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**Irish Migration to Cuba, 1835-1845:
Empire, Ethnicity, Slavery and 'Free' Labour**

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to the National University of Ireland, Galway**

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School of Humanities
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Abstract

This interdisciplinary thesis examines and critically analyses previously unexplored materials relating to Irish transient labour in Cuba from 1835-1845. Sociological theory and historical analysis are applied to archival accounts of Irish railroad workers to examine this episode of labour migration from a multi-dimensional perspective that pays close attention to processes of class, race, legal status and to a lesser extent gender. This study treats the archive not as a ‘repository of the facts’ but as a ‘complexly constituted’ discourse of slavery and free labour, produced in the formation of colonial processes of class, ethnicity and migration. Irish contract labourers became part of a modernising project to replace slavery with ‘free’ labour with the additional aim of ‘whitening’ the population. Postcolonial theory is applied to the historiography of the railroad workers and rather than ask ‘how the Irish became white’, this study examines the discourse and strategies of Cuban colonial elites in which Irish, workers, were seen as ‘whitening’ agents in the formation of a separate Cuban identity in opposition to the perceived ‘africanisation’ of Cuban culture. I also turn the postcolonial gaze on Irish migration history by examining pre-famine mobile labour, and its repertoire of resistance to coercive labour relations as part of ‘a counter-culture of modernity’ which began with an Irish agrarian underground.

The position of the railroad workers raises in a complex way other issues thrown up by the extraordinary historical context of transatlantic migration in which they operate including an established Cuban-Irish slaveholding elite and forced migrants from Africa and indentured labour from the Canary Islands. Irish migration to Cuba is analysed against the contentious politics of a deepening dependence on slavery in an era of abolition, Cuban nationalist ‘whitening’ strategies, and questions of solidarities and resistance in the overlapping processes of class and race.

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Map of the Havana – Güines Railroad, c. 1837



Source: La Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid

Chapter 1: Introduction

The history of a large workforce of Irish railroad workers who arrived in Havana in 1835 to build the first stretch of railroad in Latin America, before the introduction of railroad transport in Spain, is the central focus of this thesis. They were recruited in New York and brought to the Spanish colony of Cuba where, along with indentured labour from the Canary Islands, they were introduced as ‘free’ labour in the ranks of an incipient proletariat into a predominantly slave system. At a critical juncture in capitalist transformation, investment by Cuba’s wealthy sugar-producing elite in the island’s infrastructure to transport goods created a rising demand for new forms of labour. The new railroad would link the sugar producing region of the Güines valley with the main port of Havana. The abolition of slavery in the neighbouring British West Indies had just occurred and the second Anglo-Spanish Treaty signed in 1835 exerted enormous international pressure on the Cuban authorities to end slavery. The threat of abolition pushed the search for labour in new directions, geographically to Europe and the United States, to recruit cheap immigrant labour and, in line with the new dictates of political economy, the planters began to experiment with ‘free’ labour as a possible substitute for slavery.

The port of Havana, at the centre of the Spanish fleet system during the eighteenth century, continued to be an important nexus in the nineteenth-century Atlantic trade networks of sugar, coffee, tobacco and the transatlantic slave trade. Its celebrated appearance of grace and majesty, ‘a mixture of gentle impressions’, somewhat belied its position as a global hub of trade, migration and culture, which Alejandro Von Humboldt observed in 1826 as presenting ‘diverse elements of a vast landscape’ (Humboldt 2011, 27). Any search for traces of people and culture amongst what has endured in this *entrepôt* of colonialism, which imported goods and people throughout a changing imperial order, has to engage with the diversity and geographical reach that characterised the history of migration to Cuba. Adding to that history the notion of fusion, or transculturation, as Ortiz termed it, Antoni Kapcia accurately describes the challenge of searching for cultural influences in the twenty-first century city:

For just as Havana's visible identity is one of fusion and confusion, so too can one trace a history based on the continuous fusion of cultural influences and manifestations, making a clear-cut identity as difficult to detect as the cityscape (Kapcia 2005, 5).

The influence of early nineteenth-century Irish immigrants is hardly visible in this fusion but, in searching colonial archives for an account of immigrant lives, the goal of this research is not to find 'a clear-cut' Irish identity but, to examine the historical record of *los irlandeses*, the Irish railroad workers, during their time in Cuba, out of the 'reportage laid down by colonial bureaucracies' (Pratt 1992, 131). In searching the historical record in the National Archive of Cuba for evidence of colonial immigrant lives, the search for Irish names produced a much wider and more complex picture of Irish migration to Cuba which goes back to the eighteenth century. In attempting to give an account of the railroad workers it became apparent that an elite class of Irish slaveholders had contributed to moulding conditions in Cuban society which led up to that innovation. In framing this episode of Irish labour migration in 1835, as the 'outcome of colonial processes' of migration, labour and race, this study could not ignore the contribution of the earlier migration of Irish-Cuban planter families who were 'integral to the continuing formation of such processes' (Axel 2002, 14). Irish merchants, planters and high-ranking military men were at the centre of colonial power and wealth, building a plantation economy dependent on forced African labour, but they were also enthusiastic supporters of free-market ideology and the formation of a separatist Creole identity. In pursuit of these transformations they were involved in strategies to increase the white population with European, including Irish, settler families and the importation of 'a colony' of Irish labourers in the early part of the nineteenth century. The railroad workers at the centre of this study represent a small but significant chapter within wider processes of race and class formation at a critical time in the development of colonial capitalism in Cuba. In the discourse of transition to free labour they were construed as an ideal type of cheap labour but as white labour they were crucial to the formation of a white underclass in the project of 'whitening' the nation.

Rafael Fernández Moya from the Oficina del Historiador de la Ciudad de La Habana has recently compiled the first account of Irish influences from the colonial

memory as it was ‘engraved in brick and mortar’ (Stoler 2009, 2).¹ The best known example of this is O’Reilly Street in Habana Vieja, named in honour of Dublin-born Alejandro O’Reilly, a general in the Spanish army who rose to prominence in Cuba for his contribution to imperial defence after the British occupation of Havana in 1762. The arrival of high-ranking military men in Cuba in the eighteenth century occurred through Iberian-Irish connections or, as was the case with the O’Farrill family, through a providential change of imperial loyalties by members of an Irish propertied class from the British West Indies to the Spanish Caribbean. Nineteenth-century Irish migration differed significantly not only in its mediation through the United States and the lower socio-economic status of this numerically much larger group, but also because of its trajectory within the emerging Atlantic networks of colonial labour.

There are few notable traces of an Irish presence in the fusion of cultural influences in Havana’s cityscape but the written sources held in the National Archives of Cuba provide a colonial account of Irish lives, lived amongst some of the wealthiest and more often the poorest of European immigrants in Cuba’s history. However if, as Kapcia suggests, the trace of a cultural influence is more easily found in the ‘distinctive fusion of noises’, one of Havana’s ‘signatures’ (Kapcia 2005, 1), then the sight and sound of an Afro-Cuban piper on the Malecón, playing an Irish tune on a set of Galician pipes, would strike a note of hope and even greater confusion in my search for the history of an Irish presence in Cuba. The intriguing fusion of Irish music with Afro-Cuban roots resonated with my research questions in the dust-filled colonial documents; what were Irish people doing in this Caribbean Spanish colony in the early decades of the nineteenth century, and how did they get here?

The records in the National Archives of Cuba bear testimony to the prosperity and influence of an Irish-Cuban planter elite from the eighteenth century and, in the nineteenth century, Irish settler families participated in a ‘white colonisation’ strategy to boost the numbers of white population, but it was the mobile proletariat of railroad

¹For an account of a host of place names bearing the mark of an Irish presence in different parts of Cuba since the sixteen hundreds, see Rafael Fernandez Moya ‘The Irish Presence in the History and Place Names of Cuba’ *Journal of Irish Migration Studies in Latin America* 5 (2007), accessed 20 February 2012 <http://www.irlandeses.org/ims1a0711.htm>..

workers who formed the largest group at any one time and who were, moreover, quickly repudiated by the authorities for their resistance to the power of capital. Up to the late nineteenth century Irish emigrants could be found at every level of Cuban society. Fernando Ortiz distinguishes between those Irish firmly placed at the heart of Spanish-Cuban aristocracy, such as the celebrated Irish generals and merchants, O'Reilly, O'Donnell, O'Farrill and O'Gaban, and those who identified with the anti-colonial struggle, including abolitionist Richard Madden and Irish Fenian, James J. O'Kelly, war correspondent with the *New York Herald* and author of *Mambiland*.² Ortiz also paid tribute to Irish recruits amongst the regiments of the Narciso López expedition who were subsequently imprisoned in Ceuta by the Spanish authorities.³ In the recent survey by the City Historian's Office referred to above, Fernández Moya presents a catalogue of the enduring marks on Cuban place names in memory of Irish immigrants who, over the centuries, made significant contributions to the economic, cultural and political evolution of the island. He suggests that the Irish were 'particularly noticeable during the construction of the island's first railroad' and notes their involvement in the first worker's strike recorded in Cuba (Fernández Moya 2007, 193).

This study traces the path of proletarianisation of Irish migrants who, as a colonised labouring population, became propertyless workers, hurled 'rightless and unprotected' onto the Atlantic networks of colonial labour. They attempted to adapt to the wider contending forces of colonialism and industrial modernisation through harsh experiences of migration and new forms of labour relations. Their freedom and social mobility were inhibited in ways determined by the economic and social conditions of their destination. Cuba, by 1835, was still tied to the Spanish empire in a colonial relationship which was maintained in exchange for the protection of a slave system. In the circulation of commodities and labour on the wider Atlantic trade networks, Irish

² Fernando Ortiz wrote a lengthy forward to the 1934 Cuban edition of James J. O'Kelly *La Tierra del Mambí* (Ciudad de la Habana: Colección de Libros Cubanos, 1930), xiii. He cites a host of Irish connections with the Cuban aristocracy which came through the Catholic courts in Europe and the Irish brigades in the Spanish army. He includes the names of O'Donnell, O'Farrill and O'Reilly. Such was Ortiz's praise for O'Kelly's contribution through his writings to *Cuba Libre* that he suggested erecting a statue or naming a street after him.

³ See also Herminio Portell Vilá *Narciso López y su Época, 1850-1851*, (La Habana, 1958). No publisher given.

migrants were crossing the Atlantic to escape the oppression of British colonialism in the opening decades of the nineteenth century at the same time as forced African migrants were being brought to Cuba in ever-greater numbers. The Irish experience can only be fully understood through analysis within the broader historical and social context of transnational and ‘trans-colonial’ migration from Ireland, the Canary Islands and West Africa, and the continual processes of class and race formation in the multi-ethnic and trans-cultural environment of the Americas.⁴ They formed part of a small flow of European migrant labour in the nineteenth-century Spanish Caribbean within larger migratory flows of forced African labour, contract labour from the Canary Islands and later Chinese indentured labour. Irish labour was introduced as a test of ‘free’ labour and a forerunner of white immigration at a time when the pressure to abolish slavery was growing.

Accounts by Cuban and Spanish historians make scant reference to this group of immigrants and only as part of the historiography of the railroad. There has been no substantial investigation of the Cuban archives relating to any of the three episodes of Irish migration outlined here. This research presents the first attempt by any scholar to document and critically analyse the historiography of a group of Irish men and women caught up in a highly racialised system of colonial labour in Cuba. In a contextualisation of the railroad workers within a multi-layered connection of Irish immigration to the colonial world of Cuba, I hope to broaden our understanding of the sometimes overlooked diversity of class and identity amongst the Irish who went to work and live in Spanish colonies but also provide an insight into the Irish location in the ‘colonial order of things as seen through its archival productions’ (Stoler 2002, 157). Because of the transcolonial and transnational history of the Caribbean region, research on Irish migration to Cuba involves a search of the archives in several different places. I have concentrated on the Cuban archive, with some research in the Spanish archive. The British archives proved to be a rich source of documentation for this group of workers,

⁴ For a discussion on the importance of a comparative, transnational and transcultural approach to the study of Irish migration globally, see Kevin Kenny, ‘Diaspora and Comparison: The Global Irish as a Case Study’, *The Journal of American History* 9 (2003): 134-162. On the question of ‘transcolonial’ debates on labour in European colonies, see Ann Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 116-119.

their colonial subjects, whereas I found no records in the Irish archives. For the same reasons, to understand the context of the Caribbean it is necessary to consider a multiplicity of documents on Irish history and migration, the Irish in the United States, Irish migration to the Caribbean and Cuban labour and immigration history. For this reason also the material is discussed in relation to the different subjects in different chapters throughout the thesis.

Within the broader context of Irish Latin American Migration Studies, Edmundo Murray, author of *Becoming Irlandés* (2006), suggests that Irish migration and settlement in the Spanish Caribbean is the least researched to date (Murray 2003). In her survey, 'Irish Historical Writing on Latin America', Mary Harris underlines the challenge to historians who wish to locate Ireland within the discourse of colonialism, citing Murray's description of nineteenth-century Irish immigrants in Argentina behaving 'as English colonisers in a remote location of the Anglosphere'. According to Harris, the close historical ties between Ireland and Spain have complicated the Irish attitude to Spanish colonisation, and she posits that 'Catholicism, rather than postcolonialism, proved the strong point of identification with Latin America' (Harris 2006, 259). My research challenges this position and questions the advantage of Catholic identification to the Irish by analysing labour relations on the Cuban railroad, as a confrontational site of class conflict in which Irish workers were rejected by the authorities within months of their arrival. As a colonial category of cheap, white, immigrant labour, Catholicism made little difference to these migrants in the emergence of 'free' labour and a changing imperial world where, as Stoler puts it, 'designations of kinds of people that were once deemed adequate were no more' (Stoler 2009, 4). At this particular juncture of incipient capitalist relations the racialisation and subordination of labour superseded imperial ideas of Catholic loyalties.

Methodological and Theoretical Framework

This interdisciplinary thesis examines and critically analyses, within the field of Irish Studies, Cuban Studies and Caribbean Studies previously unexplored materials relating to Irish transient labour in Cuba between 1835 and 1845. Sociological theory and historical analysis are applied to the accounts of Irish railroad workers to examine this episode of labour migration history from a multi-dimensional perspective that pays close attention to processes of class, race, legal status and to a lesser extent gender. The archive in this study is treated not as a ‘repository of the facts’ but as ‘complexly constituted instances of discourse that produce their objects as *real*, that is, as existing prior to and outside of discourse’ (Axel 2002, 14). This study applies postcolonial theory to the historiography of the Irish railroad workers and taking a new direction to the conventional line of inquiry of ‘how the Irish became white’ in the United States, I examine the discourse and strategies of the Cuban ruling elite in which the Irish, before they were introduced as wage labourers, were construed as whitening agents in the formation of a Cuban identity. I also turn the postcolonial gaze on Irish migration history by examining pre-famine mobile labour, and its repertoire of resistance, as part of what Paul Gilroy terms, ‘a counter-culture of modernity’ (Gilroy 1993). The approach I use is to examine the archive against the social, political and economic backdrop of Cuba during a time of heated debate on slavery and free labour and a burgeoning nationalist sentiment. The importation of cheap white European labour in the 1830s, driven by a shortage of labour supply and a fear of ‘africanisation’, provides a window into the way in which processes of labour, class and race formation were adapted to changing economic and political climates in colonial Cuba.⁵ The ongoing discourse on the transition to ‘free’ labour reveals a great deal about the mindset of the slave-holding class in forging paradigms in the control of racial hierarchies and labour. By 1835, as the pressure to abolish slavery increased, debates on slavery became more heated, slave revolts were more common than at any other time and transcolonial comparisons with

⁵ The idea of *africanización* (africanisation) of Cuban society drew on a racialised colonial discourse used to distinguish between a white Cuban nation of Spanish heritage desired by colonial elites and a nation of mixed African and European cultural heritage. The term was employed to invoke fear amongst planter elites of Cuba becoming a black republic, like Haiti.

Haiti added renewed force to the planters fears. Elaborate schemes for white colonisation and new sources of labour were debated in a contested and contradictory discourse which reads more as a ‘blueprint of distress’ (Stoler 2002, 157). The fear of slave revolts, and insubordinate wage-workers threatening the colonial order, was responded to with rigid and brutal controls amid debates on ethnographic categories and types of colonial labour. The case of Irish railroad workers, as analysed here, affords an interesting examination of the reformulation of labour in the discursive strategies of the planter elite. These documents throw more light on the rationale of the planters and their logic of labour relations which was based on property in human beings. The contradictions inherent in their rationale for importing cheap white labour as a likely substitute for slavery are laid bare by the coercions they exercised over ‘free’ labour.

The documents span a period between the first census in 1794 and the 1841 census when demographic concerns, expressed in crude racist ratios between black and white, became increasingly more pressing. Early debates about immigration reflect imperial designs for Cuba which centred on the security and economic prosperity of the colony. Tensions in the debate arose when Cuban colonial-society developed into a white minority elite and black majority subjects and the discourse changed from one of planter/slave to one which reflected class concerns and a conflict of race. Documents in the Cuban archives chart the repetitive cycles of ‘conflictive concerns’ in the minds of the planter-class and the tensions this produced between different sectors of colonial-society.

The Archival Field

The Cuban National Archive (ANC, *Archivo Nacional de Cuba*) contains extensive records for the colonial period going back to the seventeenth century, but for the nineteenth century they are described as voluminous (Perez 1984, 144). There is, according to Perez, a considerable overlap of subjects, so that a search for materials can take the researcher across a range of *fondos* (collections). A logical place to start would be the *Fondo Ferrocarriles* which is the main source for the history of the railroad in Cuba but this did not cover the period of the early construction. This collection was more recently organised with an inventory by Oscar Garcia and Alejandro Zanetti before

writing their major work on the history of the Cuban railroad, *Caminos Para el Azúcar* (1987) with a publication in English, *Sugar and Railroads: A Cuban History 1837-1959* (1987). They make very brief mention of the workers imported from the United States. This collection unfortunately has since been damaged by hurricane flooding. As Zanetti and Garcia mention ‘the bibliography on Cuba’s railroads is lamentably scanty’ (Zanetti and Garcia 1987, xxvi). Other publications that I consulted included a detailed monograph by Violeta Serrano, *Crónicas del Primer Ferrocarril de Cuba* (1973) and a Spanish publication by Alfonso Ballol, *El Camino de Hierro de La Habana a Güines: Primer Ferrocarril de Iberoamerica* (Madrid 1987). These publications give brief descriptions of the conditions of the early railroad workers based on manuscript archival sources, which I have been able to expand on in this study.

For reasons to do with the colonial process of archiving the subjects of immigration, railroads and *los irlandeses*, as the Irish railroad workers were referred to, the relevant records are found across a number of different *fondos* or collections. The ten-day’s wait to have my application for access processed was more useful than at first anticipated. Not being a seasoned researcher of nineteenth-century Cuba, and being presented with a pre-digitised system and pace of research, I had more time to try to discern the ‘structures of thinking’ of a colonial database.⁶ Browsing the database involved an exploration of the card catalogues held in wooden boxes, crisscrossing the four walls of the reading room. The guides to each collection are organised chronologically or by name and sometimes cross-referenced by subject. Older cards were in manuscript and not always complete or legible with others more recently catalogued in typescript. With characteristic beginner’s optimism I started my search with the keyword *irlandeses*. Drawing a blank I then moved to *inmigración* which also led nowhere. Back to E for *extranjeros* (foreigners) and F for *ferrocarril* (railroad), both yielding sparse results, they led me to the records of different relevant collections. *Reales Cédulas y Ordenes* is a collection containing royal decrees, circulars and documents relating to the *Junta de Población Blanca* and the establishment of new

⁶ For an introduction to the collections in the National Archives of Cuba, see Louis A. Perez Jr. ‘Record Collections at the Cuban National Archives: A Descriptive Survey’, *Latin American Research*

colonies of white foreigners. Starting a new search of *Población Blanca* was more productive and threw up an array of manuscripts of government correspondence and official reports outlining strategies to promote white settlement, the rules and regulations of acquiring residency and the right to conduct business in Cuba. It also contains documents with the lists of names of Irish settler families who as part of these schemes came from New Orleans and Philadelphia in 1818-1820.

Gobierno Superior Civil, a ‘collection of miscellany’ dealing more with the institutional character of the colonial government and the administration of the Captain-General (Pérez 1984, 146), contained manuscripts dealing with royal decrees, stipulating the rules of entry and regulation of movement of foreigners, surprisingly also dealt with the railroad; a search with the key-word *extranjeros* in the collection *Asuntos Politicos* threw up references to proclamations detailing strict rules regulating the circulation of foreigners dating back to 1750. In 1808 a royal decree ordered that ‘no consuls, agents or any class of representative of people from foreign nations would be admitted to the Spanish Indies’.⁷ Another reference to correspondence from the Captain-General to the Governor of Santiago de Cuba in 1811 demanded ‘the most scrupulous vigilance of foreign passengers’ landing at any port.⁸ The references alone in this particular collection which, dealing with ‘such diverse matters as banditry, *cimarrones*, piracy and the colonial militia’ (Pérez 1984, 145), gives some indication as to the changing colonial sensibilities in relation to *extranjeros* over the course of a century. By 1846 references to *extranjeros* had changed from a matter of imperial defence to one of regulating and controlling contact with the Afro-Cuban population. In 1846 the Captain-General was concerned ‘about meetings of *mulatos* in Cuba and some suspicious *extranjeros*’.⁹ Still looking for a lead to Irish immigrants and railroad workers, I browsed the index cards for the *Real Consulado y Junta de Fomento* under *ferrocarril* and the search became more productive with several references to *los operarios* (unskilled labourers). This collection is described by Pérez as the ‘one of the most important sources for the

Review, 19:1 (1984). Also see Louis Pérez Jr. and Rebecca J. Scott (eds), *The Cuban Archives/Archivos de Cuba* (Havana: Ediciones, 2003), also published in English by University of Pittsburgh Press in 2003.

⁷ See ANC GSC, 10-25, July 1808.

⁸ See ANC GSC, 213-165, 1811.

⁹ See ANC GSC, 141-17.

economic history of Cuba between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries' (147). It is made up of official reports and government correspondence on subjects such as the slave trade, population statistics, the railroad, white colonisation and all aspects of economic development. The *Real Junta de Fomento* collection also held the records of the Railway Commission, the *Comision del Ferrocarril*. The Irish finally appeared, with no reference to *los irlandeses*, but in documents described as: 'about the unskilled workers on the railroad', 'measures taken by the government to prevent desertions', 'contracts for the railroad' and 'an enquiry into the unfortunate occurrences on the railroad and how order was reinstated'. This seemed like a good place to start and indeed yielded the largest number of documents on the railroad workers in question with passenger lists, details of their contracts, reception and accommodation. The different reports therein by the engineers, the Railway Commission, newspaper reports, and correspondence between the *Junta de Fomento* and the Captain-General provide a rich source from which to document and analyse the harsh conditions and coercions at play, which led to protests and strikes by the railroad workers. These manuscripts describing the response of the colonial authorities, the engineers and the military forces, provide an insight into the discursive strategies of the ruling elite and their contradictory ideas on 'free' labour. In the consternation over the insubordinate Irish labourers, as reported in the colonial record, and the perceived threat they posed to the social order, the discourse of 'free' labour and the earlier welcome increase to the white population quickly turned to a racialised discourse of a 'degenerate' class of whites with 'a disinclination to work' (Stoler 2002, 192).

The next collection in my search I approached with a certain degree of trepidation when I discovered two shelves of thirty typewritten ledgers of anywhere between 250 and 800 pages each. These volumes comprise the guides to a miscellaneous collection known as the *Libros de Miscelánea* and *Miscelánea de Expedientes* dealing exclusively with the nineteenth century. It is a rich treasure trove of chaotically organised records relating to civil and criminal disputes, records of altercations in which people fall foul of the law, which provide unexpected and tantalising details concerning the general population. It also contains information on the entry and departure of ships and lists of foreigners. It is organised alphabetically, so starting with the first initial of

names of foreign residents allows a head start. Luckily with Irish names, a search starting with O' or Mc provided an encouraging warm-up. Nevertheless, while the collection was catalogued in 1922, the old binding and the deterioration of some of the volumes can make the search a very frustrating experience, balanced, it has to be said, by discoveries of references to documents which are like finding gold nuggets. There are records with lists of applications for residency by Irish settler families and their applications to the *Junta de Población Blanca* for aid when they were left destitute by prospective sponsors. When I returned from my research trip I read the wise caution of more seasoned researchers than I, who recommend approaching this set of records with 'time, patience and mental stamina'.¹⁰ It is worth the effort because while this collection is not about any new large public work or major social or political upheaval it is filled with what Stoler describes as 'rich ethnographic moments stored in the non-eventful' (2009, 157).

In the collection *Donativos y Remisiones*, containing a wide array of donated materials to do with commerce, military leaders of the independence period, correspondence by political figures and intellectuals there are references to Irish names dating from the middle to the end of the nineteenth century. Within the same time period *Instrucción Pública*, which deals with public education in the latter part of the colonial period, has references to many Irish names, by now double-barrelled, applying to receive and give instruction in subjects as varied as mechanics, languages, medicine and music. I did not have time to search this collection but it would be a good place to work back from, linking the now fused Irish-Cuban names to earlier settlers.

The final collection I looked at was the records of the Military Commission, *La Comisión Militar*, which deals with public order, crime, slave conspiracy and rebellions. This massive collection comprises 'at least 165 *legajos*, or bundles of testimony for

¹⁰ For a fascinating description and excellent guide, gleaned from hard-won experience, into the intricacies of this collection, see Jorge L. Giovanetti and Camilla Cowling, 'Hard Work with the Mare Magnum of the Past: Nineteenth-Century Cuban History and the *Miscelánea de Expedientes* Collection' *Cuban Studies* 39 (January, 2008): 60-84. Giovanetti and Cowling draw our attention to the deteriorating condition of this collection which is a problem across many of the collections I consulted. The concern and commitment by the staff at the archive to protect and conserve the documents is impressive, but the challenges are enormous, given the sheer volume of the collections and the scarce resources available to carry out the necessary work of conservation which includes digitisation.

1844' with verbatim transcripts of the military tribunals dealing with the *Escalera* conspiracy (Finch 2007, 15). I examined the bundle containing the records about the Irish and other foreigners accused of conspiring to revolt which, interestingly, also appears in the Cuban, British and Spanish archives. At the National Archives in Kew Gardens, the Foreign Office collection held a surprising amount of detail in English on British subjects in Cuba, including Irish, contained in consular dispatches by British Consuls petitioning on behalf of Her Majesty's subjects who fell foul of the law or ended up in prison. My search of the *Archivo Histórico Nacional* in Madrid (AHN) provided little extra on the Irish railroad workers; however I was able to re-read copies of documents of the *Junta de Fomento* in pristine condition compared to the more deteriorated state of some of the records in Havana. The contrast between research in the metropolitan archive and the post-colonial archive facilities is stark testament to 'uneven development' in the periphery into the twenty-first century.

This research was carried out over two three-month visits to Havana. Because of the time-consuming nature of researching primary sources, I spent considerably less time than I would have liked reading secondary literature and accounts by Cuban historians of the period which could only be consulted in Cuba. Inter-library loan is not possible and much of the historical research carried out in the last fifty years in Cuba is relatively difficult to obtain from outside Cuba. I chose instead to use my time consulting primary materials in the archival collections. A survey of historical literature and newspaper reports at the National Library, (*Biblioteca Nacional 'Jose Marti'*), the *Instituto de Historia*, and Havana University Library, *fondos raros y valiosos*, the Rare Books Collection all provided secondary material, in nineteenth-century travel narratives, contemporary Cuban and Spanish accounts adding texture and context to the history of the colonial period, the railroad, the slave trade and abolition. The records of the *Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País* (henceforth abbreviated to *Sociedad Económica*) are held at the *Instituto de Lingüística y Literatura* in the *Memorias de la Sociedad Económica*. This colonial institution was set up in 1791 by twenty-seven Havana planters to inform the work of the *Junta de Fomento* by promoting agriculture, trade, literature, education and science. The planters used it mainly as a forum to promote schemes to advance the efficiency, technology and prosperity of the sugar

industry. The many volumes of the *Memorias* provide rich historical documentation on a wide variety of subjects to do with sugar production, population trends, white colonisation, immigrants and railroads, but they are also an invaluable record of the mindset of the planter class on all aspects of the colony and particularly on the subject of slavery and abolition.

It goes without saying that immigrant mobile labour is a difficult cohort to research because they were poor, transient and often illiterate, therefore leaving few records of their own. They appear obliquely and infrequently in the records and more likely when they fall foul of the authorities, but they become more centrally located as the Irish railroad workers did when they erupt and challenge the colonial order. The Irish railroad workers occupied more space in the archive than they might otherwise have had they not contested the degree to which their labour was coerced. After the highs and lows of a total of six months of exciting finds in a bewildering labyrinth of colonial archives I was beginning to get a sense of the ‘processes of archiving’ and ‘how colonial sense and reason conjoined social kinds with the political order of colonial things’ and even then how ‘that “common sense” was subject to revision and actively changed’ (Stoler 2009, 9). In the subject index of ‘colonial things’ in the archive in Havana, certain subjects mattered more for reasons of ‘colonial sense’, and the appearance or absence or location of subject matter followed a similar archival rationale. To find records of Irish immigration under a subject index for ‘white population’ in the early nineteenth century speaks volumes. While looking for traces in documents about the railroad workers I also became aware of the huge irony in the colonial memory of place and ‘bricks and mortar’, discovering that the National Cuban Archive building on the corner of Compostela and San Isidro, only a few blocks from the main Garcini railway station, was built on the ground where Ricardo O’Farrill first had his slave depot, conveniently near the port and the slave market (Fernández Moya 2007, 190).

Structure of Thesis

Chapter 1 focuses on the archival collections in the Cuban National Archive relating to Irish migration to Cuba over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Paying close attention to the colonial process of archiving, this chapter outlines the collections which pertain primarily to the Irish railroad workers at the centre of this study, and some of the challenges to carrying out this research. Chapter 2 draws on the records across a number of collections with sources relating to the construction of the railroad to document and examine the experience of Irish contract labourers imported in 1835. The Irish were not alone and circulated with others in transatlantic networks of colonial labour. Consequently, their sojourn in Cuba is contextualised as part of a multi-ethnic workforce of forced African labourers and indentured workers from the Canary Islands who, together with Irish contract workers, found on arrival in Cuba that their freedom was inhibited in ways they had not previously experienced. The chapter documents their recruitment in New York through labour networks of pre-famine Irish immigrants. The records pertaining to the Irish experience provide details of a system of contract labour imported from the more advanced capitalist labour relations in the United States. Technically it was no longer categorised as slavery but it was still highly coercive and therefore considered ideal for the mobilisation of a large workforce alongside a slave system. The documentary evidence is also used to describe the terms and harsh conditions of the contracts as they materialised on the tracks of the Cuban railroad. The evidence is reinforced by correspondence in consular dispatches by the American and British consuls who become involved through petitions by destitute immigrant railroad workers. The response by the workers to such practices permits a greater understanding of the forces at play, which the introduction of new forms of ‘free’ labour into a slave system bring to the fore: the reluctance of a slave-owning elite to relinquish a sense of ownership of labour, the resistance by immigrant labourers subjected to brutal coercion and colonial fears of a contagion of liberty in an era of abolition. Viewed by the authorities as potentially subversive to the social order of things, the chapter also analyses the strategies of the authorities and their justification for the brutally repressive measures employed to deal with protest and insubordination. The reports and correspondence between the authorities and the engineers provides interesting ground

for an analysis of the cooperation between colonial authorities and the American engineers in the coercion of new forms of labour. The consternation of all parties in control demanded a reformulation of the cheap, white, Catholic labourer in the production of colonial ethnographic categories. The discourse of Irish ethnicity, employed in the search for an apparently cheaper but less intractable cohort of labouring subjects, is analysed in the representation of Irish labour in Cuban historiography. As ‘free’ white immigrants in a highly racialised society, Irish recalcitrance to the coercions of contract labour raises the question of ‘the wages of whiteness’ in the Cuban context which is dealt with more deeply in Chapter 4.

Chapter 3 steps outside of Cuba and into the broader historical and social context of the colonial processes of migration labour and race which led to the circulation of Irish emigrants in Atlantic networks of colonial labour. By looking at the history of settler colonialism in both Ireland and Cuba under two different European imperial powers, this chapter points to the parallels in colonial processes on the periphery but draws comparisons in the resulting differences in population dynamics which created a surplus labouring population in Ireland and a labour vacuum in Cuba by the early nineteenth century. In following the migration trajectory through which propertyless labourers, fleeing colonial oppression in Ireland, became proletarianised, I pay particular attention to locating Irish migrants within the different structures of race and class in Ireland, the United States and Cuba. This leads to a necessary diversion in which I consider Irish emigration to the British West Indies during an earlier period of forced migration during the seventeenth century. Here I introduce the early parameters of European systems of control, based on a colonial imaginary of race and class, which begin to structure the continuing formation of colonial processes which order the relationship between free and unfree labour and black and white colonial subjects. The strategies of control change in response to colonial policies which are continuously reformulated to adapt to the demands of changing economic forces. Irish indentured labour in this period was replaced by slave labour; however, by the nineteenth century, Irish migrant labour was beginning to be seen as a likely substitute for slave labour. In an attempt to understand the pliable function of Irish migrant labour within capitalist transformation in the United States and Cuba, I address the mobility and

proletarianisation of Irish labour within the discourse of abolition and the transition to ‘free’ labour and the contending forces of modernisation and political economy.

Having discussed the trajectory of Irish labour between Ireland and Cuba as the ‘outcome’ of colonial processes, Chapter 4 questions what the ‘wages of whiteness’, as Roediger termed white privilege, represented to the railroad workers in the context of colonial Cuba (Roediger 1999). Did the petty privileges of whiteness prevent class solidarity amongst a multi-ethnic workforce on the railroad? An answer to this question, first calls for an examination of the earlier Irish cohort of planter families and their formative contribution to the inscription of white dominance in colonial Cuba. Their role is framed here in the ‘continuing formation of colonial processes’ which, towards the end of the eighteenth century, were designed to reap the benefits of a liberalisation in trade to increase their own prosperity through sugar production and the expansion of the slave trade. By the early decades of the nineteenth century their descendents, now at the heart of the Creole elite, supported the formation of a separatist white Cuban identity amid growing anti-colonial sentiment. I analyse their contribution to the debates on slavery, free labour, ‘africanisation’ and ‘whitening’, which were raging in Cuba as the mainland Spanish colonies were fighting for independence from Spain. The social and cultural rationale for importing white Catholic Europeans becomes evident through an analysis of the discourse of race and national identity that preoccupied colonial elites. Drawing on research by Cuban and Spanish scholars documenting the experience of immigrant families from different European countries, who arrived during 1818-1826, as part of a coastal settlement plan, this chapter uses additional archival sources pertaining to Irish colonists to examine their participation in the Hispano-Cuban white colonisation strategy. As a vanguard group in the process of ‘white colonisation’ the documentation of their experience lays the ground for an analysis of the participation of Irish immigrants within the colonial formations of class and race and the wider national project of ‘whitening’ the nation. The pressure of abolition and a growing anti-colonial sentiment in the 1830s present a new urgency to the need to increase the white population and the plan to import up to a thousand Irish labourers is applauded as ‘not only good for the railroad’, but ‘it will serve as an experiment to increase the white population and would have far reaching and

momentous consequences'.¹¹ This chapter concludes by analysing the discourse of the Creole nationalist elite in their plans to 'whiten' the population of Cuba and create an underclass through *mestisaje* or racial mixing of poor white immigrants and the black population. I explore the significance of 'the wages of whiteness' to both the earlier settlers and the railroad workers in this context of *mestisaje* and *blanqueamiento* in the context of early Cuban nationalism and compare their position to that of Irish ethnicity in the United States.

The final chapter delves into the stubborn resistance by Irish workers to the coercions of contract labour, in some of the first work stoppages in the history of labour in Cuba. By first reviewing the history of agrarian unrest in pre-famine Ireland, I contend that the insistent challenge by migrant labourers to the processes of proletarianisation, starting in the Irish countryside and continuing in the industrial world of the United States, informed their protest against the coercions of capitalist labour relations. In the context of labour relations in Cuba, where their liberty was inhibited, I argue that there is a connection between their experience of class up to this point and the repertoires of resistance which they draw on when faced with the extremes of coercion in Cuba. The question of subaltern resistance is extended in an examination of the 1844 *Escalera* conspiracy during which Irish workers were accused of plotting with the black population 'against the white population' to overthrow the system of slavery in Cuba. The intriguing question of their involvement in the conspiracy is not addressed as a question of proving guilt or innocence, but as an examination of the circumstances in which they came to be accused. This chapter examines the obvious contradictions of how, in advance of their arrival, Irish immigrants were heralded by the authorities in 1835 as being good for the increase in white population only to be accused less than ten years later of plotting its overthrow. It does this by first investigating the political dynamics of the British campaign for abolition and the resulting irrational climate of fear in which Irish, as British subjects, became the object of suspicion and terror by the Cuban authorities. While the *Escalera*

¹¹Railroad Commission to Kruger and Wright, August 1835 ANC JF, 130-6375.

conspiracy has been viewed within a meta-narrative of international intrigue around the the politics of abolition, I introduce the possibility that the Irish identified with enslaved Africans in conspiring to bring an end to slavery. This position is elucidated in the context of a ‘mobile Atlantic’ where protagonists, originating in pre-capitalist systems of labour in Ireland and the African continent, circulating on Atlantic networks, constantly resisted the coercions at the heart of emerging capitalist labour relations and slavery.

Chapter 2: The Railroad Contracts (1835-1837)

To make up their numbers or to show how much could be done for little money, upwards of a thousand Irishmen, who are to be found in every part of the world prepared with their lusty sinews to cheapen the price of labour, were tempted in an evil hour to go there [Cuba] from the United States, allured by promises on the part of the railroad company, which were never fulfilled (David Turnbull 1840, 190).

David Turnbull, a prominent British abolitionist who attended the gala opening of the first twenty-nine miles of railroad between Havana and Bejucal in November 1838, provides one of the earliest published accounts of Irish labourers who worked on the construction of the Cuban railroad. Turnbull's description accurately locates the Irish as a mobile 'reserve army' for industrial capitalism, but his praise of their natural physical endowments and willingness to 'cheapen the price of labour' reads less as a tribute to their ethnicity, than a possible solution to the pressing need to find a substitute for slave labour. However, in his account of their ill-advised migration to Cuba, strikingly sympathetic for its time, Turnbull highlights the deception and exploitation they encountered during the construction of the first stretch of railroad in Latin America.

Introduction

This chapter documents the recruitment and experience of over a thousand Irish labourers who formed a multi-ethnic workforce with enslaved and indentured labour from the Canary Islands and the African continent in the construction of the first forty-nine miles of railroad linking the port of Havana to Güines. As pressure from Britain to abolish slavery mounted, Cuba's wealthy planter elite began to experiment with new forms of labour in the search to find a replacement for slavery. The introduction of contract labour to build the railroad constituted the first experiment in importing cheap wage-labour from Europe. Cuban and Spanish historiography concur in a description of the conditions and treatment of the railroad workers by the colonial authorities as 'bitter and shameful' (Serrano 1973, 33). This account will focus on the Irish workers, and will compare their situation with other bonded labourers, particularly Canary Islanders, also forced into a brutal work regime under Spanish military rule. Rebellion and protest by Irish workers within weeks of their arrival led to their repudiation by the colonial authorities and marked them out as

unsuitable for the discipline and logic of capitalist labour relations. The importation of Irish labourers may have been viewed at the outset as a likely solution to the problem of securing cheap labour but, as this account suggests, the Irish response to the unfreedom of contract labour served only to harden attitudes to the control of wage workers by the ruling elite in Cuba. Despite international pressure to abolish slavery Cuban sugar planters continued to accumulate vast wealth from a clandestine slave trade right up to the last quarter of the nineteenth-century and persisted with the logic of slavery which gave slave-holders the right of ownership over the bodies of their workers.

The importation of cheap, white immigrant labour from the United States and Europe in 1835-1837 is mentioned as part of the historiography of the Cuban railroad. Scant references to Irish railroad workers describe them as the ‘white slaves’ of England (Moreno Friginals 1976), and as victims of wage-labour, ‘hardened drunks and turbulent individuals’ (Zanetti and Garcia 1987). The following account is the first to examine the introduction of Irish wage labour to Cuba as it was conditioned by legal and social constraints in the early development of a system of contract labour. This analysis of the historical record which focuses on the conditions and unfreedom of contract labourers will permit a more accurate and nuanced representation of the position of Irish labourers at a critical juncture in Cuba’s incipient capitalist development. Through a closer reading of the record of the organisation of labour in one of Cuba’s first major public works projects, this study analyses the position of Irish migrant labour as an emerging form of unfree labour, the coordinates of which were influenced by the political and economic forces at play in Cuba at the time. It also elucidates the circumstances which led to some of Cuba’s first work stoppages and the representation of Irish labour in the colonial records as ‘turbulent’ ‘with no inclination to work’ and indifferent to the ‘rewards’ of wage labour.¹

¹ The protest and work stoppages are analysed in greater depth in Chapter 5.

Colonial Discourse and the Archive

The archival sources I draw from are principally the records of the *Real Junta de Fomento*,² or Royal Development Board, containing documents from colonial institutions associated with the construction of the first railroad. These include manuscripts from the Railroad Commission or *Comisión de Camino de Hierro*, reports by the American engineers with the contracts for the Irish recruits, correspondence papers of General Miguel Tacón, the Captain-General³ of Cuba, and newspaper reports in the *Diario de La Habana*.⁴ I also examine contemporary accounts by British and American consular officials contained in correspondence between the Cuban authorities and the Colonial Office in London, in which foreign consuls report on terrible conditions of labour, and make petitions for aid and repatriation on behalf of the railroad workers.

The colonial records of the *Junta de Fomento* give an insight into the discursive strategies of powerful sugar planters on the question of a transition from slavery to free labour and their overriding concern to secure a cheap and abundant supply of labour. The interests of wealthy Cuban plantation owners, articulated in the reports of the *Junta de Fomento* and the Railroad Commission, portray the contradictory logic in the mindset of the planter class whose extraordinary wealth depended on slavery but, who were also afraid their slaves would rise up against them as happened in neighbouring Haiti. They debated the pros and cons of other forms of labour that might replace slave labour, and which would also reverse what

² The Royal Development Board or *Real Consulado y Junta de Fomento* was set up in 1795 as the official agricultural and economic development agency to oversee all aspects of sugar production. It was made up of wealthy sugar planters and merchants. The abbreviated form *Junta de Fomento* is used in this thesis. The *Comisión de Camino de Hierro* was short lived, disbanded on completion of the Havana-Güines railroad. I will refer to it here as the Railroad Commission.

³ The Captain-General was usually a military appointment to govern Cuba made by the Spanish Crown and had extraordinary powers in all matters of administration, justice and the treasury. General Miguel Tacón, a peninsular Spaniard, governed Cuba during the construction of the Havana-Güines railroad (1834-1838). He was not well disposed to this 'Anglo-Saxon ironmongery' believing that such innovations should be installed in the motherland of Spain before the colonies. Described as, 'a despot of great persistence, a passionate Spanish patriot [...] the survivor of a hundred fights in Columbia and Peru on behalf of the Crown against independent South America'. Hugh Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom* (London: Pan Books, 2002) 120. Tacón was responsible for a deepening political divide between *peninsulares* (from the Spanish Peninsula) and *criollos* (those born in Cuba). He passed for a liberal in Spain but in Cuba he despised the *criollo* oligarchy and surrounded himself with Spanish merchants involved in the slave trade accepting the customary Captain-General's cut from the trade amounting to \$100,000 a year. Thomas (2002) 119-124.

⁴ *Diario de La Habana* was a daily Havana newspaper, started by the *Sociedad Económica*, a civic organisation representing reform-minded sugar planters, which ran from 1800-1848.

the planters feared as the ‘africanisation’ of Cuba. Colonisation strategies to increase the white population and tip the balance of population in favour of whiteness are the subject of Chapter 4. The discourse of a transition to free labour adopted by the colonial elites, and their thinly-veiled unwillingness to abolish a hugely profitable slave system, provides an insight into the psychology of labour relations and how it was envisaged free-labour might function. The reports of the American railway engineers signal the introduction of a system of contract labour to Cuba and with that the rationale for the importation of Irish railroad crews. Read together with the records of the colonial institutions they illuminate the alliance of private contractors, the Cuban planter class and the colonial authorities in creating the structures necessary to control immigrant labour and all aspects of production relating to the sugar industry and the construction of the railroad. The documents examined here demonstrate the similarities in the mindset of the colonial elites and the American agents of technological progress when it came to their common purpose in devising strategies to increase profits through the coercion of imported wage-labourers. What emerges from the records about this test of ‘free’ wage labour is the unified strategy from apparently different ideologies in the exploitation of ‘free’ labour based on a similar logic used to control slave labour. The thousands of anonymous labourers from Africa, the Canary Islands and Ireland appear only obliquely or in distortion in the historiography of the sugar railroad and only because they protested at their conditions and threatened the social order. The representation by the colonial authorities of Irish labour employs a familiar descriptive trope of the colonial Other, ‘troublesome’, ‘feckless’ and unfit for the demands of capitalism. However, this reading of the nineteenth-century manuscripts pieces together from the coded remains of Spanish colonial discourse about race, ethnicity and labour relations an account of the Irish railroad workers’ experience which foregrounds the unfreedom of contract labour and gets closer to the reality of their conditions. Besides illuminating the discourse of race and labour of the period, the records also provide rich documentary evidence of the structures of control and coercion introduced with the system of contract labour, which provoked rebellion and protest by a multi-ethnic workforce.

The Sugar Railroad

The first line of railway of any consideration which has yet been laid down in the West Indies is that which now exists in this island, connecting the Havana with one of the most important of its sugar districts, and having its inland terminus at the town of Güines, forty-five miles distant from the capital (Turnbull, 187).

First in the West Indies, first in Latin America, ten years before Spain, and seventh in the world, Turnbull draws our attention to what was, for its time, the most innovative and cutting-edge technology introduced to one of the last surviving colonies of the Spanish Empire. As the frontiers of sugar production spread southwards to the fertile valley of Güines, the railroad was a crucial step in overcoming the difficulties and high cost of overland transportation of sugar by mule and cart from the sugar plantations to the port of Havana. The significance of the railroad did not so much improve the infrastructure of the island as it catered for the interests of Cuba's wealthy plantation owners.

Figure 1: The 'Acana' Sugar Mill, with Steam Train (c.1857)



Source: Ballol, Berta Alfonso., *El Camino do Hierro de La Habana a Güines: Primer Ferrocarril de Iberoamerica*. (Madrid: Fundación de los Ferrocarriles Españoles, 1987), 146

Tied to the production of sugar, the railroad provided a cheaper, faster route to the global market, but also opened the way for profound economic transformation and modernisation. The resulting industrialisation and increased prosperity copper-fastened Cuba's dependence on sugar and on slavery. This was the beginning of the 'sugar-railroad' and its subordination to the interests of what, in less than a decade, became the 'largest sugar-exporting economy the world has ever known' (Knight 1970, 54). The implications for Cuban society were equally transformative and nowhere more so than in the area of labour and the intensification of the racial divide. The railroad introduced a dependency on foreign capital into colonial Cuba, but also a *modus operandi* of managing the first large labour force which was not enslaved. The incorporation of contract-labour into a well established slave system and with that the importation of cheap immigrant labour from Ireland, the Canary Islands, Galicia and finally China, was an experimental phase in Cuba's gradual and late transition from slavery to free labour.

The Search for Labour

Towards the end of 1834 the *Junta de Fomento*, responsible for the promotion of the railroad, organised an initial loan of two million dollars from a London banking firm.⁵ The Spanish Consul in New York, Francisco Stoughton, immediately contracted the American engineers Alfred Kruger and Benjamin Wright Jr. to direct its construction.⁶ Excavations on the first twenty-nine mile stretch between Havana and Bejucal began on 9 October 1835 and, according to the Chief Engineer, laying the tracks for this part of the railroad was the most dangerous and experimental part of the whole project.⁷ The hilly and uneven ground between Havana and Bejucal

⁵ For more details on the first foreign loan in Cuban history which came from the London banking firm, Robertson & Company, see Reports of Railroad Commission in *Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Junta de Fomento*, hereafter ANC JF, see ANC JF, 133-6505. The loan was guaranteed by Martínez de Pinillos. For information on the planter families involved in promoting the railroad, see Zanetti (1987), Chapter 6.

⁶ Francisco Stoughton succeeded his father Don Tomás Stoughton as Spanish Consul in New York where, between them, they ran the consulate for nearly fifty years (1826-1863). They came from an Irish-Spanish family. Francisco, who was responsible for sending Irish immigrants to Cuba during 1818 and again in 1835, had lucrative business interests in Cuba. He was fluent in both English and Spanish writing in a Spanish language periodical *El Redactor y Mercurio de Nueva York*. He wrote in English under the *Nom de plume*, Walter Cox. He collaborated with the exiled Cuban priest Félix Varela in the development of education in modern languages. For more information on this joint collaboration, see Mar Vilar *La Prensa en los Orígenes de la Enseñanza de Español en los Estados Unidos (1822-1833)*, (Murcia, 1996), 111-115.

⁷ Alfred Kruger, *Informe del Ingeniero Director del Ferrocarril del Júcaro*, (La Habana: Imprenta Oliva, 1841).

‘demanded complicated and infrastructure grading works, levelling hills or even opening pathways through them’ (Zanetti and Garcia 1987, 28). The plans involved the construction of several bridges, including one crossing the Almendares River to the west of Havana. This required a large work force, first to drain swampy ground along the route and then excavate rocky terrain with explosives, before building tunnels and embankments. On 1 August 1835, the Chief Engineer estimated that the initial excavations for the railroad would be completed within eight months and ‘in order to receive the benefit of the expenditure, and to impart to the community the advantage of the improved channel of communication [...] a force of at least 1,500 men should be employed in the gradation’.⁸ He thought it advisable on the grounds of economy to employ as much local labour as possible, but interspersed with imported labour so that foreign superintendents could ‘direct advantageously their operations and teach them the proper use of tools to which they have been unaccustomed’.⁹ Some of the animals would be procured locally because, as Kruger reasoned, ‘[t]he oxen of the island are better than those in the United States particularly for this climate, they will be employed in loosening the earth with the ploughs’.¹⁰ Calculated to achieve maximum productivity and profit margins, the Chief Engineer’s ambitious plan specified the number of men, mules, wheelbarrows and pick-axes needed for the job, with all but the oxen to be imported from the United States.¹¹

It was not possible to fill the huge demand for unskilled labour required to build the railroad from a scarce local supply. Outside the plantation system white immigrants became farmers or gravitated towards urban areas to work as artisans where they were able to command higher wages than were possible in Europe (Moreno Friginals 1976, 131). Skilled labour such as mechanics, metal workers, and foremen to supervise the different stages of construction would have to be imported. Coming at the same time as the second Anglo-Spanish treaty of 1835 outlawing the trade in slaves, and having negotiated such a huge loan in London, the *Junta de Fomento* was reluctant to take the risk of recruiting slaves illegally imported from Africa (Zanetti and Garcia 1987, 118). The system of the slave market or *barracones*

⁸ A. Kruger to the *Comisión de Camino de Hierro*, 1 August, 1835, in ANC JF, 130-6375.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

ended in 1836 and from this time on the landing and distribution of slaves took place clandestinely (Knight 1970, 63). Creole white workers, more costly to employ, would not work alongside slaves in what was considered racially demeaning manual labour. The search for unskilled local labour continued during the months of September and October 1835, with daily advertisements appearing in the Havana newspapers trying to recruit whites, free blacks, or rented slaves. The monthly salary was advertised as ‘ten pesos, with good rations and deductions for days lost or in case of illness’.¹² The advertisements stipulated that workers for hire must be ‘agile and robust *ladinos*’, sending a clear message to slave owners that, newly-arrived slaves from Africa (*bozales*), and therefore illegal, would not be used.¹³ Slave owners were reluctant to risk renting their slave property for such dangerous work at the low rates of rent on offer. Recruitment was so slow that by 5 December 1835, the salary was increased to thirteen pesos a month.¹⁴ To begin with, the *Junta de Fomento* used every available body, including *cimarrones* or captured fugitive-slaves, and any available rented slaves and *emancipados* or liberated slaves.¹⁵ In addition, as Turnbull described it,

A vast number of prisoners from the Cabaños, most of them transported convicts from Old Spain [...] were likewise placed at the disposal of the company; as was also a portion of the captured Negroes emancipated by British cruisers [...] given up to the tender mercies of the captain general, and placed, therefore, in a much worse condition than ordinary slaves [...] making the very word emancipados a term of reproach and a byword among the lowest of the Negro population (140).

¹² These advertisements appeared daily in the *Diario de La Habana*, between 13 October and 13 November, 1835.

¹³ The term *ladino* refers to a slave who was Spanish-speaking and who had arrived before the first Anglo-Spanish treaty in 1817. Creoles or *Ladinos* are ‘that class of negroes long settled in the island and acclimated’. Richard Madden *The Island of Cuba: Its Resources, Prospects and Progress Considered in Relation the Influence of its Prosperity on the Interests of the British West India Colonies* (London: C. Gilpin, 1849), 234.

¹⁴ *Diario de La Habana*, 5 December 1835.

¹⁵ *Emancipados* was the term given to Africans liberated from illegal slave ships. The Anglo-Spanish Slave Trade Treaty 1817 stated that Africans disembarked in Cuba, under the supervision of the Court of Mixed Commission, were handed over to Cuban colonial officials. They were hired out to planters, described as ‘responsible trustees’ as apprentices, to be given religious and occupational instruction in ‘preparation’ for ‘civilisation’. Their legal status was ambiguous in that they were not slaves but neither were they free. After five years they were liberated to become integrated into Cuban society as free persons, but more often, their period of contract was extended or renewed. Their condition was sometimes worse than had they been in slavery because planters did not have any obligation towards the welfare of *emancipados* because they were not their property. See Franklin Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba During the Nineteenth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), 34.

There were one hundred and forty prisoners from the Spanish peninsula, but more labour was needed to complete the initial building phase of the railroad within time and budget. Competition from sugar planters, who never had enough slave labour to keep up with the expansion of sugar production, pressured the government to authorize the Railroad Commission to import their own labour. This is why, according to a report by the *Junta de Fomento* in the *Diario de La Habana*, in a country with such a scarcity of labour and where wages were so high compared to wages in Europe, rather than abandon the project ‘it was necessary to bring a colony of *irlandeses* and another from the Canaries’.¹⁶ Having agreed to introduce the system of foreign contract labour, the *Junta de Fomento* signed agreements with private contractors to carry out the different phases of construction. The investors in the railroad were some of Cuba’s wealthiest planter families who had a powerful influence on the development of the sugar industry. In the first phase of its development between 1835 and 1845 the promoters came from a group of *nouveaux riche* who were supplanting the more conservative oligarchy as ‘a technical-economical vanguard of the plantation system’ (Zanetti and Garcia 1987, 108). The Railroad Commission appointed by the *Junta de Fomento* acted for the Spanish colonial authorities in Havana to finalise the contracts for different sections of the line with American contractors.¹⁷ The engineers Kruger and Wright contracted the technical staff and equipment needed to survey, prepare and supervise the first forty-five miles of the railroad from Havana to Güines. Mostly American, the contractors recruited their own work-crews, before relocating to Cuba in time to start construction.¹⁸

¹⁶ *Diario de La Habana*, 13 July 1837.

¹⁷ The three leading members of the Railroad Commission were, Count Wenceslao Villaurutia, Miguel Escobeda and *Intendente* Claudio Martinez de Pinillos, the secretary of the treasury and president of the *Junta de Fomento*, see ANC JF, 130 – 6390.

¹⁸ Railroad Commission to *Junta de Fomento*, see ANC JF, 130-6375.

Figure 2: Map of the route of the Havana-Guines Railroad

Source: Oscar Zanetti and Alejandro García, *Caminos Para el Azúcar* (Havana: Ministerio de Cultura, 1987) 84-85

The *Junta de Fomento*, resurrected an earlier ‘white colonisation’ strategy devised by the *Comisión de Población Blanca*¹⁹ to promote the importation of colonists of European descent, emphasised the need to import white labourers as distinct from white colonists or farmers. The Railroad Commission applauded the plan to import up to a thousand labourers as ‘not only good for the railroad’, but in a more rhetorical flourish announced, ‘it will serve as an experiment to increase the white population and would have far reaching and momentous consequences’.²⁰ With a population of just under a million and few immigrants, the introduction of hired labour promised the arrival of the ‘right’ sort of labour, both ‘white’ and ‘free’. The *Junta de Fomento* became like an ‘ambidextrous gambler’, combining the importation of white wage-labourers with the rental of any available surplus slaves (Zanetti and Garcia 1987, 118).

The Chief Engineers inevitably looked to North America, where they could rely on well-established labour networks for contractors from canal and railroad construction works to supply enough semi-skilled and unskilled workers.²¹ Kruger

¹⁹ The *Comisión de Población Blanca* or the Commission for White Population was set up to promote white immigration. It is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

²⁰ Railroad Commission to Kruger and Wright, August 1835, see ANC JF, 130-6375.

²¹ ‘When engineer Benjamin Wright was chosen to oversee the Blackstone Canal in Massachusetts, for example, he brought with him several veteran Irish builders, who prospered and laid the foundation of Worcester’s Irish Community. Peter Way, *Common Labourers: Workers and*

expressed his doubts about recruiting such a large number in such a short space of time:

Twelve hundred men to be collected in the space of two to three weeks is a large number for so short a period [...] I fear that not more than half that number can be obtained notwithstanding numerous letters I have written to contractors and superintendents who for many years have been under my orders on different works in the United States desiring them to come on with all the force they can collect.²²

With seasonal lay-offs in large construction works during the winter months, it was envisaged that migrant labourers would work from November to June, the dry season in Cuba, and return to the North on finishing their contracts. The first crew of workers contracted were experienced overseers, foremen and cartwrights.²³ The Spanish Consul signed the contracts for laying the tracks with eight private contractors in New York: James Gibbs, Erasmus Denison, Charles Randolph, John Kenny, Hugh McCafferty, John Mulany, Michael Eagan and E. Huntington.²⁴ They were responsible for keeping their crews together, paying their wages, and ensuring that work was completed on schedule. Contractors drew on networks of railroad and canal workers where seasoned immigrants or those picked straight off the boats were in plentiful supply. Very often contractors, who were also immigrants, operated as ‘a bridge between the two worlds of the immigrants and the industrial elite’, recruiting their fellow countrymen and women as soon as they arrived in the United States (Watson 2006, 56). Railroad companies relied on this network to exploit immigrants, who had little choice but to sell their labour at the lowest possible rates. The navvies who went to Cuba were a mixture of seasoned canal workers and newly arrived immigrants from Ireland to the United States. In a similar railroad construction project in Philadelphia in 1832, contractor Philip Duffy hired fifty-seven labourers from Derry, Donegal, Tyrone and Leitrim, who boarded the John Stamp in Derry before making the transatlantic journey to Philadelphia (69).

the Digging of North Americas Canals 1780-1860 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 41.

²² Report by Kruger to *Junta de Fomento*; see ANC JF, 130-6375.

²³ The word in Spanish is *carpintero de carreta* or Cartwright in English. These artisans made and repaired carts and wagons.

²⁴ See ANC JF, 130-6390.

Irish Labour Networks in New York (1830s)

The developing American economy provided a preparatory environment for the system of contract labour which was used later in Cuba. The American railroads were, in terms of the scale, as Walter Licht describes it, ‘comparable to no other concerns’ and in terms ‘of the complexity, diversity and geographical range of operations [they] were rivalled perhaps only by earlier military organizations and campaigns’ (Licht 1983, 5). The railroad would introduce to Cuba a concentration of labour, larger than anything yet seen on the sugar plantations, and mediated as it was through the industrialising centres of North America; it also marked the entry of an Irish mobile proletariat into the Cuban labour market. The early development of American capitalism, driven by the push to extend commercial networks through railroad and canal technology, exerted new demands on capital and labour. Benjamin Wright had profitably managed some of the largest forces of immigrant labour on the construction of the Erie Canal in the 1820s. The ‘mushrooming of the labour force’ with the construction of the Erie Canal brought about significant changes in the organization and control of labour, which served as a later model for labour relations in the building of railroads (Way 1993, 32). Peter Way’s detailed work, *Common Labour* (1993), chronicling the harsh working-life of canal workers in the early decades of the nineteenth century, describes how these changes moulded and conditioned the experience of recently arrived immigrants from Ireland and other parts of Europe. By 1835, Irish emigrant workers had already established themselves as pioneering labour on the construction of the Baltimore and Ohio railroad. Known as trackmen they worked at the cutting edge of economic and technological developments in the United States. They were some of the first European migrants to work on the Erie Canal, forming an army of brute labour ‘who journeyed from job to job on public works’.²⁵ Recruited in New York, where many of them had families, this transient way-of-life of the seasoned navy was lived out in remote areas along the tracks and canals of early industrial America, often accompanied by their wives and children in shanty towns filled with ‘the most marginal of peoples in terms of their origins and prospects’ (Mason 1998, 254). Out of the restricted choices open to

²⁵ Cited in Mason, “‘The Hands Here Are Disposed to Be Turbulent’: Unrest Among the Irish Trackmen of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, 1829-1851’, *Labor History* 39 (1998): 255.

them many chose this way of life, holding out the hope that they might eventually become independent and own a plot of land.

In 1830s New York, the unwelcome influx of impoverished Irish refugees provoked already strong anti-Catholic sentiment. New York suffered the consequences of a devastating cholera epidemic in 1832 and the Great Fire of 16 December 1835. Irish immigrants flocked to one of the first Catholic Churches in New York, St. Peter's in Barclay Street, where Catholics made up a small percentage of the population and generally occupied the lowest socio-economic status (McCadden and McCadden 1969, 72). The Spanish Consul, Francisco Stoughton, also a partner in the importing firm of Dominick Lynch, a 'staunch Irish rebel', was a 'founding father' of the parish of St. Peter's. He was a personal friend of the Vicar-General, Cuban philosopher and priest, Felix Varela, who, exiled for his anti-colonial and abolitionist activities, ministered to a growing influx of Irish immigrants between 1822 and 1843 (61).²⁶ Access to a ready-made nucleus of immigrant labour provided an ideal recruitment network for Stoughton and the *Junta de Fomento* in Cuba. Stoughton, as the representative in New York was paid \$58,361 for his services and he delegated others to do the hiring (Moyano Bazzani 1991, 110). Henry Richards mobilised some of these crews and trying to recoup what was owed to him by Wright he wrote to Stoughton, the Spanish consul,:

You know I have been extremely diligent in looking out for men on the railroad and that I obtained a considerable number some of whom were sent by the brig Havre and

²⁶ Varela's life and work in Cuba, where he held the chair in philosophy in San Carlos University before his exile to New York, is described in a biography by Joseph McCadden and Helen McCadden, *Father Varela; Torch Bearer From Cuba* (1969); see also Joseph McCadden, 'The New York-to-Cuba Axis of Father Varela', in *The Americas*, vol. 20, no. 4 (Apr., 1964): 276-392. Varela worked as a missionary in a Catholic parish with growing communities of Cuban émigrés and Irish immigrants. He is credited with opening schools in Ann Street and John Street, where he also taught young immigrants. Felix Varela and Irish priest John Power, both Vicars General, developed and ministered to a rapidly growing diocese. Varela published the *New York Weekly Register and Catholic Diary* with an opening editorial, which promised that it would be 'purely republican, inflexibly impartial, and thoroughly Irish'. With an estimated 40,000 Irish in New York City in 1830 Varela's parish journal catered for an Irish-American readership (McCadden 1969, 86). Vilified by Spanish colonial authorities, Varela was described by the Spanish Minister of State as a 'bad Spaniard and worse priest'. McCadden suggests that Stoughton, whose Irish forebears were exiled in Spain to escape British oppression, 'had lived and prospered in New York long enough – albeit as His Spanish Majesty's minister – to appreciate the advantages of liberty, American style, and the disabilities suffered by Cuban colonials' (61). While conscious of the potentially rich seam of material in this particular axis of Catholic migration, Irish-Spanish-American connections, Irish and Cuban anti-colonial connections and circuits of labour in Cuba and the United States, unfortunately funding did not extend to a search of the relevant repositories in New York at this stage of the research.

was to be allowed 40 dollars for my services and I gave my receipt to Mr Wright who said he would get the money from you on producing my receipt and that he would afterward hand the 40 dollars to me. Mr Wright omitted to give me the money or to leave it with the storekeeper Mr. Jenkins and he has sailed for the Havana. I stand in great want of it and I am obliged to request that you will pay me said \$40 or if Mr Wright has obtained it from you to do the needful that I may obtain it. Mr Pascoe knows I did not obtain the money. I am Sir with great respect your servant Henry Richards.²⁷

This nexus of Irish immigrant labour and the connections between Father Varela and the Spanish Consul, Stoughton, needs further investigation to understand the recruitment network which led to such large numbers going to Cuba to work on the railroad. In speculating on why migrant labourers from Ireland decided to go to Cuba, the expectation of relieving economic hardship for themselves and their families must have influenced their decision to move yet again to a third country. Cuba was not a destination associated with Irish migration so it is more likely they were lured by promises made by the contractors, who also had little knowledge of Cuba, its climate, or even what language was spoken there. For some, the decision to move was one they made frequently, following the next available offer of work. There is also the possibility that some may have been press-ganged through debt-bondage. It cannot be discounted that Catholic migrants may have been persuaded by the growing anti-Catholic and nativist hostility in the United States in the vain hope of greater tolerance in a Catholic Spanish colony.

Los Irlandeses

In November 1835, the Spanish Consul signed contracts with captains of four ships - the *Havre*, *Roanoke*, *Choctaw* and *San Miguel* - to transport tools, equipment and men for the *Junta de Fomento*. The ships left New York early in November and after two to three weeks at sea they docked in Havana. The ships' manifests itemized their cargoes of pickaxes, shovels, drills, ploughs, carts, water containers, mattresses and *operarios* (labourers) for the railroad. The captain of each ship, on arrival in Havana, was paid eight pesos for each passenger who travelled below deck and twenty for

²⁷ Henry Richards to Spanish Consul, Francisco Stoughton, see ANC JF, 130- 6390.

cabin passengers. The fourth ship, the *Havre*, docked in mid-December carrying ninety-six workers for the Railroad Commission.²⁸

The collective term *los irlandeses* was given to the recruits from the United States who were mostly Irish, but there were also German, English, Scottish and American workers amongst them (Knight 1970, 33). Some Spanish and Cuban accounts make the assumption that most of those with Irish surnames were North Americans, descendents of the ‘old country’.²⁹ Some were Irish-American, but as migratory patterns in the early decades of the nineteenth-century demonstrate, emigration by poor and landless Catholics was well underway before the massive outflow of the famine years (Miller 1985). It is very probable that some of this cohort were recently arrived from Ireland, while others had navvied in England before making the transatlantic journey to New York. An analysis of over three-hundred surnames suggest county origins to be predominantly in the north-west and north midlands of Ireland such as Donegal, Sligo, Fermanagh and Leitrim, though other counties to the west and south of Ireland are also represented.³⁰ In what was a predominantly male cohort, there were twenty-two women, twenty listed as wives, one mother, Mrs. Campbell, accompanied her son John and one woman, Catherine Mc Mahon, is named independently. The American Consul, Nicholas Trist, commented six months after their arrival that ‘[...] not only men but entire families embracing women and children appear to have been attracted hither by offers of employment on the rail-road [...]’.³¹ There are different estimates of the number of Irish workers who came to Cuba and figures vary from five hundred to ‘upwards of a thousand’.³² For the period November 1835 to November 1836, as the following

²⁸ *Diario de La Habana*, 10 November 1835; *Diario de La Habana*, 16 December 1835, (Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, La Habana Cuba, Sala Cubana). For copies of ships manifests for these four ships see ANC JF, 179-8234.

²⁹ It is assumed in some accounts of the railroad workers that immigrants with Irish surnames were not in fact natives of Ireland, but descendants of Irish emigrants of an earlier migration to the United States. See Manuel Moreno Fraginals *The Sugar Mill: The Socioeconomic Complex of Sugar in Cuba*. Translated by Cedric Belfrage (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976) 135; and Fariña González, ‘Las Contratas Isleñas del Ferrocarril La Habana-Güines (Cuba)’, *XIII Coloquio de Historia Canario-Americana*, 1998 (2000) 2098.

³⁰ The surnames in these four passenger lists have been checked against the list of Irish surnames based on the Tithe Applotment Survey 1823-1838 and Griffiths’ Valuation 1848-1864.

³¹ Letter from the American Consul, Nicholas Trist to *Junta de Fomento*, 17 May 1836, see ANC JF, 130-6378.

³² At the time of this research the National Archives in Havana were in the process of duplicating the records of passenger lists and ships manifests for this period. The volumes of these lists were in a much deteriorated condition and were not available for public access in 2008-2009.

table shows there were between 800 and 1,200 *irlandeses* out of a total of 2,749 labourers working on the section of railroad between Havana and Güines.

Figure 3: Number and Category of Railroad workers (1835-1836).

Origin of the Railroad Workers	
Capitanía General de Cuba	140 prisoners
Acueducto de Fernando VII	87 emancipados
Real Junta de Fomento	145 slaves 200/250 cimarrones 927 Canary Islanders 800/1,200 irlandeses
TOTAL	2,299/2,749 labourers

Source: Eduardo Moyano Bazzani, *La Nueva Frontera del Azúcar: el Ferrocarril y La Economía Cubana del Siglo XIX*. (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1991), 109

The surviving ships manifests in the records of the *Junta de Fomento* provide the names, surnames and occupations of three-hundred and sixty-four men described as artisans, carpenters or cartwrights, mechanics and overseers, but the vast majority were described as labourers. The Irish recruits were described as semi-skilled with experience in explosives and railroad construction (Ballol 1987). Their contracts were from six months to a year, depending on how long the *Junta de Fomento* decided to keep them employed. They simply stated that the same conditions of work prevailing in the United States applied in Cuba; the same number of days and hours of work, the same regulations. The stated monthly pay was twenty-five pesos³³ but, as the contract states, ‘the Junta de Fomento have to pay the cost of our passage to the owners of the ships and provisions for which we are in agreement that deductions of no more than thirteen pesos are made from our salary’.³⁴ The contract promised accommodation but it stipulated that food, clothes and medical attention would not be provided. It also outlined that pay would be withheld for days not worked due to illness, bad weather or absenteeism. Those labourers who were skilled in rock excavation and the use of dynamite were paid a little more. The cost of a one-way

³³ The peso was on a par with the United States dollar at the time. See Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba* (1970), 30.

³⁴ Contract number 14 for *peones y trabajadores* see ANC JF, 13- 6378.

passage of fifteen dollars would be deducted over the first two months of the contract.³⁵

Taking care to protect the interests of the investors, the engineers cautioned that these kinds of labourers who are generally ‘poor and careless’ could not be trusted to pay their debts. The advances they received were most likely to provide something for their families in their absence.³⁶ Judging by the number of chits contained in the records signed by Wright and Stoughton authorising ‘advances on pay’, many of the workers were indebted to the company before boarding the ships in New York.³⁷ Overseers Hugh McCafferty, John Mulany and Michael Eagan were contracted at two and a half pesos a day for a period of six months to a year, and were all in-debt to the *Junta* before leaving New York. Foremen James Gibb, Charles Randolph, John Kenny and Erasmus Denison, all described as mechanics with knowledge of construction and machinery, were contracted on a monthly salary of one hundred and ten pesos. They each had received an advance of one hundred pesos, to be deducted from their wages over the course of their contracts.³⁸ A number of labourers owed at least the first month’s pay before starting which, with all the other deductions, meant that they would be paid little or nothing for the first few months.

In his report to the Railroad Commission Kruger cites a previous experience of importing a thousand workers from England for the construction of canals in the United States at a cost of \$30,000. He complained bitterly of the number of workers who took advantage of the wide open territories and the freedom to move and ‘without any moral obligation they soon departed the service of the works, so that within two months they had not given any value and the cost of their passage paid by the company was lost’.³⁹ Not to be caught out a second time, Kruger reassured the Commission that, given the natural geography of Cuba, no one would escape paying:

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Kruger to the Railroad Commission, 1 September 1835, ANC JF, 130-6390.

³⁷ See ANC JF, 130-6390, for a file containing four ships manifests, with lists of names of Irish recruits, contracts, receipts and chits of advances to workers. See Appendix 1 for the passenger list from the ship *Havre*.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Kruger to the Railroad Commission, 1 August 1835, see ANC JF, 130-6375. The experience of recruiting Irish workers in England is borne out by Peter Way, ‘A number of Irish contractors and their men were brought over from England to work on the Erie Canal’. See Way, *Common Laborers* (1993), 41.

‘being surrounded by ocean and not having passports necessary to leave, they would enforce the contracts even more by circulating orders to the overseers along the line so that the railroad peons cannot find a place to hide’.⁴⁰ The Spanish Consul in New York authorised the passenger lists to serve as a general passport for all the imported artisans and labourers to travel to Cuba.⁴¹ The contracts signed by the workers meant that they forego their right to leave the job or find other work during the term of their contracts, binding them to the contractors until any outstanding debts were paid. There was no fixed period of time on the contracts which conveniently stated a term of six months to a year, as the *Junta de Fomento* wished (*a la voluntad de la Junta*). A further constraint was the prohibitive cost of repatriation and departure from the island. At the outset, in order to prevent loss of capital through desertions, the engineers secured an alliance between the colonial authorities, private ship owners, and the contractors, to restrict and control the departure of imported workers until they had paid the cost of their transport to Cuba.

Described as a ‘heterogeneous conglomerate’ by Cuban historians Zanetti and Garcia, the initial multi-ethnic workforce on the railroad was comprised of different cultures and religions with a diversity of African and European languages, including Irish. This army of workers was surrounded by an intricate subsistence economy including food and clothes sellers, washerwomen and of course, grog-sellers. They were thrown together in ‘a diversity of recruiting mechanisms, and a diversity of forms of exploitation’ (Zanetti and Garcia 1987, 117). The Captain-General of the island, Miguel Tacón, when he finally gave his approval for the project, agreed to rent to the *Junta de Fomento* a supply of African *emancipados*, to work out their five year apprenticeship on the railroad.⁴² *Emancipados* and slaves were used in ever greater numbers for the most exhausting and dangerous work, as the railroad extended its network throughout the island; they were easier to procure locally than wage-labourers and equally could be disciplined with impunity. The rental of slaves cost more than wage-labour, and the company incurred greater losses in the event of desertion or death. Enslaved workers who were rented out by their

⁴⁰ Kruger to *Junta de Fomento*, September 1835, see ANC JF, 130-6390.

⁴¹ See note on page 2 of passenger list of the Brigantine *Havre* signed by Francisco Stoughton see ANC JF, 13- 6378.

⁴² Franklin Knight states that the railroad companies owned very few slaves but relied instead on the labour of *emancipados*, whom they treated just as badly, if not worse ‘purchased slave property’. Franklin Knight *Slave Society in Cuba* (1970), 34.

owners often escaped from the railroad by running away to join fugitive slave communities. Wage-labour was expensive because of its scarce supply but also because ‘many of the contracted parties either died or returned to their native lands’ (Knight 1970, 33).

Labourers from the Canary Islands

The *Junta de Fomento* was not only an ‘ambidextrous gambler’ in recruiting slave and free labour; it also played its hand on both sides of the Atlantic. At the end of 1835 the *Junta* signed agreements with shipping agents in the Canary Islands to import as many workers as they could find so long as they were in good health, robust, hard-working and between the ages of twenty and forty. Referred to in Cuba as *isleños*, from the periphery of Europe, the Spanish-speaking Canary Islands were geographically located close enough to Africa to metaphysically identify its inhabitants as a race apart from Europeans ‘a hardy race, better able than Europeans to support the heat of a tropical climate [with] a similarity of habits and language’ (Turnbull 2005, 261). Canary Islanders were amongst the first European settlers, having arrived in the seventeenth-century, to cultivate tobacco on the lands between Havana and Güines and providing labour for the harsh conditions of the copper mines of Santiago de Cuba. More so than any other group of European origin, they provided a supply of labour which, when needed, served as a substitute for slavery (De Paz and Hernández 1992). Over three centuries of chain migration to Cuba was maintained and financed by strong family ties and island identity. At the time of the railroad contracts in 1836, the *isleños* were already present in significant numbers with established social and family networks in the agricultural sector, growing tobacco and farming cattle. Their migration to Cuba was ‘like indentured labourers to the British colonies of the past, contracted to work for a specific period but afterwards free’ (Thomas 2001, 113).

Contract workers from the Canary Islanders and *los irlandeses* were checked as to their physical condition, health and ability to work. The weakest which, included women and children, were rejected at port and left to fend for themselves without any assistance. This preoccupation by the *Junta de Fomento* as to the physical condition of the workers was typical of a slave-owning mentality in which the main purpose was to extract the maximum value from their workers for a minimum

investment (Fariña González 2000, 2101). For each worker recruited at the port in Havana, the shipping agents were paid half an ounce of gold. The first consignment of contract-labourers from the Canaries arrived in April 1836, each new immigrant landing with a debt of forty-four pesos for the cost of their passage and ‘paperwork’. The monthly salary agreed with the Canary Island recruits was nine pesos, with deductions of three pesos a month to cover the cost of the contract, passport, and transportation to Cuba and repatriation when the contract finished. Workers remained in bondage until their debts to the shipping agents were paid in full. They were paid considerably less than the Irish, however in contrast some meagre food rations, clothing and medical attention were included in the terms of their contracts. Days lost through illness, desertion or imprisonment simply prolonged their debts (Ballol 1987). The mother of a thirteen year old, Fransisco Ruffino, petitioned the *Junta de Fomento* to have her son returned home, but learnt that he would not be released for another five months until his debt of forty pesos was paid in full to the contractors. Ruffino did not survive the arduous conditions and died in debt to the company.⁴³ Married men were encouraged to bring their wives, and one ounce of gold was paid by the *Junta* to the captain of the ship for any woman accompanying her husband, incurring for each couple a debt of twelve pesos monthly on top of the cost of their passage (Fariña González 2000).

In what is described as the beginning of a haemorrhage of an island community to the Americas, records of the railroad contracts have allowed historians in the Canary Islands to establish a database of each migrant and their families, their exact provenance and socio-economic status (De Paz and Hernández 1992). Mostly illiterate, rural workers from Tenerife, who had no experience of capitalist labour relations, they were no more equipped than the Irish recruits for the conditions of exploitation they would encounter. One of the main contractors for the railroad, Bernardo Forstall, the son of an influential Irish merchant from Kilkenny, plied trading routes between the Canary Islands, mainland Europe and the Americas between 1830 and 1850. Forstall employed sub-contractors to deal with the licenses, passports and other documentation and out of a total of nine hundred and twenty-

⁴³ ANC JF, 8-542.

seven contract-workers from the Canary Islands; his shipping company carried some seven hundred and fifty of them to Havana to work on the railroad.⁴⁴

The historiography of migration from the Canary Islands in nineteenth-century Cuba provides a rich source of documentation on the railroad contracts from which to establish a detailed account of the conditions of their labour. This is an invaluable source from which to build a more accurate picture of the intricacies of contract labour and debt-bondage as they applied to other migrant workers in Cuba and it serves as a comparison with the terms and conditions of the Irish contracts.⁴⁵ In both cases the worker's survival depended on the contractors honouring their side of the bargain in the provision of wages food and clothing. When they failed to comply, as often happened, workers went hungry trying to exist on meagre food rations and when they fell ill the promised medical attention did not materialise. The coercions of debt-bondage, implicit in both the Irish and Canary Islander contracts, left few options: to stay on the job and hope to survive the extreme and brutal conditions, or risk incurring severe punishments for protest or desertion. For some the dangers inherent in the railroad contracts made it a fatal choice, as the number of deaths testifies. In 1836 there were one hundred and fourteen deaths amongst the migrants from the Canaries (Moyano Bazzani 1991). Figures for the Irish did not appear in the records consulted. In the case of the *isleños*, in what was more like a short-term indenture, their well-being and continued productivity was the responsibility of the contractors as was repatriation on termination of the contracts. The terms and conditions of the Irish contracts, on the other hand, contained elements of the modernising influence of wage-labour, in that the contractors bought their services at a higher price than the Canary Islanders but bore no responsibility for their well-being or repatriation. These differences are an interesting illustration of different processes of labour and migration and the articulation of migration with different mentalities in terms of labour practices in countries of origin and destination. Even though the harshness of day-to-day working conditions in a

⁴⁴ Don Pedro Forstall, a native of Kilkenny established a merchant house in the port of Santa Cruz in Tenerife, trading under the name of Pedro Forstall y Hijos. For more detail on the way in which this shipping company operated, see Manuel Fariña-González, 'Las Contratas Isleñas del Ferrocarril La Habana-Güines (Cuba)', XIII Coloquio de Historia Canario-Americana 1998, (2000): 2102-2109.

⁴⁵ A search of the national Archives of Ireland has so far produced no references to this episode of Irish migration.

plantation economy was equally brutal for both groups of immigrants there were crucial differences between the Canary Island contracts and the Irish contracts, demonstrating the influence of capitalist labour relations in the United States on contract-labour, at a time of transition to wage-labour, as yet unknown in the Canary Islands.

The System of Contract Labour

The introduction of new technology to Cuba from industrial centres in Britain and North America brought with it new forms of labour relations and new ideas about the regimentation and control of a large labour force. The system of contract interested the planters as a novel means of synchronising a labour force which might in the future replace slavery. Plantation owners who invested in the railroad were impressed with Kruger's organisational plan, designed to mobilise and control such a concentration of labour. Kruger's initial report to the *Junta de Fomento* recommended the system of contract, based on minimising risks to investors, now widely used in large public works and railroad construction in North America:

Work done by contract is more economical than by men employed by the day, better and with greater certainty of the period it is accomplished; [...] With regard to the maintenance of the labourers, mules, oxen etc, I am of the opinion that contracts should be made with individuals at so much a head for each man and beast, for if the provisions are furnished at the cost of the Junta [Board] in the bulk, I fear that much waste would accrue and a door would be opened to the cupidity and dishonesty of the superintendents (Kruger 1835).⁴⁶

The advantages of out-sourcing the financial risks of 'boarding and sustenance' for the men and mules to private contractors appealed to investors and colonial authorities alike. Unlike the slave system, 'free' workers belonged to no one so their employers took little or no responsibility for their maintenance or survival; they were paid seasonally and only for days worked, and were dispensed with when their labour was no longer needed. Moreover, they had few rights and no protection as migrant labourers in a country where they had no family or social networks and no knowledge of the language. This type of alienated cheap labour could be more easily

⁴⁶ Kruger report to Railroad Commission, 16 August 1835, see ANC JF, 130-6375.

subjected to a highly coercive work regime modelled on slavery and was therefore ideal for a society, such as Cuba, in transition to capitalism (Calavera Vayá 1989).

Discipline and Control of Contract Labourers

The mobilisation of such a large labour force which was not enslaved presented new challenges to the colonial authorities in finding ways to exert control over the productivity and division of railroad labour. Despite conflicting ideologies on the superiority of free labour over slavery, capitalist managers voiced no moral qualms when it came to the enforcement of coercive labour practices in controlling this new category of European contract-labour. The colonial authorities, accustomed as they were to the management of plantation slavery, and the engineers with their experience of capitalist labour relations, were united in their aim of profitably extracting labour while privileging the interests of those who purchased it. Cuba's sugar economy, which depended on slavery for its prosperity, relied on the colonial authorities to rigorously enforce a racial hierarchy typical of slave based plantation societies.⁴⁷ Kruger and the *Junta de Fomento* agreed on the imposition of a hierarchy of segregation and exclusion used to secure the boundaries of race and legal status amongst the railroad workforce. Segregation and control was structured in the built environment and reinforced materially by a hierarchy of food rations.

Immigrant labourers disembarking at the docks in Havana were processed by the authorities before being housed in temporary accommodation of the most rudimentary type along the tracks of the railroad. Adopting a model used for labourers and their families on the railroad and canals in the United States which, not unlike the slave quarters on a Cuban sugar plantation, Kruger's design was as follows:

[t]he sides of the house are 9 feet from the ground to the eaves, from 12 to 15 feet wide, and the length dependent on the number of men to be accommodated are arranged in berths similar to those in the cabin of a ship, by placing 3 on each side, above another [...] for every 2.5 yards 6 men are accommodated; the doors are at each end, and to afford the necessary ventilation in a warm climate, portholes or orifices could be made to move on leather hinges one at each berth, which being opened would afford both

⁴⁷ The social and racial hierarchies of colonial Cuba is described in much greater detail in Chapter 4, as is the position of Irish immigrants within Cuban society of the 1830s and 1840s.

light and air; the roof could be formed of one inch boards or the leaf of palm tree (Kruger 1835).⁴⁸

These overcrowded and unsanitary wooden bunkhouses operated more like prisons under the surveillance and control of contractors and armed militia. Workers lived in very close quarters with the foremen responsible for securing food rations, clothing and alcohol. Absolute dependence on the contractor for their basic subsistence needs very often kept workers from deserting the job, even in the most intolerable conditions. Much of the early work on the railroad was experimental and dangerous. Safety precautions were costly and therefore minimal and many accidents occurred due to inexperience and sometimes intoxication.⁴⁹ Workers in England were paid once in nine weeks and in a public house; they were paid with paper tickets, provisions tickets and beer tickets to purchase their subsistence needs at elevated prices in the encampments. An 1847 report on railroad workers in Manchester accused the contractors of plundering their labourers by a system of truck, in cold calculation by the directors and contractors. The sub-contractors were accused of being responsible for accidents through their lack of skill and unwillingness to make the smallest outlay for greater safety. Many fatal accidents happened due to mismanagement and ignorance but very often deemed to be 'the man's own fault'.⁵⁰

On the Cuban railroad, after a sixteen-hour working day of back-breaking work with meagre rations, there was little possibility of social interaction. Shanty towns appeared out of which a temporary and multi-ethnic worker culture emerged, one which was socially fragmented in its alienation, powerless to change their conditions and threatening in its size and marginalisation. The colonial authorities consistently blamed the insubordination amongst the ranks of the immigrant camps on drunkenness and ethnic short-comings. Railroad workers relied on alcohol to blunt the edges of their unremitting degradation; it was a common feature in this type

⁴⁸ Alfred Kruger to the Railroad Commission, 16 August 1835, see ANC JF, 130-6390.

⁴⁹ Similar conditions in Manchester were described in a report in 1846, which described up to 900 or a 1000 men working on tunnelling, blasting, digging and casing the tunnel with masonry, under dangerous conditions and often under the influence of alcohol.

⁵⁰ Papers read before the Statistical Society of Manchester on the demoralisation and injuries occasioned by the want of proper regulations of labourers engaged in the construction & working of railways *Railway* (Hume Tracts 1847), 15-16. Accessed 4 October 2010, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/60209521>. See also: *Railway labourers and Labourers on Public Works: Report of the Select Committee, Bristol Selected Pamphlets*, 1847, 47. Accessed 4 October 2010, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/60241868>.

of labour control to supply alcohol which inevitably contributed to dependency and debt-bondage.

In keeping with the social hierarchy of Cuba at the time, the large influx of foreign labourers was defined, demarcated and disciplined, based on a colonial imaginary of race, ethnicity and class. This is vividly spelt out in the engineers' conferral of privilege based on social status, which was conceived to segregate the workers as follows:

[i]t will be necessary to specify distinctly in the contract the quantity and quality of food for the whites, whether hired labourers, prisoners or blacks, for which purpose it will be expedient to keep separate the different classes of labourers [...] and if this reason did not exist, I would strongly recommend that each colour and class be kept separate, for the white man is debased when compelled to work with the black, and the latter by his intimate association with the former, loses the respect he would otherwise entertain for the whites generally and becomes more difficult to govern [...] the same remark might apply to the prisoners and hired men and there is still a stronger reason in the last instance that a guard will be necessary for the prisoners and if they work conjointly with hired labourers the facilities for their escape are increased or to counterbalance it a larger force of soldiers must be sustained to ensure a corresponding degree of security. Another reason also would urge this separation that prisoners invariably require a rigorous treatment to obtain from them even an indifferent day's work and this example would create a similar habit among the rest (Kruger 1835).⁵¹

The differentiation of food supplies and the demarcation of labour based on race, and category of worker were linked, in Kruger's scheme, to disciplinary processes in the abstraction of labour.⁵² The different categories of contract-workers, convicts, and *emancipados* were all denied freedom of movement, confined to the camps under a military-style regime. Kruger's authoritative views on the need to preserve the status quo of racial and class division by means of differential food rations and segregated disciplinary practices, paid lip-service to the superiority of nominally free workers over slave labour, which was strongly symbolic in the discourse of social relations in

⁵¹ Kruger to the Railroad Commission, 1 September, 1835, see ANC JF, 130-6390.

a slave society. But what was really at stake in this careful management of racial and juridical categories was a well-founded fear of contagion of a common sense of injustice, spilling across colour lines and threatening the boundaries of race and class. White contract labourers, awarded petty privilege on paper at least, were undoubtedly at the top of this lowly labour hierarchy, but even they were in danger of contagion by what Kruger saw as the ‘indifference’ of the imprisoned, while at the same time representing a risk of contagion by liberty (albeit limited) to the unfree. In other words discipline, control and spatial segregation on the tracks of the railroad not only implemented colonial policy in safe-guarding the boundaries of race, equally such practices were designed to guard against the formation of horizontal relations and alliances across the ranks of a subaltern and multi-ethnic labour force.

The construction of each section of the railway was supervised by an assistant engineer whose duty was to ensure that the contractors completed their section of the line on time and within budget, as agreed with the Chief Engineer. The workers were disciplined under a military-style hierarchical system policed by private contractors who in the event of unrest, could rely on the added force of the military government (Martín Fadrugas 1998, 76). Prevented from seeking better pay and conditions elsewhere anyone who left the railroad, before their contract finished, was criminalised as a ‘deserter’. The *Junta de Fomento* was determined not to lose money through desertions or insubordination and the same military discipline was applied to prisoners, *emancipados* and contract workers. The assistant engineer answered to Kruger, at the pinnacle of a chain of command that ‘will be unhesitatingly obeyed’.⁵³ Keeping detailed accounts of the costs of construction and the value of labour extracted was paramount so that any shortfall could be recouped by stinting on food rations, delaying or withholding pay. At the end of every month the assistant engineer provided an account:

[o]f cubic yards of excavation and embankments completed by each contractor as well as the number of perches of masonry, of the wood, iron and stone delivered on each part of the Road, estimating it at the contract prices (where one exists), compare the returns of labour of the different superintendents for the month.⁵⁴

⁵³ Alfred Kruger to the Railroad Commission, 16 August 1835, see ANC JF, 130-6390.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Next in line to the assistant engineer was the Principal Superintendent who carried out daily inspections of the accounts of the superintendents to examine their ‘labour returns’. His orders were:

To keep a book in which will be recorded the actual number of men, horses, mules, oxen carts so engaged daily upon every portion of the work [...] with such remarks in relation to the mode of labour, treatment of men as shall appear to him necessary to the correction of any abuses [...] he shall examine the quantity and quality of food for both labourers and animals employed [...] examine the infirmaries, reporting the number of sick and the nature of their disease [...] and whether they should be removed or not.⁵⁵

Directly under the Principal Superintendent was the office of sub-superintendent who supervised the labour of between fifty and two hundred men ‘seeing that every man works properly and faithfully and attending also to the feeding and the care of the mules, oxen etc. and maintaining good order among the men during hours of repose’. Weekly returns of labour productivity, implements and explosives used were submitted to the engineer. The last line of control was the foreman who had under his supervision twenty-five to thirty workers (Ballol 1987, 95).

Cholera and Company Profits

Injury and mortality rates amongst the workforce were very high due to the appalling work conditions and the gruelling and dangerous, physical labour. Of course the promised medical attention fell far short of what was promised, and as portrayed in Turnbull’s account, ‘as soon as anyone fell sick or was maimed, as many of them were in the service, they were instantly paid off and left to their own resources or beggary’ (190). During the rainy season in 1836, there were two reported outbreaks of cholera in the encampments along the railway tracks, provoking such fear and panic that workers began to riot. Without the necessary preventative measures and proper medical attention, the disease spread rapidly. The railway company built wooden barracks as makeshift hospitals in Puentes Grandes and El Retiro and their official report on the outbreak glorified the ‘fine attention’ they provided for their

⁵⁵ Ibid.

workers, while lamenting the ‘extraordinary costs of medicines and aid to the workers’.⁵⁶

Records of deaths due to cholera are sketchy and we can only rely on estimates provided by the railroad company. Three hundred and forty enslaved workers died on the first stretch of the line and were buried in the parish of El Cerro, just outside the city walls.⁵⁷ The Railroad Commission wrote to the President of the *Junta de Fomento* in June 1836, at the start of the rainy season, announcing four cases of incurable cholera in La Portuguesa at the foot of the Castillo Del Principe. On account of the ‘thousands of inconveniences’ in carrying the corpses to the church, through populated areas, and the ‘formalities involved in burying emancipated slaves’, the commission looked for permission to open what was termed a ‘provisional cemetery’ beside the railroad encampments.⁵⁸ The Captain-General, Miguel Tacón was informed and promptly contacted the Archbishop, who gave his permission to bury without further delay, the railroad workers who died from cholera in unmarked and segregated graves beside their encampments. The next victim, in nearby Marianao, a week later, was a liberated slave named as Marcelino Carabalí, described as ‘no. 10 from the Goleta Vaquina’, apprenticed to the *Junta de Fomento*. Other burial sites were opened in Bejucal, Melena, Quivicán and Güines.⁵⁹ Moreno Friginals, assessing the grim death toll, poignantly concludes that, just like sugar, the Güines railroad ‘was made with blood’. There are no recorded deaths of Irish workers in the parish records of El Cerro or Bejucal, but Moreno Friginals estimates that ‘there were as many Canary Island and Irish dead as there were blacks – perhaps more, for dead Canary Islanders and Irishmen represented no loss of invested capital’ (Moreno Friginals 1976, 136). At most, they represented a short-term loss because of the scarce supply of cheap labour in Cuba, but the Railroad Commission could always fall back on slave labour.

The anonymity of the free labourer, as long as they did not come to the attention of the authorities, was ensured and even more so when burying victims of

⁵⁶ Railroad Commission to *Junta de Fomento*; see ANC JF, 78-3137.

⁵⁷ A search of the burial records in El Cerro and Bejucal produced no records of Irish names during this period. The parish priest and administrator of the parish records in Bejucal confirmed that the burial records of slaves from Mozambique working on this section of the line had been recently retrieved by officials of the Mozambican embassy.

⁵⁸ Railroad Commission to the *Junta de Fomento*, 23 June 1836, see ANC JF, 78-3137.

⁵⁹ See ANC JF, 39-1745.

cholera. There were no names recorded for the hundreds buried in unmarked, mass graves. The prospect of recouping any outstanding debts from their deceased workers was lost. However, in case the overseers were guilty of ‘with-holding information’ about workers fleeing the tracks in the ‘confusion and unrest’ in the days following the first outbreak of the illness, the Commission published the names of ‘deserters’ in the daily newspapers.⁶⁰ The Railroad Commission gave a full account of the costs incurred in burying the dead, quelling unrest and the losses arising from desertions. The report miserably complains that the total ‘does not include the extra costs of medicine and assistance and the considerable loss of labour during the epidemic and from those still convalescing’.⁶¹ The contractors bore the cost of the delays in completing their section of the line due to the devastation of cholera. A similar epidemic occurred on the Philadelphia railroad, on the stretch known as Duffy’s Cut, in which fifty-seven Irish lost their lives within six weeks of arriving in America.⁶² Fear turned to panic as was common with such epidemics. The workers fled the encampments looking for help, but they were turned away by people in the locality, afraid of catching the disease themselves. The workers were forced back to the railway camps to die. An account of a cholera outbreak amongst Irish workers on the Chesapeake and Ohio canal testifies that victims were left to die unattended (Watson 2006). It was reported that when cholera struck the camps on the Chesapeake and Ohio canal in 1832, the Irish fled north to Pennsylvania (70). It is highly likely that the Irish labourers who came from North America had already experienced the horrors of similar outbreaks of cholera and quite possibly survived by fleeing the locality. Military force was used in Cuba to stop any rioting and to prevent workers from running to escape the epidemic.

Disease was rampant in Havana, a city famous for its poor sewage, filth, and epidemics of yellow fever, small pox and cholera. In 1833, the first cholera epidemic claimed ten percent of the population in two months and decimated one fifth of the

⁶⁰Railroad Commission to the *Junta de Fomento*, 19 September 1836, see ANC JF, 78-3137.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² ‘The 57 men were forced back to their shanty in the valley, where the disease ravaged the camp. After the first fatal case, “fear changed to panic.” Such cholera-induced panic was common. With conflicting theories about the source and spread of cholera, its victims were often left to die alone and unattended. In the 1832 cholera outbreak among the Irish workers along Chesapeake and Ohio Canal in Washington County, there were similar instances of inhumanity’. William W. Watson, J. Francis Watson, *The Ghosts of Duffy’s Cut: the Irish Who Died Building America’s Most Dangerous Stretch of Railroad* (London: Praeger 2006), 71.

slave population in the Güines Valley plantations. In 1832, cholera had reached epidemic proportions in Quebec, upstate New York and several major European cities. Official announcements of the arrival of cholera and its subsequent ravages in New York, Paris and other European cities in the same year, were accompanied by disturbances and riots.⁶³ In Havana, angry mobs pelted stones at the house of a physician involved in a public health campaign which, the public had been naively assured, would prevent an outbreak of cholera. The high death rate from cholera made the already scarce supply of labour more critical for the planters. They ran out of capital and ruined their credit with the merchants and slave traders as they tried to fill what Turnbull described as ‘ [t]he extraordinary chasm produced by the ravages of cholera in the four successive years 1833, 1834, 1835, and 1836’ (Turnbull 2005, 85). The administration of public health during this period was managed by a centralised Superior Board of Health whose main responsibility was ‘to prevent the development of epidemics’.⁶⁴ As with all areas of administration some of the most powerful Creole planters and merchants exerted considerable influence on the Board. Consequently, even though the Board had wide powers covering sanitation and urban hygiene in the colony, ‘the scope of the prophylactic operations of the Board was largely determined by the socioeconomic priorities of the Creole elites’ (Denis Lopez 2007, 173). Reflecting the interests of liberal Creoles, advocates of free trade, there was a strong lobby against quarantine orders emanating from Madrid, because they were likely to restrict the movement of sugar exports and food imports through the port of Havana.

Representatives from the medical profession, the lowest ranking members on the Board, were asked to perform their patriotic duty free of charge by working at the port, disinfecting cargo landed in Havana (Denis Lopez 2007, 185). In the ensuing ‘battle over quarantine’, those in favour of prophylaxis were silenced by this manoeuvre, allowing lay members of the Board to argue convincingly against theories of contagion and quarantine. At the next meeting the Board unanimously decided that Havana was officially free of epidemics (193). A hopelessly inadequate ‘quarantine system’ was put in place at all Cuban ports. This would offer a cursory

⁶³ For a discussion of the relationship between popular violence, government intervention, and medical authority, see Adrian Denis Lopez, ‘Disease and Society in Colonial Cuba 1798-1840’, Ph.D. Thesis, University of California, Los Angeles (2007), Chapter 2.

examination of ships entering the port, ‘their cargo would be landed and “disinfected” very fast, and more importantly, they would be promptly loaded with Cuban sugar and coffee [...] offering a fast and cheap way to “clean” their vessels, if not for real, at least on paper’ (184). After a few months, operating a policy of disinformation and managing isolated cases of cholera without ‘alarming the public’, Havana officially shut down its quarantine system in January 1833. Three months later more than 8,000 people, almost 10% of the population of Havana had died. Officials were accused of negligence, showing equal disregard for human life and the public interest, and they were blamed for failing to prevent the epidemic. Article nine of the Superior Board’s legal code stated that: ‘All sanitary infractions will be irrevocably punished with the utmost rigor, depending on their seriousness and the damage they inflict on the society as a whole’ (174). Its implementation appears to have been lax when it came to the damage inflicted on the labour force employed by the Railroad Commission and the *Junta de Fomento*. The weight of responsibility for sanitary refractions appears by now to have fallen on the individuals at risk, rendering labourers, who survived the contagion of cholera by fleeing, guilty of the crime of desertion.

Desertion and Destitution

In the management and control of labour in Cuba, physical force and brutality were permitted in the slave code to increase the productivity of slaves. Contract workers were subjected to daily moral and physical degradation but as far as the records reveal, there is no evidence to suggest that they were subjected to the overseer’s lash on a routine basis. In the case of workers living on the edge of survival, the contractors used starvation and debt as leverage to coerce productivity and discipline. Incentives to productivity worked their way down the chain of command in a hierarchy of coercion. When there were delays in agreed schedules for different sections of the railway line, due to loss of labour through illness, worker insubordination or financial miscalculations, penalties were imposed on the contractors. When they found themselves in debt to the company and unable to pay their workers or the suppliers of food rations contractors often chose to flee the camp rather than face their workers without the means to pay them. Bound by their

⁶⁴ For detail on the workings, the organisation and membership of the Superior Board of

contracts to the *Junta de Fomento*, angry labourers were forced to continue working while starving.

Unprotected and without rights, breaches of contractual obligations by the agents responsible for their welfare meant that workers were confined under conditions which became so intolerable as to threaten their very survival. Without money to buy food the labourers protested and downed tools, demanding what was owed to them. The coercions of the contract and the threat of penal sanction ceased to compel a now desperate and angry mob to submit. Within weeks of their arrival violent riots broke out amongst the Irish, who armed themselves with knives and sticks. As early as 16 December 1835, rebellion by striking workers was dealt with by the full force of the military government. Moreno Friginals suggests that because the Irish and Canary Islanders represented an almost a fifty-percent saving, the company was prepared to go to any lengths to prevent them from leaving the job for better-paid work (Moreno Friginals 1976, 135).⁶⁵ In no uncertain terms, Kruger laid all the blame for unrest and social disorder on the ‘in subordinate’ and ‘drunken’ *irlandeses* from the United States. In a report to the Railway Commission he wrote:

Those who are not satisfied with the terms of their contracts and wish to leave the service of this government, are at liberty to do so if they have paid all their debts in relation to their passage and accommodation, and they must leave the island within three days [...] and [after three days] they will be treated with all the rigor of the vagrancy laws of the country [...] however much the engineers need the services of those workers imported from the north, under no circumstances will they be allowed to work constantly in a drunken state, in subordinate and disobeying the overseers; neither will their requests for more pay be tolerated [...] anyone unhappy with their contracts can go back to the United States from where they came such a short time ago, and at their own expense (Kruger 1835).⁶⁶

Military law was enforced and anyone who deserted the railroad was accused of being a ‘runaway’, a crime which incurred imprisonment or execution (Moreno Friginals 1976, 134). The rule of the engineers was backed up by the rule of law,

Health (*Junta Superior de Sanidad*), see Denis Lopez (2007), 163-188.

⁶⁵ The standard Cuban wage was 12 to 25 pesos a month for unskilled labour. Moreno Friginals, *The Sugarmill*: (1976), 135.

⁶⁶ Kruger to the Railroad Commission, 1 September 1835, see ANC JF, 130-6390.

which restricted movement to such a degree that workers were forced to stay on the job despite deteriorating conditions. Military force was used to regain control of this large body of 'free' labour from the United States.

The liberty to leave, if dissatisfied with the conditions of the contract in Cuba, was set at a price no one could possibly pay. For anyone who freed themselves from debt-bondage by paying off the *Junta de Fomento* for the cost of coming to Cuba, the next step to freedom was just as precarious. Finding the cost of a passport and passage to New York, the equivalent of a few months' pay, something the workers considered they had a right to, could only be achieved by helping themselves to company property. As foreigners, they were not permitted to work anywhere else, and quickly fell into the category of criminal as defined by the immigration and vagrancy laws of the state, which held that any foreigner found wandering in the streets or countryside without permission from the authorities was liable to be thrown into prison. To avoid further reductions to the company's profits through loss of labour due to the imprisonment of their workers, the Railroad Commission provided the authorities with a list of the names of all the imported foreign workers, so that if apprehended they could be returned immediately to the railroad; this time without the ritual of contracts, as forced labour.⁶⁷ Those returned to the line had by now accumulated even greater debts with the addition of penalties imposed for desertion and the cost of their apprehension (Moyano Bazzani 1990).

On termination of their contracts the Irish, who were not entitled to repatriation, were dispensed with by the *Junta de Fomento* and many of them ended up in the poor-house or begging in the streets of Havana and in the countryside (Serrano 1973, 38). According to Turnbull's account, the number of vagrants and beggars on the streets of Havana 'has certainly no parallel in any other place in the West Indies'. After visiting different charitable institutions in the city, accompanied by his friend Richard Madden, he could say with a degree of confidence that 'a life of vagabond freedom would certainly be preferred, in such a climate, to the irksome regulations of a workhouse'. Beggars were arrested and 'sent by force to the *Casa de Beneficencia*', however admission later became a voluntary procedure (Turnbull 2005, 212). Some foreign migrants died in jail, others died in the streets waiting in

⁶⁷ The Railroad Commission to Captain-General, Miguel Tacón, see ANC JF, 130-6378.

the vain hope of a passage out of Cuba. The Irish workers also appealed for aid to the British Consul, David Tolmé, who Turnbull complements:

For doing all in his power to obtain justice for them at the hands of the local government but the only result of his interference was to obtain from the Captain-General Tacón, an offer to receive them at the prison of the Cabañas [...] but although their suffering must have been extreme, not a single individual accepted the offer, preferring without exception, the precarious resource of eleemosynary aid (191).

The British Consul wrote to the Foreign Office in London as follows:

I have endeavoured to render the outlay for the relief of British Subjects as moderate as possible: for many to whom I have refused money I have procured work and to others whom I did not consider entitled to public support I have been able to give private charity. On the whole I hope your lordship will think, viewing the immense influx of labourers of the lower classes, mostly Irish, who seldom thrive here that my expenditure on account of Government has been kept within the bounds of just economy (British Consul, Tolmé).⁶⁸

The *Junta de Fomento* washed its hands of any responsibility for those who became destitute having been, as they claimed, so well looked after during the time of their contracts:

The foreigners brought from New York [...] have no right in their contract (which they freely signed) to have the cost of their return paid by the Junta de Fomento. If they have finished their contract in the stipulated time or are fired and don't have the resources to pay their return or if they say they can't pay (something which can't be proved except by their own word) for this reason it is rare that the money will be provided out of the limited funds of public works (*Junta de Fomento* 1836).⁶⁹

Only three months into the contracts, the American Consul dealt with petitions for aid from 'a number of unhappy workers, Americans, Irish and German' who were destitute and could not afford the five pesos for a passport to return to the United States. He wrote to the office of the Captain-General, Miguel Tacón: 'on the subject of certain Irishmen discharged from the work of the railroad one of whom has died

⁶⁸ Correspondence of the British Consul to Foreign Office, 27 July 1838, in The National Archives, Foreign Office, hereafter (TNA FO), see TNA FO, 72/513.

⁶⁹ The *Junta de Fomento* to the Captain-General, 5 July 1836, see ANC JF, 130-6378.

and the rest are threatened with the same fate, owing to their present state of destitution and abandonment'. Another English man, George Webster, was thrown off the railroad declared to be suffering from 'mental derangement'. He was later arrested, ending up in prison with others from the railroad, guilty of wandering undocumented in the streets; they were charged with vagrancy. Webster, who spent three months in prison, pleaded to be set free to find a ship that would take him to England.⁷⁰ A letter written on behalf of a group of twelve workers, in possession of documents to say they had paid their debts and were free to leave, pleaded with Tacón to put them on a boat back to where they came from, 'having worked so hard they are left with nothing to buy food or lodgings until they can find a boat to take them'.⁷¹ The American Consul wrote to Tacón, saying that 'Scarcely a day passed without one or more of these miserable people presenting themselves to this consulate, which is no way authorized to afford relief to any class of persons excepting only mariners of the US'.

The Consul intervened in more than one case:

Yesterday I sent off by the brig Sarah to New Orleans, a poor woman who with two young children had accompanied her husband from NY. She was utterly destitute; and to pay her debts to the people who had received her and her children in their house, and her passage to New Orleans I was obliged to advance out of my own pocket the sum of sixty dollars, not one *real* of which will ever be repaid to me. Today another woman has presented herself in the same situation; and as I do not possess an inexhaustible purse I was under the necessity of telling her that I cannot afford any further assistance to that class of people (American Consul, Nicholas Trist 1836).⁷²

He berated the *Junta de Fomento* for allowing this 'class of person' to desert, as '[t]hey will fill the jails with navies [sic] whose only crime was to trust those who lured them to Cuba with promises they had no intentions of fulfilling'. Trist appealed to the Captain-General in February 1836 to do something about the situation, highlighting,

⁷⁰ George Webster to the Captain-General, 17 February 1836, see ANC JF, 130-6378.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* This letter, written on 17 May 1836, is signed by Henry Krone, Thomas Dwyer, William Wallace, Edward Gallagher, John Byrnes, Alex Mc Donald, Michael Ward, Patrick Ward, James Henry, James Duggan, John Mornington, Thomas Burns, William McCloud, and Richard M Johnson.

⁷² Nicholas Trist to Miguel Tacón, 16 May 1836, see ANC JF, 130-6378.

‘the consequences which would inevitably arise from the want of some regulations whereby persons importing white labourers to be employed on the railroad should be required to provide against their becoming destitute vagabonds [...]’.⁷³

The only possible remedy, according to the Consul, was first and foremost that the right to repatriation must be included in the contracts, and secondly, the authorities should engage in strict regulation and monitoring of the movement of foreign workers. He wrote as follows to the Cuban authorities:

The Superior Authority should oblige the persons charged with providing labourers for the railroad to be responsible for the transportation out of the island as every foreigner whom they may attract hither or take into their employ after his arrival here, as soon as such foreigners may be discharged from paid work or may leave it. If the conductors of the works of the railroad were required to furnish to the proper secretary at the end of every month a list of all the foreigners imported by them, or taken into their employ during that month, and at the end of every week, a list of every foreigner who had been discharged or who had absented himself from said works during that week; and if they were further required to take the proper steps for sending every such person out of the island - this growing evil would be put a stop to. Without some such regulation it appears to me that it must increase every day’ (Nicholas Trist).⁷⁴

Eventually, as Turnbull described it,

the evil became so great, and lasted so long, that the British Consul at New York, Mr. Buchanan, at the suggestion [...] of Mr. Tolmé, found means to warn his countrymen of the great dangers to which they would expose themselves, by engaging in an enterprise conducted on such cold-blooded and iniquitous principles (Turnbull 2005, 191).

The Canary Islanders, who arrived six months after the Irish labourers, were equally degraded by their conditions. The food rations were so bad that in February 1837, they protested by presenting the local mayor in Bejucal with their daily fare said to consist of ‘a box full of raw plantains, sweet potatoes, and twenty-three bits of bone, all stripped clean, all of a blackish colour and so disgusting looking that

⁷³ Nicholas Trist to Miguel Tacón, 24 February 1836, see ANC JF, 130-6378.

⁷⁴ Nicholas Trist to *Junta de Fomento*, 16 May 1836, see ANC JF, 130-6378.

eating them as rations was impossible'.⁷⁵ The *Junta de Fomento* dismissed the protest by the *isleños*, saying:

This is the first complaint we have received in ten months [...] we have increased their wages from 9 to 13 pesos a month. They get the same accommodation, help when sick and the same rations as the prisoners working on the railroad and they [the prisoners] are to be envied judging by the lack of complaint, their state of health and sense of wellbeing and contentment.⁷⁶

The protesters ended up in prison before being forced back to work. They also deserted their contracts in large numbers; being Spanish speakers and having some semblance of family and social networks they had the risky possibility of escape (Zanetti and Garcia 1987, 117). The *Junta de Fomento* complained to the Captain-General that 'the Canary Islanders are known for their propensity to desert trying to get work elsewhere. They don't respect the contract they signed up to, to get here'.⁷⁷ The *Junta* persuaded the authorities to use any punishment they saw fit to prevent desertion from the railroad works. They published notices in the daily newspapers warning 'that it was forbidden to persuade or help any Canary islanders to desert' and severe penalties would be imposed on anyone caught helping or giving refuge to railroad deserters (Zanetti and Garcia 1987, 29). Count Villanueva, the director of the Railroad Commission, ordered deserters returned to the line to be shackled and chained for two months (Serrano 1973, 36). The earnings of those who survived were absorbed in repayments for passage, passports, the contractor's expenses and monthly medical fees and debts incurred as penalties. Moreno Friginals estimates that after all these deductions were made the workers from the Canary Islands were left with a total of between twelve and eighteen pesos cash after one year's work (135). By the end of the year, out of a total of nine hundred and twenty-seven islanders, only seven remained. A total of six hundred and twenty-seven finished their contracts and found other work far away from the railroad. One hundred and fifty-six died, one hundred and fourteen of those in a cholera epidemic (Fariña González 2000, 2117).

⁷⁵ ANC JF, 8-550.

⁷⁶ Junta de Fomento to Miguel Tacón, 13 October 1836, ANC Fondo Real Consulado (RC), in ANC RC, Caja 8-528.

⁷⁷ *Ibíd.*

No exact figures have been found for the Irish contingent during the first year of the contracts. However the following figures presented by the Railroad Commission suggest that the greatest number arriving at any one time came from the United States during the first four months of construction and began to diminish somewhat in numbers with the arrival of the Canary Islanders in April 1836. The information presented by the Railroad Commission unfortunately does not give a breakdown of Irish and Canary Islanders; nonetheless the figures in the table below give an idea of the combined numbers from the United States and the Canary Islands.

Figure 4: Number of Railroad Workers between November 1835 and May 1837.

Year	Months	Workers
1835	November	557
1835	December	1,066
1836	January	1,368
1836	February	1,312
1836	March	967
1836	April	907
1837	May	981

Sources: Archivos Históricos Nacionales, AHN Ultramar, Fomento, Legajo 37, Caja 1. Cuadro del camino de hierro de La Habana-Güines, 30 June 1837 provides the figures for the number of workers employed up to 31 May 1836, on the construction of the first seventeen miles of railway track between La Habana and Rincón ;also see Moyano Bazzani, *La Nueva Frontera* (1991), 108

The first thirty-nine miles of railroad between Havana and Bejucal was opened to traffic (two trains a day, one for freight and one for passengers) in November 1837, and the next section to Güines was completed in 1839, almost three years ahead of schedule (Zanetti and Garcia 1987). On 19 November the opening of the railroad was celebrated with a gala ball ‘in the spacious station-house at Güines [...] with all that disregard of expense’, funded by the larger contractors who, according to Turnbull, ‘are supposed to have realized more than ordinary profits by the undertaking’ (Turnbull 2005, 187). The cost of wages paid to different groups of labour, published by the Junta de Fomento, and up to the opening of the railroad represented twenty-one percent of the total cost of construction, in which they

estimate a total of 53,471 pesos paid to *los irlandeses* and 48,600 to the Canary Islanders

Figure 5: Labour Costs of Transport, Wages and Food Rations (1835-37)

Transport Wages & Rations	Costs
Irlandeses	53.471 pesos
Isleños (Canarios)	48.600 pesos
Jornales (wages)	178.706 pesos
Raciones (rations)	144.687 pesos
Total	425.464 pesos

Sources: AHN, Ultramar, Fomento, 37-1745, in Berta Alfonso Ballol, *El Camino de Hierro de La Habana a Güines: Primer Ferrocarril de Iberoamérica*, (Madrid: Fundación de Los Ferrocarriles Españoles:1987), 87

The *Junta de Fomento* calculated the investment in contract labour taking into account the losses from desertions, death, and protests over this short period and concluded that slave labour was a more profitable option. This experiment in ‘free’ labour served to fill a demand for labour to begin construction. However, it did not fulfil the longer-term criteria for the mobilisation of a subordinate labour supply. The system of contract labour was an experiment in ‘free’ labour which served as a supplement to slave labour and as a metaphor for white colonisation.⁷⁸ When the most difficult section of the line was finally completed, the *Junta de Fomento* congratulated itself, in a report in the daily newspaper *Diario de La Habana*, for their clever exploitation of labour. Despite claims of near financial ruin, due to the rigors of the climate and what was described as

the bad selection of workers, [it] added to the white population and it secured the construction of the biggest and most difficult public work this island has undertaken in its novelty and distance of seventeen leagues and the work of fifteen hundred men.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Irish participation in different ‘white colonisation’ schemes in the 1820s is discussed in Chapter 4.

⁷⁹ *Diario de La Habana*, 31 July 1837, see copy in ANC JF, 130-6383.

After the opening of the Havana-Güines railroad, construction was taken over by private railroad conglomerates and they reverted to the system they found most profitable, that of slave labour and ‘*emancipados*’ who were contracted out for a number of years, ‘the idea being to “civilise” them, after which they were freed’ (Knight 1970, 34).

After a large slave revolt on the Sabanilla line near Matanzas in 1843, railroad companies became wary of using gangs of slave workers and they tried once again to encourage white-labour migration from Spain. In what was described as a ‘quest for uneducated peasants with a history of docility and stoicism’ the railroad in Cárdenas commissioned a Havana merchant to contract forty labourers between the ages of twenty and forty years of age, single and from the interior of the Spanish province of Galicia (Bergad 1990, 247). Galician wage-labourers were contracted for three years on a wage of ten pesos a month plus a five peso food allowance. The company deducted four pesos a month, to be held back, and returned in a lump sum of thirty-six pesos to each worker who finished the three year contract. They also took to the streets to protest over working hours, food and living conditions. Military troops were brought in to quell unrest and disturbances (Zanetti and Garcia, 1987). The coercive nature of the contract system and the conditions of work, climate and food did not augur well with Irish, Galician or Canarian workers, all of whom protested in different ways. Attempts by the colonial authorities to stimulate immigration, as a means to increase the white population, while also addressing a scarcity of labour, operated at cross-purposes. Having managed their plantations with slave labour for so long little had changed in their sense of ownership of labour and their sense of entitlement to control the bodies of workers. The tradition of coercion and abuse of labour and whether slave or free continued up to and beyond emancipation in a long and disorderly transition from slave labour to ‘free’ wage-labour.

The first Cuban railroad, as Zanetti points out, was a government owned and administered enterprise. The slow and complex administration by the colonial authorities soon gave way to pressure from plantation owners, ready to invest in further extensions of the line, and permission was granted by royal *cedula* in 1839 to sell the railroad to private companies. Bids by rival corporations, representing members of the Cuban aristocracy and the sugar oligarchy, pushed up the stakes. The

final decision, made in Madrid in 1841, stipulated that no foreigners could have a stake in the ownership of the railroad, which was eventually won at auction by the Cuban Railway Company, made up predominantly of sugar planters. Over the next fifty years different railroad companies petitioned the *Junta de Fomento* to build railway lines which would link their members' plantations with the port of Havana. By reducing transportation costs they were able to increase sugar production. Throughout the 1840s, the last decade of the sugar boom, private companies sold shares and invested huge fortunes building up to fifty miles of track a year, in the lay-out of a railway system, which exclusively served the private interests of Cuban planters (Zanetti and Garcia, 57). As for the labour force, Zanetti points out that the use of wage-labourers could not succeed in a slave system where ‘

White journeymen – particularly the Canary Islanders, who faced no cultural differences – could easily find other ways to make a living often abandoning work they found too difficult or work that had been traditionally assigned to slaves (29).

The white waged workforce, decimated by epidemics and desertions, was quickly replaced by thousands of Asian labourers and new forced labour from Africa who suffered the same if not worse conditions and for longer periods of bondage. Though imported wage-labour was expensive, ‘it continued throughout the period as a recurrent expense item’ (Knight 1970, 32). Irish and other European workers continued to arrive in their hundreds right up to mid-century. In 1858 various annual reports for four of the major railway companies give figures for foreign white labour employed on the railroad in which the greatest number was Irish. One hundred and twenty-four of the foreign workers returned to the United States and two hundred and thirty-one died in Cuba.

Figure 6. Foreign White Labour Employed on Railroad 1858

Company	Irish	English	USA	German	French	Total
Güines- Matanzas	319	36	5	54	15	429
Havana	146	-	15	9	-	170
Regla- Matanzas	28	1	1	3	-	33
Sabanilla- Maroto	70	-	-	-	-	170
Total	663	37	21	66	15	802

Source: Annual Reports of Cuban Railway Companies in ANC JF 39-46, taken from Franklin Knight *Slave Society in Cuba during the Nineteenth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), 32. There is an error in this table on the last row giving figures for the Sabanilla-Moroto railway company. The number of Irish in column 1 is 70 and the total in column 6 inflates the figure to 170

Skilled Worker ‘Elite’

The difference between skilled and unskilled labour and the possibility of upward mobility within the organisational structure of the railroad workforce had the potential to disrupt class solidarity amongst immigrant labourers. Of those who stayed on, some became overseers or moved into more skilled and better-paid positions. Some became sub-contractors supplying crews from those who had finished their contracts but continued working for the railroad and others, like Daniel Goulding, became overseers of crews of rented slaves. The internal labour market in Cuba was hardly sufficient for the country’s developing needs and the introduction of steam engines, through the expansion of the railroad and increased mechanization of the sugar mills, created a new demand for skilled mechanics (*maquinistas*) to operate and maintain the machinery. The *Sociedad Económica*⁸⁰ recommended in 1840 that ‘every mill, every steam boat and every train locomotive has to have with it an intelligent foreigner to direct and inspect the engine’ (Knight 1970, 32-34). When planters purchased new machines the contract often included a skilled mechanic to travel with it, to supervise the installation (Bergad 1990). Each sugar

plantation employed one, if not two mechanics to maintain the mill engine in good working order throughout the harvest season. Many of these mechanics migrated to Cuba on a seasonal basis. As Richard Dana described it,

they leave home in the autumn, engage themselves for the sugar season, put the machinery in order, work it for the four or five months of its operation, clean it, and put it in order for lying by, and return to the United States for the spring.⁸¹

Writing of his travels to Cuba in 1850, Dana described the engineer in one plantation he visited, as ‘one of a numerous class, who the sugar culture brings to Cuba annually’ (Dana 1859, 129-30).

Research by Jonathan Curry-Machado on engineering migrants from the British Isles describes the trajectory of English, Irish and Scottish mechanics that came from Britain, where the number of people employed in engineering workshops had almost doubled by the mid-nineteen hundreds. He demonstrates that the opportunities for mechanics in a country like Cuba were much greater in the sense that ‘they were presented with the chance to move on from being simple installers and operators of machinery, to become agents for planters and engineering companies, owners of workshops, even inventors in their own right’ (Curry-Machado 2003, 139). Few mechanics travelled directly from British ports to Cuba, and most came through the United States where they were considered some of the most experienced in operating new machines (116). The circuit which existed between engineering workshops and foundries in New York, New Orleans and Cuba was travelled by skilled mechanics from the British Isles throughout the nineteenth century. Daniel Downing, a native of County Waterford, came to work as a mechanic on a plantation in Cardenas, from a foundry in New York where he worked with Robert Hiton, from Liverpool.⁸² Turnbull recounts visiting an estate in Bejucal, called La Pita where he came across the first steam engine he had seen in his travels throughout Cuba. The engineer, a native of Belfast, after working for a few years in the United States had come to the island with his two brothers and all three of them were working as machine operators

⁸⁰ See introduction for a description of this colonial institution which dealt with all aspects of the sugar industry.

⁸¹ Richard Henry Dana, *To Cuba and Back: A Vacation Voyage* (Ticknor and Fields: Boston, 1859), 129.

⁸² Both come to the attention of the colonial authorities in 1844, accused of participating in the Escalera slave conspiracy. See Chapter 5.

on sugar estates (287). He earned one hundred and thirty-six dollars a month in 1844 and ‘had good prospects of getting some orders for machinery which would have put a considerable sum of money in my possession’.⁸³ When Kruger decided to import locomotives from the United States in 1838, he had no difficulty in recruiting mechanics to operate the train engines. Sugar planters used the connections of Henry Coit in New York, or they accompanied new machinery imported from Britain (Curry-Machado 2003).

Patrick Doherty, from the Inishowen peninsula in Donegal, was recruited in New Orleans in April 1841 to operate a train locomotive on the Havana-Güines railway line. One month later, the train he was driving crashed into a stationary freight train, near Bejucal, causing one fatality. He was arrested, accused of maliciously causing the collision, and thrown into prison to await trial. The incident caused a huge sensation, being the first fatal railroad accident in Cuba. Doherty spent two years in prison waiting for the trial and was banned from working as a train driver in Cuba.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, he stayed on in Cuba for thirty-six years, after which time he returned to Donegal with enough wealth to buy-out the local landowner in Tirhoran, County Donegal.⁸⁵ Patrick Doherty came from a large family who eked out an existence in the most northern part of Donegal, as tenant farmers on lands settled by English landowners; he left for New Orleans in the 1830s and returned to Ireland a wealthy man by the standards of the day. The story of Patrick Doherty spans the history of the introduction of railroad transportation in Cuba and demonstrates some of the risks and the onerous responsibilities of the mechanics operating this new technology. Because of the scarcity of mechanics in Cuba and the risks attached to the position, they were ‘highly paid, even pampered in comparison to other workers’ (Curry-Machado 2003, 139).⁸⁶

⁸³ Testimony by Daniel Downing, see TNA FO, 72-664.

⁸⁴ Testimony by Patrick Doherty in correspondence between David Turnbull, the office of the Captain-General of Cuba and the Foreign Office in London 1841-42 in TNA FO, 72-585. This case is discussed further in Chapter 5 in the context of anti-British sentiment in Cuba in the 1840s.

⁸⁵ Engraved on the tombstone of Patrick Doherty in Tirhoran graveyard on the Inishowen peninsula is that he spent thirty-six years in Cuba. Details of his return and a photograph of the tombstone were very kindly supplied in a personal communication from Patrick Doherty’s great-great grand-niece.

⁸⁶ For a detailed history of foreign *maquinistas* (mechanics) in nineteenth-century Cuba, see Curry-Machado (2003).

Irish Labourers and Railroad Historiography

On the centenary of the first railroad, Cuban anthropologist, Fernando Ortiz, described sugar as the ‘muse’ of the Cuban railroad and the sugar mills as the ‘viscera’ of the Cuban economy, in which the exploitation of human labour was ‘the most archaic and barbarous’ during the sugar boom of the eighteen twenties and thirties; but it reached ‘titanic’ proportions with the circulation of the railroad (Ortiz 1937, 167). Sugar and the railroad developed in tandem and created an insatiable appetite for labour. The railroad and the continued subjection of a cheap labour force provided the ‘key to the creation of a sugar empire’ dominated by British banks (168). Labourers associated with developments funded by British investment were British subjects, according to Ortiz, but he did not distinguish between those immigrants who were colonial subjects from Ireland (164). The thorny question of Irish identification with the British Empire became more significant at a later stage when Irish railroad and sugar mill workers were accused of participating in the *Escalera* conspiracy to end slavery in Cuba (see Chapter 5).

In yet another centenary commemoration of the gala opening of the railroad in honour of the Spanish Queen, Isabel II, the American historian Duvon Corbitt had little to say about those who laboured on the railroad, but he highlighted their importation as part of a strategy of white colonisation (Corbitt 1938). He elaborated on the promotion of white immigration to Cuba when he outlined the provision in the second Anglo-Spanish treaty of June 1835, which stipulated that the annual importation of slaves must be diminished and that of free labourers would be increased (Corbitt 1942).

Accounts written by Cuban scholars make brief references to Irish migrant workers and their contribution to labour history and working-class struggle. In one of the first monographs on the history of the railroad, Violetta Serrano chronicles the treatment of the railroad workers as a ‘bitter and shameful episode’ akin to slavery in which their fate was one of abject, drunken misery, dying of hunger and plagued by disease (Serrano 1973, 38). Manuel Moreno Fraginals, in his pioneering economic history of the sugar mill in Cuba, *The Sugarmill* (1976), presents an analysis of Irish migrant labour which draws on Thomas Carlyle’s 1839 racialised depictions of the Irish in Britain. Moreno Fraginals describes ‘Irishmen’ who came along with the

machinery and equipment for the railroad as constituting ‘the lowest and most miserable of the working class in Great Britain’. He traces the labourers’ trajectory as follows:

They had emigrated to British factory centres and became a morally and physically degraded lumpenproletariat. Carlyle describes how they lived in filthy hovels, sleeping on straw and old rags, throwing their excrement out the door, raising pigs under the same roof and sometimes sleeping with them. In the first industrial phase of unrestricted exploitation the migrant mass from Ireland competed with English workers and lowered even further the “minimal human needs” of factory personnel. Psychologically, drink was an important element in the lives of these people. As the cheapest workers available in Europe who knew enough to lay rails, they were brought to Cuba by the contractors to be submitted to a slavery similar to the Negro’s. When their contracts ran out they became human scrap; they were often found dying in the Havana streets (Moreno Fraginals, 135).

Furthermore, on reading Engels’ ‘pitiful descriptions of the Irish in Great Britain, as the ‘white slaves’ of England, Moreno Fraginals reluctantly concedes that the potent argument of the ‘barbarous exploitation of wage-workers by the English’ as a defence of slavery may have had some merit (132). In a similar analysis, Zanetti and Garcia describe the Irish as ‘old victims of another “slavery”, that of wage-labour, hardened drunks and turbulent individuals’ (Zanetti and Garcia 1987, 117). Moreno Fraginals provides the most extensive account of the Irish railroad workers, but relying as he does on Carlyle’s descriptive trope, he perpetuates a received version written more than a hundred years earlier. Carlyle’s racialisation of the Irish is worth quoting here:

Crowds of miserable Irish darken all our towns. The wild Milesian features, looking false ingenuity, restlessness, unreason, misery and mockery, salute you on all highways and byways. [...] he is the sorest evil this country has to strive with. In his rags and laughing savagery, he is to undertake all work that can be done by mere strength of hand and back; for wages that will purchase him potatoes. He needs only salt for condiment; he lodges to his mind in any pighutch or doghutch, roots in outhouses; [...]

the Saxon man [...] may be ignorant; but he has not sunk from decent manhood to squalid apehood (Thomas Carlyle, 1842).⁸⁷

Carlyle's anti-Irish prejudice employed potent images of poverty, filth, degeneracy and general turbulence served as markers of racial difference and provided grist to the cultural mill of colonialism.⁸⁸ Engels wrote of the million or so 'impoverished population of Ireland' who had nothing to lose by coming to England, as having 'grown up almost without civilisation [...] rough, intemperate, and improvident [...] (Engels 1987, 123).⁸⁹ More recent scholarship challenges such depictions by Victorian radicals as a racialisation of Irishness, which also served to disrupt class alliances by Irish labourers with their British counterparts through the construction of an imagined imperial racial unity (Martin 2005, 205). In industrial Britain at the time Irish immigrants were seen as driving down wages and 'cast in the role of reactionary scab labour against the English working class' (Gibbons 2004, 62). The cultural baggage attributed to Irish labourers in Cuba was pressed into service for different reasons; colonial authorities marked them out as unfit for the disciplines of industrial labour but, in contrast to England, they were accused of driving wages upwards.

A more recent publication by the Spanish Railroad Foundation commemorating one-hundred and fifty years of the Cuban railroad contains the most detailed account of the conditions of Irish railroad workers, referencing the many records concerning them contained in the National Archives in Havana and Madrid. In this account Ballol remarks on the negative characterisation of the Irish in the documentation he consults, and comments on the smugness of the Railroad Commission when it finally divested itself of their services (Ballol 1987, 82). The

⁸⁷ Thomas Carlyle, *Chartism* (1842) cited in Amy E. Martin "'Becoming a Race Apart': Representing Irish Racial Difference and the British Working Class in Victorian Britain' in *Was Ireland a Colony?* (2005), 200.

⁸⁸ Irish labour and the formation of working class consciousness in industrial Britain and the United States is discussed in Chapter 4. For a more in-depth discussion of the racial stereotyping of Irish labour see Amy Martin (2005), op. cited; Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press 1996), see Chapter 12, 'Race Against Time: Racial Discourse and Irish History'; Gibbons, *Gaelic Gothic* (2004). For a wider discussion of colonial stereotyping and the Irish, see Richard Lebow, *White Britain and Black Ireland: The Influence of Stereotypes on Colonial Policy* (Philadelphia, PA: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1976) and Perry L. Curtis, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1997).

⁸⁹ Marx and Engels saw the bonds of empire as a great obstacle to the revolutionary potential of the British working class and saw the Irish as the catalyst in firing their latent radical potential.

importation of contract labour from the United States was the first experiment in cheap wage-labour and on procuring a significantly cheaper version from the Canary Islands, the colonial authorities dispensed with this interim workforce as ‘turbulent, disease-ridden drunkards’. As it turned out, the risks to capital were just as great with contract workers from the Canary Islands and they too were replaced with yet cheaper indentured labour from China.

Contract labour, as a juridical entity within the wider Atlantic network of trade and labour, was well suited to the demands of public and private institutions. As a solution to the abolition of the trade in slaves, the system of contract created incentives for the mobilisation of thousands of labourers from countries where sections of the population had been forced off the land, to regions where labour was needed (Fariña González 2000). Ireland, despite having a large supply of surplus labour in the early nineteenth century, did not become a source of trade in contract labour, in the same way as Mauritius, India or China, in the aftermath of slave emancipation. However, there were episodes of Irish migration in the form of ‘voluntary’ contracts, in exchange for transport costs, to Jamaica, Panama and Brazil during the nineteenth century. The trajectory of Irish migration on the British and Iberian circuits of colonial labour will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3. In Cuba, where the colonial authorities and slave owners were under scrutiny for the illegal trade in slaves, they found a temporary replacement in the system of contract which facilitated the coercion and exploitation of workers euphemistically described as ‘free’ labour.

The End of the ‘Free’ Labour Experiment

The strategies of control, used to confine and isolate Irish railroad workers and bind them to their contracts, proved ineffective. The Irish were intractable in their protest against such extreme coercion. The authorities quickly resorted to using military force but this did not succeed in quelling revolts and protests by the railroad workers who found themselves caught in a violent struggle between labour and the forces of capital. Those who deserted ‘filled the prison’ or became ‘vagabonds’ wandering in the countryside and in the streets of the capital. From the perspective of slave-

This is discussed further in Chapter 5 in relation to the question of Irish resistance to the discipline of capitalism.

owning elites, with a sense of ownership of labour power the threat posed by insubordination to the social order of the colony and the logic of capitalism was perceived as too great a risk.⁹⁰ As for the welfare of the wage-workers, the *Junta de Fomento* dispensed with any responsibilities for the social or physical protection of the workers.

When the control they exerted failed to subordinate the work-force the authorities quickly looked for solutions which hinged on hierarchies of race, disposition and work ethic. In the colonial scheme of things the designation of *irlandeses* was no longer adequate due to what was construed as a ‘disinclination to work’ with the characteristic ‘indolence and insolence’ of an inferior class (Stoler 2002, 165). As members of a ‘free’ and white labouring class they were described as follows:

We thought of them as our first exercise in increasing the white population [...] even though as “free labour” we exceeded their contracts, providing the necessities of their accommodation, increased their pay and provided assistance when they were sick; but the incredible drunkenness of the majority of these miserable wretches (*la intemperancia increíbles de la mayor parte de esos desgraciados*), [...] those who would abandon the job without permission end up roaming the countryside and towns, they are caught by police and brought back to their posts [...] doubtless, as predicted by the American Consul, many of these will suffer and perish, no matter how they are treated or whatever country they are in; wherever else they bring their excesses they take the same risk of not being recompensed for their work.⁹¹

Consternation and contempt by the *Junta de Fomento* illustrates the way in which their narrow idea of ‘free’ labour equated more with new forms of coercion, whereas the workers, who were not new to the coercions of industrial wage-labour demonstrated by their resistance a working-class consciousness informed by a more enlightened meaning of freedom. In June 1836 the *Junta de Fomento* defended its refusal to repatriate the Irish and in a parting shot said:

‘they sent us what is known in the north as old soldiers, disease-ridden incorrigible drunkards (*soldados viejos ebrios incorregibles de costumbres pesimas, llenos de*

⁹⁰ The response and forms of resistance by recalcitrant Irish workers in Cuba is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, in the context of Atlantic circuits of colonial labour and alliances formed between transnational migrants of different ethnic origins.

enfermedades) [...] they deceived their bosses by disguising their vile habits and uncontrollable character (*character indómito*) at the time of their contracts [...] At the start they worked with some vigour after they were given the cheapest quality liquor [...] which made them abandon their work to indulge in a continuous orgy (*Al principio, trabajaron con algún vigor después el ínfimo precio a que le proveían de bebidas fermentadas [y la necesidad que pronto conocieran en que estábamos de sufrirlas], los indujo a desmayar en las tareas y a entregarse a continúas bacanales*)'.⁹²

In contrast to the moral critique by the *Junta de Fomento*, the Railroad Commission put forward an economic motive for the rejection of Irish workers in favour of a new wave of what turned out to be significantly cheaper labour from the Canary Islands:

Henceforth they [Canary Islanders] could prove to be the most economic of workers, now that the company has liberated itself from the high daily wage paid to the Irish [...] despite the extraordinary attention necessary to manage them and the high cost of their labour – without them it would not have been possible to begin the railroad. It was a clever move to bring them here.⁹³

Looking to the example of the British West Indies, the next experiment in cheap expendable workers looked outside the continents of Africa, Europe and the Americas to the latest traffic in labour from the Asian continent. Cuban planters enthusiastically embraced the trade in Chinese indentured labour as yet another solution to providing an economically viable substitute for slave labour. It cost no more than six hundred pesos to buy the labour of a Chinese person contracted for eight years. In 1847, Chinese workers, much cheaper than rented slaves or wage-labour, were paid an absurdly low monthly rate of four pesos a month, which amounted to a saving of 70% in labour costs (Zanetti and Garcia, 122). One peso a month until the debt was paid was deducted for their passage from China. Chinese workers were also paid in food (fish, rice, yams) and clothing (two changes of clothes and one blanket a year). Even with accommodation and food included these rates were much lower than the average monthly wage for unskilled labour at the time which ranged between seventeen and twenty-five pesos a month (Bergad 1990). A clause in their contracts allowed for the sale of Chinese contracts adding legitimacy to the open trade in Chinese labourers that developed in parallel to the

⁹¹ *Junta de Fomento* to the American Consul, 15 March 1836, see ANC JF, 130-6378.

⁹² *Junta de Fomento* to Miguel Tacón, 3 June 1836, see ANC JF, 130-6378.

market in slave labour. In collaboration with the *Junta de Población Blanca* some of Cuba's most powerful elites, linked to the slave trade, began to substitute their illegal cargo of slaves for the legal importation of Chinese coolies. Between 1847 and 1873 over 120,000 Chinese indentured labourers (overwhelmingly male) landed in Cuba.⁹⁴ In the aftermath of the European contracts the Cuban *hacendados* developed what in legal terms became an intensive system of indenture, in which disciplinary measures were put in place to control and punish Chinese workers with the backing of government regulation in the 'handling and treatment of Asian colonists' (Hu-DeHart 2005, 171).

In what was a hardening of attitudes towards the substitution of slavery with 'free' labour, the conditions and regulation of the Chinese contracts were more carefully crafted, which according to the captain-general of Cuba 'would assure their subordination and discipline, without which they could hurt instead of benefit agriculture' (173). These new contracts included a clause which stated the Chinese workers 'renounce the exercise of all civil rights which are not compatible with the compliance of contract regulations' (173). The contract, imbued with an ideology of protecting property rights over human rights privileged once again the Cuban planters by transposing the right to ownership and control over the bodies of workers from the legal institution of slavery to a system of Chinese indenture. The Chinese were marginalised and alienated, locked up at night in wooden huts with no possibility of social interaction. They were inserted into the social and racial hierarchy of slavery in which they were despised by blacks and whites, and attributed with very different kinds of deviance to the Irish; 'vice', criminality, and opium smoking, with the added 'crime' of sexual deviance and homosexuality. The Chinese response is discussed in Chapter 5 in the context of resistance to the discipline and logic of incipient capitalism.

The international campaign to abolish slavery exerted huge pressure on Cuba's elites to find a substitute for slave labour. However their experiments with other forms of labour were desperate attempts to maintain the old structures of bondage and coercion after the trade in slaves was legally abolished in 1835. Even though

⁹³ *Diario de La Habana*, 4 June 1836.

⁹⁴ The Cuban census of 1868 counted 24,046 Chinese of which 58 were female (some possibly born in Cuba).

Chinese workers were an important component of the workforce on sugar plantations up to 1877, slaves continued to form the core of the labour force up until slavery was finally abolished. Their presence in such large numbers did little to change the fundamental structure of labour relations.⁹⁵ Despite the shrinking supply of slave labour and the inevitable changes on the horizon, the logic applied to labour by the planter elite remained entrenched in the system of chattel slavery, and an entitlement to control and dominate their property in labour and people. ‘Slavery governed the psychology of labor relations’ and the transition to free labour, however slow and gradual, did not easily change the mentality of planters who had prospered so much from the slave system (Bergad 1990, 259).

The harsh conditions and persistent coercion and control of the Irish contracts resembled the day-to-day working conditions of slavery but legally, their status stopped short of becoming some-one else’s property. Labour structures in Cuba’s incipient capitalist relations had not yet evolved in their laws or their attitudes to adapt to new forms of labour; they still governed their workers in the spirit of a slave code. The terms and conditions of contract labour granted no rights to the workers but the rights of the *Junta de Fomento* were paramount. The laws of the colony governing labour control and immigration were structured to protect the investment of the ruling class, with any risk or loss to capital borne by the contractors. Yet the labourers imported from the United States, seasoned proletarians with nothing to sell but their labour power, were subjected to the coercion of their contracts, and if breached, they incurred harsh punishments. The notion of mutual obligation or promise had not yet become part of the legal concept of a labour contract. The only party to the contract with a responsibility to fulfil the terms of the agreement was the worker and the arbiter was the full force of a military government. The failed promises and obligations of the *Junta* were treated with impunity and replaced in the historical record as ethnic short-comings of Irish labourers.

⁹⁵ For more detail on Chinese contract labour see Bergad (1990), Chapter 13, ‘Non-Slave Labor’. For a more extensive literature on Chinese immigrant labour in Cuba in the nineteenth century see Juan Pérez de la Riva, *El Barracón y Otros Ensayos* (Havana: Ciencias Sociales, 1975) and *Los Coolies Chinos en Cuba 1847-1880* (La Habana: Ciencias Sociales, 2000); Duvon C. Corbitt, *A Study of the Chinese in Cuba, 1847-1947* (Wilmore, Ky: Asbury College, 1971); Evelyn Hu-DeHart, ‘Opium and Social Control: Coolies on the Plantations of Peru and Cuba’, *Journal of Chinese Overseas*, 1:2, (November 2005): 169-183; Joseph C. Dorsey ‘Identity, Rebellion, and Social Justice among Chinese Contract Workers in Nineteenth-Century Cuba’, *Latin American Perspectives*, 31:3 (May, 2004): 18-47.

As Turnbull's commentary at the beginning of this chapter suggests, the movement of Irish migrants in the turbulent circuit of Atlantic labour networks was well established by the early decades of the nineteenth century. The trajectory of Irish migrant labour, shaped by the British Atlantic system of colonial labour, depended on the migration of colonised subjects for its labour supply (See Chapter 3). However, Turnbull, a strident abolitionist occupying the higher moral ground of free labour, offered no critical analysis of the connection between the abolition of slavery, British colonial policies in Ireland and the formation of a mobile, cheap and sinuous labour force. The Irish abolitionist and Superintendent of Liberated Africans in Cuba, Dr. Richard Robert Madden, travelled with Turnbull on the inaugural journey of the first train to Bejucal. A tireless champion of anti-slavery and liberation from colonial domination in Ireland, Madden's proposed solution to the problem of labour supply after emancipation in Jamaica was 'a well-conducted system of emigration [to] obtain sufficient number of free labourers from [...] the Canaries, Madeira and the Azores' (Madden 1849, xxii). This new 'system' of Irish emigrant labour in Cuba was far from 'well-conducted' but curiously, Madden made no mention of his compatriots, subjected to the brutal exploitations of 'free' wage-labour on the Cuban railroad. As a British colonial official, resident in Havana between 1835 and 1839, he could hardly have avoided the spectacle of 'upwards of a thousand' Irish workers. Nevertheless, his concerns about labour were confined to what he termed as the 'Americanisation' of Cuba, to which he attributed the drive of enterprise and energy in building the railroad, but the continuation and support of slavery in America and Cuba and the threat this posed to British imperial interests worried him more (156). Madden's silence on the exploitation of wage-labour was not unusual from an abolitionist perspective of the time, slow as it was to express moral outrage at other forms of labour, which were unashamedly coercive. His solidarity with oppressed African slaves took precedence over a critique of British colonial policies and the mobilisation of colonial labour, which impacted on British subjects whether they were indentured labourers from India, emancipated slaves in the West Indies or migrant Irish contract labour. Within the context of the early nineteenth-century colonial worlds of the British and Spanish Caribbean, the juxtaposition of slave labour and apprenticeship with indentured, contract and wage-labour is a more accurate representation of the reality of labour relations than any linear progression or

transition from unfreedom to freedom. The abolition of slavery in the West Indies in 1833, and the subsequent stepping up of Anglo-Spanish negotiations to end slavery in Cuba pressurised slave owners and colonial authorities to experiment with other forms of labour, which was more often ‘slavery by another name’.

Conclusion

Through an analysis of the records of the colonial institutions responsible for mobilising the railroad workforce, this chapter has described the circumstances of Irish contract labour on the construction of Cuba’s first railroad. A close reading of these documents has identified a network of recruitment in New York through an unexpected nexus of Irish-Cuban contact with the Spanish Consul, Francisco Stoughton, and Cuban priest, Felix Varela and a growing number of recently arrived Catholic Irish immigrants who congregated in New York. These connections mediated the move by poor migrant workers from Ireland to the Spanish colony of Cuba. The introduction of wage-labour, to bolster a scarcity of slave labour, was controlled through a system of contract, recommended by the American engineers as ideal for the protection of capital and the social order of the colony. What transpired was a highly coercive system of labour that resulted in a violent relationship between Irish wage workers and incipient capitalism. This account challenges the way in which the Irish railroad workers have been represented in Cuban historiography and presents an alternative view of a multi-ethnic context of modernising labour relations and advancing technology in which Irish labour resisted the exploitations of capital. The picture which emerges provides an insight into the logic of Cuba’s slave-holding elite who, with a very narrow idea of free labour, experimented with new forms of control by forcing labourers to work on the railroad through debt-bondage, criminalisation, and restricted mobility. It also draws attention to a triangle of exploitation and control by capitalist enterprise, colonial authorities and military force, in structuring new forms of unfree labour which were violent in the extreme. The disastrous outcome for many Irish labourers, who went from New York to Havana in 1835, with the hope of realising greater economic freedom, was destitution, imprisonment and premature death. What is clear from this account is that Irish migrant labour as a likely substitute for slavery in Cuba served more as a test of nominally ‘free’ labour at a crucial historical juncture in the debate about slavery versus free labour. Their contestation of the coercions of contract labour

made the experiment unworkable within the logic of slave production. Because of the workers' insistent resistance to this logic, the use of Irish migrant labour as a substitute for slavery in Cuba presented too great a risk to capital and a threat to the slave-dependent prosperity of the plantation elites.

Chapter 3: Colonialism, Migration and the Charms of Liberty

Introduction

If Ireland, with a population of seven million at the close of the eighteenth century, was remarkable for its surplus labour, Cuba, with a population of less than one million, was equally noteworthy in its dependence on imported labour. This chapter sets out to examine the historical trajectory of Irish transient labourers who were enticed to migrate on from the United States to a third country, in the Spanish Caribbean, in 1835. It also investigates why a small country like Cuba, one of the last remaining colonies in Spain's diminishing empire, became a destination for Irish labour. The dislocation of migrant labour from Ireland to Cuba is analysed within the context of its integration into the global enterprise of industrial capitalism. The building of the railroad and the advance of capitalist modernity in Cuba created a demand for labour that was dependent on processes of migration in the Atlantic world in which pre-capitalist and capitalist forces conspired to supply labour from Ireland, Africa and the Canary Islands. The linear narrative of a transition from slavery to free labour is questioned in light of this migratory arc, which followed a jagged contour between free and unfree labour relations as it moved between British and Iberian colonial systems. The chapter is divided into three sections dealing with colonialism, migration and labour. Section one begins with an examination of the different processes of colonialism in Ireland and Cuba which produced very different population dynamics affecting the reproduction and mobilisation of labour. Section two analyses Irish emigration in the context of colonisation strategies aimed at exporting excess or undesirable populations with the twin aim of meeting the demand for labour in the colonies. Beginning with a brief account of a diverse, but predominantly involuntary, seventeenth-century Irish migration to the British Caribbean, the section follows with an examination of pre-famine migration from Ireland to the United States and the transformation of a pre-capitalist workforce to a mobile proletariat. Moving as they did, within a changing and contradictory discourse of abolition and free labour, in section three I contend that the discourse of capitalist labour relations, particularly when applied to early nineteenth-century Cuba and Ireland masks the complexity of labour relations which were still

characterised to a large degree by coercion. The experiment, to substitute slave labour with cheap Irish labour, as documented in Chapter 2, demonstrates the incongruity of liberal ideas about free labour in the context of slavery in colonial Cuba. Within the context of Irish migration to Latin America and the Caribbean, this chapter will emphasise the way in which diverse colonial policies of labour, race and migration were applied in different colonial systems, to reproduce and dominate a cheap labour force. It also analyses the way in which ‘the practice of race’ (Wolfe 2011, 274) was used to position and control Irish migrant labour. The racial discourse of ‘whitening’ which was crucial to the labour agenda in Cuba will be discussed at length in Chapter 4. The labourer’s response to their conditions raises important questions about the movement and politicisation of Irish emigrants in the early industrial Atlantic economy which is discussed in Chapter 5.

Section One: Settler Colonialism in Ireland and Cuba

Historians of empire have divided overseas colonies into four different types, taking into account the diversity of the tropical zones in the Caribbean and the Americas: administrative, plantation, mixed settlement and pure settlement. The use of such a framework, albeit a crude one as Joe Cleary suggests, is productive in attempting to ‘distinguish the new and varied compositions of land, labour and capital (and the attendant class, racial and cultural relations) that have typically emerged and predominated in different colonial situations’(Cleary 2007, 32). This framework is employed here to examine the nexus of changing forms of labour control and patterns of migration, as they were shaped by Iberian and British colonial policies in Ireland and Cuba. It also serves as a structure for analysing the trajectory of this group of railroad workers as it shifts between colonial peripheries during an age of emancipation at a crucial juncture in the development of industrial capitalism. Already seasoned subjects of colonial modernity in Ireland, Irish migrants negotiated changing structures of race, class and freedom as they moved between different imperial powers.

In this particular migratory arc from Ireland to the Spanish Caribbean, Irish emigrants moved from a British colony of settlement to a Spanish settler-plantation colony still dependent on slavery. Focusing on these two types of colony provides a

useful schema from which to compare the position of mobile labour within a variety of colonial processes and their attendant forms and transformations of labour and social relations. Patrick Wolfe defines settler colonialism as principally a land-centred form of colonialism in which surplus value is extracted from land by means of a subordinated labour force made up of indigenous and/or an imported labour force of slaves, and indenture (Wolfe 2001). The hierarchy of race in terms of land ownership and wealth, according to Wolfe, was justified by a ‘Euroamerican colonial discourse’ based on John Locke’s philosophy that ‘private property accrued from the admixture of labour and land’, which in the Americas meant that ‘blacks provided the former and Indians the latter – the application of enslaved Black people’s labour to evacuated Indian land produced the White man’s property, a primitive accumulation if ever there was one’ (Wolfe 2011, 275). A society which is premised on the expropriation of native people’s land ‘requires that the people who provided it should never be allowed back’. While the problem for a society, ‘premiered on the exploitation of colonised labour requires the continuing reproduction of its human providers’ (272). The native Irish provided both the land and the continuing reproduction of labour, while Cuba, in contrast, quickly replaced forced native labour with imported slave labour to work the lands expropriated from the native peoples. The discourse of race, shaped by legislation, constrained the rights and liberty of the native Irish and enslaved labourers imported from Africa, laying the ground for practices of racial and cultural domination to be adapted and honed to the particular labour demands of different places, according to the demands of colonial capitalism. This brings to the fore a consideration of colonisation policies and colonial state structures which were predicated on contradictory liberal hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion. Race was a formative element of capitalist domination in the control of labour and its reproduction, and labour migration was crucial to the success of capital. Contextualisation of the positioning of Irish migrants within hierarchies of race and class in colonial Cuba provides a unique account of Irish migrant labour and its shifting relation to other categories of labour defined by race.¹ The conditions and inhibition to freedom experienced by the Irish railroad workers in Cuba represented for them a

¹ The position of Irish immigrants in Cuba in relation to colonial discourses of race and nation are discussed in Chapter 4.

backward step in the transatlantic march towards proletarianisation and modernity. So how did different colonial processes on the periphery of the British and Iberian empires conspire to ‘liberate’ or proletarianize Irish labour on the Atlantic networks in the early 1800s, only then to inhibit their freedom as contract labour in Cuba, already ‘beyond contradiction, the wealthiest and most flourishing colony possessed by any European power’?²

The competitive imperial drive to establish overseas colonies in the early modern period meant that Ireland and Cuba were incorporated roughly contemporaneously into an emergent Atlantic economy. By virtue of their location on the Atlantic rim, they became crucial political and military sites for competing European powers in the struggle for domination in the New World: Ireland in the struggle for control of the Atlantic, and Cuba, for control of the Caribbean Sea lanes and access to New World gold and silver. By the end of the fifteenth-century Spain, having displaced the native Guanches was already in control of the Canary archipelago, and had ousted the Moors from Granada and settled their lands, before undertaking a westward expansion to the Caribbean. The plantation of Ireland by English and Scottish settlers was also underway with legal, political and administrative institutions firmly under English control. England and Spain both had well ‘rehearsed’ models for further expropriation and plantation, and armed with more than a shared civilising discourse they transferred their colonising strategies to new territories in the Americas (Canny 1973). The connections and comparisons between different English colonising ventures and the overlap of people involved in Munster and Virginia have been explored by historians on both sides of the Atlantic.³ Comparisons of the different systems of representation in shaping colonial rule in Ireland and Spanish America have also been studied in a textual analysis

² Herman Merivale, the British political economist, lecturing on colonization and the colonies in Oxford, made this comment about Cuba in 1839; cited in Robert Paquette, *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of Escalera and the Conflict between Empires Over Slavery in Cuba* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University press, 1988) 29.

³ David Quinn stresses the connections between English colonisation in Ireland and sixteenth-century colonial activities in the Americas; Nicolas Canny further suggests that the ideology of and justification for colonisation in Ireland, as it hardened attitudes to the Gaelic Irish, was simply extended and mapped onto indigenous population of the New World and imported slaves. See Canny, Nicholas P. ‘The Ideology of English Colonisation: From Ireland to America’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 30

of foundational documents in the early modern period by figures such as Las Casas and Spenser (Carroll 2001, 23). European colonial enterprises dealt with the question of land and labour by imposing what they saw as the natural order of things, that is, the subjugation of inferior and alien peoples by a superior power. Moral justification for methods of colonisation derived from their civilising mission in which cultural inferiority, and with it freedom, would evolve only through subservience. At about the same time as the English reached this conclusion about the Irish, the Spanish saw the Indians in the same light (Canny 1973). One of Cromwell's closest advisers proposed in 1646 that 'the wild *Irish* and the *Indian* do not much differ, and therefore should be handled alike'.⁴ If not through subservience, then by a policy of extermination, using 'slash and burn tactics' equally justified in Ireland and the New World. From the earliest colonial encounter 'race and religion were intertwined' as heathen Indians and Popish Irish were vilified in the colonial imagination (Gibbons 2004, 10). Domination of colonised peoples was facilitated by an adaptable discourse of cultural imperialism which constructs the colony and its population as Other, uncivilised and therefore unable to self-govern (Said 1993).

The process of colonisation in Ireland and Cuba, not unlike that of the West Indies or the American colonies, was characterised by violent and accelerated transformation from pre-modern indigenous societies to mercantile capitalism and later industrial capitalism. Cuba's colonial formation shares the complex history of the Caribbean region with the virtual extinction of the native population and the introduction of forced labour from outside, on lands expropriated by European settlers for production in a globalised commodity market.⁵ As a colony settled by Spanish people, with an imported and enslaved work force, the dominant colonial relationship in

(October, 1973), 575-598. See also Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race: the Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* (London: Verso 1997).

⁴ Cited in Luke Gibbons, *Gaelic Gothic: Race, Colonization, and Irish Culture*, (Galway: Arlen House, 2004), 9.

⁵ Contemporary oral histories in Cuba describe communities that still identify ethnically with an indigenous past. For a discussion of the destruction of Indigenous Society in early colonial Cuba see Aviva Chomsky; Barry Carr and Pamela Smorkaloff (eds.), *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, (London: Duke University Press, 2003) 9-28; Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History* (London: Yale University Press, 2005); and Julio LeRiverend, *Economic History of Cuba* (Havana: Book Institute, 1967).

Cuba centred on labour and race. Conflict over land was class based, arising from the accumulation of property and expanding sugar production by a landed elite, to the detriment of small holders of European origin, free blacks and surviving natives. The creation of a settler colony in Ireland involved reconfiguring a traditional society through the establishment of a powerful landed class, loyal to British imperial interests. The old Gaelic order, and with it customary access to land, was destroyed in favour of a Protestant land holding class who had no traditional ties to a now colonised peasantry. Claims to land by a dispossessed, Catholic majority who held on to traditions of communal landownership, was a fundamental and constant source of conflict throughout Ireland's colonial history. While both primitive accumulation and class based restricted access to land was a dominant feature of both colonies, subaltern claims to land access in Cuba came after emancipation and independence, at the end of the nineteenth century.

The historiography of European colonisation documents a discourse of superiority and inferiority which informs the systems of subjugation employed in Ireland. This has formed the basis of comparative approaches to the study of conquest and settlement in the Atlantic colonial world. Subaltern historiography, a much smaller canon of texts, and the more nuanced response of the colonised have until recently received considerably less attention. There is also a scarcity of comparative research on discursive strategies of co-operation, alliance and resistance in different colonial sites around the globe.⁶ Postcolonial Studies has allowed greater comparative research through a wider geographical framework and 'has shown more interest than most in the histories and structures of feelings of [those] subaltern classes and organisations' (Cleary 2007, 26). However, Cleary's earlier reminder that 'discursive identifications between Ireland and other colonial situations remained scattered, opportunistic and unsystematic' still holds (Cleary 2003, 29). A good starting point, as Cleary suggests, is a comparison of the history of Ireland's early colonisation with other areas of expropriation and settlement, such as plantation and settler colonies of today's Latin America. However, with any such comparison consideration must be given to the

⁶ A considerable body of work in Irish Studies and Postcolonial Studies in the areas of Irish literary and cultural history have addressed subaltern modes of protest and cultural forms but comparative

reluctance to apply the concept of settler colonialism to studies of the colonial history of Latin America and as Richard Gott argues, the fact that not enough attention has been given to the study of ‘the prolonged white settler struggle to maintain their political control over societies in which they were so dramatically outnumbered’.⁷ With the establishment of mixed settlement colonies in the highland regions of Latin America where the indigenous peoples were not annihilated to the extent they were in Cuba ‘the Iberian settler culture and social structures nonetheless became the dominant ones’ in which they sought ‘to monopolize control of the land and to replace native political and cultural institutions with their own’ (Cleary 2003, 30). As was also the case in Ireland ‘the indigenous peasantry were left in place but required to pay tribute to [European] landlords or political authorities in the form of labour or commodities’ (30-31). Labour was exploited through coercive landlord-peasant relationships, in ‘the extraction of feudal rent’ which was ‘of an absolute character’ as argued by McDonough and Slater, in that ‘it relied on increasing the amount of labour applied to producing the rent’ (McDonough and Slater 2005, 27). As a colony of settlement, Ireland had more in common with the highland regions of Latin America in terms of the control of land and labour, although it diverged in terms of the demographic majority of the native population and their rival claim to land and territory which persisted after independence and into the twentieth century. In the mainland Spanish colonies where settlers depended on forced native labour to work expropriated lands, it was not until after independence that land clearances led to a campaign throughout the nineteenth century of extermination of Indian peoples (Gott 2007).

Unlike administrative colonies, which intervened from the metropolis to exploit resources, settler colonies were ‘characterised by a much larger and more socially mixed metropolitan-affiliated population and in such cases the colonist and indigenous

studies with other colonial sites and trans-cultural identifications and co-operation are scarce enough. This theme is discussed at greater length in Chapter 4.

⁷ This criticism has important implications for the development of white immigration policies to the detriment of indigenous and black populations regarding land rights and political rights in Latin America up to the present. The role of Irish immigrants as both active and passive participants in Cuban white immigration strategies is discussed at length in Chapter 4. The case for applying the concept of ‘white settler’ colonies to Latin America is clearly argued in Richard Gott, ‘Latin America as a White Settler Society’, *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 26 (2007): 275.

societies were more closely intermeshed' (Cleary 2003, 36). Creole elites in Cuba, like Anglo-Irish Protestant elites in Ireland became intermediaries in the colonial relationship and took on an increasingly self-assertive role in the face of imperial subordination. When the question of independence arose, Irish Protestant nationalists and Cuban Creole nationalists were equally reluctant to risk the loss of political control, where 'the danger of mass insurrection from below' might mean sharing citizenship with the majority black population in Cuba and the majority Catholic population in Ireland (39). There are significant parallels worth comparing, such as the influence of anti-colonial struggles in North and South America at the end of the eighteenth century on colonial-settler nationalism in Ireland and Cuba. Both colonies remained tied to empire under administrative control by London and Madrid for nearly a century more. They remained on the periphery of transformations in the capitalist global economy throughout the nineteenth century during which anti-colonial and nationalist movements were central to the development of both societies.⁸ A comparative colonial history of Cuba and Ireland, though not within the scope of this thesis, might well be a productive starting point, as the above demonstrates, in the comparison of discursive identifications and at the very least an 'inventory of contrasts and similarities' (Connolly 2003, 23).⁹

The process of colonisation in Ireland and Cuba, not unlike that of the West Indies or the American colonies, was characterised by violent and accelerated transformation from pre-modern indigenous societies to mercantile capitalism and later industrial capitalism. In the competing struggle to dominate Atlantic trade, Spanish and British colonies were oriented commercially to an emerging Atlantic economy in which all economic development and trading links were regulated and channelled through the imperial centres of Madrid and London. Ireland, under-populated and under-exploited was considered as a 'blank space' to be civilised with 'the authority and symbolic ordering of English culture' and the 'introduction of an agricultural landscape, economy and society central to that end' (Montaño 2011, 49). Settlers constructed their version of

⁸ Cuba won independence in 1898 and Ireland in 1922.

⁹ For an account of 'contrasts and similarities' which emerge in points of resistance to colonial rule in Ireland and Peru, as evidenced by the rebellion of the United Irishmen and the Tupac Amaru rebellion see: Sean J. Connolly, 'Tupac Amaru and Captain Right' in David Dickson and Cormac Ó Gráda (eds.) *Refiguring Ireland: Essays in Honour of L. M. Cullen* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2003).

civilisation through a ‘built environment’ which sought to ‘improve’ the productivity and spatial organisation of the colony by ‘enclosing their lands, establishing private property, cultivating fields’ (50). The boundary between barbarism and civilisation was strengthened by a material culture, the signifiers of which were permanence, symmetry and improvement. Designs for the Munster Plantation demonstrated ‘[t]he tidy symmetry of the carefully arranged seignories, the central market towns, the castles, houses, fences, ditches, and enclosed agricultural fields’ which as Montaña concludes, represented the cultural and material borders between the coloniser and the colonised (57). Now a colony of settlement, by the end of the seventeenth century Ireland was transformed from ‘a lightly settled, overwhelmingly pastoral, heavily wooded country, with a poorly integrated, quasi-autarkic and technologically backward economy’ to being fully integrated into the world of North Atlantic trade and agricultural capitalism dominated by English imperialism (Whelan 1993, 204). The resulting socio-economic and cultural transformation was, as Whelan argues, unique for its time in Europe in terms of its ‘suddenness’. Dispossession and forced exile of the propertied Irish, and the Cromwellian re-settlement of 1641, saw an unprecedented immigration of settlers from England and Scotland, comprising up to twenty-seven percent of the population and the formation of a larger than ever landless and destitute Catholic peasantry. This latter group formed the basis of early outward migration westward to the American colonies and the Caribbean as indentured servants and transportees.

The Reproduction of Irish Labour

The subjugation of Ireland through the commercialisation of its economy served to mould its dependence on Britain and in the bigger scheme of things, as Sir William Petty saw it in 1762, the island ‘lieth Commodiously for the Trade of the new American world: which we see every day to Grow and Flourish’; its insertion into the Atlantic world economy was assured, albeit indirectly.¹⁰ By the end of the seventeenth century trade and navigation restrictions were put in place to eliminate competition from Irish

¹⁰ Sir William Petty 1672, quoted in Thomas M. Truxes, *Irish American Trade 1660-1783* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6. See also Thomas Bartlett in Kenny, *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

industries.¹¹ Irish commodities were used to service England's Atlantic enterprise which meant that any colonial trade was in fact 'Anglo-Irish' trade where a growing percentage of the value of Irish exports went to England (Bartlett 2004, 69). Population expansion in both Britain and Ireland in the latter half of the eighteenth century made for increased exports of food to Britain, thus making Britain the main importer of Irish agricultural products by the close of the century (Ó Tuathaigh 1990, 2). Massive population increase coupled with economic dependency on England in trade, technology and finance also 'locked Ireland tightly into an Atlantic division of labour' which served as a supply of cheap labour for industrial development in England (O'Hearn 2005, 13). The earlier eclipse of the Irish woollen industry was replaced by an expanding linen trade, in which Ireland produced linen for the English navy and its colonies for the next two hundred years. The provision trade to the West Indies supplied the sugar colonies with food (mainly beef, butter and salted herring) so that plantation labour forces could concentrate solely on producing commercial crops for the global market (Rodgers 2000). Cork was the centre for food exports and Belfast the centre for the production of both fine and coarse linen for export to the colonies.

By the eighteenth century the immigrant-landlord class in Ireland had established far greater control of the legal and political system than was ever the case in England. The native population, displaced from the land, formed a now colonised and dependant peasantry subject to the authority of a class of landowners/agents who, unlike the Gaelic chiefs, were freed of customary obligations to their tenants and the peasantry had no customary protection (McDonough and Slater 2005, 30). Denied access to land under the Penal laws the Catholic peasantry, in a predominantly rural economy, were confined to a class of tenant farmers, agricultural day labourers and cottiers, exploited by a small number of landowners and commercial farmers or 'middlemen' in a system of usurious contractual arrangements. As Clark and Donnelly state:

Though the land was owned by a relatively small elite, numbering perhaps fewer than 10,000 aristocrats and gentry, their estates were generally sublet to such a degree that for

¹¹ The British Navigation Acts (1647, 1650 and 1651) which restricted trade with Ireland insured that colonial produce could only be shipped to England, and on English ships.

the majority of rural dwellers, their landlord was not the proprietor of the soil but rather a large farmer. Such a farmer might sublet part of his holding to small tenants at a stipulated rent; he might give cabins and plots of ground to laborers, who would pay rent for these by working for him at a stated wage; or he might let some of his land in conacre to laborers for the growing of a crop of potatoes. Thus it was usually the large farmer, rather than the proprietor or his agent, who directly controlled access to both land and employment (Clark and Donnelly 1983, 31).

In this landholding system of conacre, landless labourers and their families did not engage in a cash economy but were in effect bound to a landowner, bartering their labour or part of the crop in return for a patch of subsistence ground to build a cabin and grow potatoes. Population pressure and the continuous subdivision of family leaseholdings created huge competition for subsistence plots. Where in other peasant societies rent was ‘a fixed proportion of the produce, determined by custom, that of the cottier is whatever competition may make it – the competition, we repeat, of impoverished men, bidding under the pressure of prospective exile or beggary’ (Cairnes [1873] 1967, 161).¹² The Gaelic system known as rundale or *clachan* persisted as a more communal practice of landholding which enabled family members to have access to arable land for potatoes and oats as well as more mountainous terrain for grazing animals. Middlemen acting on behalf of absentee landlords developed a practice of ‘rack-renting’ in which they extracted increasingly higher rents from tenants. Landlords attempted to consolidate unprofitable subsistence holdings by evicting insolvent tenants whose plots of land were subsequently rented by auction to the highest bidder putting further upward pressure on rents. Tenant farmers cashed in on profitable sub-letting, while at the same time securing a constant supply of cheap labour for the expansion in tillage. This is the reason why ‘profits of higher output at a time of rising prices did not reach the labourer, the cottier or many of the small famers’ (Ó Tuathaigh 1990, 129). With the monopoly of land held by the landlords, intense competition for land caused inflated rents and the reduction or absence of reward for one’s labour. Due to the lack of industrial development in Ireland and consequently the labourer’s ‘inability to acquire

an economic existence outside the agricultural sphere of production' the Irish tenant was tied to the land. To avoid eviction the labourer or members of the family had to be prepared to move to find wage employment in order to subsist. The condition of dependency was such that 'this economic bondage could only be broken by emigration' (McDonough and Slater 2005, 31).

In the decades before the Famine, evidence of a modernisation process associated with an expanding market economy, contrasted with official enquiries into the condition of Irish poor reporting alarming levels of poverty throughout the countryside. The benefits of capitalist modernisation and the free market in land and labour did not of course filter down to large sections of society throughout the countryside. A rapid rise in population, disproportionately amongst the rural labouring class, from almost five million in 1791 to almost seven million by 1821, created greater competition for land and an abundant supply of cheap labour.¹³ The census of 1841 reported that 70% of the population consisted of labourers and smallholders with less than five acres. Insecurity of tenure, rack-renting and competition for land resulted in a relationship between tenant and landowner unmediated by market conditions; it was monopolised by the absolute dependence of the tenant on the bare means of subsistence (McDonough and Slater 2005, 36). The majority of the Irish workforce by 1845 was employed as agricultural day-labourers or they worked in exchange for access to a plot of land (Mokyr and Ó Gráda 1988). Seasonal migration to England where wages were considerably higher than in Ireland or Scotland became an established pattern amongst the rural poor, as noted by Engels: 'the Irish had nothing to lose at home, and much to gain in England; and from the time when it became known in Ireland that the east side of the Irish Sea offered steady work and good pay for strong arms, every year has brought armies of the Irish hither' (Engels 1987, 123).

¹² John Elliot Cairnes held the professorship of Political Economy in Trinity College, Queen's College Galway and University College London. A disciple of John Stuart Mill, Cairnes made a strong case for peasant proprietorship after the Famine in 1847.

¹³ In the period before the 1821 census population growth in Ireland was faster than anywhere else in Western Europe. It began to slow down in the following decade. See Joel Mokyr and Cormac Ó Gráda, 'New Developments in Irish Population History, 1700-1850', *The Economic History Review*, 37: 4 (November, 1984).

Growth in Irish industry was seriously disadvantaged by competition in a common market with Britain. Consequently the only sector where growth occurred was agriculture which continued in the decades right up to the Famine. The emphasis on commercially viable tillage farming benefitted from population growth and a limitless supply of labour, subsisting on a plot for potatoes in exchange for labour. Families subdivided their small plots or took over waste land to provide enough food to insure against starvation with the result that areas of highest population density and poorest land underwent most subdivision (Ó Tuathaigh 1990, 133). As a result the predominant economic relationship was based on rent and labour in a society of ever widening social and political division. In 1841 four-fifths of the population were rural dwellers and ‘the resident landlord, living in the Big House and frequently owning the adjoining village, was the king-pin of this society’ (146). After the Napoleonic wars, falling prices and rising rents exacerbated by a serious crop failure and famine in 1817, intensified economic hardship and social disorder. Population expansion in Britain and the consequent demand for Irish products decisively subordinated Irish agriculture to the British market and ‘the negative economic consequences of colonialism for Irish development became evident’ (Boylan and McDonough 1998, 117). The policy of consolidation pushed families off the land making a large part of the rural population redundant and forcing a surge in emigration. The resulting poverty and dislocation was, as Boylan and McDonough state, ‘an essential condition for the inauguration of capitalist development, providing both a labour force and a potential urban market’ (118).

In the 1820s and 30s, throughout the countryside cottiers, labourers and small farmers, drawing on a traditional ‘moral economy’ in their antagonism towards the landlord system, joined, in increasing numbers, the ranks of secret agrarian societies. They adopted violent strategies of resistance to prevent evictions, keep down rents and discourage the transfer of lands to pasture. Agrarian unrest, oppositional culture and their connection with migration from Ireland is discussed in detail in Chapter 5. Pre-famine rural society in Ireland is seen to have retained a collective world view in which communal loyalties and family subsistence were valued over individual profit. After the Famine, official recognition was given to a view of contemporary Irish society which

held that social norms were in fact derived from early Irish society ‘based on kinship and status, and crucially, joint ownership of property’ (Boylan and McDonough 1998, 127). This influenced a change in policy which acknowledged customary rights of tenants and eventually in the aftermath of the Famine, peasant proprietorship.

Rising numbers of Malthusian poor and scarcity of capital were construed by the government of the day as the cause of widespread poverty. More objective analysis points to Ireland’s dependant economic status, resulting from integration into a free trade area by the 1800 Act of Union with the world’s leading industrial economy. Although legally no longer a colony of settlement and constitutionally joined to the United Kingdom with parliamentary representation in London, Ireland’s relationship to England continued under the control of a colonial-style administration with institutions such as the police and legal systems, Dublin Castle and the Lord Lieutenantcy, all of which had no counterpart in the rest of the United Kingdom (Cleary 2003, 41). Engels described this relationship to Marx as ‘the first English colony and as one which because of its proximity is still governed exactly in the old way, and here one can already observe that the so-called liberty of English citizens is based on the oppression of the colonies’.¹⁴ Ireland’s insertion into the British Atlantic economy meant that prices and wages were determined by market forces, which with the unregulated maintenance of the landlord system facilitated ‘an unfettered capitalist exploitation of peasant labour’ (Cleary 2007, 35). Dependency theory takes the view that Ireland’s integration into the British and wider Atlantic capitalist economy exacerbated a colonial economic dependence which contributed to a path of underdevelopment of the economy.¹⁵ The

¹⁴ Cited in Joe Cleary, ‘Misplaced Ideas? Colonialism, Location, and Dislocation in Irish Studies’ in *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory* edited by Clare Carroll and Patricia King (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003), 41.

¹⁵ The neo-Marxist school of dependency theory critiqued theories of imperialism and modernisation by focusing on the periphery. Dos Santos applied this analysis to Latin America in 1969 arguing for the reformulation of the theory of imperialism by taking account of economic dependency and its historical force. Its scope was extended to underdevelopment globally including countries of the European periphery. It has been extended to include political and cultural concerns on the periphery. The dependency perspective, conceptualised as a product of unequal economic exchanges based on historical power relations between colonial countries, was then used to analyse the specificity of different countries (Cardoso and Faletto 1979); it was first applied to the Irish case by Raymond Crotty in 1979 and Eoin O’Malley in 1981; Boylan and McDonough (1998) examine the application of dependency theory to the economy of the nineteenth century. Thomas Boylan and Terrence McDonough ‘Dependency and

socio-economic consequences in the first half of the nineteenth century of the market-driven change in agriculture were catastrophic and ‘swept away the poorer classes on the Irish landscape, small holders, cottiers and landless labourers. This demographic change was preserved and intensified through continuing emigration’ (Boylan and McDonough 1998, 125). The consequent fracture of Irish society, culture and identity is described by Whelan as a ‘fast forward’ transition from ‘utter backwardness to comparative modernity’, one which was ‘not achieved without great cultural and social trauma’ (Whelan 1993, 207). In so far as emigration or exile is perceived as part of this trauma, Kerby Miller emphasises that it was a response to the structural changes in Irish society as a consequence of British imperial policies (Miller 2008). The incongruity of dependent labour and the march of capitalist modernity unleashed from the ranks of the rural population a mobile proletariat, which as Lloyd posits, was ‘formative and not peripheral to the development of colonial capitalism, and if the Irish experience was not that of the English Industrial Revolution, but rather one of capitalist underdevelopment, it was nonetheless a crucial experience for the dynamics and effects of capitalist modernity’ (Lloyd 2008, 122).

Caribbean Plantation Colony of Cuba

The Caribbean as the ‘inaugural site’ of European overseas imperial rule is somewhat overshadowed by a focus on the beginnings of the American colonies. Sidney Mintz highlights the historical significance of the region for what he terms its ‘precocious modernity’. As he reminds us:

the year 1619 stands out for us – when the first enslaved Africans were brought ashore at Jamestown. Yet by that same year Spanish Santo Domingo had been a European colony for more than 120 years; the Hispanic Caribbean had been shipping the New World’s first sugar made by African slaves for more than a century.¹⁶

Modernization: Perspectives from the Irish Nineteenth Century’ in *Ideology and Ireland in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Tadhg Foley and Sean Ryder (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998).

¹⁶ Sidney W. Mintz, *Three Ancient Colonies: Caribbean Themes and Variations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 5. Quoted in David Scott ‘Preface: Remnants, Exigencies ... Islands’ in *small axe* 34, (December 2010): vii-x.

Spanish conquest in the Caribbean brought about the early demographic collapse of the native Caribbean populations of Arawaks and Caribs. With its lands evacuated and its human landscape irreversibly transformed by the early decades of the sixteen hundreds, European colonizers were ‘able to work out the problems of settlement, adjustment and development to a very large degree as if the Antilles were empty lands’ (Mintz 1966, 918). The remaking of the Caribbean in European colonial terms with the introduction of large-scale sugar plantations, described by Mintz as ‘landmark experiments in modernity’, imposed a system of labour control, the scale, complexity and coercion of which had not yet appeared in early modern Europe (Mintz 1996, 295). When it came to realising profits to invest in plantation agriculture, European planters were ‘apparently quite free of prejudice when it came to brute labour – even fellow Europeans would do’ (Mintz 1974, 47). In the British Caribbean, the demand for labour stimulated the migration first of indentured servants from Ireland, England and Scotland and then the massive mobilisation of forced labour from Africa. The plantation system ‘adapting to stolen labor, producing capitalism’s first commodities, feeding the first proletarians [...] embodied a dawning modernity’ in terms of labour organisation, which by the nineteenth century had become archaic (296).

By the time Columbus turned his attentions to Cuba in the early fifteen hundreds, after a violent subjugation of the native Taino and Ciboney peoples, the first Spanish settlers in Hispaniola had already been granted tenancies of land and rights to exploit any surviving Indian labour. Not a densely populated island to begin with, the Spanish Crown introduced a system to exploit indigenous labour by distributing ‘tenancies’, or grants of small farms with native crops and native labour. The farms or *estancias* concentrated on raising cattle and agricultural crops with Indian labour and Spanish managers (LeRiverand 1967, 79). As with the English colonisation of Ireland, the early development of a commercial settlement plantation was contingent on the appropriation of land from the native people, the destruction of indigenous communal organisation and the violent subordination of labour. Indian communities rebelled and many ran away, to become maroons (*cimarrones*) in alternative settlements of refuge and resistance (*palenques*). Cuban historians have traditionally emphasized the virtual extinction of the indigenous people from ‘brutal clash of two civilisations’, slaughter,

disease and suicide, within forty years of invasion (De la Riva 2003, 24).¹⁷ Most versions of the history of Cuba vehemently deny the survival of an Indian population and have the ‘Indians depart swiftly from the scene’ (Gott 2005, 22). Fernando Ortiz concluded that ‘the aboriginal base of society was destroyed in Cuba, and it was necessary to bring in a complete new population, both masters and servants’ (Ortiz 1995, 100) The American historian Irene Wright, in 1910 doubted ‘that the present-day Cuban retains even a corpuscle of aboriginal red’.¹⁸ This received ‘rubbing-out’ of the native population is challenged by evidence of the survival and existence of thousands of Indians in *Palenques* or maroon settlements, where they were later joined by runaway African slaves. Their declared ‘absence’ from the scene made it easier for settlers to lay claim to Indian lands, which by 1550 had been put under protection by the Spanish Crown. The obliteration thesis of not even ‘one-drop’ has been more recently challenged by ethnographic research which attests to the continued presence of communities in Eastern Cuba who still identify with their indigenous past.¹⁹

In his early chronicle of the conquest, Bartolomé de Las Casas decried the demographic collapse of the native populations of Hispaniola and Cuba. Having been awarded a grant of land with Indian labour (*encomienda*) by the Crown, he later renounced the Royal grant and promoted their replacement as a labour force with African slavery. Las Casas advised the crown to introduce slaves to the plantations of the New World and ‘if necessary, white and black slaves be brought from Castile to

¹⁷ Pérez de la Riva and Fernando Ortiz subscribe to this notion. The concept of ‘transculturation’ as conceived by Fernando Ortiz framed ‘the contemporary tree of Cuban multi-ethnicity with a strictly Ibero-African trunk’ despite his in-depth study of the history and archaeology of Indo-Cuban cultures. Barreiro notes that Ortiz, the eminent Cuban anthropologist, did so in reaction to right wing efforts to use indigenismo as a ploy to ‘obfuscate black issues’. The legacy of racial politics and identity formation in the early days of the Cuban republic left its mark on the work of Ortiz and influenced the narrative of indigenous demographic collapse, for much of the twentieth century. See Barreiro, ‘Survival Stories’, in *The Cuba Reader* (2006), 31. See also Gott’s discussion of ‘What happened to Cuba’s Indians?’ in *Cuba: A New History* (2007), 21-23.

¹⁸ Irene Wright, *Cuba* (New York 1910), quoted in Richard Gott, *Cuba* (2005), 22.

¹⁹ Anthropologist José Barreiro at Cornell University supports the view that the indigenous people did not ‘die out’ and provides evidence from ethnographic research carried out in the Pico Turquino mountain range of Oriente. He has conducted interviews with communities who have ‘indigenous lineage’ and are the ‘descendants of the original Taínos who met Columbus’. See José Barreiro, ‘Indians in Cuba’ in *A Cuban Reader* (2003); The Indian population and their cultural heritage were excavated in the late nineteenth century by a movement based on *indigenismo* and a glorification of the Indian past to pose as a ‘counterweight’ to the promotion of an African or Afro-Cuban heritage. See Richard Gott, *Cuba* (2007).

keep herds, build sugar mills, [and] wash gold'.²⁰ Anticipating the contradictions of nineteenth-century Cuban nationalists whose 'fear of the island's being totally Africanised' led them to consider abolition, Las Casas, by the early decades of the sixteenth century, also lamented the trade in slaves.²¹ He intervened to end the slave trade and proposed the free transportation of 'quiet peasants' from Spain to the Indies where they would be 'provided with land, animals, and farming tools, and also granted a year's supply of food from the royal granaries' (Allen 1997, 5). The first shipment of enslaved Africans to the Spanish Caribbean occurred in 1518 and by 1527 the enslavement of a diminishing supply of native labour, no longer sanctioned by the Crown, was substituted with African labour, forced to work on some of the first sugar plantations already in existence in Cuba. African slavery functioned as a labour system in Cuba for nearly a century before the United States or Brazil (Bergad 1989).

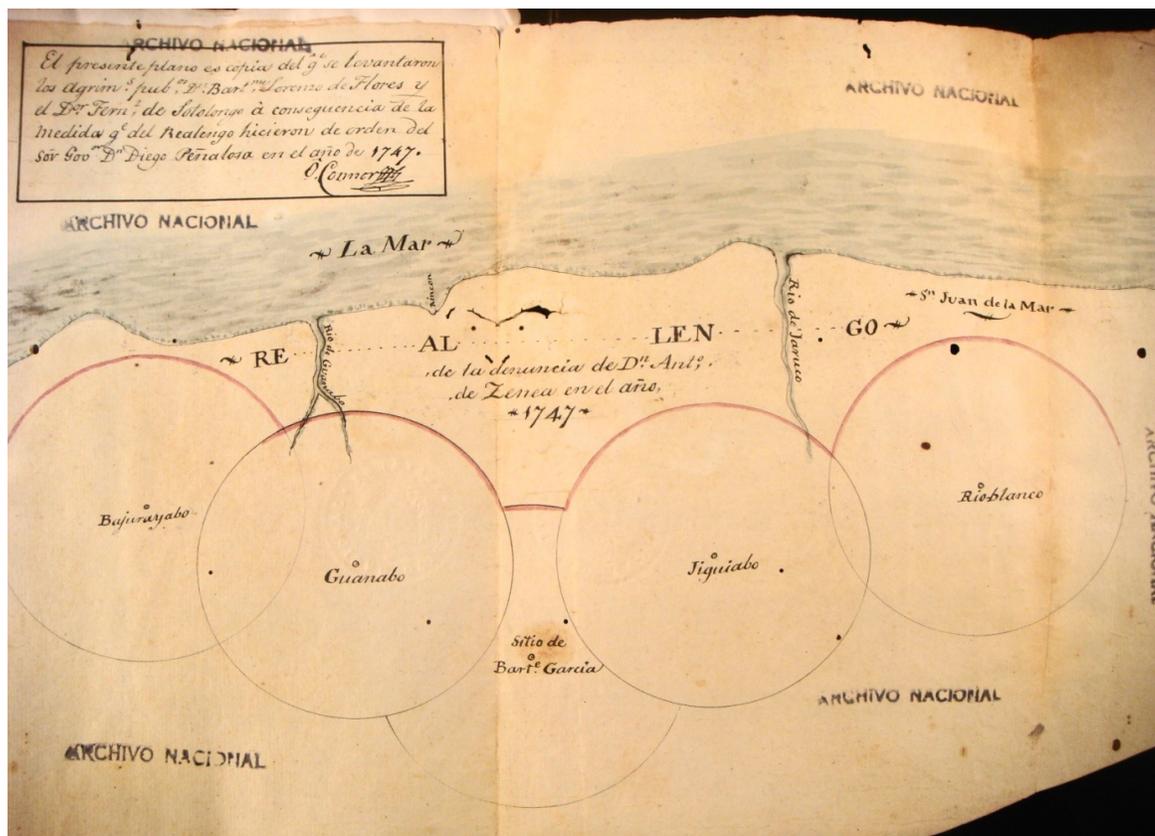
Towards the end of the sixteenth century newly-arrived entrepreneurs were given grants of land, known as *mercedes*, by the local municipal councils or *cabildos*; however, as LeRiverend points out in his *Economic History of Cuba* (1967), there was no legal basis in Cuba during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for private ownership of land (62). Nonetheless, the landscape of the sparsely populated colony was transformed by a built environment of Spanish-style haciendas on vast tracts of frontier land which would form the basis of land ownership up to the early nineteenth hundreds. To begin with, the boundaries of land grants were not designated by acreage but by convenient geographical land-marks designed to serve the needs of a cattle-ranching economy which allowed herds to roam freely throughout the countryside grazing on natural pastures. Conflict between members of an emerging landed gentry and increased petitions for land led to a new system of land boundaries in 1579, in which the boundary of a hacienda was set by the radius of a circle stretching the equivalent of 2 English

²⁰ Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias* 3 vols. edited by Augustin Millares [Mexico City, 1951], 3: 474; Cited in Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, Vol. 2. (1997), 5.

²¹ This contradiction is discussed in Chapter 4. See Antonio Benitez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island : the Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (London: Duke University Press, 1992), Chapter 2, for a fascinating discussion of the history of slavery as documented in the Las Casas chronicle, in particular its use as a foundation document for the nineteenth-century 'apostle' of Cuban nationalism Antonio Saco. For Las Casas and Saco, anti-colonial and anti-slavery thought overlap, not necessarily for humanitarian reasons, but in the interest of preserving or constructing a white Cuban nation.

miles from a centre point.²² The ‘owner’ was granted land in usufruct in exchange for maintaining an inn at the centre of the circle and supplying beef to the nearest town or settlement (Thomas 2002).²³ The following map from the *Intendencia General de Hacienda* illustrates the confusing system of overlapping circular boundaries which were set out by a surveyor often in response to disputes over land boundaries and land usage.²⁴

Figure 6. Map of Royal Lands in the name of Juan O'Connor 1747



Source: Archivo Nacional de Cuba IGH, 20-2

²² See Bergad *Cuban Rural Society in The Nineteenth Century* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), Chapter 1, n. 3

²³ For the history of the settlement of Cuba I have relied on Julio LeRiverand *Economic History of Cuba* (Havana 1967); Hugh Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom* (London: Pan Books 2001) and Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History* (London: Yale University Press, 2005).

²⁴ The *Intendencia General de Hacienda* was set up in the 1760s as part of a process of modernisation in the administration of the treasury. See Archivo Nacional de Cuba (ANC); Intendencia General de Hacienda (IGH), see ANC IGH, 20- 2.

Spanish settlement in Cuba was predominantly urban with the majority of the island's inhabitants living in towns. With the growth of commercial opportunities associated with the port of Havana and transatlantic trade, petitions were made by a small nucleus of powerful families to the Havana *cabildo* for lands around its perimeter to use as pasture for cattle to supply the Havana market with hides, tallow and salted meat. The average grant of land for cattle covered approximately 56,582.4 acres.²⁵ In contrast Ireland, with a smaller land mass and much larger native population, landed estates of 12,000, 8,000, 6,000 and 4,000 acres predominated.²⁶ Cuba is the largest island in the Caribbean and according to Humboldt, 'its surface area differs little from that of England proper, without Wales' (Humboldt 2011, 24). Bergad describes the system of *mercedes* which developed as based upon 'nepotism, personal connections and no doubt bribery' (6). Covered with thick forests, land was cleared to supply abundant hard-woods to the shipyards, busy with the construction of an expanding imperial fleet. Indians, free blacks and poor Spaniards were dispossessed of any lands previously worked in commonage and were forced to work for wages for big farmers on the estates or *haciendas*. As the population of these embryonic settlements grew, small churches were built at the centre-point, surrounded by coffee farms, cattle ranches and a few sugar plantations. The lands in between the circles, known as *realengos* or land belonging to the crown, were rented to immigrants from Spain as small-holdings in exchange for the payment of a tax or tithes (Thomas 2001, 13). Some of these frontier lands were settled by Canary Islanders, known as *vegueros*, who since the mid-sixteenth century cultivated tobacco on small-scale family farms or *vegas*. The expansion of tobacco farms from Matanzas to the Güines valley near Havana and Pinar del Rio further west brought the *vegueros* into conflict with bigger farmers in a protracted struggle for land rights amidst the appropriation of more and more lands to raise cattle (LeRiverand 1967, 62). The colony was subordinated to the metropolis, making trade with foreigners illegal, and boosting alternative trade networks through more lucrative deals with smugglers and pirates at different points along the undefended coast (Gott

²⁵ For a detailed discussion of land tenure before sugar in Cuba and particularly the Matanzas region see Bergad, *Cuban Rural Society* (1990) Chapter 1; also Julio LeRiverend, *Economic History of Cuba* (1967), Chapter 2.

²⁶ Sir Walter Raleigh received the largest estate of 40,000 acres. McDonough and Slater (2005), 29.

2005). There was no great demand for labour during the seventeenth century as long as the colonial economy relied on cattle ranching. Cuba would remain a colony of white settlement until the middle of the eighteenth century, forming a society, as Knight puts it, with little or no strife, with ‘no foreigners of note, no Indians, no very rich people, few African slaves’ (Knight 1970, 5).

The importation of slaves had, for over a hundred years, relied on the *asiento* which was a system in which companies were granted a royal licence for a period of two years to sell a limited number of slaves to Cuba. Underdeveloped economically, with a concentration of wealth amongst the aristocracy in Havana, there was little opportunity for enrichment outside servicing and repairing Spanish galleons in Havana and entertaining their crews. The population grew apace with the slow and lethargic rhythm of agricultural growth up until the eighteenth century when Spanish settlers began to see commercial value in the cultivation of the indigenous crop, tobacco and the commercial production of sugar and soon both crops were as profitable as cattle. Up to the middle of the eighteenth century Cuba remained a colony of relatively few surviving natives, a small number of free blacks and slaves, and small numbers of Spanish colonists. Cuba and Hispaniola without exports of gold or silver became a regional backwater with ‘no labour, no investment, no political direction, and no good trading facilities’ (Watts 1993, 308). The region was, however, brought into the early modern world-system to facilitate European colonial expansion, with the establishment of the imperial fleet system in the mid-sixteenth century, when Havana became the centre of ship building and the main port for the Spanish *flotas* in need of supplies and protection en route between Mexico and Spain. These important functions on the colonial periphery not only linked the Cuban with the European economy (LeRiverand 1967), it also became ‘central to the Empire’s structures of power, administration and trade’ (Kapcia 2005, 27). In the last quarter of the eighteenth century just as most other Caribbean Islands were turning away from sugar and slavery, Cuba made a second rapid and revolutionary transformation from a colony of settlement to a plantation economy dependent on massive imports of forced African labour. Between 1750 and 1850, Cuba went from being ‘a neglected, underpopulated and somewhat economically stagnant way station on the periphery of the vast Spanish overseas possessions to become the centre of an emasculated American

empire' (Knight 1977, 231). By the mid-nineteenth century, having undergone extraordinary demographic, economic and societal changes, Cuba emerged in the global circuit of sugar as one of the most advanced and profitable sugar plantations in the world, dependent on slavery and the most intense form of labour control anywhere in the Atlantic world.

Colonial societies were structured to exclude all but the settler elites, or men of property, from the civil and political order of the colony. In a comparative view of the periphery of an evolving world-system, David Watts argues that Ireland has much in common with the Caribbean region in terms of its contemporaneous colonial settlement which brought about rapid developmental changes 'involving the establishment of a new capitalist system', and central to that system, 'in both places, a 'new' estate agriculture' and consequently a new labour system (Watts 1993, 314). Incorporation into a globalised market forced the destruction of communal systems of agriculture, to be replaced by colonial capitalist systems of large landed properties: the plantation system in Cuba and the landlord system in Ireland. These capitalist spaces, created for the production of crops for the world market, transformed the management of land and labour, leading to 'the implementation of rigidly regimented systems of labour with different degrees of "unfreedom"' (Dal Lago 2009, 392). However, the crucial difference was the difficulty of emptying the land in Ireland of its 'teeming' population while on the contrary in Cuba, the growth of sugar production led to an insatiable demand for imported labour.

Section Two: Migration and Labour in the Green and Black Atlantic

Irish Migration to the Caribbean (1600-1750)

While no slaves were transported through Irish ports, Ireland was firmly implanted in the Atlantic world through two centuries of emigration in which the Black Atlantic became ‘deeply interwoven with Irish history’ and the import of mahogany and slave-grown products of sugar, rum and tobacco ‘infiltrated Irish social life from poor-house to mansion’ (Rodgers 2009, 46). Writing about the Irish in Montserrat, Michael D. Higgins states that ‘the Irish connection with the Caribbean in general [...] is multi-layered in source and consequence’ (Higgins 2011, 178). He distinguishes between two competing narratives in Irish historiography of migration to the Caribbean; that of forced migration or imposed exile during Cromwell’s transportations of the populations of Galway and Drogheda, and that of a dispossessed Catholic propertied class who arrived in the seventeenth century to establish trade networks based on Irish kinship between the West Indies and metropolitan centres in Europe.²⁷ Some of the first Irish planter families, ranked with the wealthiest in the West Indies, were connected to the Tribes of Galway, who as Higgins argues, were benignly represented ‘as examples of some Medici-style greatness’ (176). The largest group were indentured servants, some with a semblance of choice but the majority were forced into servitude as transportees. The figures are not precise but up to forty-thousand emigrants who were mostly indentured servants went to the West Indies between the late seventeen and early eighteenth centuries (Bartlett 2004). Indentured servants signed up in return for a passage to the New World, for a period of bondage lasting anything between three and ten years, after which they were entitled to a ‘freedom due’ of £10 or a piece of land. However, the promise of a plot of land faded with the sugar plantations using up all available land for cultivation, pushing out small holders. This somewhat neglected

²⁷ For a study of Irish trade and kinship networks in the Danish colony of St Croix, See Orla Power, ‘Irish Planters, Atlantic Merchants: the Development of St. Croix, Danish West Indies, 1750-1766’, Ph.D. Thesis, NUI, Galway 2011; On the Irish in Montserrat see Michael D. Higgins *Renewing the Republic* (Dublin: Liberties Press, 2011), see Chapter 14 ‘Sugar, Tribes, Dispossession and Slavery: Montserrat and its Irish Connection’; for the most extensive study to date on the subject of Irish involvement in the slave trade and the campaign for abolition, see Nini Rodgers *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery 1612-1865* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

period of Irish migration constitutes, according to Luis Cullen, ‘the largest single flow of white immigrants during the seventeenth century to the West Indies’ and some of the first group of European white settlers to be found on British and foreign islands (Cullen 1994, 113). Much of the history of Irish indenture in the Caribbean tells a story of excessive cruelty, and continued hostility to their English masters, which extended to conspiring with rival European powers and with slave insurrections. Their presence is recorded in colonial State Papers in connection with ‘religious, political and security problems that the Irish created then and later, especially when war or invasion was feared’ (126). In Cullen’s view it was not part of the forced migration from Cromwellian times, more a highly structured migration involving sons of well-off families and a stream of indentured servants making up ‘the bottom layers of the white population’ immediately above the enslaved Africans (126). Viewing this migratory flow as a mechanism of colonial labour supply, Bartlett describes the ‘direct trade in Irish emigrants’ to the West Indies as a category of export ‘which should be treated as a branch of commerce’ (Bartlett 2004, 65).

In the most extensive study to date, Rodgers details the activities of members of the Irish gentry; merchants, capitalists and adventurers who during the eighteenth and nineteenth century developed colonial trade networks through complex kinship and Anglo-Irish connections and benefited from the slave trade. She distinguishes between different groups of Irish gentry including Gaelic, Anglo-Irish and Ulster Presbyterians. Religious and ethnic affiliations determined position and mobility within the social and political order of the early Caribbean, conditioned as it was by competing imperial powers. Joining the colonial elite class through marriage, capital investment or the colonial bureaucracy they used their position in the Atlantic world to expand colonial trade through inter-imperial brokerage and across the religious divide (Quintanilla 2009, 62). The move by Creole Irish planter, Richard O’Farrill, who left Montserrat for the Catholic colony of Cuba in 1722, proved advantageous and before long he married into the Cuban aristocracy. He provided a link to the British slave trade and was in a prime

position to benefit from the introduction of the free trade in slaves in Cuba in the latter half of eighteenth century, becoming one of Cuba's wealthiest plantation owners.²⁸

The history of Irish settlement in the West Indies during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as documented by Aubrey Gwynn in 1932 from extant church manuscripts, describes how colonial traders recruited labour from correctional institutions in Ireland, political prisoners, conscripts and indentured servants, most of whom had no choice in their destiny.²⁹ Not all were servants, and Creole Irish planters relying on kinship networks from Ireland and throughout the Caribbean achieved extraordinary wealth: 'Activating contacts in Bristol and Cork, they imported slaves and provisions, the two most desired commodities in the west Indies' (Rodgers 2007, 148). In early eighteenth-century Jamaica families from Munster and Connacht, the Kelly's, Bourke's and Maddens opened the way to acquiring land through holding some of the highest legal offices. They found it easier to conform to the established Protestant church in the Caribbean than in Ireland or in the mainland colonies (149). Irish gentry and merchants, Catholic and Protestant, prospered as plantation owners producing tobacco, cotton and indigo for which they used indentured labour from Ireland. This merchant class are described as 'effective and enterprising colonisers at home and abroad' who contributed to the development of the British Empire (Olmeyer 2004, 57). Donald Akenson, writing about servants and gentry in Montserrat, suggests that they all became able colonisers abroad through their experience of being colonised at home.³⁰ Higgins disputes this view as over-simplistic, but acknowledges that dispossessed Irish arriving in Montserrat did not identify with the native Arawaks or Caribs; nor did the oppressed Irish servants support the slave revolt planned for St. Patrick's Day in 1768.

²⁸ The history and influence of the O'Farrill family and other Irish families who were part of the planter elite in Cuba is discussed in Chapter 4.

²⁹ Some of the first studies of Irish settlement in the West Indies were carried out by Aubrey Gwynn SJ based on church records. See A. Gwynn, 'Early Irish Emigration to the West Indies (1612-1643)' *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 18: 71 (September 1929); A. Gwynn, 'Cromwell's Policy of Transportation Part II' *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 20:78 (June 1931); and A. Gwynn, 'The First Irish Priests in the New World' *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 21:82 (June 1932).

³⁰ In this history of Montserrat Irish settlers are treated as one homogenous group who went there by choice to better their prospects. See Donald Akenson, *If the Irish Ran the World: Montserrat, 1630-1730* (Liverpool: McGills Queens University, 1997). This view is contested by Higgins arguing that such a generalisation is an over-simplification of a much more complex history needing more in-depth research, (Higgins 2011), 187.

Higgins argues for a more nuanced analysis on the grounds that ‘there are no pure forms of the relationship between coloniser and colonised’ and suggests that ‘there is no one simple Hibernicist story, no more than there is one simple Africanist story that stands in competition with it’ (Higgins 2011). The vast majority of Irish immigrants arriving in the West Indies in the seventeenth century were Catholics dispossessed of their lands, adventurers and speculators amongst them, but most were indentured labourers and transportees. This cross-section of Irish society played its part in the process by which European colonists in the seventeenth century ‘turned the Caribbean into the world’s sugar-bowl’. In the crossfire of warring European powers the Irish saw difficulties and opportunities and whether colonised or coloniser at home, ‘when seeking their fortunes in Europe’s overseas empire they had to choose which king to serve and which colony to plant’ (Rodgers 2007, 145). Island-hopping by the Irish in the Caribbean involved negotiating with rival imperial powers and was more often to their advantage as the rise to wealth and power of Irish planter families in Cuba demonstrates.

The question of ethnic alliances across class boundaries amongst the Irish, superseding race privilege in the Caribbean has not been the subject of much historical enquiry. While the Irish experience of oppression did not presuppose identification with oppression of slavery in the Caribbean, there is as much evidence of alliances and co-operation amongst Irish servants and African slaves as there are incidences of racial status defeating class solidarity. Undoubtedly all servants were treated harshly in the English colonies but ‘Irish Catholic subjugation was magnified by English Protestant’s sense of cultural and religious superiority’ (Shaw and Block 2011, 35). Hilary Beckles describes Irish servants in Barbados as being considered by their English masters as ‘insubordinate and riotous social misfits’. Their conditions were often described as ‘slave-like’ in which they were disciplined and policed by their masters as the ‘enemy within’ (Beckles 1990, 515). Irish servants were accused of conspiring with slaves in Barbados and collaborating with the French invaders in Montserrat (516). The same accusation would be repeated in Cuba two hundred years later when free Irish immigrants were accused of collaborating with British abolitionists in 1844 and of participating in the largest slave conspiracy in Cuban history.

By 1650 as the European taste for sugar reached new heights, the Caribbean landed elite willingly responded to British colonial policy to replace European servants with African slave labour. This early plantation period was formative for English planters, who unlike their Iberian counterparts were not as familiar with the management of slave labour in the production of agricultural commodities. The trade in slaves from Africa was not yet well established in the British West Indies and any existing trade was in the hands of the Spanish, Portuguese and the Dutch. The development of plantation production of tobacco, cotton and indigo as export commodities was based on indentured labour from Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales. Beckles argues that the demands of plantation agriculture in the West Indies transformed a traditional pre-industrial English system of indentured servitude into a form of 'proto-slavery' in the West Indies (Beckles 1985). In what was seen as 'a training ground' for English planters in the enslavement of black labour, Eric Williams argues that 'the transportation of white servants established a precedent for the transportation of Negro slaves' (Williams 1944, 103). Planters attuned to market forces which moulded the relationship between forms of labour control and the accumulation of capital, were honing their skills through the greater exploitation of their servants to accumulate the capital needed to buy slaves. In the early years of sugar plantations the term 'white slavery' derived from the positioning of servants in the fields as part of slave gangs under more brutal overseers. The institution of English servitude in the West Indies was governed by the 'custom of the Country', where it was transformed into a more coercive system in which servants were conceived by planters as a 'species' of property with a saleable value, edging closer to chattel slavery. When the ships carrying servants arrived, the West Indian planters hurried to inspect the 'white' cargo before the sale began. Servants had a market value and were sometimes exchanged for other commodities, as in the example of Thomas Anthony, a trader in servant labour from Kinsale, County Cork who exchanged a cargo of servants in Barbados in 1637 for a quantity of 'good tobacco'.³¹ The sale of servants on the market 'laid down the basic prerequisite for slavery to develop' (Beckles 1985, 40). When periods of indenture for

³¹ For an account of the changing labour market from white indentured servitude to forced African labour, particularly in Barbados, see Hilary Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in*

Europeans came to an end, many freed servants moved on to mainland colonies, causing the white population to decrease in size. In the Island of Montserrat, where in 1678, up to seventy percent of the population were Irish, bound and free, those who stayed behind as freed bonds people, became smallholders or sharecroppers and wageworkers, some of them of them acquiring a slave or servant themselves. In a colony where the economic predicament of freed workers was influenced by a growing market in slave labour and access to property and social mobility was conditioned by swearing allegiance to the Anglican Church, survival strategies amongst the Irish included collusion with slaves (Berleant-Schiller 1989, 546).³² The transformation to slave labour for the production of sugar paid off very quickly for the West Indian planters - Irish planters included.³³ In Barbados in 1645 there were 6,000 slaves and 11,000 white farmers growing tobacco; by 1667 the island produced mainly sugar on 745 plantations with 80,000 slaves and ‘was held to be nearly twenty times richer than before coming to sugar’, all in less than twenty five years (Thomas 1998). Over the next hundred years, as African slavery became the predominant system of labour and whites were freed from servitude, racial division centred on juridical status in which poor whites of Irish extraction were ‘bought off by the petty privileges of plantation society’ (Higgins 2011, 184).

Irish Mobile Proletariat (1800-1845)

The process of primitive accumulation in Europe ‘divorced direct producers from the means of production, and in fact made possible the settlement and cultivation of the New World’ (Rediker 1982, 125). From the early modern era up to and beyond the nineteenth century, Irish labour became part of a highly mobile proletariat in the Atlantic world. Irish migrants formed part of the masses of men and women ‘suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence, and hurled onto the labour market as free, unprotected, and rightless proletarians’ (Marx 1990, 876). Positioning Irish labour in the transnational context of the Atlantic economy locates them within the march of

Barbados, 1627-1713 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), Chapter 3.

³² For a fascinating and detailed account of the transformation from white servitude to black slavery in the early plantation economy of Montserrat, see Riva Berleant-Schiller, ‘Free Labor and the Economy in Seventeenth-Century Montserrat’ in *The William and Mary Quarterly* (July 1989).

³³ See Akenson (1997) and Higgins (2011) on the fortunes realised by Irish planters in Montserrat through this transformation to sugar production.

capitalist modernity and global processes of labour and migration. It connects the demand for labour abroad and enclosures at home as ‘twin aspects of the same process, involving global migration networks, emigrant remittances, capital formation and labour dispersal’ (Kenny 2003, 152).

The connection between excess labour and capital in Great Britain and the abundance of land in the colonies had long been exploited and was more formally conceptualised in practical terms in the 1830s by Edward Gibbon Wakefield as colonization. Colonization or colonial settlement viewed in purely economic terms in the nineteenth century was embraced by the new science of political economy (Foley 2011, 15). It was conceived of to begin with, as a civilising enterprise, which benignly coincided with ‘the transfer of communities who sought to maintain allegiance to their own original culture while seeking a better life in economic, religious or political terms’ (Young 2001, 20). Indigenous people were not the focus of theories of empire or theories of colonisation; as Foley puts it, ‘they were seen variously as natural hazards, impediments to the march of empire, potential labour, candidates for rescue from savagery and barbarity, or souls to be saved’ (Foley 2011, 15). More important to the theorists was the potential fit of abundant land in the colonies with the conveniently mobile excess capital and labour in the ‘Mother countries’ thereby expanding the market through colonial enterprise. Colonization or the aim to ‘settle elsewhere’ amounted to an act of geographical violence in Said’s terms, because the appropriation of land in the colonies provided Britain with an outlet for surplus, undesirable populations satisfying the demand for labour at the same time. Not everybody chose to settle elsewhere, as David Eltis points out in distinguishing between free and coerced migration, where the context of the decision presented little or no choice, and where the decision to relocate was not made by the migrant but some other individual (Eltis 1983) .

As the history of transatlantic migration from 1630-1830 demonstrates, the transfer or dislocation of unwilling or coerced migrants was by far the greatest. Up to the middle of the nineteenth century the transatlantic mobilisation of labour, in which the majority were involuntary or coerced migrants, produced the turbulent dislocation of millions of Africans and smaller numbers of Europeans. Up to 1820 more than two

million Europeans migrated while over fifteen million Africans were forcibly transferred to the Americas. Amongst the north western nations of Europe, English ships carried three times as many Africans as Europeans to the New World, and for every ten people on board British ships, before 1800, almost nine of them carried a 'labour debt' to be paid on their arrival in the Americas (Eltis 1983, 31). During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, once they arrived in the colonies, the exploitation of race worked to impose differential limits to the liberty of the imported workforce and segregate the unfree and the nominally free. The division of forced labour by petty privileges of race was designed to weaken or prevent alliances across class and when this did not always produce the desired result laws were passed to prevent against whites and blacks associating. In Montserrat in 1693 and 1736 laws were introduced to ban slaves and white servants from trading at slave markets and to suppress the threat presented by the 'many mischiefs arise[ing] from the unchristian-like association of white people with Negroes whites and blacks [...] drinking, playing, or conversing' (Berleant-Schiller 1989, 561). In the British Caribbean, slaves from Africa and indentured servants from the British Isles were braided together in the production of sugar and tobacco within racialised structures imposed by plantation society. Their labour was seen at different points as interchangeable, and by the end of the eighteenth century, when the profitability of slavery was on the wane and the humanitarian campaign for the abolition of slavery gathered momentum, cheap white labour was introduced as a substitute. Imagined colonial hierarchies of race based on juridical status, by now well entrenched, posed new challenges to colonial authorities not only in terms of supply, but also in terms of degree or forms of coercion. Exceptions like Cuba, where slavery actually increased despite international treaties to ban the trade, and continued to be extraordinarily profitable up to the 1860s, the principal challenge to the supply of labour came from pressure to end the illegal trade in slaves while the domination of new forms of labour was secondary. Discourses of race and labour introduced new arguments to accommodate the coercion of different forms of 'free' labour in the aftermath of the abolition of slavery.

Emigration as a proportion of population was higher in Ireland than any other European country. In over a century of increasing outward flow, between 1801 and 1921

as many as eight million men, women and children emigrated from Ireland of which two-thirds went to the United States (Fitzpatrick 1990, 1). Historian Kevin Kenny cautions on projecting a transnational diasporic identification onto the mass of ordinary Irish migrants and presumably to those who left before the Famine (Kenny 2003, 135). He cautions that collapsing all Irish migration history into the concept of diaspora, derived from a single event such as the Famine, diminishes and conceals ‘its religious, regional, socioeconomic, and temporal diversity’ (145). Contradictory and powerful Irish emigration motifs, such as Millers’ ‘banishment and exile’ or Akenson’s ‘entrepreneurs’, in the Americas at least, have prised open the case for what Kenny describes as ‘a more flexible typology’ which includes criteria of ‘*origin, articulation, and temporality*’ (143). The diversity of Irish migration to the West Indies is a clear example of this and it is worth applying a similar flexible typology to Irish migration to Cuba, which although similar in some respects to the West Indies, as we will see in Chapter 3, it was made up of very different migratory flows articulating with Spanish colonial policies at different times in Cuba’s history making the experience very different to the United States or even Argentina.

Irish Migration to Latin America

Studies of overall figures for more neglected destinations in Latin America are not available but the number who arrived in the port of Buenos Aires between 1822 and 1929 is estimated to have reached 7,159 Irish immigrants (Kelly 2009, xix).³⁴ Irish ‘colonies’ in Latin America were viewed in a positive light to increase population in deserted areas but also ‘to *whiten* the native population’, and between Argentina and Uruguay alone Murray cites a the number of Irish-born immigrants as high as 50,000 (Murray 2008, 17). As Kelly points out in her 2009 study of Irish ‘*Ingleses*’ detailing the Irish immigrant experience in Argentina, the fact that it was Spanish-speaking and Catholic made the emigrant experience qualitatively different to settlement in North

³⁴ Kelly’s figure is based on the analysis of figures by Eduardo Coghlan, *El aporte de los irlandeses a la formación de la nación Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1982), 16, and Centro de Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos, 2003. Kelly’s study gives an array of quantitative information but, as she discusses at length, accurate figures of Irish immigrants in Argentina (a tiny proportion of the overall number of English immigrants) is hampered because official records did not always distinguish Irish from English origins and a generic description of ‘*Ingles*’ was applied to English speaking immigrants.

America. The newly independent Argentina looked to Europe as a source of white labour and with the help of expanding British commercial interests in the River Plate, Argentina and other destinations such as Brazil took on a more 'exotic' appeal. In a detailed study of English, Irish and Irish American settlers in nineteenth-century Brazil, Oliver Marshall argues that very little was known by intending migrants about the reality of life there. Irish and English immigrants, who went to work as agricultural workers on colonisation schemes in Brazil in the 1860s, were influenced by exotic images painted in promotional pamphlets of 'a land of mystery or lush paradise' (Marshall 2005, 8). Agents representing the Brazilian government targeted impoverished immigrants in New York and industrial centres in England. They recruited immigrants through their consular offices and sometimes used the Catholic Church to target 'simple labourers' promoting Brazil as 'a land of unparalleled potential prosperity for immigrants' (8-9). Based on promises of cheap land and employment in a Catholic country a group of some 339 emigrants, predominantly Irish were recruited by a Dublin priest, Fr. Montgomery, in the English Midlands. Others, recruited in the slums of New York, were quickly disillusioned by the conditions they would find in Brazil. As Marshall describes it '[R]emote locations and poor communications, land unsuited to European farming techniques, poor administrations and lack of resources all conspired against successful outcomes for immigrants, no matter how determined to succeed'(205). European immigrants earned a reputation for being 'extremely troublesome' and not 'necessarily hard working', and in Marshall's view, it was easier to blame the immigrants themselves, 'in this case falling back on the old stereotype of 'wild Irish' succumbing to the bottle and brawls- than to accept responsibility for a flawed scheme' (203).

Schemes such as the recruitment of 3,000 people in Cork to join the Brazilian army were equally doomed to failure, when on arrival in Rio de Janeiro they were abandoned, they mutinied in the streets. In one of the last attempts at establishing an Irish colony in Argentina 700 emigrants left Cork in 1889 as part of a wider immigration scheme promoted by the Irish-Argentine community. Also abandoned in harsh conditions, many died, especially children in what came to be know as the 'Dresden Affair' (Murray 2008). Re-emigration to the United States, Australia or return to Ireland

was not infrequent from Latin America. In Argentina after years of difficult and transient working conditions some Irish migrants became prosperous sheep farmers with large estates, establishing the beginning of a class of privileged Irish landowners on the agrarian landscape (Kelly 2009, 85). The majority of Irish immigrants worked for landowners and in contrast to North America, Irish settlement was predominantly rural, taking advantage of the expanding sheep farming industry (76). Edmundo Murray's collection of emigrant letters describes a very successful and self-consciously Irish-community in *Becoming Irlandés* (Murray 2006) and demonstrates the kind of correspondence which contributed to a strong and enduring process of chain migration between three counties in Ireland and Buenos Aires.³⁵ A further distinguishing feature of Irish-Argentine migration which has parallels with Irish immigrants in South Africa is the extent to which social and economic mobility was facilitated by overtly identifying culturally as '*Ingleses*' in countries with close political ties with Britain and where Englishness was positively viewed.³⁶ This makes for an interesting comparison with Cuba where the opposite was the case and hostility to British subjects intensified during the 1830s and 40s, in the context of imperial tensions in the Caribbean and international pressure to abolish slavery. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, Irish identification with Britishness, whether chosen or imposed, proved to be risky. However, as mentioned above, Irish participation in white immigration schemes to Latin American countries during the nineteenth century must be viewed within nationalist concerns to whiten the indigenous and black populations of those countries.

North America

The exodus to North America during the pre-famine period was episodic to begin with, associated mainly with colonisation ventures, demands of the market and for some, persecution or poverty at home. By the early 1830s Catholic emigrants joining the transatlantic flow began to outnumber Protestants for the first time, but still remained

³⁵The three counties from where most emigrants to Argentina left from were Longford, Westmeath, and Wexford, all in the relatively prosperous province of Leinster close to the eastern seaboard with easy access to British markets. Ibid. Chapter 1: Points of Departure.

³⁶ Irish immigrants in South Africa were predominantly urban and not Catholic. See Donald Akenson *The Irish in South Africa* (Grahamstown: Rhodes University, Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1991).

smaller in number than Ulster Presbyterians. For the greater part of the eighteenth century out of a population of 2.4 million, an average of 5,000 a year crossed the Atlantic. A reciprocal trade in cargo and people grew between Ireland and colonial America, particularly in the provisions trade, fisheries in Newfoundland and the flaxseed and linen trade (Adams 1932). Between the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the Great Famine, in what was to become the most significant outflow from any European country an estimated 1.5 million emigrants left the country. Ó Gráda emphasises the distinctive regional patterns associated with pre-famine emigration and the predominance of families rather than individuals (Mokyr and Ó Gráda 1984); Adams highlights some of the first transatlantic outflow of Catholic migrants before the Famine as providing ready-made workers to nineteenth-century America (Adams 1932).³⁷ Predominantly family migration in the pre-famine decades, those who migrated to England were a more impoverished emigrant stream than those who went to North America and they settled in textile towns where employment could be found for men, women and children. Ó Tuathaigh makes the point that a large number of pre-famine immigrants comprised a seasonal migration in which there was a high rate of mobility and a disproportionate concentration on construction, dock-work and railway navvying (Ó Tuathaigh 1981, 153). A much larger stream of permanent Irish emigration to North America responded to the demand for immigrant workers and contributed to industrial and urban expansion throughout the nineteenth century. Fitzpatrick describes Irish immigrants as particularly well suited to servicing other people's industrial revolutions because of their rural backgrounds and lack of skill; they found their way into the worst jobs in areas of expanding employment as servants and labourers in the cities, as miners or construction workers on public works, they were 'cheap, industrious, mobile and adaptable'. They occupied what he calls 'the worst seats in the best theatres' (Fitzpatrick 1990, 23).

To satisfy the demands of territorial expansion on the other side of the Atlantic nineteenth-century political economy adopted the tenets of Wakefield's art of colonisation, advocating the free international movement of labour to redress the

³⁷ The biggest outflow of emigrants came from the more industrialised Ulster province and

balance between land, capital and labour. Proposals by state-funded emigration came to nothing but landlords and their agents advocated controlled emigration and the Catholic Church promoted schemes of ‘Catholic colonisation’ in both North and South America.³⁸ Of the thousands who petitioned the Colonial Office between 1817 and 1844 for official assistance to emigrate, the majority looked for aid for family groups to move and stay together in America. Many expressed the wish to escape ‘dependence’ on a landlord by finding independent security overseas. The traditional worldview of peasant farmers at this time resisted the ‘proletarianizing and pauperizing consequences’ of socio-economic changes in Ireland (Miller 2008, 57). Miller argues that the failure of ‘illegal combinations’ such as trade unions and agrarian secret societies to halt the detrimental ‘progress’ of an alien economic model prompted surges of emigration which ‘meant that emigration was at bottom involuntary exile’ (62). His extensive analysis of emigrant letters during this period describes the desire by many for personal independence, and the predominant motive of migration as exchanging “dependence” and the “slavish” effects of proletarianisation for a small farm or sufficient land to make a comfortable living (60).³⁹ While external funding was crucial in ‘facilitating and moulding’ emigration, any assistance by the state, landlords and philanthropists was dwarfed by remittances sent home by emigrants, resulting in chain migration with family allegiances becoming the main selection process (Fitzpatrick 1990). The ensuing flow of emigrant labour, as argued by Burawoy, cannot be simply explained as a condition of push and pull factors associated with the market, to which individuals respond by migrating. In his comparative study of migrant labour in South Africa and the United States, he demonstrates that migrant labour forms part of ‘a functioning

commercialised regions of Leinster, Munster and east Connacht.

³⁸ For a full account of Father Montgomery’s emigration and settlement scheme to transfer Irish Catholics from Birmingham to Brazil in 1867, see Oliver Marshall, *English, Irish and Irish-American Pioneer Settlers in Nineteenth Century Brazil*, (Oxford : Centre for Brazilian Studies, 2005); For details on Irish Catholic colonisation in Minnesota and a survey of earlier colonisation schemes in North America, see Gerard Moran, ‘“In Search of the Promised Land”’, *The Connemara Colonisation Scheme in Minnesota, 1880*, *Éire-Ireland*, vol. 31:3 & 4, (1996).

³⁹ The exile motif detected by Miller in Irish emigrant letters is also viewed as a sentiment which was fostered by nationalist propagandists in the United States. Miller argues while large numbers regarded themselves as political exiles, most were voluntary emigrants who in response to adverse conditions at home wished to escape poverty and unemployment (Miller 2008), p. 12. Also see Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

system of migrant labour [...] where the flow of labour is regulated to a greater or lesser extent by dominant political and economic interests' (Burawoy 1976, 1051). The links between European expansion and international migration are well established, as the demand for people to colonise new territories set in motion a process of transnational migration in which Irish and other European emigrants crossed the Atlantic as indentured servants, wage labourers, settlers, soldiers and transportees.

Irish emigrants who went to the United States were a socially and culturally diverse group, many of whom were small farmers, poor artisans and labourers who 'left home to achieve what they called independence', interpreted by Miller as a 'pre- or proto-capitalist ideal of 'comfortable self-sufficiency' (Miller 2008, 252). The immigrant ideal of 'independence', expressed in letters to family members back home, in a land where 'the millions of uncultivated acres' could provide freedom from 'the slavish effects of proletarianisation' and the freedom to compete in the market-place were in line with the early Republican culture of the United States (60). This ideal of independence and equality of opportunity, built on the expropriation of native lands and the forced labour of slaves, changed as the movement of labour in the Atlantic became part of a class formation process structured by capitalist transformation and the demands of industrial America. Irish immigrants in the United States settled overwhelmingly in urban-industrial areas in the United States and had little choice but to join the ranks of the proletariat as contract-workers and wage labourers on canals or in factories as textile workers⁴⁰.⁴¹ They formed the most urbanised group in the United States and some of the poorest, just above Native-Americans, African-Americans and belonging in greater numbers than other European migrants to the ranks of the unskilled (Kenny 2000, 61). Their fate, as wage workers, was driven by free-market ideology and the 'invisible

⁴⁰ By 1870, Irish-born immigrants in the United States made up five percent of the total population, and accounted for almost one-quarter of the population of Boston and New York City; see Kevin Kenny, 'Diaspora and Global Comparison' (2003), 150. There is an extensive literature on Irish migration to America, concentrating on urban settlement in Massachusetts, New York and Philadelphia. On Irish textile workers in the Boston area, see Brian Mitchell, *The Paddy Camps: the Irish of Lowell 1821-61*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Haisa Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1983); David Doyle, 'The Irish as Urban Pioneers in the United States, 1850-1870,' *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 10 (Fall

hand' was no less violent than where they had come from. In the conditions of early industrial America, forming the underclass of 'free' workers, a wage was no guarantee of fending off starvation or death. As an immigrant group who were unskilled and largely illiterate and desperately constrained by lack of choice, their presence in high numbers in the hardest and lowest paid jobs as canal diggers, labourers, domestic servants and prostitution was legendary up to mid-century. They shared some of the same occupations as African Americans in what were the most despised and servile jobs, occupying some of the lowest positions in the hierarchy of American society.

The Irish were the only immigrant group in which there was no disproportion between numbers of women and men migrating to the United States. The back-breaking work of domestic 'help', engaged in predominantly by Irish women and free Black women throughout the nineteenth century, described by some commentators as an 'archaic' form of labour based on the master/servant relationship, 'out of step with the capitalism of the period', but as Marjorie Howe argues, domestic servants were immersed in and defined by modernising influences of 'geographical movement, the cash economy, sexual transgression, and urban life' (Howe 2009, 99). As with male proletarianisation the discipline of capitalist labour relations was imposed through strict rules and regulations; the worker was freed to move on and the employer was free from any tradition of obligation or responsibility for their domestic servants.⁴² In general social mobility amongst the Irish was restricted in American cities well into the twentieth century, where in Boston for instance they arrived 'as unwelcome intruders into a closed, long-established hierarchical society' (Kenny 2003, 151). By 1835 poor Irish Catholics, increasing all the time in numbers, while they occupied the lowest strata of white society, on arrival in the United States 'were securely white by law, positioned within the race of the settler, not as victims of colonialism' (Roediger 2008, 144). The arrival of growing numbers of unskilled Catholic migrants from the least Anglicised areas of Ireland coincided with the formation of a new bourgeois middle class with

1990-Winter 1991); Ronald Baynor and Timothy Meagher, *The New York Irish* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996).

⁴² For a discussion of cultural meanings generated by the 'Irish Maid' in the Atlantic world as they appear in strands of nineteenth-century modern Irish literature, see Marjorie Howes, 'How Irish

strong capitalist values and a revival of Protestantism in the United States. As Anglo-American Protestantism came to define American society and culture, anti-Irish prejudice, centring on religion rather than race became more virulent by the 1830s, as Kenny observes ‘most nativists at this time were opposed not to immigration generally but to Irish Catholic immigrants in particular’ (Kenny 2000, 115).

The same could be said for British reaction to the hordes of immigrants from Ireland in the pre-famine years. A damning view of Irish migration to Britain came from Cornwall Lewis in his report on *The State of the Irish Poor in Britain* in 1836, as ‘unparalleled in the history of the world’, and suggests that it goes against the grain of what usually happens:

from more civilised to less civilised nations, as was the case with [...] the Spanish and Portuguese settlements in America; with the English settlements in North America, the East Indies and New South Wales [...] the Irish emigration into Britain is an example of a less civilized population spreading themselves as a kind of substratum, beneath a more civilized community.⁴³

Amid growing concerns about the influx of Irish emigrants into England and their ‘pernicious influence on the English [and Scottish] working class’, Cornwall Lewis recommended that certain measures be introduced in Ireland to prevent the migrating poor from going to England.⁴⁴ Subscribing to a Malthusian analysis of the perils of population increase in both England and Ireland, political economy and the discourse of ‘improvement’ generated broad agreement that colonization would be beneficial to all at home and abroad. Labour was conceived by

Maids are Made: Domestic Servants, Atlantic Culture, and Modernist Aesthetics’ in *The Black and Green Atlantic*, edited by Peter O’Neill and David Lloyd (2009).

⁴³ George Cornwall Lewis, *Report on the State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain*, (London, 1836), 7.

⁴⁴ Irish emigration to Britain during the nineteenth century was small in the context of the total outward flow however at the same time as demand for labour in the industrial centres of England grew the influx of immigrant Irish accelerated. Numbers of Irish-born in England by 1841 reached 420,000 of which some 100,000 had arrived in the 1830s. Their numbers reached a maximum figure of 806,000 in 1861. See Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh ‘The Irish in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Problems of Integration’ in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 31, (1981), 151. For a discussion of nineteenth-century Irish labour in Britain see Ruth-Ann Harris, *The Nearest Place That Wasn’t Ireland: Early Nineteenth-*

some as a simple matter of supply and demand, and according to the political economist Cliffe Leslie, ‘whether it be English labour or Irish labour, it is a commodity which finds its way to the best market’.⁴⁵ Addressing the question of why Ireland, with its cheap labour force, failed to undergo an industrial revolution, Mokyr reasoned that ‘British capital did not have to come to cheap Irish labour because cheap Irish labour would come to British capital, both in England and in North America’ (Mokyr 1985, 259).

The failure of colonial policies threatened to undermine English models of improvement and reform in Ireland. While adhering rigidly to *laissez faire* orthodoxies, the discourse of nineteenth-century political economy, in light of its failure in Ireland, proffered a view of Irish poverty and squalor as having more to do with ethnic impediments, deeply rooted in the Irish character and culture. Population pressures, rising poverty and Irish political proclivities continued to confound reform policies and ideas of improvement and were viewed by colonial reformers as a tenacious ‘recalcitrance to capitalist economic and political transformation’ (Lloyd 2007, 312). In fact, the more Irish conditions did not succumb to the dictates of political economy, the more they became ‘not merely an anomaly but a scandalous and potentially destabilising alternative to the economic and political forms that the reproduction of capital requires’ (313). In 1845, Engels paid tribute to the indispensable contribution of the Irish ‘reserve at command’ to the ‘rapid extension of English industry’ (Engels 1987, 123). This is echoed by Hobsbawm more than a hundred years later, remarking that even though the Irish ‘were remarkably slow to adapt themselves to industrial society [...] they provided industry with its mobile vanguard, especially in building and construction [...] bringing with them their muscle, their dash and their readiness to work in huge spurts’ (Hobsbawm 1968, 266). Compared to the English proletariat, they were according to Hobsbawm:

Century Irish Labour Migration, (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1994); Arthur Redford *Labour Migration in England 1800-1859*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1964).

⁴⁵ Thomas Edward Cliffe Leslie, *Land Systems and Industrial Economy of Ireland, England and Continental Countries*, London: Longman, Green & Co., 85-116 [1868] cited in T. Boylan and T. Foley (eds.) *Irish Political Economy*, vol IV, (London : Routledge , 2003), 183.

[a] pauperized, degraded peasantry whose own native society had been crushed by some centuries of English oppression into fragments of old custom, mutual aid and kinship solidarity, held together by a generically Irish 'way of life' (wakes, songs, etc.) [...]. To the English and Scots, and especially their middle class, they were merely dirty and feckless, undesirable semi-aliens (Hobsbawm 1968, 266).

Antagonism towards Irish immigrant labour intensified when they accepted lower rates of pay for longer hours and their use as strike-breakers became the source of a long and bitter legacy (Redford 1964). Admired for his brawn rather than any skill, in order 'to become a mechanic, a mill-hand, he would have to adopt the English civilization, the English customs, become in the main, an Englishman' (Engels, 125). Hobsbawm does not entertain such promise in his claim that 'apart from the language (if they happened no longer to be Irish-speaking) they brought nothing with them to make more sense of nineteenth-century England or Scotland than of China', which might well have been more aptly applied to their ill-advised migration to further flung corners of the Spanish Caribbean (Hobsbawm 1968, 226). However, with faint praise, he remarked that 'they provided the British working class with a cutting edge of radicals and revolutionaries, with a body of men and women uncommitted by either tradition or economic success to society as it existed around them' (226). Irish migrant labour in the industrialising centres of Britain or the United States was characterised in a discourse of racialisation and cultural distancing which differentiated Irish immigrants as a backward workforce with contaminating pre-industrial instincts, or as Lloyd puts it, as 'a dissolute and disease-ridden lumpenproletariat that undercuts the wages of the English worker' (Lloyd 2008, 120). As the above accounts demonstrate, the historiography of the dislocation and emergence of Irish 'free' labour on Atlantic circuits has contributed to reproducing and adapting 'difference' based on ethnicity, nationality, religion and race across different temporal and socio-economic contexts. The construction of difference in capitalist labour relations has proved to be a powerfully divisive tool against resistance to exploitation, where diverse groups of workers might 'practice labour solidarity' across racial or gender divides.

Section Three: The Transition from Slavery to ‘Free’ Labour

The Test of Free Labour

In the opening pages of *The Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776, Adam Smith declared that the modern world of commerce is dependent on the cooperation of the voluntary labour of an abundance of workmen. The main source of improvement for society lay in the productivity, division and maintenance of its labour. It followed that ample reward promoted industrious workers and consumers, in pursuit of the two greatest blessings, ‘opulence and freedom’. For a society whose aim was wealth and liberty, slavery was not only morally objectionable, but economically defective. Adam Smith’s formulation of the superiority of free labour provided for abolitionists and political economists a stark and tidy dichotomy of Caribbean slave and European wage worker (Drescher 1999, 58). However in a discourse of abolition, this new economic ‘faith’ in free labour versus slave conveniently omitted and obscured regimes of labour organisation and control which, in legal terms, were not slavery but neither were they free. The cause to abolish slavery, in an age of capitalist expansion, did not extend its critique to the fundamental problem of an economic system in which European colonialism continued to rely on exploitative labour practices and simply adapted its racialised discourse. The dictum of the superiority of free labour over slavery and the importation of cheap white labour won plaudits amongst abolitionists also. The London-based *Anti-Slavery Reporter* cited the thousands of white workers from the Canaries, Spain and Ireland working in sugar plantations and on railway construction in Cuba as proof of their suitability as a substitute for slavery. The *Reporter* happily vouched that they had the capacity to ‘work hard in both sun and rain’.⁴⁶ It neglects to mention however, the condition of thousands of labourers from Ireland and the Canary Islands described as free, who were coerced by contracts which created debt bondage, in conditions ‘akin to slavery’.

Colonial capitalism structured labour relations, recasting them not simply as free wage labour, but as a more flexible combination of free and unfree labour. The change in mode of production and labour relations according to Wallerstein’s World-System

⁴⁶ *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 1 November 1854.

theory came about early in the sixteenth century, when Europe saw the creation of a capitalist world-economy as a solution to the crisis of feudalism. The new world order created capitalist market relations which subordinated peripheral, dependant economies, such as Ireland and Cuba, to serve the needs of core-capitalist states (O'Hearn 2001). Within the core states of Western Europe the division of labour involved the transformation of dependent peasant to free wage labour in agriculture and industry. However, in the peripheries of Latin America and the Caribbean, imported forced labour prevailed in the mines and plantations. In Ireland, the reproduction of a constant supply of migrant labour, as described above, 'supplied both the fodder and the labour power for a developing capitalism' (Lloyd 2008, 122). But as the Cuban and Brazilian experience shows, the disjuncture of ideas of free labour with the dependence on slavery and coerced labour were not at all at odds with a hugely profitable system of colonial capitalism. The transient nature of migrant labour was perfectly suited to this fluid and arbitrary system of labour relations at the periphery where free labour encountered different conditions and coercions in different places. For European migrants circulating on Atlantic networks of colonial labour, transience and flexibility, through dislocation was a necessary corollary to the development of capitalism, in producing a work force made up of free and coerced labour which, as Wallerstein argues, is crucial to capitalism (1979).

Not only did Europe through its embrace of liberal economics, exploit the economic surplus of the colonies, contributing to their underdevelopment in the long-term, it was exacerbated by maintaining archaic modes of production. Because direct producers had some access to the means of subsistence, extra-economic coercion extracted surplus in the form of rent. McDonough and Slater argue that the tenurial relationship was feudal or quasi-feudal, arising as it did from the demand for a limited supply of land and conditioned by dispossession, landlords could extract ever higher rental payments from tenants by means of extra-economic coercion. The surplus from greater productivity was far from reward for one's labour in Adam Smith's vision, it was fixed by competition. In the case of nineteenth-century Ireland, McDonough and

Slater posit that much of the character of this period is explained by the persistence of feudalism into quite late in the century.⁴⁷

In as much as the concept of capital cannot fully account for the mode of production in colonial Latin America, Steve Stern argues that its socio-economic structure cannot be termed ‘feudal’ either. Avoiding what he sees as a conceptual trap, he argues that to interpret historical explanations of patterns of labour and economy in colonial America as ‘a variant of world capitalism is misleading’ (Stern 1993, 51). To the critical alternatives of ‘feudalism’ or any other archaic mode of production, Stern says that history is not that cooperative, in that it has given us significant anomalies in the periphery which are precociously industrial, particularly in the production of silver and sugar. While merchant capital has undoubtedly had a transformative impact on technology and labour, the existence of a ‘shifting combination of heterogeneous relations of production in a pragmatic package’ in the outposts of the colonial periphery is, in Stern’s view, at odds with Marxism (54). Latin American theorists agree that European-centred categories of feudalism and capitalism have limited historical applicability in developing a theory of colonial modes of production. In the case of Irish historical and economic development, Cleary suggests that theoretically it simply does not fit into the ‘feudalism-absolutism-capitalism sequence’ usually applied to the core centres of European imperialism (Cleary 2007, 36).

Poverty, population growth and the Famine in Ireland confounded the doctrines of political economy and challenged the limits of colonial institutions to such an extent that the rhetoric of backwardness and the persistent menace of ‘incivility’ were frequently invoked to justify reform of old regimes of control to deal with newly liberated subjects. A similar discourse was applied to the problem of labour in the aftermath of emancipation in the West Indies in which the greatest challenge was the ‘backwardness’ of the African character. Policy makers in London construed problems of governance of the social order and free labour in a rhetoric of cultural limitations in

⁴⁷ Based on the failure of an autonomous industrialisation process and the persistence of a rural agricultural economy subordinated to Britain, McDonough and Slater argue that the extraction of rent before the Famine cannot be considered a capitalist rent because it relied on increasing the amount of labour applied to producing rent, extracted through extra-economic coercion. See McDonough and Slater, ‘Colonialism, Feudalism and the Mode of Production’ in *Was Ireland a Colony?* (2005).

need of discipline and moral reform (Holt 2000, 20). With the ‘peculiarity of the African’ and the ‘peculiarity of the Irish cottier’ they were ‘constituted as a racial exception to the universal rules of economic behaviour’ (22). As with Catholic emancipation, economic liberalism had to find a way of substituting the social order of slavery to exercise control over the now free Black population, previously excluded from the public sphere. The formulation of colonial policy necessary to cordon off the ‘residuum’ of society – the teeming poor in Ireland and freed slaves in the West Indies – laid bare the contradictions of liberal ideology. Conflicts arose between colonial authorities and dominant settler populations seeking to maintain a hierarchy in which they could hold onto political and economic power. The great difficulty as J. E. Cairnes described it in 1862 lay with the ex-slave owners who wished to ‘re-establish under some new form his old tyranny’ (Cairnes [1862] 1969). Freed slaves withdrew their labour from plantations, when the planters lowered their wages, taxed the cabins they lived in and charged them rent for their provision grounds. Choosing instead to move onto previously unsettled land, they became peasant farmers rather than hired hands. Rather than produce crops for export they produced food for subsistence and sale in local markets. Planters in the West Indies complained of a scarcity of labour and lack of labour discipline (Engerman 1982). At the same time the Irish Catholic peasantry were demanding political rights, through underground agrarian resistance and through the power of mass mobilisation, agitating for access to land and relief from tithes and taxes. The discourse of transition to free labour in the West Indies now hinged on the more muted material concerns of regulation of land ownership and labour control. Policy makers adopted a discourse of the moral concerns of inculcating ex-slaves and peasants with bourgeois values, something they considered impossible without the rule of a liberal and superior civilising force.

Liberalism claims to apply to all humanity which, in Uday Metha’s terms, tends to be ‘transhistorical, transcultural and most certainly transracial’ (Metha 1997, 63). It claims that freedom is a natural inheritance and equality is universal provided that its constituents are rational. The proviso as inserted in Locke’s *Second Treatise* states that perfect freedom must remain ‘within the bounds of the Law of Nature’, which for Metha is where freedom, equality and rationality evince an ‘anthropological minimum’

contingent on a qualified capacity to reason (63). Inculcated by education and therefore social status the inheritance of liberty is in strict accordance with cultural norms and therefore ‘riddled with a hierarchical and exclusionary density’ (Metha 1997, 70). Liberal ideology and practice, particularly when applied to the colonies, took the boundaries to political inclusion very seriously indeed and universalism was reserved for men of property. For British possessions other than America and Australia or those colonies in a backward state of development, different in civilisation, language and race from Britain, a more forceful style of colonial rule was needed using coercion to inculcate capitalist discipline where colonised people are incapable of self-interested economic behaviour or ‘self-command’ (Lloyd 2007, 326). Thus in Ireland and the West Indies the ‘hierarchical and exclusionary’ tendencies of economic and political liberalism ruled out representative government and universal political inclusion. Democratic reform or democratic rule was inherently contradictory in colonial societies, dependent on economic and social inequalities (Holt 2000, 44). The road to reform lay in the inculcation of bourgeois habits of labour through refinements in taste and expansion of desires over crude subsistence. Desiring more than “a pot of coco soup and herring tail” or “potatoes and buttermilk” the freed slave and the Irish peasant would work for wages to feed themselves and their families (45). In the very short shadow of the Haitian revolution and the 1798 Irish rebellion, despotism, in an age of emancipation, took on a special force when dealing with colonised people of ‘minimal capacities’. Adam Smith’s ‘invisible hand’ could not be relied on here to reform the ‘indolent torpor’ of the Irish or ‘the savage sloth’ of the slave. With the guiding hand of superior men, the freed slave would acquire proper habits of consumption and labour through a system of apprenticeship and the discipline of a treadmill; and Catholic paupers were dealt with by the institution of the Poor Laws and the workhouse, or emigration.

The ‘Natural Wage’

The debate on the index of reward for the labouring population was taken up by J. R. McCullough in his *Principles of Political Economy* where he identified the wage for labour as linked to subsistence needs. But this was further determined by ‘the ratio

which the capital of the country bears to its labouring population'. Countries with large populations would necessarily earn the lowest wage by this reckoning, which in Ireland's case as the system of cottierism demonstrates, there were no wages at all. The danger of the extinction of the labouring population was certainly a consideration which, McCullough reasoned in 1849 two years after the Great Famine in Ireland that:

the race of labourers would become extinct were they not supplied with the food and other articles sufficient, at least for their support and that of their families. This is the lowest limit to which the rate of wages can be permanently reduced; and for this reason it has been called the natural or necessary rate of wage.⁴⁸

On this very thin line where ethnicity was linked to survival, Adam Smith elaborated that the wage was based on 'whatever the custom of the country renders it indecent for creditable people, even of the lowest order to be without'.⁴⁹ A natural wage, just like freedom, was incorporated into economic doctrines through the social production of cultural hierarchies throughout empire for which exclusionary measures must apply. The wage index was therefore culturally linked and if by the laws of nature and the laws of economics, not only in the case of over-population but where the culture and character of a nation was morally deficient or backward in the European capitalist sense, then it followed that wage rates would follow suit. In South Africa and the West Indies the question of work after emancipation was posed: would they 'work under the same inducements of interest that are operative with other classes'? The answer from the state was no, not without a dose of colonial authority.⁵⁰ The test of free labour for colonial policy became more a test of the colonised wage workers in all their racial and cultural backwardness. The universalism of free labour ideology was also 'riddled with hierarchical and exclusionary density', as was the moral contract of emancipation.⁵¹

The formulation of plans to direct the transformation of the peasant and the freed slave into hired wage workers could not agree on proprietorship as a solution because

⁴⁸ J. R McCullough, *The Principles of Political Economy* (1849), cited in Lloyd, 'The Political Economy of the Potato' *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, 29, nos. 2-3, (June-September, 2007), 322.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Cited in Thomas Holt, *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 29.

⁵¹ Ibid.

economic security depended on the regulation of social relations based on rent, capital and the exploitation of labour. Economists such as Mill and Cairnes saw private property as the way towards moral improvement of the poor. Mill's proposal for peasant proprietorship was framed as:

the secret for converting an indolent and reckless into a laborious, provident and careful people. It is a secret which never fails. All over Europe the untiring labourer, the peasant whose industry and vigilance never sleep, is he who owns the land he tills.⁵²

The system of apprenticeship in the West Indies, designed to keep emancipated slaves working on plantations to ensure export commodities, was just one way of attempting to control labour, by restricting its options. The other was to raise the price of Crown lands and keep land out of reach of persons without capital while preparing the ex-slave for the discipline of labour (Holt 2000). In Ireland and England where opposite ratios in the balance of land and labour persisted, J.E. Cairnes, a disciple of John Stuart Mill, advocated emigration as the true remedy for the evils of surplus and redundant populations to new countries where 'the conditions of production are exactly reversed' [...] 'It is, that what is in excess in each should be brought to supplement what is deficient in each; in a word – that we should colonize' (Cairnes 1873).⁵³ Migration was well underway by 1833, with Irish 'free labour' directed to North America and Australia and indentured labour from China and India under government subsidy and regulation imported to the West Indian sugar plantations. In what was perceived in Ireland as a second-shipment of Irish labour to the West Indies, less than five years after the abolition of slavery, the Jamaican Legislature offered an inducement of a bounty of £15 a head to planters for 'mechanics, artisans and field labourers imported for the purpose of cultivation of the soil' (Senior 1986, 16). Jamaican plantation owners used shipping

⁵² John S. Mill, cited in David Lloyd 'The Political Economy of the Potato' *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 92:2 (2007), 327. For analysis of the political project of political economic doctrine in nineteenth century Ireland see Lloyd, op. cited and for the most extensive documentation of English economic doctrine and Ireland see Thomas Boylan and Timothy P. Foley, *Political Economy and Colonial Ireland: The Propagation and Ideological Function of Economic Discourses in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (London: Routledge, 1992); also see T. McDonough, E. Slater, and Thomas Boylan, 'Irish Political Economy Before and After the Famine' in *Was Ireland a Colony?*, edited by Terrence McDonough (2005).

agents in Belfast and Limerick to recruit emigrants and their families to work as field labourers in the sugar cane fields and in the coffee fields.

Virtual Slavery – Nominal Freedom

Despite colonial reservations about ‘the shovelling out and dumping of Irish Paupers’, and deviating from the rule of *laissez-faire*, a ‘judiciously controlled’ colonisation was construed as having remedial possibilities for Ireland. Rather than simply rely on Adam Smith’s belief in the labourer’s self-interested motivation, Edward Gibbon Wakefield and the National Colonisation Society favoured the capitalists’ management of labour for which he advocated ‘systematic colonization’. In the interests of prosperity, Wakefield explained, the scarcity of labour in the colonies was counteracted by colonial slavery, both ‘nominal and virtual’; and in the absence of Negro slavery, the virtual slavery of convicts, indentured servants and ‘redemptioners’ furnished as much labour as their masters needed. Illustrating this point, Wakefield conceded that the success of the great public works in states where slavery was forbidden depended on a ‘large supply of slavish Irish labour’.⁵⁴ He advocated the principle of ‘combined’ or concentrated labour based on greater productivity while restricting access to cheap land, not only to prevent the dispersion of colonists, but more crucially to restrain ‘the passion for owning land’ which in the new American settlements, ‘prevents the existence of a class of labourers for hire’.⁵⁵

In what Wakefield describes as mankind’s ‘simple contrivance for promoting the accumulation of capital [...] they have divided themselves into owners of capital and owners of labour’. This ‘quite original social contract’, as Marx ironically terms it, fits the bill for Western Europe, home of political economy, where the process of primitive accumulation is more or less accomplished, but not so in the colonies where ‘the producer owns his conditions of labour and employs that labour to enrich himself instead of the capitalist’ (Marx 1990, 932). Unlike the mother country where force was

⁵³ Cited in Tadhg Foley, ‘An Unknown and Feeble Body’: How Settler Colonialism Was Theorized in the Nineteenth Century’ in *Studies in Settler Colonialism* edited by Fiona Bateman and Lionel Pilkington, (2011), 16.

⁵⁴ Edward Gibbon Wakefield, *A View of the Art of Colonization* (London: John W. Parker, 1849), 456

used to expropriate labour, in order to ensure the wealth of the colonies, the capitalist, according to Marx, has to invent ‘artificial means to ensure the poverty of the people’.⁵⁶ Wakefield’s theory of systematic colonisation, according to Marx, is simply a means to guarantee the essential missing complement to the capitalist man by manufacturing the wage-labourer or ‘the other man, who is compelled to sell himself of his own free will’.⁵⁷ In what Wakefield saw as a hierarchy of industriousness, the ideal type of colonist was the ‘energetic’, ‘accumulating and domineering’ Anglo-Saxon not like the hordes of paupers ‘of the Milesian-Irish race’, ‘who poured into North America, by and large, virtually slaves by means of their lazy reckless habit of mind’, they ‘never colonise, but only emigrate miserably’ (Wakefield 1849, 456). Unavoidable as it was, for the capitalist, dealing with the ‘degraded races’ of negro slaves, emancipated convicts and the ‘pauper-Irish emigrants’, they were, in Wakefield’s words, ‘a public nuisance, a political danger, [and] a social plague’ (176). Even so, their value was recognised and as free wage labour they were sometimes used as a lesser risk to capital than the loss or injury of slave labour. Frederick Law Olmsted, in his account of the slave states acutely observes the division of labour on a steamboat travelling on the Alabama River. While watching bales of cotton being loaded on to a steamboat on the Mississippi, he remarks to the ship’s mate that the Irish gangers were in a more dangerous position trying to stow the bales bounced down the gangplank by slave hands. The reason for this arrangement, according to the mate, was ‘the niggers are worth too much to be risked here; if the Paddies are knocked overboard, or get their backs broke, nobody loses anything!’ (Olmsted 1996, 215). The value of chattel slaves may have spared them more dangerous work left instead to free Irish workers who in turn exploited this situation to bargain for higher wages. One Louisiana overseer complained of the high price of Irish workers, but in deference to the higher value of his slaves, he thought it better to use Irish men for ditching and clearing land ‘than to use up good field hands in such severe employment’ (Gleeson 2001, 53).

⁵⁵ Edward G. Wakefield, *England and America* (London, 1833), vol. 2: 33.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

The same slave owners in the American South must have seen some distinction between wage workers on the levees of the Mississippi and free wage labour in Britain when they employed the rhetoric of white/wage slavery to decry the exploitation of factory workers in their defence of slavery. Pro-slavery polemicists justified chattel slavery as a more benign system of labour control, compared to the supposedly ‘free’ wage-labour system in Ireland and England. One Cuban plantation owner, the Marquis de Arcos, sympathised with the Irish peasant while accusing British abolitionists of hiding their real interests beneath a veil of false philanthropy. Comparing the situation of slaves in Cuba with the ‘twelve million slaves’ in the British West Indies, he states that ‘seventeen percent of the population die of hunger every year and in Ireland alone more than a thousand die [every year]! Who has ever seen even one slave die in Cuba for want of food?’⁵⁸ The contradictory and contested discourse of slavery was also employed as a touchstone against which to measure oppression in Ireland. An American slave owner, John Randolph of Roanoke, while travelling in England and Ireland with his black servant Johnny, wrote to a friend back home,

Much as I was prepared to see misery in the South of Ireland, I was utterly shocked at the condition of the poor peasantry between Limerick and Dublin. Why, sir, John never felt so proud of being a *Virginia slave*. He looked with horror upon the mud hovels and miserable food of the *white slaves*, and I had no fear of his running away (Cunliffe 1979, 36).

The use of the metaphor of slavery is so pervasive, as argued by David Brion Davis, that it is in danger of ‘diluting the charge that Negro slavery in the South was a system of exceptional and intolerable oppression’.⁵⁹ Frederick Douglass, a fugitive American slave, who understood more than ‘the sentiment’ of slavery was clear in his denial of slavery in Ireland.⁶⁰ As a prominent abolitionist, who saw more value in making alliances than idealising free wage labour, he was impressed by Ireland ‘ever chafing under oppressive rule’. Hearing a similarity in the sorrowful music of the Irish

⁵⁸ Marqués de Arcos to Gerónimo Valdés, Governor of Cuba. Havana, 19 May 1842. Archivo Nacional de Cuba (ANC) Gobierno Superior Civil (GSC), see ANC GSC, 941- 33186.

⁵⁹ David Brion Davis, “Abolitionism and Ideological Hegemony,” in Thomas Bender, ed *The Antislavery Debate*, (Berkeley: University Of California Press, 1992), 173.

peasants, something resonant of African slaves, led him to remark that both were trapped inside the same ‘wail’. ‘The Irishman is poor,’ he said “but he is not a slave. He is still the master of his own body’. American slavery rendered its victims as mute as ‘the silent dead’, but the Irish can assemble, write and speak to press their grievances and they can emigrate.⁶¹ In the shadow of revolution in France, the American colonies, Haiti and Ireland it is no surprise that the oppression of slavery and the Irish peasantry should strike a mutual chord. However as the experience of contract labour in Cuba demonstrated the boundary between freedom and unfreedom for the Irish was fragile.

With slavery as the touchstone what then is free-labour in the colonial context? Frederick Cooper suggests that ‘the aftermath of slavery – freedom – is all too often treated as an undifferentiated, unexamined conceptual foil to bondage’ where free labour was simply defined as an end to coercion. Free labour within a present or past historical terrain is ‘a structure of labour control that needs to be analysed in its own way’ and not as a binary opposite to slavery (Cooper, Holt and Scott 2000, 3). But in the dual context of emancipation and free labour market ideology, freedom meant the autonomy to contract one’s labour voluntarily according to calculated self-interest. Equality in terms of legal standing was postulated in the reciprocity of an equivalent exchange. This rather lopsided notion of equality, empty of rights or protection for the worker and enshrined in law, was weighted in favour of the capitalist. The so-called progress in transforming the dependant peasant or slave into a ‘free’ and rightless proletarian simply changes the form of servitude into, what Marx describes as, the enslavement of the worker (Marx 1990, 875). Capitalist market relations and the unfreedom (in practice) of the freely entered into contract, created for the ‘free worker’ more of a situated freedom demanding to be substantiated at every turn. As labour forms, ‘neither contract labour nor wage labour’, as Steinfeld and Engerman argue, have ‘fixed natural sets of characteristics, one of which was freedom or unfreedom’ (Engerman and Steinfeld 1997, 116). Changing over time and place ‘[T]hey were social/legal practices’ in which

⁶⁰ C.L.R. James describes the forceful contribution which runaway slaves made by joining the campaign for abolition as the “self-expressive presence [...] embodying in their persons the nationally traumatic experience of bondage and freedom [without whom] antislavery would have been a sentiment only,”

⁶¹ Quoted in Roediger, David, ‘Race, Labor, and Gender in the Languages of Antebellum Social Protest’ in Stanley Engerman, *Terms of Labour* (1999), 175.

‘freedom or unfreedom were coincidental rather than essential features of both’ (116). For the more recently liberated, or the more ‘primitive races’, bestowed with a peculiar, partial and situational freedom, coercion and constraint governed the political economic order. In the British West Indies, for example, emancipation replaced chattel slavery with the apprenticeship system in which freedom for slaves was both gained and constrained at the same time. Conceived of as a wage labour system, special magistrates replaced the master ‘to oversee the supplanting of slavery’s coercion by wage labour discipline’ (Holt 1992, 26). Consequently, as Holt argues, the problem of abolition for British policymakers was at root a problem of labour: ‘how to pass from bondage to freedom without overthrowing the existing apparatus of social order in the passage’ (26).

Emancipation benefitted ex-slave owners, not only by payment of compensation but also in freeing them from their interest and obligation towards the welfare of their slaves. The emancipation of the labourer, Georg Simmel argues, ‘has to be paid for, as it were, by the emancipation of the employer, that is, by the loss of welfare that the bonded labourer enjoyed. The harshness or insecurity of his present condition is very much an indication of the process of emancipation [...]’ (Simmel 1990, 300). Now free to work as apprentices, subsistence for freed slaves was dependent on renting ground from the plantation owner. Freed in the ‘double sense’, as Marx described it, detached from the land and deprived of the means of production, the ‘free’ worker according to Thomas Holt ‘discovered that new forms of coercion lay at the heart of the new freedom’ (Holt 1992, 6). Well versed in forms of coercion, and equally well charged with economic motive of self interest, apprentices in Jamaica defied British colonial ideology by refusing to become ‘more efficient and worthy plantation workers’ (27). They choose instead economic alternatives to the plantation system and would find their way to the market by becoming peasant farmers.

The problem of forced labour, as a category other than slavery, was historically associated with colonialism, but persisted in post-emancipation societies, or ‘gradual’ emancipation societies such as Cuba, in the form of indenture, gang labour, convict labour, and contract labour. Irish contract labourers, while free to migrate through

different countries and voluntarily sign contracts to sell their labour power, they were ‘free’ proletarians who, became bonded under the structures of labour relations in Cuba’s incipient capitalist relations. Coming as they did, from a legacy of limited freedom in the Irish countryside, through the marginal existence of unskilled and dangerous working conditions of the canals and railroads of industrial America, the restricted choices they had to sell their labour power were prey to the market forces of supply and demand. In the transformation of the dependant peasant into a free worker, legal constraints to freedom persisted and workers were still ‘answerable with their bodies for breaching a labour agreement’ with little or no moral objection (Drescher 1999, 81). Violation of a voluntary labour agreement was still punishable by imprisonment and physical coercion in both England and the United States until the end of the nineteenth century. Labour was not free until employers lost the legal right to invoke extra-economic pressure or criminal penalties for premature departure or non-performance (50). However ‘economic’ inequality also inhibited their freedom in the sense that they were still forced to sell their labour power.

For the Irish and Canary Island wage workers, as well as convicts and freed slaves, on the construction of the Cuban railroad any breaches of contract by the labourers were criminalised by the laws of the state, incurring penalties and imprisonment for violations. As I have outlined in Chapter 1, they were subject to the full force of the military government. In the aftermath of their contracts, only when their labour debts were paid, did they pass from bondage to juridical freedom. Their formative experience as subjects in a colony of settlement, might well have prepared them for the exploitations of race and labour, but their transatlantic bid for independence was no less unstable in the Caribbean world of colonial modernity than in rural Ireland. As a mobile and transient labour force faced with the violence of global capitalism their desire for freedom, equality and independence continued to be ‘misplaced’ in colonial Cuba. That Irish migration to the West Indies was complex and multi-layered is well established and it is worth applying a similar ‘flexible typology’ to Irish migration to

Cuba.⁶² Although similar in some respects to the British West Indies, particularly in terms of the cross-section of class, the decision to migrate to Cuba was not made by somebody else, but the presumption of freedom associated with contract labour in the United States, limited as it was, assumed an altogether different meaning in the Spanish colony of Cuba.⁶³ The timing of this migration to the Caribbean, almost one hundred years later, lays bare the continued inhibition to freedom in an age of transition from slavery to wage labour.

⁶² See Kenny's wide-ranging discussion of diasporic approaches to Irish global migration in which he makes the case for combining transnational with cross-national to transcend the nation-state as the primary unit of historical analysis in: Kevin Kenny, 'Diaspora and Comparison: The Irish as a Case Study' *The Journal of American History*, (2003).

⁶³ The different migratory flows are discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: The Irish as Whitening Agents in Colonial Cuba

Introduction

By the time the railroad workers arrived in Havana, debates on racial demographics and the status of labour supply had been well underway since the previous century. The railroad workers, however, were not the first Irish to arrive in Cuba. A consideration of previous migrations from diverse sections of Irish colonial society opens a window into the overlapping processes of labour, race relations and class formation in colonial Cuba, as well as providing a fuller picture of Irish migration to the country. This chapter sets out to analyse three distinct episodes of Irish migration: the first episode, made up of propertied Irish families, who became part of the Cuban planter-class; the second were poor immigrant families who arrived as part of a white colonisation scheme; the third comprised contract workers, imported as ‘free’ labour to build the railroad.

The chapter is divided into three sections, each dealing with the successive episodes of Irish migration to Cuba. Section One gives an account of wealthy Irish merchants and high-ranking soldiers in Spanish regiments who arrived just after the British left Havana in 1763. As some of the wealthiest and most powerful of the ruling elite in Cuba, they pursued prosperity through sugar and slavery, supporting the decision at first by the planter class to forego political separation from Spain, in exchange for colonial reform within the imperial system. By the early decades of the nineteenth century their descendents, now at the heart of the Creole elite, supported the formation of a separatist white Cuban identity amid growing anti-colonial sentiment. Section Two describes the Hispano-Cuban white colonisation scheme, in which hundreds of Irish families were settled in coastal areas between 1818 and 1826 as part of a policy by the Spanish crown to increase the white population of the island for the purpose of creating a white buffer zone against the growing black population. Section Three deals with the importation of cheap Irish labour to build the railroad in 1835 at a time when Cuba was coming under increasing pressure from Britain to abolish slavery. The treatment of Irish railroad workers, as a test of ‘free’ labour, has been dealt with in Chapter 2. The question addressed in Section Three is the significance of the ‘wages of whiteness’ to the railroad workers in the context of race and class politics at a time of heated debate

about slavery and free labour and the formation of a separate Cuban national identity.¹ Their presence is analysed here as part of a reformist project to whiten the nation, which shaped Hispano-Cuban labour policies and European immigration throughout the nineteenth century. The position of the railroad workers within the class and racial structures of Cuban society has a bearing on their response, discussed in Chapter 5.

It is well established by scholars of diaspora that within the British Empire the Irish were ‘both subjects and agents of imperialism’ (Kenny 2004, 93). Given the diversity of their position in Cuban society, the same could be said of the Irish diaspora within the Spanish Empire. Irish planter families were ‘actively imperialist’ in the formation of a system of white domination in which property rights, racial identity and class, formed the basis of colonial society. The system intensified towards the latter half of the eighteenth century as prosperity from sugar production and the slave trade soared with the sugar boom. Irish-Creole families continued to benefit from slavery right up to the end of the nineteenth century. They were also influential in Cuba’s changing colonial relationship with the Spanish Empire and the formation of a separate Creole identity. In pursuit of the formation of a white Creole nation, they played an active part in reform strategies designed to increase the white population through different colonisation schemes. In contrast, white settler families and migrant labourers who came after them could be construed as ‘passive’ agents of these reform ideologies by partaking in the Hispano-Cuban strategy to ‘whiten’ the majority black population. The question posed in this chapter as to the role of Irish immigrants in reinforcing white dominance is addressed by examining their position within the racial and social structures of Cuban colonial society at that time.

The identification of Irish immigrants with Catholicism in the Spanish Empire is considered to have been crucial to the success of their settlement. However, I argue that in relation to migrant Irish workers, considerations of class and labour relations were equally if not more important. The Irish in Argentina, who ‘entered what was an elite

¹ The ‘wages of whiteness’ is a term taken from David Roediger’s study of the working class in the United States in which he suggests that the history and politics of race are crucial to an understanding of racism in the formation of working class consciousness. See David R. Roediger *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1999).

social climate for *ingleses*' and strategically fostered an '*Inglés*' identity (Kelly 2009, xvi), were unequivocally 'white'. Cuba, still part of the Spanish empire had none of the Anglophile attitude of post-independence Argentina and the Irish who came to Cuba to work on the railroad were identified as *irlandeses*. The extent to which Irish immigrants embraced 'whiteness' and contributed to the structural process of inscribing white dominance in the Cuban context will be examined through an examination of the socio-economic transformations associated with sugar production and subsequent changes in labour and race relations. With respect to the planter-class, their contribution to shaping colonial structures of white privilege is unambiguous. However, the question of race as it applied to lower social class Irish immigrants is not as clear cut, given the ideological underpinnings of immigration and colonial labour which brought them there in the first place. In relation to this class of immigrants, who arrived in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the question might be more properly framed as: what was the significance of the 'wages of whiteness' to Irish settlers and 'free' labourers in the context of race and class politics in Cuba? I have limited questions of Irish identity to an examination of Irishness and whiteness within colonial constructions of class and racial identity during this period.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Atlantic economy at the end of the eighteenth century created societal imperatives in Ireland and Cuba which readily responded to the demand for cheap migrant labour on the Atlantic networks of colonial labour. The exodus of Catholics from Ireland to the United States after the Napoleonic wars began just as Cuban sugar planters decided to import greater numbers of white settlers of European descent. In 1817 the Spanish Crown for the first time allowed Catholics who were not Spanish subjects to migrate to Cuba and in 1826 Agustín Ferrey, *Intendente* of Havana and the senior colonial administrator on the island, recommended the 'urgent promotion' of white Catholic immigration to Cuba. As part of his plan to import two thousand colonists he viewed the Catholic Irish as a particularly worthy and prolific source.² In a well worn pro-slavery polemic, he proclaimed that 'our slaves on this island, generally speaking, are infinitely happier than the wage workers of

² Ferrey to Tomas Romay, 27 March 1828, see ANC JF, 185-8341.

Europe, and especially the degraded masses of Irish Catholics'.³ On these grounds, he assured the Spanish court that many would jump at the opportunity to emigrate: 'whole parishes (*parroquias enteras*) from Ireland would transport themselves to a country where they were assured an honourable living and could openly profess the religion of their forbearers'.⁴ In this instance the historically close ties with the Spanish metropolis, based as they had been in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries on religious solidarity, were complicated by incipient capitalist relations in nineteenth-century Cuba. The evidence documented in Chapter 2 demonstrates that for Irish and other European migrant labourers, the promise made by wealthy sugar planters of an 'honourable living' in the Catholic Spanish colony, based on religious tolerance, had somewhat less altruistic motivations. Class and race, rather than religion, would define their experience in the 'peculiar mix' of labour relations in Cuba, which would prove to 'harden conditions for wage-labour', regardless of their religious persuasion or ethnic origins (LeRiverand 1967, 158).

³ *Memoria de la Isla de Cuba escrito por el Intendente Agustín Ferrey* (Madrid 1826), Archivo General de las Indias (AGI) Sección de Santo Domingo, legajo 1157. Cited in María Dolores Pérez Murillo, 'Proyectos o Ensayos Encaminados al Aumento de la Población Blanca Productiva en la isla de Cuba Durante la Primera Mitad del Siglo XIX' (Universidad de Cádiz, 1987): 275. Accessed 16 January 2012. <http://rodin.uca.es:8081/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10498/11213/14029741.pdf?sequence=1>.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Section One: The Irish-Cuban Creole Planter Class

Towards the end of the eighteenth century shifts in international markets created a bigger demand for Cuban sugar, but the British invasion of Havana in 1762, which marked a radical transformation in the colony's economy, is considered by many historians to be a turning point in the development of plantation agriculture. During the short eleven months of British occupation, they broke the restriction on trade with Spanish ports demonstrating the commercial potential of trade with Spanish America. Trade opened up with the British colonies of North America, giving planters and merchants a taste of legal access to new markets outside the Spanish empire. Some of the first American merchants opened trading houses in Havana and slave imports rose sharply to ten thousand that year alone, marking the beginning of an unregulated slave trade which would continue to grow up until the second half of the nineteenth century. It also marked the beginning of Cuba's political and economic relationship with the United States, which apart from larger sugar exports, became 'the best source of the manufactured goods, skilled laborers, and enlightening ideas so seriously lacking in the island' (Knight 1970, 7). While Cuba's integration into the North Atlantic economy undoubtedly provided a catalyst for the expansion of the sugar economy, its meteoric growth was dependent on free trade networks in the North Atlantic and free access to the transatlantic slave trade. However, as Moreno Fraginals points out, the exploitation of new markets without the stranglehold of colonial monopolies and regulations would not have been possible had not the existing indigenous sugar-producing capacity, already in the hands of Cuba's oligarchy, been established 'in contempt of colonial laws' (Moreno Fraginals 1976, 15). Creole *hacendados* (plantation owners) were ready for the transition to free trade after the British left in 1763, ready for the legal importation of forced African labour and the intensification of the production of sugar for export. They could now negotiate directly with British slave traders, who brought slaves from Jamaica for sale in Havana, instead of through 'rapacious middlemen' such as Richard O'Farrill and Cornelius Coppinger (16).

The origins of the Cuban sugar oligarchy can be traced back to a ‘distinguished ancestry’ in ‘Spain, France, Portugal, Ireland or the Low Countries’, but the majority of them came to Cuba in the eighteenth century (Knight 1977, 235).⁵ Richard O’Farrill, already established in the British West Indies, could trace his family’s roots to the old Gaelic order. Cornelio Coppinger, according to Thomas, ‘the gaunt ruins of whose castle still bleakly stand near Glandore, County Cork’, moved to Havana in 1763 and took advantage of the opening up of the slave trade to become one of the wealthiest slave traders in Cuba (Thomas 1998, 299).⁶ Irish families joined the Cuban aristocracy by pursuing property and marital ties and as ‘outsiders’ they succeeded in copperfastening their status and wealth by gaining titles of nobility. Established wealthy families such as O’Reilly and O’Farrill, Arango, Peñalver and Calvo, all related through marriage, dominated Havana society and government up to the mid-nineteenth century in a system where office-holding, military service and wealth converged in the centres of colonial power. As the owners of vast expanses of land and in a position to control the slave trade, they were perfectly placed to ‘dominate and direct the expansion of wealth’ and take every advantage of the potential for growth in the plantation economy. More importantly, as Knight points out, their close associations through family and political positions ‘provided the opportunity to fashion laws which further reinforced their situations’ including the restriction of land acquisition (Knight 1977, 253).

The English occupation of Havana in 1762, according to Thomas, brought ‘an immediate descent on the island by British merchants’ but the most important legacy of their expedition was the ‘acceleration of an inevitable historical process’ (Thomas 2001, 36).⁷ Some of the merchants who took advantage of the slave trade to accumulate wealth in the Caribbean frontier were Irish and, as Thomas argues, ‘every Atlantic facing

⁵ Fulfilling the Spanish requirement of *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood), as Knight explains, included ‘admitting to the family’s unflinching adherence to the Roman Catholic religion, and the absence of any trace of Moorish or Jewish blood through at least four generations on either side. Franklin Knight ‘Origins of Wealth and the Sugar Revolution in Cuba, 1750-1850’, *Hispanic American Historical Review* 57:2, (1977): 235-6.

⁶ See also Rafael Fernández Moya, ‘The Irish Presence in the History and Place Names of Cuba’, *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America*, 5:3 (November 2007). Accessed 24 February 2008. <http://www.irlandeses.org/ims1a0711.htm>.

people' was involved in the slave trade and Ireland was no exception in producing merchants who profited from the 'carriage of millions of people'(11). While Irish ports were not used, Irish merchants were directly involved in the trade through other European and Caribbean vantage points. Irish merchants, who had successfully negotiated trade and kinship networks in the British West Indies, sought through Spanish patronage to take advantage of this economic revolution in Cuba based on African slavery. Their successful integration with the Cuban aristocracy marked a break with Spanish suspicions about the Irish in the Americas of previous centuries in which 'the Spanish clearly believed that their co-religionists had been tainted by their history of co-operation with the English' (Shaw and Block 2011, 44). As one of the first families to establish an Irish-Cuban connection, Ricardo (Richard) O'Farrill y O'Daly (?- 1739), born in Montserrat in the British Caribbean, arrived in 1715 as the Havana agent for the South Sea Company, recently awarded the monopoly or *asiento* to sell slaves to the Spanish colonies for the next thirty years. A descendent of Catholic-Irish nobility from Longford, he was naturalised as a Spanish subject with a registered title of nobility in Havana by 1722. Before settling in Cuba he returned to Jamaica to collect his belongings of '236 slaves, 260 barrels of flour' and all that he needed to start a sugar plantation (Cornide 2003, 412). O'Farrill built his slave depot in *Callejón O'Farrill*, in the port of Havana, on the same site of the building which today houses the Cuban National Archive (Fernández Moya 2007, 190). Creole Irish planters in Montserrat and Jamaica had to conform to Protestantism to hold high office, nevertheless they 'achieved striking wealth' (Rodgers 2008, 149). With no such barriers to the centres of power for Catholic merchants in Cuba, the O'Farrill family rapidly accumulated huge wealth in the Spanish Antilles through trading in slaves, to become what has been described as 'one of the oldest and most distinguished' families at the centre of the Cuban aristocracy (Ely 2001, 411).

Ricardo O'Farrill's success in the Spanish empire may have been driven by grievances against England; but as Pezuela reminds us, none of this would have been

⁷ According to Moreno Fraginals, the English, 'in eleven months they introduced as many blacks as would normally have entered in twelve or fifteen years'. Manuel Moreno Fraginals, *The Sugarmill: The Socioeconomic Complex of Sugar in Cuba*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976), 17.

possible but for his marriage to the daughter and heir of the most important property owner and speculator in Havana at the time, Don Agustin Arriola.⁸ His first Cuban-born son, Don Juan José O’Farrill (1721-1779), was the owner of *Santo Cristo de la Vera Cruz*, one of the largest plantations in Cuba in the second half of the eighteenth century. His marriage to a second cousin, the daughter of a marquis, bolstered the connection to titled nobility paving the way for some of their twelve children to follow suit.⁹ Such were their tentacles throughout the higher echelons of Cuban society that Juan José’s wife, Doña Luisa Herrera y Chacón was known as the grandmother and great grandmother of everything fashionable in Havana (*toda La Habana elegante*) (Cornide 2003, 413). The genealogy of the O’Farrill family and their immersion in sugar production and slavery up to the middle of the nineteenth century is well documented but what is hardly studied is their connection with trade and kinship networks outside the Spanish Caribbean. Research on Irish emigration to Spain is a dynamic area of historical research, yet Irish-Spanish connections within the Atlantic economy, some of which may have relied on trans-colonial kinship networks have received very little attention in this period. The Irish-Spanish influence in the development of colonial Cuba is a valuable starting point for this line of enquiry. Whether connections and networks existed between distinct social classes of Irish immigrants is an obvious and important line of enquiry. It would permit a more assured examination of Irish-Creole identity and the workings of Irish transnational labour networks in the Spanish Caribbean.

Irish-Cuban Creoles maintained their connections with Europe and just like their Catholic counterparts in the West Indies, they sent their children to France and Spain to ensure a Catholic education and used such circles of education amongst the European

⁸ Detail on the extended O’Farrill family can be found in Jacobo De la Pezuela, *Diccionario Geográfico, Estadístico, Histórico, de la Isla de Cuba*, Tomo I, (Madrid 1865), 159. For information on General Alejandro O’Reilly see (164); O’Gaban (162) and Kindelan family (504).

⁹ As a second-generation ‘outsider’, the Creole Juan O’Farrill married to become the son-in-law of a marquis, the brother-in-law of a Count through the marriage of his sister to the first Conde de Buena Vista and eventually through his daughters marriages he would see four sons-in-law gain titles. See Allan J. Keuthe ‘Los Llorones Cubanos: The Socio-Military Basis of Commercial Privilege in the American Trade under Charles IV’ in *The North American Role in the Spanish Imperial Economy*, edited by Jacques A. Barbier and Allan J. Keuthe (Manchester, 1984), 144.

elite to forge networks within the Atlantic system of trade.¹⁰ Merchants with Irish origins continued to arrive, in the aftermath of the British, as high-ranking officers in the Spanish military, most notably, O'Reilly and Kindelan. Sebastian Kindelan-O'Regan (1763-1826), born in Ballymahon, County Longford, was made governor of Santiago de Cuba in 1798 and welcomed 'with open arms' the flood of French immigrant families fleeing the slave revolution in Santo Domingo (De la Pezuela 1865, 503). Kindelan displayed equal enthusiasm for the illegal importation of African slaves after the first Anglo-Spanish treaty of 1817 (Guerra 1971, 314).¹¹ Merchants by the name of Coppinger and Madan, who came also at mid-century in time to profit from the sugar boom, became key figures amongst the planter elite and in the slave trade.¹²

Consistent with Bourbon reformism in the Spanish Empire, the new liberal Spanish State introduced military, fiscal and institutional changes to renovate the imperial enterprise and stimulate trade. Military and fiscal policy reforms injected finance for a new defence programme, overseen by Dublin-born General Alejandro O'Reilly (1725-1794), an Irish soldier in the Spanish military (Thomas 1998).¹³ O'Reilly could see the advantages of importing huge numbers of slaves into Cuba, a thousand of whom were sold to the Crown to complete a lavish public works and defence installations. Reporting to the Crown in 1764, he pointed out that 'the prosperity

¹⁰ For a study of trade and kinship networks in which Irish families from Galway in Saint Croix maintained their connections with Europe through kinship, see Orla Power 'Beyond Kinship: A Study of the Eighteenth-Century Irish Community at Saint Croix, Danish West Indies', *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America*, 5:3 (November 2007). Accessed 24 February 2008. <http://www.irlandeses.org/imsla0711.htm>.

¹¹ Having successfully defended the port of Baracoa against English corsairs in 1807, he was appointed interim Governor-General of Cuba for a year in 1823 after which he retired to his *hacienda* in Santiago de Cuba, surrounded by his 'illustrious family' (Fernandez Moya 2007), 192.

¹² There has been no substantial research by Irish historians on the Cuban branch of the O'Farrill family from Longford. As some of the biggest slave traders and sugar plantation owners Cuba has ever known, the name O'Farrill has been linked to Cuba from the colonial period up to the 1959 revolution. For more detailed information on the different branches of the O'Farrill family down through the generations up to the twentieth century see Maria Theresa Cornide, *De La Habana, de Siglos y de Familias*, (La Habana: Ciencias Sociales 2003) and Santa Cruz y Mallen, *Historia de Familias Cubanas* (1940), vol. 3, 334-339.

¹³ Reputed to have been an outstanding military strategist, organising the military troops on the island, particularly the Black and Mulatto Militias, he was appointed governor of Louisiana in 1769, and granted a Spanish peerage in 1772 (Fernández Moya 2007), 191. For more information on Alejandro O'Reilly see E. Beerman, 'Alexander O'Reilly: an Irish soldier in the service of Spain', *Irish Sword*, 59 (1982); Prince of Monglâne, 'Eight Prominent Irish Families in Cuba', *The Dún Laoghaire Genealogical*

of this island depends mainly on the import of African slaves [...] The King [too] will derive much more revenue from the import duties on slaves'.¹⁴ The slaves were sold on to plantation owners, all of which fuelled the local economy. Loyalty to the Spanish Crown allowed General O'Reilly to advance his career and reputation at a time when, in Ireland, the taking of Havana was celebrated as a triumph for the Protestant cause.¹⁵ Cuba was the most important military outpost of the Spanish empire and O'Reilly, charged with the reorganisation of the island's defence, recruited the officer class from amongst Havana's planter aristocracy. Juan José O'Farrill, already a powerful and wealthy sugar planter, served as lieutenant colonel of a Havana regiment.¹⁶ O'Reilly's tenure coincided with securing a pact between planter elites who held military office, and the Spanish Crown, which provided greater opportunities for planter elites to expand their wealth and status. The colony took on the military and financial responsibility for the island's garrison, in exchange for which they were awarded with new commercial freedoms (Keuthe 1984, 143-145). The opportunities and status associated with military office opened the way for Creole elites, now prepared to pay for the privilege of the much coveted positions, to ingratiate themselves in the Spanish court. The empire's dependence on the Cuban aristocracy for recruitment, finance and leadership of the militia 'explains much about imperial-colonial politics' (154).

The Spanish crown continued its programme of reform and revamped old colonial institutions to make them 'more amenable to metropolitan manipulation' (G. Paquette 2007, 8). Recognising the need to placate discontented elites in the break-up of old monopolies, or at least collaborate with them, besides granting military positions the Crown also granted administrative positions to an ambitious and 'increasingly self-

Society, 8, (1999); B. Torres Ramirez, 'Alejandro O'Reilly en Cuba', *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* 24 (1967).

¹⁴ O'Reilly to the Spanish Crown 1764, cited in Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The History of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (London: Papermac, 1998), 279, n.18.

¹⁵ Bonfires were lit in Cork in honour of a local hero Sir Boyle Roche, serving in the British forces, who distinguished himself in the attack on the Morro. Nini Rodgers 'The Irish in the Caribbean 1641-1837: An Overview', *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America*, 5: 3 (November 2007): 152. Accessed 24 February 2011 <http://www.irlandeses.org/imsla0711.htm>.

¹⁶ Military titles were coveted by the planter class and as Keuthe posits, military command 'evoked images of a feudal past, which seemed especially appropriate to landed magnates who powered their industries with slave labor'. Keuthe 'Los Llorones' (1984, 145).

confident *criollo* population’ (Kapcia 2005, 37).¹⁷ This new ‘liberal pact’ included dismantling established mercantilist practices, opening trade with other economic powers, and the maintenance of social order, in exchange for which, colonial elites agreed to allow Spain to rule for the time being (Scarano 1998, 592). The Crown modernised the old Royal *Consulados*¹⁸ to become the *Real Consulado y Junta de Fomento*, an official organ of empire adapted to maintain control of all aspects of the new boom in the sugar industry, financial, technical, labour supply and the slave trade (Moreno Friginals 1976, 47). A sister organisation, the *Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País* (Economic Society of Friends of the Country), was set up in 1793 as an academy to develop the most modern enlightenment ideas on agriculture, industry and progress. Representing the interests of planters, Don Juan José O’Farrill was a founder member and vice-director. In the absence of any parliamentary representation for the colony these civil society institutions were used by colonial elites as vehicles to advance their own interests, privileges and prosperity and of course by extension, tax income for the Spanish crown (G. Paquette 2007, 263).

Administrative modernisation augured well with the beginning of a cycle of unprecedented prosperity in Cuba which began in 1790. Revolution in the neighbouring French colony of Saint-Domingue and the destruction of the largest supplier of sugar in the Caribbean caused sugar prices to soar and the profits fuelled a sugar boom in Cuba. The half-century between 1792 and 1840 marked a period of accelerated growth in the Cuban economy based on the production of sugar and a massive increase in the importation of slaves. Between 1765 and 1790 it is estimated that the number of African slaves landed in Cuba reached two thousand a year as compared with two hundred and forty a year in the preceding two-hundred and fifty years (Moreno Friginals 1976, 19). By 1791 the slave population reached 85,000 and by 1817 that number would double to 199,000 (Gott 2005, 46). Sugar production shaped the economic and political transformation of the island, creating a society moulded to serve the interests of an

¹⁷ Twenty-six sugar planters were granted noble titles of either marquis or count. Up to this point only twenty-three titles in total had been handed out in three hundred years of Crown control of Cuba. See Robert Paquette, *Sugar Is Made With Blood: The Conspiracy of Escalera and the Conflict between Empires Over Slavery in Cuba* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 85.

increasingly powerful Creole planter elite, in which processes of labour, immigration and settlement conformed to a hierarchy of race and class on which the control of plantation slavery depended. Reform-minded Creoles, including Irish-Cuban families, used their influence to negotiate the most advantageous positions for trade in the changing dynamics of the Atlantic economy. The colony's most prominent families were based in Havana where they remained at the centre of colonial, economic, political and military power forming a 'recognisable elite, based on agriculture, administration and commerce' (Kapcia 2005, 27).

The O'Farrill and O'Reilly clans were at the centre of this elite group, initiating the transformation of land usage from cattle and tobacco farming to large-scale sugar production, firstly in the environs of Havana province and later expanding south to the fertile Güines valley and east to Matanzas (Bergad 1990). As one English observer wrote in 1820,

the sugar ingenios (plantations) which formerly surrounded the city have now disappeared: the soil has been exhausted, and instead of labouring at its renovation, the planters have gradually receded into the interior, successively occupying new lands.¹⁹

In the space of one generation, as Roland Ely describes it, extensive inland areas were transformed into a 'green sea of cane stalks', while coffee planters struggled to hold on to what little land remained in coastal areas (Ely 2001, 441). Accordingly, the relentless accumulation of lands increased exponentially as small rural farms and cattle ranches were devoured by land clearances to construct mills and plant cane. While the planters included an immigrant cohort, the owners of the plantations were largely native-born *criollo* or Creole elites who acted in their own class interests, while staying loyal to the Spanish crown (Bergad 1990, 160). Private property rights were established by royal decree as late as 1818, at which point land grants, stretching back to the period of

¹⁸ The *Consulado* was an institutional part of the Spanish American colonial administration and defence structures.

¹⁹ Robert Francis Jameson, *Letters From the Havana During the Year 1820* (London 1821), 4. This collection of letters were dedicated to Irish writer John Wilson Croker (1780-1857) who served as first secretary of the Admiralty between 1809 and 1830.

conquest, were transformed into inalienable land ownership rights.²⁰ The break-up of the landholding system of circular *haciendas* and the introduction of private property marked the beginning of a land market which cleared the way for wealthy sugar planters to own extensive areas of land. Two O’Farrill brothers, José Ricardo and Juan Manuel, established some of the first mills in Matanzas towards the end of the eighteenth century, and were responsible for introducing the first steamship, the *Neptuno*, operating between Havana and Matanzas in 1819 (Cornide 2003, 417).²¹ By 1840 large sugar planters would also dominate the province of Matanzas making it the richest sugar-producing region in the world. In contrast to the British Caribbean islands where landowners very often resided in England, the *hacendados* in Cuba were ‘resident nobility, many of whom never saw Spain’; ‘Cuba is their country [...] in which they live and in which they hope to die’.²²

General Alejandro O’Reilly, though he did not stay in Cuba, used his military position to benefit from the slave trade and accumulate land. The O’Reilly dynasty was strengthened through the marriage of his son, Count Pedro Pablo O’Reilly to the Countess of Buenavista making him the owner of a large estate called ‘*Alexandria*’, in ‘the beautiful plains of Güines’ on the outskirts of Havana. Alexander Humboldt stayed with Count O’Reilly during his mapping of Cuba, and later described it as a ‘vast mansion, whose terraces were especially favourable for astronomical observations’ (Humboldt 2011, 35). Count Pedro was portrayed by Richard Madden, as an absentee plantation owner with little interest in his estate, just like the rest of the aristocracy; ‘these gentlemen think of nothing but their pleasures, gambling [etc. etc.]’ (168). He described the estate as ‘splendid, and on an immense scale [...] Alexandria has 102 Negroes’ (Madden 1849, 165). At the height of the sugar-boom, the O’Reilly estate ‘was falling rapidly into decay’, because of a decrease in the supply of slaves ‘due to the

²⁰ To establish rights to land the multiple heirs had to prove family possession for a hundred years on uncultivated lands, and fifty years on farmed land.

²¹ Juan O’Farrill, Brigadier General, was granted a special concession from the Spanish crown to import the first steamboat to Cuba. He is credited with the first modernisation of transportation for sugarcane, at roughly the same time as the steam powered sugar mill was introduced to the colony.

²² Jameson, *Letters from the Havana* (1821), 8.

ordinary course of nature, no fresh *Bozales*²³ having been purchased to supply the place of those who had been carried off by that stern law of mortality which so rapidly and ruthlessly cuts down gangs of negro labourers on the sugar plantations' (Turnbull 2005, 281). Madden, who visited the plantation with Turnbull, attributes the Count's state of debt to 'no increase by births, but a very great increase in deaths' (167). The worsening conditions of life for slaves, particularly during the sugar boom, resulted in a relatively fast decline in the slave population but also because of lower birth rates and higher death rates amongst African-born slaves.²⁴ Turnbull was critical of the plantation system and its inhumanity to the slaves but, nevertheless, *el Conde* O'Reilly impressed him as 'a nobleman who presents in his own person a favourable sample of the Creole Aristocracy' (280). The O'Reilly family met the same fate as others of their class in the transition from colonial dependence to American imperialism towards the end of the nineteenth century, when the family was described as 'decrepit' after the loss of their monopoly on cattle slaughtering (Thomas 2001, 246). They kept their peerage well into the twentieth century. The British Consul David Turnbull remarked in 1840, that 'Many of the largest proprietors in the island such as the O'Reilly's and the O'Farrels are descendents of Irishmen' (Turnbull 2005, 280). As to the preservation of an Irish identity amongst the 'Creole grandees of Irish origin', Turnbull comments that they 'have lost [I fear] the brogue and the language altogether, leaving nothing but the name to tell of the grievances and wrongs which had driven their ancestors into exile' (281). Wealthy owners of sugar mills around Havana included names of Irish origin such as

²³ *Bozales* or *negros de naciones* were the terms used to describe slaves who were recent arrivals from Africa. They did not yet speak Spanish and positioned at the lowest rung of Cuba's slave hierarchy they were put to work in the fields, doing the most exhausting work. They became *ladinos*, when they were baptised into the Roman Catholic religion and could communicate in Spanish, but they remained doing field work. *Criollo* slaves born in Cuba and had a better understanding of the language and the customs of the country and were ascribed greater status amongst the slave community. They were bought and sold at higher prices especially if they were skilled in domestic or urban trades. The distinction between *bozales* and *criollos* took on new importance in the 1830s when slaves who only spoke African languages were certainly imported illegally.

²⁴ After the 1817 Anglo-Spanish treaty, outlawing the trade in slaves, Cuba relied on increasing importation of slaves from Africa through a clandestine slave trade. The brutality and hardship cut short the lives of enslaved Africans and the natural decline of the slave population was also influenced by their refusal to bring children into a life of slavery. Other reasons particular to Cuba were high manumission rates but also a greater number of slaves fled captivity by hiding out in maroon communities in remote areas or found refuge in the large free black urban communities. For a comparison of slave populations in Brazil, Cuba and the United States, see Laird Bergad *The Comparative Histories of Slavery* (2007), Chapter 4.

O’Farrill, Madan and O’Reilly. Other prominent Irish names were Duany (Duane), O’Gaban, Kindelan, O’Naghten, and Coppinger.²⁵

Wealth, status, property and prestige, handed down through the generations and different branches of these families over the course of a century, made them some of the largest investors in the sugar industry and the slave trade by the middle of the nineteenth century. José Ricardo O’Farrill inherited his father’s fortune in 1846 and invested in the expansion of sugar production. As the owner of six plantations, producing an annual total of 22,000 boxes of sugar, he owned over a thousand slaves.²⁶ The following table provides details of some of his properties between 1849 and 1853, the legacy of slave-dependent wealth in the O’Farrill family over the course of a century:

Figure 7: Property owned by José Ricardo O’Farrill during the years 1849-53

Mills	Acreage Caballerías	Slaves	Oxen ploughs	Trains	Capital invested (pesos)	Net profit	Annual
Callajavos	101	376	140	4	400,000	39,320	
San Rafael	65	290	130	6	400,000	72,987	
Limones Nueva	70	330	140	5	400,000	56,003	
Concordia	50	217	120	4	200,000	35,581	
San Antonio	48	185	70	5	180,000	51,501	
Gicoteita	20	60	20	2	150,000	22,009	

Source: Roland T. Ely, *Cuando Reinaba Su Majestad Azúcar (La Habana: Imagen Contemporanea, 2001), 452*

By 1853 José Ricardo owned seven mills valued at \$1,380,000 pesos and three cattle ranches valued at \$170,000 pesos. He owned properties in Havana worth \$1,380,000 pesos (see Fig. 7). Together with his mother and sister, they took the biggest loan ever given to a Cuban planter family in the nineteenth century; but high interest rates, plus

²⁵ The only Irish account of Cuban-Irish planters, written by the Prince of Montglâne, is based on the genealogy and connections with Irish nobility, as documented in Fransisco Xavier de Santa Cruz Mallen, *Historia de Familias Cubanas* (La Habana: Hércules, 1940). This nine volume work traces the lineage of the Cuban nobility and the names of families of Irish origin appear throughout the nine volumes. Montglâne sketches the history of the most prominent Irish families in Cuba who, he says, ‘stand out as especially eminent in Cuban social and political history’ (Montglâne 1999, 11).

²⁶ José Ricardo O’Farrill had an annual profit during these years of 277,491 pesos.

increasing costs of running a plantation at a time of falling prices for sugar on the world market led to the financial ruin of the O’Farrill dynasty by the end of the nineteenth century.

Joaquín Madan emigrated from Ireland in the second half of the eighteenth century, to become a prominent merchant and slave-trader in Cuba. Originating in Waterford, the Madan family had connections in La Laguna, Tenerife.²⁷ He set up a trading company called *Madan Sobrino e Hijos* (nephew and sons), owning several ships, including the *San Joaquín* which transported some of the largest cargoes of *bozal* slaves, imported directly from the coast of Africa.²⁸ As one of the first Havana merchants to open a branch in Matanzas, he and a close associate from Massachusetts, Atkins, came to dominate commercial life there. In 1819, just two years after the first Anglo-British treaty, it is recorded that between March and July of that year, four ships owned by Madan imported 343, 256, 280 and 363 Africans.²⁹ The size of these imports placed Madan and Atkins ‘in a league with the largest carriers landing in Cuba’ (Bergad 1990, 359). He became part of the Cuban aristocracy and through his daughter Antonia’s marriage to the Alfonso family he was linked to one of the most powerful slave-trading families in Cuba.³⁰ His son Cristóbal Madan, born in Havana in 1806, married his niece Maria Alfonso Madan and became a wealthy planter with a sugar mill on 540 hectares worked by three hundred slaves (Ely 2001). Growing political and moral opposition to slavery in Cuba and the wider world forced a debate on new supplies of labour for which Madan recommended that *Junta de Fomento* find ‘cheap, submissive labour’ of any race or creed. Madan proposed the substitution of slavery with an apprenticeship system which would put an end to ‘the pernicious concentration’

²⁷ For more information on Irish merchant connections in the Canary Islands during the eighteenth century, see A. Guimera Ravina, *Burguesía Extranjera y Comercio Atlántico. La Empresa Comercial Irlandesa en Canarias (1703-1771)*, (Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 1985).

²⁸ See Bergad (1990) Chapter 3, n. 45.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 359 n. 5; Bergad cites the Archivo Histórico Provincial de Matanzas (AHPM) Esclavos, Bozales, legajo 21.

³⁰ See *Historia de Familias Cubanas*, vol. 5, 164-170, for an account of the Madan lineage. For details of Madan as merchant and slave trader in Matanzas see (AHPM), Esclavos, Bozales, leg. 21 cited in Bergad (1990), 351 n. 20 and 359, n. 5.

of free blacks in the cities, by sending them to work on sugar plantations.³¹ His rationale for ending slavery exemplified the racist logic underlying an emerging Creole nationalism in the formation of a white Cuban race, when he argued as quoted in Knight, that ‘the race is almost of no use, either to itself or the country in which it lives’ (Knight 1970, 97).

Creole Loyalties

The relationship between Ireland and the Iberian world, as already noted, was rooted in the exchange of religious and political loyalty for the protection of the Spanish crown.³² For elite Irish refugees in eighteenth-century Cuba, the exchange involved a relationship with empire which permitted the pursuit of prosperity in accordance with the privileges of their class. Exerting their influence and power over the liberalisation of the slave trade, Irish-Cuban elites were no less acquisitive than other members of the aristocracy, concerned to consolidate property and wealth and embed attendant racial hierarchies on which continued white and class dominance depended. These processes of socio-economic transformation at the turn of century which bolstered Creole prosperity would eventually put strains on the colonial relationship with the peninsula. Continued allegiance to the Crown hardly waned when during the political upheavals which produced the first black independent republic in Haiti in 1804, and independence revolutions in the American colonies, Cuba remained ‘the ever-faithful isle’. Concessions from the Spanish Crown, used precisely to quell the kind of insurrections which happened in South America, secured loyalty from Cuban elites for the time being. There were some dissenters however, who favoured independence, but as a conservative

³¹ For further details of Madan’s ideas on labour supply, see also Ely, *Cuando Reinaba su Majestad Azúcar* (2001), 606, n. 98.

³² See *La Emigración Irlandesa en el Siglo XVIII*, coordinated by Begoña Villar García (Universidad de Málaga, 2000). This collection of essays contains some of the most recent scholarship on emigration to Spain in the eighteenth century associated with the Irish Jacobite diaspora. Focusing on three major social groups who led these migrations, this work gives excellent detail from Spanish archives and analysis of Spanish historiography on the Irish military and nobility, clerical and commercial connections with Spain. Some of the essays make reference to a transatlantic Irish-Spanish migration to the Indies and mainland Spanish America. Surveys of the connections of colonial Irish families with Spain have been undertaken by Cuban historians. See Herminio Portell Vilá, *Historia de Cuba en sus Relaciones con los Estados Unidos y España*, vol. 1 (La Habana, 1938). Fernando Ortiz wrote a lengthy forward to the 1934 Cuban edition of James J. O’Kelly, *La Tierra del Mambí* (1930). He cites a host of

elite they were ‘fearful of the economic and social consequences of a break with the colonial motherland’ (Gott 2005, 52). Advocates of colonial rule argued that Cuba needed the military power of Spain to protect the social-economic order; therefore it could not become an independent nation (Ferrer 1999, 8). With the massive increase in slave imports, even the more ‘progressive’ Creoles, who favoured sovereignty, consented to the presence of imperial troops to allay fears of slave revolts. In response to any political challenges the Spanish authorities, confident that ‘the fear of the Negroes is worth an army of 100,000 men’, exploited the paranoia of wealthy planter-elites by invoking images of racial warfare and insurrection from below.³³ The *criollo* population clung to their colonial masters with a pro-Spanish loyalism, which was ‘mostly pragmatic’ knowing that ‘colonialism perpetuated their wealth’ (Kapcia 2005, 28). Poised to move into a dominant position in the world sugar-market, profit-minded planters, despite their ‘uneasy relationship’ with the metropolis, ‘readily used to their own advantage the structures and resources of the Spanish Empire’ (Dal Lago 2009, 397). Despite their misgivings about being overtaken by the black population they took every advantage of the demise of sugar production in Haiti and rapidly became the wealthiest colony in Spain’s diminishing Empire.

Cuba’s bonds with empire were increasingly strained as Creole nationalists became more resentful of their colonial status, and the vicissitudes of Spanish imperial politics. By the 1830s after independence in South America, the accommodation between the Crown and the planter elite had changed from one of imperial defence to a major source of revenue for Spain’s crumbling empire. The Captain-General assumed extraordinary powers and most of the top administrative and military positions in the colonial government were now held by peninsular Spanish. The new ruling elite treated its Caribbean colony, not as a province of Spain, but as a dependent colony incapable of governing itself. Creole elites rejected the humiliating condition of colonial Other and colonial tensions centred on imperial taxes and the persistence of the illegal slave trade (Guerra 1971, 312). Frustration and discontent amongst sections of the Creole planter

Irish connections with the Cuban aristocracy which came through the Catholic Courts in Europe and the Irish brigades in the Spanish army. He includes the names of O’Donnell, O’Farrill, and O’Reilly

³³ Quoted in Richard Gott *Cuba* (2007), 52.

class was ‘not loud but deep’ and ‘the curses of the Creoles [...] would in all probability, have given open expression to the latent, but long-cherished, desire of independence’ (Turnbull 2005, 82).

Miguel Tacón’s tenure as Captain-General in 1834 introduced an era of renewed despotism in which Creole influence and expression was subjected to even greater surveillance, arbitrary censorship and intimidation.³⁴ Yet despite press censorship, or because of it, Creole nationalists displayed an interest in the cause of Ireland as a site of anti-colonial struggle. Cuban newspapers reported on Daniel O’Connell’s election to parliament in 1828, as the leader of the successful campaign for Catholic emancipation, when Catholics were not yet allowed hold public office.³⁵ The *Diario de Santiago de Cuba*, in October 1835, described the jubilation on such a ‘fine day’ with unusually high temperatures, when a disciplined crowd of forty thousand Irish gathered peacefully after a rebellious plebiscite in County Clare, electing Daniel O’Connell as their representative to the London parliament.³⁶ In muted strains of anti-colonial solidarity the report concluded that still nothing had changed in Ireland’s administration; Ireland, the report claimed, ‘is still like a beggar at England’s doors’ (*La Irlanda es todavía como un mendigante a las puertas de Inglaterra*). Echoing the censored resentment of Creole nationalists at Cuba’s dependent status, the article unambiguously referred to the inferior colonial status of Ireland within the British Empire as not having the same rights as England. In clear tones of religious solidarity, superimposed on what might be read as displaced nationalist sentiment, Ireland was described as still suspended, after such a long time, between the contradictions of religious persecution, military occupation, and a few liberal trade concessions, prey to the vicissitudes of whichever party was in power in London. One year later Daniel O’Connell was eulogised yet again, in the *Diario de la Habana*, as a lawyer who defended the cause of Ireland in the London parliament, like

³⁴ For an excellent study of Cuban political culture and the press in the early decades of the nineteenth century see Larry Jensen, *Children of Colonial Despotism: Press, politics, and Culture in Cuba, 1790-1840* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1988).

³⁵ See *Diario de la Habana*, 30 May, 1836.

³⁶ In sympathy with the ‘colonised Irish Catholics’ the writer congratulated the rebellious crowd of forty thousand for their maturity, abstaining from violence, despite the heat and the whiskey. ‘Se reunieron cuarenta mil irlandeses, y absteniéndose de toda violencia, y a pesar del Whisky y del influjo de la temperatura eligieron a O’Connell para que los representase en el Parlamento’ in the *Diario de Santiago de Cuba*, 27 October, 1835.

he would a client.³⁷ Ireland, described in the Havana newspaper, as ‘a conquered province’, ‘cruelly oppressed by England’ was in need of an orator such as O’Connell, ‘to seek reparation for the injustices suffered by his countrymen’.³⁸ O’Connell’s credentials as the liberator of oppressed Catholics at the hands of the English appealed to Creole nationalists but his stance against the oppressions of slavery on humanitarian grounds would not. For them Cuba was still a ‘beggar’ at the Spanish court, prey to the whims of the monarchy in Madrid. There was much common ground in terms of anti-colonial sentiment and in the negotiation of the coloniser/colonised relationship in both island colonies on the periphery of the British and Iberian empires.³⁹

By the mid-nineteenth century the mood for independence from Spain had become stronger but the question of race and nation continued to shelve the bid for independence in which, for some of the planter class, animosity towards Spain had ‘changed into a desire for a connection with the United States’ (Madden 1849, 84). Creole planters like Cristobal Madan took up residence in New York in the 1840s, and at a safe distance from Havana and Madrid became a vociferous critic of the tax that the crown extracted from its colonial subjects. He became an advocate for the annexation of Cuba, arguing that the United States had become its largest trading partner, buying most of its sugar and supplying most of its manufactured goods (Gott 2005).⁴⁰ American politicians suggested buying the island from Spain before exiled Cuban planters took matters into their own hands and organised a ‘filibustering’ expedition led by Narciso López, a former Spanish officer with connections to wealthy plantation owners. Setting out from New Orleans, with the aim of liberating the Cuban people from the injustices of Spanish colonialism, the expedition expected to be reinforced by Cuban resistance. On landing near Havana in 1851, Lopez was accompanied by two hundred European, American and exiled Cuban adventurers. Amongst them were, nineteen ‘rebel Irish

³⁷ *Diario de La Habana*, 30 May 1836, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Sala Cubana.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ The staging of a play in Havana in 1841, *Los Pies Negros de los Irlandeses*, written by a Mexican playwright Felix Mejia, portrayed Ireland’s troubled colonial context and also provided an opportunity to represent, from a safe distance, parallels in their colonised condition, but with the over-riding cause of Catholic emancipation from British colonialism.

⁴⁰ Gott points out that Madan’s brother-in-law was John O’Sullivan, who had coined the phrase ‘Manifest Destiny’ in 1845, expressing the need for US expansion ‘to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions’. See Gott *Cuba* (2007), 67.

emigrants' described in one account as having 'fought against British domination over the Green Erin' (Portel Vilá 1958, 494).⁴¹ The British consul sought to have them released on the grounds that they were lured under false pretences to join the expedition. This group of young emigrants from Ireland between the ages of sixteen and twenty-six were sentenced to ten years' imprisonment in Ceuta.⁴²

When it came to relinquishing the protection of class and wealth which the imperial system afforded them, the fear of 'insurgency from below' presented too great a threat to their elite status and prosperity. The nationalist cause in Ireland and in Cuba submerged questions of race in a heightening of class division in the struggle to gain political rights within the imperial system. In the construction of a separatist Cuban identity, Irish Creoles, like most of their class, were not willing to share citizenship with the black majority population. In the struggle to separate Ireland from union with Britain the new ruling class of Protestant and Catholic landlords would disenfranchise the mass of poorer Catholics. Popular resistance by the labouring class to emerging capitalist relations within the Irish colonial framework is the subject of Chapter five. Such divisions weighed heavily on the politics of independence, just as they did on support for abolition of slavery, resulting in the struggle for independence in Cuba being shelved until 1868 because of the race question. Imperial strategies on immigration and colonisation, designed to mitigate elite concerns about the racial demographics of the colony, were enthusiastically embraced by members of the Irish-Cuban elite who played a central role in the instigation and management of the Hispano-Cuban white colonisation strategy. Migrant families and labourers from Catholic European countries were deployed in the search for a substitute for slave labour with the additional purpose of creating the security of a white buffer zone.

⁴¹ Lopez led three expeditions to Cuba in the early 1840s and 50s all of which failed partly due to lack of expected support from Creole elites claiming to support US annexation of Cuba.

⁴² Correspondence between the British Consul Joseph Crawford, the Foreign Office and the Governor-General of Cuba in NA FO, 73-793.

Section Two: Immigration and White Colonisation

If the laws in the Antilles and the legal status of people of color do not change for the better soon and if we continue to talk without acting, political supremacy will pass into the hands of those who have the power of labor, the will to emancipate themselves, and the courage to endure long privations. This bloody catastrophe will occur as a necessary result of circumstances without any involvement of Haiti's free blacks [...] [W]ho would dare predict the impact that an African Confederation of the free States of the Antilles, situated between Columbia, North America, and Guatemala, would have on the politics of the New World? (Humboldt 1826).⁴³

Humboldt's *Political Essay* was banned in Cuba for its 'dangerous sentiments', but his prediction that 'more than any island in the Antilles, the island of Cuba has the ability to prevent this shipwreck' was taken very seriously indeed but not by preparing 'for the gradual abolition of slavery' as envisioned by Humboldt (68). The proximity of a zone of liberty for slaves in Haiti was used by the colonial authorities to create in the minds of the slave-holding elite, a perpetual fear of slave or black agency as a threat to the political order. Heightened racial division increased white domination, but it also fuelled the collective urge by Cuba's black population to resist the slave system. In the first few decades of the nineteenth-century when thousands of slaves were landed each year from Africa, slave revolts, conspiracies and rumours of insurgency became more widespread.⁴⁴ As Cuba's black population increased to outnumber whites, their presence in Cuban society posed 'a real, not imaginary threat to the public order' and to the existence of the plantation system and the colony itself (Mildo Hall 1996, 74). The spectre of Haiti became the driving force of white colonisation strategies throughout the nineteenth century (Naranjo Orovio 2005, 91).

The successful slave revolt in Saint-Domingue (Haiti) in 1791 led to the exodus of some of the wealthiest slave owners from the French colony, seeking refuge in Cuba - up to thirty thousand French refugees flooded into Santiago de Cuba. They brought capital and the labour of thousands of slaves and were soon followed by Spanish and French settlers fleeing Haiti after independence in 1804, and New Orleans after the

⁴³ Alexander Humboldt, *Political Essay* [1826] (2011, xxii and 68).

Louisiana Purchase a year earlier. Cuba became a magnet to entrepreneurs, merchants from Europe and loyalists fleeing the now independent colonies; as many as 1,500 a year in the first three decades of the nineteenth century (Ely 2001, 112). A New York merchant's magazine reported that Cuba 'had become a place of general refuge' where 'the ports of the island have been thrown open, strangers and emigrants have been encouraged to settle there'. Written in 1840, the writer states that 'During the last fifty years, a concurrence of circumstances has rendered Cuba the richest of the European colonies in any part of the globe'.⁴⁵ The New York writer attributes this in no small part to 'the contribution of new migrant energy to the invigoration of the traditional agricultural economy of tobacco and cattle with a more advanced technology and experience in the management of sugar plantations'.⁴⁶ These migrants also brought new expertise to the production of coffee; thirty years after their arrival there were three thousand cattle ranches and five thousand tobacco farms, with an additional one thousand sugar mills, and two thousand coffee *haciendas*.⁴⁷ French and Spanish refugees certainly boosted their fortunes and those of Cuban planters but their arrival also introduced a very immediate and palpable sense in Cuba of the power of the black population to incite revolution. This power to incite was felt by elites and slaves alike. The accelerated growth of the plantation economy fuelled a violent cycle of production and a ritual of 'endless combat', propelled, as Benítez-Rojo puts it: by 'the more sugar, the more Negroes; the more Negroes, the more violence; the more violence, the more sugar; the more sugar, the more Negroes' (Benítez-Rojo 1992, 109). The increase in the black population intensified surveillance and control and exacerbated racial tension which logically could have been expected to operate as a deterrent against slavery to the slave owners and the authorities. However to maintain the prosperity and immense profits from sugar production, planters and merchants persisted in their demand for unlimited supplies of slave labour. The planter's fears of slave revolts were tempered by a plan to promote white immigration as a means 'to restrain the Negroes' with the slogan of 'control rather than abolition' (Gott 2005, 54).

⁴⁴ Slave resistance is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

⁴⁵ *Hunts Merchant's Magazine and Commercial Review* (New York 1840), vol. III, 351.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Colonial institutions such as the *Sociedad Económica de Los Amigos Del País* played a pivotal role in promoting white immigration. The *Sociedad* in Havana attracted a new generation of Creole landowners, sugar planters and intellectuals, modernising elites enthusiastic about advancing ideas of free trade. Two of its most prominent members, Francisco de Arango y Parreño and José Antonio Saco, saw in the shifting dynamic of the Atlantic economy Cuba's emergence as the dominant producer of sugar. The *Sociedad Económica* became 'the seed-bed for most enlightened thinking and eventually separatist thinking in Havana' and with that, 'the most important institution for the formation of an elite *criollo* identity' (Kapcia 2005, 43). As a civic institution, the *Sociedad* had a wide influence on socio-economic developments in the colony, applying the new science of political economy to questions of agriculture, new technologies, labour, population and its ethnic composition.

Francisco Arango, planter and statesman saw the key to success in Cuba's economic development as depending on the ability of the market to maintain what he termed a 'happy equilibrium' between unrestricted slave imports and agricultural exports. Cuba's integration into the changing conditions of the Atlantic economy as envisioned by Arango's reform ideology was based on a 'flawless' mix of pro-slavery with liberal principles of political economy. The co-existence of slavery, free trade ideology, and Enlightenment thought in the world view of the Creole elite is, as Dale Tomich puts it, 'regarded as at once a defining feature and a central paradox of the nineteenth-century Cuban slave regime (Tomich 2005, 58).⁴⁷ Arango's reinterpretation of political economy for the Cuban economy accurately predicted that slavery presented no anomaly to economic progress and no archaic 'backwardness', which might impede progress in achieving dominance in the sugar trade on the world market (Tomich 2003). Support for slavery was invigorated and a Royal *cédula* in 1789, instigated by Arango, opened the trade in slaves to Spanish and foreign traders. After the slave revolt in Haiti in 1791, the *Sociedad* cautioned that the number of 'Negroes may not only be prevented

⁴⁷ Ibid. Between 1800 and 1827, French planters increased the number of coffee plantations from 80 to 2,067; also see Gott (2007), 46, n.14.

⁴⁸ Francisco Arango elaborated his ideas on political economy in his well-known *Discurso sobre la agricultura de la Habana y medios de fomentarla* (1793), cited in Tomich (2005), 58. This program of

from exceeding that of the whites, but that it may not be permitted to equal that number'.⁴⁹ In January 1792, Arango petitioned the Spanish Crown to promote the settlement of white families in towns along the coast and to create villages in convenient places 'as a powerful check on the seditious ideas of rural slaves' (Corbitt 1942, 282). New defence strategies concentrated on expanding centres of population in urban areas but also on creating rural villages by colonising under-populated coastal zones. The first white colonisation schemes were on lands along the Eastern shore, a short fifty miles from Haiti, and on the Southern shore, as a defence position with Jamaica, only eighty miles away. These schemes were overseen by a newly formed Council for White Population or *Junta de Población Blanca*.

Council for White Population and Irish Immigration (1818-1825)

As part of the Bourbon reforms and new strategies to defend its American colonies, the Spanish government began to sponsor emigration to Cuba. The move also relieved population pressures in the metropolis, particularly in areas such as Andalusia, Galicia and the Canary Islands. In almost three hundred years of Spanish colonisation the white population of Cuba only amounted to 96,000 inhabitants by the first census of 1774. The importation of European labour did not begin in earnest until the nineteenth century. Petitions for colonisation schemes by members of the planter-class during the late eighteenth century saw the beginnings of settlement in coastal areas, but there was 'no grand rush' to Cuba despite offers of small parcels of land (Corbitt 1942). Restrictive laws against 'undesirables' meant that immigration was confined to Spanish subjects of the monarch 'all presumed to be Catholic'; or enslaved Africans presumed to be heathens and 'therefore, convertible to Catholicism' (Martínez-Fernández 1992, 25). In contrast with English colonial policy which, untroubled by sectarian scruples with regard to labour supply, sent Irish Catholic servants in significant numbers to plantation colonies in the West Indies and North America, the Spanish Crown endorsed new schemes to increase the white population, 'provided that they were from the right place

social and economic development and reform was written in the midst of the slave revolt in Haiti. His goal, as he described it, was 'propagating enlightenment' (*propogar las luces*), in Tomich, 61.

⁴⁹ *Memorias de la Sociedad Económica*, (1794) 54-55, cited in Corbitt 'Immigration in Cuba' *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 22 (May 1942): 282-283.

and professed the correct religious sentiments' (Corbitt 1942, 280). Members of the Cuban aristocracy targeted the oppressed masses of Irish Catholics as an expedient cohort, who might be tempted by gestures of religious protection in Cuba.

Britain drew up new measures with Spain at the Congress of Vienna (1815) to end the slave trade within five years in which it was agreed to pay to Spain one million pounds to fund the migration of Canary Islanders to the Spanish Caribbean and to pay half a million to indemnify slave owners (Naranjo Orovio and Garcia Gonzalez 1996). The governor of Cuba, Don Luis de las Casas, a plantation owner himself and closely connected to the most influential landowners, gave the plan his full support. Because of their importance to the sugar industry questions of slave labour and white immigration were debated and decided in the colonial institutions of the *Junta de Fomento* and the *Sociedad Económica de Amigos Del País*. The established socio-demographic order consisted of forced labour from Africa for the production of sugar; peninsular Spaniards who filled the ranks of an increasingly militarised colony, and an agricultural labour force of predominantly Canary Islanders and other European immigrants (Alonso Valdes, n.d.). However, as the census figures proved, up to the middle of the nineteenth century the lure of wealth from sugar and slavery would mean that the economic interests of the planter-class took precedence over any plans for white colonization.

Irish Settler Families (1818-1820)

Obsessive concerns by colonial elites about race, nationhood and prosperity were debated in a protracted discourse of race, labour and nationality in which all kinds of possibilities were considered to socially engineer the most profitable mix of white and black populations. The debate about immigration which centred on the dichotomy of pro-slavery and anti-slavery is analysed here in the context of the overarching tensions between the Crown's ambition to hold on to its Spanish colony and a growing anti-colonial sentiment amongst the planter-class. The records of the *Junta de Población Blanca* pertaining to the first settler families who arrived from the United States in 1819, and the railroad workers in 1835, illustrate the concerns of the colonial authorities in controlling the balance of black and white amongst the population, cheap labour supplies and restricting ownership of land. This section examines the influx of Irish

emigrant families to Cienfuegos on the south coast, and Moa to the east. When contrasted with the later immigration of Irish railroad workers, the different ideological underpinnings of immigration and colonial labour become evident, as they were determined by rapidly changing socio-economic conditions in Cuba. The 1819 migration is examined in the context of imperial policies of colonial settlement and security and the 1835 importation of cheap labour is analysed in the context of Creole reformist policies which linked labour supply with increasing the white population. The latter policy devised under the duress of mounting pressure to end the slave trade was conceived of as a substitute for slave labour which would also fulfil the function of whitening the population and stem the tide of what was termed as the *africanización* of Cuba.

The *Comisión de Población Blanca* was set up in 1812 and, as its title suggests, its function was to execute white immigration strategies. Formed within the Creole reform movement of the *Sociedad Económica*, it was made up of influential landowners, including José O’Farrill and Tomas Romnay, prepared to use their connections to raise money from the owners of large estates to fund the schemes.⁵⁰ A royal *Cédula* stipulated that a tax of six pesos on every male slave landed in Cuba over the next three years would go the *Junta de Población Blanca* to fund its colonisation ventures; a lucrative fund given that fifty-six thousand slaves were shipped to Havana during this time (Corbitt 1942, 290). Based on a selection process spelt out by Royal decree in 1817, designed principally to exclude non-Catholics, the Spanish Crown was careful to keep out Jews, Muslims, Protestants and other heretics. Following the Spanish cultural tradition of *limpieza de la sangre* as an essential requisite of ‘Spanishness’, it specified the need to stimulate migration from Spain and the Canary Islands to populate Cuba, but breaking with tradition, the *Cedula* opened the way to immigrants from Catholic countries friendly to Spain, provided they did not subscribe to revolutionary or democratic ideas (Rovira González 1976, 19). Letters of domicile which granted permission to stay longer than three months required that “everybody is required to prove that they are of the Roman Catholic Religion”. Yet as the British Consul pointed

out “the majority of British subjects who are residing in these colonies of Spain are not Roman Catholics”.⁵¹

[T]hose Protestant young men – young men of principle & character are called upon by the authorities at the Havana to declare themselves, upon oath, to be what they are not – Roman Catholics, by religious profession, in order to obtain their Carta de domicilio and thereby become qualified and entitled to remain in the colony.⁵²

On swearing loyalty and service to the crown and the Catholic Church they would have the same rights as Spanish colonists. Hence, exemptions were granted to merchants of European origin who had capital to invest and technical know-how; they were tolerated as a necessary evil, though they were excluded from the social, religious and political life of the island. The bar against non-Catholic immigrants in the Spanish Caribbean did not stop Protestants from ‘circumventing, in one way or another, the requirement of a Catholic oath and [they] maintained a very low religious profile’ (Martínez-Fernández 1992, 26).

In the plans to establish rural villages strict rules confined settlers to frontier life and the colony to which they were assigned. They were barred from engaging in maritime commerce and from becoming owners of stores (*bodegas*). They were entitled to purchase land and slaves and after five years they earned the right to naturalisation, which meant they renounced protection as foreigners by their respective consulates and became subject to the same laws as Spanish colonists. In return the colonist was obliged to defend the island against any invasion and against revolt by the slave population. They could move freely to other parts of the island, and establish businesses. If a foreigner wished to leave the territory during the first five years they were subject to a tax of 10% on goods and earnings.⁵³ Besides laying down conditions for the control of religious and race allegiance and the *Cédula* also listed the type of workers they required: labourers, carpenters, stone-breakers, brick masons and coopers (Naranjo

⁵⁰ The *Comisión Población Blanca* was made up of five landowners, José Ricardo O’Farrill, Juan Montalvo, Andrés Jáuregui, Antonio del Valle Hernandez and headed up by Dr. Tomas Romay.

⁵¹ Letter from Joseph Crawford to Palmerston, 22 January 1852 see NA FO, 72-886.

⁵² Letter from D. R. Clark to Palmerston, 26 January 1850 see NA FO, 72-885.

⁵³ A copy of the *Cedula* can be found in ANC Reales Cédulas y Ordenes see ANC RCO, 67-340.

Orovio 2005). On their arrival to Cuba each colonist was registered by name, age, nationality; occupation, destination and any goods and assets in their possession on arrival.⁵⁴ The register of foreign residents which provides the names of 166 Irish colonists who arrived in 1818-19 includes listings such as: Dionisio (Denis) O'Reardan, twenty-one years old, accompanied by his wife and four children, natives of Ireland, ironmonger, going to the town of Alquizar to work in a foundry. The applications for domicile are accompanied by letters of sponsorship from owners or administrators of coffee farms, cattle ranches and artisan workshops.⁵⁵ Within two years more than ten thousand colonists entered Cuba under these conditions with almost five thousand going to Nuevitas on the north east coast (99). The creation of coastal settlements was part of a security measure to guard against smuggling or invasion and priority was given to white settlement in the eastern part of the island in places such as Guantanamo (Rovira Gonzalez 1976).

Frontier Colonies in Cienfuegos and Moa

Increasing trade with North America opened Cuba to the circulation of transnational migrants from Europe who formed the greatest numbers in some of the first colonisation schemes. The movement of immigrants via the United States was mediated by the Spanish consul in New York, Francisco Stoughton who had business interests in Cuba. He intervened for one American company starting a business in Moa in the eastern part of Cuba, and organised the immigration documents for one group of the colonists and their families to be handed over to the Governor of Baracoa. He wrote with enthusiasm for the new business venture saying they had received 'favourable reports on the healthy climate and the benefits of employing white labour'. In November 1826, Stoughton arranged with a shipping company to transport labourers, blacksmiths and carpenters, who he claimed were 'not without means' to work for a company established in Moa, to the port of Baracoa.⁵⁶ The settlers were Scottish and Irish and included families by the name of Power, Higgins and Mac Namara (Fernández Moya 2007, 193).

⁵⁴ ANC LM, 1210.

⁵⁵ Applications for Residency made to the Governor-General, all signed by Jose O'Farrill who oversees the process on behalf of the *Junta de Población Blanca*, see ANC JF, 190-8559. See Appendix 2.

⁵⁶ Francisco Stoughton to the Governor of Baracoa, 25 November 1826, see ANC RCO, 67-34.

The town of Cienfuegos on the Southern coast was founded on the banks of the Jagua River through a similar settlement scheme, in which Luis De Clouet, a native of Louisiana with connections to the French port of Bordeaux started a colony with one hundred and forty-seven immigrants from Bordeaux. Using networks associated with the Catholic Church immigrants of European origin were recruited in Philadelphia, Baltimore and New Orleans (Rovira González 1976).⁵⁷ Promises of grants of land, accommodation, seeds and livestock enticed about 845 settlers by 1823 with eighteen Irish families amongst the first colonists to arrive. De Clouet's proposal to settle this area around the Bay of Jagua was presented as a defence against attack or invasion from Jamaica to the south for which the government agreed to give him one hundred *caballerías*⁵⁸ of land to distribute among forty families (Naranjo Orovio 2005). A designated area of *realengos* or royal lands was granted by local officials to be divided amongst the settlers, while the founder of the colony was granted an area of land equivalent to the size of the colony, in exchange for his investment. According to a new royal decree in 1822, settlers of new colonies in Cuba or Puerto Rico were free to exploit mines for a period of fifteen years and free to import any equipment necessary for extraction of salt or minerals, but they were forbidden to import slaves from outside Cuba.⁵⁹ After two years leaseholders had to pay one-hundred pesos, plus four annual payments of twenty-five pesos and ten more of fifty (Corbitt 1942).

⁵⁷ See also Laura Cruz Ríos, *Flujos Inmigratorios Franceses a Santiago de Cuba (1800-1868)*, (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente 2006).

⁵⁸ A Cuban measure, the equivalent of 33.33 acres or 13.5 hectares in Thomas, *Cuba*, (2001) see glossary). A land measurement of varying sizes (usually 42 hectares), *Collins Spanish-English Dictionary* (Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1990).

⁵⁹ See a copy of the royal decree and details of the regulations for immigrants in ANC RCO, 67-34 and ANC RCO, 67-42.

Figure 8: First Settler Families in Cienfuegos

Origin	Number
French	84
Spanish	19
Irish	18
German	11
Portuguese	2

Source: Violeta Rovira González, ‘Apuntes Sobre la Organización de la Economía Cienfueguera y Significación de los Franceses Fundadores En ella’, *Revista Islas*, 52:53 (September 1975-April 1976):35.⁶⁰

The Irish colonists were predominantly family groups; with the names Carr, Collins, Reilly, Boyle, Owens and Byrnes listed in the records for the colony.⁶¹ Not unlike the terms and conditions of indentured service, their contract of settlement stated that if they abandoned the colony before the stipulated five years they would be obliged to pay the cost of the passage and food incurred (37). They were housed in tents for six months to a year, until they cleared the land and completed the construction of houses. The area provided by the *Junta de Población Blanca* was uncultivated wasteland with little value and no protection; consequently colonists were prey to surprise attacks by highway robbers. De Clouet formed a militia to protect the colony thus increasing the value of the land (24). In addition to the land granted to him he was given civil and criminal jurisdiction over the colony which he passed on to his heirs (Corbitt 1942). The colony was beset by friction and discontent as the hardship and insecurity of frontier-life fell far short of promised expectations.

Hundreds of recently arrived colonists to other areas of the country petitioned the *Junta de Población Blanca* to release the initial settlement funds promised to them in

⁶⁰ For the names of Irish colonists see Appendix 3.

⁶¹ The settler John Byrne from Wexford, who came to Cienfuegos, was grandfather to Matanzas native and well known Cuban, poet Bonifacio Byrne. This detail on the descendent of John Byrne was presented in a paper discussing the role of Byrne, a key figure in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Cuban history by Gera Burton at the Society for Irish Latin American Studies ‘Secrets and Lies’, Dublin March 2011. See www.irlandeses.org for further details. The educationalist Juana Byrne, first head mistress of a school for poor girls, is also a descendent. Gera Burton, Silas paper. See Moya ‘The Irish Presence in the History and Place names of Cuba’, (2007): 193.

their contracts signed by the Spanish Consul in Baltimore. There are two large volumes in the Cuban National Archive of up to one thousand petitions for settlement provisions by European colonists, the majority of whom were from the Canary Islands; three hundred and sixty-nine petitions were from Irish colonists.⁶² An interesting contrast appears throughout the petitions: the Canary Islanders all signed with a mark or through a representative, while many of the Irish have signed their names, though the script is immature. Accounts of the funds released were signed by Juan O’Farrill on behalf of the *Junta*.⁶³ One petition came from a group of four Irish coopers, with their families, who on arrival found the positions promised them did not exist. They requested help as ‘they are reduced to the most extreme misery, forced to beg on the streets’.⁶⁴ The contracts given to colonists provided for the sum of three *reales* to be paid per head of family for the first three months and one and a half per child, accommodation and transport from Havana to their place of settlement. Owen O’Reilly, a native of Ireland, who came with his wife and four children from New Orleans to Havana as part of the colonisation project of the *Junta de Población Blanca*, pitifully explained that they were destitute, ‘not being able to find work and not having the language of the country’.⁶⁵ Another petition claims that having complied with all the terms of their contracts when they moved to the countryside to work with a plantation owner, they found themselves reduced to the most extreme poverty.⁶⁶

The *Junta* enlisted support for the colonisation project from local plantation owners who pledged to engage white colonists on their lands. As the above petition testifies, in many cases they abused the contracts, using the logic typical of slave owners; they were less interested in the well-being or indeed survival of immigrant white workers who were neither their property nor their class. Class and profits outweighed racial solidarity across class divisions on the white settlement frontier and the economic imperatives of slave owners took precedence. The need to control access to land also superseded any policies of white colonisation; between 1813 and 1820

⁶² The lists of names of Irish families are included in the *Cartas de Domicilio de extranjeros* (1818-1819) in ANC LM, 1210.

⁶³ Petitions to the *Junta de Población Blanca* in ANC JF, 191-8566 and ANC JF, 191-8567.

⁶⁴ Petition to the *Junta de Población Blanca* in ANC JF, 191-8566.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

hundreds of Canary Islanders, displaced from their land by large landowners, were reduced to begging, wandering in the countryside and towns, looking for alms and work (Naranjo Orovio and Garcia González 1996, 62). In the Cienfuegos colony disputes over land between local landowners, the authorities and De Clouet led to settlers being evicted and having to re-establish themselves elsewhere. As Rovira González suggests, the government took advantage of the situation by concealing certain weaknesses and irregularities in the colonisation contracts, and De Clouet was accused of despotism (29). In January 1820 discontent led to rebellion against the founder, in which colonists accused him of violence, verbal abuse and unjust treatment. By February, up to seventy-six mostly recently arrived French immigrants had deserted the colony. Many more became disillusioned with the situation and being artisans and not peasants they drifted towards urban areas to find work. Given the rigid control of racial segregation and the regulation of plantation estates, white immigrants could only be employed in occupations such as muleteers or porters. As soon as they were released from their contracts they found work with farmers growing tobacco and raising cattle or they moved to urban areas where they found wage-work in tobacco or artisan workshops.

By 1826, there were 619 inhabitants in Cienfuegos, with 484 whites. Over the next ten years sugar production expanded enormously and by 1838, the slave population was estimated at over four thousand. Colonists hired or bought slaves on a small scale. Some colonists must have found work in the twenty-six sugar mills, where 1,322 whites were employed (Rovira González 1976, 57). Criticism of this colonisation scheme was levied at the colonial authorities by smaller landowners for not ‘protecting our race’ and ‘[O]n the contrary, instead of an increase in white population, that of the negroes has grown in the district then chosen as the site for the new colony: namely Cienfuegos’.⁶⁷ Despite its rather shaky foundation, the colony of Cienfuegos, which grew first from the efforts of a small population of white indentured labour, clearing virgin forests for contraband trade in hardwood, developed perfect conditions for the expansion of sugar production and the illegal trade in African labour. Many settlers eventually became

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Cited in Corbitt (1942): 293, n. 41.

wage workers, cutting wood or working in copper mines and in the tobacco industry.⁶⁸ Cienfuegos retained a mercantile connection with France but González concludes that the majority of the early French settlers abandoned the colony. More research is needed to establish the settlement patterns of Irish families and their descendents.⁶⁹ For those who survived the initial hardship it is likely that they took advantage of the opportunities that arose during the sugar boom and the rapid economic growth of Cienfuegos, contributing to laying the foundations of the town's middle class (García Martínez 1977). Upward social mobility was based on the presumption of privileges implicit in the racial hierarchy of colonial Cuba at the time.

The authorities were mistaken in the 'good will' they expected from the big landowners for the settlement of white families on government-donated lands. They tried to enlist their support in accommodating families in exchange for labour, but the *hacendados* were not interested in white families cultivating the land; they wanted agricultural workers as a substitute for or in addition to slave labour, now becoming more scarce or too expensive (Balboa Navarro 2005). The landowners obstructed the colonisation schemes making it very difficult to use the land for cultivation. In some cases settlers were granted land that did not belong to the government. A type of land-war ensued in which the *hacendados* pushed small-holders off their lands, either by bringing them to financial ruin through the courts or by resorting to violent expropriation. The *Junta* accused the *hacendados* of land-grabbing which they claimed was detrimental to agriculture and the social order (241). One land owner from Sancti Spiritus who supported the settlement of small holders, warned the authorities that without freeing up the land held in usufruct by the large *hacendados*, the royal decree of 1817 was a 'dead letter'.⁷⁰

The metropolitan push to colonise the countryside with peasant families, loyal to Spain, on agricultural small holdings did not result in any spectacular increase in the

⁶⁸ Some of the main products from the area for the export market were coffee and beeswax.

⁶⁹ For example Juan O'Bourke appears as an investor in the San Esteban sugar mill in 1839-1840 and he is identified as coming from nearby Trinidad.

⁷⁰ José Bruna al Intendente Alejandro Ramírez, 1818. Cited in Balboa Navarro 'Las Luces en La Agricultura. Redistribución y Legitimidad de la Propiedad Agraria. Cuba, 1790-1837' in *Las Antillas en la Era de Las Luces y La Revolución* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2005), 242.

white population. A series of colonisation schemes throughout 1819 and 1820 brought in 1,702 individuals out of whom 416 were Spanish, 384 French and 201 from England and Ireland (Humboldt 2011, 78). Remarking on the ‘insignificant increase’ such schemes made to the white population, in addition as Humboldt points out, ‘rare are the examples of official *whitening* in the form of *white letters* that the *Audiencia* accorded to high-yellow families [familles d’un jaune pale]’. (78). This official practice of ‘whitening’ or *blanqueamiento* involved the purchase of a certificate or the so-called white letter from the authorities by ‘light-skinned persons of African descent’ to certify white Iberian ancestry.⁷¹ The colonisation schemes managed by the *Junta de Población Blanca* did not amount to much but they did contribute to laying the foundations of settlement for towns along the coast in which European families, including Irish, and their descendents formed the basis of early populations in Nuevitas, Cienfuegos, Baracoa and Guantanamo. Efforts to ‘correct’ the racial balance were sidelined by ‘the lure of wealth through slave trading and slave-based sugar production’ and efforts to diversify forms of labour exploitation were ‘sabotaged’ despite fears of slave revolts and the africanization of Cuba (Bergad 1990, 245). The perpetual fear of being taken over by their slaves reached new heights when slaves revolted or with the spread of rumours of insurgency. On these occasions sections of the planter-class mustered some enthusiasm for the promotion of white colonisation. Such were the tensions within the *Junta de Población Blanca* that its members, more concerned with maintaining the supply of slaves, were slow to act on the question of white immigration. They were prepared to promote strategies for white settlement but the logic of the planter class was to preserve the status quo of chattel slavery and the enormous wealth it produced for them.

The Racial Contract –Whiteness and Property

The question posed at the beginning of this chapter was to what extent Irish colonists became passive agents or unwitting participants in Spanish imperial designs to inscribe white dominance in Cuba. In the thirty years since 1792, when Arango first petitioned the Crown to promote white immigration, colonial policies were designed to reinforce and intensify the racial hierarchy based on skin colour and sharpen class divisions of

⁷¹ See Humboldt (2011), 354 n.1.147.

colonial society. The position and status of newcomers to the colony was carefully moulded to consciously create a class of poor whites who were spatially and socially segregated from slaves but who had some access to privileges categorically denied to slaves. From the outset the racial contract, legally defined by royal *Cédula*, undergirded the relationship between whiteness and property for new immigrants, including property in people.⁷² Property rights and racial status was ‘a built-in and natural product’ of European immigration to Cuba, in order to carve out the distance between poor whites and slaves.⁷³ The entitlement to property in slaves, enshrined in the laws governing white immigration and residency, bolstered white dominance and racial allegiance. For Irish immigrants coming to Cuba, there is little evidence to suggest it was any different to the United States where, as Theodore Allen argues, they arrived into a society ‘already constructed on the principle of racial oppression, including the white-skin privileges of laboring-class European-Americans’ (Allen 1994, 184). While most poor colonists may never have become landowners, they could still purchase slaves. In the formation of a ‘white buffer-zone’ they were bound in opposition (including bearing arms) to slave resistance, but also to oppose cross-racial alliance in the frontier zones where they settled. Colonists were bound by the law to uphold the social order of colonial society based on the subjection of slaves by partaking in the hegemony of ‘white civil spaces’ (Mills 1997, 50-53).

While lower-class Irish immigrants may not have consciously identified as white and privileged in the racial hierarchy of colonial Cuba, the case of Mary Gallagher demonstrates the control and surveillance by the state of the racial contract which structured the relationship between poor whites and enslaved blacks. In this case of an Irish washerwoman in Havana who was the owner of a slave, the British Consul

⁷² For a discussion on the connections between property and ‘the pursuit of happiness’ based on whiteness and white privilege, see David Roediger ‘The Pursuit of Whiteness: Property, Terror, and Expansion, 1790-1860, *Journal of the Early Republic*, 19: 4, Special Issue on Racial Consciousness and Nation building in the Early Republic (Winter, 1999).

⁷³ Ann Stoler in discussing the hierarchy and division amongst Europeans in the colonial encounter in Sumatra argues that ‘racism is the classic foil invoked to mitigate such divisions and is thus a critical feature in the casting of colonial cultures’. See Stoler ‘Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and Boundaries of Rule’ *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31:1, (1989): 137.

appealed for justice on behalf of a British subject who he believed was the victim of extortion. David Turnbull wrote to the Captain-General Geronimo Valdés:

I have the honour to communicate to Your Excellency, the grievous oppression committed to one of my country women [...] who is the owner of a slave named Enrique, by birth an African of the Congo nation, about fifteen years of age and therefore a victim of the slave trade; in the purchase of whom she expended the greater part of her earnings. On the evening of Sunday the 26th September last, Enrique was allowed by his mistress to go out to walk; and he was accompanied by another boy, the slave of a Frenchman who keeps a chocolate shop in the Calle de san Ignacio near the church of Santo Domingo. In the course of their walk Enrique picked up in the street a piece of iron with a knob at each end known by the name of a life preserve; and which from what followed was in all probability left in his path for the very purpose of entrapping the unwary [...] Enrique had evidently been watched for immediately afterward in proceeding on his walk the two boys were arrested and tied together by the sub commissary of the district of Santa Catalina.

Enrique was thrown into prison and Mary Gallagher, who ‘understood Spanish very imperfectly’, in her dealings with the Commissary of the district of Santa Catalina, was forced by ‘threats and intimidation’ to pay two ounces of gold for the return of her slave. Before Enrique was returned to her two months later:

[...] she was required to attend at the prison and witness the infliction of corporal punishment on the person of Enrique; after which he was restored to her; but not until she had paid the sum of \$16.14 to one of the officers of the prison;

The British Consul and well-known abolitionist, Turnbull, who had recently taken up his post in Havana, not only advocated on behalf of the washerwoman who was ‘robbed’ at the hands of officials, he also sought compensation for losses sustained by the temporary loss of her property. Furthermore, Turnbull sought compensation for Enrique who suffered the consequences of the legal restrictions on slaves in ‘white civil spaces’:

‘now this poor washerwoman had not the means of satisfying this extortionate demand [...] by such is her reputation for industry and integrity that she succeeded in borrowing the money [...] On a review of this case of official extortion I cannot doubt for a moment that Your

Excellency will not only order the whole of the money to which Mary Gallagher has been robbed to be immediately refunded to her; but that Your Excellency will award an indemnification to the unfortunate Enrique for his two months imprisonment and for his sufferings under the lash; as well as a compensation to his mistress for the loss of his services for the other inconveniences she has sustained in the course of this nefarious transaction'.⁷⁴

It was the presumption of liberty which distinguished white immigrants however lowly their status, from the black population of whatever class or juridical status. The slave code stated that 'Any individual of whatever class, color, and condition he may be in is authorized to arrest any slave if he is met outside of the house or lands of his master'.⁷⁵ As a washerwoman, Mary Gallagher had the same occupation as many urban female slaves, but was entitled to own slaves; poor whites and free blacks were obliged to 'apprehend' any slave found without permission in civic spaces. The laws of racial oppression extended throughout the public sphere and across class, authorising racial superiority by poor whites over any black person whether slave or free, with an overlapping social division between black people of different juridical status. Amongst the underclass of black and white, displays of lax control over one's slave property, or failure to comply with the implicit contract of racial superiority, incurred penalties designed to prevent against the risk of an incipient proletarian consciousness across racial boundaries. Mary Gallagher's apparent infringement of these laws, by allowing her slave to move freely in the streets of Havana, was repudiated by the authorities. Poor whites did not always support slavery and indeed as Domingo del Monte reported 'only the poor speak badly of the slave trade'.⁷⁶ Perceived as abolitionist in attitude by the authorities and by association, anti-colonial, the practice of racism and white domination according to the colonial system of 'social control' was carefully policed.

Some Irish immigrants who became property owners 'accepted their place in the white-race system of social control and claimed the racial privileges entailed by it' (Allen 1994, 184). They took every advantage of their whiteness in the 'pursuit of prosperity' based on privileged access to property. The available evidence on the

⁷⁴ Turnbull to Captain-General, Geronimo Valdes, 6 December 1841 see ANC GSC, 844-28326.

⁷⁵ The Slave Code of 1842, in Paquette, (1988), 269.

⁷⁶ Cited in Paquette (1988), 94.

Cienfuegos colony suggests that when the local economy changed to intensive sugar production many of the colonists became wage-workers. Other Irish immigrants like Juan O’ Bourke, who between 1835 and 1846 benefitted from the sugar boom by investing in the foundation of a sugar plantation, the *San Esteban* estate. Social mobility and the accumulation of wealth and property based on the ‘racial contract’ continued to benefit descendents of O’ Bourke who became landowners and continued to invest in the same plantation up to 1860.⁷⁷ The colonial contract, however, was contested by the O’ Bourke descendents who collaborated with the annexationist cause in 1850 and with anti-colonial forces in the war of independence (Fernandez Moya 2007, 193). By the 1860s descendents of this creolised immigrant family saw it as in their interest to support the cause of independence though not enough is known about their stance with respect to abolition. An estate near Cienfuegos owned by descendents of O’ Bourke was divided into lots (*solares*) after independence and the neighbourhood is known today as Barrio O’ Bourke.⁷⁸ Research which focuses on Irish settlers in Cuba during the 1820s is necessary to establish a clearer picture of the settlement patterns of different cohorts of Irish immigrants in different parts of the island. This would permit a comparative approach to Irish migration to other parts of the Americas within a similar timeframe but it would also open up the possibility of a comparative perspective on European immigration to Cuba.

⁷⁷ See Appendices nos. 2 & 3 in Rovira González ‘Apuntes sobre La Organización de La Economía Cienfueguera’, *Revista Islas* (1975): 148-156.

⁷⁸ My thanks to Rafael Fernández Moya for this information about the O’ Bourke family of Cienfuegos. The first O’ Bourke, a doctor from Limerick, came to Trinidad and married there in 1824 to Maria Icolaza Palacios y Veloz. He became the owner of a sugar plantation near Cienfuegos. They had ten children.

Section Three: Slavery, Free Labour and Whitening (1835-1840)

The Demographics of Slavery

By the early decades of the nineteenth century divided loyalties amongst the planter-class rested on questions of pro-slavery and abolition, annexation with the Southern States of America or remaining loyal to Spain. The sugar boom, slavery, abolition and changing demographics were fundamental to these socio-economic and political tensions. Dependence on slavery was the mainstay of pro-slavery Spanish loyalists and dovetailed with the interests of empire, whereas annexationists supported slavery for different political ends; to achieve independence from Spain under the protection of the slave states in the United States. Abolition or the gradual ending of slavery was more generally promoted by Creole planters who envisioned a Cuban nation with equal rights within empire. Creole nationalists, prepared to consider independence from Spain, introduced ideas of reform in the search for labour, the formation of a ‘Cuban race’ and Cuban national identity. The importation of Irish immigrant labour and the inscription of white dominance, discussed in section two, while equally pertinent to the emerging conflict of race and nation in this early nineteenth-century vision of what an independent Cuba might look like; as the debate on abolition gathered force, the discourse of increasing the white population became one of finding a cheap labour substitute for slavery and the emerging imperative of incipient capitalist relations. But before addressing the position of Irish labour within these discourses of transition from slavery to free labour, forging Cuban national identity and ‘whitening’ policies, it is helpful to examine some of the socio-economic transformations in Cuba during the sugar boom which led to the demand for cheap white labourers from Ireland.

Despite Britain’s efforts to outlaw the trade in slaves, the trade actually increased in Cuba.⁷⁹ The first census in 1774 counted the white population of Cuba as fifty-six percent of the total. In the transformation from a settler society to a large-scale sugar and

⁷⁹ The first recorded shipment of African slaves to the Americas was in 1511 in Hispaniola and the last was landed on the south coast of Cuba in 1873, to work on the Juraguá sugar plantation, near the city of Cienfuegos. The last of the large barracones or slave markets in Havana was destroyed in 1836, after which time the arrival and sale of slaves took place clandestinely at other ports and under cover of night. See Knight *Slave Society in Cuba* (1970), 63.

coffee plantation society, nearly seventy thousand slaves were imported between 1763 and 1793 and sugar production almost doubled.⁸⁰ The following table shows that the black population was increasing at a faster rate than the white population in the fifty years between 1772 and 1827.

Figure 9: Census Figures 1774-1827

Population of Cuba	1792	1817	1827
White population	133,553	290,021	311,051
Black population	140,426	340,952	393,436
▪ <i>Free people of colour</i>	55,930	115,691	106,494
▪ <i>Slaves</i>	84,496	225,261	286,942
Total (black + white)	273,979	630,973	704,487

Source: Consuelo Naranjo Orovio, ‘El Temor a la “Africanización”’: Colonización Blanca y Nuevas Poblaciones en Cuba (El Caso de Cienfuegos)’ in *Las Antillas en la Era de las Luces y la Revolución* (2005), 88

The population of Havana more than doubled in the twenty years between 1790 and 1810, with a total of 96,114; just one hundred less than New York, making Havana one of the six most populated cities in the Americas at this time (Humboldt 2011, 33). The overall population of the island almost quadrupled with the biggest increase attributable to the number of slaves introduced during this twenty-year period. The percentage of whites in the total population was decreasing and continued to do so until 1860, when the ratio reversed. Of the total number of enslaved people brought into Cuba, 61% arrived during the seventy year period between 1774 and 1841.⁸¹ The census of 1841 revealed an increase in the number of slaves which for the first time was greater than that of whites: the white population was 41.5% of the total, the slave population was 43%, and when combined with the number of free people of colour, the black population

⁸⁰ For figures on slave imports to Cuba see Bergad, García and Barcia, *The Cuban Slave Market* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁸¹ Population figures are from, Comisión Estadística, see *Cuadro Estadístico* 1846. More than 595,000 slaves arrived in Cuba during the last fifty years of the trade up to 1867, roughly the same number of slaves imported to the United States over the whole period of the trade which was 523,000. See Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 2.

was 61%.⁸² By 1800, it is estimated that thirty-six percent of the population lived in slavery, many still speaking African languages and having little or no contact with the Creole world outside the plantation (Benitez-Rojo 1992). African-born slaves were in the majority in the sugar and coffee plantations of Western Cuba; where the black population was close to double that of whites (Torres Cuevas and Reyes 1986).⁸³

For the first time in Cuba's history the increase in the black population, particularly in western Cuba, with the greatest number of sugar plantations, caused alarm amongst the plantation owners who had until recently, been indifferent to the efforts of the *Junta de Población Blanca*. In a lengthy petition to Captain General, Dionisio Valdes, in 1841, the *Junta de Fomento*, representing the planters, cited the census statistics in a plea to end the illegal trade on the grounds that, 'it appears because of that providential law deducible from these statistical facts that the increase of the servile is destined to prejudice the increase of the dominant race'.⁸⁴ What was emerging amongst such powerful interest groups is not just the concern for their economic prosperity, but the debate was changing to consider what kind of nation they wanted. A new generation of reform-minded planters and prominent intellectuals envisioned a separate but exclusive *criollo* or Creole identity and were prepared to consider independence from Spain, by creating a Cuban nation, and 'the only one that any sensible man would concern himself with' was in Antonio Saco's terms 'a Cuban nation formed by the white race' (Ferrer 1999, 3). While the discourse of Cuban nationalism now centred on race and nationality, the planter class envisioned a vast labour market of dispossessed workers, both native and imported, who would also tip the balance in favour of whiteness (Moreno Fraginals 1976). Some of the earliest discursive formulations of national identity sought to assuage the racial anxieties of the planter-

⁸² The credibility of slave estimates has been questioned by Antonio Saco who argued that these figures were an underestimation of the number of slaves on the island, arguing that slave owners were more likely to conceal the true numbers of their slaves, fearing that the census was being taken in preparation for a government tax, or a British inspired programme of emancipation (Paquette, 298, n. 43).

⁸³ Estimates show that 780,000 slaves were imported to Cuba before the trade ended in 1867, more than twice the number brought to the United States and eight percent of all African slaves brought to the Americas. For a comparison on of African slavery in the Americas See Laird Bergad, *Comparative Histories of Slavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁸⁴ *Junta de Fomento* to the Captain-General, 1841, see NA FO, 84 Consular Documents Havana, Volume1, Mr. Turnbull, January - April 1841.

elite, caught between remaining loyal to Spain or sharing independence with the other half of the population of emancipated slaves.

‘Free’ Labour Versus Slavery

The economic and social transformation of Cuba between 1790 and 1840 created a labour demand that was met by reinvigorating or revitalising slavery, which Tomich has termed a ‘second slavery’ (Tomich 2003). At a time when plantation slavery was on the wane in the other sugar islands of the Caribbean, the production of sugar and the importation of African slaves to Cuba increased exponentially. Following the abolition of slavery and the subsequent decline in sugar production in the British Caribbean, Cuba was steadily increasing production and by 1835 was supplying 19.61% of the world’s sugar consumption.⁸⁵ To meet the demands of the sugar boom, into the nineteenth century, the economic and social history of colonial Cuba was described as a ‘licentious’ search for workers to exploit in the production of sugar (Pérez De la Riva 1973). Even though the trade in slaves became illegal in 1820, slave imports reached their peak in the 1830s and 1840s during a period of the most intense clandestine trade in slaves. External pressure to abolish slavery heightened in 1835, pushing sugar planters to embark on a discourse of transition from slavery to prepare, in theory at least, for a free-labour system. In the sparsely populated countryside, with a narrow internal labour market, the Cuban planter-class began to consider working their sugar plantations with new forms of imported wage- or contract-labour, argued by some to be a more profitable exercise. Irish immigrants arriving at this crucial time in Cuba’s transition to capitalism were part of the experiment to introduce ‘free’ white-labour into a tightly entrenched slave system. In this kind of plantation society dependent on the illegal slave trade ‘people who were nominally ‘free’ were subjected for the first time to compulsory labor systems that one would be hard pressed to functionally distinguish from slavery’ (Scarano 1998, 594).

Because of Havana’s crucial position in the colonial trading system, demand for labour in both urban and rural areas came from a wide range of economic activity. Bergad disputes the popular notion that slavery was uniquely equated with sugar

⁸⁵ In Manuel Moreno Faginals, *El Ingenio* (La Habana: Ciencias Sociales, 1978), 35-40. Cuadro 1 de Series Generales de Producción.

production in Cuba and shows the distribution of slave labour in different areas of the economy. He underlines that as late as 1827 no more than one-quarter of the enslaved population worked on sugar plantations, one-quarter on coffee farms and a quarter worked in urban occupations.⁸⁶ The remaining quarter worked on small farms and cattle ranches.⁸⁷ Right up to 1846 when sugar had expanded enormously, one-third of the 320,000 slaves worked on sugar plantations. It was not until 1862 that nearly half of the slave population lived and worked on sugar plantations; the peak of the sugar economy, just six years before the outbreak of the Ten Years War and the beginning of the dismantling of slavery (Bergad 2007).⁸⁸ Free white, black and mulatto labourers worked in areas associated with the plantation economy, particularly as muleteers in transporting sugar.⁸⁹ Up to the middle of the nineteenth century, labour in Cuba was by necessity a system of ‘extraordinary diversity’ and slavery but just ‘one component in a complex labour system’ in which most workers were free people including blacks and mulattos (Bergad 2007, 138-9). Free blacks by 1841 formed 23% of the total population. This small but significant number of free blacks, predominantly urban dwellers, formed an emerging class of *creolised* artisans who dominated the skilled trades in the port cities of Matanzas and Havana. The 1846 census shows that free people of colour were in the majority in occupations such as ‘butchers, sawyers, masons, midwives, mine workers, musicians, soap makers, stonecutters, tailors, and wet nurses’.⁹⁰ They owned property which included slaves, formed companies of militia and *cabildos* (associations), which provided a reservoir of African culture for a growing African-Cuban culture, and the

⁸⁶ For a history of slavery and coffee production in the Havana valleys, see María de los Ángeles Meriño and Aisnara Perera Díaz, *Un Café Para la Microhistoria: Estructura de Posesión de Esclavos y Ciclo de Vida en la Llanura Habanera (1800-1886)* (La Habana: Ciencias Sociales, 2008).

⁸⁷ For a history of the development of slavery in Cuba and a comparison of the economic aspects of slavery in Cuba, Brazil and the United States, see Bergad, *Comparative Histories of Slavery* (2007), Chapter 5.

⁸⁸ The 10 October 1868, marks the beginning of the first of three anti-colonial wars which wracked Cuba over the next thirty years: the Ten Years War (1868-78), the Guerra Chiquita, or Little War (1879-80), and the final war of Independence (1895-98), ending with the Spanish American War. ‘All three rebellions were waged by an army unique in the history of the Atlantic world - the Liberation Army, a multiracial fighting force that was integrated at all ranks’, in which at least 60% of, was composed of men of colour. Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba* (1999), 3.

⁸⁹ Others worked for high wages clearing forestland in frontier areas. According to the British Consul, Joseph Crawford, it took a three-man crew just over a month to clear and plant one caballeria of land for a salary of 525 pesos. Bergad, *Rural Society in Cuba* (1990), 246.

⁹⁰ See Paquette, *Sugar Is Made with Blood* (1988), 107, for a table of the occupational distribution of Cuba’s free coloured population.

resources of benevolent aid in times of difficulty for people of colour both slave and free. Proportionally the size of the free black community was higher in the total population than all of the slave societies in the Americas except for Brazil. Though legally free, their freedom was inhibited by laws which constrained black people in the public sphere and banned inter-racial marriage. Free blacks generally lived in urban areas and created black barrios to buffer the oppression of racism. Their position in Cuban society is considered to have been more fluid with greater social mobility than in the United States, for instance. However racial boundaries became more rigid during the sugar boom partly due to a growing fear by whites of the *africanización* of Cuba, but also informed by pseudo-scientific race theories used to reinforce the racial hierarchy. Many free blacks were small-holders and some worked seasonally on sugar plantations holding positions as administrators and overseers. The more prosperous free blacks improved their social mobility sometimes by buying positions in government-sponsored militia. During the 1830s and 1840s, the colony's Spanish administrators considered the free black population as the greatest threat to the social order. Their freedom represented the threat of spreading a desire for liberty amongst the slave population and in the repression that followed the *Escalera*⁹¹ conspiracy thousands of free people of colour were either deported or fled Cuba. The conspiracy is discussed in Chapter 5.

Different opinions have been advanced regarding the economic viability of slavery with the acceleration of technological advances during the nineteenth century. Eric Williams in his influential work *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944) argued that the abolition of slavery was not pursued for humanitarian reasons, but was a pragmatic response to the rise of capitalism, an imperative of the free market and its derivative, free labour. Slavery and the slave trade had contributed to financing Europe's industrial revolution, the very advancement of which now made slavery less profitable. Moreno Fraginals takes this argument a step further, arguing that technology was incompatible with slave labour. The economic inefficiency of slavery thesis is disputed by Bergad, who, based on more recent examination of economic data, argues that modernisation in production

⁹¹ The *Escalera* conspiracy, translates as the 'Ladder' conspiracy refers to the largest slave conspiracy in Cuba's history, uncovered in 1844. The use of the term *Escalera* describes a form of torture used to extract confessions from slaves.

processes and transportation ‘made slave labour more efficient and higher yielding in terms of income produced per slave’ (Bergad 1989, 97). New technology improved not only efficiency; it made sugar production significantly more profitable. The increasing cost of transport and the dreadful state of roads were the stimuli for planter investment in the construction of the Havana-Güines railroad. The railroad, which served the plantations of the most prosperous landowners, provided a powerful impulse to the cycle of increased production. Despite the ending of the legal trade in slaves in 1835, and the increasing cost, contraband slave labour was still more economically viable than free labour. Surplus labour was almost non-existent and because of the abundance of land there was not the same need amongst the free population to find wage work. The average monthly wage at mid-century was twenty or thirty pesos as compared with the equivalent of two or three pesos in Europe for unskilled and ten to twelve for skilled labour. In 1844 the annual total cost of an agricultural slave was seventy pesos (López Segrera 1985, 88).

Unprecedented reward from the combination of slave labour and other forms of coerced labour with ‘modernized capital-intensive colonialism’ created economic and demographic growth that was more impressive than in the metropolis. The institution of slavery as Scarano posits, not only ‘eased the colonies insertion into international circuits of trade’, it provided capital for ‘state-of-the-art infrastructure and lined the pockets of planters, merchants and industrialists on both sides of the Atlantic’ (Scarano 1998, 594). While sugar production was the principal determinant in the search for labour, inequalities in the colonial relationship with the Spanish empire, forced a change in thinking as to the social and cultural functions of labour relations amongst Cuban nationalists. Even though the world of the planter-class was unified in maintaining their slave-based wealth, political divisions were intensifying over questions of the need to control the demographic make-up of the island. Fissures in the unity of the dominant European plantation elite based on burgeoning anti-colonial sentiment and the formation of a Cuban nation forced the question of abolition in reformulating the labour supply.

Africanisation and Cuban Nationalism

Just as the ‘ever-faithful’ Spanish colony reached its zenith in the Atlantic economy, the undertow of its dissolution was beginning to rise to the surface. Growing discontent amongst Creole elites and increasing racial tension saw black insurgency become more organised and anti-colonial sentiment gather more widespread force. The spectre of Haiti amongst the planters was matched only by a contradictory fear of abolition and approaching near psychoses in the minds of the plantation owners, they now feared more than anything a future with a shortage of labourers (Calavera Vayá 1989). The planters tried to reconcile their dependence on slave labour with their fears of a slave rebellion, while believing that without slavery they would lose everything. Reluctantly seeking alternatives and ‘surrounded on all sides by abolition’ the *Junta de Fomento* pleaded with the Captain-General to end the illegal trade in slaves warning that ‘the number of your natural enemies within the island is daily increased’, and that ‘it is on account of the slave trade that the immigration of Europeans has not been increased’.⁹² In a spirit of reform the *Junta* ‘guided by the light of experience and the prodigious progress which human reason has made’ begged the Captain-General to take action to ‘correct the economical and social mistakes of our ancestors’.⁹³ According to this group of Creole reformists, the mistake was not the degradations of slavery but the planter’s dependence on slavery in this new era of abolition: ‘What a misfortune that the good fathers of that epoch did not ask for the abolition of the slave trade and clamour vigorously for the importation of white colonists!’⁹⁴ The social mistake, in their view, was the threat to Creole descendants of white Europeans of africanisation by the *gente de color* (people of colour).

The fear of cultural contamination of an emerging Cuban identity prompted Creole separatists to adopt a discourse of abolition, based on the racist ideology of *blanqueamiento* or whitening of the Cuban nation, in which the black race would eventually be extinguished. José Antonio Saco, the ‘apostle’ of Cuban nationalism, argued that ‘miscegenation was the only viable means’ of ensuring that the emerging

⁹² Petition from Junta de Fomento to Captain-General, Jan-April 1841, in NA FO, 84.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Quoted in Knight *Slave Society in Cuba* (1970), 96.

Cuban nation would become whiter over time (Guevara 2005, 106). As the architect of colonial labour strategies, Francisco Arango had earlier prescribed a social order which moved beyond social and economic racism to create what Tornero terms a ‘national racism’ (Tornero 1987). In order to contain the risky but necessary degeneration of whiteness through miscegenation, Arango was more than alert to the need for ‘structures of dominance’ in the regulation of colonial labour and intimate relations across racial boundaries. He outlined the economic necessity of inter-racial unions but he demanded measures to ensure the social and cultural exclusion of black Cubans and that of their descendants (Zeuske 2002):

the concept of one drop of Negro blood infecting the white [blood] to the most remote member even if our senses and our memory do not discover it, we must recall the testimonial of the dead kept in tradition of parchment covered with dust – it seems to be obvious that with the exclusion of any identification with us, the doors to civil liberties should also be closed (Arango 1811).⁹⁵

In order to police the boundaries of race and secure, as Zeuske puts it, ‘the cultural prison of socially stigmatized blackness’ forever, Arango reassured that the stain of the sacrificial adulteration of white blood would not be covered by dust, but in the ‘tradition of parchment’; the inscription of race and the protection of class was assured for generations to come (Zeuske 2002, 213). At a time of heightened anti-colonial pressure Arrango was confident that the colonial regime of governance in Cuba could be relied upon to increase division by marking and excluding this category of *gente de color* from the body politic; thereby offsetting any threat to the well-established ‘racially bifurcated principles of governance’ (Stoler 2001, 861). As Zeuske emphasises, just one year after Arango made his plea to the Spanish court, the liberal constitution of Cádiz of 1812 denied voting rights to the *castas pardas* (coloured castes) re-iterating the exclusion of black people by banning *libertos* or free men and women of colour from public spaces (Zeuske 2002).

⁹⁵ Arango y Parreño (1811), cited in M. Zeuske, ‘Hidden Markers. Open Secrets’ *New West Indian Guide* (2002), no. 3/4, Leiden, 213.

Discourse of Abolition and *Blanqueamiento*

Demographics, labour relations, and national identity dominated political and economic debates and the discourse of anti-slavery overlapped with anti-colonial sentiment - albeit with racist undertones. The Spanish Crown, concerned that the advocates of abolition were also advocates of independence from Spain, continued to turn a blind eye to the illegal slave trade, believing that the fear of another Haiti strengthened the ties of the 'ever faithful island' to the metropolis. The urge for autonomy amongst liberal Creoles was further tempered by abolitionist pressure from Britain, against which Spain offered some protection. David Turnbull remarked of Cuban abolitionists, that

[T]he great object of Creole patriots is to increase the white population, and thus render further importation of Africans unnecessary. Without denying them the credit of philanthropic motives, it cannot be concealed that the desire for independence may be traced through all their reasoning[s], just as it is notorious that the sentiment is deeply implanted in their hearts (Turnbull 2005, 269).

Abolition did not sit comfortably with Cuban nationalists because of the fear of a social revolution, provoked by insurgence 'from below', but also because slavery was their economic lifeblood and their wealth gave them status within Empire. However, it was difficult to do away with the demographic majority of Afro-Cubans without first talking about abolition. Reform-minded Creoles found it easier to imagine the eradication of the black population and in its place, as envisioned by Domingo Del Monte, a future in which 'the rich fields of that precious colony not be fertilised by any more sweat than that which fell from white brows'.⁹⁶ The reform movement by Cuba's modernising elites conceived of a nation racially and culturally in their own likeness populated by Europeans and their descendents, making Cuba the most 'European' colony in Latin America (Gomariz 2009). The Spanish preoccupation with *limpieza de sangre* moved to an epidermal expression of nationality and 'gradually evolved into an unwritten law of purity of the skin to reinforce white supremacy' in a society faced with abolition and the prospect of sharing citizenship with *gente de color* (Paquette 1988, 112).

⁹⁶ Cited in José Gomariz, 'Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda y La Intelectualidad Reformista Cubana. Raza, Blanqueamiento e Identidad Cultural en *Sab*' *Caribbean Studies*, 37: 1, (2009): 114.

Saco decried slavery, not on any moral grounds, but in unequivocally racist terms he argued that it was an obstacle to ‘progress and civilisation’; and in economic terms it was ‘a hydra that frightens those capitalists who would come to settle on our soil’.⁹⁷ Saco’s proto-nationalism in which he saw slavery as the cornerstone of Spanish colonial domination, expressed an ardent desire, without violence or revolution to bring about ‘*la disminución, la extinción si fuera posible, de la raza negra*’ (to diminish or if possible extinguish the black race) before it ruined ‘our island’ economically and culturally.⁹⁸ In his view of Cuba’s future polity, black people were passive subjects, there to benefit the white coloniser (Portuondo Zúñiga 2005). With greater urgency, after the emancipation of slaves in the British Caribbean, Saco warned that:

[t]he colonisation of Cuba is necessary and urgently required to give to the white population of Cuba a moral and necessary preponderance over its black inhabitants [...] It is necessary to counter the ambitions of 1,200,000 Haitians and Jamaicans who seek her lovely beaches and unused lands; it is necessary to neutralise as far as possible the terrible influence of the three million blacks who surround us – the millions to come by natural increase – and who will drag us down in the near future in a bitter bloody holocaust.⁹⁹

Saco recommended white immigration as practiced in the English colonisation system, not as in the West Indies, but more like the system in Canada which had an influx of 200,000 immigrants between 1834 and 1839, as compared with the ‘flood’ of African slaves in Cuba (Opatrný 2005).¹⁰⁰ Fearing the result of the emancipation of slaves in the West Indies, Saco began to envision citizenship for descendants of Cuban slaves, provided they became ethnically whiter and shed their African ways. In this view the only way to civilisation for the weaker inferior ‘black race’ was by interbreeding with the stronger superior white. According to Saco:

⁹⁷ Cited in Corbitt ‘Immigration’ (1942), 300.

⁹⁸ Citations from José Antonio Saco *Obras* in Olga Portuondo Zúñiga, *José Antonio Saco: Eternamente Polémico* (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2005), 155.

⁹⁹ Quoted in Knight (1970), 99.

¹⁰⁰ After a study tour of the English colonies in 1835, Saco drew some of his ideas on labour and colonial reform from ‘parallels’ with the English colonial system, not in neighbouring Jamaica, but in Canada. He marvelled at the increase in white population where they did not have the same labour demand as Cuba.

The great illness of the Island of Cuba consists in the immobility of the black race. By preserving her colour and primitive origin, she remained separated from the white race by an impenetrable barrier; but mobilize it, mix it with the other race, allow it to find its movement and then the barrier will start to collapse in stages, until it finally disappears (Saco 1844).¹⁰¹

Saco's prescription for white-washing the population, while ensuring the protection of class and white racial purity, would confine such mixing to free black women and poor white immigrants who could 'only afford to eat bread and plantains' (Portuondo Zúñiga 2005, 164). The 'pure white' woman of the Creole ruling class, who stood in contrast to the 'almost white' *mulata* (mulatta, a woman of mixed-race, black and white), would not be contaminated in the creation of a white under-class. In this case the union of 'not quite white' Irish labourers with Afro-Cubans would not only provide bodies for a substitute labour force, it would contribute to the nation's racial project of *blanqueamiento* while ensuring a class ceiling, in what Guevara calls the 'ultimate unattainability of whiteness by non-whites' (106). The colonial category of *mestizaje* (interracial unions), as Stoler argues, embodies one of the tensions of empire, that of inclusion/exclusion, which in colonial Cuba turned on Creole/Spanish credentials as much as on racial categories. Included as labouring bodies in the project of nationhood, but excluded from 'white prestige', the boundaries and prestige of those who conceived the policy, Cuban (descendants of European) white males, were assured.¹⁰²

The project of *blanqueamiento* or 'whitening' the nation was constructed in social and cultural terms, in opposition to africanisation, and rested on a modernizing imperative and rhetoric of economic progress. The racist attitudes in this kind of nationalist discourse are, in Barbara Fields' terms, 'promiscuous critters' turning up in a discourse of opposites where black is backward but not expendable and white is the modern nation (Fields 2001). The intellectuals sought to modify the chains of bondage by exchanging the sweat of black labour for white labour, not by complying with

¹⁰¹ Cited in Gema A. Guevara, 'Inexacting Whiteness: *Blanqueamiento* as a Gender-Specific Trope in the Nineteenth Century' *Cuban Studies*, 36 (2005): 106.

¹⁰² 'Conceived as a dangerous source of subversion, it was seen as a threat to white prestige, an embodiment of European degeneration and moral decay'. See Ann Stoler, 'Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia' in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, edited by Frederick Cooper and Laura Ann Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 199.

international treaties or philanthropic campaigns, but by means of colour-coded social engineering. Contamination of class was protected through surveillance of the ‘white woman’ of the elite ruling class and contamination of race was protected by policing sexual contact through legislation. Guevara argues that miscegenation, as portrayed in the Cuban novel, ‘was sanctioned only when it involved women of colour and white men, thus adhering to a legal system that limited inter-racial marriage to poor white men and women of colour’ (Guevara 2005, 107). This is borne out by the records that show a high number of inter-racial unions between impoverished white immigrant men and free black and mulatto women (Martínez-Alier 1974).

The *Junta de Población Blanca* faded out of existence by 1835 and the project of whitening the nation was submerged in the economic forum of the *Junta de Fomento*, which, untrammelled by the tensions of the abolitionist debate, was the first to advocate the need for white wage-labourers. With explicit orders from the Spanish Crown not to follow the system of colonisation used up to that point the *Junta de Fomento* was charged with adopting measures to give ‘occupation to useful laborers from the Peninsula, its adjacent islands, or from other points in Europe’ and see to it that ‘some of them be employed on selected sugar plantations, completely separated from the Negroes, in order to learn the results of this kind of experiment when economically directed’.¹⁰³ Contract labour was not a viable replacement for slave labour but was used more to supplement it in an imaginary gradual transition to free labour (Knight 1970). The experiment with Irish labour as a test of that transition, at a time when colonial ideas about permissible levels of coercion were archaic, instigated the difficult and violent relationship that developed between ‘free’ labour and capital. Irish and other railroad workers of European origin became the vanguard of cheap white labour within the nexus of Hispano-Cuban ‘colonisation’ policies designed to ‘whiten’ Cuba’s majority black population.

The search for new technologies to increase sugar production led the wealthy Creole-elite to look to industrial centres beyond the Spanish Empire for capital, machines and the importation of cheap ‘free-labour’ other than through the usual

¹⁰³ *Boletín del Archivo Nacional*, XXII, 163-164, cited in Corbitt ‘Immigration’ (1942).

Spanish colonial networks (Curry-Machado 2009). Such was the ‘ardent desire’ of the big plantation owners to import labour that, according to the well known literary figure and plantation owner Domingo Del Monte, they were willing to bring workers from anywhere, ‘even Siberia’.¹⁰⁴ Transportation of immigrants, chiefly from the Canary Islands and mainland Spain (as discussed in Chapter 2), became a lucrative business for those previously involved in the slave trade who simply substituted their cargo for one which was legally permissible. For the immigrant, the cost of the passage meant personal or family debt which often trapped them into contracts for years trying to work off the costs. Many found themselves in a position of debt-bondage during which some lost their lives due to overwork, poor nutrition and the rigors of the climate. There were frequent desertions and in many cases women turned to prostitution to survive.

In this new context of a decline in the supply of slave labour, a change in the discourse of labour emerged that cast the white immigrant not as a colonist, settler or farmer but as a ‘free’ labourer working for a wage. However, accustomed as the planters were to chattel slavery, in which labour was extracted by coercion, they could only conceive of ‘free’ labour in terms which at best were closer to indenture. They were reluctant to give up the power of ownership and coercion but they easily relinquished all responsibility for the welfare of their workers. In order to facilitate a smooth transition, while still maintaining control over immigration and the labour market, the Spanish government agreed a solution in which labour was sold for the duration of a contract to plantations, railroad companies and private individuals (Calavera Vayá 1989). In the same way as slave traders traded in slaves, private speculators would trade in contract labour, particularly Chinese, by selling labourers contracted for a certain period of time to private land-owners and colonial institutions.

The most suitable immigrant worker for this kind of hybrid-capitalist labour relations was ideally a seasonal or temporary worker, paid a low wage with no burden on the plantation owner to provide accommodation, food, clothing and medical attention. Better still if they did not speak the language or understand the customs of the

¹⁰⁴ Cited in Calavera Vayá ‘Elite y Mercado de Mano de Obra en Cuba 1825-1930’, *Quinto Centenario*, 15 (1989), n.2.

country, they could more easily be subjected to a work regime of coercion (Calavera Vayá 1989, 139). In contrast to earlier colonisation strategies, family migration was discouraged in favour of mobile male labourers - labour as a commodity, removed from its social context - to better serve the demands of capitalist labour relations. Permission to marry in the case of Chinese-indentured labour was at the behest of individual *patronos* or employers, and most *patronos* found wedlock 'too stabilizing and too normalizing a boon' (Dorsey 2004, 21). With the construction of the railroad, some thirty-five thousand white immigrants entered Cuba between 1834 and 1839 and about seventy thousand slaves during the same period (Corbitt 1942).

The forging of a Cuban identity by Creole nationalists in the first half of the nineteenth century adopted strategies of exclusion based on identifying the Other as black, *mulato*, Asian or non-Spanish (Naranjo Orovio and Garcia Gonzalez 1993). But to accommodate new social constructions of labour which were white, the racial discourse about Chinese contract labour also implied more porous barriers in the racial divide. Starting out as legally white, in order to segregate Chinese subaltern labour, the construction of Chinese identity as passive and perverse quickly took hold as 'old discourses were grafted on to new ones' (Dorsey 2004, 20). A colonial official subtly affirmed the hierarchy: 'Though the Chinese race is thought to be purer than the African race, whites look upon it with a certain aversion' (Martínez-Alier 1974, 78). However, in less subtle prose, Cuban society at mid-century rendered the Chinese 'indistinguishable from slaves' as they were allocated that space 'at the intersection of slave labor and wage labor'. Their honorary white status was bounded by the socio-cultural limits of slavery which 'dictated that coolie identity continued to amplify unequal relations of power' relying instead on popular and state-based discourses which 'challenged and nullified the legal taxonomy of coolies as free white men' (Dorsey 2004, 20). Irish railroad labourers occupied a similar position of unfreedom, though considerably shorter than Chinese coolies, however, in the discourse of the state and their employers, they were 'free' white wage workers, with the addendum of ethnic inferiority. In the alliance of class and race, the Irish and Canary islanders disrupted the social order, the glue of which was an all-white, all-European solidarity in opposition to an all-black and almost white conflation of free/unfree subjects. The discourse of race in

the context of labour relations had to be repeatedly modified and adapted to align racial ideologies with political and economic pragmatism in an era of abolition. This shaped the way in which categories of ‘whiteness’ and ‘wage-labour’ were introduced into a system where slavery still predominated. The heightened racial divisions in Cuban society of white/non-white found new ways to accommodate this juxtaposition of slavery and ‘free’ ‘white’ labour, which placed black and white labour in the same occupational and class status, with little functional distinction by juridical status.

‘The Wages of Whiteness’

Though Creole nationalists may have sympathised with the plight of colonial Ireland, the economic imperatives of sugar production did not permit solidarity with emigrant labourers of Irish origin, who were co-religionists but not of their class. Once they arrived in Cuba their lowly social status was not white enough and therefore closer to the status of slaves, in the colonial ethnography of the ruling elites. While immigrant labourers coming from the United States may have had some sense of themselves as white they would not have been prepared for the inhibitions of liberty thrust upon them by repressive laws in Cuba. Curry-Machado argues that migrant workers arriving in the 1830s and 40s would not have been so ‘comfortable and familiar with the identity of White and Free’ as those arriving later:

Migrant workers arriving in Cuba in the mid-nineteenth century from the European and North American industrial centres found themselves in a very different class context from that from which they came. Although the *maquinistas* formed part of a developing skilled working class elite, they nevertheless came from societies in which class-consciousness was relatively well developed.¹⁰⁵

For the migrants working on the railroad in occupations usually reserved for enslaved labourers, there was no way out of their subjugation. They may have been awarded petty privileges on paper on the basis of their skin colour, but the restraints on their liberty, not to mention the conditions and brutal discipline imposed, was a state much closer to slavery. The brutal treatment of ‘free’ workers continued up to mid-century as the case

¹⁰⁵ Cited in Jonathan Curry-Machado ‘Indispensable Aliens: The Influence of Engineering Migrants in Mid-nineteenth Century Cuba’, Ph.D. Thesis, London Metropolitan University (2003), 196.

of Irish labourer John Powers, who was killed in 1859 while working at Ceiba Mocha, demonstrates:

[He] died of unheard of barbarities inflicted upon him whilst he was confined in ‘the stocks’ by a person who acted under the orders of the Spanish authority.¹⁰⁶

This was not an isolated incident as a later report by the British Consul to the Captain-General reveals:

It is reported that more than one of the labourers have been killed or have died in consequence of the blows inflicted on them by the soldiers or whatever else the armed men are who assume to themselves the right of inflicting upon the labourers the most cruel punishments with their swords and clubs. The poor men being first placed in the stock, and so rendered entirely incapable of any resistance.¹⁰⁷

Subject to violent brutality, with no protection from the authorities they were criminalised by draconian laws if they attempted to abscond. The prevailing order at this time in Cuba, based on race and juridical status, effectively meant that the ‘wages of whiteness’ were meaningless in this context. The ‘wage’ did not confer status and even less so reward for one’s labours, because materially, the so-called wage fell below what was necessary for social reproduction (arguably implicit in the idea of a wage). The wage, as outlined in Chapter 2, started out as a debt, and even when pay was delayed it served more as a strategy of coercion by the authorities to limit freedom. Implicit in the contract system and the structures built around enforcing it was the idea of the dispensable nature of these workers. The invocation of whiteness served more as a rhetorical ploy in response to a temporary concern to mobilise a large labour force to expedite the problem of transport for the sugar mills. When it came to profits, the project of ‘whitening’ and the threat of slave revolts paled in the hierarchy of concerns for the sugar planting elites.

Before coming to Cuba many of the Irish immigrants had already been exposed to proletarianisation as wage-workers in the industrial trenches of the United States. They had also experienced ‘a presumption of liberty’, implicit in the right of

¹⁰⁶ Letter from Crawford to Captain-General, Havana, 26 March 1859 in NA FO, 313-54, cited in Curry-Machado (2003), 195.

immigration and naturalisation, since the American Constitution in 1790 provided that ‘any alien, being a free white person [...] may be admitted to become a citizen’; privileges derived from being white which were completely new to Irish immigrants (Allen 1994, 185). In the racial hierarchy of the United States they were ‘free’ individuals, albeit ‘rightless and unprotected’ however, as free proletarians, Irish immigrants were despised (in the same way as in Britain) for lowering the wages and prospects of native-born workers. German immigrants, tarred with the same brush suffered similar marginalisation by nativist anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant prejudice. This gives some insight as to why the move to a third country, a Spanish colony, might have held some attraction for Catholic wage-workers. The Irish were less skilled than the Germans which meant they occupied the most unskilled and servile occupations, and as has been mentioned in Chapter 3, their labour was often used as a substitute for slave labour, as a lesser risk to capital than injury or death to more valuable slave property. In the racial social order of United States, Irish Catholics learnt quickly that black people could be ‘despised with impunity’ (148). Anti-Irish prejudice heightened the competition for work; hence assertions of whiteness increased status and reward where assertions of Irishness did not. Roediger’s ‘wages of whiteness’ held a different meaning in the world of America’s early industrialisation, where white was pitted against black in the early formation of a working class. The political alliance by Irish immigrants with whiteness, forged as it was out of marginalisation and hostility, contributed forcefully to the emergence of a white American working-class consciousness based on racist assumptions. In that sense they seemed a perfect cohort for Cuba’s emerging capitalists who wished to import a white working-class as a bulwark to both their fear of black insurgence and their fear of abolition.

¹⁰⁷ Crawford to Captain-General, Havana, 9 May 1859, in NA FO, 313-54.

Conclusion

Before 1835, and the influx of railroad workers, Irish immigrants in Cuba, whether ‘Creole grandees’ of the eighteenth century, or frontier settler families in the 1820s, were perceived in some quarters as worthy refugees, fleeing Catholic oppression. Irish planter families integrated into colonial society, well placed at the top of the hierarchy, as powerful players in the slave trade and the plantation economy. They contributed in no small measure to launching Cuba’s slave trade after the British left Havana, and they were at the heart of the clandestine trade right up to the middle of the nineteenth century. Wealthy and well-connected, with the added advantage of straddling both the Spanish and British empires, they ably increased their prosperity by stimulating the slave system and embedding white dominance. The pursuit of wealth and power by the planter class, based on a ‘natural right’ to private property, enhanced by the colonial encounter, sharpened the racial divide in direct proportion to profit. Their consciousness of class was just as sharp when it came to instigating reformist policies to create an underclass of labour. White settlers from Ireland, as ‘human capital’ in the colonial frontier, proved no less sound an investment than any other European immigrants within the ‘logic’ of white colonisation. Restricted by class in their access to property, the limitations to social mobility were not indefinite and Irish settlers, once they were free of their contracts, could gradually assert their white entitlement to property in land or slaves.

The contract labourers and mechanics arriving at the beginning of Cuba’s industrial revolution, though applauded as a boon to the much needed white population, were repudiated by the authorities as being recalcitrant to incipient capitalist relations. This first experiment in contract-labour, for all its Catholic credentials and whiteness, was premised on the temporary and expendable nature of cheap migrant labour. However the threat of an insubordinate white proletariat to the forces of social control and the discipline and logic of capitalism were overriding concerns in finding solutions to the problem of labour supply. The familiar use of a ‘moral’ critique of the Irish as described in Chapter 2, found flaws in their ethnicity but it did not call their whiteness into question. This contrasts with the racialisation of the Irish in North America in the

early part of the nineteenth century where the litany of adjectives used by native-born white Americans to describe the Catholic Irish 'race' included 'savage, grovelling, bestial, lazy, wild, simian and sensual' (Roediger 1999, 133). The same racialisation and disdain was applied to the lumpen proletariat in Britain.

The Irish had not yet embraced their position as white in the racial pecking order of the United States, where pitting race against class worked to disrupt possible alliances between black, Chinese and Irish immigrants. However as Irish Catholic immigrants were increasingly associated with racial inferiority by nativists, culminating in brutal 'anti-Irish' riots in Philadelphia in 1844, this resulted in increasing religious and cultural prejudice against Irish Catholics. It also divided the co-operation which existed between Protestant and Catholic immigrants, homogenous in their poverty, and their common interest in reform causes in Ireland (Roediger 2008, 144). As Roediger has argued, 'shared oppression need not generate solidarity but neither must it necessarily breed contempt of one oppressed group for the other' (Roediger 1999, 134). In the 1830s Irish Americans had at times displayed solidarity with African Americans, opposing violent mobbing of free blacks and abolitionists and in 1842 seventy thousand Irish signed an anti-slavery address in Ireland. Abolitionist sentiment did not necessarily transfer to the other side of the Atlantic when, only two years later, Irish immigrants displayed alarming enmity to the black population, in their support of slavery in America (135). Despite exhortations by Daniel O'Connell to side with the campaign for abolition, many Irish immigrants in the United States who had enthusiastically supported the campaign for Catholic emancipation, had by the early 1840s enthusiastically embraced white supremacy and the Democratic Party's defence of slavery as sanctioned by the American Constitution. Hardening anti-Irish, anti-Catholic attitudes by Nativists in the mid-1840s, at a time when almost 50% of all migrants coming to the United States were fleeing the Great Famine in Ireland, saw a surge in Irish allegiance to the Catholic Church and the Democratic Party. Support for abolition and solidarity with black Americans was traded for citizenship by Irish males and the possibility of asserting a right to social and political freedom in a country built on racism, and pro-slavery

support.¹⁰⁸ The ambivalence of Irish identification with the struggle for abolition may have been guaranteed on home turf, but as Frederick Douglass observed in 1853,

The Irish [...] sympathising with the oppressed people everywhere when they stand on their own green isle, are instantly taught when they step upon our soil to hate and despise the Negro. They are taught that we eat the bread which of right belongs to them. The cruel lie is told the Irish, that our adversity is essential to their prosperity.¹⁰⁹

This stance, as represented by Irish male workers in the public sphere, was not necessarily universal amongst Irish immigrants. Irish racism was not homogenous, and without such public displays (or indeed research) it cannot be taken for granted that the same racial identity and hostility existed between Irish and African-American women. It may have been easier to sign such a petition in Ireland where it implied alliance with the cause for Catholic emancipation and Home Rule, but in the United States where the political and social order were built on a racist premise, the Irish choice to ‘become white’ as ‘a strategy to secure an advantage in a competitive society’ submerged solidarity across the racial divide and the principle of equality in pursuit of perceived benefits attaching to racist class credentials (Ignatiev 1995, 2).

In Cuba where there was no anti-Catholic prejudice and no anti-Irish prejudice, whiteness, in the rhetoric of advocates of free labour and a white Cuban nation, certainly held promise for the labouring poor in a Spanish colony. Yet the whiteness of the railroad workers was immaterial to their condition, within the narrow conception of free labour constructed by slave-holding elites. The coercion of labour was of much greater concern at the coalface of industrialisation than racial solidarity or indeed the reproduction of whiteness. Economic imperatives superseded racial anxieties amongst elites at this juncture in Cuba’s troubled colonial context. Incidences of animosity by white railroad workers towards enslaved workers do not appear in the records and their

¹⁰⁸ For a detailed discussion of Daniel O’Connell’s support for the campaign to end slavery and his rejection by Irish immigrants in the United States, see Bruce Nelson, ‘“Come Out of Such a Land, You Irishmen”’: Daniel O’Connell, American Slavery, and the Making of the “Irish Race” in *Éire-Ireland* 42; 1 & 2 (Spring/Summer 2007): 58-81. See also Luke Gibbons *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), 171-180.

¹⁰⁹ Frederick Douglass, 10 May 1853, cited in Peter O’Neill ‘Frederick Douglas and the Irish’ *Foilsiu* 5:1, (Spring 2006): 73.

swift repudiation by the authorities may well have been a response to the risk of contagion in unleashing black resistance to similar harsh oppression. As documented in Chapter 2, racial segregation was policed, thus making solidarity amongst oppressed groups less easy to read, however further investigation is needed to establish the nature of the relationships amongst this multi-ethnic class.

At the turn of the eighteenth century many Latin American settler elites sought to 'whiten' their populations, engendering a European *mentalité* through fostering immigration from Europe. Argentina is noted for its 'success' in effectively diluting and diminishing its Afro-Argentine population with the influx of immigrants. Studies of European immigrants in Argentina describe the enthusiastic embrace of whiteness by the Irish in Buenos Aires; although not as extreme as their reactionary stance in North America's race/class wars, it eased their way out of the subaltern position they came from (Healy 2005). They were easily classified 'as *ingleses* and therefore unequivocally white', contributing to the structural process of inscribing white dominance.¹¹⁰ The Irish who came to Cuba to work on the railroad had not yet subscribed en masse to the pro-slavery cause of the Democratic Party and as the above discussion demonstrates their embrace of whiteness was not so clear cut. Perhaps the line of enquiry is not the reward of the 'wages of whiteness' or how immigrants became 'black' or 'white'; but a potentially more enlightening question, as framed by Barbara Fields, as to 'how persons not born and bred to it, whatever their ancestry, became oriented in the American world of black and white'? (Fields 2001, 52).

¹¹⁰ See Claire Healy, 'Migration from Ireland to Buenos Aires (1776-1890)', PhD Thesis, National University of Ireland, Galway (2005); and Helen Kelly, *Irish 'Ingleses'* (2009).

Chapter 5: Repertoires of Resistance

Introduction

This chapter examines the recalcitrance of Irish railroad workers evidenced by their protests against a system of contract labour which coerced and criminalised them through debt-bondage. Irish protest at coercive labour practices in Cuba is examined in the light of resistance to a process of change which began in Ireland and continued to unfold in the radically different world of industrialising North America. The mode of resistance adopted by Irish workers is further considered in the context of Cuban labour relations into which they were introduced through voluntary migration but which inhibited their freedom in ways previously unknown to them. While diverse forms of struggle or resistance are influenced by historical and cultural legacies, Irish protest is examined in the multi-ethnic context of the Atlantic world where different categories of labourers responded to constraints to their freedom imposed by the social and legal structures of incipient capitalist relations. Irish protests at their conditions on the construction of the Cuban railroad were far from being merely spasmodic and violent upsurges. I argue that forms of struggle which emerged from the creation of a landless proletariat in Ireland underlay the generation of subaltern resistance by Irish migrants in the intersecting British and Iberian systems of colonial labour. Accusations against Irish immigrants of identifying with the British abolitionist cause in Cuba suggest a divergence from the disassociation with black workers and slaves, based on racial privilege that took place in North America in the 1830s.¹ Evidence of Irish cross-racial solidarity is examined by asking why, less than ten years later, at the height of British abolitionist pressure, a number of Irish immigrants were accused of participating in a widespread conspiracy by Cuba's black population to overthrow slavery.

Early protest and strikes by Irish migrants on the tracks of the railroad were, I argue, neither a mere 'reflex action' nor the inevitable result of a collision

¹ By the early 1830s Irish Catholics in the United States were beginning to identify with the anti-abolitionist Democratic Party out of which emerged 'a lasting marriage that gave birth to new ideologies stressing the importance of whiteness'. David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (Verso: London, 1991), 141. Also see Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

between the archaic habits of peasants and the disciplines of industrial modernity.² Their resistance was an intrinsic part of the contradictions of modernity and emerging forms of labour exploitation. Marx's insights into the unequal power relations between worker and capitalist within the emerging technological revolution reveal the dialectic of discipline and resistance in which the worker is at the same time the political Other of the rule of capital, and the producer of wealth and source of capital accumulation. Moreover, as Thompson argues, it is workers' lived experience of these class formation processes, and especially 'of the conflicts and struggles inherent in relations of exploitation', which shapes their consciousness and their repertoires of resistance to the modern state. In this Caribbean colonial context, resistance by newly proletarianised immigrants to a system which valorised 'free' labour while relying on levels of coercion which were very close to slavery, is highly likely to have drawn upon such a repertoire, and was a constant threat to the social order.

In the historiography of the railroad, capitalist relations of production with the importation of white immigrant labour marked the introduction of a 'free work force [...] in the ranks of the colony's incipient proletariat' and as a result 'encountered powerful resistance within the field of labour' (Zanetti and Garcia 1987, 118, 408). These authors attribute the seeds of militant proletarian activity in Cuba to the earliest workers on the railroad - the thousands 'who toiled under the burning tropical sun, who laid the rails and later ran the engines' in an 'active theatre of class struggle' (116, xxiii). The brief reference to a mobile proletariat from Ireland locates the migrants as victims of capitalist relations but does not analyze the relationship of class and race in the formation of early working-class consciousness by immigrant labour. Zanetti and Garcia point out that along with cigar workers, railroad workers played a pioneering role in the history of proletarian labour in the colonial period in two important proto-union type activities: the development of mutual aid or protection associations and the early use of a classic form of working class militancy - work stoppages. While there is no evidence of Irish benevolent

² In his seminal essay on peasant insurgency Ranajit Guha, of the Subaltern School, highlights the way in which elite historiography attributes peasant resistance to a series of provocations 'triggering off rebellion as a sort of reflex action, that is, as an instinctive and almost mindless response to physical suffering of one kind or another (e.g. hunger, torture, forced labour, etc) [...]'. See Guha, 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency' in *Selected Subaltern Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 45-86.

societies, within weeks of their arrival they were involved in work stoppages and protests and were quickly identified by the authorities as a threat to the social order. In this nexus of antagonism between plantation elites and heterogeneous forms of colonial labour the diversity of Irish, Canary Islander, African and Chinese cultural legacies was brought to bear on the highly exploitative relations of production in early nineteenth-century Cuba, characterized by the logic of slavery and ownership of labour. The labouring population in Cuba was not, as Thompson puts it, ‘some nondescript undifferentiated raw material of humanity’ to be acted on by Cuba’s incipient industrialisation (Thompson 1963, 194). They formed a ‘conglomerate’ with diverse experiences of oppression and coercion which may well have prevented collective organization. However, the pressure of divisive structures of race and ethnicity had not yet precluded the possibility of class alliance in a period of unanimous opposition to exploitative labour practices and inhibition of freedom.

From the moment they arrived in the teeming port of Havana ‘the city half-hidden behind a forest of masts and sails’, Irish workers must have been struck by the militarised, commercial environment of the tropical colony at the height of a sugar boom.³ As a key port in the global sugar market and the transatlantic slave trade, the port of Havana was described by Alexander Von Humboldt as presenting ‘diverse elements of a vast landscape’. The dockside was teeming with ‘dray carts loaded with cases of sugar and the porters elbowing passersby’ and large numbers of enslaved dock-workers loading cargoes of sugar and molasses (Humboldt 2011, 27). Irish migrants had sold their labour to a powerful transnational machine of capital, sugar and slavery, in which the construction of a railroad would reduce the cost of transporting sugar to a fraction of the price paid for overland transportation by mules or ox-drawn carts. The profits would accelerate productivity and intensify labour control in ways hitherto unknown in Cuba. Irish labour, as ‘a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital’, would contribute to the accumulation of wealth at a critical

³ Humboldt describes the entrance to Havana in 1801 as ‘one of the most pleasant and picturesque on the coastline of tropical America’, while at the same time having to march ‘knee-deep in mud’ on narrow unpaved roads through the multitude of pedestrians and carriages. What stands out at first sight are ‘fortified castles that crown the rocks to left of the port’, the post-office or *Correo*, the tobacco factory, and ‘the barracks [barracones]’ where the sale of slaves took place, all of which attest to Cuba’s position of defence within the Spanish Empire as well as its geo-political position in the slave trade and global commodity networks. Alexander Von Humboldt *Political Essay on the*

juncture in Cuba's capitalist development. As Marx described it, 'these labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market'.⁴

Migrant labourers from Ireland became part of an imported 'reserve army' of brute labour, vital to the production of sugar in western Cuba where, at the time, 34% of the population were enslaved workers of African origin. Already a seasoned proletariat on the networks of canal construction in the United States, the Irish came with experience of adaptation to and contestation of the demands of an emerging *modus operandi* in the management and control of large bodies of different forms of labour. They were highly mobile, moving from job to job, laying the ground for inland transportation networks which expanded the connections within a global circuit of commodities, trade and labour. Transport networks and transitory labour networks became mobile conduits for the circulation of commodities but they also circulated cultural formations and ideas. Just as ships were the 'living means [...] the mobile elements that stood for the shifting spaces in between the fixed places that they connected', Gilroy argues that 'they need to be thought of as cultural and political units [...] a means to conduct political dissent and possibly a distinct mode of cultural production' (Gilroy 1993, 16-17). Migrant navvies, from a pre-capitalist system of labour in Ireland, transformed the shifting spaces at the margins by negotiating and contesting emerging capitalist labour relations and the conditions of their labour.

The chapter is divided into three sections: Section 1 examines the cultural formations of communal responses to oppression born out of a politics of pre-capitalist agrarian unrest in Ireland during the 1820s and 30s. I argue that the Irish culture of resistance which emerged from a complex dynamic of colonialism, in which pre-capitalist and capitalist forces conspired to create a mobile proletariat, underlay the generation of subaltern resistance by Irish migrants to labour practices in colonial Cuba. Section 2 locates Irish protest within the context of coercive labour relations in Cuba and explores the extent to which incipient class struggle by Irish

Island of Cuba: a Critical Edition, edited by Vera M. Kutsinski and Ottmar Ette (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 26-27.

labour in early industrial America had a bearing on their protests in Cuba. Section 3 examines the paradoxical position of *los irlandeses*, forerunners of free labour and white colonisation in Cuba, some of whom were later accused of conspiring ‘against the white race’ to overthrow slavery and Spanish colonial rule. In 1844, during a bloody crackdown by Leopoldo O’Donnell, the Captain-General of Cuba, Irish migrants were now identified as British by the Cuban colonial authorities, and therefore supporters of an abolitionist conspiracy. In the context of the historically vexed question of why an Irish ‘counter-culture of modernity’, to use Paul Gilroy’s term (Gilroy 1993), did not in general transgress racial boundaries in the United States in solidarity with other oppressed people, there is a case to answer in Cuba as to whether or not Irish immigrants were involved in the *Escalera* conspiracy, or indeed, identified with black insurgency.

Section One: The Agrarian Underground in Ireland (1761-1840)

E.P. Thompson’s emphasis on the adaptation of popular culture and consciousness to changing relations of production as a ‘process of becoming’ applies beyond industrialising Britain to the wider Atlantic world. Meiksins-Wood points to the complexity of ‘historical beings, the bearers of historical legacies, traditions and values’ which by necessity generate ‘continuities cutting across all historical transformations’ (Meiksins-Wood 1995, 92). Situating Irish migrants in-the ‘mobile Atlantic’ and therefore outside the confines of the nation state, Linebaugh and Rediker argue that without studying the common ground and the points of contact between workers ‘black and white, Irish and English, slave and free’, a vital world of cooperation, contact, overlap and exchange is obscured by historians (Linebaugh and Rediker 1990, 225). Their analysis of multi-ethnic struggles during the eighteenth-century Atlantic world underlines the influence of transnational ‘continuities and connections’ which, they argue, informed popular working-class struggles.⁵ They trace the subversive experience of mobile Irish labour to the ‘Hidden Ireland’ of the Whiteboys, a network of secret societies engaged in agrarian protest against the

⁴ Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, cited in David McLellan, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 227.

⁵ See also Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (London: Verso, 2000).

commercialization and privatisation of communally held land.⁶ Just as dispossession created a mobile labouring population who struggled to retain access to land, ‘so the forms and experience of that struggle will move with the wandering, roving proletariat thus created’ (238). The transatlantic transfer of Irish traditions of violent protest continued into the latter half of the nineteenth century, embodied by the Molly Maguires in the anthracite region of Pennsylvania. In a reinterpretation of the history of the Molly Maguire ‘outrages’, Kevin Kenny emphasises the importance of a transatlantic perspective in understanding the impact of immigration on American labour history. He traces the ‘pattern of violence’ engaged in by Irish miners to agrarian unrest in Ireland, and argues that ‘it was adapted in Pennsylvania to the conditions of industrial exploitation faced by the immigrant workers in their new homes. Accustomed to oppression but not to its industrial form, the immigrants responded with a type of violence that had roots in the Irish countryside’ (Kenny 1998, 8). The same ‘points of connection’ in terms of socio-economic history are made in relation to the notorious Ned Kelly gang in Australia, in Peter Carey’s novel *The True History of the Kelly Gang* (2001). Parallels between the hidden Ireland of the Whiteboys, the Molly Maguires and the Kelly gang or ‘Mollies down under’, lead Heather Smyth to suggest ‘that communal “peasant” protest may have similar meanings and functions’ in Ireland as they did in Ned Kelly’s Australia (Smyth 2009, 200).

Whiteboyism and agrarian protest have been described as a ‘violent and conspiratorial’ tradition (Garvin 1982, 134); ‘frontier-type law’ (Wall 1973, 113); and ‘retributive justice’ (Kenny 1998, 8), in which secret societies imposed their code of law on the rural community, dispensing ‘rough justice’, to any transgressors. Since the mid-eighteenth century, throughout rural Ireland organised groups of agitators engaged in clandestine strategies of protest.⁷ Political grievances stemmed from a potent sense of injustice against tithes collected for a Protestant church and

⁶ Whiteboys were ‘Groups of men assembled by night to level the ditches which landlords and graziers had erected around the commons on which the people had until then enjoyed free grazing rights. At first they were called ‘Levellers’ but as they broadened their strategy to include the regulation of rents and tithes, the movement grew to become an oath-bound secret society’. Maureen Wall, ‘The Whiteboys’ in *Secret Societies in Ireland*, edited by T. D. Williams (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1973), 13.

⁷ For an analysis of popular religious riots as a form of collective disturbance in early modern Europe, see Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), Chapter 6, ‘The Rites of Violence’.

the collection of taxes with the greater numbers of evictions for non-payment amongst poor labourers and cottiers.⁸ They took the law into their own hands, as one underground leader explained in 1833:

The law does nothing for us. We must save ourselves. We are in possession of a little bit of land which is necessary to ourselves and our families survival. They chase us from it. To whom do you want us to address ourselves? Emancipation has done nothing for us, Mr. O'Connell and the rich Catholics go to parliament. We are starving to death just the same.⁹

They tore down ditches to disrupt enclosures on land given over to pasture, where small farmers and labourers previously had rights to grow subsistence crops. Violence was used to deter landlords from raising rents, evicting tenants or paying unfair wages. They intimidated their targets by posting anonymous threatening letters or notices, demanding specific action to redress grievances. They carried out attacks on property, burning down buildings and maiming or killing animals pasturing on enclosed lands. Some of the threats were followed up with assaults on landlords and their families, and more extreme violence and assassinations were frequently the outcome.¹⁰ Rather than statutory reform of the tithe and agrarian system, the colonial authorities responded with reprisals and a series of statutes, making membership of secret societies a capital offence. Ireland was 'in a state of smothered war' in which coercion by the ruling authorities was subverted by complex forms of organised agrarian protest which became an almost constant feature of rural life until the twentieth century (Moody and Martin 1967, 229).

Collective violence of this kind was not unusual in pre-modern or pre-industrialised societies throughout Europe and the African continent. Natalie Zemon Davis suggests that 'rites of violence' are more often 'prompted by political and moral traditions that legitimize and even prescribe their violence' (Zemon Davis

⁸ Against a backdrop of falling wages, and high rents, a wave of unrest in 1821-23 was sparked off by a new English agent on the Courtney Estate in Limerick when he evicted tenants who were in arrears. See Joe Lee, 'The Ribbonmen', in T. D. Williams (ed.) *Secret Societies in Ireland* (Dublin, 1973), 27.

⁹ Cited in Kevin Whelan, *The Tree of Liberty: Radicalism, Catholicism, and the Construction of Irish Identity 1760-1830*, (Cork: Cork University Press, 1998), 54.

¹⁰ For a list of strategies of resistance associated with different societies see Michael Beames, *Peasants and Power* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1982), Appendix I; for the most recent historical research on the extreme violence and campaign of terror during the Rockite rebellion in Munster and south Leinster during a three year period, see also James S. Donnelly jnr. *Captain Rock: The Irish Agrarian Rebellion of 1821-1824*, (Cork: The Collins Press, 2009).

1975, 154). She locates this type of violence not as a senseless and random cruelty, but as confined within a ‘repertory of actions’ which are ‘aimed at defined targets’ and prescribed by ‘traditions of popular folk justice’. In this sense, Zemon Davis connects the collective sense of the ‘rights of violence’ with the fundamental values and identity of a community (178). The roots of violence, then, were to be found where values central to the integrity of popular justice were threatened, challenged or subordinated. In the Irish context, repeated and extreme violence of agrarian secret societies was shaped by communal responses to economic upheavals associated with the clash of pre-capitalist and capitalist labour relations. The inevitable and overarching cultural domination of colonialism which was critical to this process was the most deeply felt political grievance precisely because it ‘offends against the most ingrained customs and mores of a society’ (L. Gibbons 2003, 154).

Whiteboys and Subversive Laws (1761-1790)

Throughout the eighteenth century, a mentality of dispossession amongst descendents of the native Irish landowning class underlay a popular culture of resistance to the ongoing process of settler colonialism. Despite the forfeiture of their lands, Old Catholic families retained their status as native elites or ‘shadow lords’; albeit disenfranchised they ‘mutated into an underground gentry’ with ‘a potent afterlife in the Catholic middleman’ employed to manage large estates (Whelan 1996, 3). Notwithstanding the cultural conflict and divisive impact of colonialism, their position as heads of families allowed them to hold onto remnants of an ‘ancient lordly power’ within the surviving social structure, with which they exercised ‘effective cultural control of their communities’ (3). Catholic middlemen families straddled both worlds of the traditional Irish landowning class and the ‘modern’ colonial world of the landed-estates where ‘they possessed a very peculiar influence over the common people, which is not enjoyed by Protestants of the same rank’.¹¹ As transcultural brokers they drew on a culture of unwritten laws’; an alternative agrarian code which was at odds with the enforced colonial order of forfeiture and privatisation. The effect of modernising influences of capitalist relations served to accelerate sharp economic divisions or class conflict between a rising class of land-grabbing Catholic elites and a rapidly expanding class of dispossessed and alienated

¹¹ Edward Wakefield, *An Account of Ireland: Statistical and Political*, (London, 1812) cited in Whelan (1996), 17.

labouring poor (Clark 1978). As a result, changes to the formation of agrarian class structure intensified the struggle by displaced tenants and small-farmers against Protestant landlords and clergy but also against Catholic big-farmers and shopkeepers.

Heather Laird, in her study of the law as a site of colonial struggle, points to evidence of 'alternative courts and other subversive legal practices', underlining an alternative code of law and popular justice, in the organisation of agrarian agitation since the emergence of Whiteboyism (Laird 2005, 25). Drawing on the Brehon Laws, or pre-colonial legal system, peasant insurgency upheld customary rights of land use in their attempts to deal with the negative effects of modernisation. Clearly at odds with colonial rule the rural population, at times of distress, obeyed the local alternative Whiteboy code to deal with 'the inequities of landlord law, the police and court system, and the transgressions of land-grabbers' (Kenny 1998, 20). Kenny employs the term 'retributive justice' to describe such forms of collective violence because it was 'designed to redress violations against a particular understanding of what was socially right and wrong' (8).

More recent historiography has dispelled the myth of a unified nationalist Catholic peasantry 'doing valiant battle against an alien landlord class' (Kenny 1998, 9). It is acknowledged that underground agrarian unrest was engaged in by diverse groups in rural Ireland which included different collective efforts across social class (Clark 1978, 24). The radicalism of Whiteboy activity in the eighteenth century, characterised by a refusal to recognise the legitimacy of the established order, was derived from Irish peasant culture (Beames 1982, 97). Whiteboyism, Beames argues, was not revolutionary in the sense of attempting to overturn one political order for another, but it did envisage a different kind of socio-economic order in which landholding was controlled by peasants (97). Their ranks were filled with cottiers and landless peasants who relied chiefly on family labour to work their holdings and more marginal or transient labourers. They targeted all those who oppressed the rural poor, including their own clergy who admonished, denounced and even excommunicated offenders (Moody and Martin 1967). Deteriorating and oppressive socioeconomic relations and the occupation and control of land (Kenny 1998, 19), rather than religious sectarianism and a general notion of Irish nationhood, were central to the formation of Whiteboy consciousness (Beames 1982, 92). The

evidence about the methods of organisation by secret societies of its nature is ‘shadowy’, but more recent scholarship describes *ad hoc* groups or small companies ‘brought together temporarily by family ties and the demands of mutual obligation’, who carried out attacks on behalf of aggrieved individuals in localised agrarian disturbances (S. Gibbons 2004, 12). Historians distinguish between ‘widely diffused’ networks of different secular societies of agrarian agitators such as Whiteboys, the proto-nationalist Society of Ribbonmen and the highly organised and hierarchical structures of the sectarian societies of the Orange Order and the Rockites.¹²

The challenges to the agrarian system presented such a threat to the authorities, as to be ‘nothing short of rebellion’ and ‘the “unfinished business” of colonialism’ (Foley and Ryder 1998, 7). The resulting conflict was the ‘inescapable effect’ of the collision between two different cultural and legal systems; that of English improving ideologies of the Protestant landowning elite on the one hand, and that of customary rights to land fundamental to the Gaelic tradition and the majority Catholic population on the other. The underlying and continuing rupture in Irish society deriving from competing demands over land use and land ownership, meant that ‘economic or social reform of the kind that could normally be accommodated within the existing political order tended to acquire a disruptive dimension that challenged the system itself’ (L. Gibbons 2003, 150). Moreover, the systematic expulsion of the majority Catholic population from the public sphere by the Penal Laws created a polarisation of society which unified the rural masses in the collective underground insurgency of the ‘Hidden Ireland’. Outside the reach of the colonial state, a collective ‘private sphere’ emerged which introduced into the Irish political landscape almost constant disruptive violence, terror and reprisal. Up to and after the 1798 Rebellion, rural underground movements demanded agrarian and economic reform, which included a more radical agenda of social and political transformation. The emergence of the Defender movement in Ulster in the 1780s and 1790s mobilised around land and religious grievances, to address the political participation of Catholics. The 1800 Act of Union and the delay in the promise of Catholic emancipation stoked the fires of religious grievance amongst a population

¹² For a discussion of the sectarian origins of Ribbonism, see Sean Farrell, *Rituals and Riots: Sectarian Violence and Popular Culture in Ulster, 1784-1886* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 2000). See also Michael Beames, ‘The Ribbon Societies: Lower Class Nationalism in Pre-

already convulsed by violent upheaval. The growing willingness in the countryside amongst tenants and labourers for collective organisation, ‘marked an incipient stage in the politicisation of the rural poor’ (Lee 1973, 27).

By the 1820s, the growing politicisation of agrarian movements extended to become a more sophisticated system of underground, oath-bound networks, known as Ribbonism.¹³ Without any central authority, this regional ‘underground network’, described in one official report as ‘a vast trades union for the protection of the Irish peasantry’, formed a violent and threatening opposition to the state.¹⁴ The Rockite rebellion of the early 1820s was much more than a series of localised agrarian outrages. The Rockites rebelled against the agrarian system, but their ethos was also ‘nakedly sectarian’.¹⁵ The hardship of the economic crisis following the Napoleonic wars, and a bad harvest in 1817 hardened communal resolve. Economic discontents were further fuelled by religious sectarianism and the fervour of millenarian hopes of deliverance from Protestant imperial domination. Though they were not associated with the Catholic Association of Daniel O’Connell, more moderate Catholics mobilised around this time to build support for the campaign for Catholic emancipation, achieved in 1829, and the admission of Catholics to parliament (Clark and Donnelly Jr. 1983, 83).

There was growing alarm in Dublin and London at the increasing intensity of protest, described by Lord-Lieutenant Wellesley in 1822 as ‘the apparent union of the great body of the population in a common system of disobedience to the Law [...]’.¹⁶ Emergency legislation was introduced granting wide powers to the forces of the state, amounting to thirty-five coercion Acts between the Union and the Great Famine in 1847, aimed at different categories of insurgency, broadly categorised as ‘agrarian disturbance, sectarian violence and political agitation’ (Crossman 1991,

Famine Ireland’, *Past and Present*, 97 (1982); Beames, *Peasants and Power: The Whiteboy Movements and Their Control in Pre-Famine Ireland* (1982).

¹³ For further detail on the agrarian underground in pre-famine Ireland see Joe Lee, ‘The Ribbonmen’, in *Secret Societies in Ireland* (1973); Tom Garvin, ‘Defenders, Ribbonmen and Others: Underground Political Networks in Pre-Famine Ireland’ in *Past and Present*, 96 (August 1982).

¹⁴ George Cornwall Lewis, *Report on the State of the Irish Poor* (London 1836), quoted in Ó Tuathaigh, *Ireland Before the Famine 1798-1847* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1990), 139.

¹⁵ For a discussion of the Rockite movement see James S. Donnelly Jr, *Captain Rock: The Irish Agrarian Rebellion of 1821-1824* (2009); James S. Donnelly Jr, ‘Captain Rock: Ideology and Organisation in the Irish Agrarian Rebellion of 1821-1824’, *Éire-Ireland* (Fall-Winter 2007).

309). The 1796 Insurrection Act imposed the death penalty (later replaced with transportation for life) on anyone convicted of membership of secret societies or of administering unlawful secret oaths. Offences under the act were tried by military courts, usually without juries, and magistrates were given sweeping powers of search and detention. The Coercion Acts were a series of statutes which introduced curfews on specific districts proclaimed as ‘disturbed’ and the Lord-Lieutenant had the power to prohibit any public meeting he considered a threat to the public peace.¹⁷ Records show that between 1795 and 1851 four thousand ‘social rebels’ were transported to Australia with over a quarter of the total shipped to Australia between 1818 and 1830 (Shaw 1966, 182). Approximately 4% of the nine thousand Irish females transported were convicted of arson which indicates their involvement in agrarian agitation (183).

Described as ‘midnight legislators’, the term Whiteboys came from the white frocks they donned at night.¹⁸ Protest relied for its symbolism and disguise on ritual forms and folk culture derived from pre-Christian, Celtic traditions. Ritual ceremonies associated with the calendar of the changing seasons and life-cycle festivities of weddings, wakes and funerals marked and celebrated the survival and continuity of peasant communities. Weaving protest into the apparently innocent and everyday calendar of rural life was a highly significant aspect of popular insurgency, by ‘combining public and private spheres into its dissident version of the Hidden Ireland’ (L. Gibbons 1998, 41). The ceremonial costume and disguise of rebellion used by the Whiteboys and other secret societies borrowed from the symbolism of Gaelic culture swearing allegiance to ‘a series of enigmatic female figures who hovered between the other world and everyday life in the imagination of the peasantry’ (141). Culturally in direct opposition to linear ideologies of permanence, improvement and reform, peasant revolts were guided by a radically different cosmology of transformation which was associated in popular culture with ‘new beginnings, renewal, good tidings and reform – reform above all in the social order’

¹⁶ Wellesley to Peel, 3 January 1822, cited in Shaw, *Convicts and the Colonies: A Study of Penal Transportation from Great Britain and Ireland to Australia and Other Parts of the British Empire* (London: Faber, 1966), 174.

¹⁷ See A. G. L. Shaw (1966), Chapter 8, for more detail on the policy of ‘immediate removal’ as a deterrent to crime and outrage and the penalties of transportation for those convicted by military courts.

¹⁸ See also Samuel J. Clark and James S. Donnelly Jr. (eds.), *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, 1780-1914* (Madison: Madison University Press, 1983), 5.

and marked by events and festivals on the seasonal calendar.¹⁹ Female figures rooted in pre-Christian pagan traditions offered not only a symbol of collectivity to the Irish poor, but were important symbols for disguise and cross-dressing in dissident communal societies. Representing what Kenny terms ‘the transformation of cultural play into social protest’, ritualised protest afforded a degree of anonymity and cultural authority in which rebels could ‘uphold an alternative social order against external authorities’.²⁰

Inspired by notions of ‘moral economy’, the protocol of violence was founded on a value system based on the economic rights of local tenants and farmers and the consequent constraints in the legal and political system of the time (Donnelly 2007). Cunningham’s recent analysis of popular urban mobilisations in the form of ‘food-riots’ in Limerick, Ennis and Galway, in 1812 and 1817, suggests that ‘crowds in all regions of the island drew on the full repertoire of protest strategies’ associated with an Irish moral economy (Cunningham 2008, 45). In broad agreement with E.P. Thompson’s concept of the ‘moral economy’, Cunningham nonetheless argues that its application is limited with respect to the ‘agrarian underground’, precisely because ‘their appeal was not to established legality (even if they borrowed some of its ritual), so their objectives were not normally achievable through “bargaining by riot”, but rather through terrorizing those who had transgressed their code’ (Cunningham 2010, 121). Cunningham distinguishes between ‘market-regulating crowds’ and ‘rural militancy’ in terms of their modus operandi and their social base. Food riots in Ireland before the famine represented instances of collective bargaining between the crowd and local authorities, to redress the ‘breaches of an age-old contract’ (121). The activities of ‘price-regulating crowds’ and the observance of some sort of ‘protocol of riot’ which engaged in ‘limited exemplary violence’, according to Cunningham, had a considerable impact on the moral-economic protest of the period. One such protest involved labourers on the Shannon Navigation

¹⁹ Michael Mullet, *Popular Culture and Popular Protest in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), cited in Heather Smyth, ‘Mollies Down Under’ (2009): 198. Zemon Davis also describes occasions when “carnival right of criticism [...] sometimes tipped over into real rebellion”, *Society and Culture*, (1975), 147.

²⁰ In relation to the Molly Maguires, Kenny notes that they dressed in straw costumes, white shirts, or brightly coloured women’s clothing and ‘rather than being an aberration, the Mollys were very much an outgrowth of the cultural world that surrounded them. Moving quickly from taunts and threats to outright violence they presented themselves as the custodians of their community’ (Kenny 1998), 23.

Works, demanding a pay rise to ‘meet the state of the markets’. On Monday 1 June 1840, a few hundred protestors marching through the streets of Limerick swelled to three or four thousand, men, women and children, protesting the rising prices of grain and potatoes. They brought their grievances to the city authorities where the crowd was attacked by workers in the grain store. Riots broke out and despite damage to property there was no food stolen, leading a sympathetic local police inspector to report ‘they were compelled to their bad acts by hunger’ (2010, 133). The local authorities made food available at lower prices for the city’s poor but ‘ringleaders’ were charged with public disorder and imprisoned.²¹

Colonial reports of enquires into ‘the enigma of the Irish people’ sought to evaluate ‘the condition and character of the Irish peasantry, viz. their disposition to organised crime and disturbance’ with a view to implementing an Irish Poor Law which might contain the problem in Ireland rather than have it spilling over into Britain (Cornwall Lewis 1812, 98).²² Written in what Guha terms the ‘prose of counter-insurgency’ (Guha 1988, 45) various commissions reporting on the state of the Irish poor ‘have attributed the turbulence of the inferior Irish to their inherent barbarism; some to their religion; some to their hatred of England; some to their poverty; some to their want of education’ (Cornwall Lewis 1812, 2). The historiographical enigma of the colonised peasant in Ireland or in India, as argued by Ranajit Guha, is the elaborate omission of peasant consciousness by colonial elites:

The omission is indeed dyed into most narratives by assimilating peasant revolts to natural phenomena: they break out like thunder storms, heave like earthquakes, spread like wildfires, infect like epidemics. In other words, when the clod of earth turns this is a matter to be explained in terms of natural history. Even when this historiography is pushed to the point of producing an explanation in rather more human terms it will do so by assuming an identity of nature and culture, a hall-mark, presumably of a very low state of civilization and exemplified in “those periodical outbursts of crime and lawlessness to which all wild tribes are subject”, [...] (Guha 1988, 47).

In 1834, D.H. Inglis identified an Irish oppositional culture in the ‘desire generally ascribed to the Irish peasantry, of opposing the course of justice’. He

²¹ Cunningham argues that a moral economy operated in towns and cities throughout Ireland up to 1845 and suggests that price-regulating crowds were an important factor in Irish urban affairs until the Great Famine. See John Cunningham, ‘“Compelled to their bad acts by hunger”: Three Urban Irish Crowds, 1817-1845’ in *Éire-Ireland*, 45: 1&2, (2010).

described the Irish exception to a rhetorical English norm, as being a ‘great contrast to the neighbouring island [...] where every man’s hand is raised in support of the law; in Ireland, all are arrayed against it’.²³ The Irish peasantry had very little contact with central government, and the world of colonial modernity which it represented, was mediated through the system of landlordism. The largely Protestant yeomanry force was replaced in 1822 by a new centralised police force, the Royal Irish Constabulary, adding to an already potent mix of social, political and religious antagonism. The rural population was alienated from the modern world of colonial officialdom, not only because it conducted its business in English, but also because the world view of the rural poor remained rooted in a separate belief system coming from an oral Gaelic tradition, right up to the end of the nineteenth century (Bourke 1999, 9).

Pre-Modern Memories and Modern Coercions

As the colony lurched backwards and forwards between a complex dynamic of colonial capitalism, pre-modern labour relations and social agitation throughout the countryside, its disordered development was construed at the metropolitan centre as a peculiar kind of ‘barbarous incivility’ and relegated to the pre-modern and the pre-history of capitalism (L. Gibbons 1996, 165-169). Lloyd argues that these ‘recalcitrant formations’ persistent in colonial peripheries, at once futuristic and primitive, are simultaneous with capitalist progression (Lloyd 2008, 99). Within such contradictory processes, tenacious residues of so-called ‘backward’ traditions become ‘formations that find ways to live on in transformation, counterpointing modernity critically by representing, however weakly or even self-destructively, alternative ways of living’ (3). Lloyd points to the Irish system of cottierism²⁴ as one such alternative; a ‘mutated form’ of colonial labour which

²² See also Wakefield’s *Account of Ireland* (London, 1812), iii and 139.

²³ See English observer, D.H. Inglis *Journey throughout Ireland during the Spring, Summer and Autumn of 1834*, (London 1835), 343-344.

²⁴ Cottiers did not engage in a cash economy but were in effect bound to a landowner, bartering their labour or part of the crop in return for a patch of subsistence ground on which to build a cabin and grow potatoes. An Irish cottier is distinguished from a serf as J. S. Mills described it: ‘the conditions of whose contract, especially the rent are determined not by custom but by competition’, cited in Cairnes *Political Essays* [1873] (New York; Augustus M. Kelley, 1967), 161-162. Landless labourers engaged in a cash economy by selling their labour (usually to multiple employers) in exchange for a wage which they used to rent a land on the open market to grow potatoes. There was a clear distinction between the proletarianised labourer and the cottier who bartered with his ‘master’ who was his landlord and his employer (usually a farmer). See Chapter 3.

was described by political economist J.E. Cairnes as ‘a specific and almost unique product of Irish industrial life’, where ‘[i]n the lowest deep there was thus found a lower deep; and Irish serfdom merged in the more desperate status of the Irish cottier’.²⁵ Such ‘arrested development’, as Lloyd puts it, produced ‘the anomalous mix of medieval serfdom with capitalist conditions of competition and contract’ (99). Citing James Connolly’s *Labour in Irish History* and the ‘medieval memory’ of the colonised Irish, Lloyd points to Connolly’s claim regarding the ‘substantial political effect’ of the memory of alternative systems of land ownership, which persist as a form of counter-culture in the consciousness of the colonised. Becoming part of a ‘subaltern narrative’ antagonistic to colonial modernity, Connolly suggests that this alternative consciousness contributed to radicalism amongst the Irish peasantry and a ‘radical potential’ amongst the emerging ‘wage labouring’ class.²⁶

In contrast to the evolution of an Irish counter-culture within contending forces of modernity, a more immediate ‘radical potential’, in the consciousness of African-born slaves was fundamental to resistance plantation society (Bergad 2007, 209). The living memory of not being enslaved amongst a population coming from diverse African cultures fuelled the organisation of the *Escalera* conspiracy which occurred in the region of Matanzas, where 70% of the population was enslaved and the majority of those involved had known freedom at an earlier point in their lives. Before being sold into slavery they had been taken captive as a result of warfare between rival African nations. The continuity of resistance between the slaves’ backgrounds and their enslavement in the Americas is seen as having ‘the most significant influence on slave revolts’ (Barcia 2008, 5).²⁷ In his critique of the study of slave resistance in Cuba, Barcia argues that the focus on slave rebellions and marronage have obscured the equally significant

²⁵ See John E. Cairnes, *Political Essays* [1873], (1967), 163-164.

²⁶ James Connolly, cited in David Lloyd ‘Rethinking National Marxism: James Connolly and “Celtic Communism”’, in *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity* (Dublin: Field Day, 2008), 109. Also see James Connolly, *Labour in Irish History* (Dublin: New Books Publications, 1983).

²⁷ See also Gwendolyn Mildred Hall, *Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies: A Comparison of St. Domingue and Cuba* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996) for a discussion of the oppositional culture of African slaves based on their own reading of the oppressions of slavery and the influence of African cosmologies on perception and transformation of power relations. The population estimates in Haiti pre-revolution suggest that out of a population of six hundred thousand people three hundred and seventy-five thousand were enslaved people born in Africa. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, ‘Culture on the Edges: Caribbean Creolization in Historical Context’ in *From the Margins:*

practices of non-violent resistance.²⁸ Most recorded acts of insubordination in the assassination of masters and overseers, which frequently became collective actions developing into mass revolts, were carried out by African-born slaves. The thousands of slaves who arrived in Cuba in the early decades of the nineteenth century ‘had a profound sense of commitment and solidarity and certain knowledge of how to make war’ (34). Acknowledging the influence of the subaltern studies school and particularly of James Scott’s ‘hidden transcripts’ on the study of slave resistance, Barcia investigates what he terms, ‘disguised’ forms of resistance which have been overlooked in the historiography of slave resistance in Cuba, such as ‘slave’s use of the law, as well as cultural practices, such as music, dance, religious practice, gossip, folktales and jokes’ (9). In the same way as Irish migrants in North America relied on a culture of resistance which originated in Ireland, African slaves and Creole blacks dealt with the coercions of slavery by relying on their own distinct belief systems and religious and folk culture for a repertoire of resistance to contemporary European forms of domination and control.²⁹ During the repressive administration of Captains-General Tacón and later Leopoldo O’Donnell, when Creole and black associations or *cabildos* were suppressed or banned altogether, free blacks set up secret societies, based on African language groups, which functioned as benevolent associations and also secured control of access to certain jobs for free blacks, particularly as dock-workers (Casanovas 1998, 48).³⁰ Evidence of the influence of African cultural continuities on the organisation of the *Escalera* conspiracy ‘through the tribal organisations and dance groups of the plantations’ is widely cited.³¹ Enslaved workers used the cover of social occasions in public spaces,

Historical Anthropology and Its Futures Brian Keith Axel (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 204.

²⁸ For a discussion of non-violent forms of resistance, see Manuel Barcia, *Seeds of Insurrection: Domination and Resistance on Western Cuban Plantations, 1808-1848* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), Chapter 6.

²⁹ I draw here on Guha’s assessment of peasant rebellions in colonial India in which he concludes that peasant insurgents in British India made a correct reading of their contemporary world and engaged in a conscious political struggle against domination by the ruling classes. See Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983). For a discussion of Guha’s contribution to subaltern studies and some of the problems of postcolonial historical writing see Dipesh Chakrabarty ‘Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Historiography’, *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1:1, 2000.

³⁰ The *Abakuá* society still exists today.

³¹ See Gwendolyn Mildred Hall, (1996), Chapter 4, for a comparative approach to black insurgency and the tribal origins of different modes of resistance in Cuban and Haitian plantation societies and the response by Spanish and French colonial authorities. Mildred Hall notes the ‘extreme

which they shared with free blacks, to organise and build the momentum of resistance and ‘called upon the public and performative nature of African-based music and dance’ in the communal space of plantation dances, to organise and mobilize resistance. These occasions were, from the planters’ point of view, intended as a form of social control, but were used by black people to circumvent the borders of control as a venue to plan and prepare uprisings to overthrow the planters control (Finch 2007, 318-320). The *Escalera* conspiracy was far-reaching and ‘extraordinarily well-organised’ over a period of time under cover of tribal organisations and the secret structures of *cabildos de nación*³² and the communal space of slave societies.

There is an epistemological gap between the ‘prose of counter-insurgency’ and the veiled historiography of clandestine oppositional movements, which persisted under the full force of a militarised colonial state, as in the Whiteboys of a Hidden Ireland or slave insurgents in colonial Cuba. Nonetheless it is still possible to decipher parallels in the dialectic of resistance between pre-modern forms of labour and the contending forces of colonial modernity and the experience of dispossession, dislocation and coercion. Resistance to the forces of the state construed, in the prose of counter-insurgency, as the product of inferior and rebellious traditional cultures, provides a window into a diversity of forms of resistance in pre-capitalist labour relations to the wider processes of modernity.

Irish forms of protest would circulate broadly in the ‘reconstituted’ multi-ethnic repertoires of resistance to coercive labour practices in the modern Atlantic world. The struggle to survive the harsh conditions of colonial labour generated a culture of multi-ethnic co-operation in what Rediker describes as ‘dialectic of discipline and resistance’ in the Atlantic system of labour and capital (Rediker 2007, 178). Yet, as the experience of Irish multi-ethnic co-operation in the United

cruelty and abandonment of judicial norms’ in the repression of the *Escalera* conspiracy (59). See Aisha Finch, “Insurgency at the Crossroads: Cuban slaves and the Conspiracy of *La Escalera*, 1841-1844”. PhD Dissertation, New York University, (2007) for a study of a radical resistance movement which focuses on the political cultures of rural Cuban slaves; see also Manuel Barcia Paz, *Seeds of Insurrection* (2008) for a study of different forms of resistance practised by African-born slaves and their descendants under Spanish colonial rule in Cuba.

³² *Cabildos de nación* were black cultural societies which served as communal spaces of ethnic cohesion. Free blacks and mulattos formed the membership and organised social outlets for slaves. The *cabildos* were at the centre of plotting and organising resistance and they formed an island-wide bridge to the slave population, which weakened identification with white culture, but as Paquette

States shows, instances of political solidarity were ‘counterpointed by moments of brutal inter-racial competition’ (O’Neill and Lloyd 2009, xix). Roediger’s thesis, discussed in Chapter 4, highlighting the importance of the structures of race relations to the formation of capitalist class relations in the United States, informs an analysis of Irish labour in Cuba; however, the dynamics of race and class relationships were significantly different in the Cuban labour market which was completely regulated and scarce on supply. To illustrate this point section two analyses Irish resistance to incipient capitalist labour relations in Cuba in light of their earlier experience of a free market in labour on the railroads and canals in the United States.

Section Two: The Dialectic of Discipline and Resistance

Marx was acutely aware of the ironies of ‘free’ labour within modern industry, and indeed drew parallels with slavery:

Masses of labourers, crowded into the factory, are organized like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army they are placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy of officers and sergeants. Not only are they slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois State; they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the overlooker, and, above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself. The more openly this despotism proclaims gain to be its end and aim, the more petty, the more hateful, and the more embittering it is (K. Marx and F. Engels 1845).³³

As the struggles and resistance of workers developed in response to this military style control, capitalists were ‘constantly compelled to struggle with the insubordination of the workers’ (Marx 1990, 490). The dialectic of discipline and resistance applied to all categories of labour in Cuba where, as we have seen, with the simultaneous mix of ‘free’ labour and slavery, the sense of ownership of labour which permeated labour relations fell back on the extremes of coercion and the repressive forces of the colonial state to exercise control over the bodies of their workers. Unlike the factory code in England where ‘the overseers book of penalties replaces the slave drivers lash’, in Cuba’s early capitalist disciplinary

(1988) points out they also militated against black class solidarity (125); the word also described a municipal council in the colonial period.

³³ Cited in Ian MacIntosh (ed). *Classical Sociological Theory: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 43-44.

code they operated in tandem (550). For the newly arrived contract labourers and recently enslaved Africans, the logic of slavery under Spanish colonial rule produced an intensity of control which inhibited their freedom in ways previously unknown to them. The resulting increase in slave rebellions in the 1830s and 1840s and resistance by the railroad workers to the discipline and coercion of capitalist labour relations created instability which disrupted the slave-holders ambivalent and contradictory rhetoric of a transition to free labour.

‘Free’ labour was introduced to Cuba under the duress of a second Anglo-Spanish treaty in 1835, in which Spain agreed to enact legislation punishing all Spanish subjects found guilty of trading in slaves and to emancipate all slaves found on captured ships. Between 1830 and 1834 nine slave ships transporting 2,760 Africans were captured by British cruisers. In 1835 they captured eight vessels with 2,146 Africans, though no one was liberated and it was ten years before any legislation was introduced (Knight 1970, 138). Nevertheless, the threat of their supply of slaves being interrupted caused great alarm to Cuban planters and traders. Even though a dynamic clandestine trade continued, pressure from Britain increased, ‘exceeding the limits of polite diplomacy’, and caused such panic amongst the planters that some sold their estates and left the country (140). Forced to experiment with substitute labour supplies and by default a transition to ‘free’ labour, the slave owners’ understanding of ‘free’ labour could only conceive of control by the most coercive measures available to them. During the 1830s the planter class, who only knew how to extract labour through slavery, used the legal mechanisms of the state to put in place controls for labour which was nominally free (Casanovas 1997). The colonial authorities sanctioned the power of the planters and furthermore legitimised the coercive practices of private contractors by imposing penal sanctions for any breach of the contracts. Forced labour formed part of the labour regime of the colony, where one third of the work force was enslaved and there was little distinction in the methods of coercion used to extract labour. It was no different to the British Caribbean where after the legal system of slavery was dismantled ‘[its] institutional fabric was lovingly preserved’ (Mintz 1996, 298). The colonial authorities similarly substituted slave labour with the system of contract labour, a close equivalent, which was governed by the same

legal code applied to prisoners and soldiers. In the minds of the planter elite contract labour, conceptualised as ‘free’, was more a metaphor for forced labour.

By 1835 Irish railroad workers were already seasoned ‘shock troops’ of industrialization in Britain and the United States. Up until 1824 ‘no such thing as a railway worker existed anywhere in the world’ but by 1847 there were 47,000 permanent staff employed in Britain alone (McKenna 1976, 27). This figure does not take into account the transient armies of labour used in the construction of railroads in the 1830s, where thousands of ‘strange navigators’ who were for the first time ‘brought hastily together in large bodies [...] crowded into unwholesome dwellings, while scarcely any provision is made for their comfort or decency of living [...] they are hard-worked [...] exposed to great risk of life and limb.’³⁴ The miserable realities of railroad workers in Britain in the 1840s were no different to the exploitative labour practices of public works construction in the United States, Brazil or Cuba.³⁵ The system of importing contract labour, used throughout the nineteenth century, did away with the need to use scarce local labour for large public works projects, while at the same time exerting the power to keep wages to a minimum. The ‘dull compulsion of economic relations’ was a powerful stimulus to immigrant labour in the industrial centres of *laissez-faire* Britain where wage incentives were used to get people onto work sites. But to make workers productive and keep them ‘on the job’, the company bosses had to fall back on ‘certain forms of legal or physical coercion involving specific controls or compulsions for particular work’ (Engerman and Steinfeld 1997, 111). Penal sanction for violation of a ‘voluntary’ labour agreement was viewed as ‘a normal contract remedy’ in England up until the end of the nineteenth century.³⁶ This was believed to be ‘part and parcel of the creation of large-scale free markets’ as a

³⁴ Railway Labourers and Labourers on Public Works: Report of the Select Committee, (Bristol Selected Pamphlets, 1847) 6.

³⁵ For a discussion of immigration schemes in Brazil as a solution to the problem of labour scarcity and railroad construction, see Lucia Lamounier ‘The “Labour Question” in Nineteenth-Century Brazil: Railways, Export Agriculture and Labour Scarcity’, Working Paper No. 59/00, Department of Economic History, London School of Economics (2000).

³⁶ Between 1857 and 1875, criminal proceedings were taken against approximately 10,000 workers a year for breach of labour contracts. They could be imprisoned for up to three months for quitting before their contract had expired. Penal sanction was not abolished until 1875 when organised labour succeeded in a campaign which promoted the idea that legal sanction was ‘inconsistent with the liberal principle of equal treatment under law’ making it available to workers when employers breached contracts. Robert Steinfeld ‘Changing Legal Conceptions of Free Labor’ in

means to enforce labour agreements ‘against largely propertyless workers’ in place of money damages (Steinfeld 1999, 144-145). Yet in the United States penal sanctions for adult white workers had been abolished by the early nineteenth hundreds.³⁷

Irish Immigrant Labour in the United States

Irish immigrants arriving in the United States in the 1820s and 30s grappled with capitalist labour relations in early industrial America, where, as discussed in Chapter 3, they joined a large mobile proletariat working in the trenches of the transport revolution in an alienating and increasingly hostile environment. Skilled and unskilled Irish Catholic immigrant workers were involved with their Protestant counterparts in organising trade unions and strikes in the 1830s and competed for jobs with native-born citizens. Frequent economic depressions in the late 1830s and early 40s exacerbated competition for jobs and housing, aggravating inter-ethnic tensions between Catholics and Protestants which precluded class solidarity.³⁸ The strengthening institution of the Catholic Church and Catholic representation in trade unions made them targets of nativist hostilities, against which they banded together in an ever-widening class division between immigrant labourers and the growing dominance of middle-class Americans and Irish-Americans. As the immigrant group ‘most exposed to nativist opposition’ Irish Catholic workers engaged in pitched street battles with native Protestants members of the Know-nothing party, later to be incorporated into the Republican party (Miller 2008). Canal labourers resisted the process of proletarianisation and responded with the same communal response adapted from agrarian protest: by collective actions of rioting and damaging the property of their employers (Way 1993). They formed secret societies to defend themselves against the vagaries of capitalist labour relations and the hostilities of Protestant middle-class America. They reverted to a violent defense of what they knew to be ‘traditional norms of communal justice and reciprocity’ which resulted in brutal conflicts with exploitative employers and other workers, perceived as competition (Miller 2008, 258). Labour unrest was largely as a result of constant

Terms of Free Labor: Slavery, Serfdom and Free Labor, edited by Stanley Engerman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 146-147.

³⁷ Adult white indentured workers, still being imported as late as 1830, were subject to penal sanctions for breaches of labour contracts. Steinfeld (1999), 148.

threats to subsistence in a system of wage-labour where incomes fluctuated depending on the season, with winter lay-offs and summer ‘sickly seasons’, and the precariousness of the contracting system in which workers could not always rely on getting paid (Way 2001, 493). The annual earnings for a labourer and his wife in Philadelphia in 1831 amounted to \$156 for ten month’s work, labouring at \$12 a month and two months at \$5, with no days lost, plus 50 cents a week earned by the woman, but expenses for a family with two children amounted to \$171.02.³⁹ In the struggle to survive a hand-to-mouth existence canal workers tried to gain some control over their ‘right to subsist’ in such precarious working conditions through labour organization based sometimes on the violent practices of secret societies. When wages were late or failed to materialize, having worked so hard and still facing starvation, workers banded together and carried out violent assaults and robbery against contractors and canal officials. Defending themselves with sticks and axes they also stole provisions from their employers and local residents, chopping down trees and fences for fuel. Heavy drinking and intra-communal faction fighting were all part of what Peter Way describes as ‘canaller culture’ and were the only means they understood to dissipate oppressive work practices and the general threat of alienation and emasculation (Way 2001). In the ‘wedding of capital and state’ rioting and labour militancy were dealt with by harsh repression by military troops and incarceration to force labour into submission (515). In the context of nineteenth-century labour protest in America, Kenny suggests that Irish immigrants responded to unfavourable circumstances, born out of relations of production, in two distinct ways, depending on the prevailing climate. In circumstances of hostility to Irish immigrant labour on the construction of public works in the United States and Britain, Kenny identifies a ‘subterranean pattern of Irish collective violence featuring faction fights (gangs based on local or county origin) and secret societies such as the Ribbonmen and the Molly Maguires’ (Kenny 2003, 153). Where hostility lessened,

³⁸ The economic crisis of 1837 saw the Philadelphia Trades Union collapse. See Miller *Ireland and America* (Dublin: Field Day Press, 2008), 257.

³⁹ Cited in Peter Way ‘Shovel and Shamrock: Irish Workers and Labor Violence in the Digging of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal’, *Labour History* (2001): 498. These calculations made by Mathew Carey, an Irish-American journalist, highlight the importance of public charity and poor houses to the survival of canal labourers and their families.

the older forms of violent protest adapted from the Irish countryside changed to trade-union participation.⁴⁰

In the early technological revolution of railroad construction the creation of a wage-labour force out of immigrants and the profits of the railroad companies depended on the cheapest possible labour, and ‘contractors had raised labor exploitation to a science by the late 1830s’ (Mason 1998, 258). Out of this emerging proletariat a fragmented work-force developed different strategies to bargain with contractors when they reneged on or stopped short of conditions agreed. Their critique of early capitalism may not have been refined but based on accumulated experience of its exploitation they responded collectively to contest the coercions involved. One of the few means they had to bargain was through withholding their labour and they frequently downed tools in protest. Similarly, on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal in the mid-1830s where class struggle reached an new ‘white-hot’ intensity, ‘[n]ascent labor organisations directed riots and strikes, while the canal company responded with state-backed repression in the form of military intervention and legal prosecution’ (Way 2001, 491). Immigrant Irish labourers recruited from the canals of North America brought this experience of labour militancy with them to the Cuban railroad, where the colonial authorities responded with even greater repression.

Irish Protest on the Cuban Railroad

As documented in Chapter 2, unfavourable conditions in a climate of harsh coercion produced a violent response from the workers and resistance to coercive labour relations on the construction of the railroad. The Irish migrant labourer’s encounter with industrial America introduced new and different tensions between the migrants’ aspirations for freedom and the exploitation of wage labour. That tension was intensified in colonial Cuba where the Irish railroad workers were constrained by a status which was juridically unfree. The additional force of colonial rule, and a legal system tied to the regulation and control of slavery, created structures of subordination which they had not encountered up to now. Contract labour in the

⁴⁰ For a transnational and cross-cultural discussion of the influence of Irish immigrants on American labour history, see Kevin Kenny, ‘Diaspora and Comparison: The Global Irish as a Case Study’, *Journal of American History*, June 2003. See also, Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

United States during the early years of industrialisation was not subject to legal or physical compulsion and most conflict between workers and canal or railroad companies arose over pay levels or failure to pay wages. They did not have the freedom to move to another job, once they arrived in Cuba, where it was a crime of desertion, punishable by imprisonment to leave before the contract expired. The contracts created a system of debt bondage and coercion which functioned as a replacement for physical force to ensure that workers stayed on the job. As a form of labour control it was not much different to conditions of indenture, in so far as a period of labour was exchanged for the cost of transferring to a new location or a new country. The railroad contracts were of course for a shorter term, but the day-to-day conditions were more brutal and perilous in contrast to indenture of the previous century in the British West Indies where, Irish servants were entitled to a payment, or a small patch of land, at the end of their service. The economic and legal coercions of labour often blurred the distinction between free and unfree labour and this could vary in degree, or at different stages of the labour contract, and over time and place (Engerman and Steinfeld 1997, 114).

Under the same *modus operandi* as the canals and railroads in the United States, the Irish railroad workers in Cuba were bound to the same hierarchy of contractors and sub-contractors responsible for their pay and conditions. The engineers bore the responsibility for overseeing the construction process but the contractor acted as ‘a middleman between capital and labour becoming a lightning rod for all the grievances inherent in that position’ (Way 2001, 493). The management of the railroad finances and the system of contract did not run as smoothly as Kruger predicted (see Chapter 2). Financial misdealing and corruption by unscrupulous contractors, or failure to complete a section of the line on schedule, meant that payments were sometimes withheld. Contractors frequently found themselves in debt to the railroad company; and the workers, who were the most vulnerable in the chain of debt, often did not get paid. Unable to pay the wages, contractors fled the railroad, leaving their workers without food or the means to procure it. Erasmus Denison, an overseer who came from New York in November

1835, left the camp in the first month without paying his workers.⁴¹ Though the records did not fully explain why he did this, it is probable that the contractor fell short of meeting agreed targets on a section of line and the Railway Commission refused to pay Denison. The authorities accused Thomas Casey, a foreman, and Cristobal O’Bourke of deserting without paying their workers. Not having passports to leave the country they ‘escaped to the mountains’.⁴² When workers demanded their pay, the company washed its hands of any responsibility, blaming the fleeing superintendants, but insisted the workers continued on the job to pay off what they owed for the cost of transport from the United States. Without the means of subsistence workers were forced to fend for themselves.

In March 1836, Miguel Pedroso, a local landowner, made a complaint to the authorities accusing the trackmen, black and white, of robbing food from his property. Irish workers were accused of stealing and killing his pigs. When he looked for compensation for damage to his property by trackmen, the company by way of apology used a familiar trope, describing the Irish as hardened trouble-makers, well known for their pilfering and drinking habits.⁴³ According to the Railway Commission, in the five months since construction started, with two thousand men, this was the first breach of security against any landowner, to whom ‘the company was indebted and most concerned to protect’.⁴⁴ The labourers’ complaints about the lack of food went unheard and they found alternative networks to provide food for themselves and their families. This audacious attempt by hired labour to subvert economic coercion and avoid starvation and hunger and the manner in which they took matters into their own hands, may well have been inspired by notions of ‘customary rights’ to property, which in this situation constituted theft, an offence against private property.⁴⁵ Where the threat of starvation and destitution failed, the state was prepared to impose even harsher measures of coercion.

⁴¹ Report on Erasmus Denison, an overseer with an Irish crew, who fled the railroad works without paying his workers in ANC JF, 8-535.

⁴² Alfred Cruger to the *Junta de Fomento*, 18 January 1866, see ANC LM, 2908 B.

⁴³ ANC JF, 8-521.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ See David Featherstone, ‘Atlantic Networks, Antagonisms and the Formation of Subaltern Political Identities’, *Social and Cultural Geography*, 6: 3 (June 2005): 399. Irish coal-heavers on the London docks who were engaged in ongoing disputes about their labour throughout the eighteenth century regarded the taking of coal-sweepings on the dockside as a customary right to left-over coals. Regarded as ‘a disposition to pilfering’ by the ‘river police’, Featherstone highlights the ‘dynamic

The precarious environment of insanitary accommodation, dangerous working conditions, inadequate food and pay provoked the labourers to rebel within weeks of their arrival in Havana. Unable to feed themselves or their families, their survival was at stake. Meagre rations of bad food fuelled ongoing protest, causing such a scandal that the office of the Captain-General was moved to accuse the contractors of starving the workers for the sake of the company profits (Moreno Fragnals 1976, 136).⁴⁶ A group of Canary Islanders brought their complaints of mistreatment by the contractors and the scarcity of food to the capital to the office of the Captain-General. They were thrown into prison as deserters and later returned to the railroad shackled and chained for two months, and this time without contracts (Serrano 1973, 36). There were frequent riots over food rations, and delays in getting their paltry wages. Desperation and alcohol fuelled rioting frequently ended in violent disorder with brutal repression by government troops. The *Junta de Fomento* typically defended their ‘exemplary’ treatment of the workers saying:

this is the first complaint we have received in ten months [...] we have increased their wages from 9 to 13 pesos a month. They get the same accommodation, help when sick and the same rations as the prisoners working on the railroad and they [the prisoners] are to be envied judging by the lack of complaint, their state of health and sense of wellbeing and contentment.⁴⁷

That the conditions of contract workers were no different to that of prisoners adds further evidence to the coercions at play. Spanish troops were used to work in public works or private enterprise in the same way as prisoners. Under military discipline, conditions on construction works were no less miserable than in prison or the barracks (Casanovas 1997).

Kruger complained to the Railroad Commission that the finances invested in the project were in jeopardy, because neither the overseers nor the contractors could enforce obedience and subordination amongst the workers. He pointed out that since ‘there was insufficient moral or pecuniary obligation to compel these workers to comply voluntarily with the terms of their contracts’ other measures would have to

technique’ used by Irish labourers who assertively used customary rights in different contexts to establish an alternative network parallel to the official coal trade.

⁴⁶ For lists of the different food rations for black and white workers see ANC JF, 190-6390.

⁴⁷ Junta de Fomento to Miguel Tacón, 13 October 1836, ANC Fondo Real Consulado (RC), see ANC RC, Caja 8-528.

be adopted.⁴⁸ Kruger and the Railroad Commission succeeded in getting the full backing of the colonial government and troops to reinstate law and order and get as many workers as they could back to the line. According to Kruger,

There are orders to impose severe penalties on anyone who hides or gives employment to any of the labourers or artisans imported from the United States in the service of the government railroad works. The military government is determined to apply whatever force necessary to reinstate order. (Kruger 1835).⁴⁹

Military law meant that protesters and deserters ended up in prison only to find themselves returned to the railroad work gang, this time as forced labour without the 'ritual' of contracts. In addition to the costs of their return to the railroad they were fined twenty-four pesos (two months' earnings). The 'wages', as a unit to deduct from, functioned less as a reward for one's labour than as a means to coerce the laborer through accumulating debts. In the subordination of labour 'all punishments', as Marx tersely put it, 'naturally resolve themselves into fines and deductions from wages,' (Marx 1990, 550). The earnings of those who survived were absorbed in repayments for their passage from New York, contractor's expenses, monthly medical fees and debts incurred as penalties. Turnbull observed in 1840, 'they [...] were to be sent back from whence they came at the expense of the company whence the term of their engagement arrived' but these promises were never fulfilled (190). Written contracts 'freely' entered into, still a novel concept in Cuba's slave labour system, were weighted in favour of the employer with no legal protection for the worker. Mistreatment of the workers or breach of contract by the Railway Commission was treated with impunity, while labour protest and insubordination, calculated in terms of the losses incurred, was dealt with by the full force of military rule. The practice of resistance by the railroad workers in Cuba resembled that of Irish navvies in the United States in equally unfavorable conditions. When employers fell behind in paying their wages, workers became indebted to food sellers and grog shops. They downed tools and rioted, 'not driven by any sense of

⁴⁸ ANC JF, 130-6390.

⁴⁹ ANC JF, 130-6383.

ethnic or class grievance' but because their very existence depended on it (Way 1994, 2).⁵⁰

The use of state violence to force workers into submission was replicated in Cuba with further inhibitions to the worker's freedom through criminalising those who tried to leave as deserters and vagrants. The Chief Engineer Kruger threatened imprisonment to restore order to the rebelling railroad workers:

Those who are not satisfied with the terms of their contracts and wish to leave the service of this government, are at liberty to do so if they have paid all their debts in relation to their passage and accommodation, and they must leave the island within three days [...] and [after three days] they will be treated with all the rigor of the vagrancy laws of the country [...] Anyone unhappy with their contracts can go back to the United States from where they came such a short time ago and at their own expense (Kruger 1835).⁵¹

The workers responded collectively and began to riot armed with their tools. Kruger warned that the threat to the social and economic order posed by insubordinate workers would be brought under control by the force of military troops:

The engineers will receive immediate help from the government and whatever force necessary to reinstate the order they are determined to maintain. But they [the engineers] hope that sense will prevail when the workers become aware of the force a military government can unleash; they will put an end to the insubordination, the outcome of which harms no one more than the infrastructure (Kruger 1835).⁵²

Troops were brought in to quell the unrest with the full force 'a military government can unleash'.⁵³ Just as Kruger recommended, by using the system of contract, the burden of financial risk fell on the contractors and ultimately the workers, thus protecting the profits of the company.

⁵⁰Irish modes of protest on the construction of canals in the United States are discussed in Peter Way, 'Labours Love Lost: Observations on the Historiography of Class and Ethnicity in the Nineteenth Century' in *Journal of American Studies*, 28 (1994): 1. Also see Peter Way, *Common Labourers* (1993).

⁵¹Alfred Cruger to Railroad Commission, December 1835, see ANC JF, 130-6390.

⁵²Alfred Cruger, December 1835, see ANC JF, 130-6390.

⁵³December 1835, see ANC JF, 130-6390.

Multi-Ethnic Protest

It is worth noting that all the references to protest in primary sources and in historical accounts refer to *los irlandeses* and *los isleños* with no mention of the Dutch, English or German workers who came – albeit in much smaller numbers – from New York. Apart from the slave rebellion on the railroad in 1843, the accounts of unrest by enslaved workers on the railroad refer only to desertions or ‘runaways’. Notices published in the daily newspapers offered rewards for runaway slaves who had deserted the railroad works; other notices warned that it was strictly forbidden to help or give refuge to the deserters. Reports of the Canary Islanders’ attempts to challenge the contractors to comply with their end of the contract are not dissimilar to that of the Irish. More is made of their desertion from the railroad, presumably because part of their debt included repatriation, for which the ship owners had already been paid.

The authorities responded to the protests by Irish and Canary Islanders with the same force and domination they used to control their slaves. Resistance to coercion by the immigrant labourers represented a risk to the immense profits of the planters; they were also a constant threat to the social order. Undeterred by the failure of the ‘turbulent Irish’ to fulfill the economic imperative of the planters, they looked to other continents for less intractable races for the longer-term project of railroad work. When the experiment in ‘free’ labour did not live up to its economic promise the planter elite found it could use with impunity more familiar forms of control which were closely associated with slavery, in the ‘coolie’ trade.⁵⁴ The embedded logic of slavery and of slave ownership applied the same methods of coercion and control over the bodies of Chinese coolies, creating a familiar but unique form of labour, constructed in the colonial discourse as an interim arrangement between slavery and wage-labour. The rules for punishment were taken verbatim from the slave code: authorising floggings, shackles and confinement in stocks (Pérez de la Riva 2000). With little difference in the treatment of slaves and Chinese indentured labourers on the railroad, the numbers of deserters and mortality rates for both groups were equally high. The Chinese were supplied with opium with the intention of dulling their senses and inhibiting protest. The overseers exploited

⁵⁴ The term ‘coolie’ was used in Asia and the Caribbean for contract workers from China.

the worker's dependency to exert discipline and extract labour by controlling the supply of opium imported for this purpose. Opium dependency was also used to 'set the stage for what would become a form of extended indentured labor akin to debt peonage' (Hu-DeHart 2005, 171). In both cases this strategy 'backfired', when abuse of alcohol and opium led to an inability to work, the workforce was reduced. Some were maimed or died in careless accidents and the incidence of suicide was so high amongst the Chinese labourers that throughout the nineteenth century Cuba had a higher rate of suicide, multiple and single acts, than any other country in the world (Pérez de la Riva 1975, 477).⁵⁵ Tragically, high rates of suicide and opium addiction contributed to a stereotype of Chinese coolies as docile and suicidal in the face of daily brutality by overseers on plantations and railroad construction. However, evidence from Cuban court records paints a very different picture of the Chinese as violently rebellious and gives details of Chinese workers accused of conspiring to kill overseers who engaged in the worst excesses of brutality. Between 1857 and 1874 there were 312 cases of homicide involving 440 Chinese accused of the crime, and nearly all were convicted. They used collective strategies to frustrate attempts by planters to punish individuals, and all the Chinese on any one estate would confess to the homicide. They torched cane fields and they also deserted the plantations (Bergad 1990, 253). Many of the homicides on plantations were carried out in co-operation with enslaved workers. Dorsey, however, cautions against what he terms 'idealised notions of inter-subaltern brotherhood' between slaves and Chinese, based on the deep resentment by the Chinese over 'pervasive associations made between slave and coolie labor'. They only united when things were at breaking point in the hardship of plantation life and that was to carry out the execution of a *mayoral* or overseer (Dorsey 2004, 27). Exercising no racial preferences for their targets, Dorsey suggests that 'Chinese contract workers were especially adept as inadvertent agents of multiculturalism and the politics of equal opportunity'. They made alliances with African-born slaves based on a common 'sense of natal estrangement and permanent dislocation' (27).

⁵⁵ Between 1850 and 1872, 500 Chinese labourers per annum took their own lives, compared to an average of 35 a year amongst Africans. Nigerian Ibos were known for taking their own lives but more so when crossing the Atlantic in slave ships. See Joseph C. Dorsey 'Identity, Rebellion and Social Justice amongst Chinese Contract Workers in Nineteenth-Century Cuba' *Latin American Perspectives*, 31: 3, (2004), 26.

Protest and Desertion

Having already experienced dislocation, estrangement and the exercise of mobility to improve their prospects or avoid excessive coercion, Irish labourers continued to find employment in seasonal or transient occupations. The nature of employment in the construction of railroads implied mobility and transience – moving from one section of line to another or to different locations as the seasons demanded. Central to navy culture, which developed in the United States, was the option of ‘moving-on’; in other words, workers exercised the only freedom open to them, under the constraints of contract labour, by voting with their feet to search for more favourable conditions. However under Cuban regulations, anyone who left the job before the end of a contract, even when the contractor reneged on his side of the deal by not paying the crew, constituted the crime of desertion, punishable by law. Failing to negotiate any improvement in their conditions, Irish workers, Canary Islanders and Africans defied military force and penal sanction by absconding. They fled the line getting as far away from the railroad as possible. The Irish deserted in large numbers, and as already stated, not having social networks or the language of the country, many ended up wandering destitute in the streets and countryside begging for alms. As documented in Chapter 2, large numbers of Irish ended up in prison criminalized for vagrancy or desertion. Their situation came to the attention of the British and American consuls who were moved to complain to the authorities about the carelessness of bringing such large numbers of impoverished emigrants to Cuba, at the mercy of exploitative employers, only to end up in jail because after working so hard they still could not afford to pay for their return journey.

Reminiscent of an earlier seasonal migration to Newfoundland, where the governor observed that a great number of seasonal fishermen from Ireland and the South-West of England did not have the means to go home at the end of the season, because neither the ship’s captain nor the hiring master ‘thought themselves obliged to provide for their passage home’. They were paid in liquor and ‘effects’ in advance, so that when the season ended they were destitute. These seasonal migrants ‘experienced oppression in profoundly geographical ways, through not being able to return home’ (Featherstone 2005, 392). Finding themselves in a situation of debt-bondage and not having the means to return to Ireland, many simply left the job which, in the words of the governor of Newfoundland, constituted desertion: ‘some

idle dispossessed men desert from their masters' service before the end of the voyages for which they engage to serve and betake themselves to a loose, idle vagabond life' (392).

Desertion was part of a repertoire of resistance widely used by diverse groups of mobile labour, sailors, soldiers and slaves. In Featherstone's view the widespread practice of desertion in power relations which controlled the labourers' mobility 'illuminates how spatial relations were constituted in antagonistic ways through Atlantic subaltern politics' (392). Marcus Rediker argues that desertion is much more than a mere act of refusal where workers' 'took to their feet or threatened to take to their feet, in an effort to influence the conditions of their labour. They ran, individually and collectively, in "confederacies" and after "conspiracies", from seaport to seaport looking for better maritime wages, or from one seasonal or casual labour market to another' (Rediker 1988, 237). Desertion or the threat of mobility as a strategy produced power which constituted 'subaltern political activity' and contested the Atlantic network of cheap Irish labour for the construction of inland transportation. It threatened the fundamental logic of ownership of labour, by demonstrating the power of coerced labour to escape, with the consequent risks to capital that this entailed. It threatened the social order by demonstrating the weakness in the chain of command and its failure to maintain a 'well-disciplined' labour force. Most dangerous of all, it was an assertion of liberty. The desire to flee from slavery or coercion has been described as a 'refusal and search for liberation' (Negri 2000, 212). Featherstone takes issue with 'this emptying of the space of power' and cites Rediker's interpretation of desertion as productive of power. Divorced from the means of subsistence, the exercise of mobility generated subaltern power by reconfiguring power relations in different forms of labour control and in such limited struggles for freedom (Featherstone 2005). The early construction of the Cuban railroad was dependent for its labour supply on a transient, mobile workforce. Through insistent contestation and mobility, the labour force disrupted and challenged the disciplinary apparatus of the colonial authorities. Just like Irish transient labour in Britain, 'the restless and migratory spirit' which represented a resistance to 'permanent improvement', provoked disdain precisely because of the

difficulty of disciplining such an urban proletariat.⁵⁶ In different industrial centres where coercive labour practices were routine, transience or desertion constituted a strategy of protest in which migrant labour found and generated alternative networks of subsistence and protection; constituting what Lloyd terms the ‘recalcitrant potential’ of transitory labour as a response to capitalist coercion (Lloyd 2008, 123).

Capital sought to reproduce itself by overcoming the recalcitrance of ‘free’ labour within Cuba’s slave system. By introducing transient immigrant labour it attempted to resolve the challenges presented to it by the scarce supply of labour amid pressure to abolish slavery. However, constant antagonism by this group of labourers demonstrated that capital could not fully overcome the power generated through insistent acts of resistance, individual or collective. The ending of slavery did not mean the end of coercion but neither did it mean the end of resistance. The superiority of wage-labour proved to be empty rhetoric to planter elites who refused to exchange the logic of ownership of labour and coercion for the principle of ‘ample reward’ for one’s labour.

The labourer who survived was freed from the contract or debt-bondage in this situation but in terms of the history of the struggle between capital and labour the introduction of nominally free migrant Irish labour to Cuba’s incipient capitalist relations posed an enormous threat to the social order of a rigidly controlled slave system. Wendy Brown draws on Marx’s insight into the relationship between power and limited freedoms in her suggestion that subordinated subjects by breaking ‘the code of containing behaviour’ can unleash ‘loose latent capacities and generate powerful resistance to domination’ (Brown 1995, 21). Faced with inhibitions to their freedom such as to threaten their very survival, the railroad workers used collective modes of protest, based on a moral repudiation of fundamental breaches to ‘freely’ entered into contracts by private agents and backed up by the colonial authorities. In response to the dangerous and violent coercion inherent in the labour system, the migrant subject’s refusal to submit challenged entrenched ideas of the unfreedom of labour characteristic of the slave system in Cuba. Furthermore, by contesting the

⁵⁶ In relation to Irish transient labour in Britain, Ruth-Ann Harris suggests that ‘it may be necessary to revise some earlier assumptions about the nature of the labor force during the early period of industrialisation if we accept the fact that it appeared at the time to be extremely transitory’. See Ruth-Ann Harris, *The Nearest Place that Wasn’t Ireland: Early Nineteenth-Century Labor Migration* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1994), 121-122.

unfreedom of their contracts, the disruption by Irish workers of the discipline and logic of capital also challenged the elite Hispano-Cuban discourse on labour, whiteness and national identity as discussed in Chapter 4.

Contagious Resistance

The disruption to emerging capitalist relations of production by immigrant ‘free’ labour and the fear of contagion and alliances with other elements of the labouring population presented the greatest threat to the preservation of the social and economic order of Cuban colonial society. As discussed in Chapter 2 the colonial authorities represented the cause of the problem as an Irish proclivity, not so much for rebellion, as a disregard for the rewards of labour through ‘fecklessness and turbulence’, making them unsuitable for the disciplines of capitalist labour relations. At the same time in Britain’s more advanced industrial society the disruptive potential of an Irish immigrant workforce at the imperial centre was also viewed as a problem of cultural backwardness or worse, ethnic inferiority. While they were accused of lowering the living and working standards of their English counterparts, their contagion effect, as Engels saw it, had it uses as a catalyst to fuelling the revolutionary dialectic, helping ‘to widen the gulf that separates the capitalists from the workers, thus inevitably hastening the approaching cataclysm’ (Engels 1958, 139). According to Engels ‘the English are indeed responsible for the fact that poverty strikes the Irish a little sooner than it would otherwise do’, but ‘[t]he actual manner in which poverty strikes the Irish may be explained by the history, traditions, and national characteristics of the people’; a manifest destiny they shared with the Latin races, in Engels scheme (308). Immigrant Irish degeneracy and the contamination of the British working classes could be the vector for a radical antigen to capitalism: ‘on the one hand it has, as we have seen, degraded the English workers, removed them from civilization, and aggravated the hardship of their lot; [...] Irish immigration further contributes by reason of the passionate, mercurial temperament, which it imports into England and into the English working class’ (153). As ‘a race apart’, Engels held on to the promise of the transmission of revolutionary Irish blood with an instinctive predisposition to violence against oppression, into the British national body; not by social contamination, but by miscegenation ‘between the calm, rational English worker and the violent, insurrectionary Irish worker’ (Martin 2005, 189). Ethnic stereotypes were pressed

into service by colonial authorities in Cuba to protect against disruption of the social order and in Britain by Engels for revolutionary ends as subversive contagion.⁵⁷ Whether in a more advanced laissez-faire labour market or in a tightly regulated Spanish colony, the paradox of immigrant Irish labour, despite its obvious value, was its perceived contamination effect, at the same time detrimental to the production of capital. Contradictory and multiple constructions of Irishness in discourses of labour, race and resistance travelled on Atlantic circuits of labour, some of which served to maintain Irish migrants as an exploitable or dispensable sub-stratum, while others paradoxically permitted a more fluid identity with which to negotiate class and racial boundaries at the margins of industrial modernity. This was nothing new to Irish Catholics, excluded from citizenship until 1829, and described as ‘foreigners in their native land’ they did not need to go overseas ‘to experience the “multiple identities” valorized in post-colonial theory: the uncanny experience of being a stranger to oneself was already a feature of life back home’ (L. Gibbons 1996, 176). Stereotypes of ‘rebellious Irish’ were deployed by Victorian Marxists as a source of revolutionary contagion of English wage-workers, at the same time as their subordination by capital and their promise as ‘whitening’ agents in the formation of a white buffer-zone against the africanization of Cuba, was predicted by wealthy planter elites in the Spanish Caribbean. The potential for subversive contagion and the promise of whitening the nation’s bodies circulated in equal measure with cheap Irish labour on Atlantic networks.

Narratives of transnational labour as ‘rebellious Irish’, ‘docile slaves’, or ‘humble Chinese’ relying on essentialist, cultural and racial representations have served to obscure a more complex history of co-operation and resistance by African, Irish and other European labour.⁵⁸ The modernisation of the Caribbean took place in the constant presence of multicultural Others; as Mintz explains it, ‘people who

⁵⁷ See Amy E. Martin ‘“Becoming a Race Apart”: Representing Irish Racial Difference and the British Working Class in Victorian Critiques of Capitalism’ in Terrence McDonough (ed.) *Was Ireland a Colony? Economics, Politics and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2005). See also Luke Gibbons, *Gaelic Gothic: Race, Colonization, and Irish Culture* (Galway: Arlen House, 2004); Gibbons argues that Marx and Engels’s notion that ‘the political and economic identification with Britishness militated against the radicalization of the working class, in marked contrast with the “embittered” and incendiary discontent of the Irish poor’ is faint praise indeed and all the more damning in its ‘recourse to racial terminology’ (63-34).

⁵⁸ I am drawing here on Paul Gilroy’s suggestion that ‘cultural historians could take the Atlantic as on single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce

come from different places and who are not *in* their own culture can become modern, in part because institutional recourse to a standard common tradition is not immediately available', the consequence of which is 'a social detachment that can come from being subject - while recognising one's own lack of power - to rapid, radical, uncontrolled and ongoing change' (Mintz 1996, 295-296). This experience and negotiation of labour relations in the rapidly modernising world of the Caribbean, where the distinction between slavery and emerging forms of 'free' labour were blurred, produced a culture and politics of resistance in which historical and cultural diversity were brought to bear on modern relations of production. In the multi-ethnic mix of Cuban labour, Irish migrants played their part in ways, which as Lloyd insists 'must be seen as an intrinsic element of modern social formations' in the development of capital and not as archaic residues from pre-capitalist or pre-modern forms of labour' (Lloyd 2008, 123).⁵⁹

Modern social formations, as they emerged in Cuba, included diverse practices of resistance in overlapping processes of labour and class formation which gave rise to what were viewed by the colonial authorities as menacing connections and alliances across racial and cultural boundaries. At a time of intense militarisation in Cuba and harsh political repression, Casanovas posits that the shared socio-economic conditions resulting in co-operation between free and unfree labour 'helped urban labourers of different social ranks to developing collective action' (Casanovas 1997, 251). Solidarity across class in urban areas may have been more visible at a time of segregation in the public sphere, but as the above evidence about Chinese alliances with African slaves suggests, co-operation in the hidden subaltern world which crossed racial boundaries during the worst excesses of control and brutality is not so easily uncovered. In Cuba immigrant labour was divided within a hierarchy of control which marginalized and segregated the workforce according to race and ethnicity. The maintenance of the social order was given added force by the disciplinary practices imported with the system of contract labour, discussed in

and explicitly transnational intercultural perspective' (Gilroy 1993, 15) and on Sidney Mintz's description of Caribbean world as precociously modern which is explained in Chapter 3.

⁵⁹ Hobsbawm's historicist treatment sees peasant rebellion as arising from the 'archaic phase' of the history of social movements to be eventually overcome by a transition from traditional or primitive societies to colonial capitalism. See E.J Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978).

Chapter 2, used to control thousands of labourers working together on the railroad. The authorities were all too alert to the contagion effect by any one group breaking the established code of subordinate behaviour and inciting slave rebellion. Nonetheless the evidence strongly suggests that for Irish emigrants, already seasoned in contesting labour relations in the industrial world of canal work in the United States, the ‘wages of whiteness’ were not yet sufficient to dissuade inter-ethnic alliances.

Caught in processes of historical transformation and conflict, the common experience of exploitation was expressed in diverse forms of resistance to new and more intensive forms of coercive labour relations. The complexity of diverse cultural responses to oppression provides some insight into constructions of ethnicities in the discourse of colonial authorities, but it also provides a window into the different forms of labour control and the diverse strategies adopted by different ethnicities to subvert these controls. The Canary Islanders, who had some semblance of a social network to fall back on, deserted risking the penalties if caught taking refuge in *isleño* communities, which provided shelter and work. Rebellious slaves risked escape by running away to remote parts of the island to live as fugitives in maroon communities. Runaway slaves provoked a level of panic amongst the colonial authorities that matched only their fear of slave revolts.⁶⁰ Chinese indentured labourers chose an ‘individual’ form of escape in the oblivion of opium addiction, but as Dorsey has demonstrated, Chinese workers also resorted to violence in response to excessive brutality. Both Chinese and Africans also chose a way out of degradation through suicide. The Irish, with neither social networks nor geographical knowledge, rioted first and then ran away to end up destitute in public places or imprisoned for desertion. Their response to oppression in Cuba, of rioting and finding ways to subsist by stealing food, drew on repertoires of communal modes of resistance, derived from traditions of insurgency in rural Ireland adapted to industrial work practices in the United States. Like their eighteenth-century predecessors the ‘motley proletariat’ was according to Linebaugh and Rediker:

⁶⁰ Marronage, according to Manuel Barcia, was ‘one of the most distinguishable and regular forms of slave resistance in the New World’ demonstrating a ‘vast and highly developed geographical knowledge of the areas in which they lived’. Barcia, *Seeds of Insurrection* (2008), 51. Barcia also highlights their guerrilla tactics, their ways of obtaining provisions, and their relationships with slaves on nearby plantations as key to their survival.

often ahead of any fixed consciousness. The changes of geography, language, climate, and relations of family and production were so volatile and sudden that consciousness had to be characterized by a celerity of thought that may be difficult to comprehend to those whose experience has been steadier (Linebaugh and Rediker 1990, 245).

In the multi-ethnic environment of Cuba's sugar boom, resistance by labourers from four continents played their part in 'releasing a certain force into the social realm' which put pressure on relations of production and contributed in a cumulative way to contesting the contradictory and narrow discourse of 'free' labour (Brown 1995, 21). This final chapter concludes with an analysis of the context in which Irish migrants were accused of participating in a major slave conspiracy in Cuba in 1844.

Section Three: Irish Migrants and the Conspiracy of *La Escalera*

In the experiment with cheap white labour as a replacement for slavery the importation of Irish labour, as already mentioned in Chapter 4, was ascribed the additional purpose of whitening the population and stemming the tide of africanisation. The British experience of importing Irish labour as a solution to tipping the balance in favour of whiteness in planter economies of the Caribbean may have been successful numerically, but perceived as ‘black men in white skins’ (Beckles 1990, 515), Irish indentured servants were considered by their English masters as the ‘internal enemy’ and at different times were seen as a greater threat to peace than their African slaves. Suspicions of Irish participation in slave revolts in the eighteenth century ran deep. The accusation of Irish identification with African slaves in Barbados was repeated again in Cuba more than a century later when a number of Irish migrants were suspected of conspiring ‘against the white race’ to overthrow slavery and colonial rule. The Irish in the Spanish colony of Cuba, imported as early forerunners of free labour and ‘whitening’ strategies, were later accused of participating in a well-organised and widespread conspiracy thought to have been fomented by British abolitionists. While these accusations might have reflected elite anxieties about subversive contagion, they also raise the question of whether or not some Irish immigrants did indeed support slave insurgency in Cuba. In the context of colonial Cuba, in contrast to the United States, as argued in Chapter 4, the pressure of divisive structures of race and ethnicity had not yet materialised into ‘wages of whiteness’ or as a privileged status gained from an all-white, all-European ethnic identification across class. Nonetheless the question of why Irish migrant workers came to be accused of being involved in the conspiracy of *La Escalera* remains to be answered. It is also necessary to consider whether there is any substance to an Irish abolitionist perspective in Cuba given the surge of Irish anti-abolition support in the United States, occurring at the same time as the black population was organising the largest conspiracy to revolt in the history of Cuban slavery.

The 1817 Treaty of Madrid to end the trade in slaves came into effect in 1820 on the payment of £400,000 by the British government as compensation to the Spanish colonies and to the owners of captured vessels. The treaty established a mutual right of search and detention for any ships suspected of carrying slaves, and a

Court of Mixed Commission with equal representation by Britain and Spain, to arbitrate on captured slavers and their cargoes (Keene 2007).⁶¹ The treaty, as part of Britain's global crusade to end slavery and backed up by its superior naval power, was viewed with a large degree of suspicion by the new Latin American republics and by Spain, fearing that it represented 'an initial step towards an international police authority by the British fleet upon all the world's oceans' (315). Even though continual and open violations of the treaty persisted, Cuban planters protested loudly at what they saw as a plot by Britain to 'strike at the labour supply of foreign colonies in order to improve the competitive position of her own'; they claimed that they were victims of British persecution. The mixed commission court was viewed by them as an 'inquisitorial tribunal of foreigners' (Murray 1980, 95).

At the height of the sugar-boom, the planter elite was set to reap the profits of new investments in railroad technology, all of which depended on maintaining control over and stability in the increased numbers of slave imports. The illegal slave trade accelerated to keep up with the demands of increased sugar and coffee production and by 1841, as highlighted in Chapter 4, the number of African-born slaves working on plantations, particularly in the western region of Cuba around Havana and Matanzas, was close to double that of whites.⁶² The intensification of control and surveillance fuelled a widespread insurgent movement amongst the black population culminating in the conspiracy of *La Escalera* which was uncovered by the authorities early in 1844. The largest slave rebellion Cuba had seen took place in March, 1843 in Matanzas and was revealed to have been highly organised, spreading throughout the area most populated by recently arrived Africans.⁶³ Coinciding with the arrival of General O'Donnell, continued resistance between the spring of 1843 and the summer of 1844 resulted in massive state terror against slaves, free blacks

⁶¹ There were four Commissions, the British colony of Sierra Leone, Havana (for Spain), Rio de Janeiro (for Portugal), and Surinam (for the Netherlands). The first British diplomatic official in Cuba was the judge of the Havana court, Henry Theo Kilbee, an Irish lawyer who served for nine years between 1819 and 1828. The first British consul was appointed to Santiago de Cuba in 1830 and in 1833 Charles David Tolmé was appointed to Havana. See Edward Keene, 'A Case Study of the Construction of International Hierarchy: British Treaty-Making against the Slave Trade in the Early Nineteenth Century', *International Organization* (Spring 2007).

⁶² For slave import and population figures see Laird Bergad, Fe Iglesias García and María Del Carmen Barcia, *The Cuban Slave Market* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Chapter 2.

⁶³ Laird Bergad has shown that in the district of Sabanilla; where the November 1843 insurrection took place, 76% of the local population was enslaved and most of the people living in this district lived on sugar estates. See Bergad, *Cuban Rural Society in the Nineteenth Century* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 32.

and mulattos accused of participating in a far-reaching conspiracy to overthrow the colonial state and bring an end to slavery.⁶⁴ Those accused of involvement were tried by military tribunals and official figures show that almost a thousand slaves and twice as many free people of colour were killed, imprisoned or deported.⁶⁵ The decimation of the free black population, described as a thriving black bourgeoisie, is cited as the greatest tragedy in forestalling abolition and eliminating the possibility of a multi-racial independence movement; as was the persecution of white men – respectable landowners, Creole intellectuals, and foreign workers – who were accused of conspiring with the black population (Finch 2007).

British and Irish Abolitionists

Several Irish newspapers reported on a devastating hurricane which hit Cuba on 5 October 1844 and wreaked havoc in Havana:

the city [of Havana] presented more the appearance of a town that had just been bombarded and sacked than the proud noble city of Havannah [...] there was nothing but heaps of ruins [...] every street being like a river.⁶⁶

Old people could not remember another hurricane like it. In the city of Matanzas, in western Cuba, many people mark this day as the patron saint day of Plácido, the free mulatto poet, put to death in June of the same year for his part as a leader in the largest conspiracy by people of colour in Cuba's history. They saw the devastation wrought by the hurricane in Matanzas as divine retribution for the crimes committed by the Spanish colonial authorities against the black population (Paquette 1988, 232). The *Nation* newspaper goes on to describe the damage to ships in the harbour left 'high and dry' at the fish market on the wharf, but 'Her Majesty's ship *Romney* escaped injury'.⁶⁷ This British hulk had been anchored in the harbour at Havana since 1837, to house liberated African slaves (*emancipados*) until they could be transferred to a nearby British colony (Murray 1972). The second slave trade treaty

⁶⁴ The name *La Escalera* came from a form of punishment long in use in which victims were stretched and tied to a ladder – *escalera* – and whipped. Officials of the military commission used this form of torture throughout 1844 to extract confessions from those accused.

⁶⁵ For an extensive discussion and analysis of the conspiracy of *La Escalera* and an analysis of slave and black resistance in Cuba, see Robert Paquette, *Sugar Is Made with Blood* (1988); Gwendolyn Mildo-Hall *Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies* (1996); see also Laird Bergad, *Comparative Histories of Slavery in Brazil, Cuba and the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Chapter 7; and Aisha Finch 'Insurgency at the Crossroads' (2007).

⁶⁶ *The Nation*, 16 November 1844.

of 1835, which provided for the transfer of slaves freed from illegal slave ships to British colonies, was overseen by Richard Robert Madden, an Irish doctor, appointed by the British Colonial Office as Superintendent of Liberated Africans. Madden defended the positioning of the vessel as a solution for a temporary depot for freed Africans, who the colonial authorities would not allow to set foot on Cuban soil. Manned by a West Indian regiment of black soldiers in British uniforms, bearing arms, the *Romney* was perceived by the colonial elite in Cuba as a reminder of the spectre of the Haitian revolution and a fearful symbol of abolitionism which served to inflame anti-British sentiment.

The emancipation of the slave population in 1833 in neighbouring West Indies sent shock waves of panic throughout Cuba. As a measure to protect against what was feared in Cuba as the corrupting and foreign influence of emancipation, General Tacón in 1837 banned any free blacks from foreign territories entering Cuba and deported several black British subjects (Murray 1980). Fear of abolitionists, and contamination by ‘the spirit of liberty’, led to a deep mistrust of foreigners and of the free black population, who comprised between fifteen and twenty percent of the overall population. There was a strong belief amongst the planter class that the British government and its agents were fomenting a foreign abolitionist conspiracy. Tacón sent reports to Madrid expressing the view that ‘the aim of all the fanatics who call themselves friends of the Africans is to light the fires of revolution on our island through the violent emancipation of the slaves’ (Murray 1976, 108). In this climate of fear and hysteria the planter class displayed a xenophobia in which all foreigners, and especially British subjects, were suspected of supporting abolition. Madden’s presence in Cuba until 1840, followed by David Turnbull, a militant abolitionist, were interpreted as evidence of a well-coordinated British conspiracy which threatened the island’s security. Madden’s anti-slavery credentials were solid, as a member of the British Anti-Slavery Society since 1829, and in his work for the Mixed Commission in Jamaica, where his brief time as a Special Magistrate in Jamaica in 1834 was not without controversy.⁶⁸ His association with the literary circle of Domingo Del Monte and other progressive Creoles who wished to promote

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ He became known for his efforts to get planters to treat emancipated slaves fairly under the apprenticeship system. After an attempt on his life in 1835 he returned to London where he published an account of his time in Jamaica.

Cuban literature dovetailed with his abolitionist activities.⁶⁹ Madden was only recently entitled to become a servant of empire, after Catholic emancipation in 1829. With this fluid make-up in his identity and in his writings, distancing himself from less ‘civilised’ subjects of empire, Sweeney casts him as ‘an Irish-Catholic-metropolitan-liberal, a position from which he felt well able to tackle certain iniquities from the inside’ and ‘through the medium of empire’ (Sweeney 2009, 184, 193).

Creole opposition to the slave trade was less an abolitionist cause than a means to an end, to gain political rights within empire without losing their slave-built prosperity; however some Creole elites flirted with the abolitionist cause of Madden and Turnbull. While claims of a unified abolitionist conspiracy between Creole and British abolitionists are thought to have been exaggerated, Madden’s association with like-minded creoles ‘loomed larger in the minds of the Cuban authorities, as the mastermind of this spreading conspiracy’ (Murray 1976, 110). Tacón sought Madden’s recall on the grounds that he ‘is a dangerous man’ whose only purpose is to ‘disseminate seditious ideas directly or indirectly’.⁷⁰ Lord Palmerston, at the British Foreign Office refused to withdraw Madden and he also refused to give in to the interests of slave holders and their repeated requests to remove the *Romney*. Tacón imposed a repressive regime of colonial domination, tightening up on colonial restrictions and absolute censorship on Creole expression that culminated in the banishment from Cuba of Antonio Saco, who dared to publish an article criticising the slave trade. Tacón’s term as Captain-General marked a new era of hostility to progressive Creoles during which he surrounded himself with ‘a

⁶⁹ Madden’s travel writings became part of a wider social and political reform agenda associated with the British abolition movement. See Fionnghuala Sweeney, ‘“To Redeem Our Colonial Character”: Slavery and Civilization in R. R. Madden’s *A Twelvemonth’s Residence in the West Indies*’ in *The Green and Black Atlantic* edited by Peter O’Neill and David Lloyd (2009). Madden attended Domingo del Monte’s *tertulias* or literary circles and promoted literary activity “for its humanizing effects in all places it matters not where”; his experience included setting up a literary institution in Jamaica. Larry Jensen *Children of Colonial Despotism: Press, Politics, and Culture in Cuba, 1790-1840* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1988), 128, n.10. He was also responsible for translating into English the first slave narrative to emerge from Spanish America, which he smuggled out of Cuba to London to be published by the abolitionist press. *Poems by a Slave on the Island of Cuba* was the autobiography of Juan Fransisco Manzano, who grew up in Cuba working as a house slave. Manzano had learned how to read and write and eventually bought his freedom with the help of a group of dissident white elites attached to Del Monte, who introduced him to Madden. Manzano was also caught up in the *Escalera*.

⁷⁰ Tacón to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Reservado, no. 4, 31 August 1836, in Pérez de la Riva, *Correspondencia del Capitán General Don Miguel Tacón* (La Habana: Consejo Nacional de la Cultura, 1963), 252-255.

peninsular clique, of wealthy implacable hispanophiles’ and remained ‘politically and socially beyond Creole influence’ (Jensen 1988, 108).⁷¹

Madden’s account of Cuba, (as noted in Chapter 2) makes no mention of the harsh treatment of Irish immigrants in the late 1830s, but neither did the brutality they endured reach the Irish newspapers of the time. However, concern for emigrants ‘inveigled under insidious promises’ to go to nearby Jamaica, received considerable coverage right across the nations’ newspapers. In a tone disparaging of native Jamaicans, the Dublin *Freeman’s Journal* of December 1840 warns Irish emigrants against the ‘suicidal act’ of being tempted into slavery and a ‘pestilential’ climate in post-emancipation Jamaica.⁷² In contrast, in the Spanish Caribbean, the association of British abolitionism with subversion placed Irish immigrants under suspicion of conspiring with slaves to overthrow Spanish colonial rule. Unlike the anti-slavery stance of the *Freeman’s Journal*, reports of the *Escalera* slave revolt in 1844 emanating from London and Madrid in some other newspapers maintained an imperialist tone, and avoided any news of contact and solidarity at the margins of the Black and Green Atlantic worlds.⁷³ The appointment of the infamous Spanish General Leopoldo O’Donnell, of Irish descent, as the new Governor of Cuba was reported in the *Tuam Herald* in August 1843.⁷⁴ O’Donnell took office in November 1843, coinciding with the uncovering of the conspiracy, or the Year of the Lash as it is also called, making 1844 in Cuban history synonymous with O’Donnell and the brutal repression he unleashed, during a year of martial law.⁷⁵ Coverage in the Irish

⁷¹ See also Hugh Thomas, *Cuba*, (2002), ‘Captains-General in Search of Wealth’, Chapter 14; and Felicia Chateloin, *La Habana de Tacón* (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 1989).

⁷² For more information on this episode of Irish migration to the Caribbean see Carl Senior, ‘Limerick ‘Slaves’ for Jamaica’ in *The Old Limerick Journal* vol. 19, (summer 1986): 33-40.

⁷³ The *Freeman’s Journal*, established in Dublin in 1763 was the mouthpiece of British rule with very little Irish news up until the late 1830s, after which it became one of the leading Irish nationalist newspapers.

⁷⁴ The *Tuam Herald*, August 1843. Leopoldo O’Donnell was a descendent of the famous O’Donnell family from Donegal who fled in 1608 to the continent. Leopoldo was born in Tenerife in 1809 and entered the Spanish army. During his time as Captain General of Cuba between 1843-1848 estimates show that illegal slave imports increased and it was thought that he was ‘pocketing the customary per-head payoff from the slave trade’. Robert Paquette, *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of Escalera and the Conflict Between Empires Over Slavery in Cuba* (Middleton, Ct: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 230.

⁷⁵ Robert Paquette describes O’Donnell as follows: ‘at thirty-four the youngest of the eleven Captains-General who had come through Havana since 1800, [...] looked less the laurelled warrior than a bureaucratic factotum, he was stiff and balding, sleepy-eyed and callow-faced. Yet he had survived the high-stakes game of peninsular war and politics, a worthy descendant of Donegal, whose forefathers had tendered their swords to the Spanish Crown’ (209). O’Donnell, a controversial figure in the history of colonial Cuba, is described by many Cuban writers as ‘a crude and sadistic butcher’ (24).

newspapers at this time about events in Cuba reflected British interests in the region and their concerns about the American annexation of Cuba. However a brief notice appeared in the *Nenagh Guardian*, June 1844, reporting on the conspiracy of *La Escalera*. Quoting from a letter in the *Observer*, the writer described the horror of the plantation owners not at ‘the butchery in cold blood of 700 or 800 Negroes but on account of the great loss sustained by the proprietors, each slave costing between 400 and 500 dollars’, with no compensation from the state.⁷⁶ This mercenary but telling statement accurately reflects the attitude of the slave-holding elite and the colonial authorities’ who increased their illegal purchase of slaves, whose labour underwrote the intensification of sugar production.

Historians in Cuba are divided over whether such a vast conspiracy actually existed, or whether colonial authorities fabricated it as a pretext to justify a more brutal repression of the slave population.⁷⁷ Most scholars agree, however, on the extent of the violent repression and state-brutality against slaves and free people of colour. Robert Paquette’s compelling analysis of what he describes as ‘one of the most controversial episodes in Cuba’s colonial history’ (1988, 4) concludes that while there is still much uncertainty surrounding the conspiracy, it existed more as a convergence under the banner of anti-slavery of several overlapping conspiracies against colonial rule, slavery and racial discrimination in which distinct groups of slaves, free people of colour and dissident whites were involved. More recent research by Aisha Finch redirects the focus of the historiographical narrative of colonial state terror associated with *La Escalera* and emphasises a reading of the record which foregrounds ‘a political movement of enslaved and free Afro-Cubans who planned judiciously for their freedom’ (Finch 2007, 367). What Finch uncovers in the plans for the 1844 rebellion were ‘multiple, and potentially even contradictory, ideas about freedom’ which included cross-racial alliances with the aim of independence and abolition (183). Such cross-racial alliances in 1844 anticipated a ‘devastating anti-colonial insurgency’ in pursuit of emancipation from slavery and colonialism, and shows that ‘racial politics, class politics and nationalist politics’ were felt by “people on the ground” to be part of the same injustice (Scarano 1998, 597). A weakening of control by the colonial authorities and the slave-holding elite

⁷⁶ The *Nenagh Guardian*, 8 June 1844.

was becoming more evident. There were several large revolts throughout 1843, culminating in the uncovering of the *Escalera* conspiracy in November of that year. The brutal and bloody repression of the black population, enslaved and free, and the massive intimidation of anyone who presented the slightest threat of opposition, instigated by O'Donnell, have been interpreted by some historians as 'the only means of holding the colony for Spain' (Mildo Hall 1996, 61). Many Creole whites and free blacks escaped torture and death by fleeing the island. Foreign engineering workers or *maquinistas* of British, Irish, German and North American origin implicated in the conspiracy were imprisoned and tortured.⁷⁸ Of the twelve white British subjects (English, Scottish, and Irish) imprisoned, all of whom worked as machine operators and engineers on sugar plantations, four can be identified as Irish.

In March 1843 an extensive slave insurrection started on the Alcancía sugar estate in Bemba, planned in conjunction with enslaved railroad workers on the Júcaro-Cardenas railway line. Daniel Goulding, an Irish overseer of a slave crew working on the railroad, was arrested, accused of helping the slaves he was supervising to join the uprising.⁷⁹ Goulding came to Cuba as a superintendent with the first Irish railroad workers who arrived in November 1835. Maurice Hogan, a coffee plantation owner and Patrick O'Rourke, a machinist on a sugar plantation, were implicated in the conspiracy on the evidence of slaves working on the estates. Both were arrested in Cardenas, accused of procuring ammunition to assist a slave insurrection. Patrick O'Rourke, while working as a superintendant on the railroad in June 1837, had already been fined a month's wages for allowing his crew of slaves to play their drums at night; he immediately deserted the railroad but re-appears in the record seven years later working as a machine operator on a sugar plantation in Cardenas.⁸⁰ Hogan, the son of Irish parents, living in New York, died three years

⁷⁷ For a fuller discussion of this controversy see Paquette *Sugar is Made with Blood* (1988), and Rodolfo Sarracino, *Inglaterra: Sus Dos Caras* (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 1989).

⁷⁸ Different skills were represented in this group, including carpenters, iron-mongers, train drivers and railroad mechanics. By 1850 up to six hundred of these skilled foreign migrants worked in railroad workshops, plantations, foundries and mines. See J. Curry-Machado 'Privileged Scapegoats: The Manipulation of Migrant Engineering Workers in Mid-Nineteenth Century Cuba', in *Caribbean Studies*, 35:1, (2007).

⁷⁹ ANC Commission Militar (CM), see ANC CM, 29-5; also see Passenger list for Brigantine 'Havre', the first shipment of Irish railroad workers including Daniel Goulding as supervisor in ANC JF, 130-6390.

⁸⁰ ANC JF, 8-572.

later in Cardenas. Patrick O'Rourke died weeks after his release from prison, having been accused of involvement in the conspiracy of *La Escalera*.

Daniel Downing, a native of Waterford, worked as mechanic on La Mola estate near Cardenas. He was arrested, accused of conspiring with other foreign engineers, to supply arms to the insurrection. Downing was charged, based on the evidence of two witnesses working on the same estate, with talking to another 'ingles' about killing Spaniards. The trial heard evidence from two eye-witnesses and three third-party witnesses who, in Downing's account were flogged before giving evidence.⁸¹ He was imprisoned in Cárdenas with three American machinists and forty other prisoners, most of whom were slaves who, according to Downing, were sent out in chain gangs during the day, 'The chain gang were put in this room every night. Some of the Negroes had been flogged and the smell of their lacerated parts was most dreadful'.⁸² Downing's testimony complained of his ill-treatment at the hands of the authorities, being kept in the stocks for six days and nights until he managed to bribe his jailors to get better treatment:

Besides being in the stocks the hole of which was too small for my leg caused me great suffering I applied to the hoary headed old savage called the jailer to remove me to a hole which appeared smoother and larger but he scoffed at me and treated my wish with contempt and ridicule. The first night I had nothing under me and lay on the boards. Afterwards they brought a blanket which I gave to another prisoner who had nothing. I had my cloak. I was six days and nights in that situation until they took my declaration and then I applied to the gentleman who interpreted for me to be removed to a better room as my health was delicate and I was subject to fevers and it was granted for which I have to pay \$3 a month.⁸³

After giving a declaration Downing reported:

we were taken to the Matanzas prison and put into a large room with many others – On the second day we were removed to a much smaller one with no light and little air. We had no water, nothing to sit on, nothing to lie on. There we remained for 5 months and three days.

⁸¹ Downing was charged at a military tribunal in Matanzas on 15 July 1844, presided over by an official, Manuel Zibuan. Also charged on that day were four English machinists, one 'Anglo-American' and one German. See ANC AP, 140-22 and ANC CM, 50.

⁸² Statement by Downing in NA FO, 72-664.

⁸³ Ibid.

Downing's testimony, written for the British Consul, described his condition during his imprisonment in which he says he was

treated like a murderer or a felon without any cause whatever – the shock my health has received for the space of five months – the injury done to my character and reputation and being kept in suspense all the time not knowing when or how such persecutions might terminate.

His co-accused Henry Elkins, a British machinist working on a sugar plantation was accused of having contacts with Turnbull to smuggle in a shipment of arms from England for the insurrection.⁸⁴ He asserted his innocence based on his ignorance of the Spanish language:

I can't speak scarcely a word of Spanish except sufficient to get along with the operation of cane grinding with the Mayoral and Negroes and surely [...] the Negroes could not understand us.

Patrick O'Rourke's case never went to trial as he was released only days before he died as a result of ill-treatment. The British Consul sent the following account of his incarceration to Lord Aberdeen at the Foreign Office:

Patrick O'Rourke, a native of Ireland, was arrested in Matanzas on the evening of the 1st of April and placed in prison until the 11th when he was carried on horseback with his hands tied behind him accompanied by three Dragoons a distance of thirty miles to the estate of Torriente where he was placed in the stocks until the following morning when he was brought up for examination; the evidence against him was that he had been heard talking with a Negro about obtaining ammunition to assist in the insurrection, this conversation was said to have taken place four months previous to that time at Jucaro, at which time O'Rourke could prove he was in Matanzas, a distance of five miles away. He was then removed to the sugar house and put in irons where he remained a prisoner upwards of a hundred days. He was treated with the utmost severity lying on a board with no covering and with two tiles for a pillow he was fed the same diet as the Negro prisoners. On the 12th of August he was brought to Cardenas much emaciated and in a most deplorable condition having lost count and recollection of the days of the month or the week. He was totally unable to help himself and his mind quite gone. Unquestionably his ill treatment and unheard of suffering have destroyed an athletic man in the prime of life He remained there in prison until the 22nd

September when he was removed to the hotel of Mr Lovatt, where he lingered, sinking gradually, until the eve of the 11th October when he died (Crawford).⁸⁵

The British consul, Joseph Crawford reported to the Colonial Office that ‘O’Rourke is chained by the leg to a bar in the sugar boiler house with a great number of Negroes and having been prisoner upwards of a hundred days he is much emaciated and in a most deplorable condition’.⁸⁶ An informant described Patrick O’Rourke in the days before his death:

as being at the time of his arrest, a strong healthy looking man of about 35 years of age. At the time I first saw him on being brought to this place, his hair and beard were turned completely white, and he had the appearance of a man of 60 [...] the immediate cause of his death was a complaint of the liver [...] There is not the slightest doubt that his illness was brought on and his death caused by the severe treatment and want of sustenance which he suffered during his confinement (George Bell).⁸⁷

The British consul continued to protest the innocence of all the British subjects imprisoned during the *Escalera* trials and as proof of their innocence he pointed to their respectability and honesty, as recognised by their employers who, in the case of Downing, was taken back into employment on the estate where he had worked before his imprisonment.⁸⁸ Downing was still working in Havana in 1860 as an engineering agent (Curry-Machado 2007). Still convinced of the innocence of British subjects accused of taking part in the conspiracy, the British Consul, as late as 1851, in a dispatch to Lord Palmerston, looked for compensation:

for Her Majesty’s Subjects who were subjected to great and most unjust and unmerited sufferings during the Government of General O’Donnell [...] when they were falsely accused of combining with, aiding and abetting the Negroes in conspiring for the purposes of insurrection’ [...] Poor Patrick O’Rourke, another man much abused has died at Cardenas; a very serious matter, the cases of these victims, will be to answer, as these people must do the just complaints of her majesty’s government. I have not yet succeeded in finding out the place of his birth with a view to discovering his relatives

⁸⁴ William Sim to Crawford, July 1844, in NA FO, 72-664.

⁸⁵ Crawford to Lord Aberdeen, in NA FO, 97-382. For more details on the case of Patrick O’Rourke see NA FO, 9, 1844.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Crawford to Lord Aberdeen in NA FO, 72-664.

to whom any compensation which may be awarded would I presume pertain, (Crawford).⁸⁹

The Foreign Office, under Lord Aberdeen, decided it was best to ‘let the matter drop’.⁹⁰ The British Consul, Joseph Crawford, who replaced Turnbull after his expulsion from Cuba, was charged with the job of smoothing out Anglo-Spanish relations. Turnbull had inherited from Madden a wide network of contacts of ‘restive slaves’ and free blacks, liberal Creoles, and paid informants who, Paquette suggests, he provoked rather than converted to the cause of abolition (141). Crawford’s consular dispatches demonstrate knowledge of some of these contacts and Creole and Afro-Cuban plans to overthrow the Spanish government. Crawford supported abolition but dissociated himself from the actions of David Turnbull, known to have given moral support to those conspiring against slavery and colonial rule, particularly during 1841 and 1842 (Paquette 1988, 168). Amongst people of African descent in Cuba there was a broad awareness of British and Haitian emancipation of slaves which led to a belief in their power and moral authority in helping to liberate Cuba. Focusing on the trial records containing verbatim testimony by slaves and free blacks, Finch describes a discourse of ‘English assistance’ circulating throughout rural slave networks of insurrection. One rebel reported ‘they were relying on firearms and munitions that the English were supposed to distribute [...] the English were going to give freedom to the slaves and money to the free people, but he knows not what manner of government’ (Finch 2007, 149). A belief that help was also coming from Haiti featured in many of the testimonies. The underground network used ‘emissaries’ who were free to move between the city and the countryside, from coffee plantation to sugar plantation, between free people and slaves to mobilise the insurrection. Free blacks and white workers, who were ‘*ingleses*’ and had the independence and mobility, could be relied on to facilitate the connections and overlap in what was a multi-layered conspiracy.

Many innocent people were caught up in the frenzy of reprisal and repression by O’Donnell’s officials, authorised to use ‘extra-legal procedures’ during the military tribunals to extract proof of a conspiracy. It is widely accepted that

⁸⁹ Joseph Crawford to Lord Palmerston, see NA FO, 72-793.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

some slaves may have knowingly perjured themselves against whites to escape further torture: some slaves may have consciously implicated innocent white sugar plantation workers in recompense for some previous offence or simply because they were white (Paquette 1988, 235).⁹¹

O'Donnell gave instructions to the head of the military tribunal to take whatever steps necessary to 'return the slaves to their habitual state of discipline and servitude without grave damage to the proprietors' and to punish severely and in an exemplary fashion 'the chiefs [of the slaves] and the white and free people of color who have introduced this germ of unrest and insubordination'.⁹² One historian of the *Escalera* González de Valle, observed that the idea of any white engaging in the conspiracy 'defies reason'; however, Paquette, Finch and others argue that there is evidence of groups of dissident whites and people of colour 'converging' to organise this conspiracy (249).

The Irish Complication

During the *Escalera* trials, Irish workers earlier known as *irlandeses* were classed as '*Ingleses*', an identity described as 'at best ambiguous' but more likely synonymous with what it meant to be 'white' and 'foreign' in Cuba at that time (Curry-Machado 2009). Foreign engineers on sugar plantations were in demand and most were from the 'British Isles'.⁹³ Migrant workers' claims to 'Britishness', even in cases of possible antipathy to Britain, were reserved for times of crisis when in need of protection or assistance. During the military trials, they were denied this claim, as foreigners resident in Cuba for more than five years came under Spanish jurisdiction, losing the right to protection or diplomatic assistance. At this time when the transatlantic-abolitionist movement was at its peak, Anglophobia became

⁹¹ Up to 'four thousand people were tried by a military tribunal, 96 were condemned to death, about 600 to prison and over 400 deported. Voluminous testimony was taken about the details of the organisation of the conspiracy which indicated that the British were expected to supply arms', see G, Mildon-Hall (1996), 56.

⁹² O'Donnell to García Oña, cited in Paquette *Sugar Is Made with Blood* (1988), 236.

⁹³ See Chapter 2 for an account of foreign mechanics that came to Cuba via the United States. Also see Jonathan Curry-Machado 'Indispensable Aliens: The influence of Engineering Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Cuba' PhD Thesis, (2003), London Metropolitan University. As prescribed by the *Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País*, 'every mill, every steamship, every locomotive on the railway has to have beside it an intelligent foreigner who directs and inspects the machine', *Sociedad Económica* (1819-1844), *Memorias de la Sociedad Económica*. Havana: Sociedad de Amigos del País, 1840. Cited in Curry-Machado, 'Running from Albion: Migration to Cuba from the British Isles in the Nineteenth Century' *The International Journal of Cuban Studies*, 2: 2 (June 2009): 5.

widespread, particularly among the colonial authorities who viewed ‘every idea contrary to slavery [as] seditious and the word abolitionist the greatest crime’ (Paquette 1988, 143). At the height of this politically tense atmosphere, with a huge military presence, foreign residents were vulnerable and exposed, so much so that ‘even the most innocent of activities or words could be suddenly misconstrued’ simply by being ‘the wrong nationality, in the wrong place at the wrong time to fall foul of the law’. Paquette suggests that ‘to be British was to be subversive’ and cites the example of Patrick Doherty, a ‘British’ train driver (from the Inishowen peninsula in Donegal, mentioned in Chapter 2) on the Havana-Güines line in 1841, who was driving a train that crashed into another stationary train and spent two years in jail awaiting trial accused of sabotage (Paquette 1988, 140). The incident caused a huge sensation, being the first fatal railroad accident in Cuba, in which one person died and several others were injured. David Turnbull described visiting Doherty in Bejucal and speaking to him through the bars of his dungeon. Having met with the local Mayor, who was also the Judge in Doherty’s trial, he was told of a voluminous book of evidence containing declarations by all of the passengers, injured parties and their friends. Turnbull believed the atmosphere to be so prejudiced that Doherty could hardly escape a lengthy prison sentence. He protested Doherty’s innocence and appealed for justice noting that Doherty’s co-accused, ‘a Spaniard was at large in the vicinity of the prison and is not compelled to consort with convicted malefactors’. He continued to appeal for his trial to be moved from Bejucal to Havana in the interest of a fair trial. In his sentence in December 1842, not unfair under the circumstances, he was banished from the jurisdiction of Havana for four years and ordered to pay legal costs and indemnify all of the injured. He was banned from working as a train driver in Cuba.⁹⁴ Turnbull advocated for British subjects who fell foul of the law for whatever reason and arranged the release of six West Indian British subjects who were kidnapped in British possessions. During the *Escalera* trials hundreds of emancipated slaves, British subjects from the Bahamas and Jamaica, were kidnapped and enslaved again in Cuba, were all summarily deported (Curry-Machado 2004).

⁹⁴ Turnbull to Tacón, May 1841, see NA FO, 72-585. Doherty stayed in Cuba throughout the independence wars, returning to Ireland in 1880.

The dynamics of transnational migration generated shifting and fluid identities which were both influenced by and produced different tensions at different times within the social order of Cuba. Consequently the structures of social control imposed on foreign workers a need to articulate identity in multiple ways. At the height of Anglo-Spanish imperial tensions in the 1840s, Irish workers were no longer identified as *irlandeses*, with the promise that entailed, of inscribing white dominance and providing a cheap source of labour to replace slavery. They were identified as British subjects who supported abolition and were suspected by the authorities of conspiring with slaves against the white population, for which they represented a threat to Spanish colonial rule. From the perspective of black insurgents, Irish workers could easily have been identified as *ingleses* and therefore possible allies in the struggle to overthrow slavery or on the contrary as whites who identified with pro-slavery attitudes and therefore suspect. They worked in locations which were in very close proximity to the underground networks of the insurrection, and they could have acted as emissaries connecting support for abolition, between black insurgents and the English-speaking world. The fate of O'Rourke, for example, earlier penalized for demonstrating an empathy with his slave crew, was not dissimilar to that of hundreds of slaves who perished in the *Escalera* because of being identified as a sympathizer with the 'English' cause to bring about the end of slavery.

The records attest to the pliable identity of Irish migrants within the discourse and political climate of slavery and British abolitionism, starting out as cheap white labour on the construction of the railroad in 1835 and in less than a decade of upward social mobility and becoming 'elite' white *maquinistas* on sugar and coffee plantations or as overseers or skilled workers on the railroad they were perceived as *ingleses*. A division emerged amongst foreign migrants, as pointed out in Chapter 2, based on an 'elite' worker status by those who earned more as mechanics or overseers and worked in conditions far removed from those of slave labour. Sugar production relied increasingly on machinery which depended on and raised the status of *maquinistas* in terms of responsibility and pay. Foreign engineers chose the identity which most suited their aspirations, according to Curry-Machado, which he argues played a part in widening the division between foreign workers and slaves on the plantations and railroads but did not always preclude finding common cause with

the black population (2003). However despite the efforts of the authorities to buttress the slave system by hardening racial divisions and preventing against class solidarity, Cuba's multi-racial working class engaged in common struggles. In the words of one progressive-minded planter,

White mechanics and coloured mechanics, when employed in work together, live together and treat each other as men of one colour; sleep in the same room, eat at the same table, both free and coloured, slaves & whites. This fact is under my eye, and is to be seen everywhere. No white mechanic dares scorn at ...a mechanic of colour because of his colour – at work, and at church, we are all the sons of Abraham!⁹⁵

The association of racial status and juridical status was not as sharply internalized in terms of identity, as in white/free, black/unfree, in the 1830s and 1840s, certainly amongst white unskilled migrant labour, such as the railroad workers. This would come later, as already discussed in Chapter 4, in the 1850s when there was more to be gained from the 'wages of whiteness' than from class alliances across racial boundaries. There were, however, exceptions to the shift in racial perception which informed the Irish-American stance against abolition – not all Irish immigrants adopted this position, and it cannot be taken for granted amongst all of the Irish in Cuba, especially since their presence there occurred before Irish racial animosity in the United States hardened to the extent that it did. The question here, however, is whether the multiplicity of identities amongst Irish migrants included identification with the emerging British discourse on abolition in the context of colonial Cuba. Richard Madden did not think so: 'The Irish alas! I have invariably found, who are employed in any shape, are advocates for slavery in all its horrors' (Madden 1849, 165). However it is highly likely Madden was referring to the Irish planter class in this statement, as he does not mention any other class of Irish throughout his account of Cuba. Daniel Downing, who identified himself as an Irish native saw it in his interest when incarcerated to plead 'a British subject throws himself on the government of his country and asks for protection'.⁹⁶ The situational articulation of multiple identities by Irish transnational migrants, at a juncture of inter-imperial and subaltern tensions over the abolition of slavery and anti-colonial

⁹⁵ Cited in Curry-Machado, 'Indispensable Aliens' (2003), 189.

⁹⁶ Statement made by Daniel Downing, 1844 in NA FO, 72-64.

resistance is an extraordinarily complex web of possible identifications which needs further research to fully understand.

That the foreign *maquinistas* instigated insurgency in Cuba is discounted by Curry-Machado, who suggests that they were ‘scapegoats in the racial and political struggles of the period – unwitting representatives of abolitionism and symbolising foreign desires for domination’ (Curry-Machado 2007, 210). This concurs with Finch’s argument that the movement was ‘organised, directed and executed by people of color’ and that ‘white participation in this venture was minimal’ (17). If indeed it is the case, that Irish migrants were unwitting scapegoats, this points to the huge irony that Irish migrants should be punished for conspiring against slavery in support of humanitarian policies which Britain did not see fit to apply to its colonial subjects in Ireland. The accusations of participation by these Irish workers identified here in the *Escalera* conspiracy were made on evidence, known to be extracted through torture. However, Paquette’s careful examination of O’Donnell’s correspondence on the conspiracy, held in the Escoto collection at Harvard, has raised doubts as to whether all the evidence extracted by torture amounted to falsehoods.⁹⁷ Doubts about the credibility of the thousands of witness declarations arise not only from the way in which they were extracted but also because of the way in which they were mediated into the record by military commission officials, to become what Finch describes as ‘an archive of violence’ (Finch 2007, 14). Despite their immediacy and value as a ‘primary source’ for historians, testimony by the insurgents are what Guha terms ‘statements from the other side [...] by way of direct or indirect reporting in the body of official correspondence’ which are prompted by concerns of the state (Guha 1988, 48). Finch’s research of the trial documents, in addition to proof of a conspiracy, establishes ‘a world that was meant to be hidden to the colonial authorities: of illicit movements within and across plantation borders, clandestine meetings and conversations, underground trade networks between estates, weapons being exchanged, oaths being taken, religious rituals being

⁹⁷ The conspiracy of *La Escalera* is one of the most documented in the history of slave revolts in Cuba. The records of the trials of the conspirators held in the Archivo Nacional de Cuba fill one hundred and sixty-five bundles of testimony each of which exceeds five hundred pages. There are hundreds of other documents dispersed in libraries and archives in the United States and Spain. One of the largest holdings in the United States covering nineteenth century Cuba is the José Escoto collection at Harvard Library. Escoto was head of Matanzas Public Library and compiled and collected documents relating to the period which included letters by O’Donnell and other important contemporary accounts. See Paquette (1988), 8.

performed', not unlike the world of rural Ireland up to the Great Famine (17). The production of a culture of dissent in colonial Cuba has roots in African experiences and Irish experiences which drew on values and traditions from their countries of origin.

This research while not setting out to establish the guilt or innocence of the Irish workers accused during the military trials, has focused more on the context which led to their imprisonment but, in doing so, it has highlighted parallels in the experience of clandestine resistance between Irish migrant labour and African slave labour to Cuba's slave system – albeit from different perspectives. The colonial state denied any political consciousness to peasant or slave uprisings and remained silent on the sustained violence which marked the transformations in the control of labour. Based on evidence presented here this chapter has demonstrated how Irish migrant labour registered opposition to the violent coercions inherent in Cuba's incipient capitalist labour relations by drawing on repertoires of resistance with roots in Irish agrarian resistance. Cultural legacies of opposition were adapted to labour organisation in the United States and in Cuba under extreme and brutal circumstances on the construction of the railroad. The assumption that elite worker status widened divisions between free and unfree in the case of foreign *maquinistas* which ruptured class alliances has some merit but more so during the 'tranquility of terror' which followed in the aftermath of *La Escalera*. Most of these workers, before coming to Cuba, had circulated on networks of trade and labour which valorized free labour over slavery and were more likely to support abolition before coming to Cuba. However the intriguing question of whether or not Irish or indeed English or Scottish workers, subjects of the British Empire, identified with the British abolitionist cause to the extent of cooperation with the slave insurgency remains unanswered. More in-depth research is needed focusing on the details of their movements and connections on wider networks of dissent, in labour protest, abolitionism and anti-colonial activities before their arrest to throw more light on their outlook. This raises further questions about Irish abolitionism in the context of empire. To what extent was support for abolition amongst transnational Irish migrants in the early part of the nineteenth century influenced by local conditions? Was this bound up with their perception of the British empire or indeed the Spanish

empire? Did their experience in Cuba incite a consciousness of abolition or on the contrary, as occurred in the United States, did it fuel support for slavery?

A similar pattern of white involvement in slave revolts in the West Indies emerged in the case against a party of Irish servants, accused of participating in a plot by slaves to revolt, collapsed due to insufficient evidence (Beckles 1990, 518). There is evidence to suggest that Irish labourers particularly on the railroad, who worked in some of the same occupations as slaves did, could not always be relied upon to adopt an ‘all-class, all-white, all-European “white” identity’ in the Caribbean. Up to the middle of the eighteenth century, Irish bond labourers in the West Indies were among the usual suspects when it came to forming alliances with Africans and their descendents, or rival colonial powers, in any challenge against British authority. More than a century later, their identification with a rival colonial power was not guaranteed, but a cross-racial alliance over class division was still possible before mid-century, particularly where there was little distinction between contract labour and slavery.

The transatlantic and imperial dimensions of the *Escalera* conspiracy have received much scrutiny, and particularly the role played by British abolitionists. Raising the question of ‘alternative ideologies of resistance among slaves’, Ada Ferrer notes the absence of focus on the principal participants of this insurgency and the influence of African or Afro-Cuban ideologies of resistance (Ferrer 1992, 86). The belief that the British were behind the conspiracy also suggests a refusal to credit the black population with any political agency of its own. In a similar way the focus on the Irish subaltern as ‘scapegoats’ because of their ‘Britishness’ may well obscure or veil what they were actually doing. As a corrective to this ‘meta-narrative of imperial intrigue’, Finch has ‘re-centred’ African slaves and their descendents who built a radical resistance movement based on the political culture of rural Cuban slaves, stemming from plantation life and political traditions which African people brought with them to Cuba.⁹⁸ The ongoing opposition by the black population in Cuba to a system of domination and repression by colonial authorities and slave owners was to ‘test the limits of the institution of slavery in a wide variety of ways’; it ‘resisted domination in its countless forms by negotiating, by reproducing their

cultures, by openly revolting, by running away to the forests and mountains, and by taking their own lives' (Barcia 2008, 2). Like Finch, Barcia's approach to the study of slave resistance in Cuba, based on the records of the *Escalera* trials, posits that the cultural background of African-born slaves is 'integral to story of their resistance' (2). Notwithstanding the problems of linguistic interpretation and the problematic nature of the evidence, gained through an extra-judicial process of interrogation prompted by concerns of the state, both authors have used these 'exceptional' documents to extraordinary effect in providing a less-veiled analysis of the 'internal world' of the rebels. In order to redefine transatlantic movements and the discourse of the politics of freedom and emancipation, Finch argues 'that any history of anti-slavery struggle is incomplete without black-political struggles and oppositional cultures at its centre' (Finch 2007, 4). In a similar vein, the question of Irish subaltern resistance and solidarity in Cuba may be further illuminated by focusing on the overlap of transatlantic continuities between oppositional cultures in early nineteenth-century Ireland and African cultures of dissent as they circulated at the same time within Atlantic networks of resistance. Undoubtedly, the 'overlap' between labourers from Europe and Africa in terms of inter-subaltern solidarity within the social and political order of colonial Cuba needs closer scrutiny to illuminate the influence of the contending forces of modernity in the Americas on points of possible identification or divergence between migrants from pre-capitalist societies. This chapter has linked the influence of the historical cultural legacies of Irish opposition to labour relations in colonial Cuba where slave labour was valorised over free labour in the accumulation of wealth from sugar production. Research has demonstrated that African oppositional culture was integral to the struggle against slavery: however, more focused research on the convergence of African, Irish and Canary Island oppositional cultures at this 'point of contact' in the Spanish-Caribbean is necessary to gain a fuller understanding of the experience and co-operation within networks of resistance to incipient capitalist relations in Cuba.

⁹⁸ For an insightful and forensic study of the 'exceptional' and unique documentary record of slave insurgency in the *Escalera* conspiracy, see Aisha K. Finch, 'Insurgency at the Crossroads' (2007).

Conclusion

This study has contextualised the presence of Irish railroad workers in Cuba within the wider contending forces of emergent capitalism in the Atlantic economy where it was believed that the ‘invisible hand’ of the market place would forge the transition from slave labour to wage-labour. It has also traced the path of proletarianisation from the pre-capitalist world of colonial Ireland in which the peasantry were cut loose from their means of subsistence and forced onto commodity circuits in the Atlantic world, to form the backbone of industrial labour in the Americas. Their experience in the developing American economy provided a preparatory environment for the move to Cuba as contract labourers. The heterogeneity of the American workforce increased opportunities for capitalist exploitation where the combination of enslaved workers and so-called ‘free’ or wage workers made it possible to restrict the parameters of freedom to the lowest common denominator and intensify the exploitation of labour as a commodity. The material line between free and unfree labour was blurred and indeed, in the move to abolish slavery, ‘ideal’ new forms of labour emerged which, legally, were not slavery, but were still highly coercive.

The thesis has argued that Irish migrant labour imported to Cuba under a system of contract became part of a modernising imperative at a critical juncture in the development of capitalism in a Spanish colony, under increasing pressure from Britain to abolish slavery. Also, with the emergence of a nationalist project, the railway workers were seen as ‘whitening agents’ by reform-minded Creoles. White colonisation schemes became part of a wider strategy to socially engineer a white Creole Cuban identity in opposition to a growing fear of the ‘africanisation’ of Cuba with the expansion of the slave trade. However, far from enlightened ideas of liberty and free labour, the experience of these early wage labourers challenges the normative notion that freedom was synonymous with the absence of coercion. This was a multi-ethnic world of black and white workers who experienced differential degrees of freedom through which the formation of class consciousness, originating in pre-capitalist societies on the other side of the Atlantic, unfurled in the modern world of America. By the time the Irish reached Cuba they formed a mobile proletariat, with experience of class conflict from colonial Ireland and more recently industrial America, where the structures of a racial pecking order served to disrupt

class alliances amongst the labouring population. As 'free' proletarians they were seasoned in the confrontations of the system of contract labour where they had already adapted an Irish repertoire of resistance to the exploitations of colonial capitalism in the 'new world'.

Irish emigrants, on the transatlantic circuit of colonial labour, converged on New York, a crossroads between two empires caught up in a tense political dynamic over slavery, sugar and global trade. Mediated through the United States, their move to Cuba occurred at an extraordinarily complex and busy historical juncture of incipient capitalism and burgeoning nationalism in one of the last remaining colonies of the Spanish empire, under increasing pressure from Britain to end slavery. The formation of a Cuban-Irish nexus of migrant labour through the Catholic Church in New York and the Spanish Consul, also closely connected to Irish merchants in the United States, opens up an unexpected and complicated avenue of inquiry in which Catholic Irish labour became a commodity in the emerging demand for new forms of labour in the Spanish Caribbean in an era of abolition. An investigation of this network, of which Catholicism was an essential element, would open a window onto the recruitment mechanisms operating within the early Irish emigrant community in New York and on the conditions of life which led to making the decision to go to Cuba. It opens possibilities for further research on the profile of such a large group of emigrants, their provenance, their kinship networks in New York and also on those who returned from the ordeal on the Cuban railroad.

In Cuba, where the touchstone of labour relations was slavery, the slave-holding mentality of ownership of labour power by colonial elites maintained a heavy and not so invisible hand in the control of 'free' wage labour, which was coercive in the extreme. This is clear from the accounts of the Irish experience, as the first large workforce of so called wage labourers in the Cuban labour system. The evidence from archival sources, about what is a neglected episode of Irish migration and the construction of the Cuban railroad, highlights the 'in-betweenness' of Irish labour experience in 1830s and 1840s Cuba. Their experience was not one of slavery however, neither was it free; it constituted a category which lay between forced and free labour. As formerly 'free' labourers in the United States they were forced into a situation of debt-bondage in Cuba where their liberty was inhibited to a degree, even more restrictive than that of a cottier in Ireland, where the freedom to move or

emigrate was an option. The railroad quickly became a confrontational site of class struggle in which Irish migrants drew on strategies of protest born out of a presumed right to subsist and a presumption of liberty. They went on strike, they stole the means to prevent starvation, armed with work tools they engaged in violent rioting and finally, to survive the life-threatening coercions of the contract, many opted to defy the might of military force and the penalties of incarceration and further bondage by running away. They were quickly criminalised by the colonial authorities and treated as violent deserters and thieves who threatened the social order of the colony. Such disruption, where labour was scarce, also threatened the booming sugar industry on the cusp of technological modernisation. They represented a disruption of the colonial order of things, no less so than a challenge to the capitalist logic of things. They were marked out as insubordinate and audacious in their demands for fair play, with a peculiar ethnic ‘disinclination to work’. In the discourse of transition from slavery to free labour in Cuba, in contrast to the United States, Irish migrants were quickly designated as the wrong kind of substitute for slavery, and they were dispensed with for a labour system which was even more tightly controlled and coerced with the introduction of Chinese indentured labour.

The arrival and movement of Irish labour contributed to a continuous class formation process in the United States; however under the extreme coercions of Cuba’s incipient capitalist relations, their refusal to accept coercion, in what amounted to a reversal of the ‘freedom’ of a wage-labourer, reduced their value to colonial capitalists in the interim between wage and slave labour. Their legacy in the labour history of Cuba was undoubtedly central to building the early infrastructure of capitalism; however in the political context of free market ideology their so-called ‘disinclination to work’ under such coercive practices must equally be seen as a moral challenge to the violent relationship between labour and capital evolving at the time in Cuba and the wider Atlantic world in a contested terrain of the transition to free labour. This analysis of the Irish experience in Cuba, as a form of labour structured out of the ‘in-between’ or transitional stages from slavery to free labour, presents a new framework from which to examine Irish migrant labour on Atlantic circuits in the early decades of the nineteenth century. It makes a clear contribution to the analysis of the formation of labour and hierarchies of race in some of the early labour experiments in the United States and Cuba. This presents a range of

comparative possibilities in relation to examining the position of Irish labour within different labour processes at different stages of capitalist development in the United States and the Spanish Caribbean.

In colonial Cuba, where race and class were beginning to define a separate national identity, Creole elites, including planter families of Irish origin, who feared the africanisation of Cuba, instigated different strategies of whitening the nation which targeted the unwanted Catholic population of Britain's oldest colony. At the same time in Ireland colonial elites, joined by an emergent Catholic landlord class, invoked cultural nationalism against what was perceived as the anglicanisation of Ireland. In both colonial situations, in two different empires, anxieties over class, ethnicity and religion fuelled fears of the threat of insurrection from below, by a Catholic majority in Ireland and a black majority population in Cuba, which shaped the move towards independence throughout the nineteenth century. Yet in the troubled colonial context of Cuba, the introduction of propertyless Irish Catholics took on a more complex double meaning as part of a parallel project both to 'whiten' the nation and supply cheap labour. In other colonies of settlement, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the Irish were still 'becoming white', while in Cuba, a colony where Irish-Creoles were well established at the centre of the Catholic ruling elite, this unique designation ascribed to immigrants from Ireland raises extraordinarily interesting questions about their position in the formation of an underclass within the parameters of free and forced labour. Up to their arrival in Cuba, inter-racial unions or miscegenation were strictly proscribed in the colonial order of things, but in the formation of early Cuban nationalism Irish ethnicity took on a novel dimension as an agent of whiteness.

Patterns of Irish settlement in Cuba by participants in white colonisation schemes needs further and more refined investigation focusing on class and ethnic solidarities and resistance to the labour processes on the railroad. The contact between European settlers and African slaves, which occurred in the frontier context of Cienfuegos and Moa in the early decades of the nineteenth century, was late in the history of the development of Caribbean societies and the process of Creolisation. The introduction of Irish, English and American mechanics to sugar mills also stands out in the uniquely late development of the plantation complex in Cuba. In the wider history of Irish migration to the Caribbean, Irish immigrants entered the Creolisation

process in Cuba much later than anywhere else in the Caribbean and at a critical time in the development of Cuban nationalism. The issue of Irish ethnicity in the context of a discourse of whitening or *mestisaje* has, until this research, received little or no attention in the history of immigration and the formation of Creole identity. Likewise, it has not been the focus of any research in the history of Irish migration to Latin America. This is very rich terrain for further comparative studies where similar strategies of mixing the indigenous or African-American populations with poor white settlers were part of the development of national identities, albeit later on, in Argentina and Australia. As already stated, depending on their temporal and colonial location, Irish migrants were regarded as a viable source of cheap labour in the search for a substitute for slave labour. In Cuba however, as Catholic colonial subjects of the British Empire, they were temporarily viewed as a promising pool of immigrants to contribute to the formation of a white Cuban identity within the ideal of a new independent nation. This thesis argues that the perceived promise of an Irish contribution to the inscription of white dominance, and indeed as a supply of cheap labour, was eclipsed by their protests and refusal to submit to the discipline of capital and the new forms of coercive labour practices on the Cuban railroad. The perception of Irish workers as ‘whitening agents’ and as a viable source of wage labourers was short-lived; nonetheless, at a time when economic imperatives at the height of a sugar boom, wholly dependent on slavery and other forms of coercion, took precedence over the formation of a white nation, their presence in this early experiment in free labour, as an in-between category of labour and consequently an in-between category of race, deserves further attention.

The ‘wages of whiteness’ in the Spanish colony of Cuba did not have the same currency for Irish wage labourers as in the United States because of the common ground of inhibited freedoms amongst the railroad workers coerced under a system of heterogeneous labour categories. It is tempting and hopeful to read this as an obvious site for inter-subaltern solidarity, however this important question requires research which is sensitive to the complexities of the margins of a plantation society under pressure to abolish slavery. Questions about the kind of relationships that may have evolved between Irish, Canary Islander, African and Afro-Cuban workers are pertinent to this line of inquiry. To what extent did such a diverse workforce contribute to or militate against solidarity in the development of a ‘counter-culture of

modernity'? What part did the railroad workers play in the British campaign against slavery? The question of Irish identification with the British campaign to abolish slavery in Cuba raises some very intricate questions which lay the ground for further research within the relatively new area of Irish-Empire Studies. To what extent were Irish migrants in Cuba agents of British imperial causes in opposition to a rival Spanish crown? In the expansionist era of the sixteenth and seventeenth century European struggles for dominance in Caribbean, Irish servants demonstrated a greater willingness to identify with rival Catholic imperial campaigns and to some extent with the cause of enslaved Africans. As exploited workers in Cuba's incipient capitalism almost two hundred years later, loyalty by British subjects of Irish origin to British imperial concerns or indeed to the Spanish Crown is not so clear-cut. Recognition of the complexities of a separate or different Irish view of imperial politics, as suggested in this thesis, expands on Curry-Machado's examination of the position of migrants from the British Isles in nineteenth-century Cuba. His location of Irish migrants under the banner of British subjects, albeit with a recognition of their colonial status, in terms of anti-slavery and anti-colonial sentiment in the decline of the Spanish Empire, needs more precise analysis of the diverse origins of *maquinistas* from the British Empire.

Such research also needs to think outside the structures of the colonial blueprint which can obscure cross-racial and subaltern connections. The field of the colonial archive and migration historiography can inhibit the frame of analysis to one which interprets resistance to the coercions of labour as no more than flash-in-the-pan instances of protest. Rediker and Linebaugh, focusing on eighteenth century Atlantic circuits of labour and resistance, have demonstrated the frequency and force of cross-racial solidarity, cooperation and overlap, by breaking through colonial structures of segregation and division, and also language and cultural barriers. Studies of resistance in the early nineteenth century, which focus instead on networks of resistance, as Aisha Finch has done in her examination of the *Escalera* conspiracy, permit a more complex frame with a sharper focus on the relationships between Irish and indentured labour from the Canary Islands and China and forced African labour in Cuba. In tracing the trajectory of Irish migration to Cuba this study also suggests the need for greater comparison with other migrant groups, who are also subjects of colonial processes of migration and proletarianisation. In the case of

these migrations converging in Cuba at a crucial time in the development of capitalism there are many possibilities for a comparative study of the impact of contending forces on pre-modern groups as they adapt to capitalism. A greater understanding of the structures of class originating in pre-capitalist societies in Ireland, the Canary Islands and the African continent is a necessary starting point from which to examine the nature of solidarities and resistance in colonial Cuba. From the perspective of global processes of labour and migration within the march of capitalist modernity, the historical experience of the formation of class-consciousness before crossing the Atlantic, must be taken into account in an analysis of resistance in a plantation society. Just as Gilroy has framed maritime transportation networks as a means to ‘conduct political dissent’, the circulation of labour on the construction of railroads also formed a culture of confrontation in this early industrial site of class struggle. As this research has demonstrated, the historiography of early railroad labour in Cuba is somewhat overshadowed in the colonial archive by what Stoler terms a ‘blueprint of distress’. While this throws light on colonial hierarchies of race, class, gender and labour, shifting the perspective to a blueprint of resistance to inhibited freedoms enhances our understanding of the relationship between diverse labouring groups forced into a violent relationship with capital and the contending forces of modernity in Cuba. The more narrow analytical focus on the coercion of labour homogenises the experience of class and resistance and masks the differences and possible connections which emerged in the contestation of colonial processes.

Finally, this composite analysis of the colonial record of three different waves of previously unexplored Irish migration to Cuba makes a clear contribution to Irish Studies by widening the frame of the study of Irish migration in the Atlantic world, not only by including the Spanish Caribbean, but also opening the previously unexplored time-frame of Irish migration to the Caribbean as late as the early nineteenth century. By taking a transnational perspective to this episode of migration to Cuba this study makes new connections between Irish Studies and Caribbean studies which expands on recent scholarship on the ‘Black and Green Atlantic’. This opens up the possibility for comparative, cross-colonial and cross-national approaches to the study of Irish migration within different processes of labour and race formation in Cuba and the newly independent Latin American countries, and

similarly in the United States and the British Caribbean. Within the field of Cuban Studies and Slavery Studies, the Irish experience presents further comparative possibilities particularly in relation to inward migration by other Europeans, Africans and Chinese within the framework of a late transition to free labour in the nineteenth century. This study also makes new connections between migration processes occurring in the Canary Islands and Ireland and their influence on settlement patterns and the inscription of white dominance in Cuba. Irish migration to Cuba and their protest against the coercions of capital highlights the importance of a global framework through which to analyse the broader historical and social context, but also the importance of comparison of colonial and capitalist processes of migration, labour and race and their contestation in the multi-ethnic and trans-colonial environment of the Spanish Caribbean.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Passenger List The Harve 1835

C

List of Mechanics Laborers & Emigrants employed for the great project the Foment of the Island of Cuba - Despatched by brig Harve to Havana Nov 1835

Superintendents & Emigrants to pay \$20 each for passage for themselves and accordingly for their families

John Mascoo Wife & 2 Children (= 1 Emigrant) 3	60.00
William Blawitt	20.00
Engineer of the Harve Cuba	20.00
Daniel Goulding - -	20.00

Mechanicks & Laborers to pay \$2 Dollars each passage

Daniel Goulding - Super ^t	Thomas T Evans
Thomas Hall do st	John Armstrong
James M Donnell	Ed & M Entyne 30
Stephen Boothman	John Henry 30
Michael Hickey	Samuel Murphy
Justin Rucke	Patrick Walsh & Wife
John Bryan	Patrick Quady
Robert Ford	William Montgomery
William Boyd	Joseph Meredith
John Buckley	William Blawitt
Joseph Buckley	Edward Richardson
George Mason	Thomas Dodd
John Dillon	James Rye 20
Richard Lanerty	140 Catherine McMahon
Andrew Carrol	Patrick Byrnes
James Wood & Wife	John Dogherty
Maurice Connell & Wife	Patrick Sullivan
William Lawrence	Richard Bland
Michael ...	Thomas McCorrigan
James Green	Charles Reeves
James M Gure	Patrick Holden
Rich Clarke	James Ryssell
Cornelius Dogherty	William Kelly
John M Cleary	50 Roger M Mahon
Robert Montgomery	Daniel Callyhan
Joseph ...	Joseph Scott
	Robert Montgomery

Appendix 2

List of Names From The Register of Foreign Residents 1818-19

Name	Status	Age	Occupation
1. Santiago Connell			
2. Alejandro Mc Donnell			
3. Francisco O Meara			
4. William O Connell	Single		Cooper
5. Patricio Mc Kenna	Married	26	Stonemason
6. Eduardo Regan	Married	43	Carpenter
7. Jeremiah McCarthy	Married	30	Carpenter
8. Miguel Hogan		23	Farmer
9. Phillip Ryan	Single	32	Farmer
10. William Carpenter	Married	30	Builder
11. Thomas Healy	Single	29	Farmer
12. Thomas Lynch	Single	22	Farmer
13. Daniel Daly	Single	26	Carpenter
14. John G Howard	Single	26	Farmer
15. John McGonegall	Single	40	Farmer
16. Connor Rooney	Single	25	Farmer
17. Patrick Hogge	Single	42	Farmer
18. James Donnaghue	Single	24	Carpenter
19. Folan	Single	22	Farmer
20. Owen	Single	29	Cooper
21. Bartolomew Sprengs	Single	39	Cooper
22. John Higgins	Single	28	Cooper
23. James Canty	Single	27	Cooper
24. Denis Farrill	Married	45	Blacksmith
25. Daniel Thornton	Single	36	Carpenter
26. Thomas Flanagan			
27. Felix Henry			
28. John Toole	Married	40	Builder
29. Owen Nelly	Married	36	Farmer
30. John Brown	Married	45	Builder
31. George Locke	Single	23	Builder
32. John Kelly	Married	31	Builder
33. Thomas Kerney (Carney?)	Single	32	Builder
34. Thomas Cook?	Single	21	Builder
35. John Brown	Married	45	Builder
36. James Reilly	Single	22	Baker
37. –	Single	24	Shoemaker
38. David Newman		37	Carpenter
39. Eduardo Murphy	Married	21	Carpenter
40. James Mc Coy	Single	21	Carpenter
41. Daniel Walsh	Single	27	Carpenter
42. Edgard Colgan	Married	30	Baker
43. James Gallagher	Single	25	Cooper
44. Patrick Brennan		28	
45. Patrick Phelan	Single	30	Carpenter
46. John Roddy	Single	22	Carpenter
47. James McManus	Single	23	Carpenter

48.	Charles Evers	Single	28	Builder
49.	William Gibson	Single	30	Carpenter
50.	Henry Lynch	Married	29	Carpenter
51.	John Grace	Married	34	Carpenter
52.	Patrick Ratigan		30	Builder
53.	Simon Toole		37	Carpenter
54.	John Walsh		26	Carpenter Cutter
55.	Patrick Mac Cinell	Married	30	Carpenter
56.	William Beird	Married	40	Stonemason Builder
57.	John Downing	Widow	32	Boilermaker
58.	John Burke	Single	36	Carpenter
59.	John McGuire	Single	32	Carpenter
60.	Ephrain McNamara	Single	24	Carpenter
61.	Miguel Downing	Single	27	Carpenter
62.	John Connery	Married	45	Carpenter
63.	Bernard Nelly	Single	20	Blacksmith
64.	Daniel Moloney	Single	34	Blacksmith
65.	Margarita McDermot		25	Seamstress
66.	M. Owen	Single	24	Carpenter
67.	Miguel Mooney	Single	28	Carpenter
68.	William McCarthy	Married	40	Builder
69.	Cristobal Cusack	Single	37	Builder
70.	Bernard Sheales	Single	36	Builder
71.	Francisco O Connor	Married	42	Carpenter
72.	Daniel McNamara	Single	22	Carpenter
73.	Tomas Murria	Single	20	Carpenter
74.	James Doyle	Single	41	Carpenter
75.	John Rooney	Single	26	Carpenter
76.	Jeffry O Connell	Single	28	Carpenter
77.	Daniel Murry	Married	30	Builder
78.	John Fitzgerald	Single	26	Blacksmith
79.	Christopher O Conner	Widow	30	Shoemaker
80.	John Green	Single	27	Builder Stonemason
81.	Elizabeth Mont	Single	29	Seamstress
82.	Andres Martin	Single	23	Carpenter
83.	William Hay	Single	26	Carpenter
84.	Columno O Kelle	Single	21	Carpenter
85.	James O Brian	Single	26	Builder
86.	Miguel Kelly	Single	23	Carpenter
87.	John Taylor	Single	20	Builder
88.	William Leeson	Single	25	Builder
89.	James Mooney	Single	25	Builder
90.	Pedro Fox	Single	29	Builder
91.	Patrick Connell	Single	25	Carpenter
92.	Tomas Lovatt	Single		
93.	Andres Wood	Married	30	Carpenter
94.	Hugh Donnelly	Married	40	Builder
95.	Roberto McCartney	Single	29	Carpenter
96.	Miguel Haynes	Single	30	Cooper
97.	Miguel Callaghn	Single	31	Builder
98.	Robert Ross	Single	44	Carpenter
99.	John Wall	Married	38	Builder

100. James Warren	Single	22	Carpenter
101. George Murray	Single	25	Carpenter
102. John Semple	Single	25	Carpenter
103. William Morland	Single	28	Farmer
104. Tomas Castivin	Single	35	Carpenter
105. William Caley	Single	28	Carpenter
106. Charles Kelly	Single	28	Pharmacist
107. James Mansfield	Single	27	Carpenter
108. Tomas Redden	Single	28	Farmer
109. William Reynolds	Single	24	Carpenter
110. Philip Rooney	Married	31	Builder
111. John McNally	Single	38	Farmer
112. John Sheehy	Married	27	Carpenter
113. William Stuart	Single	22	Cooper
114. John McDonagh	Single	33	Farmer
115. Robert Wilson	Single	48	Farmer
116. David Clancy	Single	24	Stonemason
117. John Kerby	Single	30	Stonemason
118. Patrick Clancy	Single	22	Gardener
119. ? Bradley	Single		Farmer
120. Denis Reardon	Married	21	Blacksmith
121. James Coter	Single	21	Gardener
122. Daniel Burke	Single	27	Builder
123. David Galluey	Single	35	
124. John Cuff	Married	37	
125. Miguel Daly	Single	26	Blacksmith
126. Thomas Nevin			
127. Thomas O Brien	Single	30	Stonemason
128. Santiago Lauanders	Married	27	Farmer
129. James Toochy	Single	25	Stonemason
130. Thomas McInerney	Single	30	Builder
131. ? Hart	Single	29	Builder
132. Bernardo Hart			
133. Nayle Fannan	Single		Builder
134. Daniel Reynolds	Single	30	Farmer
135. ? Mullan	Widower	39	Cooper
136. Vaughan	Married		Carpenter
137. ? Kerby	Single	27	Carpenter
138. David Warrens	Single	32	Farmer
139. David O Neill	Single	20	Farmer
140. Geremiah Dempsey	Single	22	Farmer
141. William Burnes	Single	26	Carpenter
142. Frances Rourke	Single	25	Builder
143. John Meade	Single	27	Carpenter
144. Miguel Sullivan	Single	24	Builder
145. Patrick O Brien	Single	30	
146. Andres Holland	Single	30	Labourer
147. John McCartan	Single	25	Labourer
148. Frances Burke	Single	25	Labourer
149. Patrick Mansfield	Single	26	Labourer
150. Daniel Philips	Single	24	Blacksmith
151. James Power		28	

152. Daniel Donovan		30	Blacksmith
153. William D Connery	Married	46	Farmer
154. Samuel Harrison	Widow	42	Carpenter
155. Daniel O Connell	Married		Farmer
156. James Bowan	Single	27	Farmer
157. Joseph Grady	Single	35	Builder
158. William Aften	Married	38	
159. John O Reilly	Married	62	Farmer
160. Samuel Smith	Single	25	Distiller
161. Thomas Sanders	Married	25	Carpenter
162. ? Mc Ardell	Widow		Farmer
163. ? Carty	Single		
164. David Clunes	Single	30	Blacksmith
165. Edward P Troy	Widow	45	Carpenter
166. Alejandro Mc Donneld	Single	30	Farmer

Source: Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Junta de Fomento, 190-8559.

Appendix 3

Names of Irish Colonists who came from Philadelphia to Cienfuegos

	Name Occupation	Age	Status
1.	Guillermo (William) Carr	43	Labourer
2.	Isabel Marinot (American)	30	Wife
3.	George	13	Son
4.	María	11	Daughter
5.	Patricio Collins	22	Labourer
6.	Jayne Reley (Jamie Reilly)	22	Labourer
7.	Maria MacDonald	30	Wife Labourer
8.	Ana	10	Daughter
9.	Juan Boyle	50	Labourer
10.	Cristina Paulinger	23	Labourer
11.	Sebastian	4	Son
12.	Juan	2	Son
13.	Juan Hotton	28	Labourer
14.	Maria Guerty	27	Wife
15.	Juan Conrad	28	Labourer
16.	Luisa Ownf (Owen)	19	Wife
17.	Felip Honery	32	Carpenter
18.	Cecelia Honery	28	Wife Dressmaker
19.	Guillermo	6	Son
20.	Juan Miller	22	Carpenter
21.	Lidia Sybbs	18	Wife Dressmaker
22.	Francisco Farland	45	Mason
23.	John Byrnes	26	Carpenter
24.	Jayne Collins	29	Locksmith

Colonists from Philadelphia travelled on Las Tres Saly; all profess to be Catholics, 1818

Source: ANC GSC 631-19 901 20

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Fondo de Manuel Moreno Friginals

National Archives, London (NA)

Colonial Office Papers

Foreign Office Papers

Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI)

Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid, Spain (AHN)

Ultramar

Libraries

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Special Manuscript Collections, Sala Cubana

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