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Los Angeles

Urban Slavery in Colonial Puebla de los Ángeles, 1536-1708

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in History

by

Pablo M. Sierra

2013

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Urban Slavery in Colonial Puebla de los Ángeles, 1536-1708

by

Pablo M. Sierra

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Kevin B. Terraciano, Chair

This study addresses the emergence, rapid development and gradual decline of chattel slavery in the city of Puebla de los Ángeles during the early and mid-colonial period. The presence and exploitation of African slaves in Puebla has been ignored in the historiography of colonial Mexico (New Spain), Latin America, and the greater African Diaspora. By crossreferencing extant municipal, notarial, parochial and judicial records with Spanish- and Nahuatl-language colonial chronicles, I reconstruct the history of African slaves and their descendants in Puebla from 1536 to 1708. My notarial investigation focuses on bills of slave purchase, letters of manumission, apprentice contracts and loans produced between 1600 and 1700. I find that during the seventeenth century, 20,000 slaves were bought in notarized transactions in the Puebla slave market. The city's large and wealthy Spanish population demanded large retinues of skilled and unskilled slaves to labor as domestics, water carriers, wet nurses, textile workers, etc. The owners of sugar plantations (*ingenios*) in nearby Izúcar, Cuautla, and the Cuernavaca basin also required large numbers of enslaved workers in the context of extreme Indigenous depopulation.

By the 1620s, a series of epidemics, combined with exploitative labor practices, reduced the Indigenous population of Central Mexico and the greater Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley to 10% of its pre-Hispanic levels. In response, the Spanish Crown authorized the implementation of a sophisticated slave trading system, led by Angola-based Portuguese merchants, to operate in Puebla de los Ángeles. These Lusophone networks relied on the *encomendero de negros*, a locally-based merchant to regulate the entry and sale of all new African arrivals to the city between 1616 and 1639. Yet African slaves had already begun to erode the foundations of chattel slavery well before these dates. Although theoretically reduced to human property under Spanish law, Afro-Poblano slaves actively resisted their bondage by exercising their religious rights as practicing Catholics. In particular, male slaves established numerous formal unions with free women (of all races) through the sacrament of matrimony. In turn, children born of these unions were legally free, leading to numerous generations of free Afro-Poblanos by the end of the seventeenth century.

The dissertation of Pablo M. Sierra is approved.

Lauren Derby

Mark Q. Sawyer

William R. Summerhill

Kevin B. Terraciano, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2013

To Marina Sánchez Gómez, *mi abuela*.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables	vii
List of Acronyms	viii
Acknowledgments	ix
Vita	xii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 - Formative Slavery in the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley, 1536-1580	21
Chapter 2 - The Transatlantic Voyage: From Angola to Cuextlaxcoapan, 1595-1635	52
Chapter 3 - The African Influx and the Puebla Slave Market, 1600-1700	81
Chapter 4 - Failed Freedoms, Manumissions and Apprenticeships	122
Chapter 5 - Slave Matrimony and Afro-Indigenous Interactions	158
Conclusion - A City of Freedmen	200
Bibliography	219



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1. Slave trains conducted from Veracruz to Puebla de los Ángeles	63
Table 3.1. Male-female slave ratios in the Puebla slave market, 1600-1639	90
Table 3.2. Average purchase price for slaves in Puebla by age group, 1600-1635	92
Table 3.3. African slaves sold in Puebla by ethnic labels/origin, 1595-1635	107
Table 5.1. Number of married slaves owned by <i>obrajeros</i> in 17th-century Puebla	171
Table 5.2. Groom marital preference by ethnic/cultural labels, 1585-1615	177
Table 5.3. Slave-free marriages in Sagrario and San José by legal status, 1585-1657	183
Table 5.4. Number of grooms and brides by race and legal status, 1660-1700	186

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

AGN	Archivo General de la Nación (México)
AGNP	Archivo General de Notarías del Estado de Puebla
AHJP	Archivo Histórico Judicial de Puebla
AHPA	Archivo Histórico de la Parroquia del Santo Angel Custodio de Analco
AMP	Archivo Municipal de Puebla
APSJ	Archivo Parroquial del Señor San José, Puebla
ASMP	Archivo del Sagrario Metropolitano de Puebla

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## VITA - PABLO M. SIERRA

### EDUCATION

*University of California-Los Angeles*

C.Phil, History (2009)

Specialty: African Presence in Colonial Mexico

Subfields: Colonial Latin America, African Diaspora, Urban Slavery

*University of California-Los Angeles*

M.A., History (2008)

Specialty: Colonial Latin American Slavery

Subfield: Afro-Mexican History

*University of Pennsylvania, College of Arts & Sciences*

Bachelor of Arts, *Summa cum Laude* (2006)

Major(s): World History, Latin American Studies

Minor: French

### FELLOWSHIPS, GRANTS & AWARDS

Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship (DDRA)

*Oct. 2009 – Aug. 2010*      Puebla and Mexico City, Mexico

Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship (Summer - Portuguese)

*Jul. 2008 – Sep. 2008*      Salvador, Brazil

Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship (Academic Year - Portuguese)

*Sep. 2007 – Jun. 2008*      Los Angeles, CA

### PUBLICATIONS

“Mine Workers and Weavers: Afro-Indigenous Labor Arrangements and Interactions in Puebla and Zacatecas, 1600-1700” with Dana Velasco Murillo in *City Indians in Spain's American Empire: Urban Indigenous Society in Colonial Mesoamerican and Andean South America*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2012.

“María de Terranova: African Female Slaves, Spanish Masters, and the Practice of Self-Rescue in Puebla” *Journal of Pan-African Studies*, Special Issue (forthcoming Spring-Summer 2013).

## CONFERENCE PAPERS & SCHOLARLY PRESENTATIONS

- Puebla de los Esclavos: West Central Africans and Urban Slavery in Colonial Mexico Jan. 2013  
- American Historical Association 2013 Annual Meeting - New Orleans, LA
- Esclavo, chilero y capitán: El caso de Felipe Monsón y Mojica May 2012  
- IV Encuentro de Estudios Afroamericanos - Mexico City, MEX
- Felipe Monsón y Mojica: Man of the Sword, Vendor of Chiles Oct. 2011  
- American Society for Ethnohistory 2011 Annual Meeting - Pasadena, CA
- Motivaciones mulatas: Insurgencia, tributo y raza en la región de Puebla, 1800-1821 Oct. 2010  
- XXII Encuentro Interno de Estudiantes de Historia - Puebla, MEX
- Los negros en la Ciudad de los Ángeles, siglo XVI<sup>o</sup> Apr. 2010  
- Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla - Puebla, MEX
- Afro-Indigenous Interaction in a Colonial Mexican City: 1585-1674 Feb. 2010  
- Fulbright-Hays/García Robles Mid-Term Conference - Mexico City, MEX
- Conflict and Coexistence: The Afro-Indigenous Obraje in Puebla de los Ángeles Nov. 2008  
- American Society for Ethnohistory 2008 Annual Meeting - Eugene, OR
- Afro-Indigenous Relations and the Urban Sphere in Puebla and Zacatecas Jul. 2008  
- Institute for Transnational History of the Americas - Tepoztlán, MEX
- El matrimonio negro en Puebla, 1585-1615: ¿Afro-criollismo o mestizaje? Jul. 2008  
- Congreso Internacional Diáspora, Nación y Diferencia - Veracruz, MEX
- Castas, Negros, y Afro-Mexicanos: A Brief Overview of Mexican Slavery Apr. 2008  
- Black-Latino Relations Conference - Los Angeles, CA
- The Negotiation of Afro-Mexican Identity in Sixteenth Century Puebla Nov. 2007  
- American Society for Ethnohistory 2007 Annual Meeting - Tulsa, OK

## Urban Slavery in Colonial Puebla de los Ángeles, 1536-1708

### *Introduction*

On October 23rd, 1635, Antonio, another Antonio, Diego and Miguel understood that their lives had forever changed. The rector of Puebla's Jesuit college had just purchased them for a lifetime of labor at a price of one-thousand six-hundred sixty pesos, to be paid in silver.<sup>1</sup> The four Angolan youths, boys really, were no longer the property of Pedro Jorge and Antonio Abreu, the Portuguese captains who first purchased, branded and brought them from the port of Luanda (on the coast of West Central Africa) to the viceroyalty of New Spain. No longer would the city's official slave trader prod their adolescent bodies in the central plaza. After months of travel, they would now serve their final purpose in Puebla de los Ángeles as textile workers, muleteers, shepherders, cooks, and status markers. Their newly imposed Spanish names would become more important now, at least when in the presence of the Jesuit priests. Little did they know that as slaves of the Puebla Jesuits, they would be joining a much larger group of men and women from Angola and Kongo, people who undoubtedly spoke Kimbundu or Kikongo. Perhaps some of them actually knew their real names.

We know little else about Antonio, Antonio, Diego and Miguel. Their lack of Spanish surnames (their African familial histories having been effaced) makes tracking further references to them nearly impossible. Yet their relative anonymity in the archives should not be equated with historical irrelevance. Enslaved Africans played a central role in the development of the viceroyalty of New Spain and the city of Puebla de los Ángeles. No less than 20,000 bills of slave purchase, for the seventeenth century alone, are housed in Puebla's notarial archive. Such a documentary corpus speaks to a consistent dependence on African labor in Puebla and the

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<sup>1</sup> Archivo General de Notarías de Puebla (hereafter, AGNP), Not. 4, Box 152, 1635/10/23.



surrounding hinterland during the colonial period. This labor complemented and, at times, completely replaced, that of the Indigenous workers in the city's brutal textile mills. From a demographic perspective, African slaves provided Spaniards with a permanent, unalienable worker base at a time of catastrophic Indigenous depopulation. The influx of this new slave population relieved some of the pressures leveled upon the native communities of New Spain. It is not a coincidence that the transatlantic slave trade to New Spain peaked in the 1620s and 1630s, the precise decades when the very slow process of Indigenous demographic recovery began.

The primary objective of this dissertation is to explain the intertwined histories of Africa and Latin America as they coalesced during the seventeenth century in the city of Puebla de los Ángeles. Of course, the history of the African diaspora to Spanish America and New Spain extends well before and after those hundred years. I have opted to focus my study on the period spanning from 1536 to 1706. The former year marks the first reference to a Black minority inhabiting Puebla when it was nothing more than a struggling pueblo of a few hundred settlers. The latter year marks the sale and exodus of a thirty-six-member slave community of textile experts from a local mill to the town of Mixcoac. I have chosen this event as the endpoint for the dissertation in order to retain a seventeenth-century focus for the project. Puebla would be negatively impacted by profound socioeconomic changes in the early and mid-eighteenth century. Though chattel slavery survived in a weakened state throughout most of the 1700s, most slaves no longer resided in the city itself. The turbulent nineteenth century brought about Independence and the formal abolition of slavery in 1829, but by that point there were virtually no slaves left in Puebla to free.

Nowhere is the ascent and fall of slavery more evident than in the Archivo General de Notarías de Puebla (AGNP), which holds six separate notarial series on everyday transactions for the colonial city. My notarial investigation focuses on the 1600-1700 period because these years cover the slave trade to Puebla under the Portuguese slaving monopoly (1595-1639) and the irregular slave trading period that followed (1640-1700). A truly exhaustive examination of Puebla's seventeenth-century notarial archive cannot be completed adequately without a team of research assistants. However, I have managed to produce a notarial database that covers 20% of the slavery-related material contained in this repository for the seventeenth century. Hopefully, a new wave of researchers will fill the lacunae left by this dissertation project. Nonetheless, the general dearth of studies on Mexican slavery during the long seventeenth century seemed to provide a worthwhile opportunity for such a project. Fortunately, this historiographical void was not the result of a lack of historical material. During my first summer research trip to Puebla, I very quickly came to the realization that the greatest difficulty in developing this doctoral project would be knowing when to stop collecting research material. Put simply, Puebla's colonial archives are overflowing with documents related to Africans, their descendants and their experiences in the colonial city.

The second overarching goal of this dissertation is to produce a nuanced, statistically-informed study of early Latin American urban slavery. This is not to contest that late colonial plantation slavery was not important. Innumerable nineteenth-century studies on the sugar and coffee plantations of Cuba and Brazil have made this an unassailable tenet. Instead, I argue that the early urban demand for slave labor has been underacknowledged in the region's historiography. Moreover, it is simply impossible to understand the social dynamics of the early Latin American city without acknowledging its large enslaved populations. The first colonists of

the viceroyalty of New Spain (and Peru) borrowed heavily from a late-fifteenth and early sixteenth-century Iberian model in which the use of coerced labor was not restricted to the rural sphere. I believe this precedent and its linkages to the Spanish American scenario have not been properly explored. The slaves of Puebla were distinctly urban and participated in every sector of the colonial economy. What has not yet been understood is the extent of this participation.

The third objective of this dissertation is to contribute to the local historiography of Puebla de los Ángeles. As the viceroyalty's second city, Puebla boasted a large Spanish population and became renowned as a European bastion among the densely populated Indigenous hinterland of the Central Mexican highlands (a reputation it has maintained to this very day). However, the historical archives indicate that Puebla was also an Indigenous and an African city, or at least one with a considerable African population. Throughout the seventeenth century, thousands upon thousands of Angolans and Kongolese walked through its cobblestone streets, traded in its central plaza and constructed its ubiquitous churches. Skilled African stonemasons also assisted in the construction of Puebla's greatest landmark: the magnificent cathedral, consecrated by Juan de Palafox y Mendoza in 1649. And yet, the historians and historiography of Puebla remain eerily silent on the presence of a conspicuous African population. Why?

Over the last twenty years, the history of Africans and their descendants has grown exponentially in Mexico. Multi-cultural initiatives spearheaded by both Mexico's National Autonomous University (UNAM) and the National Institute of History and Archaeology (INAH) have propelled the study of the Afro-Mexican past into the academic limelight. Norma Angélica Castillo Palma, Ursula Camba Ludlow, María Elena Martínez, Blanca Lara Tenorio and many other Mexican scholars have produced innovative studies on the cultural representation, gender

and labor patterns of Africans in New Spain. In the United States, the pioneering works of Ben Vinson III, Herman Bennett and Frank T. Proctor have also proven instrumental in rescuing the history of a population generally ignored even after Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán's seminal publication, *La población negra de México*, in 1946. This dissertation draws from many of these works that consider the African past fundamental to the construction of the modern Mexican nation and the colonial Mexican experience necessary to a reassessment of the African Diaspora.

Unfortunately, recent advances in Afro-Mexican history remain largely inaccessible to the majority of Mexicans today. A cataclysmic attack on the teaching of colonial history within the Mexican public school system has reduced most educational curricula to anecdotal treatment of the Mexica, Cortés' conquistadors and the fall of the great floating city of México-Tenochtitlan. The rich, complex history of the colonial period has been essentially effaced for nationalistic interpretations of Miguel Hidalgo, José María Morelos and the War of Independence against Spain. Thus, the complex history of the viceroyalty of New Spain (as colonial Mexico was once known) has and is currently in the process of being even more forgotten. This is lamentable, particularly since it is during the colonial period that the history of Africa becomes intertwined with that of Mexico. Whereas today the African presence in Mexico is associated with the port of Veracruz, the town of Yanga (San Lorenzo de los Negros), and the poverty-stricken Costa Chica, this study focuses specifically on the enslavement, commercialization and exploitation of Africans in the city of Puebla. For the majority of Mexicans and Poblanos, this is news! Slavery certainly afflicted other parts of the American continent: the United States, Cuba, and Brazil. But Puebla could not have had an enslaved African population, or could it?

While contemporary historians have convincingly discredited the myth of Puebla de los Ángeles as an exclusively European space and acknowledged the prominence of its Indigenous and mestizo ranks, their narratives still fall well short of the city's true demographic complexity. Despite consistently outnumbering the Spanish population throughout the early colonial period, Africans and their descendants simply do not figure in Puebla's historical narratives. The omission of these groups from the city's historiography is especially problematic given the ubiquitous references to *morenos*, *pardos*, *negros*, and *mulatos* (and their female variants) in colonial chronicles, travelers' accounts, and census materials. Africans and their descendants are particularly conspicuous in the city's notarial, municipal and parochial documentation as 1) enslaved human property, 2) practicing Catholics, 3) land-owning citizens, 4) free-colored militiamen and 5) individuals in constant opposition to Spanish rule.

While highlighting the colonial experience of a generalized "Afro-Poblano" population, I nonetheless intend to respect the overarching cultural, juridical and social differences that led certain of these individuals to be differentiated and to differentiate themselves from one another. I therefore use the term "Afro-Poblano" cautiously and only when a particular set of circumstances generally affected all people of African descent in Puebla (e.g., viceregal ordinances barring *morenos* and *pardos* from bearing arms). Rather than conflating various caste classifications into a single overarching category, my research stresses the diversity of experiences comprised by individuals of African descent within social groups that have been historically overlooked. In doing so, I intend to complicate ethnocentric interpretations that restrict colonial interaction exclusively to racial lines, while neglecting the significance of linguistic fluency, religious organization, patron-client networks, and local barrio politics.

In terms of nomenclature, I privilege the use of the ethnic/racial identifiers *moreno* and *pardo* (instead of *negro* and *mulato*, respectively), as these were the preferred terms for self-identification in colonial Puebla. Throughout the colonial period, the terms *moreno/negro* were used consistently to refer to dark-skinned individuals of “pure” African descent, while mixed-race individuals of partial African descent were typically identified as *pardos*, *mulatos*, or occasionally, *mestizos*. I hesitate to use the terms *negro* and *mulato*, because of their pejorative connotations and because they were infrequently utilized by individuals of African descent themselves. Even Spanish officials preferred the *moreno/pardo* construction when addressing these groups in a positive light. The contrast is particularly evident in notarial documentation in which free *morenos* and *pardos* manumitted *negro* and *mulato* family members. In other words, the latter terms connoted slavery, an association that free people would obviously reject when appearing before any notary, judge, priest, etc.

However, it is important to note that during the seventeenth century, *moreno/pardo* terminology was also used to highlight individuals of African descent who had formally married in the Church, held respectable occupations and, thus, constituted an elite of sorts within the Afro-Poblano population. The salient association between *pardos* and *morenos* as people of a higher social strata would largely disappear by the mid-eighteenth century, however. The term *zambo* or *zambaigo*, denoting a person of Afro-Indigenous ancestry, virtually does not appear in local records. Moreover, *pardo* and *mulato* merely indicate a degree of African descent and do not specify whether an individual had an Indigenous, mestizo, or Spanish parent.

As a result, this project will also emphasize the importance of birthplace amid an African population generally divided into West African (*Bran*, *Arara*, *Terranova*, etc.) and West Central African (*Angola*, *Anchico*, *Kongo*, etc.) components. Colin Palmer and Enriqueta Vila Vilar have

firmly established that West Central Africans constituted the overwhelming majority among Africans disembarked in New Spain. Their Bantu-derived languages, culture and religion would have certainly predominated among Puebla's African population. But what of the much smaller African ethnic groups that also inhabited seventeenth-century Puebla? Would an enslaved woman from the Bight of Biafra interact with her Angolan contemporaries or prefer establishing a social network with people of distinctively West African heritage? In the same vein, this dissertation project also documents the transformation of the term *criollo* as an indicator of cultural familiarity with Iberian forms. During the early seventeenth century, *criollos* were not merely American-born individuals, but generally people of African descent who hailed from any part of the rapidly expanding Spanish and Portuguese empires. Thus, I also challenge some accepted ideas regarding concepts like *criollo* and *ladino* throughout this study.

However important skin color, profession, or birthplace may have been (and they were), gender and its juridical implications proved to be the single most significant factor in determining the nature of racial relations in colonial Puebla de los Ángeles. The transmission of slavery via the enslaved woman's womb, a legal concept known as *la ley del vientre*, limited the extent of formal unions with Spaniards, while unintentionally producing high degrees of interaction between the city's African, *mestizo* and Indigenous populations. Though largely restricted to Indigenous women and enslaved Black men, during the early seventeenth century Afro-Indigenous couples and their progeny gradually moved away from Puebla's central plaza and settled into the city's peripheral native barrios. These unprecedented unions and the accompanying residential shift effectively resulted in the creation of an extensive, free mixed-race population whose very existence and labor inhibited the perpetuation of Mexican slavery during the late colonial period.

It should be noted, however, that Africans and their descendants were not the only group of people enslaved or sold in the city. Centuries before the Spanish conquest, the local populations of the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley also trafficked in human beings. Indigenous slavery, but of a very different variety, resurfaced in Puebla during the sixteenth century through the Spaniards' exploitation of Chichimec war captives. In addition, a minority of South Asian slaves, incorrectly labeled as *chinos*, were also subjected to slavery in New Spain's second city during the seventeenth century. As a result, I have opted to develop a dissertation project that focuses concretely on urban slavery, and its commodification of a wide variety of people from various racial and ethnic groups. The objective here has not been to "recreate" the colonial archive but to expose the breadth and pervasiveness of an institution that has not been generally associated with the city of Puebla.

By examining local notarial, municipal, judicial and parochial sources, I will demonstrate how Puebla de los Ángeles simultaneously developed into a cornerstone of New Spain's slave trade and an urban haven for an increasingly numerous and diverse freedman population between 1536 and 1708. In chronological order, the following five questions will drive my investigation: 1) How did a perceived need for African-based slavery arise in early colonial Puebla? 2) Who instigated the use of chattel slavery in an urban space theoretically bereft of forced labor, and for what purpose? 3) How did Lusophone slave traders create a new slave-owning class in seventeenth-century Puebla, and what effects did their withdrawal have on local society? 4) By what means were slaves able to free themselves and how successful were these emancipating efforts? 5) How was the sacrament of matrimony utilized by both slaves and slaveowners to further their respective goals?



Admittedly, this doctoral project falls short in a number of areas. For the most part, I only address the history of free Afro-Poblanos tangentially. Such an endeavor is a book project in and of itself, and I have not felt I could do it justice in the few following chapters. The fascinating lifestories of Puebla's *pardo* militiamen, such as Capt. Felipe Monsón y Mojica, offer a tantalizing window into the history of people of African descent during the eighteenth-century. I hope to pursue such a book manuscript in the near future. At the same time, I have shied away from Inquisition sources, thus forsaking a study on the creation and/or recreation of African cultural forms, ritual practices, religiosity, magic, etc. Many scholars will argue that this reflects an unfortunate lack of interest on the matter. Nothing could be farther from the truth. I am certain that Africans in seventeenth-century Puebla, just like their Brazilian counterparts, combined West Central African and Native American ritual practices with various modes of folk Catholicism to cope with the inhumanity of slavery.<sup>2</sup> If I have privileged material from local notarial, municipal parochial, and judicial archives to produce a social history of slavery, it is merely because these sources have been underutilized to a stunning degree.

This thesis draws heavily on a social history model that promotes a more comprehensive understanding of quotidian life through locally-produced sources and (when available) native-language records. By focusing on “the informal, unarticulated, daily and ordinary manifestation of human existence,” I believe it is possible to develop a new understanding of Puebla in relation to the institution of slavery.<sup>3</sup> Subalterns and marginalized groups, historically relegated by the “official” histories of the elites, or at least homogenized into the rabble of the colonial underclass, now become dynamic and distinguishable historical actors. This methodology

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<sup>2</sup> James Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship and Religion in the Afro-Portuguese World, 1441-1770* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 6-7.

<sup>3</sup> James Lockhart, “The Social History of Early Latin America: Evolution and Potential,” in *Of Things of the Indies: Essays Old and New in Early Latin American History*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 1.

enables the scholar of colonial society to address questions of non-elite agency, resistance and negotiation, thereby surpassing an older historiography focused on upper-strata governmental and religious figures, particularly those residing in viceregal capitals (e.g., Mexico City).

Throughout this dissertation I also make the argument that the local archives of Puebla remain woefully understudied by historians of New Spain, Spanish America and the African Diaspora. Puebla's notarial archive boasts hundreds of boxes of virtually uninterrupted series since the late 1530s. Its judicial archive dates from the 1570s and multiple parroquial repositories date from 1585. Far too many scholars have overlooked these priceless sources of information for the comforts of Mexico City's Archivo General de la Nación (AGN) and/or Seville's Archivo General de Indias (AGI). This dissertation project is thus also an explicit attempt to understand the history of slavery in Puebla based on locally-produced documents.

### *Theoretical Framework*

Throughout this study, I have attempted to combine the concerns and methodologies of social history, the ethnohistorical field (largely concerned with issues of Native American continuities and adaptation) and the rapidly-expanding scholarship of the African Diaspora. I find that the study of enslaved urban populations in colonial Mexico requires this combination of approaches in order to adequately comprehend the daily interactions that unfree people sustained among themselves and with the urban societies they shaped and/or encountered. In this regard, I have borrowed heavily from Matthew Restall's idea of a "harmony-hostility dialectic" between African and Indigenous-descended populations.<sup>4</sup> According to Restall, this "dialectical theme of black-native hostility and peaceful black-native interaction" was articulated in the arenas of

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew Restall, "Black Slaves, Red Paint" in *Beyond Black and Red: African-Native Relations in Colonial Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 4-10.

identity, community and cultural change. In turn, this dynamic resulted in a process of interculturalization, informality and diachronic intensification.

Interculturalization describes the reciprocal process of Afro-Indigenous cultural influence and accommodation that would have taken place in any number of scenarios that concentrated African and Native American people (e.g., Puebla's textile mills). Informality refers to the lack of a "systematic or institutional attempt by natives or Africans to impose cultural elements in a way that compares with Spanish efforts, at, for example, religious conversion." This second concept thus privileges the dynamics of daily urban life as played out in marketplace interactions, social gatherings and festivities. Finally, diachronic intensification posits a "blurring of divisions between the two groups and their cultures". There is substantial evidence for this final characteristic of urban Afro-Indigenous interactions in Puebla. By the early eighteenth century one same woman could be referred to as an "india de razón" (a rational Indian), a "mulata aindiada" (an Indianized mulatto woman) and a "parda libre" (a free-colored woman).<sup>5</sup>

Patrick Carroll has recently proposed a similar framework for studying African peoples in the Americas by focusing on rural, Afro-Indigenous interactions. According to Carroll, it is possible to differentiate the experiences of Black *ladinos* versus that of Black *naturales*. The term *ladino* refers to non-Spaniards who learned the Castilian language, and generally adopted to Western mores. *Naturales*, on the other hand, is a more ambiguous term that merely indicates one's belonging to a given society due to having been born there, and thus possessing an organic familiarity with a given cultural, linguistic and religious framework. According to Carroll, while *ladinos* appear frequently in colonial cases that evidence a tense and antagonistic relationship with rural Native Americans, *naturales* of African descent rarely surface in the historical record

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<sup>5</sup> Archivo Histórico Judicial de Puebla (AHJP), Exp. 2941, 1722/10/29. The woman in question was Francisca de los Santos, a 30-year old laundress, who assisted a slave in escaping her owner.

precisely because they "established village kin and cultural ties by marrying into a local Indigenous family and by adopting the local Indigenous lifestyle."<sup>6</sup>

Still, peace and coexistence rarely surface in the historical record. This much is evident in an older historiography of Latin American race relations which emphasized the use of Africans and their descendants as abusive overseers of Indigenous workers. This dissertation challenges this overarching generalization by distancing itself from a) the rural setting of the agricultural hacienda and b) documentation produced by European and Native American elites. While the dangers of relying on the historical testimony of Spanish high officials is self-evident, there are similar risks to consider when studying colonial records produced by the Nahua elites of Central Mexico. Indigenous governors and town councils entered frequent complaints against *morenos* and *pardos*, who allegedly trespassed into Indigenous communities and lands, illegally participated in elections within the *república de indios* or simply altered the traditional way of life. Undoubtedly, actions such as these took place during the colonial period. However, I would argue that these conflicts more often expose Indigenous elites' concerns over class, economic influence, and social control of Indigenous laborers and, more specifically, of Indigenous women. In other words, how accurately do elite-derived documents portray plebeians' views of interethnic relations in New Spain?

I believe that by focusing on locally-produced sources in the colonial urban scenario, our understanding of interethnic relations necessarily changes. As the most valuable commodity in New Spain (only behind bullion), slaves left behind long paper trails that documented their social

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<sup>6</sup> Patrick Carroll, "Black Aliens and Black Natives in New Spain's Indigenous Communities" in *Black Mexico: Race and Society from Colonial to Modern Times*, eds. Ben Vinson III and Matthew Restall (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009), 74-75.

interactions with owners, spouses, godparents, creditors, religious brotherhoods, etc.<sup>7</sup> In the case of pre-1615 Puebla, long-forgotten parish records reveal a surprising number of formal unions between African men and Indigenous women. These records have not been taken into account in studies of Indigenous matrimony, which is usually portrayed as highly endogamous. Logically, then, a far more harmonious Afro-Indigenous reality may have defined quotidian life in the urban centers of New Spain.

This dissertation is thus also an attempt to impact the ethnohistorical field. Scholars of Nahua history must take into account the impact that 200,000 Africans had on colonial Mexico's Indigenous society, economy, culture and politics. Too many people of African descent, both free and enslaved, inhabited the Indigenous neighborhoods (*tlaxilacalli*) of Puebla to have had no effect on local Native American culture, religion, commerce, etc. Given the unbalanced sex ratio produced by the slave trade, thousands of African men sought companionship with thousands of Indigenous women during the early colonial period. By the same token, the possibility of entering formal and/or informal unions with African men, whether free or enslaved, allowed Indigenous females to break with the communal obligations that typically bound them to their native communities. Many of these women were *naborías*, displaced people that had been incorporated into the economy of the viceroyalty's booming cities. As impoverished urban dwellers, they experienced many of the same social, economic, and material conditions that affected the Afro-Poblano population.

This historiographic challenge obviously also extends to scholars of Puebla and New Spain's considerable Spanish population. An older historiography concerned with elite political and religious figures obviously overlooked questions of slave agency, resistance and the

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<sup>7</sup> Tatiana Seijas, "The Slave Market of Colonial Mexico City" (paper presented at the American Historical Association Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C., January 2008).

development of lucrative slave markets. By contrast, the study of urban slavery, and thus of an extensive enslaved group, must highlight the formation of a broad Spanish slave-owning class during the early seventeenth century. Master artisans, royal officials, bishops, lower clergymen, widows and all types of individuals of European ancestry participated and profited from purchasing human beings as chattel in the colonial city. This point needs to be particularly emphasized in a city widely celebrated for its Baroque religiosity, architecture, and artistic production.<sup>8</sup>

As is evident, the work of Douglas Cope has been central to the development of this dissertation. In the *Limits of Racial Domination*, Cope delineated how "elite attempts at racial or ethnic categorizations met with resistance as non-Spaniards pursued their own, often contradictory, ends: social mobility, group solidarity, self-definition." Thus, urban plebeian behavior generally did not coincide with the Spanish ideology of racial hierarchy. Indeed, the exponential growth of the *castas*, a socio-economic category that lumped Blacks together with people of mixed descent, rapidly rendered the Spanish-Indian dual-republic model useless. Moreover, the Spanish-casta dichotomy that emerged during the mid-to-late sixteenth century was also soon discarded for "yet another social dichotomy, based on cultural rather than racial indexes." As upwardly mobile *castas* integrated into the growing Spanish economy, built businesses, and attained greater status, they eroded the socioeconomic distinctions that separated them from a growing number of poor Spaniards.

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<sup>8</sup> Curiously, Poblano nowadays celebrate the colorful dress, coiffure and makeup associated with the folkloric representation of Catarina de San Juan, *la china poblana*. The legend surrounding this devoutly Catholic South Asian woman is a point of pride for the city. Yet few scholars have bothered to acknowledge that a *china* living in early seventeenth-century Puebla was undoubtedly a slave, a *china esclava*. Moreover, in the 1620s, Catarina de San Juan would have been one of thousands of slaves, the vast majority of whom were African. Thus, the legend of the *china poblana* necessitates a slave trade, both transatlantic and transpacific.

But what of the men and women who continued to toil under slavery even as the *sistema de castas* disintegrated? Cope's study masterfully captures the vicissitudes of Mexico City society between 1660 and 1720, when "many slaves filled highly visible but relatively unproductive roles as personal servants to wealthy Spaniards." Unfortunately, this timeframe cannot properly gauge the profound economic impact that enslaved Africans and their descendants had in the major urban centers of New Spain during the early seventeenth century. While domestic service was always an undeniable characteristic of urban slavery, slave labor was central to the functioning of Puebla's early textile mills and transportation systems. Perhaps more importantly, slavery persisted in Puebla and its slave market actually rebounded towards the end of the seventeenth century.

Finally, this dissertation also challenges the historiography of the African Diaspora on a number of fronts. For example, questions of slave agency in matrimony must be scrutinized more carefully under particularly coercive contexts in the Latin American city. Whereas a marriage between Angolans may be interpreted as an attempt to preserve a specific African cultural heritage,<sup>9</sup> the formalization of such unions also proved advantageous to slave owners. The latter generally benefitted from marriages between Africans because they essentially guaranteed the procreation of new generations of slave labor. Another point of contention is the understanding that *pardos/mulatos* are constantly referred to in the literature as people of African descent, while failing to acknowledge the Indigenous and Hispanic components of their ancestry, as well. This is especially problematic when studying mixed-race people who only spoke Nahuatl, or who attempted to serve in Indigenous town councils or Spanish militias. As all *pardos* carried mixed

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<sup>9</sup> Herman Bennett, "Genealogies to a Past: Africa, Ethnicity, and Marriage in Seventeenth Century Mexico," in *New Studies in the History of American Slavery*, eds. Edward E. Baptist et al. (Athena: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 127-147.

bloodlines I prefer more culturally-specific terms such as Afro-Indigenous or Afro-Hispanic to delineate their rich, complex heritage.

Among scholars of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, I hope this study complicates and accentuates the relevance that New Spain had in the unrelenting demand for involuntary African workers. During the first four decades of the seventeenth century, the viceroalties of New Spain and Peru demanded, distributed and consumed slave labor at an unparalleled rate. Moreover, whereas Brazilian sources cannot accurately quantify the demand for African slaves during this period, Mexican records can.<sup>10</sup> The production of Mexican silver, prior to the Minas Gerais gold boom, can now help explain why Portuguese slave traders were so willing to make the lengthy trip to Puebla. By the same token, scholars of the slave trade have overly simplified the slave trade to New Spain as the result of a growing demand for coerced labor in the mines. For the most part, Zacatecas relied on Indigenous miners for the perilous aspects of silver extraction. Africans were simply too valuable (and expensive) to sacrifice in such operations.

By contrast, the Spanish elites of Mexico City did possess the type of wealth needed to maintain large retinues of domestic slaves and urban laborers. However, the capital city and its slave market were inconveniently located for the purposes of distributing slave labor throughout the viceroyalty. During the seventeenth century, the agricultural heartland of New Spain was situated to the south of Mexico City, in the vast plains encircled by the Indigenous city-states of Cholula, Huexotzingo, Tepeaca, and Tlaxcala. A growing textile industry, and its corresponding coerced workforce, was based in the Puebla-Tlaxcala-Atlixco triangle, also south of the viceregal

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<sup>10</sup> Daniel Barros Domingues, David Eltis and Alexandre Vieira Ribeiro have recently produced the first serious attempts to understand the early colonial slave trade to the captaincies of Pernambuco and Bahia. See David Eltis, ed., *Extending the Frontiers: Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).



capital. As a result, this dissertation project will demonstrate that the demand for slave labor in Zacatecas and Mexico City, while significant, has been overstated.

Ultimately, Puebla de los Ángeles emerged as a lucrative slave market due to its ideal positioning as a gateway city between the port of Veracruz and the highlands of Central Mexico. During the seventeenth century, a cluster of burgeoning towns, sugar plantations and agricultural haciendas turned to Puebla's opulent merchants, religious institutions and political figures for financial credit, social prestige and all types of commodities, slaves included. A powerful, internal demand for slaves also ensured that thousands of Africans and their descendants would remain in Puebla proper. In addition to the labor needs generated by the city's textile mills, Spaniards relied on domestic servants for the convents, hospitals and educational institutions that dotted the urban landscape. As a result, the Puebla case may come to be seen as a blueprint for how secondary mainland cities that were neither ports nor capitals came to develop sizeable slave populations in colonial Latin America.

### *Outline*

Chapter 1 addresses the formative years of slavery in Puebla from 1536 to 1580. During the middle decades of the sixteenth century, Spaniards conceived of Puebla as a utopian space for Christian families that would not rely on the exploitation of Indigenous labor. However, this consideration was never extended to a small minority of African descent, whose enslavement was considered a *de facto* privilege of Spanish urban life. The Spanish city council attempted to regulate this African minority by establishing a slave registry known as the *Caja de Negros*, but was soon overwhelmed by the rapidly growing slave population of the city. This initial chapter

makes use of a range of municipal ordinances, personal correspondence and rare published materials.

In Chapter 2, I detail the cultural, social and political implications of Puebla's growing role in the transatlantic slave trade during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Slave life became a central tenet of daily life in Puebla as young Africans and South Asians entered the city's textile mills, religious convents and elite households as skilled and unskilled laborers. Through the use of Inquisition documents, slave transportation contracts and diverse notarial sources, this chapter contextualizes the slave influx to Puebla in the light of terrible Indigenous depopulation. The intricate relationship between the Indigenous majorities of the Puebla-Tlaxcala valley and the incoming African populations will remain a central theme in the following chapters.

Chapter 3 offers a systematic examination of the Puebla slave market based on the study of four thousand bills of slave purchase from 1600-1700. This century-long study intends to demonstrate how Puebla became a central node of the slave trade to New Spain, both before and after Portuguese independence. However, it was the first four decades of the seventeenth century that witnessed a veritable Angolan influx to the city of Puebla. Never again would so many involuntary immigrants enter the colonial city. In this regard, the role played by the Crown-sanctioned slave dealer, the *encomendero de negros*, will be essential to understanding how slaveholding came to be increasingly accessible during the 1620s and 1630s for the greater Spanish population. I also contend that as distinctly urban consumers, Poblanos demanded enslaved African females at a surprising rate.

Chapter 4 explores the ambiguous, often contradictory, existence that slaves and freedmen encountered as apprentices, skilled laborers and debtors in the colonial city. Personal

freedom remained a luxury during the seventeenth century, as evidenced by the very small number of manumission records located in the notarial record. Most promises of manumission simply went unfulfilled and even self-purchase did not represent a viable escape from slavery for most people of African descent in colonial Puebla. Unfortunately, it is now evident that acquiring manumission papers often meant that slaves incurred unpayable debts as nominal freedmen. In turn, the accumulation of these loans often resulted in imprisonment as ex-slaves and their families found themselves trapped in cycles of endemic debt.

Finally, Chapter 5 will address the fascinating topic of formal and informal unions among slaves. Enslaved people in Puebla de los Ángeles had considerable access to the sacrament of matrimony, a religious right they exercised frequently and, at times, instrumentally as a pathway to freedom. However, marriage became a very unbalanced affair in the colonial city as slave men entered formal unions with free women (of all races) at a very elevated rate. Enslaved females did not have this same opportunity and as such were severely limited in the search for spouses, particularly free spouses. Counterintuitively, I contend that marriage between slaves was indicative of both slave agency and slave-owner interference in ecclesiastical affairs.

## ***Chapter 1 – Formative Slavery in the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley, 1536-1580***

This chapter will focus on the re-establishment of slavery in the Puebla region after the arrival of the first Spanish colonizing parties. As will be seen, the native communities of the region had established their own precedent for this practice in the selling and purchasing of *tlatlacotin* men and women. At the fall of México-Tenochtitlán in 1521 however, no form of slavery could have been practiced in Puebla, as the ancient Cuextlaxcoapan had been abandoned centuries before. Only with the arrival of the Spaniards was chattel slavery formally reintroduced. A miniscule community of African men and women would provide the labor needed to maintain the city's first European households. As a semi-permanent Indigenous workforce from Cholula and Tlaxcala fulfilled the city's agricultural demands through the 1550s, African slavery in Puebla acquired distinctly urban characteristics that distinguished it from the sugar plantation model that would take hold in places such as Veracruz, Morelos, and the Bahian Recôncavo.

Puebla's first *Actas de Cabildo*, despite their various flaws, form our primary source of information for this chapter. These municipal minutes and ordinances reveal a foundational presence of enslaved Black men in the city as early as the mid-1530s. At the same time, the *Actas* expose the Spanish authorities' preoccupation over the growing interaction between Black men and Indian women. For the most part, however, the *Actas* preserve an administrative, elitist and ideological perspective of Spanish society, and as such should be treated with extreme caution. The records of another administrative body, *La Caja de Negros*, also document the existence and expansion of a sizable African population in early Puebla. I will analyze the *Caja's* operations in its regulatory capacity and for its role in the early institutionalization of African slavery in mid-sixteenth-century Puebla. By combining the data from these two municipal

institutions with information from López de Velasco's sixteenth-century demographic study of New Spain, I am now able to situate Puebla's slave population at no less than 300 men and women by the year 1550.

Drawing on municipal documentation, colonial chronicles and pioneering studies of slavery, this chapter resolves many long-held doubts regarding the early African presence in the Puebla region. While colonial chroniclers of the city make no mention of Africans (or free Black men) participating in these first years of European settlement, early municipal documentation has revealed the contrary. This early African presence exposes the myth that Puebla would exclusively be settled by self-sustaining Spanish nuclear families and a minimal Indigenous workforce.

Puebla's foundational story received considerable attention by local colonial chroniclers, who associated the establishment of this new European town with a divine colonizing project. In the late seventeenth century, Miguel de Alcalá y Mendiola described how angels laid out the city's grid pattern with ropes, moving the urban plot away from an alternative location that the first settlers had chosen.<sup>1</sup> Gemelli Carreri proposed that Queen Isabel dreamt of angels laying out a city with ropes at the precise time when Puebla was being constructed. Finally, Pedro López de Villaseñor noted that it was Julián Garcés, the influential Dominican bishop of Tlaxcala, who saw angels measuring the plot where the city was founded.

This heavily Christian foundational lore was complemented by the eighteenth-century work of Mariano Fernández de Echeverría y Veytia, who compiled a list of Puebla's original thirty-four settlers. According to Veytia, thirty-three Spanish men and one widow participated in

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<sup>1</sup> Carlos Contreras Cruz and Miguel Ángel Cuenya, *Puebla de los Ángeles: Una ciudad en la historia* (Puebla: BUAP/Océano, 2012), 15-25. Cuenya and Contreras offer the most complete synthesis of the diverse foundational stories of Puebla.

Puebla's establishment between 1531 and 1532.<sup>2</sup> In his account of the city's foundation, Fray Toribio de Benavente claimed that between 7,000 and 8,000 Indigenous workers from Tlaxcala and other surrounding settlements were present at the celebratory mass that was offered on April 16, 1531.<sup>3</sup> However, a much smaller Indigenous component would remain to construct the city. As a result, the local historiography has traditionally emphasized the dual Spanish and Indigenous heritage of early colonial Puebla.

More importantly for our purposes, the records of Puebla's municipal council demonstrate that Africans were present in the colonial city since the 1530s. Spaniards viewed African labor as an entirely acceptable supplement and possible eventual substitute to Indigenous slavery. Important religious figures, such as the archbishop of Mexico, attempted to right this wrong early on, but to no avail. Even as Puebla officials innovated with the *indios de servicio* system in outright rejection of the *encomienda* model, the demand for permanent Black workers continuously escalated during these first five decades of European settlement. In fact, the successful establishment of Briocense migrants and their textile mills in the 1560s and 1570s catalyzed the importation of African slaves to Puebla. This textile-driven development signaled a turning point for the history of African people in Puebla. Africans would no longer serve merely as domestic servants and status markers; the primary Poblano industry now demanded their forced labor as skilled weavers, carders and cloth shearers. As a result, by 1580 the demand for African slaves was as undeniable as their presence in the colonial city.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 23-25.

<sup>3</sup> Julia Hirschberg, "An Alternative to Encomienda: Puebla's *Indios de Servicio*, 1531-1545," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 11, no. 2 (Nov. 1979): 244.

## *Prehispanic Slavery*

The native communities of the central Mexican highlands had several Nahuatl names for the two sites that would one day become the city of Puebla. According to prehispanic lore, the brothers Ulmecatla and Xicalancatl first settled the towns of *Cuextlaxcoapan* and *Huitzalapan*.<sup>4</sup> The first toponym has been dedicated the most study, resulting in a rough translation as "the place of the snakeskin river" or "the river where the snakes shed their skin".<sup>5</sup> Over time, the residents of these early city-states or *altepemeh* engaged in many wars with neighboring settlements, resulting in the their destruction. Just who Cuextlaxcoapan and Huitzalapan's enemies were and why they battled is uncertain, although Cholula's antiquity and proximity to both sites made it a probable candidate.<sup>6</sup> While there is little to no archaeological evidence of these ancient settlements or armed conflicts, one thing is clear. By the time Hernándo Cortes and his forces entered the central highlands in 1519, Cuextlaxcoapan was little more than an uninhabited plain and had been so for quite some time.<sup>7</sup>

Very little is known about early forms of prehispanic slavery in the greater Puebla-Tlaxcala valley. Within the Central Mexican highlands two major slave markets monopolized the sale and

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<sup>4</sup> Fray Juan de Torquemada, *Primera parte de los veinte y un libros rituales y monarchia indiana...* (Madrid: 1723) I, 32. The siblings were the third and fourth sons of the Iztac Mixcuatl, the legendary resident of "the place of the seven caves," also known as Chicomoztoc.

<sup>5</sup> Fray Agustin de Vetancur, "Tratado de la Ciudad de la Puebla de los Angeles, y grandezas que la ilustran," in *Theatro Mexicano. Descripción breve de los sucesos ejemplares históricos y religiosos del nuevo mundo de las Indias* (México: Editorial Porrúa, 1982). Vetancur also proposes the interpretation of Cuextlaxcoapan as "the place where the entrails of the sacrificed were disposed," although we have no context for who these sacrificial victims were, or who was sacrificing them.

<sup>6</sup> A ground-breaking discovery on Puebla's prehispanic origins has recently come to light in the archaeological excavation of la Casa del Mendrugo. The jade, conch and ceramic funerary relics of a noble couple found at this location present a distinctively Olmec influence and have been dated to the year 2000 BCE. See the online archives of *La Jornada de Oriente*, Sección Cultura, Dec. 6, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Torquemada, I, 47. "En la Gentilidad estuvo poblado, y con las guerras en aquel tiempo quedó de Indios despoblado, llamabasse *Cuixtlaxcoapan* en idioma mexicano..."

purchase of human beings: Izúcar and Azcapotzalco.<sup>8</sup> Izúcar (the prehispanic altepetl of Itzocan, a mere 67 kilometers from Puebla) became a focus of the Triple Alliance's military efforts during the mid-fifteenth century against the enemy city-states of Huexotzingo, Cholula and Atlixco. In the writings of Tezozomoc, the merchants of the Izúcar market specialized in slaves, gold, feathers and precious stones, products that directly appealed to the social elites of the region.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, we do not know who these slaves were or from what altepetl they originated.

However, the rediscovery of an Indigenous chronicle from the nearby town of Tepeteopan indicates that yet another prehispanic slave market operated in the highlands. The *Anales de Tepeteopan* specify that slaves were sold on the plains of *Cuextlacoapanzinco*, on the actual site of Puebla around the year 1370.<sup>10</sup> This is an important assertion as it indicates that prior to the military rise of the Triple Alliance, slave markets may have been more commonplace and certainly existed outside of Azcapotzalco and Izúcar. Furthermore, these annals note that Indigenous commoners, or *macehuales*, were sold at this location in exchange for cacao beans.<sup>11</sup> This particular form of exchange marks a departure from the norm in that most slave purchases in prehispanic society were priced in cotton cloths, at least during the fifteenth century.<sup>12</sup> In Cuextlacoapanzinco, the enslaved were bound together with cane-like reeds and sold "because

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<sup>8</sup> Carlos Paredes Martínez, *El impacto de la conquista y colonización española en la antigua Coatlalpan (Izúcar, Puebla) en el primer siglo colonial* (México: CIESAS/Cuadernos de la Casa Chata, 1991), 14-15.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* The establishment of such an important commercial center had the explicit purpose of causing commercial conflict and an eventual war with Huexotzingo, Atlixco and Cholula.

<sup>10</sup> *Anales de Tepeteopan: De Xochitecuhtli a don Juan de San Juan Olhuatecatl, 1370-1675*, eds. Blanca Lara Tenorio et al. (México: INAH/CIESAS, 2009), 32-33.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* "...allá en el otro tianguiz de la llanura, junto a Cuextlaxquapamzinco (ciudad de Puebla), allí se vendían macehuales a cinco cacao, atados con bejucos, los ataban porque pagaban 'su tributo en especie'."

<sup>12</sup> Lourdes Mondragón Barrios, *Esclavos africanos en la Ciudad de México: El servicio doméstico durante el siglo XVI* (México: CONACULTA/INAH, 1999), 17. According the Florentine Codex, slaves bought for ritual sacrifices were priced at 30 cotton cloths. Captives with attractive physiques and singing and dancing abilities were purchased for 40 cotton cloths.



they paid their tribute in specie," thereby suggesting that these captives belonged to a subjected and commercially-poor altepetl that had no other natural resources or manufactured goods with which to pay the dominant city-states of the region. Curiously, these particular annals do not make use of the term *tlatlacotin*, the Nahuatl term that Spaniards associated with their concept of slaves during the sixteenth century.<sup>13</sup>

In his study of the political organization of the Central Mexican highlands, Alfredo López Austin defines the singular form *tlacotli* as "one temporarily bound to a creditor and obligated to render personal services".<sup>14</sup> Creditors purchased tlatlacotlin from Indigenous slave traders known as *tlacanamacac*, literally "sellers of people" in the Nahuatl language. Typically, tlatlacotin were forced to sell themselves into this particular form of servitude after incurring gambling debts or committing severe crimes. War captives were commonly slaves, too. In addition free men could "lease" themselves into slavery, an arrangement in which family members were allowed to substitute their labor in place of the debtor.<sup>15</sup> Their liberty was secured only after fulfilling the original debt and as such was imagined as a form of economic bondage. In other cases, families facing famine in drought-stricken areas resorted to selling children they could no longer maintain as a desperate survival measure.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The use of macehual for slave is rare within Nahuatl documentation and perhaps reflects the indigenous chronicler's unfamiliarity with the term tlatlacotin at the time he wrote (or copied) the annals. James Lockhart has suggested that by the mid-seventeenth century specific terms for classes of people, such as tlatlacotin, began to disappear. At the same time, the term "macehual" was used to approximate the colonial term "indio". See James Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992) 111, 115-116.

<sup>14</sup> Alfredo López Austin, "Organización política en el altiplano central de México durante el posclásico." *Historia Mexicana* 23, 4 (Apr.- Jun. 1974): 534-535. López Austin considered war captives, or *mamaltin*, a completely separate social category as these men were associated with ritual sacrifice. This does not appear to have been the case for *tlatlacotlin*.

<sup>15</sup> Mondragón Barrios, 19.

<sup>16</sup> Camilla Townsend, "Sex, Servitude, and Politics among Pre-Conquest Nahuas as Seen in the Cantares Mexicanos" *The Americas* 62, 3 (Jan. 2006): 359. The famine-induced selling of Mexica children was a common phenomenon during a fifteen-year period of severe droughts during the mid-fifteenth century.

Other scholars of Mexico's prehispanic and early colonial past have also noted that while Nahuatl populations certainly practiced slavery, the Indigenous form differed greatly from the European model that came to be established shortly after the Spanish conquest. For the most part tlatlacotin labored as domestic servants and only rarely worked the land, a task typically reserved for macehuales.<sup>17</sup> According to James Lockhart, nobles and commoners alike owned domestic slaves of this type, many of whom were young foreigners and orphans. Lockhart suggests that during "preconquest times, tlatlacotin may have been quite numerous and several subtypes may have existed... but by a few years after the conquest, slaves were a minor population barely distinguished from other menial servants and lower dependents".<sup>18</sup>

The non-perpetuating nature of prehispanic slavery provides clues as to why tlatlacotin disappeared so rapidly after the conquest. Contrary to the Iberian form of slavery introduced during the 1520s and 1530s, Indigenous slavery was not transmitted from mother to child. As a result, tlatlacotin servitude was for the most part restricted to a single individual and generation. These domestic slaves carried out unskilled tasks such as sweeping and carrying water; replacing them with free workers would have been quite simple. Early census records from the 1550s indicate that Indigenous slavery had virtually disappeared in nearby Morelos, thereby confirming the argument that "Central Mexico was never a slave-dependent economy".<sup>19</sup> The actual institution of chattel slavery only re-emerged with the arrival of the Iberians and the foundation of the city of Puebla in 1531-1532. And yet, there is no mention of Africans, slave or free, in any of the city's foundational stories.

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<sup>17</sup> Townsend, 357-358.

<sup>18</sup> Lockhart, *The Nahuas*, 99-100.

<sup>19</sup> Townsend, 358.

### *Early Slavery in Puebla de los Ángeles*

In part, it is quite fitting that not a single Spanish chronicler mentions a foundational African presence during the settlement of Puebla de los Ángeles. During the first twenty years of Spanish rule in the central Mexican highlands, Africans were an uncommon sight. Although conspicuous due to their skin color, the native populations of the region perceived Africans as integral members of the colonizing parties of the 1520s and 1530s. Amidst the ferocity of the early contact period, the local population of Tecoaque (in the modern-day state of Tlaxcala) ritually sacrificed Black men and women traveling with fifty of Cortés' soldiers and his Indigenous allies in the summer of 1520.<sup>20</sup>

The archaeological findings from Tecoaque thus allow us to confirm that women of African descent were present in the early conquest of the Central Mexican highlands. Based on the skeletal remains found on the site, the people of Tecoaque sacrificed at least five Black women, sixty-two European men and one Indian noble during Xócotl Huetzi, the feast of the fire deity. In a belated relation of the attack on his party, Cortés does not differentiate between the Black and Iberian members of his expedition. Instead, he merely mentions "forty-five peons" and "five men on horseback".<sup>21</sup> Black women were held in particularly high esteem based on their positioning around an Indigenous noble from Ocotelulco. Eventually, those first pioneering Black men and women would be associated with the growing Spanish presence in México-Tenochtitlan. However, on the rare occasion that Africans ventured outside of the city, they tended to serve as military auxiliaries within a context of conquest.

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<sup>20</sup> Enrique Martínez Vargas and Ana María Jarquín Pacheco "Sacrificios de negros al inicio de la conquista de México," in *¿Donde están? Investigaciones sobre Afromexicanos*, ed. Emiliano Gallaga Murrieta (México: Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, 2009), 111-113.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

While recognizing the African participation in the conquest and colonization project, the Indigenous did distinguish the first Black men to set foot in Mesoamerica from their European counterparts. The Indigenous authors of Book XII of the *Florentine Codex*, noted that Moteucçoma, the ruler of the city-state of México-Tenochtitlán, took the Spanish "for gods, considered them gods, worshiped them as gods. They were called and given the name of gods who have come from heaven, and the blacks were called soiled gods".<sup>22</sup> Thus, these Black conquistadors were regaled with the same lavish dinners and Nahua rituals as their Spanish mates.

A powerful curiosity and dread permeated the encounter of these men and their cultures between 1519 and 1521. In an attempt to resolve whether the conquistadors were mortal or could be turned back, Moteucçoma sent his high priests and soothsayers to study these foreigners while attempting to satisfy their perceived demands. He even sent captives "in case [the Spaniards] should drink their blood."<sup>23</sup> Not surprisingly, the Spaniards found such practices revolting, but what of the Black perspective towards this Nahua ritual? Drinking human blood was a cultural feature of various African societies, particularly of the militaristic Jaga or Imbangala people of the greater Angola region. Yet in all likelihood, the Black conquistadors, described in the *Florentine Codex* as men familiarized if not raised in Iberian culture, would have been just as astonished when Moctecçoma's emissaries "sprinkled blood in the food".<sup>24</sup>

Puebla's early Spanish chroniclers were far more concerned with tracing the religious significance of the city's foundation than detailing if any lowly African slaves participated in the

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<sup>22</sup> James Lockhart, *We People Here: Nahuatl Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 82. In the original Nahuatl, the phrase "And the blacks were called soiled gods" reads "auh in tilitique teucacatzacti mitoque".

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

enterprise. Numerous versions of just how, when, and why the city was founded in the years 1531-1532 were produced during the colonial period.<sup>25</sup> Puebla's foundation myth remains polemic to this day, although there is relative certainty that a group of thirty or so Spanish settlers ventured forth from Mexico City to establish a new town on the southeastern side of Popocatepetl-Iztaccihuatl mountain range. The original intent of the settlers was to create a neat, efficient city, meticulously designed on a grid-pattern, one that would stand apart from the rest of New Spain by rejecting the Indigenous exploitation inherent in the *encomienda* system.<sup>26</sup> Instead, Puebla was to provide a new, Christian model of urban development based on the independent labor of Spanish nuclear families.

Unfortunately, the ideal of Puebla succumbed rapidly once its settlers faced the harsh realities of constructing a new settlement. An estimated 8000 Indians from Cholula, Tlaxcala and Huexotzingo helped erect the foundations for the nascent town in April of 1531.<sup>27</sup> Heavy rains and a flooding Atoyac river wiped out that initial attempt at Spanish settlement that year, forcing the abandonment of the town. In the fall of 1532, the surrounding altepeme once more provided the Spaniards with the labor needed for Puebla's second foundation.<sup>28</sup> By this point, the utopian project had been completely written off. Spanish settlers would receive the labor of thirty Indians

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<sup>25</sup> The city's colonial historiography has been heavily dependent on municipal documentation, particularly with respect to land and water grants, and religious institutions, thus privileging the notion of pious, dual and all-encompassing Spanish and Indian republics. See Mariano Fernández de Echeverría y Veytia, *Historia de la fundación de la ciudad de la Puebla de los Ángeles en la Nueva España, su descripción y presente estado*, ed. Efraín Castro Morales (Puebla: Ediciones Altiplano, 1962); Miguel de Alcalá y Mendiola, *Descripción en bosquejo de la imperial cesárea muy noble y muy leal ciudad de Puebla de los Ángeles* (Puebla: BUAP/ Fomento Editorial, 1997); Pedro López de Villaseñor, *Cartilla vieja de la nobilísima ciudad de Puebla*. (Puebla: Secretaría de Cultura, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> Hirschberg, 242-244.

<sup>27</sup> Fausto Marín Tamayo, *La división racial en Puebla de los Ángeles bajo el régimen colonial* (Puebla: Centro de Estudios Históricos de Puebla, 1960), 8-10.

<sup>28</sup> Hirschberg, 245-246.

per *vecino* for the construction of their individual residences, and another twenty for the cultivation of their fields.<sup>29</sup>

As unsuccessful as various aspects of the Puebla experiment proved to be, the settlement of this new Spanish town amidst the Indigenous hinterland did introduce a number of reforms in relation to the use of native laborers. The Franciscan influence on the city founders proscribed instituting the dominant labor-acquiring *encomienda* system, by which entire towns were subjected to individual Spanish conquistadors and high officials.<sup>30</sup> Instead, Puebla would receive the weekly rotating service of 1300 to 1600 *indios de servicio* from Cholula and Tlaxcala, with smaller contingents continuously arriving from Calpan, Huejotzingo and Totimehuacan.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the Puebla city council did not favor the powerful conquistador class in the allotment of these Indigenous workers. Instead, *indios de servicio* were strategically and temporarily given to married men, preferably to those who had not participated in the military conquest of the region.<sup>32</sup>

The implementation of the *indios de servicio* system from 1532 to 1545 had important consequences for the social, demographic and labor development of early colonial Puebla. For the receiving party, matrimony became fundamental to acquiring the Indigenous labor that settlers so direly needed. In many cases this meant establishing formal, Church-sanctioned unions with the native nobility, as Spanish women were particularly scarce at this time. In demographic terms, the constant influx of Tlaxcalteca and Cholulteca laborers led to the early

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<sup>29</sup> Marín Tamayo, 15.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Hirschberg, 252-253.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 255-256. Approximately 67% of the Spanish men receiving *indios de servicio* were married, another 11.3% were widowed. Single men only accounted for 2.6% of the total.

establishment of Indigenous neighborhoods on the periphery of the Spanish traza.<sup>33</sup> Once the Crown terminated this particular labor arrangement, many of these temporary workers would stay in Puebla to become a permanent and remunerated labor force. As a result, the year 1545 would mark a watershed moment for the history of labor relations in the city. Although the Indigenous would undoubtedly constitute the bulk of the workforce, the door was now formally open for a new type of laborer: the African slave.

Thus, from the very outset, Puebla must be characterized as a multiracial city and one heavily dependent on non-European labor. Furthermore, because of the disproportionate number of Spanish males to females, *mestizaje* amidst early Poblanos dated back to the city's original inhabitants (sixty-eight Spanish residents by 1534), twenty who were legitimately married to native women.<sup>34</sup> Mestizos then, should have played a significant role in the development of sixteenth-century Puebla. However, the historical record is silent with regards to this particularity. Elizabeth Kuznesof has argued that during the early to mid-sixteenth century Spanish society in Puebla absorbed the children of unions between Spanish men and Indigenous women, particularly when the latter belonged to the local nobility.<sup>35</sup> As a result, Spaniards, Indians, and mestizos would have constituted the first Poblano society as described by the city's colonial chroniclers.

People of African descent were a definite presence in the city of Puebla since at least 1536, when an early piece of municipal legislation first makes mention of *negros*. These

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<sup>33</sup> Hirschberg, 259. "Although Indians had originally been forbidden to live in Puebla in the interests of social experimentation, by 1534 some had settled permanently in the city, and by 1545 Puebla was officially receiving Indian vecinos."

<sup>34</sup> Marin Tamayo, 16. It should be noted that this high rate of Spanish-Indian racial mixture (29.4%) was tempered by the arrival of the Spanish women ("para hacer vida maridable") from the 1550s onward.

<sup>35</sup> Elizabeth Anne Kuznesof, "More Conversation on Race, Class, and Gender," *Colonial Latin American Review*, 5 (1996): 129-133.

municipal minutes, or *Actas de Cabildo*, document the Spanish elite's perspective of the development of a very young settlement and as such, should be treated with caution. When referencing the city's Black population, the *actas* taxonomize Afro-Poblanos into four categories, as 1) a threat to the Indigenous population, 2) inconvenient to greater society when colluding with Indians, 3) physically endangering Spanish rule, and 4) as part of a raucous and incomprehensible urban underclass. Despite the blatant bias found in these particular sources, the city's municipal minutes have also preserved the earliest references to an African presence in colonial Puebla de los Ángeles.

Technically, Africans should never have participated in the development of Puebla, since there was to be no dependence on forced labor in the first place. This is an important issue and one that has not been previously addressed by the local historiography. Franciscans and Crown officials alike clearly demonstrated a genuine preoccupation over the exploitation of the Indigenous, but this concern did not extend to Blacks. On the contrary, a small, enslaved African population appears to have accompanied the Spanish colonization project in the early years since Puebla's foundation. As we shall see, both *indios de servicio* and Black slaves worked together since the 1530s in the nascent city. We do not know who these first Black men were, but their skin color appeared sufficient to distinguish them within the city's *tianguiz*, or Indigenous marketplace.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Archivo Municipal de Puebla (AMP), *Actas de Cabildo*, Vol. 4, f. 137/135r, 1536/02/28. "En este dia los dichos señores ordenaron y mandaron que por quanto en el tianguiz de la ciudad los ~~españoles~~ y negros que a el van hacen mucho daño e bellaquas y las yndias del tianguiz reciben daño, por tanto mandaron que se pregone publicamente que ningun ~~español~~ de la ciudad ni negro en ninguna manera vaya a el dicho tianguiz, so pena de un peso de oro de minas, la tercera parte para el acusador, y la tercera parte para obras de la dicha ciudad, y la otra tercera parte para el juez que lo sentenciare. Y esto se entiende ~~a los vecinos~~ y estantes en la dicha ciudad y verá el teniente desde el dia que sea pregone y si algun español hiciere daño a las yndias en el dho tianguiz que pague la dicha pena y que si su amo del negro no quisiere pagar la pena le den cincuenta azotes en la plaza."



*In the City of Angels of this New Spain on the twenty-eighth day of February 1536, the members of the city council ordered that as far as the city's tianguiz is concerned, it is noted that ~~Spaniards~~ and Blacks go to it and cause great harm and rifts, and that the market's Indian women are harmed, therefore it is to be proclaimed that no ~~Spaniard~~ nor Black man may go to the tianguiz... and the lieutenant shall see to it that if a ~~Spaniard~~ harm the Indian women in the tianguiz he shall pay the said fine [of one gold peso] and that if the owner of the Black man does not desire to pay the fine, then he [the Black man] will be given fifty lashes in the plaza.*

This initial reference to an early African presence is extremely significant to the history of slavery in Puebla for a number of reasons. Initially, this relatively standard piece of legislation targeted both Blacks and Spaniards. However, over time this general condemnation of two groups' behavior became a specifically race-based law with differing penalties and consequences. Within the original document the term Spaniard was crossed out in every instance. Instead, the public proclamation of the ordinance would have only singled out the city's African community, this group's abuse of Indigenous women, and the corporal punishment to be received for their behavior. Thus, what was supposed to have been a measure to protect Indigenous women in the marketplace in practice became a specifically enacted law against Blacks.<sup>37</sup>

In this juxtaposition of Indigenous victim vs. African aggressor another parallelism is evident. The Spanish city council identified Blacks as male and Indians as female. This gendered characterization of Puebla's African and Indigenous populations may have in fact been accurate (with respect to the imbalanced ratio of Black men to Black women) in the first five years since the city's founding. However, the 1536 Acta also foreshadows the colonizing party's growing preoccupation with Afro-Indigenous contact. This concern would be increasingly evident by the

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<sup>37</sup> When referencing the city's black population, these municipal records can be easily classified into four categories: 1) As a threat to the indigenous population, 2) inconvenient to greater society when colluding with Indians, 3) physically endangering Spanish rule, and 4) as part of a raucous and incomprehensible urban underclass.

end of the century as African men sought Indigenous women as wives. Finally, in this first reference to an African presence in Puebla, the *term* negro was clearly defined in reference to an enslaved individual devoid of any agency before the law. Only his owner could pay the fine to liberate him. Suffice it to say that the earliest legislation on Puebla's Black population defined *negros* as criminal slaves.

### *La Caja de Negros: The First Slave Registry*

If during the 1530s the early Afro-Poblano presence was already associated with slavery, in the two following decades such connotations would grow stronger with the establishment of the *Caja de Negros*. In his pioneering study on Mexico's Black population, Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán lamented the loss of these registers, which would have preserved the memory of an early African settlement in New Spain (and modern Mexico).<sup>38</sup> Although we lack the foundational dates for other cities, in 1541 Puebla's Spanish Cabildo established this administrative body to address all issues related to slavery.<sup>39</sup> Pedro López de Villaseñor recounts that the Caja consisted of two judges, a scribe, and two bounty hunters (*cuadrilleros*) for runaway slaves. Each of these men would be paid 50 gold pesos annually for their services. More importantly, the Caja would produce a register of all *negro*, *mulato*, and *morisco* slaves over the age of fifteen. As each major Spanish settlement was supposed to produce its own records this register would presumably aid in the recovery of runaway slaves and thus prevent the formation of *cimarrón*, or runaway, communities, which were already forming around Veracruz at the time. In addition, slave owners

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<sup>38</sup> Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *La población negra de México: Estudio etnohistórico* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1972), 206.

<sup>39</sup> López de Villaseñor, 97.

were required to deposit an annual fee of two pesos per slave into a three-key safebox in order to maintain the body's administrative fees.

Although this institution would disappear sometime before the early seventeenth century, Puebla's *Caja de Negros* was active and well-funded during the 1550s. Though the actual slave registers are lost, a copy of the Caja's activities for the year 1553 survives in the city's first municipal volumes.<sup>40</sup> In this published transcription of the Puebla slave registry, three city officials reported that the Caja contained 576 pesos derived from 288 slaves. The latter number is of some significance as it only referred to those enslaved men and women over the age of fifteen whose owners had actually gone through the trouble (and cost) of having them registered. As a result the children of slave unions, in addition to the undetermined number of those of Spanish, mestizo, and Indian fathers, would not be included in the Caja's listing. While an exact calculation of just how many children of full or partial African ancestry lived in Puebla is impossible at this point, the Afro-Poblano population circa 1550 would have actually consisted of well over 300 individuals.

Local officials responsible for the Caja were more than aware that a significant number of slave owners were eluding their efforts and asked the authorities to help minimize this problem. In their report they alluded to the fact that it was very difficult for them to maintain a reliable record with the increasing number of slaves brought in daily from "Spain, Guinea or other parts of New Spain".<sup>41</sup> Even the natural growth of Puebla's Black population appeared problematic, as Spanish masters were supposed to register slave children with the authorities as soon as they reached fifteen years of age. Clearly, there were a number of financial and social incentives not

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<sup>40</sup> *Suplemento del libro número primero de la fundación y establecimiento de la muy noble y muy leal Ciudad de los Ángeles*, ed. Efraín Castro Morales (Puebla: Ayuntamiento del Municipio de Puebla, 2009), doc. 135, ff. 245r-245v.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

to do so. Finally, city officials also suggested extending the Caja's jurisdiction to the towns of Orizaba and Tehuacan, thereby indicating a significant African population in both sites as early as the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>42</sup>

A number of structural factors rendered the *Caja de Negros* unviable by the last two decades of the sixteenth century. The Black population of the greater Puebla region was simply expanding at a much greater rate than could be controlled by such a small administrative body. By 1574, the cosmographer López de Velasco estimated that 500 Black men and women lived in the city, in addition to a very vague population of "muchos mulatos".<sup>43</sup> This trend would continue well into the early seventeenth century, when a massive influx of African slaves overwhelmed the Caja's capabilities. By that point, Afro-Poblanos would have composed the bulk of a slave population numbering in the thousands. Furthermore, it was not a passive population. The bounty hunters hired by the Caja continually brought in runaway slaves from Mexico City, where they sought anonymity amid a rapidly expanding African community.

Despite its obvious flaws and early downfall, the *Caja de Negros* established an important number of paradigms for the study of race relations in Puebla. First of all, it defined slavery as an institution that could legally bind people categorized as *negro*, *mulato* or *morisco*. Catholic preoccupations over *moriscos* and their dubious Muslim ancestry faded over time, while African ancestry became the most important signifier in this characterization. Asian slaves were still not considered within the jurisdiction of Mexican slavery at this point, although they would be included by the early seventeenth century. Second, the children of slaves lived within a vague

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* "...es necesario que los negros que hay por manifestar en la comarca desta ciudad, así en el ingenio de Oliçaba, y en Teguacan y en las otras partes que son más cercanas a esta ciudad que a la de México, Guaxaca, a la de Veracruz, se manifiesten en la caxa desta ciudad conforme a las ordenanças de vuestra señoría ilustrísima."

<sup>43</sup> Aguirre Beltrán, 208. Aguirre Beltrán citing López de Velasco also notes that 500 Spaniards lived in the city, although they remained in the minority compared to the 3000 indigenous men and women who resided in Puebla.

system that institutionalized the ownership of their parents' bodies but did not immediately restrict theirs. This technicality may have actually facilitated the early manumission of slave children, who as members of Spanish households could ingratiate themselves with their owners more easily than their parents could. Finally, the slave registers produced by the Caja allow us to state definitively that a significant enslaved African population lived within the city of Puebla prior to the 1580s.

### *Human Property in the Mid-Sixteenth Century*

As human property, African slaves would become increasingly visible in the notarial archives of the city of Puebla during the mid-sixteenth century. Peter Boyd-Bowman's pioneering study of this underutilized source reveals that the institutionalization of African slavery was well under way in Puebla by the 1540s, if not earlier. In his influential article on early Poblano slavery, Boyd-Bowman located bills of slave purchases for approximately 240 men and women of African descent for the years 1540 through 1555.<sup>44</sup> Out of these, only thirty-three were considered *ladino*, or conversant in Castilian language (and culture). By contrast forty-six slaves were classified as *bozales*, the term used to identify African slaves who had recently arrived from their homelands and had little understanding of Spanish society.<sup>45</sup> Another five were labeled "entre bozal y ladino", as if to recognize their growing, but still limited, familiarity with the colonial scenario. No further information was available for the remainder of the slaves sold in the city, but considering the timeframe and prices given, it is safe to say that a majority of them would have been recent African arrivals.

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<sup>44</sup> Peter Boyd-Bowman, "Negro Slaves in Early Colonial Mexico," *The Americas* 26, 2 (Oct. 1969): 134-151.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

Although slave prices fluctuated considerably during the mid-sixteenth century, the average price for both male and female slaves at this time centered around 105 pesos (a fraction of what they would cost fifty years later).<sup>46</sup> *Ladino* and skilled slaves would have been placed at a premium, especially considering the scarcity of Spanish artisans and craftsmen at the time. In his study, Boyd-Bowman highlights the distinctively West African composition of this first slave community; Biafara, Bran, Zape and Wolof individuals together account for seventy men and women. Blanca Lara Tenorio's study for the same period also confirms this finding as Biafara and Bran people feature prominently during the years 1547-1552.<sup>47</sup>

Boyd-Bowman's finding is of some significance and confirms current research on the Atlantic slave trade. During the early to mid-sixteenth century, most of the African slaves in Europe and America came from the immediate West African coast, among the countries today constituted by Senegal, Guinea-Conakry, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone and Liberia.<sup>48</sup> Tellingly, no Angola slaves and only ten Kongo individuals from West Central Africa surface in Boyd-Bowman's research. By contrast, during the *asiento* period (1595-1639), when the Spanish Crown sold Portuguese merchants the exclusive right to the Spanish American slave trade, most slaves would hail from West Central Africa. But at this point in the mid-sixteenth century, most slaves were still being introduced from the regions closest to the Iberian Peninsula. In other cases however, slaves catalogued as *negros* had actually been born in Spain or Portugal, or at least raised there since a very young age.

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Blanca Lara Tenorio, *Esclavitud en Puebla y Tepeaca, 1545-1639* (Mexico: INAH/Cuadernos de los Centros Puebla-Tlaxcala, 1976), 16. The first four extant slave purchases in Lara's study include three West African slaves (2 Biafra and 1 Bran) and a couple from Puerto Rico.

<sup>48</sup> Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas: Restoring the Links* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 158-159.

It is important to note that during the mid-sixteenth century, the trans-Atlantic slave trade primarily operated via the European ports of Cádiz and Lisbon. Many of the first African slaves to set foot on American soil would have been registered as originating from European ports, when this was not technically true. During the first sixty or seventy years of the sixteenth century, Portuguese merchants increasingly traded for West African slaves that they would later sell throughout the Iberian Peninsula. As a result, important commercial centers such as Lisbon, Cádiz and Seville would receive significant slave populations.<sup>49</sup> Some of these involuntary migrants would stay in Spain and Portugal, but for the vast majority enslavement at the hands of the Lusophones meant eventually being sold to Mexico, Peru or Brazil. For an example of how an African slave could have been purchased in Spain and brought to Puebla, consider the following 1566 letter from one Luis de Córdoba, a resident of Puebla, writing his wife in Seville and persuading her to make the trip across the Atlantic.

*Therefore, sell what you own over there... and buy the service of two slave women and a Black slave [man] that they may serve you on the sea [voyage], make sure these three pieces be of very good quality, as they are what is most needed here...*<sup>50</sup>

Buying slaves or "pieces" for company and security for the voyage across the Atlantic appears frequently in the letters written by Spanish emigrants to their relatives back on the Peninsula. In most cases, such concerns could be easily alleviated by securing the passage of a nephew, cousin, or brother-in-law. Yet Córdoba's letter represents a shift in the reason behind the demand for African slaves. Spaniards in New Spain, whether in rural or urban settings, simply needed permanent workers, whether skilled or unskilled. The dehumanization of African slaves by

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<sup>49</sup> See Chapter 1 for a more detailed discussion on this topic.

<sup>50</sup> Enrique Otte and Guadalupe Albi Romero, eds. *Cartas privadas de emigrantes a Indias* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993), 147-149. "Así que, por tanto, señora, vended lo que allí tenéis, y cobrad lo que debe el rey, pues que decís que no lo habéis cobrado, y comprad servicio que os sirva por la mar de un par de esclavas y un esclavo negro, tres piezas que sean muy buenas, que es lo que más acá es menester..."

labeling them as "pieces" (*piezas* or *peças*) was already well established in slave trading circles at the time this particular letter was penned.<sup>51</sup> Politics, disease and religious zeal had made Indian slavery an untenable proposition by the 1560s.<sup>52</sup> Africans on the other hand were more immune to European-introduced diseases and for the most part, did not constitute a target population for religious conversion. Black slaves, then, would replace Indian captives. Perceptions of skill had little or nothing to do with this shift. The crux of the matter was the permanency and, if possible, perpetuity of this new worker base.

### *A Religious Plea*

The abolition of Indigenous slavery in 1542 (in the "pacified" areas of Spanish America) remains a crucial point towards understanding how and why African slavery become so firmly entrenched in New Spain towards the end of the sixteenth century. Bartolomé de las Casas led the successful fight against the enslavement of Mexico's native populations, although enforcing their humane treatment at the hands of the colonizers proved an entirely different matter. The Indigenous were still subjected to various forms of coerced labor through the *encomienda* and *repartimiento*.<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, by the mid-sixteenth century it became clear that Indian slaves could no longer be had (unless acquired under the pretext of "just war", a common occurrence on the northern frontiers of the viceroyalty). Moreover, the native inhabitants of the Central Mexican region were in theory guaranteed a judicial persona and the right to present complaints

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<sup>51</sup> John L. Vogt, "The Lisbon Slave House and African Trade, 1486-1521" *Proceedings from the American Philosophical Society* 117, no. 1 (Feb. 1973): 2-4.

<sup>52</sup> Mondragón Barrios, 48. Among the epidemics that decimated the indigenous population of central Mexico those for the following years were particularly severe: 1520-21, 1531 y 1532, 1566, 1587-88 y 1592-93.

<sup>53</sup> The former refers to a Crown-sanctioned grant of tribute and labor to an individual Spaniard, while the latter system consisted of a weekly rotating allotment of indigenous workers intended to benefit the broader Spanish population.



before tribunals exclusively dedicated to their cause. A profound religious element factored in the "humanization" of the Indigenous. The efforts of Franciscan and Dominican missionaries were paramount in determining that as Europe was being lost to Protestantism, the Indies had to be salvaged for the sake of Catholicism. The Indigenous people of Mexico featured prominently in this grand scheme, their enslavement could not.

Clearly, the Church of the sixteenth century did not have the same concerns for the African slaves that were gradually becoming more and more numerous in New Spain. Black slavery expanded significantly during the early 1500s on the Iberian Peninsula and the Atlantic islands. An entire logic of justification was already in place when the first African slaves made their way into the central highlands of Mexico. All this would change with the New Laws of 1542. The abolition of Indigenous slavery naturally resulted in a question that few theologians bothered to answer: If the native inhabitants of the Indies were to be free, what kept the African men and women of New Spain enslaved?

The writings and official correspondence of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas clarify some of the doubts with regards to the implementation of Indigenous versus African slavery in early Spanish America. Even as he agitated for the end of Indigenous slavery, Las Casas requested and received the rights to transport twenty-four Black slaves to his newly-appointed bishopric in Chiapas (southern New Spain) in 1543.<sup>54</sup> Yet by 1555, the Dominican had retracted his call for substituting Indigenous slaves with Africans as he found the latter's captivity equally unjust. Five years later, Las Casas laid out a stern critique of the early transatlantic trade, one dominated by

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<sup>54</sup> Isacio Pérez Fernández, *Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, O.P. De defensor de los indios a defensor de los negros* (Salamanca: Editorial San Esteban, 1995), 36-37, 42-43, 73, 92-93. In 1516, Las Casas, acting on behalf of a group of Spanish *encomienda* holders, requested a royal license to take "a dozen blacks" to the island of Hispaniola. The colonizers of Hispaniola would then "release the indians they had" and held as slaves. It should be noted, however, that Black slaves had been introduced to the Caribbean since Columbus' second voyage and by Spanish settlers since 1501. In 1518 and 1531, he would once again request Black slaves, now not merely for domestic service, but for hard labor in the first sugar cane plantations (*ingenios*) of the Spanish Caribbean.

Portuguese seafarers, in his *Historia de las Indias*.<sup>55</sup> It should be noted that like the overwhelming majority of the thinkers of his age, Las Casas was not concerned with the institution of slavery *per se*. The Dominican fought to eradicate the illicit enslavement of the Indigenous, first, and Africans, second.

In 1560, the archbishop of Mexico, Fray Alonso de Montúfar, perhaps influenced by the work of Las Casas, attempted to expose the ideological underpinnings and contradictions inherent in allowing the enslavement of Africans to be established in the viceroyalty. In a scathing critique of the early transatlantic slave trade, Montúfar argued that there existed no cause "for Blacks to be any more captive than Indians", nor had any scholars detected any legitimate reasons for their enslavement.<sup>56</sup> The archbishop argued that Africans did not "wage war on Christians" and had consistently demonstrated their "good will in receiving the Holy Gospel". The significance of such criticism cannot be understated. Iberians had historically linked Africans with Islam, thereby equating skin color with a politico-religious adversary. Here, Montúfar argued that such generalizations lacked validity as Africans in New Spain had constantly proven to be fertile ground for Catholicism and thus deserved just as much freedom as their Indian counterparts.

The Mexican archbishop proposed ceasing the slave trade altogether in order to teach the Catholic doctrine directly on the African continent. In this respect Montúfar appears to have been

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<sup>55</sup> Pérez Fernández, 130-131. Chapters 22 through 27 of Book I address the issue of illicit Portuguese intervention along Africa's Atlantic coast, while Chapter 29 of Book III addresses his error in having called for the importation of Black slaves.

<sup>56</sup> Manuel Lucena Salmoral, *Regulación de la esclavitud negra en las colonias de América Española (1503-1886): Documentos para su estudio* (Alcalá: Universidad de Alcalá de Henares, 2005), 52-54, "Carta del obispo de México, Fray Alonso de Montúfar, al rey sobre los escrúpulos existentes por esclavizar a los negros después de haberse liberado a los indios."

particularly critical of Portuguese slavetraders and their "conquests".<sup>57</sup> The wars between African nations seemed to him no excuse for the enslavement of the Black men and women sent to New Spain, particularly as these wars appeared to be incited by the Portuguese themselves. Furthermore, the archbishop argued, the "spiritual and corporal benefits" that Blacks received once in Christian captivity were negligible, as in most cases the enslaved were forced to relinquish their families and wives in Africa for lives of bigamy and concubinage in New Spain. As a result, it was much preferable to send missionaries to African soil and thus preach the Gospel to men "free in their bodies, and more so in their souls".<sup>58</sup> Not surprisingly, Montúfar's pleas fell on deaf ears. The archbishop's rationale clearly deserved consideration and in fact followed many of the lines espoused in the fight against Indigenous slavery. Unfortunately, from a Spanish point of view, the extreme demographic decline of Mexico's native populations necessitated the introduction of a new workforce. The Spanish Crown viewed Black slave labor as a natural, historically-viable alternative. No efforts were made to remedy the religious perils that slavery imposed on the African men and women sent to New Spain after 1560, and as a result "shiploads from every part of Guinea" would continue to arrive in greater and greater numbers.

### *The Briocense Influx: Textiles, Skill and Perpetuity*

As the community of West African involuntary migrants grew in Puebla, another immigrant contingent made its way to the central highlands of New Spain. Their particular situation, as free men, Spaniards, and Catholics, could not have been any more different from their enslaved counterparts. Known as *briocenses*, they hailed from Brihuega, a small town in the

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

archbishopric of Toledo and just east of Madrid. As textile specialists, the people of Brihuega encountered a particularly difficult agricultural and commercial crisis during the last third of the sixteenth century in Spain. Forced to look for better conditions elsewhere, a small contingent voluntarily headed to Central Mexico. From 1560 to 1620 they established one of the most unique migratory movements to the Indies. During this period, one fourth of Brihuega's four thousand people left their hometown and almost all of them settled in one specific place: the city of Puebla.<sup>59</sup>

The Briocense community of sixteenth-century Puebla has been studied for its remarkable cohesion and commercial success in the textile business. Various members of the Anzures, Angulo, Pastrana and Rivas families all contributed directly to the rapid expansion of *obrajes*, colonial textile mills. What few scholars have noted is that this very growth directly implied the equally exponential demand for forced labor, at a time when Crown officials were beginning to limit access to Indigenous workers and when the Indigenous population was in severe decline. Furthermore, by the early 1570s obraje owners in Puebla and elsewhere had begun to realize that purchasing African slaves could pay off as a long-term investment. In 1571, Cristobal Escudero, a Briocense textile mill owner living in Coyoacán, replaced his master cloth shearer with a team of slaves who allegedly produced finished cloths of an equally high quality.<sup>60</sup> The cost of maintaining his former Spanish employee cost Escudero over 300 pesos annually. By contrast, a single slave's entire work life could easily be bought for such a sum!

As Briocenses established the commercial infrastructure for Puebla's success as New Spain's primordial textile center, they were also increasing demand for African slave labor.

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<sup>59</sup> Ida Altman, *Transatlantic Ties in the Spanish Empire: Brihuega, Spain and Puebla, Mexico 1560-1620* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>60</sup> Altman, 57-58.

Consider Juan de Brihuega's letter, written from Puebla in 1571, to his brother Pedro García, who was still in Spain at the time.

*With respect to the rest, glory to God, we are doing well. I own a textile mill with twelve looms with the people that are needed to run it, four Black men and a Black woman, and we are well disposed to earn our keep, God willing.<sup>61</sup>*

Brihuega's letter to a family member back in his hometown reveals a great deal about how slavery was evolving in mid-sixteenth century Puebla. Spanish migrants evidently possessed the means to purchase slaves in Puebla, or at least were able to bring them directly from the Iberian Peninsula as Luis de Córdoba suggested his wife to do in 1566. As seen in the previous section, the permanency of African labor made it increasingly attractive to Spanish textile mill owners from the mid-sixteenth century forward. Yet the scale of Juan de Brihuega's operation makes clear that the first obrajes in Puebla still followed the small, artisanal basis of textile production prevalent in Spain at the time. Evidence for the town of Brihuega in the 1570s indicates that the immediate nuclear family (wives, sons, and daughters) formed the basis of the labor force for woolen cloth production, particularly in spinning.<sup>62</sup> On occasion, more successful cloth merchants employed one or two young apprentices, suggesting that the traditional Briocense obraje back in Spain rarely exceeded ten workers.

The years between 1568 and 1575 thus mark the first fundamental change in the nature, scale and workforce of textile production in Puebla. During those years the city council granted the Briocenses Andrés de Angulo, Alonso de Rivas, and Juan de Pastrana considerable amounts

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<sup>61</sup> Otte, 154. Juan de Brihuega to his brother Pedro García, in Brihuega, "En lo demás, gloria a Dios, nos va bien, que tengo un obraje con doce telares de paños, con la gente que es menester en él y tengo cuatro negros y una negra, y estamos bien puestos para ganar de comer, si Dios fuere servido."

<sup>62</sup> Altman, 43-45.

of land near Puebla's rivers for the construction of their obrajes and fulling mills.<sup>63</sup> Ida Altman has suggested that the ease with which these men obtained such lands grants is indicative of the relatively limited development of textile operations in Puebla prior to the Briocense influx. In any case, it is clear that the men from Brihuega and their creole (American-born) children were extremely successful at establishing obrajes with increasingly large workforces. By 1620, "the majority of the obraje owners in Puebla were briocenses by origin or descent".<sup>64</sup> By direct correlation, briocenses should have also been the largest slave owners in Puebla during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

What nonetheless remains very confusing are the cultural implications of the Briocenses' acceptance and wholesale implementation of African slaves in their textile operations. Slavery was not prevalent in Brihuega during the sixteenth century. The Alpujarras rebellion (1568-1571) and the subsequent enslavement of Spanish *moriscos* had little to no effect on this Iberian region, which may have only received up to forty slave men and women.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, unlike Seville, Lisbon and Valencia there is little evidence of an extensive demand for African slaves in this small town of the archbishopric of Toledo. What then, motivated the people Brihuega to commence purchasing Black men and women for their commercial operations in Puebla? Were Briocenses merely adapting to the predominant culture of labor in mid-sixteenth century New Spain? These questions deserve further research, and cannot merely be explained by financial factors, such as increased access to credit. At the same time, what becomes very clear is that between the years 1560 and 1580 African slaves became a viable option as skilled textile

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

workers in the Briocense mindset. This realization would have considerable consequences for the development of Puebla as a major textile center and slave market, as will be seen in Chapter 3.

*Prietos and Morenos: Free Afro-Poblanos in the Mid-Sixteenth Century*

Understanding just how the early African population of Puebla developed during the mid-sixteenth century has proven to be a very difficult task. As slaves, Black men and women were not allowed to own property or present testimony. Quite to the contrary, Black men and women were overwhelmingly considered human property. As a result, the notarial and judicial records of the 1530s-1570s are largely bereft of references to free people of African descent. Marriage and baptism books, which have proven so valuable to the study of Afro-Poblanos in later centuries, have simply not been located in this period prior to the implementation of the Tridentine Reforms in New Spain. Thus, considering the extant documentation for the period, one could certainly argue that the words *negro* and *mulato* were very much synonymous with enslaved people in sixteenth-century Puebla.

However, even during this early period a free Afro-Poblano minority surfaces in the historical record. For instance, in 1539 the city acknowledged “Juan de Ordáz, negro” as a *vecino*, a title usually reserved for Spanish men of considerable social status and enough financial security to settle land within the urban square.<sup>66</sup> The very next year, Francisco Díaz, a Black, married freedman (*horro*) was also included on the official list of residence only to be

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<sup>66</sup> López de Villaseñor, 286. "Lista de los vecinos que se recibieron para poblar la ciudad a quienes se les mercedaron solares, huertas, suertes y caballerías tierras, según sus cualidades, que pueden servir a los señores procuradores para el reconocimiento de informaciones."

followed by Juan de Montalvo in 1550 and Diego Monte in 1571.<sup>67</sup> The *vecino* status accorded to these four individuals reveals a surprising acceptance of free Blacks in early Poblano society.

Yet what exactly did it take to be considered a *vecino* of Puebla? Judging from the four Afro-Poblano men we just mentioned: status, profession and a wife. Juan de Montalvo appears to have led a successful life as the city towncrier, an especially conspicuous profession and one that would have required interacting with all sectors of society.<sup>68</sup> Five years after his arrival, Montalvo had secured enough money to send one Pedro de Padilla all the way to Guatemala in order to bring his wife back to Puebla!<sup>69</sup> Juan de Ordáz also did well for himself; he emerges at least two times in the city's notarial record, in both occasions selling house lots (*solares*). In 1545, he even received a 200-peso dowry from Catalina González, his Black wife.

These first four Afro-Poblano *vecinos* certainly distinguished themselves as men of means during the mid-sixteenth century. However, they cannot be considered representative of the city's greater Black population. Instead, they demonstrate that even at this juncture of Puebla's history, certain non-Spaniards were able to establish themselves within the urban square as much-needed non-Indigenous settlers of a nascent city. Within less than a century, free Afro-Poblanos would be stripped of this right as the Spanish minority became fearful of the formers' growing numbers.

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 290, 295.

<sup>68</sup> James Lockhart, *Spanish Peru, 1532-1560: A Social History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 217-218. Lockhart notes that within the urban sphere, many free blacks in early colonial Peru became town criers. Perhaps their "vital function" as social and cultural intermediaries between the indigenous majority and Spanish minorities aided in this respect.

<sup>69</sup> Boyd-Bowman, 150.



## *Conclusion*

The Indigenous communities of the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley practiced a non-perpetuating form of slavery before the Spanish conquest and into the fourteenth century. Native-language sources from nearby communities document the habitual presence of Indian captives at a number of slave markets in the Puebla vicinity, then known as Cuextlaxcoapan. Although the site of the actual settlement had been deserted for quite some time by the arrival of the Spanish colonizers, one could argue that the early inhabitants of the region had in fact established a precedent for human captivity. As a result, the Spanish foundation of Puebla de los Ángeles in 1531 simultaneously marked the re-establishment of slavery in the region. This time African men and women constituted the bulk of a small, but steadily growing workforce. However, the gradual introduction of these involuntary immigrants challenged the very ideology of Puebla's foundation as a utopian space for nuclear Spanish families who would not depend on Indigenous slave labor. Any discussion of African slavery in colonial Mexico must therefore consider this particular development within the context of severe Indigenous exploitation, demographic decline and the New Laws of 1542.

Although the historiography of the city is silent on the matter, Africans participated in Puebla's foundational process and were present in the city as early as the mid 1530s. We do not know who these first Black settlers were or whom they accompanied, but they were certainly significant enough for the Spanish Cabildo to single them out as criminal slaves and aggressors of Indigenous women. Although free Black men later on presented themselves before this same city council and received the title of *vecinos* and the rights and privileges therein contained, the early African presence in Puebla was defined by slavery. The establishment of the Caja de Negros in 1541 marks the institutionalization of a practice that would reach its apogee a century

later. Yet even during this early period, a few determined voices attempted to put an end to the enslavement of African men and women. Archbishop Montúfar certainly exposed the ideological inconsistencies of enabling the enslavement of Africans while abolishing that of the Indigenous, but to no avail.

By the 1560s, a new type of Spanish immigrant would enter Puebla society and in turn introduce demands for a new breed of skilled laborers. These Briocense textile experts insisted on having Black "piezas" sent along with their family members from Spain. Faced with increasingly rigid legislation protective of Indigenous laborers, Briocense mill owners found the ideal solution to the colony's labor shortage in African slaves. Perpetuity rather than skill became the focus of their preoccupations. Religious ideology would not shield West African men and women "captured in just war" and who were considered historical enemies of Catholicism. As a result, by the late 1570s the stage was set for a massive influx of African slaves, whose involuntary importation would forever change the history of Puebla.

## ***Chapter 2 - The Transatlantic Voyage: From Angola to Cuextlaxcoapan, 1595-1635***

On August 22, 1622, twenty-three thousand Africans departed the port of São Paulo de Luanda for the slave markets of the American continent. Never before had so many enslaved people left the coast of Angola in a single day. An insatiable, growing demand for their bodies and labor called from the other side of the Atlantic. The cities of Lima, Cartagena, Salvador, Mexico City and Puebla all demanded more Africans. And so, led by the Portuguese, more Africans unwillingly came. A few months later, three thousand of Luanda's enslaved reached the port of San Juan de Ulúa alive. Upon arrival in New Spain's port of entry, these young men and women entered a life of uncertainty. Why had they been brought here? What role would they play in this new land?

Throughout this chapter, I argue that between 1597 and 1630, African-based slavery in Puebla expanded exponentially despite the considerable obstacles that acquiring new African arrivals implicated, and notwithstanding an unsettling Spanish paranoia towards their own imported workers. Even after the brutal repression of the Mexico City 1612 slave conspiracy, Poblanos purchased ever larger lots of African slaves by means of the local *encomendero de negros* and his Portuguese connections. A mature slave-owning culture and marketplace, complete with sales, auctions and manumissions of branded, runaway and injured slaves, emerged in Puebla's central plaza during these years. Curiously, the enforcement of racially-based legislation targeting Blacks and mulattos of the 1610s and 1620s occurred just as more Spaniards grew dependent on the slave population of the city and viceroyalty.

This chapter will make use of sources of a more qualitative nature in order to speak to the slave experience in the early seventeenth-century city. By drawing on travel chronicles, Nahua

annals, Inquisition proceedings and rare municipal materials, I intend to provide a more detailed understanding of what it meant to be a slave in an urban center as large and diverse as Puebla de los Ángeles. I commence with a brief analysis explaining the intricacies of the slave journey from São Paulo de Luanda to Cartagena de Indias, and finally to Puebla. This chapter will also draw on writings of the Jesuit-turned-ethnographer, Alonso de Sandoval, whose descriptions of the seventeenth-century slaving world remain our most valuable qualitative source of information. I then turn to the actual process of buying and/or selling a slave within Puebla's central plaza. Finally, I provide a reconstruction of the political, demographic and legal restrictions imposed on a rapidly increasing slave population in seventeenth-century New Spain.

#### *São Paulo de Luanda to Cartagena de Indias*

The idea of the Middle Passage is not often associated with Mexico, let alone Puebla. However, during the final years of the sixteenth century and first decades of the seventeenth century, thousands of African slaves traversed the Atlantic Ocean aboard Spanish and Portuguese slave ships with Puebla as their final destination. These young men and women departed from four principal slaving ports distributed along the African coast: Cacheu, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Luanda.<sup>1</sup> The majority of the slaves from the Senegambian region of West Africa departed from Cacheu, in modern-day Guinea-Bissau. The islands of Cape Verde concentrated slaves from the "Rivers of Guinea", an umbrella term used to encapsulate all of the coastal lands between the Senegal River and the mountains of Sierra Leone. São Tomé specialized as a slave factory for the Windward Coast down to the Bight of Biafra, which nowadays would include the states of Togo, Ghana, and Nigeria. Finally, the island of Luanda

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<sup>1</sup> Alonso de Sandoval, *Un tratado sobre la esclavitud* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1987), 136.

served as the largest slave depot of the African continent.<sup>2</sup> Slaves collected from the resident Portuguese and Afro-Portuguese communities in Kongo, Angola and Loango were sent to the island-port of Luanda for the arduous sea voyage across the Atlantic.

Since West Central Africans comprised the overwhelming majority of the slaves sent to Puebla during the seventeenth century (see Chapter 3), we will concentrate on the experience of the slaves emanating from the port of São Paulo de Luanda.<sup>3</sup> During the late sixteenth century, the various kingdoms of the West Central African region underwent severe political instability, suffering several major wars well into the 1630s. The growing Lusophone presence (mercantile, militaristic and religious) in the region played a primordial role in this destabilization, particularly after the establishment of the Portuguese settlement of São Paulo de Luanda in 1576.<sup>4</sup> Situated on the Angolan coast directly in front of the island-port of Luanda, this new Iberian bastion guaranteed the Portuguese rapid military access to the principal provinces of Kongo and Angola. As will be seen, the rapidly expanding slaving enterprise greatly benefitted from this key establishment.

The young men and women shipped out from Luanda became slaves through one of two means: a) outright purchase through *pumbeiro* slaving networks or b) capture in the various regional wars waged between the nobility of various West Central African states. Alonso de Sandoval notes that the former system represented the most commonly used mechanism of slave acquisition in Angola. This slaving mechanism depended on *pumbeiros*, extremely valuable

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<sup>2</sup> Sandoval, 136. The Jesuit Alonso de Sandoval noted that small groups of slaves from Mozambique and the East African coast were on occasion also sent from Luanda. It is unlikely that Mozambique and Cafre slaves in Puebla arrived from this direction, however. In all likelihood, East African and South Asian slaves living in New Spain arrived via the Manila galleon.

<sup>3</sup> When pertinent, I will make reference to the experience of West African slaves, who were far more prevalent in New Spain during the mid-sixteenth century.

<sup>4</sup> C.R. Boxer, *Portuguese Society in the Tropics: The Municipal Councils of Goa, Macao, Bahia, and Luanda, 1510-1800* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), 111-112.

Black intermediaries employed by the resident Portuguese residents of São Paulo de Luanda.<sup>5</sup> Outfitted with teams of load-bearers, *pumbeiros* carried their commissioned merchandise, typically consisting of imported cloths and alcohol, approximately 200 miles into the interior provinces of Angola, Matamba and Malemba.<sup>6</sup>

Once within the West Central African hinterland, *pumbeiros* exchanged their products for slaves in several well-established slave marketplaces. The intricacies of these slaving fairs fall beyond the scope of this study, although it should be noted that information on these markets remains fairly vague. However, it is clear that Europeans did not directly participate in these transactions. Instead, *pumbeiros* interacted with other African slave traders, known as *genses*, who "came from over two hundred and three hundred leagues with many Blacks from different Kingdoms."<sup>7</sup> Slaves from these lands often received ethnic labels such as Malemba, Monxiolo, Angico or Anchico, although many more must have been generally labeled as "Angola" slaves upon departure from Luanda.

Regional wars between various important Angolan and Kongolesse provinces served as an important alternative of slave acquisition in West Central Africa. In this respect, the European influence did result in the direct production of slaves for Spanish and Portuguese America. Typically this consisted of African nobles reaching out to the resident European merchant communities, and their military auxiliaries, for assistance in fighting a rival ethnic group or

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<sup>5</sup> Sandoval, 146.

<sup>6</sup> A similar system operated in Cacheu, where Portuguese merchants known as *tangomaos* employed a number of African slaving agents, or *mochileros*. This slaving system was predicated on the exchange of South Asian textiles, European wine, iron, etc. for black slaves from the West African hinterland. For a more detailed analysis of the role of alcohol in slave trading see José C. Curto, *Enslaving Spirits: The Portuguese-Brazilian Alcohol Trade at Luanda and its Hinterland, c. 1550-1830* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2004), 53-65.

<sup>7</sup> Sandoval, 141, 145.

separatist state.<sup>8</sup> In return for this military aid, African leaders offered generous commercial agreements to the merchants, in addition to several hundred slaves for export. The Portuguese rarely turned down opportunities of this nature, which often resulted in the enslavement of hundreds of slaves within a few days. A few turbulent weeks later, these war captives would find themselves headed towards Cartagena de Indias, the principal Spanish American port and slave distribution center.<sup>9</sup>

If sold and shipped from São Paulo de Luanda, these young men and women would spend between six and eight weeks within the confines of the slave ship during the first leg of the Atlantic crossing until arrival in Cartagena.<sup>10</sup> Alonso de Sandoval argues for a two-month transatlantic slave voyage, although it is uncertain if he was exaggerating to convince his audience of the inhumanity of the trade. The actual sea voyage from the West African coast to Cartagena generally varied between 35 and 40 days, although the longer trip from São Paulo de Luanda could run up to 50 days.<sup>11</sup> Precise information on the duration of the journey from Angola to Cartagena is very difficult to come by as most ship captains merely recorded their date of departure from Seville and their arrival at a given American port. Enriqueta Vila Vilar persuasively argues that although the entire sea voyage from Seville to the Spanish American port could be completed in four months, on average it took a slaving ship between one and a half

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<sup>8</sup> Sandoval, 145.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* The unexpected acquisition of hundreds of slaves could have disastrous consequences for the slave ships heading to Spanish America. On one such occasion, a vessel loaded with 900 slaves from Angola shipwrecked in view of Cartagena. Only thirty slaves survived the tragedy; many had been captured in a regional war that had been influenced by the slave ship's captain.

<sup>10</sup> Sandoval, 152.

<sup>11</sup> Enriqueta Vila Vilar, *Hispanoamérica y el comercio de esclavos* (Seville: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1977), 148-151.

to four years to complete this route.<sup>12</sup> Much longer and deadlier voyages would be expected for slaves departing from Cape Verde and the port of Cacheu. Regardless of their original port of departure, the length of their trip would be unavoidably extended for another six to eight weeks as their vessels sailed from Cartagena to Veracruz.<sup>13</sup> After setting sail from Cartagena, slaveships frequently made brief stops in Campeche in order to reach the port of Veracruz.

The Jesuit priest Alonso de Sandoval, who was based in Cartagena during the first two decades of the seventeenth century, witnessed the inhumanity of the transatlantic passage firsthand. In 1604, the Crown ordered that all slave ships bound for the Spanish Americas make port in either Cartagena or Veracruz in an attempt to reduce contraband operations.<sup>14</sup> Thereafter Cartagena would become the focal point of the Spanish American slave trade due to its relative proximity to the African coastline. From 1616 to 1623, Sandoval compiled dozens of letters and first-hand interviews from slave traders, ship captains and clergymen throughout the Atlantic world that described the *modus operandi* of the trade. The Jesuit was deeply appalled by the unsanitary conditions aboard the *armazones*, or slave vessels, that he visited in Cartagena.

Sandoval's description of the conditions aboard exposes the inhumanity of the trade:

*...the slaves are linked together at the neck with long chains in groups of six; at the same time, they are shackled two at a time by the feet in such a way that they are imprisoned from head to toe. They are kept below deck, and locked away from the outside, where they see neither sun nor moon. There is not a Spaniard who will dare stick his head below deck without sickening, nor will he persevere an hour below deck without risk of grave illness. Such is the stench, misery and tightness of this place.<sup>15</sup>*

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> AGN, Real Fisco de la Inquisición, Vol. 10, Exp. 6, ff. 207r-207v.

<sup>14</sup> Alejandro de la Fuente, *Havana and the Atlantic in the Sixteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 38.

<sup>15</sup> Sandoval, 152. All translations and interpretations of Sandoval's text are my own.



As to be expected with such conditions, the slaving vessels were often little more than floating hospitals and cemeteries. Sandoval bluntly states that a third of the slave cargo often perished during this first leg of the sea voyage.<sup>16</sup> While corroborating this estimate is simply not possible at the moment, it is well known that arriving slave ships were often kept in quarantine to prevent epidemic diseases on land.<sup>17</sup> Bouts of smallpox, measles, and *tabardillo* thus delayed a ship's arrival in port for additional days or even weeks. Particularly threatening to the slave cargo was a disease known as *mal de Luanda*, deemed incurable at the time.<sup>18</sup> This particular illness would develop upon boarding the slave vessel on the Angolan coast and over time would cause extreme swelling and cause the slaves' gums to rot. The extreme humidity below deck exacerbated these terrible symptoms leading to sudden death. Yet for the common slave, even arrival on land did not guarantee escape from death.

#### *From San Juan de Ulúa to Puebla*

What thoughts would have gone through the minds of the African adolescents and young men upon setting foot in New Spain? Surely, that they were in an inhospitable place. The dampness of the San Juan de Ulúa fortress and port of Veracruz certainly was not the most welcoming environment. Spaniards in general avoided staying in Veracruz for more than a few days, as bouts with yellow fever were known to wreak havoc on the white population. The young men and women of Kongo and Angola would have instead been surprised at the sight of so many Black men and women dressed in European garb, speaking some creolized form of Castilian or

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<sup>16</sup> Sandoval, 152.

<sup>17</sup> Sandoval, 599. Local port officials were responsible for inspecting a ship's slave cargo and preventing its disembarkment if there were evidence of contagious diseases. Sandoval documents one such case from an infected slave ship from Cape Verde.

<sup>18</sup> Sandoval, 153.

Portuguese, going about the port as shipbuilders, sailors, water carriers and domestics. For most of the slaves just off the ship, arrival in Veracruz meant the end of a horrifying seabound ordeal. For others, the viceroyalty's port of entry would simply be the place where they had come to die. But for the overwhelming majority, an arduous land journey, across the tropical fields of the Veracruz and up the central highlands of Mexico, was only beginning.

Locating documents describing the land-based transportation of slaves from the Veracruz coastlands to Puebla has proven exceedingly difficult. Most documentation of this nature simply does not exist, as slave traders preferred informal agreements with muleteers who had little interest in appearing before a notary public to formalize their operations.<sup>19</sup> Introducing contraband slaves that had not paid royal taxes would have also been increasingly complicated with formal paperwork. As a result, the notarial archives hold little evidence of just how thousands of Africans made the difficult trek from Veracruz to the central highlands.

With this documentary void in mind, we resort to Inquisition records that provide valuable anecdotal data on the *modus operandi* of slave transportation. Originally, these highly detailed investigation logs were intended to record the clandestine religious gatherings of crypto-Jews, or *conversos*, many who were Portuguese slave traders and ship captains. Over time, these Inquisition records have become the historian's most valuable tool for understanding the inner workings of the transatlantic slave trade to Mexico. The investigations of the Holy Office against Portuguese slavetraders hold such intricate details that it is possible to reconstruct their entire social and commercial networks. For one such case, we turn to the Inquisition's proceedings against the slave dealer Francisco Rodríguez de Ledesma.

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<sup>19</sup> However, slave traders did maintain private records, which provide priceless information on the mechanisms of the transatlantic and interamerican slave trade. The Portuguese slave trader Manuel Bautista Pérez kept a highly detailed log that kept track of the cost of transporting, feeding and housing hundreds of African slaves from Upper Guinea to Lima, Peru. See Linda A. Newson and Susie Minchin, *From Capture to Sale: The Portuguese Slave Trade to Spanish South America in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 219-227.

On September 23, 1597 the *San Juan Bautista* slave ship arrived in the port of Veracruz, via Cartagena and Campeche, carrying an undetermined number of African slaves. Ledesma, who years later would be condemned and reconciled as a Jewish apostate, was responsible for the sale of these *bozales*, or new African arrivals, in various cities of New Spain. Ledesma was well acquainted with the politico-commercial terrain of Angola and Senegambia. He had made quite a fortune for himself since 1588 by trading European textiles on the West African coast in exchange for slaves.<sup>20</sup> From posterior slave sales, it appears that he had gradually found an equally lucrative slave trade in Angola. Thus, the enslaved young men and women in his custody had departed from São Paulo de Luanda during late May or early June of 1597.

Upon arrival in Veracruz, most of Francisco de Ledesma's slaves were naked, which prompted him to borrow money from the local *encomendero de negros* in order to dress them in some coarse cloths.<sup>21</sup> The slaveship had made at least two stops prior to arriving in New Spain, once in Cartagena and another time in Campeche. The site of a flourishing contraband market in slaves, English products and other prohibited goods, Campeche's location halfway between Cartagena and Veracruz allowed slave traders to make indispensable stops for "water and food". Dressing the human merchandise aboard the *San Juan Bautista* was considered pointless until arrival in Veracruz itself.<sup>22</sup> The nudity of the slaves aboard the ship, compounded by extremely unsanitary conditions, high humidity and poor diets, helps explain why new African arrivals suffered from acute skin infections and other diseases once on land.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> AGN, Real Fisco de la Inquisición, Vol. 10, Exp. 6, ff. 61r-62r.

<sup>21</sup> At the time, one Gaspar Perez served as *encomendero de negros* for the port city of Veracruz. As we shall see in the following section and chapter, the *encomendero de negros* was the Crown-sanctioned, official distributor of African slave labor. This would be a position of growing importance in early-seventeenth-century Puebla.

<sup>22</sup> Sandoval, 152. The Jesuit notes that even once on land, African slaves were often left unclothed by their owners.

<sup>23</sup> Sandoval, 153.

The evidence at hand suggests that the meals and medical care afforded to slaves improved considerably from Campeche onwards. Thus, unloading unregistered contraband slaves was not the only reason for a brief respite in Campeche. During the last leg of the sea voyage from this port to San Juan de Ulúa, slaves were fed meat and honey in addition to cider syrups.<sup>24</sup> As a veteran slave trader, Ledesma understood the importance of ameliorating his slaves' diets and appearance for disembarkment in the San Juan de Ulúa fortress. Under Ledesma's orders, the resident medic at San Juan de Ulúa was able to cure nine slaves once on land. Potential purchasers in the city of Veracruz, a mere row of a boat away, would be immediately informed of the health and general appearance of his human cargo. Those slaves that remained ill from the sea voyage were fed chicken once on the mainland. Altogether, Rodríguez de Ledesma's slaves spent sixteen days recovering in Veracruz before the arduous trip to Puebla.<sup>25</sup>

This critical period of recovery and acclimation is often referred in the historical literature as a time of *seasoning*. Said time of seasoning could last up to three years, a period during which slaves would recover (or not) from the horrifying voyage across the sea and begin to acclimatize to local diseases, climates and cuisine. For instance, in late eighteenth-century Brazil, "more than 40 percent of the Africans who had survived the Middle Passage succumbed to various diseases".<sup>26</sup> According to James Sweet, malnutrition aggravated the physical deterioration of slaves in Brazil to the point that few African-born slaves survived the colonial setting for more than three years. Statistics of this nature are not yet available for New Spain,

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<sup>24</sup> AGN, Real Fisco de la Inquisición, Vol. 10, Exp. 6, ff. 513r-513v.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Sweet, *Recreating Africa*, 58-63.

although it is unlikely that new African arrivals would have perished at the same rate. Due to the 8000 miles that separated the viceroyalty from Angola, importing slaves was a much more expensive endeavor in New Spain, prompting slave owners to feed their workers better than their Brazilian counterparts. Still, the sudden climatic change that slaves endured, in addition to the drastic change in their diets, were often sufficient to cause death or another epidemic outbreak among the healthy slaves.<sup>27</sup> The housing conditions that Middle Passage survivors first experienced on firm land did little to improve their recovery. Sandoval notes that slavers in Cartagena owned private housing facilities with large rooms that had been provisioned with little more than sleeping boards for their debilitated human cargo.<sup>28</sup>

From the documentation at hand, it is evident that Portuguese slave traders had a sophisticated, well-articulated support network at their disposal at the very moment they set foot in New Spain. Upon arriving in Veracruz, Ledesma had secured a considerable loan to dress his slaves, pay some outstanding debts and contract a mule train to transport his human cargo all the way to Puebla. The slave trader had also been able to secure over two weeks of lodging for his slaves in a local inn in Veracruz. While highly informative, the previous document does not elucidate on just how Africans managed the difficult trail from Veracruz to Puebla. Some slaves were physically unable to continue the voyage on to the Central Mexican highlands. Four of Ledesma's slaves remained in Veracruz where they were eventually sold at reduced prices.<sup>29</sup> In one tragic case, we learn of the death of Juan Ladino, a slave that had emerged as the group's

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<sup>27</sup> Sandoval, 152-153. During the first leg of the sea voyage, the daily food ration for a slave consisted of a single maize biscuit and a small jar of water.

<sup>28</sup> Sandoval, 153.

<sup>29</sup> AGN, Real Fisco de la Inquisición, Vol. 10, Exp. 6, ff. 515r. Yet even Ledesma's *savoir-faire* and all of his connections could not keep him from being arrested, and his slaves confiscated, by Inquisition officials in Puebla. After much controversy and deliberation the Inquisition officials determined that the slaves were to be sent to Mexico City, where they were to be sold in public auction to the highest bidder in December of 1597.

captain and quickly learned some Portuguese and/or Spanish. Presumably, Juan had distinguished himself from enslaved his shipmates in some way during the Middle Passage. Perhaps he had been a noble or warrior of some sort back in West Central Africa, which enabled him to exert authority over the slave community that had formed aboard the San Juan Bautista. Unfortunately, after being sold for the exorbitant price of 512 pesos, Juan "el negro capitanejo" died a week later from a bad cough, probably pneumonia.<sup>30</sup>

<b>Table 2.1. Slave trains conducted from Veracruz to Puebla de los Ángeles.</b>				
<i>Year</i>	<i>Slaves</i>	<i>Slaveship captains</i>	<i>Muleteers</i>	<i>Additional stops</i>
1597	26	Francisco Rodríguez de Ledesma, <i>vecino</i> of Seville	n.a.	n.a.
1605	43	Simão Rodrigues de Montemayor, Simão Rodrigues de Oliveira, <i>vecinos</i> of Lisbon	Cristóbal Torres, Joseph de Trujillo, <i>vecinos</i> of Puebla	n.a.
1621	126	Sebastián Vaez de Acevedo, "who came from Angola"	Mateo Gallegos, <i>vecino</i> of Cachula	Xalapa
1630	81	Capt. Juan Nuñez Franco, "from the kingdom of Angola", Pedro Díaz de Morais	Bartolomé de Aguilar, <i>vecino</i> of Veracruz	Dos Caminos venta (outskirts of Tlaxcala)
<i>Source:</i> AGN, Real Fisco de la Inquisición, Vol. 10, Exp. 6, ff. 507r-510r; AGNP, Not. 4, Box 58, 1605/05/13; Not. 4, Box 138, 1630/05/31.				

A later notarial document from Puebla indicates just how slaves made their way from the port of entry to their final destination. In May of 1630, Puebla's most important slave dealer, Juan Fernández de Vergara, was expecting the shipment of 81 Angolan slaves that were being

<sup>30</sup> AGN, Real Fisco de la Inquisición, Vol. 10, Exp. 6, ff. 530v.

sent to him by Capt. Juan Nuñez Franco and his associate, Pedro Vaez de Morais.<sup>31</sup> On this occasion, the sending and receiving parties awarded a rare contract to two separate muleteers for the task at hand. For such a large traveling party, no less than 40 mules would have been necessary as slaves normally traveled in twos. The trek from Veracruz to Puebla was a difficult one that required traversing the tropical lowlands of the coast, climbing through the dense, semi-temperate forests of the eastern Sierra Madre mountains, and finally traversing the plateau of the central Mexican highlands. A number of scheduled stops at various inns and roadhouses, or *ventas*, were paramount to the survival of the slave party. Back in 1597, Francisco Rodríguez de Ledesma traveled with a relatively small group of twenty-six Angolan slaves, thirteen men and thirteen women of all ages.<sup>32</sup> All twenty-six of them were pent up in a single room at the inn of one Juan Rodríguez on the outskirts of Puebla. By the second decade of the seventeenth century, slave trains en route to Puebla consisted of much larger groups of new African arrivals.

In 1630, Fernández's muleteers led the large slave train to the Dos Caminos venta, a rest stop within the jurisdiction of Tlaxcala, where local officials performed an inspection of their contracts and sent them on their way.<sup>33</sup> At a cost of 3 pesos 6 reales per slave, the total cost of transporting Fernández's 81 slaves would have run just over 300 pesos for thirteen days of travel.<sup>34</sup> This was a significant sum of money and one that could have been presumably paid off in exchange for one of the slaves being transported. Regardless of the manner of payment, for most of the Angolan individuals the two-week trek from Veracruz to Puebla would have represented the last of a harrowing journey that had begun six months to a full year before. Upon

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<sup>31</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 138, 1630/05/31.

<sup>32</sup> AGN, Real Fisco de la Inquisición, Vol. 10, Exp. 6, ff. 507r-510r.

<sup>33</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 138, 1630/05/31.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* The monetary system in New Spain functioned with pesos, reales and tomines. As 8 reales equaled 1 peso, 3 pesos 6 reales equaled 3.75 pesos.

arrival in Puebla, these new African arrivals would have had at least one month of experience in New Spain. A few crucial Spanish words probably formed part of their vocabulary by this point: *agua, comida, dormir*, etc. As we shall see, this first month in the viceroyalty would offer little comfort as the following weeks would be fraught with uncertainty and desolation.

### *The Slave Market: A Qualitative Perspective*

In August 1620, a citizen of Puebla named Manuel González issued a formal complaint to city council regarding the inhumane treatment that local Poblanos afforded slaves. In particular, González expressed concern over how the public "beat the slaves with sticks" rather than let them rest under the cover of the city's arched portals as was customary.<sup>35</sup> Puebla's portals, which surrounded the central square, represented highly contested spaces, particularly during the rainy season (May-Sept.), which explains the timing of González's letter. The crux of the matter was the residents' mistreatment of African slaves at a time when the commercial activity of the public plaza had to be relocated under the cover of the portals. It is easy to imagine the type of conflict that would arise between merchants, buyers, and pickpockets jostling for space as dozens of slaves merely attempted to keep dry. Yet González's preoccupation over the wellbeing of these young Angolans had little to do with genuine humanitarian concern. Instead, Manuel González's complaint must be understood as that of an extremely successful slave trader preserving the quality of his human merchandise.

As the official slave dealer, or *encomendero de negros*, for the city of Puebla, Manuel González occupied a position of power that surprisingly few scholars have cared to study. The *encomendero* position represented an early seventeenth century innovation, one that was testament to the immense influence that Portuguese slave traders held over the local merchant

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<sup>35</sup> AMP, Actas de Cabildo, Vol. 16, ff. 2r-3r.



community.<sup>36</sup> On December 27, 1615, the Spanish Crown awarded Antonio Rodríguez de Elvas, a Portuguese merchant, the royal slaving monopoly to the Indies, in addition to a commercial privilege known as the *derecho de internación*.<sup>37</sup> Henceforth asiento holders and slaveship captains, overwhelmingly of Portuguese extraction, would be able introduce their human merchandise into the principal cities of the mainland instead of impatiently waiting for buyers to make their way down to the (always unhealthy) port of Veracruz.<sup>38</sup> By wresting power away from the port's powerful factors and customs officials, the entire apparatus of the slaving system now came to rely on various encomenderos distributed throughout the viceroyalty.

As the official importer and distributor of new African slave arrivals to the city, Manuel González exercised sufficient power to have his concerns directly addressed by the members of the Puebla municipal council or *cabildo*. Based on the notarial record, González served as Puebla's first encomendero de negros, beginning sometime before 1616. Nonetheless, he had already made a name for himself prior to his appointment as a middleman in one of the largest slave purchases on record for the history of Puebla with the sale of 50 Arara (from the Allada kingdom) slaves to a resident of Izúcar.<sup>39</sup> By 1618, González had already established himself as a man of importance in the city. An official register of his activities reveals his direct

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<sup>36</sup> Aguirre Beltrán, 45-47. Aguirre Beltrán places the appearance of the *encomendero de negros* sometime after 1615. However, the Inquisition proceedings against Francisco Rodríguez Ledesma indicate that there were already port officials using that term in Veracruz as early as 1597. See AGN, Real Fisco de la Inquisición, Vol. 10, Exp. 6, ff. 129r-131v.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* Early *encomenderos de negros*, whose names Aguirre Beltrán does not provide, apparently took slave trains all the way up to the mining towns of Zacatecas and Durango.

<sup>38</sup> Antonio Rodríguez de Elvas, also known as Antonio Fernão de Elvas in Portuguese documentation, profited immensely from increasingly militaristic Portuguese interference in political affairs between Kongo and the emerging kingdom of Ngola. During his term as asiento holder, "annual legal exports from the [West Central African] region ran around 9,000 captives and could be as high as 12,000, if estimates for smuggling are included." See Linda M. Heywood and John K. Thornton, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 159-160.

<sup>39</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 78, 1615/12/01.

participation in the sales of no less than 115 African slaves in Puebla between late September 1618 and January 1619!<sup>40</sup> Clearly, the *encomendero de negros* possessed sufficient capital and exercised enough power through his commercial relations to influence local government.

In his 1620 complaint to the members of the *cabildo*, González shrewdly highlighted the increased income the Crown and city enjoyed due to his activities. Of course this fiscal revenue could drastically decrease if slaves were to be sold elsewhere or in clandestine operations, thereby lending his petition true political weight. More importantly for our purposes, González established that Puebla's slave market took place directly within the city square,

*I, Manuel González, neighbor of this city and encomendero of the slave ships that come to this city say that as is well known, I contribute great amounts of money to his Majesty derived from slave purchases and sale taxes. And it is so, that during the rainy season the Blacks [slaves] that I take out to sell in the city's public plaza take cover under the portals when it rains. But the locals throw the slaves back out [into the rain] and mistreat them, beating them with sticks, all of which is done with inhumanity, and they do not let them remain under said portals as is common and customary.*<sup>41</sup>

This is an important finding, and one that trumps previous notions that Mexican slavery operated on an informal, word-of-mouth basis. While many transactions took place between neighbors, family members and business partners within the privacy of the home from the late 1590s through the 1630s, large slave lots were also sold at public auction in the central plaza.

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<sup>40</sup> Capt. Benito de Lima provided 95 of the slaves that González sold during that four-month stretch in Puebla. This is a strong example of the immediate impact that the *derecho de internación* had on local slave markets in New Spain and elsewhere.

<sup>41</sup> AMP, Actas de Cabildo, Vol. 16, ff. 2r-3r. The original Spanish documents reads as follows: "Este dia se presento y leyo en el dho cabildo una petiçion que dize assi = Manuel Gonçalez vezino desta çudad y encomendero de las armazones de negros q vienen a esta çudad. Digo que como es notorio Yo doy a su Mag[esta]d entre año mucha cantidad de pesos procedidos de las alcavalas y ventas de los d[ich]hos esclavos y es ansi que a causa de fazer el tiempo de lluvias los negros que saco a vender a la plaça publica desta çudad cuando llueve se recogen en los portales della y los vezinos los echan y maltratan dandoles de palos todo con ynhumanidad y no quieren dejarlos estar en los dichos portales siendo como es comun y general."

Typically, large slave lots sold in the city would eventually be separated into smaller and smaller groups. However, *encomendero* influence guaranteed that wholesale purchases of African slaves would also take place in Puebla's central plaza. Consider the role played by Manuel González in 1615 as middleman for Capt. Joseph de Hurtado, a Portuguese slavetrader, in the sale of fifty Arara slaves to Pedro García Palomino, a resident and apparent owner of a sugar cane plantation in the nearby jurisdiction of Izúcar.<sup>42</sup> In the bill of slave purchase, García declared his satisfaction with his slave lot because, "I myself chose the slaves among many other *piezas* that the aforementioned captain had at my disposal." Here we have irrefutable proof that while the Portuguese *asiento* system remained active, newly arrived African slaves were sold in large lots in the heart of the colonial city.

A purchase contract from 1595 reveals how an individual slave purchase might have occurred in late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century Puebla. This particular case revolves around Domingo, a 22-year old Black man from "the land of Portugal" who suddenly found himself at public auction after the death of his owner.<sup>43</sup> Irrespective of the type of treatment that Domingo may have experienced at the hands of his former owner, the young Portuguese man would now encounter the anxiety and humiliation of having a price set on his body. Fortunately, Domingo was a single man; he would not have to experience the loss of a wife and children to the general public. However, we do not know if he was being separated from his parents, siblings, or childhood friends as the notarial record is silent on such matters. Instead, we can merely confirm that his entire social sphere was being violently altered for an uncertain future.

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<sup>42</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 78, 1615/12/01. This fascinating document also permits us to speculate about the early beginning of the *encomendero de negros* system. In the bill of purchase González does not identify as *encomendero*, although he was clearly operating as one.

<sup>43</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 41, 1595/04/07, ff. 166v-167v. Such a vague origin could mean any number of Atlantic and Pacific possessions under Lusophone control, although in this case Domingo probably hailed from Lisbon or its outskirts.

His former owner's son, who had been named executor of his father's will, would now escort Domingo to the portals just below the municipal palace. The local towncrier would gather a crowd to announce that a slave was being sold. Potential buyers would examine Domingo's teeth, skin, and genitals in search of any physical defects that could lead to a possible price reduction.<sup>44</sup> Eventually, Juan Pérez Andrada, a farmer (*labrador*) from the nearby town of Cuautinchan would set Domingo's worth at 355 pesos.<sup>45</sup> Domingo's ordeal was far from over, however. In fact, he would have to endure the humiliating wait as the towncrier once more made his rounds around the portals, asking if no one "would give more." Only after confirming that his body was worth some three hundred pesos would Domingo commence the uncertainties of a new life in a new setting with new expectations.

Once in Puebla, potential purchasers evaluated slaves based on their physical appearance, age, visible or "secret" defects, special occupational skills and perceived character flaws. Few African arrivals possessed the type of occupational training required for skilled positions in Puebla's textile mills. If any did, there is no evidence of such abilities in the notarial record. Character flaws, or *tachas*, were equally difficult to detect among individuals who had just arrived on the mainland. Typically, character flaws consisted of being labeled as a "thief, drunkard or runaway." As could be expected for people without jobs, steady diets or homes, new arrivals rarely practiced any of the above-mentioned behaviors. Instead, sellers usually reserved such negative appraisals for *creoles*, American-born slaves, or *ladinos*, acculturated Africans,

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<sup>44</sup> Physical examinations for slave purchases were thoroughly performed. Potential purchasers noted even the smallest of defects in their human merchandise. In 1630, Leonor, an eighteen-year old Angolan woman was sold for lower than average price, because she had "a cloud in her eye" perhaps a premature cataract or lipid deposit. See AGNP, Not. 4, Box 138, 1630/07/29.

<sup>45</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 41, 1595/04/07, ff. 166v-167v.

who were far more familiar with the vices of life in Spanish America.<sup>46</sup> Creole slaves were also more likely to have accumulated physical defects through perilous labor, street fights, common disease or the frequent physical abuse inflicted by their owners.

Excluding histories of disapproved behavior, and particularly abscondage, could result in the cancellation of a slave purchase. Reporting instances of everyday resistance and flight appears to have been of paramount importance during the early seventeenth century. Consider the case of Diego, a thirty-year old Kongolese man, whose owner opted to disclose his slave's rebelliousness rather than indemnify the purchaser for future transgressions.<sup>47</sup> Diego had twice escaped from his master's house (but not the city), the reason for which he was forced to wear a chain in public.

More severe punishments for slave resistance often took the form of branding. In 1595, Pedro Bueno sold a young mulatto slave for 400 pesos.<sup>48</sup> In the bill of sale, he noted that the eighteen year-old's face had been burned with a branding iron, whose end had been shaped into a capital S and the figure of a nail. The youth, who had been born as a slave member of Bueno's household, had escaped his master's service once and presumably been branded after recapture. The resulting "S y clavo" scar permanently marked the faces of hundreds of Poblano slaves who would have to bear the brand (even if they somehow attained their liberty years later). More importantly, the ironing rod served to impose a humiliating sign of failed rebellion and Spanish dominion on their bodies.

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<sup>46</sup> Sandoval confirms this connotation of *ladinos* as vice-ridden people that had been exposed to Western culture without proper religious instruction. See Sandoval, p. 443.

<sup>47</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 59, April 1605, f. 484r.

<sup>48</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 51, November 1595, f. 594r.

For new arrivals, branding in Puebla would have actually represented a second terrible experience as most had been burned with the asiento monogram upon capture in Africa. Anton, a twenty-five year old from São Tomé, suffered such a fate at the hands of Marcos Gallardo, a local confectioner.<sup>49</sup> In his bill of purchase, his owner declared that Anton was "branded on the face with a sign that says 'Marcos Gallardo', although the mark is difficult to read". Gallardo was not alone in this depraved practice, however. In numerous other cases, Poblano slave owners burned their names onto their enslaved workers' bodies. Instances such as these demonstrate the sheer brutality that accompanied the rationalized acceptance of slavery in the city. On one hand, the sale of men and women obeyed a strict mathematical science based on supply and demand, age, appearance and perceived defects (see Chapter 3). On the other, individual slave owners could senselessly torture what they considered to be "their" human property, in any way they found fit. As will be seen in the following section, the slaves of Puebla learned how to curb these abuses through institutional means and individual resistance.

### *Slave Life in a City under Transition*

The seventeenth century was a time of great changes for all the residents of Puebla, African slaves and freedmen included. The African influx would have a particularly significant impact on the city and greater region's demography. Let us recall that after the city's initial foundation and re-establishment during the 1530s, Indigenous groups from Tlaxcala, Cholula and Texcoco came to constitute the majority of the city's population during the mid-sixteenth century. They were soon followed by waves of Spanish immigrants (especially Briocenses) and a

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<sup>49</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 59, March 1605, f. 408r. In all likelihood, Anton was a native of the West African kingdoms that traditionally supplied Sao Tomé merchants with slaves.

considerable influx of African slaves around 1590.<sup>50</sup> At the end of the sixteenth century, Puebla's non-Indigenous population numbered no less than 20,000 people, including 2,500 slaves.<sup>51</sup> This slave population would expand rapidly over the next forty years. By the second decade of the seventeenth century, non-Indigenous people outnumbered Indigenous in the city of Puebla. This demographic trend would continue, with tribute counts suggesting that just over 300,000 Indigenous people remained in Central Mexico by 1646.<sup>52</sup>

At the same time, Puebla consolidated as a commercial, political and religious powerhouse during these years of Indigenous population decline and African influx. As the primary textile center of the viceroyalty, Puebla single-handedly possessed the most textile mills in all of Spanish America.<sup>53</sup> Its obrajeros soon extended their influence into nearby settlements such as Atlixco, Cholula and Tecamachalco. Politically, Puebla would come to represent a true counterweight to the peninsular interests espoused in Mexico City. By the early seventeenth century, Puebla's municipal council numbered twenty regents, making it the largest Spanish town council on the American continent at the time.<sup>54</sup> Finally, the site of the bishopric of Tlaxcala was transferred from its namesake settlement to Puebla de los Ángeles during the mid-sixteenth century. With this change, Puebla would come to concentrate hundreds of secular clerics, in

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<sup>50</sup> Altman, 34.

<sup>51</sup> María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 144.

<sup>52</sup> Sherburne F. Cook and Woodrow Borah, *Essays in Population History, Vol. III: Mexico and California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971-1979), 96-97.

<sup>53</sup> Carmen Viquiera and José I. Urquiola, *Los obrajes en la Nueva España, 1550-1630* (México: CONACULTA, 1990), 136-137. In 1604, Puebla had 35 textile mills in operation. 24 textile mills were operating in nearby Mexico City, while Tlaxcala had 13 such workshops.

<sup>54</sup> Jonathan I. Israel, *Razas, clases sociales y vida política en el México colonial 1610-1670* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1980), 101.

addition to the members of the highly influential Franciscan, Dominican, Agustianian and Jesuit orders.

The cultural implications of these changes must be factored into any evaluation of slave life in Puebla de los Ángeles. The African influx to the city occurred at a moment of true economic success, during which middle-strata Poblanos enjoyed increased access to credit for slaves and to the social status that being a slave owner carried. During these years, a small slave presence suddenly became dominant, especially within the context of severe Indigenous depopulation. While Nahuatl conversations undoubtedly continued to take place on city streets, Kimbundu and Kikongo would have become quite prominent, as well. The difficult process of learning the Castilian variant of the Spanish language is something to which African slaves would necessarily have to adapt. Back in Kongo and Angola, many of them had first been exposed to a creolized form of Portuguese, at times referred to as "lengua de San Thomé".<sup>55</sup> In the urban centers of New Spain they would struggle to conceal their foreign accents, which were readily parodied by more literate members of their new society.<sup>56</sup>

As new African arrivals of this booming city would rapidly realize, Puebla was a fragmented ensemble of neighborhoods, workshops, waterways and orchards. A young Angolan living amid the textile mills of the San José barrio would have a radically different urban experience vis-à-vis the creole domestic who worked in one of the many religious convents just off the central square. Likewise, slaves charged with maintaining the flour mills of the Atoyac river had little in common with the extraordinary slave cantors of the Cathedral.<sup>57</sup> Despite this

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<sup>55</sup> Sandoval, 140.

<sup>56</sup> Omar Morales Abril, "El esclavo negro de Juan de Vera: Cantor, arpista y compositor de la catedral de Puebla (florevit 1575-1617)," in *Historia de la Música en Puebla* (Puebla: Secretaria de Cultura del Estado de Puebla, 2010), 47-61.

<sup>57</sup> Morales Abril, 49-53.



diversity of experiences, the slaves of Puebla did have one thing in common: they were property. Their proprietors understood this asymmetrical dynamic and feared its reversal.

The young African men and women just arriving in Puebla during the early seventeenth century would have experienced an urban colonial society dependent on slaves, but also quite fearful of them. During Holy Week of 1612, rumors of an alleged uprising in nearby Mexico City sent Puebla's municipal authorities into panic.<sup>58</sup> The most thorough and objective account of the slave conspiracy comes from the writings of Don Domingo de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin, the reknowned Indigenous annalist of early seventeenth-century Mexico City. Chimalpahin described the fear that overtook the capital's Spanish population on April 15, 1612 (Palm Sunday) upon hearing rumors that "the Blacks and mulattoes were about to rise and declare war on the Spaniards, so that everyone said that Maundy Thursday the Blacks would do their killing."<sup>59</sup> Moreover, "it was said that the Black renegades who had established themselves at Acapulco would come from the seashore, and that some Blacks who had turned renegade and run away from Mexico here, leaving their masters behind, would come here from Veracruz."<sup>60</sup> In the original Nahuatl version of the text, Chimalpahin referred to the "Black renegades" as *cimalontli tilitique*, undoubtedly a reference to the independent runaway community that the slave Yanga founded in the highlands between Puebla and Veracruz in 1608.

As Maundy Thursday approached, the paranoia over an alleged slave uprising peaked when "some mischievous Spanish youth" ran through the streets of Mexico City yelling that the slaves had finally arrived. Yet nothing happened on the night of Holy Wednesday or Maundy

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<sup>58</sup> AMP, Actas de Cabildo, Vol. 14, ff. 220/219v.

<sup>59</sup> Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, Don Domingo de San Antón Muñón, *Annals of His Time*, eds. James Lockhart et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 214-215.

<sup>60</sup> Chimalpahin, 216-217.

Thursday; no organized insurrection or spontaneous rebellion of any sort took place. Still, the damage had been done. In the Spanish mindset, the Black population of New Spain represented the greatest internal threat to the viceroyalty. On May 2, 1612, thirty-five Black men and women were executed in Mexico City's central plaza. The following day "29 of the said dead were only decapitated and their heads stuck on top of the gallows... six Blacks were cut up... they hung them all in the said main roads coming into Mexico."<sup>61</sup> The repression of the capital's Black population and its religious confraternities continued until the end of May, when the last conspirators were sent off to Spain. Throughout his narrative, Chimalpahin exudes an air of skepticism over the Spanish justification for this brutal repression:

*These then are all the things that were said and told about the Blacks; many other additional things were said about them, not all of which tales can be told here, for they were accused of very much that maybe they truly were going to do or maybe not, for only our lord God himself knows whether it is so, because some [of the Blacks] did not acknowledge the full truth of it; though they were punished and hanged, they said on dying, "Let us in the name of our lord God accept the death sentence that has been passed upon us, for we do not know what we are accused of that we are being punished for." Here are given the names of all the lords civil and criminal judges of the Audiencia in the time of whose government it was and who ruled all by themselves in Mexico, who as long as there was no lord viceroy administered justice regarding the said Blacks and sentenced them to be hanged, as was done to them, as everyone found out and saw. The first of the judges, who had been the most senior in the Royal Audiencia was...<sup>62</sup>*

The text continues with Chimalpahin enumerating the names and titles of the fourteen members of New Spain's supreme ruling body as if to perpetually link their lineages to the dishonorable memory of the brutal slave repression. The Indigenous chronicler even went as far as to ridicule the Spaniards' cowardice by noting how, "we Mexica commoners were not at all frightened by it

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 219-225.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

[rumors of the rebellion] but were just looking and listening, just marveling at how the Spaniards were being destroyed by their fear and didn't appear as such great warriors."<sup>63</sup>

The Indigenous population of Puebla must have had similar sentiments when the first news of the rebellion arrived via courier mail. In a letter dated April 15, 1612, a Mexico City resident named José de Bañuelos warned the Puebla municipal council to prepare for the worst, and to "prevent the damage that would be done to the city, as it promises to be great...".<sup>64</sup>

Bañuelos indicated that Black couriers (some dressed as friars) entering and leaving the capital city had been corresponding with other conspirators throughout the viceroyalty, thus making the alleged uprising a veritable regional threat. Puebla's city regents immediately decreed a state of emergency, organized the Spanish militias and ordered all textile mill owners to lock down their Black and mulatto laborers. Henceforth both free and enslaved Afro-Poblanos would be forbidden from meeting in their religious brotherhoods.<sup>65</sup> Gathering for song or dance would also be prohibited, in addition to walking in the street in groups of three or more. The Spanish municipal council would punish such common behavior with two hundred lashes per offense, a veritable death sentence. Fortunately, no bloodshed took place in Puebla. Yet the brutality of the punishment imposed by the Audiencia betrayed the generalized Spanish fear of an organized slave rebellion at the precise instant in which Africans rivaled the colony's white population.<sup>66</sup> In what has been described as the moment of greatest racial tension in the history of New Spain, Afro-Poblanos found a new level of intolerance directed towards them.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> López de Villaseñor, 97-100.

<sup>65</sup> AMP, Actas de Cabildo, Vol. 14, ff. 220/219v.

<sup>66</sup> Aguirre Beltrán, 210.

<sup>67</sup> Israel, 78.

Even greater restrictions would be placed on free men and women of African descent following the arrival of the Marquis of Gelves, New Spain's thirteenth viceroy, in 1621. During the next three years, Gelves targeted the viceroyalty's freedmen with a series of restrictive ordinances intended to curtail their growing independence.<sup>68</sup> The viceroy decreed that free people of African descent vacate their households and move into Spanish residences or workshops where they would be under direct European supervision. Gelves' virulent restrictions may have proven difficult to actually enforce, however Spaniards in Puebla did attempt to capitalize from the viceroy's racial laws during the next decade. In particular, slaves seeking liberty through letters of manumission (or even by self-purchase) found their masters increasingly hesitant to provide their freedom papers. In 1630, one particularly industrious West African woman, María de Terranova, was sued by her former master on the grounds that she "could neither live nor trade on her own solely on account of being free, but rather should be compelled to serve a Spaniard for her daily wage".<sup>69</sup> Six years later, the Puebla municipal council even forbade free Afro-Poblanos from registering as property-owning citizens (*vecinos*).<sup>70</sup> This last restriction undoubtedly had the ulterior motive of preventing free people of African descent from petitioning for land grants, a privilege which Afro-Poblanos had exercised since 1538!

Thus, during the second and third decade of the seventeenth century, a newfound climate of racial hostility, legalized and accentuated by viceroy Gelves, infected Spanish colonials and African slaves and freedmen. The anonymous Indigenous chronicler of Puebla reported that in

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-82. Gelves also ordered that slave owners register their domestic servants, which he considered superfluous, in an attempt to reduce the Spanish elite's overreliance on Black intermediaries.

<sup>69</sup> AHJP, Exp. 1260, ff. 11-12.

<sup>70</sup> AMP, Actas de Cabildo, Vol. 18, f. 152r, 1636/12/10. "Este día la dicha ciudad acordó se pregone el mandamiento para que ningun negro ni mulato traiga y se asiente en el libro de privilegios y el original se meta en el cofre."

1637, five Black men were executed on the hill of San Juan Centepec (just west of the city) but does not state why this occurred.<sup>71</sup> The chronicler continually reported on other racially-specific events of this nature well into the second half of the century. In 1659, for instance, Blacks and Spaniards fought on Holy Thursday "in the place where the tortilla makers sell their wares [in the marketplace]."<sup>72</sup> In the bilingual version of the annals studied by Lidia Gómez García, an image of a Black hand and a white hand crossing swords was drawn just above the 1659 entry as if to summarize the contentious nature of the Afro-Hispanic relationship in seventeenth-century Puebla.

But what of the Indigenous population? How did they react to the African influx to their urban centers? The historical literature on Spanish American slavery has rarely focused on urban Afro-Indigenous interactions. Fortunately, the city of Puebla provides some intimate views of this contact. As noted previously, there were no native Cuextlaxcoapatecos to eradicate or conquer in the 1530s. Puebla was a vacant plain deep within the Indigenous triangle formed by the city-states of Cholula, Tlaxcala and Huexotzinco. As a result, any interaction between Africans, Tlaxcaltecas and Cholultecas took place within a decidedly urban, colonial environment. Black and mulatto slaves in the city of Puebla did not occupy the traditional role of abusive agricultural overseers so typical of the Novohispanic rural setting, although they may have played the part within the city's textile mills. People of African descent undoubtedly occupied an intermediary status between Indians and Spaniards, but not to the degree that the historiography has dictated.

In the Poblano case, interactions between Blacks and Indians must have been particularly intense within the boundaries of the Analco, Santa Cruz and San José parishes. These first two

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<sup>71</sup> Camilla Townsend, transl. *Here in This Year: Seventeenth-Century Nahuatl Annals of the Tlaxcala-Puebla Valley* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 96-97. Lidia Gómez García, Lidia et al., eds. *Anales del barrio de San Juan del Río. Crónica indígena de la ciudad de Puebla, siglo XVII* (Puebla: BUAP/ICSyH, 2000), 83.

<sup>72</sup> Townsend, 101-105; Gómez García, 88-89.

religious districts were overwhelmingly composed of Indigenous people who had been gradually incorporated into the Spanish economy. Africans and their progeny initially made their way into these Indian neighborhoods as domestic slaves for a small Spanish community. On the other hand, the San José parish concentrated hundreds of African slaves and indebted Indigenous workers in its infamous textile mills. As will be seen in Chapter 5, these intensive workplace interactions would produce thousands of formal and informal unions during the early seventeenth century.

In particular, the children of the unions between men of African descent and Indigenous women would come to define a difficult choice by the mid-century mark. Early on, these children would have been incorporated into Indigenous society and accepted as members of the *república de indios*. Although labeled as *mulatos*, in other parts of Spanish America these children would have been called *zambaigos*, a term used to refer to individuals of mixed African and Indigenous descent. They would have spoken Náhuatl, Spanish and in all likelihood a few words of Kimbundu or Kikongo. However, as the African presence in the city grew, along with racially-specific corporations, such as the Black and mulatto brotherhoods and militia companies, Afro-Poblanos increasingly found their entry into Indigenous corporations blocked by the Crown's protectionist measures.<sup>73</sup> Even the much celebrated bishop Juan de Palafox y Mendoza prohibited the participation of "mestizos, mulattos and others of mixed ancestry" in Indigenous government.<sup>74</sup> In 1647, he decreed that only individuals of confirmed Native American ancestry (from both paternal and maternal sides) should be allowed to hold office in Indigenous cabildos. Palafox's initiative implied that people of partial African descent constantly

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<sup>73</sup> Martínez, 152.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

participated in these non-Spanish political corporations during the first half of the seventeenth century.

### *Conclusion*

For the young African men and women en route from Luanda, arrival in Puebla de los Ángeles meant an overwhelming array of new experiences. European languages and technologies, Spanish Catholicism, and monumental stone-and-mortar construction represented just some of the new things they would encounter. On the other hand, extensive interaction with people from nearby Cholula and Tlaxcala also had cultural repercussions for these involuntary African immigrants. Indigenous diet, ritual practices, and language would converge with the cultural baggage that thousands of these Black slaves introduced to Puebla.

Unfortunately, the considerable African influx to Puebla and New Spain was also met with increasing racial hostility by many members of Spanish society. Racially-motivated ordinances and restrictions legitimized an anti-African mentality in Puebla precisely at the moment when Poblanos were most willing to purchase permanent Black laborers. The *encomendero de negros* played a crucial role in this latter development, which in turn stimulated the establishment of a slave-owning culture in New Spain's second city. Still, Puebla did not become a slave society between 1597 and 1630. The local economy would continue to depend on access to remunerated Indigenous workers, even as their numbers continued their catastrophic decline. In this regard, African slave labor alleviated some of the labor-driven pressures exerted on the Indigenous communities of the Puebla-Tlaxcala valley during the first half of the seventeenth century. To test this hypothesis, we must first come to understand the extent of the African migratory movement to Puebla and its slave market.

### ***Chapter 3 – The African Influx and the Puebla Slave Market, 1600-1700***

During the early seventeenth century, New Spain and Angola established a terribly unequal relationship, one that could be used to threaten servants on the West Central African coast into submission. In his *Istorica Descrizione*, compiled circa 1662, Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi noted that in Portuguese Angola slaves obeyed "not only the word but even the signal of their masters, since they are afraid of being carried to New Spain."<sup>1</sup> Curiously, this particular threat in all likelihood represented the fears of young Angolans one to two generations before. At the time Cavazzi was gathering his historical notes on Queen Jinga and her court, most Angolans were being shipped to the Dutch Caribbean and Portuguese Brazil, not Mexico.

Still, the specter of slavery in New Spain, and Puebla, in particular, has yet to be properly contextualized within the framework of the African Diaspora. Why did the threat of being sent to New Spain, as opposed to Brazil, Peru, or Cuba, resonate among West Central Africans? Clearly, the impression that thousands upon thousands of young men and women would encounter terrible conditions specifically in New Spain must have been forged at some point during the seventeenth century. In the following pages I argue that the threat of enslavement in New Spain coalesced between 1616 and 1639 as Lusophone slave traders created a new slave-owning class in Puebla de los Ángeles. As the Spanish Crown continued to limit access to native workers, Africans became the state-sponsored solution to the labor shortage confronting colonists, despite the costs and perils associated with importing slave labor into New Spain.

Involuntary laborers from the West and West Central African coasts (and South Asia) soon complemented and, at times, completely replaced Indigenous workers in the Puebla's

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<sup>1</sup> Heywood and Thornton, 186.



booming textile mills, convents, monasteries, religious and secular offices, etc. Thus, during the early seventeenth century slaveholding came to be perceived as an economic necessity. Faced with the final period of Indigenous demographic decline, West Central Africans came to represent permanency in an urban society desperately dependent on the forced labor of non-Europeans. Ultimately, some 20,000 slaves, the majority of African descent, changed hands in the Puebla slave market during the seventeenth century.

Through the figure of the *encomendero de negros*, acquiring new African arrivals became increasingly accessible starting in the early seventeenth century, especially due to the credit networks that Portuguese slave traders had at their disposal. In Puebla, the unrelenting demand for new African arrivals translated into a sizeable population of Angolan adolescents laboring in virtually every sector of the local economy. Africans' sudden absence from the slave market following Portuguese independence would have considerable consequences for the city's Black population. Slave purchases from the mid-century onwards document an aging African community gradually being replaced by American-born Black and mulatto slaves. Most importantly, Poblano demand for slaves did not disappear after 1640. Instead, the Puebla slave market appeared reinvigorated by the 1660s and continued to expand until the beginning of the eighteenth century.

### *Royal Interference in Puebla's Textile Mills*

King Philip III's 1601 royal decree marks a watershed moment for the history of slavery in New Spain and the Americas, in general. Through his ordinance, the king of Spain formally prohibited the use of Indigenous labor in two of the most demanding colonial enterprises: sugar

plantations and textile mills.<sup>2</sup> The measures dictated for textile mills (and thus, specific to the urban sphere) were based on a series of inspections conducted in the mid-1590s by a Crown-appointed consultant, the *oidor* Dr. Santiago del Riego. In his visit to Puebla, del Riego was appalled to find 2200 natives working under inhumane conditions in the city's forty textile mills.<sup>3</sup> The *oidor's* recommendations for Puebla were soon extended to the entire viceroyalty. Africans, no matter the cost, were to be forcibly introduced in order to replace the moribund Indian. Yet, Puebla's textile barons successfully resisted these royal initiatives during the first two decades of the century. By 1604, the viceroy of New Spain had only managed to prohibit native labor in Mexico City's *obrajes*; Puebla's textile mill owners remained unscathed.<sup>4</sup>

Nonetheless, the Crown remained steadfast in its determination to eradicate the practice of imprisoning Indigenous workers within the *obrajes*. In 1609 and 1615, royal officials liberated locked-up native workers during their inspections of the Puebla textile mills. As a result, one would expect to find a considerable number of African slaves in the city's *obrajes* in the years between these official visits. Yet this was not the case.<sup>5</sup> Widespread corruption within local government prevented the Crown-mandated substitution of African slaves for Indigenous workers from taking place. In fact, in 1616 the city regent and municipal council drafted a formal proposition to be delivered to the viceroy, in which they laid out the complications inherent in

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<sup>2</sup> Viqueira and Urquiola, 101.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 109-111. At the time, Puebla and its "forty prisons" constituted the single-most important textile center of New Spain and Spanish America.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 104. Puebla's exemption from this ordinance hints at the true political power that local textile barons had vis-à-vis their competitors in Mexico City. It also highlights the commercial and political rivalry between the viceroyalty's first and second cities that increased throughout the seventeenth century.

<sup>5</sup> Altman, 58. In this regard, Ida Altman notes, "even *obrajeros* who could afford to use substantial numbers of slaves still relied primarily on indigenous labor, an indication that at least in the first decade of the seventeenth century the composition of the typical *obraje* workforce had not changed substantially."

substituting Indigenous workers with African slaves within the obrajes. According to the local political elite (and the obrajeros who lobbied on behalf of their cause),

*...the Black [slaves] are not suited for such labor because they are clumsy and lack the required ability and skill. Furthermore, they cannot be had as many as are necessary because they are very expensive and many die, and if the Indians were to go missing so would the obrajes... and the royal sales tax and his Majesty's duties would decrease, and this Republic and its neighbors would suffer great needs and labors.*<sup>6</sup>

The members of city council also noted that the entirety of Puebla's economy depended on wholesale textile purchases and contracts that obraje activities generated. Wool and dye production, maize and wheat agriculture, cattle raising and many other branches of commerce would diminish if pro-Indigenous labor measures were not constrained.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, the Crown remained steadfast in its determination: Black men and women would provide the labor that the native population could and would not.

By 1620, the Crown attempted to impose its will in Puebla through the figure of a local official, the *juez de obrajes* or *veedor de obrajes*, who repeatedly liberated debt-ridden Indigenous workers from the confines of the city's textile mills. Prior to that year, enforcement of Phillip III's decree had been unequal, leading to a petition by three obrajeros that all of the city's textile sweatshops be thoroughly inspected. In all likelihood, the plaintiffs promoting this litigation had invested considerable capital in African slaves.<sup>8</sup> These men resented the fact that many of their competitors got away with hiding their native workers in private houses, inns and

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<sup>6</sup> AMP, Actas de Cabildo, 1616/06/28, Vol. 15, ff. 111r-111v.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* When they had been previously freed, the natives, as "enemies of work," had committed many grave crimes, thefts, assaults, and deaths. The cabildo also noted that Indians could easily (and cheaply) be sustained with an "ear of corn and a bit of chile and water."

<sup>8</sup> Viqueira and Urquiola, 140. The three disgruntled obrajeros were José Gutiérrez, Alonso de Pastrana and Pedro de Sierra.

clandestine dungeons during official inspections.<sup>9</sup> The ensuing inspections resulted in the appointment of a new supervisor and revealed that at least ten of Puebla's thirty-three obrajes continued to rely on forced Indigenous labor. Stringent measures would ensure that this would no longer be the case.

Thus, the first two decades of the seventeenth century marked a cautious shift in the nature of the local urban economy. During this period of transition, the Crown gradually forced textile mill owners into begrudgingly substituting African slaves for Indigenous workers. The result of these new policies, in combination with the newfound accessibility of the West Central African coasts via Portuguese slaveships, is readily visible within the Puebla notarial archives. Despite their conspicuous omission from Puebla's historiography, thousands upon thousands of African slaves were purchased during the second, third and fourth decades of the seventeenth century in legal transactions recorded as *cartas de compra-venta*, or bills of slave purchase. This study represents the first foray into such an exhaustive topic for the seventeenth century. Much research remains to be done on the slaving networks that transported involuntary African and Asian immigrants from the ports of Veracruz, Campeche and Acapulco to the city of Puebla, and on the slave communities that emerged from this process.

#### *Demography of the Puebla Slave Market, 1600-1635*

Due to the formulaic and statistical nature of notarial sources, slave histories for New Spain often become mere slave price indexes and averages. Bills of slave purchase, in particular, dehumanize men and women into "pieces" of human property, eliding social connections, familial histories, to say nothing of individual motivations. This is not the intent of the following section. However, the sheer scale of Puebla's enslaved population, the innumerable transactions

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

in human property, and the historiography's silence on the matter are simply irreconcilable. Thus, I have found it necessary to provide a comprehensive overview of how Puebla's slave population and slave market developed throughout the long seventeenth century. The "hard data" presented in the following pages offer the first systematic estimates for the Puebla slave market during the seventeenth century, and must be considered just that: estimates.

In his classic study of Mexican slavery, Colin Palmer noted that between 1595 and 1622, New Spain was authorized to receive just over fifty thousand African slaves.<sup>10</sup> However, the records of this African influx originate in Seville's *Casa de Contratación*, and do not account for the actual slave transactions that took place within the urban centers of New Spain. In addition, as no slaving *asiento*, or Crown-sponsored monopoly agreement, was signed between 1611 and 1615, the archives of the metropolis hold little evidence of slaving activities to Mexico.<sup>11</sup> Puebla's notarial archive, however, contains thousands of documents on the transatlantic slave trade and the development of a lucrative slave market. In order to capture the general tendencies of the Puebla slave market, I have constructed a notarial database of over 3100 enslaved individuals based on bills of slave purchase for the entire seventeenth century. I have examined all pertinent, slave-related records for a single year in five-year intervals across the seventeenth century (e.g., 1605 for the years 1605-1609).<sup>12</sup> This methodology has its shortcomings, however.

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<sup>10</sup> Colin Palmer, *Slaves of the White God: Blacks in Mexico, 1570-1650* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 14-17.

<sup>11</sup> AGNP, Not. 3, Boxes 36-38; Not 4, Boxes 77-78. The Puebla slave market appears to have weathered this interruption in the slave trading monopoly as 85 slaves were sold in 1615 alone.

<sup>12</sup> The sheer size of the city's notarial archive (998 boxes), the lack of a catalogue, or digital register of any sort, in combination with the general decomposition of many of the extant registers, has simply made it impossible to tackle this endeavor on a year-by-year basis. I have found the most complete notarial series for the seventeenth century within the third and fourth notarial offices of the AGNP.

For instance, the unexpected arrival of various slaveships in a single year could alter the overall understanding of the Puebla slave market for a given five-year period.

Ideally, the *longue-durée* approach employed here will nullify such outliers by providing twenty reference points with which to track the larger tendencies and demand for coerced labor. Within the database, each individual's entry includes his or her first name, last name, gender, caste category, linguistic/ cultural fluency, land of origin, age, juridical status, marital status, familial connections and occupation. When available I have also kept track of each slave's personal transaction history.<sup>13</sup> Most notarial documents do not include information for all of the above-mentioned categories, thus requiring the assemblage of large numbers of entries to detect changes in the slave population's demographic composition over time. In addition to this information on individual slaves, I have also recorded the names and occupations of slave purchasers, intermediaries, sellers, sale prices and terms of payment.

The objective behind the production of this database is to understand a number of questions that have challenged the historiography of Poblano, Novohispanic, and American slavery in general. For instance, how significant was the presence of the *encomendero de negros* during the early-seventeenth-century slave trade to New Spain? It is surprising that so few studies have bothered to study the role that these influential powerbrokers played in local societies in Spanish America, let alone Puebla. Also, what were the demographic characteristics of those first African slaves introduced in the early years of the Portuguese *asientos* to Puebla?

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<sup>13</sup> Most slaves were sold multiple times during their lifetimes. Unfortunately, the absence of last names or family histories for the overwhelming majority makes it simply impossible to track down how many times a given slave was sold. For instance, there are 301 references to Black women named "María" in my notarial database. Even after filtering these references for ethnic labels, we are left with 135 Marías who were identified as being Angolan. Thus, identifying how many times a particular "María, negra de tierra Angola" was sold in the Puebla slave market is a daunting task. On the other hand, I have often been able to trace the trajectory of slaves within Puebla society by cross-referencing a slave's familial history with the names of their previous slave owners.

Did Poblano society value enslaved children and their mothers? Finally, what characteristics differentiate the Puebla slave market from other colonial urban centers?

From 1600 to 1620, owning African slaves became a conspicuous reality in Puebla de los Ángeles. Although Philip III's decree had not yet taken effect, the catastrophic decline of the viceroyalty's Indigenous population effectively encouraged Spaniards to import greater and greater numbers of slaves. As the Portuguese slaving monopoly began to take hold, West Central African slaves began to replace the West African group that had entered the colony a generation before. Approximately 1400 African slaves from both regions entered the city of Puebla during these twenty years, although Angolans accounted for the overwhelming majority (63.5%) of these new slave arrivals.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, only 275 *criollo* and *ladino* slaves (categories that included both Blacks and mulattos) were sold during this period. Thus Puebla's early seventeenth century slave population was not merely Black, it was distinctly African.

During this twenty-year period, textile mill owners were still able to resist royal initiatives protecting Indigenous workers and thus delayed purchasing African slaves. However, the inventories of the obrajeros Pedro de Hita and Alonso Gómez in 1609 and 1610, respectively, do speak to an early experimentation with slave labor. De Hita employed 136 wage-receiving natives in addition to 10 "Black and Indian" slaves.<sup>15</sup> Gómez held the debts of 161 Indigenous workers in addition to 25 Black and mulatto slaves. Judging from our notarial sample, it appears that Puebla's juez de obrajes was only truly able to enforce Phillip III's decree from 1620

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<sup>14</sup> In compiling this information I have considered *bozales* as new African arrivals. In an attempt not to overstate the scale of the African influx, I have excluded bills of purchase in which individual slaves were listed as *entre bozal y ladino, ladino, or criollo*. Furthermore, slaves listed with African ethnonyms (e.g. Angola, Bran, Congo, etc.) but no specification of their familiarity with Spanish culture have been excluded.

<sup>15</sup> In all likelihood, these "Indian slaves" originated from the Chichimec wars on the northern limits of the viceroyalty. For instance, in 1570 we find a transaction in which the rights to a shackled Chichimec slave, from the mines of Fresnillo, was sold to a Puebla resident. See AHJP, Exp. 16.

onwards.<sup>16</sup> Very few textile mill owners surface as sellers or purchasers of slaves prior to this date. The textile mills were therefore not the origin of Puebla's seventeenth century demand for African labor. At most, textile mill owners purchased one hundred slaves for their operations between 1600 and 1620.<sup>17</sup> Instead, a non-descript group of royal officials, clergymen, merchants and widows buying one or two slaves for domestic service and protection formed the overwhelming majority of slave purchasers. This finding is consistent with notarial studies of slavery in Seville for the first decade of the sixteenth-century.<sup>18</sup> The Andalusian elites of the period distinguished themselves by owning close to four slaves each, while members of the clergy claimed one to two slaves. The scattered participation of shoemakers, ironsmiths and weavers in these bills of sale also indicates that local artisans did in fact buy slaves whenever they could afford to do so.

In contrast to rural slave communities in the Americas, Poblanos' growing demand for domestic slave labor ensured that a considerable number of African women entered the urban sphere. The slave community of early-seventeenth-century Puebla was not a sexually balanced sector of society, yet this imbalance was not nearly as prominent as in other areas of Spanish and Portuguese America.<sup>19</sup> Based on the study of all enslaved individuals found in bills of slave

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<sup>16</sup> Viqueira and Urquiola, 264-268. In 1594, Bartolomé de la Torre's textile mill held 130 Indigenous workers and only 4 Black slaves. Similarly, the obraje of Marcos Cepeda only counted with 1 Black slave who toiled alongside 40 Indigenous textile laborers.

<sup>17</sup> This is calculated from 34 slave purchases made by textile mill owners between 1595 and 1615. It should be noted that obrajeros from the nearby city of Tlaxcala, particularly Luis Garcia, actively participated in this early phase of slave-purchasing in the Puebla slave market.

<sup>18</sup> José Luis Cortés López, *La esclavitud negra en la España peninsular del siglo XVI* (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1989), 68-71. Most of these enslaved people were described as *moros*, and thus included a wide range of ethnic groups of Muslim heritage.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Edgar Conrad, *Children of God's Fire: A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 86-91, 100-107. For instance, in 1872, the Viscount of Subahé registered an adult slave population of 79 men and 4 women for his sugarcane plantation in the Santo Amaro



purchase between 1600 and 1615, I have calculated a male-female ratio of 1.4:1. By contrast, between 1620 and 1635 the slave trade to Puebla intensified, resulting in a 1.8:1 male-female ratio. Altogether, approximately 11,000 thousand slaves were sold in the Puebla slave market during the first four decades of the seventeenth century. Yet to properly understand the market's fluctuations, it is necessary to segment the early-seventeenth-century African influx into two periods: 1600-1619 and 1620-1639. *Encomenderos de negros* participated extensively (and officially) in the slave trade of the latter period, which resulted in the introduction of far more African males than had been customary. In addition, a disproportionate number of enslaved children were also sold in Puebla during the 1620s and 1630s.

<b>Table 3.1. Male-female slave ratios in the Puebla slave market, 1600-1639.</b>				
	1600-1619 Sample	1620-1639 Sample	1600-1639 Sample	1600-1639 Total Estimate
Female Slaves Sold	226	555	781	3905
Male Slaves Sold	318	1011	1329	6645
Total Slaves Sold	544	1566	2110	10550
Male:Female Ratio	1.4:1	1.8:1	1.7:1	1.7:1
SOURCE: AGNP, Notarías 3 & 4. Bills of Slave Purchase for 1600, 1605, 1610, 1615, 1620, 1625, 1630 & 1635.				

### *Prices, Female Labor and Child Labor under Slavery*

A brief survey of the prices paid for these men and women demonstrates that the relatively high number of female slaves being sold in the city was no anomaly. Poblanos specifically sought out enslaved women for their capabilities as maids, cooks and wet nurses. In

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municipality of Bahia, Brazil. By contrast, during the mid-nineteenth century, five coffee plantations in Rio de Janeiro held a 1.6:1 male-female ratio among their adult labor force.

the extremely stratified urban societies of New Spain, breastfeeding elite children became the domain of Black, mulatto and Indigenous women.<sup>20</sup> Referred to as *nodrizas* or *chichiguas* (from the Nahuatl language), these women effectively raised generations upon generations of Spaniards, often at the expense of their own children.<sup>21</sup> For instance, in 1610, Antonia, a thirty-year old African woman of the Zape nation, was sold during the eighth month of her pregnancy.<sup>22</sup> In the bill of purchase, the seller, a Spanish widow, indicated that the buyer, another Spanish widow, was to be held responsible for "any risk of death due to the pregnancy". Both widows were essentially speculating Antonia's ability to breastfeed. In addition, they may have also been anticipating the birth of the enslaved woman's child, who would in turn become their human property. Only by taking into account this gendered demand for female slaves can we understand why pregnant women appear in the Puebla slave market.

This discussion leads to the question of how and if female slaves were valued in early seventeenth-century Puebla. The logical follow up to this line of questioning is whether child slave labor was also of value in the colonial city. In other words, were women's reproductive capabilities considered an asset in this particular slave market? A considerable obstacle in resolving these doubt is the fact that many enslaved women were sold along with their enslaved children.<sup>23</sup> Whether a matter of morale or sheer slave-owning convenience, it is rare to find a bill

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<sup>20</sup> AGNP Database, 1600-1700. To date, I have located 15 notarial documents, which specify that the women being sold or bequeathed were pregnant (*preñada*). Here pregnancy serves as the codeword for a female slave's future role as a wet nurse.

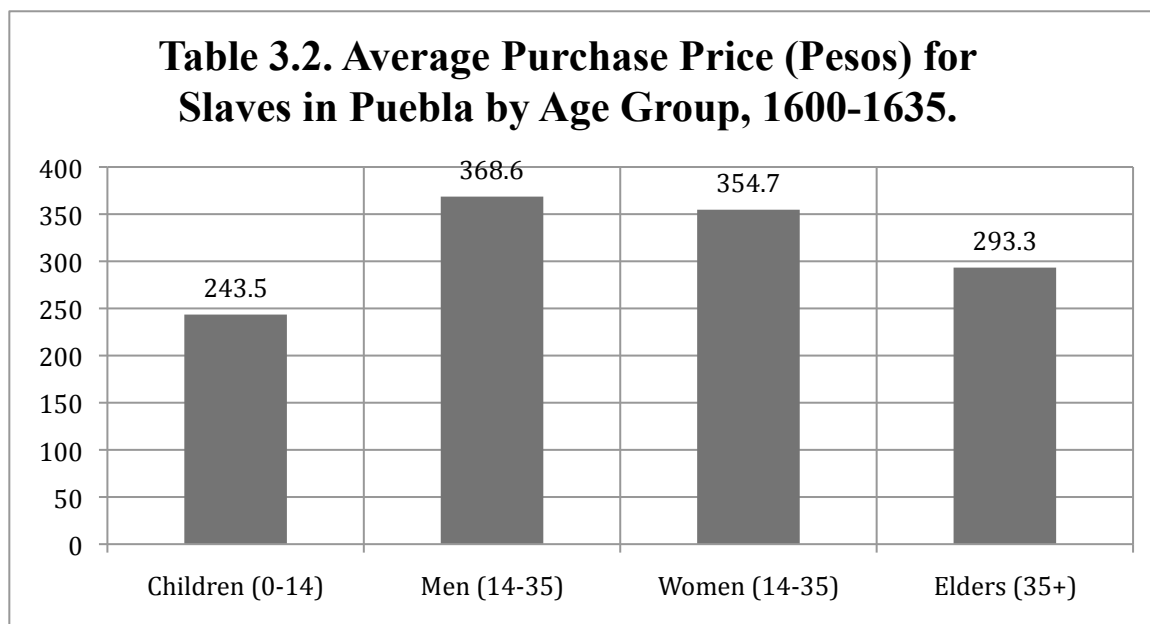
<sup>21</sup> Martínez, p. 138. The theologian José de Acosta argued that Spaniards degenerated in the Indies due to the constellations and to the breast milk they received in infancy from indigenous wet nurses. I would contend that enslaved women of African descent would have also featured prominently in these "purity of blood" ideologies.

<sup>22</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 67, 1610/01/05.

<sup>23</sup> AGNP, Not. 3 and 4, 1600-1635 Bills of Slave Purchase. Among the 31 slave mothers sold in this particular sample, I was only able to locate 5 instances in which a mother was sold independently of her children.

of slave purchase for a slave mother without her children. Thus, discerning a mother's value separate from that of her children is difficult.

Still, drawing from a large notarial database allows us to make a series of calculated assessments regarding motherhood, childhood and slavery. To the first doubt, we can now confirm that women were indeed valued in the Puebla slave market, but not as highly as men (See Table 3.2). From 1600-1635, able-bodied enslaved females between fourteen and thirty-five years of age received an average price of 355 pesos, while their male counterparts were priced at 369 pesos. However, at an average of 378 pesos, enslaved mothers received higher sale prices than enslaved men in prime physical condition. These price averages confirm that slave-owning Poblanos valued slave women's nursing and reproductive capabilities.<sup>24</sup>



However, it should be noted that bills of slave purchase do not provide satisfactory evidence about slave motherhood. Slave mothers only surface in thirty or so documents out of

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<sup>24</sup> Table 3.2 is based on a total of 1316 bills of slave purchase in which individual prices were available. Collective sales or those in which slaves were sold in exchange for textiles, sugar or other products were excluded from this graphic since they tend to distort prices and male-female distinctions. The four categories depicted above are based on the following number of observations: Men (671), Women (427), Children (165), and Elders (53).

the six-hundred-plus references for enslaved women that this slave purchase database considers. Thus, it appears that slave owners only specified that their female slaves were mothers when it was convenient to do so. An alternative explanation would be that enslaved females in Puebla simply did not have children of their own. Nonetheless, it is extremely unlikely that only 5% of enslaved women procreated during this time.<sup>25</sup> A more plausible explanation would be that slave-owning Poblanos valued enslaved mothers to such a degree that they simply refused to relinquish the women's services at this stage of their life.

But what of enslaved children? Slavery studies have often centered on the treatment afforded to children and adolescents to determine whether slave owners sought to establish naturally-reproducing populations or preferred to import new African arrivals to complement their workforce.<sup>26</sup> Bills of slave purchase again only provide a partial answer to this question. Overall, approximately 1300 children would have been sold in Puebla between 1600 and 1635, constituting 12.5% of all slave sales. As could be expected, slave children in Puebla were sold for a wide range of prices, spanning from 100 pesos for an eighteen-month old infant to 400 pesos for a thirteen-year old mulatto slave. On average an enslaved child cost 243 pesos, there being no price differential between boys and girls.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, enslaved boys were sold more often than girls, yielding a 1.6:1 ratio that approaches the sexual distribution of the greater slave population.

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<sup>25</sup> Guillermo Rodríguez, doctoral candidate in History at the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP), is preparing a demographic history of Africans and their descendants in seventeenth-century Puebla based on 30,000 baptism records (and counting). His promising research will help understand the natural growth of this population through fertility rates for wed and unwed mothers.

<sup>26</sup> These prerogatives were often dictated by the perceived availability of African-born slaves. During the late 1820s and early 1830s, Cuban slave owners "prepared for any possible future contraction in slaving" by intensively purchasing younger slaves and enslaved women with childbearing potential. See Laird Bergad et al., *The Cuban Slave Market, 1790-1800* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 1995), 61-67.

<sup>27</sup> Enslaved boys (ages 0-13) received an average price of 243.8 pesos, based on 109 observations. Enslaved girls averaged 242.8 pesos, based on a smaller number of observations (56).

These new findings suggest a number of things. First, enslaved children were highly valued in Puebla despite the fact that they would not have been particularly productive workers until age six at the very least. This speaks to the social prestige that enslaved children provided elite families as unnecessary, yet highly conspicuous status markers. Secondly, child slave labor remained largely undifferentiated prior to puberty, a biological milestone that appreciated the value of male slaves over females in their twenties and thirties. Finally, the fact that more enslaved boys than girls were being sold indicates that a) Spanish families preferred to retain the female offspring born to slave mothers, b) enslaved girls were more frequently manumitted as children than boys, and/or c) the suppliers of the transatlantic slave trade were introducing elevated numbers of enslaved boys in accordance with American societies' demands for coerced male labor.

Perhaps the cruelest aspect of the slave trade to Puebla is the fact that African-born children appear consistently in these bills of slave purchase. Some 500 African youths, or 42% of all the enslaved children sold in Puebla, would have passed through the city's slave market during the first four decades of the seventeenth century.<sup>28</sup> As part of the human cargoes sent across the Atlantic, these children must have been quite carefully selected by slave traders on the West Central African coast. For instance, the Portuguese trader Manuel Bautista Pérez generally included forty to fifty children on each of his slave ships to sell in Cartagena. Lusophone slave traders "often sought to purchase children or colluded with local officials to define some slaves as youths or children in order to reduce the amount of tax for which they were liable."<sup>29</sup>

According to Susie Minchin and Linda Newson, Portuguese slavers in early-seventeenth-century

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<sup>28</sup> AGNP, Not. 3 and 4, 1600-1635 Bills of Slave Purchase. Amidst the 265 slave children considered in this notarial sample, at least 110 had been born in Africa.

<sup>29</sup> Newson and Minchin, 64.

Cartagena paid a half-tax for youths and nothing at all for the importation of enslaved children.<sup>30</sup> Something similar may have occurred in the summer of 1620 when the *encomendero de negros*, Manuel González, sold six Angolan thirteen year-olds to a local Poblano. The six boys, unceremoniously renamed as Agustín, Antonio, Francisco, another Francisco, Manuel and Mateo, had arrived in New Spain as the property of Capt. Luis Mendes, most probably a citizen of Lisbon.<sup>31</sup> Thus, Mendes may have been cashing in on a group of youngsters who together would earn him 1450 pesos and simultaneously allow him to escape a heavy tax.

In fact, a firm pattern emerges from the Puebla notarial archive in that children labeled with African toponyms (*Angola, Congo, Beni, Bran, Mozambique* and *Sao Tomé*) were all between six and thirteen years of age and had no familial information included in their bill of purchase. African-born children under six years old virtually do not appear in the notarial record. The reason for this is simple. Labeling a fifteen-year-old as someone two years younger permitted slave traders to evade their fiscal obligations at the port of entry. The same profits could not be made with small children. This strategy stands in direct contrast to the hundreds of creole children (both Black and mulatto) whose bodies were subject to sale since birth. Slave sellers could confidently list the names of creole children's mothers, particularly for children aged three and younger, since they often owned them as well.

In contrast to the elevated number of women and children sold on the Puebla slave market, relatively few adults aged thirty-five and over appear in bills of purchase. In fact, sales

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* Also see Lucena Samoral, 129. In 1765, slave ship captains in Spanish America paid a 20-peso tax for branding *muleques* (ages 6-14), 26.6 pesos for *mulecones* (14-18) and 40 pesos for adult slaves.

<sup>31</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 100, 1620/07/27. Mendes introduced a small lot of eight children and only two adults to the Puebla slave market. His slaving associate, Capt. Tomas Rodríguez, did identify as a Lisbonite.

of elder slaves do not even account for half of the sales of enslaved children.<sup>32</sup> There are a number of theories that could explain this startling fact. The absence of older slaves in Puebla could simply be read as evidence of the brutality of chattel slavery, even in an urban mode. Textile mill overseers certainly inflicted the type of punishment that would dramatically shorten the life of a slave. An alternative interpretation of the data would be that as slaves gained skills as apprentices, artisans and master artisans, their labor came to be increasingly valued in their mid-thirties and early forties. Finally, there is the possibility that as domestic slaves aged, they became firmly entrenched within their owners' households. The establishment of these slave-master dynamics may have prevented the sale of older slaves, who would have encountered particularly difficult conditions working for new owners at this stage of their life.

However, even after taking into account all of these variables, remarkably few slaves over the age of thirty-five appear in Puebla bills of purchase. To be more precise, elder American-born slaves are practically absent from these records. Africans, on the other hand, account for over 80% of all elder slave purchases.<sup>33</sup> The implications of these results are clear. Up to 1635, most slaves older than thirty-five had been born on the African continent. While creolized, fluent in local languages and often highly skilled, these African-born individuals remained enslaved until the end of their days. In this regard, the conspicuous absence of older creole slave sales during this period may be interpreted as evidence of their successful escape, evasion or manumission from slavery. Freedom through birth must also factor heavily in the

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<sup>32</sup> AGNP, Not. 3 and 4, 1600-1635 Bills of Slave Purchase. Only 77 slaves older than thirty-five years of age were located in this notarial sample.

<sup>33</sup> At this juncture of the seventeenth century, bills of purchase for creole slaves rarely included their specific land of origin (the distinction between African-born and American-born being of greater importance). Among those that did include their natal lands were slaves from Mexico City (1), Santo Domingo (2), La Margarita (1) and Brazil (1).

absence of older creole slaves. We will return to the question of elder slaves, particularly creoles and mulattos, in the analysis of the Puebla slave market from 1640-1700.

*"Encomendero de Negros" Influence on the Puebla Slave Market*

During the 1620s and 1630s the demand for African slave labor in Puebla de los Ángeles peaked in direct correlation to the catastrophic decline of the local Indigenous population throughout the viceroyalty. These years also coincided with the military campaigns that the Portuguese waged on the populous states of West Central Africa. During the 1630s, these regional wars resulted in the expulsion of between 10,000 to 15,000 slaves annually to the American continent.<sup>34</sup> New Spain, Peru and Brazil would receive the overwhelming majority of the slaves expelled during these catastrophic wars. As will be seen, Puebla formed an important part of New Spain's demand during this early phase of the transatlantic slave trade. Within my sample, the years 1620, 1625, 1630 and 1635 register the highest number of slave purchases on record for the city. This development is all the more remarkable when considering that the slave trading monopoly to New Spain changed owners (*asientistas*) thrice during these years.<sup>35</sup> Despite the impact such administrative changes could have had, Puebla's slave market remained remarkably stable, even in light of growing anti-Portuguese sentiment throughout New Spain.

During the 1630s, one man single-handedly controlled the slave market of the city and greater region: Juan Fernández de Vergara. Fernández appears to have been the heir for the position of *encomendero de negros* that Manuel González established circa 1616 (see Chapter 2).

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<sup>34</sup> Heywood and Thornton, p. 161.

<sup>35</sup> Aguirre Beltrán, 45-48. Antonio Fernández d'Elvas, alias Antonio Rodríguez de Elvas, held the asiento from 1615-1622. Manuel Rodríguez Lamego followed from 1623-1630, while Melchor Gómez Angel and Cristóbal Méndez de Sossa received the slave trading monopoly from 1631-1639.



Puebla's encomenderos benefitted immensely from residing in the city full-time, allowing them to establish commercial networks with textile mill owners, high church and government officials, religious orders, and sugar plantation owners resident in the city. Through their dealings with major Portuguese slave traders such as Pedro Vaez de Morales, Juan Nuñez Franco, Pedro Jorge Abreu and Antonio de Abreu, local encomenderos were directly responsible for the influx and orderly distribution of West Central Africans to Puebla and the surrounding hinterland.<sup>36</sup> It appears that by this point, the slave trade to Puebla had become an extremely efficient machine in which Portuguese captains were solely responsible for acquiring slaves and delivering them to the encomendero. Lusophone slave traders ran their operations exclusively through González, Fernández and their extensive client networks. In turn, the encomenderos advertised, sold and collected all debts resulting from outstanding slave purchases.

During the 1620s and 1630s, the encomendero de negros managed to extend considerable credit to people of all walks of life. The fact that encomenderos were permanent residents of the city allowed them to gauge with increasing certainty who could and could not repay debts. As a result, over half of all the slaves sold in Puebla during the 1620s and 1630s were purchased on credit.<sup>37</sup> Slave dealers-turned-creditors awarded their clients an average of just over nine months to pay off their debts. Typically this consisted of dividing the total purchase price evenly into two or three installments. The first installment was due in cash upon drafting the bill of slave purchase while the second or third would be collected months later. With credit easily extended in this form, middling Poblanos ventured into slave ownership during the 1620s and 1630s with

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<sup>36</sup> Aguirre Beltrán, 48. Aguirre Beltrán noted that a similar phenomenon for Mexico City, where Sebastián Vaz de Acevedo, also spelled as Sebastián Vaez de Acevedo, held the position of city encomendero from 1628 to 1638.

<sup>37</sup> AGNP Database, Not. 3 and 4, Bills of slave purchase for 1620, 1625, 1630 and 1635. 50.2% (785) of slaves for these encomendero-dominant years were paid on credit. 45.5% (712) of slaves were paid upfront in cash, while the remaining 4-5% were bought in account of previous debts or unspecified installments of textiles, sugar, wheat, etc.

the certainty that they could repay resident slave dealers the price of one or two Angolan slaves. For master artisans like the carpenter Pedro de León, finding apprentices was a constant struggle.<sup>38</sup> As adolescent, unremunerated novices, apprentices often fled their employers, stole tools and generally did not complete their stipulated training period. Yet the five months that the local encomendero awarded Pedro de León made purchasing a fifteen-year old Angolan slave (read, permanent apprentice) a palpable reality.

Textile mill owners also benefitted from the credit offered by the encomendero de negros, but not to the degree that one would have expected. The local historiography has highlighted Puebla's textile sweatshops as the city's economic engine during the seventeenth century. Thirty-three of these textile mills operated in Puebla circa 1620, averaging no less than fifty workers each.<sup>39</sup> As a result, one would expect the purchase of at least one thousand slaves for the two decades in question since all Indigenous workers were to be liberated from these coercive textile workshops. Surprisingly, our notarial sample reveals that at most some four hundred slaves would have been bought to labor within the city's textile mills between 1620 and 1639. The preceding period from 1600 to 1619, when one would expect to find obrajeros being pressured into purchasing African slaves, only produces the sales of one hundred slaves.

These modest numbers indicate that textile mill owners simply did not replace their Indigenous workforces by purchasing enslaved people. This would appear to be a contradictory statement, since marriage records demonstrate that Puebla obrajes in fact concentrated large numbers of slaves (see Chapter 5). For instance, Capt. Diego de Andrada Peralta owned no less

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<sup>38</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 137, 1630 April, 1630-04-26.

<sup>39</sup> Viqueira and Urquiola, p. 236.

than ninety-four slaves, who worked in his textile mill between 1664 and 1690.<sup>40</sup> The obrajero Bartolomé de Tapia also possessed forty-six slaves between 1629 and 1646. Yet it is clear that Tapia did not purchase this number of coerced laborers.<sup>41</sup> In fact, a larger trend emerges in the analysis of this data. Textile mill owners generally did not purchase slaves from *encomenderos de negros*. Instead, they relied on local merchants, master artisans, sugar plantation owners, church officials and even ordinary citizens to supply them with an eclectic mix of South Asian, African, creole and mulatto slaves for their operations. By complementing their workforces with slaves on a piecemeal basis, obrajeros may have counted on the natural growth of their small slave populations in order to gradually outfit entire textile mills (see Table 5.1). As a result, we must look at other sectors of the greater Puebla economy and society as potential buyers for this lucrative slave market. Put differently, if the city's powerful textile barons were not purchasing asiento-introduced slaves at the height of the African influx, who was?

This question leads us to consider the role that the Puebla slave market had for potential slave buyers outside of New Spain's second city. Could Puebla's *encomendero de negros* have supplied African slave labor to a broad expanse of central and southern New Spain, and not simply to its limited metropolitan area? As the viceregal capital, Mexico City undoubtedly functioned as the primary slave market for New Spain, and particularly for the cities of Toluca, Guanajuato, Querétaro, Zacatecas, etc. However, the capital's role in colonial slaving has been overstated.<sup>42</sup> The African slaves forced to trek the Eastern Sierra Madre mountains necessarily

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<sup>40</sup> ASMP, APSJ & AHPA marriage database, 1629-1700.

<sup>41</sup> Only six slave purchases, for four men and two women, can be attributed to Bartolomé de Tapia. All the bills of sale for this particular obrajero date from 1635, but Tapia did not seek the services of the *encomendero de negros* for any of these purchases.

<sup>42</sup> Despite its presumable importance to a proper understanding of the African Diaspora to Spanish America, there are relatively few studies on the Mexico City slave market for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Mondragón Barrios offers enticing data on the African influx to New Spain, but does not provide total numbers of the trade to

made a number of stops prior to their arrival in Mexico City, namely in Puebla and Xalapa. As the second-largest city in the viceroyalty, and home to a considerable population of wealthy Spaniards, Puebla de los Ángeles logically emerged as a competing slave market vis-a-vis Mexico City.<sup>43</sup> This became particularly true under the *encomendero de negros* system, when buyers from Antequera (modern-day city of Oaxaca), Atlixco, Córdoba, Cholula, Tepeaca, Tehuacán and even Santiago de Guatemala appear repeatedly throughout the notarial record.<sup>44</sup> In particular, large numbers of purchases refer to the rapidly expanding sugar cane plantations of Izúcar, Cuautla and the greater Cuernavaca basin.

As a result, two distinct groups emerged as the most important slave purchasers in Puebla during this period of *encomendero* influence: sugarcane plantation owners and religious institutions. In fact, four of the six most important slave purchasers in the 1630s owned or leased sugarcane plantations, *ingenios*, in the Central Mexican hotlands. For instance, Francisco and Luis de Rebolledo, father and son owners of the Santa Ana ingenio, purchased no less than 31 slaves in 1630 and 1635 alone!<sup>45</sup> With no down payment required, the Rebolledos guaranteed several generations of slave labor for their plantations based solely on their good credit. Five months after the purchase date, the *señores de ingenio* would make an initial payment of 3500 pesos, with another 7000 pesos due a full year later. Yet the more remarkable fact is that the

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the viceregal capital. To date, the only formal study of the Mexico City slave market is Seijas's "The Slave Market of Colonial Mexico City" (2008).

<sup>43</sup> Various scholars of the viceroyalty's political, social and ecclesiastic history, namely Ida Altman, Jonathan Israel and Miguel Ángel Cuenya, have argued that Puebla and Mexico City must be understood as competing urban centers within a highly competitive colonial environment.

<sup>44</sup> This must have been especially true during the devastating Mexico City flood of 1629-1634, when the members of the Audiencia seriously considered moving the viceregal capital to Puebla. See Israel, 40.

<sup>45</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 152, 1635 October, ff. 1701r-1703r. The Rebolledo family purchased these 31 Angolan slaves at 500 pesos each for their sugar plantations for a staggering 15,500 pesos. They were granted seventeenth months to repay their slaves to the *encomendero de negros* Juan Fernández de Vergara.

Santa Ana plantation was located in Las Amilpas, modern-day Cuautla, a region far more associated with Mexico City's sphere of influence.

As mentioned, religious institutions also benefitted from the credit networks that Puebla's *encomenderos* offered them. In particular, the Jesuit order appears to have taken advantage of the payment plans that the *encomendero* Juan Fernández de Vergara had to offer. In one of the largest slave purchases on record for Puebla, Father Andres Pérez, representing the Jesuit company of Mexico City, purchased twenty-six Angolan slaves for their academic institution on October 23, 1635.<sup>46</sup> The Puebla Jesuits did not stray far behind however, as that same day they purchased another four slaves for their institution.<sup>47</sup> Altogether, the Jesuit orders of both cities participated in the purchase of thirty-slaves in a single year, making them Puebla's most important corporate slave buyers.

By the mid-1630s, Juan Fernández de Vergara exercised a staggering commercial dominance over his competitors. In fact, no other slave dealer sold more than 15 slaves to the Puebla public during the years 1630 and 1635. Fernández's only true competition, Martín Muñoz "el Viejo", was actually an employee of his.<sup>48</sup> In fact, based on their official recorded activity within Puebla's notarial offices, Fernández and Muñoz participated in the sale of no less than 1500 new African arrivals during the 1630s.<sup>49</sup> Puebla's *encomendero* successfully transformed a

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<sup>46</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 152, 1635 October, f. 1720r.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 1725r.

<sup>48</sup> Muñoz sold five slaves in 1630 and thirty-three in 1635. However, Fernández de Vergara appears in many of these slave purchases (to be paid in installments) as the collector.

<sup>49</sup> As the primary middleman for slave ship captains, Fernández de Vergara sold 259 slaves in 1630 and 1635 alone. Those same years, he sold 14 slaves independently. In combination, with the sales of his employee, Muñoz, both slave traders total the sale of 311 slaves in the notarial sample.

local, distinctly urban slave market into a vast, far-reaching regional slave distribution center for the growing sugar plantations of the *tierra caliente*.

Encomendero influence on the Puebla slave market had tangible consequences for the composition of the local slave population. Between 1620 and 1635, the average age of all slaves sold in Puebla was 20.1 years old. These averages are composed of the estimated ages that slave traders assigned their captives and as a result must be understood to be approximations based on perceptions of an individual's physical development. Even the wording found in bills of slave purchase reflect these were estimates, as slave ages were followed by the phrase "more or less". Nonetheless, Portuguese slave traders were expert appraisers and often fluent in African languages, which lends credence to the ages they assigned their enslaved human merchandise.<sup>50</sup> In sum, the African slaves sold in Puebla were in effect young men and women in prime physical condition and as a result, the most valuable workers for sugar plantation owners. The imposing participation of Portuguese captains and Poblano encomenderos guaranteed that the slave population of Puebla would be an increasingly young one heading towards the mid-seventeenth century.

After isolating those slave transactions made by encomenderos and slaveship captains from those made by local residents, we arrive at the conclusion that Portuguese captors were increasingly seeking out African children and adolescents for sale in New Spain. Amid this specific group of 566 slave transactions, the age of the enslaved averaged 18.0 years for the years 1620, 1625, 1630 and 1635. If on average the entire ordeal of capture in West Central Africa to slavery in Puebla took between six months to a year, then the typical Angolan or Kongolese

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<sup>50</sup> Israel, 47.

slave was sixteen or seventeen years old when taken from his homeland.<sup>51</sup> Yet this was merely the norm. African ten and eleven-year olds appear consistently in the Puebla archives whenever slave ship captains or asiento middlemen were present. The elevated numbers of African-born slave children being sold in Puebla correlates directly to the growing participation of Portuguese slavers in the local slave market. By contrast, only rarely would an asiento-introduced slave exceed 25 years of age.<sup>52</sup>

For purchasers seeking new African arrivals, the physical appearance of a slave and his/her estimated age represented the most important attributes in relation to price. Residents of Puebla paid significantly more money for *bozales*, who were identified as "people recently brought from Guinea" (the latter, a general synonym for the African continent). Research for the 1630s reveals a considerable seventy-three-peso difference between slaves sold by encomenderos and slave ship captains (410 pesos) versus those sold by common Poblanos (337 pesos).<sup>53</sup> The principal reason behind this divergence lies in the fact that encomenderos dealt exclusively with new African arrivals, while the average Poblano sold creole slaves or hispanicized Africans. Yet let us recall that the numbers we have discussed are merely averages. *Señores de ingenio* demanded particularly strong workers for the arduous labor of their sugarcane plantations. In order to secure such slaves, they (in addition to various master artisans)

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<sup>51</sup> Vila Vilar, 148-151.

<sup>52</sup> Only 4 of the 125 slaves that Juan Fernández de Vergara sold in 1635 exceeded twenty years of age. The oldest of these young men and women was twenty-five years old.

<sup>53</sup> In 1620s Puebla, encomenderos sold their slaves at an average of 343 pesos, while civilian sales averaged 315 pesos. The increase in prices seen during the 1630s can be taken as evidence for Juan Fernández de Vergara's monopoly over the introduction of new African arrivals.

were willing to pay sums of money far above the norm. Seventy-two slaves were bought for over 500 pesos in 1635 alone.<sup>54</sup>

The net result of these factors resulted in the development of a very young, African slave population in Puebla with very strong connections to West Central Africa and Angola in particular, during the first half of the seventeenth century. According to the quinquennial notarial sample on which this study is based, over 6100 West Central Africans were purchased in the Puebla slave market between 1595 and 1635.<sup>55</sup> This particular slave population would have been demographically dominated by more than 5500 Angolans, in addition to 500 Kongolese and 100 Anchico. In other words, nearly three out of every four Africans claimed Angola as their land of origin, although many must have actually come from the interior kingdoms of Matamba, Malemba and Anchico.<sup>56</sup> By contrast, at most 1200 West Africans entered the city during this four-decade span (see Table 3.3). In all likelihood, the proportion of West Africans in Puebla has been overestimated due to the extremely unusual sale of fifty Arara slaves in a single transaction.<sup>57</sup> With this adjustment, people from Congo would have constituted Puebla's second largest African ethnic group (6.2%) followed by a smaller Arara contingent.

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<sup>54</sup> AGNP, Bills of slave purchase, 1595-1635.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Malyn Newitt, ed. *The Portuguese in West Africa, 1415-1670* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2010), 160-162, 213. The Anchico, or Teke people who lived along the north bank of the Zaire River, held an ambiguous relationship with the Kingdom of Kongo during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. After the death of the Manicongo, Dom Diogo I, in 1561, the deceased ruler's brother waged war on the Anchico. Yet towards the end of the sixteenth century, the Manicongo apparently maintained "a guard of the Anzichi and other tribes, who remain near his palace."

<sup>57</sup> Alex Borucki, "Trans-Imperial History in the Making of the Slave Trade to Venezuela, 1526-1811," *Itinerario* 36, 2 (Aug. 2012): 37-38. The arrival of Ardra slaves, who in Spanish records appear more frequently as "Arara", to Venezuela, became quite common in the years after the cessation of the *asiento* system. Borucki notes how "the Dutch preferred trading with the King of Ardra, who dominated the region, but pressure from the King of Ouidah, where French, Dutch and English slavers operated, decreased the shipments of captives from Ardra."



In general, ethnic distinctions between Africans did not result in significant price differentials. Angola, Kongo and Calabar slaves on average received a purchase price of between 360 and 400 pesos during the 1630s, although certain lots of slaves could often sell for much higher prices. The only Africans distinguished along ethnic lines for their elevated sales prices were individuals identified as *Fulupo* or *Fulupo de los Ríos*, who hailed from the Casamance region of Senegambia (modern-day Diola people).<sup>58</sup> Gwendlyn Midlo Hall, citing Alonso de Sandoval, has noted that this was no fluke, since "Spanish officials and colonists in the Americas prized Senegambians... above Africans from any other region."<sup>59</sup> Sandoval also noted that as the hardest working slaves, Senegambians were also the most expensive.<sup>60</sup> Slaves from Senegambia and the Casamance region had been far more common during the early slave trade to New Spain (1540-1580), but by the 1630s formed a very small community on the mainland, Puebla included.

The overwhelming Angolan dominance not only among new arrivals, but throughout the Afro-Poblano community guaranteed that the latter would remain an African-born population for quite some time. Creoles, or people of African descent born within the domains of the Iberian empire, formed a distinct and often-distinguished minority, but remained just that: a minority. Out of the enslaved 2066 men and women found in this notarial sample, only 333 (16.1%) creoles appear in bills of slave purchase. Sixty of these enslaved creoles hailed directly from Puebla de los Ángeles, while twice that number had no land of origin included in their bill of purchase (which does not preclude Poblano roots, either). This notarial indifference towards

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<sup>58</sup> Although the number of *Fulupo* slaves in my sample is small (4 cases), the average price for *Fulupo* slaves exceeded 500 pesos.

<sup>59</sup> Midlo Hall, 88-89.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

creole origins had significant implications that we will address in subsequent chapters. For now, suffice it to say that being *criollo* had no specific substance other than having a deeper linguistic, cultural and religious familiarity with Western culture.

<b>Table 3.3. African slaves sold in Puebla by ethnic labels/origin, 1595-1635.</b>				
<i>Region</i>	<i>Ethnonym</i>	<i>Sample Total</i>	<i>Estimated Total</i>	<i>% of African Pop.</i>
<b>West Central Africa</b>	Anchico	17	85	1.1%
	Angola	1113	5565	72.5%
	Banguela	3	15	0.2%
	Congo	95	475	6.2%
	Malemba	2	10	0.1%
		<b>1230</b>	<b>6150</b>	<b>80.1%</b>
<b>Entrepôt</b>	Sao Tomé	<b>17</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>1.1%</b>
<b>West Africa</b>	Arara/Arda	117	585	7.6%
	Bran	37	185	2.4%
	Others (18 groups)	84	420	5.4%
		<b>238</b>	<b>1190</b>	<b>15.5%</b>
<b>East Africa</b>	Mozambique	<b>17</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>1.1%</b>
<b>Various</b>	Unknown	<b>34</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>2.2%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>All Regions</b>	<b>1536</b>	<b>7680</b>	<b>100%</b>
<i>Source: AGNP, Quinquennial sample of bills of slave purchase for 1595-1635, Nots. 2, 3 &amp; 4; Tulane University, Latin American Library, Puebla Notarial Collection, 1600-1620.</i>				

In general, people from the viceroyalty of New Spain formed the majority of creole slaves sold in Puebla. In particular, our evidence proves the rather logical presence of male and female slaves from the port of Veracruz, Mexico City, and Tlaxcala. A smaller creole component also hailed from the southern limits of New Spain, with places like Campeche, Oaxaca, Chiapas

and even Santiago de Guatemala appearing repeatedly throughout slave purchases.<sup>61</sup> Notably there is little to no evidence of creoles hailing from the western or northern fringes of the viceroyalty. Instead, Puebla may have been providing creole slaves for cities like Guadalajara, Valladolid (Morelia), Zacatecas and San Luis Potosí.

Perhaps the defining element of Puebla's creole population resided in its sheer regional diversity. Many enslaved men and women considered criollos were not born or raised in New Spain. Instead, we find creole slaves from the Caribbean, Havana and Santo Domingo in particular. Other slaves claimed to be creoles from Cape Verde and Brazil, which raises questions of just what the *criollo* label actually meant: birth in Spanish America or an undefined time of residence among Iberians? After all, despite the union of the Iberian crowns, both Cape Verde and Brazil remained not Spanish, but distinctly Portuguese possessions. Finally, there is the question of how to think about creole slaves from Spain itself. In virtually all of these cases, Spanish slaves listed Seville as their city of origin. Slaves of course, formed a significant segment of the late 16th and early 17th century Iberian population.<sup>62</sup> However, the implications of their movement to New Spain and Puebla, in particular, has yet to be properly studied.

Given the sheer number of slave purchases recorded during the 1620s and 1630s, it is quite clear that Poblanos were willing to pay elevated premiums in order to secure African-born individuals despite the fact that the city's creole populations was rapidly growing during the early seventeenth century. Counterintuitively, local residents preferred purchasing men and women unfamiliar with the Castilian language, Catholic religion and Western mores over those that had

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<sup>61</sup> There is even evidence of creole slaves living in heavily indigenous areas, such as the Mixteca region of Oaxaca. In October of 1635, María, an eighteen-year old black creole from the town of Yanhuitlan, was sold to the *obrajero* Bartolomé de Tapia. See AGNP, Not. 4, Box 152, 1635/10/01, f. 1512r.

<sup>62</sup> Cortés López, 68-71. Cortés located over sixteen hundred references to slaves in the notarial archives of Seville between 1500-1513. He estimates a population of just under sixty thousand slaves for "continental Spain" during the early sixteenth century.

been born immersed in their culture. Why? Perhaps slave-owning Poblanos perceived new African arrivals as more reliable workers with less exposure to the vices of Spanish American society. Yet at the same time, the allure of "untainted" slaves carried a heavy price tag that did not even factor the costs of training and providing *bozales* with the skills required for their daily lives. Again, we must look past sheer financial figures to understand the cultural aspects of Poblano demand for slave labor. At an additional seventy pesos per slave, purchasing new African arrivals signified financial power, but especially status. The seventeenth-century slave-owner must have understood the social significance of this possession. After all, as the slave's very first owner, he/she had the power to name, educate, train, and mold an African *bozal*. The same could not be done with creoles.

#### *"Chinos" in the Puebla Slave Market*

During the Portuguese dominion of the Puebla slave market, we also come across the first records of an extremely diverse minority of Asian slaves. Quite incorrectly assigned the label of *chinos*, the majority of these individuals actually pertained to the diverse South Asian kingdoms that interacted with Lusophone merchants and slave dealers during the early seventeenth century. Many of these slaves had been captured in regional wars (such as those of the Arakan), or sold into slavery by their parents during periods of extreme drought and/or famine.<sup>63</sup> After several months or even years of sailing the Indian sea, these slaves would have found themselves in the Philippine Islands. Many of these South Asian slaves would remain in the Philippines but a significant number would reach New Spain, via Manila and the Pacific port of Acapulco. From this latter destination, small contingents of chino slaves reached Puebla during the 1630s.

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<sup>63</sup> Tatiana Seijas, "Transpacific Servitude: The Asian Slaves of Mexico, 1580-1700." Ph.D diss., Yale University, 2008, 40-41.

Puebla's notarial record confirms a number of hypotheses regarding Asian slaves in New Spain. Of first importance is the fact that the majority of "chinos" originated neither from China nor the Philippines. Only two of the thirty-one Asian slaves with land of origins included in their bills of purchase claimed to be from the Philippines, with one slave originating in Cochin.<sup>64</sup> Instead, South India appears to have contributed a large number of slaves to the Asian slave trade. Those who reached Puebla claimed to have come from lands surrounding the Bay of Bengal, Malabar and the islands of Goa and Sri Lanka. The difficulty in locating the point of origin for many of these Asian slaves is compounded by the use of identifiers such as "de la India de Portugal". Such appellations could refer to any of the Portuguese trading posts outside of Spain's jurisdiction, or to large extensions of the South Indian coast.

In total, fifty-five Asian slaves were located in this sample of Puebla bills of slave purchase between 1600 and 1635. In other words, Asians comprised approximately two percent of all slave sales in Puebla. At an average of 326 pesos, Poblanos paid considerably less money for these South Asian slaves than they would for new African arrivals. This lower price may have been a reaction to the older age of most *chino* slaves (21.9 years), in comparison to the city's young West Central African population.<sup>65</sup> Although our sample is small, *china* slaves typically sold for 287 pesos, while *chinos* were purchased for 339 pesos. With only eight Asian women surfacing in this sample, *chinos* had a 5.9:1 male-female sex ratio. Such an unbalanced statistic proves that Poblanos had little to no interest in the reproductive capabilities of South Asian women, nor had they any concern for their natural growth.

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<sup>64</sup> AGNP, Not. 4., Slave purchase database, 1630-1635.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

By the same token, while the Manila Galleon transported slaves it was not a slave ship. The Trans-Pacific slaving routes were largely a byproduct of a robust commercial interaction in silk and silver. In other words, the purchase prices assigned to *chino* slaves made them far more similar to the creoles and mulattos of Puebla than to the population of new African arrivals. Furthermore, many Asians had actually assimilated important cultural and legal aspects of Iberian life in their time as residents of the Philippines. Upon arrival in New Spain, a few could actually claim being creoles despite their Asian origins.<sup>66</sup> This rapprochement with the enslaved Black creoles and mulattos of Puebla would have fascinating consequences for the construction of a complex *chino* identity, as will be seen in the following chapter. For now we will merely note that the entry of a small, South Asian minority into Puebla coincided with the peak years of encomendero influence between 1616 and 1639.

#### *The Puebla Slave Market after 1640*

Understanding the basic demography and epidemiology of New Spain during the seventeenth century is essential to comprehending the fluctuations of the Puebla slave market. According to Peter Gerhard, two of the most serious and widespread epidemics to ever impact the viceroyalty took place in 1629-1631 and 1692-1697.<sup>67</sup> Yet even prior to these epidemic waves, the Indigenous population of the viceroyalty had already declined dramatically from an estimated 22 million people in 1519 to under one million by 1620. This explains why the slave trade peaked in Puebla during the next two decades. Africans, though by no means entirely

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<sup>66</sup> Consider the case of Baltazar, a nineteen-year old *chino criollo*, who claimed to be from Cochin. AGNP, Not. 4, Box 102 bis, 1630/09/17.

<sup>67</sup> Peter Gerhard, *Guide to the Historical Geography of New Spain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 22-25.

immune from Old World diseases, did have a higher tolerance and historic familiarity with measles and smallpox than the Indigenous. The same could be said for the exponentially-growing, mixed-race sector of society known as *mestizos*.<sup>68</sup> Approximately fifty-thousand mestizos inhabited the bishopric of Tlaxcala (Puebla included) by 1646. According to Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, over five thousand Africans lived within the bishopric in addition to seventeen thousand men and women of mixed African and Indigenous heritage.<sup>69</sup> Yet in light of the almost eleven thousand slaves sold in Puebla between 1600 and 1639, even Aguirre Beltrán's calculations seem modest. To put it succinctly, the Black population of Puebla was quite large by the mid-century mark. Yet during the second half of the century, few Africans would pass through the Puebla slave market as Poblanos turned to creole and mulatto slaves for their labor needs.

Portuguese independence in 1640 had severe consequences for Spanish America, particularly since the Lusophones controlled the slaving routes of West Central Africa. The effects of this politico-commercial break had an immediate impact on New Spain, where the African influx of the early seventeenth century would never again be replicated.<sup>70</sup> The intervention of the Dutch West India Company throughout the South Atlantic also exacerbated the effects of Portuguese independence. Many Portuguese slave traders would have undoubtedly continued to satisfy the Mexican demand for African-born slaves through the Campeche contraband trade despite official prohibitions. However, with the Dutch capture of Luanda in

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<sup>68</sup> Aguirre Beltrán, 218-219. Mestizos accounted for nearly 17% of the Tlaxcala bishopric's population, an incredible figure for a population that did not exist prior 1519.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* Aguirre Beltrán suggests that 5,534 Africans and 17,381 *Afromestizos* lived within the bishopric of Tlaxcala in 1646. By this same calculation, the total population of the bishopric was close to 309,860 people. In other words, people of African descent accounted for 7.4% of the bishopric's population.

<sup>70</sup> A number of Poblano slave purchasers, and thus debtors, to Lusophone slavers must have benefitted from the interruption in the trade. How the *encomendero de negros* attempted to secure repayment has not been sufficiently studied in the literature of the Spanish American slave trade.

1641, Portuguese attention was diverted to recovering its principal African port.<sup>71</sup> The Lusophones only re-established themselves in Luanda seven years later. From that point on, the Portuguese would never again exert the same control over the slave trade to New Spain.

In smaller provincial towns where *encomenderos de negros* had not established themselves as key players in the local economy, the loss of Lusophone slaving networks was mitigated. In major slaving centers such as Puebla, however, the absence of *encomenderos* like Manuel González and Juan Fernández de Vergara meant that for the next twenty years, middling merchants would regain control of the local slave trade. In the absence of the Lusophone slaving networks, buying slaves on credit became increasingly difficult, thereby restricting less wealthy *Poblanos* and diminishing their purchasing power. Only in the 1660s would the Crown introduce the *asiento* system once again to foreign merchants. More importantly, despite such considerable obstacles, the Puebla slave market did not disappear after 1640. An acute demand for African slaves persisted throughout the city and region, even with the very modest demographic recovery of the Indigenous population.

The cessation of Portuguese slave trafficking to New Spain also signified a major change in the cultural and regional composition of Puebla's slave community. Whereas the early seventeenth century could have been defined as "the Angolan influx," the following sixty years would see a far more heterogeneous mix of West African, South Asian, and especially American-born and mulatto slaves. Over time, this latter group of mixed-race individuals would come to erode the very foundations of the slave system through the ambiguity of its social,

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<sup>71</sup> John K. Thornton, "Central Africa in the Era of the Slave Trade," in *Slaves, Subjects and Subversives: Blacks in Colonial Latin America*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), eds. Jane Landers and Barry Robinson, 89-90. The political consolidation of several West Central African kingdoms during the second half of the seventeenth century effectively ended the direct procurement of slaves from Portuguese hands. In 1656, the Lusophones were forced to sign a peace treaty with Ndongo's Queen Jinga, who had effectively fended off Portuguese activity since 1624.



political, and juridical status. Yet at the end of the seventeenth century (when this study ends), the Puebla slave market remained active and profitable. The slave trade had become a regional affair, largely limited to the confines of the viceroyalty. Increasingly, slavery in Puebla would come to be defined not by the people of Angola, but by those from the city's Analco, San José, and Sagrario parishes.

Reported ages in slave transactions represent one of the most reliable indicators of a significant change in the Puebla slave market after 1640. During the 1630s, the typical slave sold in Puebla was just over twenty years old. When forming part of the lot of an encomendero, the average slave was usually an eighteen-year old adolescent. Research for the 1640-1700 period, based on the sales of 987 enslaved individuals, shows a very notable shift in the average age of the Poblano slaves at the time of purchase. During these six decades, the age of the average slave sold to Puebla had risen to 24.3 years of age, a noticeable departure from the encomendero years of the slave market. The effect of a growing population of free creole and mulatto mothers may also explain why individuals being sold in slave transactions were "aging". With fewer Afro-Poblano children being sold into slavery, an increasingly adult population would raise average slave ages. The typical slave being sold in Puebla during 1640-1700 was at least four to five years older than his early-seventeenth-century predecessor, without a doubt the effect of much smaller numbers of African adolescents entering the city.

As a result of the demographic change in slave purchases, one could also anticipate a significant drop in slave prices. My research confirms this trend for the last sixty years of the seventeenth century, when the average sale price for a slave amounted to 295 pesos. With fewer and fewer new African arrivals on the market, Poblano purchasers logically refused to continue paying the same elevated amounts of money they had previously spent on bozal slaves. The slow

recovery of the region's Indigenous population, in combination with the staggering growth of mixed-race groups (*mestizos, mulatos, castizos, pardos, etc.*) must be factored into this development. Workers from these sectors were now increasingly accessible, and could easily be lured into textile mills through remunerated labor and cash advancements. With impossible repayment terms and extremely low wages, a mestizo or Indian worker could now replace the relatively high cost of buying slaves in Puebla.<sup>72</sup> In fact, from the numbers at hand, it is evident that local slave-owners demonstrated an open rejection towards purchasing creole slaves, Black and mulatto alike. Once more, we must consider the cultural implications of such behavior.

By the same token, the Spanish Crown could no longer demand the importation of new African slaves given that it could no longer supply them. In fact, it was not until 1662 that a new *asiento* contract was awarded to the Genovese merchants, Domingo Grillo, Ambrosio Lomelín and Agustín Lomelín.<sup>73</sup> The Genovese conveniently turned to the Dutch slaving entrepot of Curaçao, just off the coast of Venezuela, for their human merchandise, which was then re-exported to New Spain. From this point forward, the Dutch supplied the slave trade. This reliance on "foreign" powers culminated with the slaving monopoly of Balthasar Coymans, who admitted both Dutch and English-introduced captives.<sup>74</sup> Yet for all the slaving contracts signed between 1641 and 1700, the fact remains that relatively few Africans entered Puebla after Portuguese independence.

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<sup>72</sup> Based on 105 observations, the price for an adult creole slave, without skill or gender distinctions, averaged 352.4 pesos. By contrast, free mulattos received 5 pesos per month for manning a flourmill, while an experienced carder could be hired for 7 pesos. As non-slaves, wage-earning workers did not have to be housed or clothed, which also reduced their employment costs. See Altman, 58-59.

<sup>73</sup> Aguirre Beltrán, 52-58. The Grillo & Lomelín slaving monopoly expired in March of 1674. According to Borucki, "Curaçao became the largest slave supplier not only for Venezuela, but also for the Spanish circum-Caribbean from 1657 to 1714." See Borucki, 35.

<sup>74</sup> Slaves that entered New Spain under Coyman's *asiento* were branded with an intertwined "BC". Within our sample, only two slaves in the Puebla slave market bore his mark.

*Creoles and Mulattos: The Formation of a Mexican Slave Population*

Perhaps the best way of understanding the evolution of the Puebla slave market is by tracing the dwindling numbers of African-born individuals over the century. From 1600 to 1635, men and women born in Africa accounted for 74% of all the slaves sold in Puebla. Angolans constituted the overwhelming majority of this new slave population. By the last twenty years of the century, African-born individuals in Puebla only constituted 21.1% (215) of all slave purchases. Thus, American-born Blacks and mulattoes essentially formed over three-fourths of Puebla's slave population from the 1660s onwards. How are we to understand the sudden appearance of a very large, enslaved mixed-race population? Evidently mulattoes had been enslaved since the sixteenth century, but their status was still quite ambiguous at the time (as had been the case with mestizos). By the late seventeenth century, however, any degree of African descent was deemed sufficient for the purposes of legal enslavement. In the context of fewer and fewer new African arrivals, Spanish society found ideal candidates for slavery in individuals with increasingly diluted African ancestry.

Yet this process of accepting creole and mulatto slaves over new African arrivals took time. For twenty years after Portuguese independence, the Puebla slave market simply collapsed. If during the 1630s slave transactions peaked at over 450 sales per annum, we only find 86 slave sales in 1640 and 82 in 1645.<sup>75</sup> This dearth of data must also be attributed to the proliferation of a contraband slave market. An illicit trade in slaves must have grown considerably, perhaps through the port of Campeche, during the 1640-1662 period.<sup>76</sup> A closer look at the data suggests

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<sup>75</sup> AGNP, Bills of slave purchase, 1600-1700. In 1630, at least 456 slaves changed hands in Puebla. 440 slaves were sold in 1635.

<sup>76</sup> Aguirre Beltrán, 52-55.

that despite an initial rejection of creole slave labor, Poblanos gradually came to value and demand American-born workers. With fewer new African arrivals entering the viceroyalty, older slaves became increasingly prominent in the Puebla market. Slaves that never would have been considered for sale under encomendero influence, gradually become more attractive to the general public. In fact, whereas a thirty-year old slave would have been considered an unwise investment in 1630, by 1660 such a slave was considered quite acceptable. As to be expected, slaves in their physical prime (ages 14-35) received the highest purchase prices at 328 pesos by the second half of the century.

Financial reasons, especially a lack of credit, must have contributed to a newfound acceptance of older slaves and the general depreciation of slave prices in mid- and late-seventeenth-century Puebla. The fall of the Portuguese slaving machine after 1640 effectively ended the extension of credit for slave purchases in Puebla. In the first years after the official cessation of the Lusophones' asientos, credit was still relatively accessible to the general public. About 25% of Poblanos purchased their slaves on credit, at little to no interest. The true shift in purchasing behavior would appear approximately twenty years after Portuguese independence. Between 1660 and 1675, less than five percent of all slave sales in Puebla were made on credit, and for the final two decades of the century this number would fall below four percent. Only rarely would slave dealers offer more than 6 months for repayment, assuming their clients had strong financial credentials.

Given the increasing difficulty of securing credit for their slave purchases, Poblanos began buying older slaves at lower prices. Whereas twenty to thirty years earlier acquiring a young Angolan slave in prime physical condition could cost more than 500 pesos, by the late seventeenth century such prices were simply unviable. From 1660 to 1700, slave dealers

conducted well over 90% of all slave sales exclusively in cash. This in turn also led to a depreciation of slave prices. In Puebla, master carpenters, tailors, shoemakers and other artisans could rarely afford a cash payment of 400+ pesos for their shops, let alone for a single slave. The mid-to-late seventeenth century was a time of economic contraction in Puebla.<sup>77</sup> However, the demand for slaves in the city did not abate. In fact, the slave market peaked for a second time between 1685 and 1699. Thus, we arrive at an average of approximately 140 slaves sold annually on the Puebla slave market during the last sixty years of the seventeenth century. Altogether, this amounted to a total of over 8400 slave purchases in Puebla from 1640 to 1700!

A number of considerations must be factored into the study of children and adolescents for sale as slaves during the second-half of the seventeenth century. Unlike the majority of their Angolan predecessors, the slave children of Puebla generally lived surrounded by their families. In the case that a nine or ten-year old was sold considerable efforts were made to keep him/her within the city limits or within one same slave-owning family. The notarial record presents clear proof of such family-sustaining strategies time and again.<sup>78</sup> In fact, a significant number of young slave women in Puebla would only be sold in the company of their children, particularly infants. As the seventeenth century progressed, greater and greater numbers of these children (and their mothers) would be American-born, and thus immersed in Western society, law and language.

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<sup>77</sup> Cuenya Mateos and Contreras Cruz, 43, 78-81. Puebla's economic collapse would be attributed to growing competition from the Bajío region, which emerged as the primary supplier of foodstuffs and products for the booming silver mines of Zacatecas. Between 1678 and 1746 Puebla lost approximately 50% of its population to outmigration, epidemic disease, high mortality rates and low fecundity. In particular, the last decade of the seventeenth century has been characterized as one of epidemic disease (*matlazahuatl*) and poor harvests.

<sup>78</sup> For instance, in August 1645, Juana Márquez and her husband, Sargt. Manuel de Herrera agreed to sell Cristóbal, a six year-old *negro criollo*, to one Diego de Alvarez. Cristóbal claimed to be "the son of Catalina, the black Angola woman" who was also a slave to Alvarez. In this case, a bill of slave purchase allegedly reunited mother and son. See AGNP, Not. 4, Box 170, 1645/08/05.

How did Poblanos viewed American-born slave children and their mothers? Based on my analysis of 186 slave purchases for children, I can now conclude that in the post-encomendero period children were indeed seen as valuable commodities on the slave market. As acquiring young, new African arrivals became increasingly difficult after 1640, the value of creole slave children grew. However, locating bills of slave purchases without the accompanying mother has proven difficult, especially for infants up to five years old. Nonetheless, children up to five years old sold for 120 pesos on average, while six to ten year-olds were priced at 184 pesos. Finally, Poblanos paid approximately 242 pesos for children ages eleven through fifteen.

What conclusions can we draw from these findings? First of all, Poblano slave owners after 1640 understood that the children of slave mothers would become permanent workers of their own. The natural growth of the slave community in Puebla was therefore understood to be beneficial to slave owners, which may explain why enslaved women rarely had more than one child.<sup>79</sup> While enslaved infants were rarely sold individually, this was not the case for children aged six to ten. In other words, the work life for the typical urban slave began at a very young age, and in many cases implied an early separation from his/her family. Furthermore, the evidence for older children clearly demonstrates that Poblano slaves began working well before puberty. Finally, the analysis of this data on slave children forces us to reconsider the value that was assigned to gender roles. When evaluating the slave prices assigned to female slaves and their children we must consider that even enslaved infants were considered valuable.

I now turn to price differentials between male and female slaves in Puebla de los Ángeles from 1640-1700. A gender imbalance in the number of men and women sold in Puebla is

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<sup>79</sup> Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpuru, *Familia y orden colonial* (México: El Colegio de México, 1998), 212. In a valuable comparative scenario, Black women in Mexico City's Santa Veracruz parish (1650-1668) demonstrated extremely low fertility rates. On average, married Black women only had 1.1 children, well below the averages for Spanish and mestiza women. The prospect of having their children born into slavery undoubtedly affected enslaved Black women more than those with "free wombs."

evident, but less accentuated than that of the early seventeenth century. In this later period, male slaves constituted just over 58 percent of the slaves sold in the city, with women appearing in 42 percent of sales (a 1.38:1 male-female ratio). This still unbalanced ratio is surprising at a time when fewer and fewer new African arrivals were being sold in Puebla. My data, based on 957 observations, shows that on average Poblanos paid 338 pesos for working age women and 322 pesos for working age men.

What else can we learn from this extended statistical sample? First of all, the period devoid of Portuguese participation (1640-1700) can be defined as one in which local slave suppliers were unable to secure adolescent, African-born slaves as they had done at the beginning of the seventeenth century. In their absence, older slaves well into their thirties became acceptable as members of an increasingly skilled labor force. An even older slave generation (41+ years of age) surfaces in the notarial record for the first time during this later period. At ages fifty or sixty, many of these men and women would have formed part of the early Angolan influx of the 1610s and 1620s. By the last decades of the seventeenth century they would no longer be identified as Angolas or *bozales*, however. Instead, their names would be followed by disparaging descriptors such as "the old one", "maimed" or "weak".

### *Conclusion*

The early seventeenth century represented a "golden era" for Puebla's economy, which generated an enormous demand for slaves, as domestic servants, textile workers and sugarcane plantation laborers. In response to this unprecedented demand, the Portuguese holders of the slave trading monopoly to Mexico created the *encomendero de negros* position. By streamlining the collection and sale of new African arrivals, these slave trading agents spurred on the delivery

of Angolan youths to the colonial city. In essence, a new slave-owning class enjoyed increased credit with *encomenderos de negros* between 1616 and 1639. In the twenty years following Portuguese independence, Poblanos punished slave traders for the sudden loss in the supply of young African workers. The decline in the availability of *bozal* slaves accompanied a steep decline in slave prices during the 1640s and 1650s. Only until the 1660s would the Puebla slave market stabilize. This time, creole Blacks and mulattoes would form the bulk of the slave population as the once-overwhelming Angolan majority aged. By 1700, the irreversible recovery of the Indigenous population and the exponential growth of mixed-race groups made acquiring African slaves an exorbitant and unnecessary expense.



## *Chapter 4 - Failed Freedoms, Manumissions and Apprenticeships*

This chapter will address the increasing integration of Afro-Poblanos into colonial society as freedmen, apprentices and debtors. In this examination of the difficult transition into liberty, I argue that the acquisition of freedom rarely followed institutional avenues. Manumissions, even when notarized without slavery-prolonging clauses, only accounted for a minimal number of actual liberties. As a result, our documentary sources shift to debt contracts, manumission letters, and apprenticeships. Within the notarial record, the ubiquitous *cartas de obligación*, or debt contracts, will allow us to understand how slaves only nominally secured their liberty via legal means. Instead, freedom for people of African and Asian descent was overwhelmingly characterized by endemic debt, economic exploitation and a continued dependence on Spanish patrons.

### *Manumissions and Continued Bondage*

In general, manumissions in seventeenth-century Puebla were rare occurrences, particularly when compared to the thousands of slave purchases within our century-long notarial sample. To date, I have only located 107 *cartas de libertad*, or manumission letters in the city's fourth notarial office for the 1600-1700 period. A liberal calculation would allow us to estimate that perhaps up to eight hundred slaves were freed during the seventeenth century through this proceeding. In reality, it is unlikely that more than six hundred individuals secured their freedom by means of manumission letters in Puebla. Furthermore, a closer examination of these documents suggests that only a fraction of those individuals holding manumission papers

actually enjoyed their freedom. Instead, Spanish patrons appear to have been extremely cunning in continuously delaying, if not outright denying, slaves' legal claims to freedom.

In Puebla de los Ángeles, the act of liberating one's slaves rarely occurred prior to 1630. In the decades prior to this date, manumission appears to have served as a valuable instrument only for the enslaved infants and wives of Afro-Hispanic unions. The earliest case at our disposal, dating from 1574, sets the tone for the history of early manumissions in Puebla.<sup>1</sup> In this particular occasion, an elite female slaveowner, Doña María de Alcazar, liberated Antonio de Limpías, a six-month old "niño mulato", for the sum of 110 pesos. Antonio had been born to Isabel de Limpías, a creole slave, and Nicolás de la Parra, a Spanish pharmacist. Only years after manumitting his own son, Nicolás would free the mother of his child for an additional 400 pesos.

The manumission of baby Antonio reveals a great deal regarding the nature of Afro-Hispanic interactions and manumissions in early colonial Puebla. Spanish men, such as Nicolás de la Parra, appear consistently in *cartas de libertad* acknowledging their role in procreating children with women of African descent. There does not appear to have existed an unbearable stigma in having sexual relations with women of other racial groups at the time. Nicolás de la Parra was particularly outspoken in this regard. In a judicial investigation conducted after his son's death in 1593, he openly declared,

*I am the natural father of the said Antonio de Limpías, whom I procreated with Isabel de Limpías. I was single at the time, as was she. I always supported and sustained the said Antonio de Limpías as my son, recognizing him and esteeming him as such... furthermore, Antonio was born enslaved, because his mother was a slave, and I freed him for 110 pesos...*

For Spanish men of means like Nicolás, manumitting slave children allowed them to maintain and perhaps even improve their social status. By freeing their children at infancy, they spared

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<sup>1</sup> AHJP, Exp. 368, 1574/05/12, ff. 9r-10r.

their offspring years of hard labor, in addition to avoiding themselves the social stigma of having procreated a child into slavery. This may have been precisely the case of another mulatta infant liberated in 1621.<sup>2</sup> At only eight months old, Constansa received her freedom from her owner, Doña Isabel Pacheco de Villapadierna. Constansa's father was a lowly sockmaker from the Philippines (and a Puebla resident) but had somehow scraped together 100 pesos to pay Villapadierna for his daughter's freedom. Unfortunately we know nothing regarding the fate of Constansa's mother, Inés de Pacheco. Considering the father's occupation, in all likelihood Inés remained a slave in Villapadierna's service.

The social pressure exerted by elite Spanish women may have played an unforeseen role in slaves securing manumission papers during the early seventeenth century. In his study of colonial Mexico City and Guanajuato, Frank T. Proctor notes that female slaveholders freed slaves at higher rates than their male counterparts.<sup>3</sup> This would have been particularly true of female members of high society, who did not depend on slave earnings for their own subsistence. Aside from the two afore mentioned cases, a third example from 1605 suggests that elite women frequently manumitted their slaves.<sup>4</sup> In that year, the widow Doña Maria Correa agreed to manumit Isabel de Salmerón, a *morena* (dark-skinned slave) of hers. Isabel's husband, a Spanish man by the name of Hernando Ponce, agreed to remunerate Doña Maria with the considerable sum of 500 pesos in exchange for his wife's freedom. Needless to say, while Spanish men often sought Afro-Poblanas as concubines, documentation of this sort is rare. *Morena* women almost

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<sup>2</sup> Tulane University, Latin American Library, Puebla Notarial Collection, Box 4, Folder 21, 1621/09/29.

<sup>3</sup> Frank T. Proctor, *Damned Notions of Liberty: Slavery, Culture and Power in Colonial Mexico, 1640-1769*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010), 163. Female slave owners freed approximately 50% of slaves in Mexico City and Guanajuato, while only accounting for 19-29% of all slave purchasers.

<sup>4</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 59, 1605/06/28.

never married Spanish men in early colonial Puebla (although *pardas* did). Given their juridical condition, cases of Spaniards manumitting their enslaved wives are virtually unheard of.

Manumissions appear to have become a nominally more viable means of securing one's freedom after 1630.<sup>5</sup> Our examination of slave purchases in the context of severe Indigenous demographic decline explains this tendency. As permanent, unalienable workers, African and Asian slaves (and their enslaved progeny) were simply too valuable to relinquish during the early seventeenth century. After 1630, however, the exponential growth of a mixed-race urban workforce allowed Spanish patrons to gradually dispose of their slaves. Our findings for the 92 manumissions from 1630 to 1700 suggest that a growing number of slaves of African and Asian descent of all ages and both sexes were able to secure their freedom after the Indigenous demographic nadir. The literature on early Spanish American slavery has often noted that manumission documentation favored women and young children in urban centers.<sup>6</sup> According to the same line of reasoning, Spanish slave owners rarely manumitted male slaves in prime physical condition (particularly between 14-35 years of age).

By contrast, my examination of Puebla's manumission data suggests that this characterization may have been valid only up to the third decade of the seventeenth century. After this point, a third of all liberated slaves actually represented men and women in their most productive working years. Infants and the elderly together accounted for the other two thirds of the city's manumitted population. How do we explain this development? Judging from the extant

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<sup>5</sup> 93.2% (108) of manumissions within my sample took place after 1630.

<sup>6</sup> Rachel Sarah O'Toole, "To Be Free and *Lucumí*: Ana de la Calle and Making African Diaspora Identities in Colonial Peru" in *Africans to Spanish America: Expanding the Diaspora* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), eds. Sherwin K. Bryant et al., 76-77; Carlos Eduardo Valencia Villa, *Alma en boca y huesos en costal: Una aproximación a los contrastes socioeconómicos de la esclavitud, Santa Fé, Mariquita y Mompo, 1610-1660* (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia, 2003), 130-131; Frederick Bowser, "The Free Person of Color in Mexico City and Lima: Manumission and Opportunity, 1580-1650" in *Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere: Quantitative Studies*, eds. Stanley L. Engerman et al. (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1975), 331-363; Proctor, 163.

documentation, it appears that slaves born and/or raised in mid-century Puebla held increasing social and financial resources at their disposal when attempting to secure their freedom. As people with at least one or two generations worth of social networks, Afro-Poblanos could rely on immediate family members, godparents, and influential merchants and clergymen to lobby in their favor.<sup>7</sup> The same could not be said about new African arrivals.

As a result, a slave's perceived level of creolization appears to have constituted the determining factor in securing his or her freedom papers. In direct contrast to our findings for slave purchases, American-born slaves outnumbered African-born slaves three to one in manumission records.<sup>8</sup> This astounding ratio becomes all the more revealing when considering that the African slave influx to Puebla peaked only in the 1630s.<sup>9</sup> Out of the 94 manumitted individuals in our 1630-1700 sample, only 10 originated from the African continent. Furthermore, the reported ages for this tiny minority of African freedmen confirms the idea that slaves required a considerable degree of creolization and legal acumen in order to fight for their manumissions. This, of course, required time and exposure to people with understanding of Spanish law and justice. In eight out of these ten successful cases, the African freedmen in question were over thirty-five years of age. If the typical African slave arrived in Puebla at eighteen, this would mean that securing one's freedom papers took approximately twenty years of labor.

By contrast, creoles were far more successful when it came to purchasing their *cartas de libertad*. Out of thirty creole manumissions with ages included, approximately half hailed from central and southern New Spain. The predominance of creole freedmen begins to make sense

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<sup>7</sup> 16.2% of all *cartas de libertad* include information on third parties that acted in favor of enslaved individuals.

<sup>8</sup> A total of 32 manumitted slaves were catalogued as *criollos*.

<sup>9</sup> Between 1600 and 1635, creoles only accounted for 16% of slaves sold in Puebla.

when considering that familial networks were essential to securing an enslaved relative's manumission. Even when born to enslaved parents, creole children often received their liberty due to their progenitors' lifetime savings. The same could not be said for African-born individuals whose parents almost certainly did not accompany their children across the Middle Passage. As individuals stripped of these priceless social networks, Africans remained enslaved at a far greater rate than creoles. The average age for creole manumission came at 28.6 years, while African-born slaves averaged 42.3 years.<sup>10</sup> Yet even statistics such as these do not fully capture the advantage that creoles held over Africans in seventeenth-century Puebla.

In manumission documents, most enslaved infants did not receive cultural labels such as *bozal*, *criollo* or *natural*, but were merely referenced by their age and caste. For example, an infant receiving his freedom papers in 1610 was referred to as "Tomás, the four-month old mulatto son of our Black creole slave, Antonia."<sup>11</sup> Despite this lack of information on place of birth, other indicators prove that the overwhelming majority of manumitted children had been born on American soil. Out of 44 enslaved children (ages 0-13) only four were classified as *negros*, which would have included infants born in Africa. The remaining children overwhelmingly consisted of mulattos. By the mid-seventeenth century, notaries in Puebla began assigning (or simply recording?) increasingly specific racial/phenotypic labels for manumitted children of African descent.<sup>12</sup> For instance, Gabriela de San Joseph, a freed three-year old, appears as a *mulata blanca* in her manumission letter, even though her mother was simply listed

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<sup>10</sup> Puebla notarial database, Not. 4, 1630-1700.

<sup>11</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 164, January 1640, f. 152r.

<sup>12</sup> This concern with mulatto phenotypic gradients is first evident in notarial documents (from my sample) starting in 1645. The notaries Juan Guerra and Diego Cortes de Brito both made use of the term that year, suggesting that they did not innovate in coining these labels.

as a *mulata*.<sup>13</sup> This growing concern with phenotypic characteristics is evident in several freedom letters as manumitted children were described as *mulatos cochos*, *mulatos prietos* and *mulatos blancos* (quince-colored, light-skinned and dark-skinned mulattos, respectively). Despite these innovations, the fact remains that virtually all of the children liberated in seventeenth-century Puebla had been born on the American continent.

Studying the children found in these *cartas de libertad* also advances a number of theories regarding the reach of the Spanish caste system. In his study of colonial Mexico City, Douglas Cope suggested that most *casta* children did not receive an "official" racial classification until he or she "first came into contact with governmental or religious bureaucracies, that is, when he first entered the labor force or married. Marriage registers therefore became the primary source for racial designations."<sup>14</sup> Cope notes that baptismal registers only began to systematically record racial information in the early eighteenth century. Here I contend that the process of officially assigning a caste or racial category to children of slave parents could begin at manumission, well before formal entry into the workplace and/or marriage. Among the 44 children found in my sample, 72% received a racial category of some sort (typically *negro* or some variation of *mulato*).<sup>15</sup> As a result, only a minority of manumitted children escaped the imposition of pejorative caste labels at the moment of their liberation.

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<sup>13</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 170b, 1645/06/12.

<sup>14</sup> Douglas Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebian Colonial Society in Mexico City, 1660-1720* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 55.

<sup>15</sup> AGNP, Manumissions database, 1600-1700. Slave children raised in elite households may have been spared *casta* labels due to their owners' social standing. Among the eight manumitted children who did not receive a *casta* label in this sample, three were slaves of the influential de la Quadra family. The sisters Jerónima, Juana, and Melchora de la Quadra were the children of Ana de la Cruz, a creole *mulata* slave from Guatemala. In 1650, the mother and her three daughters, who evidently took their master's last name, would all receive their freedom upon the death of Jerónimo de la Quadra. In 1625, the three-year old child of a slave couple, Alonso, was also not given a racial label, perhaps because his master was none other than the Bishop Don Alonso de la Mota y Escobar. See AGNP, Not. 4, Box 124, 1625/01/23 and Not. 4, Box 143, 1650/01/23.

To resume our findings of manumission, three factors appear to have weighed considerably in the manumission of Puebla's slaves: creolization, caste category and familial ties. Individuals born on African soil would find themselves disadvantaged under all three variables as the least acculturated, most socially isolated and definitively categorized as dark-skinned individuals. By contrast, many *negros criollos* could rely on parents, godparents and lifelong acquaintances to aid them in their legal maneuvers. However, the association of Blackness with slavery remained a considerable obstacle in seventeenth-century Puebla even for creoles fluent in Castilian and well-informed of their rights as royal vassals and Christian subjects.<sup>16</sup> For mixed-race peoples of African and Asian descent born into slavery, skin color became less and less relevant to their condition as unfree individuals. As people well-integrated into urban society and knowledgeable of their rights and restrictions, acquiring freedom increasingly meant securing modest sums of money from a variety of acquaintances, patrons and family members.

#### *Delayed Freedoms, or the Limbo of Manumission*

Unfortunately, manumission papers rarely translated into actual freedom for the creole Blacks and mulattos receiving them. Spanish slaveowners and their executors often manipulated testaments, amendments and even actual *cartas de libertad* in order to delay or simply deny slaves their freedom. This section addresses many of these mechanisms and demonstrates how precarious freedom could be under notarized manumissions. At the same time, I address how Afro-Poblano families mobilized the resources at their disposal to counter patrons' liberty-delaying tactics. Through the evidence presented, we prove that slaveowners very rarely liberated their enslaved workers out of sheer good will. Instead, slaves could almost certainly

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<sup>16</sup> Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico*, 3.



expect to pay inflated prices for their *carta de libertad*, or at the very least remain in their masters' service for a number of years despite being nominally free.

Manumission documents from seventeenth-century Puebla can be classified into three categories: unconditional freedom, conditional freedom and self-rescue. The first term refers to those rare instances in which a slaveowner freely parted with a slave's labor.<sup>17</sup> Documents such as these often stipulated the manumission of a slave's child, even if his or her parent would remain slaves. Consider the 1640 case of the previously mentioned mulatto infant, Tomás, and his mother, Antonia.<sup>18</sup> At only four months old, Tomás would be liberated without restrictions for his "loyal service" to Puebla's high judge, Dr. Don Cristóbal de Torres. In reality, Torres was rewarding Antonia, his Black creole slave, for her years of labor in his household. As could be expected, members of the Spanish elite could occasionally afford to free slaves in recompense for their service. In addition, manumitting the occasional slave served as a powerful incentive to those unfree workers that remained under a patron's service. Loyalty to the master could pay off, it seemed. However by retaining Tomás' mother in his service, Torres would continue to exert considerable influence on the infant and his living conditions.

Granting a conditional manumission, or *libertad condicional*, instead of absolute freedom, proved to be a far more common occurrence in seventeenth century Puebla. For most non-elite slave owners, their permanent workers represented substantial investments, and as such were highly valuable and transferrable capital. Freeing a slave essentially meant relinquishing several hundred pesos worth of labor, to say nothing of the resources invested in training,

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<sup>17</sup> Proctor, 162. In his study of Mexico City manumissions (1673-1676), Proctor separates conditional manumissions (39%) and manumissions upon the slave owner's death (10.6%). Together, these documents accounted for just under half of all manumissions in late-seventeenth-century Mexico City. Unconditional manumissions only accounted for 21.6% of all cases.

<sup>18</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 164, January 1640, f. 152r. Aside from serving as Puebla's *justicia mayor*, Torres also served as counselor for the Audiencia de Guadalajara.

feeding, clothing and occasionally providing medical care for a slave. As a result, most masters reluctantly manumitted their slaves, and only after receiving a significant sum of money in recompense.

Even household slaves that had been born and raised under a single slaveowner failed to escape this unspoken monetary requirement. In 1680, the city's prominent notary public, Alonso Corona Vázquez, agreed to free Joseph Corona, a twenty-five year old mulatto, for a cash payment of 325 pesos.<sup>19</sup> The notary clearly knew Joseph well, and gave a full physical description of his slave within his letter of manumission. He is of "good stature, large eyes, Black and curly hair, and I have raised him as a son in my house and in company of Doña María Ana de Torija, my deceased wife", Vázquez declared. "And due to the particular love and good will I have toward him, I award this manumission letter", he continued. The documentary record does not delve any further into Joseph's relationship with the notary or Doña María, who may have had a particularly close relationship with the freed slave and his mother, the ex-slave Magdalena. Here we have a perfect example of the weight that familial networks had on securing an enslaved relative's freedom. In his twenty-five years of life, not only had Joseph labored for Vázquez and Torija, his mother had also done the same for the couple.<sup>20</sup>

Typically, remunerations for conditional freedoms ranged from 100 to 300 pesos. However, extremely valuable slaves could end up paying the astronomical sum of 600 pesos for their freedom!<sup>21</sup> A fascinating example centers on Antonio, a twenty-four year old "chino

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<sup>19</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 214, 1680 November, f. 13v.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* By 1680 Magdalena was a free woman. Her life savings were undoubtedly behind her son's freedom, even as one Lic. Don Cristóbal de Guadalajara presented Joseph's owner with the money that would set him free. Entrusting a trustworthy Spaniard with manumission funds often proved the last step in securing one's freedom.

<sup>21</sup> In terms of labor, a very experienced muleteer could charge up to 10 pesos per month, while a skilled obraje worker earned up to 5 pesos a month. As a result, Antonio's manumission letter was the equivalent of paying for five to ten years of labor up front.

Bengala", whom even as a slave had somehow managed to marry an *india principal* from the Tlaxcala province named Magdalena Luisa.<sup>22</sup> As a member of the local Indigenous elite, Magdalena Luisa appears to have possessed significant financial resources (despite the lack of the *Doña* appellation). Her marriage to a slave, however, clearly indicates that many native nobles no longer held the social standing that their sixteenth-century predecessors enjoyed during the early colonial period. In 1630, Magdalena Luisa purchased Antonio's freedom for 600 pesos from the executors of the late Roque Fernandez Taran. In all likelihood, Antonio worked within the pharmacy run by Fernandez's widow and her second husband, a known pharmacist (*boticario*). Despite the extraordinary price paid for Antonio's manumission, the executors refused to liberate the Bengali slave. They noted that he received his freedom "with the strict condition that the said Antonio chino is to serve us for a year from the date of this letter... and upon failure to do so, pay us one hundred pesos in cash."<sup>23</sup> In this case, either Antonio's labor within the pharmacy was indispensable or Fernández's executors were simply exploiting the slave's elevated social networks to the limit.

Other Poblano slaveowners simply preferred to include compulsory labor clauses within their slaves' *cartas de libertad*. In 1665, Diego de Espinosa liberated Lisa de la Cruz, a twenty-eight year old mulatta slave with the following condition, "as long as I live, the said mulata will tend to my house and anything else in which she might be needed, and she will not excuse herself from this obligation in any manner, since I am awarding her liberty with this encumbrance."<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately for Cruz, her master was only twenty-five years of age, thus

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<sup>22</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 138, 1630 June, s.f.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, "... con calidad expresa que el dicho Antonio chino nos a de servir un año desde oy que la otorgamos y livertamos de la sujeción y cautiverio en que ha estado ... y por su defecto pagarnos cien pesos en reales."

<sup>24</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 196, 1665 November, f. 1164r.

guaranteeing a lifetime of unpaid servitude under his power. This particular case is all the more regrettable since ten years after her supposed manumission, Lisa would see her son Joseph, a slave, sold to one of Puebla's largest slaveowners. How many more times would a similar story be repeated in the colonial city?

As a result, a slaveowner's death frequently symbolized a window of opportunity for individual slaves or entire slave families that had been promised their freedom years or decades before. In this respect, death represented the ultimate condition in at least sixteen letters of manumission. In 1645, the city councilman Andres Arano prepared for his eventual passing by promising nine of his slaves their freedom upon his death. However, two of his slaves, Pascuala and Ramón, both teenagers, would have to await the death of Arano's nephew, Dr. Don Antonio de Gaviola, in order to enjoy their freedom. In another noteworthy case from 1650, Jerónimo de la Quadra, a Puebla merchant and neighbor, promised an entire slave family its freedom without remuneration. Upon his passing, Ana de la Cruz, a thirty-year old mulata from Guatemala, and her three children would be able to enjoy their new status as free individuals before the law. Unfortunately, benevolent manumissions such as Quadra's seem to have been the least common in seventeenth-century Puebla.

Other conditional liberties also stipulated additional payments in order to guarantee a slave's freedom. When Luis Hernández, a free Black shoemaker, offered 85 pesos for Francisco, his six-year old son, he was forced to make an additional payment of 45 pesos to be paid off in six months.<sup>25</sup> Francisco's owner, a woman by the name of Constansa Rodríguez, may have thought that six months would allow the struggling second-hand shoemaker (*zapatero remendón*) enough time to gather these last funds. Perhaps Hernández would patch together a series of small loans from his humble clientele. Or perhaps Rodríguez thought six months to be sufficient time

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<sup>25</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 102b, 1630 September, s.f.

to purchase a new slave to replace Francisco. In either case, it is doubtful the slaveowner was truly benefitting from keeping a six-year old in her employ. In cases such as these, it is difficult to discern whether slave owners and emancipators had previously established verbal agreements on the price of manumission. If too much time elapsed between such an arrangement and the actual fundraising, masters could easily raise the price of a manumission.

Slaveowners also abused promises of future payment in order to retain technically free men and women under their control. In 1650, the widow Doña Antonia de Ureña admitted to having kept the mulatto Nicolás de la Cruz in her service for nineteen years even though a Blacksmith had requested his freedom when Nicolás was only four years old. Apparently, the Blacksmith had promised Ureña 140 pesos for the child's freedom, but had only satisfied the widow with 90. As a result, Nicolás, now twenty-three years old, had remained in slavery for nearly two decades as a result of a deficit of only 50 pesos.<sup>26</sup> An even more infuriating case dates from 1645 when Bernarda, a domestic slave of Isabel de Baeza and Juan de Hurtado Mendoza, finally received her freedom.<sup>27</sup> Bernarda had been promised her manumission in 1615 (as a six-year old), but through a series of manipulations had been denied her *carta de libertad* for thirty years! Only after the deaths of Baeza and Hurtado did an executor actually grant this free Afro-Poblana her freedom.

Of the three types of manumissions, *rescate*, or self-rescue, provides us with the greatest amount of detail on the intricacies of individual slave agency and collective resistance to the *status quo*. Rescates are predictably rare documents since they required at least three

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<sup>26</sup> By comparison, in seventeenth-century Puebla a horse could be purchased for 25-100 pesos, the yearly lease of a storefront cost 60 pesos and twenty-five *manta* shirts could be bought for 50 pesos!

<sup>27</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 170b, 1645 April, 209r.

conditions.<sup>28</sup> First, the slave in question had to practice a profession in which he or she was entitled to a portion of the proceedings. Secondly, the slaveowner had to acquiesce to the slave's request to be freed. Finally, the soon-to-be-free individual needed sufficient legal acumen and social capital to actually be able to exercise his or her right to self-purchase freedom. Fortunately, such a case exists in the remarkable judicial proceeding of the West African freedwoman, María de Terra Nova.

In May of 1627, María de Terranova received her freedom papers from Julian Bautista de Cabrera, a Puebla neighbor and fish merchant by profession.<sup>29</sup> In the *carta de libertad*, Bautista noted that he was freeing María for the very considerable sum of 600 pesos. A free Black man named Francisco Carmona (perhaps the leader of an Afro-Poblano religious confraternity) paid María's owner 500 pesos in cash. This money presumably consisted of María's life savings, which she had entrusted to Carmona. María would liquidate the remaining 100 pesos within six months by selling fish for Bautista in Puebla's central square. However, Bautista also included a very specific restriction in María's manumission: "Never and in no manner, is she to sell fish of her own, nor a third party's, even for free. Instead, she is to continue selling only my product as she has done up to now", he stated. After fulfilling her debt to Bautista, María would receive the respectable salary of six pesos per month in addition to her daily meals.

María's manumission represents an anomaly, both chronologically and thematically. Let us recall that slaveowners almost never freed their slaves prior to 1630. Furthermore, Africans rarely earned their manumissions papers even during the mid and late seventeenth century. As a woman from the Bight of Biafra, María represented a tiny minority within the city's

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<sup>28</sup> In his chapter on colonial manumissions, Proctor indicates that slaves purchased their freedom 28.8% of the time in late seventeenth-century Mexico City. This figure seems high or may simply represent a local tendency within the viceregal capital during the mid-1670s. See Proctor, 162.

<sup>29</sup> AHJP, Exp. 1260, 1627-05-31, f. 1r-2r.

overwhelmingly Angolan and Kongolese population. Even more remarkably, the thirty-five year old freedwoman had perfected her craft as a fish vendor to an astonishing degree despite not having been born or raised in New Spain and its complex language, religion and culture. María's knack for selling fish was such that her two previous owners, Manuel de Rojas, and later, Cristobal de Malla, had apparently made enough money from her sales to return to Spain as rich men.<sup>30</sup> Aware of the amazing profits she produced, in early November, 1626, Bautista de Cabrera spent over 2000 pesos in order to own this remarkable woman.

Yet a mere six months after the purchase, María had managed to secure her freedom. According to Bautista, María had pleaded her case "offering to work better and more willingly [as a free woman] than as a slave".<sup>31</sup> Reluctantly, the new slave owner relinquished his rights as María's master, but not before compelling her to sell his fish exclusively even as a free woman. Judging from the extant judicial proceeding, it is clear that María had no intention of following Bautista's clause. Instead, the ex-slave rapidly established a commercial relationship with one Domingo de Olivera, another fish merchant, who supplied her with the produce that she so readily sold in the plaza. Feeling betrayed, Bautista lodged a criminal complaint against María only two weeks after having freed her. The former slaveowner claimed that he had explicitly outlined María's post-manumission obligations and she had failed to follow them. Therefore, her *carta de libertad* was to be declared void.

In response, María hired a lawyer to represent her before the city's lower courts and justices. In the lengthy ninety-six pages of litigation that ensued, María and her counsel never

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 9r-10r. "... la dicha Maria negra por ser diestra en el ministerio del pescado que siempre vendió a Manuel de Rojas, su primer amo, y al dicho Cristobal de Malla se les había seguido de ello mucho interés y aprovechamiento en gran suma de pesos de modo que fue parte para que los dichos dos sus amos adquiriesen y juntasen caudal con que se fueron a España...".

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 3r-3v.

took more than a day to respond to her former owner's accusations. One particular appeal, dated July 27, 1627, proved just how articulate María and her defense could be.<sup>32</sup> Rather than submit to Bautista's demands that María relinquish her fish-selling operation, the woman from Terra Nova presented the following response:

*The act of liberty... is so pure in its nature and so perfect that it admits no conditions, nor has any doubts, and those that have been placed on me should be removed and taken away since Julian Bautista did not offer a liberal manumission [for me]. Instead, I executed the rescue of my person, satisfying and giving far more...than was necessary.*

By emphasizing that she had purchased her freedom outright, María argued that her manumission could not be conditioned by her former master's demands. In September of 1629, María de Terra Nova's dispute with Julian Bautista de Cabrera reached the royal audience and chancellery of New Spain, in Mexico City. During the three months that Bautista attempted to restrict and annul her freedom, María continued to ply her trade as Puebla's most successful fish vendor. In this final and unresolved piece of litigation the ex-slave presented herself as "María, negra libre de Tierra Nova". Her fate as a free woman would now depend on the judgment of Don Cristóbal de la Mota y Osorio, secretary of the king's chamber.

Thus, it appears that even when purchasing their manumissions via *rescate*, highly-skilled, financially healthy and well-assessed ex-slaves continued to endure the demands of their former owners. Undoubtedly, many freedmen were successful in establishing themselves as independent and productive neighbors in Puebla. However, for the majority, manumission simply did not represent a viable or appealing route to liberty. Enslaved people of African and Asian descent would simply have to find other alternatives in their quest for freedom. In this respect, structured apprenticeships and service contracts with Spanish patrons represented

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 15r.



valuable approximations to the free status that slaves so eagerly sought. We now turn to the promises and pitfalls found within these alternatives.

### *Apprenticeship: A Skilled Slavery*

The historical literature on apprenticeships in New Spain is limited. Nonetheless, Brígida von Mentz has successfully established that whatever the legalese contained within them, apprentice contracts furnished employers with young, semi-permanent workers with little to no pay.<sup>33</sup> This was certainly the case with the male adolescent Afro-Poblanos who labored within the artisan ranks of the city. (Women, of all classes and races, were officially excluded from the world of apprenticeship.) For many of these young *pardos* and *morenos*, their poorly remunerated labor posed little contradiction to their quotidian reality as economically disadvantaged laborers. Even free apprentices could find themselves chained up within the city's workshops in conditions physically identical to those of slave laborers. In fact, during the first half of the seventeenth century, slaves and apprentices worked side-by-side plying their trades as shoemakers, tailors, and weavers. But the case of Puebla's *chinos*, *negros* and *mulatos* is worthy of distinction. Only these three groups of people could simultaneously fulfill the role of apprentice and slave.

In a century-long examination of Puebla's Notaría 4, I have located forty-eight apprentice contracts for young men labeled as *mulatos*, *pardos*, and *negros* or *morenos*. Within this sample, eight of these contracts pertained to slave-apprentices. Undoubtedly, many more young men served precisely the same functions but their owners did not bother to formalize their

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<sup>33</sup> Brígida von Mentz, *Trabajo, sujeción y libertad en el centro de la Nueva España: Esclavos, aprendices, campesinos y operarios manufactureros, siglos XVI a XVIII* (México: CIESAS, 1999), 164-165; Richard Salvucci, *Textiles and Capitalism in Mexico: An Economic History of the Obrajes, 1539-1840* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 100-107.

arrangements before a notary. Prior to 1650, Spanish slave owners in Puebla placed their slaves under the tutelage of master artisans with the expectation that as skilled journey investing in their slaves would pay off in the long term. After years of training, slave owners could rent out their slaves to master artisans for considerable monthly salaries as certified journeymen (*oficiales*).

A fascinating case from 1610 illustrates how Spanish slave owners could profit from leasing their skilled slaves. That year, Doña Juana Meléndez wrote the viceroy complaining that the head architect (*obrero mayor*) of Puebla's cathedral project intended to dismiss three Black slaves of hers from the construction site.<sup>34</sup> Meléndez, whose husband apparently suffered from some sort of mental illness, owned a crew of six Black slaves, all who were skilled masons.<sup>35</sup> "They have worked for over ten years on the construction of the Cathedral church in the city of the Angels and, as it were, four of them are the best officials that this kingdom has to offer," Melendez argued.<sup>36</sup> The crux of the matter centered on the poor salaries these skilled masons were receiving at the Cathedral, where all six of them earned a combined 7 reales per day. The slaveowner refuted this imposition by the architect (perhaps a new appointment?), by claiming that her slaves earned no less than a daily peso and half (12 reales) on any other construction site. For this particular slave owner, her crew of skilled slaves represented no less than an annual income of 210 pesos. Reducing that figure by half was simply not an option for Doña Juana.

From the scant records at hand, it appears that slave owners preferred to train their slaves in low-skill professions. Within our notarial sample, slaves only appear as apprentices for common professions as shoemakers, hatmakers and tailors. As seen in the previous example,

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<sup>34</sup> AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, Box 6610, Exp. 1, 1610/05/25.

<sup>35</sup> Doña Juana Melendez was married to the *Contador* Juan de Burboa Guevara, at one point the city accountant and a close acquaintance of viceroy Don Luis de Velasco II. He had fallen from grace after failing to properly collect *alcabala* taxes, which prompted Crown officials to embargo his possessions (except for his slaves, apparently).

<sup>36</sup> By Melendez's own admission, two of her six slaves could not claim to be skilled officials. However, "even when two of them do not possess sufficient experience, this is remedied by the exceeding expertise of the others..."

slaves could also specialize in masonry, carpentry, Blacksmithery, etc. Instances of training in these construction trades do not surface in the Puebla archives, although enslaved apprentices clearly participated in them. Furthermore, slave-apprentices nearly vanished after the mid-century mark. While seven slave-apprentices surface in our sample during the first half of the seventeenth century, I have only located a single case of a slave working as an apprentice after 1650.<sup>37</sup>

The only other scenario in which slave men appeared in apprentice contracts was when their authority as an authorizing *paterfamilias* was required. In this fascinating juxtaposition of civil rights within slavery, unfree men could present themselves before a public notary in order to ratify their sons' apprenticeship papers. Undoubtedly, this was a rare occurrence as slave fathers only appear in five extant cases we have at our disposal.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, these cases are valuable as they speak to the undeniable bias in favor of male figures (even enslaved ones) inherent in Spanish law, business and society. Four of these five Afro-Poblano fathers were classified as *negros*, while only one *mulato* paterfamilias appears among these particular documents. As a result, it appears that an individual's caste designation did impact his son's chances of leading a more fulfilling life. Among the seven *pardo/mulato* fathers that appear in apprenticeship contracts, only one remained enslaved. For the most part, all of these men could claim to be free citizens of Puebla. They all held last names, which implied a degree of acculturation that new African arrivals simply did not possess.<sup>39</sup> By contrast, not a single free

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<sup>37</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 209, 1675 August, f. 698r.

<sup>38</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 137, 1630/04/16; Box 151, 1635/06/25; Box 174, 1650/07/20 and 1650/09/03; Box 188, 1660/03/03.

<sup>39</sup> Subtle class distinctions among people of partial African descent began to differentiate *pardos* from *mulatos* by the end of the seventeenth century. The only two *pardo* fathers that appear in apprenticeship contracts both claimed to have "legitimate children", while *mulato* fathers seem to have had their children out of wedlock. See AGNP, Not. 4, Box 240, 1700/01/29 and 1700/03/24.

*moreno* or *negro* father appears in the apprentice record. Thus the presence or omission of certain racial categories does seem to reify the caste system, at least within the notarial record. Most Black males were slaves, by contrast mulatto men held an ambiguous position in which more and more of them could claim rights as free individuals. For the latter group, an everyday exposure to free people of all walks of life, and especially artisans, enabled them to secure apprenticeships for their sons in a way that slaves simply could not.

*Mulatos* and *pardos* formed the overwhelming majority of the Afro-Poblano apprentices, free and enslaved alike, as only eight *morenos/negros* appear in our sample. A partial explanation for the apparent dominance of these mixed-race individuals must consider that the demography of labor in Puebla changed considerably during the seventeenth century. As seen in the previous chapter, the African influx to the city declined considerably after the 1640s. The same could not be said about *pardos* or *mulatos*, most of whom had been born and raised in the city or viceroyalty. As people of partial African descent, their presence in the colonial city was not predicated upon the continual arrival of Black slaves. In fact, the *mulato/pardo* population of Puebla exploded during the second half of the seventeenth century.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the overrepresentation of *mulatos* as seventeenth-century apprentices may actually reflect the inverse demographic tendencies of "pure Blacks" versus people of mixed descent within the city.

Generally speaking, an apprenticeship was intended to benefit both the employer and the student. Apprentices, and particularly free Afro-Poblanos, simply needed the opportunity to learn a profession in order to earn a living, maintain a household, pay tribute, etc. In addition to receiving a monthly wage and the skill set for a given trade, apprentices also received a complete

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<sup>40</sup> Peter Gerhard, "Un censo de la diócesis de Puebla en 1681," *Historia Mexicana*, 30, 4 (Apr.-Jun. 1981): 534. By 1681, Puebla had a total population of 68,000 people, of which approximately 34,000 were described as racially-mixed individuals or *castas*. The inherent difficulties of separating *mestizos*, from *mulatos*, *castizos*, *lobos*, *coyotes*, etc., are obvious. *Negros* would have also been included in this *casta* category but formed an ever-smaller part of the population, due to low fertility rates and the cessation of the Portuguese slave trade in 1639.

uniform by which they would be recognized as *oficiales* upon fulfilling their contracts. Perhaps more importantly, apprentice contracts relieved poor Afro-Poblano families from feeding and maintaining their young adolescents. Master artisans were required to provide their pupils with "food, bed, and clean clothes" in addition to providing medical attention.<sup>41</sup> For a young *pardo* or *moreno* apprentice, the accumulation of his monthly salaries could even help manumit an enslaved family member.

Supervised labor under a master artisan began at just around fourteen years of age.<sup>42</sup> Unfortunately, this number remains an estimate at best since many contracts merely stipulated that the apprentice was "older than fourteen, but younger than twenty-five". At the other end of the spectrum, only at age twenty-five did young men legally reach adulthood. Fourteen then, appears to have been the recognized age for entry into the Spanish American labor market and may help explain why so many African youths were brought into Puebla. Recall that Portuguese slave traders often included small lots of prepubescent children as part of their human cargoes in order to minimize royal tariffs. An alternate reason for purchasing twelve and thirteen-year olds is now evident as these youths were ideal candidates for the rigors of urban apprentice labor. However, it should be noted that African-born adolescents do not surface in notarized apprenticeships.<sup>43</sup> In fact, mulattos consistently outnumbered all African and Black creole youths in these contracts, particularly after 1650.

Technically, adolescents between fourteen and twenty-five years of age needed the authorization of their parents, typically their father, to formally begin an apprenticeship. Those

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<sup>41</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 188, f. 238r, 1660/03/03.

<sup>42</sup> Puebla notarial database, 1600-1700. An average age of 13.8 years for apprentices entering contracts comes from the exact reported ages of 28 apprentices.

<sup>43</sup> AGNP, Apprenticeship database, 1595-1700. Only 9 Black apprentices surface in this sample, as opposed to 40 mulatto youths (including 1 *pardo*). Only 2 apprentices, out of a total of 51, did not include racial labels in their contracts, but both noted that their fathers were free mulattos.

youths who were orphans, did not know their parents, or had been cut off from their families due to the slave trade should have received the legal assessment of an objective third-party guardian, or *curador ad litem*.<sup>44</sup> This guardian-of-sorts was responsible for guaranteeing the wellbeing of the apprentices under his care and preventing exploitative treatment from the master artisan, although it is rather unlikely that he actually fulfilled his obligations. Judging from the appearance of a single *curador* for six separate Afro-Poblano apprentices between 1660 and 1675, it seems that the guardian requirements represented a minor bureaucratic affair rather than genuine concern for adolescent workers.<sup>45</sup>

Artisans required a permanent and skilled labor force in order to produce finished goods. Just as in the initial demand for slave labor, permanency remained the *sine qua non* of apprentice contracts. In general, most of the contracts signed by young Afro-Poblanos fluctuated between two and five years of service to a master artisan. The forty-seven contracts at our disposal averaged 43.7 months of labor per apprentice. This data is consistent with Alejandro de la Fuente's research on early colonial Havana, where most apprenticeships ranged between 24 and 59 months of labor.<sup>46</sup> In other words, only after three and a half years of generally unpaid service was a young apprentice considered schooled enough in his craft to call himself an *oficial*.

The very wording of apprenticeship contracts suggests that life under a master artisan was a treacherous, physically demanding occupation. In every single one of these documents, artisans vowed to treat their apprentices respectfully ("hará buen tratamiento"), yet our evidence suggests that this was not often so. Contracts often included murky clauses with respect to an

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* A total of 12 youths, roughly a quarter of all Afro-Poblano apprentices, noted that they were orphans. Naturally, these youngsters, bereft of familial networks, faced greater risks within artisan workshops.

<sup>45</sup> "Juan Godinez, vzo" appears in apprentice contracts from 1660-1675, while other guardians such as Juan Bautista Romero and Juan de Bique served during the 1610s and 1630s, respectively.

<sup>46</sup> De la Fuente, 109. The Havana sample includes 85 apprentice contracts for the 1578-1610 period.

apprentice's earnings. Consider the case of Pascual de la Cruz, a sixteen year-old mulatto and the son of a slave. In 1660, Pascual agreed to complete an apprenticeship with Gaspar de Cabrera, one of many master shoemakers in the city. In doing so Cabrera never outlined how much money Pascual would earn during his service, merely noting, "he would pay him what an official of said craft usually receives".<sup>47</sup> As could be expected, artisans often undercompensated their young apprentices.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, artisans compelled their young workers to remain under their direct surveillance for the entire duration of the contract. It should be noted that workshops were located within artisans' homes, thus exposing apprentices to their employers and the latter's families at all hours of the day. This convergence of public and domestic spaces engendered a working environment with physical, psychological and sexual perils for young adolescents. Presumably, apprentices had the opportunity to visit their families on Sundays and holidays but the wording in their contracts offered little room for minor absences or acts of rebelliousness. Instead, artisans could legally seek out absent apprentices and apprehend them with physical force. These adolescent runaways could then be forced to finish the term of their contract in chains within the workshop. Furthermore, these binding documents explicitly prohibited apprentices from seeking out other master artisans in search of better working and living conditions.<sup>49</sup>

Young Afro-Poblanos who completed their arduous training often did not lead better lives than other sectors of the population who finished their apprenticeships. By cross-

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<sup>47</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 188, f. 238r, 1660/03/03.

<sup>48</sup> The seventeenth-century exploitation of apprentices (of all caste categories) extended well into the late eighteenth century. In 1778, the city prosecutor, Pedro de Ovando Ledesma, condemned the manner in which master artisans retained apprentices well past the terms of their contracts without remuneration. See AHJP, Exp. 4539, ff. 1r-3v.

<sup>49</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 188, f. 238r, 1660/03/03.

referencing apprentices with other notarial databases (slave purchases, debt contracts, and manumissions) I have located thirty skilled Afro-Poblanos within the city's seventeenth century archive. Out of these thirty, only eight could claim to be free men. Despite training as carpenters, tailors, Blacksmiths, weavers and even confectioners and silversmiths, skilled Afro-Poblano and Asian laborers remained slaves. For Spanish, mestizo and Indian apprentices, finishing their training signified increased salaries, better living conditions and perhaps even the opportunity of establishing their own independent workshops.

The use of chains and handcuffs on free and enslaved workers perhaps best symbolizes the inherent coercion that young Afro-Poblanos encountered in the city. As incoherent as it may seem nowadays, master artisans often weighed down their pupils with irons while simultaneously expecting them to work diligently at their crafts.<sup>50</sup> In September 1625, Domingo, the mulatto slave of one Bartolomé Martínez Moyano, entered a three-year apprenticeship with Rodrigo Quintero, a milliner.<sup>51</sup> The latter owned a hat-making workshop, or *obraje de hacer sombreros*, where it was expected Domingo would work as a loader, hauling materials from one end to the other of the shop. Incredibly, Domingo was to serve in this capacity shackled ("con prisiones") for the entirety of his thirty-six month term. Furthermore, if at any moment Quintero were to remove the apprentice's irons and the young man fled, it would be the hatmaker's responsibility to search for him. On the other hand, Martínez Moyano was compelled to locate his slave if Domingo escaped, irons and all.

As is evident, for young Afro-Poblano officials, freedom, a natural familiarity with their urban environment and a sought-after skill set did not guarantee a comfortable existence.

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, "... y si faltare de trabajar, lo a de desquitar con prisiones en el dicho oficio."

<sup>51</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 123, 1625 September, f. 2194r.



Consider the late sixteenth-century case of the free mulatto, Domingo de Anaya. In April of 1595, Anaya agree to work for Nicolas Ginovés, a master shoemaker, for a two-year term.<sup>52</sup> Ginovés must have appreciated the fact that Anaya was a highly skilled shoemaker as he awarded him an eight-peso monthly salary. In addition, the master artisan agreed to pay for Anaya's meals during the time they would work together. Ginovés even granted his prospective employee a thirty-four peso advance. Thus, at first glance, it would appear that this was a fairly standard transaction between a skilled laborer and a master artisan.

However as we delve deeper, Anaya's financial and legal difficulties begin to emerge. Apparently, Anaya owed another shoemaker (by the name of Juan Gómez) the modest sum of twenty-six pesos. Unable to repay the money, Gómez had Anaya thrown into prison. News of such an event would have rapidly circulated among guild circles, eventually reaching the opportunistic Nicolás Ginóves. Thus, the advance Ginovés had offered the imprisoned shoemaker merely satisfied the latter's debt with his ex-employer and prison fees. Situations such as these were typical and merely demonstrate how freedom rarely meant leading an autonomous, self-sufficient lifestyle.<sup>53</sup>

#### *A Never Ending Cycle: Afro-Poblano Debt after Slavery*

The preceding sections allow us to understand that drafting a manumission letter before a notary only awarded enslaved individuals a very limited freedom. Slaves and freedmen, both skilled and unskilled, confronted a difficult political, economic and fiscal environment during the early seventeenth century. In 1574 the Crown determined that people of African descent would

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<sup>52</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 41, April 1595, f. 209r. 1595-04-18.

<sup>53</sup> For another illustrative case from 1635, see the case of the free mulatto glassmaker, Bartolomé Pascual and his patron, Diego de Valencia. AHJP, AGNP, Not. 4, Box 151, May 1635, f. 755r.

pay tribute regardless of their juridical status.<sup>54</sup> This stance hardened during subsequent decades, particularly with the decreasing fiscal income from a rapidly dwindling Indigenous population. Furthermore, an examination of Puebla debt contracts confirms the hypothesis that slaves and their relatives resorted to loans in order to pay for letters of manumission, tribute, personal debts, etc. It is therefore surprising that the issue of debt has not surfaced more frequently in slavery studies.

Considerable evidence from the Poblano case indicates that debt was often the catalyst for the incarceration of freedmen. For instance, a register of all the prisoners held in the Puebla jail for the years 1685-1686 has preserved valuable information on freedman debt. That year, a coal miner incarcerated Juan Pascual, simply described as a *negro preso*, for a 300-peso debt.<sup>55</sup> Apparently, Pascual originally owed this money to a third party, the muleteer Antonio Marselis. The free *chino* Salvador de la Cruz was also in arrears to another muleteer, Juan Gallardo, for an undefined amount of money, yet apparently substantial enough for his imprisonment.<sup>56</sup> After six weeks in jail, De la Cruz would eventually be freed but only after agreeing to a monthly two-peso payment to his creditor. In 1686, Francisco de Salazar, a *mulato libre*, was also thrown in jail for an unspecified debt.

Clearly, incarcerating an insolvent borrower was an inefficient way of securing repayment. As Douglas Cope has noted, "debtor's prison was not the ultimate solution for financial problems but an intermediate step designed to bring the debtor to account. The creditor used the legal system to demonstrate that he was serious about collecting the debt and to improve

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<sup>54</sup> Ben Vinson III, *Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 133.

<sup>55</sup> AHJP, Exp. 2442, "Relación de los presos que se encuentra en la Real Cárcel de la ciudad, por visita general, del Gen. Don Juan Isidro de Pardiñas Villar de Franco y Camaño," ff. 1r-1v.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, ff. 3v-4r.

his leverage in the subsequent bargaining."<sup>57</sup> Small debts under 50 pesos, would, in all likelihood, not result in imprisonment. The debts of most freedmen were probably confined to this range, given their potential for repayment and limited credit. The prisoners Salvador de la Cruz and Francisco de Salazar most certainly owed larger sums of money, debts that required new creditors and obligations. Thus, by focusing on debt contracts drafted by free Blacks, mulattos, and *chinos*, we gain a valuable window into the exigencies that formal freedom demanded of urban slaves. The focus on debt highlights the economic dependency that most ex-slaves experienced at the hands of Puebla's high- and middle-strata society. It is readily apparent that freedom came at the price of endemic debt and continued subservience to Spanish patrons.

Within our sample of Puebla's fourth notarial office there are 72 cases in which free *chinos* and Afro-Poblanos recognized their debts to second-parties, typically Spaniards of means. In 15 of these 72 cases (21%), debtors acknowledged that the money they owed stemmed from having been incarcerated for having defaulted on their obligations.<sup>58</sup> Every additional day spent in prison resulted in accrued fees, which would have to be repaid in some manner. A selection of these cases will help us understand how freedmen of African and Asian descent rapidly entered a cycle of unending debt and frequent prison sentences.

In 1635, the free mulatto siblings and minors, Joseph de Vela and Lucas de Vergara, found themselves in a dire predicament. Their sister, Ana de Galvez, also a free mulata, had been imprisoned for a 200-peso debt to a Poblano merchant by the name of Juan Pérez.<sup>59</sup> The merchant had loaned Ana this sum so that she could manumit her mother, Antonia de Vergara.

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<sup>57</sup> Cope, 101.

<sup>58</sup> By contrast, free *chinos* and Afro-Poblanos only appear as creditors in 6 cases, all of which took place after 1630 (but concentrated in the period after 1650).

<sup>59</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 150, 1635 March, f. 389r.

Evidently, Ana had defaulted on her obligations and her creditor had not hesitated to throw her into prison. Now the two underage brothers found themselves seeking yet another person of means to pay Ana's prison fees in addition to the original debt. A close reading of the document suggests that Joseph and Lucas did not have any artisanal training or educational experience to use as leverage with a master artisan. Fortunately, a miller agreed to take on the family's debt if both siblings agreed to work for him. Altogether, Joseph and Lucas would receive a monthly salary of eighteen pesos for their services in the mill. If all went well, they would pay off their sister's debt in just over two years, as the miller was to retain ten pesos per month.

In cases such as these, in which debts originated from the purchase of manumission letters, ex-slaves benefitted immensely from the economic contributions of immediate family members. In turn, this may explain why so few African-born slaves were successful in securing their freedom papers. No Africans emerge in the four debt contracts derived from *cartas de libertad* at our disposal. Instead free creole families, with both Black and mulatto individuals, emerge as active agents in the liberation of their relatives. Their familiarity with Spanish law, language and culture cannot be underestimated in circumstances such as these, particularly when children were involved. While the mulatto siblings in the case above successfully freed their sister from jail, it is highly unlikely that they completed their service with the miller on schedule. As illiterate, unskilled and unsupervised children, their patron enjoyed a position of power that could rapidly turn into a detrimental situation.

Our next case illustrates how well connected Afro-Poblanos could ensure a less burdensome beginning to their lives as free people. In 1650, Juana de Escobar, a free Black woman, and Nicolás, her twenty-five year old mulatto son (and thus, an adult by law) agreed to

reimburse the widow Juana Nieto with 50 pesos.<sup>60</sup> Nieto had lent mother and son the money "out of friendship and goodwill" in order for them to secure their freedom. However, even small loans of this nature required collateral in the form of reputable co-signers. María de Escobar, another free Black woman and possibly Juana's sister, agreed to serve in this capacity. Yet only after the inclusion of Alonso Pérez de Zamora, who served as the bishopric's notary, was the family's credit considered acceptable.

As a result, maintaining close ties with influential Spaniards remained essential to any Afro-Poblano family's intent to secure funds for manumission, establish commercial credit, or earn the goodwill of the court justices. This continued economic reliance on people of means helps explain why both urban freedmen and slaves rarely considered collective rebellion as an avenue towards advancing their goals even though Spaniards represented the overwhelming majority of slave owners.<sup>61</sup> True, the development of these patron-client networks "divided the urban poor by pitting clients against each other in a struggle to cut the best possible deal for themselves and their families."<sup>62</sup> But establishing these asymmetrical relationships also incentivized freedman agency and entrepreneurship. As a result, extremely successful ex-slaves, such as the fish vendor María de Terra Nova, sought out the commercial backing of Spaniards to finance her outstanding legal battle. The absence of such connections to the upper strata of colonial society could and did result in what we can only term "failed freedoms." An ex-slave's debt could quickly become economic servitude not merely for the freedman in question, but also for his or her spouse and extended family.

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<sup>60</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 174, 1650 September, f. 692r.

<sup>61</sup> Cope, 123, 160.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

An emblematic case from the early seventeenth century highlights how even free Afro-Poblanos well integrated into Indigenous society struggled to maintain a modicum of social, economic and judicial independence. In 1605, Diego de Valencia, a man "of mulatto color" and a neighbor of Cholula, appeared before one of the city's notaries to acknowledge a debt to one Francisco Díaz de Vargas.<sup>63</sup> The debt, for which he was imprisoned, originated in the purchase of a chestnut-colored horse for 106 pesos. It appears that Valencia had succeeded in paying off a fraction of the horse's value before falling behind in his obligations, as he owed 94 pesos at the time of his incarceration.

As a result, he and his wife Magdalena, an Indigenous woman fluent in Castilian, would now pay off the remainder of his debt by working for Díaz de Vargas. Together the couple would earn a meager six pesos a month, meaning that their debt would only be fulfilled in two years' time. Unlike the previous cases we have discussed, Valencia and his spouse did not call forth on Spaniards to come to their aid (which perhaps explains why they would receive such poor salaries). Instead, Diego could only count on his mother-in-law, María Castilan Suchil, an Indigenous or mestizo woman, and on another Afro-Indigenous couple from Cholula as co-signers.<sup>64</sup>

As in Valencia's case, free Afro-Poblanos often owed their creditors relatively small amounts of money. Most debts ranged from 30 to 90 pesos, and only rarely exceeded 200 pesos. Larger amounts typically reflected the inability to reimburse a creditor for manumission papers or simply indicated how a smaller debt had snowballed through the accumulation of tribute and

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<sup>63</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 58, 1605 October, s.f.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* Juan Francisco, identified as an *indio*, and María Hernández, "of mulata color," both neighbors of Cholula, appear as a married couple in the document as *fiadores* for Diego and Magdalena.

prison fees. In 1640, the mulatto Diego Rodríguez found himself precisely in such a situation.<sup>65</sup> Rodríguez requested an 82-peso loan "with which to pay his majesty the fourteen pesos of royal tribute" that he owed in addition to sixty-one pesos for an outstanding debt to Juan de Martos, a Puebla neighbor. The remaining seven pesos he requested were for the "arrears spent in order to leave the city's jail and prison." Many other debt contracts must have followed this formula in which third parties incarcerated delinquent Afro-Poblanos, particularly if they had not fulfilled their tribute obligations.<sup>66</sup>

The imposition of tribute payments on freedmen must be understood as one of the most challenging aspects of Afro-Poblano life during the seventeenth century. While they remained enslaved, Blacks and mulattos could not be held responsible for paying royal tribute. This fiscal obligation logically fell on the slave owner. However, as soon as a slave secured his freedom, he was automatically exposed to the unrelenting fiscal demands of Crown officials. At an annual rate of 12-16 pesos, tribute forced free Afro-Poblanos into a competitive urban labor market, for which most ex-slaves were largely unprepared.<sup>67</sup> As we have seen, most freedmen did not complete apprenticeships and those who did hardly earned sufficient salaries to sustain their families. Thus, free individuals of African descent predictably turned to low-skill, physically-demanding jobs as muleteers, domestic servants, textile workers, etc.

It is precisely at this juncture during the early-to-mid seventeenth century that the figure of the mulatto *arriero*, or muleteer, enters the colonial imaginary. Men of African descent (and mestizos) have traditionally been portrayed as wanderers and fiscal evaders in the historiography

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<sup>65</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 164, 1640 January, f. 57r. Rodríguez was given just over thirteen months to pay Manuel de Pita, a cattle raiser from the province of Tuxtla.

<sup>66</sup> In at least one other case dating from 1635 an Afro-Poblano muleteer explicitly refers to owing the king's tribute and other creditors. See AGNP, Not. 4, Box 151, 1635 June, f. 999r.

<sup>67</sup> Vinson, 134.

of New Spain without explaining the underlying conditions that caused such behavior.<sup>68</sup> Yet judging from Puebla debt contracts it is now clear that work on the viceroyalty's mule trains offered ex-slaves the best opportunities for breaking their cycles of debt for one or two years of hard labor. On average, muleteers entering debt contract received eight pesos a month, with more experienced men earning up to twelve pesos. By contrast, wool carders could only expect to make three pesos per month in the city's ubiquitous textile mills.<sup>69</sup> As a result, muleteers and mule train owners accounted for nearly a quarter of all Afro-Poblano individuals drafting debt contracts in the seventeenth-century city.<sup>70</sup> Spanish patrons could force these unskilled freedmen into such labor arrangements with the certainty that they would not be able to secure more profitable employment elsewhere.

The case of the muleteer Diego López perhaps best represents the failed liberty that most Afro-Poblanos experienced during the mid-seventeenth century. In June of 1635, López agreed to reimburse a Spanish mule train owner with 212 pesos to be paid over a two-year span. As a *mulato* and a Puebla native, López did not confront the difficulties that the thousands of Angolan and Kongolese slaves endured during the first half of the seventeenth century. To the contrary, the muleteer had been born and raised immersed in the complex Spanish and Indigenous culture of the second largest urban center in New Spain. His immediate, biological family undoubtedly aided him in his moments of need, both financially and emotionally.

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<sup>68</sup> Cayetana Alvarez de Toledo, *Politics and Reform in Spain and Viceregal Mexico: The Life and Thought of Juan de Palafox 1600-1659* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 92.

<sup>69</sup> These averages are calculated from the monthly salary reported in the debt contracts of nine muleteers, mule train owners and loaders. The lowest paid muleteer, the mulatto orphan, Esteban Pascual, would only receive four pesos per month. Pascual's poor salary can be explained by the fact that he was legally a minor (under the age of 25) and had failed to fulfill a prior debt contract by running away. See AGNP, Not. 4, Box 100, 1620 August, f. 2392r.

<sup>70</sup> These seventeen muleteers and mule train owners accounted for 23.6% of all Afro-Poblanos entering debt contracts. By contrast, only four wool carders appear in our sample, a surprisingly low number considering the importance of textile mills in colonial Puebla.



Still, Diego López had fallen behind on his personal debts and tribute obligations. For the next twenty-four months he would "serve and compensate" his creditor, Diego de Padilla Matamoros, as an *arriero* in the latter's mule train "going with it any place and any where it might go, in this kingdom and beyond its boundaries." For López, who might have always been free, liberty could not be equated with an independent workshop, a permanent home or even the comfort of family. He certainly enjoyed a great degree of spatial mobility as a muleteer, but so did countless slaves that served in this same capacity. Instead, his nominal independence was dictated by the payment of tribute, cyclical debt and the months of service owed to a Spanish patron. The city prison would always await in case he failed in his obligations.

#### *Female Domestic Service through "Cartas de Servicio"*

The previous cases illustrate the tenuous freedom that young Afro-Poblanos encountered in seventeenth-century Puebla. But what of Black and mulatto women? To understand the female working experience we turn to a different type of documentation in domestic service contracts or *cartas de servicio*. As could be expected, the overwhelming majority of such agreements did not pass before a public notary.<sup>71</sup> In Puebla, most domestics were family-owned slaves, long-time acquaintances or merely trustworthy workers recommended by friends, rendering formal paperwork quite pointless. In a few rare instances, however, Afro-Poblanos women did complete notarial formalities in order to work within the house of a Spanish paterfamilias. The clauses contained within these contracts reveal a surprising amount of detail regarding the cultural expectations for female domestic servants.

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<sup>71</sup> Cope, 104. Only a small number of domestic service contracts were drafted in seventeenth-century New Spain. Cope only located one formal contract for a female domestic worker in Mexico City during the 1670s.

Our sample size for Afro-Poblana service contracts is admittedly small, only numbering six cases and all dating from a thirty-year range (1595-1625). Thereafter, service contracts must have become unnecessary. The exponential growth of the female mestizo and mulatto population at mid-century and the resulting oversupply of domestic laborers may explain this tendency. Nonetheless, a number of generalizations from these *cartas de servicio* can be readily made. First of all, only free women identified as "mulatas" entered into formalized arrangements of this type. In an interesting parallel to apprenticeship contracts, it appears that women of partial African ancestry enjoyed greater remunerated working opportunities than their Black counterparts. Spanish patrons appear to have sought out mulata adolescents as domestic servants. Four of these six women reported their ages: Juana de la Cruz, age 9; Juana de los Reyes, 12; Petrona, 17, and Isabel Ortiz who claimed to be between 14 and 25 years old.

These young women were expected to fulfill daily chores such as washing, cooking, and sewing in addition to simply obeying their patrons' will. More specific tasks, such as breastfeeding, appear to have fallen to slave women who already had children of their own. Nonetheless, the central discourse in service contracts for women focuses primarily on the rigors of devoted service, Christian morality and honor. For instance, in 1615, Juana de la Cruz entered a service contract with a married couple, Cristóbal de la Cruz and Sebastiana de la Vega.<sup>72</sup> Francisca Hernández, a free *mulata* and Juana's mother, appears to have personally requested that the Cruz de la Vega family receive her daughter in their home. In the service contract, Hernández declared that she wished Juana to stay with the Spanish couple so that her daughter "would not go to waste when she became a woman and would know how to serve and work." Hernández evidently sustained a good relationship with Sebastiana de la Vega, to whom she referred to as an "honorable and Christian person."

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<sup>72</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 78, 1615 July, 1615/07/01.

Clauses on religious morality in these service contracts were exclusive to working women. Such elements are nowhere to be found in apprenticeship and labor contracts for Afro-Poblano men. In another noteworthy case from 1610, Juana de los Reyes, a twelve-year old *mulata* from Pachuca agreed to spend the next six years of her life working for the widow Ana de los Reyes.<sup>73</sup> The widow would instruct Juana in "the Christian doctrine and good manners" in addition to teaching her how "to sew and work." In general, service contracts in proper domestic training and Christian morality offered poor monetary recompense. Although Reyes, the widow, would feed, house and clothe the twelve-year old Juana, she would only pay her 50 pesos for 6 years of service! Likewise, Francisca Hernández's nine-year old daughter would only receive a peso for each of her 48 months of labor.

Perhaps these poorly paid service contracts simply reflected the going wages for child workers as both these young women were. However, in three other *cartas de servicio* that include stipulated wages for older adolescents, their monthly salaries only rose from 2 to 2.5 pesos. As a result, one must question whether these young Afro-Poblanas actually benefited from formal service contracts. Rather, it seems that Spanish patrons could obtain the labor of nominally free, but impoverished, *mulata* adolescents at little to no expense. By locking them in to four, five or even six-year contracts they essentially ended up paying child wages to adult women.

### *Conclusion*

Enslaved Africans and creole slaves continued to arrive in the city during the forty years under question, but never at the rate experienced under the Portuguese slaving monopoly. By 1640, Puebla de los Ángeles had a considerable population of African descent, as Blacks but

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<sup>73</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 67, 1610 May, 1610/05/08.

especially mulattos acquired sophisticated skill and technical expertise within the artisan ranks. The visibility of this minority group as exchangers of credit and currency is also deeply revealing of the freedom that *pardos* and *morenos* had achieved within a short timespan. Access to apprenticeships and service contracts, both sanctioned and unsanctioned, were crucial in this regard and guaranteed the consolidation of a highly skilled, but poorly remunerated population.

The acquisition of freedom formed an elemental, if treacherous, part of the Afro-Poblanos' rise in urban society. Spaniards rarely awarded letters of manumission to their slaves, and those that did delayed their servants' freedom as long as they could. Yet the city's free *pardo* and *moreno* population continued to grow exponentially. How could this be? This chapter has established that manumissions did not account for the growth of the free Afro-Poblano community. At the same time, the newfound freedoms of citizenship also exposed people of African descent to the payment of tribute, an onerous tax from which they had been exempt under slavery. Time and again, the notarial records expose a population unable to satisfy their fiscal and personal obligations.

The most common manifestation of this situation was the signing of a *carta de obligación*. This borrowing technique frequently resulted in the accumulation of arrears, and was often only resolved by placing an individual's or family's labor on the line. This strategy was cunningly used by Spaniards and consisted of bailing out Afro-Poblanos (imprisoned for unpaid debts) in exchange for the latter's signature of a one- or two-year contract. While these formal mechanisms provided freedmen with access to credit, they simultaneously perpetuated a notable economic dependence on Spanish patrons. Liberty came at a high cost in seventeenth-century Puebla de los Ángeles.

## *Chapter 5 – Slave Matrimony and Afro-Indigenous Interactions*

This chapter makes a number of important arguments regarding urban slave populations and matrimony in seventeenth-century New Spain. My systematic use of records in Puebla's parochial archives enable me to make a number of definitive statements regarding urban slaves and matrimony. First of all, slaves married far more consistently and at a much higher degree than has been previously accepted. Secondly, this behavior also included late-sixteenth-century exogamous marriages, particularly between men of African descent and Indigenous women. As a result, this chapter will also address the difficult question of whether marriage between slaves constituted slave agency or the imposition of the slave owner. Due to the abnormally large enslaved group of brides and grooms who claimed to be the human property of obrajeros, the city's coercive textile mills will constitute a central setting for this scenario. In particular, I argue that Puebla obrajeros co-opted and manipulated the sacrament of matrimony rather than openly opposing it. This hypothesis, based on a parochial database of over 3800 marriages, forces us to reconsider ideas of ethnic solidarity and racial endogamy within the context of colonial urban slavery. In testing this hypothesis, the chapter will examine the extensive marital data housed in two of the Puebla's most important parishes, San José and Sagrario, from 1585 to 1700.

Tracing slaves' marital choices enables us to formulate a partial perspective of their social networks based on church-produced documentation. Thus, this chapter will also discuss the rights and advantages that enslaved people of African descent earned when entering formal unions, both endogamously and exogamously. At the same time, we will gauge the influence of masters on their slaves' nuptial possibilities, focusing particularly on the city's powerful textile

mill owners. In contrast to their scant participation in notarial transactions, obrajeros emerge as prominent slaveholders in the slave marital record. Finally, this chapter will also weigh the impact of informal unions on the emergence of a free Afro-Poblano population. The inherent difficulties of quantifying informal interactions will be evident in the selection of a broader range of qualitative examples on cohabitation and concubinage from the city's notarial, judicial and inquisitorial archives.

### *Slave Agency on the Road to the Altar*

Perhaps no colonial documentation captures the social and spatial mobility that urban slaves possessed in colonial Mexico better than marriage records. Slaves living on plantation and mines certainly did not enjoy the same prerogatives because rural priests depended on powerful Spanish patrons for the upkeep of their parishes. As a result, priests in the countryside could not uphold a slave's decision to marry when it proved inconvenient to his or her master.<sup>74</sup> In the haciendas of rural Morelos, for example, bachelorhood, whether voluntary or imposed, remained a notable feature of slave life.<sup>75</sup> Puebla de los Ángeles, however, presented enslaved people with a religious and political milieu in which ecclesiastical authorities could often trump civil law, and thus Spanish property rights. At least one thousand presbyters lived in the city of Puebla, presenting urban slaves with considerable allies to defend their religious rights.<sup>76</sup> In other words,

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<sup>74</sup> Richard Boyer, *Lives of the Bigamists: Marriage, Family, and Community in Colonial Mexico* (University of New Mexico Press: Albuquerque, 2001), 95-97; Herbert Klein, "Blacks" in *The Countryside in Colonial Latin America*, eds. Louisa Schell Hoberman and Susan Migden Socolow (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 179-183.

<sup>75</sup> Cheryl English Martin, *Rural Society in Colonial Morelos*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985), 130-133. In 1690, the sugar cane plantation owned by the Order of San Hipólito owned nineteen adult male slaves. Eleven of these men were bachelors, six were married to free women and two married slave brides.

<sup>76</sup> Gerhard, "Un censo," 530-536. By 1681, the Puebla bishopric included 102 secular parishes and 26 demarcations (*doctrinas*) for the regular orders. Altogether, 430,000 people fell under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Puebla.

Poblano slaves may have enjoyed the benefits of living in an atypically powerful religious center in which slave owners' traditional authority could be checked.

Historically, slaves struggled to defend their ecclesiastical rights within Iberia and its American territories. In his incriminating assessment of slave owning tendencies in early-seventeenth-century Cartagena de Indias, Alonso de Sandoval accused Spanish masters of "consenting [their slaves] to cohabit for many years, but not suffering or permitting them to marry, rather prohibiting it; and beating and shackling them for it."<sup>77</sup> Moreover, "should some of them marry, the slave owners obstruct their use of the marriage by denying the [enslaved] married women the liberties they give to the *amancebadas*," as female cohabiting slaves were known. Similar situations also prevailed within the Iberian kingdoms of the sixteenth century. In 1568 the bishop of Lisbon launched an investigation to address slaves' apparent unwillingness to marry in the Portuguese capital. In the process he discovered that "some slave couples were unaware that they could marry with benefit of clergy," as slave owners forbade most slaves from entering formal unions.<sup>78</sup> By the late sixteenth century, the bishop's initiative had produced the desired result. African slaves were now marrying within the Church.

As in Lisbon and Cartagena, the question of slave matrimony presented New Spain's ecclesiastical authorities with a true conundrum. How could Africans demand to participate in Catholic religiosity when for centuries they had been considered a people outside of the

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<sup>77</sup> Sandoval, 421. "Que diré de lo que pasa en materia de casamientos? Saben y consienten, que esten amancebados muchísimos años, y no sufren, ni permiten que se casen, antes se lo prohíben; y sobre ellos los azotan y aprisionan, y los venden para otras partes. ... Y si algunos se casan, les estorvan el uso del matrimonio; y las licencias que les dan a las amancebadas, niegan a las casadas...".

<sup>78</sup> A.C. de C.M. Saunders, *A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal, 1441-1555* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 104.

Church?<sup>79</sup> At the same time, how could they not be included in a colonial project that justified its existence by claiming new territories for Catholicism? Evidently, people of African descent living in New Spain could not be denied the Catholic sacraments in light of the intensive evangelization campaign that the regular orders directed towards the Indigenous population, particularly in the Central Mexican highlands. While it is true that as urban dwellers most slaves interacted with secular priests, not addressing the formers' spiritual needs endangered their salvation and the spiritual mission of Spain's evangelizing project. In this respect, Herman Bennett has accentuated the fact that urban slaves in New Spain yielded a tripartite identity as people subjected to slavery, royal vassals and persons with souls.<sup>80</sup> As members of a Catholic society, slaves could and should not be deprived of their right to marriage.

By the same token, the question of how to address the marital status of enslaved people who left families behind on the African continent preoccupied church officials as early as the mid-sixteenth century. In a 1560 letter to the King, the archbishop of Mexico, Fray Alonso de Montúfar, not only questioned the validity of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade to New Spain, he even argued that it imperiled the salvation of African souls.<sup>81</sup>

*... under said captivity, slaves are often and commonly exposed to great damage to their salvation, marrying here [New Spain] those that left their natural and legitimate wives and husbands in their homelands, and taking husbands to one land, and their first wives to another land, where they are converted and marry others, or where they live in concubinage, as they often do, so that neither the church prelates are able to remedy this, nor their masters. The latter keep [slaves] in their houses in such a grave, general and daring state, that in lands ruled by such Christian kings and princes, ... this must be condemned and sentenced as evil...*

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<sup>79</sup> James Sweet, "The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (Jan. 1997): 157-158.

<sup>80</sup> Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico*, 5.

<sup>81</sup> Francisco del Paso y Troncoso, ed. *Epistolario de Nueva España, 1505-1818* (México: Biblioteca Histórica Mexicana, 1938-1942), IX, 53-55, as quoted by Lucena Samoral, 52-55.



The issue of bigamy became increasingly important to the Church following the Council of Trent and into the late sixteenth century.<sup>82</sup> Under Catholic law, marriage was an immutable union between woman and man, which could neither be breached by distance nor divorce. Accordingly, African slaves who had previously married in their homelands could not technically remarry. Yet the strict application of ecclesiastical law in this matter would have limited a great many enslaved men and women from entering formal unions in New Spain. On the other hand, excluding Africans from the sacraments implied relinquishing moral and spiritual control over a sizeable population. This was not an option. As a result, African family histories were essentially erased from the historical record for the convenience of legitimizing formal unions before the Church. This circumstance must be forcibly taken into account when considering studies that comment on slaves' preference for informal unions and concubinage.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century, Pedro Moya de Contreras, the first inquisitor of New Spain, formalized the practice of requiring marriage petitions for all of the viceroyalty's inhabitants. From his appointment as head of the Office of the Holy See in 1571 to his lengthy rule as archbishop from 1573 to 1591, Moya strengthened the secular church through these new responsibilities.<sup>83</sup> At the same time, the formalization of what had previously been a simple, verbally enacted sacrament legitimized the will and personal choice of African slaves. A considerable paper trail would now validate (and at times, complicate) slaves' desire and ecclesiastical right to marry. Furthermore, "the marriage contract also accorded the couple heterosexual rights to a married life by preventing either party from being sold beyond a certain

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<sup>82</sup> Boyer, 15-17.

<sup>83</sup> Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico*, 81; Boyer, 16-17.

geographical distance."<sup>84</sup> As we will see in the following pages, enslaved Catholics actively contested being separated from their lawfully wedded spouses.

Slaves, however, could be brought before the Inquisition for remarrying if their first wives still lived, but this impediment clearly referred to marriages held within Iberian or other Catholic territories. Other restrictions that could prevent slaves from marrying included consanguinity, but given the elimination of African family histories this could only apply to Hispanicized Blacks and mulattos.<sup>85</sup> Within Puebla's marriage books, African individuals are merely described by their skin color, land of origin and the name of their owner. By contrast, American-born Blacks and mulattos more often specified the names of their parents, and declared whether they had been born of formal (*hijo legítimo*) or informal unions (*hijo natural*). Creole slaves would often also declare to have been born as orphans, otherwise known as "children of the Church" (*hijos de la Iglesia*). In order to prevent unlawful marriages from taking place, slaves (and all other Catholics) were instructed to bring two or more witnesses that could vouch their names, occupations and backgrounds. In extreme cases, some couples could provide only one person, but church officials clearly expressed a preference for more.<sup>86</sup>

Thus, in order to marry, slaves needed to petition the approval of their union prior to the wedding by appearing before a high church official known as the *provisor*. Once in his presence both bride and groom would state their names, land of provenance, legal status and marital status, their parents' names and/or the name of their owner. A slave necessarily had to state his master's name and if possible, occupation. A free person could not be owned, but could live

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<sup>84</sup> Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico*, 81.

<sup>85</sup> To my knowledge no study has attempted to address this terrible injustice or its justification. Perhaps Church scribes merely considered African family histories unverifiable and thus did not even attempt to record them. Only Herman Bennett's work has managed to rescue the testimony of some African slaves who testified to having known the bride or groom back in their original homelands or on the slaving vessels that brought them to New Spain.

<sup>86</sup> Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico*, 80.

within a Spaniard's house or obraje.<sup>87</sup> After providing all of their biographical information and witnesses, the provisor would notify the couple's parish priest(s) so that the latter could know and reveal the betrothed's intention to marry before the community. The banns consisted of publicly announcing a couple's desire to marry during three consecutive Sundays during mass. The parish church being the social epicenter of colonial society, anyone aware of a legitimate impediment to the union had the moral and religious responsibility of reporting it to the local priest or scribe. Fortunately, this was rarely the case.

The only marriage petitions currently available for the study of seventeenth-century Puebla are restricted to the small parish known as la Santa Cruz. For reasons unclear, the marital petitions for the parish between 1690 and 1698 were housed in the older, largely Indigenous parish of Analco.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, the petitions presented here refer to a very small, emergent religious community on Puebla's eastern riverbank.<sup>89</sup> Few references to men or women of African descent surface in the Santa Cruz petitions, and only in one case did a slave attempt to

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<sup>87</sup> For instance, free individuals often claimed to "work for" a certain obrajero, "serve in the house" of a given aristocrat, or to "have been raised" by a wealthy widow. These distinctions may seem irrelevant nowadays, but held true meaning in colonial Puebla. By contrast, slaves were merely considered property "of" someone.

<sup>88</sup> The scarcity of colonial marriage petitions in Puebla's parochial archives is attributed to their apparent concentration within the restricted Diocesan Archive, otherwise known as the Archivo del Provisorato. This priceless repository remains closed to the public and research community. By contrast, Herman Bennett was able to produce an innovative study of African religiosity in Mexico City because the marriage petitions of that bishopric were incorporated in to the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN). Sadly, producing a similar study for Puebla seems implausible at the moment.

<sup>89</sup> Archivo Histórico de la Parroquia del Santo Angel Custodio de Analco (hereafter AHPA), Box 16, Informaciones matrimoniales de españoles y castas, 1687-1698. Throughout this documentary collection, the Santa Cruz parish is time and again referred to as "the new parish of Santa Cruz", thereby suggesting that Analco priests were probably assisting the latter's clergy with their recordkeeping. Altogether, 132 marriage petitions survive for the years 1687, 1691-1692, 1694, 1697-1698. A total of five Afro-Poblanos appear in these six years of records; all five were entering exogamous unions.

marry within the parish during this period.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, none of these petitions retain the testimony of the bride and groom or their witnesses.

Despite this unfortunate lack of marriage petitions, it is safe to say that in the vast majority of cases, slaves in Puebla, and New Spain in general, were able to obtain the necessary wedding bans from the church scribe. Some 3800 extant marriages involving people of African descent, many of them enslaved, prove this to be the case. Still, slaves did find their religious rights imperiled under three scenarios: when endangering their owners' property rights, when marrying free people and when committing bigamy.

### *Masters and Matrimony*

Slave owners had widely varying influence over a slave's decision to marry, although in Puebla religion often trumped property rights. On paper, it seems that slave owners demonstrated little reticence towards allowing their slaves to enter formal unions. In this respect, slaves living in Puebla found more favorable conditions than in Cartagena de Indias. However, certain trends within Poblano slaves' marital choices suggest that masters significantly influenced these formal unions. Outright opposition to slave marriage could surface if a marriage jeopardized pre-existing labor arrangements. In Puebla, this would be the case when an enslaved individual married someone outside of the city's jurisdiction, for instance in Atlixco, Tlaxcala, Veracruz or Mexico City. More often, slave owners complained about having to grant slaves' spouses entry into their homes.<sup>91</sup> By ecclesiastical law, married individuals had the right to have sexual

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<sup>90</sup> AHPA, Box 16, Informaciones matrimoniales, 1687-1698. On April 10, 1697, Roque de Zamora, a Black slave owned by Antonio de León, requested permission to marry María Jerónima, an indigenous woman from the Santa Cruz parish. Both bride and groom were widowers, a fact that surely expedited their religious paperwork. They were married only two and a half weeks later.

<sup>91</sup> Such complaints also extended to boyfriends, whose intentions could then be slandered through accusations of concubinage. See AHJP, Exp. 2146.

relations with their spouses, regardless of their legal status. The right to lead a conjugal life was known as *vida maridable*, and as such, slaves could file suit against their owners if this right were breached. As a result, slave married couples could not be lawfully disjoined by being sold separately to a remote sugar plantation, textile mill or distant city. When masters forced such situations, slaves could and did appeal either to the civil and/or religious authorities.

In 1579, for instance, the married slave Antón presented a suit against his former owner for separating him from his lawfully wedded wife, Inés. Both slaves had married when they lived together in Mexico City within the household of a single owner.<sup>92</sup> At the time of the latter's death, a Poblano by the name of Antonio de Reinoso acquired the couple but then sold Antón without his wife to another buyer in Mexico City. During this forced separation, Antón earned the goodwill of his newest owner and convinced him to reunite his family by purchasing his wife from Reinoso. Such pleas were quite common in colonial Puebla, as was Reinoso's negative reply.<sup>93</sup> In his suit, Antón complained that despite his best effort, "Antonio de Reinoso does not want to sell [Inés], reason by which he has unmarried us and [prevented] us from having a conjugal life."<sup>94</sup>

In his suit before the Vicar General of the Archbishopric of Mexico, Antón stressed that according to ecclesiastical law Reinoso could not separate a married couple. Therefore, the slave demanded Inés' return from Puebla and requested permission to bring her to Mexico City "where I am in the service of my master and so that I may make marital life with her as my legitimate

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<sup>92</sup> AGN, Bienes Nacionales, Box 131, Exp. 1.

<sup>93</sup> Wealthy slave owners could often afford to reunite slave families. Actions such as these reveal slaves' ability to pressure their owners into taking actions that benefitted the formation and preservation of slave family units. By the same token, convincing a slave owner to purchase a spouse and children also represented considerable goodwill on the part of the master. This was precisely the case of the slave Juan Francisco, who convinced his owner, Domingo de la Hedesa, to purchase his wife Isabel and their two young children at the considerable cost of 700 pesos. See AGNP, Not. 4, Box 174, September 1650, f. 701r.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, f. 2r.

wife." Remarkably, the ecclesiastical authorities rapidly ordered an investigation and deemed Antón to be quite correct in his petition.<sup>95</sup> Less than a week after presenting his case, the Vicar mandated Reinoso to send Inés to Mexico City to reunite with Antón. Furthermore, Inés would remain in Mexico City permanently. Should Reinoso fail to abide by this ruling, or otherwise disrupt the slaves' matrimony, the Vicar would impose the considerable fine of 200 Castilian ducats and excommunicate the slave owner from the Catholic faith.

Antón's victory over his former master illustrates the ideal functioning of slaves' religious rights within the colonial urban context of New Spain, but in all likelihood does not represent their everyday reality. In large part, this slave couple succeeded because Anton received his owner's authorization to pursue an ecclesiastical suit. Slave agency notwithstanding, the guarantee that Inés would fall into someone else's dominion surely appeased any misgivings the ecclesiastical authorities may have had. Puebla's proximity to Mexico City and the strength of both cities' ecclesiastical institutions surely helped in this respect, as well. In other words, Inés and Antón may have found themselves in an "optimal" situation to challenge a delinquent slave owner. Slaves without witnesses, with intransigent masters, or those that had been sent to more remote areas of the viceroyalty surely did not encounter such fortune. Yet at the same time, cases such as Anton's also demonstrate that slave matrimony was a Catholic sacrament to be defended. Soon, slave owners found co-opting this religious sacrament preferable to opposing it and the viceroyalty's powerful Church hierarchy.

On the other hand, slave matrimony could prove quite beneficial to Puebla's slave-owning class. Children born to slave mothers were automatically considered the master's property, regardless of the father's legal status. Furthermore, the formation of enslaved nuclear

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* Lucas, a Black slave owned by Don Luis de Sosa, a Mexico City resident, testified that he had been present at the couple's veiling ceremony many years before. The fifty-five year-old witness was even able to remember the officiating priest's last name and physical appearance.

families essentially consolidated the slave owner's hold on a growing number of people. Poblano masters, regardless of their religiosity, must have understood slave matrimony as a long-term investment, particularly during the first three decades of the seventeenth century. Let us recall that during this period, the purchase of a single African or skilled creole slave could cost up to 500 pesos each!<sup>96</sup>

Thus, we must address the thorny issue of whether marriage between slaves represented slave agency or slave-owner imposition. As Douglas Cope has aptly noted, "parish books should not be viewed as neutral or objective records, but as one forum among many for the contestation and manipulation of racial identity."<sup>97</sup> I have taken heed of this concern, particularly since "parish records, as a statistical index to interracial unions, are misleading." Of course, the corollary to this claim is that marriage registers do not accurately represent racially endogamous unions (formal or informal), either. After all, among racially mixed people, illegitimacy rates hovered over the 50 percent mark during the second half of the seventeenth century in urban New Spain.<sup>98</sup> Unfortunately, informal unions are not nearly as well represented in the historical record as they should be. Thus, I have attempted to sort through Puebla's marriage registers with the greatest care, while recognizing the importance of non-marital unions in everyday society.

In his groundbreaking study of African Christianity in colonial Mexico, Herman Bennett argues that African-born men and women explicitly sought out spouses from their respective homelands.<sup>99</sup> According to Bennett, from 1570 to 1640 African ethnicity remained the deciding

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<sup>96</sup> For the sake of comparison, consider that in 1610 a horse-drawn carriage cost 200 pesos and an ox cost 22 pesos. An average house in Puebla's eastern riverbank was sold at 380 pesos in 1630. See AGNP, Not. 4, Box 65, April 1610 and Box 139, December 1630.

<sup>97</sup> Cope, 68-69.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico*, 97-104.

factor in a slave's decision to marry in Mexico City. While this may have been the case, Bennett fails to consider the role that slave owners played in these ethnically exclusive marriages. As well over 95% of Africans in Puebla (and presumably, Mexico City) remained slaves during the early seventeenth century, practically any marriage between Africans would have proven beneficial to slave owners as a marriage between slaves.<sup>100</sup> For the masters, any children procreated from these marriages would have likewise represented an additional economic boon.

As a result, slave owners would often sponsor their unfree workers' marriages, cover their church fees, or at least loan them cash advances for their religious expenses. This certainly appears to have been the case among Poblano obrajeros.<sup>101</sup> During the first half of the seventeenth century, the textile mill owner Bartolomé de Tapia adopted slave matrimony as a strategy to enhance control over his labor force, which consisted of at least forty-six slaves and an undetermined number of free people. Between 1629 and 1646, fifty-eight of his workers, free and unfree alike, married in Puebla's San José parish.<sup>102</sup> More importantly, twenty of these marriages took place between workers owned or employed by Tapia. Counterintuitively, Tapia now had more control over these forty married men and women, regardless of their legal status.

Two examples from Bartolomé de Tapia's extensive workforce will illustrate how obrajeros gained further control over their workforce and benefitted from sponsoring workers' marriages. In 1633, Ventura de Gracia, a Black slave from Mozambique, married the widow

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<sup>100</sup> See the discussion below on the ASMP and APSJ marriage database, years 1661-1699.

<sup>101</sup> AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 399, Exp. 2, f. 295v. The case of Sebastián Domingo de Munguía (later in this chapter) offers a valuable qualitative example of how instrumental obraje owners were in the arrangement and financing of slave marriages.

<sup>102</sup> APSJ, *Libro de matrimonios de morenos*, 1629-1657. ff. 1v-31v. I have yet to locate Bartolomé de Tapia's obraje inventory. As a result, reconstructing his workforce through the parochial register has proven the most effective way of studying his textile mill.



Bárbara Jacob.<sup>103</sup> While the marriage record does not elaborate on the ethnicity, profession, or legal status of her husband, Bárbara Jacob was listed as an *india*, and thus, as a free person. Yet as Ventura's dependent, Bárbara now also became liable for any debts that her husband incurred during his time in the obraje. Furthermore, if Barbara needed to leave the textile mill's premises for an extended period of time, she would have to substitute her labor for that of a family member.<sup>104</sup> This coercive practice was known as *salir al trocado* ("to leave in exchange of..."), and effectively augmented mill owners' control over an increasingly free worker base.<sup>105</sup>

In April 1634, just a year after Ventura and Barbara's wedding, another couple decided to formalize their union before the church. As in the previous case, bride and groom worked for Bartolomé de Tapia, although on this occasion both parties were enslaved.<sup>106</sup> Teresa María, a single, Black Angolan woman married Juan Francisco, who also claimed to be single and from the same land. As obraje slaves, they encountered a very difficult existence with considerable social, spatial and judicial restrictions. Any children this Angolan couple might have would also be born enslaved. Within their entry in the marital register, the church scribe also noted that Juan Francisco had been "branded on the face", a punishment typically imposed on runaway slaves.<sup>107</sup> We cannot state with certainty that the mill owner Tapia sponsored or even favored this marriage as a way of appeasing his slave and securing a permanent worker. Yet the companionship offered

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<sup>103</sup> APSJ, *Libro de matrimonios de morenos*, 1629-1657, f. 7r. The marriage ceremony was officiated by Lic. Francisco de Baeza, with Domingo de Montiel and Juan Alvarez as witnesses.

<sup>104</sup> von Mentz, 244.

<sup>105</sup> Salvucci, 116-117. According to Salvucci, these power dynamics resulted in husbands and wives being "jointly indebted" with children acting as "guarantors." Thus, the entire labor of a family would be linked to a single obraje. Should one family member fail his obligations, another would pay the textile mill with their work.

<sup>106</sup> APSJ, *Libro de matrimonios de morenos*, 1629-1657, f. 10r.

<sup>107</sup> Face branding was a punishment reserved for slave transgressors, and especially runaways, and should be differentiated from the brands that were burned into adolescent slaves during the Middle Passage. As recent arrivals, most Angolan slaves would have received the royal brand on their chest or shoulder. Church scribes did not record these marks. For more in this distinction, see Chapter 3.

by another person from Juan Francisco's original cultural milieu must have provided some respite to both groom and owner.

<b>Table 5.1. Number of married slaves owned by obrajeros in 17th-century Puebla.</b>					
<i>Obraje owner</i>	<i>Parish</i>	<i>Years</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Capt. Diego de Andrada Peralta	Sagrario	1664-1690	73	21	94
Bartolomé de Tapia	S. José	1629-1646	27	19	46
Juan Moreno	Sagrario	1663-1682	24	9	33
Capt. Don Domingo de Apressa	Sagrario	1687-1699	20	2	22
Capt. Don Pedro de Andrada Peralta	Sagrario	1690-1698	14	6	20
Capt. Gabriel Carrillo de Aranda	Sagrario	1678-1684	11	5	16
Capt. Don Juan de Guadalajara	Sagrario	1662-1682	7	7	14
Don Jeronimo Carrillo	Analco	1650-1656	9	2	11
Joseph de Tapia	S. José	1647-1654	5	5	10
<i>Source: ASMP, APSJ &amp; AHPA marriage database, 1629-1700.</i>					
Table only includes obrajeros with ten or more slaves in the marital record.					

These two scenarios played out in Puebla's many textile mills during the late seventeenth century to such a degree that it might explain the notorious absence of obrajeros as slave purchasers in the notarial record. In Chapter 3, we explained that textile mill owners simply do not surface in slave purchase records. Yet obraje owners alone possessed no less than 309 married slaves according to the few extant Black and mulatto marital registers available for Puebla!<sup>108</sup> (See Table 6.1) Furthermore, from 1661-1700, the Andrada Peralta family arranged twenty-six marriages from within their own slave community, while the obraje owner Juan

<sup>108</sup> ASMP, APSJ and AHPA marriage databases, 1629-1700. The actual number of marrying slaves owned by obrajeros is much higher. Consider that this combined database is missing the middle three decades of the Afro-Poblano marriages for the Sagrario parish, the city's largest, and another three crucial decades of data for the Analco parish.

Moreno facilitated eleven slave marriages from his personal labor force.<sup>109</sup> Of course, these aggregates do not even begin to consider the number of slaves born into obrajes from informal unions. Still, it is now quite evident that textile mill owners made use of the sacrament of matrimony to enhance control over their workforce and to legitimize the numerous slave unions within their obrajes.

How could obrajeros congregate such numbers of slaves if they did not buy them? Here I advance the hypothesis that slave matrimony and concubinage became a key instrument not only in securing slave labor, but also in the actual procreation of obraje slaves. At the time of his death in 1660, the textile mill owner Miguel Carrillo had a workforce of seventy-nine slaves.<sup>110</sup> In his will and inventory, ten of these slaves, all of them twelve years of age or younger, declared to be the children of various enslaved women who lived in the obraje. Another eight enslaved youngsters, ages 13-18, also labored in the textile mill as full-fledged workers. Perhaps because of their status as working adolescents, the names of their parents were not included in the inventory. Unfortunately, Carrillo's obraje does not specify how many of his slaves were married, although undoubtedly many were.<sup>111</sup> As the trans-Atlantic slave trade to New Spain had all but ended by 1660, these young slaves in all probability had all been born in Carrillo's textile mill. In other words, Carrillo could count on his slaves' formal and informal unions to produce between 13-23% of his slave workforce. Further research on slave baptismal records and notarial

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<sup>109</sup> ASMP, *Libro de matrimonios de negros y mulatos*, 1661-1699.

<sup>110</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 189, 1660 October, ff. 1016r-1020v.

<sup>111</sup> In this respect, the lamentable loss of Puebla's Sagrario parish marriage books for the years 1615-1660 impedes me from specifying whether married slaves had children in Carrillo's obraje.

inventories will be needed to prove or disprove this theory.<sup>112</sup> Still, there is sufficient evidence at the moment to argue that a significant percentage of enslaved obraje workers were born, not bought. Slave marriage emerged as an important instrument to this end.

### *Slave Marriage: Endogamy, Exogamy and Indifference*

Marriage has often been used by colonial historians to measure degrees of interaction between constituent elements of a given society. In particular, scholars have looked at measurements of endogamy and exogamy to determine whether slaves were able to ascend through the caste system by way of Church-sanctioned matrimony. For the case of Puebla's slave community, I believe that the study of marital records refutes many incorrect assumptions regarding people of African descent. Despite high indices of concubinage, urban slaves could and did seek out formal matrimony.<sup>113</sup> Enslaved individuals understood that marrying within the Church offered them a number of religious rights that translated into real benefits in their everyday lives. These benefits were particularly significant when marrying a free spouse. In the following section, I argue that matrimony presented slaves with an incomparable opportunity to free their progeny by pitting ecclesiastical law against civil law in colonial Puebla de los Ángeles.

The terrain of interracial relationships, both formal and informal, is a treacherous one for modern scholars of enslaved colonial populations. Our present views on race, marriage and "passing" inform an often distorted analysis of a past where people held vastly different views of

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<sup>112</sup> The promising doctoral research being carried out by Guillermo Rodríguez at the Autonomous University of Puebla (BUAP) will soon provide key statistics on rates of slave fertility, family size, children born of legitimate and illegitimate unions, etc., in colonial Puebla.

<sup>113</sup> Edgar K. Love, "Marriage Patterns of Persons of African Descent in a Colonial Mexico City Parish," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 51, no. 1 (Feb. 1971): 83, 91. Also see Love, "Legal Restrictions on Afro-Indian Relations in Colonial Mexico" *Journal of Negro History* 55, no. 2 (Apr. 1970): 136; Aguirre Beltrán, 247-248.

race, class, gender, etc. In order to avoid an anachronistic perspective exclusively based on racial exogamy/endogamy, my analysis will focus on three variables: legal status, culture and race.

This lens raises three major questions. How did a largely unfree African-based population approach marriage with enslaved and free members of its own community? How did this same population view matrimony with free Spanish, Indian and mestizo individuals? Finally, does an Afro-Poblano behavior appear in colonial marital data or can a case be made for socially distinct *pardo* and *moreno* populations?

This analysis of Puebla's extant marital registers centers on a series of parochial books from the city's three most important parishes: Sagrario, San José and Santo Ángel Custodio (Analco). These parishes encompassed the majority of the city's African-descended population, and thus most of its slaves, as well.<sup>114</sup> In order to properly reconstruct slave marriage patterns I have consulted "Libros de matrimonios negros y mulatos" and Spanish marriage registers for both parishes. The reason for including the latter is simple. Many women of African descent slipped into Spanish registers when marrying mestizos, Spaniards, or even very affluent *pardos*. By contrast, most Indian marital registers have not been examined since they almost exclusively contain information on Indigenous brides and grooms.<sup>115</sup> For instance, only three individuals of African descent appear in Analco's "Libro de matrimonios de naturales" out of a total of 1450 brides and grooms.

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<sup>114</sup> The Santa Cruz parish was not included due to its small population, late foundation (circa 1683), and the scattering of its records into the Analco records. The San Marcos parish record is presently in very dire need of restoration and proper cataloging.

<sup>115</sup> This observation is confirmed by an analysis of the year 1687 within the Sagrario's "Libro de matrimonios indios, 1681-1693." Out of the eighty-one marriages listed that year, only one involved an Indigenous groom and a *mulata* bride. The overwhelming majority of these unions took place between Indians (93%) or between Indigenous men and mestiza women (6%).

*Breaking Tradition: Slave Marriage in Puebla, 1585-1615*

The earliest marriage register that speaks to the slave population of Puebla is the Sagrario Metropolitano's "Libro de matrimonios negros, 1585-1607."<sup>116</sup> The Sagrario, the city's central parish, concentrated the overwhelming majority of the Spanish population not only for the Puebla metropolitan area, but for New Spain's entire southeastern region. Hundreds of affluent Spaniards from throughout the viceroyalty maintained a large slave population within the Sagrario, even if the former did not actually live in Puebla year round.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, fifteen members of Puebla's municipal council, most of them inhabitants of the central parish, owned just over two hundred slaves.<sup>118</sup> The overwhelming majority of these slaves would have been occupied as domestic servants, coachmen and bodyguards. Among the enslaved, those who did not labor in the domestic sphere normally found work within the ubiquitous *obrajes* or as day laborers in construction.<sup>119</sup> Water carriers, mule teamsters and itinerant food vendors working for a daily wage, or *jornal*, also constituted a large segment of the slave demographic.

These early marriage books provide the indelible image of an overwhelmingly African-born slave population that sought to make a difficult existence more endurable by seeking recourse to the sacrament of matrimony. While African men and women each comprised just over a third (and possibly more) of the Black brides and grooms in these early Puebla registers,

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<sup>116</sup> I owe my colleague, Verónica Gutiérrez, a debt of gratitude for having located this particular register while researching the records of the ASMP. This marriage book, remarkable in its antiquity and fine preservation, is actually a subsection of the city's first Indigenous marriage register, "Libro de matrimonios de indios, 1585-1607." Henceforth, I will refer to this first register of Afro-Poblano marriages as the "Libro de matrimonios de negros, 1585-1607."

<sup>117</sup> José F. de la Peña, *Oligarquía y propiedad en Nueva España 1550-1624* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1983), 172-173. For instance, the city regent, Capt. Don Felipe Ramírez de Arellano owned two agricultural estates in the valley of Atlixco. Another regent, Juan de Narváez, also owned haciendas in Huexotzingo and in the San Pablo valley. These enterprises resulted in visits to the countryside, both for business and leisure.

<sup>118</sup> de la Peña, 177-178.

<sup>119</sup> Identifying the specific occupations that wage-earning slaves carried out has proven considerably difficult as most of these slaves listed their owners' names and professions, not their own jobs.

96% of these Africans were slaves.<sup>120</sup> The greater Black population endured similar circumstances as 93% of them were categorized as human property. As a result, one could make the argument that during the late sixteenth century, slavery was indisputably linked to phenotype, where dark skin color was largely synonymous with enslavement.

This linkage between dark skin color and enslavement was especially true for Black women born in Africa. As the most disadvantaged group in all of colonial society, virtually all of the African women living in Puebla were slaves, a condition they would transmit to their progeny. Espousing an African woman thus became a nearly unthinkable proposition for men of all backgrounds, with the exception of enslaved males.<sup>121</sup> As a result, nearly 80% of all African women married other African slaves. Hispanicized Black men (*ladinos*) and American-born Blacks (*criollos*) also represented potential grooms for such African brides, whom they married 15% of the time. Unfortunately, the great majority of these *ladinos* and *criollos* were also slaves, which virtually ensured that any children resulting from the marriage would remain legally subjected to Spanish masters.

By contrast, men born on the African continent demonstrated notably different marital behavior even though most of them also remained chattel slaves. While over half of all African men married African brides, another 20% married Black *criolla* and *ladina* women. These latter unions with Black women fluent in Spanish language and culture undoubtedly sped up the creolization process of the African community. Surprisingly, the remaining African men in our sample did not marry *mulatas*, as one might have expected given their partial African ancestry.

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<sup>120</sup> We are lacking information on place of origin for over half of the 624 Black brides and grooms in these early registers. Considering the extremely high enslavement rate for most of these individuals, which mirrors that of African-born spouses, it is very likely that a considerable percentage of them would have been born in Africa.

<sup>121</sup> Of the 94 African-born women found in these marriage books, only 4 could claim to be free women. A similar trend can be found among men claiming African origins as only 5 out of 125 were considered free people.

Instead, 16% of all African grooms in Puebla married Indigenous women between 1585 and 1615.<sup>122</sup> Despite this modest percentage, the implications of this finding are extremely significant. In a socio-racial group with an enslavement rate close to 100%, matrimony with Indigenous women provided a failsafe avenue towards the next generation's emancipation. Moreover, this rarely studied interaction also documents the emergence of a new, ethnically ambiguous, female Indigenous presence in New Spain's urban centers. By marrying African men, these Indian brides were breaking the mores of traditional Indigenous society and simultaneously creating a new multi-racial urban culture. Entering formal unions with Indian brides not only allowed African men to procreate free children, marriage also allowed slaves to expand their social networks beyond a community of African descent that was overwhelmingly defined by slavery.

<b>Table 5.2. Groom marital preference by ethnic/cultural labels, 1585-1615</b>			
	African Grooms	Creole Grooms	Mulatto Grooms
African Brides	55.6% (74)	6% (14)	2% (2)
Creole Brides	20.3% (27)	42.5% (99)	11.9% (12)
Indigenous Brides	16.5% (22)	32.2% (75)	51.5% (52)
Mulatto Brides	1.5% (2)	6.4% (15)	17.8% (18)
Mestiza Brides	0% (0)	3% (7)	5.9% (6)
Spanish Brides	0% (0)	0% (0)	2% (2)
No data	6% (8)	9.9% (23)	8.9% (9)
<i>Total</i>	<i>100% (133)</i>	<i>100% (233)</i>	<i>100% (101)</i>
Source: ASMP, Libro de matrimonios de negros, 1585-1607; Libro de matrimonios de españoles, 1585-1615.			

<sup>122</sup> Despite the widespread availability of single Indigenous men in Puebla, African women only married them 1% of the time.



A closer reading of these marriage registers for American-born and hispanicized Blacks and mulattos reveals an even higher rate of interaction between men of African descent and Indigenous women during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. As urban dwellers born and raised in the same peripheral neighborhoods where Nahuatl served as the *lingua franca*, it is rather logical that *mulatos* and *negros criollos* would find suitable partners among Indian females. In 188 marriages, Black creoles and ladinos still preferred women similarly identified 42% of the time, but very clearly avoided formal unions with African-born women (6%). Moreover, mulattos followed this same tendency by only marrying African women at the extremely low rate of 2%. In what can only be explained as a marked cultural/generational divide, Black criollos and ladinos opted for Indian brides in 32% of the unions. Mulatto men also demonstrated a stunning preference for Indigenous women, whom they married 52% of the time!

The significance of such behavior cannot be understated and complicates our understanding of a marital "Afro-Mexican consciousness". During this early period just prior to a massive West Central African slave influx, American-born Blacks and mulattos either discriminated against, or were shunned by, women born on the African continent.<sup>123</sup> As for the argument advanced by Bennett that Angolan men and women in early seventeenth-century Mexico City sought each other out in order to maintain their cultural identities, such a hypothesis fails to consider that such unions benefitted slave owners.<sup>124</sup> Children born to slave mothers guaranteed masters future generations of unfree labor. In this regard, African slaves and their Spanish masters may have found common ground through ethnically-endogamous matrimony.

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<sup>123</sup> Edgar K. Love found a similar pattern in late seventeenth-century Mexico City as mulatto grooms only married Black women 2% of the time. See Love, "Marriage Patterns," 85-86.

<sup>124</sup> Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico*, 101-109.

While a marriage between Angolans strengthened the cultural affinities of displaced individuals, it also reified the slave owner's control over the married couple.

By contrast, children born of marriages between enslaved men of African descent and Indian women effectively truncated the transmission of slavery, by way of the Indigenous free womb. Altogether, 149 Indigenous women married into the greater male Afro-Poblano community (African, creoles, mulattos) at the end of the sixteenth century and beginning of the seventeenth century. In essence, these native brides were a reflection of the intense social, cultural and demographic changes that impacted Indigenous populations throughout the Mesoamerican region. In their study of colonial Yucatán, Christopher Lutz and Matthew Restall posit that Afro-Indigenous marriages were facilitated by the gender imbalance prevalent among the heavily female urban Indian population, which would have found a natural complement in the heavily male slave population.<sup>125</sup> A parallel situation existed in the Puebla region, where epidemics and labor drafts drew in the Indigenous population from the *altepeme* surrounding the city. Even at a minimal birth rate per couple, these 149 Afro-Indigenous marriages would contribute at least 300 free individuals of partial African descent to the greater Poblano society by the beginning of the seventeenth century.<sup>126</sup> Of course, these numbers must be understood as mere fractions of the natural growth of the greater Afro-Indigenous community, as they exclude the city's other colonial parishes. In addition, none of these estimates account for children born from informal unions.

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<sup>125</sup> Christopher Lutz and Matthew Restall, "Wolves and Sheep: Black-Maya Relationships in Colonial Guatemala and Yucatan," in *Beyond Black and Red*, ed. Matthew Restall (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 194-197.

<sup>126</sup> Gerhard, "Censo", 538. Gerhard estimated that every Black, mulatto or mestizo *vecino* represented a household of four individuals in Puebla's 1681 census. As mixed families, Afro-Indigenous married couples would fall into said category.

In contrast to Peru, where the offspring of Black-Indian unions were labeled *zambaigos*, in New Spain Afro-Indigenous children were mostly known as *mulatos*. There does not seem to be a convincing reason for why this was the case, especially considering the widespread use of the word throughout most of Spanish America since the late sixteenth century.<sup>127</sup> This particularity may help explain why so many of Puebla's *mulatos* were marrying Indigenous women. Culturally, linguistically and even demographically, a significant proportion of the city's mulattos were actually half-Indigenous themselves.<sup>128</sup> These early marriage registers serve as testament to this formalized interaction, and thus to the very emergence of a mulatto population of partial African and Indigenous ancestry. Thus, we must be very cautious when making use of terms such as "exogamy" and "endogamy" to speak of such people.

In the same manner, a very explicit contrast must be made when differentiating the marital choices of men and women of partial African ancestry. *Mulatas* very rarely sought to marry Indian men or viceversa (3%). The same could be argued for Black creole and *ladina* women, who despite being raised in the same peripheral neighborhoods as their male Indigenous neighbors only married them 2% of the time. It is possible that more of these formal unions could be found within Indigenous marriage registers, particularly since many *mulata* brides surface in Spanish registers.<sup>129</sup> Nevertheless, marital records from the mid and late seventeenth century indicate that this was simply not the case. Women of African descent rarely married Indian grooms, despite the fact that African, creole, ladino, and mulatto men all sought out

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<sup>127</sup> Kris Lane, "Captivity and Redemption: Aspects of Slave Life in Early and Colonial Quito and Popayán," *The Americas* 57, 2 (2000): 228 n. 3; Martin, 127.

<sup>128</sup> Rob Schwaller, "Mulata, Hija de Negro y Yndia: Afro-Indigenous *Mulatos* in Early Colonial Mexico," *Journal of Social History*, 44, 3 (Spring 2011): 897-898.

<sup>129</sup> Between 1587 and 1612, at least 19 *mulatas* married Spanish men in Puebla's central parish. In all likelihood, this number falls far short of the actual number of mulatto women found in such Spanish marriage books, as women of African descent would often be labeled *mestizas* when marrying Spaniards.

Indigenous brides on a fairly consistent basis. As a result, we must turn to "free womb" laws and their impact on slave marital behavior as an alternative explanation.

By focusing exclusively on an individual's legal status (slave or free), I approach the study of slave matrimony without having to rely exclusively on the complicated racial categories used by priests, church scribes, brides and grooms. The suppression of colonial racial nomenclature thus allows us to consider the marital behavior of Chichimec Indians, Asians, Africans, and American-born Blacks and mulattos as a single slave community.<sup>130</sup> This multi-racial slave population married with one central differentiating aspect. Enslaved men in Puebla had considerable access to free women, while enslaved women only rarely married free men. This tenet holds true across every racial group and ethnicity in seventeenth-century Puebla.

Slave men living in early Puebla de los Ángeles married free women almost 40% of the time, but enslaved females could only enter formal unions with free males in 12% of recorded marriages. Undoubtedly, this considerable disparity was the consequence of slave women giving birth to slave children. On the other hand, the fact that a large percentage of the enslaved male population could marry free women essentially prevented the perpetuation of chattel slavery in Puebla.<sup>131</sup> As a significant urban center in which slaves interacted with free women every single day (in contrast to rural sugar cane plantations), the early seventeenth-century city presented male slaves with the tangible possibility of securing their progeny's freedom through the

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<sup>130</sup> This method also allows us to consider the 82 slave individuals without racial labels that appear in these early marriage registers.

<sup>131</sup> APSJ, *Libro de matrimonios de negros y mulatos*, 1692-1739. In the San José parish, references to slaves become increasingly scarce by the second decade of the eighteenth century and very rare by the mid 1730s.

sacrament of matrimony. In this respect, Puebla may offer an exceptional case due to the strength of its religious institutions.<sup>132</sup>

*Slave Marriage in the San José Parish, 1629-1657*

We are unable to continue studying the Sagrario's records for the middle of the seventeenth century as they have been lost. Thus, to understand the development of slave marriage in Puebla, we turn to the San José parish, located to the north of the city's central square. Early on, San José was settled by diverse groups of Nahua peoples, poor Spaniards and a growing mixed-race population. As ever-larger numbers of African slaves entered the city during the first two decades of the seventeenth century, Blacks and mulattos became increasingly prominent actors in the parish as well. The marriage register we will now analyze captures the evolution of San José's slave population both before and after secularization. I expected the "Libro de matrimonios de morenos, 1629-1657" to present a significant counterpoint to the tendencies found within the Sagrario's records. Surprisingly, this does not appear to be the case. The information culled from San José seems to mirror the marriage records from Puebla's central parish a full generation before. In fact, slave men and women had virtually the same opportunities to marry free individuals as their predecessors in the Sagrario.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Rosalva Loreto López, *Los conventos femeninos y el mundo urbano de la Puebla de los Ángeles del siglo XVIII* (México: El Colegio de México, 2000), 37. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the city's diverse regular orders and secular clergy erected no less than seventy-two religiously affiliated buildings, including convents, churches, chapels and hospitals.

<sup>133</sup> Slave men in San José married free women 36% of the time, while slave women entered formal unions with free men at a rate of 9%.

<b>Table 5.3. Slave-free marriages in Sagrario and San José</b>				
<b>by legal status, 1585-1657</b>				
	Sagrario (1585-1615)		San José (1629-1657)	
	Free Spouse	Slave Spouse	Free Spouse	Slave Spouse
Slave Women	11.6% (35)	88.4% (35)	8.9% (11)	91.1% (112)
Slave Men	38.3% (165)	61.7% (266)	35.6% (62)	64.4% (112)

*Source:* ASMP, Libro de matrimonios de negros (1585-1607), Libro de matrimonios de españoles (1585-1615); APSJ, Libro de matrimonios de negros (1629-1657)

The real differences emerge not in the behavior of Afro-Poblano slave brides and grooms but in the composition of these particular parish populations. Whereas Africans constituted just over a third of the Black population in the Sagrario, they now accounted for 60% of San José's marrying Black community. Clearly, the Portuguese slave trade to New Spain had impacted the composition of the Afro-Poblano sector by the third decade of the seventeenth century. Male Asian slaves, incorrectly labeled as *chinos*, also became briefly prominent in San José during the period in question.<sup>134</sup> Most of these Filipino and South Asian slaves worked as skilled laborers in the textile mills found throughout the San José parish. As noted earlier, the emergence of large obraje operations must be factored into the composition of this marrying slave population.

An equally important development in San José, and probably in Puebla as a whole, was the considerable growth of the mulatto population. Whereas mulattos remained a minority at the end of the sixteenth century, by the middle of the seventeenth century these mixed-race men and women had practically established demographic parity with Blacks in the marital register (and

<sup>134</sup> Despite not having African ancestry or being "morenos", 22 Asians were included in the Black marriage register. As 18 of them were slaves, their inclusion in the marriage book speaks more to their inclusion as slaves than to their skin color.

perhaps throughout the city).<sup>135</sup> This exponential increase of Puebla's mulatto population must be factored into demographic histories that detail the rapid growth of the viceroyalty's mestizo population. More significantly, mulattos that married during the mid-seventeenth century were mostly free people, in contrast to Blacks whose enslavement rate remained unchanged at 95%.<sup>136</sup>

In terms of actual spouse selection, slave men, in particular, no longer sought out Indigenous brides at the same pace as at the end of the sixteenth century. The epidemic outbreaks of the early seventeenth century must have impacted the number of these interracial marriages up until the 1640s, when the Indigenous population of the viceroyalty began its modest demographic recovery. From 1629 to 1657, Indian women in Puebla continued to be valued as life partners due to free womb laws, yet in relative terms their "value" diminished as more Afro-Poblanos obtained their freedom. Instead, mestizas emerged as increasingly attractive brides for mulatto men, who undoubtedly identified with their common American roots and racially-mixed heritage.<sup>137</sup> In addition, mestiza women may have even presented their husbands with the opportunity to evade the tribute payments that burdened Indians throughout the viceroyalty. Black and mulatto women, on the other hand, remained largely restricted to marrying enslaved Black and mulatto men.<sup>138</sup> In general, fewer Afro-Poblanas appear in these mid-century

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<sup>135</sup> 112 black men formed the largest group in San José's "Libro de matrimonios morenos", with 102 mulatto males constituting a close second. Comparative data on *negras* and *mulatas* offer more complicated questions since only 59 mulatto women surface in the register versus 107 Black women. As Puebla's mulatto population had already attained natural growth, we can only assume that a large proportion of *mulatas* were actually being labeled *mestizas*, *españolas*, and perhaps even as *indias* in the parish's other marriage books.

<sup>136</sup> Only 29% of mulatto women contracting nuptials in San José were slaves, while 44% mulatto men were also considered unfree.

<sup>137</sup> A generation before *mulatos* married indigenous women 52% of the time. From 1629 to 1657, this number fell considerably to 28%. Mestizas, who practically do not surface in the city's earliest marriage register now constituted almost 19% of all *mulato* brides. This trend would accelerate at the end of the century.

<sup>138</sup> 94% of Black brides in San José remained enslaved from 1629 to 1657, in contrast to only 29% of mulatto brides.

records.<sup>139</sup> Confronted with an increased number of available free female brides from other racial groups, Black women in San José found fewer and fewer opportunities for marriage.

Concubinage and other types of informal unions may have presented a more level field for this particular group of females, which was still overwhelmingly composed of slaves.

The appeal of concubinage and cohabitation must have been significant for enslaved women of all racial backgrounds in San José. Consider that of the 123 slave *chinas*, *morenas*, *pardas*, and *mulatas* that married in the parish, only 11 (8.9%) were able to marry free men! By contrast, enslaved men of the same four groups married free women in 62 occasions (35.6%). This considerable difference between San José's male and female slave populations exposes the heavily gendered nature of colonial marriage in Puebla. Just as in the Sagrario parish a full generation before, gender defined how the slave residents of San José understood marriage. For enslaved males the sacrament of matrimony presented an opportunity to formalize their interactions with free people. For slave women, marriage rarely offered such a prospect.

#### *Free Brides and Slave Grooms: Instrumental Marriages in Puebla, 1660-1700*

The archives of the Sagrario and San José have preserved complete series of Black and mulatto marriage registers for the last four decades of the seventeenth century. The fortuitous preservation of these marriage books allows us to trace and contrast the development of Afro-Poblano matrimony in the city's two most significant parishes. As shall be seen, by the end of the century, San José had developed into a haven for a vibrant, and predominantly free mixed-race

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<sup>139</sup> Women of African descent (*mulatas/pardas* and *negras/morenas*) only accounted for 60% of all brides in the San José's Afro-Poblano marriage registers from 1629-1657. Men similarly defined represented more than 76% of the grooms in the same marriage books.



population.<sup>140</sup> The residents of the Sagrario also followed this trend, although slavery remained slightly more entrenched in the households of the city's Spanish elite. More importantly, a notable demographic shift took place in the closing decades of the century as mulattos outnumbered Blacks at a 3:1 ratio within the marital record. From 1660-1700, no less than 3,284 mulatto men and women married in Puebla's two most important parishes, in comparison to 1,062 Black brides and grooms.<sup>141</sup>

<b>Table 5.4. Number of grooms and brides by race and legal status, 1660-1700</b>			
<i>Sagrario parish</i>			
	<i>Free</i>	<i>Slave</i>	<i>Total</i>
Black males	88	549	637
Black females	42	296	338
Mulatto males	933	648	1581
Mulatto females	1023	239	1262
Asian males	17	12	29
Asian females	5	8	13
<i>Total</i>	<i>2108 (54.6%)</i>	<i>1752 (45.3%)</i>	<i>3860 (100%)</i>
<i>San José parish</i>			
	<i>Free</i>	<i>Slave</i>	<i>Total</i>
Black males	1	52	53
Black females	7	27	34
Mulatto males	190	69	259
Mulatto females	162	20	182
Asian males	0	1	1
Asian females	1	0	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>361 (68.1%)</i>	<i>169 (31.9%)</i>	<i>530 (100%)</i>
<i>Source: ASMP &amp; APSJ, 1660-1700 marriage database</i>			

<sup>140</sup> Of the 2,560 grooms whose records survive in the Sagrario, 1,231 were slaves. In San José, only 124 out of 378 grooms were slaves.

<sup>141</sup> While mulattos outnumbered Blacks in both parishes, the Sagrario retained a higher percentage of Black grooms (25%) in comparison to San José (14%). This trend is illustrative of the more racially-mixed, free population that lived on the periphery of the city in contrast to the Spanish-dominated center with its large population of enslaved domestic workers.

This considerable statistical disparity in the number of Black and mulatto spouses at the end of the seventeenth century can be attributed to a number of factors. First, the official end of the Portuguese-conducted slave trade to New Spain evidently affected the demographic composition of the Afro-Poblano population. Second, the city's mulatto population had grown exponentially since the early seventeenth century. Mulatto growth was restricted neither by the African slave influx nor by the more modest expansion of the Spanish population. More significantly, an ever-greater proportion of these individuals of partial African ancestry attained free status while Black men and women were mired in slavery.

The marital statistics that emerge among these four subgroups of the Afro-Poblano population (*mulatos*, *mulatas*, *negros* and *negras*) during the late seventeenth century are particularly noteworthy, as evidenced by the notable similarities between parishes. Only 11% of *mulatas* in San José and 19% in the Sagrario remained subjected to slavery from 1660 to 1700.<sup>142</sup> The significance of these indicators is tremendous! By the end of the seventeenth century, mulatto women (along with *mestizas* and *indias*) effectively eroded the institution of slavery in Puebla by becoming procreators of free children. Through their marriages to enslaved men (both Black and mulatto), the *mulata* residents of San José and Sagrario actively mitigated the perpetuation of slavery. In both parishes, between 80 and 88% of *mulatas* (again, mostly free) were willing to marry Black and mulatto grooms despite the fact that large percentages of these groups remained enslaved.

Mulatto men in late seventeenth-century Puebla did not reciprocate their female contemporaries with similar rates of spousal selection. While *mulatos* in the Sagrario and San José married *mulatas* just over half of the time, they still demonstrated an open aversion to Black

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<sup>142</sup> Out of 182 *mulata* brides from San José, only 20 were slaves. In the Sagrario, 239 mulatto women claimed to be slaves out of a total of 1262 brides.

brides.<sup>143</sup> While the city's Black population began to dwindle at the end of the seventeenth century, it was still much larger than the very low marriage rate represented in *mulato-negra* marriages. In particular, the male mulatto residents of San José, who were increasingly free, branched out into the greater Poblano society in search for potential brides. Whereas a generation before San José's mulatto parishioners still sought out Indigenous brides, by the late seventeenth century mestiza brides accounted for almost 30% of their marriages. In both parishes *mulatos* married Indian women 9% of the time, while Black women only surface in less than 4% of mulatto marriages.

In general, while the city's marrying mulatto population attained freedom, Black grooms and brides remained overwhelmingly enslaved.<sup>144</sup> As has been previously discussed, this reality had greater consequences for Black brides, who remained unable to marry anyone other than Black and mulatto men. In this regard, the similarities between the Sagrario and San José are stunning. In the former parish, Black women only married Indigenous, mestizo, castizo and Spanish grooms 3% of the time. The exact same rate held true for San José, where only one *negra* married a *mestizo* during the entire 1660-1700 period!<sup>145</sup> Moreover, African women were virtually restricted to marrying African men, just as enslaved Black brides could only expect to marry enslaved Black men. By contrast, the Black grooms of both parishes were able to marry

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<sup>143</sup> Only 7 of 259 mulatto grooms took *negras* as brides in late seventeenth century San José (2.7%). In the Sagrario, *mulatos* took Black brides at a slightly higher rate, with 66 *mulato-negra* marriages (4.2%).

<sup>144</sup> By the end of the seventeenth century, the effective rate of enslavement for Black men and women in both parishes was approximately 88%.

<sup>145</sup> In January 1669, Ursula de Asperilla, one of the few free Black brides in Puebla, married the mestizo Lázaro Zambrano in the San José parish church. Both were widowers, which may help explain why this unlikely union took place.

*indias* and *mestizas* approximately a quarter of the time and in relatively equal numbers.<sup>146</sup> In other words, for enslaved Black men matrimony represented a reliable avenue for social advancement and the guaranteed freedom of their children. For the Black women of the late seventeenth century, the sacrament of marriage signified nothing of the sort. If anything, marriage merely represented a Church-sanctioned partnership between unfree spouses. Unlike their male contemporaries, enslaved women could expect little prestige, social capital or other civil benefits from formal unions.

#### *Bigamy under Slavery: The Case of Sebastián Domingo*

Yet what did the sacrament of matrimony represent on a personal level? In particular, what could marriage mean to a young enslaved African as he or she adapted to a new land, culture, religion, workspace, etc.? The case of Sebastián Domingo, accused of bigamy in 1642, will shed light precisely on these questions of companionship, property rights and ecclesiastical law. As a truly qualitative case, Domingo's life story and perilous situation before the Holy Office of the Inquisition expose the machinations of slave matrimony and the pervasiveness of slave owners even in this most personal of sacraments.

In March of 1642, a middle-aged Kongolesé slave by the name of Sebastián Domingo de Munguia, presented his testimony before an official of the Inquisition in Puebla. Sebastián was forced to answer an extended list of questions about his forty-odd years of life, and in particular about his marital status. He did not know whom his accusers were or what he was being charged with, but considering that he worked and lived within the confines of one of the city's textile mills, the possibilities were obvious. His first wife, whom he had not seen in eight years, had

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<sup>146</sup> In San José, eight Black grooms married Indigenous brides, while six married mestizo women. In the Sagrario, seventy-eight Black men married *mestizas*, while sixty-four grooms took Indian brides.

recently made her way from the port of Veracruz to Puebla, and sought out her husband in his workplace. The reunion must have been bittersweet as Sebastián had married for a second time, with a slave living in the same obraje, no less! Thus, the potential list of accusers and the probable offense was quite clear: his Portuguese master and textile mill owner, Luis de Mesquita; his first wife, Felipa; his second wife, Isabel; and all of the other obraje slaves and free workers. Sebastián would face charges of bigamy.

By mid-April 1642, Sebastián had been sent in chains to the Inquisition's prison in Mexico City. His case was apparently worthy of greater scrutiny and required a meticulous examination of his life. After a month in the secret dungeons of the Holy Office, Sebastián was finally asked to recount his life story (*discurso de su vida*), to which he responded,

*Being a youth between fifteen and sixteen years old he was taken from Kongo in Guinea, his homeland, by a Portuguese man with other Black bozales and came straight to Campeche and from there was sent up to the city of Mérida, where he was sold to don Juan de Montejo Maldonado, in whose service he remained for about fifteen years...*<sup>147</sup>

After this period of relative stability in the Yucatán province, Sebastián would be bought and sold a total of seven times. Over the next fifteen to twenty years, Sebastián lived in Veracruz (on two separate occasions), Mexico City, Tlaxcala, Atlixco and Puebla de los Ángeles. It was precisely during his second stay in Veracruz, circa 1624, that he married Felipa de la Cruz, an African woman "from Guinea" and slave of Francisco Hernández, the warden of the Veracruz jail. At the time Hernández also owned Sebastián as a slave.

In their testimony before the inquisitors, Sebastián and Felipa disclosed little else about their two years of marriage other than the fact that their union ended abruptly when their master "threw Sebastián Domingo out of Veracruz." No reason was given for this arbitrary violation of

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<sup>147</sup> AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 399, Exp. 2. f. 296v.

their marital rights. Instead, the warden had Sebastián sent to Mexico City where he was to be sold. Yet "no one [there] had wanted to buy the respondent because he said he was married."<sup>148</sup> Clearly, the consequences of purchasing married, illegally separated slaves were considerable for slave owners.<sup>149</sup> Perhaps the concentration of religious institutions in New Spain's capital, particularly the offices of the Inquisition, dissuaded most purchasers from acquiring slaves, even at a discount. As a result, Hernández decided to take Sebastián to the city of Tlaxcala. As a largely Indigenous city and one with few secular priests to hold up ecclesiastical law, Tlaxcala presented a more lax environment for negligent slave owners than Puebla or Mexico City. Unsurprisingly, Hernández readily found a buyer in the Portuguese textile mill owner, Luis de Mesquita.

This new master and his line of work would imply a life of hardship for Sebastián. Colonial obrajeros were ill-reputed for exploiting their laborers, both free and unfree. Textile mill owners rarely followed civil law, and only begrudgingly acquiesced to the religious statutes of the day.<sup>150</sup> Luis de Mesquita's slaves may have suffered particularly difficult conditions as their master relocated his textile activities from Tlaxcala, to Atlixco, and finally to Puebla, within a fifteen year-span. With each move, his slaves lost their opportunity to adapt to their new environment, and establish friendships with commoners, priests and other influential people. Altogether, Sebastián spent a difficult sixteen years with Luis de Mesquita. In his testimony, Sebastián highlighted his master's disregard for the Church in his testimony before Inquisition officials, noting that while he had confessed during Lent "he had not received communion

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<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 297r.

<sup>149</sup> Recall that in 1579, the slave owner Antonio de Reinoso lost an ecclesiastical suit to his slaves Anton and Inés for having illegally separated them. See AGN, Bienes Nacionales, Box 131, Exp. 1.

<sup>150</sup> Viqueira and Urquiola, 108-111; von Mentz, 158; Salvucci, 37, 122-124.

because he had not been sent to church during Holy Week."<sup>151</sup> In fact, despite the accusations of bigamy leveled against him, Sebastián was able to portray himself as an obedient, practicing Catholic in contrast to his uncouth Portuguese master.

Throughout the inquisitorial proceedings, Sebastián Domingo time and again demonstrated that his marriage to Felipa represented far more than a mere religious contract. By his own admission, Sebastián fled his master on "four occasions to make marital life with his wife," despite the severe punishment that awaited him on each return to the obraje.<sup>152</sup> The considerable hardship implied by the trek from the central highlands to the Veracruz coast did not seem to deter the married slave, either. In other words, while we do not know whether Sebastián actually chose to marry Felipa, it is abundantly clear that he went to great lengths to preserve his marriage. For a man that had experienced as much instability as Sebastián, the companionship of a wife represented something profound. In this respect, Sebastián demonstrated how slaves could safeguard their personal relationships within the limitations imposed on them through chattel slavery. In fact, it appears that Mesquita grew so weary of his slave's acts of *petit marronage* that he orchestrated a ruse to permanently distract Sebastián from Felipa. In essence, the slave owner allegedly paid a group of muleteers to visit his obraje with the news that Sebastián's first wife had died.

In the first recounting of the events as told by Sebastián, only after hearing of Felipa's passing and burial did he agree to marry the Angolan slave, Isabel. The slave owner Luis de Mesquita would clearly benefit from Sebastián's new-found willingness to marry another obraje-dwelling slave. In Sebastián's own words, by way of this union, Mesquita could now "secure his

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<sup>151</sup> AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 399, Exp. 2, f. 296r.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 309v.

money".<sup>153</sup> Sebastián no longer had a legitimate reason to escape the textile mill, nor could the ecclesiastical authorities charge Mesquita with impeding a wedded Christian couple from engaging in conjugal life. Charges of this nature could be potentially catastrophic for a foreigner, and particularly for one of the circumspect Portuguese community.<sup>154</sup> Instead, Mesquita went out of his way to ensure that Sebastián and Isabel could begin their lives as a couple by "giving them six pesos for the [marriage] rights." Loaning or gifting slaves money for their wedding was a common tactic among textile mill owners, and may help explain why so many obraje slaves appear in colonial marriage registers.

As most slave owners, Luis de Mesquita understood that even slaves' religious rights could be manipulated to benefit his labor demands. In a 1645 rental contract for the Fresneda textile mill in Atlixco, he stipulated that "those slaves born in the obraje from the mulatto woman presently there, or from any other female slaves" would be his property during the entirety of the lease.<sup>155</sup> Thus, it is unsurprising that Sebastián repeatedly complained that he had been "forced" into marrying Mesquita's slave, Isabel. Any children born of their union would have immediately become the obrajero's property. This situation almost took place, as Isabel had given birth to an infant during her marriage to Sebastián, but, tragically, the child did not survive. Isabel would have been approximately 40 years of age at the time, undoubtedly making her pregnancy one of

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<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*, f. 307v.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*, f. 268v. The 1640s was a particularly difficult decade for the resident Portuguese community of New Spain, who were constantly accused of being crypto-Jews. Sebastian Domingo's case may have been especially worth pursuing due to Luis de Mesquita's provenance. In fact, a section of instructions in Sebastián's case ordered Inquisition officials to investigate whether Mesquita, "being Portuguese and of a suspicious nation," has said or done "something against our holy Catholic faith, or some rite, ceremony, or fast consistent with the law of Moses."

<sup>155</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 170, 1645/10/20, ff. 451r-458r. Although the rental contract took place between Sebastián Domingo's initial and final testimony, the slave inventory included in the agreement lists him as "Domingo batanero angola de edad de cinquenta años."



high risk. Whether Isabel and Sebastián intended to have a child together is beyond the scope of this study, but it is undeniable that Luis de Mesquita would have benefitted from such a decision.

Ultimately, the case of Sebastián Domingo de Munguia demonstrates the inordinate power that masters had over their slaves even when entering formal church-sanctioned unions. Sebastián demonstrated great effort in saving his marriage to his first wife, Felipa, even though a considerable distance separated them. However, it is worth noting that even this first marriage had taken place when bride and groom had been owned by the same man. The same scenario, albeit with different brides, repeated itself a few years later under the influence of the obraje owner Luis de Mesquita.<sup>156</sup>

Whereas a superficial reading of marital registers could support a historical context in which African slaves sought each other out for matrimony, a closer analysis informed by judicial, notarial and inquisitorial documents reveals that marriages between slaves were often coerced events. At best, slaves manifested their agency within the context of their imposed marriages. Under this hypothesis, I suggest that masters could and did constantly interfere in slave matrimony, particularly in areas in which the Church did not enjoy considerable authority. Within the urban context, obrajes would have certainly constituted such spaces of ecclesiastical lawlessness.

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<sup>156</sup> Sebastián Domingo's case ends without a proper conclusion or even sentence from the Inquisition officials. Sometime between his first (1642) and last deposition he was removed from Luis de Mesquita's domain, although he remained an obraje slave in Puebla. Sebastián's second wife, Isabel, died during this six-year interlude, while Felipa's fate remains a mystery. After restating his case before the Holy Office in 1648, Sebastián was returned to Alonso de Hita's textile mill in Puebla.

### *Concubinage and Informal Unions*

While the study of matrimony is essential to understanding slavery, it is a fact that most slaves did not marry in the colonial city. However, given the strength of Puebla's religious institutions and the dominance of its textile barons, Poblano slaves may have married more than their contemporaries on sugar cane plantations or silver refineries. Still, demographic and social historians have convincingly proven that throughout New Spain's urban centers, most children were not born to two-parent households, let alone to married couples.<sup>157</sup> Instead most couples engaged in informal unions, which, if sustained for prolonged periods of time, could lead to charges of concubinage.

Concubinage in seventeenth-century Puebla de los Ángeles referred to a number of sexual, cultural and social practices that ran counter to Catholic law. In general, a couple could encounter charges of concubinage for "eating and sleeping together as if they were legitimate husband and wife."<sup>158</sup> The crux of the issue, then, was whether a couple had formalized their union before the Church. However, informal sexual relations could hardly be punished if they only took place once or twice, instead accusations of concubinage surfaced only after repeated incidents. Only after an anonymous denouncer provided the city's *alguacil ordinario* with relevant information could an arrest be made. Thus, committing random acts of "carnal excess" could not in itself lead to charges. Only after a personal relationship came to be of ill-reputed public knowledge could a couple be exposed as violators of civil law.

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<sup>157</sup> Martin, 133-134. Slave children born out-of-wedlock were also characteristic of the rural setting. Consider the case of the mid-eighteenth century hacienda Cocoyoc, where over two-thirds of all slave children were born of informal unions.

<sup>158</sup> AHJP, Exp. 1961, f. 1r.

Unfortunately, concubinage cases rarely speak to slave unions, although these must have been prevalent in Puebla's textile mills and elite households. Perhaps it was assumed that as unfree people, slaves could hardly be expected to maintain the same degree of Catholic observance as free citizens. To a degree, this is a valid point, particularly in Spanish households where female slaves could suffer sexual assault from their masters or their employees. Yet thousands of marriages in Puebla parishes demonstrate that slaves were expected and encouraged to maintain the sexual mores prevalent in novohispanic society.

Judging from the scant extant documentary evidence on slave concubinage in Puebla, it appears that such charges were usually filed to prevent free men of low social standing from socializing with unfree women. In two of the three cases at our disposal, free men were arrested, jailed, fined and reprimanded for associating with female slaves. Consider the 1639 case in which a young fruit-seller, Francisco Hernández Delgado, was charged with concubinage for associating with Juana, a *mulata* slave owned by the influential Marqués de Amarilla family.<sup>159</sup> In what can only be considered a power ploy by the slave's owner, the city justice arrested Hernández for providing Juana with a horse ride to his cousin's house. The fruit-seller was released with an insignificant fine, but with the considerable threat of one year's exile from Puebla if he and Juana were seen together again. Juana was not jailed, but received a more stern threat of spending two years in Santa María Egipcíaca, a cloistered house for negligent women.

In another case a wealthy Spaniard brought charges of concubinage, trespassing and theft against his slave's lover in April of 1654. Juan de Sicilia, the city's ecclesiastical notary, denounced that a young Spanish man had been having a "carnal, illicit friendship" with his

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<sup>159</sup> AHJP, Exp. 1739, ff. 1r-1v.

twenty-year old *mulata* slave, Josefa.<sup>160</sup> For well over a year, Juan Carrillo, a goldleaf gilder, had been visiting Josepha at night unbeknown to her master. Their rendezvous allegedly took place in Sicilia's garage, although a pair of witnesses claimed otherwise. Sicilia's wife was aware of these meetings, and had once discovered Juan hiding under a bed in the slaves' chambers. On another occasion, she even found the young Spaniard hidden in one of her rooms. This brazen conduct did not bring forth charges of concubinage, however. Only after Juan boldly locked his lover's master into his own house, stole away Josefa, her four-month old child, Josefa's mother and some of the masters' clothes, were charges properly filed.

But, what of Josefa? What circumstances could motivate a young, mulatto slave to enter such a relationship? As demonstrated earlier in the chapter, Black and mulatto women did not find the same social advantages in matrimony as their male counterparts. For a domestic slave like Josefa, the likelihood that she and Juan could establish an independent household in the city was fairly slim. Purchasing her freedom would cost her Spanish lover between 300 and 400 pesos, to say nothing of manumitting Josefa's child and mother. Moreover, Josefa and her family actually had their own chambers within their master's house hold, thereby relieving Juan of some pressure to become a proper *paterfamilias*. Still, Juan in all likelihood felt obligated to provide his enslaved wife, his four-month daughter and his mother-in-law with a better life than that of a domestic slave. Their elaborate plan to steal some of the master's possessions and lock him in to his own house reflects the financial and social limitations of this young couple.

A final example of the complex relationships held between free men and unfree women will help illustrate why informal unions so often went unreported. In 1673, a Puebla official filed suit against José de Villalobos, a nineteen-year old mestizo for his aggressive, violent behavior

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<sup>160</sup> AHJP, Exp. 2146, f. 1r.

towards Teresa, the former's Black creole slave.<sup>161</sup> Villalobos, infuriated by the slave's refusal to betroth him, had allegedly attacked Teresa with a knife in broad daylight. Arrested for his irreparable behavior, the young mestizo confessed that his rage stemmed from the fact that he and Teresa had a considerable prior history. In his statement, Villalobos claimed that he had worked for Teresa's owner for seven years in the latter's glass-making workshop. During said time, "he and Teresa cohabitated and the confessant asked Ignacio Gómez [their patron] for Teresa's hand in marriage. Gómez promised to give him Teresa as his wife, but later on changed his mind, refused to give her away and threw the confessant out."<sup>162</sup> The fact that Villalobos nonchalantly incriminated himself as an *amancebado* in a non-concubinage case reflects how common this practice was in everyday Puebla. Employees and domestic slaves faced little opposition from their patrons when it came to establishing informal unions within the private spaces of the Spanish household.

These three scenarios illustrate how slave concubinage described a very specific, gendered practice. Although unmarried male slaves undoubtedly sustained sexual relations with women, none of these "crimes" survive in the city's archives. Either slave-slave interactions were considered insignificant and therefore outside the reach of the law, or patrons concealed such interactions from public knowledge. The former possibility appears far more plausible for a number of reasons. First, the three cases considered here reveal that slave owners attempted to restrain their female slaves from male suitors, particularly free ones. In turn, this power dynamic could help explain why so few women of African descent married exogamously. Note that the cases studied took place between female slaves and Spanish or mestizo men of low social status

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<sup>161</sup> AHJP, Exp. 2329, f. 5r.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 5r, "... y en ese tiempo se amancebo con dicha negra Theresa y se la pidio este confesante para muger al dicho Ignacio Gomez el qual prometio darsela por muger y despues se arrepintio y no quiso y echo a este confesante de la casa...".

(a fruit vendor, a goldleaf gilder, and a glassmaker/carder). Thus, accusations of concubinage did nothing to prevent or expose sexual relationships between elite men and slave women (<or viceversa). In addition, while enslaved men could and did have access to free women, these interactions were of less significance since by civil law, free women gave birth to free children.

### *Conclusion*

What, then, can be said regarding slaves in the formalization of their unions? First, and foremost, a cache of ignored marriage registers from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries has proven that thousands of slaves participated in the Catholic sacrament of matrimony in Puebla. Whether from Angola, the Philippines or the Chichimec territories of northern New Spain, slaves married to a far greater degree than the current historiography suggests. Second, a considerable number of slaves married people of different races and legal status. The protection afforded to the Indian women of the viceroyalty through "free womb" laws made Afro-Indigenous matrimony an alluring prospect for men of African descent. Finally, the marriage register has also proven how influential slave owners could be in their slaves' possibilities and decisions to marry. Slave owners, and particularly obrajeros, acknowledged slaves' recourse to ecclesiastical tribunals to protect their marriages. Ultimately, this balance of power resulted in slave owners deciding to co-opt the sacrament of matrimony rather than oppose it. While determining just how autonomous slaves remained in their spousal choices is beyond the scope of this chapter, slave owners undeniably influenced the financing of many marriages.

## Conclusion - A City of Freedmen

This dissertation ends in 1706, the year that a community of thirty-six slaves was sent from Puebla to Mixcoac, a small textile town in the Valley of Mexico.<sup>1</sup> The sale of this slave community is significant to the history of slavery in Puebla for a number of reasons. By the end of the seventeenth century, few obrajes remained active in Puebla de los Ángeles. Most were rather small enterprises, with few if any Black or mulatto slaves. The one notable exception was the textile mill owned by the city regent, Don Domingo de Apressa y Gándara. In 1700, an inspection of Apressa's obraje was carried out with the same purposes that these official visits had had since the late sixteenth century: Indigenous workers were supposed to voice allegations of abuse at the hands of their overseers.<sup>2</sup> Yet the Apressa textile mill posed a different set of problems with an extraordinary workforce composed of thirty-one *esclavos negros* and two free mulattos.

The enslaved workers of the Apressa mill formed a truly unique labor force in early eighteenth-century Puebla. Only one other slave worked in all of Puebla's other obrajes between 1700 and 1710! Free *morenos* were just as rare and, in fact, none surface in the inspections carried out in thirteen textile mills during the first decade of the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> What, then, can we deduce from such a strange workforce? First, Africans were becoming a rare sight in eighteenth-century Puebla, particularly outside of the elite household. Most of the men in this obraje would have been creoles, the majority born in Puebla and perhaps a few others coming

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<sup>1</sup> Proctor, 170.

<sup>2</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 224, f. 176r.

<sup>3</sup> Alberto Carabarán Gracia, *El trabajo y los trabajadores del obraje de la ciudad de Puebla, 1700-1710* (Puebla: Cuadernos de la Casa Presno, 1984), 61.

from Guatemala, Oaxaca and Mexico City. In fact, only one toponymic reference to an African past emerges among these thirty-one men, and an indirect one at that. Juan Pedro de la Cruz, a Black slave whose occupation and origin were not specified, was married to "María Josefa Loanga." A decidedly small minority of Loango slaves, who hailed from the Atlantic coast just north of the Kongo river, found themselves in Puebla de los Ángeles during the 1690s.<sup>4</sup> In his one-line complaint to the inspector, Juan Pedro noted that María Josefa "had been sold to a resident of Veracruz."<sup>5</sup> In other words, the couple had been unlawfully separated. No other annotations appear in the margins of the extant inspection and it is unlikely that any action was taken to reunite the couple.

The only other complaint that emerges in the inspection of the Apressa mill revolves around the Black slave Francisco de la Cruz and his owner, Francisco Martínez de Viana. Aware that this might be his only opportunity to leave the confines of the mill legally, Francisco noted that Viana had encountered financial difficulties leading the former to be held "in deposit," essentially as a pawned good, at Apressa's workplace.<sup>6</sup> In other words, Francisco was establishing that although he was a slave, he could not be treated like a slave belonging to the textile mill. In a clear example of slave agency, Francisco asked "to be sold out of the obraje," to which the inspector responded by ordering that a letter be written to Viana, informing him of the situation. Evidently, working and living conditions within the mill were far from ideal. Yet as a slave belonging to a third-party, Francisco was able to shrewdly voice an opinion, which he cloaked as a request centered on his master's property rights.

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<sup>4</sup> Slaves from Loango were typically associated with Dutch slavers, who transported their human captives to the slave port of Curaçao for re-export to South America. According to Alex Borucki, "The eponym Loango eventually became synonymous with Curaçaoan origin in eighteenth-century Venezuela: *Loango* meant both "Curaçao black" and an origin on the coast of Loango." See Borucki, 38.

<sup>5</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 224, f. 176r.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*



This leads us to our next point regarding eighteenth-century slavery in Puebla. By the late colonial period, slaves in Puebla possessed considerable legal acumen, to say nothing of the ability to communicate with the greater urban society. The case of Francisco de la Cruz's workmates, however, highlights the power dynamics that even creole and ladino slaves continued to encounter in the colonial city as human property. The thirty men allegedly declared to "have no complaints, because they are treated well and are given food and dress. The workload is not too much."<sup>7</sup> For this slave workforce and community, voicelessness remained a fact of every day life. Hispanization did little to remedy their plight.<sup>8</sup> Despite their Spanish surnames, adherence to Catholicism and familiarity with colonial law, they would all be sold to the textile mill in Mixcoac.

This slave exodus from Puebla during the eighteenth century was also replicated in broader, regional terms. Whereas the Puebla slave market had traditionally supplied the sugar cane plantations of Izúcar and Las Amilpas, the emergence of Córdoba as New Spain's primary sugar-producing area at the turn of the century effectively ended this relationship. Between 1700 and 1706, the factors of the Royal Company of Guinea targeted Córdoba, nestled just below the Sierra Madre Oriental highlands, as its primary market in New Spain.<sup>9</sup> A very small number of these slaves would then be resold to Poblanos. This shift in sugar production was quite notable throughout the eighteenth-century, as Córdoba residents purchased as many slaves as they could away from Puebla and other urban centers (e.g., Antequera and Xalapa). The transformation of the slave landscape was finally completed in 1771, when the San Nicolás Tolentino sugar

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Of the thirty-one workers found in Apressa's obraje, twenty-seven held Spanish last names while the remaining four simply went by their Spanish first names (Santiago, Manuel, Lorenzo and Juanes).

<sup>9</sup> Adriana Naveda Chávez-Hita, *Esclavos negros en las haciendas azucareras de Córdoba, Veracruz, 1690-1830* (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana/Centro de Investigaciones Históricas, 1987), 36.

plantation of Izúcar sold its entire 308-slave workforce to four Córdoba planters in a single transaction!<sup>10</sup> With the decline of slave labor in the fields of Izúcar, the Puebla slave market essentially ceased to exist. Poblano elites still sold, endowed and exchanged the rights to a handful of domestic slaves, but by the mid-eighteenth century, chattel slavery was essentially an institution of the past. How did this come to be?

Throughout this dissertation I contend that by the mid-to-late seventeenth century, Puebla de los Ángeles was well on its way to becoming a city of freedmen. Free people of African and Asian descent outnumbered their enslaved counterparts several times over. These free *morenos*, *pardos* and *chinos* integrated into the urban economy of New Spain's second city and made their services essential to its survival. As the caste system disintegrated into a meaningless taxonomy of phenotypic gradations, this freedman population and its descendants acquired ever more influential positions in local commerce, religion and society. Perhaps no Afro-Poblano captures this transformation better than the *pardo* Capt. Felipe Monsón y Mojica. Born a slave to an elite Spanish family, Felipe and his Indigenous wife would eventually dominate the local market for chile peppers and other native agricultural products in Puebla.<sup>11</sup> By the 1680s, Felipe "el chilero" had become an influential leader of the city's *pardo* religious brotherhood. His crowning achievements were the construction of a lavish household in Puebla's San José neighborhood and being named captain of Puebla's *pardo* militia, an event recorded in the city's Indigenous annals.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 58.

<sup>11</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 205, 1671/05/29.

<sup>12</sup> Gómez García, 104-105.

The late seventeenth century also witnessed the growing access of Poblano freedmen and their descendants to apprenticeships. In turn, these apprenticeships actually began to produce skilled journeymen and master artisans of African descent, and not just unremunerated adolescent laborers. The free *pardo*, Lázaro Rodríguez de la Torre, for instance, worked as a master printer and typesetter in Puebla from the 1660s to the 1680s.<sup>13</sup> In 1662, Rodríguez printed Fray Bartolomé de Letona's *La perfecta religiosa*, which would become a seminal text for female monastic life in New Spain.<sup>14</sup> Most Afro-Poblano master artisans, however, specialized in textiles precisely because their labor had been historically concentrated in the city's obrajes. Thus, Gaspar de Santander worked as a master cloth shearer, a position that allowed him to become a leader among the *pardo* confraternity of the local Jesuit college.<sup>15</sup> It is from this textile artisan base, and specifically from the Santander family, that a powerful group of *pardos* and *morenos* would emerge to lead Puebla's free-colored militias during the eighteenth century.<sup>16</sup>

Another undeniable fact is that late colonial Afro-Poblanos increasingly fell into the *pardo/mulato* category, a direct reflection of their racially mixed heritage. Dennis Valdés has correctly described the eighteenth century as "the era of the mulatto slave in Mexico," noting that while "most mulattoes were free persons in colonial Mexico, by the eighteenth century they were also the vast majority of the remaining slaves."<sup>17</sup> The parochial and notarial data for eighteenth-century Puebla irrevocably confirm this assessment. By contrast, South Asian slaves, who had

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<sup>13</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 209, 1675/12/30.

<sup>14</sup> Mercedes Isabel Salomón Salazar, "Los Borja: Una dinastía de libreros e impresores en la Puebla de los Ángeles del siglo XVII. Un primer acercamiento," in *Miradas a la cultura del libro en Puebla* (Puebla: UNAM/Gobierno del Estado de Puebla, 2012), 233.

<sup>15</sup> AGNP, Not. 4, Box 223, 1685/12/29.

<sup>16</sup> Vinson, 60-61.

<sup>17</sup> Dennis N. Valdés, "The Decline of Slavery of Mexico" *The Americas*, 44, 2 (Oct. 1987): 177, 193.

always formed an amorphous slave subpopulation in New Spain, virtually disappeared from Puebla after the 1680s. Technically, *chino* slaves had been emancipated by royal decree in 1672, although they were still occasionally sold after this date.<sup>18</sup> However, as a heavily male, highly skilled group with a greater ability to blend into Indigenous society, *chino* slaves would have also undoubtedly attained their freedom without the abolition decree (and in less time than the gradual decline of *pardo/mulato* slavery).

Africans, who had been such a conspicuous sector in Puebla up to the mid-seventeenth century, ceased to arrive in significant numbers after Portuguese independence. Other Spanish American elites (in Caracas, Havana, etc.) simply continued the importation of African slaves through non-Portuguese sources. For instance, the post-1640 relationship between Venezuelan planters and Dutch slave traders is quite clear.<sup>19</sup> Ironically, Puebla, and New Spain, in general, did not partake in the transatlantic slaving boom of the eighteenth-century. Although elite Poblanos and the resident *encomendero de negros* financed the development of a lucrative slave trade between Angola and Spanish America a century before, chattel slavery in Puebla was a moribund institution by the mid 1700s. Representatives for the powerful Lusophone slaving networks of the seventeenth century became obsolete.

The contrast between New Spain and the mature slaving societies of the French and British Caribbean during the eighteenth century is all the more revealing considering the sheer scale and nature of slavery in the latter region. As David Eltis has noted, the early Spanish Americas featured "highly varied types of slave employment" which distinguished the region from

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<sup>18</sup> Seijas, "Transpacific Servitude," 236-237. Chichimec slaves from New Spain's northern frontier were also included in what essentially became an abolition decree for all non-African slaves. Chichimecs, although an even smaller slave population in Puebla than *chinos*, also disappear from the notarial record by the mid-1670s.

<sup>19</sup> Borucki, 35-38.

societies like French St. Domingue.<sup>20</sup> Poblanos' use of slaves as textile workers, water carriers, apprentices and domestic servants confirms Eltis's assessment. By contrast, during the eighteenth century, the English and French forcibly introduced 3.1 million African captives to work on their booming plantations.<sup>21</sup> The Portuguese disembarked 2 million Africans in Brazil for agriculture and mine labor. By contrast, only a few thousand slaves entered New Spain during the eighteenth century. After securing the slaving monopoly to Spanish America in 1701, the Compagnie du Senegal proved to be far more interested in introducing contraband French textiles than slaves to New Spain.<sup>22</sup> Little changed with the slaving *asiento* passing to the British South Sea Company in 1713, as less than four thousand slaves arrived in New Spain.<sup>23</sup> Very few of these slaves would have reached Puebla. Simply put, by the eighteenth century, Poblano elites were either financially unable or not interested in replenishing an aging slave workforce with young African arrivals.

Yet how could the elites of an urban center so dependent on slave labor so rapidly do without entire generations of slave labor? Had they not invested astronomic figures to import thousands of West Central Africans to Puebla? In theory, a significant African-based slave population could have been maintained in New Spain's second city by prohibiting formal unions between free women and unfree men. The Church could have denied the sacrament of matrimony to all slaves, limiting their reach into the greater urban society and disempowering them as second-class Catholics. Secular authorities could have also imposed terrible physical

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<sup>20</sup> David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 26-27.

<sup>21</sup> Transatlantic Slave Trade Database. Number of slave disembarked by countries over 100-year periods. Accessed May 9, 2013. <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/assessment/estimates.faces>.

<sup>22</sup> Aguirre Beltrán, 73-75.

<sup>23</sup> Colin Palmer, *Human Cargoes: The British Slave Trade to Spanish America, 1700-1739* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 108-111. The ports of Veracruz (1716-1739) and Campeche (1725-1739) received 3,011 and 805 slaves, respectively.

punishments on the parents of racially mixed children born out wedlock. Any of these measures would have mitigated the rapid growth of a freedman population in colonial Puebla de los Ángeles. Of course, these restrictions were not implemented. To do so would have limited the pervasiveness of the Church in secular affairs and exposed the sexual exploitation of Afro-Poblano women by Spanish masters.

Thus, slave agency, combined with the spatial dynamics of the Spanish American city, the availability of a large, non-Spanish, free population, the disproportionate power of the Catholic Church all combined to erode slavery in seventeenth-century Puebla. African, Asian, creole, and mulatto slaves all utilized their rights as religious equals to defend their rights to conjugality and companionship. Male slaves more familiar with Spanish law, primarily creoles and mulattos, strategically entered marriages with free women for the purpose of attaining their freedom and that of their children. An irreversible emancipating process based on free birth, which had begun since the sixteenth century, effectively eroded chattel slavery in Puebla by the end of the seventeenth century. As a result, freedom in Puebla was directly linked to religious rights and access to free spouses. Outright flight from slavery was undoubtedly always a possibility, but a precarious one that implied severing the precious social ties that bound together Afro-Poblano families and friends. In considering free womb births as the primary gateway to freedom, we must also recall that manumissions only accounted for the liberation of a minimal number of free people in colonial Puebla.

A lack of residential segregation also facilitated the erosion of chattel slavery in seventeenth-century Puebla de los Ángeles. Poblano slaves of Puebla could not be restricted to a single, racially specific neighborhood. Spanish American urban slavery, particularly within city centers, relied on the service and uninterrupted access to slaves who lived within elite

households, convents, monasteries and parish buildings. The same could be said about slaves who worked and resided within textile mills. As a result, the construction of racially-exclusive, socially segregated spaces would have proved counterproductive to slave owners in seventeenth-century Puebla. There were no slave ghettos. Even the peripheral neighborhoods of the city featured an incredibly diverse population. For instance, the once-exclusively Indigenous neighborhood of Analco was characterized by an intense interaction between impoverished Spanish, Afro-Poblano, Asian and Nahua artisans, day laborers, muleteers, laundresses, etc. In fact, a considerable free Afro-Poblano presence is evident in Analco real estate transactions since the mid 1640s.<sup>24</sup>

The racial fluidity of this emerging working class in Puebla's peripheral neighborhoods further weakened the grip of slavery on urban society. By 1700, most slaves in Puebla could not be called *negros* or *morenos*. As a matter of fact, the emergence of terms like *mulato blanco*, *mulato cocho*, and *mulato prieto* suggest that there was a growing elite concern over how to distinguish enslaved people of partial African descent from swarthy-skinned Spaniards, mestizos, castizos, and other free Afro-Poblanos. Simply put, phenotypical differences no longer served as slave labels. This was especially problematic when considering that slaves worked side-by-side with free laborers, had full access to all Catholic sacraments, and resided in racially diverse neighborhoods both as slaves and as freedmen. Thus, when a mulatto slave married a free woman, there was very little that distinguished him from his free counterparts.

As Herman Bennett has aptly noted, "slaves constituted both chattel and legally recognized persons who had rights beyond those that the master bestowed."<sup>25</sup> This would have

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<sup>24</sup> For Afro-Poblano real estate activity, see AGNP, Not. 4, Boxes 170 and 170bis, July-December 1645.

<sup>25</sup> Herman Bennett, *Colonial Blackness: A History of Afro-Mexico* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 167.

been particularly true in Puebla from the late seventeenth century onwards as chattel slavery lost its phenotypic character. Participation in religious confraternities further blurred the line between free and enslaved people of African descent even further. In 1723, for instance, Juan de la Trinidad, a slave of the Puebla Jesuits, commissioned the elaboration of a new altarpiece for the Annunciata religious confraternity.<sup>26</sup> As chief deputy for this Afro-Poblaro brotherhood, Trinidad was authorized to award a notarized contract with two master sculptors (which he then signed). Religious brotherhoods required the annual election of leaders from within the Afro-Poblaro community, a democratic process that empowered slaves within the arena of colonial Catholicism. Chattel slavery could not survive under such a context. In fact, Puebla freedmen increasingly encountered many of the same conditions that other free colonials of their same socio-economic strata encountered. For instance, free Afro-Poblaros "did not face a class of slaveholders intent on denying them employment or dispossessing them of land or other means of subsistence," a situation that distinguished them from "other descendants of Africans in the world's plantation zone."<sup>27</sup>

While the gradual extinction of chattel slavery was undoubtedly a positive development for Afro-Poblaros, the eighteenth century has been understood as a generally difficult period in Puebla history. The city's textile mills suffered a century-long decline to the booming towns of the Bajío, principally Querétaro and Guanajuato. The establishment of the trade fair at Xalapa, in 1722, debilitated Puebla's historical role as a necessary commercial stop en route to Mexico City

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<sup>26</sup> Fondo Antiguo José María Lafragua, Microfilm 6, Legajo 155, 1723-09-07. The confraternity's formal name was "Esclavitud de morenos y pardos de nuestra señora la Virgen María de la Anunciata."

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*



and the silver mines of the North.<sup>28</sup> Finally, a series of terrible epidemics, particularly the *matlazahuatl* scourge of 1737, killed thousands of Poblanos (of all strata).<sup>29</sup> The combination of all these factors resulted in the notable depopulation of what had once been the viceroyalty's second city and Mexico City's foremost political rival.<sup>30</sup> Puebla essentially became an expeller of migrants and a notoriously, filthy, decrepit and dangerous city.<sup>31</sup> Counterintuitively, this same century witnessed the organic emergence of a freedman class from what had once been a substantial slave population.

What does this decidedly negative characterization tell us about late colonial Puebla and its freedmen? Previous studies of this eighteenth-century city have simply not considered the cultural, social and economic implications of this free *pardo* population. Did free *pardos* compete for the same jobs that lower-class Spaniards sought in an impoverished Puebla? Did the former prefer to migrate to more promising urban centers in the Bajío region or did they stay in the same city where they could benefit from their familial ties and patron-client networks? Herman Bennett posits that creoles "found it easier to stay together and live in one place as families while maintaining kinship ties" in a quest for "domestic stability."<sup>32</sup> Could Afro-Poblanos achieve such a goal in a city experiencing truly difficult economic times? Ben Vinson's work on free-colored militiamen provides some tantalizing details on the daily lives of Puebla's

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<sup>28</sup> Miguel Ángel Cuenya Mateos, *Puebla de los Ángeles en tiempos de una peste colonial*. (Zamora: Colegio de Michoacán/BUAP, 1999), 98.

<sup>29</sup> Cuenya Mateos, 177-205. Over 7,000 Poblanos perished due to the *matlazahuatl* of 1737, wiping out 15% of the city's population within an eight-month period! Scholars have yet to determine whether this particular disease was a variation of typhus, yellow fever or the plague, although Cuenya Mateos favors the latter.

<sup>30</sup> Miguel Marín Bosch, *Puebla neo-colonial, 1777-1831: Casta, ocupación y matrimonio en la segunda ciudad de Nueva España* (México: Colegio de Jalisco/BUAP, 1999), 66, 125. By 1746, Puebla's population had plummeted to 50,000 inhabitants, a loss of approximately 40% of its 1681 population.

<sup>31</sup> Cuenya Mateos, 110.

<sup>32</sup> Bennett, *Colonial Blackness*, 168.

eighteenth-century *pardos*, particularly with respect to their fiscal and judicial exemptions. Yet were *pardo* militiamen more influential among eighteenth-century Afro-Poblanos, because there had been an exodus of journeymen and master artisans to areas with more vibrant economies?

Clearly, much work remains to be done on the history of enslaved and free people in colonial Puebla de los Ángeles. The connection between slaves and religious confraternities remains an unexplored subject, as is the use of slave labor throughout the city's numerous convents and monasteries. African ritual practices in Puebla have also not been sufficiently studied. The question of if, how, and to what extent African-born freedmen succeeded in attaining their liberty via flight in Puebla and New Spain's other urban centers will be crucial to advancing the history of the African Diaspora as a whole.

Hopefully, this study will serve as an entry point to a more profound study of slavery in Puebla de los Ángeles and the greater Central Mexican region. Although the focus of my study is not the sixteenth century, I have established that the African presence in Puebla can be traced back to 1536, five years after the first attempt to settle an uninhabited plain known as Cuextlaxcoapan. This initial municipal reference to the city's Black population was an early attempt to regulate Afro-Indigenous interactions, which were described in an extremely gendered manner. The city's councilmen defined Blacks as 1) men, 2) slaves and 3) aggressors of Indian women. This tripartite characterization of Blacks reveals a generalized Spanish preoccupation with how to control, physically and socially, an enslaved population that had been introduced by the European conquerors to assist in the colonization project.

Ironically, the very foundation of Puebla was intended as an explicit attempt to curtail the Iberians' exploitation and dependence on the Indigenous populations of Central Mexico. By stimulating the construction of an urban center based on the labor of nuclear Spanish families,

the Crown and regular orders promoted the idea of a European haven only temporarily assisted by *indios de servicio*. No considerations of this sort were made for the Black slave minority that had inhabited Puebla since its inception. In other words, while debates over the validity of coerced native labor impacted royal policies, Black slavery was quietly accepted as an obvious alternative. The terrible epidemics of the mid and late-sixteenth century devastated New Spain's Indigenous population, cementing the growing association between African ancestry and chattel slavery.

As a result, Puebla's elites devised a slave registry, the *Caja de Negros*, to exert greater control over an enslaved population that already numbered in the hundreds by the mid-sixteenth century. At least 300 slaves lived in Puebla by 1553. Twenty years later, López de Velasco noted that the presence of five hundred Black men and women, in addition to an undetermined number of mulattos, within the city limits. In part, the growth of this early Afro-Poblano population must be attributed to the pressing need for skilled, permanent laborers in the urban centers of New Spain. In Puebla, the transition to large-scale textile operations occurred towards the end of the 1560s, a process that stimulated the importation of Black slaves to Puebla via the Iberian Peninsula. West Africans, many who had lived for several years in Spain and Portugal, arrived in Puebla in greater numbers during the last quarter of the sixteenth century. More and more of them would labor within the city's infamous textile mills, but the overwhelming majority served as domestic servants, handymen, coachmen, laundresses, etc.

Throughout this dissertation, I have attempted to resolve several long-held doubts regarding the importation of Africans to seventeenth-century Puebla. Previous studies have often relied on estimates based on the number of slaving licenses awarded to slave traders bound for New Spain. By conducting a twenty percent sample of Puebla's notarial archive and by focusing

on individual bills of slave purchase, I have produced a more precise assessment of the transatlantic slave trade to Puebla, Central Mexico, and New Spain for the years 1600 to 1700. According to my research, approximately 20,000 slaves were sold in Puebla throughout the seventeenth century. Slave trafficking became particularly pronounced in the years between 1616 and 1639, with the largest number of slave transactions taking place during the 1630s. An unrelenting Spanish demand for permanent African laborers made the transatlantic voyage to New Spain and Puebla a truly lucrative enterprise for slavers who received payment in silver. A growing domestic slave market in creole and mulatto men and women also appeared during this period. During the first forty years of the seventeenth century, the price of all adult slaves rose steadily, reaching an average of 350 to 370 pesos. However, purchases for newly arrived Africans in their late teens and early twenties could easily reach 500 pesos per slave.

What does this notarial investigation tell us about the nature of slavery in seventeenth-century Puebla? First, it is now evident that an extremely sophisticated slave-trading network operated in New Spain on a large scale. Puebla was a central node of this slaving infrastructure as a major urban market and as a key distribution point to the sugar plantations of Izúcar and the Cuernavaca basin. An extensive Lusophone slave trading network, connecting Lisbon, Luanda, Cartagena and Veracruz, made its presence felt through the local *encomendero de negros*. This Crown-sanctioned merchant has not been properly studied in New Spain or Spanish America, for that matter. His activities in Puebla give us a glimpse into the transatlantic supply of and local demand for African slaves during the early seventeenth century. By monopolizing the entry of all new African arrivals, the *encomendero de negros* facilitated the acquisition of Angolan youths between 1616 and 1639 by offering his clients an average of nine months of credit. Thus, the

peak years of the Puebla slave trade coincide precisely with this twenty-three year span of *encomendero* activity.

Second, the Lusophone-led slave trade to New Spain would have continued well into the late seventeenth century had it not been for Portuguese independence in 1640. Slave transactions and slave prices had never been higher in Puebla than in the 1630s. Native depopulation in Central Mexico hit an all-time low during the 1630s and 1640s, with tribute counts suggesting that just over 300,000 Indigenous people remained in Central Mexico.<sup>33</sup> This fact explains why the transatlantic slave trade to New Spain accelerated during the second and third decade of the seventeenth century, despite an emerging Spanish paranoia over rumored slave rebellions. Paradoxically, more African captives were sold in Puebla in the years following Yanga's successful resistance in 1609 and the brutal 1612 Mexico City slave repression. Despite these powerful reminders of a potential mass insurrection, African slaves became indispensable to the Spanish colonial project. It was simply impossible to do without them. As a result slave imports peaked despite a growing Spanish xenophobia toward African slaves. Spaniards loathed and feared the very workers whom they paid fortunes to enslave and transport.

This dissertation also sheds new light on the complicated colonial relationship between Indigenous groups with Africans, creoles and mulattos. By analyzing marriage patterns between free and unfree individuals, I have proven that enslaved men constantly sought out free brides. The considerable disparity in marriage choices between enslaved men and women leads me to conclude that slaves used the sacrament of matrimony strategically, as a way of ensuring their progeny's freedom. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, this dynamic was particularly evident between enslaved men and Indigenous women. American-born Blacks and

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<sup>33</sup> Cook and Borah, 96-97.

mulattos established Church-sanctioned unions with displaced women who had migrated from their native communities to Puebla or simply represented a new generation of Indigenous urban dwellers. The children born of these formal unions would form an entire generation of free Afro-Indigenous individuals in the early-seventeenth-century city. This fascinating dynamic has not been properly studied for Puebla, or New Spain, leading to an overemphasis on mulattos being the product of highly asymmetrical relationships between Spanish men and Black women. While many individuals labeled as *mulatos* were undoubtedly born of such circumstances, I argue that many other *mulatos* were actually people of partial Indigenous ancestry. Thus, the seventeenth century Afro-Poblano community embodied a complex mixture of African, Spanish and Native American bloodlines, phenotypes and cultural practices.

By the mid seventeenth century, a growing population of free Afro-Poblano females enabled more marriages among people of African descent. *Mestizas* also participated in this dynamic, marrying mulatto grooms at a high rate. Finally, the marriage registers for Puebla's Sagrario parish from 1660 to 1700 highlight the demographic explosion of the *mulato/pardo* population. Mulattos were three times more numerous than Blacks in the marital record, and five times more likely to be free people during these four decades. In fact, free mulattos outnumbered free Blacks fifteen to one in these registers! One constant trend can be traced throughout the early, mid, and late seventeenth century: enslaved men had constant access to free women through matrimony. As transmitters of slave status, unfree women very rarely married free men.

Throughout this dissertation, I also contend that, for slaves, the acquisition of freedom often implied entering new ties of economic dependency with Spanish patrons. Endemic debt was a fact of daily life for most Afro-Poblanos, but especially for freedmen. Time and again, the notarial record reveals how incarcerated freedmen were required to enter low-paying work

arrangements in order to satisfy previous debts. A closer examination of these records demonstrates that purchasing one's own or a relative's manumission letter was often the initial cause of throwing an ex-slave into debtor's prison. We must recall that most slave owners rarely granted letters of manumission without remuneration. Slaves, particularly children and adolescents, were understood to be valuable financial investments in seventeenth-century Puebla. By inflating the price of a slave's liberty well beyond his or her actual market value, slave owners made certain they would reap a handsome profit or at the very least retain the services of an extremely valuable slave. To say the least, few slaves were able to purchase their long-delayed freedom at the prices demanded by their masters. Those who did often fell behind in their monthly payments to their creditors, thereby entering cycles of endless debt. In other words, as historians, we must be able to distinguish the differing social, material and economic realities that distinguish people who had been born free from individuals who found a way to purchase their freedom.

Evidently, the rigors of colonial life continued to impact the lived experiences of Afro-Poblanos even after attaining their freedom. Upon entering apprentice contracts with established master artisans, free Black and mulatto youths essentially surrendered any autonomy they may have enjoyed as children. Establishing this type of notarized agreements granted master artisans almost complete control over their pupils for three and a half years. Abuses certainly occurred during apprenticeships, especially since workshops were little more than extensions of the artisans' living quarters. In extreme cases, apprentices encountered punishments and material conditions that were hardly different from those experienced by slaves. In fact, Afro-Poblano youths retained the dubious distinction of being the only members of society who could simultaneously serve as both slaves and apprentices. Technically, *chino* youths could have also

labored as slave apprentices, but none appear in the sample of the notarial record that I examined.

By the last quarter of the seventeenth century, the figure of the slave apprentice ceased to exist in Puebla. Undoubtedly, slaves continued to receive informal instruction as potential journeymen who could be sold at a later date. Nonetheless, this shift away from training enslaved youths marks an important change in the nature of slavery and slave owning in the colonial city. In the Spanish mindset, a growing appreciation for free wage labor gradually supplanted the dependence on enslaved workers. Three to four generations of Afro-Poblanos had received formal training through apprenticeships since the early seventeenth century. Together with the rapidly growing *mestizo* population, these Afro-Poblanos constituted a dependable, highly skilled urban labor pool that obviated the need for slave labor.

Despite these considerable gains, many Afro-Poblanos would continue their lives as domestic slaves, cooks, bodyguards and coachmen. To a large degree, domestic slavery survived in Puebla because of an elite Spanish population that continued to ennoble itself with slave retinues, armed bodyguards and coachmen. Poblano elites evidently still preferred the unwavering "loyalty" of domestic slaves in their kitchens and washrooms over the crude wage labor increasingly performed by free *pardos* and mestizos. Continued domestic servitude would have been particularly true for Afro-Poblano women in the late seventeenth century, whose occupations went unrecorded in virtually all of the documentation from this period. Negative evidence of this sort must be interpreted carefully. If nothing else, the remarkable lifestory of María de Terranova – discussed in Chapter 4 – makes us appreciate the remarkable skill, legal acumen and sheer tenacity that defined the life of one such African woman. Yet for every



extraordinary case, there must have been many more instances in which slave women were subjected to demeaning labor, sexual assault and isolation from their families.

In conclusion, three elements coalesced to end slavery in early eighteenth-century Puebla de los Ángeles. First, the cessation of the Portuguese slave trade in 1639 cut off the entry of African laborers to New Spain. Despite several attempts to reestablish this slave influx during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, colonial elites found fewer and fewer benefits to paying the high prices of transatlantic slaving. The second element centers on the emergence of a free *pardo* population, whose considerable skills and familiarity with Spanish technology, law and religion rendered new African arrivals unnecessary. Racial mixture by way of formal, Church-sanctioned unions played a crucial role in the formation of Puebla's free *pardos*. Enslaved Afro-Poblano men successfully sought out free brides amid the greater urban population, an interaction that guaranteed the birth of multiple generations of free people of African descent. *Pardo* growth was central to the development of the third slavery-ending element in colonial Puebla: the emergence of a wage-earning working class. With a very slow Indigenous population recovery only beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, free *pardos* came to form a crucial worker pool throughout urban and rural New Spain. Thus, importing African slaves to Puebla became truly unjustifiable by the 1680s. The formal abolition of slavery in 1829 was largely a symbolic act for Afro-Poblanos. Slavery had died a slow death throughout the eighteenth century.

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