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Steps Into the Organic Unknown: How Eighteenth-Century Dutch Slaves Turned a Foreboding Amazon Jungle into a Welcome Refuge

by

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British social commentator Thomas More wrote the novel, *Utopia*, in order to express his vision of a "perfect" society. Since *Utopia*'s publication in 1516, many other Western authors have attempted to articulate their vision of what this society might look like. Most of those visions were intimately tied into mankind's relationship to industrial and technological progress and that relationship's effect on man's relationship to nature.[1] Groups like the Shakers, the Amana Movement, and the Oneida Community were founded to counteract the gender and labor narratives presented by Western governments.[2] While transplanted African slaves would not likely have had any knowledge of these philosophical debates going on in European literary circles, the basic principles being debated were crucial to their circumstance. By the eighteenth century, the transatlantic slave trade was well into forcing the Western world to come to grips with its own vision of Utopia. The slave trade in particular forced this introspection because what is most interesting about utopias is not their efficacy in creating perfect societies but their "illumination of the non-utopian societies from which all utopias spring."[3] The "non-utopian" society from which maroon communities sprang was the European plantation complex, and the measure of its dystopia was reflected in the depth of cultural creation found in maroon communities.

There is no way to tell when the first maroon communities of the Dutch Guianas were founded, but the Dutch began engaging in the slave trade in earnest around 1630, and a century later they embarked upon their first mission to recover escapees from a band of maroons three-

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[1] Howard P. Segal, *Utopias: A Brief History from Ancient Writings to Virtual Communities* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 47–58.

[2] Timothy Miller, *The Encyclopedic Guide to American Intentional Communities*, (Clinton: Richard W. Couper Press, 2013), especially xiv. Most of them, however, retained Western racial hierarchies!

[3] Segal, *Utopias*, 1.

hundred strong.[4] Since the South American rainforest was then, as it is now, a forbidding and dangerous landscape, and given the large amount of organization, cooperation, luck, and time it would take to found a maroon community, it is likely that Africans began trying to escape from the circumstances of slavery fairly soon after their arrival in the Dutch Guianas. In order to negotiate the often-unreasonable challenges to personal mobility in the colonial complex, many African slaves chose to alternately exploit the trust they were afforded—appearing faithful to the colonial gaze but participating in acts of collusion outside of it. The more trust a slave was invested with, the more mobility they accessed and the more use they could be to insurgent slaves.

But the desire to ascribe a singular character to people is one fraught with uncertainty and, with slaves, perhaps misplaced optimism. Many of the documents left by Dutch colonials administrators were communiques directed towards benefactors and senior politicians in the Netherlands. As such, they were eager to portray themselves as in charge of the situation—despite the fact that they were asking for help. The tendency, then, to utilize the term "good" and "faithful" to describe their slaves is part of the colonial imaginary, one in which a faithful slave does indeed have an immutable character—they are one of the "good guys." The truth, however, remains that it is most likely the case that most slaves described as "good" or "faithful" had not been so in every instance of their bondage, and the fact that they were enlisted to track down slaves who have already acquired their freedom could have actually increased the odds that they would be inspired to achieve their freedom sometime in the future. One of the reasons slaves might have felt forced to exploit this political economy of trust is because the Dutch chose to compensate for their feeble population numbers with ferocious acts of terror, such as cruel and

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[4] Alvin Thompson, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in Guyana, 1580-1803* (Bridgetown: Carib Research and Publications, Inc.,1987), 91, 144.

excessive capital punishments. The maroon "utopia" was found in the desire to imagine an alternate reality to this violent world, whether it be a new space or a new identity. The story of the Dutch colonial project could in some ways be seen as one of Europeans searching for a sort of utopia but failing, and yet creating dystopic conditions for its segregated class of slaves, who actually eventually wound up erecting a makeshift utopia apart from yet adjacent to their abandoned colonial space.

From about the early 17th century until the abolition of slavery, the Dutch Guianas hosted the highest concentration of maroon communities in the New World. In 1763, the highly volatile slave complex of the Dutch colony of Berbice burst into open rebellion, a circumstance that set off a rash of attempts by colonial administrators and slave rebels alike to identify the allegiances of the colony's slaves. The creole slave Andre's master, for instance, had been beheaded while Andre was hiding in the jungle during the rebellion, so his loyalty must have been highly suspect. Andre seems to be aware of the incredulity of his claim of innocence when asked during the next year's trial why he did not remain on the plantation. He answered: "It is said to remain with your master, but he is the one who said that if the evil Negroes came, we must walk into the bush, because that meant he could not help us; whereupon the evil Negroes came, I went into the bush."[5] Although Andre obviously would want to be seen as "faithful" as possible during his trial, he had to square his story with what the prosecutor already knew—his master was beheaded while he hid in the jungle. But for Andre, the choice to take refuge could have been far more than an attempt to simply hide. What if the rebels had taken up *residence* at that plantation? Sooner or later, Andre would have had to re-emerge, and when he did, he certainly would not have wanted the rebels to believe that he was loyal to his dead master. In this sense, the jungle

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[5] 1764 Testimony from Berbice Rebellion Trial Transcript, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, UK [TNA] CO 116/33.

became a shroud under which a slave's political allegiances could remain effectively unidentifiable, all while they maintained a panoptic gaze on the colonial landscape, determining the opportune time to re-enter, and what guise to employ.[6] Of course, there is no way to tell if Andre himself was intentionally remaking his political identity while watching and waiting in the jungle. He could have been, as he said, following orders. But the point remains that if he could credibly deploy the narrative of being ordered into the jungle, then undoubtedly some or many other slaves must have taken the opportunity of social chaos to melt into the landscape and encase themselves in the chrysalis of anonymity.

One way slaves made that landscape their own was by giving it new names that expressed their claim on it. The Saramacca maroons of Surinam, for instance, named their community after the river along which they had made their escape. Others still spoke to a rebel ethic, or at least a proclamation of intent. European soldier J. S. Stedman related how one of the black soldiers he was fighting with related to him the names of a number of rebel settlements, all of which had to do with either protection or defiance:

> IT SHALL MOULDER BEFORE IT SHALL BE TAKEN
> GOD ALONE KNOWS AND NO PERSON ELSE
> COME TRY ME—IF YOU BE MEN
> DO DISTURB ME—IF YOU DARE
> THE WOODS' LAMENT
> HIDE ME, O YE SURROUNDING VERDURE[7]

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[6] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*: *The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 195–228. Foucault popularized the notion of the panopticon, conceptualized by Jeremy Bentham. For Foucault, however, the panopticon served as the ultimate tool of Western powerbrokers, the "all-seeing" eye of whatever institution was being used to oppress the disadvantaged.

[7] J. G. Stedman, edited by Richard Price and Sally Price*, Narrative of a Five Years Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam in Guiana on the Wild Coast of South America From the Year 1772 to the Year 1777* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 400.

During the clean-up campaign along the Berbice River after the rebellion was put down, colonial officials really got an appreciation of the degree to which the rebels could reappropriate and reconstruct a formerly colonial space. Berbice Governor Simon Hoogenheim "discovered at a small water-place some thatched huts which appeared to have served as watch houses for the rebels, and at the Westsonburg Creek a trace of negroes with some beautiful dugout canoes which they took away with them."[8] It is quite apt that one of the structures that Hoogenheim discovered on his trip to survey the post-rebellion landscape was a rebel watch house. The watch houses were in some sense the eyes of the slave-run panopticon, gauging appropriate times to reengage with this reality while serving as an ever-present guard against any attempts by colonial agents to Disturb Me—If You Dare. And how does the information gleaned from one pair of eyes help a slave in another watchtower miles away? The slaves instituted a highly effective communication network that served in effect as the brain center to these seemingly infinite pairs of optic nerves; a neural network which in effect animated this organic jungle underground.

A Place of Refuge; or, Nightmares of the Colonial Imaginary

The Amazonian jungle played a distinctive role in the construction of maroon identity in the Dutch Guianas. For African slaves, the jungle represented an organic, unknown quantity— but since the unknown brings with it the potential for creation, it was as an empty palette upon which to imprint purpose. One of the most crucial roles the jungle played in the context of rebellion was as a place of refuge for runaway slaves where there was little chance of immediate recapture; where they could regroup, refresh, recuperate, and make plans. Rather than seeing nature as a force to work with, emerging utopian technophile ideology in Europe had convinced many that the key to a perfect civilization lay in bending nature to man's will. To the colonial

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[8] J. J. Hartsinck, translated by Walter Roth "Berbice Revolt of 1763" *Journal of the British Guiana Museum and Zoo* No. 20, (Dec. 31, 1958) Pt. IV, 54.

man, however, nascent race theory had not fully conceptualized the role of "uncivilized man" in regard to his place in nature. In this not–fully developed ideology, "uncivilized man" was still fused with nature; he became a part of the natural landscape, to be regarded as no more than a beast until he could be taught language, religion, comportment, and so forth. For "civilized man," unconquered nature set off emotional triggers that, in writing, were evident in his choice of literary devices.

The writings of British doctor George Pinckard while in the Dutch Guianas provides a fertile opportunity to analyze the emotional space into which many Western colonials placed the man vs. nature binary—and thereby the master/slave dynamic. Rather than seeing the jungle as a welcome refuge for slaves seeking anonymity, the terrifying terms the British doctor uses to describe the Guianese bush's organic unknown reifies its oppositional role in his Western world view as a "noncivilized" space. In one section in which he endeavored to describe the lifestyle of "Bush-negroes" in Demerara, for instance, he made sure that the reader was aware that rebels had set up camps in the "thickest parts of what is termed 'the Bush;' where they now live in all bad habits of savage nature; and are become mere hordes of brigands or marauders." When describing their fighting habits, he reiterated that the rebels fled to camps located "in the hidden recesses of the forest; from whence they issue only to ravage and plunder."[9] Later, when reflecting on where many of the rebel encampments existed, he mentioned again that they were "concealed in the profoundest gloom of the forest."[10]

Pinckard's use of the terms "thickest," "hidden," and "profoundest gloom" to describe his idea of where maroons lived in the Guyanese jungle confirms the notion that conflations of "the

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[9] George Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies, Including Observations Relative to the Creoles and Slaves of the Western Colonies, and the Indians of South America, Interspersed with Remarks upon the Seasoning or Yellow Fever of Hot Climates* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy Paternoster Row, 1816), Vol. I, 370.
[10] Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies,* Vol. I, 375.

bush" and uncivilized man's wild nature directly contributed to Western paranoia; paranoia that possibly led to harsher colonial treatment and thereby more flight into the jungle, completing a circuit of resistance. Pinckard did not explain what he meant by the idea that nature cultivates "bad habits" among "savage" Africans, but based on his social conditioning it is reasonable to surmise that he meant any habits that took Africans further from the colonial project's idealized notion of Western culture. The defamatory code word *savage*—though really just a redundant modifier for *nature*—carries with it a negative nuance of disorder that, when applied to humans, implies a weak-minded regression to basic human impulses. In this formulation, Africans were fused with nature, but awaited Western man to help them construct their civilized selves as they in turn dissembled their uncivilized natural selves.

The colonial project demanded that slaves abandon their previous cultural narrative and accept the Western one as a condition of their subjecthood and as a confirmation of their "faithful" identity. However, due to slaves' ability to slide between assignations of loyalty, the Dutch were too distracted and the British, after taking over the colonies in the early 1800s, too optimistic to get an accurate grasp on whether slaves were really internalizing this narrative. As a result, the "faithful"/"rebel" dichotomy was the most pervasive categorization in Dutch colonial writing—for many it was a primary indicator of whether colonialism was "working." Many of the accounts of slave rebellion attest to how many "good" and "faithful" negroes were enlisted to track down the wrongdoers. Contemporary historian J. J. Hartsinck made mention of "negroes from the estate who had remained faithful" tracking down "insurgent negroes" during a 1749 rebellion.[11] In 1761, two years before the Berbice Rebellion, a group of Jewish planters hired a historian to tell their story, and even he distinguished rebellious Negroes in their colony who had never "done the least harm to their master" from the "forty-eight good negroes" enlisted to track

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[11] Hartsinck, "Berbice Revolt of 1763," Pt. I, 37.

them down in July of 1761.[12] In the aftermath of the Berbice Rebellion, the colony of

Essequibo's governor Storm van Gravesande attests to "faithful slaves,"[13] and during the

manhunt following the Berbice Rebellion, official court records refer to "faithful Negroes" being

sent out to capture one of the accused ringleaders.[14] As far as Dutch authorities were concerned,

the transition from slave to subject required that Africans fundamentally change how they saw

themselves in the world. The colonial geography was even a real-time map of this inculcation.

The colonial imaginary saw the jungle as evil and mysterious—any slave, then, who was

acculturated would never turn to the jungle as a place of refuge, but would seek out the socially

constructed refuges—the dwellings of friends? abandoned buildings?—of the colonial complex.

Choosing the organic unknown of maroon life was in effect a rejection of a European-imposed

modernity, in favor of a constructed reality of the slaves' own choosing.

The importance that a place of refuge could have for runaway slaves should not be

understated.[15] The near-unlimited potential the jungle had to serve as that refuge makes one

question reports of battle skirmishes by the colonial powers. Among the many instances when

officers claim that rebels fled into the jungle, how often was it the case that instances of them

fleeing were really strategic retreats to hidden refuges? Barbadian official Gedney Clarke, for

instance, seems fairly confident in his "Transaction in Rio Berbice and Demerary from good

authority which happened in December 1763" that after a counterattack on an overrun plantation

in Berbice, "the remainder of the Rebells flew into the woods and must have been destroyed."[16]

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[12] Jacob R. Marcus and Stanley F. Chivet, eds., *Historical Essay in the Colony of Surinam, 1788* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1974), 86.

[13] TNA CO 137/14.

[14] TNA CO 318/74.

[15] Michael Mullin, *Africa in America: Slave Acculturation and Resistance in the American South and the British Caribbean, 1736–1831,* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994) , 54. "From their obscure beginnings Maroons understood the importance of keeping to themselves."

[16] Storm van S' Gravesande, C. A. Harris and J. A. J. de Villiers, eds., *The Rise of British Guiana: Compiled from His Despatches Vol. II*, (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1911), 440–443.

Clarke sent a detachment of troops to Demerara under a Captain John Smith, who thenceforth marched into Berbice to engage the rebels, so it is undoubtedly Smith's report that Clarke drew from. But could either have really been so sure the rebels "must have been destroyed?" Could it not have been the case that either Smith or Clarke was woefully ignorant of the existence of maroon refuges in the woods? Or could it have also been the case that one or both of them wanted to express to his superiors that the threat was neutralized?

The potential that this organic "underground" had for potential slave unrest was not lost on early colonial officials—they did make an attempt to institute a system of controls over black social mobility. As early as 1746 the Berbice colonial council passed an ordinance that when one or two slaves ran away from their plantation, notice had to be given to one's surrounding neighbors within twenty-four hours.[17] If "one or more slaves of theirs has been absent for eight days, knowledge must be given to the people next to Burger Meier, who will inform the governor by letter."[18] In 1749, they passed an ordination against any "resident from sheltering a runaway slave on their plantation at a penalty of five guilders per day."[19] It is impossible to determine how effective these controls were, but a 1760 ordinance suggests there was some effect. This new ordinance contains the same language as the prior ban on sheltering slaves, but it is instead directed specifically towards the native population rather than the colony's European residents. In addition, it adds a bizarre mix of carrot-stick incentivizing: A stipulation provides that "Indians and Indianesses" who bring runaway slaves immediately "to the fortress" or to their masters "shall be richly paid for their trouble." However, a proviso adds "on penalty that if it is hereafter found that some Indians or Indianesses have done this offense, arbitration shall be the

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[17] April 6, 1746 Berbice Public Notice, TNA CO 116/68.
[18] 1746 Letter from Berbice governor Jan Lossner, TNA CO 116/68.
[19] Oct. 9, 1749 Berbice Public Notice, TNA CO 116/68.

punishment."[20] If no other ordinance specifically directed towards Indians was passed before the earlier 1749 ordinance, then this suggests an interesting series of events. If the 1749 ordinance was successful, runaway slaves, now restricted from their usual hideaways amongst family and friends on neighboring plantations, had been forced into the organic unknown of the jungle and were seeking shelter with neighboring Indian peoples. The 1760 ordinance, then, was passed to put a stop to *that* avenue of escape. The decision to release an almost-identical edict eleven years after the first, one that applies specifically to Native Americans, betrays a weakness in the colonial complex's ability to assert political authority over peoples to whom they have given an indeterminate political status. The authorities seemed to be aware of the ambiguous and unfinished political identity that they had given native inhabitants, and so in effect they tried to cover both bases by threatening a penalty as well as offering a reward for complicity, an incentive absent from the earlier edict directed towards Europeans. The rich payment is a nod to the incentivizing method that the colonial complex has traditionally used with natives. The intercultural contact this narrative suggests was likely indicative of a part of the communication network that rebels and slaves had forged with native populations, and that savvy slaves utilized in their negotiations for personal and family security.

By the late eighteenth century, evidence began to pile up that slaves were using the jungle as places of refuge, despite what some officials wanted to believe. One Berbice planter who had his mill burned down automatically presumed that if his slaves *had* run away, they were likely not hiding in the built environment of the colonial complex, but rather in the organic unknown of the jungle. After sending out two search parties to find runaways in the year after the 1760 ordinance, he found it "impossible" that "many people went to the bush for two days cruising through very thoroughly and no one was found." He later sent in a coterie of Indians, distrustful

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[20] Oct. 7, 1760 Ordinance of the Berbice Colonial Council, TNA CO 116/68.

of the slaves he had previously sent to search.[21] During another revolt led by a slave named

Adam two years later year, Hartsinck mentioned rather offhandedly that when "Lieutenant

Thielen . . . with a Corporal and 12 privates was sent to stop the further progress of the mutiny . .

. they became aware of the negroes in the forest, where they had in the meanwhile reinforced

themselves."[22] While Adam's Rebellion was in full swing, Governor Hoogenheim had to face

one instance in which "the rebels attacked very violently from out of the bush from three

sides."[23] By 1795, it seems that *maronnage* had become such a normalized option of slave

resistance that maroon camps were being constructed at an alarming rate. British Major

M'Creaph's letter during that year's rebellion even tells about a camp that was being built *before*

its inhabitants had even escaped, suggesting that slaves had accounted for the aftermath of the

revolt and had routinized the construction of a possible refuge within their daily tasks.[24]

Visions of Utopia

   Once a camp had been established for a significant amount of time, maroons incorporated

their lived environment and surrounding lands into a defense complex. According to British

doctor George Pinckard, by at least 1816 Demerara maroons

> "[planted] around [their encampment] buildings oranges, bananas, plantains, yams
> eddoes, and others kids of provisions; thus in addition to the trees of the forest, procuring
> themselves further concealment by the plantations which gave them food. . . . Round the
> exterior of the circular spot was cut a deep and wide ditch, which, being filled with water,
> and stuck, at the sides and bottom, with sharp-pointed stakes, served as a formidable

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[21] Letter from anonymous planter, 1761/1762, TNA CO 116/33.
[22] Hartsinck, "Berbice Revolt of 1763," Pt. I, 39.
[23] May 1763 letter from Wolfert van Hoogenheim, TNA CO 116/33.
[24] M'Creaph to the Duke of Portland, TNA CO 111/4. "Blacks in the West Coast . . . had already with incredible Secrecy and Quickness establish'd some hutted Camps in the Woods."

barrier of defence. The path across this ditch was placed two or three feet below the surface, and wholly concealed from the eye by the water being always thick and muddy. Leaves were strewed, and steppings, similar in their kind, made to the edges of the ditch, at various parts . . . to deceive any who might approach."[25]

But not all colonial agents experienced futility while negotiating maroon defenses.

Creoles and Indians—two marginalized groups that were often pitted against Africans—seemed

to have had a better knowledge of the maroon organic unknown. Once, while in pursuit of a band

of fugitive rebels during the Berbice Rebellion, Captain Borger's "Indians and mullatoes . . .

stopped themselves . . . knowing that the runaways had prepared the way between the two rivers

with walls and moats."[26] The knowledge that fellow slaves and Indians were better suited to

track down rebels than Europe's finest troops seems to have been well established by the

beginning of the nineteenth century. Once the government raised a "corps of blacks from among

the most faithful of the slaves; and also engaged in their interest a party of Indians from the

woods," Pinckard reports that,

> "they proceeded onward, having the sagacious Indians on their flanks; by whose acuteness and penetration they discovered . . . where the companies of the brigands had taken up their residence, and, by well-concerted attacks, defeated and routed . . . them. . . . The expertise of these men, in such a pursuit, is peculiar, and beyond all that could be imagined, by those who live in crowded society. They not only hear sounds in the woods, which are imperceptible to others, but judge, with surprising accuracy, of the distance and direction from whence they proceed. The position of a fallen leaf, or the bending of a bramble, to slight to be noticed by an [sic] European eye, conveys to them certain intelligence respecting the route taken by those whom they pursue. From constant practice and observation, their organs of sense become highly improved, and they hear with an acuteness, and see with a precision truly surprising to those who are unacquainted with their habits and their vigilance. With such guides, the corps moved with confidence, and was conducted with safety.[27]

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25 Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies,* Vol. I, 375.
26 1763 report on Berbice, TNA CO 116/33.
27 Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies,* Vol. I, 372–374.

The concealed path across the ditch around the maroon encampment "was found out by the

sagacity of the Indians, who soon discovered that to attempt to pass at any other part, was to be

empaled alive."[28]

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the propensity for runaway slaves to reconstruct

their social lives was how fast and on how large a scale they could do it. Far from encountering

squalid makeshift camps, when a detachment of Dutch soldiers were sent on a mission to rout

out the last remaining Berbice rebels, they,

> "found a great camp of negroes whom they attacked, this being but an advanced post
> which immediately fled to the main army of Atta who, as soon as he learnt of the advance
> of the white likewise took to flight. Here they found a large number of huts, some
> prepared and raw cassava which they threw into the water, many muskets which they
> destroyed, some money, silver objects, and goods of which they took the best for spoil."[29]

Maroon fortifications and defense measures were renowned throughout the Caribbean.[30] And the

lengths Guianese maroons went to keep unwanted trespassers away from their camps speaks to a

desperate ingenuity birthed by mortal necessity. They in fact seemed to live in a constant state of

preparedness. Soon after taking the Plantation Vigilantie, Berbice rebels "were engaged in felling

timber, which it appeared should serve them as palisades with which to entrench themselves on

that plantation or elsewhere."[31] After the rebellion had been quelled, scouts surveying formerly

rebel territory "reported that the paths through the forest were all beset with man-traps, after the

fashion of the negroes; they pulled up fifty of these which proved to be extraordinary

inventions," according to Hartsinck.[32] One group of Congo rebels had, near several plantations,

"entrenched themselves and strewn the approaches with man-traps made of a species of cane, 1

to 1 1/2 feet long, called Putuaalen, sharpened on either side and stuck in the ground with the

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[28] Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies,* Vol. I, 375–376.
[29] Hartsinck, "Berbice Revolt of 1763," Pt. VII, 64.
[30] Mullin, *Africa in America*, 59.
[31] Hartsinck, "Berbice Revolt of 1763," Pt. IV, 47.
[32] Hartsinck, "Berbice Revolt of 1763," Pt. VI, 61.

point forward, which prevented the approach of soldiers who, wounded by them, sustained fiery and inflamed sores."[33] In 1790, Scots soldier J. G. Stedman described one Surinam encampment which "was naturally surrounded by a broad infoardable Marsh or Swamp which prevented all Communication except by private paths under water known only to the rebels alone and before which [their commander] Baron had placed loaded swivels which he had plundered from the neighbouring estates."[34]

Maroon defense technology seemed to incorporate available natural resources to fortify already isolated environments. When Dutch officer Major M'Creaph's troops encountered a "principal" rebel camp, they found that "It was so situated that to approach it on any Side was only to be done by wading several Hours up to the Waist in Water, thro' the Woods which opposed constant impediments to their Progress, by fallen Branches, intertwining underwood, and other distressing Obstacles peculiar to those wild and immense Forests." But the maroon defensive capabilities were not limited to stationary obstacles. Oftentimes, colonial recapture squads were faced with military resistance that was not only adequate, but excellent. As indicated by M'Creaph's report, "several Soldiers and Volunteers, who, being almost sunk with Fatigue, and unable to keep up with the Rest, were . . . made Prisoners by the Insurgents, and others far more fortunate were pick'd off by their unerring aim." But if the maroons built a "principal camp," what would be the purpose of subsidiary camps? Were they set up to decentralize command? Had the maroons segregated themselves by ethnicity, or some other factor? Either way, the camp system seemed to be vital to maroon strategy. M'Creaph confirms

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[33] Hartsinck, "Berbice Revolt of 1763," Pt. VI, 66.

[34] Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, 84.

that it took four months to completely put down the rebellion, during which time "We

successively destroy'd . . . their other Camps."[35]

Even if the rebels did not remake the structural architecture of a contested space, they still

retained a sort of quasi-sovereignty over that space. This could explain Stedman's account that

"Rebels still often visit" a village that "had been demolished . . . to pick up some of the ryst,

Yams and Casadas, which the Ground continued /in its barren State/ to produce" even though the

Dutch were making camp there at the time.[36] Apparently this was not as unusual a situation as

one might expect, as Jamaican maroons were also known to continually returned to a site they

had once abandoned.[37] Only the savviest social navigators of the colonial complex had much

hope of safely conducting this borderzone of no-man's lands created by this environment of

political flux. British doctor Pinckard depicts in clear contrast his cultural unawareness of

Berbice's social geography when he recounts an instance in which he and his comrades, struck

by the "unusually soft" rumblings of their conversation "amongst the trees. . . . were induced to

sound the huntsman's call, and the halloo of the chase, in order to observe the melodious echo. . .

. [But] our friendly conductor, M. Fenner, instantly took alarm, and begging us to desist, desired

that we would quicken our pace and be still, lest we should bring down the Bush-negroes; who,

if they should find themselves able to overpower us, would certainly take off our scalps!"[38]

Rather than be "completely free" or "completely enslaved," one group described in

Berbice seems to have found another sort of middle ground, one that was eerily evocative of

their ambiguous political and ethnic identity. In describing this group of runaway creoles,

Hartsinck gives no indication of whether or not their ambiguous racial status was related to the

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[35] M'Creaph to the Duke of Portland, TNA CO 111/4.

[36] Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, 136.

[37] Mullin, *Africa in America*, 59.

[38] Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies,* Vol. I, 481.

ambiguous political status of their community, or if their ethnic segregation was a function of either of those factors, only that,

> "in 1738, a settlement of a novel kind was established in an island in the Cuyuni. A number of creole slaves having revolted and betaken themselves to this island, a compromise was effected between them and the Government whereby it was arranged that they should continue to occupy the island under the Government, performing the kind of labour upon the plantations which was regulated by the terms of the agreement. . . . the inhabitants being known as the Company's 'half-free creoles.'"[39]

In this instance, the creoles negotiated for themselves a mediated political autonomy that seemed to be within the comfort zone of the colonial authorities.

Surinam governor Wigbold Crommelin worried in June 1763 that the political environment that the rebels had created during the Berbice Rebellion would coalesce into legitimate rogue states, further destabilizing his colony's neighboring maroon community: "the rebels have come . . . to the Courentyne and they and their followers with the people there prevented a defense to form, to row out in combined might because it would not only be very dangerous for Berbice but for us all should they make a free state with the people there or with the Indians."[40] By October, Essequibo governor Gravesande also voiced fears that the Berbice Rebellion could degenerate into the same kind of political morass as experienced by Crommelin. Concerned that his forces would not be able to repel a rebel attack, Gravesande admitted that "if the Rebels retreat to this side freely held, they will be able to strike against all from upriver to below, thus being able to outlast us, and this will become a retreat for our evil-willed slaves, such as the people of Surinam have found."[41]

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[39] *British Guiana Boundary: Arbitration with the United States of Venezuela* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1898), 47.
[40] June 2, 1763 letter from W. Crominelen, TNA CO 116/33.
[41] October 18, 1763 letter from Storm van s' Gravesande, TNA CO 116/33.

Conclusion

       Ultimately, the colonial slave system of the Dutch Guianas was primed for self-sabotage. Pinckard's description of the maroon recapture raid suggests that colonial administrators themselves played a role in enabling slaves to shift between identities. The common practice of sending slaves on these raids, while possibly providing relief for Dutch troops, undoubtedly gave them knowledge of the routes leading to, as well as the means to construct, a maroon camp. Likewise, the forays with Amerindians into the jungle likely both provided slaves with tutors in the ways of the wild, as well as gave them the locations of and languages spoken in area Indian villages, which could be used as supply and relief stations during an escape. Whether "faithful" slaves later used this knowledge for themselves or utilized communication networks to transfer it to someone else, whatever amount of communication and intelligence slaves had was in part due to administrators importing more slaves than they had whites to administer them. The British doctor's wistful elegy to a native knowledge of natural resources that is unimaginable in his "crowded society" exemplifies the fundamental psychological paradoxes promoted by the Western civilizing project.

       But while the inculcation of the "faithful" slave required one sort of self-construction, Pinckard's literary conceits portraying the rebels as coming out of the jungle almost from nothingness betrays a *de*construction, this one drawn straight from the nightmares of the colonial imaginary. Here, the rebels exist *solely for the purpose of* and *only when engaging in* raiding. They do not gather forces, plan, bid goodbye to loved ones, and then leave the jungle to ravage and plunder; they issue forth "only" to ravage and plunder, as if they sprang into existence immediately prior to raiding; there is no "them" before then because the colonial mind could not

place rebels on the opposite end of a "faithful"/"rebel" binary where things like strategy and tearful goodbyes existed in reality. In the colonial imaginary, rebel camps could not consist of loving families, and a social life, and artistic cultural creation—despite all the evidence to the contrary. They must instead be "mere hordes of brigands." But no one could survive in the jungle for so long without building some sort of social community. Common reasoning would have told Pinckard that there is no incentive to raiding and marauding without also creating a space to come back and enjoy the spoils. Yet his language portrays maroon camps as dark foreboding places full of gloomy ne'er-do-wells.

The great irony of the Dutch Guianese dystopia is that it brought shame and horror to people in the exact location that it was to have brought wealth and glory. The legendary city of gold known as El Dorado made famous in 1596 by British explorer Walter Raleigh was rumored to be located between the Dutch Guianas' Amazon and Orinoco rivers. Candace Slater has remarked how the El Dorado myth became a utopian vision for "a weary and conflict-ridden Europe."[42] But if El Dorado was a utopian vision for Europe, it was a severely conflicted one. Raleigh, for instance, went on at least two expeditions up the Orinoco in search of gold, but his "El Dorado" ultimately turned out to be "a Countrey that hath yet her maidenhead, never sackt, turned, nor wrought, the face of the earth hath not beene torne, nor the verture and salt of the soyle spent by manurance, the graves have not been opened for gold, the mines not broken with sledges, nor their Images puld down in temples."[43] Ironically, after spending a career searching for gold, Raleigh's ultimate manifesto on Guyana praised its natural wonders, and *the fact that it had not been plundered for gold!* Scots soldier Stedman seemed to embody the anti-technology

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[42] Candace Slater, *Entangled Edens: Visions of the Amazon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 38.

[43] Sir Walter Raleigh, *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich and Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana, with a relation of the great and Golden Citie of Manoa (which the Spanyards call El Dorado) And of the Provinces of the Emeria, Arromaia, Amapaia, and other Countries, with their rivers adioyning* (London: Robert Robinson, 1596), 96.

strain of the late–eighteenth century Enlightenment man, though he was firmly ensconced in the

cogs of the colonial machine. Still, his elegy to the beauty of Surinam is nothing if not utopian:

> "Surinam look'd like a large and beautiful garden Stocked with everything that nature
> and Art could produce to make the life of Man both Comfortable to himself and useful to
> Society. All the Luxuries and Necessaries for Subsistance were Crowding upon the
> Inhabitants while the five Sences seem'd intoxicated with bliss; and, to use an old
> Expression Surinam was a Land that overflowed with Milk and Honey."[44]

The contradiction seems to be lost on these writers. Any riches they might have procured from El

Dorado would have contributed nothing to its natural beauty, and there is little doubt the

discovery of gold would have inevitably led to the destruction of the area's environment.

Although European utopias were envisioned as a response to technological creep,

expressions of utopia in the New World were of a different character. Rather than attempt to

leash technology to civilization, creoles like Venezuelan poet Andres Bello "believed that

European cultural values would find new life and development in the Americas," advocating "an

agriculture that would carefully cultivate the soil and produce abundant fruits as a means to

founding a rationally ordered society, based in a partnership of man and nature."[45] Mexican poet

and revolutionary Ignacio Martinez expressed nearly the same sentiment in a scathing indictment

of civilization: "a family will be happy to supply you with a roof and without the remotest idea

of being paid. . . . If tomorrow this little town were crossed by the railroad . . . and gentlemen of

industry, its simplicity will become corrupt, its customs will become depraved, its hospitality and

indifference to money will become sordid avarice."[46] Writers like Bello's and Martinez's

rejection of the dystopic colonial model is similar to the way the establishment of a maroon

community was a culturally creative *antithesis* of that same model. Even though the Dutch

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[44] Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, 80.

[45] Segal, *Utopias*, 21–22

[46] Elliott Young, "Imagining Alternative Modernities: Ignacio Martinez's Travel Narratives," in Samuel Truett and Elliott Young, eds., *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 160–162.

Guianas served as a possible vision of utopia for some Europeans, what the Dutch ended up finding there was disease, a rebellious underclass, and a lack of European high culture. Additionally, the Dutch colonial project was an economic failure, and by the time the British secured suzerainty there its metropole was in a full-blown national debate over slavery.[47] Yet however dystopic Europeans ultimately found the Dutch Guianas, it paled in comparison to the nightmarish landscape they set up for African slaves.

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[47] Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution.*