



Binghamton University's  
Department of Comparative  
Literature presents:  
**The Maroon Ecologies and  
Heritage Conference  
Program**

**Monday, February 24, 2025**

Binghamton University, Alpern Room, LN 2200

Breakfast for Presenters: 8:00-8:30 Alpern Room, LN 2200

**8:30-8:45 Welcome Remarks** Giovanna Montenegro, Associate Professor,  
Comparative Literature, Binghamton University; Provost Donald Hall,  
Binghamton University

**Hybrid Roundtable: Land, Legibility, Leverage: Thinking and Working  
Across Maroon Communities and Environmental Relations**

Alpern Room, LN 2200 and on Zoom

**8:45-9:30**

Moderator: Giovanna Montenegro, Binghamton University.

8:45-9:00 Building a Sustainable Garden in Quilombo do Camorim;  
Isabella Franco Da Silva'25; Harpur Fellows Program, Binghamton  
University

9:00-9:30

(Quilombo/ Brazil) - Julia Sauma - Lecturer, Anthropology, Goldsmiths,  
University of London (Will join via Zoom)

(Accompong/Jamaica) - Lydia Gibson, Assistant Professor of Race and Technology, Georgetown University; Visiting Assistant Professor, Columbia University.(Will join via Zoom)

**9:30-10:50 Literary, Historical, and Sociological Perspectives on Marronage in the Caribbean and Brazil**

Alpern Room, LN 2200

Moderator: Warren Harding; Assistant Professor of English, Binghamton University

9:30-9:50 “Moravian Missionaries Amongst the Saamaka,” Giovanna Montenegro, Associate Professor, Comparative Literature, Binghamton University

9:50-10:10 “Emigrés, Evangelicals and Self-Proclaimed Robin Hoods: Emmelie Prophète's Maroon Nation” Robyn Cope, Associate Professor of French, Romance Languages and Literature.

10:10- 10:30 “Decolonizing Cities: Black Movements and Territories of Life in Brazil,” Juliana Goes, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Binghamton University

10:30-10:50 Discussion

**10:50-11:50 Perspectives from Ethnobotany**

Alpern Room, LN 2200

Moderator: BrieAnna Langley, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Binghamton University

10:50-11:10 “Maroon Ecologies, the Biocultural Archive through Music.” Kenneth R. Otero-Walker, Project Manager of The Biocultural Diversity Collections, New York Botanical Garden.

11:10-11:30 “The Mystery of African Rice in Suriname and French Guiana”  
Nicholaas Pinas, PhD Candidate, Naturalis Biodiversity Center, Wageningen  
University, Netherlands

11:30-11:50 Discussion

### **Greenhouse Tour**

11:55- 12: 15 Greenhouse Tour w/ Josh DeMarree, University Greenhouse  
Manager

### **Lunch**

12:15-1:25 pm Lunch for Symposium Speakers LT1506 (15th Floor of the  
Library Tower)

### **1:30-2:30 pm Maroon Cultural Heritage, Climate Change, and the Environment**

Alpern Room, LN 2200

Moderator: Kathleen Sterling, Associate Professor of Anthropology,  
Binghamton University

1:30- 1:50 Thanya Fonkel, “Climate Change and Rice Cultivation: An  
Opportunity to Reevaluate Cultural Heritage,” Graduate Student, History,  
Anton de Kom University, Suriname

1:50- 2:10: “The Maroon Landscape,” Cheryl White, Head Lecturer, History,  
Anton de Kom University, Suriname

2:10-2:30pm Discussion

### **2:30- 3:15 Saamaka Rice and Cultural Heritage**

Alpern Room, LN 2200

Moderator: Cheryl White

“From Seed to Meal: Heritage and Tradition in the Rice Culture of the Saramaka People” Joni Dekoe, Director, Saamaka Museum, Pikin Slee, Suriname;

Interpretation: Elysa Kooijman, Graduate Student, Comparative Literature, Binghamton University.

**3:15- 3:30 Coffee Break**

Alpern Room, LN 2200

**3:30- 4:30 Saamaka Maroon Aesthetics**

Alpern Room, LN 2200

Moderator: Tom McDonough, Professor, Art History, Binghamton University  
Totomboti Collective, Pikin Slee, Suriname- Presenting- Marjet Zwaans, Netherlands/Suriname

**4:30-5:00 Refreshments** (Hosted by Latin American and Caribbean Area Studies Program) with empanadas from La Isla

**5:00- 6:00 Afro- Cuban Ensemble Performance**

with James Burns, Associate Professor, Ethnomusicology, Binghamton University; Kenneth Walker, New York Botanical Garden, and Heidy Batista, Lecturer, Theatre Department, Binghamton University

**7:00** Dinner with Presenters

Organized by the Department of Comparative Literature with assistance from the Latin American and Caribbean Area Studies Program

## **Presenter Bios for Maroon Ecologies and Heritage Conference (In Order of Appearance on Program)**

**Isabella Franco da Silva'25** is a senior biological sciences major on a pre-med track from Brazil. Last year, she received a Harpur Fellows project award that allowed her to return to Brazil to build a kitchen and sustainable garden in the Quilombo do Camorim community outside of Rio de Janeiro.

**Lydia Gibson** is Assistant Professor of Race and Technology at Georgetown University and Visiting Assistant Professor at Columbia University, whose research explores forest use in a Jamaican Maroon community and how ritual practice and traditional ecological knowledge is shaped by postcolonial conditions, environmental relations, and environmental and climate change. Lydia's research also contributes to the emerging field of environmental data justice, and explores how environmental discourse and data practices shape and differentiate access and power in environmental spaces.

**Julia F. Sauma** (she/her) investigates how collective life is maintained within and against violent extractive structures and institutions in Brazil and the UK. She works with Amazonian Quilombo (Maroon) activists and families in Brazil to create interventions in and reflections about the diverse labour involved in maintaining collective refuges on an anti-Black frontier. Julia's auto-ethnographic work explores what listening means for D/deaf and Hard of Hearing researchers. She is a Lecturer in the Department Anthropology, Goldsmiths, University of London.

**Giovanna Montenegro** (she/her) was born in Caracas, Venezuela. She is author of *German Conquistadors in Venezuela: The Welsers' Colony, Racialized Capitalism, and Cultural Memory* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2022). She was Fulbright US Scholar to Suriname from 2022-2023 where she started conducting research for her next book project: "Subverting Colonial Fantasies: Maroon and Indigenous Environmental Resistance in Suriname and the Guianas" which has just been supported by an NEH fellowship. She is Associate Professor of Comparative Literature and Director of the Latin American and Caribbean Area Studies Program at Binghamton University.

**Robyn Cope** specializes in French Caribbean literature and culture, including the legacy of racialized slavery, forms of neocolonialism, and Afro-diasporic peoples' ongoing freedom struggle. She is particularly interested in contemporary Caribbean women's writing. Cope has made numerous contributions to the emerging field of literary food studies, including a monograph entitled *The Pen and the Pan: Food, Fiction and Homegrown Caribbean Feminism(s)*, published with the University of the West Indies Press. Cope's current projects focus on female survival strategies and forms of resistance in post-earthquake Haitian fiction, including literary depictions of 21st-century female heirs to the historical Haitian maroon.

**Juliana Góes** is an Afro-Brazilian researcher committed to liberation and the construction of a new world. Currently, she is working on two book projects. The first, titled *Decolonizing Cities: Black Movements and Territories of Life in Brazil*, examines the intersections between Black movements in Latin America, self-determination, and urban politics. The second book, *Du Bois on Latin America and the Caribbean: Trans-American Pan-Africanism and Global Sociology*, co-authored with Agustin Lao-Montes and Jorge Vasquez, delves into Black internationalism across the Americas. In addition, Góes' research interests encompass Black feminism and womanism, abolitionism, and decolonial praxis. Her commitment to these areas is reflected in her extensive collaboration with grassroots movements and her ongoing efforts to integrate academic scholarship with activist practice. She has ongoing collaborations with Black organizations, sex workers' groups, urban settlements, and anti-prison movements.

**Kenneth R. Otero Walker** is a Bronx born New York City native who graduated from the prestigious Brooklyn Technical High School, majoring in Biochemistry through the Gateway to Medicine program, and has merited a Bachelor's degree in Latin American and Caribbean studies with a minor in Africana studies from Binghamton University. This emerging ethnobotanist has spoken internationally on a wide range of topics in ethnobiological study, from using novel ethnographic methods for qualitative and quantitative data analysis, to biocultural collections research and management. His studies use ethnographic explorations of biocultural practices to preserve and examine traditional and local plant knowledge.

**Nicholaas M. Pinas**, is a PhD candidate in ethnobotany at Naturalis Biodiversity Center/ Leiden and Wageningen University and Research/ Wageningen in the Netherlands. He is also a descendant of Maroons in Suriname. His research focuses on 300-plus years of rice cultivation in Maroon communities in Suriname and French Guiana. His recent publication highlights the importance of in-situ conservation of rice landraces in Maroon communities.

**Thanya Soké Fonkel**, MPA, BA is a member of the Saamaka Maroon community of Suriname and works for the Government of Suriname as a community development worker. She is also an independent researcher, applying qualitative research methods with special attention to oral sources within Maroon communities. She studied Bachelor of History at the Anton de Kom University of Suriname, Faculty of Humanities. She also studied Master of Public Administration in governance (MPA), at the FHR Lim A Po Institute for Social Studies (FHR) in collaboration with The Erasmus International Institute of Social Studies (ISS). In addition, she also has a Bachelor of Arts in Social and Cultural Education work, obtained from the Surinamese Higher Professional Training Academy for Higher Art and Culture Education (AHKCO). Academie voor Hogere Kunst en Cultuur Onderwijs.

**Dr. Cheryl White** is a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Humanities at the Anton de Kom University of Suriname. She is an archaeologist. Her research focus is the material, immaterial heritage of tropical forest communities of African Diaspora Maroons.

**Joney Doekoe** is Director of the Saamaka Museum located in the forested interior of traditional Saamaka territory on the Suriname River. The Saamaka Museum works closely with the Totomboti Foundation (a consortium of traditional wood carvers) to preserve and promote Saamaka Maroon material and immaterial heritage.

**Marjet Zwaans** is an artist who has an affinity for working in a collective because of the added value of complementary forces. Correspondence and connection are therefore guiding themes in her work. She draws inspiration from regenerative systems and concepts from Ecological Economics, wherein sustainable scale and redistribution of resources are prioritized over efficiency. She transfers these ideas into spatial installations, workshops and performances. Marjet is from The Netherlands and came into contact with Totomboti during a trip to Suriname in 2018 and has since stayed for regular long-term visits in Pikin Slee to create artworks together and to learn more of the culture. She is now fluent in Saramakan and has worked on several international projects with Totomboti. Herer in they combine textile works, woodcarving, sculpture, singing, drums and documentation of these forms in audio, video and photos.

As a resident at the Jan van Eyck Academy in Maastricht, she had the chance to bring her former studies in Economics and Fine Arts in multiple possible relations. That is when her interest in lichen and Ecological Economics grew. Before she had finished studies in Economics and Fine Arts at Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, Art Academy Minerva, Erasmus University Rotterdam and Universidad de Chile, Santiago.

With Totomboti she exhibited at Buro Stedelijk, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam; Oerol, Terschelling; Unfair Amsterdam. One of Totomboti's works was recently acquired by the Fries Museum, Leeuwarden. She has exhibited individually at Documenta and Art Rotterdam. Marjet and Totomboti also have collaborated with Prof. Giovanna Montenegro's 'Environment in Latin America: Between Crisis and Sustainability' class in Spring 2023 and Spring 2025 as part of the Center for Civic Engagement's funding for CEL (community-engaged learning courses).

In her collaboration with Totomboti, Marjet bridges her Western neo-liberal upbringing, education and schooling with Saramakan oral traditions that interface with ancestral spirits, the world of gods and natural surroundings.

**Heidy Batista García** is a distinguished dance artist with a diverse and accomplished career as a performer and educator. Born and raised in Cuba, she pursued her passion for dance through rigorous training in classical ballet, culminating in her graduation from the National Ballet School in Havana.

Following her education, she joined Danza Contemporanea de Cuba, the leading contemporary dance company on the island, where she developed her skills in the Cuban Modern Dance Technique and explored her African roots. She has toured extensively and performed at

renowned venues, including The Joyce Theater in New York, Sadler's Wells in London, and Mercat de les Flors in Barcelona.

In addition to her performance career, she earned a Master of Dance degree from the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) at the University of Melbourne, Australia, and an MBA from Torrens University, Australia. Most recently, Heidi joined the Theatre Department at Binghamton University, NY, where she continues to explore and contribute to the field of movement expression. Her commitment to dance inspires those around her and enriches her students' educational experiences.

**James Burns** is an associate professor of music and Africana studies. Burns joined the Binghamton faculty in 2005, having previously lectured in African music and culture at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, and in African drumming at Goldsmiths College. He is also a member of the Society for Ethnomusicology. As an active ethnographic researcher, he has conducted over eight years of ongoing fieldwork in Ghana, Togo, and Benin with Ewe-Fon, Akan, and Dagbamba (Dagomba) ethnic groups funded by grants from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (U.K.) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (U.S.). Important publications from this research include the books *Female Voices from an Ewe Dance-drumming Community in Ghana* (Ashgate 2009), which was awarded honorable mention for the J.K. Nketia African music prize by the Society for Ethnomusicology (2010), and *The Beard Cannot Tell Stories to the Eyelash: Creative Transformation in an Ewe Funeral Dance-Drumming Tradition* (forthcoming); in addition to the journal articles, "Rhythmic Archetypes in Instrumental Music from Africa and the Diaspora" (Music Theory Online vol. 16/4, 2010), and "Doing it with style: an ethnopoetic study of improvisation in Ewe dance-drumming," (African Music vol. 9/1, 2011). Apart from these written publications, Burns has also produced several audio-visual recordings of Ewe music including the highly regarded audio CD *Ewe Drumming from Ghana: The Soup Which Is Sweet Draws the Chairs in Closer* (2005 British Library/Topic Records), and music videos for the Dzigbordi and [Dunenyo](#) performing groups from the Volta Region of Ghana. Professor Burns is also a teacher and performer of traditional music from the African diaspora and directs the Nukporfe African Dance-Drumming Ensemble at Binghamton.