

Geographies of Subversion: Maroons, Borders, and Empire

In 1725, an enslaved man named Capois of Gros Morne was searching the savannahs of northern Port-à-Piment for his owner's missing cattle when his horse became stuck in the mud. After noticing the extreme heat of the water beneath his feet, Capois assessed that he had found a hot spring. He recalled hearing stories of bathhouses in France and decided to dig a six-by-four-foot hole and build a small hut on top. Capois found two fellow bondsmen who the springs could potentially heal, one suffering from extensive rheumatism and another in Jean Rabel whose ailment was thought to have been incurable. Both men were successfully cured. Within a few years, the spring gained a reputation for miraculous healing and became a site of pilgrimage as a shrine had been constructed around it, with old crutches and written testimonies decorating nearby trees. By the end of the century, what became known as Eaux de Boynes was instituted as a formal government-sponsored health spa. Capois was offered his own personal slave as reward for his discovery, an offer he declined.¹ He was not a maroon, but in being obligated to search for his owner's missing property, he was able to explore the land beyond his plantation of origin. In so doing, not only had Capois identified a previously undiscovered natural resource, but he demonstrated an awareness of its inherent value and usefulness as a healing mechanism.

Enslaved people like Capois were, at times, at the front lines of exploring geographic spaces that European colonizers had not yet explored or exploited. Drawing on insights from historical and postcolonial geographies, this chapter is concerned with enslaved Africans' geographic knowledge as part of their collective consciousness that aided the pursuit of freedom. The story of Capois and the Eaux de Boynes hot springs

demonstrates that black people learned the land on an intimate level and figured out ways to generate life-sustaining elements and processes from it. Whether it was physically tending to the land on sugar, coffee, indigo, or cotton plantations, laboring on public works irrigation projects, cultivating crops on personal small land plots, locating specific plants and herbs to assemble ritual packets, discovering pathways and riverways to quicken escape routes across the plains or mountain ranges, or finding caverns or densely forested mountains to hide in as maroons – the colony’s environmental landscape was itself a form of cultural knowledge with which Africans and African descendants needed to become familiarized in order to survive. Armed with this knowledge, they found nooks and crannies within and external to the system, carving into and subverting social and geographic spaces intended for the financial benefit of the plantocracy, creating maroon spaces amid a wildly prosperous slave society. This chapter looks at the physical environment of Saint-Domingue and how maroons leveraged their knowledge of it in their freedom journeys. *Les Affiches* advertisements oftentimes indicate from where the maroon had escaped and, in at least 1,000 cases, speculate about where that person may have been trying to flee. This information, and data from other sources, helps to foreground the spatiality of marronnage, allowing us to read beyond what is present in texts or maps to find out the natural and topographical realities maroons faced and grappled with in reconstituting colonial landscapes as geographies of subversion.

As this chapter is concerned with viewing marronnage as a contestation of colonial geographic formations, it becomes important to highlight the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of power, plantation economies, and empire as well as the limitations of each. The first part of the chapter explores how maroons forged possibilities of freedom within immediate locales that were dominated by plantation slavery. Saint-Domingue’s diverse environment contained nearly 500,000 enslaved people and an untold number of maroon individuals and family units who hid both in plain sight and in areas previously believed to be uninhabitable. They constructed what Sylviane Diouf (2014: 8–9) calls a “maroon landscape” at the intersection of three worlds: maroon refuge, white-dominated spaces, and physical and social territories carved out by enslaved people. This maroon landscape constituted geographies of subversion, as maroons sought refuge and community, and built solidarities across Saint-Domingue, from its urban centers to its mountains and forests – the very landscape that French planters and authorities had exploited slave labor to in turn exploit and profit from – and beyond, into Santo Domingo. Maroons built huts in the mountains and

forests using mud and leaves, and constructed booby-traps with the same flora and fauna. They lurked on the outskirts of large plantations, and drank from the rivers, and cultivated their own gardens. They retreated to urban centers where there were enough free people of color that the *maréchaussée* fugitive slave police would not be able to easily identify a maroon who was living as a free person. Or they defected to Santo Domingo, becoming a source of tension between the Spanish colony and Saint-Domingue and presenting a need for diplomacy between the two colonies around the issue of marronnage. The second part of the chapter examines the relationship between empire and marronnage, and how, for well over a century, enslaved Africans had knowledge of and exploited the geopolitical conflicts between the French and Spanish crowns by traversing the border between Saint-Domingue and Santo Domingo and establishing liberated zones on their own terms.

By committing marronnage within and against the French colonial enterprise of Saint-Domingue, runaways forced authorities to reckon with questions of imperial reach and power. European imperialistic pursuits in the Caribbean can be described as an “act of geographical violence through which space was explored, reconstructed, re-named and controlled” (Crush 1994: 337). The island that Saint-Domingue and Santo Domingo shared was the first location in the Americas to encounter Christopher Columbus and accompanying Spaniards’ violent imperial ventures. Initially called *Ayiti* by the Taíno-Arawak indigenous inhabitants, Columbus re-named the entire island *La Española* when he arrived and wrested control of the island’s southern areas. Upon the beginning of French rule over the western third of *Española* in 1697, they renamed the region Saint-Domingue and each city and town was given recognizably French names. This symbolic dominance over the landscape through naming processes was combined with the terroristic violence that Taínos and Africans encountered, and environmental violence against the land itself.

Included in the conquered physical spaces was “nature” itself, which was converted into “natural resources” that colonists extracted, processed, and imported into Europe, such as sugarcane, coffee, gold, and other minerals. (Mignolo 2011). French colonization of western *Española*, Saint-Domingue, spread much farther and faster than the attempts of Spanish predecessors, exploiting high-quality, moisture-rich lands and razing the forests to create space for hundreds of sugar plantations.² Colonial conquest therefore involved processes of deforestation and reforestation – the transfer of plants, trees, and crops from one space

to another to construct a desired arboreal landscape and to attach new social and economic meanings to environmental formations (Sheller 2012: 187–188). As early as the 1690s, the French royal government recognized the detrimental effects of plantation expansion on Saint-Domingue's woods and implemented legislation to protect and preserve vegetation and other natural resources. The *Code Noir* made it illegal to sell firewood, and the king banned the felling of the Gayac tree that was used for ship construction. These policies were ignored, leading to increased importation of wood for hospitals and shop building. In 1712, plantation owners were required to clear land plots within a year of purchase, a rule that inadvertently helped to further stimulate the slave trade, since planters relied on enslaved people to do the clearing. Plantation owners near Le Cap also forced slaves to steal wood from the hospital, where it would then be sold at the city's market.³ Colonists' destruction of Saint-Domingue's physical environment made room for more plantations and thus more enslaved laborers, who were then coerced into performing geologically harmful labor.

Colonialism also spatialized slavery itself, in that the institution of racialized forced labor was intended to exist singularly in the colonies, not the French mainland. France was thought to have been an entirely free nation regardless of one's racial identity. However, even this belief was challenged when in 1777 free people of color from the colonies were banned from entering the home country and claiming citizenship.⁴ Generally speaking, France was a geographical space meant for free whites, and Saint-Domingue was a space designated for enslaved blacks. By the end of the eighteenth century, the spread of sugar increasingly dominated Saint-Domingue's landscape in the lowlands and valleys, and coffee plantations in the mountainous highlands. In 1789, there were nearly 800 sugar plantations, over 3,000 coffee plantations, over 3,000 indigo plantations, and nearly 800 cotton plantations.⁵ Sugar plantation sizes were quite large and could cover between 580 and over 900 acres of land.⁶ But while sugar was produced in the plains, and the plantation presence expanded horizontally, coffee plantations in the mountains added a vertical dimension to sites of oppression. The looming presence of these plantations and the *maréchaussée* fugitive slave police operated in a panopticon-like fashion where enslaved people were under seemingly constant surveillance. In France, punishment for serious crimes was increasingly peripheralized to prisons, but in Saint-Domingue, authorities centralized demonstrations of colonial punishment, executing known maroons and other rebels in town squares, thus creating a symbolic

association between rebellion, death, and humiliation in public spaces (Foucault 1977).

The enterprise of European colonialism exerted power over the land to gain the surplus value of the agricultural products that enslaved Africans physically extracted; therefore, coercive authority extended to Saint-Domingue's enslaved inhabitants, whose physical movements and actions were restricted to activities related to productivity – specifically for French profits. As Stephanie Camp (2004: 6) explained, “places, boundaries, and movement were central to how slavery was organized and to how it was resisted.” She argues that enslaved people lived within a “geography of containment,” where, through law and custom, plantation personnel patrolled slave grounds, determined and enforced work schedules, and required passes to account for slaves' comings and goings. The *Code Noir* had several provisions that dictated the terms of how, when, and where black people could move and for what reasons, and the *maréchaussée* fugitive slave police were responsible for imposing the boundaries of the geography of containment. Slaves belonging to different owners could not congregate for any reason lest they face the whip as a minimum punishment or death at most, since frequent violations would constitute *grand marronnage*. Owners were prevented from allowing assemblies of slaves and would be fined if held in violation. The *Code Noir's* limitations on enslaved people's physical movement were also linked to disempowering them economically: slaves were not supposed hold *marché de nègres* or *nègre* markets and could not sell sugarcane, fruit, vegetables, firewood, herbs, or any other type of commodity. Their goods could be confiscated and returned to their owner unless they had a ticket from that owner. But given the overwhelming population of Africans and African descendants in Saint-Domingue, these rules were not always upheld or were outright ignored. For example, the *marché de nègres* were prominent features of city life in both Port-au-Prince and Cap Français. As discussed in Chapter 3, enslaved people were known to congregate in churches, at burial grounds, or on the outskirts of plantations to perform their sacred rituals and other cultural practices. Chapter 4 highlighted maroons' social ties to other maroons, free and enslaved people, and how their skills and experience in selling goods at the markets allowed them to traverse the colony.

The connections constructed by enslaved people and maroons in living quarters, ritual spaces, markets, mountains, caves, and other unmonitored areas were part of a “rival geography,” which Camp (2004: 7) defined as an “alternative way of knowing and using space that

conflicted with planters' ideals and demands." Maroons cultivated rival geographies beginning with the early Spanish colonial period. Late Haitian anthropologist Rachel Beauvoir-Dominique (2009) argued that petroglyphs and archaeological remains found in several cave systems indicated that the collaborations between Taínos and Africans during Cacique Enriquillo's early sixteenth-century revolt against the Spanish and the rebels' collective retreat to mountain chains – such as the Baoruco west of the city of Santo Domingo – facilitated the exchange of cosmological beliefs about the world and practical knowledge of the island's topography, plant usage, and resistance tactics. Within West African and West Central African cosmologies, elements of the natural environment – bodies of water, flora and fauna, rocks, the wind, lightning, and thunder – were associated with the deities and other spirit entities. The sacrality of the land itself informed enslaved and marooned Africans' ways of interacting with the environment, redefining space, and reclaiming power. For example, the Bwa Kayman ceremony that ushered in the August 1791 uprising occurred under the canopy of the sacred *mapou* silk cotton tree, which holds spiritual meanings and functions as a social space for ancestor reverence. The *mapou* marks important crossroads for public gatherings in contemporary Haitian Vodou and other African and indigenous-based cultures of the Caribbean like Jamaica, Trinidad, and Guyana (Sheller 2012: 137–139, 201–204). The existence of such modes of thinking suggests Africans not only held alternate conceptions of spatial orders, but they struggled in the material realm to create rival geographies – or geographies of subversion – by staking claim to “resources, land, and livelihood” in contest with the rapidly expanding plantation regime (ibid.: 190). Rival geographies are similar to, or can constitute, free spaces that accompany or foment collective resistance and other forms of prefigurative politics by providing safe, protected zones where actors can interact, freely communicate, express emotion and thought, and share information and other valuable resources. Networks of resistance actors, and the networks of physical spaces they occupy and frequent, are part of an ongoing process of building insurgent “scenes” (Creasap 2012) where enslaved people and maroons could have “reimagined their lives as free people within the very geography in which they were intended to be enslaved” (Miki 2012: 503).

Another example of maroons' usage of rival geography included their contentious occupation of mountainous zones that sat along the Saint-Domingue–Santo Domingo border, and their entanglement in geopolitical

fight between the French and Spanish. The second part of this chapter treats the imperial border as part of Saint-Domingue's geographic landscape that had a critical relationship to marronnage. The Saint-Domingue–Santo Domingo border changed over time and proximity to it enticed runaways to attempt escape; moreover, the presence and value of black people as a form of capital, as potential laborers, and as rebels shaped the border itself as an ongoing political project. Though the island was the first in the Americas to receive European explorers and colonists, by the end of the seventeenth century it had become a backwater colony, effectively leaving the western lands open to settlement by maroons, pirates, and *boucaneers*. After several decades of fighting, the Spanish finally ceded Saint-Domingue to the French in 1697 with the Treaty of Ryswick and maintained rulership over the island's eastern two-thirds – the colony of Santo Domingo. Yet the agreement did little to quell rivalry between the French and Spanish crowns, nor struggles over property ownership at the border itself. These localized spats were reflections of inter-imperial competition for control and dominance over the slave trade, the enslaved, sugar production, and territory. For over a century, beginning in the late 1600s, enslaved Africans and maroons leveraged the conflict between the French and the Spanish to their benefit, turning on one empire or the other until the boundary between Saint-Domingue and Santo Domingo was finalized with the 1777 Treaty of Aranjuez.

Enslaved people perceived several incentives for pledging allegiance to the Spanish. Since Santo Domingo had not developed a plantation system at the same pace or depth as Saint-Domingue, and there was more geographic space in the east for runaways to inhabit, farm, and start a new life. The Spanish Empire based its policies on slavery on the medieval *Siete Partidas*, which affirmed the innate humanity of enslaved people. Spanish codes were widely considered to have been more amenable to sustaining human life – while the reverse was true of Saint-Domingue. Throughout the Spanish Empire, it was not uncommon for entire towns to be built for free people of color. Moreover, interactions and collaborative rebellion among Africans and indigenous Taínos began in the Baoruco mountains near the city of Santo Domingo, creating a long-lasting legacy of resistance and freedom that was known to even newly-arrived Africans, as generations of enslaved people made their way to the growing maroon settlement. Several formerly enslaved people of Saint-Domingue were aware of the geopolitical stakes and at times wagered on marronnage in Santo Domingo as an alternative route to freedom. As these fugitives disappeared behind the border, they implicitly denied French planters' access

to their labor value and therefore caused financial loss. Additionally, once on Spanish lands and having assurances of Spanish loyalty, some maroons took up arms against the French or raided nearby plantations. Besides the runaway advertisements, primary sources such as letters from planters and military officials help to highlight cases of runaways who fled Saint-Domingue for Santo Domingo and explore several instances of the Spanish co-opting African Saint-Dominguans by arming them and/or implicitly and explicitly promising freedom from enslavement or better treatment and a better quality of life.

THE SPATIALITY OF MARRONNAGE

Information about the geographic dimensions of marronnage was a key component of *Les Affiches américaines* advertisements. Planters who placed advertisements for the public to help locate and recover a fugitive needed to identify themselves and the location of their plantations so that readers could associate the bondsperson with a particular parish or neighborhood. Planters often had to travel from rural areas to reach the major towns to publish the advertisements, but in cases where the slave owner's location of origin was not specified, this information can be inferred from the name of the plantation owner, lawyer, or manager listed in the advertisements. Slave owners needed to include as many details as possible, however speculative, about where a runaway might have absconded. Geographic data gleaned from *Les Affiches* advertisements provides insights into how many advertisements were placed or distributed in the major urban centers, either Cap Français, Port-au-Prince, or Saint Marc, the location where the planter was based, and the runaways' suspected whereabouts. Of the over 10,000 runaway advertisements, the majority – 6,874 – were placed in the newspaper that was circulated from Cap Français (Table 6.1). Based on the volume of advertisements placed at Le Cap, the city and its surrounding region experienced the highest volume of marronnage over time, since it was the colony's oldest and most populated urban center, followed by Port-Prince and Saint Marc. Besides the three cities, plantations at Léogâne, Gonaïves, Arcahaye, Artibonite, and Dondon reported the highest numbers of maroons.

In over 1,000 cases, advertisements included speculative information about where the runaway(s) hid. As previous chapters have clarified, enslaved people were far from socially dead figures who lacked meaningful relationships to kith and kin. Planters were aware of bondspople's intimate relationships and used this information to surmise that some

TABLE 6.1. *Frequency of runaways' locations*

Newspaper publication location	Parishes	Location of runaways' escape	Runaways' suspected locations	
North (Cap Français) – 6,874 runaways	Ouanaminthe	70 (0.69%)	22 (1.85%)	
	Fort Dauphin	274 (2.71%)	52 (4.37%)	
	Terrier Rouge	95 (0.94%)	36 (3.02%)	
	Trou	191 (1.89%)	48 (4.03%)	
	Valière	30 (0.30%)	2 (0.17%)	
	Limonade	227 (2.25%)	40 (3.36%)	
	Quartier Morin	134 (1.33%)	22 (1.85%)	
	Grande Rivière	278 (2.75%)	40 (3.36%)	
	Dondon	348 (3.44%)	30 (2.52%)	
	Marmelade	127 (1.26%)	11 (0.92%)	
	Petite Anse	187 (1.85%)	22 (1.85%)	
	Cap Français	1,287 (12.73%)	122 (10.24%)	
	Plaine du Nord	58 (0.57%)	27 (2.27%)	
	Acul	158 (1.56%)	25 (2.1%)	
	Limbé	263 (2.6%)	48 (4.03%)	
	Port Margot	158 (1.56%)	31 (2.6%)	
	Borgne	263 (2.6%)	24 (2.02%)	
	Plaisance	270 (2.67%)	25 (2.1%)	
	St. Louis du Nord	118 (1.17%)	9 (0.76%)	
	Port-de-Paix	210 (2.08%)	24 (2.02%)	
West (Saint Marc) – 577 runaways	Gros Morne	104 (1.03%)	32 (2.69%)	
	Jean Rabel	102 (1.1%)	8 (0.67%)	
	Môle Saint Nicolas	84 (0.83%)	7 (0.59%)	
	Morne Rouge	108 (1.07%)	23 (1.93%)	
	Saint Marc	500 (4.95%)	30 (2.52%)	
	Gonaïves	384 (3.8%)	29 (2.43%)	
	Artibonite	305 (3.02%)	59 (4.95%)	
	West-South (Port-au-Prince) – 4,402 runaways	Bombarde	2 (0.02%)	0
		Port-à-Piment	15 (0.15%)	4 (0.34%)
		Ile de la Tortue	6 (0.06%)	0
Petite Riviere		15 (0.15%)	2 (0.17%)	
Verettes		28 (0.28%)	4 (0.34%)	
Mirebalais		169 (1.67%)	16 (1.34%)	
Arcahaye		346 (3.42%)	16 (1.34%)	
Croix-des-Bouquets		219 (2.17%)	27 (2.27%)	
Port-au-Prince		647 (6.4%)	45 (3.78%)	
Léogâne		427 (4.22%)	47 (3.95%)	
Grand Goâve		73 (0.72%)	7 (0.59%)	
Baynet		27 (0.27%)	0	
Jacmel		161 (1.59%)	15 (1.26%)	
Cayes de Jacmel		19 (0.9%)	1 (0.08%)	

TABLE 6.1. (continued)

Newspaper publication location	Parishes	Location of runaways' escape	Runaways' suspected locations
	Cul-de-Sac	212 (2.12%)	43 (3.61%)
	Isle Gonâve	5 (0.05%)	6 (0.5%)
	Petit Goâve	133 (1.32%)	25 (2.1%)
	Fond des Nègres	73 (0.72%)	6 (0.5%)
	Anse à Veau	217 (2.15%)	8 (0.67%)
	Petit Trou	74 (0.73%)	4 (0.34%)
	Jérémie	341 (3.37%)	13 (1.09%)
	Cap Dame Marie	37 (0.37%)	1 (0.08%)
	Cap Tiburon	26 (0.26%)	2 (0.17%)
	Coteaux	27 (0.27%)	2 (0.17%)
	Port Salut	56 (0.55%)	0
	Torbeck	7 (0.07%)	1 (0.08%)
	Cayes	237 (2.34%)	11 (0.92%)
	Cavaillon	61 (0.60%)	6 (0.5%)
	St. Louis du Sud	21 (0.21%)	1 (0.08%)
	Aquin	89 (0.88%)	14 (1.18%)
	Santo Domingo	24 (0.24%)	16 (1.34%)
Total observations		10,107	1,191

who embarked on marronnage were actively seeking to reconnect with friends and family members on other plantations, in different neighborhoods or different parishes of the colony. Other aspects of maroons' identities that gave clues to their whereabouts included their labor-related skills or a reputation for past rebelliousness. Ultimately, only the individual who decided to become a maroon knew definitively the reasons behind their escape and the destination they had in mind as they escaped. As Saint-Domingue's economic development escalated in the eighteenth century, plantations increasingly covered the rural landscape and cities grew, multiplying the enslaved population and leaving fewer unoccupied areas for maroons to claim and settle. Maroons left urban areas heading for the mountains or other desolate areas, others left rural regions for the cities, and still others lingered near familiar surroundings or were captured before they were able to venture afar (see Figures 6.1 and 6.2). The movement of maroons between plantations and between urban and rural areas meant that they subverted places dominated by plantation expansion and created autonomous spaces in the absence of slave-based economies.

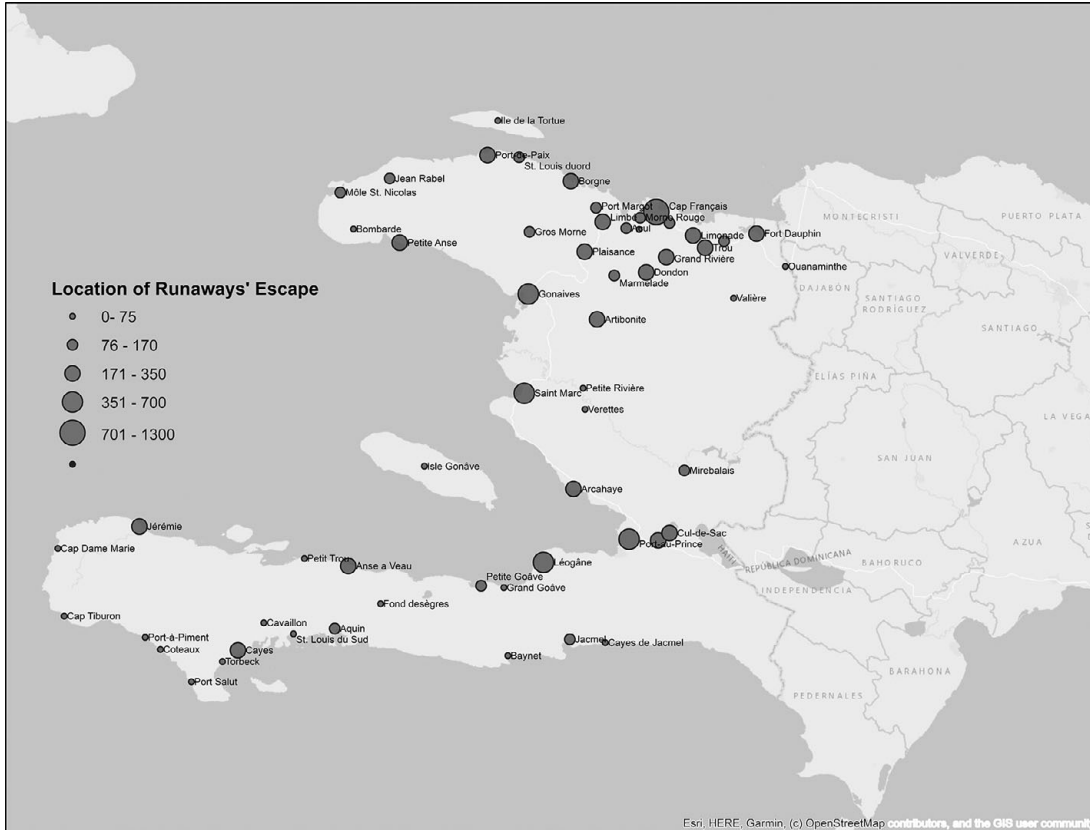


FIGURE 6.1. Runaways' locations of escape, map created by Reese Manceaux and Crystal Eddins

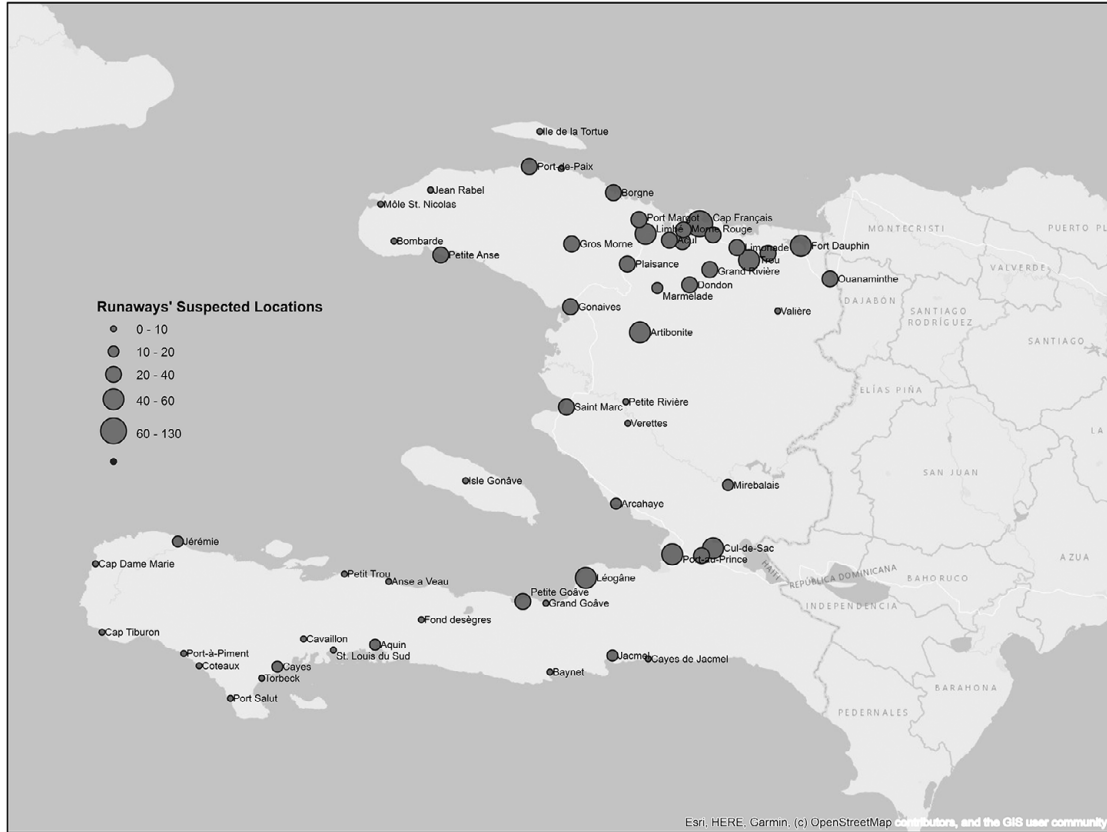


FIGURE 6.2. Runaways' suspected destinations, map created by Reese Manceaux and Crystal Eddins

Hiding in Plain Sight

Many runaways were attracted to the bustling city of Cap Français, in part because the significant presence of free people of color created social spaces where formerly enslaved people could blend in and live as self-freed individuals. Neighborhoods like Haut-du-Cap, Providence, Petit-Carenage, and Petite-Guinée or “Little Guinea,” a section of town with a significant enslaved and free black population, appear frequently in the *Les Affiches* advertisements as suspected havens for runaways living in Le Cap. Le Cap attracted runaways in large numbers: between October 1790 and August 1791 alone, 122 runaways were suspected of hiding somewhere in Le Cap, and authorities captured over 500 runaways in the city and its surrounding areas.⁷ Escapees with an artisanal trade, or who were perceived as having a lighter skin complexion, had an advantage in self-fashioning their freedom. Though men escaped to Le Cap as well, the city was the singularly significant destination for maroon women.

Unlike enslaved men who traveled as valets, fishermen, or carpenters, women often did not venture beyond plantations for work-related tasks. Women were not as familiar with the colony’s landscape, in part accounting for their lower numbers as maroons. Instead, some women maroons fled into urban areas where they could participate in formal and informal commercial activities as “market maroons.” They bought and sold provisions, goods, and services, which allowed them economic autonomy and “their own insurgent geographies, fashioning an infrastructure of black freedom . . . where they took up public space, created networks, and forged community.” Free women of color were already known as entrepreneurs in Port-au-Prince and especially in Le Cap; that maroon women sought to assimilate into these social, geographic and economic spaces “was an open challenge to the racialized and gendered logics of slavery” that mandated enslaved women exclusively perform agricultural and reproductive labor.⁸ For example, Marianne, a 23-year-old mixed-race woman, was well known as a vendor at the Le Cap market selling fish, herbs, milk, and fruit.⁹ An unnamed Mina woman was often seen around the plantations of Haut-du-Cap selling bread.¹⁰ The Haut-du-Cap neighborhood also harbored an unnamed Arada woman who had been hiding there for nearly a month.¹¹ Rosie of the Agüia nation used her language skills in Dutch, English, and Spanish to pass as a free woman and possibly marketed herself as a broker or trader alongside other free women of color at Le Cap.¹²

Maroons also fled their enslavers from within Cap Français at a high rate, meaning there was a circulation of people to and from the city to the

mountainous rural districts. Men especially gravitated to areas like Artibonite, Léogâne, and Fort Dauphin, less-populated areas that were connected to waterways, mountains, and caverns, and could facilitate escape and informal economic activity. Places like Fort Dauphin were especially considered dangerous and difficult to access; however, these characteristics would have made for the creation of insurgent geographies as maroons organized themselves and laid claim to lands and rights. Léogâne was the home base of the rebel ritualist Dom Pedro in the 1760s, Fort Dauphin saw several conflicts between armed maroons and the *maréchaulsée*, and Artibonite was home to smaller, self-liberated communities. Where colonists saw inaccessibility, maroons saw geographies of freedom.

Reaching the Inaccessible

Through forced labor tasks or their self-initiated journeys, Saint-Domingue's enslaved people and runaway fugitives traversed the colony and were exposed to its vastly diverse topography, including its several mountain chains. The Taíno moniker *Ayiti*, and the most literal interpretation of the well-known Haitian proverb "behind the mountains are more mountains," derived from the fact that mountain ranges cover three-fourths of the 10,714 square miles of what became Saint-Domingue-Haiti. In addition to several smaller mountain ranges in the north, in the west there are the Cahos and Montagnes Noires, and the southern mountains of Pic la Selle, the Matheux, and the Baoruco – all of which were hiding places for maroons.¹³ Two of these mountain chains exceed heights of 1,000 meters above sea level, including one in the westward-jutting southern peninsula where maroons later established the Platons Kingdom during the Haitian Revolution. The other 1,000-plus-meter mountain range occupies the island's south-central region, Pic la Selle, sitting southeast of Port-au-Prince.¹⁴ Semi-arid savannas, lush rainforests, sinkholes and deep cave systems also characterized Saint-Domingue's landscape. The caves were locations for Taíno ritual practice, transculturation and exchange between Taínos and Africans, and served as protective zones for runaways in transit toward maroon communities.¹⁵ Some of these sites included what is now called the Voûte à Minguet of Dondon and Bassin Zim in Hinche, Central Plateau; the Bohoc/Colladère at Pignon and St. Francique at St. Michel de l'Attalaye, both in the Central Plateau; Dubedou near Gonaïves in Artibonite; the caves of Tortuga Island; Grotte Dufour in Marmelade; the Morne Deux-Têtes

Meillac at Limbé; caves at Camp-Perrin; the Moreau Cave at Port-Salut; the Grotte aux Indes at Pestel; the Grande Grotte at Port-à-Piment; and the Grotte nan Baryè in Grand Anse.¹⁶

Among the identified destinations for runaways, areas in the northern department were the most common. Besides those who went to more populated towns like Le Cap or Port-au-Prince, many runaways were last seen in Fort Dauphin, Trou, Limbé, Limonade, and Grand Rivière. With its mountain ranges and savannahs, and immediate access to both the northern coast and two major roads leading to the interior of Santo Domingo, Fort Dauphin had been the second most important city in the north and was the first to receive influxes of inhabitants when the town was known as Bayaha under Spanish rule.¹⁷ But by the eighteenth century, the French found Fort Dauphin less than optimal for a viable naval base and it was sparsely populated, apart from five potteries, rendering it a “useless” port.¹⁸ Moreau de Saint-Méry similarly described Fort Dauphin in less than flattering terms: as a “pesthole” that was dangerous and difficult to access due to overflows of river water.¹⁹ However, it was a porous site of the Saint-Domingue–Santo Domingo border, operating as an entrepôt for illegal smuggling between Monte Cristo and Le Cap, especially during the Seven Years War.²⁰ The informal economic activities of French, Spanish, Dutch, and North American traders made Fort Dauphin an attractive place for some runaways to peddle items or sell their services and find some financial independence. For example, a creole man named Étienne had passed for free for ten years since 1756 – he was not branded, spoke strong French, and had pierced ears, though his legs were scarred. Étienne was known to frequent Maribaroux and Fort Dauphin, working as a *pacotille*, or a vendor of various wares.²¹ A 20-year-old Kongolese woman named Zaire was described as a trader and left her owner in Le Cap, a *mûlatre* woman named Zabeau, headed for Fort Dauphin.²²

In the early eighteenth century, the mountainous towns east of Le Cap were renowned for the threatening presence of armed maroon bands who were known to rob and kill whites and attack plantations. According to Moreau de Saint-Méry, places with names like Piton des Nègres, Piton des Flambeaux, Piton des Ténèbres, Tête des Nègres at Môle Saint Nicolas, and Crete à Congo signified the dominance of fugitives who had occupied inaccessible places. At Trou, just south of Fort Dauphin, the name of notorious maroon rebel Polydor evoked memories of his band, murders, and the intensive effort to capture him.²³ Later, a section of Trou called Écrevisses, along with Fort Dauphin, became a popular destination for

runaways and was the place where Thélémaque Canga, Noël Barochin, and Bœuf pillaged plantations and fought the *maréchaussée*. The mountains of Morne à Mantegre, between Grande Rivière and Limonade, had a reputation as a maroon haven since Colas Jambes Coupée's campaigns in the early 1720s.²⁴ In the southern peninsula, the section of Grand Anse bears the name Plymouth after the maroon Plymouth who, along with his followers, destroyed plantations throughout the region and was captured in 1730.²⁵

While the northern plain was more densely populated and sprawling with closely connected plantations, the western and southern departments were less developed. Outside of Port-au-Prince, the western parishes of Artibonite, Léogâne, and Cul-de-Sac attracted the most runaways, probably because plantations were spread farther apart, and parishes sat adjacent to mountains like the Cahos and Montagnes Noires. The priest Jean-Baptiste Labat reported in the 1720s that 700 heavily armed maroons were occupying the Montagnes Noires northeast of Port-au-Prince.²⁶ *Les Affiches* advertisements also indicate that these mountains were places of retreat for runaways in the latter half of the century. Two men and a woman of the Ganga and Mina nations all marooned to the Montagnes Noires near Port-au-Prince.²⁷ A group of four Kongolese and one Mondongue men took haven in the Montagnes Noires – Houan (Juan) or Jean, Jean-Louis, and Jupiter escaped to join with Cesar and Louis who had already been there for some time.²⁸ Pierre-Louis, a *griffe* and a carpenter, hid for two months in the Grand Bois mountains in Croix-des-Bouquets, which was a site of conflict between maroons and the *maréchaussée*.²⁹ Above Port-au-Prince, a group of 17 unnamed maroons, described as mostly creoles, escaped a Gonaïves plantation in May 1769 and were presumed to have been hiding at Artibonite.³⁰ One unnamed Kongolese woman and ten Kongo men escaped from Artibonite and were suspected of finding haven with “other black maroons.”³¹ Télémaque, a creole from Jamaica who spoke English and “the language ordinary to the *nègres*,” had been in flight for nine months and was thought to be either in the Cahos mountains around Saint Marc or on the Santo Domingo side of the hills.³²

The southern parishes that most maroons fled from were Jérémie, Les Cayes, and Anse-a-Veau. Though these southern districts did not report as many runaways' suspected destinations as northern parishes, this does not mean there were no maroon hideouts in those areas. Maroon activity was reported in Grand Anse as early as the seventeenth century prior to French rule, and bands like those led by Plymouth were hunted in the

1720s and 1730s. Since the southern department developed much more slowly than either the northern or western departments, maroons in these regions probably lived among themselves in relative peace until the rise of the mixed-race coffee planter class during the mid- to late eighteenth century. Planter Laborde learned in September 1780 that three bondsmen, Jean, Cupidon, and Jupiter, had been captured or killed during the pursuit of a maroon band residing in the mountains of Aquin.³³ Neron, an Arada man, and Cipryen, a Kongolesse, had escaped for six months and were suspected to be hiding with a black man from Corail Guerineau and “several others” – other maroons presumably – in the southern Baynet mountains that separated Grande Rivière from Gris-Gris.³⁴ Just before Christmas of 1788, a Bambara woman named Françoise escaped from her owner in Cap-Tiberon and was suspected of attempting to reach an armed community near Jérémie:

Françoise, Bambara, stamped on the breast [MARAIS], age around 30 years, of tall height, red skinned, having marks of her country on the face and body, the middle finger of the right hand cut, speaking French and English; people have seen this nègress in the heights of the Riviere des Anglais, called Baumanoir, with a negro who carried a bundle of linen and a sickle, they have taken the road from the Source-Chaude [Hot Springs], opposite Jérémie, north and south, from the Anses, at that spring there are many maroon negroes; there is another negro who left as a maroon at the same time and from the same quarter, and who has carried off a gun with around six [units] of powder and lead. Give notice to M. Marias Lamothe, at Cap-Tiburon.³⁵

The fact that Françoise spoke English suggests that she was either brought to Saint-Domingue through the intra-American slave trade from Jamaica or North America, or perhaps she learned English from ongoing interactions with English-speaking Jamaican slaves and traders near Jérémie. In any case, she was seen with a man carrying a package of linens and a sickle near Riviere des Anglais, the northern end of which heads toward the mountains between Cap Tiberon and Jérémie. A third man escaped around the same time as Françoise, but was carrying a gun and six units of gunpowder. Françoise and her unnamed companion took the road of the Hot Springs near the coves of Jérémie, where many runaways were residing. The hot spring coves in which runaways would have sought refuge may have been either the Port-Salut Moreau Cave or the Grotte nan Barye of the Grand Anse.³⁶

Letters sent in 1775 described marronnage as a pervasive problem that had the capacity to undo the colony; one contributing factor cited was the dense, nearly impenetrable mountain ranges into which the *maréchaussée*

and other hunters attempted and often failed to pursue fugitives.³⁷ Though Saint-Domingue's mountains were increasingly occupied by coffee plantations by the mid-eighteenth century, maroons were adept to finding locations that were isolated and difficult to access enough to avoid capture. West Central African runaways especially would have been inclined to turn to the mountains, since the highlands north and south of the Congo River were more densely populated due to the hospitable climate for farming and fishing.³⁸ Spaces that were supposed to be unreachable and uninhabitable were the very places where maroons were able to find refuge away from the reach of the plantocracy. Waterscapes were also a space that, in Europeans' imagination, provided the means of transportation associated with trade and slaving. However, enslaved people utilized Saint Domingue's rivers and sea-adjacent ports as routes to free themselves.

Waterways: Routes of Un/slaving

Kevin Dawson's (2018) work, *Undercurrents of Power: Aquatic Culture in the African Diaspora*, provides a unique lens through which we can view Africans' and African descendants' relationship to, knowledge of, and uses of waterways that were part of their cultural geographies. Contrary to beliefs widely purported by Europeans that Africans had water phobias or that their bones were too dense to float, continental Africans who lived along the coasts or on riverways were equipped with technical abilities to navigate waters, build and operate boats, deep dive and even surf — oftentimes with stronger proficiency than Europeans themselves. West Central Africa, the zone where most of Saint-Domingue's African population originated, was a rainforest ecology that experienced heavy rains and had major river systems that flowed for miles from the interior to the coast, such as the Congo and Kwanza rivers. High waterfalls, whirlpools, and swamp wildlife made these rivers and their tributaries difficult for Europeans to navigate, while locals fashioned small canoes and arrows that allowed for easier fishing and hunting.³⁹ African children learned to swim, surf, and canoe at an early age, and various water sports provided opportunities for men to exhibit their bravery and masculinity. Water-based activities were not only recreational and cultural in nature; familiarity with waterscapes allowed Africans to resist the slave trade in ways other than suicide by drowning as an act of spiritual self-preservation, as associated with the Igbo.⁴⁰ In 1544, a marooned community of Angolan shipwreck survivors formed on

the southern coast of São Tomé, and at the Bight of Benin, the lacustrine community Tofinuland originated from migrations of Aja-Fon speaking peoples fleeing the prolific slave trading Dahomey Kingdom's imperial conquests of the early eighteenth century.⁴¹

By the eighteenth century, transoceanic travel from Africa was associated with slaving activities. Few examples of Africans' voluntary movement across the Atlantic exist; most of the millions who involuntarily voyaged on ships were captives whose collective experience constituted the Middle Passage. Over the course of three centuries, European nations refined their slave trading processes to a bureaucratic science, leveraging capital funds and insurance from privatized and state-sponsored companies, using ledger books to account for their cargo, employing a range of personnel – including sailors, surgeons, and brokers – to complete each voyage, and maintaining trading relationships at ports of each point of the “triangular trade” between Europe, Africa, and the Americas. The systematic nature of the racialized slave trade nearly ensured that any black person crossing the Atlantic was destined to be enslaved in the Americas, making the ocean and other smaller waterways sites where freedom was impossible (Mustakeem 2016). Canoes and canoe-makers were critical components of fishing communities and were the fundamental means of transport that helped form commercial networks between African coastal ports and the hinterlands. Economic enterprise and cultural, social, and political developments associated with the slave trade were heavily dependent on these boatmen and their knowledge of waterways to establish trade relationships. Traveling along rivers allowed European slave traders and their African intermediaries to have greater access to communities deep in Africa's interior, where violent raids resulted in boatloads of captives being taken to the coastal ports where they would then wait for weeks or months at a time to board a slave ship. The crisscrossing oceanic travel and commerce of European-owned slave ships made them “living, microcultural, micropolitical system[s] in motion” (Gilroy 1992: 4) that transported African worldviews, mores, sensibilities, behaviors, and practices.

Less frequently, enslaved Africans were not only made into cargo occupying the bellies of slave ships, they were owned by naval and other government officers, fishermen, and large-scale traders, and spent long periods of time on the vessels' top decks, performing a variety of tasks associated with the maintenance of the vessel. Aquatic skills gained on the continent and at sea were part of the cultural legacy enslaved Africans brought to the Americas, which was useful in a water-bound colony like

Saint-Domingue. The difficulty of crossing the colony's many mountains meant that coastal shipping and water-based movement were primary modes of transportation.⁴² Over 30 identified rivers flowed from the mountains to the coastlines, and with a wet climate and natural disasters, flooding was a common and dangerous occurrence. Some of the major river routes included Trois Rivières, which flowed south from Port-de-Paix and the Artibonite River, often referred to as Saint-Domingue's "Nile," that flowed nearly 60 miles east into central Santo Domingo. The colony was made up of over 800 miles of coastline, which meant that every region of Saint-Domingue touched or was close to the sea.⁴³

Having access to a body of water, such as women who bathed or washed clothing in rivers (Figure 6.3) would have made boating or swimming away from slavery a tempting possibility; runaways who were skilled swimmers had an advantage in marronnage. For example, an unnamed Mondongue man threw himself from a schooner three leagues, or about ten miles, from land and was suspected of reaching Môle Saint Nicolas, since his comrades attested that he was an excellent swimmer.⁴⁴ Enslaved people who inhabited plantations with proximity to waterways had access to small boats and canoes that they used to escape – even if they

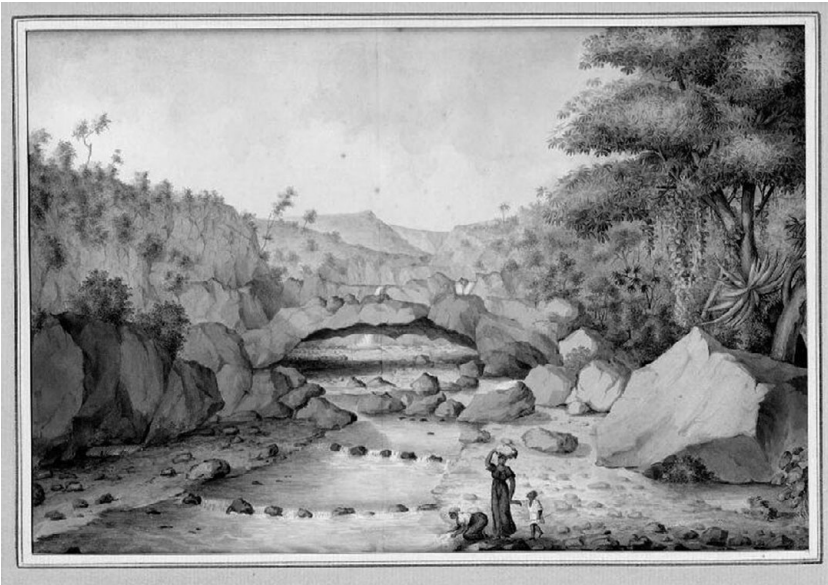


FIGURE 6.3. "Propriété sucrière des familles Thiverny et Fresquet à Saint-Domingue, aquarelle anonyme Archives Bordeaux Métropole, Bordeaux Fi Saint-Domingue 1"

were not particularly noted for having maritime experience. Dozens of runaways listed in *Les Affiches américaines* and other runaway advertisements were suspected of taking flight in a *canot* or canoe. The *Gazette de Saint Domingue* reported that four men and two *nouveaux* women of the Nagô and Arada nations banded together to escape their owner Jarossay in a fishing boat in June 1791.⁴⁵ While long-distance trade in Africa was largely conducted by men, women similarly had canoeing skills and used them to conduct local trade. Two unnamed women, one of whom was breastfeeding a two-month-old child, may have already had boating experience when they left Cayes in a canoe in December of 1767.⁴⁶

Several runaways in Saint Domingue were canoe-makers or masons, fishermen, swimmers, or were part of the colony's naval forces. Fugitives with maritime knowledge and experience, even those from different regional or ethnic backgrounds, could find common ground and escape together through the rivers or ports. For example, three sailors – Pierrit, a Kongolese man described as the captain, an English-speaking Nagô man named Louis, and Azor, who was also Nagô – fled Le Cap in a stolen boat over 30 feet long. It was believed they were headed to the Jacquezy neighborhood in Le Trou, a common maroon destination and hotbed for armed band activity.⁴⁷ Some maroon sailors were enslaved people sold to Saint-Domingue from other Caribbean islands, which gave them a wider understanding of inter-imperial waters. Saint-Marc, who claimed to be a freeman from Jamaica, and Jacob, who also spoke a little English, were two sailors who left in a Danish boat called *The Iris*.⁴⁸ Two other sailors from the Anglophone Atlantic, Robin and Guillaume, escaped Fort Dauphin in a small fishing boat, and may have taken another enslaved person with them.⁴⁹

For Europeans, waterways were highways for the commercial buying and selling of captive slaves. But for Africans, water and water-based activity facilitated trade and leisure, and in the colonial context their acquired recreational and practical skills also contributed to efforts to liberate themselves. Self-directed mobility was a scarcity for enslaved people, as were windows of opportunity to escape. Yet the vastness of Saint-Domingue's topography, its mountains, rivers, plains, ports, sink-holes, and caves offered a number of options for seeking refuge in the act of marronnage. Also, part of this landscape was the ever-changing boundary between French Saint-Domingue and Spanish Santo Domingo. The border not only drew the political distinction between two European empires, it represented a nearly 400-mile gate to a new geographic, social, economic, and cultural scene. The contention between the two colonies

and their respective royal administrators made the border more than just an imaginary line in the earth; it became a literal site of grappling between French, Spanish, African and indigenous peoples through trade, competition for land and slaves, and collaboration and resistance. The next part of this chapter will explore relations between the Spanish and the French, and the ways in which people of African descent took advantage of inter-imperial conflict and carved out social and geographic spaces for themselves as maroons.

SITES OF CONTENTION: THE SAINT-DOMINGUE–SANTO DOMINGO BORDER

Spatial structures, like social, economic, and political structures, shape material conditions and humans' lived experiences; conversely, human activity in the form of sustained collective action can impact or transform those structures. Mimi Sheller (2012: 191) argues that "despite the existence of dominant social orderings of space and legal systems to uphold that ordering, in practice other social productions of space nevertheless emerge alongside or are directly superimposed on hegemonic space." The border between Saint-Domingue and Santo Domingo operated as a spatial structure that delineated the nature of the colonial social order and slavery in Saint-Domingue. It also proved to be a structure – much like the colony's urban areas, mountains, and waterways – that, through the conscious and sustained collective action of black people, could be manipulated and mobilized as a subversive rival geography. Two late seventeenth-century policies delineated the legal and geographical boundaries of French slavery: the 1685 *Code Noir* formalized regulations about slavery in Saint-Domingue and other French Caribbean islands, and the 1697 Treaty of Ryswick established French control of western Española. In the months leading up the *Code Noir's* ratification in 1685, the governor of Saint-Domingue sought specific directives to limit the number of enslaved Africans in the colony. He also expressed concern about the numerous Africans, indigenous people, and *mûlatres* escaping to the Spanish territory after the French military captured 100 fugitives and returned them to Saint-Domingue. The governor alleged not only that runaways had learned the meaning of freedom during their escapes but that 24 of them were responsible for killing white colonists. These concerns influenced the *Code Noir's* aim to maintain royal control of the colonies through the regulation of "crimes" committed by the enslaved – especially marronnage.⁵⁰ The inauguration of this repressive legal

mechanism to extend and institutionalize the powers of plantation regimes, colonial authorities, and the French monarchy was in part a response to Africans' ongoing collective agency, which certainly did not cease in 1685. Enslaved Africans also disregarded the Treaty of Ryswick by subverting and exploiting the artificial border between Saint-Domingue and Santo Domingo, as conflicts between the French and Spanish provided Africans with geographic leverage to negotiate their freedom through marronnage. But more importantly, the ever-shifting geopolitical border *itself* was constituted by inter-imperial competition for land, resources, and laborers, as well as Africans' collective acts of agency for their freedom.

From the earliest moments of enslaved Africans' presence on the island of Española, runaways and rebels regularly resisted forced labor under the Spanish *encomienda* and *repartimiento* systems by reconstituting sections of the landscape as liberated zones. The first Africans and remaining Taíno escaped Spanish mines, ranches, and plantations, finding refuge in the Baoruco mountains or the western region that the French later occupied. Rebels in the northwest traded goods with French and Dutch settlers in the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-centuries. Runaways joined up with Dutch raiders as early as 1625, but the formal onset of French colonization of Saint-Domingue in 1697 and its aggressive sugar-based plantation economy essentially reversed the directional flow of African runaways from east–west to west–east.⁵¹ Africans brought to Saint-Domingue encountered a slavery regime that was much more relentless, violent, and industrialized than anything developed on the continent of Africa or in Santo Domingo, especially after the Spanish redirected their energies to mining on the South American continent. For over a century, conflicts between the Spanish and French over land, resources, and slaves had an immediate impact on the enslaved people of Saint-Domingue and their perception of options for freedom. Not only did Spanish colonists raid French plantations and kidnap enslaved people in Saint-Domingue, but open warfare between the two royal governments created windows of opportunity for enslaved people to disavow their French owners and see what life in Santo Domingo had to offer.

Slave codes, existing in both the French and Spanish colonies, attempted to delineate the social boundaries of bondage as it related to enslaved people's freedom statuses, family, and rights to humane treatment. A major distinction between the two codes was that the Spanish system was based on the medieval *Siete Partidas* code, which stated that though slaves had no civil rights, they did have innate human rights.

This is not to suggest that enslavement itself was easier in the Spanish Empire than elsewhere in the Americas, but in contrast to officials in slave-holding French Caribbean colonies, Spanish officials actualized aspects of their policy to ameliorate the basic living conditions for enslaved people. Assimilation into Christianity and the Spanish language and culture, as well as marriage rights, were important avenues for enslaved blacks to create extensive social networks. Narrow paths of manumission were also available and served as a form of social control to discourage rebellion. Courts in the Spanish Empire reinforced enslaved people's human rights by allowing them to seek prosecution of abusive owners using a court-appointed defender. They also sued for their freedom, the right to marry, and the right to keep their families together. The Catholic Church had traditions of charitable works that created social institutions which benefitted enslaved people, such as the *cofradías* or confraternities, hospitals that served slaves and free people of color, and service in local militias, which could lead to mobility or emancipation.⁵²

The willingness to arm blacks through militia participation and other means to fight enemy forces was a feature of slavery in Santo Domingo from as early as 1600–1650, when Spanish planters armed slaves against their local sugar-planting competitors.⁵³ Not only could blacks be armed in Santo Domingo, but some freemen occupied their own town, symbolizing a possibility of freedom and mobility that would never have been officially sanctioned by the French colonial state. After nearly two centuries of fighting rebels during the Christmas Day Wolof uprising and maroons like “Captain” Sebastian Lemba, Diego Guzman, and “the cowboy” Juan Vaquero, the Spanish established a town near Santo Domingo for self-freed runaways called San Lorenzo de los Negros de Minas. The town was self-governing and captains from each major ethnic group – Minas, Aradas, Kongos, and Brans from the Gold Coast – held authoritative control over their respective group. Garcia Congo was the sergeant of the town militia, while his lieutenant was Mina and the captain was of the Bran nation. The groups operated independently but collaborated when necessary.⁵⁴

In 1679, the same year as San Lorenzo's founding, a man named Padre Jean led an insurgency in the north aiming to kill all the white colonists between Port-de-Paix and Port Margot. Padre Jean killed his Spanish owner then headed toward Tortuga for refuge; the small island had been the site of rebellion of white planters desiring independence from France.⁵⁵ From there, he crossed over to Petit Saint Louis, where he recruited 25 enslaved Africans, some of whom had been kidnapped by

the French from Spanish owners. As they travelled east, nearly reaching Port Margot, they mobilized others and killed any Frenchmen with whom they crossed paths, with hopes of gaining a pardon from the Spanish. The insurgents were blocked at the Borgne parish while raiding plantations for additional arms and supplies. *Boucaneers* commissioned by the governor eventually sought out the insurgents who then retreated to the mountains near Port-de-Paix and were found by French settlers' defensive units who were initially reluctant to engage. Padre Jean and six associates were killed, but many others fought their way back into Spanish territory, where they were received with impunity. Other runaways from French plantations in the west began running east to claim religious asylum.⁵⁶

Ongoing inter-imperial warfare fostered the seeds of rebellion among the enslaved. In 1689, the French fought against Spain, England, and parts of the Holy Roman Empire in a conflict known as the Nine Years War, and Española's western lands became a local scene as the Spanish and French embarked on a near-century-long struggle for control of the territory.⁵⁷ The French attacked the Spanish city of Santiago in 1690; and the next year, the Spanish retaliated by pillaging what would become Cap-Français and reinstating it into their territory. Between 1691 and 1695, Spanish and English forces penetrated as far west as Port-de-Paix, burning towns, capturing enslaved Africans, and taking them to San Lorenzo de los Negros de Minas.⁵⁸ Bondspeople owned by the French took advantage of the conflict and planned to rebel: in 1691, around Léogâne, 200 were implicated in a conspiracy to kill their owners and take over their plantations. Authorities executed two of the men involved on the breaking wheel and three others had their legs cut off.⁵⁹ November of 1691 saw another conspiracy in Port-de-Paix organized by Janot Marin and an 18-year-old Senegambian named George Dollo "Pierrot," who planned to rally others to leave the colony and go to war against their owners. With Marin at the head of seven, their plan was to assemble in Limonade and head to the Spanish territory. Once they left, the remaining slaves at Port-de-Paix would kill all the white men, women, and children of the parish and the rebels would be granted power over the district by the Spanish. Marin and Pierrot were assisted by a young white indentured servant, who later revealed the plot, and a bilingual, bi-racial man from the Spanish territory. The "*mûlatre* Espagnol," named Espion, was a spy who had been in communication with Marin and Pierrot for three months. Espion instructed the men to try to take over Port-de-Paix by convincing the blacks to leave, and, once the masses agreed, Marin and Pierrot would send a black lieutenant named Congre to Gonâve so the

Spanish could receive the news then descend on Cap Français. Upon arrival, the Spanish would relinquish control over Port-de-Paix to the black rebels. However, once the French learned of the impending Spanish attack, military aid was sent to galvanize troops from the northern districts who were then informed of the conspiracy to join the Spanish. Although it was nearly a successful attempt to exploit the fighting between French and Spanish forces during the Nine Years War, the plot failed, and a military tribunal sentenced Marin and Pierrot to be burned alive.⁶⁰

Others were more successful at using Spanish aggression to their benefit and they escaped to San Lorenzo de los Negros de Minas or other small towns near the capital city, Santo Domingo. Over 100 escaped in 1692, and 20 years later approximately 500 former enslaved Saint-Dominguans were still living in the Spanish lands. In May 1697, 300 enslaved people in Quartier Morin and Petite Anse organized an insurrection but were quickly disassembled, though it is not clear if this was another attempt by the Spanish to undermine French control of enslaved Africans in order to gain the upper hand in combat.⁶¹ Still, the Treaty of Ryswick was ratified in November 1697, ending the Nine Years War – but it would not be the last time enslaved people's uprisings and escapes were timed to exploit the ongoing French–Spanish conflict that created vacuums of power in Española's northeastern regions.

Another plot was uncovered in 1704, when M. de Charritte proclaimed that Africans near Le Cap were again planning to kill the local whites at the behest of Spanish agents.⁶² This conspiracy may have been connected to a maroon camp that formed in the mountains outside of Cap Français, where entire family units resided and organized incursions until 1704.⁶³ Acknowledging that rates of marronnage into Santo Domingo tended to be excessive during wartime, the Council of Léogâne issued a bounty for the government to pay 25 *piastres* for any person in Santo Domingo who could return a runaway, but this restitution was rarely paid. In February 1711, the king of France overruled the Council of Léogâne, stating that each planter had an individual responsibility to re-locate fugitives.⁶⁴ Still, government funds were used to help planters recoup costs associated with chasing runaways. Later, in May 1711, two runaways – Houx and Moussac – were killed, and their owners were compensated with six hundred *livres* each for their losses.⁶⁵ Even after the war ended, early eighteenth-century Saint Domingue had not yet fully formed into the proto-industrial sugar-producing powerhouse it would soon become and maroons seemed to have free rein of the colony,

prompting the creation of the *maréchaussée* fugitive slave police in 1721.⁶⁶ M. Dubois, the colonel commandant of Cul-de-Sac, reported mass desertions, to which militias were organized to capture the deserters in 1715 and 1717.⁶⁷ In July 1715, Dubois sent a convoy to Santo Domingo to re-capture runaways, but this search came up empty handed because the Spanish warned the escapees of the convoy's arrival.⁶⁸ The 1717 dispatch did discover a settlement that had a well that was 40 feet deep, presumably constructed by the fugitives to meet their needs for fresh water.⁶⁹

Runaways to the Spanish territory remained an issue and attempts to control them resulted in mixed outcomes. In 1718, the Spanish king gave an order to return to the French all the blacks who had taken refuge in Santo Domingo.⁷⁰ The French moved into Azua, with the commandant of Azua leading the charge. An expedition into the Baoruco mountains in 1719 resulted in the capture of a band leader and ritual healer named Michel, as well as other leaders in Maribaroux.⁷¹ In another case, runaways in Santo Domingo were rounded up for return to Saint-Domingue in 1719, but local Spaniards forcefully opposed this ruling and instead took the captives to San Lorenzo. By the late eighteenth century, San Lorenzo held some 300 free black inhabitants, all descendants of either kidnapped or runaway African Saint-Dominguans.⁷² Between 1721 and 1723, tensions between the Spanish king and his colonial officials were again exacerbated when the governor of Santo Domingo declared that he would no longer return French runaways to Saint-Domingue. In somewhat of a ploy, he wrote to French administrators that he had captured 128 runaways and that the colonists could come and retrieve them, so the French colonists sent a ship to the bay of Ocoa with two representatives onboard. The two agents went to Santo Domingo, but as the fugitives approached the boat the Spaniards changed their minds and gave arms to the Africans, who then revolted in a declaration that they were free. The two agents only narrowly escaped but later attempted to charge the Spanish crown for the sunk costs.⁷³ Aggression between the French and Spanish continued into the 1730s; in 1727, 15 Spaniards destroyed two French settlements in Trou-de-Jean-de-Nantes, Ouanminthe, and took with them some enslaved Africans.⁷⁴ Later, a group of Africans stole a boat and went to Santo Domingo, where they intermarried with members of the local population, and a colonial officer, LaGrange, was tasked with finding them and returning them to Saint-Domingue.⁷⁵ Despite the Treaty of Ryswick establishing the west as French territory in 1697, the presence and value of black people cast a stark relief onto the distinctions between

life, society, and slavery in the two colonies, making the border a hotly contested, politicized entity. Spanish incursions from the east continued until the 1770s, when a formal agreement in December 1777 finalized the final geographical boundaries between the two European colonies.⁷⁶

Maroons Making the Border

Geopolitical contestations between the French and Spanish starting in mainland Europe continued to spill across the Atlantic to the island of Española and caused conflicts between colonists, as well as rifts and misunderstandings between colonists and their respective royal governments. These struggles centered on competition for land, resources, and enslaved people, whose very presence and collective actions to self-liberate further ignited and shaped inter-imperial contestations over the border, and shaped the border itself. The decrease of sugar production in Santo Domingo did not stem the desire for outputs like those occurring in Saint-Domingue, leading envious Spanish planters to take advantage of Saint-Domingue's deadly labor regimes and harsh punishments for maroons by luring or kidnapping enslaved people from plantations during raids from the east. Spaniards attempted to drive away several planters from Bassin-Cayman, Dondon in 1741, and in 1747 they kidnapped five blacks and a plantation overseer from Marre-a-la-Roche, Dondon.⁷⁷ When Port-au-Prince was founded in 1749 and sugar production increasingly spread in its suburban areas, economic development in the areas surrounding the city and the Cul-de-Sac region pushed Saint-Domingue's boundaries eastward, and maroons who had been in these border regions found themselves at the center of conflicts between French and Spanish authorities.⁷⁸ As in previous decades, a major concern of Saint-Domingue colonists was that enslaved Africans were continuing to take advantage of geographic proximity to the Spanish territory as a channel for escape. African Saint-Dominguans had an incentive to do so since Spanish codes held several provisions that allowed for manumission from enslavement and, at times, the establishment of free black towns such as San Lorenzo de los Negros de Minas.

In October 1751, the militia commander of Mirebalais received a substantial budget from colonial authorities to chase runaways into Santo Domingo. The commander, Bremond, had at his disposal 300 *livres* for every captured runaway, a high-ranking militia officer, and as many *maréchaussée* archers as he could pay himself.⁷⁹ According to Spanish officials, some 3,000 runaways from Saint-Domingue had escaped to

Santo Domingo, or the Baoruco mountains more specifically, in 1751 alone.⁸⁰ A good number of these perhaps escaped after the earthquake on November 21 of that year that almost destroyed Port-au-Prince.⁸¹ Spanish planters likely welcomed these refugees to provide additional labor due to the lack of plantation-based economic growth in the island's eastern regions. While Saint-Domingue's enslaved population grew exponentially in the eighteenth century, Santo Domingo's reached a maximum of 15,000 in 1789, a far cry from its neighbor to the west. Though there was growing industry toward the end of the century, Santo Domingo had essentially become a sparsely populated "backwater" colony of the Spanish empire.⁸² Spanish colonists' desires for land and black workers continued to manifest as aggression over the border – they burned four plantations in Ravines-a-Mûlatres in Valière in 1757 after warning the planters to abandon the settlements.⁸³

While island-dwelling Spanish colonists irritated relations with their French neighbors, during the 1760s, the Spanish crown offered collaborative support regarding Saint-Domingue's problem of runaways. A letter from the king of Spain on October 18, 1760, revealed that the primary cause for marronnage was the harsh treatment enacted by French planters, who had not held to their agreement to stop punishing deserters.⁸⁴ Yet, Spanish colonists again undermined Saint-Domingue's attempts to regulate its runaway problem when on May 22, 1764, the governor of Santo Domingo, Don Manuel d'Azlor, proposed that Saint-Domingue model San Lorenzo de los Negros de Minas and build its own free settlements to house runaways.⁸⁵ Spanish attitudes toward re-settling fugitives may have incentivized more runaways from Saint Domingue, resulting in another expedition in pursuit of fugitives into the Spanish territory on August 21, 1764.⁸⁶ In February 1765, the Saint-Domingue colonial governor, Comte d'Estaing, declared a state of alert, mandating that all colonists were required to be armed at all times with guns, bayonets, gunpowder, sabers, and machetes or swords. Further, he ordered that fugitive-chasing militias would be comprised of *gens du couleur* and free black *affranchis*.⁸⁷ One year later, a treaty was established between d'Azlor and Rohan, general governor of Saint-Domingue, to return all maroons, thieves, and absent-without-leave soldiers, and to stop the sale of goods by merchants who passed through Bete à Cornes without legal right.⁸⁸ The 1766 treaty also stated that any Santo Domingo planter would be fined 50 *livres* for harboring fugitives or kidnapped Africans. The two colonial forces also decided to cooperate to chase maroons in the mountains.⁸⁹ This agreement suggests that despite

ongoing negotiations between the two royal representatives, Spanish planters continued use Saint-Dominguan runaways as labor and as trading partners – meaning that maroons played an active role in orchestrating relations between the two colonies as they attempted to concretize and manage the border.

The Spanish and French royal and colonial governments were conjoined by shared interests in enslaving and preventing maroons from dominating areas that bordered the two colonies. Yet, their common goals did not reach the local level, where planters from Santo Domingo continued to antagonize Saint-Domingue planters over land and slaves. In 1769, Don Nicholas de Montenegro, commander of St. Raphael in Santo Domingo, renewed aggression against Saint-Domingue when he kidnapped a Dondon planter and four black captives and took them to Santo Domingo until 1771, when the planter paid a ransom to the king of Spain. Spanish planters continued to violate the 1766 agreement and stake claim to French lands in Saint-Domingue, again in the parish of Dondon. Montenegro gave a French *mûlatre* permission to settle in Dondon in March 1771, but 50 Spanish men arrived in May, kidnapping the plantation overseer and a black woman, then burning down several plantations. In retaliation, an armed force went into Santo Domingo and kidnapped nine blacks and an overseer without damaging any property. Negotiations to return each set of hostages ensued, and the French agreed to return portions of Dondon to the Spaniards.⁹⁰ Interestingly, over twenty years later, on the night of October 10 or 11 in 1789, nine men and four women, all Kongolese, escaped to Saint-Domingue from their owner, Montenegro, the commander of St. Raphael.⁹¹ These maroons may have been the kidnapped slaves who chose to return to Saint-Domingue, perhaps due to its familiarity or kinship ties they may have formed. In either case, these maroons and people enslaved along the border were both subjects and agents of the border's creation.

Despite these local spats, Spanish colonial forces adhered to their earlier agreements and sent convoys into the border region to search for runaways, and the French continued to establish militias to retrieve the numerous maroons from the Spanish territory.⁹² In 1770, a group of 13 runaways from Saint Domingue were captured in the countryside along the border and then interrogated in the city of Santo Domingo. Six were from the Loango Coast, identifying as Kongo and Mondongo. Several knew their French owners, while others were recently arrived and could not speak Spanish or French. An unbranded African named Bucu did not know how long he had been in the colony because he had escaped

toward the east immediately after leaving the slave ship. This indicates that the political strife over the Spanish–French border was not lost on even the most recently arrived Africans, who used the contestation to their benefit.⁹³ By 1775, some 15,000 maroons were believed to be in Santo Domingo.⁹⁴ Africans’ knowledge of the eastward haven did not go unnoticed; the French government created a commission in January 1776 to search for runaways “who passed daily into Spanish Santo Domingo,” providing compensation per fugitive recovered.⁹⁵

Some maroons who fled Saint-Domingue for Santo Domingo blended into colonial society, either farming, working for local Spanish planters, or residing in San Lorenzo de los Negros de Minas. Others joined established maroon communities who operated outside the sphere of both colonial societies and antagonized plantations in Saint-Domingue and Santo Domingo. In Saint-Domingue’s western department at Béate – a small island that forms a sound with Baoruco and Anse-a-Pitre in Cayes de Jacmel – maroon bands’ attacks on plantations in the 1770s prompted a renewed struggle between the French and Spanish to defeat the maroons. The Council of Léogâne had already increased *maréchaussée* presence in the south in 1705, 1729, and 1741. Yet as the numbers of troops increased, so did the number of runaways. Administrators sent a detachment to Fond-Parisien in Croix-des-Bouquets on February 19, 1771, and another group was sent to Grands-Bois in Mirebalais on May 19, 1774. On February 8, 1775, there was an ordinance to build a town in Croix-des-Bouquets and a sheriff with several mounted police were assigned to Fond-Parisien, Roche-Blance, and Grand-Bois. These troops were ineffective in preventing raids from runaway bands, and on October 13, 1776, another dispatch arrived at Boucan Patate because the maroons destroyed a newly built guardhouse. Though this offensive was somewhat successful, resulting in rebel deaths between Fond-Parisien and Grand-Bois as far south as Sale Trou, maroon militaristic strategy bewildered Spanish and French forces. The colonial militias were not as adept at navigating the mountains as the maroons, who for generations had deployed the mountains as part of their geography of subversion.

Two months later, in December 1776, a full-scale collaborative offensive between the French and Spanish – numbering 180 men and costing 80,000 *livres* – launched from Croix-des-Bouquets against the maroons in the Baoruco mountains. But by January 1777, the expedition was struggling to enter the dense forest and was running out of energy, food, drink, and supplies; troops were even reduced to drinking their own urine in order to survive. While some retreated to Port-au-Prince for provisions,

the rest went south to Cayes and sent a boat of 100 men to Béate, where Spanish guides suggested there were maroon settlements based in the caves. When the boat arrived, the maroons had temporarily disappeared. That spring, the maroons re-appeared, initiating a counter-attack at Fond-Parisien – back in Croix-des-Bouquets where the expedition had begun. The rebel bands attacked Boucan-Greffin in May 1777 and again in November 1778, this time kidnapping an enslaved domestic worker named Anne from the Coupe property. On December 15, 1778, another detachment was sent to Boucan-Greffin in Croix-des-Bouquets, where a brigade of eight archers and two corporals were lodged at Sieur Coupe's property to protect him. While in the hands of her captives, Anne was coerced into marrying a rebel leader named Kebinda, perhaps a BaKongo man named after the port city Cabinda. However, before the nuptials started, she convinced Kebinda to take her to a church where she was recovered by Spanish officials.⁹⁶

Once divided by maroons who took up arms for the Spanish against the French, collaborations on expeditions in pursuit of maroons united the two colonial forces and pushed them to an agreement on the contours of the geopolitical landscape and the treatment of future maroons. After a year of negotiation, on June 3, 1777, Saint-Domingue and Santo Domingo ratified the Treaty of Aranjuez to finally settle the geographical limits of the boundary between the two colonies. One of the central parts of that treaty concerned the treatment of maroons who abandoned Saint-Domingue for the Spanish countryside and mountain ranges. The two nations again agreed to collaborate on pursuits, since maroons were considered a threat to both colonies, and that the French would give compensation of 12 *livres* for returning runaways.⁹⁷ But, Saint-Dominguan runaways, and perhaps also kidnapped enslaved people, continued to disregard the agreements between the French and Spanish authorities by making new lives for themselves in Santo Domingo. In January 1778, the Intendant of Saint-Domingue suggested that there needed to be concern and consensus about the price of return for runaways who were married and living in the Spanish territory, and in the rare case that Spanish blacks were caught in Saint-Domingue as runaways, they would not be sold in the cities but kept in jails separate from other absconders.⁹⁸ Colonists' fear of maroons from Saint-Domingue and Santo Domingo possibly co-mingling indicates their conscious awareness that maroons collaborated in manipulating inter-imperial relations and persuaded each other to rebel. Over the course of three centuries, maroons forced French and Spanish colonists to expend energy, time,

and resources toward finalizing the border between Saint-Domingue and Santo Domingo. Colonists were ineffective at using the border to maintain separate societal spheres and control over the respective enslaved populations, and therefore turned to other policies that they hoped, incorrectly, would placate the enslaved and prevent further rebellion.

While the Spanish actively sought to expand the slave trade in its Caribbean and South American territories, they aimed to do so according to customs and codes that governed the treatment of enslaved people throughout the empire. The *Code Noir* was the envy of the Spanish Empire and was perceived as an important source of Saint-Domingue's economic prosperity. In 1785, a year after the French king issued a royal decree aimed to ameliorate conditions in Saint-Domingue, the Spanish similarly issued the Carolinian Slave Code for Santo Domingo. Included in the Code were provisions for learning Catholicism, the right to a small plot of land for personal cultivation, several conditions for slaves to earn their freedom, and the right to marry. In response to this new code, it seems that the number of runaways from Saint-Domingue into the east was increasing. Moreau de Saint-Méry, writing from Cayes de Jacmel, claimed that raids in this area stopped after 1785, but as Chapter 8 will explain, later incursions and conflicts with the Maniel maroons would prove this to be false.⁹⁹ In 1788, the Marquis de Najac wrote to a former governor of Saint-Domingue essentially accusing the governor of allowing the maroon problem to grow: "during your administration, over four thousand slaves fled into Spanish territory; since your departure, the Spanish hardly returned any of them, and I am convinced that there are now six thousand in the Spanish colony."¹⁰⁰ Saint-Dominguan planters and traveling merchants also attested to growing unrest among their slaves in October 1789 because of circulating rumors that the Spanish were again giving refuge to runaways.¹⁰¹ This may reflect local interpretations of the 1789 Spanish code Royal Instructors for the Education, Trade, and Work of Slaves, which limited punishments to no more than 25 strokes of the whip and threatened punishments to owners who caused serious injury, blood loss, or mutilation.¹⁰² However, these policies were not qualitatively distinct from those that existed in Saint-Domingue, and the 1789 *Real Cedula* was not actually promulgated in Santo Domingo.¹⁰³ Whereas there once may have been a perception among runaways that Santo Domingo was a safer space due to its underdeveloped plantation economy, the changing circumstances in which Spain now aimed to reinvigorate its agricultural production and slave-holding practices meant that the Bourbon colony might no longer be considered a

haven for Saint-Domingue's maroons. After centuries of exploiting the border as a geography of subversion, new Spanish policies attempted to bolster Santo Domingo as a geography of containment.

CONCLUSION

Geographic proximity to what was perceived as a less-hostile colony, Santo Domingo, was a critical component of Saint-Domingue's context. Though *Les Affiches américaines* advertisements only indicate 80 runaways headed east over the 26-year publication span, other primary sources paint a very different picture: one in which, for several decades, streams of Saint-Domingue's enslaved labor force made their way to Santo Domingo with the implicit and explicit welcome of the Spanish. On the other hand, it would not be unlikely that planters exaggerated their losses to obtain financial compensation from the royal or colonial governments. Further, the overwhelming majority black population in Saint-Domingue kept white residents at a heightened level of anxiety about a possible revolt – especially when the colony was most vulnerable during periods of war. Whites feared a looming maroon presence and often requested reinforcements to protect plantations from fugitives who returned to steal goods, food, weapons, tools, or to bring others to freedom. It is difficult, if not impossible, to quantify the actual number of runaways in the colony due to the failure of some plantation managers to report fugitive advertisements. Additionally, we do not know the numbers of children that maroon women birthed while living in self-liberated zones – though it is highly likely that they had more children than enslaved women.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, it is a challenging task to determine how much of planters' anxieties were justified. On the other hand, corroborating contemporary sources about rogue fugitive bands can help fill in the picture about the nature and scope of marronnage in Saint-Domingue.

When considering the complex geographic and geopolitical history of marronnage in Saint-Domingue and its neighbor Santo Domingo, it is no mystery why the Spanish were eager to support the revolutionary forces of 1791 led by Georges Biassou and Jean-François Papillon, himself a maroon. African collective action through marronnage had long helped shape Saint Domingue's colonial landscape and inter-imperial relations well before 1791. In the same way that structures of domination and counterhegemonic practices co-exist and grapple with each other in ongoing dialectal processes, the maroon presence was equally as

pervasive as the reach of the plantocracy. Maroons hid in plain sight in urban areas and created spaces for themselves in geographically difficult areas. Not only was their presence a reality, but their collective impact on the colonial order was undeniable. Maroon domination and agency marked locations that were re-named to reflect histories of rebellion. Moreover, marronnage pushed the boundaries of empire by forcing French colonists to reckon with their Spanish neighbors, giving insight to the ways in which subaltern intentionality impacts social and the spatial structural processes.