The *Emancipados* from Havana:

Negotiating Captivity and Freedom in the Nineteenth-Century Black Atlantic*

Los *emancipados* de la Habana:

Negociando el cautiverio y la libertad a través del Atlántico negro en el siglo XIX

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Resumen
Este ensayo expone numerosas formas de explotación bajo categorías administrativas y legales cambiantes, situando los archivos y la producción de documentación en el centro de la historia de la esclavitud, emancipación, luchas por la libertad y sistemas de trabajo forzado durante el Imperio español tardío, y utilizando como estudio de caso el de una embarcación de "emancipados" cubanos transportados a Fernando Poo. Pone de relieve los estrechos vínculos entre la abolición en el Caribe y nuevas empresas coloniales en África: individuos anteriormente esclavizados transformados en potenciales agentes colonizadores bajo fórmulas de neoesclavitud. En este marco de reconfiguraciones insulares intra-imperiales, el abolicionismo aparece íntimamente ligado al colonialismo de asentamiento.

Palabras clave: archivos, Cuba, Fernando Poo, emancipados, trata ilegal, abolicionismo, colonialismo de asentamiento

Abstract
Placing archives and paperwork at the center of the history of slavery, emancipation, freedom struggles, and enforced labor systems during the late Spanish empire, and using as case study a group of formerly captive and newly freed individuals transported back across the Atlantic from Cuba to Fernando Poo, this essay exposes numerous forms of exploitation under redefined administrative and legal categories. It stresses the links between abolition in the Caribbean and new colonial projects in Africa: neo-slavery redeployed for ultramarine enterprises, and formerly enslaved individuals recast as potential civilizational agents. Within this framework of insular intra-imperial reconfigurations, abolitionism is depicted as intimately intertwined with settler colonialism.

Keywords: archives, Cuba, Fernando Poo, *emancipados*, illegal trade, abolitionism, settler colonialism

This essay is intended—at least partially—as an archival exercise, making use of a file containing a series of unique documents that engage with the afterlives of slavery (and the illegal slave trade more specifically) in the Caribbean and the Iberian Black Atlantic. It will be anchored in two nineteenth-century insular spaces —Cuba and Fernando Poo (today called Bioko)—, and I will be revisiting one specific instance in these archives of slavery, delving into the complex twice cross-Atlantic journey and experience of a group of two-hundred captive individuals. They had disembarked in Cuba in the late 1850s, from various ships intercepted in illegal trafficking operations after the abolition of the trade.[1] They were then enlisted and transported back to Africa for purposes of labor and colonization. This archival investigation is therefore presented as a reflection on the various ways in which first, captivity, and then, neo-slavery, in the Caribbean and the ultramarine territorial domains of the late Spanish empire, shaped labor regimes and livelihoods. I will be arguing that these very labor regimes, and the fine line that separated captivity from freedom, informed and provided some of the conditions of possibility for Spanish colonialism in the Gulf of Guinea, from the second half of the nineteenth-century onwards.

I will, purposefully, be placing archives, administrative documentation, governor's reporting, and paperwork at the center of these histories of captivity, promises of freedom, and labor enforcement.[2] Using as a case study this specific group of formerly enslaved and newly freed individuals puts in front of us some of the many shades of freedom and unfreedom, and the wide variety of forms of human labor and exploitation, in a context of

[1] María del Carmen Barcia has carefully documented the inner workings of the illegal trade into Cuba after the signing of the 1817 and 1835 Treaties between Spain and the U.K. and the subsequent Penal Law of 1845, noting that from 1821 to 1866, "en tiempos del comercio ilegal de esclavos llegaron a Cuba un total de 506.259 cautivos" (2022, p. 101), a number corroborated by most historians in this field. These, while high, are only estimated figures since, as José Antonio Piqueras suggested, "el número de africanos introducidos a partir de 1861 es difícil de establecer [...] A medida que se avanza hacia el final de la trata la información sobre embarcaciones y desembarco se hace menos accesible". He calculates an average of "17.149 desembarcados por año en el lustro 1856-1860" (2011, p. 216). Meanwhile, Martín Rodrigo-Alharilla (2021) studied the role played by Spanish sailors and merchants in the illegal slave trade to Cuba during the final years of this practice.

[2] On the centrality of paperwork, petitions, and lawsuits to renegotiate social status and upward mobility in early colonial Latin American societies, see the book by Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and Adrian Masters, *The Radical Spanish Empire: How Paperwork Politics Remade the New World*. Meanwhile, Adriana Chira (2022) has vastly documented numerous legal cases of enslaved and free Afro-descendants in their efforts to claim land property rights and to attain free legal status through ownership in nineteenth-century Cuba.

overlapping colonialities and inter-imperial transfers. It also confronts us with a range of redefined and recodified administrative and legal categories, including the slippery concept of "emancipado". One of the aims of this inquiry is to explore the possibilities of the archive, and archival material, to shed some light on the complex experiences of these individuals through the available records. I hope to also generate some larger reflections on the multiple ways in which slavery, and the neo-slavery scheme I am about to describe, were intimately linked to abolition processes in the Caribbean, and subsequent colonial projects in Africa. In a nutshell: neo-slavery was refashioned and redeployed under the guise of new enterprises, and formerly enslaved individuals were turned into ostensibly civilizing agents, following a period of tutelage and labor extraction, under a regime of "apprenticeship". Within this framework of insular and intra-imperial reconfigurations of the late Spanish Empire, a potential paradox might emerge: abolitionism was intimately intertwined with settler colonialism, as Iberian imperial histories moved back and forth across the Atlantic.

The island of Fernando Poo, off the coast of Nigeria, together with an assortment of other smaller islands and the adjacent mainland coastal strip, had first been ceded to Spain through a territorial exchange with Portugal, ratified by the Treaty of El Pardo in 1778. Spain had not, however, occupied the island at that early stage. Instead, from 1827 to 1843, it was ceded to Great Britain, which established there an antislavery commission, and used it as a naval base —managed from the city of Port Clarence— for commercial ventures along the West Central African coastline. Only from the late 1850s onwards did Spain decide to formally occupy and financially exploit Fernando Poo, with the purpose of turning it into a plantation island.[3] One specific course of action the Spanish administration devised for the project consisted in the transfer of labor force from the Caribbean into this colonial territory. Such is the context in which, in 1862, Fernando Poo began to serve

[3] The first appointed governor was the naval captain Carlos de Chacón y Michelena. Dispatched to formally occupy the island on May 27, 1958, he remained in the position until September 1, 1859, and was charged with the task of establishing the local colonial administration.

as the destination for a forcible eastward relocation of black "emancipated" subjects from Havana.[4]

These individuals had been captured from ships intercepted in the Atlantic, or upon arrival to a Cuban port, and placed under custody, but their destiny remained emphatically subjected to the colonial authorities in charge. As Inés Roldán de Montaud has argued, the "emancipados" were "declarados jurídicamente libres por haber sido capturado el buque que los transportaba, en aplicación de los tratados internacionales y la presión abolicionista británica" (2011, p. 159). They were to be turned to the local authorities, technically given an emancipation letter, and employed as domestic servants or free workers. However, as she also points out, they constituted "un cuerpo extraño en el seno de la sociedad esclavista" (p. 160), and fell victims of all sorts of abuses. Ultimately, "la incorporación a la sociedad cubana como hombres libres de los poco más de 26.000 negros a quienes se declara emancipados entre 1824 y 1866 se demostró casi imposible" (p. 161), for, as she concludes, "en cierto sentido, la situación del emancipado era peor que la del esclavo. De hecho, estaba privado de la protección de los derechos que consuetudinariamente se reconocían al esclavo, entre otros, la coartación" (pp. 170-171). Cuban historian Fermín Figuera had already denounced, in his 1866 book *Estudios sobre la isla de Cuba: la cuestión social*, that "las consignaciones de emancipados y sus traspasos eran fuente perenne de abusos de todo género" (p. 16). In fact, he documented numerous cases of "emancipados" taken out of custody and surreptitiously forced into plantation work under the guise of slavery. More recently, Zuleica Romay Guerra corroborated this practice, documenting the abuses that persisted even in urban settings, outside the plantation circuits:

> Los emancipados, que legalmente no eran esclavos, pero tampoco eran libres, ya que como seres originarios de África se consideraban no-personas destinadas a la condición servil, fueron objeto de innumerables

[4] For the long and sustained history of enforced deportations from Cuba to Fernando Poo, and to other insular and coastal Spanish outposts in Africa, due to labor needs or to political reasons, and carried out by the colonial administration between 1862 and 1898, see Benita Sampedro Vizcaya, 2019, 2020.

> abusos y de un infame tráfico doméstico. Sus periodos de "aprendizaje" podían ser renovados indefinidamente para sustentar negocios en los cuales participaban, con grandes beneficios económicos, hacendados, comerciantes, contratistas y funcionarios coloniales. (Romay Guerra, 2015, p. 24)

From a political and economic standpoint, the situation of the "emancipados" responded to a number of local, regional, and contingent factors, which included the increasing pressure (at both ends) surrounding the continuity of the illegal trade, in light of the prohibition and the signed treaties that bound it; the legal, social, and economic imperatives of the abolition processes; and the emerging possibilities of new colonial settlements in Africa, for which Spanish intra-imperial networks were being mobilized.

As is often the case in the history of any colonial administration, a vast amount of paperwork and documentation was generated in relation to this operation of relocating the Cuban "emancipados" to Fernando Poo. This included correspondence between the Spanish governors appointed to both islands, or between them and the central administration in Madrid (the Ministerio de la Guerra y Ultramar, the Ministerio de Marina, or the Crown). It also encompassed several Royal Orders authorizing the recruitment, the transfer, and a variety of other dispositions; detailed passenger boarding lists or Relaciones nominales; and a myriad of legal, military, financial, and even religious provisions, such as arrangements for transportation, housing, and a newly developed urban planning project to guarantee colonial resettlement. We unfortunately do not have documents generated or directly initiated by the relocated "emancipados" themselves, but we can read about their claims, their demands, their protestations, their priorities, and their forms of resistance and defiance through governors' and colonial agents' reports and letters, situating them as de facto active agents in their negotiation of captivity, freedom, labor conditions, life arrangements, and payment expectations. We also learn of the effectiveness of some of their vindications and demands, through the adjustments and concessions that the authorities were forced to make to their labor and living conditions in their new destination in Fernando Poo.

Correspondence between the governors in Cuba and Fernando Poo and the Ministry in Madrid regarding the possibility of labor and population transfers had begun earlier but intensified from the year 1861. In an official communication dated September 25th and issued in Santa Isabel, Fernando Poo's capital, José de la Gándara reasoned as follows regarding colonial resettlement plans:[5]

> Cumpliendo lo que se me ordena en la Real Orden de 6 de agosto último, en la que se traslada una comunicación del Exmo. Sr. Gobernador Capitán General de la Isla de Cuba indicando entre otras cosas la conveniencia de mandar a esta Colonia, por vía de corrección y escarmiento, gentes de color libres de aquel país, de mala vida y no buenas costumbres, debo manifestar a usted […] y prescindiendo de las indudables ventajas que resultarían para Cuba de la medida propuesta […] que la juzgo poco conveniente para Fernando Poo, colonia naciente donde necesita acreditarse la dominación española, de cuya sociedad vendrían a ser triste muestra los negros y mulatos vagos de la Habana. (Gándara, "Oficios al Ministerio de la Guerra y Ultramar", n. p.)

In the same report, he later advances the specific request for the transfer of Cuban "emancipados", to replace the Spanish army and Spanish civilian settlers who had been experiencing a high mortality rate; he envisions that they will actually "economizarán muchas vidas de peninsulares":

> habiendo demostrado la experiencia que los soldados europeos no eran aptos por las condiciones del clima para soportar las fatigas de sus oficios, se me ocurrió solicitar del Exmo. Sr. Ministro de la Guerra que el reemplazo de esta guarnición se hiciera por emancipados de la Isla de Cuba, de oficios útiles para las construcciones públicas y particulares. Esta clase de gente es la que Fernando Poo demanda a su hermana Cuba […] Entre el crecido número de emancipados existentes en la Isla de Cuba no parece que sea difícil encontrar ochenta o cien hombres jóvenes de larga residencia en aquel país que tengan oficio conveniente que quieran venir a las puertas del país donde nacieron. (Gándara, "Oficio al Ministerio de la Guerra y Ultramar", n. p.)

[5] Doing the rounds through the colonial geography, as it was typical for military officers of this rank, José de la Gándara served as governor of Fernando Poo between September 1, 1859, and June 30, 1862; he was subsequently appointed governor of the province of Santiago de Cuba. Between 1864 and 1865 he participated as lieutenant general in the war in Santo Domingo; and between 1866 and 1869 he served as governor in the Philippines.

Relying on the concept of colonial (insular) sisterhood, Fernando Poo's governor also devises a means by which these "emancipados" should be recruited in Havana, and he advances projections for future colonial settlement plans and means of compensation:

> me parecería justo y conveniente que, de no encontrar voluntarios que quisieran venir, se obligase por la elección o por la suerte al número necesario entre los que reuniesen las circunstancias requeridas, a los que además debería concederse, al cumplir, del Fondo de Colonización, los medios que el Gobierno de S. M. creyera conveniente como un premio para los que aquí quisieran establecerse. (Gándara, "Oficio al Ministerio de la Guerra y Ultramar", n. p.)

The Cuban governor eventually modifies his initial plan to address the request and, within months, the first transfer of 200 individuals, legally categorized as "emancipados", is dispatched from Havana to Fernando Poo on board the ship "Ferrol". They arrived safely to their destination on August 1st, 1862. Missives from both governors informing of the boarding, departure, or arrival, and the subsequent arrangements, were correspondingly issued. Notwithstanding, the Cuban governor had expressed the difficulties he confronted in recruiting the number of voluntary "emancipados" that his counterpart in Fernando Poo demanded. In a letter from September 1861, he confessed having had to resort to coercive mechanisms for the enlistment: "para el envio […] de los doscientos jornaleros pedidos, habré de disponer de los emancipados sin contar con su consentimiento, puesto que ninguno quiere ir voluntariamente". (Serrano, "Carta No. 1591")

Needless to say, the group of "emancipados" who were subjected to this enforced second transatlantic journey was highly heterogenous, in terms of their place of origin, age, ethnic group, language they spoke, and the ship in which they had been apprehended and arrived at Cuba, or the expedition under which they were registered. They were all young, even extremely young, the majority being children and teenagers: their ages ranged between 9 and 37 years old, although very few were 30 or above. A significant number of them were, in fact, below 15. Even the governor filed a complaint: "el número de

jóvenes de 9 a 15 años es considerable".[6] Of these "emancipados", now recast in administrative parlance as "black emigrants", 175 were male, and 25 were women between the ages of 12 and 16. A separate housing arrangement was prepared for them; they were placed under the custody of the Jesuit missionaries, to receive a Christian education and prepare for marriage.

The boarding list, or "Relación nominal y circunstanciada", crafted in Havana by the Secretary of Government in June 1862, when the boat was dispatched, was divided in three folded parts. Each of them accommodated 67, 67 and 66 separate lines, or entries, respectively, with all the available data on every "emancipado". Each of the 200 entries was subsequently divided in nine columns, with the personal descriptors. This archival document provides us with substantial individual data, albeit in colonially codified terminology and categorizations.[7] The nine columns recorded the following: the number that, as "emancipados", they were assigned when they disembarked and were registered in Havana; their Christian name; the "nombre de su país", or at least a very loose phonetic interpretation of it; a presumed regional origin, defined as "Congo" for the majority of them;[8] the name of the expedition to which they belonged;[9] their age; their height; and the distinctive bodily marks or *señales*:[10] "Una X en la tetilla derecha",

[6] As most historians have documented, even under Cuban enslavement codes during this period, the minimum age at which workers were considered useful to work was 12, but never younger than 10: "la edad de trabajo considerada útil en los estadillos internos de los ingenios es de 12 años, sin embargo, con frecuencia eran empleados a partir de los 10" (Piqueras, 2011, p. 202).

[7] As per the implementation of the treaties on the abolition of the trade, a register of the apprehended individuals was to be kept in Havana, therefore this type of data was generally available. Roldán de Montaud corroborates that "para evitar que los bozales quedaran reducidos a esclavitud se dispuso la creación de un registro general de emancipados en el que debían anotarse los nombres, las circunstancias de los negros y los consignatarios. Cada seis meses se entregaría un estado de la situación de los emancipados al tribunal mixto" (2011, p. 166).

[8] There were only a handful of them listed as "Lucumí", "Mandinga", "Gangá", "Macud" and "Mina". For this reason, in Fernando Poo they were all to be known as "Congo".

[9] Most of them are registered as belonging to the following captured expeditions: Santa María, Cayo Sal, Páez, Pozas, Cayo Cádiz, Casilda, and Neptuno. For a partial list of captured expeditions into Cuba between 1845 and 1866, see, María del Carmen Barcia (2025). For a full list of the expeditions of which we have data up to this point, see the Slave Voyages database (https://www.slavevoyages.org/).

[10] María del Carmen Barcia has described the practices involved in the codification of the enslaved individuals subjected to the illegal trade, prior to their transportation across the Atlantic: "eran carimbados para imprimir en sus cuerpos la marca de cada dueño, pues, de esta manera, se sabía quiénes habían pagado por ellos y se descartaban posibles subterfugios tras el desembarco, ya que muchos fallecían en el largo viaje o incluso al llegar a tierra. Desde su permanencia en el barracón africano, o tal vez en el mismo barco, se les asignaba un nombre cristiano, razón por la cual en los documentos ocupados aparecen el apelativo de origen de los bozales y, además, el recién adquirido" (2022, p. 88).

"Una F sobre el brazo derecho", "Un 3 sobre el brazo izquierdo", "Una CR en cada tetilla", "Una quemadura en la paleta izquierda", "Tres pintas en la megilla derecha", "Una cicatriz de quemadura en la mano derecha", "Le falta el segundo dedo del pie derecho"...

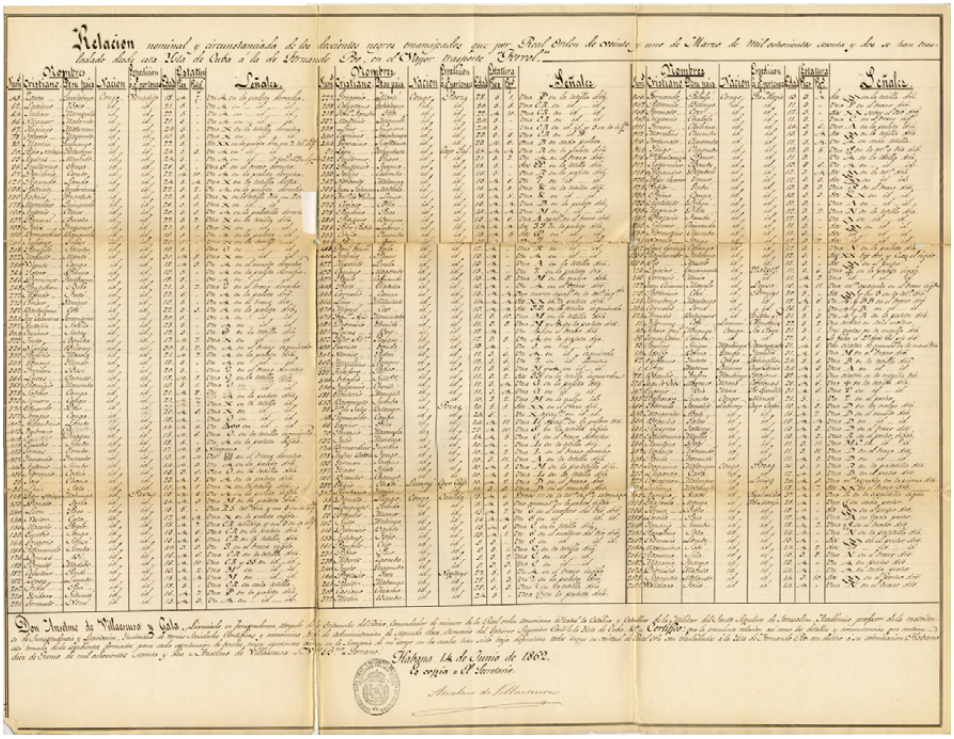


Figure 1. "Relación nominal y circunstanciada de los doscientos negros emancipados que por Real Orden de veinte y uno de marzo de mil ochocientos sesenta y dos se han trasladado desde esta Isla de Cuba a la de Fernando Poo, en el Vapor transporte 'Ferrol'. Habana, 14 de junio de 1862". Archivo General de la Administración, Ministerio de Cultura de España, Alcalá de Henares.

The 200 "emancipados" were quickly sent off to work upon arrival, and assigned, specifically, to public works and government infrastructures in the capital city of Santa Isabel. The governor issued another formal complaint, this time not about their age, but about their lack of training or professional skills:

> Mas estos emancipados han llegado, es verdad, en número de doscientos, y entre ellos hemos hallado sólo dos albañiles y un

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> herrero. Útiles son todos, y llamados están a prestar grandes servicios a la Colonia que necesita de sus brazos, pero hubiera convenido más a los intereses de la misma que en vez de sesenta y siete chicos desde nueve a catorce años que han llegado, hubieran sido hombres formados y de la clase de albañiles y carpinteros que tanta necesidad hay de ellos. (López de la Torre Ayllón, "Informando sobre el estado actual de esta isla", n. p.)

Yet, despite the official's protestations, the work carried out by these young "emancipados" over the course of the 1860s had a transforming effect on the urbanization of the island. As Miquel Vilaró i Güell has written:

> En pocos meses se terminó el templo, iniciado el año anterior por su antecesor y paralizado por una epidemia, y se acondicionó la Plaza de España y sus alrededores, al tiempo que se hicieron desmontes y se construyeron drenajes en los parajes próximos a la capital a fin de mejorar sus condiciones sanitarias. (2011, p. 14)

Mariano de Castro Antolín corroborates the impact their labor had on the city's infrastructures and conditions of habitation:

> su presencia va a dar un impulso a la ciudad como nunca había tenido hasta entonces […] La actividad desplegada fue tal que en apenas dos meses se concluyeron las obras de la Iglesia, se niveló y enarenó la plaza, y se desecó un pantano que rodeaba a la ciudad por el este y por el sur y que se consideraba especialmente pernicioso para su salubridad. También se realizaron desmontes por el oeste […] para abrir la ciudad a los influjos benéficos de los vientos. (de Castro Antolín, 1994, p. 13)

Women, meanwhile, were employed "de la manera que sea más útil para la colonia, practicando el tejido de bambú cuyo uso es muy necesario para las cubiertas de las casas" (López de la Torre Ayllón, "Informando al Ministro de la Guerra y Ultramar", n. p.). Turning these "emancipados" into settlers was, however, one of the aspirations of the colonial administration. In fact, despite the disproportionate number of men over women in the group, and their young age notwithstanding, the Jesuit mission was entrusted with the task of preparing them for marriage, relying on the social concept of family as both a first step into setting up roots and a way of increasing productivity.

Within just about one month since their arrival, on August 31st, 1862, the governor notifies the Ministry in Madrid of the collective wedding ceremony they had assembled: "se han casado veinte y una mujer con los correspondientes consortes con espontáneo y libre consentimiento de ambas partes y conforme a las prescripciones de la Iglesia Católica" (López de la Torre Ayllón, "Carta No. 146", n. p.). However, John Holt, a British settler in Fernando Poo, entered a note in his diary on that date, not without irony, with his description of the event:

> Today there has been a great deal of marrying and giving in marriage. The Spaniards have married a lot of these Cubans by wholesale. I should think there can be little liking on either side in such matches as these. I don't know whether they like it or not, but it seems strange to one who has always thought of exercising his own judgment and having a little bit of his own way when this shall occur to him. (Holt, 1948, p. 35)

Enforced child and youth labor was legally binding through the drafting of a *Proyecto de Reglamento para el régimen de los emancipados que llegasen a esta isla con destino al desarrollo de la colonia,* by Pantaleón López Ayllón in Santa Isabel on September 28th, 1862. The document went through several rounds of revisions and amendments before its final approval, two years later. Its legal language and rhetorical style conveyed a plethora of assumptions and common places regarding the infantilization of these workers, paired with the characteristic colonial condescension:

> serán considerados libres, que han de prestar su trabajo durante un tiempo determinado y mediante un precio y la manutención, en justa retribución de la libertad que se les concede y de los gastos que esta concesión origina, pero como en el estado de esclavitud no han podido adquirir el verdadero conocimiento de los derechos y obligaciones del hombre libre, quedan sujetos a la tutela del Gobierno, que cuidará de dirigir sus acciones, hasta que sus facultades se hallen suficientemente desarrolladas, obrando durante este tiempo con ellos como un tutor con su pupilo. El tiempo de la tutela será de 5 años para los emancipados que llegaron a Fernando Poo con más de 15 años, y para los de 15 o menos, la tutela será hasta cumplir los 21. (López de la Torre Ayllón, 1862, n. p.)

Legal scholar Bartolomé Clavero Salvador has established the historical continuities, in the making and the application of the law, between the Caribbean and the new colonial territories in Africa. He refers specifically, for the period of the 1860s, to the conditions under which these *Reglamentos* were drafted and enforced, and their legal consequences, characterizing the new labor laws for Fernando Poo as a clear extension of the slave system:

> Entre esclavitud y libertad hay un mundo de ordenamiento nunca formulado sistemáticamente ni por entero. Todo sumado, tras el largo período de esclavización, sangría, tráfico y trata, se tiene como alternativa colonial para África la suma y el saldo de servidumbre jurídicamente libre y tutelada políticamente […] De ahí el escenario de un derecho contractual e incluso colectivo del trabajo. De la experiencia americana y para el colonialismo en África, hubo un efectivo aprovechamiento europeo por una geografía intercontinental dilatada, un provecho no solo español entre las Antillas y Guinea […] Para Bioko, disposiciones que así neurálgicamente afectaban a derechos de individuos teóricamente libres o al menos jurídicamente no esclavos se adoptaban además como mera orden del Gobierno, el metropolitano, sin participación parlamentaria acreditada ni intervención judicial prevista. (Clavero, 2006, p. 25-26)

How was this labor legislation, enforced through the newly devised *Reglamento,* to apply to the category of "emancipados"? And how were captivity and freedom about to be renegotiated with the Spanish colonial administration? The truth is that both legally speaking and in practice, these recently arrived individuals were subjected to a myriad of vulnerabilities and abuses; and the very applicability of the term "emancipados" to them was, in the end, farcical at best. They were turned into the object of multiple inconsistencies both in the interpretation and in the implementation of the law; in the treatment that they received, and the fate that awaited them. As Dolores García Cantús has aptly observed, the lack of consent was clear from the outset, beginning with their recruitment in Havana and their forced deportation aboard the ship 'Ferrol':

> El Ferrol se había convertido [...] en un barco negrero: aunque sus pasajeros eran teóricamente libres, habían sido tratados como esclavos al ejecutar la deportación forzosa. Por otra parte, el tiempo que llevasen

> de emancipados en Cuba les sería robado al señalar el reglamento que el período de tutelaje sólo empezaría a contar desde el momento de la salida del puerto de la Habana. (García Cantús, 2004, p. 454-455)

But the group of now contracted "emancipados" also protested vigorously against the appalling conditions of life and work they encountered in Fernando Poo, and the harsh regime of unfreedom they experienced. One notable rebellion broke out shortly after their arrival, two and a half months into their new arrangement. We learn of it because the governor, Pantaleón López de la Torre Ayllón, was prompted to issue an urgent report to the Ministry in Madrid on October 18th, "Dando cuenta de las pendencias notadas en los emancipados venidos a esta Isla de la de Cuba", which he prefaced as follows:

> Tengo el honor de manifestar a V. E, que desde la llegada a esta isla de los emancipados procedentes de Cuba, he venido observando en ellos ciertas pendencias que no están, en manera alguna, conformes con los deberes y compromisos que debían cumplir en premio de la libertad que se les otorgaba y los gastos que ocasionó su conducción. Acaso a su salida de la Habana, o durante el curso de la navegación se les habrán hecho concebir ideas demasiado lisongeras acerca del nuevo destino que aquí les esperaba […] porque sin el menor reparo lo revelaban en todas sus conversaciones causándole estrañeza que se les obligara a trabajar. (López de la Torre Ayllón, "Dando cuenta de las pendencias…", n. p.)

The report, then, provides minute detail of the long list of grievances, complaints, and demands, as presented by the "emancipados" themselves; they had also issued a threat to stop work until their requests were addressed:

> La primera reclamación que expusieron, si bien mansamente, fue que no se les daba café por la mañana, ni carne salada o tajo en los ranchos diarios. La segunda, más ostensiblemente indicada, fue resistirse a recibir el real diario que se les suministra en metálico y toman en mano todos los domingos, suponiendo que sería a buena cuenta mayor la cantidad que deberían percibir a fin de mes […] Enseguida se les hizo saber que eso es todo lo que debían percibir, pues el resto, los 50 reales mensuales se le acreditarían en sus cuentas para percibirlo todo reunido el día que cumplieran su compromiso, a fin de que con

> su importe pudieran establecerse, comprar casa y útiles de labor para las tierras que se le donarían al finalizar los cinco años, en cuya época quedarían independientes […] A pesar de estas explicaciones se han notado después algunos conatos de indisciplina y complot, amenazando a los capataces de su propia procedencia, y resistiéndose un domingo a recibir el real diario de la semana, a pretexto de que, en La Habana, según decían, se les daba en mano cinco pesos mensuales. (López de la Torre Ayllón, "Dando cuenta de las pendencias…", n. p.)

As a result of these protests and orchestrated acts of resistance the colonial authorities had to ultimately make some concessions, and the young workers' conditions improved, albeit modestly: their weekly ration was enhanced, their work schedule adjusted, Sundays were free to attend mass, and they were granted their daily allowance.

It is important to note, however, the Atlantic circularity of this systemic pattern of extractivism around human labor: sometimes the same political and military agents in charge, ruled over —and generously profited— from varying forms of licit and illicit exploitation of African labor and African individuals. Pantaleón López de la Torre Ayllón, who took office as General Governor of the Island of Fernando Poo on June 30th, 1862,[11] a month before the arrival of this group of "emancipados", had previously served in Cuba, as Lieutenant Governor, between 1850 and 1854.[12] While holding this position, he had, in fact, been actively involved in facilitating the illegal traffic of enslaved individuals, from which operations he also made substantial gains. María del Carmen Barcia reviewed archival documentation revealing that he received payment for a "shipment", onboard the brigantine Jasper, that had arrived at the district of Guane in April 1853 with 296 captured passengers:

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[11] López Ayllón held the position in Fernando Poo for three years, until August 1st, 1865. Miquel Vilaró i Güell has summarized his colonial project for the Island of Fernando Poo as follows: "podríamos encuadrar su táctica colonizadora en tres líneas de acción: 1ª. Dotar la colonia de una reglamentación que clarificase las relaciones laborales entre trabajadores y patrones, tanto en el ámbito público como en el privado. 2ª. Emprender las obras públicas necesarias para el fomento de las posesiones, con el fin de demostrar su viabilidad económica. 3ª. Desplegarse en el territorio para afianzar la soberanía española sobre toda la circunscripción (2011, p. 10).

[12] "Su primer destino en Cuba fue como Teniente Gobernador de Cienfuegos [...] De Cienfuegos pasó, a principios de 1852, a Nueva Filipina, donde permaneció un año y medio, para servir después en Trinidad, hasta febrero de 1854, cuando se le concedió su regreso a la península en situación de reemplazo (Vilaró i Güell, 2011, p. 6).

> protegía el desembarco, incluso había instruido al Capitán de Guane, D. José Méndez, para que no interfiriera, ya que los negreros habían acordado pagarle 17 onzas de oro por cada uno de los 500 africanos que arribarían; sin embargo, la expedición quedó reducida casi en un 50%. Es posible que una parte falleciera durante el trayecto, o que fuese desalijada en otro sitio antes de llegar a Punta de Cartas. Lo cierto es que Ayllón se disgustó y quiso que se le pagara la cifra convenida previamente. Los espías del cónsul inglés informaron que Pío Díaz había cenado con López Ayllón y le había entregado 6.000 pesos provistos por la casa de Herrera y Hnos. (Barcia, 2025, p. 110)[13]

This was one of two well-documented cases in which he was involved. According to Miquel Vilaró i Güell,

> en su expediente consta que poco antes de solicitar su vuelta a España, tuvo lugar el desembarco de 280 negros bozales entre la jurisdicción de Trinidad y la de Sancti-Spiritus, sin que López Ayllón emprendiera acción alguna para aprehender a los autores de aquel tráfico declarado ilegal por las Cortes españolas (Vilaró i Güell, 2011, p. 6).

Nonetheless, the labor and living conditions for these individuals transported to Fernando Poo led to a high mortality rate, due to numerous factors, not least a yellow fever epidemic and a smallpox outbreak that swept the population of Fernando Poo and beyond in 1862 and 1864, respectively.[14] The diseases had been reportedly brought to Fernando Poo from the adjacent African coast by a British ship, and had devastating effects on the population of the island, having impacted, among the local community, more than 600 people, with the fatal result of 96 deaths, as historian J. De Granda Orive studied. A governor's update, issued in April 1865, tallies the casualties among the 200 "emancipados", together with the accrued compensation owed to them for their labor, which was moved back to the colonial

[13] This is a thoroughly researched case: "Un ejemplo paradigmático de la participación estadounidense en la trata negrera fue protagonizado por el bergantín *Jasper* […] Este barco salió del puerto de Nueva York, cargó esclavos en Elmina y en abril de 1853 llegó a la costa de Bailén, en el distrito de Guane, donde desembarcó, en la ensenada de Cortés, a 296 bozales que fueron trasladados a la finca Valle. El barco fue incendiado y tardó dos días en consumirse. El teniente gobernador de Pinar del Río, Pantaleón López Ayllón, protegió el desembarco instruyendo al capitán pedáneo de Guane, José Méndez, para que no interfiriera en el asunto, ya que los negreros habían acordado pagarle 17 onzas de oro por cada uno de los africanos que arribasen por ese distrito" (Barcia, 2022, pp. 81-82). Further details on this case, and López Ayllón´s profiting from the trade while in Cuba, can be found in Barcia, 2017.

[14] On the impact of these epidemics on the island of Fernando Poo during the first decade under Spanish control, see De Granda Orive (2011).

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budget's account upon their death. In the same document, the governor grumbled about the quality of this labor force to his counterpart in Havana: "la poca rentabilidad que esta partida de emancipados había supuesto para el desarrollo de la isla de Fernando Poo". (López de la Torre Ayllón, "Relación nominal de los Emancipados fallecidos"). A response with the disclaimer was issued by the Conde de Valmaseda, in charge of the Gobierno Superior Civil de Cuba, pointing that he had not been able to "averiguar, mediante el tiempo transcurrido, las condiciones, la robustez y estado de salud, por no existir ningún antecedente sobre el particular". (Valmaseda, "Contestando la Real Orden de 22 de julio último", n. p.)

Of the original group of 200 "emancipados", by July 1st, 1867, when their five-year term as "apprenticeship" would have expired, there were 116 left —100 men and 16 women— all locally identified as "Congo" settlers. On the 12th of that month, a new urban plan was officially approved for Fernando Poo's capital city, to expand the city's limits through the building of a housing project and compound. The architectural plan, known as "Plano del barrio de Congos" was signed by the "Comandante de Ingenieros Félix Recio y Brondo" and it included 66 individual family houses —with two of them reserved for the overseers— arranged around a central square, the Plaza del Pilar.

This new housing settlement must have undoubtedly contributed to improving their living conditions, but it is also to be noted that it was the "emancipados" themselves who both put the labor to carry out the project and financed the construction, again without their consent. The governor had disposed of the funds withheld from their monthly salaries, over the course of the five years, the funds they would have been legally entitled to collect at the end of their contract term, to pay for the project. It might have been this very financial and labor investment, enforced upon them, that ultimately determined their future life and destiny once the apprenticeship contracts expired, and they would have been set to be finally free. This apparent improvement in living conditions came at the price of a renewed form of dispossession, leaving them with choices dictated by financial

necessity rather than by their own aspirations for the future. Mariano de Castro has interpreted this tragic turn of events as follows, despite colonial authorities' alleging otherwise:

> A pesar del deseo manifestado por algunos emancipados en 1866 de volver a Cuba, al llegar el momento de su licenciamiento todos prefirieron quedarse en Santa Isabel, lo que atribuye el gobernador a la buena construcción de las viviendas, así como a la posesión de herramientas. Ahora bien, esta decisión no creemos que fuera tan libre y espontánea como afirma Gómez de Barreda, pues la construcción del barrio Congo y la posesión de útiles se había realizado por cuenta de los emancipados, con el caudal de su fondo de ahorro, por lo que el traslado a La Habana habría de suponer una pérdida en su capital, amén de un futuro incierto. (de Castro, 1994, p. 14)

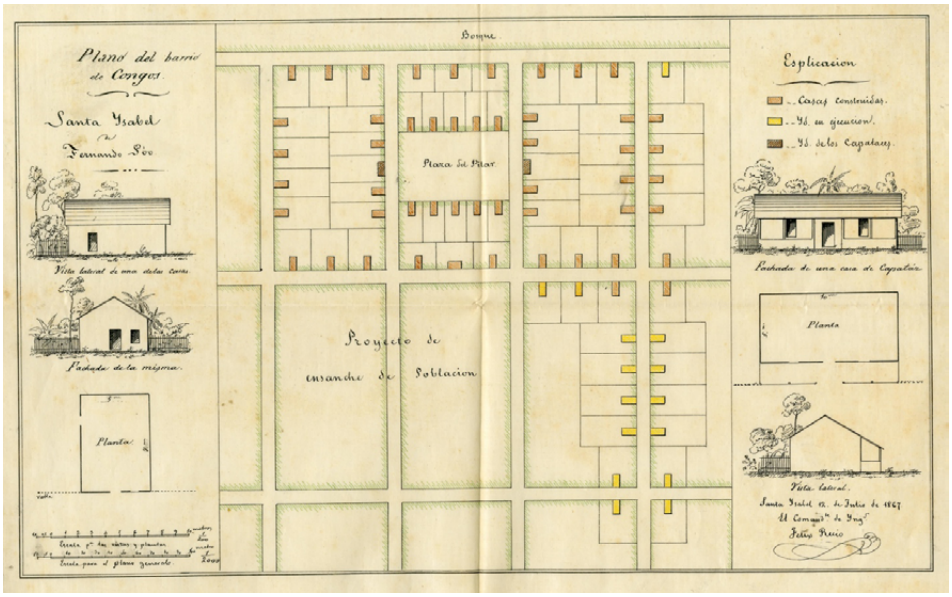


Figure 2. "Plano del Barrio de Congos. Santa Isabel, 12 de julio de 1867". Archivo General de la Administración, Ministerio de Cultura de España, Alcalá de Henares.

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Almost a century later, economic historian Abelardo de Unzueta Yuste anecdotally recalled, in 1948, and in racially loaded terminology, this chapter of the island's history, regarding the presence of the "Congo" community in Fernando Poo:

> Un dato curiosísimo para la historia urbana de Santa Isabel, poco o nada conocido: la existencia en su núcleo urbano de un barrio sucio y miserable, agrupadas sus casas sin calles, donde vivía el pueblo de los Congos, negros procedentes de Cuba, los que fueron a la isla Fernandina como trabajadores en 1862. (Unzueta Yuste, 1948, n. p.)

He goes on to speculate on what would have been of this forcibly relocated group of individuals, while invoking yet another stage of their dispossession through identity erasure and miscegenation:

> ¿Qué fue de estos negros cubanos? Seguramente se fundirían con los otros "morenos" isabelinos, pero no bubis, perdiendo noción de su procedencia, aumentando así el cruce y abigarramiento etnográfico de la capital. Curiosa paradoja del Destino; España lleva de África negros a sus Colonias americanas y una de ellas, Cuba, los devuelve al cabo del tiempo a otra colonia española de África: Fernando Poo. (Unzueta Yuste, 1948, n. p.)

To conclude with a cautionary tale in relation to our own disciplinary practices: perhaps in our archival research, and assessments on the history of slavery and post-slavery during the late Spanish Empire, in the Caribbean and elsewhere, it might prove useful to more broadly incorporate the experiences of these enforced back-to-Africa transfers of individuals and communities.[15] They often entailed a variety of forms of human labor and exploitation, under redefined administrative and legal categories, on the other side of the Atlantic. It might also be worth paying close attention to the intimate links between the stages and processes of abolition in the Caribbean and new colonial projects in Africa, as part of the continuities of empire. In fact, as Enrique Martino has aptly articulated:

[15] Rodolfo Sarracino (1988) studied the back-to-Africa movement, pursuing ethnographic work in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Equatorial Guinea, and Benin among families that had returned from the Caribbean.

> Fernando Pó was to Cuba as Freetown was to the British Caribbean or as Monrovia was to the United States, in that the contradictions of abolition in the Americas were made clear in the "emancipation" crucibles created by these empires on the West African coast (2020, p. 567).[16]

The ambiguous, slippery, multi-meaning category of "emancipado" was several times redrafted and recodified, including for new colonization enterprises, and formerly captured individuals were recast as potential civilizational agents, albeit with severe limitations in their freedom. We know that some of these individuals contested their situations and renegotiated a betterment of their conditions, but many of their life decisions were made out for them. In this revisiting of the geographies of empire, the Caribbean and the Black Atlantic as a geohistorical continuum might operate here as a more capacious framework, to make better sense of archival trajectories, and of the connectivities that they afford. In this case, to retrace some of the transfers across intra-imperial insular spaces of the late Spanish empire, and to grapple with the links between the histories and labor experiences of peoples on territorialities separated by at least two transatlantic journeys, yet closer to each other than they might appear.

Archives

AGA. Archivo General de la Administración, Ministerio de Cultura de España, Alcalá de Henares.

AHN. Archivo Histórico Nacional, Ministerio de Cultura de España, Madrid.

ANC. Archivo Nacional de Cuba, La Habana.

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[16] Ibrahim K. Sundiata has made a similar claim in his book *From Slaving to Neoslavery* (1996).

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