



# **Caribbean In/Securities: Creativity and Negotiation in the Caribbean (CARISCC)**

## **Working Papers Series**

**Maroon In/securities:  
Kamau Brathwaite on Colonial Wars of Xtermination**

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## **Caribbean In/Securities: Creativity and Negotiation in the Caribbean (CARISCC) Working Papers Series**

### **Maroon In/securities: Kamau Brathwaite on Colonial Wars of Xtermination**

*Dr Ronald Cummings, Brock University*

If Kamau Brathwaite's more recent work has been concerned with contemporary questions of security—such as 9/11 in his poem "Hawk" (2005), urban crime in his book *Trench Town Rock* (1994a) or various forms of death and dying in his *Elegguas* (2010)—a turn to Brathwaite's wider body of writing and his scholarship also reveals a broader concern with questions of in/security. His work usefully demonstrates what Pat Noxolo and David Featherstone have discussed as "a longer historical perspective and a wider global perspective" on in/securities which "unsettles the new-millennial, US-centric quality of post-9/11 security preoccupations" (2014, p.604). While Noxolo and Featherstone focus on the Plantation as a particular site for mapping this historical view of in/security and theorize "slavery as in/security", in this paper I want to use the concept of maroon in/securities as another way of engaging histories of in/securities (2014, p.604). In turning to marronage, I want to trace relational spaces of colonial in/securities not singularly bound to, although indeed not separate from, the operations and brutalities of the Plantation. Instead, I use Maroon practices, strategies and spaces as important narrative sites that afford another perspective on the violence of plantation life and its insecurities.

In colonial society, marronage operated as a particular practice that consistently generated insecurities in the operations of

the Plantation and variously threatened the ideological, military, economic and relational structures of colonial administration through a range of tactics including flight, border crossings, warfare, collaborative action, stealth and sabotage. These acts of marronage, (despite their varying scales and successes), as Simone Browne has shown, were important to "the historical formation of surveillance" and colonial attempts to track and to manage the black body through the use of tactics of power and immobility (2015, p.50). Browne contends that in fact "'bio' (of the body) and 'metric' (pertaining to measurement) has long been deployed as a technology in the surveillance of black mobilities" and as strategies "of black stabilities and containment" (2015, pp. 25, 26). She importantly urges that "rather than seeing surveillance as something inaugurated by new technologies, such as automated facial recognition or unmanned autonomous vehicles (or drones), to see it as ongoing" (Browne, 2015, p 8). These were tools that were utilized and deployed in efforts to "govern black people on the move" (Browne, 2015, p. 26). As Browne puts it, they were "technologies concerned with escape" (2015, p. 26). Maroons then might be understood as bodies that allow us to map the colonial refinement of practices and technologies of security while also allowing us to think about strategies of subversion and counter response.

I want to focus on Kamau Brathwaite's 1994 essay "Nanny, Palmares & the Caribbean Maroon Connexion" and in particular his use of the term "war[s] of xtermination", to describe colonial military campaigns against the Maroons (1994b, p. 130). The use of this phrase by Brathwaite opens up a particular space for mapping Maroon in/security and highlights the sustained and widespread threat to Maroon cultural life and survival that was presented by the colonial machinery. In his use of this phrase, Brathwaite frames the history of marronage within a discourse of in/security that offers productive spaces for meditating on the critical possibilities that are opened up by bringing Maroon studies and Security studies into conversation.

Brathwaite identifies what he terms "six main nexuses" of Maroon life and struggle (1994b, p.127). Brathwaite's nexuses are both spatial and temporal in that they locate particular moments of military struggle and/or the flourishing of Maroon cultural life and offer a vision of both the attempts to create cultural community and survival outside the limits of the Plantation as well as the history of colonial militarized terror or what he calls the "war[s] of xtermination"<sup>[1]</sup> (1994b, p.130). Brathwaite begins with Dominica and its Morne Negre which he notes was "'founded' as early as c1500" (1994b, p.129). His discussion examines how this group "took advantage of a BREAK-DOWN OF EURO POLITICAL/MILITARY AUTHORITY" particularly in the 1700s (Brathwaite, 1994b, p.130 emphasis in original). Brathwaite pays remembrance to a litany of Maroon leaders including "Congo Roy, Bulla, Zombie (Zambi), Jupiter, Juba, Cicero, Hall, Mabouya, Jacko, Coree (?Goree), Sandy and Pharcell" (1994b, p.130). His use of this listing of names notably references but also challenges and subverts military practices of memorialization of the dead and demonstrates an emphasis on signifying these Maroon lives as heroic.

While Brathwaite laments that "research/commentary on this important Maroon group is pretty well 'submerged' as you would expect" (1994b, p. 130), it should be noted that more recent critical works by Polly Pattullo (2015) and Lennox Honeychurch (forthcoming, 2016) have sought to highlight and document the history of Maroons in Dominica including the defeat and trials of 1814.

The second nexus that Brathwaite highlights is the island of Hispaniola where he focuses on the narrative of the Bohoruco Maroons, who in 1785 forced colonial powers to negotiate peace treaties. Brathwaite centers their significance in the history of that island noting that they "xisted obviously from the beginning—from the Columbian Period right thru to 1804—the time of Haitian Independence" (1994, p.128). Again foregrounding marronage as a central facet of the Haitian struggle, he argues "it is this Maroon complex which in the end becomes largely responsible for the success of the Haitian Revolution" (Brathwaite, 1994b, p.127). In the third instance he recalls Palmares, perhaps the longest standing militarized Maroon settlement in the New World, which lasted from 1599-1694 (almost a century) in Bahia, Brazil. Brathwaite also marks connections between Palmares and the fourth nexus to which he turns, the Jamaican Maroons. He highlights not just the overlap in periods of military warfare and struggle (with the First Maroon War in Jamaica beginning in 1665 and lasting till 1740) but also situates the armed resistance of the Jamaican Maroons within a wider global perspective noting that the Second Maroon War of 1795-96 "were not 'simply' or 'only' Plantation efforts to remove eradicate or xpell Maroons. 1795/96 was also the Maroon Wars of the French Revolution & the European Wars of the Haitian Revolution" (Brathwaite 1994b, p.131).



But this period, Brathwaite argues, marks a more significant moment in the histories of in/securities globally. According to Brathwaite “we are now face to face with the Industrial Crisis of/in the Plantation System” (1994b, p.131). In extending his temporal-spatial mapping of Maroon nexuses, Brathwaite next discusses the Suriname/ Guiana Maroons. He notes that this was “by far the largest (c50, 000 in 1980) & second longest-surviving [Maroon group]” (Brathwaite, 1994b, p.129). The final of his six nexuses are the Garifuna of Belize/Honduras, a group he describes as the “‘youngest’ of the Caribbean/ American Maroon groups” (Brathwaite, 1994b, p.129). But he also unsettles this strategy of periodization noting that “only if you ‘date’ them from the time of their xpulsion (1795) from St Vincent” (Brathwaite 1994b, p.129).

In mapping these Maroon histories spread across five centuries and different geographic locations, Brathwaite foregrounds military encounters and conflicts with colonial powers and their consequences for Maroons (as seen, for example, in the uprooting of the Garifuna in 1795, the deportation of Jamaican Maroons to Nova Scotia and subsequently to Sierra Leone in 1796, the fall of Palmares and the Maroon trials in Dominica and so on). However, his outlining of these histories also offers glimpses of the numerous ways in which questions of movement and/ or (im)mobility, of food and land security, technologies of war, border controls and surveillance, which have all become central to more recent discussions in security studies, might also be seen as important to a history of Maroon in/securities. In bringing theoretical discussions of insecurities into conversation with narratives of marronage, I am keen to highlight this critical nexus. In turning to Brathwaite’s work, I am also interested in how attention to marronage in the framework of insecurities might redirect discussions of terror, movement and surveillance primarily oriented around the present and preoccupied with the nation state as its epistemological object of study towards a wider critical re-examination of colonial practices of death; genocide, terror

and “xtermination”. In other words, what is at stake in this critical conjunction of Maroon and In/securities is both a renegotiation of our understandings of discourses of marronage as well as our discussions of in/securities.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Brathwaite repeatedly uses “x” as opposed to “ex” in this discussion. I read this as part of his mobilization of a crossroads poetics for reading marronage where life, death, survival, movement are brought together. We might also read this as part of his insistence on viewing these histories not as separate, but within a nexus.

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