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ARTICLE

Feeling/thinking the archive: Participatory mapping Marronage

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Abstract

This article develops a decolonial participatory method to map the geographies of descendants of fugitives from slavery, or Maroons, to disrupt white-*Mestizo* constructions of Latin American territories. Maroon-descendant communities can take advantage of existing archives and their extensive oral history to explain their territorial development from a home-grown perspective. With the researcher's assistance, members of San Basilio de Palenque, Colombia, used their knowledge and emotions as a lens through which to analyse colonial records to map their territory from both a historical and present day perspective. Feeling/thinking about dispossession and resistance while counter-using the colonial archive to reclaim Afro-descendant territory is a subversive undertaking, one that is engrained in the legacy of Maroon resistance.

KEYWORDS

archive, Colombia, decolonial methods, marronage, oral history, participatory mapping

1 | INTRODUCTION

Since colonial times, Latin American territories have been politically constructed as white-*Mestizo* spaces, erasing the presence of Afro-descendant and indigenous people and their legacies.[1] In Colombia, these racialised groups are known as 'the other Colombia' (Serje, 2005) – located at the margins of the national project (Koopman, 2021). The existing white-*Mestizo* hegemony has impacted cartography, making Afro-descendant spaces largely invisible on maps (Dunnavant, 2021). Current examples include official planning maps that only acknowledge large-scale agricultural systems that stand in opposition to those traditionally run by Black communities, which are often only captured in social cartography projects (Moreno-Quintero et al., 2022).

This article proposes a research method that aims to make Blacknesses/Maroonnesses (intentionally pluralised) a distinct presence in mapmaking, from a decolonial and participatory perspective. In recent decades, Maroonness has been reclaimed by communities of descendants of fugitives from slavery and other Afro-descendant groups, primarily in rural settings, to obtain land rights, for example, in Brazil (Bledsoe, 2017; De La Torre, 2013). Black activists have also identified as Maroons when they have performed ideological escapes from oppression, such as capitalism, patriarchy and European knowledge systems.

For the purposes of this article, Maroon-descendant communities are limited to those whose ancestors were fugitives from slavery, using the town of San Basilio de Palenque (SBP), Colombia, as a case study. During the seventeenth century,

in the aftermath of colonial extermination campaigns, having formed alliances with Catholic Church members and engaged in successful negotiations with the New Kingdom of Granada (NKG), SBP signed a peace treaty with Spanish colonial authorities in 1714. The Maroons obtained freedom, and their territory, now legally recognised, became a *poblazion* [town] (Cassiani-Herrera, 2014; Navarrete-Peláez, 2008). Politically and spatially the members of SBP still emphasise their identity as *cimarrones* [Maroons] and regard their territory as a *palenque* [Colombian term to identify Maroon territorialised societies], which has been violently dispossessed by the Colombian state, armed groups, businesses and white-*Mestizo* landowners over the centuries (Zavala-Guillen, 2022). SBP has implemented different strategies to counter dispossession, including collective titling and land reclamation (Zavala-Guillen, 2022).

Mapping SBP's spatial history of endurance in the twenty-first century comes with the responsibility of doing so in an anti-colonial manner that unsettles oppressive spatial constructions (Allen et al., 2015; Dunnavant, 2021). Therefore, this article presents a method anchored in the community analysis of colonial records through their oral history, manifested in knowledge and emotions; for the construction of maps that serve land rights agendas as evidence of the dispossession of Maroon-descendant communities, such as SBP. Furthermore, it shows how Maroon-descendant communities have *intellectually/affectively* attached themselves to their territories to overcome historical uprootedness. This mapping process was carried out with the researcher's support as a facilitator, who became an instrument to serve the community's interests.

In Section 2, the Maroon spaces are analysed as exceptions in colonial cartographies to present the political importance of mapping them. Section 3 engages with participatory historical geography and the relationship between the archive and oral history, both of which were used in the mapping exercises for SBP, as described in Section 3. The article concludes by reflecting on how advancing counter-mapping of Maroon geographies requires a community-led, disruptive use of colonial tools; in this case, the archive and the map, analysed through knowledge and emotions.

2 | MAROON CARTOGRAPHY

Maps that contain Maroon settlements are exceptional because of the denial of black lives and their social products, which in turn creates geographical absence and 'cartographic violence' (Dunnavant, 2021), a precondition for enabling the capitalist appropriation of their spaces (Bledsoe & Wright, 2019; Hawthorne, 2019; McKittrick, 2006; Ogborn, n.d.). Accordingly, colonial records on SBP show that the prevailing colonial belief was that Maroon societies needed to be eradicated for slavery to survive in the NKG (McFarlane, 2008). Therefore, cartographic absence was not due to the colonial system's lack of knowledge regarding the location of Maroon settlements. It precipitated their extermination by symbolically erasing them on maps prior to their physical destruction. However, SBP endured the transformation of the *palenque* into a freed town through the peace treaty signed with colonial authorities in 1714. Through this treaty, they demonstrated a political capacity to produce and defend territory, legally regaining freedom before the rest of Colombia's enslaved people. Hence, their territorialised society became 'mappable'.

There are other exceptions to the overwhelming Maroon cartographic silence in maps produced during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Little is known about their makers and helpers. However, the names that appear on maps provide some hints about the purposes behind them. For example, the mention of the Spanish military engineer Antonio de Arévalo (1715–1800), in a marginal note in Figure 2 indicates that the map relates to the interest of the colonial authorities in developing infrastructure in the area, and which involved the dispossession of indigenous territories (Blanco-Valiente, 2022; Gámez-Casado, 2016).

Delving into the Marron cartographic presence in these maps, Figure 1 (*c*.1654–1655– no author) shows an area of *simaroneras* between Baranoa and Malambo, a trade zone around the Magdalena River. *Simaroneras* were areas of concentration of Maroons that did not constitute an organised *palenque*.[2]

In Figures 2 (1753), 3 (1895) and 4 (1881), Angola, Arenal and María Angola name specific locations in the Montes de María, a mountainous area in Bolívar province, possibly in connection with the presence of former *palenques*. Angola, from where enslaved people were brought to the NKG was the name of the palenques' leaders, such as Domingo and María Angola (see bottom right-hand corner of Figure 2) (Navarrete-Peláez, 2008). In addition, Arenal and María Angola were the names given to another set of active *palenques* during the seventeenth century (centre of Figures 3 and 4, respectively) (Navarrete-Peláez, 2008).

Figures 2–4 show that surviving African and Maroon elements in the oral history of their ascendants opened up space in hegemonic cartographies, just as Black fugitives did in unfamiliar geographies. Their continuation in the oral history of Afro-descendant groups connects with the fact that the mapmaker in Figures 3 and 4, the British explorer

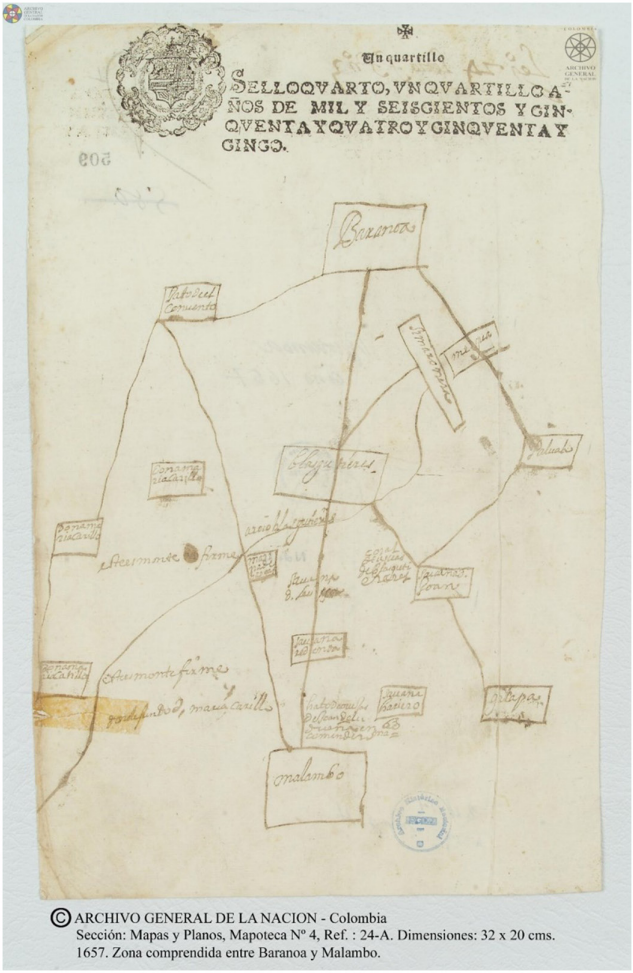

FIGURE 1 *Simaroneras.*

Frederick Simons (1850–1917), had the practice of keeping the indigenous names' location in the work commissioned by the Colombian state (Gómez-Creutzberg, 2017).

As a geographical contribution, these Black ancestral memories retained in the oral history of these groups added to the examples provided by anthropologists who have tracked *huellas de Africania* [African footprints] in Colombian society for decades (de Friedemann, 2000). Some of these *huellas* must now be reconsidered, particularly as the *huellas de cimarronaje* [Maroon footprints] imprinted on maps serve to reflect how African identity navigated and reformulated in new geographies.

Another way to break through hegemonic cartographies is through *active* mapping with and for Black communities. Since the 1980s, North American indigenous people, and other social movements subsequently, have implemented community-based techniques to counter-map and symbolically and materially take possession of their spaces (Guldi, 2017). They redirected the use of the map, an instrument for dispossessing subaltern communities, instead supporting their political agendas (Harley, 1989). These diverse techniques include the Geographical Information System, oral and sketch maps, and maps that link places with participants' biographies (Allen et al., 2015; Bryan, 2011; Herb et al., 2009; Pickles & Cobarrubias, 2008; Tobias, 2000). Their implementation has not been without risk of co-optation and new forms of knowledge domination, given the use of a European format in the mapping of these areas (Bryan, 2009).

Maps made with Afro-descendant communities have visualised land use and occupancy, provided an opportunity to come to terms with a history of resistance, violence and exclusion, and obtained collective titles (Berman-Arévalo, 2019; Fé & Gomes, 2015; Oslender, 2021). In the case of *quilombos* [the equivalent of *palenques* in Brazil], maps have pinpointed their location in the Amazon (Superti & de Vilhena Silva, 2015), while other maps show the current *quilombos*' struggles for land (Giffoni Pinto & de Moraes Wanderley, 2010). These maps were constructed using the narratives of their inhabitants.

3 | MAKING THE ARCHIVE PARTICIPATORY

This section describes how and why to facilitate the analysis of archival records by SBP members to produce cartographies that deliver a home-grown and non-academic, expert understanding of their territory. Producing this cartography was part of a dual commitment: first, as part of my doctoral research, and second, to support community strategies for land restitution through my findings. This support was agreed with the local community council of SBP before starting my PhD, after such a mapping project was agreed upon as being beneficial for both parties.

Focusing on the spatialities of social movements, participatory geographies pursue solidarity with the researched communities while aspiring to do good by acknowledging their political agendas (Kesby, 2007; Wynne-Jones et al., 2015). They aim to disrupt the notion of academic expertise by including other excluded knowledge through co-production, despite the

© ARCHIVO GENERAL DE LA NACION - Colombia
Sección: Mapas y Planos, Mapoteca Nº 4, Ref. : 31-A. Dimensiones: 30 x 30 cms.
1753. Barranca del Rey: Rios Magdalena, Mahates y Caño del Oro.

FIGURE 2 Angola.

FIGURE 3 Arenal in *Carta Corográfica del Departamento de Bolivar* – upper part – made in 1895 and copied in 1947.

FIGURE 4 María Angola.

dominance of the largely white field (Shannon et al., 2021). From a Latin American perspective, analysing territories of resistance against capitalism demands that emancipatory research practices also be informed by the feelings of the *pueblos* [people] and the ancestral and collective human and non-human memory (Diez-Tetamanti, 2014; Freire, 1993; Jiménez, 2018).

Participatory historical-geography as part of community geographies promotes inclusivity by retelling histories using a bottom-up approach, for example, by using community-led archives while supporting social causes (Bressey, 2014; DeLyser, 2014; Flinn, 2011). Yet, like DeLyser (2014), Bressey (2014) highlights a limitation to this work: communities with which historical geographers seek to engage may no longer exist. However, efforts towards institutional decolonisation can pinpoint the relationship between archives and social movements, which in some cases are the communities' successors (Evans et al., 2015). These efforts underscore community involvement in recordkeeping by adding their indigenous knowledge and oral history (Evans et al., 2015). For example, indigenous Australian children who lived in oppressive foster institutions corrected personal information in State archival records, in the process becoming co-creators (McCarthy & Evans, 2012).

Despite these efforts to make the archive an inclusive space, its relationship with oral history has been portrayed as competing (Hernández-Reyes, 2018). Archives have historically operated with a selective memory that excludes and exercises power over racialised subjects (Fowler, 2017; Sutherland, 2017; Trouillot, 2015). Therefore, participatory historical geography requires facilitating conditions where communities lead the research process through their oral history, with the support and assistance of academic researchers. A limitation regarding SBP was that this process faced a significant historical distance from the colonial era, resulting in the fragmenting of their oral recollections over time. It also meant overcoming other obstacles, such as material accessibility to records by the community, and low literacy rates as a result of structural racial inequalities in Colombian education. An advantage enjoyed by the community was that archival analysis led to a broad understanding of their territorial development through the combined forces of the old and young generations: those who know the *palabra* [spoken word as oral history], and those who are also able to read the *letra* [the Spanish written word] of the archive.[3] Furthermore, it included thinking, but also *feeling* the archive and interpreting past strategies of resistance implemented by their ancestors through emotions.

The first step in implementing this process was to hand over copies of records collected at the General Archive of the Indies (GAI), the National General Archive in Bogotá (NGA), and the Historical Archive of Cartagena de Indias (HAC) to the community. This was my obligation as a Latin American researcher with the privilege of European university funding, which had allowed me access to these archives. The donated documents were important for the community because they described their ancestral territory and episodes of dispossession recorded in the archive, for example, 1781–1783 correspondence written by Antonio de la Torre y Miranda (GAI, 1781–1783).

De la Torre was a military official who allocated land rights during his expeditions in the late 1770s and early 1780s in the Colombian Caribbean for the Spanish Crown. This correspondence describes at that time the foundation of 43 towns, six of which were established within the Montes de María and recognised as belonging to SBP as part of the 1714 peace treaty. De la Torre did not provide the names of these six settlements, but did list the 43 towns. Oral history contributed to the identification of the six towns belonging to SBP, as shown in the next section.

The second record is *Escritura* [Title Deed] no. 131 (1921). This deed sets out the collective rights of SBP to the land distributed by de la Torre, which was under threat of dispossession, as explained below. Only the last eight pages of the title deed remain. However, the first pages were published in *América Negra* by Nina de Friedemann (1991), who pioneered the study of Afro-Colombians.

The title deed describes that, in 1921, Andrés Beltran, Pedro Torres and Juan de Mata-Reyes, on behalf of SBP, requested that a notary formalise statements given to a judge regarding the community land property. Their accounts describe the borders of their community, providing geographical features as points of reference. They based their property rights on the redistribution of lands in the area conducted by de la Torre in 1779. The decision to formalise their collective land rights in the early twentieth century through a title deed was designed to protect their territory from further encroachment by white landowners, who were fencing off their lands (Cross & de Friedemann, 1979). Almost a century later, the descendants of those *palenqueros* who formalised the land in 1921 mapped this record to understand the reduction of their territory.

4 | PARTICIPATORY MAPPING: BRIDGING THE ARCHIVE AND THE ORAL HISTORY

In 2017, as part of my research, I organised a workshop in SBP to discuss archival records as evidence that can contribute to land reparation claims for Maroon-descendant communities. These claims also created conditions for reflecting on the feelings of dispossession suffered due to ongoing historical racial violence (Berman-Arévalo, 2019). Archival records also play a vital role in this process. For SBP, the records collected from different archives show that the Montes de María

constituted its ancestral territory. The record shows how this territory shrank with the establishment of the six settlements by de la Torre at the beginning of the 1780s, as explained in Section 3 (GAI, 1783).

The first mapping process involved participants suggested by the local community council.[4] The participants were Jesús Natividad Pérez-Palomino, an anthropologist; Alfonso Cassiani-Herrera, a historian; Aiden Salgado, an anthropologist; and Nicasio Reyes, the local community council's president. All were from SBP. As a researcher, I acted as a facilitator, taking notes, reading the records aloud and pinpointing locations on a base map. Women from the community showed a spontaneous interest in the exercise and also wished to share their territorial knowledge. During the exercise, the possible location of a *palenque*, *Limón* (1570–1634), was also identified at the current *arroyo* Charcón [creek]. Strong feelings spontaneously emerged during the records reading, such as grief for the territory that was lost, and pride in the archival accounts of their ancestors' resistance, although unsuccessful, to the dispossession suffered in the 1780s. They tried to resist, the participants repeated, they tried to resist. The keyword, *resistir*, which appeared in both the archive and their oral recollections, demonstrated how feelings of care over territory are intertwined throughout the Maroon mobilisation of reparation strategies over time (Diez-Tetamanti, 2014; Jiménez, 2018).

A second mapping exercise centred on the 1921 title deed, which contains a description of the SBP's borders with points of reference, such as wetlands. The local community council appointed all men, Carlos Pérez, Juan Felipe Santana and Professor Bernardino Pérez, to produce a community-revised version of the 1921 title deed based on their vast knowledge of the territory. As a female researcher, I managed my discomfort at the fact that the discussions on the territory were dominated by men, even though women actively participate at the grassroots level in daily spatial practices. Barrett and Bosse (2022) state that navigating the tensions between the community's approaches and the researcher's ideas on inclusivity/diversity involves remembering that, despite our common goals, we are outsiders, and communities are not powerless to decide their own politics.

This team discussed the title deed and read it to the elders to clarify places that may have experienced changes since 1921. For instance, some farms mentioned in the title deed had disappeared, but their oral history revealed their past location. Elders explained that by the 1900s, only a fifth of the ancestral territory had remained part of SBP. They stated that the territory of the *palenque* ran up to a church in Ovejas, near San Jacinto. Enrique Márquez-San Martín, a young community leader, also explained that there are two *pueblos negros* [Afro-descendant towns], San Cristóbal and Paraíso, who considered themselves *palenqueros*, historically belonging to SBP. These last accounts from different generations retained in the oral history were added to other locations silenced in the 1921 record. They also made visible the loss of territory that had occurred since 1921, serving as an output for the community plan on the restitution of lands that had been violently taken away.

By reading the 1921 record, deep appreciation emerged from the community of SBP towards their ancestors for looking after future generations, having politically and strategically foreseen that legal protection was key for the continuation of their people. As a facilitator, unfolding the positive emotions surrounding these ancestors allowed me to discover that they were also a territory. The community believes that the afterlife involves a return to Africa and a reunion with the first Maroons, who are a bridge between SBP and that continent (Pérez-Palomino, 2002). During the 2017 workshop, a young member of the SBP community said 'in Colombia, many have the US dream. However, ours is the African dream. We want to go back to Africa.' A Maroon cartography for the twenty-first century must also include this affective path back to this continent, as a dreamed land where discrimination does not exist and reparation is possible.

5 | CONCLUSIONS

Maroon descendant resistance is also cartographic. This article shows how this resistance breaks through hegemonic maps by identifying places with names transmitted through oral history in connection with communities of fugitives from slavery destroyed during colonial times. As anthropologists look for *huellas de Africanía* (de Friedemann, 2000), these are geographical footprints of marronage that resisted erasure. Their search in current Latin American societies can open new lines of enquiry in different fields.

Following past examples of Black counter-mapping in the struggle against capital, racial violence and land dispossession, this article pushes this concept forward by implementing a Maroon-descendant-led mapping process that takes advantage of the written and oral history of these communities (Berman-Arévalo, 2019; Moreno-Quintero et al., 2022; Oslender, 2021). It proposes a decolonial community-based study of records using fragmented spoken words passed from one generation to another that included knowledge and emotions. While previous examples of mapping carried out as 'emotional collective exercises' focused on themes of violence and exclusion

(Berman-Arévalo, 2019, p. 353), positive feelings were also captured in this article's cartographic experiences entwined with the community's struggles for land.

Combining the archive and oral history in maps made visible the violent dispossession that had occurred, and encouraged the community to act politically and collectively against it in the present as their ancestors had through history. Mapping requires overcoming material obstacles such as community access to records. Reparations for Afro-descendant communities should also include the restitution of documents belonging to their colonial history. Furthermore, the implemented methodology outlined here requires researchers to take on the role of facilitators as opposed to leaders, while communities direct the process of knowledge production, sometimes in ways that contradict our ideas on diversity and inclusion. I did not 'preach' about gender equality, but I did reflect in my practice that women do matter in territorial analysis. Subsequent mapping exercises that did not include the use of archival material – the reason why they are not part of this article – involved women directly setting the basis for their further engagement in cartography.

With these caveats and exclusions in mind, the outcome remains a home-grown interpretation of the archive by those who had been its objects in the past. Feeling/thinking the archive through participatory mapping is a matter of emotions/knowledge in the geographies of marronage that is at the same time political. Hopefully, this will spark a more systematic bridging of the literature on emotional geographies that could not be undertaken here. This method can also be extended to other racialised communities such as indigenous communities.

History has a different flavour when it is told and felt by those who were never meant to read it, as outsiders to their own history. The outcome of this mapping process is emancipatory when it is used to advance the reclamation of lost community land with the same instruments employed by colonialists to exterminate and uproot Africans and their descendants. We have learned from SBP's history that territory made marronage possible. From the implementation of this mapping method, we have seen the manner in which this community has affectionately/intellectually attached to it to endure as people.

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research Data are not shared due to ethical restrictions.

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ENDNOTES

[1] The term *Mestizo* is used here as racial mixture that serves to sustain the myth of racial democracies in Latin America and the subsequent hegemony of white and white-*Mestizo* elites in the region (Wade, 2008).

[2] Personal communication with Professor María Cristina Navarrete on 8 July 2021.

[3] SBP has a language with roots in Angola, Congo, Central West Africa and Spanish language (Schwegler, 2017).

[4] Participants decided to be identified by their real names in this research: 'their voices could be heard as belonging to them'.

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