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PEOPLES OF THE AMAZON

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AFRICAN PRESENCE IN THE AMAZON: A GLANCE

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Chapter 13

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

INCRA	National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SENA	National Learning Service of Colombia
SENA-Tropenbos Project	Intercultural education project implemented within the framework of the agreement signed between SENA and TBI-Colombia
TBI-Colombia	Tropenbos International-Colombia

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KEY MESSAGES

- African slaved people arrived to the Americas from tropical regions where domestication of species, agriculture and ecosystems' management had already taken place for Millennia.
- Slave ships transported not only slaved African Indigenous People, but also their crucial knowledge in the adaptation of species for agriculture and livestock in the Americas, and these African genetic resources themselves.
- There has been a contribution from enslaved Africans in tropical America to African regions. Free Afro-descendants traveled to Africa from Brazil, and managed to raise the money to buy their family's freedom.
- There are significant differences between the eastern region and the western region of South America in terms of the perception of the Afro-descendant presence in the Amazon. In countries like Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, the presence of this group in the Amazon basin is less evident. One reason could be the location of the ports where slave ships disembarked on both sides of tropical America.
- Many of the daily diet species of societies in the Americas are of African origin. Many of these species were domesticated, cultivated and produced by Africans in tropical ecosystems similar to those of the New World. Africans ingenuity has played an important role in the adaptation of such species to the agroecological conditions of the tropical America.
- Livelihood systems of African slaves and maroon societies show similarities in terms of biodiversity and management of diverse ecosystems in tropical America regions. These characteristics are still evident in agroecosystems of today Afro-descendant communities.
- Livelihood systems of Afro-descendant peoples are highly biodiverse in terms of species and ecosystems involved. Scientists consider the management carried out by Afro-descendants in various forested regions of tropical America - such as the Amazon - to be very positive in terms of landscape transformation.
- Another characteristic that can be observed today is the (rural) forest / urban relationship in terms of the commercialization of biodiversity products and the offer of services, which has been crucial in the economy of Afro-descendant populations since the

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abolition of slavery. The presence of African descent in the Amazon is significant in Suriname and Brazil in terms of population and ethnic territories. In Colombia, the Afro presence in the Amazon follows the path of the Pacific region in terms of collective legalization of ancestral rainforest and self-determination. Stereotypes play a central role in the perception of the African descent population in South America, but especially in the western Amazon.

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, I make an advance in the understanding of the history of Peoples of African origin in the Amazon and other regions of tropical America. I emphasize the patterns of land settlement and traditions for natural resource use and management during the two main periods in the history of African peoples in tropical America: the slavery and the freedom periods. I draw on two foundational approaches which illustrate contributions to genetic resource adaptation, knowledge, belief systems and management practices that have generated positive tropical landscape transformations that include natural resource management practices up to now: The cultural exchange perspective and the socio-historical approach. The chapter discussion is centered on three countries: Brazil, Suriname and Colombia. Geographic and sociological explanations for the invisibility of African descent peoples in academic research and policy both, in Latin America and the Amazon region are stressed. Additionally, this chapter suggests that there is a need for Amazonian scholars to have a better understanding of natural resource management by African descent peoples. Finally, it is important to mention that research and policy approaches for the Amazonian region require considering peoples of African descent as one of the key actors for conservation strategies. However, any policy designed to include such population should take into account Peoples of African origin real participation so that strategies and plans reflect the diverse cultural groups of the Amazon region.

Keywords: People of African origin; resource management; African botanical legacy; livestock; agrobiodiversity, traditional African religions; belief systems; Maroons; *Cimarrones*; Quilombola communities; *Palenques*; Social and historical environmental perspective, resilience.

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GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT

See “Chapter 13 – Figures” document

1 **1. INTRODUCTION**

2 A commonly overlooked element in the history of the Amazon concerns the presence and roles
3 of peoples of African origin in the region. Conventional histories rightly emphasize the roles of
4 Indigenous peoples, European colonizers and subsequent groups of migrants. African peoples
5 also comprise part of that history, but their contributions have been routinely overlooked and
6 thus undervalued. This is profoundly problematic, because their patterns of land settlement and
7 traditions of resource management have contributed in important ways to knowledge about
8 sustainability in the Amazon and in other regions of tropical America. The story of peoples of
9 African origin in the Amazon offers contributions to research that can support conservation
10 policies.

11 In this chapter, I therefore recount the story of the descendants of Africans who were enslaved in
12 tropical America, focusing on the Amazon. I adopt a social and environmental historical
13 perspective as well as a cultural exchange approach. These perspectives make it possible to focus
14 on how African origin peoples contributed to sustainable management practices in different
15 phases of adaptation to tropical landscapes. We review the history of African origin populations
16 in the Amazon during two central phases: the slavery period, when they were either forced to
17 work on plantations or escaped into forests and created maroon societies; and the post-liberation
18 period, when African descendent people gained access to natural resources and exercise greater
19 freedom and autonomy.

20 In this chapter I employ a social environmental historical approach while featuring cultural
21 exchange to show how Afro-descendant populations in regions of high biological diversity such
22 as the Amazon have pursued sustainable resource management. While other cultural groups such
23 as Indigenous peoples have similarly contributed sustainable management practices, African
24 origin peoples have made a distinct contribution by drawing on traditions and religious beliefs
25 from their ancestral territories (Cabrera, 1954). Crucial to understanding the practices of African
26 origin peoples in the Amazon and elsewhere in the American tropics have been multiple strands
27 of thought in Afro-Latin American studies, in which the work carried out by Afro scholars and
28 activists have been central. Such research work calls attention to the contributions of African

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1 origin peoples to sustainable resource management in the Amazon (Arocha, 1998; Brandon,
2 1991; Cabrera, 1954; Carney & Marín, 2003; García, J, & Walsh, 2017; Oliva, 2017)

3 The chapter begins with the routes of the slave trade, linking origin sites with destination sites in
4 tropical America. Presenting ports of arrival is key to making sense of the migration of African
5 origin groups to and within different countries that share the Amazon basin. I focus on three
6 countries sharing the Amazon basin, to which African slaves were taken: Brazil, Suriname and
7 Colombia. The Middle Passage across the Atlantic was a daunting test of survival for enslaved
8 Africans (Carney and Rosomoff 2009). Slave ships forcibly embarked Africans, mainly along the
9 culturally and ecologically diverse tropical coast of West Africa. Consequently, slave ships
10 transported Africans of different ethnic groups with diverse systems of knowledge, culture, and
11 spirituality. The Africans who survived the Middle Passage thus brought with them deep
12 knowledge and broad expertise in the management of tropical habitats. Similar to Indigenous
13 societies of the Amazon, Africans often came from rainforest regions and had their own long-
14 standing pools of knowledge and spiritual beliefs and deep experiences that they then applied.
15 Moreover, slave ships transported diverse African plant biota, which later become part of the
16 economy and diets of New World societies, in great measure due to the know-how of African
17 origin people (Carney & Rosomoff, 2009; T. Van Andel, 2010; Wood, 1996).

18 The second part of this chapter thus focuses on the knowledge and practices of the enslaved
19 people. I focus on the natural resource management strategies of African origin peoples,
20 emphasizing how agroecological practices allowed them to adapt to new ecosystems and thereby
21 sustain themselves. Agroecological strategies were applied both by enslaved African origin
22 groups as well as by Maroon communities among escaped slaves. In both situations, Afro-
23 descendants used agricultural strategies in which they imitated forest vegetation strata with
24 diversified crops, and incorporated agrobiodiversity among specific crops, which permitted
25 adaptation to new tropical environments, including in the Amazon. As a result, Maroon
26 settlements in various parts of the Americas are considered as refuges for high biodiversity due
27 to local knowledge, rituals, and practices (Carney, 2020; Carney and Voeks, 2003; Legrás,
28 2016). Then, African origin populations have made a significant contribution to sustainable
29 resource management practices in the amazon, by drawing on traditional practices from tropical
30 ecosystems in Africa and adapting them to tropical ecosystems in the Americas. Besides,

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1 traditional African religions and their social values and rules have played a central role in natural
2 resource management. Although the people of African origin have transformed their belief
3 systems in the Americas, the intrinsic bond between individuals, society and nature inherited
4 from African societies remains central as principles in the new spiritual rules (Ekeopara &
5 Ekpenyong, 2016; Eneji et al., 2012).

6 While African origin peoples made important contributions to knowledge about sustainable
7 resource management practices in the Amazon during the colonial period, in the 19th century,
8 and despite the liberation of slaves, white racism and societal segregation persisted. The result
9 was for the hegemonic white society to ignore African origin contributions to sustainable
10 management. In terms of African religion, beliefs were considered witchcraft and condemned to
11 ostracism by the catholic church. Further, western science did, too, since it was similarly
12 dominated by whites. That then all these helps explain the obscurity into which African origin
13 contributions fell, an obscurity from which they are now being rescued, notably by Afro-Latin
14 American scholars.

15 Afro-descendant communities have navigated this socio-political environment since the laws to
16 abolish slavery were enacted. Especially for the Afro peoples who inhabit the humid tropical
17 forests, these regions continued to be an alternative of livelihood and economic sources in the
18 post-slavery period (De-Torre, 2018; C. Leal and Van Ausdal, 2014; Leal, 2004). Carney (2020)
19 warns us about the return of the plantation era, which is evident today in countries like Brazil and
20 Colombia. The humid tropical forests that were once considered unhealthy and unproductive by
21 the dominant Latin American society, are today being destroyed by conventional agriculture. At
22 the same time, western society is forcibly displacing Afro and Indigenous peoples from their
23 ancestral territories in many rainforest regions. By contrast, biodiverse ecosystems in the
24 Amazon and elsewhere in the American tropics could be sustainably managed by recognizing the
25 agroecological practices of African origin peoples. The “Plantationocene” threatens biodiverse
26 ecosystems like those in the Amazon, as well as the cultures that could sustainably manage them
27 (Carney 2020).

28 By way of conclusion, it is very important to mention some implications about the sustainable
29 management of natural resources by African origin peoples in the Amazon for public policies
30 and conservation strategies carried out by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local

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1 Afro-Latin American communities. The issue of the African presence in the Amazon calls for
2 more attention by Amazonian scholars to African contributions to agroecological management
3 practices.

4 **2. THE PRESENCE AND ROLES OF PEOPLES OF AFRICAN DESCENT IN** 5 **TROPICAL AMERICA: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY CROSSROADS**

6 The ideas approaches proposed in this chapter are located at the interdisciplinary crossroads
7 between the sociological, historical, and environmental aspects related to the management of
8 biodiversity and the livelihoods of Afro-descendant societies in the Amazon. Specifically, the
9 chapter explores the contribution to agrobiodiversity and the management of tropical contexts by
10 African Peoples who arrived in the Amazon of Colombia, Brazil and Suriname. Two frameworks
11 allow us this interdisciplinary approach: the cultural exchange perspective developed by major
12 scholars whose research offers us crucial clues to track the agrobiodiversity of the Enslaved in
13 the Americas. First, there is the cultural exchange perspective which can also support the
14 contribution of free Afro-descendants to their continent of origin. Secondly, there is the socio-
15 historical perspective which helps us in the post-slavery era to illustrate the management of
16 peoples of African descent to natural ecosystems and the changes they generated in search for
17 their livelihood in freedom. livelihoods in freedom. These groups have had to struggle to sustain
18 themselves culturally, socially, and economically without the resources from a fair reparation
19 after abolition of slavery.

20 *2.1 Slave traffic, ports of arrival and the entrance to the Amazon*

21 In this section, I present the main regions of origin of the Peoples of African descent and the
22 regions of disembarkment with emphasizing three main Amazon basin countries: Colombia,
23 Brazil and Suriname. This is followed by some important elements that mediate the commercial
24 dynamics on both sides of South America which played a role in migration within countries,
25 including the arrival of slaves in the Amazon region (Borucki, 2009; O'Malley and Borucki,
26 2017).

27 During the 400 years that African slave trade lasted, more than 80,000 trips were made and
28 approximately 12.5 million people were transported and mainly Britain, France, Spain, Portugal,
29 and the Netherlands- participated (Eltis, 2001, p. 42; Romero, 2017). Europeans got their human

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1 merchandise along the West coast of Africa in the countries of what are now known as: Togo,
2 Benin, western Nigeria, Angola, Ghana y Guinea. They named the West coast as the "Slave
3 Coast" (Map 13.1). At the end of 18th century, slave traffic increased to fifteen thousand African
4 people per year (Miller, 1989).

5

6

7 **Figure 13.1 Slave Trade Routes and main ports of disembarkment in South America**

8 It is very important to highlight the role of both the maritime slave market and the dense network
9 of this trafficking within South America, which included multiple routes, transshipments and
10 transactions between merchants. I argue that these commercial dynamics directly or indirectly
11 affected the arrival of slaves in the Amazon region specially in western South America.

12 O'Malley and Borucki (2017) underscore the importance of the initial disembarkation of African
13 captives in the New World to understand the internal slave trade within South America. An
14 African person reaching his or her final destination can be considered a survivor of the odyssey
15 that was the transatlantic slave trade. During this journey, the person had been sold and bought
16 several times within the dense traffic network that included different ports in the Caribbean
17 islands and multiple slave traders and intermediaries including the Dutch, the English, the French
18 and the Danish. While the countless transactions were taking place, an enslaved person faced
19 drastic situations that included hunger, malnutrition, diseases, injuries, beatings and abuse of all
20 kinds (Newson & Minchin, 2007). In addition, depending on the landing ports and destinations
21 within South America, enslaved people could be forced to march for several days through the
22 diverse geography, enduring extreme climates such as the cold of the Andes Mountain range.

23 The journey within South America depended on many variables such as geography; the ruling
24 empire and its laws; demand and transportation costs, among others. As for supplying the
25 demand for slave labor in western South America, the voyage of an enslaved person could also
26 include overland journeys for transshipment down the Pacific Coast. (Maya, 1998; O'Malley &
27 Borucki, 2017) Op.it.

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1 **2.2. Advancing within South America**

2 The process of domination of South America by Spanish and Portuguese crowns was different.
3 This influence both, the incursion of the empires in the Amazon, and the arrival of people of
4 African origin to the region. According to Granero (1992), the Spanish incursion towards the
5 Amazon was not as decisive and direct as the incursion of the Portuguese in Brazil and other
6 European countries which colonized the Northern Amazon region as the Dutch, French and
7 English.

8 **2.2.1 Colombia and Panama: Indirect arrival in the Amazon region**

9 In 1717, the Spanish crown founded the Viceroyalty of New Granada. This territorial entity
10 facilitated both, the access to the western part of South America, and also, navigating two oceans
11 (Atlantic and Pacific). Furthermore, this geographical situation gave Spain the access to the
12 Amazon region via both, the northwestern South America, and the Andean Mountain range to
13 the East.

14 **Figure 13.2**

15 On the other hand, there were several central routes for the transportation of enslaved Africans
16 and merchandise to both western and eastern South America (see Figure 13.2). One route was
17 from the ports of Cartagena de Indias – present-day Colombia - and Portobello - present-day
18 Panama- to Guayaquil (Ecuador) and Lima (Perú) (Klein, 1993; Maya, 1998). The overland
19 route from Cartagena to southern regions used the navigability of large rivers such as the
20 Magdalena and Atrato, along which merchants landed their human merchandise. Many captives
21 were taken to the dense forest regions of northern Colombia. Many enslaved people reached the
22 region parallel to the Pacific Ocean. Others passed by into the northern region of Quito and some
23 other people had to cross the Andes to Peru (Maya, 1998; O'Malley & Borucki, 2017; Romero,
24 2017). In the middle of the 17th century, Cartagena de Indias was already the main slave port in
25 all of Hispanic America (Maya, 1998, p. 7). The largest supply of slaves who entered through the
26 Colombian port of Cartagena came from Benin, Angola, Ghana and Guinea. Likewise, the main
27 ethnic groups that entered were the Ararats, Lucumí, Zape, Angola, Congo, Viafara, Cambindo,
28 Matambas, Carabalí, and Popó. Romero (2017) mentions that Africans kept as surnames the
29 names of their ethnic groups and places of origin.

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1 A route to transport African people to the Southern Amazon and to other regions of the Spanish
2 in South America used the South Atlantic Ocean merchant networks from Mozambique to
3 Montevideo and Buenos Aires (Silva Da Silva and Costa Barbosa, 2020). Then, according to
4 O'Malley & Borucki (2017) Spanish made the slaved African Indigenous groups to march
5 through Rio de la Plata region to reach the Andean Mountain range to Upper Peru (today's
6 Bolivia). The human merchandise very often marched until the Peruvian coastal markets and
7 Valparaiso port in Chile (O'Malley & Borucki, Op.Cit., 2017).

8 The journeys of the slaved people within South America have been very incipiently recorded by
9 historians. Furthermore, slaved people arrival to the Eastern Andes Forest region and their
10 participation in subsequent waves of migration to the Amazon has been little taken into account
11 in the literature. Casevitz and others (1988) conducted an interethnic study on the first two
12 centuries of Spanish colonization from the Ecuadorian Andes to the Bolivian Andes and the
13 border with the eastern mountain jungles. The study reveals the presence of population of
14 African origin fulfilling various roles. Colonial chronicles mention groups of Africans with the
15 Spanish contingents loading cannons and opening roads. Slaves are also mentioned searching for
16 gold; working on the sugar plantations; and taking part in revolts with the Masiguenga
17 Indigenous group from Peru. Also, the scholars underline the presence of settlements of maroon
18 blacks in the Amazonian foothills. At this time, the border between the Andes and jungle regions
19 such as the Amazon was not only ecological, but also epistemic; Castro-Gómez (2010) mentions
20 the conception of an Andean region where civilization flourished in contrast to the natural and
21 cultural savagery of the Amazon. The guiding foray of bringing civilization and salvation is
22 carried out since the early times of Spanish colonization was also carried out in Colombia. In
23 Putumayo, blacks played a central role in the foundation of Mocoa. Despite this presence and the
24 evidence of palenques in the western Amazon, the study of this population is very new, which
25 merits anthropological, ecological and sociological research lines similar to those that have been
26 carried out in the eastern region and the Caribbean, which allow comparative studies.

2.2.2 Brazil and Suriname: Direct arrival in the Amazon region

28 The route to Brazil included several regions of the West Coast of Africa such as Senegambia,
29 West-Central Africa, and Bahía Santa Helena; the Gulf of Benin; and Southeast Africa especially
30 Mozambique (Arruda, da Silva, Sander, & Barros, 2014; Silva Da Silva & Costa Barbosa, 2020)

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1 The ports of Benguela and Luanda extended the Angola route, which was responsible for the
2 express offer of Africans sent to America (Ferreira & Ferreira, 2012; Miller, 1989; 1997).

3 During the colonial period, slave ships arrived at the ports of Bahia and Pernambuco far from the
4 Amazon because of the flourishing of the sugar economy. Although extractive activities were
5 considered of minor importance to the national economy, these were the basis of the Amazonian
6 economy. Pará (Grão Pará) is a large state located in the Amazon Delta. The Portuguese used
7 Belém do Pará to control access to the Amazon River (Legrás, 2016; Silva Da Silva and Costa
8 Barbosa, 2020). At the end of the 17th century, Belém became the capital of the Amazon region.
9 Slavery played a major role in the colonial Amazon region. African slaves were fundamental for
10 the economic growth of the state of Grão-Pará and Maranhão. Upon disembarking, black slaves
11 were transferred to the interior part of the state to work in the activities that moved the Brazilian
12 economy. Many slaves stayed in the urban area to do multiple jobs for the inhabitants of Belem.
13 Some of the activities slaved performed were musicians, butchers, artisans, healers, and they
14 cultivated food to supply the urban market (Alonso, 2012; Silva and Saldivar, 2018). In the mid-
15 nineteenth century, the boom in rubber extraction was the central economic activity of the
16 Amazon region, as important to the country as coffee.

17 This increased the requirement for slave labor. Sectors of civil society from Para, starting in
18 1869, promoted the need to emancipate all those who did servile work (da Fonseca, 2011;
19 Vergolino-Henry and Figueiredo, 1990).

20 By the mid-1600s, the Dutch established their colony in and the northeast of South America.
21 Between late the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century, Curaçao was an important
22 Atlantic center, from which the transshipment was carried out to the Dutch colonies of
23 Suriname's (O'Malley and Borucki, 2017). An estimated 300,000 Africans arrived in Suriname
24 as slaves. These African Indigenous peoples came to Suriname from regions between southern
25 Gabon and northern Angola, and Ghana, and Benin mainly to work in sugar plantations.

26 The limitless cruelty of Dutch masters caused many slaves to escape and take refuge in the dense
27 Amazon jungle. In fact, Thompson (2006) argues that sugar-producing countries have the most
28 brutal labour histories and most Maroon communities. Maroon communities in Suriname are
29 different and have their own culture and language; the groups fought for freedom from about a

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1 century and managed to establish autonomous territories within the dense tropical rainforests (T.
2 Van Andel, 2010). In 1863, Suriname declared the abolition of slavery. Former slaves from
3 coastal plantations settled mostly in the capital Paramaribo. At present there are still 6 semi-
4 independent Maroon communities with a total population of 72,553 (Vossen, Towns,
5 Ruyschaert, Quiroz, and van Andel, 2014). Suriname is considered one of the places with the
6 greatest ethnic and cultural diversity in the world, with 37% of the population from Asian Indian
7 origin, 15% of Javanese origin and 52% are Afro-descendant (Moya, 2012).

8 Research work on the contribution of Afro population to the Americas has been more prolific in
9 non-Spanish speaking countries. Therefore, it is essential to advance in the lines of research on
10 traditional practices from tropical ecosystems in Africa and adapting them to tropical ecosystems
11 in the Americas. On the other hand, we need to pay more attention of Afro-Latin American
12 scholarship, notably that of Afro-Latin American scholars, to get a full understanding of those
13 practices in terms of their origins and adaptation.

14 **3. THE ROLE OF TROPICAL PROVENANCE AND ORIGIN IN THE** 15 **ADAPTATION AND CONTRIBUTION OF ENSLAVED AFRICANS AND THEIR** 16 **DESCENDANTS IN TROPICAL AMERICA**

17 One of the imaginaries of Latin American society about African descendant groups, and even
18 including certain academic tendencies, has been to consider that these groups owe their
19 knowledge, culture, and actions to their contact with Indigenous peoples from the Americas,
20 Creoles, and Europeans. However, these imaginaries overlook or ignore several aspects that have
21 played a central role both in the resilience of the African Indigenous peoples and their
22 contribution to the economy and well-being of the societies of the Americas.

23 At the time of the arrival of the Portuguese in 1443 to explore the West Coast of Africa, the
24 Indigenous peoples, for millennia, had been building cultural and agricultural complexes; they
25 had already domesticated many species that the world knows today; and they already had
26 livelihoods and extractive systems in the diverse African tropical ecosystems (Carney and
27 Rosomoff, 2009; Großbritannien Foreign Office, 1920; UNESCO, 1959; Van Andel, 2014).
28 Coming from a tropical zone was a great advantage of the Africans, if we compare their ability to
29 adapt to the American tropics with the adaptation of the European colonizers. This ability can be

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1 observed in the agricultural systems and livelihood strategies of African descent, both of the
2 people enslaved in the Haciendas, and the thousands who fled to the jungle and became maroons
3 (*cimarrones*), as we will illustrate with examples from both the East and West part of Latin
4 America (Carney, 2020). Although the floristic composition of Africa tropical forests and of
5 tropical America is very dissimilar - Vossen and others (2014) assert that Africa and the
6 Americas they share just 1% of the total number of species, including weeds - African
7 Indigenous peoples managed to survive by identifying similarities with the flora of their
8 continent of origin, and even renaming many species (Van Andel, 2014).

9 Furthermore, Latin American imaginaries also overlook the fact that many of the economic
10 activities that we know today in tropical America are alien to this continent. An example very
11 familiar to Latin Americans are the livestock activities that have expanded at the expense of
12 tropical forests, which originally come from Europe, Africa and Asia. That is, the species of
13 bovines, sheep, goats, pigs, grasses and many other forage plants, were imported to the Americas
14 during the conquest and the colonial times (Carney and Rosmoff, 2009; De Mortillet, 1879;
15 Epstein, 1971; MacHugh and Bradley, 2001). Furthermore, knowledge of African management
16 of tropical ecosystems for livelihood should have been required to adapt plant and animal species
17 to the conditions of South America. Evidence on the knowledge and contribution of Africans to
18 the Americas regarding agricultural and livestock technologies has been studied by major
19 scholars. These researchers have refuted the widespread belief that many agricultural techniques
20 of tropical species were due to European ingenuity (Carney, 1996; Carney and Rosmoff, 2009;
21 Wood, 1996).

FIGURE 13.3

4. TRACING AFRICAN LEGACY TO THE AMERICAS

25 Carney (2009, p. 5) mentions that the link between culture and the environment has traditionally
26 been agriculture. Indeed, the African legacy to the Americas can be traced to both agro-
27 biodiversity and knowledge of agricultural techniques, seed management and adaptation to new
28 environments as well as to culinary practices (Carney and Rosomoff, 2009; Zabala Gómez,
29 2017). In this section of the chapter, we will discuss several interesting avenues of research that

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1 emphasize the other roles of African populations especially for conservation strategies and
2 sustainable management of regions of high importance for biological conservation such as the
3 Amazon.

4 Independent domestication of plant and animal species began between 15,000 to 13,000 years
5 ago. Food production arose independently in at least nine areas of the world, and species and
6 knowledge have traveled between continents at different times in human history (Diamond,
7 2002; Gupta, 2004). In Africa, domestication of species could have taken two or three millennia
8 to be realized (Carney and Rosomoff, 2009). There are two important eras in which a significant
9 botanical interchange took place: The Monsoon Exchange among regions of the Old World
10 between 300 BC-AD 700, in which one of the routes - the Western Indian Ocean through Africa
11 - contributed to nearly 2,000 species of cereals, vegetable tubers, and legumes to Asia, thus
12 helping to transform diverse food systems (Carney and Rosomoff, Op. Cit., , p. 7; Seland, 2014);
13 The second era in the XV century with the Iberian expansion that produced the so-called
14 Columbian Exchange (Carney and Rosomoff, Op.Cit., 2009, p. 7; T. Van Andel, 2010; van
15 Andel, 2014). Africans have plausibly contributed to global food systems, especially to those of
16 the Americas. The exchange of plants of African origin to the Americas and the role of enslaved
17 Africans in the adaptation of these species is also reflected also in cash crops at plantations in the
18 New World (Carney, 2009; Carney, 2020). Species of southern Asian origin species such as
19 plantains and bananas went to Africa through the ancient food trade in commodities within the
20 Old World, and they became crucial dietary staples long before the Portuguese began to explore
21 the West African coast. Later, plantains and bananas became fundamental food staples in some
22 regions of tropical America from the so-called "Columbian exchange". According to Crosby
23 (2003), during this time there were crucial exchanges between the Old and the New World in
24 terms of food crops, knowledge and even diseases which have been neglected by studies in
25 economics.

26

27 4.1. Slave Ships and the Cultural Exchange between African and American tropical regions

28 The exchange of plants of African origin and the role of enslaved Africans in the adaptation of
29 these species to the New World begins precisely with the slave ships. Slave trade ships
30 transported more than 12,5 million human beings, without considering the ships' crew, and

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1 dietary staples which were crucial to the successful crossing of the Atlantic, were transporter
2 with the enslaved people being transported. According to Carney and Rosomoff (2009), the ships
3 were provisioned in different places on the West Coast of Africa, which supplied a wide
4 diversity of plant and animal species for human subsistence. The *Oryza glaberrima* Steud, the
5 emblematic African rice species was introduced in America as food staples in slave ships for
6 years. The species has been cultivated in America by people of African origin to date (Carney
7 and Marín, 2003; J. Carney and Rosomoff, 2009; Judith Ann Carney, 2009; T. Van Andel,
8 2010). Four thousand years ago, the peoples from Africa domesticated rice along the so-called
9 Rice Coast, which is the tropical area between Senegambia, Sierra Leone and Liberia (Johnny,
10 Karimu, and Richards, 1981; T. R. Van Andel et al., 2014). The African species was displaced
11 by the Asian rice (*O. sativa* L.) when mechanical mills were introduced to the Americas. In the
12 oral tradition of both, the countries sharing the Amazon region and the United States, there is an
13 account that African women smuggled rice grains in their hair, which allowed them to grow it in
14 the Americas (Judith A Carney, 2004; T. Van Andel, 2010). The Pacific region of Colombia
15 traditionally Afrodescendant communities have cultivated and milled rice in the tropical
16 rainforest. According to key informants from Noanamá, Chocó department in the Colombian
17 Pacific (personal communication, June 22, 2021), keeping valuable items in the hair was a very
18 common practice used by older women during river journeys from forest to urban centers.
19 Several academics have highlighted the role of women of African origin in the agency and
20 resistance and resilience of the group (Carney, Op. Cit.; Hurtado et al., 2018).

21 The cultivation of African rice was central to the economy of several countries in the Americas.
22 (Carney, 2004, p. 13) comments that 1775 in Brazil the cultivation of cotton and rice was
23 promoted in the Amazon region - Belem do Pará and Maranhão- African people was bought on
24 the West coast because their knowledge on the cultivation technique. Rice was also cultivated in
25 sugar plantations with large numbers of enslaved Africans such as in the Pernanbuco region. In
26 Suriname, anthropological studies recorded 74 rice names in the languages of the Maroon
27 communities (T. Van Andel, 2010). The cultivation of this species has been central in rice
28 plantations and in the economy of the United States and South America. The cultivation and its
29 technology have been attributed to the ingenuity of the plantation owners. However, the tracks of
30 historical, archaeological and ethnobotanical research carried out by major scholars on different
31 contexts of the Americas present important evidence of the African contribution in terms of

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1 technology and agriculture for commercial and food crops of African origin. Coffee, okra,
2 sesame, kola nut among others, are also currently part of the food, agricultural and gastronomic
3 culture in particular of tropical America and the Caribbean (Agha, 2016; J. Carney and
4 Rosomoff, 2009; Carney, 2009; Clarence-Smith and Topik, 2003; Harris et. al., 2014; Van
5 Anandel, 2010; Van Anandel, 2014).

6 Rice is also a species that is found in various forest places in Latin America such as in the Pacific
7 region in Colombia and in the northern part of the Amazon in Suriname and is directly related to
8 the African legacy to the Americas. (Van Anandel, 2010; Zabala Gómez, 2017). Another iconic
9 native species from the tropical rainforest of Africa is the cola nut tree, the main ingredient in
10 Coca-Cola. This nut is found in the cultivation systems of some Indigenous Peoples in the
11 Amazon which suggests that there has been shifting cultivation between the continents. Another
12 exchange example is the cocoa that is central in the rural economy of Ghana.

13 **5. AGROECOSYSTEMS OF MAROON AND PLANTATION SLAVES.** 14 **RESILIENCE STRATEGIES IN TROPICAL AMERICA**

15 The maroon phenomenon is reported both, in the North and Northeast region of South America;
16 in the Caribbean (Thompson, 2006), as well as in the Western region South America (De
17 Friedemann, 1993; De Friedemann and Arocha, 1986; Maya, 1998; Renard-Casevitz et al.,
18 1988). Likewise, food staples from slave ships became the basic seeds for subsistence agriculture
19 of the escaped maroons in the New World. The survival of the enslaved people who managed to
20 escape depended on their skills and knowledge to obtain food supplies from new environments.
21 Similarly, those communities depended on their Western and Central African knowledge and
22 techniques in Maroon autonomous territorial spaces built in the middle of the jungles of tropical
23 America (Maya, 1998; Thompson, 2006). In Colombia, some maroon enclaves were dedicated to
24 grazing Cebu cattle, cultivating peanuts linked to funeral rites, pig farming in the middle of the
25 jungle; and the fortified construction of the *palenques*. These characteristics account for the
26 tribes and the places of origin of the African Indigenous Peoples that must have arrived in
27 Colombia via the Port of Cartagena de Indias.

28 **BOX 13.1**

29 **FIGURE 13.4**

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1 Both plantation slaves and escaped maroons depended on their medicinal, healing and magical,
2 religious and nutritional botanical knowledge, among others skills, to survive ((J. Carney and
3 Marín, 2003; T. Van Andel, Behari-Ramdas, Havinga, and Groenendijk, 2007; van't Klooster,
4 van Andel, and Reis, 2016). Van Andel (2014) mentions that the African botanical heritage in
5 the Americas is reflected in the subsistence practices characteristic of the groups that still inhabit
6 tropical forests. The multi-cropping systems of many communities from the African tropical belt
7 have transformed the rainforest into a food forest, incorporating Amerindian staples such as corn,
8 cocoa, sweet potatoes, cassava and peanuts (Carney and Rossmoff, J. Carney and Marín, 2003;
9 2009, pp. 25, 88).

10 The word Kilombo comes from the warrior society of the Ovimbundil, a Bantu ethnic group
11 from Plateau of central Angola whose language is mainly Umbundu and were in permanent
12 conflict with the Europeans. In Brazil, the Portuguese Overseas Council officially defined the
13 settlement of fugitive enslaved Africans as quilombo. At the end of the 16th century, there were
14 more than fifty sugar mills in Brazil and some fifteen thousand African slaves worked in them.
15 Social scientists, archaeologists and historians have studied the maroon phenomenon in
16 *Palmares*, Alagoas State, which is considered one of the most important in Brazil. These groups
17 came directly from the Bantu areas of Angola and Congo in the 17th century. They established
18 both local relationships with Indigenous Peoples and with local and European merchants
19 (Domínguez and Funari, 2008; Stenou, 2004). These settlements also housed Indians, mulattoes,
20 caboclos, escaped soldiers, and other individuals discriminated against by the majority of
21 society. The same characteristic has been reported for other regions where there were settlements
22 of fugitive slaves. Maroon communities are a repository of African plant resources and
23 knowledge and agricultural practices that slightly alter natural forests. Furthermore, the herbal
24 medicine of these communities is vast and diverse. Both food and medicinal species found in
25 Maroon agroecosystems that come from various tropical regions of Africa. Carney and Acevedo
26 (2003) mention the following: The western savannas between the Ivory Coast and Lake Chad;
27 the central-western rainforest comprising Nigeria and Congo; and finally, the eastern savannas
28 between Sudan, Ethiopia and Uganda. The enslaved Africans in the Americas, in addition to
29 food species from Africa, also brought medicinal plants. Carney and Acevedo continue to argue
30 that the Caribbean has a rich pharmacopoeia and, for example, of 82 plants cited in compendia of
31 medicinal plants, 43 are native to Africa.

1 **FIGURE 13.5**

2 **FIGURE 13.6**

3 **Religion and Nature**

4 Populations of African origin have made a significant contribution to sustainable resource
5 management practices in the Amazon by taking advantage of the traditional practices of the
6 tropical ecosystems of Africa and adapting them to the tropical ecosystems of the Americas.
7 African rice is considered a gift from God and like the rest of nature, it is part of the worldview
8 and traditional religion. Traditional practices have been evident in the adaptation of agricultural
9 systems and plant and animal species of African origin in the Americas. Likewise, the traditional
10 African religions of the African origin people were transformed and re-created in the Americas
11 maintaining the intrinsic link between individuals, society and nature described in the
12 eschatological belief systems and principles and codes of conduct of African societies (Ekeopara
13 and Ekpenyong, 2016; Eneji et al., 2012). Building from Escobar (2018), I could say that
14 Africans arrived in environments that facilitated the ontological relationship allowing them to
15 adapt and continue Being in the World. The universal mother for the Peoples of African origin is
16 equivalent to the bush. According to the first lines of the most renowned book by the Cuban
17 writer and researcher Lidia Cabrera: The bush is the place where everything arises from and the
18 place where everything returns to. Everything is in the bush, the supernatural forces; the
19 ancestors; the Orishas; good spirits and evil spirits ... "life came from the bush, we [the Afro-
20 descendants] are children of the bush ..." (Cabrera, 1954). The groups of African origin
21 developed different religions and beliefs such as the candomble in Brazil; Santeria and Ifa and
22 Abakua in Cuba; voodoo in Haiti; the orisha in Trinidad and Tobago; winti among the Creoles
23 from Suriname and various other beliefs among the Maroon. So, something in common that
24 these new Afro-descendant religions have is the central role that nature plays and the relationship
25 that is established between the latter and human beings. A story that connects three continents
26 through the transatlantic journey is that of the trickster-spider-Ananse (Deandrea, 2004). This is
27 a mythical character from the Akan culture of southern Ghana and the Ivory Coast is well-known
28 among African Americans and Afro Caribbean people. The character has also woven a net
29 through South America. The trickster Ananse is central in art and literature in Brazil and
30 Suriname. Ananse should have arrived to the Colombian Amazon through the Pacific Coast path.

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1 The spider intrinsically connects Afro human beings with the ancestral territory and nature from
2 birth rituals (Arocha, 1999; Escobar, 2018; Lozano, 2017).

3 **6. AGROBIODIVERSITY, THE RESILIENCE STRATEGY BOTH IN SLAVERY** 4 **AND FREEDOM**

5 Chroniclers of the Indies and landowners reported a great diversity of species in the food plots of
6 the slaves, among which was a great variety of both species from Africa and those from the New
7 World. Carney and Rosomoff (2009, p. 135) mention that these plots were called the botanical
8 gardens of the Atlantic World's dispossessed. Plots became the spaces for the adaptation of
9 African seeds, many of which are still marketed both for human consumption and for industrial
10 processes. Similarly, these authors mention the agrobiodiversity in the plots of plantation slaves
11 reported in countries such as French Guiana, Suriname, United States (The Carolinas and
12 Virginia), Colombia, Cuba, Curacao, Jamaica, Brazil, among others. Some of the species of
13 African origin reported are: cereals including: Millet (*Pennisetum glaucum*); Sorghum (*Sorghum*
14 *bicolor*); Rice, (*Oryza glaberrima*); tubers such as Yam, (*Discorea Cayenensis*; Musa including:
15 Plantain and Banana, *Musa spp.*; Taro/eddo (*Colocasia esculenta*); Legumes including: Black-
16 eyed pea or cowpea (*Vigna unguiculata*); Pigeon pea or Congo pea (*Cajanus cajan*); beverages
17 including Coffee (*Coffea spp.*); Tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*); Kola nut (*Cola spp.*);
18 Hibiscus/Roselle, *Hibiscus sabdariffa*); Oil plants including: Sesame (*Sesamum radiatum*);
19 castor bean (*Ricinus communis*); oil palm/dendê, (*Elaeis guineensis*); Vegetable and Spices:
20 Okra (*Abelmoschus esculentus*); Vegetable such as the amaranth (*Amaranthus spp.*), Guinea
21 pepper (*Xylopiya aethiopica*); and fodder including: Guinea grass (*Panicum maximum*);
22 Pará/Angola grass (*Panicum muticum*); Bermuda grass, (*Cynodon dactylon*).

23 Africans not only domesticated plants, but have traditionally been pastoralists (Diamond, 2002).
24 The tropical America lowlands did have large domesticated animals. African cattle may have
25 well-made genetic contributions to the breeds that prove suitable for the climatic conditions of
26 the Venezuelan and Colombian plains, and other regions of tropical America such as Argentine
27 pampas. Likewise, in the tropics, grasses were scarce and a large number of species of pasture
28 for bovine feed we know today have their origin in Africa. This is what has been called "the
29 Africanization of the New World Tropical grasslands" (J. Carney and Rosomoff, 2009, p. 166).

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1 On the role of agriculture in connecting culture and the environment, it is also possible to
2 emphasize culinary as a cultural value in traditional societies such as the Indigenous peoples of
3 the Americas and Africa, which in turn integrates ecosystems and knowledge about their cycles
4 and dynamics that very often includes ontological foundations of these groups.

5 7. AFRICAN ROLES IN CARE WORK AND PRODUCTION: AFRICAN 6 CULINARY AND LIVELIHOOD PRACTICES IN TROPICAL AMERICA

7 Both in the Western and Eastern regions of South America, the literature mentions the central
8 role of enslaved African women linked to the preparation of food and to various domestic
9 activities, both in plantations and cities (E. Z. Gómez, 2017; Silva Da Silva and Costa Barbosa,
10 2020).

11 Cooking is a practice that attests to the African presence in the Americas. The ingredients of the
12 foodways of Africa are still very current in diaspora culinary practices. The ingredients and, very
13 often, the names of recipes, are still of African origin and can be traced to various countries in
14 tropical America. The fufu of Ghana, Nigeria and Cameroon is a stew of yam, mashed banana
15 and other starchy tubers to which meat is added (in the Dominican Republic it is called *mangú*;
16 in Puerto Rico they call it *Mofongo*; in Cuba it is *plantain fufu*). In Colombia, a variant of fufu
17 made with cassava and pigeon peas (*Guandul*) is reported by Zabala Gómez (2017). In the south
18 western region of Colombia, rice (*Oryza glaberrima*) was not a food consumed by the elites
19 during colonial times, but it was one of the agricultural products found in the food plots of the
20 enslaved. With the passage of time, the region has rice as the fundamental base of the culinary
21 tradition Zabala Gómez (Op.Cit., 2017). In regions where rice was cultivated in the Americas
22 (The US, *Maranhão* (Brazil) and the Guianas) where rice was cultivated, slaved females as well
23 as maroons adapted rice dishes prepared with greens and beans of African origin. The *arroz de*
24 *cuxá*, for instance, is prepared with sorrel leaves (hibiscus). The name Cuxá comes from the
25 Mandinka name for hibiscus (the kucha).

26 Culinary practices of African people in the diaspora and the kitchen itself allowed for
27 perpetuating dishes from Africa. As suggested by Zabala Gómez kitchen has been a social,
28 cultural, symbolic, physical, and geographical space that, unlike others, was a place where
29 enslaved people were not persecuted by slave owners. These spaces of freedom could well have

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1 played an important role in the conservation of recipes, knowledge and beliefs, which is linked to
2 biodiversity and ecosystems where the ingredients of such recipes are collected or produced and
3 therefore to the management of the nature of these groups.



BOX 13.2

8. THE AFRO-LATIN AMERICAN CONTRIBUTION TO AFRICA: A TWO-WAY CULTURAL EXCHANGE

11 In this document we have mentioned several aspects in social imaginaries when the subject of
12 African descent in the Amazon is addressed. Another of these imaginaries is to relate Africans in
13 a single way: from Africa to the Americas. Could there be any chance that they were enslaved
14 returning to Africa? In fact, after slave the abolition of slavery, there began what is being called
15 the Brazilian diaspora in Africa, mainly from Angola, started to take place. Ferreira and Ferreira
16 (2012), Law (1997) and Mann (1999) (Law, 1997) assure us that between the centuries of the
17 slave trade, not only the enslaved people were not transported solely to tropical America. People,
18 merchandise, culture, genetic material, and ideas traveled back and forth in the ships between the
19 Slave Coast and Brazil. Micro studies, which include biographies and ethnography, can account
20 for aspects that macro and global studies overlook, but which explain many shortcuts in history.

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1 There really was a cultural exchange that featured hundreds of freed slaves who returned to the
2 West Coast in the 1830s from Brazil. They established a and continuing commercial, cultural,
3 and intellectual communication with relatives and acquaintances who stayed in Brazil. It has
4 been reported that some of those who returned sent money back to Brazil to purchase their
5 children's freedom. This exchange phenomenon between Brazil and the West Coast may have
6 been due to the fact that only some ports in the Americas, such as Salvador de Bahia, had close
7 contact with a certain region of Africa (Klein, 1993). In both cases, the exchange included plant
8 and animal genetic material, cultural and religious aspects, and knowledge about the cultivation
9 techniques of the material exchanged between both sides of the Atlantic and between people and
10 tropical landscapes (Carney and Rosmoff, 2009; Falola and Akínyemí, 2017).(Carney &
11 Rosomoff, 2009; Falola & Akínyemí, 2017)

12 **9. RESEARCH, HISTORY AND TROPICAL AMÉRICA LANDSCAPES'** 13 **TRANSFORMATION BY AFRICAN DESCENT IN FREEDOM: A VIEW FOR** 14 **AFRO-AMAZONIAN CONTEXTS**

15 Research on the peoples of African origin has been carried out mainly in the non-Spanish-
16 speaking countries including Brazil, and Suriname, and the United States and the Caribbean
17 (Oliva, 2017). In Spanish-speaking countries, interest in the Afro-descendant issue in the
18 Amazon is recent (Acosta, 2019).

19 In Spanish-speaking countries, the contributions of people of African origin in the construction
20 of nations and societies and landscapes have been neglected both, due to the racism in Latin
21 America and the influence of modern theories of social Darwinism (Lechini, 2008; Marquardt,
22 2011) (Marquardt, 2011). Since the 20s of the previous century, in the Spanish-speaking
23 countries, research has placed greater emphasis on miscegenation between whites and
24 Indigenous people (a time when whitening though miscegenation was central). This has made the
25 presence of Afro-Latin American populations decades. In Colombia pseudoscientific studies in
26 association with conservative political interests have an impact on decreeing Indigenous peoples
27 and Afro-descendants an obstacle to development promoting miscegenation and immigration of
28 the European population to the country as of 1922 (Castro-Gómez, 2009)

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1 Gradually, in Spanish-speaking countries, it has been realized that in addition to people of
2 European origin and people who are native to the American continent, there are people of
3 African origin who have played central, although definitely invisible, roles in the construction of
4 nations. Latin American. It is very common in Spanish-speaking America for African
5 contributions to be associated with music and folklore. The emergence of an Afro theme in the
6 United States during the 90s, influences the emergence of the Afro theme and problems in South
7 America and in countries like Brazil. At this time, more plural and inclusive national
8 Constitutions are defined in many countries such as Colombia.

9 Something important to consider is education policy conceived to apply to regions such as the
10 Amazon. First of all, policy is designed at the national level and does not take into consideration
11 the development plans of Indigenous and Afro populations. Very often, professionals who
12 implement governmental policy have studied in more developed regions. Knowledge about
13 Indigenous and Afro populations as well as tropical ecosystems are very scarce and technology
14 from Andean regions are quite often found in Amazon tropical ecosystems. This approach
15 nowadays still reflects the legacy conceived in colonial and republican times.

16 An agenda aimed at conducting research can take as a reference the approaches and themes of
17 the scientific work carried out in Suriname, Brazil or Colombia. However, here I follow
18 Lechicni's thinking when he draws attention to the black cultural heterogeneities that imply
19 aspects of unity and diversity in African legacies.

20 9.1 Brazilian Quilombos and Community Councils of the Colombian Pacific region, reflections 21 to refer to the invisible Afro-descendant groups in the Amazon

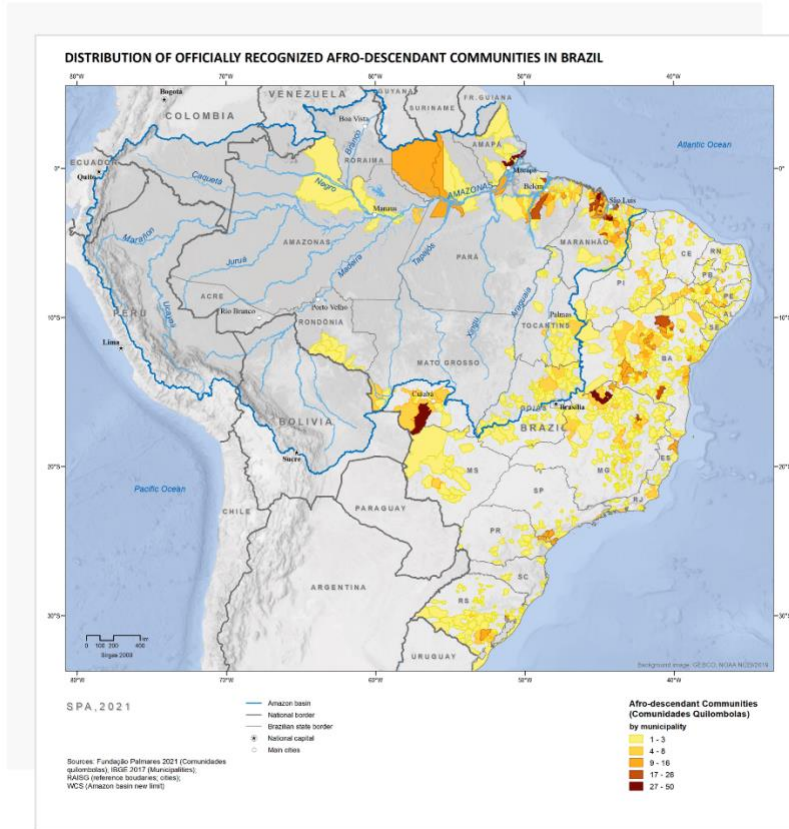
22 There is significant potential for biocultural conservation efforts in the territories of Afro-
23 descendant peoples in the three countries, taking into account their specificities. Currently, Afro-
24 descendant communities in countries such as Brazil and Colombia have made significant
25 progress in the titling of the lands they have inhabited ancestrally. In Colombia, the 1991
26 Constitution also opens a door for both Afro-Colombian communities and Indigenous peoples to
27 exercise the governance of these territories with relative autonomy. This path has been arduous
28 as no process for the abolition of slavery considered compensation laws or land distribution. The
29 Afro population throughout South America begins to face many difficulties and economic

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1 shortages in the post-abolition period. Afro communities in different regions of Brazil and
2 Colombia have formed in different ways: there are still quilombos formed in the colonial period;
3 lands collectively purchased by Afro-free communities; In some cases, land donations were
4 made from neighboring slave owners to large estates to provide cheap labor; and donations made
5 by some churches, among others. In the territories inhabited by Afro communities, they carry out
6 livelihood strategies that allow biodiversity and the use of different types of ecosystems,
7 maintaining a rural / urban relationship linked to local and national markets (Leal, 2004). This is
8 a livelihood approach that has allowed them to survive since their arrival as slaves in forested
9 regions of several countries in the basin, such as the Brazilian Amazon; the Amazon in
10 Suriname; and in the Pacific and the Colombian Amazon.

9.1.1 Brazil

12 According to official information from the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian
13 Reform (INCRA), 154 titles were issued to 217 Afro-Brazilian communities and 13,145
14 Quilombola families; these titles correspond to about one million hectares. This figure is very
15 low considering two aspects: first, titling law is almost 30 years old. Second, there are more than
16 4,500 black communities waiting to legitimate their land. Map 13.1 corresponds to the Afro-
17 descendant communities legally recognized in Brazil (De la Torre, 2018; Fiabani, 2018).



1

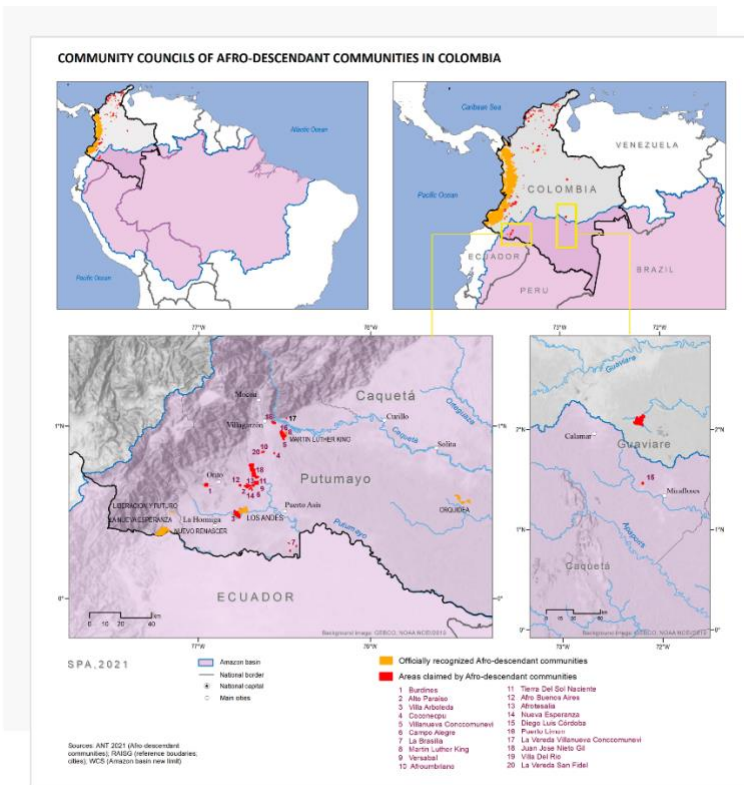
2

3 *9.1.2 Colombia*

4 The period after the abolition of slavery is considered the transition of Afro-Colombian people
 5 towards the classic notion of “peasantry.” In the 60s, Afro-descendant Indigenous movements
 6 began to question rural policies that group them within the group of creole people, following
 7 early XX century legislation enacted so that their racial lines would be physically whitewashed
 8 and diluted through miscegenation (Castro-Gómez, 2009; Oliva, 2017; Ulloa, 2007 (Ulloa,
 9 2007)). Different violent and extractive boom periods in the Amazon have promoted internal
 10 migration of Afro-Colombians mainly from the Pacific region to the Amazon (Kothari, et.al.,
 11 2019; , Trujillo Quintero, 2014), where these populations are becoming more visible (Acosta
 12 Romero, 2019). Since the enactment of the 1991 Constitution, Indigenous and Afro peoples in
 13 Colombia have the right to citizenship. The collective character of their ancestral territories and
 14 the authority of these peoples within said territories is recognized. From this historical milestone,
 15 the Afro-Colombian communities of the Pacific began processes to claim these rights. Afro

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1 communities in other regions of the country are becoming more and more visible. Previously,
2 both Afro communities and Indigenous peoples were considered within the demographic
3 category of peasants. Recently, some Colombian universities have started to study Afro-
4 Amazonians and there is an increasing number of NGOs interested in carrying out projects and
5 programs with this population group.



6

7 Along the Pacific forest region, there are 6 million of hectares titled. Afro-Colombian
8 Communities from the Amazon follow the path opened by the Afro-descendant people from the
9 Pacific region since the 1991 Constitution: to exercise citizenship rights and ethnic governance
10 of ancestrally occupied territories.

11 Although the Colombian conflict had the Amazon region as its center of operations, the Pacific
12 region is a reflection for the Afro communities in the Amazon in terms of what they face to
13 survive in the midst of the conflict to protect the ethnic territory. The incursion of armed groups
14 that dispute the drug trafficking business have generated massive forced displacement,
15 recruitment of people, combats among civil society and anxiety (Caro, 2019; Escobar, 2015;

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1 Martínez and Tamayo, 2016) In addition to this panorama, oil palm plantations are making their
2 way at the expense of the Colombian Pacific forests (Carney, 2020, p. 17). As of the 2016 peace
3 process, there has been relative tranquility in Colombia. However, the cessation of conflict
4 opened the door for the incursion of extractive interests in the Amazon which may result not only
5 in unsustainable resource use, but also in violence towards Indigenous and Afro-descendant
6 peoples.

7 **10. THE DESCENDANTS OF FREED AFRICAN PEOPLES AND THE POSITIVE** 8 **TRANSFORMATIONS OF TROPICAL LANDSCAPES**

9

10

FIGURE 13.8

11

12 **11. CONCLUSIONS**

13 Using both a Cultural exchange approach and a socio-historical environmental perspective, in
14 this chapter we intended to illustrate aspects that have been overlooked concerning the
15 descendants of Africans in tropical America and the Amazon. These approaches allow for the
16 identification of both research gaps and aspects for nurturing policy frameworks for natural
17 resource conservation and the community well-being strategies of Afro descendent people. First,
18 studies on the contribution of African Peoples to the Americas have traditionally focused on
19 cultural aspects such as music or sports (Cordova, 2019). One of the aspects neglected has been
20 the fact that African enslaved people arrived in the Americas from tropical regions where
21 domestication of species, and agriculture, and management of ecosystems had already taken
22 place for millennia. Being of tropical origin could have been an advantage for the enslaved
23 African population compared to other human groups that arrived for the first time in the New
24 World. This meant having managed the high biodiversity and ecosystem complexity of regions
25 of the West Coast of Africa, as well as techniques for carrying out livelihood activities, and
26 managing health and disease. These skills must have played an important role in the strategies to
27 maintain resilience in the face of hostile environments, either working on plantations, or living in
28 the middle of the jungle as maroons fleeing from slaved masters. These abilities could have

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1 contributed to the adaptation of a large number of species of flora and fauna to the Americas
2 which are today incorporated in the food, culture, and economy of New World societies. Slave
3 ships played an important role in the transportation of genetic resources in the form of food for
4 the Atlantic journey facilitating the exchange of many species between continents. Especially,
5 with enslaved African people, ships transported knowledge beliefs and practices central in the
6 adaptation of species for agriculture and livestock in the Americas (Carney and Rosomoff,
7 2009). Moreover, among the aspects with the greatest gaps in research have been the strategies
8 of African Peoples for their own adaptation, survival and economy during both the slavery time
9 and during the liberation stages (J. A. Carney, 2020; J. A. Carney and Voeks, 2003; De la Torre,
10 2018; T. Van Andel, 2010; Vossen et al., 2014). Researchers have agreed on the role of Africans
11 in the positive transformation of the landscapes of tropical America to date (C. Leal and Van
12 Ausdal, 2014; C. M. Leal, 2004). There is another neglected aspect that may have influenced the
13 possibility to conduct research on African people in the Amazon. Most of the body of
14 knowledge, particularly that constructed in the Amazon about African descent, has taken place in
15 non-Spanish speaking countries (Oliva, 2017). There are fundamental reasons for the invisibility
16 of African descendants everywhere in Spanish-speaking countries, but mainly in the Amazon.
17 We argue that there is a geographic and a sociological reason. On the one hand, we considered a
18 geographical explanation related to the places and ports of enslaved people who disembarked in
19 South America. Although the presence of African Indigenous Peoples in the Amazon is reported
20 early in the history of Iberian colonization, their arrival took place differently. This could
21 influence the imaginary of mainstream society in the Western and Eastern regions. In the Eastern
22 region, slave ships disembarked almost directly at the Amazon. In the case of the Western region
23 of South America, slave ships disembarked at ports on the Atlantic Ocean. Enslaved people were
24 taken through the geography of the countries of the basin to economic enclaves and mainly
25 placed in western regions. Enslaved people established some Maroon societies in the Amazon,
26 but prior to that, they had to cross the Andes mountain range. So, in the Western part of South
27 America, it is very peculiar for society to associate Afro-descendants with the Amazon region.
28 This region is more associated with Indigenous peoples.

29 The sociological explanation for the invisibility of African descent in the Amazon, mainly in
30 societies from the Western region of South America, is associated with deterministic constructs
31 and stereotypes that revolve around the African presence in the Americas. The *first* is the idea

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1 that Afro-descendant peoples have only contributed to the Americas with unskilled and related
2 heavy work, which is connected to stereotypes about their vigorous physical traits and their
3 supposed lower sensitivity (Carney, 1996; Carney, 2009; De Friedemann and Arocha, 1986;
4 Wood, 1996). The *second* construct is the "spatial notion of culture" characteristic of some
5 anthropological approaches (Castro-Gómez, 2010, p. 248; Maya, 1998), which identifies specific
6 human groups with certain geographic regions. The perception is that Afro Peoples are only
7 found in coastal regions and in certain places in the Andes. Or, there is the notion of African
8 savagery with which the enslaved arrived in the Americas. The *third* construct took hold in Latin
9 American society during the Enlightenment and is still in force today given the legitimacy given
10 by Latin American Constitutions of the late nineteenth century and *mestizaje* laws in the
11 twentieth century. This emphasizes the capacity of Afro and Indigenous peoples to reason and
12 produce valid knowledge beyond superstition (Carney, 1996; Castro Gómez, 2005). A *fourth*
13 construct involves the relationship of Latin American society with nature, the forest regions and
14 their inhabitants. These are considered unproductive lands for future development of countries,
15 and the savages that inhabit them are lazy and unable to convert these forests into productive and
16 developed areas. Finally, both the Afro and Indigenous peoples in the Americas are considered
17 peoples without their own history, and without the capacity for action. (Granero, 1992)

18 The history of peoples of African origin during their enslavement and subsequent liberation
19 shows ways to strengthen resilience and navigate uncertainties. Access to environments that
20 other segments of the population view with apprehension and disdain have been what have
21 allowed Black Peoples to adapt, maintain livelihoods, health, and the ability to exercise their
22 belief systems. These are strategies that offer keys to wellness and conservation. The dynamic
23 rainforest / rural areas / urban centers and markets are ways of maintaining relationships between
24 Afro members and families, and procuring their livelihoods and undertaking more
25 autonomously. This chapter does not intend to delve into the invisibility of Afro groups in
26 national statistics and welfare policies or in the violation of civil and human rights in the
27 different countries of the basin. This is being done very well by academics throughout the region,
28 including Afro-Latin American scholars (Buffa, 2008; Lechini, 2008; Oliva, 2017). However, we
29 want to underline the huge loss in terms of long-standing strategies for rainforest management,
30 culture and social organization patterns that is happening in crucial regions for environmental

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1 conservation. There is an unusual advance in plantations at the expense of ecosystems that are
2 important for the balance of the planet, biodiversity and human life (Carney, 2020).

3 Prominent academics have drawn attention to the importance of the human adaptation strategies
4 of Afro-descendants to tropical rainforests in the positive transformation of such landscapes in
5 the Americas. However, complex agronomic arrangements in both domestic and agricultural
6 systems, and agrobiodiversity and plant management practices that support policulture food
7 crops are gradually being replaced by new waves of monoculture plantations. The history of
8 African descent in the tropical and subtropical rainforests of the Americas provide clues for
9 navigating uncertainties and strength resilience since this history shows possible paths to ensure
10 the well-being of the former enslaved population and nature conservation at the same time. Latin
11 American society's recognition of the role of people of African origin in nation building is based
12 on the fact that society itself knows the Afro legacy and treats itself with dignity and respect.
13 Science and higher education have a great role in achieving both of these aspects. The titling of
14 ancestral territories is an appropriate way to initiate historical repairs and restore the possibility
15 of finding one's own paths to return to Being in the world. So, following the proverbs that we
16 find both in Africa and among the Indigenous peoples of the Abya Yala (Cusicanqui, 2012), the
17 Akan people of Ghana in their mythology show a possible path for the Afro peoples in the
18 Amazon: the Sankofa bird reminds us to look to the past in order to move forward to the future
19 (Carney and Rosomoff, 2009, p. 27).

20 **12. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 21 • Consider the Afro-descendant communities that inhabit the Amazon region as strategic
22 actors in the conservation of biodiversity, ecosystems, watersheds, tropical rainforest, and
23 sustainable agriculture.
- 24 • Promote research vis-à-vis diversity in territories of Afro communities, ecosystem
25 management, Afro techniques of environmental management, and promote comparative
26 studies with the Pacific region. Learn from the research experience carried out in
27 Suriname and Brazil to contribute with research in Western basin countries.

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- 1 • Promote strategies to eliminate stereotypes against Afro-descendants. Collective
2 territories are a strategy for historically neglected and racialized population who have to
3 design their livelihood strategies themselves.
- 4 • Support land recognition, especially in Colombia, where forest degradation in the
5 Amazon is less evident compared with other countries of the basin.
- 6 • Support NGO initiatives that currently support Afro communities, as well as women and
7 youth groups in the Amazon.
- 8 • The learning of NGOs that have strengthened the organizational processes for the
9 environmental governance of collective territories by the Afro population in the
10 Colombian Pacific is a very valuable experience to support the initiatives of the
11 communities in the Amazon.
- 12 • Support education programs on Afro-descendant communities in the countries of the
13 basin both for the mainstream society and for the African descent themselves, including
14 on their history, contribution and management of natural resources.

15

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1 **11. CORE GLOSSARY**

2 **Agroecosystem:** It is an ecological system that integrates geophysical (soil and climate), biotic
3 (plants and animals) and cultural aspects; in an agroecosystem, humans take advantage of and
4 direct the trophic flow through herbivores within a given landscape -my translation- (Montserrat
5 & Villar Pérez, 1995).

6 **Caboclo o caiçara:** This is the term used in Brazil to call the mestizo that arises from the union
7 of a white European person with an Indigenous person from the Americas.

8 **Cimarrón:** This term appeared in the Spanish colonial America around 1535. It is used to
9 describe Indians, blacks and animals that flee to the mountains and hills and become mountain
10 beings (Arrom, 1983). The Dictionary of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language, defines
11 cimarrón as a slave who took refuge in the mountains seeking his/her freedom¹.

12 **Palenques:** it is the Colombian term to name the enclaves constructed by fugitive communities of
13 African descent, which became part of the pattern of slave resistance. Runaway Africans formed
14 settlements with palisades and moats and sites of agricultural production. The leadership was
15 ordered following African tribal organizations and customs. The forested geography of Colombia
16 favored sustenance from tropical ecosystems and the possibility of defense against persecution.

17 **Quilombo or Mocambo:** in Brazil, these are different terms with the same meaning.
18 Quilombola or mocambo are enclaves of freedom within the slave regime. This phenomenon is
19 reported from the beginning to the end of Portuguese colonial period, but they were unable to put
20 an end to it.

21 **Maroon:** it is the Anglo-Saxon word for the thousands of enslaved Africans in the Americas,
22 who managed to flee from captivity and took refuge in wild and forest landscapes where they
23 established free communities. Marronage (marronnage, maroonage, maronage) has left an
24 indelible mark on the geographical, political, economic, social and cultural landscapes.

25 **12. BOXES**

¹ <https://dle.rae.es/cimarr%C3%B3n>

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1 **BOX 13.1. Mompo Market**

2 **Box Figure 13.1**

3 Mompo is the largest fluvial island in Colombia on the shores of one of the country's main
4 rivers. Through the Magdalena River and the Cauca River, the enslaved Africans entered the
5 interior of the country. They were distributed towards the haciendas, the populated centers and
6 towards the Pacific region. The entire region through which these rivers ran was covered with
7 dense forests, which were a refuge for the maroons, and from their palenques, they were
8 commercially related to urban centers.

9 Let us remember that the arrival of the Amazon through the western side of South America
10 occurred indirectly in countries such as Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, since their economies were
11 established in relation to the Andes and the Pacific. Reaching the Amazon required crossing the
12 high Andes mountain range.

13

14 **BOX 13.2. Secret Water Source for Escaped Slaves**

15 This story is from a paper written by Dr. van Andel and a team of scientist who study Maroon
16 societies in Suriname. <http://www.americanscientist.org/issues/id.114/past.aspx>

17 “Slaves were not the only newcomers to the New World; so were the Dutch. At times the
18 Africans’ plant knowledge gave them an edge over the people who enslaved them. In the 1770s,
19 the Scottish mercenary Lieutenant J.G. Stedman was hired by the Dutch authorities in Suriname
20 to capture escaped slaves that were attacking the plantations for food, weapons, and women.
21 When his soldiers were dying from fever and thirst during the raids through the brackish swamps
22 and the hot, white-sand savannas, Stedman wondered about the secret water source of the
23 Maroons. He admired the ability of the runaways to stay up ahead of his army without food,
24 ammunition, or drinking water.

25 If Stedman had read the diary of Linnaeus’s student Daniel Rolander he could have known the
26 answer. On September 15, 1755, Rolander observed that the succulent stems and flower heads
27 various *Costus* species, which look like a pinecone with densely overlapping, leathery bracts,
28 contained “a great supply of water... that the Ameri- can Indians and black slaves usually drink,

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1 when they lack other good, sweet water.” Whereas the herb is just a thirst-If Stedman had read
2 the diary of Linnaeus’s student Daniel Rolander he could have known the answer. On September
3 15, 1755, Rolander observed that the succulent stems and flower heads various *Costus* species,
4 which look like a pinecone with densely overlapping, leathery bracts, contained “a great supply
5 of water... that the Ameri- can Indians and black slaves usually drink, when they lack other
6 good, sweet water.” Whereas the herb is just a thirst- quencher and a medicine against sore
7 throats for Amerindians, *Costus* is a key ingredient in many Afro-Surinamese rituals. Leaves and
8 stems are chewed by people to pacify angry ghosts, and the juice is drunk by people to calm
9 down after a hefty spiritual possession.

10 Various *Costus* species are still used ritually by Africans today: in herbal baths for spiritual
11 purification and as a ritual protection against sorcery. Juice pressed from *Costus* stems is sold in
12 small bottles at the market in Libreville, Gabon. Enslaved Africans must have been familiar with
13 the use of *Costus*, although the Surinamese species are different from the African ones. The
14 evidence for this is captured in its Afro-Surinamese name *sangrafu*, which can be traced back to
15 the Kikongo word *nsanga- lavwa*, used in the Democratic Republic of Congo for *Costus* after.
16 Suriname was not the only country where Africans recognized plants from their motherland.
17 *Costus* species are known in Trinidad and Guyana as Congo cane. Further research on Afro-
18 Caribbean plant names would probably reveal many more connections to Africa.”

19

20