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WILD *CIMARRONES*: CUBAN MAROON ECOLOGY IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE  
19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AND THE CORPOREAL RIFT

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Abstract: Analyses of enslaved labor and marronage in the Caribbean and beyond abound. As insightful and important as many of these works have been, they have often overlooked the ecological dimension of the maroons' struggle for their liberation, the relationship between nature and the political struggle for emancipation. Drawing on archival data, other primary sources, and secondary materials, and building on historical materialism and ecology, this work describes some elements of the ecological dimensions of maroons' life in Cuba in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This thesis pays special attention to their metabolic relationship marronage established with its natural environment. Key theoretical concepts are part of the analysis, like corporeal rift, relative wilderness, and biogeocenosis. The thesis concludes that 19<sup>th</sup> century Cuban marronage was inseparable from the preservation of relative wilderness, and that maroons established an oppositional mode of life to that of the capitalist-colonial plantation system of production.

Keywords: Cuban marronage, maroons, wilderness, corporeal rift, metabolic rift, biogeocenosis

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The global ecological crisis and the start of the Anthropocene<sup>1</sup> prompts our society to radically transform our relationship with the rest of nature, in what can be formulated as the “Great Capitalist Climacteric”<sup>2</sup>, that is, a historical period in which we need an objective and radical transformation of the social structure to face the deep and extensive destruction of the biosphere. This critical moment of history has brought forward an unprecedented interest in the natural environment and particularly in the relationship that humans establish with it through the production and reproduction of society. The epochal crossroads in which our times are set has boosted imaginations about possible futures that go beyond capitalism and its inherent exploitation of nature as a whole, stopping and – this may even seem difficult to imagine – mending the immeasurable devastation of the Earth’s surface and its lifeforms. This vantage point set to a future where biosphere and climate change collapse has been abolished by abolishing the economic system that engenders it, has dialectically spawned an interest in exploring present day movements and struggles, while at the same time in unearthing forgotten pasts hidden in our convoluted history that show that another, more ecologically and socially sound world is possible. This latter interest, the search for past histories, is what motivates the research topic of this thesis. In searching the past for moments and peoples that have conjoined in one single struggle their self-liberation with the liberation of nature from relentless human exploitation, we may gather valuable insights to how we may do this during our contemporary socio-ecological breaking point.

In mid 2021, I was introduced to an article by Andreas Malm, “In Wildness Is the Liberation of the World: On Maroon Ecology and Partisan Nature”<sup>3</sup>, which would be the introduction to part of the internship research that I would do during the fall semester of that

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1 For a problematization of the concept of “Anthropocene” insofar as it possibly considers the whole of humanity as responsible for capitalist environmental degradation, cf. Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg, “The Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative,” *The Anthropocene Review* 1, no. 1 (April 2014): 62–69. I choose to use “Anthropocene” instead of “Capitalocene” because I consider that the potential or capacity to change the Earth system as a whole will extend beyond capitalism.

2 John Bellamy Foster, “The Great Capitalist Climacteric: Marxism and ‘System Change Not Climate Change,’” *Monthly Review* 67, no. 6 (November 1, 2015): 1–18.

3 Andreas Malm, “In Wildness Is the Liberation of the World: On Maroon Ecology and Partisan Nature,” *Historical Materialism* 26, no. 3 (September 25, 2018): 3–37.

year. Maroon ecology would be the the main topic of my research, which is now also the topic of this study. It is my understanding that the subjects that Malm’s paper explores are to be examined in greater detail in an extremely alluring future book (or books) dealing with what can be characterized as “a peoples’ history of wilderness”, a fascinating idea that would be a major contribution to the field of Human Ecology. This thesis is intended to be a small addition to the field. I focused my research on Cuban maroons during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, pretending to fill a gap in the literature regarding how Cuban marronage related to ecology. There has been great interest and a vast number of studies on Cuban marronage throughout the decades, especially since the Cuban Revolution (1953-1959), and as important as these works have been, the focus on the relationship it had with its natural environment has been relatively minuscule. To end this introduction I will briefly present what marronage is, as well as why this particular time frame and geography was chosen.

Maroons were the slaves in the Americas that ran away from the control of their masters, often escaping to remote or mostly inaccessible wild areas. Marronage is thus defined as “the practices of flight from enslavement and placemaking beyond slavery”<sup>4</sup>, or the “activities undertaken by enslaved ‘fugitive’ Africans and their descendants to repudiate enslavement”<sup>5</sup> which took place throughout the Americas from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Though there have been several categorizations of the types of marronage in scholarly works based on their geographical or social origin, such as maritime and market marronage, the most commonly studied ones are urban and rural marronage.<sup>6</sup> This thesis will focus on rural marronage, since it was the most widespread form, and where maroons generally established a more settled life in the wild. The temporal and geographical time frame of the study have to do with pragmatic reasons. While the first instances of marronage date back to the early 16<sup>th</sup> century when capitalist primitive accumulation<sup>7</sup> took place, and remained the most popular

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4 Celeste Winston, “Maroon Geographies,” *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* (May 4, 2021): 2185.

5 Marcus P. Nevius, “New Histories of Marronage in the Anglo-Atlantic World and Early North America,” *History Compass* 18, no. 5 (May 2020): 1.

6 Amparo Sánchez Cobos, “Rebeldías y resistencias esclavas en la historiografía sobre Cuba, siglo XIX,” *HiSTOReLo. Revista de Historia Regional y Local* 11, no. 21 (January 1, 2019): 260, 263; Nevius, “New Histories of Marronage in the Anglo-Atlantic World and Early North America,” 3–4.

7 On capitalist primitive accumulation in the Americas, cf. Brian Scott Williams et al., “Race, Land and Freedom,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Historical Geography*, by Mona Domosh, Michael Heffernan, and Charles Withers (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2020), 182–183, accessed July 12, 2023, <https://sk.sagepub.com/reference/the-sage-handbook-of-historical-geography/i1719.xml>.

form of slave resistance in the Americas throughout the centuries, the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had the greatest surge in uprisings and marronage in Cuba, when the influx of slaves peaked.<sup>8</sup> Between 1814 and 1852, what historian Alain Yacou has called the “long war of the maroons” took place.<sup>9</sup> After 1852, and particularly during the Ten Years’ War (1868-1878), the first Cuban war for independence, marronage sharply declined however.<sup>10</sup> There is thus more literature and primary sources that deal with marronage during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century than any other time period. Geographically limiting the study of marronage was necessary since it was a phenomenon that spread through an entire continent, with its own particularities, albeit with many similarities as well. Choosing to geographically restrict it to Cuba was due to considering it a fairly homogeneous territory in terms of climate and physical geography, as well as that the whole of Cuban marronage shared most characteristics, regardless of its specific location in the island. Being a native Spanish speaker, access to primary and secondary data was also much easier, and was a big factor in choosing this territory for analysis.

## 1.1 AIM OF STUDY

As anticipated in the previous section, the aim of the research is to provide an outline of how marronage developed in relation to the natural environment by studying maroon struggle in Cuba during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, contributing to the ecological dimension of historical materialism. Historical research on marronage can expand the theoretical notions of the relationship between nature and society, notions of unequal exchange, the metabolic rift theory (including the notion of corporeal rift), and ecological Marxism. This study aims to be a small contribution to this scholarship, deepening our understanding of the not-so-studied ecological dimension of marronage. In particular, Cuban marronage can provide a concrete example or “case study”, in

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8 Beatriz Joda Esteve, “El comercio de esclavos a Cuba, 1790- 1840: Una proporción femenina,” *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura* 41, no. 2 (October 20, 2014): 107–130; Sánchez Cobos, “Rebeldías y resistencias esclavas en la historiografía sobre Cuba, siglo XIX,” 256.

9 Alain Yacou, “La insurgencia negra en la isla de Cuba en la primera mitad del siglo XIX,” *Revista de Indias* 53, no. 197 (April 30, 1993): 23, 30, 35–36.

10 Sánchez Cobos, “Rebeldías y resistencias esclavas en la historiografía sobre Cuba, siglo XIX,” 261; Yacou, “La insurgencia negra en la isla de Cuba en la primera mitad del siglo XIX.”

which wilderness and nature can be brought to the fore when thinking about the liberation of a system of exploitation. With regards to this, it can be studied with the perspective of being a past practice that enriches present theory, one of the fundamental aspects of the Marxian concept of *praxis*. Thus, on top of its intrinsic interest as part of human history and being a relatively unexplored field, marronage is interesting insofar as it has a great potential to offer ideological grounds for our current struggles.

Marronage can be studied from the viewpoint of how nature and humankind struggle for liberation are related, and how ecology and economy are inextricably intertwined. Scholarship has examined the ecologically destructive underpinnings of capital's logic, but from my perspective has so far lacked the dialectical pole of analyses of past peoples' struggles, in the spontaneous – and in recent times non-spontaneous – “alliances” between nature and society, in the fight of peoples that amalgamated what could be defined as common “interests” shared between them and their natural environment. Learning from maroon rebels and runaways, from how they employed nature to further their ends and their struggle, from the role of wilderness itself in their resistance to slavery, can theoretically inform class struggle today in a world that is facing profound ecological transformations.

## **1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

a) Main research question:

**What is the relationship between marronage in Cuba during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the natural environment in which it took place?**

b) Secondary research questions:

1. What were some of the political and economic characteristics of maroon life in 19<sup>th</sup> century Cuba?
2. How can marronage in 19<sup>th</sup> century Cuba enhance our understanding of the corporeal rift?



3. How can marronage in 19<sup>th</sup> century Cuba contribute to the conceptualization of relative wilderness?

### **1.3 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS**

In the following chapter I will establish the theoretical cornerstones of the analysis. I firstly describe the framework of maroon geographies or maroon ecologies, setting forth its four components. Secondly, I will expound the second set of concepts that will be theoretically relevant for the topic, namely the Marxian notion of nature, biogeocenosis, and relative wilderness. Thirdly, I will outline the last framework, that of metabolic rift theory and the corporeal rift.

The next chapter will briefly describe the research methodology and its limitations. I will present which primary sources were used (archives and others), as well as explain how the findings of this study may be constrained by the methods employed.

The chapter “Cuban maroon ecology” is the main body of this work. It is divided in five sections. The first one establishes the etymological origin of “maroon” and its relevance regarding the topic at hand. The second one provides an outlook on the general characteristics of Cuban marronage during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The third one describes maroon settlements in the wilderness and their economies. The fourth section expounds the corporeal rift of slaves and maroons, and how marronage was able to partially mend that rift. Lastly, the fifth section provides a more in-depth theoretical analysis of the historical findings of this research, interrelating the concepts of the theoretical frameworks with other insights of Cuban marronage.

The last section of the thesis, the conclusion, will wrap up by briefly answering the research questions posed at the beginning of this work, and with some other closing remarks.

The Appendix shows a sample document from one of the archives that was looked into in this research.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 THEORETICAL MARRONAGE OR MAROON GEOGRAPHIES/ECOLOGIES

A prolific and emerging body of literature has recently surfaced from the social sciences regarding the study of marronage. With an interdisciplinary perspective, scholars have gone further than just providing descriptions of historical marronage by extracting theoretical insights from maroons' experience in their flight, rebellion, and living throughout the Americas. These have stemmed from new research angles from which this historical phenomenon had been studied in the past. For the purposes of this thesis, the most relevant theoretical contributions have derived from analyses of marronage from the standpoint of its relationship to the natural environment and also by employing marronage as a fruitful allegory for thinking about current social issues (the nation-state, the socio-ecological crisis, etc.) – that is, beyond the temporal and spatial confines of chattel slavery in the Americas –, perspectives that have proven to be very fertile grounds for scholarship.<sup>11</sup> These contributions have been a product of various anthropological, historiographical, sociological, geographical, archaeological, and linguistic approaches to both past marronage and also to present maroon-descendants' contexts and communities. Various scholarly works have framed the findings of these studies differently: “theoretical marronage”, “maroon geographies”, “maroon ecologies”, among others.<sup>12</sup>

Maroon geographies, for example, has been defined as the “historical and ongoing spatial praxes of Black flight from and placemaking beyond racial violence that emerged during transatlantic slavery”<sup>13</sup>, whereas maroon ecology has been characterized as “the emplaced and embodied praxis of traditional environmental knowledge and political place-making emergent

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11 Winston, “Maroon Geographies,” 2186.

12 Nevius, “New Histories of Marronage in the Anglo-Atlantic World and Early North America,” 7; Winston, “Maroon Geographies,” 2185; Janae Davis et al., “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, ... Plantationocene?: A Manifesto for Ecological Justice in an Age of Global Crises,” *Geography Compass* 13, no. 5 (May 2019): 10–11, accessed July 27, 2023, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gec3.12438>; Robert Connell, “Maroon Ecology: Land, Sovereignty, and Environmental Justice,” *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 25, no. 2 (June 2020): 219, 229; Malm, “In Wildness Is the Liberation of the World.”

13 Winston, “Maroon Geographies,” 2185.

from the historical dynamics of ethnoterritorial struggle”<sup>14</sup>. The loci of these studies has thus been placed on what some authors call “placemaking”, “emplacement”, “land”, “landscape”, and others “territory”<sup>15</sup>. Collectively they point to how these are part of strategies and practices of spatial resistance employed by marronage against systems of oppression.<sup>16</sup> As such, “Maroon geographies advance alternative ways of understanding and producing space against and outside of these structures of racial violence rooted in the history and legacies of slavery.”<sup>17</sup> From this vantage point, marronage is seen as a spatial or territorial practice aiming towards “building alternative worlds in service of liberation”<sup>18</sup>. Scholar Celeste Winston proposes a guiding framework of maroon geographies consisting in the following four components: 1) reworking geographic refuse, 2) Black cooperative placemaking. 3) fugitive infrastructure, and 4) a spatial strategy of entanglement.<sup>19</sup>

1) The component of reworking geographic refuse refers to “spaces that have been refused incorporation into dominant geographies and development and sites where the people, land uses, and material environment are cast as marginal to the workings of racial capitalism’s ecologies.”<sup>20</sup> The reworking of these spaces would refer to how marronage reappropriates areas that are colonially deemed as “unproductive”, “worthless”, or “wastelands” for capitalist exploitation, and turns this on its head.<sup>21</sup>

2) The component of Black cooperative placemaking refers to the commons created by maroons through “practices of alternative earth stewardship... [and] the novel social infrastructures and institutions they created in slavery’s aftermath, despite their experiences with segregation, isolation, and enmity.”<sup>22</sup> This would imply a socio-ecological structure contrary to that of that pertaining to capitalist relations, involving a rational/sustainable management of the land and, for example, cooperative arrangements

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14 Connell, “Maroon Ecology,” 229.

15 Ana Laura Zavala Guillen, “Maroon Socioterritorial Movements,” *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 112, no. 4 (2021): 1123–1138; Winston, “Maroon Geographies”; Davis et al., “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, ... Plantationocene?”; Williams et al., “Race, Land and Freedom”; Connell, “Maroon Ecology.”

16 Winston, “Maroon Geographies,” 2187; Guillen, “Maroon Socioterritorial Movements,” 2–3.

17 Winston, “Maroon Geographies,” 2187.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., 2187–88.

20 Ibid., 2188.

21 Ibid.; Williams et al., “Race, Land and Freedom,” 183–184; Malm, “In Wildness Is the Liberation of the World,” 10–11.

22 Roane (2018) in Winston, “Maroon Geographies,” 2190.

and the passing down from generation to generation of knowledge and subsistence strategies.<sup>23</sup> The possibilities of placemaking beyond capitalism are also within the scope of this component.

3) The component of fugitive infrastructure encompasses the material basis of maroon struggle, the “extralegal” infrastructure built through cumulative efforts within the constraints of precariousness, which reflects “people’s adaptability and reactions to oppressive structures not as isolated and individual but as equally structural as the structures they resist.”<sup>24</sup>

4) Lastly, the component of a spatial strategy of entanglement relates to the forced contradictory nature of marronage, since it is compelled to operate within a system of exploitation and constantly relate to it, while simultaneously remain in conflict with it.<sup>25</sup> It thus refers to how marronage is “ a way of crafting and enacting autonomy within a system from which one is unable to fully disentangle.”<sup>26</sup>

These four components of maroon geographies are a guiding theoretical framework for this marronage in general, and therefore are the backdrop of the topic and historical analysis of this thesis. They will frame particular Cuban maroon practices as part of a temporally, geographically, and socially broader phenomenon.

## **2.2 NATURE, BIOGEOCENOSIS, AND RELATIVE WILDERNESS**

The second theoretical cornerstone of this thesis is a Marxian notion of nature and relative wilderness. Marxist traditions have had widely differing interpretations of Marx’s (and Engels’) perspective on nature.<sup>27</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, I will draw from interpretations of nature developed by what has been called the “third stage of ecological Marxism”<sup>28</sup>, which posit a materialist and dialectical conception of both nature and human history, and underscore the

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23 Ibid., 2190–2191.

24 Ibid., 2192.

25 Ibid., 2194.

26 Bonilla (2015) in *ibid.*, 2194.

27 Cf. John Bellamy Foster, *Marx’s Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000); John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark, “Marx’s Ecology and the Left,” *Monthly Review* 68, no. 2 (June 1, 2016): 1–25.

28 Hannah Holleman, “Method in Ecological Marxism: Science and the Struggle for Change,” *Monthly Review* 67, no. 5 (October 1, 2015): 2–3.

their co-belonging. I also employ Soviet science's concept of biogeocenosis and Andreas Malm's notion of relative wilderness.

The concept of "biogeocenosis" was coined in 1944 by Soviet geographer, phytogeographer and engineer Vladimir N. Sukachev. Expanding on the German zoologist and ecologist Karl Möbius's concept of "biocenosis", it referred to a holistic and dialectical conception of both the biotic community and the abiotic environment.<sup>29</sup> It was conceived as a dialectical notion that was intended to be a more unified and dynamic category than Arthur Tansley's ecosystem concept. "Biogeocenosis" is defined as follows:

A biogeocoenose is a combination on a specific area of the earth's surface of homogeneous natural phenomenon (atmosphere, mineral strata, vegetable, animal, and microbic life, soil, and water conditions), possessing its own specific type of interaction of these components and a definite type of interchange of their matter and energy among themselves and with other natural phenomena, and representing an internally-contradictory dialectical unity, being in constant movement and development.<sup>30</sup>

This complex and holistic concept emphasizes the internal dynamics, contradictory changes and instability of ecological processes, which it stressed much more than the term "ecosystem". The idea of movement, transformation and change are essential to this vision. The etymological root of "biogeocenosis" – from the Greek "*koinos*" ("common") and the prefixes "*bio*" ("life") and "*geo*" ("earth") – underlines the idea of community, which is something essentially changing, alive and dynamic. This an idea in which the parts participate actively in the evolution of the whole and in which there is no predetermined external "order", while the notion of ecosystem could mislead to a mechanistic (since a system is not necessarily "complex" or holistic) or idealist representations of a pre-established "harmony" or petrified balance of its elements. It is in this sense that the dialectical idea of contradiction plays a central role in the concept of biogeocenosis:

In a forest biogeocoenose (as in others): two mutually-contradictory tendencies are always in operation: on the one hand, internal interactions are always trying to change, to break down the inter-relationships built up between components, and on the other hand there is the capacity to resist the changing action, to correct it, and to restore what has been destroyed.<sup>31</sup>

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29 John Bellamy Foster, "Late Soviet Ecology and the Planetary Crisis," *Monthly Review* 67, no. 2 (June 1, 2015): 3–5.

30 Sukachev, V. and Dylis, N., *Fundamentals of Forest Biogeocoenology* (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1964), 26.

31 *Ibid.*, 609.

It is this idea of opposing forces that are in constant tension and mutual determination that makes possible not only change, but, more specifically, change in the sense of destruction, disappearance, extinction.

Lastly, I will be using the notion of relative wilderness. The concept of wilderness is arguably one of the most complex ones in both environmental and human history.<sup>32</sup> As stated by environmental historian Roderick Nash, this word comes from two old Anglo-Saxon words: *wildern* and *wildeor*, which seem to share the root *will*, meaning willful or uncontrollable.<sup>33</sup> In turn, the word wilderness, especially in the context of the United States, has historically shifted from a biblical, religious, and anthropocentric conception, to a romantic, bourgeois, and spiritual idealization (*cf.* Ralph W. Emerson, H. D. Thoreau, John Muir), and, lastly, to a scientific (ecological) one (*cf.* Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson).<sup>34</sup> Yet, as important and insightful as they are, all these views shared, to varying degrees and among other issues, the outlook that there exists such thing as a “pristine” biophysical nature, untouched and unperturbed by the human species. At odds with this view and starting from the idea that practically all ecosystems worldwide bear the imprint of human activities, Andreas Malm argues that there is not such thing as absolute wilderness (in its classical, bourgeois sense).<sup>35</sup> Instead, he offers a “progressive, cosmopolitan, and Marxian” notion of wilderness, understood as a space less fully subjugated to capital than others.<sup>36</sup> Specifically, Malm introduces the notion of *relative* wilderness, that is, a landscape that shows marks of human presence, but has not been built by exploiters. Drawing on Malm’s notion of relative wilderness, the present work also attempts to shed light on this issue, using the 19<sup>th</sup>-century maroon struggle in Cuba as a case study.

## 2.3 METABOLIC RIFT THEORY AND THE CORPOREAL RIFT

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32 Carolyn Merchant, *The Columbia Guide to American Environmental History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 34.

33 Nash in *ibid.*, 34.

34 Betancourt, Mauricio, “El Origen Literario, Científico y Sociopolítico Del Ambientalismo En Los Estados Unidos de América y Su Desarrollo Durante La Guerra Fría” (Bachelor’s, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2014), 25.

35 Malm, “In Wildness Is the Liberation of the World.”

36 *Ibid.*, 3.

The third theoretical vein of this thesis stems from metabolic rift theory, which states that capitalist development has led and will continue to lead humanity towards a destructive relationship with the rest of nature, undermining the foundations of material wealth upon which ecosystems, and human society, depend on. This theory – developed strongly since the late 1990s by several scholars – built upon Marx’s powerful critique of capitalism, which was based on a holistic, ecological conception of the productive relationship humankind establishes with non-human nature in order to develop what he called its social metabolism. Influenced by chemist Justus Liebig, Marx talked of metabolism (*Stoffwechsel*) to describe the material exchange within and between society and external nature, whereby, in capitalism, an “irreparable rift” in the human “metabolic interaction” with nature occurred.<sup>37</sup> The metabolic rift is thus the specifically capitalist process of destroying the “universal metabolism of nature”.<sup>38</sup> Marx focused on how capitalist social organization and increasingly industrialized agriculture tends to despoil the soil of the country of nutrients in the form of agricultural produce or wood from forests, funneled to the cities where the majority of these commodities are consumed. At the same time, these nutrients are transformed into pollution in the form of human and organic waste which is artificially concentrated as they are discarded in urban centers.<sup>39</sup> Recent contributions to metabolic rift theory have broadened the concept to explain how the capitalist mode of production destroys many other natural (and social) systems, besides agriculture and biogeochemical cycles. The broader framework of metabolic rift theory has become very influential in socio-environmental disciplines for examining diverse phenomena, both current and historical.<sup>40</sup>

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37 Marx, Karl, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Fowkes, Ben, Penguin Books., vol. 1 (London, 1976), 637–638; Marx, Karl, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. David Fernbach, vol. III (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 949; Foster, *Marx’s Ecology*; Kōhei Saitō, *Karl Marx’s Ecosocialism: Capitalism, Nature, and the Unfinished Critique of Political Economy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2017).

38 Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick, *Collected Works*, vol. 30 (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 62–63; John Bellamy Foster, “Marx and the Rift in the Universal Metabolism of Nature,” *Monthly Review* 65, no. 7 (December 1, 2013): 8; John Bellamy Foster, “Marxism and Ecology: Common Fronts of a Great Transition,” *Monthly Review* 67, no. 7 (December 1, 2015): 2–4.

39 Foster, *Marx’s Ecology*, 137, 163–164; Foster, “The Great Capitalist Climacteric,” 7–8; Mauricio Betancourt, “The Effect of Cuban Agroecology in Mitigating the Metabolic Rift: A Quantitative Approach to Latin American Food Production,” *Global Environmental Change* 63 (July 2020): 1; Marx, Karl, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, p. .

40 Cf. Wishart, Ryan and Jonna, Jamil, “Metabolic Rift: A Selected Bibliography,” n.d., <https://mronline.org/2013/10/16/metabolic-rift/>.

Recently, John Foster and Brett Clark have broadened metabolic rift theory by posing the notion of corporeal rift, a concept that seeks to study and explain the degradation of human lives and bodies under capitalism.<sup>41</sup> They claim that capitalism creates a double rift: one in relation to nature and another one pertaining to human metabolism. In this work I draw on the corporeal rift to understand the disruption of maroons' lives and bodies, inserted within the broader theory of the metabolic rift, which in Cuban history was caused by the coming of European colonizers, the introduction of capitalist relations of production, the colonial system of exploitation which was inserted within a broader, global imperialist system and market, whereby the nutrients in Caribbean soils and crops ended up accumulating in Europe. Thus, the theory of unequal ecological exchange<sup>42</sup> – which has centered its focus on the asymmetrical flows of energy and embodied labour/nature between core and peripheral countries within the world capitalist system –, and ecological imperialism (understood as the expropriation of the wilderness of a region for the exclusive benefit of another) serve as backdrop to the topic of this thesis. are important cornerstones of the theoretical framework of the thesis since the despoliation of nature and land (in the form of nutrients) can be understood as parallel to the despoliation of human beings. The ecological rift experienced in the island of Cuba dates back to colonialism and the plantation economy, and is a process that can only be understood within the imperialist system of exploitation to which Cuba was subjected to during centuries of colonial rule. Inseparable to this process was the twin process of the corporeal rift of slaves that worked in the plantations; if Cuban resources were being siphoned and its soil was being depleted of nutrients, it was because at the same time human beings were being sucked away from their own geographies, landscapes, cultures, knowledge, and, ultimately, their own energy, productive and reproductive capacities.

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41 John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark, "The Robbery of Nature," *Monthly Review* (July 1, 2018): 1–20.

42 John Bellamy Foster and Hannah Holleman, "The Theory of Unequal Ecological Exchange: A Marx-Odum Dialectic," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 41, no. 2 (March 4, 2014): 199–233; Hornborg, Alf, *Global Ecology and Unequal Exchange: Fetishism in a Zero-Sum World* (London: Routledge, 2011).



### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 METHODS

To develop the present work, in the summer of 2021 I visited the *Archivo Histórico Nacional* [National Historical Archive] in Madrid, Spain, where I was able to review 10 records consisting of multiple documents on maroons in Cuba and the Greater Antilles, with an emphasis on the ecological dimension of marronage. I also examined other digitized manuscripts of the *Archivo General de Indias* [*General Archive of the Indies*] in Seville. These latter manuscripts were examined through the *Portal de Archivos Españoles* (PARES) [Spanish Archives Portal], which is a digitized documentary archive of the Spanish Documentary Historical Heritage established by the Spanish Ministry of Culture. I consulted some paleographical manuals to aid in reading and the analysis of the archival manuscripts.

Additionally, I consulted printed primary sources such as Fernando González de Oviedo's *Historia general y natural de las Indias*<sup>43</sup> (1535) and *Cazadores de esclavos: diarios*<sup>44</sup> (edited by Gabino La Rosa and Mirtha T. González), which includes numerous testimonies of maroon hunters (known in Cuba as *rancheadores*). I also examined a particularly interesting work, a *quasi* primary source, *Biografía de un cimarrón*<sup>45</sup> by the influential Cuban anthropologist Miguel Barnet. This last book, written in 1<sup>st</sup> person and as if it were an unedited testimony, is made of excerpts of interviews that Barnet made to one of the last known surviving Cuban maroons during the 1960's, Esteban Montejo. The last primary printed source

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43 Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, Gonzalo, *Historia General y Natural de Las Indias*, ed. Amador de los Ríos, José, vol. 1 (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 1851), <https://archive.org/details/generalynatural01fernrich/>.

44 Gabino La Rosa Corzo and Mirtha T. González, *Cazadores de esclavos: diarios*, La fuente viva 16 (Ciudad de La Habana: Fundación Fernando Ortiz, 2004).

45 Miguel Barnet, *Biografía de un cimarrón*, *Nuevos Tiempos* 459 (Madrid: Siruela, 2020); For an interesting debate regarding this extremely influential book, cf. Michael Zeuske, "The 'Cimarrón' in the Archives: A Re-Reading of Miguel Barnet's Biography of Esteban Montejo," *New West Indian Guide / Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 71, no. 3-4 (January 1, 1997): 265-279 Zeuske critiques Barnet's work regarding his omission of Esteban Montejo's life post-1900. He provides a reconstruction of "real" Montejo's life during that period, as well as his connections to important political figures of Cuba's history, basing his description on his findings of two bodies of sources. He implies that Barnet's account of Montejo is seriously flawed from a historian's perspective. For Barnet's response to this critique, cf. Miguel Barnet, "The Untouchable 'Cimarrón,'" *New West Indian Guide / Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 71, no. 3-4 (January 1, 1997): 281-289.

is a text present in the classic book on marronage *Maroon societies: rebel slave communities in the Americas*, by Richard Price. It is a text by Demoticus Philaethes, a native Philadelphian who traveled to Cuba in the mid 1800s and published a book titled *A Yankee Travels Through the Island of Cuba* (1856).<sup>46</sup> Price's book includes the excerpt "Hunting the Maroons with Dogs in Cuba".<sup>47</sup>

This study is thus based on a holistic examination of a diverse array of materials: archival manuscripts, testimonies, newspaper notices, and key secondary materials. The selection of secondary sources was also done with an emphasis on the socioecological dimension of marronage.

### 3.2 METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

The key methodological limitation present in any study of maroon history is the fact that there are virtually no extant primary sources left by maroons. Marronage itself depended on a mode of living based on leaving no trace, which in turn means for historiographical purposes the lack of sources and vestiges produced by its actors. What remains are materials left by the colonial authorities and the slave hunters who worked for the interests of the imperial apparatus.

An additional limitation is that, due to time and financial constraints, I only consulted archives in Spain and not in Cuba. I therefore could have overlooked substantial primary sources that would have complemented the findings of my study. However, through the review of secondary materials I found no evidence that Cuban archives would hold documents that would substantially contradict the findings of this research.

Finally, despite familiarizing myself with some paleographic manuals, I am not well versed in paleographic skills. Thus, reviewing the manuscripts turned out to be quite time consuming which in turn meant I could not examine a large number of primary sources.

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46 Reisman, Karl, "Darktongues: Fulfulde and Hausa in Finnegans Wake," *Journal of Modern Literature* 31, no. 2 (Winter 2008): 91.

47 Philaethes, Demoticus, "Hunting the Maroons with Dogs in Cuba," in *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, ed. Richard Price, 3rd ed. (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 60–63.

## 4. CUBAN MAROON ECOLOGY

### 4.1 ORIGIN OF THE TERM “MAROON”

The word “maroon” comes from the French “*marron*”, which in turn derives from the Spanish “*cimarrón*”. The dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy defines “*cimarrón*” in one of its entries as “Said of a slave: who took refuge in the mountains looking for freedom”<sup>48</sup>. In the foundational dictionaries *Diccionario de americanismos* (Dictionary of Americanisms) by Marcos Morínigo and *Diccionario crítico etimológico* by Joan Corominas, the term is used to refer to a Native American, Black, or animal who fled to the hills or wilderness (“*monte*”) and became insurgent, rebellious, or unruly (“*alzado*”), and wild (“*montaraz*”).<sup>49</sup> Both dictionaries identify as a probable etymon the Spanish word “*cima*” (summit or mountaintop) and assert that its earliest documented use dates back to 1535<sup>50</sup> in the *Historia general y natural de las Indias*, by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, in which the term is used to characterize both a “maroon or ferocious Indian” [“*indio cimarrón o bravo*”] and “maroon or wild pigs” [“*puercos cimarrones o salvajes*”]<sup>51</sup>. Symptomatically, Fernández de Oviedo uses “*cimarrón*” in a part of his work – chapter 51 of book VI, the “*libro de los depósitos*” – concerning a diverse array of miscellaneous subjects: marginal tales, accounts of indeterminate beings, animals, plants, and so on.<sup>52</sup> As has been argued by Firbas, these topics “resisted the logic of administration, the archive and cataloging”, that is to say, the logic of early capitalist imperialism. The semantic contiguity between human *cimarrones*, animality, and wildness in general, present even from the earliest uses of the term, is also indicative of the symbolic otherness that running away from slave and colonial subjugation represented for the colonizers. As early as the first battles

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48 “Cimarrón, Na,” *Diccionario de La Lengua Española*, n.d., accessed July 27, 2023, <https://dle.rae.es/cimarr%C3%B3n?m=form>. Translation by the author of this thesis.

49 Firbas, Paul, “Reducción y expansión de cimarrón: historia temprana de un término colonial,” in *Sujetos coloniales: escritura, identidad y negociación en Hispanoamérica (siglos XVI-XVIII)*, ed. Carlos Fernando Cabanillas Cárdenas, Colección Batihaja 36 (New York: IDEA, Instituto de Estudios Auriseculares, 2017), 131.

50 Ibid., 138; José Arrom, “Cimarrón: apuntes sobre sus primeras documentaciones y su probable origen,” *Revista española de antropología americana* XIII (1983): 49.

51 Firbas, Paul, “Reducción y expansión de cimarrón: historia temprana de un término colonial,” 131; Arrom, “Cimarrón: apuntes sobre sus primeras documentaciones y su probable origen,” 48–49; Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, Gonzalo, *Historia General y Natural de Las Indias*, 1:256.

52 Firbas, Paul, “Reducción y expansión de cimarrón: historia temprana de un término colonial,” 138; Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, Gonzalo, *Historia General y Natural de Las Indias*, 1:161–262.

between Spaniards and American indigenous populations in Hispaniola in 1494, the defeated natives fled and hid in the thick – almost impenetrable – forests in the mountains, and were referred to by their conquerors with the same terminology later used for (mostly) Black slaves who became maroons, *cimarrones*, with the same associations to their wildness, unruliness, and semantic proximity to runaway domesticated animals.<sup>53</sup>

However, the scholarly work of José L. Arrom has delved deeper into the research of the etymology of “*cimarrón*” and identified earlier uses of the word as both a noun and an adjective – as early as 1530 –, and has proposed that it has a Taino origin stemming from certain uses of the word spelled as “*simarrón*”. In general Arawakan, “*símará*” was the word for arrow, and when adding the durative suffix “*n*”, meant arrow released from the bow, arrow escaped from human dominion, or fugitive arrow.<sup>54</sup> When used to refer to non-cultivated plants, the term “*símaran*” would mean wild, undomesticated, or untamed; when referring to domesticated animals that had turned to the wild it would mean runaway, rebellious, or fierce. These connotations would overlap with its meaning concerning fugitive humans – applied firstly to indigenous people from the Americas as Oviedo’s work shows, and then, increasingly from 1544 onward,<sup>55</sup> to black enslaved people – who rebelled and fled to the wilderness seeking freedom from their former masters.<sup>56</sup> The implied meanings of the Taino “*símaran*” and the Spanish “*cima*” would have converged into the use of the word “*cimarrón*”.

It is essential to recognize that the colonial authorities’ use of the word “*cimarrón*” carried patently racist undertones. Notwithstanding these racist and oppressive implications underlying the origin of the word and the uses of it by the ruling class and their repressive apparatuses, “*cimarrón*” naturally came to have an emancipatory, albeit sometimes somewhat frightful connotation among slaves. I would argue that the same underlying shades of meaning that originally may have been an ideological product of system of exploitation, carry with them the seed of the transformation of that same system, the potentiality of revolution. As we shall

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53 Arrom, “Cimarrón: apuntes sobre sus primeras documentaciones y su probable origen,” 50.

54 Firbas, Paul, “Reducción y expansión de cimarrón: historia temprana de un término colonial,” 133–134; Arrom, “Cimarrón: apuntes sobre sus primeras documentaciones y su probable origen,” 56–57.

55 By then the native population had drastically reduced and its workforce was rapidly being replaced by slaves brought overseas from Africa. Thus, the historical driving force of marronage was no longer embodied in the indigenous peoples from the Americas. Firbas, Paul, “Reducción y expansión de cimarrón: historia temprana de un término colonial,” 133–134.

56 Arrom, “Cimarrón: apuntes sobre sus primeras documentaciones y su probable origen,” 56–57.

see, the associations encapsulated in the concept “*cimarrón*” are not merely *ideological* or *linguistic*, but were actually a reflection of the *material, corporeal* relationship between the actual maroons, their political struggle, and their non-human environment in the Americas. Since the English word “maroon” does not convey so immediately all these connotations, it is vital for the purposes of this thesis to take into account the Spanish and Taino origin of the term when using it, as well as their inextricable linkage to notions of wilderness, nature, mountainous terrain, unruly vegetation, animality, rebelliousness, ruggedness, and remoteness. Many of the Spanish terms used to describe or define the word “*cimarrón*” or “*cimarronaje*” often do not have a straightforward or univocal translation to English, such as the word “*monte*”, which can mean both hill or mountain, and at the same time a more abstract notion of “the wild”, “the bush”, or dense vegetation (such as a forest, jungle, underbrush, or thicket). Other words, such as “*montaraz*”, “*bravo*”, “*salvaje*”, and so on, also have manifold connotations which often overlap.

## 4.2 OVERVIEW OF MARRONAGE IN 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY CUBA

Most scholarly studies consider marronage to be just one, albeit the most important or noteworthy, form of slave “resistance”. Other resistances would include suicide, abortion, infanticide, legal battles, sabotage to equipment, waiting in the borders of plantations to force the owners to go and listen to their demands (and not be tracked down for marronage), burning of crops and property, killing of livestock, objection to or slowing down of work, and even cultural expressions like dances, rites, drum playing, and festivities, among others.<sup>57</sup> Some authors have even theorized how particular spaces, such as the slave barracks [*barracones*], crystallized as areas of everyday resistance, where slaves could reclaim through the fissures of

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57 Gabino La Rosa Corzo, “Armas y tácticas defensivas de los cimarrones en Cuba” (n.d.): 3; Manuel Barcia, “‘Going Back Home’: Slave Suicide in Nineteenth Century Cuba,” *Millars: Espai i Història*, no. 42 (2017): 49–73; Manuel Barcia, “‘To Kill All Whites’: The Ethics of African Warfare in Bahia and Cuba, 1807–1844,” *Journal of African Military History* 1, no. 1–2 (July 10, 2017): 85–88; Sánchez Cobos, “Rebeldías y resistencias esclavas en la historiografía sobre Cuba, siglo XIX,” 258, 264–272. Suicide and more radical forms of resistance like burning and killing of livestock were more commonly practiced by bozales, slaves that had been raised in Africa. Suicide in particular was common practice among slaves and maroons that were faced with being caught. Suicide reached great proportions towards mid 19th century in Cuba, prompting the attention of colonial authorities and certain concessions to the conditions of slaves.

slave oppression certain independence and dignity by self organization, as well as create their own systems of kinship (often based on their African place of origin, though adapted to their current reality) and social relations, in spite of their miserable and overcrowded living conditions.<sup>58</sup> Different ways of classifying the varying forms of resistance have been employed, such as active and passive resistances, or clandestine and legal, violent and non-violent, veiled and non-veiled, and so on.<sup>59</sup>

It is important to point out that marronage (*cimarronaje*) – the act of fleeing from slave bondage – as a social phenomenon predates the coinage of the term “maroon” or “*cimarrón*”. As forms of class struggle, slave resistances, rebellions, and marronage in the Americas are as old as slavery itself and lasted as long as it existed.<sup>60</sup> Between 1502 – the date of the arrival of the first African slaves in Hispaniola – and 1888 – when the last American slaveholding state, Brazil, abolished slavery – marronage was the first and most common form of slave resistance against the colonial system of socioecological exploitation.<sup>61</sup> 1502 is also the year of the earliest recorded act of marronage, when a slave that belonged to the first batch of African slaves brought to the Americas ran away to the mountains joining the Taino people.<sup>62</sup> This initial occurrence of a slave maroon belongs to a type of marronage – named “simple marronage” [*cimarronaje simple*] by colonial authorities and *petit marronage* within scholarly work – characterized by an intermittent and short-term flight from the colonial system carried out by individuals or small groups of slaves who did not join larger maroon communities.<sup>63</sup>

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58 Sánchez Cobos, “Rebeldías y resistencias esclavas en la historiografía sobre Cuba, siglo XIX,” 268; Javier Laviña, “Alimentación y Cimarronaje En Vuelta Abajo: Notas Sobre El Diario Del Rancheador,” *Boletín americanista*, no. 37 (1987): 204; Pérez de la Riva, Juan, *El Barracón: Esclavitud y Capitalismo En Cuba* (Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 1978), 13–40; For a testimony of life in Cuban slave barracks, with interesting allusions to the symbolic meaning of nature, see Barnet, *Biografía de un cimarrón*, 29–31, 49–54, 128.

59 Corzo, “Armas y tácticas defensivas de los cimarrones en Cuba,” 3; Sánchez Cobos, “Rebeldías y resistencias esclavas en la historiografía sobre Cuba, siglo XIX,” 253, 268.

60 Sánchez Cobos, “Rebeldías y resistencias esclavas en la historiografía sobre Cuba, siglo XIX,” 253–254; Franco, José L., “Maroons and Slave Rebellions in the Spanish Territories,” in *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, ed. Richard Price, 3rd ed. (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 35; Pérez de la Riva, Francisco, “Cuban Palenques,” in *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, ed. Richard Price, 3rd ed. (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 49.

61 Nevius, “New Histories of Marronage in the Anglo-Atlantic World and Early North America,” 3; Connell, Robert, “The Maroon Communitarian Dilemma: Navigating the Intersices between Resistance and Collaboration,” *Caribbean Quilt* 1 (2011): 90–91.

62 Connell, Robert, “The Maroon Communitarian Dilemma: Navigating the Intersices between Resistance and Collaboration,” 90–91.

63 Corzo, “Armas y tácticas defensivas de los cimarrones en Cuba,” 3; Nevius, “New Histories of Marronage in the Anglo-Atlantic World and Early North America,” 2–3.

This form of marronage was a widespread resource to escape from the extremely harsh and inhumane conditions slavery imposed, and generally was a response to fortuitous circumstances which allowed spontaneous fleeing.<sup>64</sup> Besides being exceedingly risky in itself, the act of running away from their masters implied also a series of dangerous and arduous undertakings, such as finding food and shelter surreptitiously.<sup>65</sup> This was most effectively achieved by maintaining a close proximity to the property from which the maroon/s had fled from, which meant a certain familiarity with the terrain and vicinity, making reconnaissance, theft of food, accessibility to tools and weapons (though petit maroons generally lacked weapons)<sup>66</sup>, and exchange with other slaves easier.<sup>67</sup> Naturally these material constraints made *petit marronage* particularly vulnerable to tracking and hunting down by parties of *rancheadores*, Cuban slave hunters, often aided by dogs.<sup>68</sup> The magnitude of *petit marronage* and its correlated capture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century can be gauged by the number of apprehended “simple” maroons recorded in two time periods. Between 1797-1815 – a stretch of time that pertains to the development of Cuban slave plantation society – 15,971 “simple” maroons were dispatched to *El Cerro*, the central maroon enclosure [*Depósito de Cimarrones*] established by the Royal Consulate and located in Havana, whereas from 1830 to 1854 – a time span that belongs to the decline of slave plantations – 9,201 were registered.<sup>69</sup> Despite these impressive numbers, *petit marronage* was not particularly feared by the ruling class, as illustrated by the Maroons Regulations [*Reglamento de Cimarrones*] established by the Board of the Royal Consulate [*Junta del Real Consulado*], which proclaims that the “simple” maroon “only flees from work” and that “To apprehend these miserable devils, neither weapons nor battle-hardened people were needed.”<sup>70</sup>

What historiography has called *grand marronage*, however, was a very different beast in the eyes of the slaveholding state. Unlike its smaller scale counterpart, it refers to larger groups

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64 Corzo, “Armas y tácticas defensivas de los cimarrones en Cuba,” 5–6.

65 Connell, Robert, “The Maroon Communitarian Dilemma: Navigating the Intersices between Resistance and Collaboration,” 92.

66 Corzo, “Armas y tácticas defensivas de los cimarrones en Cuba,” 4–6.

67 *Ibid.*, 3, 6.

68 *Ibid.*, 4; Franco, José L., “Maroons and Slave Rebellions in the Spanish Territories,” 41; Laviña, “Alimentación y Cimarronaje En Vuelta Abajo: Notas Sobre El Diario Del Rancheador,” 203; La Rosa Corzo and González, *Cazadores de esclavos*, 294; Tyler D Parry and Charlton W Yingling, “Slave Hounds and Abolition in the Americas\*,” *Past & Present* 246, no. 1 (February 1, 2020): 69–108.

69 Corzo, “Armas y tácticas defensivas de los cimarrones en Cuba,” 4.

70 *Ibid.*, 6. Translation by the author of this thesis.

of maroons who established in the wilderness for longer periods of time, generally organizing in settlements.<sup>71</sup> These larger communities frequently took part in armed struggle against *rancheadores*, regular troops, and the colonial system as a whole. Its increasing prevalence, especially throughout the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, certainly inflicted a pervasive fear, an almost collective paranoia, among colonial power and citizens.<sup>72</sup> This imperial dread was exacerbated after the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) in St. Domingue, the first successful revolutionary and independence movement in Latin America, and also due to the great dissemination of marronage throughout the Antilles, particularly Jamaica.<sup>73</sup> There were pervasive fears among the ruling classes of the creation of “a great *palenque*”, “similar to the one that all the efficiency of the English (had) not been able to destroy (...) for not having taken the corresponding measures in a timely manner”, as one Spanish captain proclaimed in 1819.<sup>74</sup>

Maroon settlements, which populated highly inaccessible mountains, marshes, and forests, came to be known in Cuba, Colombia, and Mexico, as *palenques* (*cumbes* in Venezuela, *quilombos* and *mocambos* in Brazil), *palenque* meaning palisade, and its members *apalencados*<sup>75</sup>. In Cuba, smaller sized *palenques* or palenques that did not even have basic self-sufficiency elements to their economies (like cultivated plots) were called *rancherías*, usually comprising maroon populations of up to twenty people.<sup>76</sup> *Palenques* were varyingly rudimentary hamlets mainly populated by black runaways, but they also frequently housed indigenous and white people who were looking for shelter from capitalist-colonial power and repression, some even were prominent leaders of *apalencados*, such as the leader of a *palenque* in the Jaruco region of western Cuba named Huachinango Pablo, who in fact was a native of Yucatán, in current Mexico.<sup>77</sup> During the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as part of what was called “the Experiment” – a plan by the colonists to prevent the natives from being scattered throughout the island – Indians were placed in settlements which would be the origin of many modern towns in Cuba.

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71 Nevius, “New Histories of Marronage in the Anglo-Atlantic World and Early North America,” 2–3.

72 Franco, José L., “Maroons and Slave Rebellions in the Spanish Territories,” 43–44; Clarence J. Munford and Michael Zeuske, “Black Slavery, Class Struggle, Fear and Revolution in St. Domingue and Cuba, 1785-1795,” *The Journal of Negro History* 73, no. 1–4 (January 1988): 26–27.

73 Munford and Zeuske, “Black Slavery, Class Struggle, Fear and Revolution in St. Domingue and Cuba, 1785-1795”; Barcia, “To Kill All Whites,” 77–78; Yacou, “La insurgencia negra en la isla de Cuba en la primera mitad del siglo XIX,” 22–23 *Archivo Histórico Nacional* (Madrid, España), ULTRAMAR, 3547, EXP. 10.

74 Yacou, “La insurgencia negra en la isla de Cuba en la primera mitad del siglo XIX,” 29.

75 Colonial legislation stated that groups of seven or more maroons were to be considered *apalencados*. Laviña, “Alimentación y Cimarronaje En Vuelta Abajo: Notas Sobre El Diario Del Rancheador,” 208; Sánchez Cobos, “Rebeldías y resistencias esclavas en la historiografía sobre Cuba, siglo XIX,” 260.



This created the distinction between settlements of “domesticated Indians” [*indios mansos*] and those of “wild or maroon Indians” [*indios bravos o cimarrónes*], the latter ones prompting a ceaseless pursuit to raze them by colonial power. In spite of this, as time passed many of these *palenques* grew with the coming in of black slaves, white criminals, fugitives, and pirates, and multifold *palenques* more were established as the slave population grew.<sup>78</sup> They would all become the origin of many rural towns, like El Cobre or Moa, and also the core of present Cuba’s peasant population.<sup>79</sup>

By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century *palenques* and maroons began to be a genuine menace to the colonists.<sup>80</sup> Marronage reached its peak during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it intensified because of a number of factors, not least due to the Haitian revolutionary process which served as a living example of what could be achieved through generalized slave-maroon insurgency. Additionally, from the last years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and especially during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Cuba’s sugar industry underwent a substantial economic transformation involving the modernization of productive processes and the intensification of plantation exploitation, derived from increased imperial competition within the world market. To appease this capitalist demand for cheaper commodities, the most essential commodity for colonial rule was needed: slave workforce.<sup>81</sup> There was thus a huge influx of slaves from Africa during that time period<sup>82</sup> – illegally from 1820 onward when Cuban slave imports were outlawed – and also a promotion of reproduction of Cuban slaves, circumstances which indirectly amplified marronage. It should come as no surprise that in 1796 the code *New Regulations and Tariffs that should govern in the capture of maroon slaves* [*Nuevo Reglamento y Arancel que debe gobernar en la captura de esclavos cimarrones*] was approved by colonial authorities, which decreed the registration of

76 Philalethes, Demoticus, “Hunting the Maroons with Dogs in Cuba,” 60; La Rosa Corzo and González, *Cazadores de esclavos*, 293–294.

77 Winston, “Maroon Geographies,” 2185; González Díaz, Yuri Pavel, “Palenques y Cimarrones En La Nueva España,” *Arqueología mexicana* 19, no. 119 (2013): 63–66; Malcom Ferdinand, “Behind the Colonial Silence of Wilderness,” *Environmental Humanities* 14, no. 1 (March 1, 2022): 190; Barcia, “To Kill All Whites,” 85–86; Nevius, “New Histories of Marronage in the Anglo-Atlantic World and Early North America,” 3; Franco, José L., “Maroons and Slave Rebellions in the Spanish Territories,” 41; Pérez de la Riva, Francisco, “Cuban Palenques,” 55–58.

78 Pérez de la Riva, Francisco, “Cuban Palenques,” 50–51, 55.

79 *Ibid.*, 54.

80 *Ibid.*, 51.

81 Sánchez Cobos, “Rebeldías y resistencias esclavas en la historiografía sobre Cuba, siglo XIX,” 256.

82 This period in the history of slavery in Cuba is referred to in more recent studies as “second slavery”, in contrast to that of the 17th and 18th centuries. *Ibid.*, 256; Joda Esteve, “El comercio de esclavos a Cuba, 1790-1840,” 124.

every single runaway slave, and, with the supervision and funding by the Royal Consulate – created by the Maroon Capture Office [*Oficina de Captura de Cimarrones*] –, promoted expeditions of *rancheadores* to capture them.<sup>83</sup> This registry was expressly meant to prevent the maroons from turning into *apalencados*.<sup>84</sup> After the decade of 1850-1860, marronage and its repression declined, a phenomenon linked to the crisis of the whole slave system. During the Ten Years' War (1868-1878), slave class consciousness developed from a more individualistic idea of freedom that maroons embodied towards a more collective notion of emancipation and independence, prompting more outright rebellions and war against the colonial system rather than flight from it.<sup>85</sup>

#### 4.3 MAROON SETTLEMENTS: *PALENQUES* AND *RANCHERÍAS*

The geographical conditions of the island allowed for particular ecosystems suitable for marronage. Extensive mountain ranges lie in the western, central and eastern part of the island, covering approximately 18% of the island's territory.<sup>86</sup> Around 60% of the rock is calcareous, creating numerous karsts, cave systems, and rugged peaks between gorges in the mountains.<sup>87</sup> Soils are very diverse, allowing the cultivation of a variety of crops and breeding livestock, both in terms of the colonial economy (which was constant a raiding target for maroons) and for maroons' metabolic relation with its environment. The tropical climate is of course also favorable to these ends as well. During the wet season (May-October/November)<sup>88</sup>, downpours on the mountains brought floods that made waterways of the few trails that existed, making their refuges virtually inaccessible.<sup>89</sup> Despite the centuries-long and extensive destruction of the forested areas that had existed prior to Spanish colonization and exploitation, thick expanses of woodlands covered the sierras and hills where game was abundant, and impenetrable

83 Sánchez Cobos, "Rebeldías y resistencias esclavas en la historiografía sobre Cuba, siglo XIX," 258–259.

84 *Ibid.*, 259.

85 *Ibid.*, 261.

86 Gandul Salabarría, Luis, Luna Morales, Estela Cristina, and Sierra Pérez, Doris de la C., "Programa de Desarrollo Integral de La Montaña: Plan Turquino Manatí, 17 Años de Avances," *Revista Cubana de Medicina General Integral* 25, no. 2 (2009), accessed June 22, 2023, [http://scielo.sld.cu/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0864-21252009000200012&lng=es&tlng=es](http://scielo.sld.cu/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0864-21252009000200012&lng=es&tlng=es).

87 *Anuario estadístico de Cuba 2015: Statistical yearbook of 2015* (La Habana: Oficina Nacional de Estadística e Información, 2016), 23–24, accessed June 25, 2023, [https://istmat.org/files/uploads/63420/anuario\\_estadistico\\_de\\_cuba\\_2015.pdf](https://istmat.org/files/uploads/63420/anuario_estadistico_de_cuba_2015.pdf).

88 *Ibid.*, 25.

89 Laviña, "Alimentación y Cimarronaje En Vuelta Abajo: Notas Sobre El Diario Del Rancheador," 203–204.

mangroves shrouded coastal areas.<sup>90</sup> Shrubberies, lianas, and banyan trees hoisted impervious vegetable walls, concealing and protecting maroon communities.<sup>91</sup> Jagged mountains, dense forests, dank wetlands, and dark caves were the paradigmatic maroon settlements' environments. These environments of relative wilderness were thus the material, biophysical preconditions for marronage and liberation from capitalist oppression.<sup>92</sup> Nature, relative wilderness, was the first and foremost ally of maroons everywhere in the Americas, so much so that it is in fact impossible to disconnect marronage from it.<sup>93</sup>

By late 18<sup>th</sup> century and during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, literally hundreds, if not thousands, of *palenques* were scattered throughout the island, with hubs concentrated in the mountainous regions of the far west, center, and far east. To name just a few: in the western province of Pinar del Río there was Lomas de Guane, El Rubí, el Brujo, Sierra de Villalta, Cuzco, San Diego Núñez, and Cayabajos; in the central provinces of Matanzas and Las Villas there was Guatao, Jaruco, Guanabo Camoa, Rincón de Sibarimar, Ciénaga de Zapata, Ensenada de Cochinos, Corral Nuevo, Guamacaro, Guamutas, and Hanábana, among others; in the easternmost historical province of Oriente there was Moa, Bumba, Maluala, El Cobre, and Tiguabos.<sup>94</sup> The eastern mountain ranges of Sierra Maestra and Sierra Cristal, however, sheltered the largest populations of *apalencados*, as they would once again do in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century with the *guerrilleros* of the Cuban Revolution. Generally speaking, *palenques* in the eastern mountains were more settled and populated.

The settlements generally consisted of rudimentary twigs-and-mud huts scattered and highly camouflaged in the bushes, which served the main function of protection from rain.<sup>95</sup> Traps and obstacles peppered the surrounding area to increase security, both by potentially

90 Ibid., 203–204 Before the arrival of the colonists, Cuba's territory had around 60% forest cover. By the 1980's it had around 8% left, mainly located in the Sierra de los Órganos, Sierra del Rosario, and Sierra Maestra mountain ranges. However, throughout Cuba's Special Period in the 1990s, Cuba developed a major nationwide ecological shift, which included setting forth the National Environmental Strategy, creating the National Survey of Biodiversity, establishing a system of protected areas, and developing probably the largest agroecological movement in the world. This all increased Cuba's forest cover to 23% of all land area, which in fact has been increasing on average at an annual 1.89% rate since 1991. Richard Levins and Lewontin, Richard, "How Cuba Is Going Ecological," in *Biology under the Influence: Dialectical Essays on Ecology, Agriculture, and Health* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2007), 343–364; Betancourt, "The Effect of Cuban Agroecology in Mitigating the Metabolic Rift," 7.

91 Laviña, "Alimentación y Cimarronaje En Vuelta Abajo: Notas Sobre El Diario Del Rancheador," 203–204.

92 Malm, "In Wildness Is the Liberation of the World," 21.

93 Núñez Jiménez in Barnett, *Biografía de un cimarrón*, 59–60.

94 José Luciano Franco in Sánchez Cobos, "Rebeldías y resistencias esclavas en la historiografía sobre Cuba, siglo XIX," 258–259.

harming intruders and also by alarming the inhabitants.<sup>96</sup> More established *palenques* tended to be farther away from plantations, in more remote areas, but even these retained always an impermanent nature, ready to be abandoned if needed.<sup>97</sup> While there was some truth in finding safety in numbers, especially regarding food security and less reliance on raiding of plantations, the “carrying capacity” of *palenques* could only stretch so much and start giving diminishing returns. Too many maroons would dialectically turn into the opposite, insofar as large communities would become easier targets for parties of *rancheadores* and their packs of hounds.<sup>98</sup>

Whereas smaller groups of maroons (e.g., aforementioned “simple” maroons) were almost entirely nomadic and did not have a stable hierarchy, the political organization of *apalencados* tended to be more intricate, albeit fairly straightforward.<sup>99</sup> A chieftain or captain was elected, frequently on the basis of courage, cunningness, or knowledge of the geography of the area.<sup>100</sup> Through military proficiency, these leaders would become almost mythical figures for other maroons and slaves. Slaves in particular would simultaneously look up to maroons as a permanent inspiration, a sort of vanguard<sup>101</sup> of their class, and at the same time a lot of slaves feared maroons for their reputation of wildness and ruthlessness. It is noteworthy that not only members, but also leaders of maroons were not uncommonly women<sup>102</sup>, *bozales* (African natives

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95 Pérez de la Riva, Francisco, “Cuban Palenques,” 53; Philaethes, Demoticus, “Hunting the Maroons with Dogs in Cuba,” 60.

96 Pérez de la Riva, Francisco, “Cuban Palenques,” 49.

97 Laviña, “Alimentación y Cimarronaje En Vuelta Abajo: Notas Sobre El Diario Del Rancheador,” 208–209.

98 *Ibid.*, 208.

99 *Ibid.*

100 Pérez de la Riva, Francisco, “Cuban Palenques,” 51–52; Manuel Barcia Paz, *West African Warfare in Bahia and Cuba: Soldier Slaves in the Atlantic World, 1807-1844*, First edition., The past & present book series (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2014).

101 Malm, “In Wildness Is the Liberation of the World,” 13, 19.

102 Some historians, like Javier Laviña, have minimized the number of women participating in marronage. However, when taking into consideration that female slave population was considerably smaller than male, it should come as no surprise that their absolute numbers were also smaller. One of the most important Cuban slave rebellions was led by a woman, Carlota Lucumí (also known as La Negra Carlota), a Yoruban bozal, who commanded the Triunvirato rebellion starting on November 5, 1843. Laviña, “Alimentación y Cimarronaje En Vuelta Abajo: Notas Sobre El Diario Del Rancheador,” 209; Joda Esteve, “El comercio de esclavos a Cuba, 1790-1840”; Rojas, Marta, “Carlota, La Rebelde,” *Diario Granma: Órgano Oficial Del Comité Central Del Partido Comunista de Cuba*, December 11, 2005, accessed June 22, 2022, <http://www.fidelcastro.cu/es/articulos/carlota-la-rebelde>; Ríoaseco López-Trigo, Pedro, “Carlota, La Esclava Que Honramos En Angola,” *Diario Granma: Órgano Oficial Del Comité Central Del Partido Comunista de Cuba*, November 2, 2020; Barcia Paz, *West African Warfare in Bahia and Cuba*.

turned slaves)<sup>103</sup>, indigenous people, or – with less frequency – whites. Things were run in a martial fashion, where potential traitors were killed and often no new members could leave the *palenque* for the first two years.<sup>104</sup> Larger associations of maroons operated by splitting tasks into smaller crews, which made raiding and elusiveness more feasible since they were able to act more efficiently and capture of these smaller groups minimized the risk of the whole community being discovered by *rancheadores*. Settlements always had at least a few maroons that stayed to tend the plots of vegetables, to aid the raiding parties in case they came fleeing, and to raise the alarm if any intruders stumbled into the community.<sup>105</sup> These bigger communities also allowed for a greater capacity to relate more stably to the land, the main material basis for their social reproduction through a more controlled metabolic relation with the environment, consisting in both stewardship of the soil and protection of relative wilderness. This, in turn, allowed for the reproduction and development of Afro-American social structures.<sup>106</sup> Their sense of kinship, even within slavery, was not confined in any way to the traditional nuclear family, age, gender, or ethnicity, but rather on religious traditions and shared class interests.<sup>107</sup> In the case of connection to the land, to the *palenques*' concrete natural environment, it was not based on any sort of claim of sovereignty title over the land, but rather in the security it granted in their class struggle, protection that relative wilderness provided insofar as they likewise protected it and engaged in a metabolically sustainable relation with it.<sup>108</sup>

#### 4.4 MAROONS AND THE CORPOREAL RIFT

Broadly speaking, marronage could not fully be liberated from the corporeal rift that slave populations in Cuba endured under the yoke of capital. The commodification of the lives

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103 La Rosa Corzo and González, *Cazadores de esclavos*, 290; Sánchez Cobos, “Rebeldías y resistencias esclavas en la historiografía sobre Cuba, siglo XIX,” 258; Cf. Barnet, *Biografía de un cimarrón*, 192.

104 Pérez de la Riva, Francisco, “Cuban Palenques,” 52–53.

105 *Ibid.*, 53.

106 Laviña, “Alimentación y Cimarronaje En Vuelta Abajo: Notas Sobre El Diario Del Rancheador,” 208.

107 Sánchez Cobos, “Rebeldías y resistencias esclavas en la historiografía sobre Cuba, siglo XIX,” 266–267.

108 Pérez de la Riva, Francisco, “Cuban Palenques,” 53.

of human beings – taking the full scope of meaning of the word “lives” – siphoned their bodies, minds, and vitality for the profit of the capitalists that owned them as part of their real estate.

While the racialization of Native peoples was oriented towards the settler-colonial desire to occupy and lay claim to land (hence, the impetus toward elimination, assimilation, and forced removal), enslavement is founded on depersonalizing human beings as property, as fungible commodities – not simply ‘labor’ (King 2016). Darius Scott describes this process as ‘a violently imposed spatial precarity’ (Scott, 2017, 3), and a ‘splintered emplacement’ (p. 16), as enslaved Africans were rendered landless, placeless, and ‘nowhere at all’ (Spillers, 1987, 72) in the transatlantic Middle Passage. [...] This process of repeated separation sought to foreclose the establishment of affective ties between mother and offspring, siblings, and between enslaved lovers. When enslavers fathered children with enslaved women, these children were not considered offspring; rather, as property, they served to increase the profitability of the plantation operation (Douglass, 1845).<sup>109</sup>

From the moment of their transmutation from humans into a part of the means of production, their degradation into private property by virtue of conquest and subjection to particular relations of production, West Africans turned *bozales* were stripped from their communities, social relations, means of communicating, culture, diet, even identity and bodily control; in short, they were deprived of the ability to manage of their own corporeal metabolism.<sup>110</sup> This was a fortune that slaves born in Cuba had the honor of experiencing since birth. They would come into the world having already undergone a spectral, almost alchemical metamorphosis as a manifestation of constant capital, and as Marx would vividly synthesize: “capital comes [into the world] dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt”<sup>111, 112</sup>. Besides the evident implications of the slaves’ corporeal rift – their human body robbed from their own control and coerced to obey the orders of capital at every moment –, food is perhaps one of the most telling dimensions to illustrate this rift, due to the fact that it is one of the main pillars of

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109 Williams et al., “Race, Land and Freedom,” 184.

110 Lola Loustaunau et al., “Chinese Contract Labor, the Corporeal Rift, and Ecological Imperialism in Peru’s Nineteenth-Century Guano Boom,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 49, no. 3 (April 16, 2022): 2–3.

111 Marx, Karl, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 1:926.

112 “In its struggle with workers, capital, particularly in cases of extreme ecological imperialism, often chooses to promote labor regimes based on unfree labor in the form of bonded workers, who are literally chained to the work, and thus not able to withdraw their labor power under any terms. In this respect, capital in certain historical circumstances promotes the ‘deproletarianization’ of the workforce, that is, the replacement of free labor with unfree labor.” Loustaunau et al., “Chinese Contract Labor, the Corporeal Rift, and Ecological Imperialism in Peru’s Nineteenth-Century Guano Boom,” 9. It is important to keep in mind this statement because of the apparently paradoxical notion that capital needed instances of “unfree labour” (i.e., slaves or coolie workforce), while simultaneously the differentia specifica of capitalism with regards to other modes of production based on private property is precisely the “liberation” of labour power, that is to say, that labour power can be technically rented as a commodity (the commodity of the proletariat) without the need to buy the workers (as slaves).

the production/reproduction of life, its manufacture being the primary objective of all human economy-ecology.

The metabolic rift in slaves' diets began from the moment they embarked in their transoceanic journey from West Africa to the Americas, where rations given in the ships were insufficient, less diverse – they consisted mainly in two portions per day of mostly starches – and naturally devoid of all relevant socio-cultural significance or flavoring.<sup>113</sup> Once in Cuba, slave provisions were reduced to almost exclusively *funche* (a food similar to polenta made of cornstarch, bananas, or sweet potato), a ration of jerked meat or salted cod, and large quantities of energy-boosting sugar-cane juice. During the 1840's, for instance, the daily rations per slave working in the construction of the Havana to Güines railroad were 230g of jerky, 518g of cornstarch, and 8 bananas, whereas the rations for white railroad workers included 230g of fresh bread, 259g of rice, 86g of chickpeas, 287g of fresh meat, as well as lard and salt.<sup>114</sup> The diet of slaves depended on the geographical region where their bodies were constrained, as well as the sizes of the plantations they worked in and the types of cultivated crops. Their diets were typically lacking (especially regarding the amount of food needed to sustain their brutal working demands), and slaves in plantations generally had to supplement with crops (corn, sweet potatoes, squash) grown by them in small parcels [*sementeras* or *conucos*] near the slave barracks [*barracones*], and raise chickens or pigs, though animals were mostly for trading.<sup>115</sup> These were absolutely essential for their survival and to somewhat offset what can be called their dietary corporeal rift or corporal rift of nourishment.

Maroon diet in *palenques* varied heavily depending on a number of factors, not least by their size and proximity to colonial centers. Proximity implied more difficulties regarding having plots for food production, since it increased the risk of being detected by *rancheadores*. This meant in turn that maroon economy, particularly in *rancherías*, relied more heavily on plantations and farms nearby, as well as on slave solidarity and cooperation with maroons through trading and smuggling of goods.<sup>116</sup> Besides foodstuffs like vegetables, pigs, and poultry,

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113 Laviña, "Alimentación y Cimarronaje En Vuelta Abajo: Notas Sobre El Diario Del Rancheador," 207–208. There are some indications that this diet could be higher in protein content than some of their home diets, but I find this highly disputable.

114 *Ibid.*, 206.

115 *Ibid.*, 206–207, 211.

116 *Ibid.*, 211.

tools, weapons, gunpowder, clothing, cooking utensils, and other instruments necessary for their survival had to be mostly sourced from these places,<sup>117</sup> so along with direct class confrontation with the *hacendados* (estate landowners), the existence of marronage relied on class alliances and support with slaves and small farmers.<sup>118</sup> However, more secluded *palenques* could sustain a varyingly autonomous economies-ecologies based on growing crops in plots and wild harvesting/hunting/fishing of foodstuffs.<sup>119</sup> This entailed a symbiosis between African modes of food production and those practiced by indigenous peoples in the Americas. African food staples like okra, watermelon, black-eyed peas, and yams were grown alongside American viands.<sup>120</sup> Simultaneously, “The need for secrecy and the specific ecological composition of their environments forced maroons to devise ways of occupying and utilizing forests while simultaneously concealing their presence.”<sup>121</sup> Maroon practices of wild food and goods harvesting (like honey and wax) and hunting/trapping of animals involved living lightly on the land, practicing “leaving no trace”, and at the same time consuming these products of relative wilderness for years on end.<sup>122</sup> This enacted a claim to the forest as a commons as part of the fugitive and communal living of maroons, taking care of its finite resources, while at the same time mending to some extent food insecurity.<sup>123</sup> The corporeal rift regarding nourishment and cultural practices of food production (economy), could thus be ameliorated to some degree, but still a considerable part of their economies and diet relied heavily on plantation production by the very system that tried to deny their existence as autonomous communities with agency over their bodily metabolism.

#### 4.5 MULTISPECIES WELL-BEING, EARTH STEWARDSHIP, OPPOSITIONAL MODE OF LIFE

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117 Ibid., 210, 213; Philaethes, Demoticus, “Hunting the Maroons with Dogs in Cuba,” 60.

118 Laviña, “Alimentación y Cimarronaje En Vuelta Abajo: Notas Sobre El Diario Del Rancheador,” 209, 213.

119 Davis et al., “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, ... Plantationocene?,” 8–9.

120 Ibid., 8–9.

121 Ibid., 9.

122 Ibid.; Donovan Campbell et al., “Wild Food Harvest, Food Security, and Biodiversity Conservation in Jamaica: A Case Study of the Millbank Farming Region,” *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems* 5 (May 19, 2021): 13; Philaethes, Demoticus, “Hunting the Maroons with Dogs in Cuba,” 60; Pérez de la Riva, Francisco, “Cuban Palenques,” 53–54; Laviña, “Alimentación y Cimarronaje En Vuelta Abajo: Notas Sobre El Diario Del Rancheador,” 210; Barnett, *Biografía de un cimarrón*, 66, 68.

123 Campbell et al., “Wild Food Harvest, Food Security, and Biodiversity Conservation in Jamaica,” 13.



Marronage was a mode of life and rebellion that fostered what some authors have called “multispecies well-being”.<sup>124</sup> Its concrete interaction with relative wilderness, as well as its material conditions of existence within the broader setting of colonialism and capitalism in Cuba, generated specific biogeocenoses that promoted the fragile but sustainable coexistence of human life with nature, creating “multispecies assemblages”<sup>125</sup> of plants, fungi, and animals existing within particular havens of relative wilderness. This was achieved in spite of their whole corporeal uprooting in their prior existence as slaves, their absolute dispossession of possessions, land, and original metabolic relation to nature that them or their ancestors practiced in West Africa.

Spatial alienation was central to the attractiveness of enslaved Africans for the plantations of the Americas. Colonist-enslavers believed that Africans could be prevented from escaping and establishing lives outside of enslavement and the plantation because they had no connections to the lands to which they were transplanted.[...]

While the racialization of Native peoples was oriented towards the settler-colonial desire to occupy and lay claim to land (hence, the impetus toward elimination, assimilation, and forced removal), enslavement is founded on depersonalizing human beings as property, as fungible commodities – not simply ‘labor’ (King 2016). Darius Scott describes this process as ‘a violently imposed spatial precarity’ (Scott, 2017, 3), and a ‘splintered emplacement’ (p. 16), as enslaved Africans were rendered landless, placeless, and ‘nowhere at all’ (Spillers, 1987, 72) in the transatlantic Middle Passage.<sup>126</sup>

Spatial alienation of blacks was a tool for Spanish enslavers to remove their attachment and sense of social belonging, alongside to repress their ability to be the stewards of their own lives and relation to their environment. This “splintered emplacement” however was negated through marronage, where by their praxes of struggle and life in the wilderness they developed a different connection to land and a sense of unity, creating a particular form of Earth stewardship.

But, unlike some authors emphasize, I argue that this was achieved through their real, material practices and production, not through idealist conceptions of their life. Some authors have hinted to how maroons developed “multispecies well-being” through the so-called “socioecological ethos” of enslaved indigenous West Africans, conceptions of “good use”, “spiritual rituals”, or the presence of “moral, spiritual, and relational meanings to land”, causing

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124 Davis et al., “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, ... Plantationocene?”

125 Ibid., 5.

126 Williams et al., “Race, Land and Freedom,” 184.

this particular ecology.<sup>127</sup> This idealistic interpretation, besides constituting an *ad-hoc* and fictional explanation, misses the crux of marronage: precisely that it was a product of both natural and social material conditions, that it was the outcome not of an *ideology* or *vision*, but rather of class warfare within the biotic and abiotic Cuban environment. Maroons were compelled to act not by an abstract ides of “good use”, but by material survival within a system that tried to annihilate them. Certain relations of production (slavery within a capitalist-imperialist economic system), concrete class struggle, and particular biogeocenoses is what brought to existence the specific social metabolism of marronage, as well as the superstructural socioecological conceptions and outlooks associated with maroons. Likewise, capitalist plantation economy’s destruction of Cuba’s wilderness was not guided by the currently fashionable theories of nature-society dualisms<sup>128</sup> (as in *ideal*, *conceptual* dualisms), but by the structural, relentless need for the material *accumulation of value*. The dualist conceptions of nature-society derive from the fundamental (material) *alienation* and *subjection* of nature by society within a particular set of productive relationships, those that *utilize* it as *private property* for the accumulation of capital, and not the other way around. Social metabolism operates in spite of whatever theories we make of it, and it won’t be transformed through desires, no matter how pious or wholehearted they may be.

Thus, the antagonism of marronage with the capitalist-colonial system stems from the actual material exchange with non-human nature, and maroons were “both the offspring and antithesis of plantation slavery”<sup>129</sup>. Maroon ecology was in direct opposition to the metabolic relation that plantation economy developed with Cuba’s relative wilderness. While “plantations were synonymous with barren wilderness where planters lacked the integrity to maintain the soil’s fertility”<sup>130</sup>, maroon’s plots in *palenques* and their metabolism with non-human nature promoted the thriving of biogeocenoses. Plantations inevitably created wastelands out of wilderness through its spectral metamorphosis into private property, by ways of colonial

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127 Davis et al., “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, ... Plantationocene?” 8–10.

128 Ibid., 10.

129 Bilby in Connell, Robert, “The Maroon Communitarian Dilemma: Navigating the Intersices between Resistance and Collaboration,” 92.

130 Davis et al., “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, ... Plantationocene?” 8.

figures of land claiming like the deed, the title, and the survey (used to codify and accelerate dispossession).<sup>131</sup>

Thus the ‘self-owning, earth-owning individual’ (Harney and Moten, 2017, 83) – white, western, bourgeois man – is overrepresented as the normative center of humanity itself (Wynter, 2003). In place of the myriad relations which sustain life, the notion of land as individual property is born terminally conjoined with the subject of the self-owning, earth-owning economic actor.<sup>132</sup>

This is the paradigmatic slave-owner and landholder male white settler, the homo economicus that makes “productive” use of the “wasteland” that wilderness, primeval forests, and black and indigenous lives represent.<sup>133</sup> While settler-colonial appropriation of land had been achieved through violence, dispossession, and genocide of the indigenous Taino people, as well as rendering it as *terra nullis* (and therefore uninhabited by “savages” and rightfully taken by white “civilization”), maroons’ seizure of territories was fundamentally the opposite of those processes. Maroons’ uses of plots of land had been previously developed during their slave years, tending the communal small gardens which helped with mending their diet and practicing solidarity (collective work, not confined to only black maroons) and sustainable agriculture.<sup>134</sup> A communal form of land ownership, not based on colonial claims to land, constituted a subaltern kind of property.<sup>135</sup> Woodlands were central to the creation of this type of property, particularly forested areas with high populations of fruit trees, which the maroons also cared for and grew.<sup>136</sup>

Plots in settlements nurtured what has been called an “oppositional mode of life” to that of the plantation.<sup>137</sup> They “became the focus of resistance to the overriding system of the plantation economy ... the plot illustrates a social order that is developed within the context of a dehumanizing system as it spatializes what would be considered impossible under slavery.”<sup>138</sup> Plots and maroon economy in general followed the logic of use-value production, whereas

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131 Williams et al., “Race, Land and Freedom,” 183–184.

132 Ibid., 182–183.

133 Ibid., 182–185; Malm, “In Wildness Is the Liberation of the World,” 4–5.

134 Joe P. L. Davidson and Filipe Carreira Da Silva, “Fear of a Black Planet: Climate Apocalypse, Anthropocene Futures and Black Social Thought,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 25, no. 4 (November 2022): 525; Williams et al., “Race, Land and Freedom,” 190.

135 Williams et al., “Race, Land and Freedom,” 183–185; Campbell et al., “Wild Food Harvest, Food Security, and Biodiversity Conservation in Jamaica,” 13; Pérez de la Riva, Francisco, “Cuban Palenques,” 53.

136 Connell, “Maroon Ecology,” 222; Campbell et al., “Wild Food Harvest, Food Security, and Biodiversity Conservation in Jamaica,” 13.

137 Davis et al., “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, ... Plantationocene?” 7.

138 Mckittrick (2013) in *ibid.*, 7.

plantation and colonial economy pursued only abstract value accumulation. Cuba's production was solely oriented towards extractivism and exploitation of both nature and humans with the sole purpose of profit. While some of maroon production was oriented towards being commodified and later traded with slaves and small merchants, the end goal of the realization of that exchange value was to satisfy their human needs. Thus,

In general terms, it can be argued that due to their very conformation, or due to the mere space they occupied, the Maroon societies, to speak like Roger Bastide, had to collide with the colonizing nuclei and the growth poles of the plantation economy since the development of the former weakened the integrity of the latter and vice versa. The overall impression that emerges from the analysis of the valuable documents on rural marronage preserved in the National Archive of Cuba is that said marronage constituted by its mere existence an important factor in overcoming the colonial order. In an even more unmistakable way than in the other Antillean colonies, the Cuban palenques offered in many cases a safe asylum to fugitive slaves: those palenques -especially those in the East- were a base of military, economic, social and cultural collective resistance to slave oppression at the same time.<sup>139</sup>

Cuban marronage was thus perhaps the most radically challenging to power and slave oppression of all the slave resistances. More importantly: marronage and plantation economy constituted a radical contradiction, they were both dialectical poles and negations of each other, not only on the political sphere, but also on the economical-ecological dimension. They both undermined each other, but crucially plantation economy and slavery were also conditions of possibility for marronage: the determinations of that society contained the elements of its own destruction. Class war translated to limitations in economic development and the economic preconditions of plantation society through the existence of maroons, but simultaneously that same class war translated to limitations of marronage. The social contradictions of the slave system and of capitalism that engendered class war also engendered a war against relative wilderness. Importantly, maroonage was not an attempt to "expand" privilege to blacks, but to establish new relationships to land and to abolish black oppression.<sup>140</sup> Marronage did not replicate a bourgeois notion of freedom, but represented a broader notion, based not on the narrowness of exchange-value, but on the use value logic, of self-determination, and agency.<sup>141</sup> It practiced freedom through a sustainable metabolic relationship to relative wilderness and its co-creation of a commons.

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139 Yacou, "La insurgencia negra en la isla de Cuba en la primera mitad del siglo XIX," 36.

140 Williams et al., "Race, Land and Freedom," 189-190.

141 Ibid., 187-188.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this work was to describe the ecological dimension of the maroons' political struggle in the first half of 19<sup>th</sup> century Cuba, using various archival and other primary sources, as well as key secondary sources. The primary research question – what is the relationship between marronage in Cuba during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the natural environment in which it took place? – was mostly answered in sections 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5, where I specifically described how maroons produced their metabolic relation with their biogeocenoses in symbiosis, making particular emphasis on maroon settlements (*palenques*) and the role food production in plots and wild food harvesting. I linked my empirical findings with theoretical notions like “multispecies well-being”, “Earth stewardship”, and “oppositional modes of living” which stem from a materialist analysis based on the theoretical framework explained in chapter 2.

Secondary research question #1 – what were some of the political and economic characteristics of maroon life in 19<sup>th</sup> century Cuba? – was mostly answered in sections 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4, where I outlined some general political and aspects, as well as more intricate details of maroon life, like their dependence on plantation economy, need for trade and raids, their political organization (chiefs, smaller groups, etc.), their persecution by maroon hunters (*rancheadores*) and dogs, and so on.

Secondary question #2 – how can marronage in 19<sup>th</sup> century Cuba enhance our understanding of the corporeal rift? – was answered in section 4.4, where I showed how slaves' and maroons' bodily existence, their corporeal metabolism, was stripped away by colonial capitalism and plantation economy, with a particular focus on diet and foodstuffs. I also addressed how marronage partially mended the corporeal rift of those who partook in it.

Secondary question #3 – how can marronage in 19<sup>th</sup> century Cuba contribute to the conceptualization of relative wilderness? – was treated in sections 4.3 and 4.5, where I analyzed how maroons' use and immersion within their natural environments co-produced areas of relative wilderness that were essential for their dialectical and mutual survival.

Lastly, secondary question #4 – what political contradictions are present in marronage? – was addressed in section 4.6, where I used the maroon geographies’ component of spatial strategy of entanglement described in section 2.1 to address some of the antinomies of maroon life in relative wilderness.

To end this thesis I would like to make a few remarks regarding its contribution. Firstly, besides the methodological limitations mentioned in section 3.2, time and word count constraints further limited the scope of this research. Though it constitutes a modest study, it helps to partially fill in a gap in the literature regarding the ecology of marronage, particularly maroon ecology in Latin America. Further studies on the topic should incorporate more empirical and primary data, as well as further cultivate analyses on “peoples’ history of wilderness. Theoretical and empirical elaborations regarding the relationship between human beings and nature within the context of Latin American marronage are virtually nonexistent, and I firmly believe there is a whole world to discover in this regard. As mentioned in the introduction of this work, this endeavor becomes even more salient as we approach more unstable social and ecological times in the face of the Anthropocene and *apparently* imperishable capitalism. Historical materialism<sup>142</sup> becomes a torch of hope inasmuch as it provides us with understanding of the present through the exhumation of the buried pasts, pasts that are uncomfortable for the present powers that will fight to the death to sustain their dominion over both human and non-human nature. It is thus essential to remember the maroons, to remember how not only their fight for freedom, but their very *bodily existence* depended on the *corporeal preservation of relative wilderness*, achieved only *in and through* open rebellion and naked struggle.

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142 For an incredibly interesting Marxist and revolutionary take on the role of history and the historian, cf. Moreno Friginals, Manuel, *La Historia Como Arma y Otros Estudios Sobre Esclavos, Ingenios y Plantaciones* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1999).

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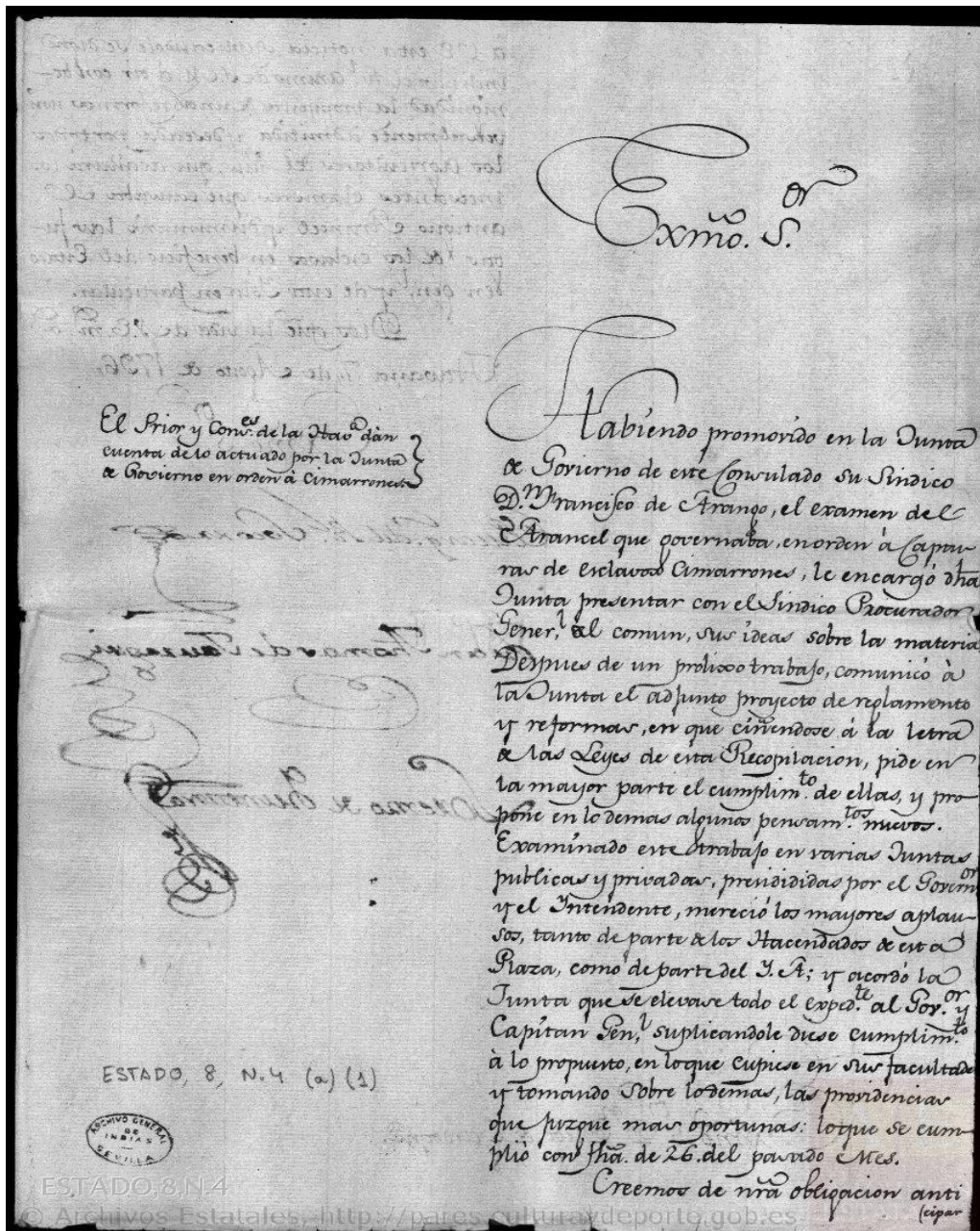
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## APPENDIX

Sample of digitized archival manuscript (first 5 pages of 1318). Available at <https://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/description/62010?nm> .

Archivo General de Indias, ESTADO,8,N.4 — “Expediente sobre captura de esclavos cimarrones” [“File on capture of slave maroons”], 1796.





à VE esta noticia, suplicandole se digno  
inclinarse el R.<sup>o</sup> Animo de S. M. à oír con be-  
nignidad la propuesta de una reforma uní-  
versalmente admitida y deseada por todos  
los Agricultores del País, que acallará los  
inescandentes clamores que causaba el  
antiguo Arancel, y disminuirá los fu-  
gos de los esclavos, en beneficio del Estado  
en gen.<sup>l</sup> y de esta Isla en particular.

Dios que la vida de S. E. M. D.

Havana 7.<sup>o</sup> de Agosto de 1796,

Exmo. S.

El Carg. del R.<sup>o</sup> Socorro

Juan Thomas de Tausagui

Soberano y Quintana

Exmo. S. D. Diego de Cárdenas

ESTADO 8, N. 4



f.º H.º 2.  
Havanna 7 de Agosto de 1796.

El Prior y Conules de aquel Convento.

Remita al Sr. con. A.º  
n.º 2.º de Agosto de 1796.



Leo por último el día de tratar fundamentalmente el punto de Cimarrones; y parece regular que antes que descubramos el dictamen que sobre el nos ha pedido esta respetable Junta, demos una idea exacta de los motivos que ha habido para examinar este asunto: del modo con que se considero por lo que sobre el han hablado, y del verdadero aspecto con que se debe mirar.

No nos detendremos mucho en explicar lo primero. Saben todos quan vehementes y quan continuos han sido los clamores de este Publico contra el arancel y systema que gobierna en nuestra Isla, para la Captura de negros o mulatos Cimarrones, y que mientras levantaban el grito dos Síndicos de la Ciudad (a) y continuaban sus tramites los ruidosos expedientes, que por la misma causa habian promovido y seguian el Sr. Marques de Casa Penalver (b) y D. Pedro Matias Menocal, el Juzgado de la Intend. (c) iba tambien anotando los hechos que alli ocurrían, en prueba de los abusos que tanto se decantaban.

La Junta del Consulado reconoció bien temprano (d) que su deber la obligaba a apitar esta Reforma: pero recargada de asuntos de la primera importancia, hubiera tardado algun tiempo en hacer tan buen oficio, sino la hubiese excitado el Sr. Visitador Intendente; a cuya propuesta, acuerdo en la Sesion de 21. de Febrero, se prefiriese este punto a los demas pendientes; y para que se tratase con la solemnidad debida; se determino tambien solicitar la asistencia del mismo Sr. Intendente, la del Ill. Ayuntamiento, del Sr. Alcalde Provincial y la de todos los Vecinos que quisiesen concurrir.

De este acuerdo resulto la Junta del 8 de Marzo (e) y de ella la unanime Resolucion de poner en nuestras manos todos los documentos que alli se tubieron presentes (f) para que con su vista y la de un nuevo papel que prometió escribir el Sr. D. Manuel de Sajas, Teniente de Provincial, formásemos nuestro dictamen y diésemos cuenta de todo en otra Junta publica. Estos en substancia son los antecedentes que ha habido, para que se examine hoy en la presente asamblea el punto de Cimarrones.

La vimos tambien de paso los supetos que sobre el han hablado hasta el presente y se sigue que tratemos del modo con que lo consideraron. Por lo que nos dá a entender la representacion que hizo al Ill. Ayuntamiento, su Síndico Personero D. José de Coca y Aquilar (g) fue D. Miguel Garcia, actual Fiel Ejecutor, y entonces Procurador del Común; el que primero pidió la Reforma del Arancel y systema consabido. No ha llegado a nuestra vista la Reclamacion de Garcia, y todo lo

- (a) D. Miguel Garcia y D. José de Coca Aquilar
- (b) Cuaderno N. 3.º
- (c) Cuaderno N. 2.º y Cuaderno N. 3.º

(d) Por Acuerdo de 33. de Julio de 1795.

(e) Cuaderno N. 4.

(f) El expediente de Menocal, el del Sr. Marg. de Casa Penalver, y el oficio del Sr. Intendente.

ESTADO, 8. N. 4 (a) (12)



(g) En 2. de Ab. del 79.º reexos su copia en la 162 de los autos de Menocal. En la 163 de 1793.



que sabemos de ella es lo que nos dice en la suya el Refrido Coca.

Este se queixo vivamente de que subsistiera todavia la dura y excesiva exaccion que el publico estaba sufriendo por la captura de los fugitivos: pidio su pronto remedio, y propuso para ello, que se moderase el antiguo Arancel: que se formara otro nuevo, consultando con la prudencia y con las diferentes circunstancias en que hoy se halla la Poblacion de la Havana: que no se diera comision de aprehender esclavos, sino a hombres de notoria honradéz, aprobada conducta y discrecion: y que la asignacion que a que a estos se hiciera, no fuese en razon de la distancia, que hay entre el lugar de la aprehension y esta Ciudad: sino de la que resulte entre el parage en que mora y en que se aprehende el esclavo.

(h) Comiezan estas Declaracion.  
desde la 12<sup>a</sup> del expediente de Menocal

(i) Testimoniado el 1<sup>o</sup> en la forma 17.  
y el 2<sup>o</sup> en la 25. del citado Real  
decreto n.º 2.

Viene a concluir en lo mismo J.º Pedro Matias Menocal, quien despues de haber probado con el testimonio de diez vecinos de la mayor excepcion (h) que los Campos estan inundados de Yapcheadores que abusan de sus facultades con grave perjuicio del publico, dexa al arbitrio del Sovierno el Remedio de estos males, pidiendo: que se tenga presente la asignacion que se hace para presidarios y esclavos del Rey en el bando de buen Gobierno de 1752, la que se señala a los Capitanes de Partido, por el Cap. 10. de su instruccion (i) y lo que sobre toda dixere el Sin-dico de la Ciudad, que era el citado Coca.

(k) 12<sup>a</sup> del Cuaderno n.º 19

Posterior a estos Recurros fue el del 5.º Marques de Casa Penalver, que aunque reducido a pedir la mas puntual observancia del Arancel actual, dio lugar a que el Sovierno pensase con este motivo, poner a todo Remedio. Y para adoptar el mejor, encargó al Ajuntamiento, por auto de 5. de Noviembre ultimo (k) que tomase en consideracion asunto tan importante, y con audiencia del Cavallero Sin-dico Procurador, dixese su parecer acerca de las medidas que estimase convenientisimas.

En honor de la Verdad, debemos decir que este auto fue el que comenzo a mirar bajo su verdadero aspecto, el grande e interesante negocio que tenemos entre manos. Nadie penso hasta entonces en descubrir la causa originaria de estos males. Nadie se habia ocupado en executar su analisis, ni menos en estudiar las medidas o Remedios que en general convenian. A lo mas que se entendieron fue a proponer paliativos y curaciones parciales, sin advertir que si se aplican a ciegas, son a veces infelices, a veces contradictorias, y a veces aun mas nocivas que la misma enfermedad.

Los que habian sido testigos de la barbarie y crueldad con que algunos quadrilleros tratan a los Cimarrones, clamaban con mucha vehemencia, en nombre de la humanidad (o sea en el de su interés) por que se contuviera tan reprehensible exceso. Pero el que no presenciò a aquella abominacion, el

ESTADO, 8, 14