Ernesto Bassi

6 Mobility, Circulation, Spatial Configurations, and Respatialization in the Wake of the Haitian Revolution: A View from New Granada's Shores

On 23 September 1791, less than a month after the outbreak of the slave revolt that initiated the Haitian Revolution, news of the slave uprising in French Saint-Domingue reached the port of Santa Marta in the viceroyalty of New Granada. Like most people and news during the Age of Sail, information about the events in Saint-Domingue traveled by ship. Pedro Pérez Prieto, the 26-year-old captain of the schooner *San Fernando*, told Santa Marta's governor, José de Astigárraga, that a French schooner that Pérez Prieto encountered at sea had informed him that "the blacks and *mulatos* [of the French colony], aided by some white inhabitants had started an uprising and had killed all whites in seventy five plantations". After killing their owners, the rebels proceeded to "burn the plantations". Based on Pérez Prieto's report, Astigárraga began preparations for what he believed, given the proximity of Saint-Domingue and Santa Marta, could be a significant influx of refugees from the French Caribbean colony.[1] News of the events in Saint-Domingue, mostly transmitted by sailors reaching New Granada from different ports in the Caribbean, continued to capture the attention of Spanish authorities in Caribbean New Granada throughout the 1790s and well into the second decade of the nineteenth century.[2]

1 Governor of Santa Marta to Viceroy of New Granada. Santa Marta, 25 September 1791. Archivo General de la Nación, Colombia (AGNC), Archivo Anexo I (AA-I), Gobierno, 13, pp. 463–469.

2 For the spread of news of the Haitian Revolution through the Greater Caribbean, see D. Geggus (ed.), *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001; D. Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002; M. Childs, *The 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba and the Struggle against Atlantic Slavery*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006; M. Lasso, *Myth of Harmony: Race and Republicanism during the Age Of Revolution, Colombia, 1795–1831*, Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007; D. Geggus and N. Fiering (eds.), *The World of the Haitian Revolution*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009; A. Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014; J. Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of Revolution*, London: Verso, 2018; C. Soriano, *Tides of Revolution: Information, Insurgencies,*

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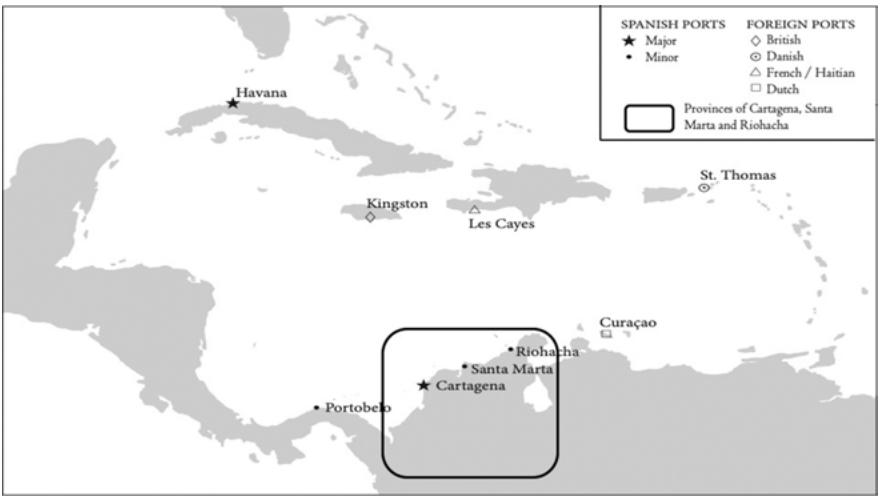
The exchange between Pérez Prieto and Astigárraga together with Astigárraga's reaction constitute useful starting points to think about mobility, circulation, spatial configurations, and respatialization, or perceived potential respatialization, during the era of the Haitian Revolution. I want to pursue this line of thinking in two different ways. First, by presenting an argument about the way in which existing (but often overlooked) geographical frameworks allow us to locate the exchange between Pérez Prieto and Astigárraga within a geographical space that I call the transimperial Greater Caribbean. And second, through an argument about the extent to which the Haitian Revolution triggered or accelerated efforts to redraw the economic geography of the Americas that went well beyond the known narrative of how, as a result of the revolution that destroyed Saint-Domingue's plantation system and gave birth to the independent republic of Haiti, Brazil and Cuba, in particular, emerged as the world's leading sugar and coffee producers.[3]

The first argument is one about lived geographies, or geographies of experience, and the second one is one about desired, but ultimately unrealized, respatialization. Looking outward from the Caribbean provinces of the viceroyalty of New Granada makes it possible to develop an interpretation that privileges what contemporaries hoped, envisioned, and thought possible over what, with the benefit of hindsight, historians know ended up happening. The view from New Granada's coast, in particular from the province of Santa Marta, enables an understanding of the mechanisms through which information was transmitted and the ways in which those who stayed put on land used this information to interpret their present and envision potential futures. For Astigárraga and other imperial officers in Santa Marta, these processes of interpretation and envisioning allowed them to imagine a prosperous Santa Marta that, through developing its agricultural potential, could become a key exporter of sugar and other agricultural commodities previously produced in French Saint-Domingue. Examining why Santa Marta could not live up to its potential (while a place like Cuba actually did) enables a better understanding of the intraimperial dynamics that resulted in the rise of certain areas and the lack of prosperity of others. Comparing the cases of Cuba and Santa Marta also enables a broader conceptualization of the rise of capitalism that takes into account not

and the Crisis of Colonial Rule in Venezuela, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2018.

3 For the impact, economic and otherwise, of the Haitian Revolution in Cuba and Brazil, see Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror* and J.J. Reis and F. dos Santos Gomes, "Repercussions of the Haitian Revolution in Brazil, 1791–1850", in: Geggus and Fiering (eds.), *The World of the Haitian Revolution*, pp. 284–313.

only places (like Cuba) that ended up becoming key sites of capitalist development, but also places (like Santa Marta) whose political and economic leaders aspired to turn into key capitalist sites but failed in their attempt.



Map 1: Caribbean Provinces of the viceroyalty of New Granada: Cartagena, Santa Marta, and Riohacha.[4]

The Transimperial Greater Caribbean and the Circulation of News of the Haitian Revolution

In their study of the role of sailors, slaves, and commoners in the spread of revolutionary activity in the early modern Atlantic world, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker present eighteenth-century sailors as "a vector of revolution". Drawing on the work of Julius Scott on Afro-American currents of communications in the Caribbean, Linebaugh and Rediker assert that sailors, through "contact with slaves in the British, French, Spanish, and Dutch port cities of the Caribbean", collected and transmitted "information [...] about slave revolts,

4 Map drawn by author (2019).

abolition, and revolution".[5] At sea and on land, sea captains and ordinary sailors also established contact with colonial authorities, merchants, Indigenous people, and many other Caribbean dwellers. Through these contacts, they collected and transmitted information – sometimes accurate, sometimes greatly distorted – about European affairs, potential invasions, alliances, and many other details of relevance to colonial authorities and the general public interested in the geopolitical developments of the Atlantic world.

The spread of this information was an important effect of sailors' common experience of circulation across Caribbean and Atlantic waters. This experience allowed them and other less mobile Greater Caribbean dwellers to understand that, despite the existence of many invisible dividing lines crisscrossing the Caribbean (e.g. political boundaries and racial divisions), the lands and waters contained within the Caribbean basin, and sometimes stretching beyond it, constituted a meaningful geographic space of social interaction – a region. Following sailors, thus, uncovers or makes visible a region usually hidden by the weight of political geographies. Uncovering this region allows us to see the coexistence of a multiplicity of ways of ordering and making sense of global space or, in this case, of the aqueous territory that I call the transimperial Greater Caribbean.[6]

The lives of the sailors on the schooners *El Congreso de la Nueva Granada* and the *Altagracia* reveal details about sailors' mobility, professional trajectories, and everyday acts of region-making.[7] Both *El Congreso* and the *Altagracia* reached Portobelo's vicinity after several months cruising the Caribbean. *El Congreso*, its 23 sailors explained, reached Portobelo after abandoning its captain on Providence Island.[8] Before reaching Providence Island, *El Congreso*, in

5 P. Linebaugh and M. Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Sales, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*, Boston: Beacon, 2000; Scott, *The Common Wind*. See also M. Rediker, *Outlaws of the Atlantic: Sailors, Pirates, and Motley Crews in the Age of Sail*, Boston: Beacon, 2014, pp. 116–119.

6 For a more detailed analysis of this process of region-making, see E. Bassi, *An Aqueous Territory: Sailor Geographies and New Granada's Transimperial Greater Caribbean World*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

7 This analysis is based on the interrogations of the sailors on both schooners. For *El Congreso*, see "Autos obrados sobre la entrada del corsario insurgente titulado *El Congreso*" ("Autos *El* Congreso"), AGNC, AA-I, Guerra y Marina, 118, pp. 721–933. For the *Altagracia*, see "Autos seguidos en el gobierno de esta capital de Santiago de Veraguas contra los individuos que sirvieron de corsarios con nación leal, en la goleta nombrada *La Belona* y la suerte les condujo a varar en el Escudo de Veraguas en la goleta apresada por aquella nombrada *Altagracia*" ("Autos *La Belona*"), AGNC, AA-I, Guerra y Marina, 130, pp. 395–481.

8 "Patente de corso", in "Autos *El Congreso*", pp. 741–743. The schooner's letter of marque said its crew was composed of 33 sailors, including 11 officers, 21 ordinary sailors, and 1 cabin boy; only 23 were interrogated in Portobelo.

typical corsair fashion, had followed a border-crossing path that had taken its sailors from Cartagena "to the coast of Jamaica, [...] then to the coast of Florida, and then to that of Havana".[9] At different points throughout this cruise, some sailors abandoned *El Congreso* while others, forcefully or voluntarily, joined its ranks, thus demonstrating the instability of sailing crews and seafaring lives.

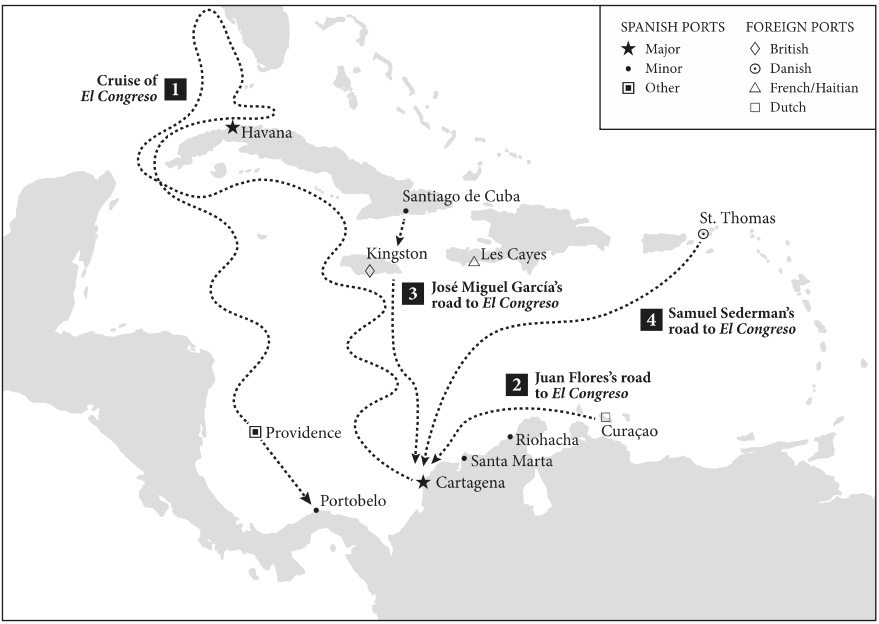
The *Altagracia*, its sailors reported, was a Spanish schooner that had been captured by Cartagena privateers near the western coast of Puerto Rico. Following orders to take the captured vessel to Cartagena, sailors Juan (an Englishman who became captain of the captured schooner but died shortly after reaching the coast of Portobelo), Ilario and Ignacio (both French-speaking sailors from Haiti), and Juan Estevan Rodríguez (a native of Venezuela) jumped from the privateer schooner *La Belona* to the captured *Altagracia*. On board the *Altagracia*, they joined Francisco Díaz, a young sailor from Venezuela, and slaves María Felipa, Vicenta, Felipa, Dolores, Juana, and Paula and her infant Ramón. While en route to Cartagena, Ignacio declared, "the winds and currents", coupled with the captain's lack of skills, diverted the *Altagracia* from its route and took it to the coast near Portobelo, where it had been stranded.[10]

To Spanish authorities, the sailors of both schooners were considered insurgent corsairs loyal to the Republic of Cartagena or, more simply, pirates. Following this logic, prosecutors sought to condemn the sailors "for the crime of sailing with all flags" and for capturing Spanish vessels while "flying [the flag] invented by the insurgents of Cartagena".[11] Sailors of both schooners naturally sought to make the case for their innocence. Of those sailing on the *Altagracia*, Francisco and the slaves were not charged with any crime, while Ignacio, Ilario, and Juan Estevan were tried as corsairs. Francisco avoided charges because all those questioned by Spanish authorities corroborated that he was on board the *Altagracia* before its capture and was forced to remain on board after the corsairs took over. Juan Estevan was acquitted of all charges, and Ignacio and Ilario were sentenced to eight years in jail in Havana. Beyond the ultimate outcome of the judicial procedure, the archival trail left by *El*

9 "Declaración de Juan Flores", in "Autos *El Congreso*", pp. 757–758. Insurgent corsairs did not follow predetermined routes. Instead, they cruised the sea in search of prey. Their cruises resembled those of tramp steamers, whose improvised itineraries Colombian novelist Álvaro Mutis described as taking them "from port to port in search of occasional cargo to transport to no-matter where" (A. Mutis, *La última escala del tramp steamer*, Bogotá: Arango Editores, 1989, p. 16).

10 "Declaración de Ignacio, marinero", in "Autos *La Belona*", pp. 402–407.

11 "Autos *La Belona*", p. 470.



Map 2: Cruise of the Insurgent Schooner El Congreso de la Nueva Granada.[12]

Congreso and the *Altagracia* reveals the existence of a space of social interaction where sailors of all colours and from many geographic origins sailing under different flags and frequently switching from one ship to another lived lives that were marked by both the risks and opportunities that circulation across the transimperial Greater Caribbean had to offer.

The life story of one of these sailors, black sailor Juan Estevan Rodríguez, offers a particularly useful illustration of how the transimperial Greater Caribbean functioned as a coherent space of social interactions. Juan Estevan's life story also brings into sharp focus the everyday risks experienced by those who shaped and lived within this loosely bounded region. His experience, in short, reveals the connections between physical mobility, the flow of information, and the configuration of regional spaces.

Born in Ocumare, Venezuela, Juan Estevan was a chocolate maker, a trade he had learned while living on the other side of the Atlantic, in Catalonia. Upon returning to the Americas 12 years earlier, he had "worked as a sailor on several merchant vessels". About 2 years before presenting his declaration to Portobelo's

12 Originally published in Bassi, *An Aqueous Territory*, p. 66.

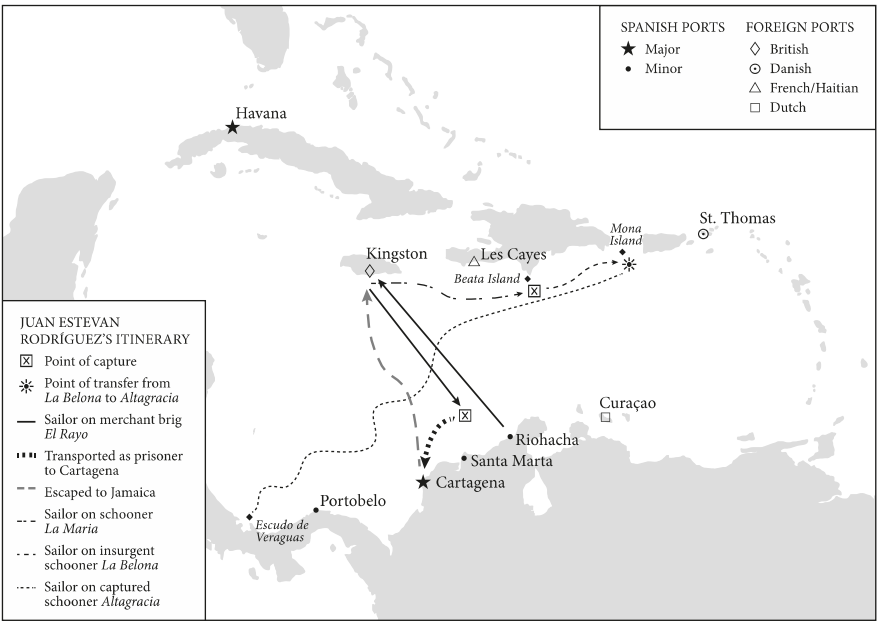
authorities, Juan Estevan was working as a sailor on the Spanish brig *El Rayo*, which "traded mules [from Riohacha] to Jamaica".[13] Returning from Jamaica, *El Rayo* was attacked and captured by a gunboat from Cartagena, where he was taken and held prisoner and forced "for six months to sweep the streets tied to a chain". After those 6 months, he managed to escape and fled to Jamaica, where he, once again, enlisted as a sailor, this time on the Spanish schooner *La María*. From Jamaica, *La María* sailed east towards Puerto Rico and "by the Beata Island, in front of Santo Domingo", fell prey to Cartagena's insurgent schooner *La Belona*. On board *La Belona*, "because some [of its sailors] knew he had escaped from prison", the captain, infamous French corsair Louis Aury, told Juan Estevan that "the only way for him [Aury] to spare his [Juan Estevan's] life was [if Juan Estevan chose] to enroll as sailor" on the insurgent corsair. Forced into his new status as a corsair for Cartagena, Juan Estevan sailed east on *La Belona* until, south of Mona Island (just west of Puerto Rico), they captured the Spanish schooner *Altagracia*. With three other sailors from *La Belona*, Juan Estevan once again switched vessels, charged with the task of taking the *Altagracia* to Cartagena. Due to the winds and currents, as one of Juan Estevan's fellow sailors explained, the *Altagracia* never reached Cartagena, and Juan Estevan and the schooner's other passengers ended up giving their versions of their Caribbean cruises to Spanish authorities in Portobelo.[14]

Juan Estevan was not alone in living a border-crossing, ship-switching, status-changing life.[15] His labour mobility (from ship to ship as well as, temporarily,

13 Juan Estevan did not provide exact dates for any of the incidents he narrated in his declaration. Besides stating that he returned to the Americas from Spain "twelve years ago", he remained ambiguous about when any of the events he was recollecting happened. Based on the time he spent as a prisoner in Cartagena (six months) and the time he spent on board the *Altagracia* (five months), it is clear that it had been more than a year – perhaps two, given that before sailing on the *Altagracia* he had sailed on *La Belona* and other Spanish vessels and had also escaped from Cartagena to Jamaica – since he had been employed on *El Rayo*.

14 "Autos *La Belona*".

15 The work of Greg Grandin includes eloquent examples of the status-changing effects sailors experienced as a direct consequence of the geopolitical instability characteristic of the Age of Revolutions in the Caribbean and throughout the Atlantic. In an example from the eastern Atlantic, in the vicinities of Cape Coast castle, Grandin writes, "Early in Britain's fight against France, a British merchant ship calling at Cape Coast castle, purchased a cargo of captured Africans. They were considered slaves, locked in the ship's hold, and destined for the West Indies to work on sugar plantations. That ship was captured by the French navy, which took the Africans not as slaves but as conscripts, distributing them among its frigates and men-of-war. The Africans were now sailors. By 1803, however, the British had recaptured sixty-five of them. After some debate within the councils of the Admiralty, the British deemed the Africans to be not slaves but prisoners of war, subjects – or, as the French preferred, citizens – of



Map 3: Juan Estevan Rodríguez's Trajectory.[16]

away from ships) as well as his physical mobility (from port to port) were common elements of Caribbean sailors' lives. Sailors' Caribbean circulations suggest the many opportunities they had to share information obtained during their frequent Caribbean journeys. While most of the conversations and interactions among these seafaring individuals and between them and coastal inhabitants and islanders are beyond the historian's reach, it is not hard to imagine the type of information and experiences that sailors usually shared. Sailors surely shared stories that created a mild sense of familiarity with distant places from which they had migrated long ago and with which few of their fellow sailors and coastal interlocutors were acquainted. Of most immediate interest to interlocutors must have been stories about the most recent trips and adventures in frequently visited

a legitimate, if rogue, nation. But since the British couldn't get France to live up to its customary obligations and provide for these (or any other, for that matter, white or black) captured sailors, the British had them distributed on ships throughout the Royal Navy. They were sailors once again, as well as, presumably, new British subjects" (G. Grandin, *The Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom, and Deception in the New World*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014, p. 300).

16 Originally published in Bassi, *An Aqueous Territory*, p. 68.

ports, coasts, and islands. The accumulation of stories about recent developments and rumours on nearby Caribbean islands and coasts contributed to the creation of a coherent transimperial Greater Caribbean milieu.

The official accounts sailors like Juan Estevan, Ignacio, Ilario, and those on board *El Congreso* submitted to port authorities offer a clear sense of the transimperial region that they inhabited, produced, and traversed on a daily basis. Less clear in their accounts are the ways in which their interactions with coastal residents and islanders allowed sailors to spread to others the sense of regionness they experienced on an everyday basis. On occasion, local prisons – to which some sailors were taken after entering specific ports – became sites where sailors could share information with prison guards and other prisoners. Sailors like Bernardo Kennedy of the Danish schooner *Guavaberry* and the seven members that composed the crew of the schooner *San Francisco Xavier*, which entered Santa Marta in July 1803, followed this path. Imprisoned immediately after entering Santa Marta and Riohacha, these sailors' ability to spread news and rumours that they had gathered in other Caribbean ports was initially limited to the few people with which they interacted while in jail. After they were released or escaped from prison, this situation changed. Kennedy, stranded for several months in Riohacha in 1806, became familiar with the Spanish judicial system and, it is not difficult to imagine, also engaged in conversation with multiple members of Riohacha's society. Like him, many others enjoyed the opportunity to socialize in New Granada's ports, spreading information that made it possible for New Granada's coastal inhabitants to become acquainted with, and feel part of, the Greater Caribbean's transimperial social field.[17]

The picture of sailors' lives that emerges from these tales of circulation is a messy one. Permanently crisscrossing Caribbean waters, legally or otherwise, sailors connected imperial spheres. They were well acquainted with commercial hubs like Kingston, Les Cayes, Saint Thomas, Curaçao, Cartagena, Havana, and other key connecting nodes of the transimperial Greater Caribbean. Their mobile lives not only took them from port to port, frequently returning to a port they had previously visited, but also, adding to their nomadic existence, from

17 "Querella de Bernardo Kennedy, tripulante de la goleta danesa *Guavaberry*, porque lo dejaron preso en Riohacha", 1806, AGNC, Sección Colonia, Milicias y Marina, 82, pp. 311–315; "Diligencias que se actúan por este gobierno sobre la aprehensión hecha por el comandante del bergantín Cartagenero guarda costa de SM a una goleta que de arribada entró en este puerto nombrada *San Francisco Xavier*", Santa Marta, 15 July 1803, AGI, Sante Fe, p. 952. See also "Informe sobre comiso en Cartagena de la balandra *La Victoria*", 25 September 1806, AGI, Santa Fe, p. 1149.

ship to ship, which usually led sailors to shift imperial patrons. It was common for sailors to have experience on board Spanish, British, Dutch, Danish, and, like those on board *El Congreso* and the *Altagracia*, insurgent schooners.

Through all these experiences, sailors both acted and were acted upon. They voluntarily enrolled on a given vessel and were forced to move from a captured schooner to a capturing one, where they then continued their nomadic lives. The unpleasant encounters Juan Estevan Rodríguez, Francisco Díaz, and others experienced at sea point to the Caribbean as a hostile environment and force us to reconsider notions of "masterless, mobile" lives at sea as closely connected to freedom and autonomy. While the sea, especially for plantation slaves, could have held a "seductive appeal", the distance separating this appealing perception from lived reality could sometimes be substantial.[18] My focus on the circumstances under which sailors moved across Caribbean waters allows me to identify the coerciveness that belied sailors' mobile existence. Sailors rarely chose where to go or when to return home. For many, in fact, there was no home. Francisco's answer when asked about his place of residence – he said, "Without fixed residence because I am a sailor" – points to the limits to the opportunities a seafaring life had to offer.[19] In their mobility, voluntary or not, full of opportunities or marked by difficulties and threats, sailors gave coherence to a transimperial space of social interactions. In short, they created a region. Read in this light, Francisco's answer becomes much more than a statement about sailors' nomadic existence. When answering, "Without fixed residence because I am a sailor", Francisco was also expressing the difficulties associated with naming the geographical space sailors inhabited. The absence of a name (a problem also faced by the historian reconstructing this lived geography) did not make the transimperial Greater Caribbean less real. Juan Estevan Rodríguez, Francisco Díaz, the sailors of *El Congreso*, and myriad other sailors, thus, offer a strong case for the role of mobility and the flow of information in the configuration of regional spaces that were lived and experienced but never consciously and explicitly articulated as regions.

18 Scott, *The Common Wind*. For similar approaches on the opportunities that life at sea offered, see W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997; E. Pérez Morales, *No Limits to Their Sway: Cartagena's Privateers and the Masterless Caribbean in the Age Of Revolution*, Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2018.

19 "Declaración de Francisco Díaz", 17 April 1815, in: "Autos *La Belona*", p. 449.

The Haitian Revolution and the Unrealized Project to Turn the Province of Santa Marta into a New Saint-Domingue

While sailors' mobility makes it possible to see the existence of a transimperial Greater Caribbean as a space in which information, including news of the Haitian Revolution, spread quickly and almost unimpeded, it is important to understand what recipients of information did with the news and rumours they were receiving. In the growing literature on the impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic world, scholars have argued that fear and a sense of opportunity were common sentiments throughout the Greater Caribbean.[20] Seeing the destruction of Saint-Domingue's sugar production capacity as an opportunity to fill a market void, planters and reformers in the surrounding islands and continental coasts developed plans to become the next Saint-Domingue. Their proposals constitute telling examples of how the Haitian Revolution created a favourable contingency for what Immanuel Wallerstein and Terence Hopkins call "the incorporation of new zones into the world-economy".[21] In other words, the shockwaves the destruction of Saint-Domingue's economy sent throughout the Atlantic make it possible to understand the Haitian Revolution as a key moment of respatialization. As this section will demonstrate, the Haitian Revolution presented planters and reformers throughout the Greater Caribbean with an opportunity to push for the implementation of long-held ideas to turn their territories into important sugar producers and vital engines of capitalist growth. Comparing the trajectories of Cuba and Santa Marta demonstrates that, in the quest to transform the economic geography of the Caribbean in the wake of the Haitian Revolution, success was far from guaranteed. For many, visions of prosperity and wealth, far from materializing, ended up becoming shattered dreams. Within this framework, thus, it is possible to interpret the Haitian Revolution as a moment of desired or envisioned respatialization that did not become a generalized reality.

The best case for the emergence of Cuba as the world's leading sugar producer was recently made by Ada Ferrer. Her analysis in her book *Freedom's Mirror* goes well beyond the assertion that in the aftermath of the Haitian Revolution Cuban planters rushed to fill the void left by the collapse of Saint-

20 For examples of the literature, see note 2.

21 T.K. Hopkins and I. Wallerstein, "Capitalism and the Incorporation of New Zones into the World-Economy", *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, 10 (1987) 5/6, pp. 763–779.

Domingue's sugar production. Ferrer carefully reconstructs the process through which Cuban planters, led by Francisco Arango y Parreño, brought the sugar revolution to Cuba, turning the Spanish colony into the world's leading sugar producer. In the process, she also questions the automatic connection between Cuba's economic and political paths. Instead of simply asserting that fearing a potential social revolution and putting their economic interests before their political ones, the emerging Cuban planter elite opted to remain loyal to Spain, Ferrer follows the trajectory of Arango y Parreño and other Cuban statesmen and reformers to conclude that in the tumultuous geopolitical environment of the 1810s, "Cuban loyalty was conditional" and Arango and his fellow Cuban planters were ready to counter any action that they could interpret as "violat[ing] the rights of property and endanger[ing] the prosperity of the island".[22]

Arango's argument was powerfully articulated in his 1793 *Discurso sobre la agricultura de La Habana y medios de fomentarla*. Ranting about what he called Spaniards' "auri sacra fames" (sacred hunger for gold), Arango criticized Spain's mercantilist "preference for and protection of [. . .] mining" and argued for agriculture and trade liberalization as the best avenues for wealth and *felicidad* (prosperity).[23] Like for many merchants of the Atlantic world, who, as Greg Grandin puts it, "were quick to adopt the new language associated with laissez-faire economics", Arango called for "más libertad, más comercio libre de negros" (more liberty, more free trade of blacks).[24] A continuous supply of slaves would fulfill the labour needs of a growing sugar industry that, under the cover of free trade, would flood Europe and the growing North American market with Cuban sugar. Moreover, demonstrating his awareness of the geopolitical environment of the Caribbean and his opportunistic instinct, Arango invoked the ongoing events in neighbouring Haiti to advise Spanish authorities to "[t]ake advantage of the moment to bring to your soil the wealth that the narrow territory of Guarico gave to the French nation".[25] What he was doing, thus, was effectively proposing a reconfiguration of the Caribbean's economic geography or thinking of the Haitian Revolution as key

22 Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror*, pp. 267, 269.

23 F. Arango y Parreño, "Discurso sobre la agricultura de La Habana y medios de fomentarla", in: *Obras del excmo. Señor D. Francisco de Arango y Parreño*, vol. 1, La Habana, Howson y Heinen, 1888, p. 56.

24 G. Grandin, *The Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom, and Deception in the New World*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014, p. 7.

25 Arango y Parreño, "Discurso sobre la agricultura", p. 77.

moment of potential respatialization that could result in the transfer of Saint-Domingue's productive capacity to Cuba.

Arango's proposals took a lot of effort to turn from idea (project) to practice (reality). One of the most important findings of Ferrer's analysis is that at certain moments Cuba's sugar locomotive risked derailing. It was at those moments that Arango demonstrated his ability to turn his ideas into reality.

Thus, Ferrer's work, as well as that of Dale Tomich and others, have effectively added analytical layers that provide a better understanding of the account of the rise of Cuba as the Ever Faithful. Their studies of Arango and Cuba's sugar boom have effectively inserted Cuba in the story of the rise of capitalism, making claims "that regard slavery in the Americas as an anomalous or archaic social and economic institution" and "true capitalism" as occurring elsewhere, completely untenable.[26] In a very significant, albeit unintentional, way, however, their focus on Cuba also simplifies the narrative of the role of slavery and the slave trade in the development of the Atlantic world's agroindustrial capitalism. Just like focusing on the lane in which a race's leader is running makes the viewer lose track of other interesting developments in the race, the focus on Cuba clouds historians' ability to keep track of other competitors. Since Cuba clearly emerged as the winner in the nineteenth-century race to turn underutilized land into sugar-producing, capitalist agricultural units, the focus is completely justifiable and cannot be a target of criticism. My point, therefore, is not that there is anything wrong with focusing on Cuba, but that turning our analytical lenses towards other competitors (New Granada, in this particular case) enhances our comprehension not just of the respatialization or reconfiguration of the world's economic geography caused by the Haitian Revolution, but also of the emergence of a type of plantation society that recent scholarship has characterized as capitalist and modern despite its continued reliance on enslaved labour.[27] Even if it is hard to make a case for the chances of New Granada in this capitalist race, the projects some of its most prominent

26 D. Tomich, "The Wealth of Empire: Francisco Arango y Parreño, Political Economy, and the Second Slavery in Cuba", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45 (2003) 1, pp. 4–28, at p. 6.

27 D. Rood, *The Reinvention of Atlantic Slavery: Technology, Labor, Race, and Capitalism in the Greater Caribbean*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2017; E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*, New York: Basic Books, 2014; W. Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013; S. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History*, New York: Alfred Knopf, 2014.

thinkers and reformers presented to promote the viceroyalty's economic development clearly demonstrate that New Granada, like Cuba and many other places in Spanish America, was part of the race.

Antonio Narváez y la Torre, governor of the province of Santa Marta during the second half of the 1770s and the first half of the 1780s, was one of the key promoters of Santa Marta's economic development. Like him, his successors José de Astigárraga and Antonio Samper believed Santa Marta had the potential to become a major exporter of a wide variety of agricultural commodities. While Narváez, writing before the Haitian Revolution, used Saint-Domingue as a model to be followed, for Astigárraga and Samper, much like for Arango in Cuba, the destruction of Saint-Domigue's plantation economy appeared as an opportunity to be seized. When compared to what Arango y Parreño envisioned and achieved, the plans and outcomes of Narváez and his successors make it possible to understand the inner workings of the Spanish Empire by illuminating the role of access to power in the accomplishment of economic goals in different imperial regions. The comparison also allows for a wider understanding of the emergence of certain places as key sites of capitalist development.

Narváez y la Torre, a *criollo ilustrado* (member of the educated creole elite), was born in Cartagena in 1733. His military and bureaucratic career included service in Spain, Africa, and New Granada. By the 1770s, he was one of the most respected members of Caribbean New Granada's elite and a prominent proponent of economic reforms that sought to transform the productive capacity of the Caribbean provinces. His 1778 "Relación o informe de la provincia de Santa Marta y Río de el Hacha" represents the best example of Narváez's economic development project, his dreams for Santa Marta and Riohacha. In it, Narváez decried the current "state of misery and poverty" of the province of Santa Marta and, based on what he saw as the province's near infinite agricultural possibilities, envisioned a prosperous future for this portion of Spain's American territories. Santa Marta, Narváez claimed, was perfectly suited for the cultivation, production on a commercial scale, and export of wheat, cacao, sugar, cotton, tobacco, several varieties of dyewoods, coffee, vanilla, woods for construction, quinine and other medicinal plants, cattle, tortoiseshell, and pearls. To further bolster this catalogue of the province's economic potential, Santa Marta was abundant in sources of water that could serve as energy producers and transportation routes, and its "advantageous location [. . .] allows for easy communication with [. . .] Spanish and foreign [Caribbean] islands, and with Europe". In short, Santa Marta's vast agricultural and commercial potential could turn it into a "source of immense prosperity for the kingdom [of New

Granada] and the [Spanish] crown".[28] Despite this potential, Narváez lamented in 1778, the province "lies in frightful misery, without agriculture [. . .] and without commerce; to such an extent that, while it could be the richest [province], it can be asserted that it is the poorest of the whole kingdom" of New Granada.[29]

The problem, according to Narváez, was clear: lack of labour. While Canary islanders and other Spaniards could offer a solution to this problem, Narváez considered "black slaves the most useful and absolutely necessary population, and that which should be requested and encouraged in this province". Because slaves were "the raw material of the raw materials that the Americas should produce", massively introducing slaves from Africa would directly result in the economic development of Santa Marta.[30]

Focusing on the French success in Saint-Domingue, Narváez claimed – supported by statistics that demonstrated a rise in the number of slaves from 206,000 in 1764 to 257,000 in 1767 – that the increased number of slaves had led to a rapid growth in the production and export of sugar, indigo, cacao, coffee, and cotton.[31] Attempting to replicate planters' success in foreign islands, Narváez asked the Spanish crown "to facilitate through all possible means the introduction of African slaves". Once "supplied [. . .] with an adequate number of slaves", the province of Santa Marta could contribute to the wealth of Spain through four different means: the multiplication of its production and exports, the increase in the consumption of Spanish products, the increase in royal tax revenues, and the development of the Spanish navy.[32] In sugar's expansion throughout the Caribbean, Narváez argued, Santa Marta was called to be the next link.

Ten years after Narváez drafted his project, his successor as governor of Santa Marta, José de Astigárraga, presented a report that repeated Narváez's proposals almost verbatim. Like Narváez in 1778, Astigárraga in 1789 opened his report highlighting "all the known advantages" of Santa Marta and lamenting that, despite the favourable conditions, the province lies in "extreme decay and misery". Santa Marta, Astigárraga affirmed, was suitable for the cultivation of a wide variety of agricultural crops suitable for exports, including cacao, sugar, coffee, and cotton. In order to develop its potential, the province

28 Narváez, "Provincia de Sta. Marta y Río Hacha del Virreynato de Sta. Fé", in: *Escritos económicos. Antonio de Narváez, José Ignacio de Pombo*, Bogotá: Banco de la República, 2010, p. 55.
29 Ibid., p. 24.
30 Ibid., pp. 48, 55.
31 Ibid., pp. 50–51.
32 Ibid., pp. 55, 62–63.

required "caudal, inteligencia y brazos" (capital, skills, and labour). Like Narváez, Astigárraga believed that labour was the key to Santa Marta's development. Therefore, "the government's attention should be directed to increasing, by all means possible, the [province's] population." And not just any population. For, given the climate of the province, both Narváez and Astigárraga found African slaves to be "the most useful [. . .] for the development and happiness of the Americas".[33]

If in Astigárraga's and Narváez's visions African slaves were the key to Santa Marta's development, how many were needed and how were they to be imported? The answers Astigárraga gave to these questions begin to make visible the gap separating their dreams from what could actually be accomplished. According to Astigárraga, "the development of this province" requires the introduction of, "at least, one thousand slaves per year, for now". In what can be interpreted as veiled recognition of the financial and logistical limitations of reaching such figures, Astigárraga proposed an initial scheme in which the crown would finance the transportation of "two hundred or three hundred slaves" to Santa Marta to be sold to "*hacendados* [owners of a hacienda] at two hundred pesos each".[34]

The reports, petitions, and proposals of Narváez and Astigárraga were far from unique. Throughout Spanish America, bureaucrats and reformers voiced similar concerns and advanced analogous plans for economic development. And the crown and its ministers had been listening. In fact, in the decade separating Narváez's "Relación" and Astigárraga's report, the crown had grown increasingly favourable to such schemes and had taken steps to liberalize the slave trade. The idea of taking advantage of Spanish America's agricultural potential by massively importing African slaves was central to what the minister of the Indies, the count of Floridablanca, in 1787 called a "happy revolution in the commerce of Spain and the Indies".[35]

A mere week before Astigárraga submitted his report, the king had signed a *real cédula* (royal decree) "granting liberty to Spaniards and foreigners" to introduce, "for a period of two years", slaves to Santo Domingo, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Caracas. This initial license was soon expanded to include the ports of Cartagena and Riohacha (in February 1791) and Montevideo (in November 1791).

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33 Astigárraga to Antonio Porlier, Santa Marta, 7 March 1789. Archivo General de Indias (AGI), Santa Fe, 1181, no.3.

34 Ibid.

35 José Moñino (Count of Floridablanca), "Memorial presentado al rey Carlos III y repetido a Carlos IV", in: A. Ferrer del Río (ed.), *Obras originales del Conde de Floridablanca*, Madrid: M. Rivadeneyra, 1867, p. 336.

On 24 November 1791, when the *real cédula* for the free trade of slaves in the viceroyalties of Santa Fe, Buenos Aires, Caracas, Santo Domingo, Cuba and Puerto Rico was passed, ten ports were opened to Spaniards and foreigners and five to Spaniards only. In the viceroyalty of New Granada, Cartagena was opened to both Spanish and foreign merchants and Riohacha to foreigners.[36] While Santa Marta remained closed, its planters and merchants expected to benefit from the availability of slaves in nearby Cartagena and Riohacha.

Beyond legislation, the geopolitical climate of the Greater Caribbean during the 1790s became another critical element in the expectation for modernization and economic transformations in Spanish America. In Cuba, Arango y Parreño invoked the ongoing events in neighbouring Haiti to advise Spanish authorities to "[t]ake advantage of the moment to bring to your soil the wealth that the narrow territory of Guarico gave to the French nation."[37] In Santa Marta, Astigárraga and his successor Antonio Samper similarly used the Haitian Revolution as key element to continue arguing for the need to import machinery and slaves to turn Santa Marta into the productive and wealthy province Narváez had envisioned in 1778.[38] The Haitian Revolution, it can be said, inaugurated a new era, although not a new way of thinking. Revolutionary turmoil in Haiti emboldened reformers in Cuba and Santa Marta to pursue the economic future they envisioned for their homelands. While Arango and his Cuban peers managed to turn their vision into a reality, Narváez, Astigárraga, and Samper failed to turn the Haitian Revolution into a source of economic development and wealth for the province of Santa Marta. Regardless of their ability to turn their visions into reality, their proposals reveal a potential way in which the Haitian Revolution offered reformers throughout the Greater Caribbean a valuable opportunity to turn their homelands into strategic sites for the reconfiguration of the region's economic geography.

The comparison of the cases of Cuba and Santa Marta, then, reveals a number of common elements. First, reformers in both places drafted proposals for economic development that placed sugar and slavery at the heart of the advancement of their provinces. Second, new legislation facilitated the importation of African slaves into both places. Third, geopolitical developments in the

36 "*Real cédula de su magestad concediendo libertad para el comercio de negros con los virreinatos de Santa Fe, Buenos Aires Capitanía General de Caracas, e islas de Santo Domingo, Cuba y Puerto Rico, a españoles y extranjeros bajo las reglas que se expresan.*" Madrid: Por Lorenzo de San Martín, impresor de varias oficinas de SM. Año de 1791.

37 Arango y Parreño, "Discurso sobre la agricultura", p. 77.

38 Antonio Samper to viceroy Ezpeleta. Santa Marta, 15 November 1793. AGI, Indiferente General, 2823, no. 2195, no. 3.

Greater Caribbean created expectations about the possibility of realizing both places' economic potential in the immediate future. An analysis of the number of slaves that entered some of the ports opened by the *real cédula* of November 1791 offers a useful way to understand why, despite these common elements, the dreams and visions of Narváez y la Torre and Arango y Parreño diverged.

Table 1 summarizes the official data recorded by Spanish imperial officials.

Table 1: Slaves Imported to Selected Spanish American Ports.[39]

	Havana	Cartagena	Montevideo	Caracas
1790	2,534			655
1791	8,498	378		2,557
1792	8,528	244	650	1,315
1793	3,767	259	2,137	
1794	4,164	136	1,178	
1795	5,832	378	1,300	
1796	5,711	18	1,300	
1797	4,552	67	1,300	
1798	2,001			
1799	4,949			
1800	4,145			
1801	1,659			
1802	9,407			
Total	**65,747**	**1,480**	**7,865**	**4,527**

The comparison, available through annual reports submitted by provincial governors and viceroys, shows a clear contrast. While tens of thousands of slaves entered the port of Havana (41,052 between 1791 and 1797, to be more precise), only about 1,500 entered Cartagena during the same period. The available numbers for Montevideo and Caracas, while more modest than those for Havana, also surpassed those of Cartagena (7,865 for Montevideo between 1792 and 1797 and 4,527 for Caracas between 1790 and 1792). Moreover, of those who entered

39 AGI, Indiferente General, 2824 and 2825.

Cartagena about half (721) were unsold and re-embarked for Havana and Portobelo. Even if a good number of those who entered and remained in Cartagena were to end up in Santa Marta, less than 1,000 slaves in a seven-year period is nowhere close to the 1,000 per year that Astigárraga considered necessary.[40] An earlier report from Santa Marta's governor, Antonio Samper, dated 25 June 1794, revealed that only 33 slaves had been brought to Santa Marta since the passing of the *real cédula* of 24 November 1791. Based on these discouraging numbers, Governor Samper concluded that, while slaves were absolutely necessary for the development of Santa Marta, free trade was not the best way to ensure an adequate supply. If an adequate number was to be supplied, Samper proposed, the royal treasury would need to not only guarantee the delivery of a previously determined number of slaves but also to give them on credit to Santa Marta's planters.[41]

Why did free trade in slaves not work for Santa Marta and the viceroyalty of New Granada? Why did Narváez's visions of prosperity for Santa Marta end up becoming shattered dreams, while Arango's similar visions became a reality in Cuba? The easy and not fully satisfactory answer is distance from the supply source. This explanation, however, fails to account for several critical factors. In short, while geography (i.e. physical distance) matters, it is not everything. Two key elements, availability of capital and access to power, provide more compelling explanations.

When explaining why many of the slaves brought to Cartagena remained unsold and were, therefore, re-embarked for other destinations, multiple officers claimed that lack of capital, or the "limited faculties" of Santa Marta's planters "to buy the number [of slaves] they required", constituted the main obstacle to the economic transformation of the province.[42] In contrast to their wealthier counterparts in Havana, planters and merchants in Santa Marta and Cartagena simply lacked the resources to compete under free trade. Because of this, several high-ranking officers in New Granada, including Samper, Governor Anastasio Cejudo of Cartagena, and Viceroy Joseph Ezpeleta ended

40 Juan María de las Doblas, "Estado general que manifiesta los negros bozales introducidos y extraídos en este puerto desde 1º de enero de 1791 hasta 30 de septiembre del corriente año, con distinción de españoles y extranjeros, clase de cada buque, su nombre, el de su capitán y puerto de su destino, que uno en pos de otro es como sigue." Cartagena, 9 October 1797. AGI, Indiferente General, 2824.

41 Antonio de Samper and Manuel Trujillo to viceroy Ezpeleta. Santa Marta, 25 June 1794. AGI, Indiferente General 2823, no. 14.

42 Antonio Samper to viceroy Ezpeleta. Santa Marta, 15 de noviembre de 1793. AGI, Indiferente General, 2823, no. 2195, no. 3.

up opposing free trade as the most effective mechanism to supply their provinces with slaves and achieve the dreams of prosperity and development that Narváez articulated in his 1778 "Relación".

If availability of capital offers an obvious explanation for the divergence of Cuba and Santa Marta, the trajectories of Francisco Arango y Parreño and Antonio Narváez y la Torre during the 1790s allow one to take a peek into the inner workings of the empire by showing the key role that access to power played in fostering economic development. As José Antonio Piqueras demonstrates, Arango spent the last four years of the 1780s and the first half of the 1790s in Spain, working as agent of the city of Havana. As such, his task was "to promote and encourage the prosperity of his homeland".[43] While in Spain, Arango not only wrote his *Discurso sobre la agricultura de la Habana* but also established connections with renowned intellectuals and powerful members of Carlos IV's royal court, including leading figure of the Spanish Enlightenment Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos and Prime Minister Floridablanca.[44] By contrast, Narváez spent most of the 1790s as governor of Panama, complaining about his current position and trying, unsuccessfully, to get relocated to a better location. His correspondence with Juan de Casamayor, whom Narváez claimed was his only contact in Madrid, is a chronicle of frustrations and lack of effective patronage. Throughout the second half of the 1790s, Narváez repeatedly asked Casamayor to intercede in his favour at the royal court in order to be granted better employment.[45] Whether Casamayor lacked connections or simply did not care enough about Narváez to waste invaluable social and political capital is unclear. Whatever the case might have been, it is clear that Narváez, one of the most respected individuals in the Caribbean provinces of New Granada, was a minuscule player in Madrid's circles of influences. On a larger imperial scale, Narváez and his dreams of a prosperous Santa Marta fell on deaf ears. Arango's visions, by contrast, backed up as they were by financially healthier Cuban elites, ran the course from idea to reality.

Beyond offering a case study in intraimperial competition and the inner workings of the Spanish Empire, the divergent paths of Cuba and Santa Marta also reveal an understudied side of the narrative of the rise of capitalism, namely that for each place that effectively developed into a key node of capitalist development, many others failed in their attempt. As a result, the comparison between

43 J.A. Piqueras, "Los amigos de Arango en la corte de Carlos IV", in: M.D. González-Ripoll and I. Álvarez (eds.), *Francisco Arango y la invención de la Cuba azucarera*, Salamanca, Universidad de Salamanca, 2009, p. 153.

44 Tomich, "The Wealth of Empire", p. 7.

45 The letters of Narváez to Casamayor are available in AGI, Panama, 261 and AGI, Panama, 262.

Cuba and Santa Marta further enhances our ability to understand capitalism – an economic system usually associated with globally integrated markets, great capital investment and reinvestment, efficient use of production factors, free wage and specialized labour, and innovation and creativity, all geared towards maximizing profit – beyond its Weberian interpretation as a "European, mostly British, primarily Protestant invention".[46] The cases of Cuba and Santa Marta contribute to the construction of what Kenneth Pomeranz calls "a more inclusive story" that not only considers slavery as a modern and capitalist institution but also allows a variety of non-European places to be cradles of capitalism.[47]

Central to these emerging narratives that, by incorporating China, Spanish North America, Cuba, the US South, and other non-European places, demonstrate the "multi-centered nature" of the rise of capitalism is the exclusion of places, such as Santa Marta, which were sites of intense intellectual activity and policy proposals that came short of translating into implementation.[48] While Cuba effectively became a key site of capitalist development during the first half of the nineteenth century, Santa Marta remained an imperial and capitalist backwater. The plans and efforts of Narváez, Astigárraga, and others, however, reveal the truly global nature of the rise of capitalism. Far from being discarded as unrealistic and quixotic, Narváez's shattered capitalist dreams should be interpreted as a key component of the spirit of the 1780s and 1790s and as an indication that, despite the growing number of studies that support the polycentric narrative of the emergence of capitalism, in this story much more than the half has never been told.

Conclusion

The configuration and reconfiguration of geographic spaces are central elements of the two arguments I have presented. In the first one, sailors created a geographic space and following sailors enabled me to uncover their lived geography. In the second one, Antonio Narváez y La Torre, José de Astigárraga, and other enlightened creoles from New Granada envisioned the possibility of

46 J. Tutino, *Making a New World: Founding Capitalism in the Bajío and Spanish North America*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2011, p. 8. For the classic Weberian interpretation, see M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, New York: Scribner, 1930.

47 K. Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 17–23; Tutino, *Making a New World*.

48 Tutino, *Making a New World*, p. 14.

a fundamental transformation of the northern provinces of the viceroyalty of New Granada. The Haitian Revolution is at the heart of both processes and arguments. In the first one, the existence of a sailor-created transimperial Greater Caribbean made it easy for news of the Haitian Revolution to spread. In the second one, the Haitian Revolution created a favourable contingency for planters, statesmen, and reformers to pursue old dreams or to conceive new visions of development for their homelands.

Thus, the spread of news of the Haitian Revolution benefitted from the existence of and triggered new forms of experiencing and envisioning geographic spaces. While the acknowledgement of the existence of a sailor-created region offers scholars the possibility to approach geographic space through a lens that does not privilege political geographies, the analysis of the ways in which reformers envisioned potential future reconfigurations of the Caribbean's economic geography makes it possible for us to recover what Ann Stoler calls a "history of what was deemed possible but remained unrealized".[49] In both cases a fundamental aspect of the analysis is that just as humans make their own history, they also make their own geography. The process through which they make both their history and their geography could have led to many places. Reaching their stated goal was far from guaranteed.

49 A. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 108.