Sugar, Slavery, and Violence: the Moral Economy of Slaves on Nineteenth-Century Cuban *Ingenios*

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Introduction

In July of 1842, more than forty African slaves in the western Cuban district of Macurijes rose up.[1] Armed with their work machetes, as well as "sticks, and baskets laden with stones," the slaves joined forces against the administrator of the sugar plantation, their overseers, and the local commandant – along with his troop of soldiers. With clear disadvantages in both arms and training, the hostile slaves were quickly put down by their oppressors, leaving six slaves wounded and apprehended – but not before "they set fire to the *ingenio's* [sugar mill's] tile works."[2] This uprising did not end well for those involved, particularly for those identified as its leaders. Indeed, the leaders – Gregorio, Ceuta, Genaro, and Beltrán – were sentenced to one hundred lashes and ten years in prison. Any other slaves involved were sentenced to fifty lashes. A prior – and nearly identical – uprising had occurred on same *ingenio* earlier in 1842, an incident that ultimately resulted in the capture and execution of five of that revolt's accused leaders.[3] The records of this particular *ingenio* indicate a clear sense of slave hostility and aggression towards their oppressors. These records also reflect the slaves' motives in this seemingly doomed uprising; in this case – according to the testimony of captured slaves – the slaves' motive being revenge for the brutal punishment of two of their fellow slaves – Jorge Lucumí and Facundo Lucumí. This record represents a rare instance in which the words, thoughts, and names of slaves from a nineteenth-century Cuban sugar plantation did not go completely lost to history.

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[1] Archivo Nacional de Cuba (hereafter ANC), *Comisión Militar, 28/1*, in *Voices of the Enslaved in Nineteenth-century Cuba: A Documentary History,* by Gloria García Rodríguez (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2011), 132-135.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Manuel Paz Barcia. *Seeds of Insurrection: Domination and Resistance on Western Cuban Plantations, 1808-1848.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2008), 39.

The majority of records that include the voices and identities of Cuban sugar slaves involve either acts of violence or insubordination – a significant fact, in itself – and they often suggest potential motivations and intentions behind the slaves' actions. Therefore, these records can help shed light on the *ingenio* (sugar mill) slave mentality. In the case of the Arratía uprising, for instance, it is apparent when considering both the slaves' admitted motives and their likelihood of success in rebelling, that achieving freedom was not always the primary goal for slaves in instances of rebellion. Indeed, according to Manuel Paz Barcia, retaliation against physical punishment frequently "could drive slaves to dangerous and unexpected responses; there were hundreds of such incidents in nineteenth-century Cuba."[4] Yet, in an environment defined predominantly by violence and brutality, slaves were fully aware that acts of resistance – particularly slave uprisings – meant the promise of punishment and the probability of death. Slaves resisted nonetheless.

The fact that Cuban slaves were willing to risk their lives in certain situations in order to retaliate or even to demonstrate solidarity brings up certain questions regarding slave experience and slave consciousness on nineteenth-century *ingenios*. Is it possible to reconstruct, from what evidence exists, how slaves on Cuban sugar plantations understood their worlds? Did slaves have a sense of morality, of right and wrong, even within the inherently immoral system of chattel slavery? What did slaves on rural, isolated plantations understand to be their fundamental rights? Were their ideas and experiences part of developments in the broader Atlantic world? British historian E.P. Thompson's idea of the moral economy of the crowd illuminates the reasons behind

[4] Manuel Paz Barcia. *Seeds of Insurrection: Domination and Resistance on Western Cuban Plantations, 1808-1848.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2008), 32.

slaves' willingness to put themselves at risk.[5] According to E.P. Thompson's analysis of eighteenth-century English crowds, almost every instance of "crowd action" was motivated by "some legitimising notion." This "legitimising notion" was not necessarily based on a legal measure afforded to the crowd by superiors in power; indeed, it was usually motivated by a popular consensus, which "was so strong that it overrode motives of fear or deference."[6] With the rise of the free market in the nineteenth-century, older notions of moral economy faded and the desire for economic profit prevailed. However, traditional notions continued to challenge the newer, and expanding notions of political economy, thus the moral economy was diminished, but it never disappeared. Although Thompson specifically discusses the changes in English ideology in the eighteenth century, this change applies to the experiences of nineteenth-century *ingenio* slaves as well. According to Thompson, the crowd – or the workers that suffer due to the increasing importance of the free market – holds on to traditional concepts of justice and fairness, and rises up against the violation of these understandings. Following this logic, slaves on *ingenios* – as both the importance of sugar and population of slaves increased exponentially in Cuba – had a sense of moral economy that they held on to, and was worth fighting and dying for.[7]

A sense of morality tied to an economy of violence also connects to another prominent writer and theorist, Frantz Fanon. In *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon explores the psychological impacts of oppression and violence on colonized peoples, and the role

[5] E.P. Thompson. "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century" (originally printed in 1971) in *The Essential E.P. Thompson*, ed. Dorothy Thompson (New York: The New Press, 2001), 316.
[6] Ibid, 318.
[7] Ibid, 362.

of violence in expressions of power and humanity – as well as in historical change. According to Fanon, colonists and enslavers are the catalysts of this system of violence. Through the colonization process, the oppressors teach the oppressed a language of force, which ultimately causes the oppressed "to express themselves with force."[8] The psychological and violent components of the lives of colonized peoples speak to slaves' mentalities and systems of violence on Cuban *ingenios.* The functions and causes of slave violence on *ingenios* parallel the meanings of violence for colonized peoples in that they reflect a sense of humanity in the face of dehumanizing circumstances. Indeed, Fanon argues, "deep down the colonized subject acknowledges no authority" and is "by no means convinced of his inferiority."[9] In spite of dehumanizing circumstances and treatment, slaves developed a fundamental sense of humanity tied to violence that "embolden[ed] them, and restore[d] their self-confidence."[10] According to Fanon, "at the very moment when they [slaves] discover their humanity, they begin to sharpen their weapons to secure its victory."[11]

When contemplating the questions above and the notion of slaves' moral economy, it is crucial to consider the nature of the sources available on *ingenio* slaves. How accurately do these sources reflect the notions and motivations of slaves on *ingenios* in seeking revenge or justice through violent actions? It cannot be forgotten that when slaves appear in official records, their voices are always somewhat tampered with. The slaves interrogated after the Arratía uprising, for instance, weren't writing their own

[8] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (originally published in 1963) Trans. Richard Philcox. (New York: Grove, 2004), 42.
[9] Ibid, 16.
[10] Ibid, 51.
[11] Ibid, 8.

statements – they were giving their statements, probably under duress, to a third party with its own interpretations, perceptions, and motivations. In addition to issues surrounding the interpreter's own biases and the circumstances of questioning, there were also issues of miscommunications and barriers due to differences in cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

In instances where sugar slaves appear in official records, it is most often as a consequence of an act of violence. In these violent acts, the slaves that appear most frequently identify themselves as Africans. In the Arratía uprising, two of the slaves who allegedly motivated the incident were identified as Jorge Lucumí and Facundo Lucumí. Additionally, the slaves listed above as the leaders of the uprising also shared the same surname – Lucumí. In Cuba, where slaves' names assigned identities according to surnames – which were replaced with constructed African ethnic backgrounds (*naciones*), such as Lucumí – slaves' names also carried the implications of different ethnicities. Slaves and slaveholders alike held biased views based on stereotypes associated with different African backgrounds – a fact that influenced both the behaviors and treatments of slaves. In this incident, the actions allegedly motivated by the punishment of two Lucumí slaves, and led by four other Lucumí slaves, were interpreted by all witnesses of and participants in the event – as well as by the third party recording the incident – through this constructed lens.

The official records involving Cuban sugar slaves are flawed in many ways and cannot be relied on exclusively in constructing slave mentalities and motivations. Indeed, it is important to supplement these records with the rare words of slaves that aren't filtered through a third party, or that are filtered but with different intentions and within

different contexts. The stories of the Cuban slaves, Juan Francisco Manzano and Esteban Montejo – in *Autobiografía de un esclavo* and *Biography of a Runaway Slave,* respectively – represent two such perspectives.[12] In *Autobiografía de un esclavo,* Manzano describes his experiences as a slave in his own words. In *Biography of a Runaway Slave,* Cuban anthropologist and novelist Miguel Barnet records Montejo's narrative of slave life. These stories, nonetheless, are also problematic – albeit in different ways from the official records. For both Manzano and Montejo their life stories rely on memories from the past – which are inherently biased to some extent, and influenced by emotion and the amount of time elapsed. The addition of a third party in writing Montejo's story complicates the matter further – as does his age, as he was first interviewed at the age of 103. While it is important to acknowledge the drawbacks of these sources, they remain invaluable in trying to reconstruct the experiences of slaves in nineteenth-century Cuba. These slave stories in conjunction with the official records shed light on how slaves identified themselves, how others identified slaves, the power dynamics on *ingenios,* and the types of slave activity on *ingenios* that warranted an appearance on the historical record. Additionally, they reflect the possible motivations of slaves – and patterns of alleged motivations – as well as white anxieties, all under the same brutal slave regime.

Ultimately, these records are useful in trying to understand the experiences and identities of just a few of the hundreds and thousands of slaves that arrived in Cuba in the nineteenth-century – the rest of which remain predominantly nameless, faceless, and

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[12] Juan F. Manzano. *Autobiografia De Un Esclavo*. (Barcelona: Linkgua, 2010.) Esteban Montejo, Miguel Barnet, trans. W Nick Hill. *Biography of a Runaway Slave.* (Willimantic, CT: Curstone, 1994).

voiceless. It is important to consider the names that exist, and the voices – however manipulated – in the records. It is also important to note, regardless of the stated motivations, that slaves did act in violent and rebellious ways that put them in grave danger – a fact which indicates that slaves had a strong sense of moral economy, even under their inherently immoral circumstances. The rise of sugar in Cuba transformed Cuba into a slave society, fully dependent on chattel slavery for economic production and success. Under this new regime of sugar slavery, the experience of slavery drastically changed, and a different population of slaves – with a distinctive understanding of the world – developed in the Western Cuban countryside. Sugar slaves learned to express their humanity, and to respond to violations of their moral economy, through a language of violence and force.

Why Focus on Sugar Slaves?

The realities of slave life in Cuba differed significantly depending on a variety of factors including the differences between rural and urban economies as well as the era of enslavement. With the appearance of *ingenios* (sugar mills and plantations) – primarily in western Cuban districts – a new kind of slave population was introduced to the island. The slave populations on these rural, and often isolated plantations were predominantly male, African, and according to historian Gloria García Rodríguez, "included almost no free population whatsoever."[13] Although there were more *cafetales* than *ingenios* at the onset of the 1840's, sugarcane quickly came to dominate the countryside. According to historian Dale W. Tomich, between 1800 and 1857, "the number of *ingenios* increased almost fourfold." [14]

The new *ingenios* were "established at a frenetic pace" and were larger than ever before, and the already established *ingenios* worked to expand their production levels.[15] The experiences of sugar slaves are of particular importance because they constituted a significant portion of the slave population – "between one-quarter and one-third of Cuba's slaves in 1840 worked on sugar plantations" – yet their voices and identities are the least accessible. [16] With new developments in technology as well as the rapid expansion of the Cuban slave populations, *ingenios* made up the largest plantation system

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[13] Gloria García Rodríguez. *Voices of the Enslaved in Nineteenth-century Cuba: A Documentary History*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2011), 10 (Introduction).
[14] Dale W. Tomich. *Through the Prism of Slavery: Labor, Capital, and World Economy*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 64.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Robert L. Paquette. *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict between Empires over Slavery in Cuba.* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1988), 51.

in New World slavery. In addition to the sheer magnitude of the sugar slave populations and plantations, the conditions of slave life on *ingenios* were inherently brutal and horrifying – making for a distinctive slave experience defined primarily by violence and death.

It is within this time frame and physical environment that the opening incident – the slave uprising of Arratía – occurred, and records indicate that slaves' violent and retaliatory actions, such as those that occurred during the incident at *ingenio* Arratía, were not altogether rare on nineteenth-century sugar plantations – particularly once sugar became the primary economic staple in Cuba.[17] Within this brutal system slaves expressed their humanity, primarily through acts of violence and subversion. Slaves consistently resorted to violence on *ingenios* in order to express their moral economic protest in spite of the very real consequences they faced in taking these actions. According to Frantz Fanon, in "instances of atmospheric violence" – such as that of Cuban *ingenios* – violence is always "rippling under the skin," and each slave identifies their enemies, "puts a name to all of his misfortunes, and casts all his exacerbated hatred and rage in this new direction."[18] With a sense of their own humanity and of justice – and of the violators of humanity and justice – it was only a matter of time before violence erupted on *ingenios.* Was slave violence on *ingenios* inevitable? Were instances of violence simply impulsive and reactionary? Did *ingenio* slaves have access to non-violent alternatives in the pursuit of justice and revenge? If so, were *ingenio* slaves aware of these non-violent methods of seeking justice?

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[17] Manuel Paz Barcia. *Seeds of Insurrection: Domination and Resistance on Western Cuban Plantations, 1808-1848*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2008), 32.
[18] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (originally published in 1963) Trans. Richard Philcox. (New York: Grove, 2004), 31.

Slavery in Cuba to Cuban Slavery

While the scope and shape of slavery drastically transformed beginning in the nineteenth-century, the institution of slavery had already been a part of Cuban society for centuries. Indeed, as early as 1523, three hundred of the first African slaves arrived on the island.[19] The presence of slaves was constant throughout the centuries, with slaves working on different tasks and in multiple areas over time. Initially, a significant number of slaves worked as cattle herders and leather tanners. Slaves also played critical roles in the production of sugar at *trapiches* (primitive *ingenios*) and in the production of tobacco.[20] Over time, slavery changed shape as it extended into the cities where slaves worked "as muleteers, hucksters, small craftsmen, or in any of the myriad marine and port-related tasks."[21] The strong presence of slaves in urban areas eventually led to the development of significant populations of *libres de color* (free people of color) through manumission, free birth, and immigration.[22] Abiel Abbot, a nineteenth-century traveler from Massachusetts, noted that Cuba, when considered "comparatively with other slave-holding islands, [was] strong in its *free* population."[23] The significant differences between rural and urban areas on the island meant "no one economic activity defined the

[19] Fernando Ortiz. *Hampa Afro-Cubana Los Negros Esclavos*. (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Nuevo Mundo, 2011), 67.
[20] Gloria García Rodríguez. *Voices of the Enslaved in Nineteenth-century Cuba: A Documentary History*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2011), 4.
[21] Ibid.
[22]Michele Reid-Vazquez. *The Year of the Lash: Free People of Color in Cuba and the Nineteenth-century Atlantic World.* (Athens: University of Georgia, 2011), 18.
[23] Abiel Abbot. *Letters Written in the Interior of Cuba: Between the Mountains of Arcana, to the East, and of Cusco, to the West, in the Months of February, March, April, and May, 1828.* (Lexington, KY: ULAN, 2013), xiv.

slave experience."[24] Indeed, prior to 1750, more slaves were incorporated into urban tasks and occupations than on farms or plantations.[25]

A shift in favor of sugar production came beginning in the 1740's, when the Spanish Crown eliminated taxes on sugar transported to Spain and an increased world demand for sugar meant a rise in profitability.[26] Although Cuban sugar and slavery had yet to become Cuba's dominant economic forces, during the 1750's the number of *ingenios* in the Havana region rose markedly. Soon after this shift in Cuba, towards an active interest and investment in sugar production, the English invaded and occupied Havana in 1762. According to Moreno Fraginals, the English presence was a crucial historical moment for Cuba in that it both introduced and implanted the concept of a Caribbean plantation system to the island.[27] Moreno Fraginals argues, that within eleven months, the British "introduced as many blacks as would normally have entered [Cuba] in twelve or fifteen years."[28] The presence of the British meant more freedom for Cuban sugar planters – which ironically meant more access to slaves through the transatlantic slave trade – and possibly as many as 4,000 slaves arrived during the British occupation.[29] With more highly concentrated levels of slave labor, the *ingenios* reached new levels of production, and created unique circumstances for slaves that fostered a

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[24] Laid W. Bergad, Fe Iglesias García, María del Carmen Barcia. *Cuban Slave Market: 1790-1880*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995), 23.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid, 24.
[27] Manuel Fraginals Moreno. *The Sugarmill: The Socioeconomic Complex of Sugar in Cuba, 1760-1860*. (New York: Monthly Review, 1976), 15.
[28] Ibid, 17.
[29] Matt D. Childs. *The 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba and the Struggle Against Atlantic Slavery*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006), 24.

slave mentality influenced fundamentally by violence – and the desire to reaffirm their humanity.

Although slaves had been present in Cuba for centuries, and the British occupation had a significant impact on the expansion of slavery, it was not until the beginning of the nineteenth-century that Cuba truly "shift[ed] from a society with slaves to a slave society."[30] In the years leading up to the turn of the century, several factors that had previously restricted both the number of slaves in Cuba and Cuba's ability to produce and sell sugar competitively on the world market were eliminated and the island became the top world producer.[31] Before 1789, Spain strictly controlled the slave population in Cuba by awarding contracts to slave traders that limited how often slave ships arrived as well as how many slaves arrived.[32] With the deregulation of the slave trade, Cuban slavery increased exponentially. Between 1790 and 1820 approximately 325,000 Africans arrived in Cuba as slaves, which was over four times the number brought into Cuba during the previous thirty years. The growth of sugar slavery meant a more severe experience for more slaves than ever before in Cuba.

While the deregulation of the slave trade had an immense impact on the growth of the slave population – and on the growth of Cuban plantation slavery – it was not the only factor in Cuba's transformation into the world's leading sugar producer. In addition to new, unlimited access to the slave market, the happenings in the broader Atlantic world greatly facilitated Cuba's economic and social transformation. The collapse of the

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[30] Michele Reid-Vazquez. *The Year of the Lash: Free People of Color in Cuba and the Nineteenth-century Atlantic World.* (Athens: University of Georgia, 2011), 26.
[31] Manuel Moreno Fraginals. *The Sugarmill: The Socioeconomic Complex of Sugar in Cuba, 1760-1860*. (New York: Monthly Review, 1976), 17.
[32] Gloria García Rodríguez. *Voices of the Enslaved in Nineteenth-century Cuba: A Documentary History*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2011), 7.

French colony Saint-Domingue in 1804 following the Haitian Revolution – beginning in 1791 – meant that "what had been the most important supplier of the world's sugar" was destroyed at the same time as Cuba's sugar and slave economy was on the rise.[33] In light of the developments in Haiti – the first successful slave revolt – Cuban planters were aware of the dangers of an economy based on chattel slavery, and the potential of slave violence. Nonetheless, Cuban elites chose to blame the slave revolt in Haiti on the ideology of the French Revolution and the behaviors of French slaveholders, thus "avoid[ing] the consideration that the slaves' own desire for freedom accounted for the Haitian Revolution."[34] Armed with this flimsy justification – and powerful economic incentives – Cuban planters moved forward at full speed, rapidly acquiring slaves and developing plantations. Cuba continued to participate actively in the transatlantic slave trade in spite of international prohibitions beginning in the first decade of the nineteenth-century. The realities of slave life and experience became more brutalized and alienating as *ingenios* grew in size and importance in the Cuban economy – and the severe nature of sugar slavery is reflected in Cuba's continued reliance on the transatlantic slave trade.

The slave trade continued to fuel Cuba's slave economy until the 1860s, and approximately 85 percent of the total number of slaves ever imported to Cuba arrived in the nineteenth-century.[35] While the institution of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade deteriorated – particularly in the British Empire – throughout the nineteenth-century, a

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[33] Laurent Dubois. *Avengers of the New World: the Story of the Haitian Revolution*. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 304.
[34] Matt D. Childs. *The 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba and the Struggle Against Atlantic Slavery*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006), 31.
[35] Matt D. Childs. *The 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba and the Struggle Against Atlantic Slavery*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006), 30.

"second slavery" developed in other areas, including Cuba.[36] World demand for sugar continued to increase along with both the Cuban sugar slave population and the rate of sugar production. Technological developments such as the use of steam power in *ingenios*, as well as the opening of new lands through railroads were additional factors in the immense expansion of the Cuban sugar economy.[37] The remarkable growth of Cuban slavery throughout the nineteenth-century repositioned Cuba as a leader in the world economy and drastically changed the realities of slave life – particularly for slaves on *ingenios*. By 1830, Cuba officially became the world's leading sugar producer "with an output of 104,971 metric tons."[38] On these ever-expanding sugar plantations, slaves had to adapt quickly and form new outlooks on their worlds – with a heavy reliance on survival instincts and connections to other slaves.

The "second slavery" that developed in Cuba relied on violence and force in controlling the ever-expanding African slave population, and slaves developed their own senses of identity and morality that were inextricably linked to violence. Additionally, slave populations on *ingenios* were predominantly male and African – a fact that consistently shaped slave consciousness and slaves' behaviors throughout nineteenth-century Cuba. According to Franz Fanon, the oppressed and colonized people – in this case, African sugar slaves – were "prepared for violence from time immemorial" making it a driving force in negotiating power dynamics on plantations, retaliating against oppression, and in constructing slave identities based on notions of humanity, morality, and justice.

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[36] Dale W. Tomich. *Through the Prism of Slavery: Labor, Capital, and World Economy*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 63.
[37] Ibid, 65.
[38] Ibid, 64.

The Legal Rights of Cuban Slaves

In attempting to recreate how slaves understood their worlds, a crucial question to ask is: what did slaves consider to be their fundamental rights? And how do these rights compare to the actual legal rights of slaves? As mentioned previously, populations of *libres de color* developed in Cuban urban centers primarily through the process of manumission. The right to manumission was one of the rights technically granted to all slaves by the Spanish Crown in the Slave Code of 1842. In addition to manumission, the Slave Code of 1842 granted slaves the right to marry, the right to switch masters in cases of excessive cruelty, and the right to make money.[39]

The road to freedom through manumission began with the process of *coartación.* In *coartación*, the price of a slave's freedom was fixed, and the slave could make payments towards his or her freedom in installments. Once a slave made the first payment – of at least fifty pesos – their legal status changed from that of a slave to a *coartado*. Although *coartados* remained enslaved until paying the full price set for their freedom, that price could not be changed, and masters could not oppose their *coartación.*[40] Additionally, *coartados* had the right to find a different master; if a *coartado* found a new master and requested to be sold, "the owner was obligated to sell the *coartado."*[41] *Coartación,* however, did not extend to family members or unborn children – if a *coartado* achieved freedom, this freedom was not inherited, nor was the

[39] Fernando Ortiz. *Hampa Afro-Cubana Los Negros Esclavos*. (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Nuevo Mundo, 2011), 303.
[40] Robert L. Paquette. *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict between Empires over Slavery in Cuba.* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1988), 270.
[41] Laird W. Bergad, Fe Iglesias García, María del Carmen Barcia. *Cuban Slave Market: 1790-1880*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995), 122.

legal status of *coartado*. This process of self-purchase through *coartación* was "firmly established and protected in Spanish legislation and claimed by slaves throughout Spanish America."[42]

Indeed, nineteenth-century travelers were quick to point out the Spanish practice of manumission with praise. According to Alexander von Humboldt, a nineteenth-century German traveller, the laws in Cuba were "directly the reverse of French and English [laws], favor[ing] in an extraordinary degree the attainment of freedom, placing no obstacle in its way."[43] Another contemporary traveller, Dr. Abiel Abbot – a preacher from Massachusetts – made similar observations in a letter from 1828 in which he wrote: "It is a redeeming circumstance in regard to the Spanish character, that their laws favor emancipation, and the government faithfully executes them."[44] While these two statements seem to be nearly identical, Humboldt's statement simply praises the laws favoring manumission – it does not claim that these laws are always upheld in reality, as Abbot's statement indicates. In fact, in his final essay in *The Island of Cuba*, "The Nature of Slavery," Humboldt distinguishes between the practice and theory of these laws – particularly in the lives of plantation slaves. According to Humboldt, "the isolated situation of the plantations makes them [slave laws] impossible to enforce."[45]

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[42] Alejandro Fuente, "Slave Law and Claims-Making in Cuba: The Tannenbaum Debate Revisited," *Law and History Review*, 357.
[43] Alexander von Humboldt. *The Island of Cuba: A Political Essay.* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2001), 136.
[44] Abiel Abbot. *Letters Written in the Interior of Cuba: Between the Mountains of Arcana, to the East, and of Cusco, to the West, in the Months of February, March, April, and May, 1828.* (Lexington, KY: ULAN, 2013), 97.
[45] Alexander von Humboldt. *The Island of Cuba: A Political Essay.* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2001), 257.

In an environment where legal rights were not necessarily enforced, and slaves may not have been aware of these rights anyway, a society based on generally accepted notions of moral economy developed on *ingenios*. In terms of the laws slaves were aware of, however, it is possible to determine which rights slaves were more likely to know, and which slaves were more likely to know *and* access them. The available records of manumission provide insight into what types of slaves were more likely to become *coartados* – and were therefore both aware of their right to manumission and able to access that right. The available records also indicate the general levels of manumission, which is of particular significance when considering the massive slave population of nineteenth-century Cuba and the likelihood – or unlikelihood – of slaves attaining their freedom.

The research of Bergad, García, and del Carmen Barcia – based on the analysis of *cartas de libertad* (letters of freedom) – suggests that urban slaves had a notably higher chance of attaining their freedom. Additionally, this research suggests that female slaves were more likely than male slaves to purchase their freedom – a conclusion supported by the fact that "female slaves were heavily concentrated in Cuba's cities and males in rural zones."[46] Ultimately, urban slaves – particularly female ones – were more likely to become *coartados*. Urban settings fostered slaves' awareness of slave rights by providing an environment that facilitated the spread of ideas through the proximity to other slaves and free people of color. Additionally, the nature of slavery in cities differed drastically from plantation slavery, allowing for more freedom of movement, independence, and even access to education.

[46]Laird W. Bergad, Fe Iglesias García, María del Carmen Barcia. *Cuban Slave Market: 1790-1880*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995), 123.

In terms of the broader patterns of manumission, the recorded frequency of *coartación* during the height of Cuba's involvement in the slave trade – between 1790 and 1880 – indicate that a mere 13% of all Cuban slaves were *coartados.* [47] These conclusions support renowned Cuban historian Fernando Ortiz in his claim that slave rights, more often than not, were illusory ("*todos estos derechos eran a menudo ilusorios"*).[48] While slaves living under Spanish colonial rule technically had "limited traditional rights [including] self-purchase and *coartación,* marriage, baptism, and to change owner in case of physical abuse," records indicate *that* Cuban slavery – particularly for plantation slaves – was a lifelong experience characterized by violence and brutality.[49]

Indeed, one of the rare appearances of an *ingenio* slave in the manumission records was a request made by Romualdo García in 1837 for the freedom of his wife, a slave on the *ingenio* Santa Lutgarda. García, a man formerly enslaved on the same plantation, was granted his freedom *only* because he was going blind and could no longer work on the *ingenio*.[50] The record does not indicate whether or not García's wife was ever *coartada* or granted her freedom. When considering where plantation slaves do appear in records – incidents of violence and resistance, and where they appear the least – records of manumission and *coartación*, it seems that plantation slaves were either unaware of their legal rights or they lacked access to their rights – or both. In an

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[47] Ibid.
[48] Fernando Ortiz. *Hampa Afro-Cubana Los Negros Esclavos*. (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Nuevo Mundo, 2011), 304.
[49] Alejandro Fuente, "Slave Law and Claims-Making in Cuba: The Tannenbaum Debate Revisited," *Law and History Review*, 367.
[50] ANC, *Gobierno Superior Civil, 938/33092,* in *Voices of the Enslaved in Nineteenth-century Cuba: A Documentary History*, by Gloria García Rodríguez (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2011), 90-91.

environment that either kept slaves ignorant of their rights through isolation or did not allow slaves to access their rights through domination and oppression, slaves developed their own system of justice and understandings of power that were fundamentally characterized by violence and the threat of violence. On Cuban *ingenios,* where the largest and most isolated slave populations existed, violence and unofficial systems of power regulated plantation life on a daily basis. Indeed, the balance of power and the methods for maintaining power was a crucial ingredient in the running of an *ingenio.*

Sugar and Ingenios

The rise of the Cuban sugar economy meant not only the rise of Cuban slavery, it also meant a new reliance on a specific form of slavery: chattel. The daily lives of *ingenio* slaves were defined fundamentally by the hazardous and backbreaking processes involved in sugar production. Sugar production was an inherently brutal process with a high injury and mortality rate – a fact reflected in the Cuban planter saying: "'*Con sangre se hace azúcar'* – 'Sugar is made with blood.'"[51] The labor on *ingenios* was constant and intense, and *ingenio* slave populations could not sustain themselves naturally – "slave-population deaths exceeded births."[52] Tasks on *ingenios* were carried out in a rotation system, and plantation administrators and overseers "saw to it that the process was meticulously carried out so that, alternating in the various jobs, the slaves worked a full day of seventeen, eighteen, or twenty hours."[53]

The slaves' tasks included clearing land, digging ditches, and cutting and hauling the sugarcane. Once the sugarcane was cut and hauled, it had to be rushed to the sugar mill for the boiling and refining processes before the "precious contents were dissipated."[54] Since the juice of the cane would go bad if the cane wasn't crushed within a day of being cut, the production of sugar relied heavily on both "speed and perfect

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[51] Robert L. Paquette. *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict between Empires over Slavery in Cuba.* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1988), 56, Manuel Moreno Fraginals. *The Sugarmill: The Socioeconomic Complex of Sugar in Cuba 1760-1860*. (New York: Monthly Review, 1976), 41.
[52] Ibid, 55.
[53] Manuel Moreno Fraginals. *The Sugarmill: The Socioeconomic Complex of Sugar in Cuba, 1760-1860.* (New York: Monthly Review, 1976), 148.
[54] Robert L. Paquette. *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict between Empires over Slavery in Cuba.* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1988), 52.

timing."[55] While the number and intensity of tasks involved in making sugar meant a backbreaking and exhausting existence for *ingenio* slaves – as well as the need for many slaves to work on *ingenios* – the speed involved also caused frequent accidents that left many slaves either maimed or killed. Abiel Abbot wrote about one such incident that he witnessed on an *ingenio* in March of 1828, when a slave got his hand caught while feeding the cane into the vertical rollers. Although the slave was not killed in this incident, his thumb was severed and his remaining fingers were mangled.[56] This kind of accident was not uncommon in Caribbean sugar mills where – especially during the harvest and milling season – slaves worked shifts between sixteen and eighteen hours. The length of shifts combined with poor diets made for an exhausted slave force, one that was more prone to dangerous accidents. Indeed, according to David Brion Davis, in northeastern Brazil it was common to see sugar slave women missing an arm.[57] In addition to the physical demands and risks of labor on *ingenios,* slave populations were exposed to a disease-ridden environment and a highly unbalanced sex ratio.[58] In the early 1820's "there was hardly a mill without 25 percent of its labor force 'useless, injured, and sick.'"[59]

The tropical climate, inhumane living conditions, and the severe tolls of *ingenio* labor on the physical and emotional health of slaves combined to create an environment

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[55] David Brion Davis. *Inhuman Bondage: the Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World.* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 108.
[56] Abiel Abbot. *Letters Written in the Interior of Cuba: Between the Mountains of Arcana, to the East, and of Cusco, to the West, in the Months of February, March, April, and May, 1828.* (Lexington, KY: ULAN, 2013), 36.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Rebecca J. Scott. *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba after Slavery*. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 23.
[59] Manuel Moreno Fraginals. *The Sugarmill: The Socioeconomic Complex of Sugar in Cuba, 1760-1860.* (New York: Monthly Review, 1976), 148.

where sickness and disease wreaked havoc. When sugar slaves were not working for their masters, or for themselves on *conucos* (slaves' provision grounds) – if masters provided them – slaves lived either in *los bohíos* (slave huts) or in *el barracón* (the slave barracks). Leading up to the entrenchment of both sugar and slavery in the Cuban economy, Cuban sugar slaves lived in *los bohíos,* which were simple huts built with materials such as "guano [and] royal palm" with "a gable roof."[60] *El barracón* – the slave barracks – was an alternate form of slave shelter introduced to Cuban plantations in the first half of the nineteenth-century, following the rise of large-scale *ingenios*.

Cuban sugar planters, with newer and larger estates – and slave forces – than ever before, began constructing *barracones* (barracks) on their *ingenios*.[61] *Barracones* were built in rows that faced one another, and consisted of high walls "made of cement with tiled roofs" and a single entrance in the center.[62] In 1831, author Don Honorato Bertrand Chateausalins wrote the first known proposal for the construction of *barracones* on Cuban *ingenios.* Chateausalins argued that *barracones* were ideal structures for the maintenance and control of large slave populations. [63] *El barracón* provided strict physical control of slaves by keeping all slaves in one location, with only one main entrance that could be locked overnight and easily monitored by administrators and overseers. Additionally, the rooms in the *barracones* were designed to have only "a

[60] Gloria García Rodríguez. *Voices of the Enslaved in Nineteenth-century Cuba: A Documentary History*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2011), 30.
[61] Robert L. Paquette. *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict between Empires over Slavery in Cuba.* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1988), 56.
[62] Esteban Montejo, Miguel Barnet, trans. W Nick Hill. *Biography of a Runaway Slave.* (Willimantic, CT: Curstone, 1994), 23.
[63] Ibid, 209.

single door with a small barred window beside it," in order to minimize any communication amongst slaves.[64]

According to Ortíz, slave life in *los bohíos* was arguably better for slaves both psychologically and emotionally. [65] Ortíz claims that slaves were better off living in *los bohíos* where they had more privacy and were grouped according to marriage and family ties. However, while it is possible that one type of shelter provided a relatively better experience for slaves than the other, both environments were extremely detrimental to the health and life expectancy of sugar slaves. Diseases were prevalent in both *barracones* and *bohíos* – characterized by Robert L. Paquette as "crude, pest-ridden palm-thatched huts." Esteban Montejo, a former *ingenio* slave, described the individual rooms as "furnaces" and *el barracón* as "swarm[ing] with fleas and ticks that gave the entire workforce infections and sickness."[66]

Administrators, overseers (*mayorales*), and slave drivers (*contramayorales*) on *ingenios* maintained the constant rate of labor through a system of physical punishment and coercion. According to Fernando Ortiz – a prominent Cuban anthropologist and scholar of Afro-Cuban culture – the slave system on *ingenios* had to be cruel and violent in order to maintain the cruel and violent system it sanctioned. ("…*tuvo que ser cruel, violento, primitivo, y salvaje como lo era la institución que pretendía sancionar*.")[67]

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[64] Ibid.
[65] Fernando Ortiz. *Hampa Afro-Cubana Los Negros Esclavos*. (originally published in 1916) (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Nuevo Mundo, 2011), 214.
[66] Esteban Montejo, Miguel Barnet, trans. W Nick Hill. *Biography of a Runaway Slave.* (Willimantic, CT: Curstone, 1994), 23.
[67] Ibid, 245.

Control of sugar slaves "depended, ultimately, on physical power."[68] The most frequent physical punishment on *ingenios* was whipping. The overseers would "give whippings with a rawhide lash" or with whips made of hemp and tree branches.[69] The lash "left marks on the skin" and "tore the skin into little strips."[70]

The lash was used so frequently that it wasn't only an implement of punishment – it was a constant tool of coercion to keep slaves moving and working. Indeed, on *ingenios*, the act of whipping was referred to as "*menear el guarapo"* – "to get a move on." In instances of punishment, the lash was called "*boca-abajo*," meaning facedown – named after the degrading physical position of the victim during the punishment. Sometimes the punishment was called "*boca-abajo llevando cuenta*," a practice that consisted of the victim counting the number of lashes received during punishment – and any mistake meant starting the count over from zero.[71] A specific kind of lashing existed on *ingenios* for the punishment of pregnant slaves, when it was necessary to keep the baby alive *("E*n este caso había que conservar la cría*")* to protect the baby's potential value for masters on their plantations.[72] In this case, overseers would dig a hole in the ground and then the slave would lie *boca-abajo* with her belly in the hole – it was thought that this would keep the baby safe from the lashes.

While travelling the western Cuban countryside in 1828, Reverend Abiel Abbot claimed he did not think that the lash was used in an excessive or brutal way against the

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[68] David Brion Davis. *Inhuman Bondage: the Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World.* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 122.
[69] Esteban Montejo, Miguel Barnet, trans. W Nick Hill. *Biography of a Runaway Slave.* (Willimantic, CT: Curstone, 1994), 40.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Fernando Ortiz. *Hampa Afro-Cubana Los Negros Esclavos*. (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Nuevo Mundo, 2011), 247.
[72] Ibid, 248.

slaves – although he did acknowledge that the lash was used with force when punishing slaves. Abbot's explicit statement that the lash was only used for correction – and his implicit statement that the lash was a generally acceptable method of punishment – is consistent with other ideas expressed by Abbot throughout the letters he wrote in and about Cuba. Throughout Abbot's letters, he conveys an apologist attitude towards Cuban slavery – and slavery itself. Abbot frequently downplays any activity that could be interpreted as cruel or inhumane. Instead, Abbot emphasizes the slaves' legal rights in Cuba and praises masters for – what he sees as – a paternalist approach in the treatment of their slaves – which, from Abbot's viewpoint meant an inherently more humane and gentle form of slavery. In spite of Abbot's apologist claims and attitudes, he does admit at one point that while on the different *ingenios* he "heard the snap of the lash."[73] Abbot also wrote that when he once saw slaves lined up "to see correction by the *mayoral* (overseer)," he "heard ten lashes more when [he] was a half mile on [his] way" – after the slaves had been dismissed from the correction line, an observation that contradicts Abbot's statement that the lash was only used in instances of punishment.[74]

The maintenance of slave populations on *ingenios* was crucial in keeping up the constant levels of sugar production. The new sugar economy's "yield point, in its marginal cost curve, was a unit of three hundred slaves."[75] However, the perceived value of sugar compared to that of slaves led Cuban planters to believe that "it was cheaper to work field slaves to death in five years or so" and to then purchase new slaves in their

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[73] Abiel Abbot. *Letters Written in the Interior of Cuba: Between the Mountains of Arcana, to the East, and of Cusco, to the West, in the Months of February, March, April, and May, 1828.* (Lexington, KY: ULAN, 2013), 55.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Manuel Moreno Fraginals. *The Sugarmill: The Socioeconomic Complex of Sugar in Cuba, 1760-1860.* (New York: Monthly Review, 1976), 20.

stead rather than worrying about the "long-term maintenance and reproduction" of slaves.[76] Indeed, the German traveler Alexander von Humboldt claimed to have "heard discussed with the greatest coolness, the question whether it was better for the proprietor not to overwork his slaves" or "whether he should get all he could out of them in a few years."[77] With this attitude, which treated slaves as replaceable commodities, Cuban planters fostered an environment of perpetual violence, disease, injury, and death. The physical destruction of slaves through labor and punishment, as well as Cuba's continued participation in the transatlantic slave trade "clearly discouraged slave family formation," not to mention, survival.[78]

Until 1819, planters consistently purchased prime-age African males to work *ingenios*, a population that was "consistently priced higher than females."[79] When the slave trade was threatened, the price of female slaves would temporarily spike – as planter fears led to "enhanced premiums placed upon female slaves of child-bearing ages."[80] Nonetheless, the possibility of maintaining the number of slaves needed on *ingenios* through natural increase was an unlikely development. According to Moreno Fraginals, the fundamental quality that shaped slave life on *ingenios* was "that the natural reproduction of slave crews was impossible" due to the harsh living conditions.[81] Indeed,

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[76] Robert L. Paquette. *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict between Empires over Slavery in Cuba.* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1988), 55.
[77] Alexander von Humboldt. *The Island of Cuba: A Political Essay.* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2001), 143.
[78] Ibid, 59.
[79] Laid W. Bergad, Fe Iglesias García, María del Carmen Barcia. *Cuban Slave Market: 1790-1880*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995), 62.
[80] Ibid, 63.
[81] Manuel Moreno Fraginals. *The Sugarmill: The Socioeconomic Complex of Sugar in Cuba, 1760-1860.* (New York: Monthly Review, 1976), 142.

in spite of planters' occasional attempts to encourage reproduction through the purchase of female slaves, male workers always dominated the slave populations on Cuban *ingenios.* The maintenance of any female slaves was further hindered by the fact that many Cuban planters "had few reservations about putting females in the fields to cut cane."[82]

The general lack of female slaves on *ingenios* supports the notion that planters intended to work sugar slaves to death rather than encourage their maintenance and reproduction. Additionally, the impossibility of natural reproduction and planters' reliance on the slave trade to keep slave populations replenished emphasizes the inhumane conditions that characterized life on *ingenios.* The general lack of women also had significant impacts on developments in slave life and culture on *ingenios* where, according to former slave Esteban Montejo, "life was lonely" and "to have a woman you had to be twenty-five years old."[83] Montejo also describes the occurrence of openly homosexual relationships where one man took the role of the husband, and the other took the role of the wife – this included washing clothes, cooking, and taking care of the *conucos* (the husband would the sell the produce from the *conucos*).[84]

Throughout the New World, slaves and free people of color alike were aware that slavery on *ingenios* was inherently brutal and deadly. In fact, *ingenios* served as a sort of cautionary tale for slaves, both a warning and a threat that life could be much worse if you get out of line. Even urban slaves in Cuba, working a variety occupations – and

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[82] Robert L. Paquette. *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict between Empires over Slavery in Cuba.* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1988), 59.
[83] Esteban Montejo, Miguel Barnet, trans. W Nick Hill. *Biography of a Runaway Slave.* (Willimantic, CT: Curstone, 1994), 40.
[84] Ibid.

typically experiencing a more free and independent existence – "lived with the uncertainty that a slight trespass beyond the circumference of permitted spheres" would get them sent *al campo* (to work on an *ingenio*.)[85] Akin to the common planter expression from North American slavery "sold down the river," getting sent "*al campo*" threatened slaves with not only the separation from their families and friends, but also with the experience of a more brutal and dehumanizing form of enslavement, that – especially for slaves sent "al campo" – would most likely lead to their deaths. The threat and fear of being forced "al campo" extended to slaves outside of Cuba as well. Significantly, in the antebellum South – where northern planters threatened to sell their slaves, and slaves were terrified to go – planters "used the threat of deportation to Cuba as an instrument for disciplining their slaves."

In *Autobiografía de un esclavo* (*Autobiography of a Slave*), Juan Francisco Manzano describes his experiences as a domestic urban slave in Cuba. Born in 1797, and enslaved until the age of forty, Manzano's enslavement occurred during the dramatic rise and expansion of Cuba's sugar economy – as well as its slave society. As mentioned in the introduction, issues of the accuracy of memory are inherent when considering autobiographies. However, Manzano was not an old man when he wrote about his experiences, and his characterizations of *ingenio* life are consistent with historical research – in spite of being based on memory and shaped by emotion. Although Manzano was not a plantation slave, he was fully aware of the horrors that characterized slave life on Cuban *ingenios.* For Manzano, the notion of going "*al campo"* was not at all an idle

[85] Robert L. Paquette. *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict between Empires over Slavery in Cuba.* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1988), 39.

threat – or an unknown reality. Indeed, one of Manzano's masters sent him to work on *ingenios* multiple times throughout his enslavement as a cruel form of punishment.[86] Manzano recalled experiencing severe physical abuses and an environment of constant fear, where he barely ate and was almost always crying ("*comia poco y casi siempre llorando*.")[87] Manzano's time on *ingenios* left him traumatized to the point that "the very name of the family *ingenio* and that of a particular overseer would fill him 'with horror.'"[88]

Manzano's personal experiences of slavery on Cuban sugar plantations left him emotionally and physically scarred for life, a fact that speaks to prevailing fears amongst slaves from Cuba to the antebellum South. Ultimately, the realities of Manzano's experiences and the fears of different slaves illuminate significant nineteenth-century developments, including the brutal nature of Cuban sugar slavery and, more generally, the variations that existed in New World slavery. An effective way to understand the variations of slavery and how they compared is to imagine the category of slavery as a "spectrum of slave systems."[89] The slavery spectrum ranges from slaves with the highest status – most access to rights and opportunities, better treatment, less harsh environments and forms of labor – to slaves with the lowest status – little or no access to rights and opportunities, cruel treatment, harshest environments and forms of labor.

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[86] Juan F. Manzano. *Autobiografia De Un Esclavo*. (Barcelona: Linkgua, 2010.)
[87] Ibid, 31.
[88] Robert L. Paquette. *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict between Empires over Slavery in Cuba.* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1988), 66.
[89] David Brion Davis. *Inhuman Bondage: the Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World.* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 36.

There were different forms of slavery in the New World, and slaves living in nineteenth-century Cuba became increasingly aware of how these slave systems compared to one another as the size and shape of slavery quickly transformed. And, assuming that slaves weren't already on the bottom of the spectrum, they were particularly concerned with how their personal circumstances could potentially worsen – and what type or types of slavery they should fear more so than their own. Cuban slaves could readily figure out where they fit along the spectrum of slavery in a variety of ways such as through social exchanges with other slaves – or people of different statuses, and by threats made by their masters. Slaves had access to information that influenced how they understood New World slavery, and how they fit into the spectrum of slave systems. According to traveler Alexander von Humboldt, the different forms of slavery in Cuba can be assessed by "a measure of the hierarchy of human deprivation [which] can be seen in the threats leveled against disobedient blacks."[90] All types of slaves were threatened with some form of enslavement considered to be worse than the statuses they already held. For instance, "the *caselero* [coachman] is threatened with *cafetal* [coffee planting], the slave working in the *cafetal* fears transfer to sugar planting."[91] Ultimately, no matter what, the worst threat to slaves everywhere was being sent *al campo* (to an *ingenio*).

[90] Alexander von Humboldt. *The Island of Cuba: A Political Essay.* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2001), 256.
[91] Ibid.

"Al Campo"

There were official and unofficial forms of power on all *ingenios.* The official forms of power established a hierarchy that categorized individuals according to occupation and status. Planters topped off this hierarchy, but since they "absented themselves from their plantations for much of the year," hired employees always worked managing the *ingenio* and the slaves.[92] Following the planters were administrators – only present in large-scale production, *mayorales* (slave overseers), and *boyeros* (ox herders). Other significant – and controversial – figures on *ingenios* were *contramayorales* (slave drivers); *contramayorales* typically were former slaves elevated to this position of authority – meaning their jobs required the physical coercion and punishment of slaves. Below *contramayorales* were the slaves, the largest group at the very bottom of the plantation hierarchy. While the official levels of power provided a framework for *ingenios* that determined the statuses and roles of individuals, unofficial power dynamics also played a prominent role in plantation life. Informal power dynamics challenged the rigidity and authority of plantation hierarchy by creating some room for manipulation and negotiation of the system.

Slave experiences on *ingenios* were greatly influenced by the fluctuating power dynamics that shifted on a day-to-day basis. Although the constant threats and realities of physical punishment were definite sources of power for the overseers and administrators on *ingenios*, those who were technically in power were also aware of the fact that they were greatly outnumbered. Additionally, the overuse of any physical corrections often

[92] Robert L. Paquette. *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict between Empires over Slavery in Cuba.* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1988), 44.

resulted in slave retaliation and resistance. Indeed, in certain situations whites – and blacks – in charge would be more lenient or harsh depending on the balance of power on any given day. In the slave uprising at *ingenio* Arratía in 1842, for instance, the administrator waited for the right moment to punish the slaves he deemed insubordinate. When these slaves were initially acting out, the "administrator was cognizant of the fact that there were only four white men on the entire *ingenio* and feared an insurrection."[93] Therefore, the administrator withheld punishment for several days until the arrival of the local commandant and his troops. The minority in power waited for a more opportune moment when the balance was more in their favor.

As mentioned previously, the balance of power and the methods for maintaining power was a crucial ingredient in the running of an *ingenio.* Therefore, it was in the best interest of planters and *ingenio* employees to "consider anything and everything related to the complicated management of their slave crews."[94] There were hundreds of slaves on any given *ingenio,* and "the slaves clearly were anything but docile" – and slaves were clearly aware of their vast majority.[95] Slaves actively participated in the negotiation of power on plantations, and at times risked life and limb to take a stand for what they saw as morally right. A constant slave majority on *ingenios* influenced slave behaviors and mentalities, and "they engaged in continuing negotiations, testing the multiple boundaries between field and household slaves, drivers, overseers, and the master class."[96]

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[93] ANC, *Comisión Militar, 28/1,* in *Voices of the Enslaved in Nineteenth-century Cuba: A Documentary History*, by Gloria García Rodríguez (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2011), 133.
[94] Ibid, 21.
[95] Ibid.
[96] David Brion Davis. *Inhuman Bondage: the Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World.* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 122.

Negotiations of power could lead to an uprising and violence, but nevertheless, slaves' ultimate goals frequently "had little to do with the issue of abstract freedom."[97]

Slaves frequently sought to shift the balance of power on *ingenios* in order to attain specific privileges such as more time and space to work on their provision grounds (*conucos*) as well as the time and freedom to participate in both internal and external trade in order to make money.[98] *Conucos* were of particular importance to sugar slaves because "the small gardens […] saved many slaves [by] providing them real nourishment."[99] Access to *conucos* also connected slaves to potential market exchanges, as a personal tract of land meant the opportunity for slaves to raise livestock and crops to sell for a profit. Because *ingenio* slaves were aware of their majority in numbers, their value to masters, and how power was structured on plantations, slaves found ways to manipulate the authority system and make their demands known. It was "a time-honored tradition" for slaves on Cuban plantations to wait for the presence of their masters to make personal demands as well as complaints and accusations against the administrators, overseers, and slave drivers left in charge of the *ingenios.*[100] There were always risks involved when slaves voiced personal demands or complaints to their masters. Masters may punish slaves for being insubordinate or for making false claims, and any accusations against plantation employees could lead to vengeful behavior on behalf of those accused once the master left the *ingenio*. Nevertheless, slaves took the opportunity

[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Esteban Montejo, Miguel Barnet, trans. W Nick Hill. *Biography of a Runaway Slave.* (Willimantic, CT: Curstone, 1994), 25.
[100] Gloria García Rodríguez. *Voices of the Enslaved in Nineteenth-century Cuba: A Documentary History.* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2011), 20.

to air their grievances to masters when they could.[101] In going over the heads of their superiors and daily oppressors, slaves demonstrated a keen awareness of both the hierarchical and flexible nature of power on *ingenios* and a willingness to manipulate it.

While slaves deliberately manipulated the balance of power in an effort to attain pragmatic goals – such as *conucos* – that could help improve their daily lives and provide them with opportunities, slaves also tested the bounds of authority in more aggressive ways with less evident long-term goals. Sugar slaves often retaliated physically against their oppressors in violent and risky ways. In instances of retaliation, slaves frequently targeted particular overseers or drivers thought to be excessively cruel. Slaves would also resort to violence in response to a specific instance – or instances – of excessive or undeserved punishment.

It is evident that slaves – in both violent and non-violent actions – had certain expectations and understandings of how things worked on *ingenios.* This was true for individuals at every level of power, and plantations were run in large part by the general understanding of and adherence to certain "rights and obligations" – which differed according to status.[102] Any violation of these mutually understood "rights and obligations […] caused heightened tensions and even open conflict."[103] Individuals on every level of the plantation power structure were aware of the dependent and flexible nature of authority on *ingenios*, and the "the daily routine on both the *ingenio* and the *cafetal* (coffee plantation) depended on such a delicate equilibrium."[104]

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[101] Ibid.
[102] Manuel Paz Barcia. *Seeds of Insurrection: Domination and Resistance on Western Cuban Plantations, 1808-1848*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2008), 22.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid, 15.

At the simplest level, slave masters and overseers attempted to control the power dynamics on *ingenios* with the division and organization of the workforce through the gang labor system. As discussed previously, there were multiple steps that had to be carried out in quick succession in the production of sugar. Therefore, masters divided their slaves into gangs – each of which carried out a different task on the *ingenio*. The division of slaves into different work gangs was essential in the efficient and successful production of sugar. In addition to the gang labor system being the most effective in terms of productivity, it also influenced the power dynamics on *ingenios* by limiting the number of slaves working together at the same time and place.

Mayorales and *contramayorales* were in charge of driving the slave gangs in their tasks and in inflicting physical corrections and punishments. *Contramayorales* were put in charge of locking slaves in *el barracón,* and monitoring them at night – a task that instilled a sense of hostility in slaves against former slaves. Slave hostility towards *contramayorales* was a desired outcome for masters and administrators, as the elevation of slaves to *contramayorales* was an attempt on behalf of masters and overseers to manipulate power dynamics through a different kind of slave division – by "promot[ing] ethnic animosities."[105] Indeed, according to former sugar slave Esteban Montejo, the slaves characterized *contramayorales* as "colored dandies" that "were ass-kissers and snitches."[106] However, this power play was not always predictable as *contramayorales*

[105] Robert L. Paquette. *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict between Empires over Slavery in Cuba.* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1988), 68.
[106] Esteban Montejo, Miguel Barnet, trans. W Nick Hill. *Biography of a Runaway Slave.* (Willimantic, CT: Curstone, 1994), 20.

"might lead those of their color in rebellion as well as punish them."[107] While using Montejo's biography presents issues similar to those involved in the use of Manzano's autobiography, it is significant that the first memories discussed by Montejo involve both rank and *nación* (ethnic identity).

While masters did attempt to control slaves – and plantation power dynamics – through organization and division, they did not always attempt to keep African slaves from the same *naciones* (ethnic groups) separated.[108] Indeed, according to historian Robert L. Paquette, while the notion of keeping Africans with similar backgrounds separated is a common myth in the historiography on slavery, slave owners frequently preferred to buy new slaves from the same *naciones* as the majority of slaves already living and working on their plantations.[109] It was believed that newly arrived slaves – *bozales* – that had yet to undergo "seasoning" – "a deadly process of biological adaptation and forced acculturation to a new environment" – would have an easier time adjusting if surrounded by "seasoned" Africans of similar backgrounds.[110]
In addition to the general hierarchy that divided the plantation according to occupation and status, a hierarchy existed within the slave populations on *ingenios*.

With the massive growth of the slave population beginning in the nineteenth-century, notions of slavery and blackness became increasingly intertwined –

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[107] Robert L. Paquette. *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict between Empires over Slavery in Cuba.* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1988), 68.
[108] Manuel Paz Barcia. *Seeds of Insurrection: Domination and Resistance on Western Cuban Plantations, 1808-1848*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2008), 14.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Robert L. Paquette. *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict between Empires over Slavery in Cuba.* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1988), 37.

understandings of race and status changed and a *sociedad de castas* (caste society) developed.[111] According to the *sociedad de castas,* rights and opportunities were limited for free and enslaved people of color depending on status, race, and gender. With the massive importation of African slaves in the nineteenth-century, "colonial officials defined people of African ancestry first by their racial identity, and second by their legal status."[112] The *sociedad de castas* categorized people according to caste – a concept related to but not synonymous with race. In colonial Spanish society, caste "referred to descent, and to putative distinctions carried in bloods, ancestry, and color."[113]

Although the classification of caste came close to modern notions of race, there were multiple dimensions to caste in addition to skin color such as language, lineage, and social status. There were several categories in the *sociedad de castas* that highlighted the divisions within the enslaved and free populations of African descent including: *bozal* (a recently arrived African), *ladino* (an African with knowledge of the Spanish language), *moreno* (pure-blooded African), *criollo* (Cuban-born), and *pardo* (of partial African ancestry). In addition to the categories listed here based on racial background and language, wealth and legal status – as free, *coartado,* or enslaved – provided some flexibility in terms of social status.[114] Therefore, according to the *sociedad de castas,* divisions existed within slave populations that elevated some slaves above others – and slaves were aware of these differences. On the lowest status level were the *bozales,*

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[111] Matt D. Childs. *The 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba and the Struggle Against Atlantic Slavery.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006), 27.
[112] Ibid, 69.
[113] Laura A Lewis. *Hall of Mirrors: Power, Witchcraft, and Caste in Colonial Mexico.* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 22.
[114] Robert L. Paquette. *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict between Empires over Slavery in Cuba.* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1988), 35-40.

followed by *ladinos*, and then the *criollos.* Above *criollos* in the general Cuban slave population were *pardos* (of partial African ancestry) – however, it was uncommon for *pardos* to be found working on *ingenios.*

In February of 1863, Alejo Criollo, a slave on *ingenio* Santa Teresa took advantage of the presence of his master, Don Rafael de Toca, and approached him – along with several other slaves including men, women, and children – with certain complaints. As is evidenced by his last name – Criollo – Alejo was a Cuban-born slave, a point he emphasized to his master "in a loud and resolute tone of voice."[115] Alejo claimed that he – along with the slaves that accompanied him – were Cuban-born and that the administrator and *mayoral* overworked them and punished them severely. Alejo Criollo's emphasis of his *criollo* identity implies that he expected a less harsh treatment than other slaves according to the *sociedad de castas.* This instance also represents the willingness for *ingenio* slaves to take a chance and appeal to their masters, in spite of the risks involved – this case resulted in twenty-five lashes (the legal limit for a single punishment) and shackles for all of the adult male slaves involved as a punishment for "making improper and unjust demands of their owner."[116] This case also demonstrates the disjointed nature of Cuban slave rights – which existed differently in the realms of theory and practice.

The case of Alejo Criollo appears in the historical record not because of his actions in approaching his master, but because of his apparent suicide following punishment. After Alejo and the two other *criollo* male slaves – Pío and Felipe – received

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[115] ANC, *Miscelánea de Expedientes*, 829/C, in *Voices of the Enslaved in Nineteenth-century Cuba: A Documentary History*, by Gloria García Rodríguez (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2011), 120.
[116] Ibid.

twenty-five lashes and were shackled in front of all the other slaves as an example, Alejo went missing. Alejo was later discovered hanging from a tree on the *ingenio.*[117] The tragic results of this event are the reason why any of these slaves appear on the record, as an investigation into the "mysterious" death of Alejo. The death of Alejo remains a mystery, as it is impossible to determine whether he killed himself, or if a slaveholder lynched him. Nonetheless, it is safe to assume that incidents where slaves communicated their grievances and desires – but did not result in the suicide or killing of a slave – did occur on *ingenios*, but did not necessarily make it into the records. Certain questions arise when considering what the motivations and intentions of slaves were in instances where they attempted to negotiate, such as: Did slaves on *ingenios* know their legal rights? Would knowledge of these rights have affected their experiences? What slaves were more likely to know what their rights were?

While it is unclear whether or not Alejo and the other *criollo* slaves understood what their legal rights were, it is evident that they all firmly believed that they had been wronged according to their own conception of right. As *criollo* slaves, Alejo and the people he spoke for had the best chance – among *ingenio* slaves – of accessing this information throughout their lives. A slave such as Alejo could communicate in and understand Spanish, and had more time to develop connections to outsiders. According to Manuel Barcía, *criollo* slaves were the most likely to understand what their rights were, and they were the most likely to "make use of every favorable aspect of the law in one way or another."[118] The incident on the *ingenio* Santa Teresa indicates the importance of

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[117] Ibid.
[118] Manuel Paz Barcia. *Seeds of Insurrection: Domination and Resistance on Western Cuban Plantations, 1808-1848*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2008), 104.

rights – whether legal or culturally understood – in the lives of *ingenio* slaves. It also indicates the differences that existed amongst sugar slaves in terms of cultural identities and experiences. If *criollo* slaves had a tendency to respond through legal and non-violent actions, did African slaves tend to react in extra-legal and violent ways?

African Identities on Cuban Ingenios

As mentioned previously, recently arrived Africans were termed *bozales* in Cuba, and it was a common practice for masters to purchase slaves from the same *nación* – ethnic background – in an effort to lessen the severity of the slave seasoning process upon arrival in Cuba. Over the centuries of Cuban slavery, planters developed cultural profiles of Africans called *naciones,* which were labels that "associat[ed] dispositions and behaviors with specific ethnic groups."[119] The expansion of slavery's size and importance in Cuba led planters to emphasize *naciones,* which were "social units based on New World constructions of African identity."[120] Although these labels can be considered as biased and stereotypical, it is useful to consider *naciones* in trying to reconstruct the mentalities of slaves on *ingenios,* since the labels were meaningful to both Africans and their oppressors. Indeed, former slave Esteban Montejo describes African slaves on *ingenios* in terms of nación, and claims that "each one [*nación*] had its own traits."[121] As mentioned previously, the first memories discussed by Montejo in his biography are based on issues of status and *nación* in *ingenio* life. This speaks to the impact of labels – both of status and ethnicity – on the way slaves perceived of themselves and of one another – as well as how they were categorized by whites. Additionally, while the labels are problematic, "the goal of this cultural profiling was to amass wealth" for Cuban

[119] Manuel Paz Barcia. *Seeds of Insurrection: Domination and Resistance on Western Cuban Plantations, 1808-1848*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2008), 14.
[120] Stephan Palmié. *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity & Tradition.* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 162.
[121] Esteban Montejo, Miguel Barnet, trans. W Nick Hill. *Biography of a Runaway Slave.* (Willimantic, CT: Curstone, 1994), 37.

planters, meaning they were not made up simply to perpetuate negative stereotypes or racist ideas – planters had incentive to base these labels on truthful observations.[122]

When the names of African slaves appear in historical records, they reflect the general Cuban practice of replacing slaves' first names with Spanish names and assigning last names based on *nación.* This is reflected in the majority of slave names used thus far, including: Jorge Lucumí, Facundo Lucumí, and Alejo Criollo. In records, slaves identify themselves and others according to *nación.* In the records from the uprising on *ingenio* Arratía, for instance, one slave named Anselmo Carabalí describes the slaves in his work crew by *nación* – "Carabalís, Lucumís, Minas, Ararás, and Congos."[123] The records of slave uprisings on *ingenios* indicate that the majority of slaves involved had *naciones* for surnames – a fact that reflects the reality that the majority of uprisings were "planned and led by African-born slaves who had recently arrived on the island." According to Manuel Barcia, most Cubans characterized Lucumís, Gangás, Carabalís, Minas, Ararás, Mandingas, and Congos as warlike and capable of revolting due to their familiarity "with guns, horses, and even with some Western combat strategies."[124]

Lucumís, Carabalís, and Gangás are three of the *naciones* that appear the most in records of slave violence and uprisings in the first half of nineteenth-century Cuba, a fact that parallels their reputations in Cuba as "among the most dangerous and savage of

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[122] Manuel Paz Barcia. *Seeds of Insurrection: Domination and Resistance on Western Cuban Plantations, 1808-1848*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2008), 14.
[123] ANC, *Comisión Militar,* 28/1, in *Voices of the Enslaved in Nineteenth-century Cuba: A Documentary History*, by Gloria García Rodríguez (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2011), 134.
[124] Manuel Paz Barcia. *Seeds of Insurrection: Domination and Resistance on Western Cuban Plantations, 1808-1848*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2008), 41.

Africans."[125] Lucumís were former subjects of the Oyo Empire – southwestern Nigeria – and, according to historian Manuel Paz Barcia, Lucumís were "respected and renowned for their rebellious temperament" by Cuban and Brazilian planters alike.[126] Former slave Esteban Montejo claimed that Lucumís "didn't like to work with cane and [that] many ran away" yet he also characterized them as "the most rebellious and the bravest" slaves that he'd encountered in his time as an *ingenio* slave.[127]

The Carabalí slaves came from the Bight of Biafra and formed a *nación* made up of people from different ethnic groups – yet they were all called Carabalís in Cuba after the Calabar River.[128] Carabalís were characterized similarly to the Lucumís – as brave and warlike. However, Carabalís were also known as the slaves most prone to commit suicide. In one of his letters from Cuba, Reverend Abiel Abbot claimed that African slaves had "the expectation of returning by death, to their native country," a belief "so strong in the Carrobalees, that suicide [was] frequent among them."[129] Indeed, according to Abbot, on one *ingenio* eight Carabalís "were found hanging in company, in one night."[130] Montejo claimed he never saw a slave commit suicide – and that therefore, he didn't believe it was a phenomenon. However, Montejo also claimed that "blacks didn't do that [commit suicide] because they went flying, flying in the sky, and headed off for

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[125] Ibid, 36.
[126] Manuel Paz Barcia. *Seeds of Insurrection: Domination and Resistance on Western Cuban Plantations, 1808-1848*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2008), 16.
[127] Esteban Montejo, Miguel Barnet, trans. W Nick Hill. *Biography of a Runaway Slave.* (Willimantic, CT: Curstone, 1994), 37.
[128] Manuel Paz Barcia. *Seeds of Insurrection: Domination and Resistance on Western Cuban Plantations, 1808-1848*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2008), 19.
[129] Abiel Abbot. *Letters Written in the Interior of Cuba: Between the Mountains of Arcana, to the East, and of Cusco, to the West, in the Months of February, March, April, and May, 1828.* (Lexington, KY: ULAN, 2013), 44.
[130] Ibid.

their homeland" – a belief that connects strongly with the African beliefs reported by Abbot.[131]

The Gangás – also related to Mandingas – was a *nación* that encompassed slaves shipped to Cuba from the region of Sierra Leone and Liberia.[132] There is no evidence that indicates that the Gangás were made up of only one ethnic group, and Ortíz admits that there is no evidence that proves the exact region of Gangá origins ("*la region Gangá no puedo precisarla sin duda.*")[133] It is, however, generally accepted that Gangás were a group of Mande speakers. As a *nación*, Gangás were characterized similarly to the Lucumís – as noble and warlike. What made the Gangás unique was their reputation as thieves, escape artists, and maroons.[134] Montejo described Gangás as "good folks" of which "many were *cimarrones* (maroons)." Interestingly, Montejo's description of the Mandingas – slaves from roughly the same region that spoke a similar language as Gangás – is quite negative, labeling Mandingas as "crooks and a bad bunch."[135]

Although the categories of *naciones* should not be relied on exclusively when reconstructing slave mentalities and identities, they are helpful in understanding the prevailing attitudes in nineteenth-century Cuba – ranging from slaves to planters. Whether or not *naciones* accurately characterized different groups of African slaves, people in this context used them consistently to label both themselves and others – and

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[131] Esteban Montejo, Miguel Barnet, trans. W Nick Hill. *Biography of a Runaway Slave.* (Willimantic, CT: Curstone, 1994), 43.
[132] Manuel Paz Barcia. *Seeds of Insurrection: Domination and Resistance on Western Cuban Plantations, 1808-1848*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2008), 21.
[133] Fernando Ortiz. *Hampa Afro-Cubana Los Negros Esclavos*. (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Nuevo Mundo, 2011), 36.
[134] Manuel Paz Barcia. *Seeds of Insurrection: Domination and Resistance on Western Cuban Plantations, 1808-1848*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2008), 22.
[135] Esteban Montejo, Miguel Barnet, trans. W Nick Hill. *Biography of a Runaway Slave.* (Willimantic, CT: Curstone, 1994), 37.

therefore reflected a way in which people perceived themselves and others. These categories and perceptions did not determine the identities or actions of slaves – but they did influence them significantly. Within these contexts, shared ideas and perceptions of cultural connections increased the probability that a sense of slave community and alliance would develop – even on *ingenios*. It is these connections that could also foster a sense of moral economy on plantations – where slaves were willing to put themselves at risk to take a stand. *Naciones* represent different expressions of one moral economy – that of the Cuban sugar slave, a fundamentally leveling and dehumanizing status, with important cultural variations.

Ingenio Slaves in the Records

Ingenio slaves took non-belligerent steps to negotiate power dynamics in nineteenth-century Cuba on a daily basis. However, the appearance of *ingenio* slaves in official records occurs only when their actions were noted – primarily as a consequence of violence or the threat of violence. The following instances reflect this fact, and the records provide insights into why slaves took these particular actions, and how they understood the world. Although more records about daily life on *ingenios* would be helpful in reconstructing the identities and mindsets of sugar slaves, the more extreme actions – that slaves risked their lives taking – reflect what was most important to slaves and worth the risks involved.

In August of 1835, the *contramayoral* on the *ingenio* Intrépido led a revolt. The *contramayoral,* Benigno Lucumí, attacked the plantation's ox herd and, with the help of several slaves "dragged him [the ox herd] to a stake that they had made ready, where they tied him fast and blindfolded him."[136] What would lead Benigno, a *contramayoral* and former slave, to risk losing his elevated status on the *ingenio* – and possibly his life*?* According to Benigno, the ox herd – who had recently starting working on the *ingenio* – had been "punishing them [Benigno and the slaves] relentlessly in the cruelest manner, using a manatee leather whip." Benigno also claimed that the ox herd did not allow enough time for rest, or let the slaves drink enough water. Although Benigno denied his involvement as the leader in this incident, he did admit that he knew about the slaves' plan to attack the ox herd – and that the ox herd had flogged him on the morning of the

[136] ANC, *Miscelánea de Expedientes,* 614/A, in *Voices of the Enslaved in Nineteenth-century Cuba: A Documentary History*, by Gloria García Rodríguez (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2011), 114.

attack. After the ox herd was tied up, Benigno led the slaves to Don Rafael Montalvo's farm – where, according to Benigno, they went to report what had happened and to get a new ox herd installed.[137]

In July of 1840, an African slave on *ingenio* Balear went a step further than Benigno and his followers, and murdered his *mayoral.* As the slaves walked out to work on the fields, Fermín Lucumí struck the *mayoral* with his work machete – knocking him off of his horse and killing him.[138] As Fermín fled the scene, other Lucumís followed him because, according to the statement of Nicolás Lucumí, they "loved and respected Fermín because he was a leader back in their native land."[139] When asked why he killed the *mayoral*, Fermín claimed he was angry with the *mayoral* for punishing him the night before, and that in his land he "killed those who attacked him."[140] According to the statements of two other Lucumí slaves involved in this incident, Nicolás and Pedro, Lucumís had different understandings of murder. Pedro Lucumí claimed that as a newly arrived slave, he didn't know that killing was a crime and that "in his homeland, killing was allowed." Nicolás Lucumí, however, claimed that he knew it was a crime to kill – especially a white *mayoral* – because "it was the first thing that his countrymen told him when he arrived on the farm."

In both of these incidents, the actions of African slaves were risky and violent – and they shed light on the slaves' identities, loyalties, and values. In both cases, slaves showed a sense of solidarity – on *ingenio* Intrépido slaves came together to plan and took action against their unjust treatment; on *ingenio* Balear Fermín's fellow Lucumís

[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid, 118.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid, 119.

followed him in support after he killed the *mayoral*, putting themselves at risk. The experiences of slaves on *ingenios* were shaped significantly by brutality and violence. Even when slaves knew they had certain rights, their calculations were to retaliate physically – perhaps for revenge or perhaps because they did not think their rights would be upheld. For example, Benigno Lucumí's statement indicates his knowledge of legal slave rights – he claimed he intended to report the ox herd for his cruel treatment in order to get a new one – yet he still felt the need to attack and punish the ox herd for his actions. Benigno's understanding of the world around him meant a violent response to any violation of his moral compass. Ultimately, the majority of incidences on *ingenios* where slaves took violent actions were in response to violent actions. Even in the case of Alejo Criollo – a slave with knowledge of his rights and the bravery to appeal to his master in a non-violent and legal way – the violation of his moral code led to violence, in this case against himself. The majority of Cuban sugar slaves acted as a response to violations of their moral standards – not necessarily by ideologies of freedom or revolution.

That is not to say that slaves on Cuban *ingenios* did not ever fight in the name of freedom and revolution. Indeed, in the 1840s, there were two incidents on *ingenios* in which slaves expressed the desire for and knowledge of both. In the first incident in 1843, a slave rebellion occurred on the *ingenio* El Triunvirato in which the motivation was, according to a slaves' testimony, "to go to the farms, gather together the greatest possible number of slaves, make war on the whites, become free, and not do any work."[141] The

[141] ANC, *Comisión Militar,* 30/3, in *Voices of the Enslaved in Nineteenth-century Cuba: A Documentary History*, by Gloria García Rodríguez (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2011), 183.

second incident was in 1844 when a slave plot to revolt was discovered on the *ingenio* La Luisa. In the slaves' confessions, they describe their plan of "killing the whites and becoming free." Afterwards, the slaves planned to "embark directly to Guarico (Haiti), killing all the whites they possibly could."[142]

Significantly, these incidents occurred in the years leading up to the Conspiracy of La Escalera (Conspiracy of the Ladder) in 1844 – an anti-slavery conspiracy named after "the principal implement to which slave suspects were bound before interrogation by the lash."[143] The reference to Haiti implies that slaves – even those isolated on rural sugar plantations – were aware of the significance of Haiti and the Haitian Revolution. However, according to historian Sybille Fischer, "the investigators of the Escalera Conspiracy were particularly interested in any detail that might suggest links to Haiti" – and it can be assumed that this was true in the interrogation of slaves from the *ingenio* La Luisa.[144] Therefore, the record of slaves' confessions is not reliable in determining the thoughts and motivations behind the conspiracy – and it is possible that words were put into slaves' mouths under duress. Nonetheless, slave conspiracies and uprisings appear to have grown in size leading up to the Conspiracy of La Escalera – a notion that connects to a growing unrest and knowledge amongst slaves, as well as heightened paranoia on behalf of whites. Ultimately, moral standards are not inherently revolutionary. However, the idea that enslaved people should be able to enforce their notions of right and wrong – even to the point of resorting to illegal, violent actions – is.

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[142] Ibid, 188.
[143] Robert L. Paquette. *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict between Empires over Slavery in Cuba.* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1988), 4.
[144] Sibylle Fischer. *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution.* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2004), 82.

Conclusion

While it is impossible to determine, with complete certainty, what slaves were thinking when they took violent actions and put their lives at risk, their actions reflect their brutal circumstances – and what mattered most in their lives. Slaves on nineteenth-century Cuban *ingenios* were treated as replaceable commodities, as chattel; and their lives were characterized by constant physical coercion and punishment, backbreaking labor in the cane fields and sugar mills, and frequent outbreaks of deadly disease. However, in spite of these extreme circumstances, as well as the systematic efforts of *ingenio* authorities to dehumanize and control slave populations through a regime of fear and violence, slaves maintained a sense of humanity – as reflected by the slaves that appear in historical records. The majority of slaves on Cuban *ingenios* had strong cultural ties to both Africa and to one another – as reflected by the significance of *naciones* – and these self-perceptions and identities did not simply disappear with the Middle Passage or under chattel slavery in the New World. Sugar slaves were aware of themselves, in terms of identity and in terms of their majority, and they found ways to manipulate the power dynamics on plantations in their favor. It is likely that many slaves on nineteenth-century *ingenios* were aware of the Haitian Revolution, and even if they weren't, white anxiety was increasingly palpable with the expansion of slavery – and slaves were aware of their power, however limited. Rising up violently against their oppressors was the most effective – albeit dangerous and doomed – way for slaves to express grievances and to force authorities to recognize their humanity, power, and the potential threat they posed to the entire *ingenio* system and slave society in Cuba.

Even under the worst of circumstances, slaves were still human beings with natural and learned understandings of both morality and justice. The predominantly violent actions of sugar slaves demonstrate these understandings, and reveal how a world characterized fundamentally by violence and death – and the constant threats of violence and death – bred a system of slave justice and morality based on violence. The moral economies of *ingenio* slaves consisted of "definite, and passionately held notions of the common [good]."[145] The records indicate that slaves on *ingenios* had a strong sense of morality – of right and wrong – and it wasn't necessarily based on their knowledge of legal rights or their desires for freedom. Indeed, slaves on Cuban *ingenios* had a sense of morality that surpassed their fears of punishment and death – and created a political economy of violence based on slaves' moral and human understandings of the world and of themselves. Within this moral economy, there were limits to injustice, brutality, and victimization – and slaves relied on violence and one another to maintain their humanity, and in order to communicate when masters and overseers had gone too far. The actions of *ingenio* slaves indicate that in certain instances, fighting for notions of justice, solidarity, identity, retaliation, and revenge was worth risking life and limb. Ultimately, slaves responded to inhumanity with human responses – reacting to violent treatment with violent actions.

[145] E.P. Thompson. "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century" (originally printed in 1971) in *The Essential E.P. Thompson*, ed. Dorothy Thompson (New York: The New Press, 2001), 318.

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