seems to reference its medicinal nature. Juxtaposed against the origin of mobbie, which was taken from the Carib word for edible tubers, Austin’s proposed etymology of mauby does not seem unreasonable. The two words are most certainly related lexically. As there are few variants like them, the American common names of soldierwood and nakedwood, on the other hand, appear to be arbitrarily chosen, while the charcoal tree, as it is called in Cuba, infers
that “the hard wood is made into charcoal” (Austin 2004). For the most part, however, local names (regardless of language) for *Colubrina elliptica* allude to its medicinal nature and its propensity to be converted into a beverage.

The ethnobotanical study of common names – especially when explored diachronically – highlights the various interrelationships between the plants in question and their human proprietors. As shown above, each vernacular name corresponds with an anthropogenic function of the plant. Exploring the development of these names over time and space provides a fundamental outline from which a larger history can be fleshed out.

Aside from *C. elliptica* and *C. arborescens*, plants in the genus *Gouania* – still within Rhamnaceae, but characterized as woody vines – are also cited as the primary ingredients (most likely substitutes) in mauby (Hutt 1981, Bayley 1949). As each plant in Rhamnaceae shares similar biochemical properties, a large variety of them create more or less the same beverage. The most notable of these properties, the presence of saponins such as mabioside and the chemical colubrinin (secondary metabolites which most likely exist to deter predators that penetrate the hard sapwood), are ultimately responsible for mauby’s famous frothing trait – a foaming head which communicates an air of fermentation, regardless of whether or not the mauby is actually alcoholic – and its characteristic bitterness. Even with this basic understanding of mauby, the sheer magnitude of possible herbal combinations makes it and other bush-teas extremely difficult to investigate, as does the fact that very few people still practice bush-medicine. Still, contemporary mauby undoubtedly originated within the bush-tea tradition, regardless of whether or not it remains considered one today.
In 1797, an anonymous Jamaican author writes that, though Jamaican slaves drink primarily water, “they prefer cool drink, a fermented liquor made with chaw-stick, lignum vitae, brown sugar, and water” (F. H. Smith 2005). While not explicitly identified as mauby, the similarities of cool drink and mauby are too numerous to ignore. It is possible that cool drink, then, is a variant or antecedent of mauby. Lignum vitae (Guaiacum officinale) shares with C. arborescens the common names greenheart and ironwood and its wood chips can be boiled to make a medicinal decoction. However, lignum vitae cannot be confused with its cousins, as it grows over twice as tall as the two Colubrina species. That cool drink is boiled with brown sugar and contains similar herbal components to mauby indicates that, within Jamaican communities, its social functions may have been similar to mauby’s uses in Barbados.

Thirty years later, Mrs. Carmichael’s description of a St. Vincentian variant provides one of the first literary references of mauby by name. In discussing the after-church activities of “country negroes”, Carmichael notes that “Mobee is a drink prepared with sugar, ginger, and snakeroth; as a bitter it is fermented, and is a wholesome cooling beverage” (Carmichael 1833). Contemporary consumers still refer to mauby as a “cooling beverage” and a bitters, and still certainly add sugar (and in some cases, ginger, too) to the decoction. “Snakeroth” is not Ageratina altissima, the snakeroth known to cause milk sickness and poison cattle, but rather refers to another common name for C. elliptica (Gill 1882) and C. arborescens (Austin 2004) and is most likely an earlier version of the name “snakewood”. In his report, Gill also records that the leaves of C. elliptica are used to make a stomachic drug. This could be a reference to mauby, indicating that when making the decoction, mauby leaves may have been used in addition to (or as a precursor to) the bark. Gill may have misunderstood which part of the plant
was used to make beverages. While people describe the use of mauby leaves in herbal baths, there are no other indications of using them to make drinks.

**Possibilities of Fermentation**

As the nineteenth century progressed, mauby’s fundamental resemblance to coffee, tea, and mobbie persisted. In his 1864 publication of *Flora of the British West Indian Islands*, A.H.R. Grisebach briefly describes *Gouania domingensis* and *Colubrina reclinata*. The former, writes Grisebach, produces a “stomachic drug” while the latter yields “a fermented drink (*Mabie* of St. Lucia)” (Grisebach 1864). Unlike Gill, Grisebach seems to distinguish between the identity of a “stomachic drug” and that of the unique drink, “mabie”. Today, *C. reclinata* exists as a basonym of *C. elliptica* (Howard 1989). Some modern scholars, however, consider mauby bark to be a product *G. domingensis* – a synonym of *G. lupuloides*, known commonly as the chaw-stick (Bayley 1949) and used both for its tooth-brush qualities and to flavor ginger beer. The fermentation of Mauby may have been deliberate, but it is equally likely that the process occurred independently of a human-mediated process.

After emancipation and throughout the mid-nineteenth century, more sophisticated manuring and cultivation methods, as well as the advent of the steam mill, helped plantation owners double their sugar production (Starkey 1961). Since sugar acts as the primary fuel for the process of fermentation, it is not surprising that an increased sugar yield corresponds with an increased production of alcoholic beverages. If mauby, sweetened with the colony’s abundant supply of sugar, was set aside for too long without the proper storage considerations, it would ferment within a few days. Though the mauby consumed in Barbados today is nonalcoholic, it is probable that the original product was fermented. However, whether it was
Grisebach’s fermented *mabie* of St. Lucia or another variant (fermented mauby can still be found on several islands in the Caribbean region, including British Guiana, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic) (Volpato and Godínez 2004) remains unclear.

By the turn of the twentieth century, Bourbon cane agriculture was on the decline and the British Government highly encouraged a system of peasant agriculture (Starkey 1961). With declining sugar yields, perhaps the prevalence of fermented mauby declined as well. The possibility exists that mauby in Barbados was never alcoholic, but it is more likely that a fermented version existed, if only for a short period of time.

Another potential impetus of fermented mauby’s disappearance was the increasing availability of ice. As more individuals were able to obtain ice on a regular basis, workers sought out cold beverages. Mauby, newly introduced to Barbados, fit the niche perfectly. Through a supply of imported bark, the drink could be domestically produced, chilled, sweetened, and consumed in a fairly short amount of time, thereby not sitting long enough to ferment. Had mauby existed in an alcoholic form in Barbados, then the advent of ice may have contributed to its decline. The beverage’s foamy head still feigned an alcoholic nature, which may have led to some false beliefs, but in reality only indicated a reaction of organic chemicals. Producing and distributing cold drinks required constant maintenance and helped usher in an era where mauby, once again, existed as a staple beverage primarily produced and consumed by certain social subgroups.

**Herbal and Medicinal Uses**

At its most basic level, the mauby is simply an unsweetened bark decoction, though most batches include several ingredients to enhance the bark’s rich flavor and to release
aromatic vapors. A fairly generic mauby recipe consists of boiling the mauby bark, cinnamon and allspice sticks, and a couple bay leaves for thirty minutes. The bark, sticks, and leaves are strained, and the decoction is allowed to cool. Next, a simple syrup is prepared by boiling sugar and water, after which it is added to the unsweetened mauby bitters until the desired sweetness is obtained (Parkinson 1999). The drink is refrigerated, or in some cases left uncovered for a few days to allow fermentation to occur. In the case of fermented mauby, a portion of the batch may be saved to act as a starter for the next batch.

Though its herbal properties abound, mauby has been the subject of surprising little formal medical research. Alleyne and colleagues investigate the effects of regularly consuming mauby and coconut water, finding that individuals who consumed both on a regular basis exhibited reduced hypertension (Alleyne, et al. 2005). The same study notes that mauby is thought to stimulate the appetite and, when unsweetened, is used throughout the Caribbean to treat diabetes mellitus. Of particular note, the presence of jujubosides — an organic compound found in Colubrina species — has recently been linked to the reduction of anxiety, probably as a neurotransmitter inhibitor (Nielsen and Schnabel 2007). This reduction in anxiety could be the “cooling of the blood” effect that Barbadians most commonly ascribe to mauby use. Consumers do not seem to consider the cooling effects of mauby to be medicinal, however, instead citing the treatment of diabetes mellitus as mauby’s most common medicinal use. The minute amounts of scientific research that have been conducted on mauby bark and diabetes mellitus, on the other hand, suggest that there is no relationship between the bark and the disease (Houghton and Lau 1997). If true, a relationship between mauby and diabetes mellitus may be the result of compounds in mauby’s remaining herbal constituents, such as
cinnamon and allspice. Conversely, mauby’s benefits may also be the results of a placebo effect, begot by the ingraining of a folk medicine culture over several generations.

Mauby belongs to a category of herbal beverages called “bush-teas”, a catch-all group defined as “any infusion of (usually dried) herbs or ‘weeds’ that are considered medicinal...especially among older folk, as a means of maintaining health” (Allsopp and Allsopp 1996). The definition itself marks mauby producers (those who produce and drink bush teas in general) as traditional and old-timey. The distinction may not be unwarranted, as only the old fashioned herbalists truly know the wide variety of herbal constituents and substitutes that can be used to make mauby and other bush-teas. Additionally, it seems that older members of society are more like to continue to boil the bark, whereas younger generations largely prefer mauby syrup.

On Saba, the smallest island of the Netherlands Antilles, bush-teas remain a popular folk remedy. Though countless combinations of traditional medicines exist – depending on the proximity of certain herbs and the traditional practices associated with them – mauby continues to be exceptionally prevalent. Two of Saba’s most chronic illnesses for which bush-medicines are utilized are hypertension and diabetes mellitus, both of which happen to be treated by mauby (Nielsen and Schnabel 2007). The diuretic aspects of mauby reduce the volume of liquids in the body, which in turn reduces the pressure that leads to hypertension. Additionally, Sabans use wilted mauby leaves and mauby baths to treat skin irritation and rashes (Nielsen and Schnabel 2007). An unlabeled caption from the Barbados Museum’s exhibit archives also notes that “cooling mauby not only quenched your thirst but also was good for cleansing the blood and preventing rashes” (Bush Teas/Herbal Medicine, Artifact
While the act of using herbal teas as bathing components is not unique in and of itself, the prevalence of the practice in Barbados seems to have declined.

Other folk remedies – that is, those remedies that have not yet been proven by medical science, but are used at a local level – reference mauby as a blood-thinner, to be taken before surgery or during menopause, and even as a cure for male impotency (Kolander 2007). *Gouania polygama*, a relative of *C. elliptica* and a possible Mauby substitute, is cited by some as a powerful aphrodisiac and the main ingredient of the Dominican Republic’s *mabi* tea. Cookbooks accredit mauby with cleansing the blood and kidneys (Parkinson 1999). In his ethnobotanical survey of the Lesser Antilles, Desmond Nicholson records a large list of uses of *C. arborescens*, including “Mabi beverage, bladder [and] kidney [ailments],” to increase urination, “[as a] laxative...soap, firewood, [a] tonic giving appetite, posts, pilings, [and] necklaces.” However compelling Mauby’s medicinal and cultural uses might seem, the lack of academic literature concerning the beverage severely challenges the integrity of its curative properties.

**Mauby Women and Population Dynamics**

The arrival of mauby women around in the early twentieth century can best be described as the beginning of modern mauby’s golden age. Mauby women were present from Bridgetown to Speightstown and throughout the Barbadian countryside, specialized vendors who walked dusty plantation roads and busy urban streets alike, large mauby-filled containers balanced on their heads. “With deft hands sellers turn the taps of [the] heavy urns atop their heads, and a stream of cold juice splashes into a glass” (Allmon 1952). She would also carry her own tin cups, called tots, which were often made from Milo or Ovaltine cans with soldered-
on tin handles (Walcott 2009), and lemons with which to sterilize the tots after they had been used.

People throughout Barbados recognized mauby women as skilled vendors – dedicated women who travelled for miles to help quench the thirst of urban and rural workers alike. Marceline Walcott fondly remembers her grandmother, Mabel Wilkinson, who “used to do a trade and raise her five to six children selling mauby. [She] would balance that pitcher on top of [a] washcloth [and] without having to hold it [would] walk for fifteen to twenty minutes – sometimes half an hour or forty-five minutes – 'til she get to different work sites to sell her mauby ... and yet lived to the ripe old age of 101, going very close to 102” (Walcott 2009). Journalist after journalist remarked on the mauby women’s impressive dexterity. “I never saw a mauby tea vendor spill a single drop” (Allmon 1952). Despite the public’s fascination with these cultural figures, however, few texts attempt to understand more than just the tools of
their trade, resulting in a class of extraordinary women who are defined almost entirely by their material culture.

The presence of mauby women not only marks the pinnacle of mauby consumption in Barbados, but it also coincides with a period of time when women comprised a large part of the Barbadian workforce. According to the West Indian Census of 1946 (See Appendix IV), for every 100 men who lived in Barbados in 1921, there were 148 women (Starkey 1961). The mass emigration of men resulted largely from the call of the First World War and the draw of foreign economic ventures, such as the construction of the Panama Canal in the early twentieth century. Consequently, many women – women like Mabel Wilkinson and other mauby vendors – fell back on a cottage industry system in order to supplement their incomes, often peddling their domestically-produced wares throughout both urban and rural landscapes. Following the Second World War, Barbadian men began returning home from wartime jobs (Starkey 1961). By 1960, the aforementioned census projected that there would be 118 women for every 100 men. This resurgence of a male labor force in Barbados coincides with the declining presence of mauby women during the second half of the twentieth century.

The story of the mauby women is not the only example of mauby’s correlation with shifting population dynamics. Examining the settlement patterns of historic Bridgetown reveals a relationship between locations of marginal (lower class) groups and a lack of adequate storage space (in which mobbie and other foodstuffs might be kept). By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the formation of several residential districts compartmentalized Bridgetown’s religious and social diversity. Marginal groups, such as Jews and Quakers, migrated into small, private districts – notably the Jewish ghetto on Swan Street and the Quaker mini-ghetto on James Street (Figure 2) – while an exclusively Anglican quarter arose
around Back Church Street and the old churchyard in the west. The southern districts along the Indian River (present day Constitution River) generally remained mercantile in nature.

Around the turn of the 19th century, a small number of freed slaves, known as Freedmen, began to settle around the Roebuck, Swan, and Palmetto Street intersection and on Back Church Street (Bowden 2003). With the formal emancipation of slaves in 1834, what was once just a few Afro-Caribbean households quickly became several small Freedmen communities. Between 1765 and 1818 alone, Bowden cites that “the white population of Barbados dropped by 2,500 and the free coloured increased by the same number, from 500 to 3,000.”

Figure 1: Bridgetown, Barbados - 1640
By comparing the two figures, it becomes apparent that undesirable land – principally the western and eastern swamps and “the waste” (Figure 1) – was appropriated by households of lower socioeconomic status. The Jewish ghetto and the easternmost free black community are both located in areas that were once occupied by swampland (Figure 2). Properties on Swan Street, located in the vicinity of the old Western Swamp, held a reputation of being unsanitary and prone to water damage, and thus would have cost considerably less than most other lots (Bowden 2003). It is unlikely that many of these buildings had favorable cellars, if cellars at all, due to the presence of moisture in the drained swampland. The lack of reliable storage, therefore, would have contributed to a lifestyle more prone to a huckster supply system and the daily production and consumption of foodstuffs. As noted earlier, this style of production may have been attributed to the lower class rather than their gentry counterparts,
and in these situations, mobbie may have only lasted four or five days (or less, by some accounts) rather than four or five weeks.

**Remembering the Mauby Woman and Her Drink**

As cultural icons reminiscent of the near past, the mauby women and their stories persist in various forms of art and literature – from poems and folksongs, to museum recreations and photographs. The songs and poems that honor these women pay tribute both to the refreshing beverage that rested atop their heads and to the hard work and dedication that empowered every step of their long treks.

**The Mauby Woman:**

I remember the good old days  
when the Mauby woman would pass our way  
Especially out by de big plantation  
with workers toiling in de hot, hot sun.

On her head she balanced that jar with such style  
And on her face was always a friendly smile  
As she turned the tap to fill the cups  
Our faces too would soon lighten up.  
As we drank the Mauby, golden brown  
She always had enough to go around  
She knew how to make us as happy as a lark  
with that wholesome drink made from a tree’s bark.

Unfortunately, gone are the days of the Mauby Woman  
This drink is now sold at stores by the gallons  
Just add the syrup to water and stir in a cup  
Delicious Mauby, Let’s drink it all up.

-Dwane Goddard (Goddard 2007)
Mauby Women, Courtesy of the Gibbs Family
THE MAUBY WOMAN

She came down the hill,  
Her head held high,  
An apron covered her dress.  
Hand balancing the cask .  
Cushioned on her crest,  
Her voice was a rooster’s  
That rolled down the hill,  
Through wide-eyed windows  
Propped open with poles,  
To summon the maids  
To bring clean evers.  
For she had lots of jugs to fill.  "Mauby Woman," she would cry.  "Get yuh sweet mauby here!"  Children ran to get their share.  
A ewer filled to frothing  
With the sweetest of mauby,  
Just a few pennies could buy.  
She begged for a heist  
To rest the cask on her head,  
And having contracted her business,  
She rolled her change in a handkerchief  
And hid it below in her dress.  
With measured gait she pursued her path,  
Refreshing homes with her labour.  
Every noon in blazing weather,  
Her voice kept up the outcry:  "Mauby woman! Get yuh sweet mauby!"  
And we never knew when she died.

(Rudder 1994)

“Miz Mattie”

1. Miz Mattie does mek some big, big bread,  
Got in soda to kill yuh dead.  
Although she know de time so hard  
She won’ keep outa Kendal yard.

Chorus

De time so hard, de crop so bad,  
De white man workin’ we to death.  
We cahn even buy a poun’ o’ lard  
An’ she won’ keep outa Kendal yard.

2. Miz Mattie walk down to Bowmanston,  
Salt bread and fish cakes breakin’ she down.  
Although she know de time so hard  
She won’ keep outa Kendal yard.

3. Miz Mattie walk from Pool to Guinea  
Wid Johnny-bakes an' cocoa-tea.  
Although she know de time so hard  
She won' keep outa Kendal yard.

4. Miz Mattie walk out to Claybury  
Wid dumplings, muffins an' sweet mauby.  
Although she know de time so hard  
She won' keep outa Kendal yard.

5. Miz Mattie walk out to Colleton  
Wid puddin' bread an' half-cent buns.  
Although she know de time so hard  
She won' keep outa Kendal yard.

6. Miz Mattie walk out to Palmer’s Gate  
Wid fry-pancakes an' saltfish bakes.  
Although she know de time so hard  
She won' keep outa Kendal yard.

7. Miz Mattie come in de yard at Bath  
Wid 'light-sweet, heavy-sweet' six-an-a-half.  
Although she know de time so hard  
She won' keep outa Kendal yard.

(Rudder 1994)                                                               (Marshall, McGeary and Thompson 1996)
Both Goddard and Rudder seek to honor the mauby woman through poetry, and in doing so, help to reveal some of the characterizations that surround her person. Conversely, the traditional folk song “Miz Mattie” mentions mauby in a long line of peddled items. Noted in the song are all the various plantation yards that Miz Mattie visited on her long walks. Remembering the joy brought by the “wholesome drink made from a tree’s bark”, Goddard cites the mauby woman’s jovial and amicable demeanor. The prose-like poem turns gloomier, however, as Goddard considers the gallons of contemporary mauby syrup – yet still he optimistically ends, “Let’s drink it all up.” Rudder, on the other hand, provides a more somber, narrative free verse. After describing the mauby woman’s basic outfit, Rudder details how “she rolled her change in a handkerchief and hid it below her dress.” After such meticulously detailed descriptions, the poem ends solemnly. “We never knew when she died” clearly alludes to the mid-century disappearance of the beverage vendors, who vanished from the streets as quickly and quietly as they had appeared. In each case, the authors lament the loss of the mauby woman and the traditional drink she sold.

These nostalgic undertones are not just restricted to reflective poetry, historic photos, and illustrative folksongs. Descriptions of the mauby vendors occur frequently in books that depict Barbadian heritage (Watson 2003, Yates 1998, Fraser, et al. 1990). After noting the mauby woman’s disappearance with the “proliferation of fast food outlets”, Karl Watson describes the mauby woman as a “familiar and welcome sight to thirsty shoppers who thronged the dusty streets of town” (Watson 2003). In his anecdotal narratives on Barbadian social life, Elombe, a Barbadian nationalist and author, frequently reminisces about mauby. He speaks fondly of its “whiffs of aromatic vanilla” and the “frothy-dead mauby, served [to] many of our parents” (Mottley 2003b). With such a rich social history that reaches back to pre-contact
Caribs while also touching the lives of several generations of modern families, it comes as no surprise that mauby exists today as a cultural icon of Barbados.

As methods of transportation grew in efficiency and fast food restaurants freckled Barbadian cities, the prominence of the mauby woman declined. Indeed, Elombe writes of Chefette, a Barbadian fast food restaurant that “covers everything: chicken, roti, pizza, hamburger, ice cream...and everything to drink from mauby to wine” (Mottley, Identities 2003b). It is interesting to note that Elombe seems to place mauby opposite of wine on what appears to be a spectrum that illustrates Chefette’s diversity and uniqueness. This suggests that, contrary to the sophistication and prestige associated with wine, mauby retains an identity that parallels simpler tastes and lighter wallets. By 1960, the specialized drink vendors had largely disappeared, replaced by the more efficient distribution systems that existed via the automobile and fast food venues. Shortly thereafter, companies such as L.G. Miller & Sons, LTD. began producing a mauby-flavored, sugary syrup that, when combined with water, yielded sweetened mauby (C. Fraser 1975). The innovation took off immediately, feeding off of an inherent need for efficiency and the increasingly global desire for instant gratification. Fewer and fewer households made mauby from scratch, as the syrup was easier to prepare and tasted less bitter than the original bark decoction.

Mauby, as it is known today, exists on the threshold of what might potentially be another shift in identity. Today the syrup is even more widely consumed, while less and less people boil mauby bark. Multinational beverage corporations, seizing the opportunity to exploit dedicated consumers, bottle mauby as a refreshing, cooling drink, or as a natural, Amerindian-inspired energy drink (Mabi Power 2009). The choice to advertise herbal drinks as “Amerindian” or “traditional” results largely from a popular pan-Caribbean movement in which
countries seek to reestablish a national connection with the region’s historic, indigenous inhabitants. From its Amerindian origin as a fermented sweet potato beverage, to its continuation as an herbal bark decoction, to its transformation into a concentrated syrup and mass-produced refreshment, it is clear that the development of Mauby will always remain closely tied to processes of globalization.

**Conclusion**

The idiom “to have (a) champagne taste with/on (a) mauby pocket” describes a person who wishes for a lavish lifestyle, but who does not have the means to support it. In the Caribbean Multilingual Dictionary of Flora, Fauna, and Foods, Jeannette Allsopp analyzes this phrase, stating that “both liquids are goldish in colour and both have bubbles, so that the costliness of the former contrasts sharply with the folk economy indicated by the latter” (J. Allsopp 2003). Allsopp’s explanation illustrates the connection between beverages, social status and economic systems. Despite the two drinks’ physical similarities, people often associate champagne, an expensive imported beverage, with upper class lifestyles and market economies. Conversely, Allsopp notes mauby’s relationship with folk economies – the mentioning of which suggests the interaction of lower and middle class individuals with more traditional economic systems, rather than market and command economies.

Mauby, as it is produced, distributed, and consumed today, exists as a product of several hundred years of intimate plant-human interactions. A medicinal enigma, its curative properties remain shrouded in uncertainty. They will most likely continue to be so until medical science can better shed light on the diverse functions of the bark’s various organic compounds. By exploring the social history of mauby and its significant role in Caribbean (especially
Barbadian) culture, it becomes apparent that changes in the globalization of mauby production, distribution, and consumption parallel transformations in Barbadian society. Additionally, understanding mauby’s history helps us to better understand, and thus preserve, mauby’s identity as a cultural icon and will hopefully shed light on the importance of ethnobotanical and socioenvironmental inquiries as bridges between history, culture, and the environment.

By no means does the case study of mauby in Barbados equate to a comprehensive history of mauby in the Caribbean. Other histories exist and intermingle, unique to each of the Caribbean communities in which mauby exists or has existed. The exploration of mauby’s interrelationships within these communities as well can only be described as paramount to the understanding of the beverage’s overall social and environmental impact. With a more holistic survey, one hopes to illuminate patterns of consumption and production – patterns that in turn may lead to the affirmation or rejection of mauby’s medicinal worth, or to a better understanding of traditional medical practices and the human-environment relationship in general. Along with more interviews and field work, exploring relevant literature throughout Europe and the Caribbean (certain papers and texts can only be found in certain locations) will be a crucial step towards constructing a wider lens in which the full spectrum of mauby’s historical and socioenvironmental relationships may be viewed.

Despite the drink’s cultural significance, mauby’s identity might well be on the verge of yet another shift. The overharvesting of *Colubrina elliptica* bark means a thinning population, which may soon equate to the disappearance of traditional boiled mauby and the emergence of some synthetic substitute. Instead of watching this happen, producers and consumers must look towards methods of sustainable production – whether it be silviculture, reduced harvesting, or an attempt to utilize local species as substitutes. Even something as simple as
boiling batches of bark twice may help reduce the demand for fresh ingredients, and thus will help relieve some of the system’s stress. Still, reconstructing current practices will certainly demand more social and environmental changes. Furthermore, modern portrayals of mauby, such as those by beverage corporations, increasingly depict it as a traditional herbal drink that is interchangeable with guarapo and chicha – sugar cane juice and a fermented maize beverage, respectively. Unlike mauby, it appears that guarapo and chicha do not exist as commodities in the global market, instead being produced solely in domestic, community, and regional settings. The three drinks undeniably have different histories, and while they may be functionally similar in some respects (social lubricants, adherence to tradition, family bonding, etc.) their cultural and medicinal values are certainly not identical. Rather than compromising the distinctiveness of all three of these beverages, consumers need to be aware of the value (be it cultural, environmental, or economic) inherent in their diversity.

Mauby’s story communicates a socioenvironmental history that frames a rich and dynamic Barbadian identity. It shows that maintaining cultural diversity via the preservation of unique cultural icons remains just as important as maintaining biodiversity via the preservation of organisms and habitats. To reiterate Carole Crumley, “No spot on the earth is unaffected by humans” (C. L. Crumley 1994). Going further, no human is unaffected by their environment. Certainly, then, no culture – indeed, no nation – exists without the presence of a socioenvironmental dialogue – a dialogue which is clearly present throughout the history of mauby in Barbados.
Appendix I – Mauby Recipes

From Culinaria, pp. 152 (Parkinson 1999)

"Mauby or Mawby

This is a drink made from the bark of small trees (Colubrina elliptica or C. arborescens) indigenous to the Caribbean. Its bitterness is an acquired taste.

4 ounces (125 grams) mauby bark
8 cups (2 liters) water
1/2 cinnamon stick
1/2 allspice stick
1 clove stick
3 bay leaves
2 cups (500 grams) sugar

Bring the mauby bark, spices, bay leaves and 7 cups (1.75 liters) of water to a boil in a large pot. Simmer for 25 minutes. Remove from heat and let cool. Strain out the bark, the spice sticks and the bay leaves. Boil sugar with the remaining water until dissolved. Mix with the mauby mixture to taste. Place in bottles with screw caps and refrigerate. Serve chilled with ice. This drink is not only refreshing, it is very good for detoxification of the blood and kidneys. Makes 8 glasses."

Stephen's Mother (Mum) (Personal Communication)

Mauby Bark (5-10 pieces - "a small handful")
Clove (Teaspoon)
Cinnamon (3-4 pieces)
Aniseed (Tablespoon)
2 Bay Leaves
1 Tsp. Rose Essence*
1 Tsp. Vanilla Essence*
1 Tsp. Cinnamon Essence
1 Tsp. Coconut Essence
1 Tsp. Almond Essence*

Bring the mauby bark, spices and 1.5 liters of water to boil (uncovered) for 30 minutes. Let tea cool. Once cool, strain ingredients. Add Essences to Tea - Rose, Vanilla, and Almond essences are the most important. Add about 1 pint of water to Tea and Essence. Add 5 generous Tablespoons of sugar to mixture, and mix. Strain remaining sugar and add water. Makes approximately 2 quarts.

Can boil ingredients a second time and repeat recipe for 2nd batch.
Let's Eat What We Grow, Grow What We Eat pp. 3-4 (C. Fraser, Let's Eat What We Grow, Grow What We Eat 1981)

1 heaped tablespoon mauby bark
1 small piece orange peel
1/2 inch strip cinnamon stick (stick spice)
4-6 cloves
Vanilla essence
Bitters
2 blades mace
6 1/2 pints cold water
Covering of nutmeg
1 1/2 lbs. of sugar to taste

METHOD:
Boil mauby bark and orange with cinnamon, cloves and mace in about 1/2 pint water until there is a strong tea-like flavour. Allow to cool, then add sugar, vanilla essence and bitters and remaining water. Strain into bottles. Leave for about 2-3 before use.

[pp. 4] NOTE: More water, sugar, bitters and essence may be added according to taste.

Springer's Caribbean Cookbook, pp. 107 (Springer 1979)

[pp. 107]
50 g (2 oz) mauby bark large piece cinnamon (spice)
12 cups water few cloves
Piece of mace piece dried orange peel
Brown sugar (about 900g or 2 lb)

Boil mauby bark in water (about 4 cups) with spice, cloves, mace and orange peel until liquid is very bitter (about 1/2 hour). Strain it off, add the rest of water and sugar until very sweet. Bottle the cooled liquid, leaving neck of bottle unfilled for froth. Cover and leave for 3 days. Serve very cold.

Nancy Davis (Personal Communication)

Mauby Bark
Stick of Hard Spice (Cinnamon)
Orange peel
Mixed essence
Milton's Mother (Personal Communication with Milton Inniss)

Mauby bark
Cinnamon stick
Orange peel

Let's Eat What We Grow, Grow What We Eat, pp. 8

SWEET POTATO BEVERAGE
1 lb white sweet potatoes
1/2 oz cloves
Water
4 large limes or 3 lemons
1/2 oz mace
3-4 lbs sugar
1 egg white, well beaten

METHOD:
1. Peel and grate potato and wash until free of starch.
2. Squeeze limes or lemons and strain juice.
3. Bring clove and mace to the boil in a little water and strain.
4. Pack potatoes into a stone jar, add sugar, lime juice and cooled clove and mace liquid.
5. Add 1 gallon water and stir until sugar is dissolved.
6. Whisk in egg white, cover and allow to stand for 8 days.
7. Strain and bottle in strong dark bottles, tying down the cork.

NOTE: This may be used after 4 days but it is much better when more mature. As an alternative, reduce spices and add yeast.


Sweet Potato Wine
1 lb potatoes
4 lbs sugar
1 gallon water
1 oz yeast
1 lb dried fruits

Method
1. Wash and peel the potatoes, cut them up very small, add to them the chopped dried fruits, sugar and cover with the water.
2. Add the yeast dissolved in a little warm water. Stir well and leave to ferment for 3 weeks, then strain and bottle.
**Sweet Potato Wine**

5 lbs potatoes (do not peel them)
2 oranges
1 gallon water
1 oz root ginger (bruised)
2 lemons
4 lbs yellow crystal sugar

**Method**
1. Scrub the potatoes well and cut up into fairly large pieces.
2. Boil the potatoes in the water for 10 minutes, then strain out the potatoes
3. Add to the liquid the rinds of lemons and oranges, add the ginger and boil for a further 15 minutes
4. Have ready a bowl containing the sliced oranges, lemons and sugar. Strain the liquid over and let it stand for 48 hours, then bottle and cork loosely. Strain off after 21 days.

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**Appendix II – Interview with Marceline Walcott**


**Regarding Mabel Wilkinson (Marceline's Grandmother) and Mauby**

"I talk a bit about my grandmother. What I was told because I was not around at the time. She live to 101. But during my younger days, I've heard that my grandmother used to sell Mauby. Mauby is a refreshing drink that came from the bark - what you call Mauby Bark. Mauby Bark, I believe, was made in uhm a Caribbean island, just like Barbados. Maybe Dominica, St. Vincent, or St. Lucia. It's a bark you boil uh with spices. You light the stove. You warm the water. You put in the Mauby bark, and you brew it I would say for about 15 or 20 minutes, and when brewed it is uhm a liquid form with something like a froth - similar to a beer, when you open a
Banks beer how you get that froth. Or if you use a beer from the, the, well what I call a tap, you get the beer with a froth. The Mauby Bark comes with a froth.

In Barbados you get Mauby bark already brewed, where you can just add water. Is a little sweetener, maybe sugar, and you just need to add tap water. Mauby is uhm a drink, I would say is a refreshing drink. When you're hot, since the Caribbean is known to be a hot climate, it is a refreshing drink. You can have it with spices when you boil the Mauby bark. You put in spice, something called spice. You can put in a little nutmeg, not too much. But when it is already boiled, then you can add your sugar to taste. You can drink it without sugar, but you can also add your sugar.

My grandmother, she used to sell the Mauby in her early days in a pitcher, like something with a tap. It was out of enamel. She would take that pitcher on her head, with this tap, and she would walk to Bridgetown to the countrysides where there are work folks, and she would sell this Mauby. I don't know how it was retailed at - how much - but she used to do a trade and raise her five to six children selling Mauby. People on the work sites, when she go around to people who cut canes and load canes that bought the Mauby, they would already have what they call, something like a cup. Ovaltine is a tea we call Ovaltine tea or Milo tea. They take the same tin that the Milo or Ovaltine came in and they turn it into the form of a cup. They get a goldsmith or some kind of welder - tinsmith, a tinsmith - to weld on a handle out of what I would say enamel.

And there, the people on the work sites, like loading the cane or carrying the cane, would have their own cup - I call it a cup but it was out of the Ovaltine or Milo tin. Tinsmith would, would meld, would weld the the handle, and they would use that handle to to use - to hold the cup, which is the Ovaltine or the Milo cup, to have the Mauby poured out in. And you
would know when the Mauby is going to drink good, because when its poured out in that cup, you get like a froth similar as I said earlier like you get when you’re drinking a Banks beer in a mug. And it's a refreshing drink. It quench the thirst when the sun is very hot. And even though you would think - you guess you all would be wondering, but how she could walk from Bridgetown with that pitcher on her head with that Mauby and yet live to the ripe old age of 101, going very close to 102. But however, she did it. She was a a Christian person. She never had a beer. She never had no kind of alcohol drink. And she raise her children as a single mother. But she enjoy selling the Mauby. And for those who haven't drank that Mauby, I guess the recipe would be: Get the bark. You boil the bark 15-20 minutes and you let that bark cool. Then you poor it out, oh, you poor it out in a glass. You add your sugar, your ice water, and some cubes of ice. And that would be you refreshing drink called Mauby. It's a Caribbean drink.

And when she carrying the pitcher on her head, she would tie what you would call something like a washcloth - she would tie that and put it on her head. And she would balance that pitcher on top of that washcloth - without having to hold it and walk, I would say for 15, 20 minutes - sometimes half an hour, 45 minutes - 'til she get to different work sites to sell her Mauby. And that is how she raise her kids from selling the Caribbean drink called Mauby.

Interviewer: I have a question: When you said 'It's made out of enamel", what did you mean by that...

Yeah. The Ovaltine, the Ovaltine tin, or the Milo tin, is a tin. It's a tin. But the handle would be something like, the same tin, but it wouldn't be colorful like the Milo or Ovaltine tin.
The handle would be out of - I call it tinning, tinning. Yeah. And they would have their Mauby drink in that, in that tin.

**Ok. And uhm I’ve heard that Mauby could be good for...for diabetes or for kidneys...**

Well yes. If it is good for diabetes or other whatever ailments there are, I believe you wouldn’t add sugar, because diabetics shouldn’t really use sugar. So it would just be the boiled - the bark boiled - and then you - Yes, I told him about the spice you would add to it - but then if you boiling it for a diabetic, you wouldn’t need essence. Essence is something to help add flavor to it that would be a little sweet. So you would just actually boil the bark, and the diabetic can use it without any spices or any essence that might be - tend to be - sweet or any sugar.

**Interviewer: Ok.**

Some people might use it with the diabetic sweetener, or might be a little bit of honey, but it is a bitter. I should get to that earlier as I spoke, but, it is bitter. Some people might not even want to go there by drinking that since it is bitter, but, it is a refreshing drink if it is made properly. And it don’t make any sense hearing me talk up a storm without having a sample to taste the good old Bajan drink called Mauby.

**And is this something that that growing up you would have been exposed to at a young age?**

Yeah. I was exposed to it since my grandmother raised me, and she used to sell the Mauby for a living. So it was like, Mauby for breakfast, lunch and dinner. But still, you didn’t have enough to get tired of it, because it was this, you know, uniq - unique drink that you
wouldn't get tired of it. Some people will use it when they are having lunch, but I prefer to have it as a refreshing drink. If you are thirsty, rather than having a glass of water, you have a glass of Mauby. Yeah.

**But I noticed that a lot of people don’t - I mean a lot of the kids don’t drink it anymore...**

No, they don’t drink it because it is bitter, and children tend to like - you know - drinks where they just open - open the bottle, put it to the head, and they drink it and it's sweet. But Mauby right now - when you buy Mauby from the supermarket you either buy the bark - where you have to boil it and make the Mauby drink - or you buy the the Mauby already boiled where you have to add water. But Mauby is not sold as a drink where you just open the cover and put it to your head and drink it. So probably the distributors need to look at that and then they will do more sales. Rather then having to mix it from scratch, they will have it on the shelf already bottled, where you can buy it and once it's chilled you can use it on the spot."

*Additional Note* Mauby would be iced, and when the mauby can would get too cold, it would be taken off Mabel's head and pushed in a hand-cart.
## Appendix III – Mauby Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Author Referenced</th>
<th>Mauby</th>
<th>Social History</th>
<th>Environmental Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before Contact</td>
<td></td>
<td>Amerindian Production of Mobbie</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1627</td>
<td></td>
<td>32 Essequibo Arawaks brought to Barbados by Henry Powell</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1628</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bridgetown Founded</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca. 1650</td>
<td>Heinrich Von Uchteritz</td>
<td>Gentry make a drink from sweet potatoes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bridgetown Swamps and &quot;The Waste&quot; Drained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1652</td>
<td>Father Biet</td>
<td>&quot;Sweetened mauby&quot; as substitute for wine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1654</td>
<td>Richard Ligon</td>
<td>Consumed by white servants</td>
<td>Drink most generally used on the island</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1670</td>
<td>John Oldmixon</td>
<td>&quot;The Servants and Slaves Drinks are Mobbie&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1710</td>
<td>T. Walduck</td>
<td>&quot;Sparkling mobby&quot; served at Christenings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1734</td>
<td>Nathan Lucas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Beetles destroy island's vegetable (esp. sweet potato) production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1743</td>
<td>Nathan Lucas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Beetles destroy island's vegetable (esp. sweet potato) production for second time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1750</td>
<td>Griffith Hughes</td>
<td>Consumed primarily by sugar boilers and overseers; Potentially a source of dry bellyache (lead poisoning)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Author Referenced</td>
<td>Mauby</td>
<td>Social History</td>
<td>Environmental Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1812</td>
<td>Nathan Lucas</td>
<td>No mention of mauby in either form; &quot;Madeira is the ordinary drink in all the English colonies&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sweet potato worm infestation attributed to the eruption of St. Vincent's Soufrière</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>John Augustine Walker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1833</td>
<td>Mrs. Carmichael</td>
<td>Contemporary mauby consumed by Afro-Caribbeans in St. Vincent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1834</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Emancipation of Slaves</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>End of Apprenticeship Period</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1834</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>Grisebach, A.H.R.</td>
<td><em>Gouania domingensis</em> yields a stomachic drug; <em>Colubrina reclinata</em>, a fermented drink (Mabie of S. Lucia)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca. 1905</td>
<td>Otis P. Starkey</td>
<td></td>
<td>Emigration of Barbadians to work on the Panama Canal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Beginning of World War I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>End of World War I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Old Barbados: 1900-1970s</td>
<td>Alleged emergence of mauby women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>Otis P. Starkey</td>
<td></td>
<td>Census reveals 148 females per 100 males</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Beginning of World War II</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>End of World War II</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Old Barbados: 1900-1970s</td>
<td>Beginning of the disappearance of mauby women</td>
<td></td>
<td>Barbadian males continue to return from war jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Otis P. Starkey</td>
<td>West Indian Census estimates 118 females per 100 males</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Barbadian Sovereignty</td>
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Appendix IV – West Indian Census Data, 1946

The Population of Barbados, 1851-1960

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census date</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Females per 100 males</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>62,272</td>
<td>73,667</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>135,939</td>
</tr>
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<td>1861</td>
<td>70,799</td>
<td>81,928</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>152,727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>73,452</td>
<td>88,590</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>162,042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>77,253</td>
<td>94,607</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>171,860</td>
</tr>
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<td>1891</td>
<td>81,657</td>
<td>101,210</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>182,867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Estimated</td>
<td>200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>70,597</td>
<td>101,760</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>172,337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>62,421</td>
<td>93,353</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>156,774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>85,727</td>
<td>107,073</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>192,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>*106,263</td>
<td>*125,722</td>
<td>*118</td>
<td>232,085t</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*preliminary


“That emigration is not new is shown by the excess of women which has appeared in every census shown in Table I. Most of the migrants are males and the excess of females gives a rough idea of the rate of emigration. Detailed data [pp. 8] kept since World War II show that the net migration varies greatly from year to year. From 1946 to 1950 there was a net immigration each year resulting from the return of Barbadians from war jobs. From 1951 to 1954 the net emigration has been modest. Since 1955 there has been a heavy emigration but in no year has the net emigration equaled the natural increase. It is certain that these migration data are inaccurate since the estimated population for March 31, 1960 (based on natural increase less recorded net migration) was 11,000 more than the 1960 census tabulated a week later” (Starkey 1961).
Bibliography


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