

# Afro-Latin American geographies of in-betweenness: Colonial marronage in Colombia

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores Maroon spatialities during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through a critical geographical analysis based on historical records collected in the General Archive of the Indies, the National General Archive of Bogotá, and the oral tradition of San Basilio de Palenque, a community of descendants of fugitives from slavery located in the Montes de María in the Colombian Caribbean. The article's findings show that San Basilio de Palenque survived by navigating in-between different colonial forms of producing territory that simultaneously implied opposition and co-optation. Drawing on Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's "ch'ixi" and Gloria Anzaldúa's "border notions," this spatial navigation embraced opposition and fissure between African, European, and indigenous elements without trying to suppress or reconcile them. This ethic of spatial balance as marronage was San Basilio de Palenque's formula for survival. The methodology implemented in this article also required stepping in-between the archive and the oral tradition, without taking sides, taking a ch'ixi/border approach, as well revisiting the history of this Maroon community in Latin America.

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## Introduction

Blackness and subversion were the first impressions that came into mind when I started to explore the production of territory by a community of fugitives from slavery – *cimarrones* or Maroons – in northern Colombia. However, the more I delved into 1000 pages of handwritten seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Spanish records that narrate San Basilio de Palenque's history from 1686 to 1783, the two notions of Blackness and subversion progressively started losing their initial prevalence.

Anthropological and historical studies have predominantly shaped the understanding of Maroon communities and their practices of resistance, including space-making. With certain exceptions explained later, in these studies the production of Maroon spaces has been assimilated to the creation of independent Black territories in defiance of the colonial regime. These spaces were understood as detached portions from Africa that resisted Whiteness in the so-called new world in colonial times.

Here, I unsettle these essentialised and romanticised narratives that have significantly dominated Maroon Studies through a critical geographical analysis based on historical records and oral tradition.

By focusing on Maroon space-making in the Colombian Caribbean, this article contributes to the literature on Afro-Latin American geographies in South America in colonial times. It also engages, though in some cases, with scholarship on Black Central America, Black North America, and the Black Caribbean. Hopefully, this will help spark a more systematic bridging of all these bodies of literature.

These bodies of literature find common ground in having critically shown how two contested forces – the violence of slavery and the Black agencies countering it – have informed the spaces of enslaved people and their descendants in the Americas and the Caribbean.<sup>1</sup> For Maroons, protection against the violence of slavery involved building communities, which have been seen as the

<sup>1</sup> K. McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, Minneapolis, 2006; U. Oslender, *Another History of Violence: The Production of "Geographies of Terror" in Colombia's Pacific Coast Region*, *Latin American Perspectives* 35 (2008) 77–102; P. Noxolo and D. Featherstone, *Co-Producing Caribbean Geographies of in/Security*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 39 (2014) 603–607; C. Hawthorne, *Black Matters Are Spatial Matters: Black Geographies for the Twenty-First Century*, *Geography Compass* 13 (2019) 1–13.

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earliest examples of Black geographies and Black autonomy in the American hemisphere.<sup>2</sup> In line with insights from previous studies, I found that the way San Basilio de Palenque produced and mobilised their spaces to survive as a Maroon community involved mastering the art of the “in-between”. This art meant being at once spatially disruptive and submissive to the regime. San Basilio de Palenque was undoubtedly not a completely autonomous territory, but a functional part of the colonial regime. In this article, I explore the in-between of these spatial dynamics of opposition and co-optation. This was a process of transformation from what is called in Colombia a *palenque*, a community of cimarrones, to a *poblacion*, a town of freed fugitives as a legal space of the colonial regime (Fig. 1).

One needs new theoretical lenses to examine the narrative of survival of San Basilio de Palenque, which included a pendular movement from different Maroon spaces strategically created to resist domination. In section one, I begin by introducing these new theoretical lenses, the Aymara notion *ch'ixi* developed by the historian and sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, and the border identity as a concept developed by the feminist activist-scholar Gloria Anzaldúa.<sup>3</sup> In indigenous studies, Rivera Cusicanqui uses *ch'ixi* as a product of the juxtaposition of two opponents, the indigenous and the colonial worlds, to explain the socio-cultural Bolivian landscape.<sup>4</sup> In a different context, Anzaldúa described the border or *chicana/mestiza* identity as a product of the junctures between the/two opposites, Texas, south-west United States, and Mexico.<sup>5</sup>

Unity and tension among contesting elements were also a characteristic of the Maroon colonial geographies. They contained predominantly African, but also European and indigenous, elements, which together unsettled and re-moulded the spatial practices of Maroon peoples. By highlighting this vision, this article articulates for the first time crossovers between Maroon studies and Anzaldúa's and Rivera Cusicanqui's readings of processes of mixture in Latin America. In section two, I explain how *ch'ixi* and border identity notions implemented as a methodology critically resignify the narrative of the history of San Basilio de Palenque. This new approach steps in-between the archive and the oral tradition, without taking sides. This narrative is drawn primarily from archival research conducted in the General Archive of the Indies in Seville and the National General Archive in Bogotá, as well as from the oral tradition collected in interviews and participatory mapping exercises during fieldwork conducted in 2016.

Based on a particular type of spatial dynamic developed by San Basilio de Palenque (*palenque/poblacion*), in sections three and four, I describe how this community developed the skill of navigating across and benefiting from all the African, European and indigenous elements present in that colonial society. In its struggle for survival, San Basilio de Palenque's identity transitioned from a

palenque of African fugitives to a colonial town of freed fugitives. In this process, they juxtaposed (in a *ch'ixi*/border approach) two spatial strategies (opposition and co-optation) that, albeit mutually exclusive at first glance, ended up proving essential to their endurance. The community's negotiated incorporation into the colonial regime – which gave it certain liberties – prevented total revolt against slavery without, however, annulling the dissident component of social resistance.

I conclude by reflecting on how San Basilio de Palenque's survival strategy contributes to the expansion of *ch'ixi*/border notions. Although these were originally conceived to help understand the clash between the indigenous and European worlds, my analysis makes explicit the Afro-descendant element largely overlooked in the interpretation of colonial and postcolonial societies in Latin America. It also helps to understand how and why these spatial practices continue to be mobilised today; they are strategies against different types of violence, including armed and racial violence in Colombia. From a *ch'ixi* approach, the present is a juxtaposition of different pasts; in this manner, the pre-colonial and colonial worlds emerge in daily social practices.<sup>6</sup> The different resistance strategies adopted by fugitives from slavery described in this article are still present in the struggles of Afro-descendant people in the Colombian Caribbean.

#### A *Ch'ixi*/Border approach to Maroon studies

The production of territories of fugitives from slavery has been largely absorbed into political concepts, which are the result of the Western-European sovereignty tradition, and romanticised narratives of subversion from the global South as “little Africas” that resisted slavery in South America and the Caribbean. Therefore, with some exceptions highlighted later on in this section, from North to South, unfamiliar thoughts have hidden their alternative understandings of Maroon spatialities. In the Western-European political tradition, Maroon communities have been described as territorial sovereignties ‘within colonial geographies’, independent nations, ‘territorially bounded communities outside the parameters of a regime of unfreedom’, and states within a state ‘with their own internal autonomy, social control and hierarchical structure’.<sup>7</sup>

These Western-European approaches to Maroon communities have sought to underscore the agency of enslaved people, by recognising them as political actors capable of producing societies in the sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth centuries. From these perspectives, Haiti, Liberia, and Abyssinia constituted examples of ‘Black sovereignty’ that unsettled the Western world during the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Focusing on Haiti, Salt explains that this country ‘rewrote the rules about who could and could not be a sovereign body, as well as how that sovereignty would be performed’.<sup>9</sup> However, Salt's analysis does not include Maroon communities, which could have been perceived as pioneers in achieving some sort of territorial sovereignty in colonial times, although not in the form of statehood.

<sup>2</sup> A. Bledsoe, *Marronage as a Past and Present Geography in the Americas*, *Southeastern Geographer* 57 (2017) 30–50, 32; Neil Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage*, Chicago, London, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> S. Rivera Cusicanqui, *Un Mundo Ch'ixi Es Posible*. Ensayos Desde Un Presente En Crisis, City of Buenos Aires, 2016; S. Rivera Cusicanqui, *La Identidad Ch'ixi de Un Mestizo: En Torno a La Voz Del Campesino*, *Manifiesto Anarquista de 1929*, *Ecuador Debate* 84 (2011) 193–204; S. Rivera Cusicanqui, *Ch'ixinakax Utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization*, *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 111 (2012) 95–109; G. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, San Francisco, 1987; G. Anzaldúa, *On the Process of Writing Borderlands/La Frontera*, in: A.L. Keating (ed), *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, Durham, 2009; G. Anzaldúa, La Prieta, in: A.L. Keating (ed), *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, Durham, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Rivera Cusicanqui, *Un Mundo Ch'ixi Es Posible*; Rivera Cusicanqui, *La Identidad Ch'ixi de Un Mestizo*; Rivera Cusicanqui, *Ch'ixinakax Utxiwa*.

<sup>5</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*; Anzaldúa, *On the Process of Writing Borderlands/La Frontera*; Anzaldúa, La Prieta.

<sup>6</sup> Rivera Cusicanqui, *Un Mundo Ch'ixi Es Posible*.

<sup>7</sup> R. Cummings, *Maroon In/Securities*, *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 22 (2018) 47–55, 53. M. Ogborn, *A War of Words: Speech, Script and Print in the Maroon War of 1795–6*, *Journal of Historical Geography* 37 (2011) 203–215. N. Roberts, *Theorizing Freedom, Radicalizing the Black Radical Tradition: On Freedom as Marronage Between Past and Future*, *Theory & Event* 20 (2017) 212–230, 220. S. W de Groot, *A Comparison between the History of Maroon Communities in Surinam and Jamaica*, *Slavery & Abolition* 6 (1985) 173–184, 180.

<sup>8</sup> K. Salt, *Ecological Chains of Unfreedom: Contours of Black Sovereignty in the Atlantic World*, *Journal of American Studies* 49 (2015) 267–286, 267.

<sup>9</sup> K. Salt, *The Unfinished Revolution: Haiti, Black Sovereignty and Power in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World*, Liverpool, 2019, 14.

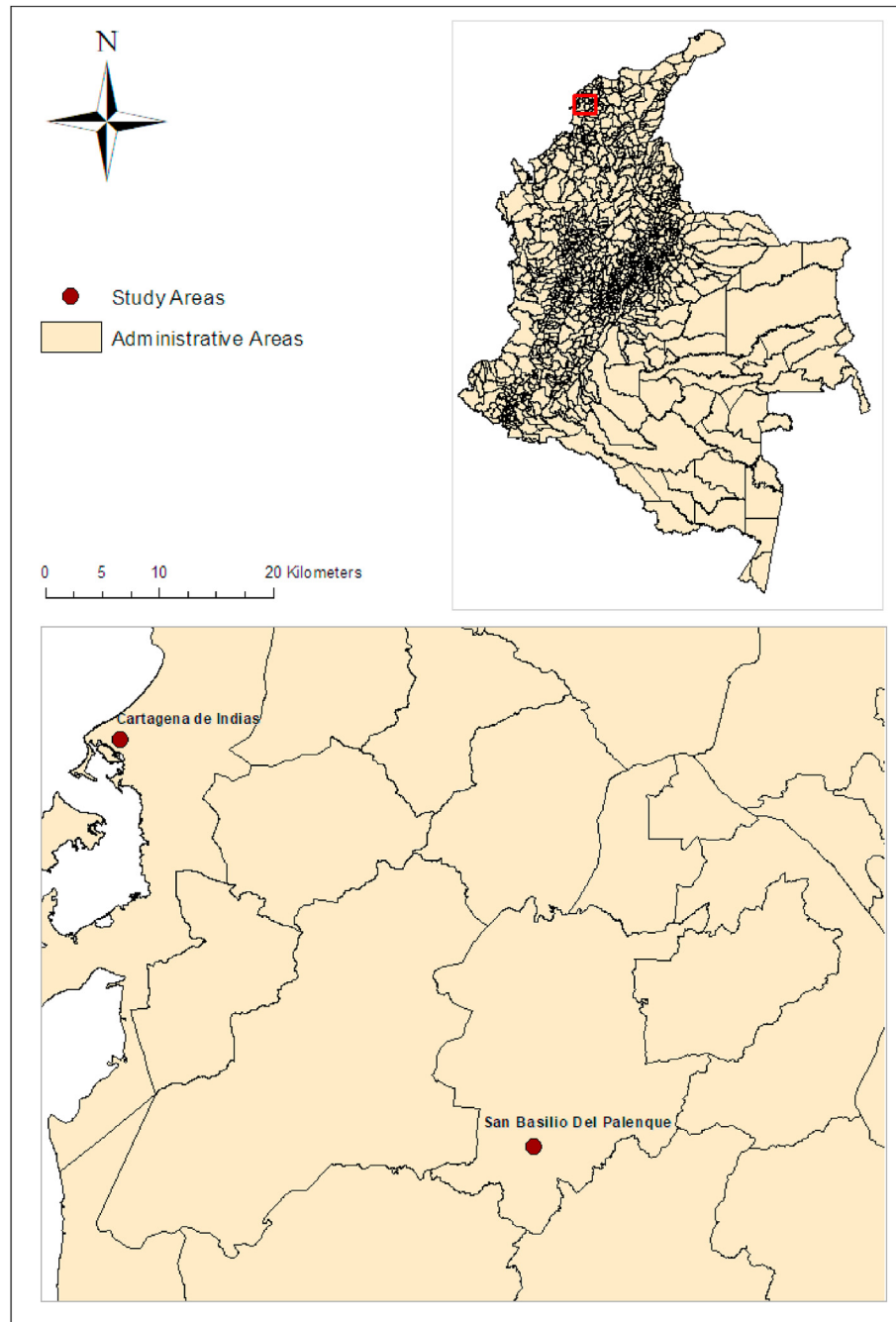


Fig. 1. Map of San Basilio de Palenque and Cartagena de Indias in northern Colombia.

Based on Black defiance narratives, the study of Maroons in Colombia has involved the search for enduring African elements. The anthropologist Nina de Friedemann found these elements in food, funerary rituals, language, and music. For example, she described the presence of *kuagros* in San Basilio de Palenque.<sup>10</sup> *Kuagros* are affinity-based groups that community members join during childhood and which provide them with economic and social support later on in their adult lives.<sup>11</sup> Friedemann identified

these groups as originating from the military tactics of resistance developed by the Bissagos islanders against colonialists.<sup>12</sup> The search for African elements in the case of San Basilio de Palenque has contributed to the perception that this community is an Africa

<sup>10</sup> R. Cross and N. de Friedemann, *Ma Ngombe: Guerreros y Ganaderos En Palenque*, Bogotá, 1979.

<sup>11</sup> J.N. Pérez Palomino, *Del Arroyo Al Acueducto: Transformación Sociocultural En El Palenque de San Basilio*, Unpublished Bachelors Dissertation, Universidad de Los Andes, 2002; Cross and de Friedemann, *Ma Ngombe*.

<sup>12</sup> J Arocha Rodríguez, Nina S. de Friedemann (1930–1998): La Etnógrafa de Africanías y Cimarronismos, *Revista de Estudios Colombianos* 47 (2016) 136–150.

outside Africa.<sup>13</sup>

However, essentialised visions of Maroon communities have been challenged in the scholarship by describing them as complex worlds with fluid interests and solidarities, as well as collaborations with colonialists and slaveholders, and reproduction of practices of slavery with newcomers to the communities.<sup>14</sup> In San Basilio de Palenque's case, there exist historical and linguistic approaches critical of its essentialised vision as an Africa in Colombia. These approaches envisage the community as influenced by elements other than the African. Maglia and Moñino have defined the community and its local *palenquero* language as 'creole products'<sup>15</sup> that hybridised Spanish with languages from Angola, Congo, and other Central-West African places.<sup>16</sup> This assertion aligns with the historians' notion of Maroon communities as syncretic spaces.<sup>17</sup> For example, other subaltern subjects such as fugitive indigenous people and fugitive women of mixed African, European, and indigenous backgrounds also joined the palenque, whose presence in this territory contributed to its subversive and diverse aspect.<sup>18</sup>

From a geographical perspective, this article addresses mixture in San Basilio de Palenque's spatial capacity to navigate in-between different colonial forms of making territory. Territory is understood here as an appropriated space for achieving political purposes.<sup>19</sup> Such navigation recalls notions that embrace opposition and fissure between disparate elements without suppressing or reconciling them. One such notion is *ch'ixi*, through which Rivera Cusicanqui tried to make sense of the 'strange' mix of her own Aymara-Bolivian society that embodied the identity of *mestizo* people like her.<sup>20</sup> In

<sup>13</sup> Revista Vive Afro, Palenque: Un Pedazo de África, <http://revistaviveafro.com/ediciones/palenque-un-pedazo-de-africa> last accessed 14 July 2020; El mercurio digital, San Basilio de Palenque, Un rincón de África en Colombia, <https://www.elmercuriodigital.net/2017/08/san-basilio-de-palenque-un-rincon-de.html> last accessed 20 August 2020; L. Ferrari, Un Epigrafe Cimarrón Para La Libertad: Monumentalización, Silencio y Repetición En El Archivo de San Basilio De Palenque, *Revista Iberoamericana* LXXXII (2016) 597–618; L. Ferrari, San Basilio de Palenque (Colombia): A Performance of Freedom, in: A. Schwegler, B. Kirschen and G. Maglia (eds), *Orality, Identity and Resistance in the Palenque (Colombia): An Interdisciplinary Approach*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia, 2017, 121–145; G. Maglia and Y. Moñino, Oralitura de San Basilio de Palenque: Temas Europeos, Africanos y Criollos, *Cuadernos de Literatura* 19 (2015) 171–201; F. D. Ávila Domínguez, Palenque Superlativo: El uso de formas axiológicas en el discurso de los guías de turismo de Palenque de San Basilio', *Visitas al Patio* 10 (2016) 93–113.

<sup>14</sup> dos Santos Gomes, *Histórias de Quilombolas Mocambos e Comunidades de Senzalas No Rio de Janeiro-Século XIX*, Rio de Janeiro, 1995. Y. Miki, Fleeing into Slavery: The Insurgent Geographies of Brazilian Quilombolas (Maroons), 1880–1881, *The Americas* 68 (2012) 495–528; H. McKee, From Violence to Alliance: Maroons and White Settlers in Jamaica, 1739–1795, *Slavery and Abolition* 39 (2018) 27–52; M.C. Navarrete, El Palenque de Limón (Cartagena de Indias, Siglo XVII): El Imaginario Del Poder y Sus Jerarquías, in: J. M. de la Serna Herrera (ed), *Vicisitudes negro africanas en Iberoamérica: experiencias de investigación*, México D.F., 2011, 101–134.

<sup>15</sup> G. Maglia and Y. Moñino, Oralitura de San Basilio de Palenque: Temas Europeos, Africanos y Criollos.

<sup>16</sup> A. Schwegler, 'On the African Origin(s) of Palenquero', in: A. Schwegler, B. Kirschen & G. Maglia (eds), *Orality, Identity and Resistance in the Palenque (Colombia): An Interdisciplinary Approach*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia, 2017, 51–120.

<sup>17</sup> M. C. Navarrete, *Cimarrones y Palenques En El Siglo XVIII*, Cali, 2003; R. Price, 'Maroons and Their Communities', in: R. Price (ed), *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, New York, 1973, 1–30.

<sup>18</sup> M. C. Navarrete Peláez, *San Basilio Del Palenque: Memoria y Tradición, Surgimiento y Avances de Las Gestas Cimarronas En El Caribe Colombiano*, Cali, 2008. General Archive of the Indies (GAI), 1693–1695, 12, 381.

<sup>19</sup> Sam Halvorsen, Decolonising Territory: Dialogues with Latin American Knowledges and Grassroots Strategies, *Progress in Human Geography* XX (2018) 1–25.

<sup>20</sup> Rivera Cusicanqui, La Identidad Ch'ixi de Un Mestizo; Rivera Cusicanqui, Ch'Ixinakax Utxiwa; Rivera Cusicanqui, 78. The *ch'ixi* notion has been also used to analyse the hybridity of current Bolivian-Aymara indigenous collective lands that are neither fully capitalist/modern nor fully indigenous sovereign spaces, as examples of contested processes of postcolonial governability (P. Anthias, *Ch'ixi Landscapes: Indigeneity and Capitalism in the Bolivian Chaco*, *Geoforum* 82 (2017) 268–275).

Cusicanqui's words, a *ch'ixi* mestizo is 'an agonized, ambivalent and unruly transcultured white-stained Indian'.<sup>21</sup> If there is any 'residual status' in this motley identity, Rivera Cusicanqui does not attribute it to the indigenous side, but to the European one. Thus, she avoids converting indigenous people into a stereotyped minority in their 'multicultural and multicolored [*abigarrados*] spaces', such as Potosí.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, *ch'ixi* is a colour, an entity, and a place. As a colour, from afar, *ch'ixi* looks grey, but in proximity, it is a juxtaposition of black and white spots that do not mix. Drawing on the Aymara artist Víctor Zapata, Rivera Cusicanqui explains that *ch'ixi* entities, especially animals, are particularly powerful because they are not black or white, but both at the same time.<sup>23</sup> She uses these analogies to explain that the juxtaposition of the indigenous and the Spanish elements, the *mestizo* identity, is a place of uncertainty, friction, and constraint. No pacification or unity is possible. Both sides exist precisely because of their unsolvable and hierarchical (one side can be more prevalent than the other) opposition born out of the colonial situation.<sup>24</sup> With this, Rivera Cusicanqui checkmates the Latin American myth of *mestizaje* as the end of racial conflicts through the fusion of the oppressors and the oppressed.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, as highlighted by Anzaldúa, if there are indeed two sides, there is yet another significant space, the borderlands.<sup>26</sup> With multiple definitions, the border resulting from the clash between the European and the American worlds has been conceptualised as a changeable line used to separate, displace, and conquer indigenous and African enslaved people.<sup>27</sup> For instance, in the *ch'ixi* Bolivia of Rivera Cusicanqui, the presence of Afro-descendants has been recorded since 1500 with an incontestable majority of indigenous and mestizo population. However, Afro-Bolivians have historically been relegated to the tangible and intangible margins of the state territory.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the primarily exclusionary character of the borders, subalterns have also found in them a space for liberation and opportunities. In Anzaldúa's work, the borderland is the world of the *chicana/mestiza* that grows where the United States and Mexico meet.<sup>29</sup> To live in the borderland is to be on both sides of the border at the same time as a *mestiza*. The borderland concept allows a permanent transgression that is continually performed without

<sup>21</sup> Rivera Cusicanqui, 'La Identidad Ch'ixi de Un Mestizo: En Torno a La Voz Del Campesino, Manifiesto Anarquista de 1929.' (n 5), 194.

<sup>22</sup> Rivera Cusicanqui, 'Ch' Ixinakax Utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization' (n 5), 99.

<sup>23</sup> Rivera Cusicanqui, La Identidad Ch'ixi de Un Mestizo; Rivera Cusicanqui, 'Ch' Ixinakax Utxiwa; Rivera Cusicanqui, *Un Mundo Ch'ixi Es Posible*.

<sup>24</sup> S. Rivera Cusicanqui, *Violencias (Re) Encubiertas En Bolivia*, La Paz, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> P. L. Alberto and J. Hoffnung-Garskof, "Racial Democracy" and Racial Inclusion: Hemispheric Histories, in: A. de la Fuente and G. Reid Andrews (eds), *Afro-Latin American Studies: An Introduction*, Cambridge, 2018.

<sup>26</sup> F. Barth, 'Introducción', in: F. Barth (ed), *Los grupos étnicos y sus fronteras*, México D.F., 1976.

<sup>27</sup> S. Martínez-Magdalena and F. Villegas Vivancos, "Aunque et Allende Stremo": De Las Productividades Etnohistóricas de La Fronterización Iberoamericana a La Apertura Descolonial de Abya Yala/Quilombola, *Antipoda* 32 (2018) 3–31.

<sup>28</sup> S. Busdiecker, Where Blackness Resides: Afro-Bolivians and the Spatializing and Racializing of the African Diaspora, *Radical History Review* 103 (2009) 105–116; B. Lisocka-Jaegermann, Los Afrodescendientes En Los Países Andinos: El Caso de Bolivia, *Revista del CELSA* 1 (2010) 317–329; J. A. Maconde, Los Afrodescendientes Bolivianos, *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 12 (2007) 246–253.

<sup>29</sup> Anzaldúa also uses the Aztec word, *nepantla* or nepantlism, to represent the in-between different cultural groups, which involves a state of constant transition for the subject (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*; E. Pérez, Gloria Anzaldúa: La Gran Nueva Mestiza Theorist, Writer, Activist-Scholar, *NWSA Journal* 17 (2005) 1–10).

getting lost in the transit/navigation between these two antagonist worlds.<sup>30</sup> In Anzaldúa's words, 'Because I, a *mestiza*, continually walk out of one culture and into another, because I am in all cultures at the same time.'<sup>31</sup>

A sense of liberation can be also associated with the strategic performance of mixed rival identities.<sup>32</sup> In this sense, the border identity "constructs, deconstructs and reconstructs" itself to overcome oppression.<sup>33</sup> These processes occur within individuals before reaching out to other allies beyond the chicana world, such as Asians and Blacks. In this context, Anzaldúa's call was to learn more about other subaltern struggles, describing the Afro-element in her work as 'our Afro-mestisaje.'<sup>34</sup> Just as southern American conjunctures allowed enslaved people to run away from slavery, the borderlands of the chicanas also sometimes gave them the opportunity to escape from the US to Mexico to achieve individual freedom after abolition took place in the latter.<sup>35</sup>

Scholars have predominantly described marronage as a logic of fugitives, a logic of tangible and intangible, one-way movement from one place to another – from slavery to freedom; from cities, mines, and large farms to clandestine communities.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the swaying back and forth between opponents present in the work of Anzaldúa and Rivera Cusicanqui shows that another reading of the ethic of marronage is possible. For these authors, the swaying is between the European and indigenous worlds, which were also part of the Maroon geographies. In San Basilio de Palenque, marronage is an ethic of balance, a spatial pendulum designed for playing the long game. The following sections explore the spatial dynamics of the fugitives from slavery in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New Kingdom of Granada, showing how Maroon communities could survive the colonial regime through in-between geographies of opposition and co-optation.

#### *A Ch'ixi/border methodological approach to palenque/poblacion*

The war against Maroon people and negotiations toward peace agreements have captured most of the attention in Maroon Studies. The aftermath, the poblacion, is less explored. Sometimes this is due to scarce and fragmentary archival records. After being neutralised, a poblacion also became less of a concern for the colonial regime. The most rigorous academic work on San Basilio de Palenque's colonial history was conducted by the Colombian historians Navarrete Peláez and Cassiani Herrera.<sup>37</sup> Their historiographical account addresses the emergence of palenques in the Montes de María around 1580 and their subsequent destruction,

save for San Miguel Arcángel, which managed to survive through a peace agreement in 1714, then becoming the town of San Basilio de Palenque.

I expand Navarrete Peláez and Cassiani Herrera's work to cover the period until 1883, based on original archival research conducted in the General Archive of the Indies in Seville and the National General Archive in Bogotá. Furthermore, de Friedemann's and Pérez Palomino's anthropological studies helped me reconstruct this community's post-1880 history.<sup>38</sup> However, there is a gap of around ninety-seven years that seems impossible to fill in from archival materials. I argue that this archival gap in the history of San Basilio de Palenque is the result of the negotiated, formal isolation of the community in colonial times. Archives also contain silences regarding subalterns because power tends to suppress their voices, particularly when the system cannot easily control them.<sup>39</sup>

In the context of the Haitian Revolution, the colonial archive presents gaps regarding the political thought of Black revolutionaries.<sup>40</sup> It was unthinkable for the colonial system to accept the idea of enslaved people revolting towards freedom and the country's independence.<sup>41</sup> 'Negro obedience' was the only possible reality accepted by the slavery system.<sup>42</sup> Thus, decisions about what to include in archives were framed by this political narrative, leading to a large exclusion of subaltern voices.<sup>43</sup> Exclusion and silencing were also practised in Colombian colonial archives regarding the enslaved people's active role in cities after independence. The colonial society of Cartagena de Indias only kept in their historical records the stories of submissive Africans and their descendants, while occluding those who had an active and political role in the city.<sup>44</sup> For Ortiz Cassiani, the combination of Blackness and lack of passivity was uncomfortable for the white elites, which led to the suppression of the stories of revolting, enslaved people in the texts produced during the nineteenth century in Colombia.

Considering these silences and selectivity, one must keep in mind that the colonial archive's voice is that of the white elites and colonial authorities of the Province of Cartagena de Indias. Maroon voices were filtered through this dominant system through second-hand reports by colonial authorities and their informants, raising the question of the reliability of these accounts. In other words, the archive narrates facts from the perspective of the colonial system.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, the overwhelming Whiteness of the archival voice made me consider a way to introduce the community's oral tradition regarding its colonial past. In this article, merging the historical records and the community's oral tradition was a way to unsettle the colonial narrative.

I collected the oral tradition material in 2016 through interviews with San Basilio de Palenque community members living in the town, in Cartagena de Indias, and in areas of forced displacement due to armed conflict, as well as through mapping exercises of their

<sup>30</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*; Anzaldúa, *On the Process of Writing Borderlands*; Anzaldúa, *La Prieta*; M. Belausteguigoitia, *Borderlands/La Frontera: El Feminismo Chicano de Gloria Anzaldúa Desde Las Fronteras Geoculturales, Disciplinarias y Pedagógicas*, *Debate Feminista* 40 (2009) 149–169.

<sup>31</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 77.

<sup>32</sup> S. Selka, *The Sisterhood of Boa Morte in Brazil: Harmonious Mixture, Black Resistance, and the Politics of Religious Practice*, *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 13 (2008) 79–114.

<sup>33</sup> M. Groenewold, *Chicana Feminism: Self-Actualization Through Border Conscience*, *Intercultural Communications Studies*, XIV (2005), 92–100, 93.

<sup>34</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 86.

<sup>35</sup> K. Monsma and V.D. Fernandes, *Fragile Liberty: The Enslavement of Free People in the Borderlands of Brazil and Uruguay, 1846–1866*, *Luso-Brazilian Review* 50 (2013), 7–25. J. D. Nichols, *The Line of Liberty: Runaway Slaves and Fugitive Peons in the Texas-Mexico Borderlands*, *The Western Historical Quarterly* 44 (2013) 413–433; S.E. Cornell, *Citizens of Nowhere: Fugitive Slaves and Free African Americans in Mexico, 1833–1857*, *Journal of American History* 100 (2013) 351–374.

<sup>36</sup> Jessica A Krug, *Fugitive Modernities: Kisama and the Politics of Freedom*, Durham, London, 2018.

<sup>37</sup> Navarrete Peláez, *San Basilio Del Palenque*; A. Cassiani Herrera, *Palenque Magno: Resistencias y Luchas Libertarias Del Palenque de La Matuna a San Basilio Magno 1599–1714*, Cartagena de Indias, 2014.

<sup>38</sup> Cross and de Friedemann, *Ma Ngombe*; Pérez Palomino, *Del Arroyo Al Acueducto*.

<sup>39</sup> V. Harris, *The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory, and Archives in South Africa*, *Archival Science* 2 (2002) 63–86; J. Ortiz Cassiani, *Negros y Mulatos En Cartagena de Indias: Memoria, Olvido y Búsqueda de Reconocimiento Palimpsesto* 5 (2006) 76–81; M-R. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Boston, 2015; S. Fowler, *Enforced Silences*, in: D. Thomas, S. Fowler and V. Johnson (eds), *The Silence of the Archive*, London, 2017, 1–40.

<sup>40</sup> Fowler, *Enforced Silences*.

<sup>41</sup> Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*.

<sup>42</sup> Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 72.

<sup>43</sup> Harris, *The Archival Sliver*, 73.

<sup>44</sup> Cassiani, *Negros y Mulatos En Cartagena de Indias*.

<sup>45</sup> A. Stoler, *Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content in the Form*, in: C. Hamilton and others (eds), *Refiguring the Archive*, Dordrecht, Boston, London, 2002, 83–100.

ancestral territory. However, this prompts another question regarding the status of oral tradition as a corrective to official archives. From a ch'ixi — border approach, this research prefers to understand the archive itself as a 'form of memory'.<sup>46</sup> Though dominant, this memory is fallible and can be challenged by counter-hegemonic narratives based on oral tradition. Subalterns have a key role in the place that oral tradition plays in relation to the archive — centre-stage, juxtaposed or subordinate — as different ways of re-owning their history.

I found examples of centre-stage and subordinated roles of the oral tradition in relation to the colonial history of San Basilio de Palenque. For the former, there is a different understanding of how the first Maroons reached the Montes de María to build *palenques*. Victor Cimarra, a community member and storyteller, rejected Navarrete Peláez's explanation that fugitives escaped from captivity travelling through towns located in the Colombian Caribbean.<sup>47</sup> Instead, he explains that the fugitives used the seashore to run away.<sup>48</sup> Afterward, they reached areas next to Pasacaballos, continuing to what is now María La Baja, thus avoiding confrontation with the indigenous population living near Turbaco. Cimarra describes that the Maroons knew this area very well because Africans were used as slave force to bring stones from there to build the fortress and other edifications in Cartagena de Indias. He states that he could only accept Navarrete Peláez's explanation if the first Maroons could ratify her version. Thus, Cimarra gives precedence to the oral tradition over the historian's version.

For the latter, with the oral tradition as subordinate, there is an avid controversy regarding San Basilio de Palenque's founding father in colonial times. The community member and historian Alfonso Cassiani Herrera highlights the importance of Benkos Biohó in his people's oral tradition.<sup>49</sup> The oral tradition regards Benkos Biohó as the first and most relevant leader of slave resistance. Relevant community places, such as the school and the main square, are named for him. Cassiani Herrera denies that Benkos Biohó existed or was the founding father of San Basilio de Palenque, as the oral tradition suggests.<sup>50</sup> Based on the historical records, Cassiani Herrera contends that Domingo Biohó was the actual founding father of another palenque, *Palenque de la Matuna*, around 1599. This palenque was the predecessor of Palenque de San Miguel Arcángel. As with Navarrete Peláez's position, Cassiani Herrera highlights that Palenque de la Matuna was the starting point of a process of marronage in the Montes de María region.<sup>51</sup> This process eventually led to the creation of the town of San Basilio de Palenque.

From a ch'ixi/border approach, in the next sections, this article navigates in-between the archive and the oral tradition, which is foregrounded when possible due to the historical distance between the present day and the colonial times. A new narration of the spatial dynamic 'palenque/poblacion' emerges in this juxtaposition and their tensions and borderlands, thus resignifying San Basilio de Palenque's history of survival.

### Ch'ixi/Border narratives of survival

In 1682, the 'Black Governor', Domingo Criollo, 'leader of four

captains of different nations' or palenques, met the priest, Balthasar de la Fuente, who arrived at 'a big population' of 'Black revolters' to convert them to Christianity.<sup>52</sup> Domingo Criollo intended to make peace with the colonial authorities. As a proof of his good intentions, he would give his son to the Crown and receive the Catholic sacraments.<sup>53</sup> In return for his offer, all the Maroons would obtain lands and freedom because 'he [Criollo] and his people have been free since time immemorial'.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, the colonial authorities did not accept these offers.

In 1683, the authorities commenced campaigns to destroy Criollo's palenques.<sup>55</sup> Despite these politics of aggression, the Maroons continued patiently building alliances with members of the Catholic Church, obtaining, on some occasions, temporary pardons for the crimes considered to have been committed by the Maroons during the act of escaping, and 'privileged' them with the recognition of their freedom.<sup>56</sup> For the Catholic Church, the palenques were sources of new Christians who, after baptism, came under the protection of the priests, gaining a sort of immunity.<sup>57</sup>

The Maroon territory was therefore a clandestine territory aligned formally and strategically with the Catholic faith. However, in the oral tradition, another world coexists alongside this religious pragmatism. San Basilio de Palenque also encompasses other territories, like an underworld territory. The *Mojano* and the *Mojano*, who are creatures with inverted feet, white skin, and brown hair, live under the community's main creek. These creatures kidnap, but then return, non-baptised children or those who disobey community practices. For instance, children should not visit the creek during certain hours alone.<sup>58</sup> They must immediately be baptised, to prevent these temporary abductions. The continued importance of this Catholic sacrament in the community recalls the strategy implemented by Criollo to protect its people, that of seeking the Church's protection. As the beginning of life embraces this sacrament, so burials are ruled by the funerary ceremony of the lumbalú, which includes dances, drums, and chants in Palenquero language, with Bantu words from Congo.<sup>59</sup>

I highlight the individual importance of the sacrament of baptism because by 1783 the archive records that the community had little commitment to other aspects of the Catholic faith: The descendants of the freed Maroons 'disregarded the reprimands of its priest, who was treated with little veneration'.<sup>60</sup> He had a house in the community, but the poblacion's church was in a state of disrepair.<sup>61</sup> The church dedicated to Basilio (Basil), a Catholic saint,

<sup>52</sup> GAI, 1686–1693, 12. Nation was the word used by the Europeans to understand African groups, such as the Ethiopian and Kisama nations, which seem to pervade the understanding of Maroon communities in the literature, as explained in this article (P. Gómez, *The Experiential Caribbean: Creating Knowledge and Healing in the Early Modern Atlantic*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press 2017; J. A. Krug, *Fugitive Modernities*).

<sup>53</sup> By 1537, Cartagena de Indias was officially the largest slave-trade port in the Spanish Americas. From 1533, this city used enslaved African people to extract gold from the funerary sites of the Sinú indigenous people and mines; to labour on large farms; private homes, churches and convents (Landers, J. et al. Researching the history of slavery in Colombia and Brazil through ecclesiastical and notarial archives, in: M. Kominko (ed) *From Dust to Digital: Ten Years of the Endangered Archives Programme*, Cambridge, 2015, 259–292; M.C. Navarrete, *Génesis y Desarrollo de La Esclavitud En Colombia. Siglos XVI y XVII*, Santiago de Cali, 2012).

<sup>54</sup> GAI, 1686–1693, 11, 12, 13.

<sup>55</sup> GAI, 1686–1693, 15, 16, 26, 28, 39, 49.

<sup>56</sup> GAI, 1686–1693, 278.

<sup>57</sup> GAI, 1686–1693, 12, 495.

<sup>58</sup> Pérez Palomino, *Del Arroyo Al Acueducto*.

<sup>59</sup> de Friedemann, *Lumbalú: Ritos de La Muerte En Palenque de San Basilio, Colombia, América Negra 1* (1991) 65–92; A. Schwegler, *Chi Ma NKongo: Lengua y Rito Ancestrales En El Palenque de San Basilio (Colombia)*, Frankfurt, Madrid, 1996.

<sup>60</sup> GAI, 1783, 14.

<sup>61</sup> GAI, 1783, 14.

<sup>46</sup> V. Johnson, *Dealing with the Silence*, in: M. G. Thomas, S. Fowler and V. Johnson (eds), *The Silence of the Archive*, London, 2017, 101–116, 103.

<sup>47</sup> Navarrete Peláez, *San Basilio Del Palenque*.

<sup>48</sup> This hypothesis is also sustained by many elders in the community. They sustain that the enslaved people escaped following the seashore to reach Tolú, and then the Montes de María.

<sup>49</sup> Cassiani Herrera, *Palenque Magno*.

<sup>50</sup> Cassiani Herrera, *Palenque Magno*.

<sup>51</sup> Navarrete Peláez, *San Basilio De Palenque*. Cassiani Herrera, *Palenque Magno*.

still exists today, sharing a gathering space with a monument dedicated to Benkos Biohó, the founding father of the community according to oral tradition.<sup>62</sup>

Despite their greater or lesser adherence to Catholicism, members of the community replicated the earlier practice of seeking the protection of its authorities during their most recent forced displacements, in 2000 and 2001, owing to the Colombian armed conflict. One of the forcibly displaced community members of San Basilio de Palenque, Rafael de La Bonguita, was named in honour of Rafael Castillo, a Catholic priest. He advised them on how to re-locate safely after being uprooted in 2001. In colonial times, during the peace negotiations, the presence of Balthasar de La Fuente was a reassurance that violence would not be carried out against them. Phrases such as, 'They would only leave their hiding places in the presence of the Bishop', give an example of their relationship with the Catholic authorities.<sup>63</sup>

Other reasons given by Balthasar de La Fuente favouring the conversion of the palenques into towns were the cropping of lands to supply provisions for Cartagena de Indias, and defence against indigenous people and pirate attacks.<sup>64</sup> These reasons were also shared by the colonial authorities back in Spain, who preferred to pacify rather than destroy the palenque. The Crown was aware that slave owners would resist its decision. However, it would keep its word and financially guarantee the royal decree, ending the destruction of the palenques.<sup>65</sup>

The news of Palenque de San Miguel Arcángel's freedom triggered different reactions. On the one hand, the white elites of Cartagena de Indias were afraid that freedom could be extended to all enslaved people. On the other hand, the still-enslaved Africans, and the residents of other palenques, started joining Palenque de San Miguel Arcángel, to enjoy the 'privilege' of freedom conceded to this community.<sup>66</sup> Local colonial authorities had differing opinions, ranging from calls to attack and destroy the Palenque de San Miguel Arcángel for good, to recognising freedom only for the *negros criollos*, those born in the palenque, in breach of the royal decree. They would eventually break ties with their ancestors, the slaves, facilitating their recapture.<sup>67</sup>

In 1685, the Maroons became the object of extermination campaigns. The local colonial authorities decided that the royal decree would be 'obeyed but not executed'. They understood that its implementation had pernicious consequences for the white elites of Cartagena de Indias, which had not been foreseen by the Crown.<sup>68</sup> Following the suspension of the royal decree, rumours reached Cartagena de Indias of uprisings in the palenques, as well as other attacks conducted by the Maroons, such as the poisoning of the meat supply of the city. These rumours were proved to be false.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, this fear created the ideal atmosphere for justifying the colonial extermination campaigns against the rebel communities: 'it is less inconvenient that they perish instead of us'.<sup>70</sup> In a letter dated 10 December 1693, the Governor, Sancho Ximeno, declared his decision to destroy the palenques.<sup>71</sup> The result was ninety-two Maroons captured, forty-three killed (including the leader, Domingo Criollo) and the burning of 137

*bohíos* [huts].<sup>72</sup> The royal reaction to the disobedience of the colonial authorities to the royal order was to open investigations, recorded in the historical records.

Apart from creating strategic alliances and offering subjection in exchange of freedom and lands, there were other reasons for the palenque's survival, such as its large population of around 234 to 600 fugitives from slavery; a network of peers who, although still in captivity in the city and on large farms, were their allies and informants about attacks being prepared; and capitalising on their location.<sup>73</sup> The records show that Maroons made use of hills, vegetation, water bodies, wetlands, and the wet and dry seasons, so that, at certain times, they were unreachable.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, natural resources helped the Maroons to obtain materials for shelter, food, and protection, and they had specific knowledge to make use of them.<sup>75</sup>

In the Montes de María, the palenques were surrounded by a trench and wooden stockades, fortified with hidden poisoned traps to make them impenetrable.<sup>76</sup> These stockades are still used to demarcate areas in San Basilio de Palenque and other towns nearby. The aforementioned geographical feature that gave protection are the *montes* (mountains), which have been a fundamental part of the territory of San Basilio de Palenque from colonial times to the present day. The *montes* made marronage materially possible for the Maroons because they allowed them, at certain times, to find temporary territorial peace.<sup>77</sup> In the oral tradition, intangibly, the *montes* also represent the warrior spirit of their ancestors. The *montes* cannot be ever entirely owned as a territory, which has its individuality as a separate being, acting on its own as a fugitive.

By implementing different strategies, the Palenque de San Miguel Arcángel subverted the pattern of extermination as the only option for dealing with Maroon communities in the Montes de María in the seventeenth century. This led to the peace agreement in 1714. The oral tradition suggests that Benkos Biohó signed the pact for the community with the Governor of Cartagena de Indias, Gerónimo Badillo. However, the archive provides another name, Nicolás de Santa Rosa, Captain of the palenque, under the auspices of the religious authority, Antonio María Cassiani, Bishop of Cartagena de Indias.<sup>78</sup>

McFarlane states that formal agreements between palenques and colonial authorities were rare in Colombia.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, a note inserted at the end of the 1714 peace agreement describes the building of a new palenque in the area of Santa Marta and the plan for its conversion into a town.<sup>80</sup> The records do not describe what happened to this palenque – that is, whether the negotiations were successful or if the initiative ended up being exterminated. However, it at least demonstrates a willingness among the colonial authorities, unseen before the case of Palenque de San Miguel Arcángel and its conversion into the poblacion de San Basilio de Palenque.

<sup>62</sup> Ferrari, Un Epígrafe Cimarrón Para La Libertad.

<sup>63</sup> GAI, 1686–1693, 56, 57.

<sup>64</sup> GAI, 1686–1693, 54.

<sup>65</sup> GAI, 1686–1693, 80, 82.

<sup>66</sup> GAI, 1686–1693, 270, 272, 274, 493, 494, 495.

<sup>67</sup> GAI, 1686–1693, 276, 500, 510.

<sup>68</sup> GAI, 1686–1693, 391, 392, 500. GAI, 1693–1695, 311, 313.

<sup>69</sup> GAI, 1693–1695, 311, 315, 316.

<sup>70</sup> GAI, 1693–1695, 323.

<sup>71</sup> GAI, 1693–1695, 357.

<sup>72</sup> GAI, 1693–1695, 359, 362, 364.

<sup>73</sup> GAI, 1714: 2, 3, 7, 11, 15, 30. A. Escalante, Palenques in Colombia, in: R. Price (ed), *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, New York, 1973, 74–81; Price, Maroons and Their Communities; A. Castaño, Palenques y Cimarronaje: Procesos de Resistencia Al Sistema Colonial Esclavista En El Caribe Sabanero (Siglos XVI, XVII y XVIII), *Revista CS* 16 (2015) 61–86.

<sup>74</sup> GAI, 1686–1693, 49, 383; GAI, 1693–1695, 13, 356, 362; GAI, 1714: 14, 45.

<sup>75</sup> GAI, 1693–1695, 12, 13.

<sup>76</sup> GAI, 1686–1693, 383; GAI, 1693–1695, 26, 38.

<sup>77</sup> W. J. Wright, The Morphology of Marronage, *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 110 (2020) 1134–1149.

<sup>78</sup> GAI, 1714.

<sup>79</sup> McFarlane, Cimarrones and Palenque, 1986; McFarlane, Cimarrones and Palenques, 2008.

<sup>80</sup> GAI, 1714: 46,47.

*In-between co-optation and defiance*

Following the 1714 peace agreement, the poblacion of San Basilio de Palenque became a perfect example of a ch'ixi/border world. A poblacion had two sides: it was at once a place for some to realise their freedom, and also an enclave where they were formally isolated to protect white property, blocking further flight and rebellion that could have threatened slavery in the Province of Cartagena in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

As explained above, the process of isolating Blackness was both induced and sought in the Colombian Caribbean. It was not only a result of Maroon efforts to find a place to live in freedom, but the effect of a peace agreement that included isolation as a requirement for survival as a people. Domingo Criollo also offered their segregation as a strategy of resistance: 'no negro shall leave the *palenque* nor have communication with any person'.<sup>81</sup>

The subversion of enslaved people and Maroons was certainly the main threat to the colonial regime.<sup>82</sup> However, Navarrete Peláez explains that palenques, including Palenque de San Miguel Arcángel, did not seek to end slavery. Her position is common in the historiography of marronage.<sup>83</sup> For instance, Reis states that, in Brazil, the resistance of the quilombos to confront slavery was not direct as such in comparison to slave revolts.<sup>84</sup> Despite the existence of large, stable Maroon communities, such as Palmares, here this author also has in mind those *quilombos* which were temporary residences for enslaved people. They joined them to practice their religion and culture, but not to live in them.<sup>85</sup> Alternatively, Ciccariello-Maher and Krug see Maroon communities as an expression of power that pursued the abolition of slavery symbolically and ontologically. Their revolutionary psychological and discursive capacity demonstrated that another life was possible for Africans and their descendants beyond being conquered and enslaved.<sup>86</sup>

I am not in a position to describe the vision of all the palenques of the Colombian Caribbean during the seventeenth century as regard the abolition of slavery as a system. Such an analysis is, anyway, outside the scope of this article. Nevertheless, the record is strongly suggestive of the intention of Palenque de San Miguel Arcángel to liberate the remaining enslaved people of the Province of Cartagena de Indias – at least until they negotiated their freedom with the colonial regime in 1714, in part by acceding to their formal isolation. My hypothesis contends that this palenque jeopardised slavery, and this was a reason why the colonial regime negotiated its incorporation in the system as an isolated poblacion.

Palenque de San Miguel Arcángel succeeded in resisting the extermination campaigns of the colonial authorities in different ways. They attracted others to the community and allowed those still in captivity to threaten those who claimed ownership over them with the possibility of reaching the palenque should living conditions not improve in the city and on large farms.<sup>87</sup> Further such uniting of slaves, in remote and wild areas, was something

that the colonial regime could not afford. The idea of Maroons controlling areas caused fear within the colonial regime because they appeared to be unstoppable, encouraging others to flee.<sup>88</sup>

As I see it, Palenque de San Miguel Arcángel had the extra-territorial capacity to impact on the freedom of other African men and women still in captivity. McFarlane states that some enslaved people aspired only to gain a 'species of freedom', such as working without mistreatment, within slavery.<sup>89</sup> I argue that the existence of the palenque gave enslaved people some leverage for negotiation with their holders despite their enslavement. The conversion of the palenque into a poblacion might decrease the possibility of expansion of agency within domination. Nevertheless, this contraction might have not been complete, because as explain further, the fact possibility to find shelter in the poblacion might have remained as an option.

There is a strong possibility that Domingo Criollo had in mind more than the individual and collective freedom of a group of slaves and their descendants. On 26 November 1690, the priest Balthasar de La Fuente described to the colonial authorities his conversations with Criollo in the montes. Criollo explained their links with other, larger palenques in the area of Santa Marta and in Panama, their networks among rebels, and their strength.<sup>90</sup> In March 1693, colonial investigations stated that, for the Maroons, the freedom of the fugitives was not enough. They intended to increase in number, to resist invasions and initiate hostilities that would lead to the liberation of all the slaves in the Province of Cartagena without any distinctions.<sup>91</sup>

However, after the palenque became a poblacion, the isolation negotiated in the peace agreement could possibly have been perceived as a scaling down of their plans for freedom of all the enslaved people remaining in the city and on large farms. Officially giving up the previous plan was possibly a way to guarantee their survival. The transformation of a palenque into a town, a ch'ixi/borderland space, was a successful mechanism in the eyes of the colonialists to stop Black revolts, by preventing conflict and further escapes. One of the conditions imposed on this poblacion to remain free was the prohibition on receiving new fugitives and the obligation to return them to their holders. For enslaved people, the difficulty in finding shelter in the poblacion after running away could have contributed to accepting their domination and maintaining the slavery status quo. However, this obstacle may not have been absolute. The ethics of freedom of the palenque seemed to continue to exist in the poblacion alongside the legal prohibition on sheltering new fugitives. The oral tradition sustains that newcomers were never returned to their holders, reinforcing the idea of ch'ixi-border world.

*Mastering the art of the in-between*

The ch'ixi/border nature of the poblacion emerges in the political manner in which it was built – as a consequence of the 1714 peace agreement with the colonial authorities and through its social components. As explained, a poblacion was a functional part of the colonial regime with certain autonomies, which has called a 'quasi-independent world'.<sup>92</sup> Overall, the final version of the peace agreement allowed the Maroons to retain more political power

<sup>81</sup> GAI, 1693–1695, 361.

<sup>82</sup> Krug, *Fugitives Modernities*, 125.

<sup>83</sup> Navarrete Peláez, *San Basilio De Palenque*; McFarlane, *Cimarrones and Palenques*, 1986; McFarlane, *Cimarrones and Palenques*, 2008; J. J. Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia*, Baltimore, London, 1993; Roberts, *Theorizing Freedom*.

<sup>84</sup> Joao Jose Reis, 'Resistencia Escrava Na Bahia. "Poderemos Brincar, Folgar e Cantar...": O Protesto Escravo Na América', *Afro-Asia* 14 (1983) 107–123; Miki, *Fleeing into slavery*.

<sup>85</sup> Reis, *Resistencia Escrava Na Bahia*.

<sup>86</sup> G. Ciccariello-Maher, *From Slavery to What World?: Flight and Exteriority in Neil Roberts' Freedom as Marronage*, *Theory & Event* 20 (2017) 193–200, 200. Krug, *Fugitive Modernities*.

<sup>87</sup> GAI, 1686–1693, 344.

<sup>88</sup> GAI, 1693–1695, 27, 29, 84.

<sup>89</sup> McFarlane, *Cimarrones and Palenques*, 1986, 147; McFarlane, *Cimarrones and Palenques*, 2008.

<sup>90</sup> GAI, 1686–1693, 13.

<sup>91</sup> GAI, 1686–1693, 391.

<sup>92</sup> McFarlane, *Cimarrones and Palenques*, 1986, 143; McFarlane, *Cimarrones and Palenques*, 2008.



than initial proposals contemplated.

The proposals foresaw, for instance, that the captain of the palenque would retain economic control of the community, but a white man appointed by the Governor would exercise political and civil power.<sup>93</sup> No white man ruled the community in the end. There may have been many reasons for this change, such as the final agreement being negotiated by a religious authority and ally, Bishop Antonio María Cassiani, instead of a military officer, Captain Alfonso de Guzmán, which in turn may have allowed the Maroons to modify the conditions or impose different ones. It is possible to speculate on the reasons why additional concessions were granted to the Maroons in the final agreement, but any such details are absent in the extant history of San Basilio de Palenque and cannot be confirmed.

The importance of the figure of Bishop Antonio María Cassiani is reflected in the current names of many members of the community. Navarrete Peláez explained that Maroons adopted the surnames of their previous holders, as a strategy imposed by Domingo Criollo.<sup>94</sup> In the case of being recaptured, this would allow the families to remain together, without being considered slaves of the Spanish Crown and sold abroad. Pérez Palomino states that Bishop Antonio María Cassiani imposed his surname during baptisms to ensure that members of the community converted to the Catholic faith.<sup>95</sup> After becoming a poblacion, apart from the surname *Cassiani*, the 1777 census demonstrates that *Domingo* was a common name among the community members, probably commemorating their former Maroon leader.<sup>96</sup> I argue that the use of the name Domingo, associated with the community's past struggle against the colonial regime, may show that, despite being a part of the colonial regime, there was clearly a side to the community – its identity – associated with opposition.

On the question of diverse identities, before the 1714 agreement Maroons owned the Montes de María, but Africans and their descendants were not its only inhabitants.<sup>97</sup> There were other fugitives, including indigenous people, and particularly women with mixed African, indigenous, and white ancestry, as well as Blacks who were married but escaped from their partners or were kidnapped by the Maroons from other towns.<sup>98</sup> Nothing in the historical records indicates that these territories were taken by the dispossession of indigenous people. However, this could have been possible. Oral tradition indicates that they owed indigenous people apologies for the land taken during the colonial times to build their communities.

According to the peace agreement, the community members were obliged to impede the entrance into the community of Spaniards, *mulatos* [a person of mixed white and African ancestry], indigenous people, or any other persons such as fugitives from slavery, except for trade.<sup>99</sup> The inability to determine who remained in their territory unsettles the idea of a poblacion as a sovereign space.

The head of the poblacion, its Captain, was in charge of conducting a strict census of the now-freed fugitives and their descendants, according to different racial categories.<sup>100</sup> The census was a reminder that the concessions on freedom and territory granted to them would not be extended to other palenques.

Freedom was a privilege.<sup>101</sup> For the remaining Africans and their descendants in Colombia, liberty would not come until 137 years after the 1714 peace agreement. A census carried out in 1777 shows that the population of the town had grown rapidly. For instance, there were 140 huts, 305 females, 301 males and seven others, whose genders were unidentifiable – because some parts of the records are illegible – making a total of 613 people living in the poblacion.<sup>102</sup>

Another census undertaken in 1778 registered one member of the Catholic church, no white or indigenous people, 314 free people of different colours and 391 slaves of different colours, for a total of 706 inhabitants.<sup>103</sup> The absence of indigenous people is a difference from the previous records, which highlighted their presence in the community before the peace agreement in 1714.<sup>104</sup> Possibly their existence in the community would have been a clear transgression of the isolation clause, and therefore their presence was not included in the census. The categories 'free' and 'slave' remained the principal division, drawing a line between those residents who enjoyed the privilege of freedom and those who still were in the process of buying it with their crops.

The payments needed to achieve the freedom of all the poblacion's inhabitants were understood as a collective task for the community. The Captain of the Palenque, Nicolás de Santa Rosa, was responsible for ensuring that these payments were delivered to their former holders.<sup>105</sup> There remained a sense in the poblacion that freedom was for all or it was not freedom, similar to Domingo Criollo's political position during the time of the palenque.

#### *A Maroon Ch'ixi/Border world*

The palenque/poblacion is an example of the ruptures and tensions of ch'ixi/border worlds as contested spaces. However, they have been largely overlooked in the analysis of these worlds. As shown in this article, in Maroon territories, opposition and co-optation are the two sides of the same coin. Nevertheless, being both at the same time did not prevent San Basilio de Palenque's territory from promptly becoming precarious. The Spanish Crown soon began to undermine the terms and conditions of the 1714 peace agreement as regards territory. In the 1780s, the reorganisation of forty-three towns in the Colombian Caribbean caused the poblacion to be dispossessed of its land. Despite resistance, six towns with more than 100 families were established within its territory.<sup>106</sup>

Sixty-nine years after the peace agreement, San Basilio de Palenque was described as living indolently, without rules or God. The aforementioned territorial reorganisation of the Colombian Caribbean has been understood in the anthropological literature as a turning point that finally made San Basilio de Palenque's ownership of certain lands official.<sup>107</sup> However, from a geographical approach, I argue that this reorganisation was the first time in the history of the community that it was dispossessed of land, starting a process that would continue until today. The 1714 agreement conferred official ownership, with the surface area of the Maroon's territory extending to the Montes de María in the Colombian Caribbean. This shows that ideas of Maroon sovereignties clash with conditions of territorial insecurity that have been developing

<sup>93</sup> GAI, 1714, 20.

<sup>94</sup> Navarrete Peláez, *San Basilio De Palenque*.

<sup>95</sup> Pérez Palomino, *Del Arroyo al Acueducto*.

<sup>96</sup> National General Archive (NGA), 1777.

<sup>97</sup> GAI, 1686–1693, 12, 83.

<sup>98</sup> GAI, 1693–1695, 12, 381.

<sup>99</sup> GAI, 1714, 37, 40.

<sup>100</sup> GAI, 1714, 37.

<sup>101</sup> GAI, 1693–1695, 356.

<sup>102</sup> NGA, 1777.

<sup>103</sup> NGA, 1778.

<sup>104</sup> GAI, 1693–1695, 12, 381.

<sup>105</sup> GAI, 1714: 34, 37, 38.

<sup>106</sup> GAI, 1783, 14.

<sup>107</sup> Cross and de Friedemann, *Ma Ngombe*.

among communities of descendants of marronage from colonial times to the present day.

The existence of these communities has been tolerable, but still difficult to digest, for the colonial, and then the State, regimes. With the political and academic focus on the Colombian Pacific due to the current armed violence in this area, the Caribbean descendants of enslaved people have largely been forgotten in these realms.<sup>108</sup> This article also shows that the identity of San Basilio de Palenque as triumphant Black resisters has contributed to an historical backlash against the community.

In colonial times, the Palenque de San Miguel Arcángel's existence as a clandestine site was a threat to the white property, but its conversion to a poblacion was acknowledged as beneficial. The passage from palenque to poblacion not only involved building a place to win freedom for some enslaved people and their descendants, but also to isolate Black people and thereby assuage white fears.

The colonial power obstructed Black mobilisation, freezing a process of marronage in the area by destroying many palenques, and incorporating Palenque de San Miguel Arcángel into the colonial system. It became more difficult for Africans and other fugitives, such as indigenous people and mixed-background women, to escape, and for alliances between enslaved people living in cities, on large farms, and in other palenques to be formed. Black uprisings that could have threatened slavery were thus successfully prevented.

From a ch'ixi/border perspective, in some instances the goals and interests of the fugitives from slavery for their territories were strategically aligned with the colonial authorities' aims. This raises the question of whether, during these periods, they could be still interpreted as being in opposition to the colonial regime. I argue that the complexity of the survival strategies developed by San Basilio de Palenque during the colonial period demonstrates that was still a dissident territory, undermining even their peers in the way they related to the regime.

In the transition from palenque to poblacion, the community also sought and accepted formal isolation in order to survive. The fact that it was incorporated into the regime did not strip away its other side: being disruptive in the act of surviving, and continuing to giving shelter to those who were supposed to return to their owners. Surviving in a context of gross racial violence by juxtaposing seemingly mutually exclusive strategies was certainly required disruptive acts. The ethic of marronage becomes an ethic of spatial balance, a pendular movement between types of territories, designed to play the long game. This is the Maroon ch'ixi/border world in action in the geographies of the Americas and the Caribbean.

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### Declaration of competing interest

None.

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<sup>108</sup> I. H. Valencia Peña, Lugares de Las Poblaciones Negras En Colombia: La Ausencia Del Afrocaribe Insular, *CS: Dinámicas regionales y sociales* 309 (2011) 309–350; A Escobar and A Pedrosa, *Pacífico ¿Desarrollo o Diversidad? Estado, Capital y Movimientos Sociales En El Pacífico Colombiano*, Bogotá, 1996.