

The rise of national identity in the early Spanish Caribbean and in Haiti

The racial composition of the different census elaborated in the eastern area of Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Spanish Santo Domingo in the first half of the XIX century, evidenced a strong connection with the social structure of the patriarchal slavery systems of cattle ranches and subsistence farming. The most significant demographic feature of these backward regions, was the fact that they had the highest ratio of free colored population and the lowest percentage of white and slave inhabitants. Actually the slow economic growth of these regions, favored the progressive emancipation of slaves, the miscegenation of the different racial groups and a exiguous white immigration from Spain. They also had a low index of economic activity and mercantile circulation. Slaves and free colored people were subject to paternalism.

Correspondently they were requested to hold white masters in high esteem and deference.

However, favorable external market conditions for sugar from the eighteenth century on stimulated the rise of a plantation regime in Haiti and in the western area of Cuba. The dynamic expansion of sugar encouraged the importation of slaves on an unparalleled scale and a soaring commercial enlargement. The most significant derivations from these developments were the intensive tensions and racial polarization that took place. Evidently, the fact of having consolidated an active and vigorous service economy, around the western port of Havana in the XVII and XVIII centuries, stimulated exploitation and mistreatment of slaves and free colored people. Thus, a rigid social stratification marginated blacks and mulattoes from social activities and the most elementary rights.¹ Male immigrants from the peninsula, came alone without women, so they related with Creole women, black and mulatto most of them. Santo Domingo

¹ . Moreau de Saint-Mery, M.L.E. *Descripción de la parte española de Santo Domingo*. Ed. Santo Domingo, Santo Domingo, 1976

stood out in this sense, since it had and a high proportion of free colored people and the lowest ratio of white population, Puerto Rico also had a high percentage of free blacks and mulattoes. In the eastern region of Cuba, where a patriarchal regime predominated and the paternal treatment of slaves and colored people gave the tone of social and economic activities, the free colored population predominated. However, its western area had the highest proportion of slaves and a high ratio of whites, with extreme racial

Census	Whites	Slaves	"Free" of color
Cuba (1778)	100 921 (55.6%)	49 960 (27.5%)	30 623 (16.8%)
P. Rico(1776)	29 263 (46.8%)	6 537 (10%)	26 611 (42.6%)
S. Domingo (1794)	35 000 (33.9%)	30 000 (29.1%)	38 000 (36.8%)
Haiti (1789)	40 000 (7.5%)	462 000(87.1%)	28 000 (5.2%)

the formation of a strong plantation system, starting from 1740, and the entrance to the country of a large amount of migrants from Spain. Thus in western Cuba, whites creoles and Spaniards, on one hand, and African slaves, on the other, prevailed, drawing sharp distinctions among the population, while a large majority of free mulattoes and blacks identified the eastern region of Cuba, Santo Domingo and Puerto Rico. The presence of small sugar mills (*rapiches*), on the eighteenth -century cattle ranchs of the eastern region of Cuba did not lead to qualitative transformations in technology, the orientation of production toward foreign markets or the treatment of slaves. The tone of spiritual life and the moderation of social relations on these regions was in large part result of the measured and restrained nature of patriarchal slavery. A variety of documents attest the difference in the treatment of slaves and the colored castes between the eastern region of Cuba and its western part. The ideologue of the eastern patriarchy, Nicolás Josep de Ribera, pointed out the respectful and considered social relations that prevailed between masters and slaves, compared to the ruthless and relentless way in which slaves were treated in the Havana region and in the English caribbean. However, paternalism, that is

patriarchal relations, were not intended at promoting subordinates among ethnic groups, but at segregating them. The obstacles to social mobility in the slave system show that the masters practiced deference and paternalism to its clientele, in order to avoid an eventual alliance of the free colored castes with slaves. The catholic church, in accordance with the patriarchal nature of social relations, attempted to demonstrate the degree of ethnocultural integration that had been achieved by means of the various versions it offered on the origin of the national Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, whose special care was to protect Cuba.² In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the domestic market of the Spanish antilles contributed to the formation of a limited sense of nationhood expressed in the love for the local homeland. Thus, the local "homeland" was restricted to the city or place where creoles were born, that is, it did not include the entire insular territory. As a result, the taking of Havana by the English meant to the havaneros the loss of its motherland, as a well known poem evidenced. On the other hand, in Santo Domingo, as the French enumerator Pedron highlighted, most of the mestizo population sought to be white, without anybody protests, and it was registered as such in the padrones.) Nonetheless, in Haiti the Africans and black creoles (85% of the total population), surpassed by a wide margin the white and mulatto population. This demographic correlation was also a result of the large plantation system established in the french colony. Haitian sugar mills amounted to 539 in 1742 and its slaves amounted to half of the slaves in the antilles. From a colony constituted by free migrants (colone du peuplement) integrated mainly by buccaneers and free french colonizers in the XVII century, Haiti, in virtue of its sugar plantation system, became an exploitation colony (colone du exploitation) where thousands of slaves died as a result of the mistreatments they

² Portuondo Zúñiga, Olga *Nicolás José de Ribera*, ed. and with an introduction by, Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, La Habana, 1986, pp. 20 and 110. Cif. José Juan Arrom, *Certidumbre de América*, Ed. Letras Cubanas, Habana, 1980

Aleida Placencia *La dominación inglesa vista por el pueblo de la Habana*, Biblioteca nacional "José Martí", La Habana, 1965, pp. 1-4

suffered.. Thus, it turned out to be the first sugar exporter of the world and coffee producer in the caribbean area.. Their exports exceeded those of the spanish, french and english antilles. Clearly the spanish antilles fell behind the south and central america process of national formation. While most Latin American countries became republics in the first half of the nineteenth century, Santo Domingo and Cuba became independents only in the second half and Puerto Rico has not been able to develop into a Republic. Some historians have explained the lag of the national construction process in Cuba and Puerto Rico as a result of the of the sugar plantation system and its sway in the development of its cultural, psychological and ethnic distinctiveness, as well as in the progress of its national consciousness.³ Whereas the building up of the hispanic antilles identities, that is, of its ethnic, psychological and cultural features, constitutes long term, secular process that commenced with the colonization of the caribbean islands by Spain and does not have a predictable end, the struggles for its construction as national states took place for the most part in the XIX century. Nevertheless, the cuban and dominicans efforts to consolidate and secure, their national states in face of the United States presence in the area, has not finished, contributing to strengthen their national consciousness and pride. The Puerto Rican nationality, has suffered alterations, but as long as long as it has not been assimilated by the United States cultural penetration, it has mainly preserved its language, cultural roots and sense of national identity, in one piece.

Another element that contributed to the formation of to sense of nationhood during the first two centuries of the colonial regime was the unity of all Creole classes and ethnic strata in the face or european pirates and corsairs incursions into the waters of the Spanish Caribbean and these classes opposition not only to Spain's trade monopoly, but to the policy of devastation decreed by

³ Paul Estrade "Observaciones sobre el carácter tardío y avanzado de la toma de conciencia nacional en las Antillas españolas". En : Ibero. Americana Pragensia Supplementum5 / 1991, Universidad Carolina-Praga, 1991, pp. 21-51

the colonial authorities against the creole ranchers and farmers who smuggled European goods, into the Hispanic Antilles. That is why illegal imports played such an essential role in the creole emerging recognition of its own self interest versus the interests of the colonial regime. The measures taken in the seventeenth century by the Spanish Crown against smuggling provoked riots and armed sublevations in Bayamo and in Puerto Principe in Cuba. These protests and rebellions were similar to those that took place in the northern region Sacred of Domingo against the devastations decreed by Governor Osorio in 1605 and 1607 and the ones that provoked in 1613 revolts among poor farmers contrary to the municipal oligarchy of San Juan. In 1702 a series of revolts ensued in San German, Ponce and Coamo, against the repressive procedures taken on smuggling, reunited poor farmers and ranchers. Ethnic solidarity was manifested among Creoles, both blacks, mulattoes and whites, in the face of the restrictive measures imposed by the colonial Spanish authorities against smuggling. A different sort of shared aims was displayed by free blacks, mulattoes and white, members of the island's militia that rushed to defend San Juan in opposition to an English invasion in 1797, much as Cuban militias, both black and white, who safeguarded Havana against the British attack in 1762

The testimony of several travelers and colonial functionaries agree about the patriarchal relationships that existed between masters and slaves on the Hispanic Antilles cattle ranches and farms, compared to the harsh relationships on the English and French Antilles sugar plantations. . The same could be accounted for the color prejudice and the barrier erected between races in Santo Domingo, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. In the Spanish Santo Domingo there is almost consensus in relation to the fact that slaves did not seek to break out and flee to the French part of the island, where there was a severe system of plantation slavery, while the Haitian slaves escaped in large numbers to the Spanish side of the island. On the Cuban cattle ranches of the east side of the Island there was scarcely any slave runaways, *cimarrones*, compared to the growing number of

slaves fugitives that fled from the sugar plantations of the western area. Another characteristic of the hispanic antilles system of slavery was the great number of holydays and religious festivals decreed each year by the Church. In the Spanish antilles, the scarcity of whites who might fill ecclesiastical, military, and bureaucratic positions, permitted blacks and mulattoes to occupy them. In Puerto Rico there is a good deal of testimony, referring to the relatively lenient bonds of slavery on farms, country properties, the same as to the lax treatment given to domestic slaves and free colored population. The same as in eastern Cuba and Santo Domingo in Puerto Rico there were integrated schools, where whites and colored teachers taught children from all the racial spectrum. Whites, mulattoes and blacks danced African and Creole rhythms. In the Spanish caribbean slaves could be emancipated easily through the payment of his price to his master. The slaves could earn money on their own and possess property. Although there existed a patriarchal system in Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo and in the eastern side of Cuba, that made shared life to a certain degree acceptable among the residents in the Island, one must not overlook the fact that this were slave societies. The western part of Cuba was patriarchal until the first half of the XVIII century, when the slave plantation regime was implanted. Custom and law tended to keep free blacks and mulattoes subordinated at a level from where no one could rise above. Colored people were forbidden to bear arms, walk the streets at night, drink alcoholic beverages, and stroll along the same side walk as whites - prohibitions which clearly show the existence of a caste society. Unlike Santo Domingo, where a biracial oligarchy held power, in Cuba and Puerto Rico, Spaniards and white creoles held power, an authority which the lower orders neither contended nor shared. White people could only benefit from the honorific "Don". Also, the prohibition against black and mulattoes pursuing high professional degrees illustrated the social barriers that existed.

The rising number of the colored population in Sacred Domingo, determined that by the early eighteenth century various laws that prohibited blacks and mulattoes from becoming attorneys or holding clerical positions were revoked. The fact that the mulattoes descendants of the first Spanish colonizers inherited from their father as heirs-at-law the title to their ranches and farms, meant that a biracial landowning oligarchy was on the way to emerge. Soon enough they acceded as incumbents in the councils of dominican cities. Frequently colored cubans, dominicans and porto ricans claimed to be heirs of the original aborigine population, in order to hide their African origins. The ever increasing racial hybridization of the dominicans led to an early sense of origin and historical destiny long before such to sense emerged in Cuba or Puerto Rico. This sense of ethnic identity constituted the step prior to the formation of a sense of national identity. Unlike New World countries, where only whites were called, creoles, this gentilitious was used in Santo Domingo for all the inhabitants of the island. In Santo Domingo, sooner than in Cuba and Puerto Rico, developed specifically ethnic, psychological and cultural traits as early as the seventeenth century.

Bibliography

- 1) José Juan Arrom, *Certidumbre de América*, Ed. Letras Cubanas, Habana, 1980
- 2) Babin, María Teresa: La cultura de Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, Editorial Cultural, 1973.
- 3) Bergad, Laird: Coffee and the growth of agrarian capitalism in nineteenth century Puerto Rico, Princeton, 1983.
- 4) Blanco, Tomás: Prontuario histórico de Puerto Rico, 6ta. Edición, San Juan, Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1970.
- 5) Brau, Salvador: Disquisiciones Sociológicas, San Juan, Edit. Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1956.

- 6) Chaunu, Pierre y Huguette: Seville et l'Atlantique (1504-1550), 11 vols., SEUPEN, 1955-1959.
- 7) Cifré de Loubiel, Estela: "Los inmigrantes del siglo XIX. Su contribución a la formación del pueblo puertorriqueño", en Revista de Cultura Puertorriqueña, No. 7, Abril-Junio de 1960.
- 8) Crescioni Negrees, Gladys: Breve introducción a la cultura puertorriqueña, Madris, Librería La Biblioteca, 1978.
- 9) Cubano, Astrid: "Economía y sociedad en Arecibo en el siglo XIX: los grandes productores y la inmigración de comerciantes", En: Inmigración y clases sociales ..., (op. Cit), San Juan, Ed. Huracán, 1985.
- 10) El proceso abolicionista en Puerto Rico, San Juan, Edit. Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1978.
- 11) Fernández Méndez, Eugenio (edit.) Memorias del Mariscal de Campo Alejandro O'Reilly." En : Crónicas de Puerto Rico, VI, ELA, San Juan, 1957.
- 12) Fernández Méndez, Eugenio: Historia cultural de Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1975.
- 13) Figueroa, Loida: Breve historia de Puerto Rico, Puerto Rico, Edit. Edil, Río Piedras, 1979, 2 Tomos.
- 14) García Fuentes, Lutgardo : El comercio español con América, 1640-1700, Sevilla, Escuela de Estudios Hispanoamericanos de Sevilla, 1980.
- 15) Ibarra, Jorge: Nación y Cultura nacional, La Habana, Edit. Letras Cubanas, 1981.
- 16) Labra, Rafael María: La cuestión de Puerto Rico, Madrid, Imprenta de J. E. Morete, 1870.
- 17) Ledrú, Andre Pierre: Viaje a la Isla de Puerto Rico (1765), San Juan, Imprenta Militar de Juan González, 1863.

- 18) Marazzi, Rosa: “El impacto de la inmigración a Puerto Rico de 1800 a 1830: análisis estadístico”, en: Revista de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de Puerto Rico, XVIII, 1-2 de junio de 1974.
- 19) Aleida Placencia La dominación inglesa vista por el pueblo de la Habana, Biblioteca nacional “José Martí”, La Habana, 1965, pp. 1-4
- 20) Portuondo Zúñiga, Olga Nicolás José de Ribera, Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, La Habana, 1986, pp. 20 and 110. Cif.
- 21) ³ Paul Estrade “Observaciones sobre el carácter tardío y avanzado de la toma de conciencia nacional en las
- 22) Quintero Rivera, Angel G., José Luís González y otros: Puerto Rico: Identidad nacional y clases sociales, San Juan, Ed. Huracán, 1981.
- 23) Quintero Rivera, Ángel G.: Patricios y plebeyos: burgueses, hacendados, artesanos y obreros, Río Piedras, Ed. Huracán, 1988.
- 24) Quintero Rivera, Ángel: “El tambor en el cuatro: la metodización de los ritmos y la etnicidad cimarroneada”. Ponencia presentada en el II Encuentro Internacional: Identidad, Cultura y Sociedad en las Antillas Hispanoparlantes, Santo Domingo, 3 al 7 de junio de 1992.
- 25) Rivero, Manuel A.: El jíbaro, Edit. Edil, Río Piedras, Puerto Rico, 1992.
- 26) Scarano, Francisco (edit.): Inmigración y clases sociales en el Puerto Rico del siglo XIX, San Juan, Ed. Huracán 1985.

- 27) Scarano, Francisco: Sugar and Slavery in Puerto Rico: the plantation economy of Ponce (1800-1850), Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984.
- 28) Turnbull, David: Travels in the West. Cuba with notices of Porto Rico and the slave trade, New York, Negro University Press, 1869.
- 25) Paul Estrade “Observaciones sobre el carácter tardío y avanzado de la toma de conciencia nacional en las Antillas españolas”. En : Ibero. Americana Pragensia Supplementum 5 / 1991, Universidad Carolina-Praga, 1991.