

# Decolonial Subversions

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An exploration of agency within  
Maroon ecological praxis: Unearthing  
the histories of Maroon ecology in  
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## Abstract

The intricate histories of Maroon ecology contain complex, layered histories of agency that shaped and redefined Maroon experiences. Rather than relying on one-sided colonial narratives of Maroon spatiality and ecological praxis that confine these experiences to the institution of slavery and defence against enslavement, this research goes deeper to explore agency through the ecological relations in the Maroon sites of Jamaica and Brazil from 1630 to 1780. By examining existing literature on Maroon experiences, this work seeks to re-imagine these relations by recognising Maroon ecology both in context and as a legitimate part of history. It also seeks to develop a framework that offers deeper insight into Maroon ecology, mainly through understanding the inextricable link between the environment and Maroon experiences.

Keywords: Maroon, agency, ecology, hinterland, coloniality, colonialism

## Introduction

Maroon ecology is a site-specific understanding of the activities, knowledge and relations practised within the environment. By understanding agency—the ability to act through the ecological commonalities of the everyday—this three-part analysis follows a decolonial and intimate understanding of Maroon ecology in Palmares, Brazil, and Jamaica. This analysis goes further to build on pre-existing traditional studies of enslavement and marronage to identify the processes of existing with the environment after marronage.

The paper is structured thematically into three sections and aims to develop an overall picture of how Maroons exercised their agency through practices within the environment. The first section, 'A Literary Undertaking', seeks to assess the extent to which pre-existing studies of Maroons have centred agency in relation to Maroon ecology through an exploration of the vast literature within Maroon studies. The second section, 'A cross-regional and ecological comparative study of Maroons from 1630 to 1780', is an investigation into the ecological contexts of Jamaica and Palmares, Brazil, which more specifically studies the structures, landscapes and practices within these environments. The chapter follows an empirical analysis of how agency in relation to the environment was both regulated and practised. The final section, 'Re-conceptualising the Significance of Maroon Sites and Re-imagining Maroon Ecological Praxis', seeks to explore the significance of Maroon environmental practices within history and sets out a framework that subverts colonial notions by highlighting the inextricable link to the environment. Therefore, this paper engages critically with a range of disciplines and uses tenets of eco-critical theory and cultural ecology to elucidate the histories of Maroons and the environment—both essential and mutually reinforcing.

This work does not exist in isolation but rather adds to the body of Maroon studies and histories in Palmares and Jamaica. The field of Maroon studies is comprised of colonial historical works starting in the early eighteenth century, anthropological accounts and later historical and archaeological accounts. An ecological account has been merely peripherally situated within the context of Maroon history and as a sub-section of Maroon experiences, which is informed by colonial frameworks that solely focus on the materiality of enslavement. This has coincided with the notion that much of the knowledge within Maroon studies has been 'exhausted' and 'complete',<sup>1</sup> especially after the contributions of the 1970s. This paper posits the reverse of these misconceptions and highlights Maroon agency within ecology as an important element within an evolving body of Maroon studies. Furthermore, it also understands that Palmares has been extensively researched and seeks not to repeat the pre-existing information but aims to centre on ecology and thereby develop further understandings of Palmares.

However, this contribution can only highlight some aspects of Maroon ecology within the contexts of Jamaica and Palmares, Brazil. Accounts of relations are extracted from existing literature within Maroon studies, which form only part of this history. Given the structures of colonialism, a great majority of Maroon experiences went unwritten or have been

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<sup>1</sup> Greg Zugrave, *Maroons and the Jamaican frontier zones of the eighteenth century* (University of North Carolina, 2005), 17.

rewritten; hence, much of the records of Maroon ecology are oral or written from the perspective of colonial officials and many later historiographers.

A people without a positive history is like a vehicle without an engine - Steve Biko.<sup>2</sup>

## I - Maroon Ecology - A Literary Undertaking

*Maroon* is a term for communities formed of people who escaped the slave-economy to live autonomously in various regions within Brazil, south-eastern United States, Peru, Suriname, Jamaica and other colonies in the Americas. From the early sixteenth century—a mere thirteen years after Columbus' arrival—until the late nineteenth century, it is estimated that over 4,000,000 enslaved Africans were transported to Brazil. From 1703 to 1800, it is estimated that 285,939 Africans were transported to Jamaica.<sup>3</sup> With the steady arrival of a population mainly from West Africa, communities comprised of men and women who were sold, captured or stolen and made to work on plantations. Maroon communities rapidly grew larger in size within the colonies.

Through escaping the plantation economy and building their lives in different areas within the landscape, Maroon communities in Jamaica and Brazil formed as both loose and systematic collective entities in their rejection of enslavement. This process of escape, otherwise termed *marronage*, derives from the term *cimarron*, which originally referred to domestic cattle taking flight to the hills. Historically, ideas of *marronage* have been separated into quantifiable categories termed *petit marronage* and *grand marronage*, as coined by Gabriel Debien. Whilst useful in offering numerical insight and nuance to the process, these terms did not focus on its spatial dimensions, which reveal the internal dynamics of Maroon communities. The term *marronage* has been expanded on by the work of Sylviane Diouf,<sup>4</sup> whose holistic reframing of the process looks beyond 'numbers, distance, and longevity'<sup>5</sup> as the most significant factors and instead brings landscape to the fore. These new categorisations, such as '*borderland and hinterland marronage*', describe the experiences as location-specific and, importantly, situate *marronage* in geography and historical relationships to place.

### What is the link between Maroon agency and the environment, and why is it important?

Given that all human activity is largely situated within the environment, an in-depth analysis combining environmental history, social theory and the political economy is a necessary undertaking that complements the existing body of Maroon studies. A study of agency within Maroon ecology follows from the existing literature and findings within archaeology and goes further to contextualise such human-environmental relationships. Historical archaeology has documented human-environmental relations in the Caribbean

<sup>2</sup> Steve Biko, *I write what I like* (Oxon: Heinemann. 2007), 29.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Price, *Maroon Societies* (Doubleday, 1996), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Sylviane Diouf, *Slavery's exiles* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Sylviane Diouf, *Slavery's exiles*, 5.

and offered insight into the everyday practices within residential villages, contributing to the pre-existing historical and anthropological perspectives within Maroon studies.<sup>6</sup>

The study of agency within Maroon ecology examines human relations with varied aspects of the environment in an effort to add detail to the intricacies of the everyday, such as ‘relations of power and resistance’.<sup>6</sup> Marronage then, in the context of ecology, is not the end result in understanding Maroon agency but rather a *means* to understand the ends—that is, the types of practices encountered in the environment. Location, topography, diet, ritual and agricultural practices are themes encompassed under human ecology and relevant in the context of Maroons, as people who escaped the slave economy that was part of a larger global structure of capitalism. Thus, in this study, the environment is inextricably part of a nexus of human interaction that has implications on both the micro-societal and global-macro level. This work, in attempting to root human experience as inseparable from Maroon ecology, gives more accuracy to these experiences. Most records of Maroon societies have been framed by non-Maroons, at least until the twentieth century. This, along with conceptual and ideological framings that assisted the study of *the other*, has affected the ways Maroons and the landscape are portrayed within literature.<sup>7</sup> Early seventeenth and eighteenth-century literature outrightly rejected and denied Maroon agency in the context of ecology—as expressed in bodies of work such as Edward Long’s *The History of Jamaica 1774*, which described Maroons as ‘living a savage way of life... in the woods’<sup>8</sup> and planters who saw marginal lands as ‘untamed, savage, dark and mysterious, just like the negroes’. Later works from a range of disciplines however, have aimed to explore Maroon’s relation to the environment in a more humane manner, highlighting agency both in their lives and relations despite some conceptual limitations.

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### What does locating agency within Maroon ecology aim to achieve?

Locating agency within environmental praxis allows for greater ways of understanding the intersecting intricacies of the Maroon experience. Importantly, it highlights the humanity of Maroons and centres aspects of their ontology that have historically been denied. From Maori and Indigenous cosmology it emerges that throughout centuries the experience of human identity has been inextricably bound up within the land,<sup>9</sup> and as Jeff Malpas asserts, the landscape is ‘heart mind and soul’. To examine ecology and recognise agency in such relations is therefore to centre humanity within the Maroon experience.

The concept of agency, defined as ‘the capacity for action’,<sup>10</sup> is significant given the history of Maroons as people who were formerly denied agency over their bodies and space during colonial rule. Exploring agency within the framework of Maroon ecology, therefore, acknowledges the reality and strict parameters of the enslaved experience. It also questions the conceptual limitations around ideas of the *body* in the environment, which in Maroon

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<sup>6</sup> Katherine McKittrick, *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*. Social and Cultural Geography, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Diouf, *Slavery’s exiles*, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica, Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1774), 339.

<sup>9</sup> Jeff Malpas, *Place and experience*. 2nd ed. (Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 3.

<sup>10</sup> Malpas, *Place and experience*, 217.

studies literature has practised the delineation of Maroons as mere *'runaway slaves'*. This terminology is based on a viewpoint that centres the 'colonial loss' as fixed within the parameters of slave-labour and does not account for Maroons as actors possessing agency over their bodies.

The framework of Maroon ecology also goes further to establish new forms of analysis, which will be explored in subsequent sections. If it is accepted that experience is intimately connected with place and that Maroon studies is an evolving body of work that to some extent has historically omitted agency in relation to Maroon ecology, there must be a committed analysis to explore the legacies of Maroon ecological praxis outside the realms of identification with colonial notions. Importantly, many ideas found in Maroon studies may not be overtly colonial—in that they directly enforce or re-enforce colonial-racial geographies or yield slave labour to the accumulation of material wealth—but rather are infused within *coloniality*, which is 'based upon the racial-social classification of the world population under a Euro-centred world power', extending to every arena of social existence and including portrayals within literature.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, such works solely reinforces the idea of Maroons' relation to the environment as characterised by disenfranchisement, war and destitution. It questions the assumptions and theoretical underpinnings that inform the understandings of Maroon agency in ecological praxis, specifically those rooted in the 'structural workings of racism which kept Black cultures *in place* and tagged them as *placeless*'.<sup>12</sup>

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## An exploration of Maroons studies literature

Some ascribed functions and characteristics that pertain to Maroons in relation to space exist in the early history of accounts on Maroon sites. These functions, particularly in the early work of Maroon studies, focused on war and violence within Maroon sites, which culminated in the longstanding idea that violence was an intrinsic mode. In Jamaica, for example, the notion remained that violence in Maroon sites was 'a prominent feature'.<sup>13</sup> However, such notions lacked context. Owing to the historical confrontations leveraged by and between Maroons and dominant forces of colonialism, primary records on Maroon sites were predominantly rooted in oppositional interactions. They are testimonies written from the perspective of colonial soldiers who passed on reports to colonial overseers, who then proceeded to write on the nature of Maroon sites. These writings, such as Edward Long's account of a captured soldier, synonymised Maroon agency and sites with violence and depicted Maroons as vessels of savagery. The colonial imagination combined 'Maroons with the wilderness they inhabited and their methods of guerrilla warfare', which influenced the perception of Maroons as people living in the 'wilderness' and a 'lawless jungle'.<sup>14</sup> These

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<sup>11</sup> Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Global Coloniality and the Challenges of Creating African Futures," *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, 36(2) (2014): 171.

<sup>12</sup> McKittrick, *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, 949.

<sup>13</sup> Zugrave, *Maroons and the Jamaican frontier zones of the eighteenth century*, 41.

<sup>14</sup> Zugrave, *Maroons and the Jamaican frontier zones of the eighteenth century*, 38.

colonial accounts licensed the idea that Maroon sites were thus areas to be tamed—meaning, by default, that Maroon sites for Maroons were *sole* ‘areas of defence’.<sup>15</sup>

This is demonstrated and reinforced in writings of the eighteenth century, where uses of the environment by Maroons rarely exceeded defence. These writings also describe battles which were ‘generally in favour of Maroons, they being more accustomed to traverse the mountainous woods’<sup>16</sup> and the Leeward Maroon leader Cudjoe, ‘using rocks to stop advancing parties without firing a single shot’.<sup>17</sup> The accounts are problematic in that violence is presented as the default mode among the Maroons, and they lack the contextual framework to understand such forms of violence as situated in retaliation to external encroachments of Maroon space in the context of *colonialism*. As ethnohistorian Neil Whitehead has noted, violence was ‘more than a mere biological function’.<sup>18</sup>

Prominent later historical writings on Maroon communities in Jamaica have been criticised for reinforcing colonial notions.<sup>19</sup> Scholars such as Charles Orser observed that historians and anthropologists of the nineteenth and twentieth century have given ‘excessive attention’ to the master/slave relationship,<sup>20</sup> which conveys human dynamics, but as argued in this paper, also extends to the depiction of Maroon ecological sites. However, some historical explorations have gone further than focusing on the enslaved-master dynamic within Maroon sites to understand the various *locations* of Maroons in relation to defence. Maroon Revisionist Literature of the 20th century, authored by scholars such as Arthur Ramos and Edison Carneiro, responded to earlier historical primary sources and questioned the legitimacy of the narrative of violence and savagery through engaging with themes such as ‘resistance’, ‘defence’ and ‘rebellion’. These themes politically furthered the understanding of Maroon agency, especially in response to colonial accounts of the time.

These works depict Maroons of Brazil and Jamaica in the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, such as Nanny of the Maroons, as heroic freedom fighters. At best, this depiction humanises Maroons and counters portrayals in previous works which have depicted them as barbaric and savage. However, whilst these revisionist views were a necessary subversive narrative in the understanding of Maroons’ individuality, the literature situates itself within the historical-colonial fixation on Maroon environmental sites as areas of *defence* and rarely extends to other human-ecological practices. While the environment was a ‘barricade for Maroons’,<sup>21</sup> it was also a space where ‘human, spiritual, biotic and abiotic realms co-

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<sup>15</sup> Price, *Maroon Societies*, 5.

<sup>16</sup> John Stewart, *An Account of Jamaica and Its Inhabitants* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 27.

<sup>17</sup> Bryan Edwards, *The proceedings of the Governor and Assembly of Jamaica, in regard to the Maroon negroes: ... To which is prefixed, an introductory account* (London: Printed for John Stockdale, 1796), 8.

<sup>18</sup> Neil Whitehead, *Dark shamans* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 6.

<sup>19</sup> Huon Wardle and Werner Zips, “Nanny’s Asafo warriors: the Jamaican maroons’ African experience,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 19(3) (2013): 686.

<sup>20</sup> Terrance Weik, “The archaeology of maroon societies in the Americas: Resistance, cultural continuity, and transformation in the African Diaspora,” *Historical Archaeology*, 31(2) (1997): 86.

<sup>21</sup> James A. Delle, *The limits of tyranny* (University of Tennessee, 2015), 213.

existed'.<sup>22</sup> Crucially, this point is not made to underestimate or downplay the role and nature of the theme of resistance, especially in the history of Maroons, where the connection between resistance and liberation within a colonial state was vital. Resistance embodied many realms of the enslaved experience, and as Orlando Patterson articulated, resistance can take both 'passive and violent forms'.<sup>23</sup>

In the late twentieth century and particularly the 1970s, historians of Maroon communities, such as Richard Price and Barbara Kopytoff, wrote extensively on the Maroon communities of the Caribbean in attempts to convey the socio-historical reality of the formation, structures and internal operations of Maroon communities. Much of the success of the work of Richard Price in *Maroon Societies*, a historical collection of Maroon societies in South America and the Caribbean, can be attributed to the wide scope that details different aspects of Maroon existence. Similarly, the work by Mavis Campbell that focused on Jamaican Maroons extended the literature through a Pan-African lens and the depiction of 'the sociological characteristics, the demographic and ethnic patterns and certain ecological factors'.<sup>24</sup> Archaeologists such as Charles E. Orser Jr., Michel Rowlands and Pedro Paulo Abreu Funari undertook extensive work on Palmares, Brazil, in the 1990s. The distinguishing quality of their work on Maroon ecology can be attributed to their analysis of the *activities* within Maroon communities, which engaged with aspects of an ecological framework. These accounts describe Maroon activity in relation to livelihood and agricultural engagements such as subsistence cropping techniques and farming systems, giving insight into wider social dynamics such as gender within Maroon ecology.<sup>25</sup> In doing so, historical, anthropological and archaeological works of the latter twentieth century extended Maroon literature in relation to ecological praxis—with new material evidence being found particularly by archaeology—despite the existence of some conceptual constraints (namely the uncritical dependence on early colonial narratives of Maroon environmental sites).

Some historical archaeologists of Maroon sites such as Charles Orser Jr., following the study of Palmares, employed a perspective of global historical archaeology based on the idea that Maroon sites were more complex than mere cultural groups and were 'embedded within a nexus of colonialism, Euro-centrism, capitalist forces and modernity'.<sup>26</sup> These ideas were also shared in works of Political Economy by authors such as Sidney Mintz, who wrote on Caribbean peasantries. His work details the formation of a peasant class and explains agrarian self-sufficiency, adding a political-ecological understanding to Maroon positionalities in the plantation economy. More specifically, Mintz' theory of *reconstituted peasantries* applied to Maroons, who in 'struggles of power between plantation and peasant

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<sup>22</sup> Robert J. Connell, *The Political Ecology of Maroon Autonomy: Land, Resource Extraction and Political Change in 21st Century Jamaica and Suriname* (E-scholarship, 2019), 23.

<sup>23</sup> Orlando Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development, and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica* (Oxford University Press, 1969), 125.

<sup>24</sup> Mavis Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica, 1655-1796* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1990), 260.

<sup>25</sup> David Barker and Balfour Spence, "Afro-Caribbean Agriculture: A Jamaican Maroon Community in Transition," *The Geographical Journal*, 154(2) (1988): 201.

<sup>26</sup> Aline Vieira de Carvalho, "Archeological Perspectives of Palmares: A Maroon Settlement in 17th century Brazil," *African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter*, 10(1) (2007): 9.



adaptations, needed land', and represented 'a mode of resistance to the plantation system's imposed styles of life'.<sup>27</sup> Wider frameworks such as power, capital and inequality were useful in understanding agency within Maroon ecology, particularly through theories of the peasantry, as they situate Maroons in the land which allows for a cross-territorial, comparative examination of Maroon sites whilst offering a more expansive, rounded theory on Maroons living within colonial capitalist structures.

However, this conceptual framework of peasantries in relation to Maroon sites of ecology has only been applied in theoretical isolation, which reinforces notions of environmental determinism in the history of Maroons and lacks nuance in the understanding of *how* Maroon formations were guided and enabled. Secondly, and closely linked to the first point, in fully applying the framework of the peasantry, the theory detracts from other notions of Maroon agency. Katherine McKittrick's work in understanding Black geographies examines Blackness in relation to space, which in part uncovers the underpinnings of modernity as characterised by the transatlantic slave trade and the plantation system. These modes of existence fostered the 'sanctioning of Black placelessness and constraint' through the systemic relational violence of servitude and free labour, which 'marked Black working-bodies as those *with-out* legible Eurocentric history narratives, without land or home and without ownership of self'.<sup>28</sup> This reality informs narratives that are often termed 'deficit discourses', which categorise Black relations to space within the realm of *perpetual* disenfranchisement, though this 'does not wholly define Black worlds'.<sup>29</sup> In and beyond Political Economy literature, these ideas are pervaded by references to Maroon history and ascriptions of Maroons as mere *runaways*, which infer the result of *dispossession* from the structures of the colonial plantation economy. Furthermore, combined and located within these notions are references to Maroon sites as peripheral 'fringe elements'<sup>30</sup> that are disconnected from the cartography of the 'real world'. Synonymising Black communal spaces with disenfranchisement, as with the theory of the peasantry, moves away from examining different forms of agency through a means of cultural-ecology but entrenches the notions of 'Blackness as disenfranchised'.<sup>31</sup> Although class and capital relations influenced the agency of Maroons in Jamaica and Brazil and thus is useful for understanding how these patterns applied to Maroon ecology, this lens cannot account for the totality of experiences which informed both the agency of Maroons and their environmental practices. Therefore, to understand Maroon ecology, a critical examination of the literature and context is necessary in tandem with other frameworks of analysis.

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<sup>27</sup> Sidney Mintz, *Caribbean transformations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 132.

<sup>28</sup> Katherine McKittrick, "On plantations, prisons, and a black sense of place," *Journal of Social and Cultural Geography*, 12(8) (2011): 948.

<sup>29</sup> McKittrick, "On plantations, prisons, and a black sense of place," 947.

<sup>30</sup> Tristan Loloum and Cyro Lins, "Land and power: an ethnography of Maroon heritage policies in the Brazilian Northeast," *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 18(5) (2012): 500.

<sup>31</sup> Virginia Mappedzahama and Kwamena Kwansah-Aidoo, "Blackness as Burden? The Lived Experience of Black Africans in Australia," *SAGE Open*, 7(3) (2017): 2.

## II - A cross-regional and ecological comparative study of Maroons from 1630 to 1780

The framework which assists the analysis of agency within Maroon ecological sites in Brazil and Jamaica between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is a cross-territorial ecological comparison with the aim of highlighting differences and parallels within these contexts, at the same time elucidating specific ecological understandings in Maroon communities. Anthropologist Sidney Mintz posits that 'any comparative study of the rural sub-cultures of the Caribbean region plainly requires some plotting of similarities and differences'.<sup>32</sup>

Brazil and Jamaica experienced a continuous process of marronage, following the will of an enslaved population and changes within state activity, despite being controlled by different colonial governments, namely the Portuguese, Dutch and British. At first glance, these countries comparatively operate in an almost diametrically opposed manner, especially given the striking differences of land area and colonial organisation. However, there are also nuances and similarities in Maroon settlement areas, such as cultural and social markers emerging from a shared African heritage.

### The State and Society

A relatively new settler colony, the first recorded arrivals of enslaved Africans to Brazil began in the mid-sixteenth century, where shortly after the process of marronage the creation of Maroon settlements began. Quilombos, otherwise known as Maroon settlements located in various areas of Brazil, given the 'absence of state power'<sup>33</sup> and control, very quickly became threats to the Portuguese state and the plantation economy, which called for their decimation. One site of Palmares in Pernambuco, Northern Brazil—its name received from the surrounding palm trees—was comprised of nine villages referred to as *Mocambos*. Records estimate that there were around 30,000 Maroons comprised of ex-enslaved peoples, made up of Africans, Indigenous communities, witches as well as poor whites.<sup>34</sup> Initially disclosed by Dutch scout official Bartholomeus Lintz, this location of Palmares was described to be around half a mile long, its street six feet wide and 'more than a single enclave but a combination of many smaller ones in the mountains'.<sup>35</sup>

Palmares existed for nearly a century until its destruction in 1694, during which time many frequent attempts to destroy it were made by the Portuguese and the Dutch during their occupation from 1630 to 1654. The two main attempts to curtail Maroon agency in relation to the environment of Palmares were through punitive expeditions by the state and state-organised and commissioned coalitions. During the period of 1654-1678, there were twenty expeditions against Palmares by colonial forces. From 1680 to 1686, there were six

<sup>32</sup> Mintz, *Caribbean transformations*, 226.

<sup>33</sup> Scott, *The art of not being governed*, 127.

<sup>34</sup> Pedro Paulo A. Funari, "Public Archaeologic from a Latin American perspective," *Public Archaeology*, 1 (2001): 84.

<sup>35</sup> Price, *Maroon Societies*, 137.

expeditions on the site. The colonial forces also ‘fully understanding the Maroons dependence on their gardens’ often made their destruction the first order of business when attacking settlements,<sup>36</sup> understanding Maroon sites as heading towards becoming an independent state. Such encroachments on Palmares territory were further exacerbated with the official localisation in 1687 by authorities who called for the ‘*ethnic soldiering*’ (italics in original)<sup>37</sup> of groups of Indigenous residents and freed-people under units, termed ‘*capitao dos assalto*’, to eliminate Palmares.<sup>38</sup> Such was the regulatory response of the state of Brazil to evoke an ever-present sense of danger, which encompassed, albeit implied, a curtailment of ecological practices that existed as part of a wider system of Maroon survival.

In Jamaica, societal organisation was different from Brazil, owing mostly to a different history of colonial powers. With the onset of Spanish arrival to Jamaica, most of the Arawak Indigenous population was decimated and therefore the Indigenous population could not be weaponised to the same extent as in Brazil. The state, therefore, was forced to use other methods to regulate Maroon ecological activity. From the early seventeenth century, an array of separate Maroon towns resided in the interior of Jamaica, which by the early eighteenth century merged under two polities: the Windward in the Eastern mountains and the Leeward Maroons in the West of Jamaica.<sup>39</sup>

In the context of the brutality of the capitalist plantation system, other acts of state violence were common and colonial officials thus frequently relied on methods such as capital punishment, the deployment of armies, soldiers and trained attack dogs from Cuba to demolish hinterland Maroon provision grounds. Once it was clear that the colonial state was unable to suppress and surpass the methods of the Leeward Maroons prior to and during the First Maroon War, the colonial officials reoriented their method of regulation to legal forms. The 1739 Peace Treaty was firstly signed on behalf of the Leeward Maroons by their leader Cudjoe on 1 March 1739 and again on 23 December 1739 by Captain Quao of the Windward Maroons. This treaty was the first of its kind, especially in that the crux of the treaty underlined Maroon ideology and practice in relation to space: that of communal land ownership and autonomy over agricultural practices. However, the treaty stipulated that Maroons must capture and return any enslaved escapees, which reflected the underhandedness of such colonial intentions. The treaty defined the scope, remit for activity and land size, which was 1500 acres for the Windward Maroons, as noted in the 4th Article of the treaty:

Fourthly, That they shall have liberty to plant the said lands with coffee, cocoa, ginger, tobacco, and cotton, and to breed cattle, hogs, goats, or any other flock, and dispose of the produce or increase of the said commodities to the inhabitants of this island; provided always, that when they bring the said commodities to market, they shall apply first to the customs, or any other magistrate of the respective parishes where they expose their goods to sale, for a license to vend the same.

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<sup>36</sup> Price, *Maroon Societies*, 10.

<sup>37</sup> Stuart B. Schwartz, *Blacks and Indians: Common Cause and Confrontation in Colonial Brazil* (Yale University), 7.

<sup>38</sup> Price, *Maroon Societies*, 182.

<sup>39</sup> B. Kopytoff, *Jamaican Maroon political organization* (Mona, Jamaica: Institute of Social and Economic Research, UWI, 1976), 88.

The system of communal tenure as highlighted in the treaty is argued to have remained an 'important factor' of Maroon identity,<sup>40</sup> which ultimately was targeted by colonial authorities in the era of post-Emancipation. Even though scholarly attention has been drawn to the immediate political effects of the 1739 Peace Treaty, which identified the legal reduction of Maroon access to land and the fact of 'instability',<sup>41</sup> few studies have paid attention to the post-Peace Treaty shift in practices on the land, for example in agriculture.

On a societal level, Jamaica was a highly stratified society given the existence of the plantation system in which slave labour was used. Therefore, due to the 'complexity of these communities, they cannot be studied in isolation but within the class structure'.<sup>42</sup> Since relative survival was *somewhat* guaranteed through the production of labour on the plantation economy, many of the enslaved population were reliant on such structures which meant marronage to the hinterland was unlikely and therefore the destination of marronage, if any, was borderland locations. The reality of marronage to the borderlands, which existed on the periphery of the plantation economy, was not only underscored by the ability to access food there but also extended to the reluctance to separate from loved ones. Thus, the very structure of colonialism in Jamaica determined the prospects of Maroon ecological relations.

In conclusion, the colonial states of Brazil and Jamaica, which emerged from two different historical contexts, demonstrate varied operations towards a parallel aim of decimating Maroon sites through state coercion. Moreover, the similarities of the structures of the state are apparent in the arrangement of society, which was predominantly shaped by capital, the importation of enslaved Africans and the expansion of the plantation economy. However, given the unique features of history, such as the Dutch imposition of Pernambuco during the 1630s and the failed suppression of Jamaican Maroons leading to the Peace Treaty of 1739, the reality of regulation was much different across contexts. As a result, the states of Jamaica and Brazil employed different forms of regulation that affected the agency of the Maroons within their ecological praxis.

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## Topography and Formation

A geographical framework that views the landscape and topography of Maroons is insightful for an understanding of how agency within ecological praxis was enabled. Revisiting known and unknown sites through historical records, anthropology, archaeology, and cartography builds up a picture, or at least a fathomable overview of the scope of Maroon activity and ecological praxis. Historical records within Maroon studies often trace Maroon activity through geography and, more specifically, through *standard cartography* except for Brazil, where Quilombo maps are available to be used. As Sylviane Diouf notes,

when applied to the study of slavery, geography has been an enlightening device that has revealed the existence of a slavery landscape and plantations landscape; but absent from this geography, although it was well trodden and of singular

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<sup>40</sup> Barker and Spence, "Afro-Caribbean Agriculture: A Jamaican Maroon Community in Transition," 201.

<sup>41</sup> Kopytoff, *Jamaican Maroon political organization*, 100.

<sup>42</sup> Mintz, *Caribbean transformations*, 10.

importance in resistance, is the “Maroon landscape” that overlapped with some... and to some degree was separated from all the others<sup>43</sup>

The Maroon landscape is thus inextricably embedded within the landscape of the colonial society, which amongst other sites, centralised the plantation economy. Crucially, however, Maroon landscapes exceed the areas observable by colonial forces of power, which therefore require a further exploration.

The reasoning behind marronage was to escape the area of colonial power in a physical and metaphorical sense, which builds on what James Scott has described as ‘moving away as an act of resistance, that rejected the institution of slavery’.<sup>44</sup> To study these sites is to understand the subversive nature of marronage and explore outside the ‘official tenets of cartography’,<sup>45</sup> which through *placing* situated Maroons without place—especially prior to the signing of peace treaties and the introduction of legal tools such as emancipation. This section focuses on two themes: ‘Locating Maroon Sites’, which explores the reasoning behind the choice of areas of settlement, and ‘Adjusting to Maroon Sites’, which unearths the acts undertaken by Maroons in Brazil and Jamaica in defining space.

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## Locating Maroon Sites

The likelihood of a successful hinterland marronage to the interior of the country was dependent on and determined by the existing landscape, which often consisted of sites that were not of any economic value to the colonial state. Comparatively smaller in size, Jamaica’s interior was comprised of dense areas of land, a mountainous terrain and Karst topography, much of which became known as Cockpit Country for its sinkholes and caves. On the other hand, Pernambuco in Brazil, which was the centre of the sugar plantation industry and held the 1km long site of Palmares, was much larger and was mostly covered with xerophytic woodlands, tropical moist forests and semi-deciduous forests. Therefore, although both sites provided key places of refuge, the larger landscape of Pernambuco offered more guardianship and refuge from the colonial state to Maroons in Brazil.

On escape from the plantation economy, hinterland Maroons sought places to be autonomous and self-sufficient and to generate some of their own resources and receive refuge. More explicitly, hinterland Maroons sought out places that gave ‘an advantage point against attacks, proximity to an escape route; close to a river as a source of clean water; soil suitable for cultivation and not susceptible to flooding, as well as access to fauna that was edible for food and medicine’.<sup>46</sup> As such, practical elements of the environment sought out by Maroons to sustain life after marronage and beyond were central features of the process of locating sites. This led Maroons in Jamaica to locate sites deeply secluded in the land and discover the interior cockpit country and the mountain ranges as suitable sites for concealment, which at their highest reached between 6,000 and 7,000 feet.

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<sup>43</sup> Diouf, *Slavery’s exiles*, 6.

<sup>44</sup> Scott, *The art of not being governed*, 127.

<sup>45</sup> McKittrick, “On plantations, prisons, and a black sense of place,” 947.

<sup>46</sup> Diouf, *Slavery’s exiles*, 130.

Hinterland Maroons in Jamaica became one of the few communities in its early history that embarked on living in the interior regions. Whilst there was a sizeable reduction in the Indigenous communities during Spanish colonisation, interior regions were inhabited by escaped earlier 'Maroons' who were formerly ruled by the Spanish. The Blue Mountain range in the east and central west of Jamaica, despite narratives of extinction,<sup>47</sup> held communities who were later joined by smaller Maroon communities settling within the range. As many more of the enslaved escaped and other Maroon communities split, the communities in the mountains grew sizeably, as demonstrated by the late eighteenth century search made by 'three hundred men, women and children from the Windward faction, making a march over across 100 miles of densely wooded and precipitous mountain ranges of the island to join Cudjoe's Leeward band'.<sup>48</sup>

In both regions borderland Maroons who were similarly on a journey of marronage settled on the periphery of the plantation economy to ensure their survival. They maintained this through raids in which they gained access to tools, foods, people and information through networks with the enslaved living on the plantation. Although borderland sites never featured the landscape that encouraged a long-term range of hinterland sites, these spaces were valuable because they provided a viable alternative to the enslaved, and through their presence and persistence, posed a direct affront and gradual diminution to the plantation economy.

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### Adjusting to Maroon Sites

Settling into the unfamiliar territory of the mountains and forests for the first time required new Maroons to 'master the forests and to become its friend',<sup>49</sup> especially in how to navigate moving quickly in and out of the territory. The focal point of finding practicality in locating Maroon sites of the hinterland was soon followed up by a process of mapping out space to suit the new ecological setting. Due to the adaptable, covert nature of these sites, especially in Jamaica, there were few set demarcations and fixed boundaries that would be clearly identified by outsiders whom the Maroons sought to evade. In the event that sites were identifiable, as in the case of Palmares, the *Mocambo*, as recorded in the 1645 Rejimbach expedition,<sup>50</sup> was secured by traps that were set along the circumference, 'with large felled trees on the South and a swamp on the north side'.<sup>51</sup> Their locations, therefore, were established through routines that worked in accordance with their surroundings and as a result were 'more diverse and mobile, making their existence less legible to the state'.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development, and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica*, 289.

<sup>48</sup> Price, *Maroon Societies*, 271.

<sup>49</sup> Flavio Dos Santos, *Peasants, Maroons and the Frontiers of Liberation in Maranhao* (2004), 379.

<sup>50</sup> Robert N. Anderson, "The Quilombo of Palmares: A New Overview of a Maroon State in Seventeenth-Century Brazil," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 28(3) (1996): 551.

<sup>51</sup> Samuel Putnam and Edison Carneiro, "O Quilombo dos Palmares," *Books Abroad*, 21(4) (1974): 253.

<sup>52</sup> Scott, *The art of not being governed*, 154.

New entrants into the territory of Palmares captured during *razzizas* (raids) were scrutinised to ensure they were not being used as couriers to discover the location. Similarly, in defining territory in Jamaica, the Windward Maroons required anyone who joined the community to participate in a ritual oath. Such was the importance of maintaining the privacy of the environment, that verification of new members was crucial. Maroons not only, therefore, had to adapt to the physical environment but to the colonial environment, which could present sudden changes to its security and function at any given time. Thus, the process of adaptation to these sites was one of fluidity, which marked the ability to abandon sites given the word of colonial raids and shift with an evolving environment.

In conclusion, the interior landscapes and topography of Brazil, although similar in function in offering places of refuge, varied in size; Pernambuco offered a greater prospect of hinterland marronage than Maroon towns in Jamaica. Still, marronage to the hinterland and borderland marronage increased in both areas, offering a viable alternative to an enslaved population. The flexibility and agency that Maroons in Jamaica and Brazil used to adjust to new environmental sites, which defined territory outside the realms of colonialism and used initiation practice, drew parallels. This speaks to a greater process of agency in the ecological praxis of marronage that transcends two contexts and landscapes.

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### Knowledge of the Environment: Agriculture

The varied soils in Pernambuco, Brazil, included lactosol, podzolic, vertisol and planosol, some of which were not conducive to the successful cultivation of new crops. Maroons of Palmares were able to identify sites where, at best, they could maximise the cultivation of corn, which was their main crop, through using systems of cultivation that produced sufficient yields in terms of quantity and longevity. The process of intercropping was thus utilised in both Jamaica and Palmares to harness more crops in a shorter period of time, which attests to the significance of horticulture within both these communities. Some gardens yielded 'manioc, yams, sweet potatoes, root crops like bananas and plantains, dry rice, maize, groundnuts, squash, beans, sugarcane and chili'.<sup>53</sup> In terms of the preservation of food, access to salt via the ocean was not always viable and hinterland Maroons in Jamaica used palm tree ash in place of salt to preserve food products and also for medicinal use.

Subsistence activities of the hinterland community in Jamaica manifested a sexual division of labour. Men were hunters, although hunting was significantly reduced after the signing of the 1739 Peace Treaty where, 'livestock would be presented by the colonial government to Cudjoe' in exchange for capturing an enslaved escapee.<sup>54</sup> Women practised a 'type of bush fallowing'<sup>55</sup> in which fire was used to clear the land. Similarly, agricultural work in Palmares was mainly undertaken by women who tilled the land in large Mocambos and cultivated small gardens.

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<sup>53</sup> Price, *Maroon Societies*, 10.

<sup>54</sup> Barker and Spence, "Afro-Caribbean Agriculture: A Jamaican Maroon Community in Transition," 200.

<sup>55</sup> Barker and Spence, "Afro-Caribbean Agriculture: A Jamaican Maroon Community in Transition," 201.

Thus, Maroon communities in Palmares and Jamaica both engaged in a tactical understanding of their environments, using adaptable, sustainable practices and forms of knowledge sharing to maintain their subsistence-based economies.

## Refuge

In the context of refuge, Maroon sites shared identical if not interchangeable functions due to the nature of marronage and evasion from the colonial state. Using the environment to enhance the chance of survival led Maroons to use the 'land as a barricade'.<sup>56</sup> Maroon sites were erected with the intention of being insurmountable; Palmares was described as 'by the end of the seventeenth century, made up of formidable man-made defences'.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, natural features for refuge were also used in Jamaica, where the Leeward Maroon community was described to be on 'high ledges of rock'<sup>58</sup> and Maroons in Trelawny Town as being surrounded by a 'fence of prickly shrubs'.<sup>59</sup> This knowledge of finding refuge within the environment does not, however, solely relate to the physical concept of the land but also includes the sum total of all living organisms and temperature, light and forces. Many elements of the environment were utilised by hinterland Maroons, especially the *night*, which was used to undergo raids and activities that were shielded by the darkness. In Jamaica, the *Abeng*, an instrument made from the horn of a cow, was used by Maroons to communicate different sets of codified information to the community. The use of the *Abeng* could communicate messages over great lengths to other territories and relayed information that was solely comprehensible to the Maroon community.

Finally, Maroons used and cultivated shared knowledge systems that contributed to the maintenance of their agricultural economies, particularly in the hinterland regions. These systems of knowledge and practice within the environment extended to agricultural practices and refuge, which constituted similar hallmarks between Jamaican Maroon Towns and in Palmares. Adaptability and innovation were required in these practices to suit an ever-shifting context of colonial society.

## III - Re-conceptualising the significance of Maroon sites and re-imagining Maroon ecological praxis

### The Significance of Maroon Sites

Maroon sites and ecological practices are significant realities situated within an anti-colonial history that subverted the rules of the state. Colonialism, through the 'securing and

<sup>56</sup> Delle, *The limits of tyranny*, 13.

<sup>57</sup> Price, *Maroon Societies*, 7.

<sup>58</sup> Price, *Maroon Societies*, 6.

<sup>59</sup> Richard B. Sheridan, "The Maroons of Jamaica, 1730–1830: Livelihood, demography and health," *Slavery & Abolition*, 6(3) (1985).



subjugation<sup>60</sup> of the enslaved in the plantation economy, aimed to ensure the expansion of the empire. Assessing both the framework of enslavement and the power relations governing Maroon sites is useful for understanding the significance of Maroon sites. Notably, the governing power relations over the environment were situated within the arbitrary actuality that ownership and access to the environment was guaranteed through the exercised assertion of European settler status or colonial force, relations which echoed the order of Christopher Columbus' 'discovery' of land and space. With such imperial relations of spatiality occurring in the contexts of Brazil and Jamaica, this legitimised both the *finding of* and *settling into* space through means of colonial imposition. Thus, in view of this history, the only legitimate means of access and agency within aspects of the environment were through imperial domination. However, Maroon ecological practices which demonstrated alternative modes of power relations within the environment through agency, challenged these orders.

Challenges to this order in Palmares and Maroon towns in Jamaica, especially through ecological practices, are significant because they imagined futures: a life outside of the plantation economy, without the permission or license of the colonial framework. It is therefore important to note that Maroon settlements in Jamaica, before the signing of the Treaty in 1739, as noted by Barbara Kopytoff, 'are important, because it was the only time when Maroons were able to develop outside the sphere of influence of the colonial society'.<sup>61</sup> Maroon settlements within this century demonstrate ecological agencies in the absence of direct legal control, albeit existing within a wider nexus of colonial socio-political domination. However, Maroon sites and ecological practices existing outside the parameters and control of the colonial state do not in themselves warrant the full notion of agency. Whilst the absence of control *is* significant and makes Maroon sites worthy of attention, the full capacity to establish relations within the environment is what enables the practice and understanding of agency.

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## Re-Imagining Maroon Environmental Praxis

How does one re-imagine the past? How can the past be re-imagined using the same historical sources and frameworks that we aim to overcome, especially for understanding agency in Maroon ecology? The most important question here must be what does the process of re-imagining agency in Maroon ecology entail? The process starts with a recognition of Maroon agency within ecology as *history*, specifically understanding these histories as legitimate vehicles of the human imagination. The process of re-imagining recognises and closely examines the existing literary and practical contributions towards the rebuilding of a history that largely went undocumented. As Paulo Freire states, 'concern for the humanisation leads at once to the recognition of "dehumanisation", not only as an ontological possibility but as an historical reality'.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, re-imagining agency within Maroon ecology places humanity over the enslaved mode of existence through the understanding of colonial oppression and its process of

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<sup>60</sup> Linda T. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*. 2nd ed. (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2012), 20.

<sup>61</sup> Kopytoff, *Jamaican Maroon political organization*, 306.

<sup>62</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (UK: Penguin Classics, 2017), 17.

dehumanisation through social relations, the structure of the economy and the 'cultural life of colonial societies'.<sup>63</sup> Historically, due to colonialism, 'the struggle to assert and claim humanity has been a consistent thread of anti-colonial discourse on colonialism and oppression'.<sup>64</sup> Whilst the assertion of humanity is crucial, re-imagining, especially in the context of agency, necessitates a further understanding than mere humanist assertions. It requires observation and examination of the historical realities of Maroons and especially the environment as mutually reinforcing entities. This process does not encourage the production of romantic literature bordering on the realms of mysticism; however from the conception, as Angela Davis notes, a more complex framework is developed that can be used as a necessary way to navigate structural cruelties.

Therefore, firstly, the process of re-imagining begins with the insertion of agency in Maroon ecology within Maroon studies literature as a historical experience that exists beyond the confines of coloniality<sup>65</sup> and dehumanisation, which relates to both the body and the environment. Secondly, as with studies of the institution of slavery, the experience of enslavement as it was lived, in the same manner, requires similar approaches that move away from 'singling out the body, the culture of poverty or the material lack implied'. This process therefore 'insists on re-imagining the subject and place of Black geographies by suggesting that there are many ways of producing and perceiving space, as highlighted through sustainable practices within the Maroon community, such as horticulture'.<sup>66</sup> This process of re-imagining aims to contextualise agency in Maroon ecological experiences and critically examine them within the structures and ideology of the time, in which relations and networks of power are elucidated as informing those experiences.

Lastly, the re-imagined approach to agency within Maroon ecology views the environment as inextricable to Maroon experiences and rather than situating this reality at the periphery of Maroon studies, it is recognised as important and engages with other modes of understanding Maroon histories.

## Conclusion

This paper has offered a three-part analysis, which has followed an exploration of Maroon ecological praxis through the examination of pre-existing Maroon literature; a study of Maroon ecological practices and agency in Jamaica and Palmares, Brazil; and an introduction to a framework of Maroon ecology.

The first section sets out a categorical and historical definition of Maroons and emphasises the importance of *place* within these categories, thus the use of the terms 'hinterland and borderland Maroons'. The section explores the body of literature within Maroon studies which starts from early eighteenth-century writings and follows through to literature written in the late twentieth-century. The colonial narratives of the 1700s were

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<sup>63</sup> Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 27.

<sup>64</sup> Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 27.

<sup>65</sup> Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Global Coloniality and the Challenges of Creating African Futures*, 187.

<sup>66</sup> McKittrick, *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, 42.

extended into later works of historiographies of the early twentieth century, which uncritically depicted the environmental sites of Maroons in a similar colonial fashion, evoking fearsome imagery of the environment and focusing on the enslaved/master dynamic within environmental relations. A literary shift occurred within Maroon studies, which began to extend these ecological narratives beyond themes of savagery and subjugation, to Maroon activities and knowledge systems within the environment. Coupled with the history of the plantation economy, Maroon ecological histories have been reduced and omitted, leading to narratives of disenfranchisement. The first section thus concludes with highlighting the importance of using a critical analysis that works in tandem with other frameworks to explore Maroon agency within ecological praxis.

The second part embarks on a cross-regional and ecological comparative study of Maroons from 1630 to 1780 with an aim to highlight the differences and similarities of Maroon ecology in Palmares, Brazil, and Jamaica. It uses the multidisciplinary, contextual framework as noted in the previous chapter and draws on specific themes to understand Maroon existence: *The State; Topography and Formation; and Knowledge of the Environment*. 'The State' explores the regulation of Maroon sites in Jamaica and Brazil whilst 'Topography and Formation' focuses on settlement and defining space; finally, 'Knowledge of The Environment' explores specific practices within the environment such as refuge and agriculture. Whilst the contexts of the two countries are different, the *objectives* of the different states remained the same—to eliminate Maroon landscapes. 'Knowledge of the Environment' explores ecological praxis in relation to agriculture and refuge, revealing that although agricultural practices and knowledge systems were formed differently, there were similar adaptable and sustainable modes which applied to food and other aspects of the environment and demonstrated the cross-territorial parallels of Maroon agency in environmental praxis.

The final part, 'Re-conceptualising the significance of Maroon sites and Re-imagining Maroon ecological praxis', explores the historical significance of Maroon sites. Agency within Maroon ecology as a meta-narrative exists within Maroon history and was exercised outside the framework of colonial domination, which in effect subverted the power relations of colonialism. Lastly, the framework of Re-Imagining is introduced and explains how Maroon ecology is a legitimate history and, more than the singular focus on *enslavement*, it offers the possibility for an understanding of the environment as inextricable to the Maroon experience.

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