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Marronage as a Past and Present Geography in the Americas

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Chattel slavery was a practice found throughout all of the Americas, lasting for hundreds of years and contributing to the assumed a-spatiality of the populations of African descent present in the Western Hemisphere. While oppressed and seemingly dehumanized by the societies in which they found themselves, Blacks in the Americas found myriad ways to struggle against the imposition of a condition of non-being. One such method was that of marronage. More than simply a reaction to slavery and non-being, marronage was perhaps one of the most creative and emergent methods of life-building found in the modern world. Maroon communities, today, occupy national memories in various manners. This paper explores the history and present-day understanding and existence of maroon communities in two American countries—Brazil and the United States. Whereas the history of maroon communities (known as quilombos) were drawn on by the Black Movement in Brazil in the 1970s and 1980s to make claims for land redistribution in wake of the fall of Brazil's Military Dictatorship, the spatial figure of the maroon community is largely absent from the national memory and imagination of the United States. Instead, U.S. Black movements are more frequently associated with advocating inclusionary politics or nationalist separatism. By exploring the effects of the idea of the quilombo as a spatial entity in Brazil and acknowledging the history of maroon settlements in the United States, this paper argues that marronage continues, in the present, as a viable spatial praxis and

posits a placement of the maroon community at the forefront of present and future discussions of U.S. human rights.

La esclavitud era una práctica encontrado a través de todas las Américas, que duró cientos de años y contribuyó a la asumida a-espacialidad de las poblaciones de ascendencia africana presente en el hemisferio occidental. Mientras oprimidos y aparentemente deshumanizado por las sociedades en las que se encontraban, los negros en las Américas encontraron miles de maneras de luchar contra la imposición de una condición de no ser. Uno de tales métodos es el del cimarrón. Más que una simple reacción a la esclavitud y el no ser, el cimarrón fue quizás uno de los métodos más creativos y emergentes de la creación de la vida que se encuentran en el mundo moderno. Comunidades cimarronas, hoy en día, ocupan las memorias nacionales de diversas maneras. Este artículo explora la historia y la comprensión hoy en día y la existencia de comunidades de cimarrones en dos países: Brasil y los Estados Unidos de América. Mientras que la historia de las comunidades de cimarrones (conocido como quilombos) se dibuja en el Movimiento Negro en Brasil en los años 1970 y 1980 para hacer las reclamaciones de redistribución de la tierra en consecuencia de la caída de la dictadura militar de Brasil, la figura espacial de la comunidad cimarrón es en gran parte ausente de la memoria nacional y la imaginación de los Estados Unidos. En cambio, los movimientos negros EE.UU. son más frecuentemente asociados con la defensa política de inclusión o el

separatismo nacionalista. Al explorar los efectos de la idea del quilombo como una entidad espacial en Brasil y el reconocimiento de la historia de los asentamientos cimarrones en los Estados Unidos, este documento sostiene que marronage continúa, en el presente, como una praxis espacial viable y postula una colocación de la comunidad cimarrón en la vanguardia de las discusiones actuales y futuras de los derechos humanos en Estados Unidos.

KEY WORDS: Marronage, Black Geographies, American South, Brazil

PALABRAS CLAVE: cimarrón, geografía del Negro, América del Sur, Brasil

INTRODUCTION: MARRONAGE AS A BLACK GEOGRAPHY

Slavery was a condition experienced throughout all of the Americas. Whether it took the form of the *encomiendas*, which forced indigenous and mestizo peoples of Central and South America to labor on plantations, or the Black chattel bondage that typified North America, the Caribbean, and much of South America, slavery was central to the creation of the Americas and foundational to the societies in which we currently live. While slavery and the legacies of the assumed inhumanity of Afro-descendant populations have wrought all kinds of devastation around the globe¹, the spaces created from the Black experience have also been the sites of emergent forms of being and unique existences all over the world. The subfield of Black Geographies attends specifically to the spatial establishment of these emergent forms of being. Attention to these spatial articulations reveal the ways in which “the racialized production of space is made possible in the explicit

demarcations of the space of *les damnés* as invisible/forgettable at the same time as the invisible/forgettable is producing space—always, and in all sorts of ways” (McKittrick and Woods 2006, p 4). Put another way, despite the fact that Black populations remain spatially marginalized and their spatial capacities illegible, Black Geographies signal unique possibilities in our world. These potentialities are vital, as Black geographies can explore and reimagine the politics of place, while the realization of freedom dreams can transform the world since they are based on place as a location of co-operation, stewardship, and social justice (McKittrick and Woods 2006, p 6). One of the iterations of Black Geographies in the Western Hemisphere is that of marronage.

Maroon communities, during the reign of chattel slavery, were those settlements established by runaway slaves, who sought to escape their condition as fungible, accumulated property. Marronage was and is typified by maroons “cultivating freedom on their own terms within a demarcated social space that allows for the enactment of subversive speech acts, gestures, and social practices antithetical to the ideals of” marginalizing agents (Roberts 2015, p 5). The settlements, “Known variously as *palenques*, *quilombos*, *mocambos*, *cumbes*, *ladeiras*, or *mambises*. . . ranged from tiny bands that survived less than a year to powerful states encompassing thousands of members and surviving for generations or even centuries” (Price 1996, p 2). While largely populated by escaping slaves, these territories were not solely the purview of runaways. Across the Americas, maroon communities remained home to not only absconding slaves, but to freed Blacks, indigenous peoples, and poor whites

(Robinson 2000, p 138; 142). This meant that early marronage had a long-standing commitment to recognizing, promoting, and defending the humanity of everyone, regardless of race. The central quality of these settlements—regardless of the number of members or how long the community lasted—was protection against the violence that typified slave society and the valuation of Black life amidst a world that saw Afro-descendant populations as completely devoid of humanity.

In this way, maroon societies, in their very being, formed fundamental critiques of, and bulwarks against, one of the essential aspects of Western society; the exercise of gratuitous violence against Black populations. These “communities stood out as a heroic challenge to white authority, and as the living proof of the existence of slave consciousness that refused to be limited by the whites’ conception. . . of it” (Price 1996, p 2). As such, maroon communities were some of the earliest Black geographies found in the Americas, forming unique worlds in which the most wretched, beset upon groups in society could form a new spatial being, despite dominant notions that such spaces were completely untenable (Roberts 2015). In short, maroon communities were one of the earliest movements in the Americas to assert that Black lives do, indeed, matter.

While maroon communities were found all over the Americas, their place in the popular histories of the Hemisphere remain uneven. While in a country like Haiti, maroons are central figures in the national history of liberation (see, for example, Jean Fouchard’s [1981] *The Haitian Maroons*), other American nations remain largely ignorant and mute on this

topic. In this paper, I trace the ways in which the understanding of maroon communities can have an effect on the spatial imaginary and material struggles of Black social movements in the Americas. Specifically, I take the case of Brazil and United States to show that while both had significant maroon settlements in their early history, the popular spatial imaginary of each nation deals with these communities in a very divergent matter. While Brazilian maroon settlements play a fundamental role in the discourses and concrete actions of Black grassroots politics in Brazil, the figure of the maroon and maroon settlement remain largely absent from the articulations of Black movements in the United States. I argue that, while Black struggles remain salient in both countries, the popular spatial imaginary—and the role that maroon societies play (or do not play)—comes to bear on the demands that movements make, the goals towards which they strive, and the manner in which different movements unite.

The comparison between Brazil and the United States is a useful one, as both are marked by Afro-descendant populations that have historically influenced and shaped the territories and political climate of their respective countries (see Du Bois 1998; Graden 2006; Kelley 2002; do Nascimento 1980a). Moreover, the current political landscape of each country is very much shaped by the competing agendas of anti-Blackness and Black Geographies (see Burton 2015; Vargas 2008). While both Brazil and the U.S. have rich, established legacies of Black struggle, the spatial and political praxes found within the various movements of each country are, by and large, distinct. A comparison between the two countries, then, is worthwhile in

that it presents an opportunity to reflect on the different ways Blacks in the Diaspora are spatially and politically marginalized as well as the variations found within Black Geographies that Afro-descendant populations create to combat systemic anti-Blackness and establish their own ways of being.

I begin by giving a brief description of Black Geographies as a methodology² in order to explicate its role in the wider discipline of Geography and reflect on how we can further conversations within Black Geographies through investigating their various articulations. I then examine the history of maroon settlements in Brazil and their present-day articulations, before shifting to an analysis of the United States, its maroon settlements, and the dearth of attention paid to maroons' legacies in popular Black movements in the U.S. I close by looking at the Gullah-Geechee community in the U.S. whose existence calls to mind maroon settlements through their history and current territorial praxis. This paper ultimately reflects on the political and spatial potential that modern-day iterations of marronage have, and considers the influence that notions of marronage could have on social movements today. Far from an erstwhile Black Geography, I see maroon communities as not only present today, but as viable futures for Black struggle, as these spatial expressions assert the value of Black life in their very being.

BLACK GEOGRAPHIES

Within the discipline of Geography, a growing number of authors have called attention to the exclusive nature of geographical literature, as well as the

"common sense" notions of space and place, both of which function to discursively and concretely fix certain bodies and populations in place or make them spatially superfluous altogether. Discussing these effects on Black populations, specifically, Katherine McKittrick argues that "the production of space, particularly within the discipline of geography and traditional spatial conceptualizations, fosters discourses that equate blackness with subordination, the ungeographic, and metaphor" (McKittrick 2006, p. 8). These dominant and dominating spatial arrangements have their origins in the Middle Passage and the metaphysical and political economic events of Black slavery, yet continue into the present through always shifting discourses and physical, material practices. As such, Black Geographies pay close attention to the historical and contemporary aspects of Black marginalization, reflecting on issues like incarceration (Shabazz 2015), juridical domination (Delaney 1998), the racialized aspects of prevailing political economic arrangements (Gilmore 2007), and the oppressive aspects of social sciences on Black communities (Woods 2002). In addition to this attention to anti-Black oppression, Black Geographies pay close attention to the many ways in which Afro-descendant communities seek to create their own sense of place and establish their own spatial praxes.

Beyond leveling critiques, Black Geographies "locate and speak back to the geographies of modernity, transatlantic slavery, and colonialism" by establishing "philosophical, material, imaginary, and representational trajectories" that result in "multiscalar processes, which impact upon and organize the everyday"

(McKittrick 2006, p 7). As a corpus within the discipline of Geography, then, Black Geographies touch on a range of spatial creations and relations, including the blues (Woods 1998), prison activism (Gilmore 2007), the spatial philosophy and praxes of Malcolm X (Tyner 2006a), anti-police violence political organizing (Alves 2014), and the future potentialities of “decolonial poetics” (McKittrick 2013). This body of literature reflects the fact that there can exist numerous forms of Black spatial expression and pays attention to multiple scales, discourses, and concrete action. Marronage, as a phenomenon, touches on all of these factors, as well.

Marronage is an open socio-spatial relation, involving “a societal transformation resulting from the struggle to institute a distinct concept of freedom” and entailing a “total refusal of the enslaved condition”, its legacies, and its attendant spatial assumptions and practices (Roberts 2015, p 7; 13). In its attempt to create a fully autonomous community (Roberts 2015, p 4), marronage must attend to multiple scales, relations, and expressions of anti-Blackness, and ultimately establish wholly new ways of being in the world. This focus on autonomy makes marronage unique to the practices and literatures of Black Geographies, as it entails not only critiquing dominant spatial arrangements, but also creating entirely new spatial relations that do not draw on modern spatial praxes as the norm. Comparing different legacies of marronage and Black struggle can allow us to better understand the complexities within Black Geographies and the ways in which marronage fits into hemispheric expressions of Black politics. I now turn to a discussion of the

different ways marronage gets expressed in the Black Geographies of Brazil and the United States.

MARRONAGE IN BRAZIL

In Brazil, maroon communities were called “quilombos,” a word of African origin that came to have significance across the whole of South America’s largest colony. The ubiquity of quilombos was the result of the fact that slavery in Brazil extended throughout the entirety of the colonial and national territory (Moura 1993, p 5–6). Found wherever there was slavery, quilombos represented some of the greatest fears held by the slave-holding elites of Brazilian society (Fiabani 2005). The reality of quilombo communities was so formidable that a 19th century Brazilian slave owner described the settlements as “a plague spread to every corner and without remedy. . . [where] neither adventurers nor discoverers could penetrate” (Moura 1993, p 5 my translation). This quote evidences one of the central features of quilombos—the ability for these communities to defend themselves against systemic, racist violence. The “adventurers” and “discoverers” mentioned in the quote were those actors whose activities led to the usurpation of indigenous lands and the enslavement of Blacks in the mines and plantations of pre-abolition Brazil. That quilombos were spaces that prevented the spread of these relations is indicative of the significance that quilombos had for the oppressed sectors of society. Quilombos provided an alternative to the brutality and domination that typified pre-abolition Brazil.

That quilombos were so common further meant that “the black maroon, the

quilombola, therefore, appeared as a signal of permanent rebelliousness against the system that enslaved him [sic]" (Moura 1993, p 11 my translation). While quilombos were widespread across the Brazilian landscape, they were all unique in their composition, spatial extent, and subsistence practices. Mountain ranges, swamps, forests, and arid plains all comprised quilombo topographies, while Clóvis Moura names seven "fundamental" types of quilombos: agricultural, extractivist, mercantile, mining, pastoral, service, and predatory settlements (Moura 1993, p 32–33). Nevertheless, it is true that some quilombos remain more famous than others, even in the present. Specifically, Palmares is generally held up as the quintessential quilombo. Palmares, located in the present-day states of Alagoas and Pernambuco, was founded somewhere between 1600 and 1606, lasted until 1695, and is estimated to have had upwards of twenty-thousand inhabitants at its peak (Kent 1965, p 173). Aside from its longevity and high number of members, Palmares is famous for its military prowess and ultimately tragic end. Facing constant aggressions from both Dutch and Portuguese militaries, the people of Palmares were forced to constantly defend their territory, such that from 1672–1694, the quilombo was facing a Portuguese military expedition every fifteen months. In 1695, Palmares was defeated by a Portuguese force of six thousand soldiers who laid siege to the quilombo for forty-two days, thus ending the existence of the famous community (Kent 1965, p 162).

Despite the variability present among the different quilombos, what remained constant throughout all of them was the intransigent insistence on living life free

from the violence and domination that typified slave society. By bringing together runaway slaves, free Blacks, indigenous peoples, and poor whites, quilombos created territories that were fundamentally at odds with the hierarchies created in Western society and imposed on the Brazilian landscape. These communities showed that the most oppressed components of Brazilian society were both willing and able to create ways of life that rejected the violent ordering to which Brazilian elites sought to subject the masses. In short, what all quilombolas sought was a radical break with dominant Brazilian society and the creation of a new way of relating to the world. By demonstrating that the "invisible" sectors of society could create viable territories, quilombos ushered in some of Brazil's first Black Geographies. During the late 20th century, Black Brazilian activists drew on this legacy of struggle to articulate their dissatisfaction with the ingrained racism of Brazilian society, to demand explicit rights in the new Constitution of 1988, and to create a common language of territorial struggle among the oppressed sectors of society (Covin 2006).

MARRONAGE'S SIGNIFICANCE IN 20TH CENTURY BRAZIL

In the late 1970s and 1980s, the Brazilian Black Movement—a coalition of disparate social movements and activists—mobilized against the country's Military Dictatorship, which had seized power in a 1964 coup d'état. The Military Dictatorship prided itself on the idea of the Racial Democracy—the notion that Brazil was a land of racial tolerance and harmony.³ The government sought to propagate this notion to the extent that it forbade discussion

of race or racial inequality under penalty of sedition (Alberto 2011, p 249). Despite the government's insistence on domestically and internationally projecting the image of a racially harmonious nation, Brazil's Black Movement sought to address the realities of racial violence in the country. In their efforts to create momentum behind their demand that Brazil, as a nation, confront its systemic racism, the Black Movement drew on figures of Black struggle to whom Brazilians could look and with whom they could identify.

The Movement attempted to unite Black Brazilians behind a common identity rooted in the memory of slavery and resistance to its continuing effects (Rios 2012, p 55). Rejecting the fallacy of the Racial Democracy, which they saw as serving to silence discourse on racial inequality, this movement argued that Brazil remained steeped in racism. The Movement demonstrated these problems by pointing to the empirical violence faced by Afro-Brazilians, such as police harassment, access to and treatment within the workplace, access to education, and political representation. Not content to simply critique the problems faced by Black Brazilians, the Black Movement sought to celebrate Black struggle and highlight both the potential for, and reality of, Black political subjectivity. They drew on the spatial figure of Palmares—Brazil's most famous quilombo—to re-define Brazilian history and who they considered true national heroes. By acknowledging Palmares as a quilombo community and historical figures like Zumbi (Palmares' last leader) and Luiza Mahim (a Muslim slave leader and participant in the famous 1835 Malé Revolt) as Black heroes, the Black Movement celebrated territories and individuals

that lived and died fighting anti-Black violence (Rios 2012, p 53–54). By commemorating the struggles of those that gave their lives fighting racial domination and constructing autonomous Black spaces, the Movement demonstrated the continued relevance of Black resistance and creativity amidst a racist society. Like Palmares, Zumbi, and Luiza Mahim, the Black Movement argued that Black Brazilians needed to continually fight the racist elements of society. Quilombos and quilombo leaders provided a legacy on which Black Brazilians could draw nearly a century after slavery had been abolished.

A new kind of national Black identity was formed in Brazil during this time. This identity at once called attention to the inherent racism of the Racial Democracy and Brazilian society and created a language around which Blacks from all around Brazil could organize. Brazil's Black Movement used a variety of methods and media through which to defend and valorize Black life. From the "black protests," which sought to take back public space and make the lived realities of Afro-Brazilians visible to the country (Rios 2012, p 43), to the focus on rural Black communities who evidenced unique forms of subsistence and governance (French 2006, p 341), to the demand that the newly emerging Brazilian government recognize the legacies of structural racism in the country, Brazil's Black Movement of the late 20th century made Black life a central issue in Brazilian society. Abdias do Nascimento—a leading figure in the Black Movement—named this approach "quilombismo," which he defined as the "erection of a society founded on justice, equality and respect for all human beings; on freedom; a society whose intrinsic

nature makes economic or racial exploitation impossible” (Nascimento 1980b, p 160). For Nascimento, quilombismo took account of the violence and destruction done in the name of progress and modernity and rooted itself in the liberation of those peoples that suffered as a result of this devastation (Nascimento 1980b, p 148). In short, quilombismo signified creating spaces of life and freedom through the active agency of those considered sub-human. 20th century quilombismo was the continuation of the Black Geographies initiated centuries prior. This required paying attention to the plight of indigenous groups as well as recognizing that Brazil defined itself on de-valORIZING the country’s African heritage (Nascimento 1980b, p 141–142). Above all, this meant establishing spaces and subjectivities that not only celebrated, but propagated Black life. Through the organizing efforts of the Black Movement and placing the language of quilombismo in national discourse, the idea of the quilombo came to have significant effects for Brazilian Blacks as Brazil transitioned to civilian rule.

QUILOMBOS IN BRAZILIAN LEGISLATURE AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Following the end of the Military Dictatorship, Brazil’s constituent assembly, convened in 1986, contained a minority of members from Brazil’s Black Movement. Despite their small number, these activists successfully demanded that the new Constitution recognize the territorial rights of Black communities. While initially insisting that the new government allocate lands to rural Black populations, members of the Black Movement had to settle for

legislation that granted territory to erstwhile quilombo communities (do Rosário Linhares 2004, p 823). The result was a transitory article in the constitution providing legal procedures for certain communities to gain territorial recognition as “remanescente do quilombos.”⁴ This ultimately led to the creation of the Palmares Foundation, whose job it was to recognize and title communities whose ways of life were reminiscent of the quilombos of the past.⁵ While far from a perfect piece of legislation, today this institutionalized program has led to 244 communities gaining territorial recognition as of 2016, while close to two thousand more wait to have their territory acknowledged (monitoramento.seppir.gov.br). More importantly, the quilombo identity—brought back to national dialogue by the Black Movement—is a common spatial trope on which Black communities in Brazil currently draw.

Central to the idea of the quilombo is the self-liberation and autonomy of Black communities. Communities identify as quilombos insofar as they see themselves existing in unique relation to the world around them. Whether it is a rural community that farms, forages, and builds their houses with wooden frames, or an urban community living in cement-block houses that fishes and sells its catch in local markets, communities seeking to take control of their own existence often draw on the idea of quilombismo. As such, it is not uncommon for communities that have not entered into the process for government recognition as a quilombo to draw in the language of quilombismo and to self-proclaim that they are quilombos. For example, the community of Gamboa de Baixo in urban Salvador, Bahia,

often couch their struggle in the legacy of quilombos. As a fishing community with a predominately female leadership, Gamboa de Baixo evidences an ethics of quilombismo by resisting the state-sponsored and localized violence that plague the city of Salvador (Perry 2013). Despite using the language of, as well as evidencing the praxis of, quilombismo, Gamboa de Baixo is not legally recognized as a quilombo. Still, the legacy of quilombos remains salient here, and informs Gamboa de Baixo's concept of struggle.

The decision to draw on the history of quilombos shows that Black Brazilians continue to see their struggle as one which began centuries ago and which persists into the present day. Furthermore, the legacy of quilombos and their commitment to self-sustenance on multiple fronts demonstrates that present-day quilombos understand that they, themselves, must fight against the structural violence they currently face. It also shows that these communities remain committed to actively *creating* and defending spaces in which Black life is valued on its own terms. In short, identifying as a quilombo—regardless of whether this is a legal claim or not—evidences the desire to create a world away from the racism of Brazilian society. The ideal of quilombismo forms the language of struggle for Black communities from various backgrounds. As Black Geographies, quilombos continue to be viable spatial alternatives for Black Brazilians.

It was because of the Black Movement's assertion of the history of quilombos and their insistence that such communities still existed that a law was put into place in the Brazilian Constitution that recognized the existence of such communities and has led to hundreds of autonomous

quilombo territories receiving titled land. Perhaps more importantly, it was the national employment of this term which has given Black Brazilians a common language of struggle. The quilombo identity has effectively united groups from all around the country under the belief that Black Brazilians are competent spatial actors and have a right to a dignified life. In short, the popular spatial imaginary of Brazil, and Black Brazil more specifically, has lent itself to the placement of autonomous territorial struggle and land reform for Black communities in the national spotlight. Comparing the case of Brazil to that of the United States reveals the ways in which unique spatial imaginaries result in diverging politico-spatial struggles, despite the presence of Black Geographies and struggle.

EARLY MARRONAGE IN THE UNITED STATES

Maroon communities were a mainstay of the North American landscape. Across the Southern United States, maroon communities existed in a number of forms. Like the quilombos of Brazil, the maroon communities of the American South demonstrated a wide range of ingenious methods to protect their freedom from slave society. Establishing houses in trees, tree stumps, treetops, swamps, caverns, and even underground caves known as "dugouts,"⁶ American maroons showed themselves able and willing to adapt to a number of different scenarios (Diouf 2014, p 98–99). Like the case of Brazil, marronage in the United States came into being insofar as there existed populations whose humanity was effectively denied by the prevailing legal, social, cultural, and

political structures. As Cedric Robinson notes, “It would be through the historical and social consciousness of these [enslaved] Africans that the trade in slaves and the system of slave labor was infected with its contradiction” (Robinson 2000, p 122). Or, the societal insistence that Blacks were not human led to the contradiction resultant from the unquestionable humanity and spatial ambition of those same Blacks. Unsurprisingly, then, the first maroon settlement appeared in North America when the first enslaved Blacks arrived on the continent. These particular maroons escaped from a botched Spanish colonizing effort in the Carolinas in 1526 (Robinson 1997, p 13). Maroon settlements existed across much of the North American landscape, including Florida, Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, and Louisiana. For brevity’s sake, I will focus on a few notable cases of marronage in the United States.

Among the most well-known maroon settlements in the United States were Bas du Fleuve in Louisiana, Belle Isle, and Bear Creek—the latter two existing in Georgia and South Carolina. Bas du Fleuve was formed and destroyed in the 1780s in St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana. The settlement was peopled by over one hundred individuals from over twenty different plantations (Diouf 2014, p 157; 182). Originally, the settlement remained unmolested from authorities due to an agreement the maroons made with a local plantation owner who allowed them to plant his land in exchange for cutting timber (Diouf 2014, p 159). Eventually, local militias, slaves, and free mulattoes were employed to hunt the maroons, who had made their presence known through raids on local plantations and storehouses

(Diouf 2014, p 176). Escaping initial attacks, the maroons relocated to another part of Bas du Fleuve which was near the *Détour des Anglais* plantation. The maroons worked along with the slaves from *Détour des Anglais*, with the maroons cutting timber and tending to the slaves’ gardens while the slaves stole domestic animals, powder, and ammunition for the maroons (Diouf 2014, p 171). By 1784, Bas du Fleuve had succumbed to a number of raids by Spanish militias and attendant free Blacks and slaves (Diouf 2014, p 182). Despite the seeming brevity of Bas du Fleuve, the mobility and adaptability the maroons demonstrated in working symbiotically with local slaves and establishing multiple settlements evidence the ingenuity present in Black Geographies and the lengths to which maroons would go to protect their autonomy.

The communities of Belle Isle and Bear Creek, also founded in the 1780s, existed in the southern part of Georgia and South Carolina on both sides of the lower Savannah River (Diouf 2014, p 187). These two settlements were populated by the same inhabitants—the maroons left Belle Isle after their increasing population led to robberies of local plantations with the intent of replenishing necessary provisions (Diouf 2014, p 190). This reality led to the organization of a militia in 1786, whose express intent was to destroy the maroons’ settlement. After leaving Belle Isle, the maroons eventually moved to Bear Creek. In Bear Creek, the large contingent of maroons that had fought for the British during the American Revolution put their military knowledge to use (Diouf 2014, p 194). At Bear Creek, the maroon community protected itself with a four-foot high breastwork, a creek obstructed with felled

trees to prevent boats from navigating its depths, and a sentry that kept watch over the area (Diouf 2014, p 197–198). The militarized nature of Belle Isle and Bear Creek made the settlements unique to the maroon landscape of the United States, however, this uniqueness served to protect the same core value for which all maroon communities struggled. This value “was more than a refusal of slavery, it was the right to self-determination” (Diouf 2014, p 208).

While Bas du Fleuve, Belle Isle, and Bear Creek all existed in the late 18th century, perhaps the most famous settlement in North America existed until the end of the Civil War. The Great Dismal Swamp, located in both Virginia and North Carolina, came into being as early as the early 1700s and was divided into two distinct areas. One area was populated largely by male maroons who sold their labor to the Land Company, for whom they chopped trees and made shingles and staves (Diouf 2014, p 212). The other portion of the maroon settlement was located “In the humid and waterlogged swamps, [where] the maroons settled on knolls and small islets that rose two or three feet above water. They were located far inland, surrounded by miles of marshes, a choice of setting that clearly exposed the maroons’ efforts at complete isolation” (Diouf 2014, p 221). The inland portion of the Great Dismal Swamp saw the maroons living in cabins elevated on stilts, hunting with bows and arrows, clearing small fields to grow corn and sweet potatoes, raising fowl and hogs, and gathering fruits, honey, bark, roots, and herbs for medicine (Diouf 2014, p 221; 223–224). The remoteness of the inner Great Dismal Swamp allowed the maroons there to farm at such a scale that

they needed very little interaction with the outside world. These isolated parts of the Swamp were so independent from the outside world that some of those born and raised there never saw a white person. Often, they never encountered anyone from outside the maroon community (Diouf 2014, p 218). While solitary, life in the Great Dismal Swamp offered protection from the violence experienced by both slaves and free Blacks in dominant U.S. society.

Moses Grandy, a slave who worked the canals around the Great Dismal Swamp so that his master might cut and transport timber, exemplifies someone who found safety in maroon communities, away from dominant society. After hiring himself out to different masters and earning a sufficient sum of money, Grandy bought his freedom from his own master. Legally free, Grandy moved into the Great Dismal Swamp, where he built himself a hut, writing, “I felt to myself so light, that I almost thought I could fly” (Grandy 2011). Clearly, life in the Great Dismal Swamp offered certain aspects of freedom that the outside world could not. Marronage in the Swamp lasted for over 100 years before Black Union troops brought the news of abolition to the swamp-dwelling community. With legal slavery no longer practiced, many maroons left the Swamp to live in the outside world.

Like the maroon communities found in the rest of the Americas, North American maroon settlements were not solely spaces inhabited by populations of African descent. Early marronage in the United States was typified by the presence of Blacks, poor whites, and indigenous peoples, such that, “by the beginning of the eighteenth century, mixed communities

of renegade colonists, Native Americans, and Africans were being molded. As the slave trade increased the local African population, it also added new human resources to the maroon villages and guerrilla bands" (Robinson 1997, p 14). These various groups needed to band together, as they all suffered different forms of subjugation from a similar power source—a society rooted in slavery and undergirded by a hierarchical metaphysics. Marronage in the United States, then, was as much a Black Geography as was marronage anywhere else, in that those populations deemed invisible and forgettable were able to create spaces that defended them against the violence that accompanies an a-political existence. Still, despite what these communities were able to achieve as autonomous spaces, maroon societies remain largely ignored in the United States' popular spatial imaginary as well as the imaginary of U.S. Black movements.

20TH CENTURY U.S. BLACK MOVEMENTS

While maroons in the United States are recognized among specific academic circles and those with a general knowledge and curiosity about the history and legacy of slavery and Black resistance, attention to maroon settlements is largely lacking among the general U.S. population as well as Black movements in the U.S. Clearly, the United States has a rich, complex history of maroon societies. The Black drive for autonomy was not only present, but strong and formidable in the United States, just as it was in Brazil and other areas in the Americas. Nonetheless, maroons remain unacknowledged in the popular spatial imaginary of the United States. Sylviane

Diouf suggests that this historical elision may be due, in part, to the fact that many scholars and white Southerners have denied the widespread existence of maroon settlements. In addition to this, the lack of large maroon colonies (a la Palmares) and maroon wars in the United States may also contribute to the national blind spot regarding maroon settlements (Diouf 2014, p 2). The consequences of ignoring the legacy of maroons is importantly demonstrated in the discourses and concrete politics of Black social movements in the U.S.

Among the articulations of Black struggle in the 1960s and 1970s, maroon communities were largely ignored as a past, present, or future space of struggle. A notable exception to this is the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, which mounted a movement rooted in an ethic of marronage. Their 10-Point Program, which articulated the demands and beliefs of the Party, insisted on the ability for Black people to determine their own destiny through the establishment of their own governing structures (Seale 1990, p 66; 69). As James Tyner states, "The Black Panther Party was consonant with other 'Black geographies' in rethinking the underpinnings of black oppressions", such that "the geopolitical thought of the Black Panthers. . . demonstrates a particular human geography that is predicated on the respatialization and repoliticization of urban space" (Tyner 2006b, p 116). Aside from this important outlier, marronage was generally neither referenced, nor practiced in 20th century U.S. social movements.

Other strands of Black struggle in the U.S., such as the Back to Africa Movement and the Civil Rights Movement, couched their demands in languages of national separatism and institutional inclusion,

respectively. *The Declaration of Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World*, drafted by the Universal Negro Improvement Association, championed the Back to Africa agenda, stating that “we. . .demand Africa for the Africans at home and abroad” and “We believe in the inherent right of the Negro to possess himself of Africa, and that his possession of same shall not be regarded as an infringement on any claim or purchase made by any race or nation” (UNIA 1920). This line of thought sought to remove Blacks from the U.S. and settle them in Africa, where they would ultimately form a self-governed nation-state. The Civil Rights Movement, on the other hand, focused largely on integrating Blacks into American society. Martin Luther King—a central figure in the Civil Rights Movement—defined integration as “the positive acceptance of desegregation and the welcomed participation of Negroes into the total range of human activities” while also labeling this integration as “the ultimate goal” of the movement (King 1991, p 118). Both of these approaches, while containing their own sets of values, fall short of creating the unique, open possibilities that marronage offers.

The Back to Africa and Civil Rights movements presented (and, in some cases, still present) important critiques of society and suggestions for improving Black Americans’ conditions, yet they ultimately rely on prevailing practices of sovereignty or nominal insertion into dominant society. Both of these registers—sovereignty and institutional inclusion—rely on the recognition of the prevailing power brokers in society; an arrangement that limits potential territorial arrangements and expressions of freedom and subjectivity. As a result, dominant power relations that

create the conditions for an assumed inhumanity, and, as such, allow for the invisibility of certain populations, remain intact.

The aim of this paper is not to denounce any of these movements, as their collective aims were and are for the liberation of an oppressed people, but rather to reflect on the differences found among the discourses and results of marronage versus sovereignty and inclusion as guiders of social movements. Brazil’s Black Movement, for example, drew on the legacy of quilombos to recognize systemic racism and violence, create a common language of autonomous struggle, and establish legislation regarding land redistribution in Brazil. The territorial implications of these factors have effectively created a nation-wide movement for land redistribution, rooted in aspirations of autonomy. Moreover, the language of quilombos has nationally united Black communities seeking to control their own destiny. In this way, Black communities in Brazil continue to discursively and concretely demonstrate the persistence of marronage in the present. On the other hand, land redistribution, in the form of autonomous, non-sovereign spaces created by and for Blacks in the United States, is a relatively marginal discourse and practice in our current moment. Despite this fact, there are, indeed, communities still in existence whose way of life evinces conditions of marronage.

PRESENT-DAY MAROON COMMUNITIES IN THE UNITED STATES

Like the case of Brazil, where present-day communities continue to practice marronage in their efforts to create unique,

autonomous societies where racist violence and human hierarchy is not practiced, the U.S. is also home to groups with similar social and political practices. Communities like the Gullah-Geechee of the Southeastern United States—not to mention a whole plethora of other populations whose cases are not as well documented—continue to maintain a unique cultural, economic, and political existence in the American South. The origins of the Gullah-Geechee community certainly have some similarities with maroon communities discussed above. For instance, the Gullah-Geechee were able to create their unique world due to a relatively high amount of independence and isolation, even as slaves. This relative independence was the result of the fact that “Plantations were spread out, often literally islands, highly isolated” while “Field hands were left largely to their own devices and lived quite remote lives” and “management [read: slave owner control] was often distant rather than direct” (Morgan 2010, p 29; 30). This isolation, coupled with the various customs, beliefs, and cosmologies—some brought from Africa, others undoubtedly cultivated in North America—held by the slaves, led these groups “to the making of their [own] history” (Morgan 2010, p 39). Their way of life meant the creation and maintenance of distinctive cultural, religious, linguistic, political, and gastronomic expressions that have persisted into the present. While these facts mirror the origins of maroon communities of the past, I am more interested in the ways in which the Gullah-Geechee have preserved aspects of marronage in the present. As discussed below, specific aspects of the current Gullah-Geechee lifestyle demonstrate a commitment to

the continuation of territories where the centuries-long struggle against anti-Black violence forms the core of the population’s territoriality. Like the quilombo communities in Brazil today, the Gullah-Geechee provide an example of the fact that marronage is not simply a thing of the past—it remains salient in the present, as well.

Today, the Gullah-Geechee’s land claim—known to some as the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor—stretches from Wilmington, North Carolina to Jacksonville, Florida, comprising some 12,818 square miles (U.S. Congress 2016; www.gullahgeecheecorridor.org). The large geographical expanse of this corridor is accompanied by a great degree of variation among the different communities that comprise the Gullah-Geechee. In other words, there is no homogenous, singular “Gullah-Geechee” experience. Rather, the many groups that comprise the wider Gullah-Geechee community continue their legacy of struggle in various contexts and manners, further evidencing the openness of marronage and the maroon commitment to remain autonomous from myriad forms of oppression. The relative autonomy of these communities has continued for generations. Traditional farming, fishing, hunting, and small-scale marketing typify Gullah-Geechee economic practices, while their language, arts, crafts, religious beliefs, folklore, rituals, and sense of place and family also remain central to the community’s reproduction (Green 2013; Matory 2008). With these practices, the Gullah-Geechee are able to practice subsistence livelihoods, providing for their families while selling the fruits of their labor for income, while also continuing their traditional linguistic, religious, gastronomic and cultural practices

(Derickson 2016, pp 40–41). This ability to materially provide for themselves, and the possession of socio-cultural practices that reify a unique relations to community and the land they live on reveal the ways in which the Gullah-Geechee produce aspects of marronage in the present-day United States, as they evidence Black spatial self-affirmation and definition amidst an anti-Black society. These all-important practices, however, are threatened by a variety of competing land claims.

In the 20th century, resort, golf course, gated community, and wildlife preserve development began threatening the continuation of their traditional existence. In 1942, for instance, a Gullah community was given two weeks to leave their homes on the Georgia coast so that the U.S. military could build a base for pilot training and anti-submarine flights. Under threat of their property being bulldozed and burned, the Gullah quickly left the area. Despite promises that the Gullah would get back their land after World War II, in 1962, the former base and surrounding area were converted into the Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge. In spite of several attempts to recover their traditional land, including federal lawsuits and petitioning the federal government for a land lease, the Gullah have not succeeded in taking back their stolen land at Harris Neck (www.npr.org). Other threats to the Gullah-Geechee way of life has come from a variety of “coastal developments” that have unfolded in the past hundred years. While islands like Cumberland, Jekyll, Osabaw, and Sapelo have also experienced the effects of the creation of environmental and wildlife reserves, other areas, like St. Simons and Hilton Head, have become overrun with resorts. Golf courses,

yacht clubs, residential subdivisions, and gated communities have replaced much of the traditional Gullah-Geechee lands on these particular islands, displacing the communities through the privatization of lands and increased costs of living in such “developed” areas (Jarrett 2003; Jenkins 2006). Another challenge to Gullah-Geechee life are Department of Natural Resources fishing regulations, which limit the amount of fish the community can catch, a reality that limits the community’s ability to continue its subsistence practices. Still other issues facing the community manifest in the property laws that the Gullah-Geechee face, which make it both legally difficult and financially burdensome to maintain legal title to land, and contribute to property seizure and sales (Derickson 2016, pp 41–43). The issues the Gullah-Geechee face make the continuation of their way of life difficult, as the ability to reproduce their inimitable lifestyle through a presence on their traditional lands is challenged through the actions of private and public interests. This is a trend the community hopes to reverse.

Despite being treated as invisible objects, the various communities of the Gullah-Geechee remain resolved to protect their community and way of life from the deleterious effects of outside forces. While landforms like marshes once protected certain Gullah-Geechee group from the pressures of outside capital and assimilationist tendencies, the current influences from non-Gullah-Geechee actors means that new forms of territorial and cultural preservation must take place. In addition to engaging the federal government by demanding legal land rights, the Gullah-Geechee have also organized things like the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island

Coalition. Formed in 1996, the Coalition's expressed goals are to advocate for the rights of the Gullah-Geechee peoples; to promote and participate in the preservation of Gullah-Geechee history, heritage, culture, and language; to work toward Sea Island land re-acquisition and maintenance; and to celebrate Gullah-Geechee culture through artistic and educational means (Goodwine 2016). Another important organization is the Gullah/Geechee Fishing Association. This Association aims to protect the rights of Gullah-Geechee and African American fishermen, to pass down traditional fishing methods with future generations, and to restore access to the areas and factories needed to sustain the seafood industry in the Gullah-Geechee community and southeastern United States (www.gullahgeecheenation.com). Both of these organizations work to protect the ability of the Gullah-Geechee people to reproduce their way of life—a way of life in which an Afro-descendant population creates a society unique from a world steeped in anti-Black violence. Above all, these measures serve to protect the Gullah-Geechee territoriality, preserving the spatial relations and understandings that define the Gullah-Geechee way of life.

The stated goals of the Gullah-Geechee remain similar in nature to the underlying aspects of quilombismo, described by Abdias do Nascimento in the context of Brazil. Like quilombismo, the history and present-day actions of the Gullah-Geechee demonstrate a commitment to justice, equality, respect, freedom, and a society resistant to economic or racial exploitation. The Gullah-Geechee's dedication to these values comes across in the varied efforts to protect their plural way of life,

which is, itself, defined by their ability to provide for and govern themselves despite existing amidst a society structured by racist and capitalist hierarchy. Given these circumstances and the Gullah-Geechee's resolve to staunchly defend their way of life, it is accurate to identify this community as a purveyor of a maroon existence. While rarely cast in terms of marronage, the Gullah-Geechee and its community goals parallel the drive for self-determination evidenced in the historical and contemporary quilombo and maroon communities mentioned above. It is this fact of self-determination and its attendant connection to modern-day marronage that make the Gullah-Geechee an anomaly in the U.S. spatial imaginary.

Queen Quet, the Queen Mother of the Gullah-Geechee Nation, describes the difficulties with which outsiders process the existence of her people, noting that statements such as, "We don't really know if they have a real culture" have accompanied discussions on the Gullah-Geechee (Griner 2015). Questions about the uniqueness of Gullah-Geechee culture, as well as an assumed defunctness of the people, accompany conversations on the Gullah-Geechee for many Americans. Ignoring the present-day ramifications of the historical, cultural, linguistic, and economic legacy of the Gullah-Geechee, is, in Quet's words, "a way to make sure people think we're legend, and that we're something of the past, that you only find Gullah Geechee in a history book" (Griner 2015). Because the history and legacy of maroon communities and marronage is relatively absent in the United States, it is unsurprising that a group like the Gullah-Geechee, who evince a modern-day marronage, would cause intellectual

consternation among those presented with their situation. It may seem to some that the Gullah-Geechee simply *cannot* exist, as the United States appears to many as a place devoid of maroon subjectivities. This approach is a dangerous one, however. An inability to recognize the importance of marronage in our present moment means an inability to grapple with a way of life that actively seeks to struggle against the violence of racist domination.

CONCLUSION: THE IMPORTANCE OF MARRONAGE TODAY

Clearly, despite the undeniable presence of Black Geographies in the U.S. and Brazil, there exists much variability among these geographical expressions. In comparing the Brazilian and U.S. cases, I have attempted to illustrate the different ways that Black Geographies can manifest themselves based on divergent spatial imaginaries and historical ideals, thereby helping us reflect on the stakes of varied historical understandings and spatial and political struggles. Moreover, I have sought to touch on the potential ramifications of engaging with, or ignoring, the realities of marronage in Black Geographies. By not recognizing the legacy of maroon societies as integral to our American landscape and not tying these communities' struggles to the centuries-long fight for autonomy by oppressed Black actors, we run the risk as geographers, activists, and citizens of being party to a structural violence that has the potential to devastate Black communities. In our present moment, with Black-led social movements once again at the fore of American grassroots politics, communities like the Gullah-Geechee and the spatial figure of

maroon societies are in a unique position to be included in emerging discourses of Black life. In thinking through what Black struggle can look like today, we would do well to learn from communities that exhibit qualities of modern-day marronage. In this paper, I have drawn on the case of the Gullah-Geechee as a diverse population that maintains aspects of a maroon community in the present-day. This is not to suggest that marronage in the U.S. solely applies to the Gullah-Geechee, nor that other communities must emulate them in order to evidence a maroon subjectivity. Rather, it means that we must pay attention to and struggle alongside populations who seek to create a future not defined by racial domination, in which all life is valued and protected.

As we move forward, finding ways to physically, discursively, and ethically assert that Black lives do matter, we must pay attention to those communities whose very being ensures that Black lives are valued and protected. This means acknowledging the victories and shortcomings of past maroon communities, who defended themselves against the most naked of anti-Black violences. It means looking to international cases, like that of Brazil, where marronage is still invoked as a viable political subjectivity amidst the quotidian racism of dominant society, and linking our experiences with Black struggle and creativity in the wider Diaspora. Moreover, it means paying attention to the communities in the United States whose existence are currently defined by a maroon ethics, yet remain largely unacknowledged because of the silence which meets the topic of marronage in North America. The ethics of marronage, while emerging during the days of slavery, continue to have a central

importance to the world we live in today, given the violence that Black populations continue to face. Marronage has this continued importance precisely because of its variable and open nature and its fundamental commitment to valuing *all* life, including that of populations deemed non-existent. In this way, marronage, as a political subjectivity and ethic, transcends time and place, remaining relevant in the present, in potentially innumerable iterations. Marronage, as a Black Geography, truly does offer an alternative way of life that redefines notions of cooperation and social justice through spaces of Black self-determination.

We must recognize the past, present, and future of the ethic of marronage here in the United States, and assist those whose way of life continues that legacy. Given the rich history of struggle and creativity present in groups like the Gullah-Geechee, those concerned with defending Black life from the structurally racist expressions of American society might have something to learn from such a community. In recognizing this fact, we, as North American scholars, activists, and citizens can reflect on present and future Black struggles and engage with the possibilities that marronage offers us, as a politico-spatial praxis. Furthermore, engaging with the potentials of marronage here in the United States will further connect Black struggles in the U.S. with those overseas, where conversations and political organizing around marronage is already taking place. As we struggle to realize a new society in which Black life *does*, indeed matter, we can take cues from those whose lives actually express such a praxis. Ignoring this reality runs the risk of contributing to the continuing erasure of Black political alternatives—alternatives

that offer a distinct approach to existing in the world.

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NOTES

1. Here I am talking about the effects of slavery as both a political economic as well as an ontological arrangement in society. In short, slavery has not only affected the material realities of Afro-descendant populations in the Americas through continued forms of marginalization such as dispossession, physical and psychological violence, and entrenched poverty, but has also led to assumptions of Black non-being, natal alienation, and a priori dishonor (Wilderson 2010, pp 13–15). While the present-day empirical instances of slavery's effects remain salient today, this "ontology of slavery" remains the purview of the figure of the Black in modernity, fixing assumptions of inhumanity and lack of spatial capacity to Black peoples (Wilderson 2010, p 18; 315). Invariably, these metaphysical and concrete arrangements are co-constitutive.

2. While a methodology, Black Geographies is appropriately understood as an epistemology, as well, given that Black geographical expressions spring from Black populations' knowledge and critique of the modern world.

3. The Racial Democracy continues to influence popular ideas of race relations in Brazil

today. This idea is underpinned by the notion that Brazil is absent racism and racial prejudice as evidenced by the high rate of racial “mixture” and miscegenation that formed the foundation of the nation. This term was first coined by Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre in his landmark (1933) *Casa grande e senzala*. This topic has elicited much conversation on the nature of race and racism in Brazil. Recent works that have touched on this topic include *Terms of Inclusion* (2011) by Paulina Alberto and “Hyperconsciousness of Race and Its Negation” (2004) by João Vargas.

4. “Remanescente” is a word that does not have an easily-identified translation in English. Most often, the word is translated as “remnant” or “residual.” In this sense, “remanescente do quilombos” would mean a community that is left over from a previously existing quilombo.

5. Since this legislation was first passed in 1988, several changes have occurred as far as what government agency takes charge of titling quilombo communities. As it currently stands, the Palmares Cultural Foundation grants quilombos cultural certification, an acknowledgement that allows communities to then begin the process of territorial titling, which is now handled by the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA).

6. Sylviane Diouf suggests that these dugouts—also known as caves or dens—may have been uniquely North American maroon creations. These constructions were underground houses that were completely inconspicuous to the untrained eye. Minimal dimensions for these caves were six feet by eight feet and six feet deep. Timber for the ceiling was either cut down or stolen from local settlements. Signs of smoke from cooking fires in the dugouts risked giving the houses’ position away, and so the maroons had to find innovative ways to hide this telltale sign of their hidden abodes. Some

would place a dead tree stump above the chimney in order to hide the smoke; others cooked with hickory or oak bark, which does not emit as much smoke as other woods; still others installed underground pipes that ejected smoke at a safe distance (Diouf 2014, pp 99–101, 104–105).

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