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‘Hombres que entre las raíces’: Plantation colonies, slave rebellions and land redistribution in Saint Domingue and Cuba at the late colonial period, c. 1750 – c. 1860

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S E H A

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Hombres que entre las raíces ('Men who among the roots' in English) is a verse of a well-known poem, '*Vientos del pueblo me llevan*' ('People's winds carry me'), by the Spanish poet Miguel Hernández (1910-1942), whose birth's hundredth anniversary is commemorated this year. Shall this work be our small tribute.

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Abstract. In the last years, the work by Engerman and Sokoloff (ES) on the divergent development paths within the Americas has provided an important backing to the institutionalist school. In line with the work by Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson, ES assume the existence of institutional persistence: once accepted the resilient nature of the institutional framework, it becomes easier to trace a link between an adverse colonial heritage and an unsatisfactory economic performance at present. Nevertheless, this interpretation, satisfactory as it is at the ‘big picture’ level, may also obscure both the presence of noteworthy causal relations and the agency of other actors. I am concerned with two questions. First: How to explain substantial differences in economic performance (particularly, land inequality) between ES’s same type of colony? Second: Is it possible to include the role of non-European agency in the development narrative? The comparative study of the plantation economies of Saint Domingue and Cuba at the late colonial period sheds light on these issues. The intrinsic instability of the plantation colonies and, in some cases, the outbreak of slave rebellions with their visible impact on the institutions and the economic performance suggest more nuanced analysis. I conclude that the recognition of both political economy factors and non-European agency in the process of economic change could benefit ongoing research on the (colonial) origins of comparative development.

Key words: Factor endowments, institutions, inequality, politics, plantation colonies, slave rebellions, land redistribution.

JEL Classification: F54, O13, O54, P16, P52.

Resumen. En los últimos años, los trabajos de Engerman y Sokoloff (ES) sobre las trayectorias de desarrollo divergentes en el continente americano han proporcionado un importante respaldo a la escuela institucionalista. En línea con las propuestas de Acemoglu, Johnson y Robinson, ES asumen la existencia de persistencia institucional: una vez aceptada la resistente naturaleza del marco institucional, resulta más fácil trazar un vínculo entre una herencia colonial adversa y un insuficiente desempeño económico en la actualidad. Sin embargo, esta interpretación, satisfactoria como es grosso modo, es susceptible de oscurecer tanto la presencia de otras significativas relaciones causa-consecuencia como la iniciativa tomada por agentes particulares. Este trabajo se articula en torno a dos interrogantes. Primero: ¿cómo es posible explicar la existencia de diferencias sustanciales en el desempeño económico (concretamente, en el nivel de desigualdad en la propiedad de la tierra) entre colonias incluidas dentro de una misma categoría por ES? Segundo: ¿es posible incluir el papel jugado por agentes no europeos dentro de la historia del desarrollo? El estudio comparado de las economías de plantación de Saint-Domingue y Cuba al final de la etapa colonial ayuda a responder estas preguntas. La inherente inestabilidad de las colonias de plantación y, en ciertos casos, el estallido de rebeliones de esclavos – con su inmediato impacto sobre las instituciones y el desempeño económico de estas regiones – sugieren un análisis con muchos más matices. El trabajo concluye que el reconocimiento tanto de los factores de economía política como de la iniciativa no europea en el proceso de cambio económico podría resultar beneficioso para la actual investigación en torno a los orígenes (coloniales) del desarrollo comparado.

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Eia pour ceux qui n'ont jamais rien inventé
Pour ceux qui n'ont jamais rien exploré
Pour ceux qui n'ont jamais rien dompté
Mais ils s'abandonnent, saisis, à l'essence de toute chose
Ignorants des surfaces mais saisis par le mouvement de toute chose
Insoucieux de dompter, mais jouant le jeu du monde.

Aimé Césaire, *Cahiers d'un retour au pays natal*.

Sabemos ya muy bien
que no hay otras moradas sino aquellas
que en la sangre encontramos, invisibles.
Y que el solo camino
es ese que hay que abrirse
con el alma y las manos,
espadas de aire, frente a pechos de aire.

Pedro Salinas, *Razón de Amor*.

Sonarán las campanas
desde los campanarios,
y los campos desiertos
volverán a granar
unas espigas altas
dispuestas para el pan.

José Antonio Labordeta, *Canto a la libertad*.
In Memoriam.

1. Introduction

“¿Pero qué es la historia de América toda sino una crónica de lo real-maravilloso?”

El Reino de Este Mundo, Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980)

Far from having reached a consensus, comparative economic history is still seized by doubt when it comes to explain the fundamental causes of the late 18th-century Western economic take-off. The so-called ‘European miracle’ gave rise to the ‘Great Divergence’ and, as the Figure 1.1 shows, Western Europe and the ‘Neo-Europes’ escaped from the Malthusian

trap and left the rest of the world behind.¹ The complex and exceptional nature of this process has encouraged abundant economic and historical research and, at present, two hypotheses compete for its explanation. The geography thesis, led by Jared Diamond and Jeffrey Sachs, has focused on the comparative advantage of coastal temperate zones and the ecology-specific nature of most basic technologies.² The determinism of this hypothesis has faced, however, the sound opposition of the institutionalist school: around the 1800s, it is argued, the different world regions did not experience a widening of their previous relative positions but a ‘reversal of fortunes’.³ This institutionalist offensive has proceeded in two successive waves. Around the 1970s and 1980s, the seminal works by Douglass North highlighted the role of well-defined property rights and the rule of law as irreplaceable elements in any social organization aimed at capital accumulation and higher income levels.⁴ In the early 2000s, Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson and James Robinson (AJR) have moved the discussion several centuries back: differences at the institutional level can explain why previously poor regions joined Western Europe in its road to modern economic growth and others did not. Put it simply: divergent trajectories of development have colonial origins.⁵

¹ On the ‘European miracle’ and the ‘Great Divergence’, see Eric Jones, *The European Miracle: Environments, Economies and Geopolitics in the History of Europe and Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000). ‘Neo-Europes’ is the term used by Crosby in Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

² Representative works by these authors are: Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: A short history of everybody for the last 13,000 years* (London: Vintage, 2005 [1997]), Jeffrey Sachs, “Institutions don’t rule: Direct Effects of Geography on Per Capita Income”, National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 9490, 2003; and John Gallup, Jeffrey Sachs and Andrew Mellinger, “Geography and Economic Development”, National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 6849, 1998.

³ ‘Reversal of fortune’ is the expression used in the important paper by Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson and James Robinson, “Reversal of Fortune: Geography and Institutions in the Making of the Modern World Income Distribution”, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 117, No. 4, 2002.

⁴ See, by Douglass North, “Institutional Change and Economic Growth”, *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 1971 and *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Jointly with Robert Thomas, see “An Economic Theory of the Growth of the Western World”, *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 1970 and *The Rise Of The Western World. A New Economic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

⁵ Two works are the most representative of this second institutionalist wave: Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson and James Robinson, “The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation”, *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 91, No. 5, 2001, and “Reversal of Fortune”. On the internal controversies of the institutionalist school, see Pranab Bardhan, “Institutions matter, but which ones?”, *Economics of Transition*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2005.

Figure 1.1. The ‘Great Divergence’



Source: Reproduced from Gregory Clark, *A Farewell to Alms. A Brief Economic History of the World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

Stanley Engerman and Kenneth Sokoloff (ES) argue with respect to the Americas what AJR suggest regarding a broader sample of 64 countries: colonial institutions explain much of current economic performance⁶. ES do not point at the feasibility of European settlement, as AJR do, but to different factor endowments (climate, soil quality, population density) when it comes to explain the emergence of particular sets of colonial institutions. Nevertheless, they both agree on a key point: the existence of institutional persistence. Precisely, only accepting that the institutional structure implemented by a number of Europeans in the colonies is resistant to change, it is possible to link current economic performance and colonial presence in the same causal chain. It is precisely that premise what allows and encourages the current convergence between the research agendas of economic growth theory and economic history.

This effort of ‘trying to explain much with little’ is both laudable and useful. Figure 1.2 lends itself to this interpretation. Advanced quantitative research confirms its validity.⁷ However, several problems arise. The political disorder experienced south from Río Grande between

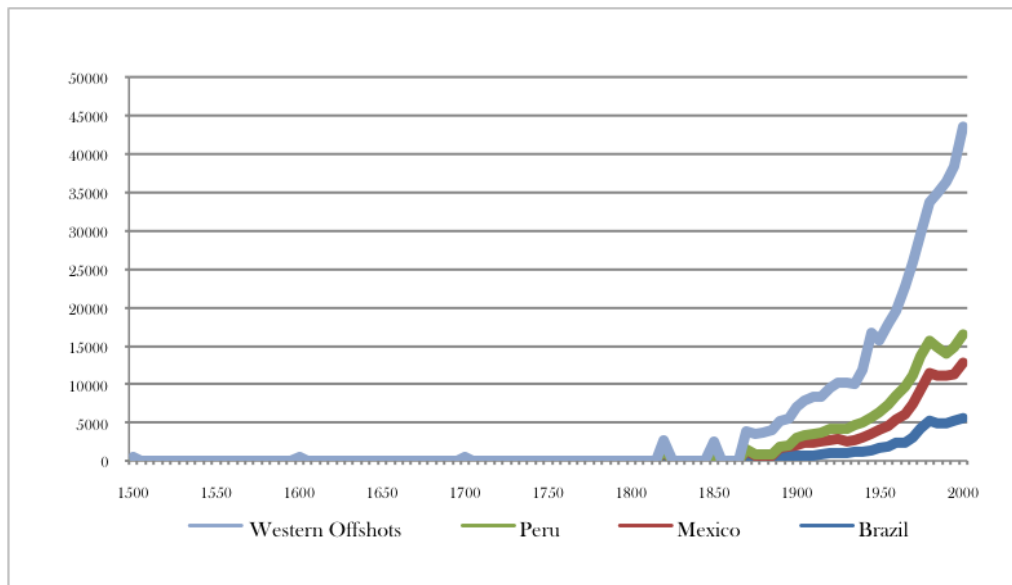
⁶ Stanley Engerman and Kenneth Sokoloff, “Factor Endowments, Inequality and Paths of Development among New World Economies”, National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 9259, 2002.

⁷ Ewout Frankema, “The Colonial Origins of Inequality: Exploring the Causes and Consequences of Land Distribution”, Ibero-America Institute for Economic Research/Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Discussion Paper No. 119, 2005.

1820 and 1870 suggests a forever lost institutional equilibrium rather than a resilient politico-legal organization able to impose old corporate interests under new republican costumes. Thus, in the last years, it is not surprising that several works have tried to clarify both the significance and the functioning of politics as a plausible explanation of divergent development paths.⁸

Figure 1.2. The ‘Great (colonial) Divergence’ in the Americas.

Evolution of per capita income, 1990 International Geary-Khamis dollars



Source: The author with data from Angus Maddison, *The World Economy. Historical Statistics* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2003).

This paper joins these efforts. Specifically, I am concerned with two questions that highlight the limits of the ES’s theoretical framework. First, how to explain substantial differences in land inequality between the plantation colonies of Saint Domingue (present-day Haiti) and Cuba? Controlling for factor endowments and according to the hypothesis of institutional persistence, ES predict that a high degree of wealth inequality with origins in the colonial era should have endured over time in both ex-colonies as a consequence of land policies aimed to preserve

⁸ Representative works are Douglass North, William Summerhill and Barry Weingast, “Order, Disorder and Economic Change: Latin America vs. North America” in Bueno de Mesquita, B. and Root, H. L. (eds), *Governing for Prosperity* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2000) and Jeffrey Nugent and James Robinson, “Are Endowments Fate?”, Centre for Economic Policy Research Discussion Paper 3206, 2005.

elites' privileged position. Nothing further from the truth. Whereas the Gini indexes for former West Indies plantation colonies are within a quite compact range of values around 80, Haiti showed in 1971 a Gini coefficient of 46.2, a value much closer to (and even lower than) Sweden's (48.8 in 1961) or US's (71.9 in 1987) ones.⁹ To answer this question requires looking inside the political economy conditions of both colonies. In the French colony of Saint Domingue, the only successful slave rebellion in history was able to overturn the plantation economy and replace it completely by a small-sized subsistence farming system at the beginning of the 19th century. In Spanish Cuba, however, an apparently identical socio-economic organization did not generate any significant challenge from inside. Although the colonial system was eventually eroded and dismantled, the plantation economy and the associated land inequality endured for a long time.

The second question also leads us to the thorough study of both slave societies. Is it possible to include slave agency in the development narrative of plantation colonies? If so, how? Both AJR and ES leave small room for this. Their hypotheses support the view that the set of institutions partly responsible for current economic performance were the direct outcome of European response to environmental and demographic conditions. Native or slave populations would only enter in their narratives either as a mass of anonymous coerced labourers or, at best, as accomplices in the resource extraction strategy put in motion in non-settlers colonies. Cristopher Bayly, from the perspective of a South Asia social historian, and Gareth Austin, as a West Africa economic historian, have refuted these implications, demonstrating how bottom-up experiences, beyond colonisers' control, were not only frequent but significant.¹⁰ In the context of the Americas and, specifically, of the plantation colonies, research made on slave rebellions provides us with a considerable amount of information to study carefully what was the precise role of slaves in the making of their own history.¹¹ Again, the stark contrast with respect to slave agency between Saint Domingue and Cuba justifies their comparative study.

⁹ Data from Frankema, "Colonial Origins", 29-32.

¹⁰ See Christopher Bayly, "Indigenous and Colonial Origins of Comparative Economic Development: The Case of Colonial India and Africa", World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 4474, 2008, and Gareth Austin, "The 'reversal of fortune' thesis and the compression of history: Perspectives from African and comparative economic history", *Journal of International Development*, Vol. 20, No. 8, 2008.

¹¹ Outstanding studies are the ones by Eugene Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution. Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1979) and Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains. Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981).

The contributions of this paper are twofold. The first is theoretical: I shall advance in the study of political forces as a plausible variable in explaining institutional change and economic performance. Analysing the determinants of slave agency in the plantation colonies of Saint Domingue and Cuba as well as the impact of the Saint Domingue revolution in the degree of land inequality allows me to qualify ES's theses. Far from accepting a direct causal relation between the colonial regime and current performance, the answers to the two referred questions lead me to conclude that, somewhere in between, politics mattered and that, rather than exogenous, they were largely the outcome of the colonial system itself. The second is historical: I shall present a necessarily brief but precise comparative study of the political economies of Saint Domingue and Cuba at the late colonial era. In the last two centuries, both colonies have received a fair amount of attention by the scholars.¹² However, I am not aware of others who have undertaken a comparative analysis as the one I present here. Only from a comparative perspective it is possible to shed light enough on the real and not so subtle differences between apparently similar regions.

In the first two sections I survey the literature. Once presented the main theses of ES as well as related empirical research, I pay attention to the debate on the role of political economy factors in the development process. The third section provides a brief historical narrative on Saint Domingue and Cuba at the late colonial period whereas the fourth analyses this evidence in order to shed light on the relationship between plantation colonies, slave rebellions and land redistribution. The last section concludes.

2. Factor endowments, inequality and institutional persistence.

ES establish a link between factor endowments and pro-development institution building. Under their approach, inequality attains a prominent explanatory position as it provides the intermediate step between both extremes of the causal chain.¹³

They differentiate among three types of European colonies in the New World according to their different geographic, climatic and demographic

¹² In the case of Saint Domingue, the classical study is Cyril R. L. James, *The Black Jacobins. Toussaint L'Ouverture and The San Domingo Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 2001 [1938]) and in the case of Cuba, of course, the meticulous work by Hugh Thomas, *Cuba or The Pursuit of Freedom* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1971).

¹³ Engerman and Sokoloff, "Factor Endowments".

conditions. In the Caribbean and Brazil, tropical climate and soil composition favoured the cultivation of crops characterized by extensive scale economies and a labour intensive nature. A reduced number of natives as well as contingents of unwilling Europeans could not supply the labour workforce that the sugar, coffee or tobacco cultivation required. Hence, slavery became the labour system on which the flamboyant prosperity of these colonies was based. In mainland Spanish America, particularly the Andean region and Central America, an abundant native population, who survived the encounter with Spaniards, had frequently been enslaved by pre-Columbian empires. Continuation in the exploitation of mineral resources convinced Spaniards to adapt those pre-conquest arrangements. In stark contrast, a third group of colonies, the northern colonies of North America, was characterized by a quite different set of factor endowments. The size of the native population was not substantial. Temperate climate encouraged European settlement and, together with soil conditions, it favoured the growing of scale-indifferent crops such as wheat. Superabundance of land and low capital requirements worked against attempts to introduce large landholdings with tenant or indentured labour. A free peasantry of European could develop.

According to ES, the resulting degree of inequality persisted over time through its effect on institutions and policies. In the Caribbean, Brazil and the Viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru, masses of landless workers, either natives or African blooded, were deprived of any access to wealth, human capital and political power. The white elites, by contrast, with a large wealth based on the monopolisation of crop cultivation, mineral extraction and their commercialization, could easily design institutions and implement policies tending to preserve their privileged status quo. The absence of such a clear-cut racial, economic and political polarization in Canada and the mid- and north-Atlantic regions of the present-day United States showed a very different outcome. There, a less sizeable and powerful elite faced a large mass of free peasants with a similar (and reasonable) degree of imported human capital: the process of institution building and subsequent policy implementation was inevitably shaped in a more egalitarian fashion. Comparative studies on the origins and evolution of institutions and policies regarding immigration, land, suffrage, schooling or taxation within the Americas corroborate this basic insight.¹⁴

¹⁴ See the institution-specific studies by Engerman, Sokoloff and collaborators: Elisa Mariscal and Kenneth Sokoloff, "Schooling, Suffrage, and the Persistence of Inequality in the Americas, 1800-1945" in Haber, S. (ed.), *Political Institutions and Economic Growth in Latin America* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 2000); Stanley Engerman and Kenneth Sokoloff, "The Evolution of Suffrage Institutions in the New World", *Journal of*

Land policy provides a meaningful example for the purposes of this paper.¹⁵ With a large stock of land under governmental control and an economic structure revolving around agriculture throughout the Americas, public decisions on land distribution should be regarded as quite revealing about the anti- or pro-egalitarian stance of the political elites. The 1862 Homestead Act in the United States and the 1872 Dominion Lands Act in Canada appear then as the culmination of a policy geared towards the promotion of land access by smallholders. In Mexico, however, the confiscation of native communal lands did not produce the same result. Rather than encouraging the rise of a commercial smallholding class, the 1857 Constitution and Porfirio Díaz's regime (1876-1910) granted a significant portion of these lands to large holders and foreign firms. Figures speak for themselves: whereas in rural Mexico in 1910 only 2.4% of household heads owned land, in the States in 1900 and in Canada in 1901 these figures were 74.5% and 87.1% respectively. Persistence of economic and political polarization over time in societies with an initial higher degree of inequality seems thus a quite plausible hypothesis.

Empirical evidence corroborates these theses.¹⁶ Table 2.1 can be seen as a rough test of ES's theory. It is observed how the range of values for plantation colonies and Spanish American differs greatly from a North American pair closer to 50. Bear in mind that an overall United States figure conceals a sharp distinction between North and South. Additionally, Ewout Frankema provides further econometric support: the hypothesis that feasibility of cash crop production has no significant impact on land inequality is rejected at the 95% confidence level. Similarly, relative land abundance and a less egalitarian land distribution go hand in hand. His first enquiry about the structural factors behind land inequality obtains a clear-cut response: *"A typical 'unequal' country is a land abundant catholic country whose geographic conditions support the production of coffee and sugar more than the production of rice, which has comparatively favourable settler conditions, such that a minority of white*

Economic History, Vol 65, 2005; Kenneth Sokoloff and Eric Zolt, "Inequality and the Evolution of Institutions of Taxation: Evidence from the Economic History of the Americas" in Edwards, S., Esquivel, G. and Márquez, G., *The Decline of Latin American Economies: Growth, Institutions, and Crises* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: National Bureau of Economic Research Books, 2007); Stanley Engerman, Elisa Mariscal and Kenneth Sokoloff, "The Evolution of Schooling Institutions in the Americas, 1800-1925" in Eltis, D., Lewis, F. and Sokoloff, K. (eds.), *Human Capital and Institutions: A Long Run View* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁵ This example is presented in Engerman and Sokoloff, "Factor Endowments", 20-22.

¹⁶ Obviously, other scholars have criticized ES's hypothesis. I have found particularly interesting Nathan Nunn, "Slavery, Inequality, and Economic Development in the Americas: An Examination of the Engerman-Sokoloff Hypothesis", Munich Personal RepEc Archive Paper No. 5869, 2007.

settlers were to dominate a labour force of indigenous people and African slaves”, concluding fairly well with a geographical pointing: “Such a description indeed comes remarkably close to and ‘average’ Latin American country”.¹⁷

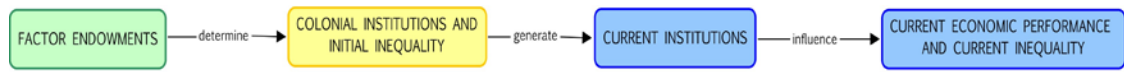
Table 2.1. Land Inequality in the Americas.

	GINI INDEX	YEAR		GINI INDEX	YEAR
PLANTATION COLONIES			MAINLAND SPANISH AMERICA		
Barbados	84.8	1989	Bolivia	76.8	1970
Cuba	79	1945	Colombia	74.3	1988
Jamaica	75.7	1961	Ecuador	77.2	1974
Haiti	46.2	1971	El Salvador	78.3	1961
Simple average	79.8		Guatemala	77	1964
NORTH ATLANTIC COLONIES			Mexico	60.7	1960
United States	71.9	1987	Peru	81.1	1994
Canada	52.6	1961	Venezuela	85.7	1961
Simple average	62.3		Simple average	76,7	

Source: The author with data from Frankema, “Colonial Origins”, 29-32. Data for Cuba are from Will Moore, Ronny Lindström and Valerie O’Regan, “Land reform, political violence and the economic inequality-political conflict nexus: A longitudinal analysis”, *International Interactions*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 1996.

Thus, ES build an economic history of the Americas as represented in Diagram 1 Current economic performance would be the outcome of a three-step causal chain: first, the initial factor endowment’s impact on colonial inequality and institutions; second, impact of colonial institutions on current institutions and, third, impact of current institutions on current economic performance. The second step, the hypothesis of institutional persistence, lies at the heart of much of the contemporary (and most significant) research on economic growth and development.

¹⁷ Frankema, “Colonial Origins”, 18.



Institutional persistence hypothesis

Diagram 1: Original Engerman and Sokoloff's hypothesis

Source: The author

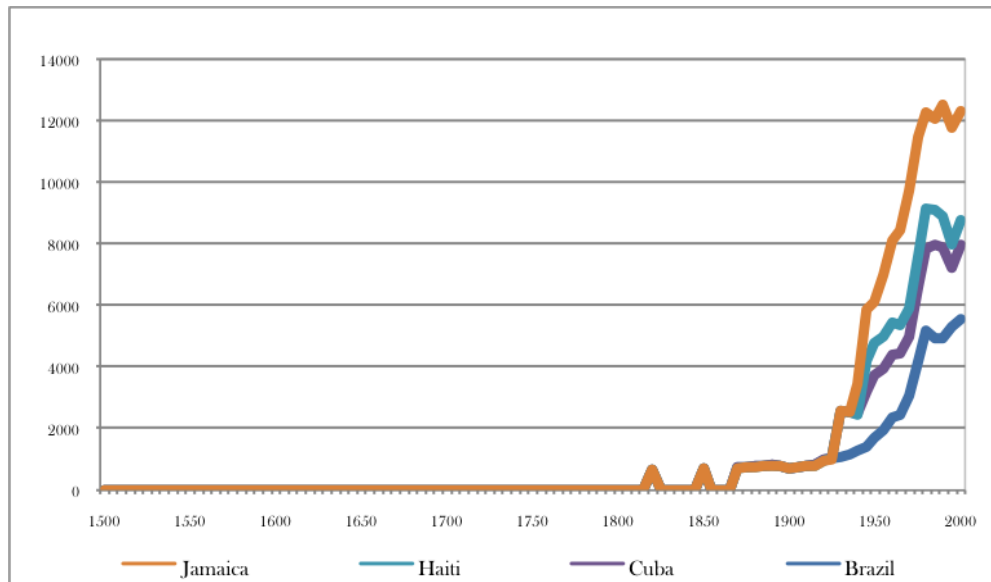
These works have undoubtedly challenged the direction of contemporary research on economic growth. Their ideas on the colonial origins of current economic performance and, in particular, the hypothesis of institutional persistence have allowed scholars to connect growth economics with economic history, a fairly fruitful marriage. As indicated, their theses present a quite plausible story and empirical works confirms them. Their merit is beyond question. However, this approach, largely satisfactory as it is, may lead to cast a shadow over other causal relationships and forces equally responsible of current economic performance. Several questions arise. First: if factor endowments are the answer, how to explain, then, substantial divergence across regions within the ES's same type of colony or across Frankema's 'typical unequal countries'? Note the divergent paths between plantation colonies in Figure 2.1 or the breathtaking 'Haitian exception' in Table 2.1. Second: is it plausible to accept that a minority of 19th, 17th or even 16th-century Europeans are the responsible for current institutional features and economic performance? Gareth Austin and C. A. Bayly have rightly pointed out some tentative answers.¹⁸ According to Austin, the 'compression of history' and the emphasis on single causes have obscured the role of the colonised peoples in making their own history. In his own words, further research should incorporate "*the positive power of indigenous agency, rather than simply the small numbers of European present, as a determinant of institutional choice in African – and Asian and Latin American – colonies and former colonies*".¹⁹

¹⁸ Bayly, "Indigenous and Colonial Origins" and Austin, "The 'reversal of fortune' thesis".

¹⁹ Austin, "The 'reversal of fortune' thesis", 1020.

Figure 2.1. Divergence between plantation colonies

Evolution in per capita incomes, 1990 International Geary-Khamis dollars



Source: The author with data from Angus Maddison, *The World Economy. Historical Statistics* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2003).

3. Politics and the weakening of the institutional persistence.

Austin's concerns regarding indigenous agency seem to fit well into a broader critique of the institutionalist literature that revolves around the notions of 'politics', 'political interests' or 'political economy factors'. As with the elusive notion of 'institutions', a lack of consensus about the precise meaning of 'politics' has not prevented the emergence of a theoretical apparatus that tries to shed some light wherever geography, institutions or trade do not reach.

Economists' interest in politics is not as novel as it could seem. It is true that, in the context of the new institutional economics and the new political economy, scholars have recently pointed at this shaky field in their quest for the foundations of a stable private market economy.²⁰

²⁰ See Douglass North and Barry Weingast, "Concluding Remarks: The Emerging New Economic History of Latin America" in Haber, S. (ed), *Political Institutions and Economic Growth in Latin America. Essays in Policy, History and Political Economy* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 2000) and Barry Weingast, "The Economic Role of Political Institutions: Market-Preserving Federalism and Economic Development", *Journal of*

But, contrasting with this apparently avant-garde trend, John Coatsworth invokes the old concerns of structuralists, Marxists and their successive mid-20th century offspring when he both applauds and calls for the re-emergence of political economy in the economic history of Latin America.²¹ “*Institutions have histories*”, he states.²² Hence, rather than pointing to their inalterable nature, he suggests how institutions are created and maintained by private groups and public entities in the political arena and how they are shaped by external shocks and endogenous threats.

ES’s theories have not escaped unharmed from these critiques. More or less belligerently, both the role of factor endowments and the existence of a resilient discriminatory institutional framework has been contested. Barry Weingast, Douglass North and Larry Summerhill (WNS) accept factor endowments as critical constraints on political and economic behaviour but do not consider the latter as a direct outcome of the former.²³ Beyond endowments, some room is still left in order to explain why, in contrast with the United States, the immediate post-Independence era plunged Spanish America into economic and political turmoil. Whereas in Spanish America a dense web of corporate rights and privileged groups clashed with republican aspirations, in the States the new political system was the natural adaptation of a more liberal, less centralized and more law-bound empire. Thus, contrasting political interests created by colonial institutions and policies had much to say in the divergence within the Americas.

Jeffrey Nugent and James Robinson (NR) undertake a more precise attack.²⁴ Controlling for both colonial power and factor endowments, they face a puzzling economic divergence between two pairs of Latin American coffee-exporting countries. ‘*Endowments are not fate*’, they conclude. Political economy factors and, more specifically, the nature of political competition in a society (predominance of the military vis-à-vis competitive elections) as well as the composition of the elites (landowners vis-à-vis merchants) are decisive when trying to explain why Guatemala and El Salvador fell behind in comparison with Costa Rica and Colombia. Elites without much stake in landowning in the context of a less militarized state were both less willing and less able to undertake the land confiscation and the labour repression required by a system of large

Law, Economics and Organization, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1995. In the latter, particularly interesting is the notion of ‘market-preserving federalism’.

²¹ John Coatsworth, “Structures, Endowments, and Institutions in the Economic History of Latin America”, *Latin America Research Review*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 2005.

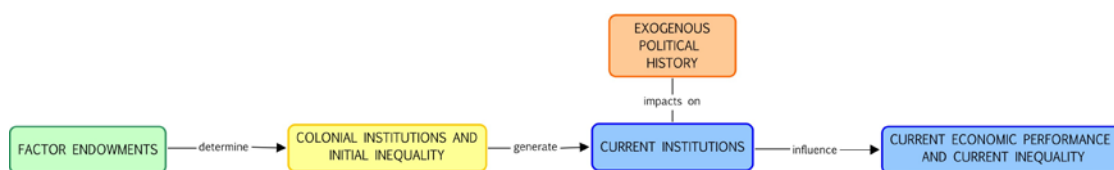
²² Coatsworth, “Structures”, 138.

²³ Weingast, North and Summerhill, “Order, Disorder and Economic Change”.

²⁴ Nugent and Robinson, “Are Endowments Fate?”

plantations. Thus, in Costa Rica and Colombia, a legal environment more favourable to land distribution arose and, with a smallholding organization of the coffee industry, human capital accumulation and socio-economic development were both faster and deeper. Like WNS, NT do not leave unaddressed the question regarding the endogeneity of these political economy factors: a peripheral position and subtle differences in the economic organization under Spanish rule would explain the degree of state militarization and the socioeconomic background of elites in the post-Independence era.

These critiques seem to have forced a re-examination of ES's theses. Rather than to accept persistent institutions in a relatively uncontested socio-political scenario, ES have recently come to admit that past institutions should be regarded more as *constraints* than as *determinants* of the current ones.²⁵ Transitions exist and they are not easily understood, they add, suggesting the existence of a missing link. They end up, however, being more explicit: “*The nature of the political power structure in society is critical in determining which institutions are adopted*”.²⁶



Weakening of institutional persistence hypothesis

Diagram 2: Revised Engerman and Sokoloff's hypothesis

Source: Adapted from Lindert, 2008.

Thus, it is not surprising that Peter Lindert has included an ‘exogenous political history’ variable in his recent review of Sokoloff’s work on inequality.²⁷ As Diagram 2 shows, politics has entered into the equation of economic and political development. Although the idea of persistence

²⁵ See the late works by Engerman and Sokoloff: “Institutional and Non-Institutional Explanations of Economic Differences”, National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 9989, 2003, and “Debating the Role of Institutions in Political and Economic Development: Theory, History, and Findings”, *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 11, 2008. Even the work on political transitions by Acemoglu seems a reasonable development of 2001 AJR’s warning on the need to look at ‘more fundamental institutions’ when trying to understand the origins and changes in property rights regimes or rule of law. See Acemoglu, “A Theory of Political Transitions”, *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 91, No. 4, 2001.

²⁶ Engerman and Sokoloff, “Debating the Role”, 127.

²⁷ Peter Lindert, “Kenneth Sokoloff on Inequality in the Americas” (Preliminary Draft) in Costa, D. L. and Lamoreaux, N. R. (eds), *Understanding Long-Run Economic Growth: Essays in Honor of Kenneth L. Sokoloff* (Forthcoming from University of Chicago Press).

continues to hold a preferential position, accepting the impact of politics amounts to weaken the role of factor endowments as the single determinant of current institutions and economic performance. The first of the questions posed in the previous section obtains thus a tentative answer. But several points remain. First: despite the efforts by WNS, NR or Coatsworth to track the origins of the ‘politics’ variable, Lindert does not face its endogenous nature. It seems a tricky strategy: to accept the role of politics only as an exogenous element amounts to preserving factor endowments as the almost unique significant variable. After all, exogenous political events (e.g., the French Revolution at the French West Indies or Spain’s Independence War in Spanish America) were certainly the exception rather than the rule. Secondly and closely related, my second question: how to incorporate Austin’s claims in this revised framework? To fit indigenous agency under the ‘exogenous political history’ heading is clearly wrong. Colonised peoples were, after all, *colonised*. They lived and worked under the constraints and the incentives of the colonial regimes. In a nutshell: whatever indigenous political, economic or social agency we consider, it always came from inside the boundaries of the colonial regime.

Hence, recognition of both internal instability and the drive of native peoples seems to describe better the abundant historical evidence of late colonial and early Republican Spanish America. Scholars have put forward a number of theories in order to explain what is an indisputable fact: the political disorder experienced by Spanish America in the post-Independence era.²⁸ Whatever the result with respect to the controversy about whether the decades between 1820 and 1870 were decisive in the Latin American falling behind or not, Spanish America did lose its institutional equilibrium since 1820.²⁹ *Caudillismo*, conflicting elites, conservatives and liberals follow one another in the historical accounts of the period.³⁰ And when occasionally the region seemed to recover the

²⁸ A survey of the diverse theories can be found in Frank Safford, “The Problem of Political Order in Early Republican Spanish America”, *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 24, 1992, pp 83-97.

²⁹ On that controversy, see two works by Leandro Prados de la Escosura: “Growth, Inequality, and Poverty in Latin America: Historical Evidence, Controlled Conjectures”, Working Paper 05-41(04) - Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, 2005, and “Lost Decades? Independence and Latin America’s Falling Behind, 1820-1870”, Working Paper in Economic History 07-18 - Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, 2007. Also Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America since Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.)

³⁰ For example, on *caudillismo*, Percy A. Martin, “Artigas, the Founder of Uruguayan Nationality”, *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1939; on federalist tendencies, J. Lloyd Mecham, “The Origins of Federalism in Mexico”, *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 1938; and, on conflicting elites, S. Rao, “Arbitres of Change: Provincial Elites and the Origins of Federalism in Argentina’s Littoral, 1814-1820”, *The Americas*, Vol. 64, No. 4, 2008. For his part, Safford provides an excellent

equilibrium, it did not necessarily fit into the institutional traits of the disappeared empire. This situation is even clearer in the case of plantation colonies. Slave resistance as an intrinsic element of these societies was already highlighted by Herbert Aptheker in 1943. Successive studies of different plantation colonies by C. L. R James (Saint Domingue), Eugene Genovese (US South) and Michael Craton (British West Indies) have tended to corroborate the usual nature of slave rebellions in the Americas³¹. Conflict between exploiters and exploited were frequently accompanied by internal struggles among the dominant classes. In the case of the French colony of Saint Domingue, slave rebellion and temporal turmoil gave way to the complete toppling of the colonial system in 1804.

Diagram 3 depicts the main thesis of this paper. Although it shows a powerful explanatory power at the big picture level, the idea of the persistence of colonial institutions must be nuanced in order to accept the existence of other causal relations. In ES's plantation and mainland Spanish America colonies, factor endowments and early inequality contributed initially to shape a set of colonial institutions largely characterised by its discriminatory nature. Small European elites built a legal system and implemented a diversity of policies (land, immigration, schooling, suffrage) clearly beneficial to their interests. However, and here is my main point, the exploitative and discriminatory nature of the system itself fuelled disaffection and contestation not only among exploited but frequently also among upper strata, which fought between them in order to preserve the control of the rents. Political events outside colonial dominions undoubtedly played a role in influencing changes but the strongest pressures against colonial or early post-colonial institutions came precisely from inside the colonial regime. Under particular circumstances, these pressures turned into overt rebellion and, when successful, into a re-configuration of the institutional system and economic performance.

overall overview of these issues in Frank Safford, "Politics, Ideology and Society in Post-Independence Spanish America" in Bethel, L. (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Latin America, Vol. III: From Independence to c. 1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

³¹ James, "Black Jacobins"; Genovese, "From Rebellion to Revolution"; Craton, "Testing the Chains".

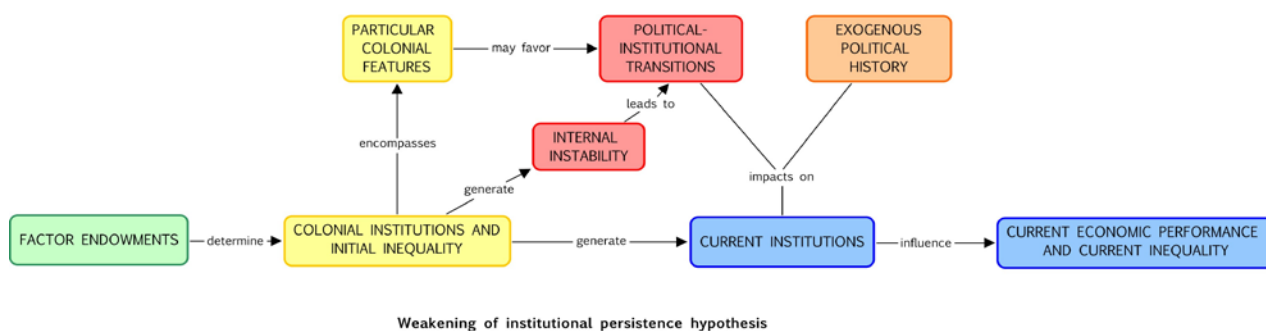


Diagram 3: Revised Engerman and Sokoloff's hypothesis

Source: The author

A comparison among the plantation colonies of Cuba and Saint Domingue can allow us to check the validity of this hypothesis and shed more light on these interaction between factor endowments, political economy factor, institutional change and economic performance. With almost identical factor endowments as Table 3.1 shows, both regions were colonised by European powers (French in Saint Domingue and Spaniards in Cuba) and, in successive periods, they became both irreplaceable sugar providers and the world's richest colonies. With a labour system based on the importation of African slaves, their social structures were characterized by racial and economic polarization. And, despite all the similarities, they followed astonishingly divergent trajectories. At Saint Domingue, civil war between the wealthy elites and the only successful slave rebellion in history led to the establishment of the first black republic in 1804, Haiti. By 1820, the previous system of large plantations had been almost completely dismantled and turned into a small-sized subsistence farming economy with an independent peasantry. In Cuba, however, not even mainland Spanish America was able to carry the island with her in the road to Independence. White planters remained loyal to Spain and no significant slave rebellion took place. The plantation system was not challenged at all and had to await the slow erosion by external technical and economic forces.

Table 3.1. Factor endowments in Saint Domingue and Cuba.

Table 3. 1a. Geographic position relative to 18^a- and 19^a century markets

	To Europe ^a	To North America ^b	To Africa ^c
Cuba	7,313 Km	2,383 Km	9,307 Km
Saint Domingue	6,971 Km	2,518 Km	8,271 Km

Source: The author with Google Maps Calculator.

^a From Havana to Cádiz and from Cap-Haitien to Nantes

^b From Havana/Cap-Haitien to Boston

^c From Havana/Cap-Haitien to present-day Lagos, Nigeria.

Table 3. 1b. Climate and soil quality.

	Climate	Soil Quality
Cuba	Equatorial/Winter dry-monsoonal	Medium Resilience/High-medium performance
Saint Domingue	Equatorial/Winter dry-fully humid	High-medium resilience/High-medium performance

Source: The author with data from Köppen-Geiger Climate Classification, 2010 and US Department of Agriculture, 2003.

Table 3. 1c. Demographic conditions at the beginning of the sugar expansion.

	Total Area	Arable Land	Population	Population density (population / total area)	Population density (population / arable land)
Cuba	11,164,400 Ha	7,494,000 Ha.	171,620 ^a	0.0155	0.023
Saint Domingue	2.313,500 Ha	846,000 Ha.	7,900 ^b	0,3413	0.009

Source: Author's calculations with data from Denis Laurent-Ropa, *Haïti, une coloïne français* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1993), Alexander von Humboldt, *The Island of Cuba. A political essay* (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1856), Frank Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba during the nineteenth century* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1970) and FAO, 2003.

^a Around 1774

^b Around 1675

4. The political economy of the plantation colonies. Sainte Domingue and Cuba.

4.1. Saint Domingue. 1750s – 1850s.

Economy. The decline of the British West Indies, as well as in Martinique, from the 1750s combined with the success of the planters' demands to provide Saint Domingue the definitive push towards its 'golden age' between 1763 and 1791. Around 1791, the colony's annual worth to France was 500 million *livres tournoises*, which was based on the fact that not only had the French possession turned by then into the largest slave colony in the Caribbean but that, from the 1770s onwards, the productivity of the slave labour was the highest in the world.³²

The economic foundations of Saint Domingue had been, however, laid at least one century before. Both the active distribution of land and the

³² Thomas Ott, *The Haitian Revolution, 1789-1804* (Knoxville, Tennessee: The University of Tennessee Press, 1973), 6.

importation of cultigens (sugarcane, coffee, cocoa, cotton) under governor d'Ogeron's mandate (1666-75) forced the colonial administration to face the evidence. A regime of small proprietorship with white indentured servants and an almost inexistent native population was condemned not to provide any economic value. The requirements of a plantation economy, beginning with tobacco around 1670 and continuing with indigo from 1685, were different. '*The great problem was to find proper day labourers for the fields*'.³³ In 1681, there were only 2,000 Negro slaves in the colony.³⁴

Figures 4.1 and 4.2 show how the situation rapidly changed. Putting aside temporal interruptions, the arrival of a number of slaves per year below 5,000 between 1711 and the late 1730s turned into a two-fold increase between 1738 and 1763, year in which planters' demands on the liberalisation of the slave trade prevailed. Between 1764 and 1791, an average of 18,000 slaves per year were imported into Saint Domingue. This three-period division can also be observed in terms of output: in 1710, the production of sugar was 2,920 tons; in 1767, it has increased to 62,640 tons and, in 1791, to 78,696 tons.

This fabulous production was set into circulation within the narrow channels of the French colonial trade system: French slavers exchanged manufactures for Negroes in West Africa and brought the slaves to the Caribbean possessions; from there, non-processed sugar and coffee, and in lesser degree also indigo and cotton, were exported to France, which sent back to its colonies manufactures and capital.³⁵ This triangular trade was mainly subordinated to the accumulation of bullion inside the Parisian coffers. The long-standing restrictions regarding the free import of slaves and other goods as well as the prohibition of processing commodities in the colonies had encouraged the rise of the French bourgeoisie, while raising the prices and constraining the supply faced by increasingly disaffected planters in the colonies. As a consequence of the reforms between the 1760s and 1780s and the continuing recourse to commerce with Great Britain and its American colonies, the '*semi-feudal*' elites of 'the Pearl of the Antilles' '*had a taste of free trade but wanted more*'.³⁶

Society. This clash between the interests of, on one hand, the metropolitan bourgeoisie and the royal bureaucracy and, on the other, the *grand blancs* ('big whites') was not, however, the only social cleavage that this burgeoning colonial economy was aggravating, even

³³ José Luis Franco, *Historia de la Revolución de Haití* (La Habana: Instituto de Historia-Academia de Ciencias de Cuba, 1966), 121.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 126

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 124.

³⁶ Ott, *The Haitian Revolution*, 9.

originating. Alongside the lines of race and economic prosperity, Saint Domingue's society was an increasingly fragmented and unstable one.³⁷

The *grand blancs* were confronted with a heterogeneous group of less favoured rural and urban whites: the *petit blancs* ('small whites'). Encompassing artisans, small merchants and shopkeepers as well as plantation overseers and managers, the *petit blancs* were undergoing the closing off of their chances for property ownership and an increasing competition in their trades by some mulattos quickly climbing up their ranks.³⁸ Their skin colour made them share with the *grand blancs* an intensifying racial prejudice. This was, in fact, their only point in common. A point, however, not strong enough to build up a cohesive bloc.³⁹

Racial prejudice seems a logical consequence in the context of late colonial Saint Domingue. Fears of slave insurrection were common for the 30 years prior to 1791.⁴⁰ Plantations were frequently shaken by slave suicide and poisoning of their white master and his relatives. Some of them ran away to the rain forests and mountains in order to establish autonomous communities of maroons who raided plantations for food and women. As Carolyn Fick has tried prominently to show, a growing number of forces 'from below' had started to play: despite traditional depictions as naïve and fainthearted, slaves were increasingly beaten by the '*consciousness of one's own self-existence*',⁴¹ A common language – *créole* –, African music and rituals, and, especially, a syncretistic religion – *voodoo* – were starting to work as powerful cohesive elements.⁴²

The conditions under which this '*sense of human dignity*' was emerging have been well depicted.⁴³ **Table 4.1** shows the size of the slave population in 1791: nearly half a million of slaves, of whom two thirds were born in Africa coming from a variety of regions, with a Western African majority.⁴⁴ Ethno racial fragmentation was deliberately reinforced by occupational hierarchy, with a small number of slaves working as skilled craftsmen or domestic servants and an overwhelming majority being field hands. It was in the plantation where the cruelty of

³⁷ Clarence Mumford and Michael Zeuske, "Black Slavery, Class Struggle, Fear and Revolution in St. Domingue and Cuba, 1785-1795", *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 73, No. 4, 1988, 14.

³⁸ Carolyn Fick, *The Making of Haiti. The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville, Tennessee: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 18.

³⁹ Franco, *Historia*, 154, 179. Fick, *The Making*, 18.

⁴⁰ Mumford and Zeuske, "Black Slavery", 18-19.

⁴¹ Fick, *The Making*, 39.

⁴² Fick, *The Making*, 42-45. Franco, *Historia* 162-168. Ott, *The Haitian Revolution*, 15.

⁴³ Ott, *The Haitian Revolution*, 13-18. Franco, *Historia*, 136-145, 161-172. Fick, *The Making*, 25-45.

⁴⁴ Fick, *The Making*, 25-26. Franco, *Historia*, 133, 165. Ott, *The Haitian Revolution*, 13.

the master had no limits: working and living conditions depressed fertility rates while mortality rates rocketed, being more economical to work slaves to death and replace them than to promote their reproduction. Louis XIV's 1685 *Code Noir* ('Black Code') was reimposed in 1784 in order to guarantee a minimum protection for the slaves but planters' racial and economic interests soon turned it into a dead letter.⁴⁵ Not even the Church had a significant presence.

Table 4.1. Racial composition in Cuba and Saint Domingue

Cuba

	1774		1827		1841		1860	
		Share of total		Share of total		Share of total		Share of total
Whites	96,440	0.56	311,051	0.44	418,291	0.42	793,484	0.57
Free coloureds	36,301	0.21	106,494	0.15	152,838	0.15	225,843	0.16
Slaves	38,879	0.23	286,942	0.41	436,495	0.43	370,553	0.27
Total	171,620		704,487		1,007,624		1,389,880	

Source: Frank W. Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba during the nineteenth century*. (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1970)

Saint Domingue

	c. 1788-89	
		Share of total
Whites	40,000	0.08
Free coloureds	28,000	0.08
Slaves	405,564	0.86
Total	473,564	

Source: Richard K. Lacerte, "The Evolution of Land and Labour in the Haitian Revolution, 1791-1820", *The Americas*, Vol. 34, No. 4, 1978.

⁴⁵ The 'Le Jeune case' is a paradigmatic example regarding the limits of official humanitarian protection *vis à vis* the private interests of the racist Saint Domingue's society. Fick, *The Making*, 37-38. Franco, *Historia*, 143-144. Ott, *The Haitian Revolution*, 16.

However, it was not this mass of black slaves who had the leading role at the early times of the revolution. An important number of *gens de couleur* ('peoples of colour' or mulattos) were trapped into a schizophrenic position between the prosperity typical of *grand blancs* and the racial prejudice against any drop of African ancestry. Both contemporary and 18th century observers agree that it was precisely the mulatto elite who played 'a central role in transforming the French Revolution into the Haitian Revolution'.⁴⁶

On one hand, mulattos owned around one third of all plantations and slaves.⁴⁷ In the decades prior to 1791, interracial marriages and success in the rural economy had allowed them to achieve and preserve economic prosperity and social respect.⁴⁸ Both their devotion to and racism toward black slaves as well as their desire for French acculturation brought them closer to *grand blancs*, falling out with *petit blancs*. On the other hand, however, racial prejudice prevented their political rise. From the 1750s their prosperity had reinforced racial tension: economically and racially threatened, the *grand blancs* supported an 'Aristocratic Reaction' and a set of discriminatory anti-mulatto laws were passed.⁴⁹ Pushing for finding the political voice to their increasing prosperity, these self-identified creole and French unleashed all the social tensions underlying 'the Pearl of the Antilles'.

Ideology and rebellion. The internal dynamics of the plantation economy of Saint Domingue had generated, by 1789, an explosive scenario. Two exogenous factors, however, contributed to light the wick of open revolution: the French abolitionist ideology and the burst of the French Revolution.

For several decades, evangelical Protestantism and the French Enlightenment nourished abolitionist ideology. The end of the slave trade and the abolition of slavery were seen as necessary steps towards the avant-garde doctrine of race amalgamation.⁵⁰ Despite colonial precautions, revolutionary pamphlets arrived to Saint Domingue and were fervently read by free mulattos and literate slaves like Toussaint Louverture.⁵¹ In Paris, the *Société des Amis des Noirs* ('Society of the

⁴⁶ John Garrigus, "Colour, Class and Identity on the Eve of the Haitian Revolution: Saint-Domingue's Free Coloured Elite as *Colons américains*", *Slavery and Abolition*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1996, 20. See also Franco, *Historia*, 203.

⁴⁷ Frank Moya, "Haiti and Santo Domingo, 1790-c.1870" in Bethel, L. (ed.). *The Cambridge History of Latin America, Vol III: From Independence to c. 1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 238.

⁴⁸ Garrigus, "Colour", 21.

⁴⁹ Franco, *Historia*, 159-160. Garrigus, "Colour", 26, 29, 30.

⁵⁰ Munford and Zeuske, "Black Slavery", 22.

⁵¹ Ott, *The Haitian Revolution*, 20. Munford and Zeuske, "Black Slavery", 22.

Friends of the Negroes’) was founded in 1788 by Condorcet, Pétion, Mirabeau and others in order to advance the abolition of the slavery. At first, however, they adopted a gradualist approach and campaigned loudly in favour of mulatto equality.⁵²

Eventually the ‘*supreme irony*’ became evident: it was the wealth accumulated by the slave traders, big merchants and sugar-refining families of France who funded the intellectual and political activities of a revolutionary bourgeoisie partly responsible for the black emancipation and subsequent fall of the sickly trade. When the Estates-General were convened in May 1789, the *grand blancs* sent a colonial committee to Paris to make their claims heard by the royal bureaucracy. More home rule and economic freedom exclusively for whites clashed with the demands of mulattos’ leaders, supported by the *Amis des Noirs*. Despite the Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen, *gens de couleur* were excluded from the recently allowed colonial assemblies and Vicent Ogé, a rich mulatto, led a failed revolt in October 1790. By then, the ‘mulatto question’ had become popular in France and eventually a Jacobin-controlled National Assembly passed full citizenship for propertied mulattos in May 1791. In a wildly polarized Saint Domingue, slaves took chance and rebelled the night of August 22.⁵³

Land distribution. The black uprising must be seen, though importantly driven by racial considerations, as ‘*a larger and more complex process of revolutionary change*’ that overturned the productive structure of Saint Domingue’s economy.⁵⁴ In an agriculture-based world, as slaves were achieving new heights of independence, it soon became clear that ‘*freedom for the mass of insurgent slaves, if it was to realized at all, was fundamentally intertwined with an independent claim to land*’.⁵⁵ With an almost nonexistent manufacturing sector, newly emancipated slaves faced two options: to work as wage earners in the old plantations or to till their own fields. Eventually, only the latter prevailed.

There is no evidence that the planned purpose of rebel slaves in 1791 was to break up their masters’ plantations and to distribute the land in an egalitarian fashion. Surely they only took advantage of a power vacuum in a context of growing false rumours of emancipation by the kings of France and Spain. Nevertheless, under French domination, slaves had

⁵² Ott, *The Haitian Revolution*, 21.

⁵³ The course of events between 1789-91, as well as the subsequent civil and international war, are depicted with great detail in Ott, *The Haitian Revolution*, 28-64; Franco, *Historia*, 173-220; Fick, *The Making*, 76-88.

⁵⁴ Carolyn Fick, “Emancipation in Haiti: From Plantation Labour to Peasant Proprietorship”, *Slavery and Abolition*, Vol. 21, No 2, 2000, 11.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

become closely attached to land. In the plantation, each black family was provided with a small plot of land for their personal use and individual profit. Originally thought as a way to depress owners' costs, this '*proto strip-farming peasant complex*' was reasserted by the 1784-85 Bourbon humanitarian reforms of the *Code Noir*.⁵⁶ Eventually, the slaves considered these plots as their own personal holdings.⁵⁷ Similarly, manumitted slaves were allowed to continue living in the plantations, where they were allotted a larger plot. In the coffee estates, the different cultivation process favoured among the slaves a stronger sense of property regarding the section of coffee trees they took care of.⁵⁸ Though more controversial, some authors also point to maroonage and its system of small private property devoted to subsistence farming as a sign of the eagerness for land.⁵⁹ Thus, it seems logical to conclude, as Lacerte does, that '*the link between freedom and landownership was forged on the plantation*'.⁶⁰

It took time, nonetheless, to materialize this link. During the civil and international war which followed the slaves' rebellion, black leadership was well aware of the fact that the necessary revenues to maintain their army only could come from the exportation of sugar.⁶¹ The defence of black emancipation required the maintenance of the plantation economy. The 1800 Rural Code and 1801 Constitution, enacted by Toussaint Louverture, established a system in which the ex-slaves, nominally free, were tied to the land and receive as wage one quarter of the net revenues.⁶² Under Dessalines (1804-06), ex-slaves continued in this new servile status while an aggressive confiscation policy put around two thirds of Haiti's land area under public domain.⁶³ Henri Christophe, Emperor of the northern Kingdom of Haiti (1811-20), also continued Toussaint's coercive labour policy.⁶⁴ These attempts to maintain the plantation economy harvested economic success although they were severely contested by peasant rebellions and the pre-1791 production and

⁵⁶ Munford and Zeuske, "Black Slavery", 13.

⁵⁷ Fick, "Emancipation", 14.

⁵⁸ Lacerte, "Evolution", 451-452.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 451.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 452.

⁶¹ Apart from the internal struggles, both Spain and Great Britain, pushed by imperial calling, occupied parts of Saint Domingue, supporting different factions. The independence of the black Republic of Haiti (from *Ayiti*, 'mountainous land' in the native Arawak language) was declared by Dessalines on January 1, 1804.

⁶² Frank Moya, "Haiti and Santo Domingo, 1790-c.1870" in Bethel, L. (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Latin America, Vol III: From Independence to c. 1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.), 248-249. Fick, "Emancipation", 22-27.

⁶³ Moya, "Haiti and Santo Domingo", 249.

⁶⁴ Fick, "Emancipation", 32-33. Lacerte, "Evolution", 456. N, 249.

export levels never were reached again.⁶⁵ Eventually, however, the contradiction between general emancipation and plantation system became evident.⁶⁶ In a context of increased internal peace, both Pétion (1806-18), in the southern Republic of Haiti, and Boyer (1818-43), in the unified Republic, initiated policies of massive land distribution among former officials and the black masses as a way to reward service and guarantee allegiance.⁶⁷ The distribution of land became unrecognizable. The resulting free peasantry turned to small-sized subsistence farming, agricultural production stagnated, state revenues plummeted and only coffee survived as a significant export crop.

4.2. Cuba. 1760s – 1860s.

Economy. Before the mid-18th century, the island of Cuba was basically a settler colony. Small-scale farmers – tobacco, beeswax, cattle – and artisans made up the bulk of its productive fabric.⁶⁸ By then, sugar production was still purely symbolic: similarly to Saint Domingue’s experience, exploitation of favourable climatic conditions and land superabundance was limited by the unavailability of labourers.⁶⁹ The extermination of the indigenous population and the high opportunity cost of coming for Castilian people eventually made inevitable the importation of slaves, whose number there was by then the lowest in all the Caribbean except in the convict colony of Puerto Rico.⁷⁰ British occupation of Havana between 1762 and 1763 represented the shock sugar expansion required: 4,000 slaves as well as long-term commercial arrangements, machinery and capital were brought to Cuba.⁷¹

In subsequent years, the Bourbon Reforms satisfied the demands of the enlightened elites and planters, who, led by Francisco de Arango y Parreño, focused all their efforts on the promotion of agriculture.⁷² Under these new circumstances, sugar planters were able to take full advantage of the destruction of Saint Domingue’s industry, the opening of the United States’ market after 1776 and the steady development of a sugar market in Europe. Exiles from Saint Domingue brought with them

⁶⁵ Fick, “Emancipation”, 27-29.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁶⁷ Fick, “Emancipation”, 33-35. Moya, “Haiti and San Domingo”, 250-261. Lacerte, “Evolution”, 456.

⁶⁸ Frank Knight, “Origins of the Wealth and the Sugar Revolution in Cuba, 1750-1850”, *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 57, No. 2, 1977, 231.

⁶⁹ Thomas, *Cuba*, 18-19. Anton Allahar, *Class, Politics, and Sugar in Colonial Cuba* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 58-59.

⁷⁰ Thomas, *Cuba*, 30, 49.

⁷¹ Thomas, *Cuba*, 52. Allahar, *Class, Politics and Sugar*, 61-62.

⁷² Thomas, *Cuba*, 72-73.

further innovations such as water-driven mills.⁷³ Tobacco lands were converted to sugar plantations and, although coffee experienced a noticeable expansion until the 1850s, sugar quickly dominated, particularly in the Western Department and Havana's surroundings.⁷⁴ As Figure 4.2. shows, between the 1770s and 1830s, Cuba experienced what Allahar has termed 'easy sugar expansion': the lack of significant foreign competition, the ready supply of slaves and the availability of fresh lands made possible a steady increase in sugar production without paying much attention to efficiency improvements.⁷⁵ By the end of the Napoleonic wars, Cuba had replaced Saint Domingue as the richest tropical colony in the world.⁷⁶

Around the 1840s, however, circumstances began to change. The Cuban sugar industry controlled by newcomers started to react to the growing challenge posed by European beetroot and falling prices. Cutting costs and mechanization (steam-engine, vacuum boiler, railroads) were becoming the indispensable conditions for survival.⁷⁷ New lands beyond the Havana region were put under cultivation, the scale of operations in sugar plantations was enlarged and a steady process of land concentration began.⁷⁸ Sugar production rocketed and, in the 1860s, Cuba became the supplier of one fourth of the global sugar production.⁷⁹ Although shortages of available wageworkers and the labour intensive nature of sugar production in the old-fashioned plantations maintained the influx of slaves (see Figure 4.1), higher slaves' prices encouraged European and Chinese immigration between the 1850s and 1870s.⁸⁰

Underlying these extraordinary achievements, socio-economic fragmentation among planters' ranks was already evident by the 1860s. In the Western and Central Departments, old oligarchic families, whose old-fashioned mills dated from the royal grants of 18th century or before, had assisted in the emergence of the much more mechanized mills of self-made immigrants.⁸¹ In contrast, those planters who could not access sources to fund the increased capital requirements fell behind.⁸²

⁷³ Thomas, *Cuba*, 80.

⁷⁴ Allahar, *Class, Politics and Sugar*, 70. Hugh Thomas, "Cuba From the Middle of the Eighteenth Century to c. 1870" in Bethel, L. (ed.). *The Cambridge History of Latin America, Vol III: From Independence to c. 1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 290.

⁷⁵ Allahar, *Class, Politics and Sugar*, 29-30.

⁷⁶ Thomas, "Cuba From the Middle of the Eighteenth Century", 290. Knight, "Orgins", 231. Thomas, *Cuba*, 52.

⁷⁷ Thomas, *Cuba*, 272.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁷⁹ Thomas, "Cuba From the Middle of the Eighteenth Century", 290.

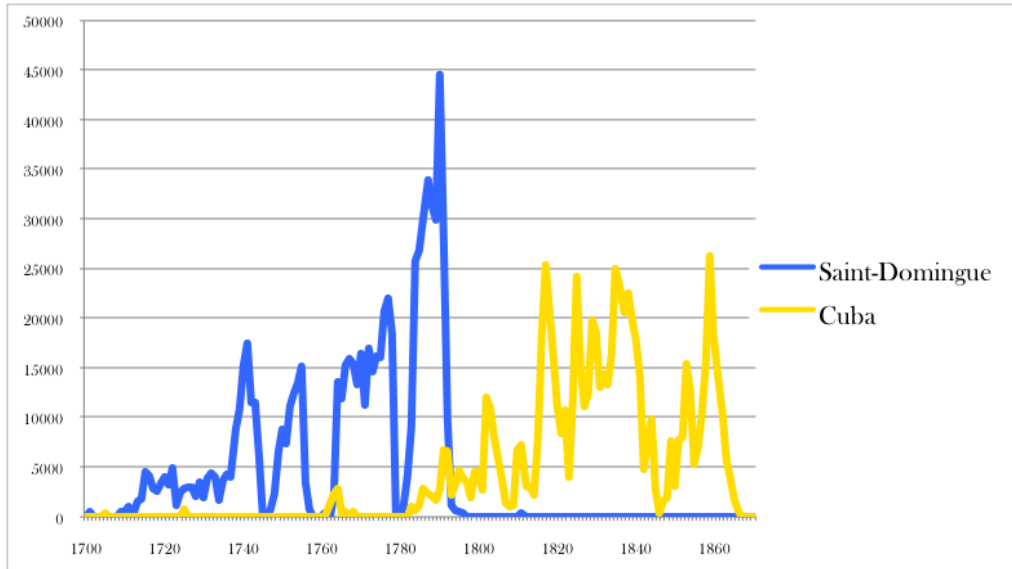
⁸⁰ Allahar, *Class, Politics and Sugar*, 34.

⁸¹ Thomas, *Cuba*, 152-155.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 170.

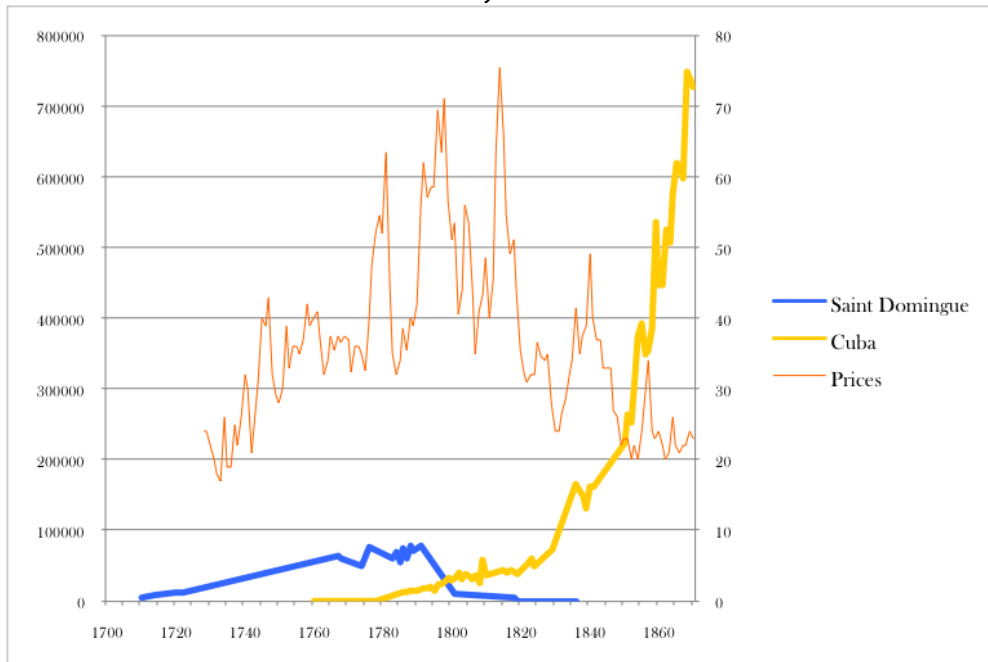
Especially in the eastern part of the island, a mass of smaller, inefficient and impoverished sugar and coffee planters developed.

Figure 4.1. Slave Importations in Saint Domingue and Cuba, 1700-1870.



Source: The author with from Atlantic Slave Trade Database. Emory University, <http://slavesvoyages.org/tast/index.faces>

Figure 4.2. London sugar prices and sugar production in Saint Domingue and Cuba, 1700-1870.



Source: The author with data from N. Deerr, *The History of Sugar* (London: Chapman and Hall Ltd, 1950)

Society. Unlike Saint Domingue, fear of slave rebellion sealed an atypical *entente cordiale* between the royal bureaucracy and the planters. The alignment of interests was evident: the promotion of agriculture involved slavery and slavery necessarily involved the existence of strong military and political power. Thus, enlightened elites and planters, putting aside any radical impulse, resigned themselves to seek progressive liberal reforms within the empire outwards and to suffer an acute identity crisis at home.⁸³ As a reward, colonial authorities satisfied planters' socio-economic demands: free trade in 1765 and 1776, free imports of slaves in 1789, constitutional preservation of slavery in 1812, legalization of land occupation in 1818-19, even noble titles.

By the 1840s, the first cracks appeared. At first, slaves' prices, increasing mechanization, liberal political economy and the incipient formation of a racist white discourse aimed at the strengthening of the Cuban internal cohesion pushed richest planters to cast doubt on the continuation of slave trade and slavery.⁸⁴ Secondly, many planters could not afford growing capital requirements and continued to rely largely on slave labour. When occasionally Spanish authorities showed some light affection towards abolitionism, flirting between Cuban planters and US Administration became intense. Slavery preservation and the reinforcement of the South within the Union were behind several US attempts to purchase the island. Thirdly, a mass of impoverished planters, left behind by the infusion of capital and technology, started to show unrest. As long as the social conflict started to revolve more around economic cleavages than around racial differences, the distance between these planters and non-white forces seemed easier to overcome.

As Table 4.1 shows, slave workforce never reached a relative size comparable to Saint Domingue's one. Only about one third of slaves worked on the sugar plantations: sugar industry, coffee and tobacco fields, cattle farming and urban trades provided them with alternative occupations.⁸⁵ Although working conditions were similar, being a slave was possibly less hard in Cuba than in other Caribbean colonial possessions.⁸⁶ Both their formal legal status as well as their higher levels

⁸³ Paquette, *Sugar Is Made with Blood*, 85. Allahar, *Class, Politics and Sugar*, 90.

⁸⁴ Thomas, *Cuba*, 93, 113-115. Manuel Moreno Friginals and Tomich have supported different positions with respect to the exact relation between mechanization and slavery: D. Tomich, "World Slavery and Caribbean Capitalism: The Cuban Sugar Industry, 1760-1868", *Theory and Society*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 1991, and Manuel Moreno Friginals, *El Ingenio. Complejo económico social cubano del azúcar* (La Habana: Comisión Nacional Cubana de la UNESCO, 1964).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

of emancipation seem to corroborate the impression held by 19th-century observers.⁸⁷ As Paquette and Thomas indicate, the domestic (and sexual) demands of the ‘frontier life’, the lengthy Spanish experience with African slavery and a more centralized and authoritarian state, less permeable to colonial interests, combined to provide better protection to slaves. Based on medieval Castilian law, Spaniards had a refined slave code that provided slaves with certain ‘benefits’: especially, since the 1520s, the right to purchase freedom (*coartación*).⁸⁸

Slaves’ easier access to freedom and miscegenation soon gave rise to a broad stratum of free blacks and mulattos.⁸⁹ As Table 4.1 presents, between the 1770s and 1840s, they represented 15-20 percent of total population, a feature in stark contrast with the British and French Caribbean. They experienced economic betterment during the sugar boom and some of them became slaveholders, others running small *haciendas* and *estancias*.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, the great majority were concentrated in the major urban areas and ports where they worked in skilled trades or as artisans. Many had received formal education and were admitted into the bureaucracy or the university.⁹¹ And, although Cuban society never overcame completely racial barriers, their military participation in the *batallones de pardos y morenos* (‘battalions of browns and blacks’) and socio-political activities in the *cofradías* (‘brotherhoods’) provided them a sort of social recognition.⁹² Although not comparable with the significant Saint Domingue’s free coloured landowning class, a small coloured bourgeoisie had already flourished in Cuba by the end of 18th century.⁹³

Thus, despite increased racist tensions since the 1840s, different authors agree that Spanish colonial rule in Cuba created an ‘*apparently tolerant society*’ in which ‘*more subtle and fluid racial boundaries*’ prevailed.⁹⁴ Higher integration of slaves into society and the subsequent rise of a middle class of coloured people helped to temper the contradiction between slaveholders and slaves, certainly favouring the consolidation of

⁸⁷ Rafael Duarte Jimenez, “El Ascenso Social del Negro en la Cuba Colonial”, Unpublished paper, 35. Paquette, *Sugar Is Made with Blood*, 112.

⁸⁸ Thomas, *Cuba*, 34-36. Emily Berquist, “Early Anti-Slavery Sentiment in the Spanish Atlantic World, 1765-1817”, *Slavery and Abolition*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2010, 184-185.

⁸⁹ Thomas, *Cuba*, 13, 33-34, 37, 66.

⁹⁰ Duarte “El Ascenso Social”, 33.

⁹¹ Thomas, “Cuba From the Middle of the Eighteenth Century”, 293.

⁹² Duarte, “El Ascenso Social”, 36-38.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 33, 36.

⁹⁴ Thomas, *Cuba*, 38. Paquette, *Sugar Is Made with Blood*, 111-112.

colonial status.⁹⁵ Precisely, it would not be a mass of ‘black Jacobins’ who eventually challenged with success the Spanish yoke.

Ideology and rebellion. Cuban social tensions had also a chance to follow the Saint Domingue’s example. Most American possessions took advantage of Spain’s political instability and, by 1820, Latin American independence was already a reality. In Cuba, however, the impact of these exogenous events was not able to galvanize social unrest. It would be necessary to wait for another half century to assist to the birth of a qualitatively different independence movement.

In opposition to the traditional narrative, it can be argued that, although smaller in scale, the Spanish empire had its own and uniquely attuned early anti-slavery movement.⁹⁶ Thus, when the Napoleonic invasion occurred and the Regency Council convened a constitutional process at Cádiz in 1808, previously silent Spanish liberal circles had a chance to show much they had been exposed to French and British abolitionism.⁹⁷ In contrast with France, however, the alliance of planters and *peninsulares* (peoples from mainland Spain) succeeded in leaving untouched both the mulatto and the slave questions. Mulatto citizenship was left behind the “*door of virtue and merit*”.⁹⁸ Similarly, British pressures and liberal deputies were unable to refute successfully conservative perspectives with regard to slave trade and slavery.⁹⁹ The Haitian spectre and commercial interests were raised and eventually constitutional preservation of slavery was granted.

In Cuba, despite several attempts, political economy conditions and satisfied planters isolated the island from any challenge to the status quo of the plantation economy. Already in 1796 Nicolás Morales, a free mulatto farmer, organized a free coloureds’ conspiracy with some white support in Bayamo.¹⁰⁰ His aims were to force local authorities to enforce the right to buy legal whiteness as well as the abolition of the sales taxes

⁹⁵ Thomas, *Cuba*, 38-39.

⁹⁶ Berquist, “Early Anti-Slavery Sentiment”, 184.

⁹⁷ Berquist, “Early Anti-Slavery Sentiment”, 186-189. Berquist argues that the silence of enlightened Spaniards is related with the existence of a body of both laws and social practice rather progressive. In any case, liberals as Isidoro Antillón or the anglophile José Blanco White engaged in the diffusion of relevant pro-abolitionist pamphlets.

⁹⁸ See James King, “The Colored Castes and American Representation in the Cortes of Cadiz”, *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 33, No. 1, 1953, and J. E. Rodriguez, “Equality! The Sacred Right of Equality! Representation Under Constitution of 1812”, *Revista de Indias*, Vol. 68, No. 242, 2008.

⁹⁹ Manuel Chust, “De esclavos, encomenderos y mitayos. El anticolonialismo en las Cortes de Cádiz”, *Mexican Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 1995, 189-196. Berquist, “Early Anti-Slavery Sentiment”, 193-196. D. R. Murray, *Odious Commerce. Britain, Spain and the abolition of the Cuban slave trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

¹⁰⁰ Paquette, *Sugar Is Made with Blood*, 124. Thomas, *Cuba*, 81.

and the redistribution of land from some rich planters. Before any action was taken, Morales was betrayed and hanged. In the first months of 1812 a nation-wide conspiracy made planters shudder.¹⁰¹ Some slave revolts had broken out in several parts of the island between January and March. Colonial authorities soon unveiled and aborted a movement of slaves and free coloureds that, led by the free black José Antonio Aponte, planned to attack the plantations. The influence of the abolitionist discussions in Cádiz as well as the existence of both inspiration and support from Haiti was recognized.¹⁰² Moreover, Captain-general and Cuban elites were forced to admit how the *batallones* and *cofradías*, colonial creations intended to favor limited non-white integration, had sheltered the plot's embryo. Even some separatist whites had provided support to Aponte. Even, as late 1843-1844, a massive conspiracy of free coloured and slaves was dismantled.¹⁰³

In contrast, stratification among white planters did bear significant fruits. When the possibility of annexation with the US collapsed, moderate creole planters fought for more Cuban political control. When their proposal of 'not taxation without representation' was rejected by Madrid in 1867, they had to assume that a rebellion would risk both their wealth and fragile political power. They remained calm. Smaller planters in the East were less doubtful.¹⁰⁴ Old-fashioned and impoverished as they were, they had not much to lose. Their calculated ambiguity towards abolition provided them with support from both a sizeable black segment and a handful of white reformers.

The '*Grito de Yara*' ('Yara's shout') inaugurated the first of the independence wars, the 'Ten Year's War' (1868-78).¹⁰⁵ They were a "*conflict between criollos and peninsulares [...] almost obliterating colour prejudice*", articulated upon a regional East-West cleavage.¹⁰⁶ On one hand, an independence and pro-abolition movement led by a mass of impoverished white countrymen supported by many free mulattos and a considerable number of slaves; on the other, the old alliance of Spaniards, big merchants and some powerful sugar planters. Although the cross-

¹⁰¹ Paquette, *Sugar Is Made with Blood*, 124. Thomas, *Cuba*, 90-91.

¹⁰² Regarding the impact of the Haitian Revolution, on Cuba, see Matts Childs, "A Black French General Arrived to Conquer the Island. Images of the Haitian Revolution in Cuba's 1812 Aponte Rebellion" and, on general, see R. Blackburn, "The Force of Example" and S. Drescher, "The Limits of Example"; all three essays in Geggus, D. P. (ed), *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2001).

¹⁰³ Paquette, *Sugar is Made with Blood*.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas, *Cuba*, 241-244.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas, *Cuba*, 245-263. On October 10, 1868, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, a white small sugar planter from Bayamo, screamed that "*we only want to be free and equal*" and enrolled his recently freed slaves in his army.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 246, 249.

racial nature of the independence movement guaranteed black participation as well as promotion in the army, banning of legal segregation and promoting racial equality myths were eventually the tools used by white elites to deter protest and the complete fulfilment of black aspirations.¹⁰⁷ Any land distribution was undertaken at that time.¹⁰⁸

5. Plantation colonies, slave rebellions and land redistribution.

The socio-political instability of the plantation economies does not seem to fit well with the hypothesis of strong institutional persistence posited by much of the institutionalist literature. Rather than to accept the unchallenged persistence of wealth inequality over time, a more nuanced depiction is required. If the agency of the slave population is going to be incorporated into the narrative of comparative development in the Americas, the existence of pressures from below and subsequent contestation of European domination must be necessarily accepted. When particular features of the colonial regime proved not strong enough to contain those pressures, open revolt broke out and effective land distribution occurred. In a nutshell: plantation economies led to socio-political instability and, under particular circumstances, this instability turned into a lesser degree of economic and even socio-political inequality. A careful examination of this assertion is required.

5.1. Slave rebellions and land redistribution

At first: is it acceptable to posit the existence of a direct link between slave rebellion and land redistribution? On bare theoretical grounds, it seems reasonable to think so. In a context of plantation economies, successful rebel slaves faced few alternatives. Opportunities in the small number of urban centres were already dominated by free coloureds.

¹⁰⁷ See Aline Helg, "Race and Black Mobilization in Colonial and Early Independent Cuba: A Comparative Perspective", *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 1997, and L. A. Pérez, "Politics, Peasants and People of Color: The 1912 "Race War" in Cuba Reconsidered", *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 66, No. 3, 1986.

¹⁰⁸ On land inequality and 20th-century reforms in Cuba, see J. L. Rodríguez, "Agricultural Policy and Development in Cuba", *World Development*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 1987.

Moreover, most slaves represented an unskilled workforce. On the other hand, living conditions as wagedworkers in their previous masters' fields were not different at all from previous slavery. Freed slaves also had to assume their own feeding once the colonial supply of foodstuff had been greatly altered. Turning to small-size subsistence farming became, therefore, a quite plausible possibility.

Historical evidence corroborates this prediction. Although it is unlikely that slaves had in mind a meticulous destruction of the plantation system, a sort of pro-independent peasantry affection had surely developed throughout the whole Caribbean. Craton has convincingly argued that, in the British West Indies, "*many of the slaves were already proto-peasants well before the end of formal slavery*"¹⁰⁹. Slave rebellions at Barbados in 1816, Demerara in 1823 and Jamaica in 1831 provide enough examples of the link between subsistence farming and slaves' demands¹¹⁰. In Cuba, the 1795 Morales' plot had as explicit objective the distribution of land to slaves whereas in the 1812 Aponte's conspiracy one of the first actions would have been "*to burn out both the cane and coffee fields*"¹¹¹. Eventually, the Saint Domingue revolution gave rise to a completely new subsistence farming system.

5.2. Plantation colonies and slave rebellions. Cuba and Sainte Domingue cases.

Secondly: even accepting the link between slave resistance and pressures for greater wealth equality, can we assume that the plantation economy led inevitably to socio-political unrest and, under certain circumstances, to open revolution? In other words: what were the causes of slave rebellions?

Since the 1980s, the answers to these questions have been articulated upon two opposed positions¹¹². After Aptheker's famous statement that "*resistance, not acquiescence, is the core of the story*", Eugene Genovese's contribution was to provide an overall understanding of a constellation

¹⁰⁹ Michael Craton, "Proto-Peasant Revolts? The Late Slave Rebellions in the British West Indies 1816-1832", *Past and Present*, Vol. 85, 1979, 120.

¹¹⁰ Craton, "Proto-Peasant Revolts?", 121.

¹¹¹ Thomas, *Cuba*, 89.

¹¹² A. Williams-Myers provides an overall overview of the debate in "Rebellion, and Revolution in the Americas: A Historiographical Scenario on the Theses of Genovese and Others", *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 1996.

of apparently disconnected slave resistance episodes¹¹³. His interpretation of slave ‘revolutions’ as exclusively a tropical appendix of a global dynamics followed close in James’ footsteps and his non-accidental characterization of Haitian rebels as ‘black Jacobins’¹¹⁴. Europe-born emancipationist ideas provided the transoceanic link. These analyses, nevertheless, were soon challenged.

The Marxist hypothesis did not fit well with, for example, the greater impact of the Enlightenment ideas on free coloureds or the counter-revolutionary stance adopted by rebelled slaves in Saint Domingue.¹¹⁵ Even Genovese conceded that “*the mechanics of ideological transmission remain obscure*”.¹¹⁶ Among the criticisms, the one by Michael Craton stands out¹¹⁷. Even recognizing the influence of 18th century Western ideology, Craton denies its obvious, direct or fundamental role. Discourses of the Age of Revolution were used into a broader context: freedom to recreate a life of their own was the most basic and cohesive ideological element among slaves’ masses. Craton, therefore, inevitably concentrates on the internal dynamics of slave societies.

Slaves’ degree of atomization and internalization of colonial values surely differed between the two Caribbean colonies. The absolute and relative higher number of slaves in Saint Domingue as well as the larger size of sugar plantations in all likelihood made easier their communication and organization. Voodoo and *creole* provided slaves a way of overcoming occupational and ethnoracial fragmentation behind their masters’ backs. Admittedly, in Cuba, *cabildos*, *cofradías*, or festivals also played this cohesive role¹¹⁸. However, in contrast with Saint Domingue, all these institutions had been originally set up by the Spaniards with the aim of accelerating the religious conversion and acculturation of newly imported blacks. Although, by the 19th century, *cabildos* and *cofradías* had lost much of their original purposes, they remained always under the somehow indulgent look of the colonial bureaucracy. In Cuba, both a

¹¹³ Genovese, *From rebellion to revolution*. Genovese differentiates ‘rebellion’, which would encompass the attempts *to restore* an idealised African world in the margins of the colonial system, and ‘revolution’, aimed at *overthrowing* the system itself on the basis of emancipationist ideologies. The Haitian revolution would had been precisely the first slave ‘revolution’. I do not follow his distinction and here both words are used alternatively. Aptheker is quoted in Craton’s Prologue to *Testing the Chains*. See also Frank Knight, “Eugene Genovese on American Slave Revolts”, *Reviews in American History*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 1980.

¹¹⁴ James, *The Black Jacobins*.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Quote in David Geggus, “Slave Resistance and the Saint Domingue Revolt: Some Preliminary Considerations”, LACC Occasional Paper Series-Florida International University, 1983, 24.

¹¹⁷ Craton, *Testing the chains*.

¹¹⁸ Paquette, *Sugar Is Made with Blood*, 124.

higher degree of urbanization and, especially, an easier access to freedom also contributed to achieve a higher integration into the colonial society. Cuban whites also seem to have been less reluctant to free their illegitimate children¹¹⁹. Cities provided a realistic alternative to countryside miserable life: as already indicated, two thirds of them worked outside the sugar plantations. The hypothesis of the ‘closing of the frontier’¹²⁰ seems then quite plausible: at Saint Domingue, a narrower range of alternatives could have pushed slaves to consider rebellion as their only viable way out. And, eventually, Humboldt’s qualms should not cast shadows on what seems a reasonable assertion: slaves were better treated in Cuba than in many other European plantation colonies¹²¹. It is possible to concede, with Brion Davis, that slavery was a single phenomenon in which differentiations of type of labour, place or master nationality were less relevant than its overall significance¹²². However, when trying to explain the divergent political economy of plantation colonies, these differences do become outstanding. As mentioned above, the legal tradition and political system brought by Spaniards to Cuba were more favourable to slave protection than those colonial regimes in which planters’ interests could prevail more easily. We should not harbour many doubts about how this made an effective difference in slaves’ predisposition to rebel.

It is in the free coloured population where is possible to find even more contrasting features. In both Cuba and Saint Domingue, the sugar boom had allowed a not inconsiderable number of free blacks and mulattos to achieve relative prosperity and social recognition. Nevertheless, this integration had, after all, quite precise limits: full citizenship, that is, the right of having say in the running of the colonial economy, was refused. Significant differences explain why the reactions to a similar situation of socio-political discrimination were so divergent. Free coloured elite in Saint Domingue was basically a rural landowning class whose wealth rested upon sugar cultivation. Greatly acculturated and representing half of the free population, they were both more inclined and better positioned to make their political claims heard. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that, when in 1789 *grand blancs*

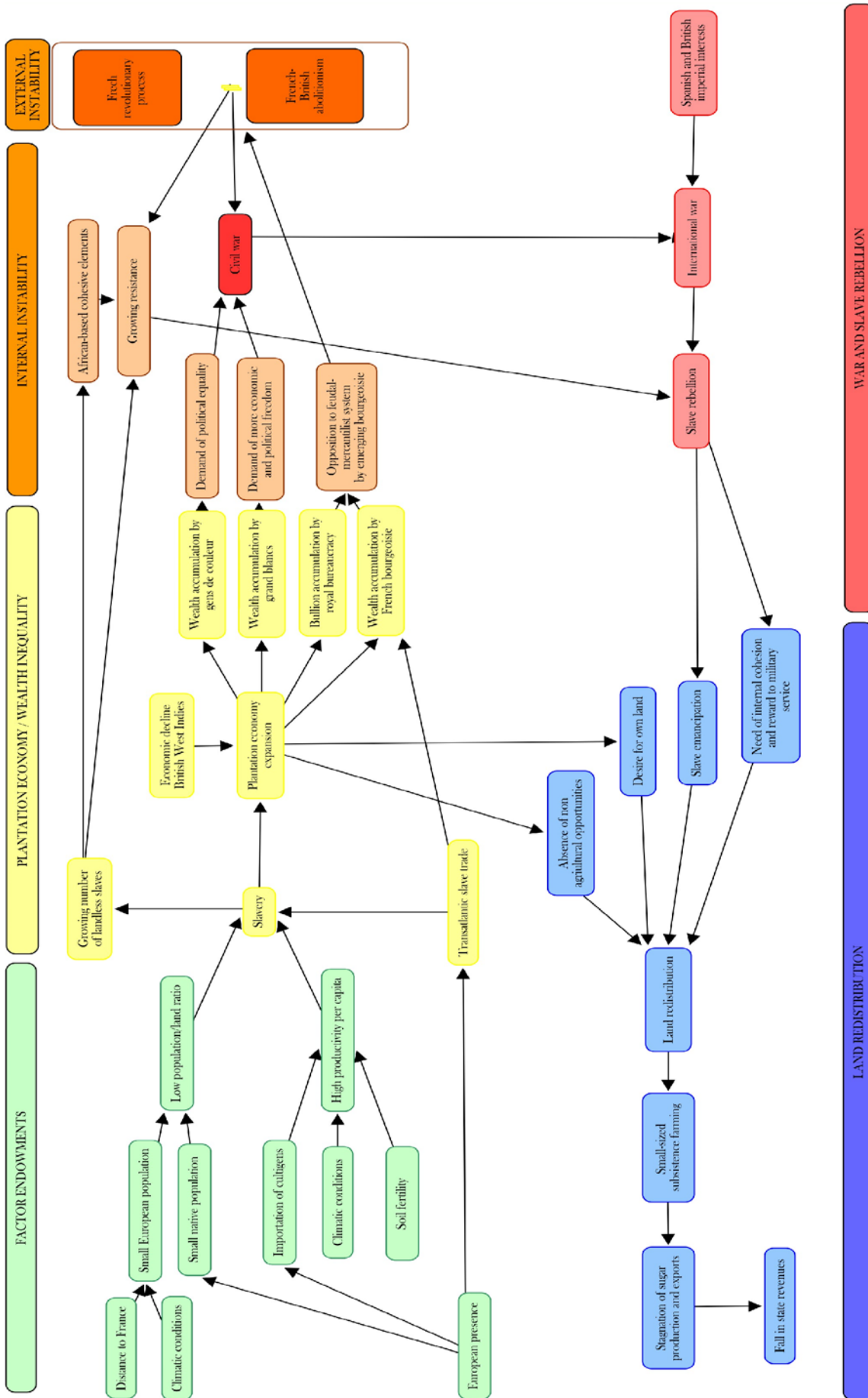
¹¹⁹ Thomas, *Cuba*, 281.

¹²⁰ David Geggus, “The Causation of Slave Rebellions: An Overview” in Geggus, D. P., *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2002).

¹²¹ Thomas, *Cuba*, 281, quotes a Baron Humboldt’s disconsolate statement: “*what a melancholy spectacle is that of Christian and civilized nations discussing which of them has caused the fewest Africans to perish during the interval of three centuries by reducing them to slavery*”.

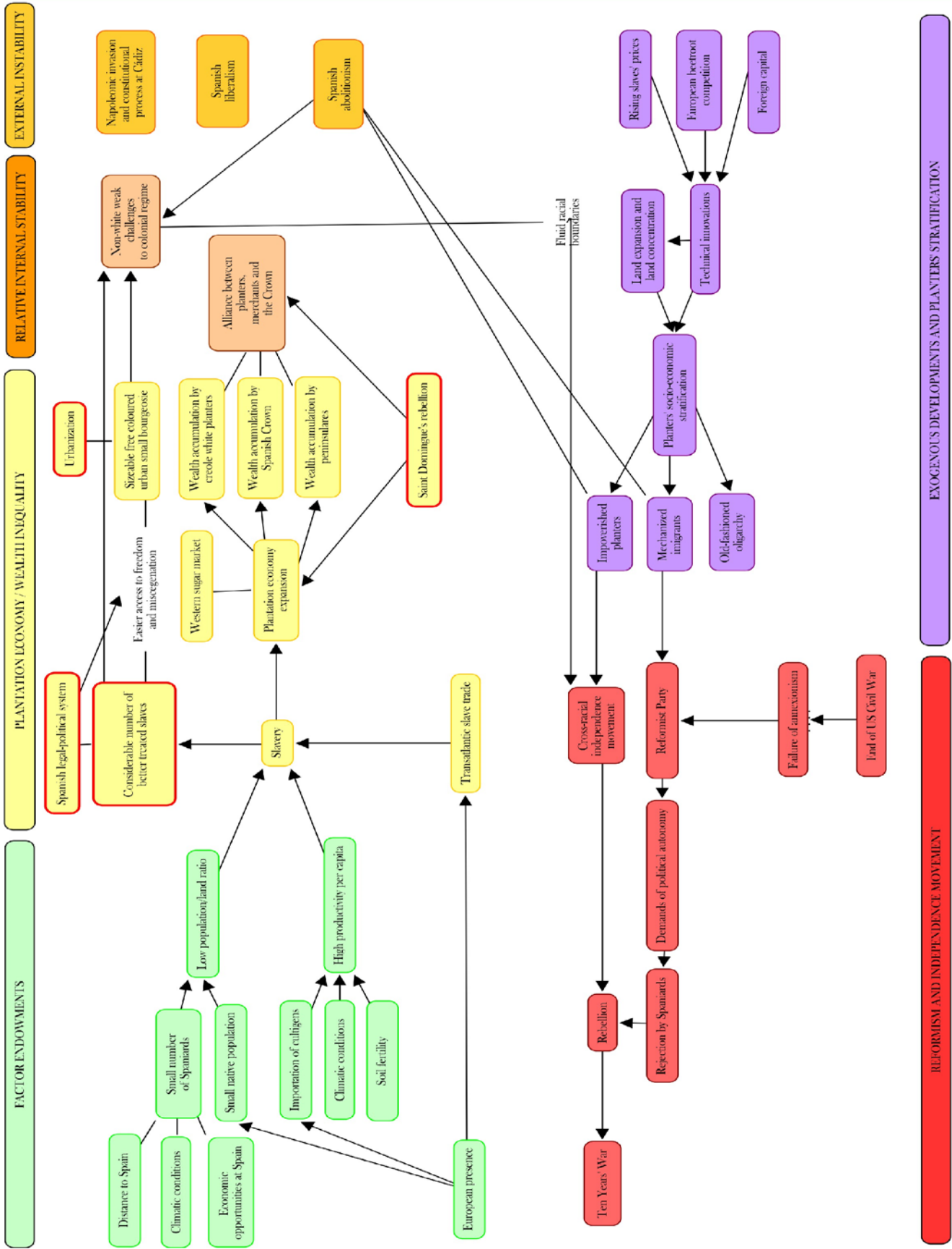
¹²² Thomas, *Cuba*, 281. See especially David Brion Davis’ *Slavery and Human Progress* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

threatened to monopolise the power of the sugar-based economy, Saint Domingue's free coloureds took up arms as an independent faction. In Cuba, in contrast, free coloured elite amounted almost exclusively to a sizeable urban bourgeoisie. Probably they were closer to economically successful freed slaves than to rich white planters. Moreover, they represented only around 25 percent of free population during the 19th century and certainly were less influenced by the anaemic Spanish liberalism. In striking contrast with Saint Domingue, the absence of a political struggle between the royal bureaucracy and the white creoles for the control of the plantation economy and the lack of a significant stake in the sugar industry keep less politically aware free coloureds relatively quiet. Given free coloureds' economic interests, an autonomous quest for political equality probably meant much less in Cuba than in Saint Domingue. Eventually, reservations of Cuban planters, economic proximity and more permeable



Conceptual Map 1: Saint Domingue 1750s-1850s: From Plantation Colony to Land Distribution

Source: The author



racial boundaries pushed free blacks and mulattos to made common cause, racial boundaries pushed free coloureds to make common cause

Conceptual Map 2. Cuba 1760s -1860s: From Plantation Colony to Ten Years' War

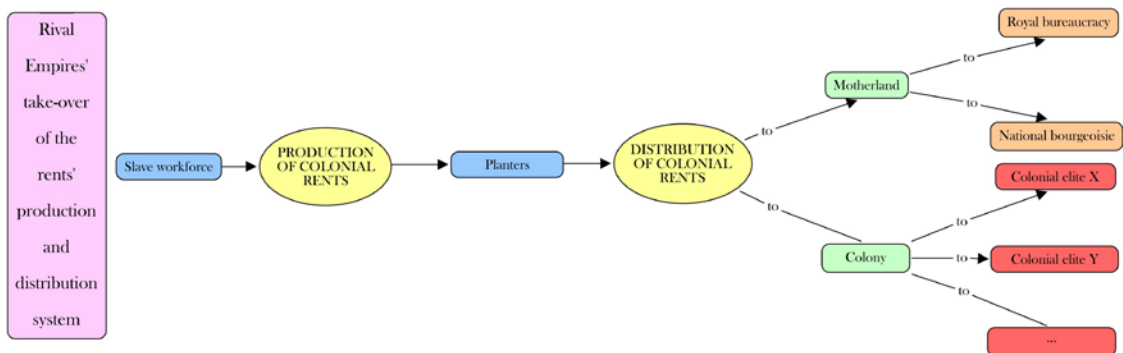
Source: The author

with slaves, as the racial composition of the 1795, 1812 and 1844 successive conspiracies demonstrates.

Regarding white elites' relation with colonial interests, the conflictive strategy followed by *grand blancs* in Saint Domingue turned into a cooperative one in the case of Cuba. The French colonial regime, especially after the Estates-General call, and successive economic concessions proved unable to contain *grand blancs*' demands. Quite naively, they thought that they could do without the threatening colonial power. In Cuba, the feedback effect was evident: white planters had learnt how a maximalist approach on *grand blancs*' side had paved the way towards political and economic collapse. They adopted a gradualist stance that allowed them to retain military protection from the motherland against internal or external threats. Additionally, it is possible that the political structure of the Spanish Empire provided less room to make their claims heard. White planters in Cuba were probably less able but certainly less willing to challenge Spanish rule.

6. Conclusion

Plantation colonies were inherently unstable. The expansion of the plantation economy and the colonial constraints under which this expansion took place gave rise, sooner or later, to a number of conflicts associated with the production and the distribution of colonial rents. Conceptual map 3 shows these socio-economic cleavages.



Conceptual Map 3. Conflicts on production and distribution of colonial rents.

Source: The author

The socio-political events in Cuba and particularly in Saint Domingue during the 18th and 19th centuries are more easily understood according

to this framework. As Conceptual Maps 1 and 2 present, the demands of more economic freedom and self-government by *grand blancs*, the racial and political discrimination against *gens de couleur*, the intervention of the British and Spanish armies, the slaves rebellion and even certain aspects of the Revolution in France fit with this framework. In the case of Cuba, these conflicts were also present. Keep in mind Arango's demands regarding free trade, the discrimination against free blacks and mulattos, the conspiracies of 1812 or 1844 or the long-standing US interests in the purchase of the island. However, both the extent and the depth of these cleavages were much lesser. As I have tried to show, several features of the Cuban political economy may explain the absence of a Saint Domingue-like chain of events. First of all, the Haitian spectre and a more centralized Empire helped Spaniards to keep planters quiet. Secondly, a larger degree of urbanization reduced the stake of free coloureds in the plantation economy, providing them with alternatives for wealth accumulation and weakening their anxiety with respect to the political control of the colonial economy. Finally, the social costumes, the legal tradition and the political organization of the Spanish Empire tempered the basic contradiction between planters and slave workforce.

At Saint Domingue, the absence of similar retaining walls favoured the aggravation of the internal dynamics of the plantation colony and, eventually, overt conflict, war and slave rebellion occurred. Bourgeois-democratic ideology and the French Revolution contributed to the turmoil but, contrary to Genovese's theses, its role was marginal and indirect. I dare to say that, even in the absence these exogenous forces, Saint Domingue could have experienced similar events. I therefore argue that the road from social instability to overt conflict was almost a direct one. The emergence of new economic and political-institutional traits at the new Republic of Haiti, perfectly visible in the transition from the plantation economy to a small-sized subsistence farming one, was not at all the outcome of exogenous political forces but the result of the usual development of the plantation economy.

7. Final remarks

“<<Vida maravillosa – decía Sofía. Pero detrás de esos árboles hay algo inadmisibile.>> Y señalaba hacia la fila de altos cipreses, alzados como obeliscos verdinegros sobre la vegetación circundante, que ocultaba otro mundo: el de los barracones de esclavos que a veces hacían sonar sus tambores como un granizo remoto.”

El Siglo de las Luces, Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980)

Reality lends itself to AJR's or ES's interpretations. At the beginning of the 21st century, Haiti ranks the second unequal country in the world after Namibia in terms of income, a dubious merit within the highly unequal Latin America.¹²³ The earthquake of January 2010, with estimates of around 200,000 deaths, brought once more under the spotlight the institutional woodworm of a country unable to manage complex emergencies. Corruption and constant socio-political unrest, even overt violence, fit well with the 'failed state' label.¹²⁴ Cuba, for its part, experienced a tumultuous succession of government during the first half of the 20th century. Under the pro-egalitarian stance of Castro's regime, Cuba scores close to the praised Costa Rica in the Human Development Index with substantial achievements in the realms of education and health.¹²⁵ In any case, the authoritarian nature of the system, widespread corruption and an emaciated economy still are some of its more salient features.

On one hand, thus, trying to establish a direct causal chain between an adverse colonial heritage, an almost nonexistent institutional apparatus and an anaemic economy does not seem a surprising task. What is more: it holds a considerable amount of truth. On the other, I am well aware of the important limitations of this paper. The choice of Saint Domingue has not been random and the 'selection bias' is obvious. The 'Haitian exception' is, after all, an exception. But even bearing this in mind, some insights are noteworthy. I have tried to highlight how the 'big pictures' often obscure both valuable causal relations and salient actors. In contrast with the hypothesis of institutional persistence, colonial and post-colonial economies often experienced institutional change, frequently as a result of socio-political forces. Moreover, these forces had been encouraged, often created, by the own dynamics of the colonial regime. A successful slave rebellion as the Saint Domingue's one allows us to recognize both the role of political economy factors and the significance of slave agency in the narrative of comparative development. A more accurate question for further research would be to ask why, even

¹²³ Evans Jadotte, "The State and Structure of Inequality in the Republic of Haiti" (paper presented at the 15th Public Economics Workshop, Universidad de Salamanca, Spain, February, 2008) and M. Lundahl, "Income and Land Distribution in Haiti: Some Remarks on Available Statistics", *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol. 38, No. 2/3, 1996.

¹²⁴ On 19th-century Haiti, from a *dependentista* perspective, see Alexander Dupuy, "Class Formation and Underdevelopment in Nineteenth-Century Haiti", *Race and Class*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 1982. On rural present-day Haiti, see J. G. Leyburn, J. G., *The Haitian People* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1941) and P. Moral, *Le Paysan Haïtien. Étude sur la Vie Rurale en Haïti* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 1978).

¹²⁵ United Nations Development Program, *Human Development Report 2009. Human Mobility and Development* (New York: UNDP, 2009).

accepting the existence of a certain institutional flexibility as a result of socio-political forces, many of these economies ended up in the long-run coming back to an institutional and economic low-level equilibrium trap. To answer this and similar questions, I do believe that history, political science and social sciences in general have much to say in a realm that always valuable economic analysis has come recently to dominate.

Zaragoza-Uncastillo-London-Havana. August-October 2010.

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