Amazon Assessment Report 2021

Chapter 13

African Presence in the Amazon: A Glance

Foto: Amazon Conservation Team

THE AMAZON WE WANT

Science Panel for the Amazon

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS NETWORK

A GLOBAL INITIATIVE FOR THE UNITED NATIONS

About the Science Panel for the Amazon (SPA)

The Science Panel for the Amazon is an unprecedented initiative convened under the auspices of the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN). The SPA is composed of over 200 preeminent scientists and researchers from the eight Amazonian countries, French Guiana, and global partners. These experts came together to debate, analyze, and assemble the accumulated knowledge of the scientific community, Indigenous peoples, and other stakeholders that live and work in the Amazon.

The Panel is inspired by the Leticia Pact for the Amazon. This is a first-of-its-kind Report which provides a comprehensive, objective, open, transparent, systematic, and rigorous scientific assessment of the state of the Amazon's ecosystems, current trends, and their implications for the long-term well-being of the region, as well as opportunities and policy relevant options for conservation and sustainable development.

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Graphical Abstract

Figure 13.A From the 15th century, a significant exchange of biodiversity took place between Europe, Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas. This is known as the Columbian Exchange. Paying attention to this type of interchange between tropical regions is central to conservation strategies. Exchanges between tropical regions of Africa and tropical regions of America were more extensive and complex in terms of genetic resources and knowledge than those between other regions with less biodiversity. Indeed, people, merchandise, culture, genetic material, and ideas traveled back and forth between slave ports on the western coast of Africa and many different tropical regions of the Americas: the Caribbean, the northern and western coasts of South America, and the eastern coast of South America. These routes were direct or indirect paths into the Amazon region.

This image focuses on one portion of the Columbian Exchange: Africa's contribution to the tropical regions of the Americas. African knowledge played a very important role in terms of the adaptation of African biodiversity in the Americas. In fact, one of the main purposes of Chapter 13 is to shine a light on the role Indigenous knowledge from tropical regions in Africa played in tropical regions of the Americas, as underlined by many prominent scholars. Therefore, the image portrays plant and animal species and human activities representing knowledge and beliefs of African Indigenous peoples traveling on slave ships to the tropical regions in the Americas.

The species in the image are a small example of the wide range of Africa's biodiversity brought on slave ships in order to survive the Atlantic crossing. Most of them became part of the New World's societies and everyday life. Upon their arrival, African domestic animal and plant species needed to adapt to the conditions and contexts of the New World. Both slaves and Maroons developed very biodiverse livelihood systems so that the aforementioned could adapt and survive to new conditions. The Graphical Abstract portrays contributions including knowledge of ecosystem management and biodiversity; food and medicinal plant species (H, I, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R and S); domestic animals (J); agricultural techniques and practices (A, B, E); belief systems and nature (D); Construction,

handcrafts, and culinary practices (C, F, G and I), and of course, music. These are African peoples' assets for resilience in the Americas. Many of these assets are today part of Latin American culture. Resilience practices of African slaves and Maroon peoples were extensively nourished by Indigenous Peoples' knowledge from tropical regions in the Americas. Moreover, in agricultural systems on both continents, a mixture of agrobiodiversity from tropical regions in Africa and tropical regions in the Americas is found. The African legacy in the tropical regions of the Americas is as vast as it is bitter.

A. Agricultural knowledge; B. Pestle (heavy club-shaped object); C. Pottery and carving traditions; D. Sacred drums and musical instruments; E. Old African tools; F. House construction and roofing; G. Traditional weaving; H. Coffee nuts; I. Jollof rice; J. Goats, sheep and cattle; K. Kola nut; L. Hibiscus; M. Pearl millet (*Pennisetum glaucum*); N. Watermelon (*Citrullus lanatus*); O. African rice (*Oriza glaberrima*); P. Black-eyed pea; Q. Spices; R. okra (*Abelmoschus esculentus*).

African presence in the Amazon: A glance

Martha Cecilia Rosero-Peña[a]*

Key Messages

- African enslaved people arrived in the Americas from tropical regions where they had managed ecosystems and engaged in agriculture and the domestication of species for millennia. Slave ships not only transported enslaved African Indigenous people and genetic resources such as plants and livestock, but the people also brought with them critical knowledge about the adaptation of species for agriculture and livestock in the Americas. Many species found in the daily diets of American societies are of African origin. This knowledge has contributed to positive transformations of tropical landscapes in the Americas.
- A commonly overlooked element in the history of the Amazon concerns the presence and roles of peoples of African origin in the region. Research work on the contribution of the Afro-descendant population to the Americas has been more prolific in non-Spanish speaking countries.
- The history of the peoples of African origin in the Amazon offers contributions to research that can support conservation policies. It is central to support research vis-à-vis biodiversity, languages, ecosystem management, and techniques. Afro-descendant communities inhabiting the Amazon region are strategic actors in the conservation of tropical rainforests, biodiversity, ecosystems, watersheds, and sustainable agriculture.
- Livelihood systems of Afro-descendant peoples are highly biodiverse in terms of the species and ecosystems involved. Scientists consider the management carried out by Afro-descendants in various forested regions of tropical regions in the Americas, such as the Amazon, to be very positive in terms of landscape transformation.
- There are significant differences between the eastern and western regions of South America in terms of the general perception of the Afro-descendant presence in the Amazon. One reason could be the geographic location of the Amazon relative to the locations where Spain, Portugal, and Holland founded cities and built ports on the coasts of South America. In Brazil and Suriname, slave ships were disembarked in ports and cities that facilitated direct entry to the Amazon region. In the Spanish Empire, slave ships supplied enslaved Africans and merchandise to economic activities and populations placed in regions located from the Andes mountain range to the west. In the case of the western region of South America, reaching the Amazon requires crossing the Andes. Regions to the east of the Andes were considered wild areas not in control of the imperial authorities, in which Maroons and those who fled from the law took refuge.
- Colonial stereotypes still play a central role in the perception of the Afro-descendant population in South America, especially in the western Amazon. Stereotypes and racism are reflected in public policy, the exclusion of these groups from society, and their expulsion from the tropical forest they inhabit ancestrally.

Abstract

This chapter aims to advance understanding of the history of peoples of African origin in the Amazon and other tropical regions of the Americas. There is an emphasis on patterns of settlement and traditions of

[a] Center for Latin American Studies. Tropical Conservation and Development Program, University of Florida (UF), U.S, mcrosero@ufl.edu, enerosero@gmail.com

natural resource use and management during the two main periods in the history of African peoples in these regions: slavery and the post-abolition or freedom periods. It draws on two foundational approaches that 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 centers on three countries: Brazil, Suriname, and Colombia. Geographic and sociological explanations for the invisibility of peoples of African descent in both academic research and policy 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 descendant peoples. Finally, people of African descent should be considered one of the key actors for developing conservation strategies. It is essential to include them in scientific research and development policy approaches for the Amazonian region.

Keywords: Peoples 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

13.1 Introduction

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

This chapter recounts the story of Afro-descendants enslaved in tropical regions in the Americas, particularly the Amazon. It adopts a social and environmental historical perspective as well as a cultural exchange approach. These perspectives make it possible to focus on how people of African origin contributed to sustainable management practices in different phases of adaptation to tropical landscapes. We review the history of these populations in the Amazon during two key phases: the slavery period, when they were either forced to work on plantations or escaped into forests and created Maroon societies; and the post-abolition or liberation period, when Afro-descendant people gained access to natural resources and exercised greater freedom and autonomy.

The chapter employs both socio-environmental historical and cultural exchange approaches to show how Afro-descendant populations have pursued sustainable resource management in regions of high biological diversity, such as the Amazon. Although other cultural groups, such as Indigenous peoples, have similarly contributed sustainable management practices, peoples of African origin have made a distinct contribution by drawing on traditions and religious beliefs from their ancestral territories (Cabrera 1954). Crucial to understanding the practices of African origin peoples in the Amazon and elsewhere in the American tropics have been multiple strands of thought in Afro-Latin American studies, in which the work carried out by Afro scholars and activists have been central. Such research work calls attention to the contributions of African origin peoples to sustainable resource management in the Amazon (Cabrera 1954; Brandon 1991; Arocha 1998; Carney and Acevedo Marín 2003; Garcia and Walsh 2017; Oliva 2017).

The chapter discusses the routes of the slave trade,

linking origin sites with destination sites in tropical regions of the Americas. Highlighting ports of arrival is key to making sense of the migration of African origin groups to and within different countries that share the Amazon Basin. There is a particular focus on three countries in the Amazon Basin to which African slaves were taken: Brazil, Colombia, and Suriname. Slave ships forcibly embarked Africans, mainly along the culturally and ecologically diverse tropical coast of West Africa. Consequently, slave ships transported Africans of different ethnic groups with diverse systems of knowledge, culture, and spirituality. The Middle Passage across the Atlantic was a daunting test of survival for enslaved Africans (Carney and Rosomoff 2009). Those who survived brought deep knowledge and broad expertise in the management of tropical habitats. Similar to Indigenous societies of the Amazon, Africans often came from rainforest regions and had their own long-standing pools of knowledge, spiritual beliefs, and profound experiences that they then applied. Moreover, slave ships transported diverse African plant biota, which later became part of the economy and diets of New World societies, in a great measure owing to the know-how of people of African origin (Wood 1996; Carney and Rosomoff 2009; Van Andel 2010)

The second part of this chapter focuses on the knowledge and practices of enslaved people, especially on the natural resource management strategies of African-origin peoples, emphasizing how agroecological practices allowed them to adapt to new ecosystems and thereby sustain themselves. Agroecological strategies were applied both by enslaved African origin groups as well as by Maroon communities of slaves who escaped. In both situations, Afro-descendants used agricultural strategies in which they imitated forest vegetation strata with diversified crops and incorporated agrobiodiversity among specific crops, which permitted adaptation to new tropical environments, including the Amazon. As a result, Maroon settlements in various parts of the Americas are considered refuges for high biodiversity, owing to local knowledge, rituals, and practices (Carney and Voeks 2003; Legrás 2016; Carney 2020). Populations of African origin have made a significant contribution to sustainable resource management practices in the Amazon by drawing on traditional practices from tropical ecosystems in Africa and adapting them to tropical ecosystems in the Americas. Besides, traditional African religions, their social values, and rules have played a central role in natural resource management. Although peoples of African origin adapted their belief systems in the Americas, the intrinsic bond between individuals, society, and nature inherited from Africa continues as the foundation of the spiritual rules constructed in the diaspora (Eneji *et al.* 2012; Ekeopara and Ekpenyong 2016)

While African origin peoples made important contributions to knowledge about sustainable resource management practices in the Amazon during the colonial period, in the 19th century, and despite the liberation of slaves, white racism and societal segregation persisted. The result was that hegemonic white society ignored African origin contributions to sustainable management. In terms of African religion, beliefs were considered witchcraft, condemned, and ostracized by the Catholic Church. Furthermore, western science also ignored these contributions, as it was similarly dominated by whites. This helps explain the obscurity into which African origin contributions fell, an obscurity from which they are now being rescued, notably by Afro-Latin American scholars.

Afro-descendant communities have navigated this socio-political environment since the laws to abolish slavery were enacted. Humid tropical forests continued to be an alternative livelihood for Afro peoples in the post-slavery period (Leal 2004; Leal and Van Ausdal 2014; De-Torre 2018). Carney (2020) warns us about the return of the plantation era, which is evident today in countries such as Brazil and Colombia. Humid tropical forests that were once considered unhealthy and unproductive by dominant Latin American societies are today being destroyed by conventional agriculture. At the same time, western societies are forcibly displacing Afro and Indigenous peoples from their ancestral territories in many rainforest regions. In con-

trast, biodiverse ecosystems in the Amazon and elsewhere in the tropics of the Americas could be sustainably managed by recognizing the agroecological practices of peoples of African origin. The "Plantationocene" threatens biodiverse ecosystems such as those in the Amazon, as well as the cultures that could sustainably manage them (Carney 2020).

Throughout the text, this chapter highlights central messages that make evident several gaps of information and research on the African presence in the Amazon to inform effective policy design. Lechini (2008) asserts that ignoring Afro-descendants in scientific research on the social, cultural, and history of Ibero-American countries is an incomplete task. This chapter adds to this assertion the need to include the environment, agroecology, and management of tropical ecosystems in this equation. Therefore, research studies to inform conservation policy need an interdisciplinary perspective that identifies and takes the contributions of African populations into account. An interdisciplinary approach in research should consider the differentiated perspective as a path to understand and include the singularities of African descent in the Amazon region.

The need to support research vis-à-vis biodiversity, languages, ecosystem management, and techniques in contexts of Afro-descendant communities allow for better understanding of livelihood strategies and the associated relational ontological knowledge. Besides, it is essential to include Afro-Latin American scholarship in research and policy design, particularly that of Afro-Latin American scholars, to gain a broad understanding of the African descent social group and the current situation they face in the region. Furthermore, a better understanding of the contributions of Afro-descendants to tropical America requires promoting research on non-English-speaking countries of the basin where research on Afro-Amazonian peoples is very incipient. Efforts to consider African descent as key actors for the conservation of regions like the Amazon would be uncertain and sterile if they do not count and include the Afro-descendants themselves and their own research interests.

On the other hand, considering Afro-Amazonian groups as strategic actors for conservation, sustainable development, and governance is a challenging task in countries of the Amazon Basin. African descent communities have been invisible in Latin American society and government programs. A pernicious myth that Afro-descendant and even Indigenous groups are incapable of making decisions persists today. The above-mentioned differential approach is a pathway to address structural racism and inequality since it takes into account the cultural diversity of the Amazon.

13.2 The presence and roles of peoples of African descent in tropical regions of the Americas: An interdisciplinary crossroads

The ideas proposed in this chapter are located at the interdisciplinary crossroads between the sociological, historical, and environmental aspects related to the management of biodiversity and the livelihoods of Afro-descendant societies in the Amazon. Specifically, the chapter explores the contribution to agrobiodiversity and the management of tropical contexts by African Peoples who arrived in the Amazonian regions of Brazil, Colombia, and Suriname. Two frameworks enable this interdisciplinary approach; firstly, the cultural exchange perspective developed by major scholars whose research offers crucial clues to track the agrobiodiversity of enslaved Africans in the Americas. This perspective can also support the contribution of freed Afro-descendants to their continent of origin. Secondly, there is the socio-historical perspective in the post-slavery era, which helps us illustrate the ability of peoples of African origin to manage natural ecosystems and the changes they implemented in search of their livelihoods. These groups have struggled to sustain themselves culturally, socially, and economically without the resources from fair reparation after the abolition of slavery.

13.2.1 Slave traffic, ports of arrival, and entry into the Amazon

This section presents some regions of origin of enslaved Africans and the ports where slave ships were disembarked in South America. The chapter focuses on three countries to illustrate differences in African descent presence in the Amazon region: Colombia, Suriname, and Brazil. Colombia represents the western Amazonian countries, in which there is less perception of the African presence in the Amazon. Nevertheless, Colombia has Afro-descendant communities. In addition, the Colombian Constitution recognizes the collective character of the Afro territories and can facilitate local governance and self-determination. Brazil and Suriname are countries with significant African-descent populations in the Amazon. Slave ships were disembarked at the gates of the Amazon region, and many enslaved Africans managed to run away. Currently, there are multiple Maroon communities with organization processes inhabiting and managing various ecosystems in the tropical rainforest. Additionally, this chapter considers some central elements that mediate commercial dynamics on both sides of South America, which have played a role in the internal migration and the arrival of slaves to the Amazon region (Borucki 2009; O'Malley and Borucki 2017).

During the 400 years that the African slave trade lasted, more than 80,000 trips were made and approximately 12.5 million people were transported, mainly in the hands of Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands (Eltis 2001 p. 42; Romero 2017). Europeans sourced their human merchandise along the west coast of Africa in the countries that are now known as Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Angola, Ghana, and Guinea. They named the west coast of Africa the "Slave Coast" (Figure 13.1). At the end of the 18th century, slave traffic increased to fifteen thousand African people per year (Miller 1989).

It is important to highlight the role of both the maritime slave market and the dense network of trafficking within South America, which included multiple routes, trans-shipments, and transactions between merchants. These commercial dynamics directly or indirectly affected the arrival of slaves in the Amazon region, especially in western South America. O'Malley and Borucki (2017) underscore the importance of the initial disembarkation of African captives in the New World to understand the internal slave trade within South America. An African person reaching his or her final destination can be considered a survivor of the transatlantic slave trade odyssey. During this journey, a person was sold and bought several times within the dense traffic network, which included different ports in the Caribbean islands and multiple slave traders and intermediaries such as the Dutch, English, French, and Danish. As the countless transactions were taking place, an enslaved person faced extremely drastic situations including hunger, malnutrition, diseases, injuries, beatings, and abuse of all kinds (Newson and Minchin 2007). In addition, depending on the landing ports and destinations within South America, enslaved people were forced to march for several days through the diverse geography, enduring extreme climates such as the cold of the Andes. The journey within South America depended on many variables such as geography, the ruling empire and its laws, demand for labor, and transportation costs. To meet the demand for slave labor in western South America, the voyage of an enslaved person could also include overland journeys down the Pacific Coast (Maya 1998; O'Malley and Borucki 2017).

13.2.2 Advancing within South America

Spanish and Portuguese domination of South America influenced both the empires' incursion into the Amazon and the arrival of people of African origin. According to Granero (1992), Spanish incursion towards the Amazon was not as decisive and direct as that of the Portuguese in Brazil, or the Dutch, French, and English in the Northern Amazon.

13.2.2.1 Colombia and Panama: Indirect arrival in the Amazon region

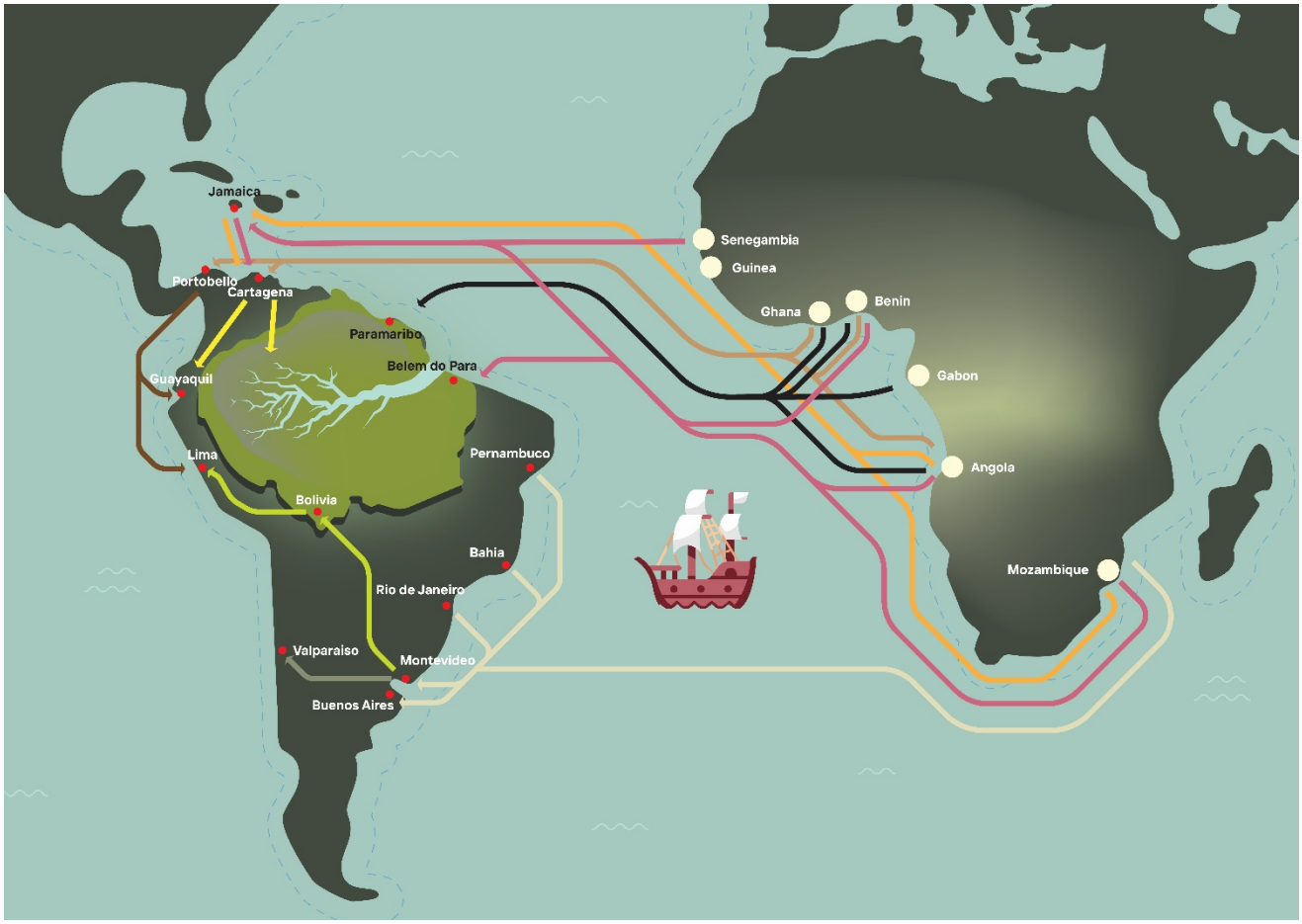

Figure 13.1 Slave Trade routes and main ports of disembarkment in South America.

In 1717, the Spanish crown founded the Viceroyalty of New Granada. This territorial entity facilitated both access to the western part of South America and also the navigation of two oceans, the Atlantic and Pacific. Furthermore, this geographical position gave Spain access to the Amazon via northwestern South America and the Andean Mountain range to the East.

On the other hand, there were several central routes for the transportation of enslaved Africans and merchandise to both western and eastern South America (see Figure 13.1). One route was from the ports of Cartagena de Indias in present-day Colombia, and Portobello in present-day Panama, to Guayaquil (Ecuador) and Lima (Perú) (Klein 1993; Maya 1998). The overland route from Cartagena to the southern regions used the navigability of large rivers such as the Magdalena and Atrato, along which merchants landed their human merchandise. Many captives were taken to the densely forested regions of northern Colombia (See box 13.1). Many enslaved people reached the region parallel to the Pacific Ocean. Others walked to the south throughout Colombia and arrived in Quito. Some other enslaved people had to walk along the Andes to Peru (Maya 1998; Romero 2017; O'Malley and Borucki 2017). In the middle of the 17th Century, Cartagena de Indias was already the main slave port in all of Hispanic America (Maya 1998 p. 7). The largest supply of slaves that entered through the Colombian port of Cartagena came from Benin, Angola, Ghana, and Guinea. The main ethnic groups were the Ararats, Lucumí, Zape,

Angola, Congo, Viafara, Cambindo, Matambas, Carabalí, and Popó. Romero (2017) mentions that Africans kept the names of their ethnic groups and places of origin as surnames.

A route to transport African people to the southern Amazon and to other regions controlled by the Spanish used the South Atlantic Ocean merchant networks from Mozambique to Montevideo and Buenos Aires (Silva da Silva and Costa Barbosa 2020). Then, according to O'Malley and Borucki (2017), the Spanish made enslaved Africans march through the Rio de la Plata region to reach the Andean Mountain range in Upper Peru (today's Bolivia). Slaves often marched to Peruvian coastal markets and Valparaiso in Chile (O'Malley and Borucki 2017).

The journeys of enslaved people within South America have been very poorly recorded by historians. Furthermore, the arrival of enslaved people to the eastern Andes forest region and their participation in subsequent waves of migration to the Amazon has been minimally addressed in the literature. Renard-Casevitz *et al.* (1988) conducted an interethnic study on the first two centuries of Spanish colonization from the Ecuadorian Andes to the Bolivian Andes and the border with the eastern mountain jungles. The study reveals the presence of a population of African origin fulfilling various roles; colonial chronicles mention groups of Africans with the Spanish contingents loading cannons and opening roads. They also mention slaves searching for gold, working on sugar plantations, and participating in revolts with the Masiguenga Indigenous group from Peru. Scholars also underline the presence of settlements of Maroon blacks in the Amazonian foothills. During the early period of colonization, the border between the Andes and jungle regions such as the Amazon was not only ecological, but also epistemic; Castro-Gómez (2010) mentions the concept of an Andean region where civilization flourished in contrast to the natural and cultural savagery of the Amazon.

The mission to bring civilization and salvation that has been carried out since the early times of Spanish colonization was also carried out in Colombia. In Putumayo, blacks played a central role in the foundation of Mocoa. Despite the presence of African descent people and the evidence of *palenques* in the western Amazon of Colombia, study of the Afro population in this region is very new. Evidence of the presence of African descent people in the western Amazon Basin since colonial times merits anthropological, ecological, and sociological research lines similar to those that have been carried out in the eastern region of South America and the Caribbean, which allow comparative studies.

13.2.2.2 Brazil and Suriname: Direct arrival in the Amazon region

By the mid-1600s, the Dutch established their colony in the northeast of South America. Between the late 17th century and the beginning of the 18th Century, Curaçao was an important Atlantic center, from which shipments of slaves went to the Dutch colony of Suriname (O'Malley and Borucki 2017). An estimated 300,000 Africans arrived in Suriname as slaves, from regions between southern Gabon and northern Angola, Ghana, and Benin, mainly to work in sugar plantations.

The cruelty of Dutch masters caused many slaves to escape and take refuge in the dense Amazonian jungle. In fact, Thompson (2006) argues that sugar-producing countries had the most brutal labor histories and the most Maroon communities. Maroon communities in Suriname are different and have their own culture and language; these groups fought for freedom for about a century and managed to establish autonomous territories within dense tropical rainforests (Van Andel 2010). Suriname declared the abolition of slavery in 1863. Former slaves from coastal plantations mainly settled in the capital Paramaribo. At present, there are still 6 semi-independent Maroon communities with a total population of 72,553 (Vossen *et al.* 2014). Suriname is considered one of the places with the most significant ethnic and cultural diversity in the world, with 37% of the population from Asian Indian origin, 15% of Javanese origin, and 52% Afrodescendant (Moya 2012).

Box 13.1 Mompox Market

Mompox is the largest fluvial island in Colombia on the shores of the Magdalena River. Through the Magdalena River and the Cauca River, enslaved Africans entered the interior of the country. They were distributed towards the haciendas, the populated centers, and towards the Pacific region. The entire region through which these rivers run was covered by dense forests, which were a refuge for Maroons who eventually had commercial relations with urban centers. Let us remember that arrival to the Amazon through the western side of South America occurred indirectly in countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, since their economies were established in relation to the Andes and the Pacific. Reaching the Amazon required crossing the high Andes mountain range.

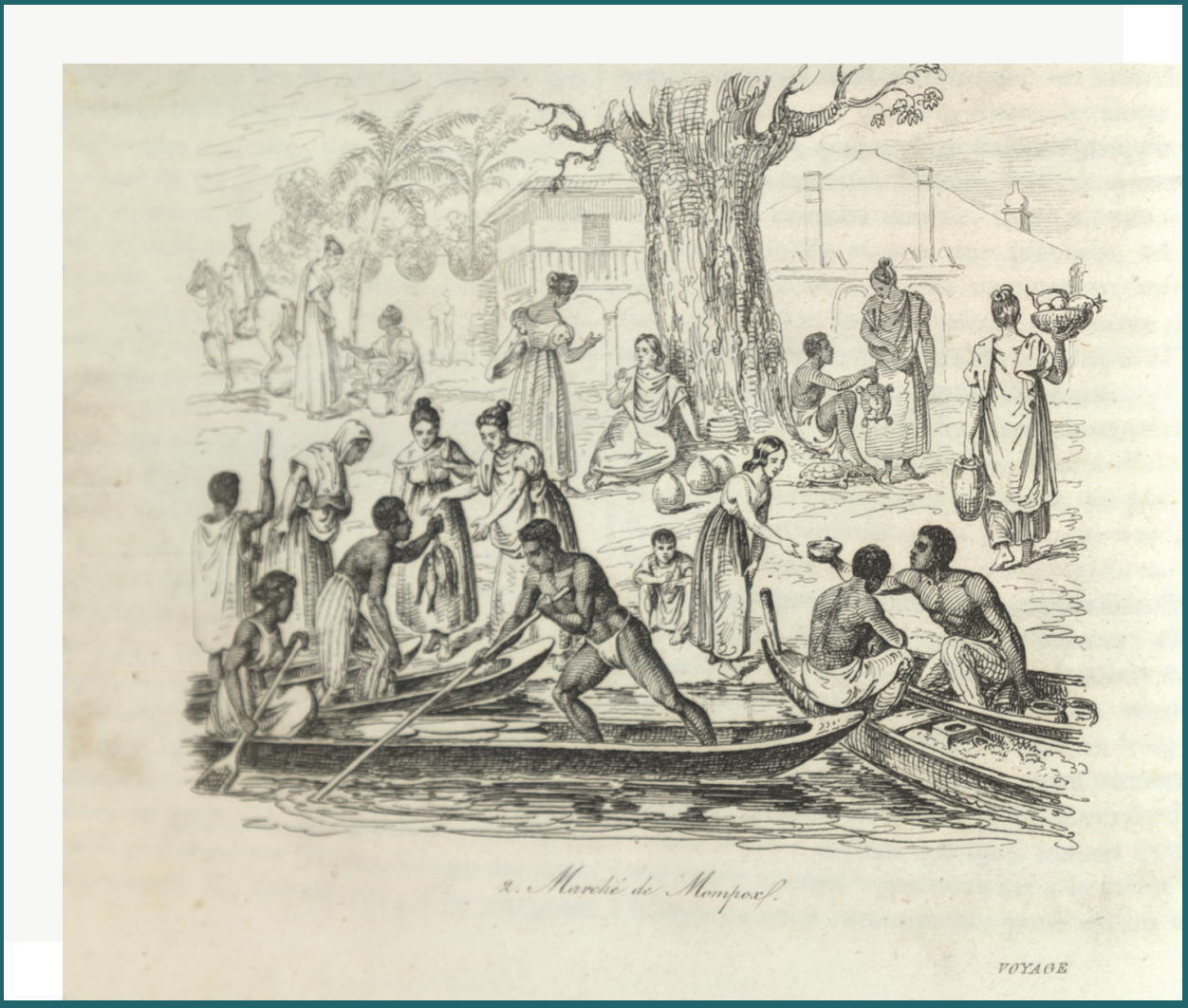

Figure 13B.1 Marketplace, Mompox, Colombia, 1826. Entry routes to the western regions of South America and the Amazon ran from Cartagena de Indias and the main Colombian rivers. Source: Alcide Dessalines d'Orbigny, Voyage pittoresque dans les deux Amèriques (D'Orbigny 1853 p. 59) (Paris, 1836), p. 59, fig. 2. (Copy in Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library) *Slavery Images: A Visual Record of the African Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Early African Diaspora*, accessed April 15, 2021, http://slaveryimages.org/s/slaveryimages/item/748 Rights: Image is in the public domain. Metadata is available under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International.

Figure 13.2 The region established in the days of Columbus as "Terra Firma" is a zone of entry of commodities and enslaved people to South America and, therefore, to the Amazon region. The region consists of the modern-day countries of Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guiana, Panama, and Venezuela. Map drawn by R. Bonne and others (1771). Source provided to Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository by Geographicus Rare Antique Maps as part of a cooperation project. https://www.geographicus.com/

On the other hand, slave routes to Brazil included ports in several regions of the West Coast of Africa such as Senegambia, West-Central Africa, and Bahía Santa Helena, the Gulf of Benin; and Southeast Africa, especially Mozambique (Arruda *et al.* 2014; Silva da Silva and Costa Barbosa 2020). The ports of Benguela and Luanda extended the Angola route, which was responsible for the straight offer of Africans as enslaved people to be sent to the Americas (Miller 1989, 1997; Ferreira 2012; Gardner *et al.* 2012). During the colonial period, slave ships arrived at the ports of Bahia and Pernambuco, far from the Amazon, because of the flourishing sugar economy.

Although extractive activities were considered of minor importance to the national economy, these were the basis of the Amazonian economy. Pará (Grão Pará) is a large state located in the Amazon Delta. The Portuguese used Belém do Pará to control access to the Amazon River (Legrás 2016; Silva da Silva and Costa Barbosa 2020). At the end of the 17th Century, Belém became the capital of the Amazon region. Slavery played a major role in the

colonial Amazon region. African slaves were fundamental for the economic growth of the state of Grão-Pará and Maranhão. Upon disembarking, black slaves were transferred to the interior to labor in support of the Brazilian economy. Many slaves stayed in Belem to labor for the inhabitants, working as musicians, butchers, artisans, healers, and farmers (Alonso 2012; Silva and Saldivar 2018). In the mid-19th century, the boom in rubber extraction was the central economic activity of the Amazon region, as important to Brazil as coffee. This increased the requirement for slave labor. Sectors of civil society from Para, starting in 1869, promoted the need to emancipate all those who did servile work (Vergolino-Henry and Figueiredo 1990; Da-Fonseca 2011).

Research work on the contribution of the Afro-descendant population to the Americas has been more prolific in non-Spanish speaking countries. Therefore, it is essential to advance research on traditional practices from tropical ecosystems in Africa that were adapted to the tropical conditions of the Americas. On the other hand, we need to pay more attention to Afro-Latin American scholarship, notably that of Afro-Latin American scholars, to fully understand those practices in terms of their origins and adaptation.

13.3 The implications of being originally from tropical regions in the adaptation of enslaved Africans and their descendants in the Americas

Latin American societies, including certain academic tendencies, think African descendant groups owe their knowledge, culture, and actions to their contact with Indigenous Peoples from the Americas, Creoles, and Europeans. However, this outlook overlooks or ignores several aspects that have played a central role both in the resilience of African Indigenous peoples and their contributions to the economy and well-being of American societies.

When the Portuguese arrived to explore West Africa in 1443, Indigenous peoples had been building cultural and agricultural complexes for millennia; they had already domesticated many species that the world knows today and developed livelihoods and extractive systems in Africa's diverse tropical ecosystems (Foreign Office 1920; UNESCO 1959; Carney and Rosomoff 2009; Van Andel *et al.* 2014). Coming from a tropical zone was a significant advantage for Africans, when compared to Europeans and their ability to adapt to the American tropics. This can be observed in the agricultural systems and livelihood strategies of the peoples of African descent, both those enslaved and the thousands who fled to the jungle (*cimarrones),* as we will illustrate with examples from both the eastern and western parts of Latin America (Carney 2020). The floristic composition of African tropical forests and tropical regions in the Americas is very dissimilar; Vossen *et al.* (2014) assert that Africa and the Americas share only 1% of the total number of species, including weeds. African Indigenous peoples managed to survive by identifying similarities with the flora of their continent of origin and even renaming many species (Van Andel *et al.* 2014).

Furthermore, Latin American nations also overlook the fact that many of the economic activities that we know today in tropical regions of the Americas are alien to this continent. Some examples familiar to Latin Americans are livestock farming and agricultural activities that have expanded at the expense of tropical forests, transforming landscapes. Livestock farming originally come from Europe, Africa, and Asia; that is, the species of bovines, sheep, goats, pigs, grasses, and many other forage plants were imported to the Americas during conquest and colonial times (De-Mortillet 1879; Epstein 1971; MacHugh and Bradley 2001; Carney and Rosomoff 2009). Regarding agriculture, we can also say that many species and cultivation techniques are foreign to the Americas. Coffee and sugar cane became central in the global economy. These crops were cultivated at the expense of forests and enslaved humans. Furthermore, knowledge of African management of tropical ecosystems for livelihood would have been required to adapt plant and animal species to the conditions of South America. Evidence of the knowledge and contribution of Africans to the Americas regarding

Figure 13.3 When the transatlantic slave trade began, ships transported enslaved Indigenous Africans and their knowledge about the cultivation of tropical plant species and the rearing of domestic animals unknown in the Americas at that time. The earliest realistic depictions of cattle from Khoikhoi (Western Cape, South Africa) were probably drawn circa 1713 or earlier. The cattle pertained to the Sanga breeds, which resulted from the interbreeding of the indigenous wild cattle found in North Africa and the Sahara 8,000 years ago with the humped Zebu introduced to Africa from Asia more than 2,000 years ago or earlier. A) Khoi man dealing with a recalcitrant sheep; B) Khoi family traveling with their domestic animals: oxen, sheep, goats, and dogs; C) Khoi person milking. Source: World Digital Library. The Library of Congress. With the support of the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization https://www.wdl.org/en/item/11278/. Download date: 02.04.2021

agricultural and livestock technologies has been studied by major scholars. These researchers have refuted the widespread belief that many agricultural techniques of tropical species were owing to European ingenuity. This is the case of rice (*Oryza glaberrima*), an emblematic African plant species. Rice cultivation became crucial in the Americas, which was adapted thanks to African knowledge (Wood 1996; Carney 1996; Carney and Rosomoff 2009).

13.4 Tracing African legacy in the Americas

Carney (2009, p. 5) mentions that the link between culture and the environment has traditionally been agriculture. Indeed, the African legacy in the Americas can be traced to both agro-biodiversity and knowledge of agricultural techniques, seed management, and adaptation to new environments as well as to culinary practices (Carney and Rosomoff 2009; Zabala-Gómez 2017).

This section discusses several interesting research approaches that emphasize the other roles of African populations, especially for conservation strategies and sustainable management of regions of high importance for biological conservation such as the Amazon.

Independent domestication of plant and animal species began between 13,000 to 15,000 years ago. Food production independently arose in at least nine areas of the world, and species and knowledge have traveled between continents at different times in human history (Diamond 2002; Gupta 2004). In Africa, the domestication of species could have taken two or three millennia to be realized (Carney and Rosomoff 2009). There are two important eras in which a significant botanical interchange took place. The Monsoon Exchange among regions of the Old World occurred between 300 BC and AD 700, and one of the routes — the Western Indian Ocean through Africa — contributed to the exchange of nearly 2,000 species of cereals, vegetable tubers, and legumes to Asia, thus helping to transform diverse food systems (Carney and Rosomoff 2009 p. 7; Seland 2014) The second era was in the 15th century with the Iberian expansion, which

resulted in the so-called Columbian Exchange (Carney and Rosomoff 2009 p. 7; Van Andel 2010; Van Andel et al. 2014). Africans have plausibly contributed to global food systems, especially to those of the Americas. The exchange of plants of African origin to the Americas and the role of enslaved Africans in the adaptation of these species is also reflected in cash crops at plantations in the New World (Carney 2009, 2020). Species of southern Asian origin, such as plantains and bananas, arrived in Africa through the ancient food trade in commodities within the Old World, and they became crucial dietary staples long before the Portuguese began to explore the West African coast. Later, plantains and bananas became fundamental food staples in some tropical regions in the Americas from the so-called "Columbian exchange". According to Crosby (2003), during this time, there were crucial exchanges between the Old and the New World in terms of food crops, knowledge, and even diseases, which have been neglected by economics studies.

13.4.1 Slave ships and the cultural exchange between tropical regions of Africa and the Americas

The exchange of plants of African origin and the role of enslaved Africans in the adaptation of these species in the New World began precisely with the slave ships. Slave trade ships transported more than 12.5 million human beings, not including the ships' crew, and dietary staples that were crucial for successfully crossing the Atlantic were transported with the enslaved people. According to Carney and Rosomoff (2009), the ships were provisioned in different places on the West Coast of Africa, which supplied a wide diversity of plant and animal species for human subsistence. The *Oryza glaberrima* was introduced to the Americas as a food staple in slave ships; this species is cultivated today in America by people of African origin (Carney and Acevedo Marín 2003; Carney 2009; Carney and Rosomoff 2009; Van Andel 2010). Four thousand years ago, Africans domesticated rice along the so-called Rice Coast, which is the tropical area between Senegambia, Sierra Leone, and Liberia (Johnny *et al.* 1981; Van Andel *et al.* 2014). African species were displaced by Asian ones (*O. sativa* L.) when mechanical mills were introduced in the Americas. In the oral tradition of both the countries sharing the Amazon region and the United States, there is an account that African women smuggled rice grains in their hair, which allowed them to grow it in the Americas (Carney 2004; Van Andel 2010). In Colombia's Pacific region, traditional Afro-descendant communities have cultivated and milled rice in the tropical rainforest. According to key informants from the Noanamá, Chocó department in the aforementioned region (B. Murillo, personal communication, June 22, 2021), a very common practice used by elderly women forest dwellers when navigating rivers to visit urban centers was to hide valuable items such as money or gold in their hair. Several academics have highlighted the role of women of African origin in the agency, resistance, and resilience of the group (Carney 2009; Hurtado *et al.* 2018).

The cultivation of African rice was central to the economy of several countries in the Americas. Carney (2004, p. 13) comments that in 1775 in Brazil the cultivation of cotton and rice was promoted in the Amazon region — Belem do Pará and Maranhão — and African people were bought on the west coast because of their knowledge of the cultivation technique. Rice was also cultivated in sugar plantations, which had large numbers of enslaved Africans, such as in the Pernambuco region. In Suriname, anthropological studies recorded 74 rice names in the languages of the Maroon communities (Van Andel 2010). As mentioned earlier, the cultivation of African rice species (*Oryza glaberrima*) has been central in rice plantations and in the economy of the United States and South America. The cultivation and its technology have been attributed to the ingenuity of the plantation owners. However, the tracks of historical, archaeological, and ethnobotanical research carried out by major scholars on different contexts of the Americas present important evidence of the African contribution in terms of technology and agriculture for commercial and food crops of African origin. Coffee, okra, sesame, and kola nut, among other Afri-

Figure 13.4 A Fugitive Negro. Pierre Jacques Benoit (1782-1854) was a Belgian artist who visited the Dutch colony of Suriname in 1831 (Benoit 1839). The tropical ecosystems of the Americas were familiar places for Maroon people, taking into account that their places of origin were mainly tropical regions of Africa. "This engraving shows an escaped slave sitting in his shelter, with various utensils and goods, including rifle and canoe, by a river in the jungle." The author once encountered one of these fugitives in an almost impenetrable forest where he had lived for three years. "He had no family or companionship and lived off of crabs, monkeys, snakes, bananas, everything that nature offered. He had only ventured twice to Paramaribo, to trade various forest products for lead shot, powder, and gin". Rights: Image is in the public domain. Metadata is available under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International.

can species, are also currently part of the food, agricultural, and gastronomic culture in particular of tropical America and the Caribbean (Clarence-Smith and Topik 2003; Carney 2009; Carney and Rosomoff 2009; Van Andel 2010; Harris *et al.* 2014; Van Andel *et al.* 2014; Agha 2016).

Another iconic native species from the tropical rainforest of Africa is the cola nut tree, the main ingredient in Coca-Cola. This nut is found in the cultivation systems of some Indigenous Peoples in the Amazon, which suggests that there have been cultivation shifts between the continents. Another exchange example is cocoa, which is central in the rural economy of Ghana.

13.5 Agroecosystems of Maroon and plantation slaves. Resilience strategies in tropical regions in the Americas

The Maroon phenomenon is reported both in the north and northeast region of South America, in the Caribbean (Thompson 2006), and in the western region of South America (De Friedemann and Arocha 1986; Renard-Casevitz *et al.* 1988; De Friedemann 1993; Maya 1998). Likewise, food staples from slave ships became the basic seeds for subsistence agriculture of escaped Maroons in the Americas. The survival of enslaved people who managed to escape depended on their skills and knowledge to obtain food supplies from new environments. Similarly, those communities depended on their Western and Central African knowledge and techniques in Maroon autonomous territorial spaces built in the middle of the jungles of tropical America (Maya 1998; Thompson 2006). In Colombia, some Maroon enclaves were dedicated to grazing Cebu cattle, cultivating peanuts linked to funeral rites, pig farming, and the fortified construction of *palenques*. These characteristics account for the tribes and places of origin of the African Indigenous peoples that arrived in Colombia via the port city of Cartagena de Indias.

Both plantation slaves and escaped Maroons depended on their medicinal, healing and magical, religious, and nutritional botanical knowledge, among others skills, to survive (Carney and Marín, 2003; Andel, Behari-Ramdas, Havinga, and Groenendijk, 2007; van't Klooster, Andel, and Reis, 2016). Andel et al. (2014) mention that African botanical heritage in the Americas is reflected in the subsistence practices of the groups that still inhabit tropical forests. Multi-cropping systems of many communities from the African tropical belt transformed the rainforest into a food forest, incorporating Amerindian staples such as corn, cocoa, sweet potatoes, cassava, and peanuts (Carney and Rossmoff, 2009; Carney and Acevedo, 2003 pp. 25, 88).

The word Kilombo comes from the warrior society of the Ovimbundil, a Bantu ethnic group from the plateau of central Angola whose language is mainly Umbundu and were in permanent conflict with Europeans. In Brazil, the Portuguese Overseas Council officially defined the settlement of fugitive enslaved Africans as *quilombo*. At the end of the 16th century, there were more than fifty sugar mills in Brazil and some fifteen thousand African slaves worked in them. Social scientists, archaeologists, and historians have studied the Maroon phenomenon in Palmares, Alagoas State, which is considered one of the most important in Brazil. These slaves came directly from the Bantu areas of

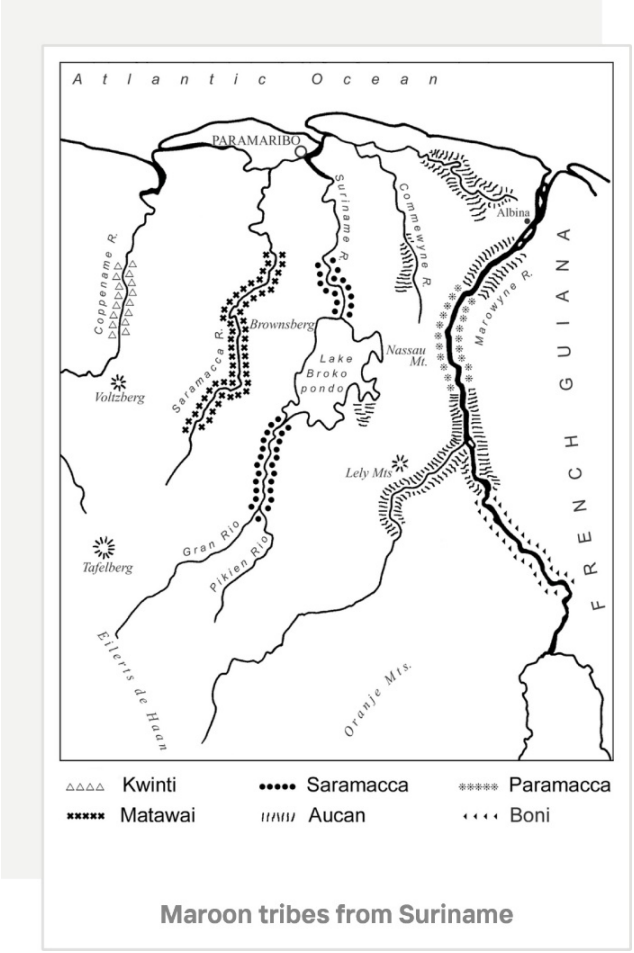

Figure 13.5 Maroon Tribes from Suriname. Illustration by H. Rypkema. Naturalis Biodiversity Center. Many African plant species that arrived inadvertently on slave ships helped Maroon and slave groups survive. However, new flora and fauna compositions forced these communities to construct their own classifications and adapt to a new environment. Source: Illustration by H. Rypkema. In: Van Andel et al (2014).

Figure 13.6 A) "View of the central vegetable, fruit and poultry market of Paramaribo in 1831 (Suriname) located between Dutch-style houses" (translation). The central role of African descendants in the food market is noted. Women played a central role in commercializing food in the eastern and northeastern regions of South America. These women were called 'higglers' in British colonies and *quitandeiras* in Brazil (Carney 2020; Carney & Rosomoff 2009). Goats are also observed, a foreign species to the Americas, as are cattle, pigs, and sheep. Vue de gran Marché aux légumes, fruits et volailles in Slavery Images, available: http://slaveryimages.org/s/slaveryimages/item/2355 B) Milkmaid and black women carrying milk in Suriname. Source: "Figure 66" in Pierre Jacques Benoit, Voyage à Surinam; description des possessions néerlandaises dans la Guyane (Bruxelles: Société des Beaux-Arts de Wasme et Laurent, 1839). Rights: Image is in the public domain. Metadata is available under Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0 International.

Angola and Congo in the 17th century. They established both local relationships with Indigenous peoples and with local and European merchants (Domínguez and Funari 2008; Stenou 2004). These settlements also housed Indigenous people, mulattoes, *caboclos*, escaped soldiers, and other individuals discriminated against by the majority of society. The same characteristics have been reported for other regions where there were settlements of fugitive slaves. Maroon communities are a repository of African plant resources, knowledge, and agricultural practices that slightly alter the natural forest landscape. Both food and medicinal species found in Maroon agroecosystems come from various tropical regions of Africa; Carney and Acevedo (2003) mention the western savannas between the Ivory Coast and Lake Chad, the central-western rainforest comprising Nigeria and Congo, and the eastern savannas between Sudan, Ethiopia, and Uganda. In addition to food species, enslaved Africans also brought medicinal plants. Carney and Acevedo (2003) argue that the Caribbean has a rich pharmacopeia, and of 82 identified medicinal plants, 43 are native to Africa.

13.6. Religion and nature

Populations of African origin have made a significant contribution to sustainable resource management practices in the Amazon by taking advantage of the traditional practices of the tropical ecosystems of Africa and adapting them to the tropical ecosystems of the Americas. African rice is considered a gift from God, and, like the rest of nature, is part of the worldview and traditional religion. Traditional practices have been evident in the adaptation of agricultural systems and plant and animal species of African origin in the Americas. Likewise, traditional African religions were transformed and recreated in the Americas, maintaining the intrinsic link between individuals, society, and nature described in the eschatological belief systems, principles, and codes of conduct of African societies (Ekeopara and Ekpenyong 2016; Eneji et al.

2012). Building from Escobar (2018), it can be said that Africans arrived in environments that facilitated the ontological relationship, allowing them to adapt and continue being in the world. The universal mother for the peoples of African origin is equivalent to the bush. According to the first lines of the most renowned book by Cuban writer and researcher Lidia Cabrera, "The bush is the place where everything arises from and the place where everything returns to. Everything is in the bush, the supernatural forces, the ancestors, the Orishas, good spirits and evil spirits ... life came from the bush, we [the Afro-descendants] are children of the bush" (Cabrera 1954). The groups of African origin developed different religions and beliefs such as the candomble in Brazil; Santeria, Ifa, and Abakua in Cuba; voodoo in Haiti; the orisha in Trinidad and Tobago; winti among the Creoles from Suriname; and various other beliefs among the Maroon. Something in common among new Afro-descendant religions is the central role that nature plays and the relationship that is established between the latter and human beings. A story that connects three continents through the transatlantic journey is that of the trickster-spider Ananse (Deandrea 2004). This is a mythical character from the Akan culture of southern Ghana and the Ivory Coast and is well-known among African Americans and Afro-Caribbean people. The character has also woven a net through South America. The trickster Ananse is central in art and literature in Brazil and Suriname. Ananse would have arrived at the Colombian Amazon through the Pacific Coast. The spider intrinsically connects Afro human beings with the ancestral territory and nature from birth rituals (Arocha 1999; Escobar 2018; Lozano 2017).

13.7 Agrobiodiversity, the resilience strategy in both slavery and freedom

Landowners and chroniclers of the Indies reported a great diversity of species in the food plots of slaves, among which was a great variety of species from both Africa and the Americas. Carney and

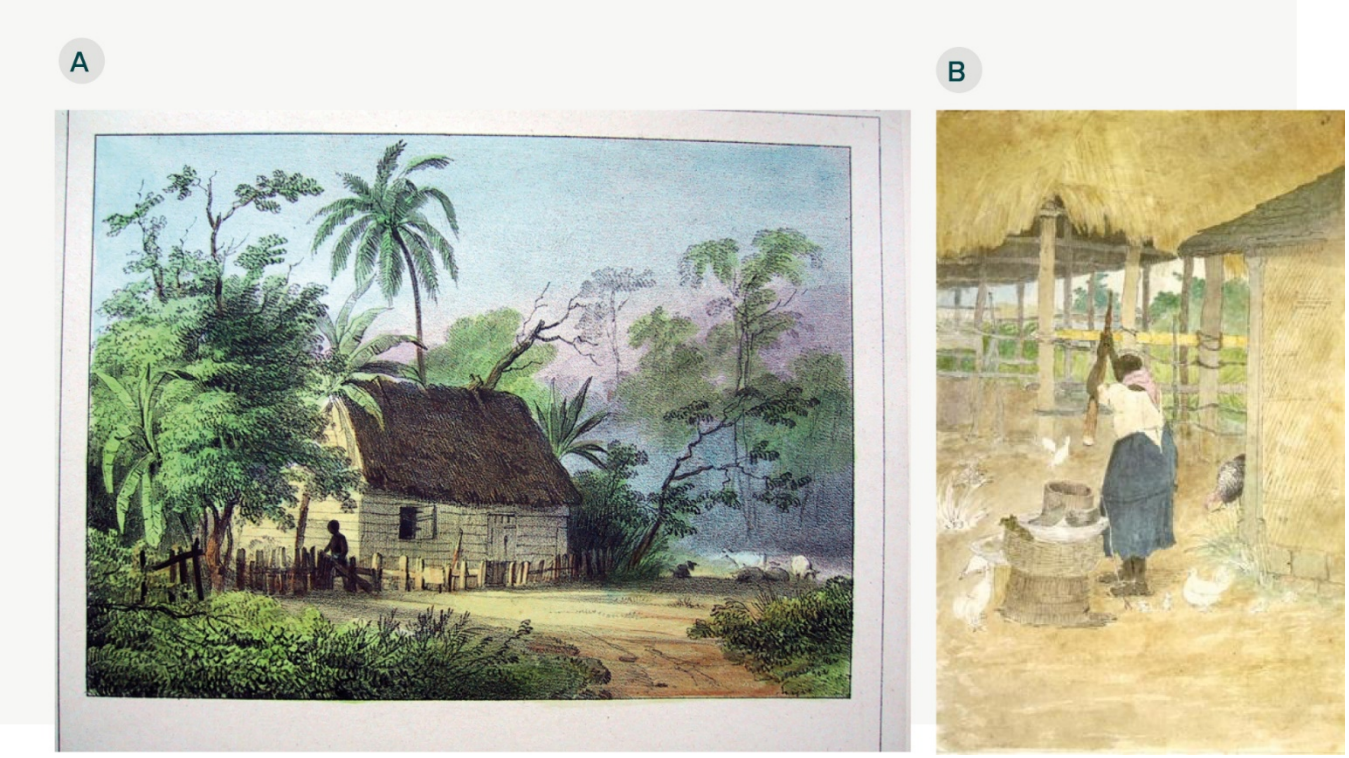

Figure 13.7 Images of Negroes' houses. Pierre Jacques Benoit (1782-1854). Agrobiodiversity in the dooryard and surrounding areas of the house. Multiestrata and Mixed-crop farming systems of Maroon and enslaved people for food, commercialization, medicine, and rituals.

Rosomoff (2009, p. 135) mention that these plots were called the botanical gardens of the Atlantic World's dispossessed. Plots became spaces for the adaptation of African seeds, many of which are still marketed both for human consumption and for industrial processes. Similarly, these authors mention the agrobiodiversity in the plots of plantation slaves reported in countries such as French Guiana, Suriname, the United States (the Carolinas and Virginia), Colombia, Cuba, Curacao, Jamaica, and Brazil, among others. Some of the species of African origin reported are cereals, including millet (*Pennisetum glaucum*), sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*), and rice (*Oryza glaberrima*); tubers such as yam (*Discorea Cayenensis)*; musa, including plantain and banana (*Musa spp*.); taro/eddo (*Colocasia esculenta*); legumes, including black-eyed pea or cowpea (*Vigna unguiculata*), and pigeon pea or Congo pea (*Cajanus cajan*); beverages, including coffee (*Coffea spp*.), tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*), kola nut (*Cola spp,K*), and hibiscus/roselle (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*); oil plants, including sesame (*Sesamum radiatum*), castor bean (*Ricinus communis*), and oil palm/dendê (*Elaeis guineensis*); vegetables, including okra (*Abelmoschus esculentus)*, amaranth (*Amaranthus spp*)., and Guinea pepper (*Xylopia aethiopica*)*;* and fodder, including Guinea grass (*Panicum maximum*), Pará/Angola grass (*Panicum muticum*), and Bermuda grass (*Cynodon dactylon*).

Africans not only domesticated plants but have traditionally been pastoralists (Diamond, 2002). The tropical American lowlands did not have large domesticated animals. African cattle may well have made genetic contributions to the breeds that have proven to be suitable for the climatic conditions of the Venezuelan and Colombian plains and other regions of tropical America, such as the Argentine pampas. Likewise, grasses were scarce in the tropics, and many pasture forage species originated in Africa. This has been called "the Africanization of the New World's Tropical Grasslands" (Carney and Rosomoff 2009, p. 166).

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

13.8 African roles in caregiving and production: African culinary and livelihood practices in tropical regions in the Americas

Both in the western and eastern regions of South America, the literature mentions the central role of enslaved African women linked to the preparation of food and to various domestic activities, both in plantations and cities (Zabala-Gómez 2017; Silva da Silva and Costa Barbosa 2020).

Cooking is a practice that attests to the African presence in the Americas. The ingredients of the foodways of Africa are still present in culinary practices of the diaspora. The ingredients and, very often, the names of recipes, are still of African origin and can be traced to various countries in tropical areas or regions of the Americas. The fufu of Ghana, Nigeria, and Cameroon is a stew of yam, mashed banana, and other starchy tubers to which meat is added (in the Dominican Republic it is called *mangú*; in Puerto Rico they call it *Mofongo*; in Cuba it is *plantain fufu*). In Colombia, a variant of fufu made with cassava and pigeon peas (*Guandul*) has been reported (Gómez 2017; Zabala-Gómez 2017). In the south western region of Colombia, rice (*Oryza glaberrima*) was not a food consumed by the elites during colonial times, but it was one of the agricultural products found in the vegetable garden plots of the enslaved. With the passage of time, rice became the fundamental base of the culinary tradition in the region (Gómez 2017; Zabala-Gómez 2017). Enslavedor Maroon women adapted rice dishes with greens and beans of African origin to the conditions of the regions of The Americas. The *arroz de cuxá*, for instance, is prepared with sorrel leaves (hibiscus). The name Cuxá comes from the Mandinka name for hibiscus (the kucha).

As suggested by Zabala-Gómez (2017), kitchens were spaces of freedom for enslaved people. The

Figure 13.8. Biodiversity and culinary practices in an Afro-descendant community forest territory in the Colombian Pacific region. Afro-Pacific groups migrated to the Colombian Amazon at different times seeking livelihood alternatives and freedom. A) an inventory of plant species associated with Afro-representative dishes, and their spatial distribution in an Afro family food plot; B) 21 different dishes and utensils that are woven or made in the Bubuey community of the Negros en Acción Community Council. Photo credits: Martha Rosero-Peña. Convenio SENA-Tropenbos, Colombia.

kitchen has traditionally been a social, cultural, symbolic, physical, and geographical space that, unlike others, was a place where enslaved people were not persecuted by slave owners. Kitchens could well have played an important role in the conservation of biodiversity linked to recipes, knowledge, and beliefs. The kitchen is linked to agriculture, family nutrition, and the health practices of Afro-descendants, who obtained species from different places in the forest territory to carry out many types of livelihood activities.

13.9 The Afro-Latin American contribution to Africa: A two-way cultural exchange

This document has mentioned several aspects of the Afro-descendant presence in the Amazon, in only one way: from Africa to the Americas. Could it be possible that the enslaved had returned to Africa at some point in history? In fact, after the abolition of slavery, the Brazilian diaspora in Africa started to form. Ferreira (2012), Law (1997), and Mann (1999) assert that during the centuries of slave trade, merchandise, culture, genetic material, and ideas traveled back and forth in the ships between the Slave Coast and Brazil. Microstudies, which include biographies and ethnographies, can account for aspects that macro- and global studies overlook, but which explain many shortcuts in history, such as why species from tropical regions of America are also cultivated and used in African contexts. There really was a cultural exchange that included hundreds of freed slaves who returned to West Africa from Brazil in the 1830s. They established continuing commercial, cultural, and intellectual communication with relatives and acquaintances who stayed in Brazil. It has been reported that some of those who returned sent money back to Brazil to purchase their children's freedom. This exchange may have been due to the fact that some ports in the Americas, such as Salvador de Bahia, had close contact with a certain region of Africa (Klein 1993). In both cases, the exchange included plant and animal genetic material, cultural and religious aspects, and knowledge about the cultivation techniques of the material exchanged between both sides of the Atlantic (Carney and Rosomoff 2009; Falola and Akínyẹmí 2017).

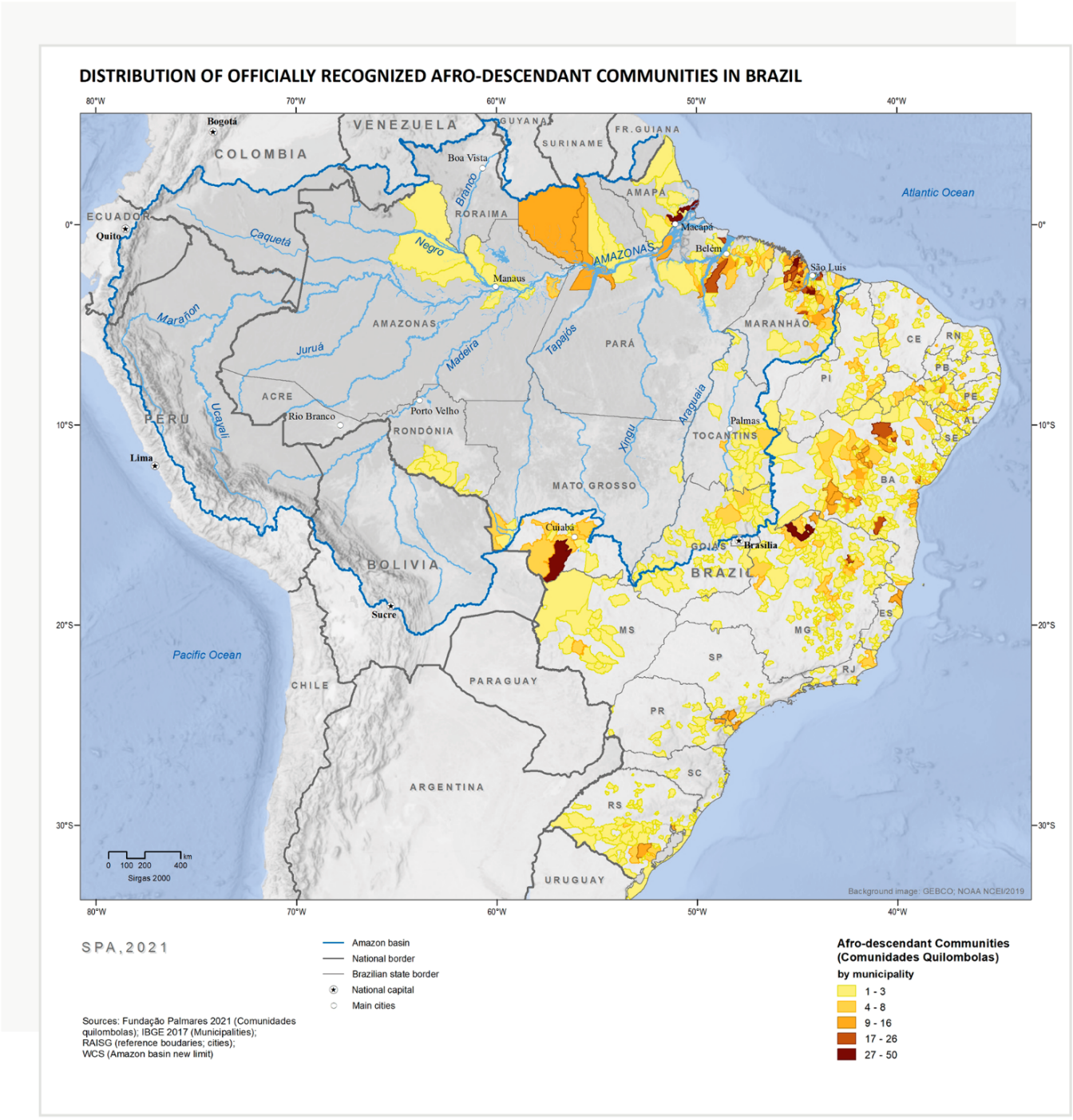

Figure 13.9 Legally constituted territories of Afro-descendant communities in Brazil. The presence of descendants of African enslaved people is significant not only in the Amazon but in the vast majority of Brazilian territory. The country's geography facilitated the direct disembarkment of slave ships into the Amazon region. Counting on these communities for natural resource conservation strategies is very important due to the characteristics of their livelihood and nature management systems. Sources: Fundação Palmares Cultural (2021) WCS-Venticinque et al. (2016), IBGE (2017), RAISG (2020).

13.10 Research, history, and landscape transformation in freedom: A view for Afro-Amazonian contexts

Global colonization and decolonization policies have influenced academic interest in African descent in Latin America and the Amazon. Historical literature has frequently mentioned Afro-descendants since the Iberian conquest and the colonial periods. It is always possible to trace African origin people in history thanks to chroniclers, Catholic priests, historians, and slave traders. However, as soon as Latin American countries abolished slavery, African descent people disappeared from historical literature (Andrews 1994). Colonial deterministic doctrines and nineteenth-century social Darwinian thought influenced the Latin American political environment. Latin American countries pretended to portray a self-image of strength and racial superiority in the face of a world that was opening up to imperialism (Lechini 2008; Marquardt 2011). At the beginning of the 20th century, the whitening of social groups through miscegenation gained momentum in the development policies of Latin American countries. In 1922, in Colombia, the conjunction between ultra-conservative political interests and pseudoscientific studies influenced the perception of Indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants as obstacles for Colombian development. Miscegenation policy was also enacted to promote immigration of Europeans to whiten Colombian society (Castro-Gómez 2009).

Research focused on miscegenation between whites and Indigenous people obscured the Afro presence in Latin American society. In the mid-twentieth century, Afro-Latin American scholars raised the visibility of the neglected Afro theme in literature and in anthropological research. This coincides with African decolonization and an interest in systematic studies of the problems of the African descent population in Latin America (Lechini 2008). Afro-Latin American racial movements in Brazil and Colombia were motivated by political thought and the Afro-American civil rights movement. In response, both countries constructed more plural and inclusive national constitutions. Afro-Latin American movements started national debates on racial inequality after the national constitutions of Brazil (1988) and Colombia (1991). The Colombian constitution opens a door for both Afro-Colombian communities and Indigenous peoples to govern their territories with relative autonomy.

13.10.1 Brazilian *Quilombos* and Community Councils of the Colombian Pacific region: Reflections on invisible Afro-descendant groups in the Amazon

There is significant potential for biocultural conservation efforts in the territories of Afro-descendant peoples in Brazil, Suriname, and Colombia, taking into account their contexts and realities. Currently, Afro-descendant communities in countries such as Brazil and Colombia have made significant progress in titling lands they ancestrally inhabited. This path has been arduous as the abolition process did not consider compensation or land distribution. The Afro population throughout South America faced many difficulties and economic shortages in the post-abolition period. Afro communities in different regions of Brazil and Colombia have formed in different ways; there are still *quilombos* that formed in the colonial period, lands collectively purchased by Afro-free communities, communities on lands donated by neighboring slave owners to keep cheap labor close, and land donated by churches, among others. In the territories inhabited by Afro communities, they carry out livelihood strategies that allow biodiversity and the use of different types of ecosystems, maintaining a rural/urban relationship linked to local and national markets (Leal 2004). This is a livelihood approach that has allowed them to survive since their arrival as slaves in the forested regions of several countries in the basin.

13.10.1.1 Brazil

The Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA) issued 154 titles to 217 Afro-Brazilian communities and 13,145 *Quilombola* families; these titles correspond to approximately one million hectares. This figure is very low considering the

titling law is almost 30 years old and there are more than 4,500 black communities waiting to have their ancestral territories officially recognized. Figure 13.9 shows legally-recognized Afro-descendant communities in Brazil (Fiabani 1988; De-Torre 2018).

13.10.1.2 Colombia

The period after the abolition of slavery is considered the transition of Afro-Colombian people towards the classic notion of "peasantry." In the 1960s, Afro-descendant Indigenous movements began to question rural policies that grouped them within the group of creole people, following early 20th century legislation enacted so that their racial lines would be physically whitewashed and diluted through miscegenation (Ulloa 2007; Castro-Gómez 2009; Oliva 2017). Different violent and extractive boom periods in the Amazon have promoted internal migration of Afro-Colombians mainly from the Pacific region to the Amazon (Trujillo Quintero 2014; Kothari et al. 2018), where these populations are becoming more visible (Acosta Romero 2019). Since the enactment of the 1991 constitution, Indigenous and Afro peoples in Colombia have the right to citizenship. The collective character of their ancestral territories and the authority of these peoples within these territories is recognized. From this historical milestone, the Afro-Colombian communities of the Pacific began processes to claim these rights. Afro communities in other regions of the country are becoming increasingly visible. Previously, both Afro communities and Indigenous peoples were considered a part of the demographic category of peasants. Recently, some Colombian universities have started to study Afro-Amazonians and there is an increasing number of NGOs interested in carrying out projects and programs with this population group.

Along the Pacific forest region, there are 6 million titled hectares of collective territories of Afro-descendant communities. The Amazon was the center of Colombia's civil conflict, and these territories are a testament to the experiences of Afro communities trying to protect their land in the midst of an armed conflict. The permanent presence of armed groups, drug trafficking, and mining have generated devastation, massive forced displacement, massacres, recruitment of youth, hostility among civil society, and anxiety (Escobar 2015; Martínez and Tamayo 2016; Nocua Caro 2019). In addition, oil palm plantations are expanding at the expense of Colombian Pacific forests (Carney 2020 p. 17). Following the 2016 peace accords between the Colombian government and the FARC, one year of tranquility was followed by rapid investments in resource extraction, which may result not only in unsustainable resource use, but also in violence towards Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples.

13.11 Conclusion

Using both a cultural exchange approach and a socio-historical environmental perspective, this chapter illustrates overlooked issues concerning the descendants of Africans in tropical regions in the Americas, including the Amazon. These approaches allow for the identification of both research gaps and aspects for nurturing policy frameworks for natural resource conservation and the community well-being strategies of Afro-descendant people. First, studies on the contribution of African peoples to the Americas have traditionally focused on cultural aspects such as music or sports (Cordova 2019). One of the neglected aspects has been the fact that African enslaved people arrived in the Americas from tropical regions where the domestication of species, agriculture, and ecosystem management had already been in place for millennia. Tropical origin was an advantage for enslaved Africans in the Americas. The ability to manage African biodiversity and highly complex ecosystems helped enslaved people adapt to the extreme situation they faced. These skills must have played an essential role in their strategies to maintain resilience in the face of hostile environments, either working on plantations or living in the middle of the forest as Maroons fleeing slave masters. These abilities could have contributed to the adaptation of many species of flora and fauna to the Americas, species remain a part of the region's food, culture, and economy. Slave ships

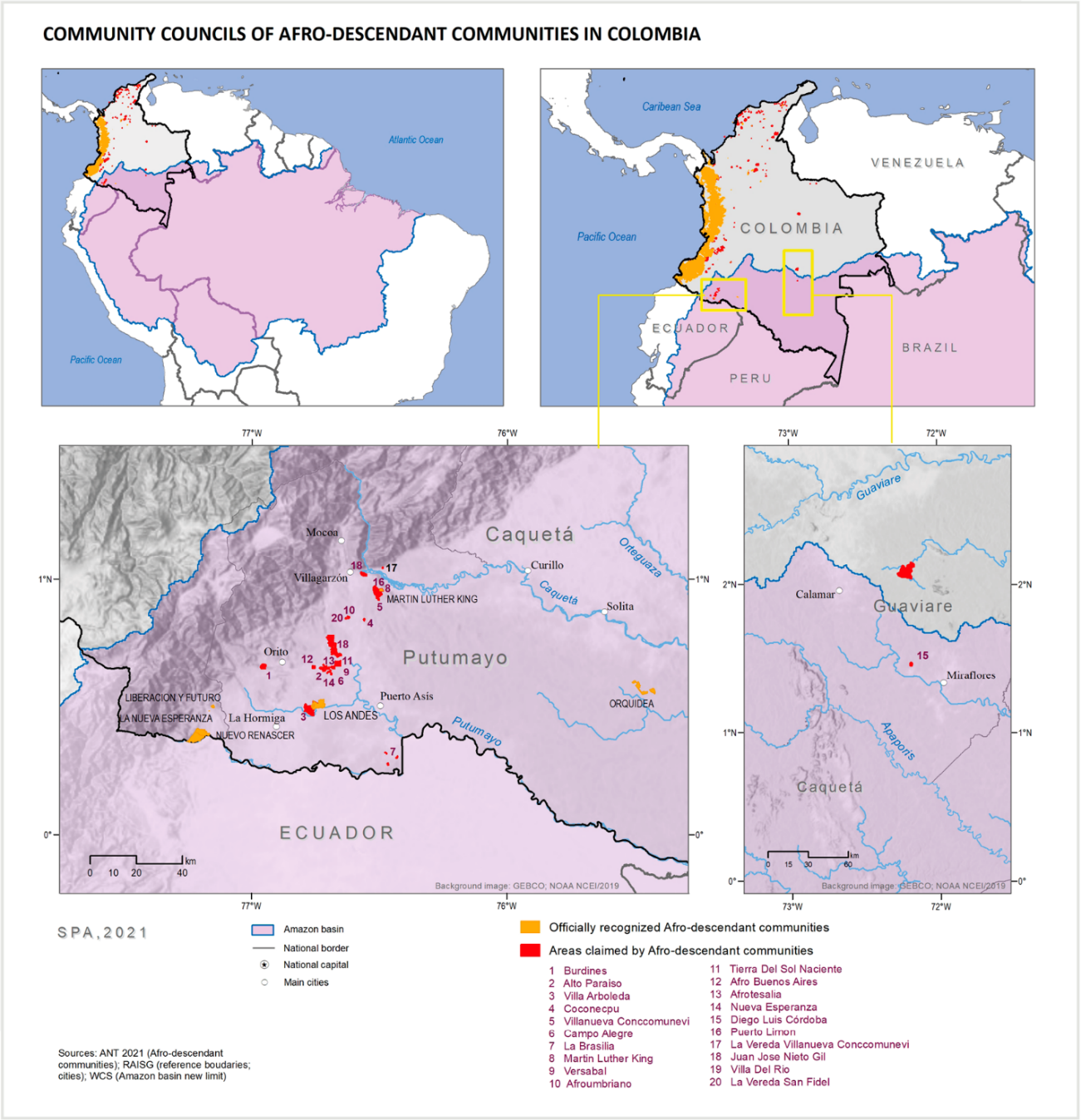

Figure 13.10 This map shows legally recognized territories of Afro-descendant communities in Colombia. Throughout the forest of the Pacific region, there are 6 million entitled hectares. The 1991 Colombian Constitution legitimized the entitling process. Afro-descendant communities in the Amazon are following the path of communities from the Pacific in exercising civil rights and ethnic governance of ancestrally occupied territories. Sources WCS-Venticinque *et al.* (2016), RAISG (2020), Agencia Nacional de Tierras ANT (2020).

played an important role in the transportation of genetic resources in the form of food for the Atlantic journey, facilitating the exchange of many species between the continents. Ships also transported enslaved peoples' knowledge, beliefs, and practices central to the adaptation of species for agriculture and livestock in the Americas (Carney and Rosomoff 2009). Gaps in research remain, including the strategies African peoples adopted for their own adaptation, survival, and economy during both slavery and liberation (Carney and Voeks 2003; Van Andel 2010; Vossen *et al.* 2014; De-Torre 2018; Carney 2020). Researchers agree on the role of Africans in the positive transformation of the landscapes of the tropical Americas (Leal 2004; Leal and Van Ausdal 2014). There is another neglected aspect that may have influenced research on African people in the Amazon. Most of the body of knowledge, particularly that constructed in the Amazon about African descent, has taken place in non-Spanish speaking countries (Oliva 2017).

There are arguably geographic, economic, and sociological reasons for the historical invisibility of African descendants in Latin American countries. On the one hand, a geographical explanation is related to the places and ports where enslaved people disembarked in South America. Although the history of Iberian colonization reports early the presence of enslaved African Indigenous Peoples in the Amazon, arrival followed different patterns in Spanish and Portuguese colonies. The Portuguese strategically founded ports, economic enclaves, and cities at the gates of the Amazon. Therefore, colonial society in the Brazilian Amazon had a broad relationship with enslaved Africans. Besides, this empire had supremacy of the slave trade. Not surprisingly, Brazil is the Latin American country with the largest Afro-descendant population. The Spanish Empire founded the main cities and central economic enclaves from the Andes to the west towards the oceans. Therefore, there was a greater demand for enslaved people in agricultural production and domestic servitude for mainstream society in this geographical portion. In the case of the western region of South America, reaching the Amazon requires crossing the Andes mountain range. The regions to the east of the Andes were considered wild and the refuge of savages, Maroons, bandits and outlaws. Extractive enclaves were established in the Amazon that motivated waves of colonization at different times in history. Enslaved people established Maroon societies in the western Amazon and played central roles in the history of the basin.

On the other hand, the sociological explanation for the invisibility of African descent in the Amazon basin is associated with deterministic constructs and stereotypes that revolve around the African presence in the Americas. The *first* sociological construct is the idea that Afro-descendant peoples have only contributed unskilled, heavy labor, which is connected to stereotypes about their strength and stamina (De Friedemann and Arocha 1986; Wood 1996; Carney 1996, 2009). The *second* construct is the "spatial notion of culture" characteristic of some anthropological approaches (Maya 1998; Castro-Gómez 2010 p. 28), which identifies specific human groups with certain geographic regions. The perception is that Afro peoples are only found in coastal regions and certain places in the Andes. There is also the notion of African savagery, with which the enslaved arrived in the Americas. The *third* construct is the ideal of whiteness in Latin American society, which began during the Enlightenment. In this period, botanical expeditions considered European knowledge superior and the knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and African descent groups as a superstitious Doxa that deceived the senses (Castro-Gómez 2010). A *fourth* construct involves the relationship of Latin American societies with nature, the forest, and its inhabitants. These are considered unproductive lands, and the savages that inhabit them lazy and unable to convert them to productive areas. Finally, both Afro and Indigenous peoples in the Americas are considered peoples without their own history, and without the capacity for action (Granero 1992).

The history of peoples of African origin during their enslavement and subsequent liberation shows ways to strengthen resilience and navigate uncertainties. Access to environments that other

segments of the population view with apprehension and disdain have allowed African descent people to adapt, maintain livelihoods and health, and exercise their belief systems. These are strategies that offer keys to wellness and conservation. The dynamic relation between the rainforest, rural areas, and urban centers and markets allows Afro families to have a diversity of livelihood strategies and therefore maintain economic resilience.

This chapter does not intend to delve into the invisibility of Afro groups in national statistics and welfare policies or in the violation of their civil and human rights in the different countries of the basin. This is being done very well by academics throughout the region, including Afro-Latin American scholars (Buffa 2008; Lechini 2008; Oliva 2017). This chapter wants to raise awareness of a group traditionally neglected by science and its contribution to the conservation of tropical regions of the Americas. Prominent Latin American scholars assert that ignoring Afro-descendants in scientific research on social, cultural, and historical aspects of Ibero-American countries is an incomplete task. This chapter adds to this statement the need to include this community in research topics such as agriculture and agroecology and ecosystem and biodiversity management. The latter themes are a hinge to integrate disciplines in research on the contribution of the African descent people to the economy and well-being of the Americas.

Furthermore, academics have drawn attention to the importance of the adaptation strategies of Afro-descendants to tropical rainforests in the positive transformation of such landscapes in the Americas. However, complex agronomic arrangements in both domestic and agricultural systems, and agrobiodiversity and plant management practices that support polyculture food crops, are gradually being replaced by new waves of monoculture plantations. The history of African descent in the tropical and subtropical rainforests of the Americas provides clues for navigating uncertainties and strengthening the resilience of these groups. This history also shows possible paths to ensure the well-being of the formerly enslaved population and conservation at the same time. The titling of ancestral territories and self-determination are appropriate ways to initiate historical repairs and can restore the possibility for African descent people to find their own path. By way of conclusion, the mythology of the Akan people from Ghana shows African descent people in the Americas a path to navigate in diaspora: the Sankofa bird reminds people to look to the past in order to move forward to the future (Carney and Rosomoff 2009 p. 27).

13.12 Recommendations

- African origin populations have made a significant contribution to sustainable resource management practices in the Amazon. African enslaved people arrived in the Americas from tropical regions where they had managed ecosystems, engaged in agriculture, and domesticated species for millennia. This knowledge has contributed to positive transformations of tropical landscapes in the Americas.
- Consider Afro-descendant communities as strategic actors in the conservation of biodiversity, ecosystems, watersheds, tropical rainforests, and sustainable agriculture.
- Provide support to research vis-à-vis biodiversity, languages, ecosystem management, techniques, and environmental management practices in African descent community contexts.
- Include African descent populations in research endeavors, paying special attention to the Spanish-speaking countries where research is very incipient; these countries can learn from the research carried out in Suriname and Brazil.
- Research to inform conservation policy needs an interdisciplinary perspective that contributes to identifying and taking the contributions of African populations into account.
- An interdisciplinary approach in research should consider the differentiated perspective as a path to understand cultural diversity in the Amazon and design context-specific strategies for conservation (Ethnic-racial statistics and socio-cultural data).

- Deterministic doctrines and political Darwinian thought have influenced Latin America greatly. There is still a tendency in mainstream society to consider African descent and Indigenous Peoples as groups unable to make decisions. This influences environmental policy design and governance in Amazonian countries.
- Strategies to consider Afro-descendants and Indigenous peoples as central actors in decision-making should review the constitutions and legislation of Latin American countries for effective legitimation of inclusive actions.
- Learn from collaborative processes carried out between Afro-Amazonian communities and non-governmental actors who have established long-term relationships with local groups and the in-situ experience to accompany their processes.
- Support NGO initiatives that currently work with Afro communities, as well as women and youth groups in the Amazon.
- Promote the contributions of Afro-descendant communities to the Americas through education, policy, and media programs This can help to address long-term structural issues and stereotypes.
- African descendants face critical situations of violence and forced displacement, which not only violate their fundamental rights, but also disrupt sustainable tropical forest management systems. These groups have historically been absent from governmental programs and require strategic support.
- Support education programs on Afro-descendant communities in the countries of the basin, both for mainstream society and for the Afro-descendants themselves, including their history, contributions, and management of natural resources. This action contributes to the social and cultural internal strengthening process carried out by African descent organizations.

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CONTACT INFORMATION

SPA Technical-Scientific Secretariat New York
475 Riverside Drive, Suite 530
New York NY 10115
USA
+1 (212) 870-3920
spa@unsdsn.org

SPA Technical-Scientific Secretariat South America
Av. Ironman Victor Garrido, 623
São José dos Campos – São Paulo
Brazil
spasouthamerica@unsdsn.org

WEBSITE theamazonwewant.org
INSTAGRAM @theamazonwewant
TWITTER @theamazonwewant