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A colonial counter economy: tobacco production on Española, 1500-1870


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A COLONIAL COUNTER ECONOMY: TOBACCO PRODUCTION ON ESPAÑOLA, 1500-1870*

INTRODUCTION

The Spanish colonization of the Americas was guided by an essentially urban ideology. Spanish officials saw the city as the lynch-pin of the American colonial empire, which had to be provided with goods and services by the surrounding countryside (Moreno Toscano & Florescano 1976). In many respects, cities thus became the symbol of Spanish hierarchy and centralism. Richard Morse (1984: 78) writes: “Colonization was largely a labour of ‘urbanization’, that is, a strategy of settlement nucleation for appropriating resources and implanting jurisdiction”.

The paradox of Spanish colonialism was that, in spite of this centralist ideology, a great deal of marginal ‘frontier’-activity took place. One could even say that colonial reality was determined more by individual colonists pushing forward the agricultural and colonial frontier than by imperial centralism. The Spanish Crown could not prevent a great deal of uncontrolled economic activity within its borders. Even in smaller territories, such as the Caribbean islands, this paradox was clearly visible. The Puerto Rican historian Angel Quintero Rivera recently stressed that the ‘urban-rural dichotomy’ has been an essential characteristic of Puerto Rican history. The rural population in the interior of the island created a peasant economy in defiance of the central government. He writes: “For this rural world, the city represented the State: it represented that which one had to retreat from.” (Quintero Rivera 1987: 130). On the neighboring island of Española, a similar situation existed. The administrative prominence of Santo Domingo could not prevent a flourishing tobacco producing peasant economy from emerging in the northern Cibao valley.

This contrast between city and countryside, between the state and agricultural producers, is critical for the political and geographical history of the regions involved and throws a particular light upon the linkages between the Spanish colonies and the world market, if we may give the Atlantic mercantile system this somewhat anachronistic epithet. While an urban ideology of absolute control and mercantilist centralization prevailed, pockets of unauthorized production and commerce existed everywhere in the enormous colonial empire. In the Caribbean area tobacco played an important role in this agricultural production outside the authority of the Spanish colonial system. Tobacco matured rapidly and was easily grown with techniques learned from the native population. It quickly became a favorite, but illegal, export. As such, it played an important role in the incursions of Dutch and French buccaneers into Spanish territory.

The Spanish Crown did all it could to eradicate the unauthorized trade and even tried the forced resettlement of the rural population. This led in Northern Venezuela and the Dominican Republic to the so-called ‘despoblaciones’ or ‘devastaciones’ in the first decade of the 17th century. When these measures proved unsuccessful over the long run, the colonial authorities tried to incorporate the tobacco sector in the Spanish mercantile system. This was more or less successful in Cuba, but on Española – today the Dominican Republic – tobacco remained a crop of independent small-holders, who resisted intervention of the national state well into the 19th century.

This paper tries to explore some aspects of the counter-economy based on the cultivation of tobacco. It will emphasize the dynamics of economic change on a local level. Without denying the influence of expanding mercantile capitalism in the 17th and 18th centuries, it will qualify theories which see Spanish centralism as the sole determining force in the colonial history of Latin America (see also Mintz 1977 and Stern 1988).

THE COLONIAL SYSTEM OF ESPAÑOLA

After the conquest of Española and the rapid extinction of the native population the Spaniards were confronted with the enormous task of creating a new society. Rather than the result of a conscious and premeditated process, the society which came into existence on the island Española showed a curious mixture of Spanish colonial ideology, ad hoc decisions by state officials and heterogeneous local initiatives. After the extermination of the indigenous inhabitants, sugar cane plantations became the mainstay of a Spanish settler colony. The cultivation of sugar cane with slave labor was to make Española the next Spanish sugar colony after the Canary Islands. The first plantation was established in 1515 (Bosch 1979: 23). In 1520, six sugar mills were functioning,
and forty water-driven ingenios were in the process of construction (Moya Pons 1976: 72-3). The cultivation of sugar cane resulted in considerable economic activity on the island and brought wealth to more than a few Spanish settlers. As a result of this development, the importation of slaves accelerated rapidly after the 1520s, and Echagoian mentioned a number of 20,000 slaves working on the island in 1568 (Rodríguez Demorizi 1970: 131). In the 1530s, the island counted a total of 34 mills producing sugar and molasses; and in 1568, "plantations owning a hundred-fifty to two hundred slaves were not uncommon". If we believe Ratekin (1954: 13), the largest plantations owned up to 500 slaves, an astounding number for the period. The sugar planters on the island were closely affiliated to the public and religious authorities. Civil servants and religious congregations acted as buyers of sugar products and owned sugar plantations themselves. Most colonial officials had some private business on the side, and a close connection between private and public functions became the rule.

However, the weak foundation of the colonial sugar economy became apparent as early as the 1570s, when trade with Spain suffered a sharp decline. The discovery and conquista of the South American continent in the 16th century caused a decisive shift in the structure of the Spanish colonial empire. The Caribbean islands lost their central place, and the continental centers of Spanish colonial expansion gradually superseded them. Sometimes two years passed without any Spanish ship arriving in the Santo Domingo harbor (Chaunu & Chaunu 1955-59: I, 497-503). Many planters went bankrupt or left, and few sugar plantations remained in the 17th century. The Spanish administration moved to the continent, and the most active and rich entrepreneurs left the Caribbean islands for the promising mainland possessions of Spain. On Española, only 800 Spanish households, some 4000 people, remained in 1574 (Peña Perez 1980: 72-3).

The North-West European expansionism in the Caribbean considerably aggravated the problems for Española. Although attempts had been made by the Dutch to establish a legitimate trade, the Spanish mercantilism forced the Dutch, French and English into smuggling and, even more harmful to the Spanish trade, into piracy. Much of the Santo Domingo transport was done with small coasters, which were an easy prey for the roaming pirate ships, which started to intrude upon Spanish territory at the end of the 16th century. In 1595 the treasurer of Santo Domingo, Diego de Ibarra reported:

"For the last four years (...) corsairs are as numerous and assiduous as though these were ports of their own countries. (...) Not a ship coming up from the outside escapes them; nor does any which leaves the harbor get past them." (Cited in Andrews 1978: 168).
These remarks were ideologically loaded; it was not so much piracy but contraband trade which was seen as the largest threat to the Spanish colonial empire. The Spanish motherland could not provision its Española colony; neither did it import the latter’s agrarian commodities. Not surprisingly, the European contraband traders found an eager market in Santo Domingo. Contraband trade was the only option of the creole population of the island. We may see the English captain, John Hawkins, as the founder of this flourishing trade. Carrying cloth and general merchandise from England and slaves from West Africa, he made four voyages to Española in the period from 1562 to 1568. He successfully traded with merchants in the northern cities Isabela, Monte Cristi and Puerto Plata. In the course of this strictly illegal trade, he even paid his duties to the local authorities, apparently hoping to convince the Spanish government of the advantages of legal trade (Parry & Sherlock 1971: 34). Although the Spanish Crown never considered permission for such an unpardonable infringement on its monopoly, the inhabitants of the island did not hesitate to take advantage of this welcome opportunity to evade the slow and inefficient Spanish mercantile structure. The illegal trade prospered especially in the interior. By 1577, the contraband trade had become ‘una verdadera tradición’ (Peña Perez 1980: 76). The entire population participated in this forbidden, but profitable, traffic.

In the 1590s, the Dutch had twenty ships which traded exclusively with Cuba and Santo Domingo (Goslinga 1971: 55). The northern part of the island in particular took advantage of this trade, and it is tempting to agree with Frank Peña Perez (1980: 93-4) when he writes:

"En 1590 la actividad comercial más importante de la Isla era el contrabando y por eso las principales riquezas se fueron trasladando hacia la banda noroeste, zona donde estaban los puertos más activas en lo que respecta al trato con los comerciantes extranjeros".

His conclusion is that “el contrabando estaba beneficiando a los vecinos del interior de la Isla, pero al mismo tiempo había perjudicado a Santo Domingo”.

This prosperous contraband trade gradually shifted the economic emphasis from production of sugar to cattle-holding. Hides and provisions were a favorite merchandise for the buccaneers, who explored the scarcely inhabited western and northern coasts of the island. The south-western valleys around San Juan de Maguana and the large region around Monte Cristi became the domain of the hateros, who were living off the illegal trade with the French and Dutch pirates. When notice went out that a ship had cast anchor off the northern coast, the roads of the interior filled with mules, cattle and carretas, which carried merchandise from distances of up to forty miles (Peña Perez 1980: 76).
Everywhere in the Caribbean creole farmers started to cultivate tobacco in the last decades of the 16th century. The centers of production were Cuba and, above all, the northern coast of Venezuela, where a considerable amount of tobacco was produced and sold. The buyers were the English and Dutch ships. At the end of the 16th century the demand for tobacco in Europe was quickly growing. The market for tobacco in North-West Europe grew rapidly and Dutch, British and French traders were eager buyers. A flourishing contraband trade developed which encompassed the entire Atlantic coast of America (Andrews 1978: 225-6; Sluiter 1948). Tobacco thus became an important vehicle of incursions on Spanish colonial territory.\(^4\)

While the sugar sector in the southern part of Española was in decline and cattle-holding was the principal activity in the rest of the country, small-scale agriculture developed around the Santiago-La Vega axis, in the so-called ‘Vega Real’. Small-scale farmers started to cultivate tobacco together with food crops. Part of this agricultural production was consumed within the region, but some of it was sold to the ships which frequented the northern coast. Tobacco quickly became a favorite cash crop of the northern population. Unfortunately, sources on the producers of the tobacco are very scarce and provide only very sketchy information, but we must assume it had acquired some significance in the late 16th century (Gil-Bermejo 1983: 71).

In the 16th and 17th centuries when the tobacco production developed in the shadow of Spanish mercantile control (and often opposed to it), the cultivation of tobacco became the realm of the creolized Spanish population. The impoverished whites and colored groups gradually integrated tobacco into their subsistence agriculture and began its commercialization. The memoria of the Cabildo of Santo Domingo, which argued against the depopulation of the northern and western territories, described the tobacco producing population of the Cibao as ‘gente común’: poor whites, mestizos, mulattoes and negroes (Sluiter 1948: 187).

They cultivated tobacco for their personal use and sold a part of it to cover their inevitable cash expenditures. In the 17th century various religious officials were exporting tobacco which they had received as tithe or prebend, to Spain, (Gil-Bermejo 1983: 154-5). In an economy where the circulation of money was very limited, easy-to-handle cash crops such as ginger or tobacco functioned as a means for the poor agrarian population to fulfill their religious and civic obligations and to acquire their basic necessities.\(^5\)

The problem was, of course, that the tobacco export was unauthorized. The Spanish Crown did not permit trade, unless it was under its control. The tobacco cultivation was such an annoyance to the colonial officials that they were
prepared to take radical measures to put an end to it. In 1604, the Crown ordered the evacuation of the populations of Northern Venezuela and Santo Domingo to interior towns, which were created for that purpose by the Spanish government. In Española the Spanish Crown decided to evacuate the population of the western and north-western parts of the island. This led to the so-called des poblaciones, which took place in the years 1605-1606. Under direction of the governor, Antonio Osorio, towns were burned down and families forcefully resettled in new settlements in the central and eastern part of the country (Peña Perez 1980).

The Spanish offensive against the illegal trade was principally directed against the tobacco trade. The Real Cedula of 1606 prohibited all cultivation of tobacco in the Spanish Caribbean possessions for at least ten years. The Cabildo of Santo Domingo protested immediately against the prohibition because, according to this institution, many people depended on the cultivation of tobacco for their ‘sustento y conservación’ (cited in Peña Perez 1986: 149). The members of the cabildo of the cathedral, pointing to the economic importance of tobacco, also opposed the Real Cedula of 1606. For many inhabitants it was the principal means of subsistence ‘dentro del contexto general de la pobreza que allí se daba’. Moreover, they referred to the income which its cultivation generated for the state and the Church. The latter received more than 1,000 ducats yearly from levies on tobacco sales. The final argument against the prohibition was the large consumption of tobacco by the African slaves, who could become restless when the tobacco supply dwindled (Gil-Bermejo 1983: 71-2). This same argument was used by the governor of Caracas who complained that the pearl-fishing slaves in Margarita hardly worked when there was no tobacco (Goslinga 1971: 83).

This episode shows to what extremes the Spanish Crown was prepared to go in order to protect its monopoly. Just as occurred elsewhere in the Spanish Empire, the Crown’s imperial policy sacrificed the potential development of its colonies to its relentless desire to maintain a centralized government and a monopolistic commercial structure (Sluiter 1948).

THE TOBACCO SECTOR IN THE 17TH CENTURY

Not surprisingly, the prohibitive legislature of the tobacco cultivation on Española was not successful. If cultivation was interrupted at all, it was only for a very short period of time. Probably as a result of the protests, the colonial officials allowed legal export of tobacco to Spain. In 1612, Santo Domingo started to export tobacco to Sevilla. The registered exports reached an amount of 322,757 pounds in the period 1612-1614. Considering the arrival of unregistered ships in Spain and the continuing contraband trade, production was
probably much more (Gil-Bermejo 1983: 71-2). The prohibition of 1606 was annulled in 1614. Of course, the stipulation that all the tobacco had to be shipped to Spain remained. In fact, if it had not been for the staunch resistance of the Sevilla merchants, the Crown had established a royal monopoly in 1634.

For the island the *despoblaciones* were less inconsequential. Much has been said about the debility and ineffectiveness of the Spanish colonial policy in the 17th century, but in specific occasions Spain could decisively influence the historical fate of its possessions. Although they were the ultimate consequence of a weak colonialism, the *despoblaciones* had profound consequences for the future of the island.

The establishment of European buccaneers in the uninhabited regions of the island and the ultimate foundation of the French colony of Saint-Domingue were the most evident result of the *despoblaciones*. In the same process, the French and Dutch buccaneers took over part of the tobacco production. In 1630, they already possessed plantations where they cultivated tobacco (Sevilla Soler 1980: 91). In Tortuga and Samaná tobacco was illegally cultivated. Later, tobacco became the chief export product of the French settlers in the western part of Española. In 1678, some two million pounds were exported to France (Peña Perez 1986: 115). The production became so great that the French market could not absorb it anymore. The consequent drop of tobacco prices induced most French planters to look for more profitable export crops, and tobacco rapidly lost its privileged position in the French settlement (Moya Pons 1976: 187-9).

In a more general sense, the *despoblaciones* were one of the causes of the economic and social stagnation of the Spanish colony in the 17th and 18th centuries. They were followed by a long period of stagnation in Santo Domingo, ‘cien años de miseria’, as Peña Perez called his book about the 17th century colony. The population diminished to an unprecedented low level, and the economic opportunities of the Spanish market were less every day. The few export products which found a market in Spain, sugar, ginger and some tobacco, could hardly be shipped in absence of vessels. Ginger, for instance, sometimes arrived damaged in Sevilla because of the long delays (Chaunu & Chaunu 1955-59: VI, 542). Life in the 17th century colony became very precarious. The population of the island, black, mulatto and white, pulled back to a kind of subsistence economy. The poverty drove them into the interior where they did their own primitive agriculture. Only a few Spanish officials and landholders could maintain their European habits and consume imported Spanish wines and wheat. Most inhabitants accustomed themselves to the local foodstuffs, *yuca*, *batatas*, *platanos*, and hunted *cimarron* cattle for their meat consumption. The poverty in Santo Domingo was so great that in 1670 the appointed archbishop, Francisco Gutierrez, refused to accept his post on the island (Peña Perez 1986:

**THE COMING OF THE FRENCH**

The ultimate proof of Spain’s failure as a colonizing mother country - the establishment of a French colony on the western part of the island - would paradoxically be the salvation of the Spanish colony on Española. The trade with the French colonists, which started with the traditional contraband trade, quickly became an important pillar of the Dominican economy. Four years after the treaty of Rijswick (1697) between France and Spain, the French part of the island counted 35 sugar mills, and 25 new ones were in the process of construction (Deive 1980: I, 134). This provided the Spanish agriculturists and cattle-holders in the eastern part of the island, and especially those living around Santiago, with a new and promising market for their products (Silié 1976: 38-46). When the Spanish and French monarchies allied themselves in the war of the Spanish Succession, the illegal trade gained some respectability. The population in the Spanish colony was also growing rapidly. The mere 10,000 inhabitants who lived on the island in 1700 increased to 70,000 in 1770 and passed 100,000 in 1780 (Moya Pons 1974).

The export of large stocks of wild cattle continued to be the most important activity, but the cultivation of tobacco expanded steadily in the northern part of the island. The Spanish authorities were hesitantly repopulating this part of the country in an effort to stop the French penetration into the Cibao valley. Tobacco, cultivated with the foodcrops, became the favorite crop of the Spanish producers again. The principal producing area was the Santiago-La Vega region, where in the 1680s ‘se cogía lo limitado para el avasto desta Isla’ (governor Andres de Robles Caballero, cited in Peña Perez 1986: 195). In the frontier region tobacco was also cultivated to satisfy the local demand and for export to the French part of the island (Moya Pons 1976: 209-11). The production was not very high in this period and hardly met consumption demands on the island. In 1687, it was reported from Santo Domingo that “el tabaco no se comercia (...), y solo se siembra el que aquí se gasta” (G. Semillán Campusano, cited in Peña Perez 1986: 196). Deive (1980: I, 137) suggests that a scarcity of slaves impeded a real expansion of the tobacco cultivation in this period. In other words, the scarcity of labor impeded a large-scale, commercial cultivation of the crop. Until this problem was solved, tobacco remained a peasant crop, cultivated together with foodcrops such as yuca, beans and maize.

Tobacco was cultivated on a small and irregular scale and formed in this way an integrated part of the war economy which dominated the Cibao until well
into the 18th century. The region west of Santiago was a virtual no man’s land where French and Spanish troops made irregular inroads. The frequent warfare created both havoc and commercial opportunities. The scarce population in this region always lived on the edge of a pragmatic neutrality and regularly engaged in semi-illegal economic activities.

In the French colony tobacco was no longer cultivated at the end of the 17th century. The French planters were only interested in profitable export products, such as sugar cane, coffee, cacao and indigo (Debien 1941 and 1962). The Cibao now became the chief supplier of tobacco for the French colony’s consumption. The Dominican andullo, a pressed tobacco roll, became famous in this period and was eagerly consumed on the French plantations. Sanchez Valverde (1944: 185) wrote in 1785, when the trade had become illegal again:

"Nuestros andullos o garrotes de Tabaco son lo mas apreciados de los Franceses (...). Esta introducción clandestina ha sido uno de los mas fuertes Comercios con que ha subsistido nuestra Colonia en su mayor decadencia".9

The island economy acquired a dynamic of its own that escaped the control of the responsible colonial authorities. Many slaves for the French colony were imported by way of the Spanish port of Monte Cristi, which became a bustling harbor town in the second half of the 18th century. In spite of the different wars between the European powers, this city was a meeting place of French, Dutch and Spanish traders; during this period, more than hundred ships were sometimes anchored at its shore (Bosch 1979: 94; Liss 1983: 30-1). The position of the city was even more important since it was also the center of the overland trade between the Cibao valley and the French plantations.

The more or less uncontrollable dynamics of this trade showed itself in the interesting fact that all three governments involved expressed open annoyance over this flourishing trade. The English talked about the ‘pernicious traffic’ (Bosch 1979: 94). The French authorities complained about “l’animosité qu’on [the French settlers] y a contre le negociant francais” and even risked a rebellion of the petit-blancs in an attempt to suppress this trade (Frostin 1975: 288-9 and passim). The Spanish government did all it could to obtain control over the frontier trade and diminish the loss of custom duties.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

The modest revival of the Santo Domingo economy which occurred in the second half of the 18th century was partly a result of the ‘Bourbon-reforms’. The Spanish state acquired new vitality under the direction of King Charles III
(1759-88) and tried with fresh determination to obtain direct control of its Spanish American colonies. The spin-off effects of the Saint-Domingue economy and the liberalization of the Spanish trade from 1765 onwards stimulated new investments and a moderate optimism in the circles of the criollo entrepreneurs (Gutiérrez Escudero 1985: 108-11).

The new economic policy outlined by Charles III and his advisors followed two different, and not always harmonious, lines. On the one hand, the onerous mercantile monopoly of a few Spanish American cities was alleviated. The Spanish Caribbean islands were the first to take advantage of this changed vision. In 1765, it was decreed that the trade exercised by the ‘islas de Barloventa’ would be free and that the merchants of these islands were free to establish direct commercial relations with a limited number of Spanish ports (Muñoz Pérez 1947). Of course, many limitations remained in existence – Fisher (1981: 22) ironically calls it a ‘strictly limited’ freedom –, but for the first time in their colonial history the Caribbean islands were allowed to pursue commercial activities without the troublesome involvement of the Spanish merchants and public officials.

On the other hand, the Spanish Crown did not intend the emancipation of its colonies. It resorted to this new legislation in order to expand agricultural production in its American possessions and thus increase state revenues. This led to an extension of state intervention and a new tendency to peninsular control. More than before, the Spanish state took on the direction of the development of its Spanish American possessions. The production and marketing of tobacco was one of the first sectors to attract the attention of the authorities in this context (for New Spain, see Lang 1975: 85-6 and Walker, 1984; for Santo Domingo, see Lluberes 1977).

In Santo Domingo this led to the creation of a Factoría de Tabacos in 1763. Its function was to buy and stimulate the Cibao tobacco “para el mayor adelantamiento de la construcción de cigarros que se deben labrar en las Reales Fábricas de Sevilla” (Sanchez Valverde 1971: 66). To facilitate the buying of the tobacco every year, 25,000 pesos would be sent to Santo Domingo. These measures resulted from the new Bourbon policy and from the British occupation of Havana in 1762, which seriously threatened the supply of Cuban tobacco to Spain. The slow communications and the inefficiency of the imperial bureaucracy were responsible for the fact that it took seven years before the first shipment of tobacco under government control occurred. In that year, 1770, around 4,000 arrobas, for a total value of 15,068 reales, were sent to Spain (Sevilla Soler 1980: 106-7).

Once a steady sale was guaranteed, the production of tobacco in the Cibao grew significantly. The export to Cadiz oscillated around 10,000 arrobas.\(^\text{10}\) Production must have been considerably higher. First, there was the tobacco

\(^{10}\)
consumption on the island itself, which was especially high among the slave population. Secondly, much tobacco was illegally exported to French Saint-Domingue and the neighboring islands. For example, in 1773-1774, 150 slaves were bought in Cuba and Puerto Rico and were paid for by tobacco representing a value of 33,000 pesos (Sevilla Soler 1980: 111). Inhabitants of the British West Indies islands, such as Jamaica, also consumed Dominican tobacco (Franklin 1971: 292).

In addition to the smallholders, many Spanish farmers started to cultivate the crop in the Cibao with the sole purpose of selling it on the Spanish market. After 1765, Spanish entrepreneurs even started to invest some capital in the tobacco cultivation. The scale of cultivation increased, and now slave labor was also used in the production process. In 1770, 247 Spanish civilians (vecinos) were involved in the cultivation of tobacco, supported by the labor of 202 slaves. For the first time some attention was given to the quality of the tobacco leaves, and the planters started to use a rude classification of the tobacco. The crop became an important export crop geared towards the Spanish market.

Concurrently, the larger-scale cultivators developed into a strong pressure group, within the island community and in the context of the wider colonial system. Through letters and representaciones they tried to influence the imperial policy and bring about favorable legislation. High officials, such as the governor, developed an extensive interest in the tobacco sector. When the Consejo de las Indias inquired into the island’s situation in 1777, the governor answered that only an increase in the production of tobacco could save the island from its misery. The cura rector of Santiago expressed the same sentiment to the Spanish Cortes in 1779 in suggesting that the Crown should buy all the tobacco which the colony produced (Sevilla Soler 1980: 114-5).

The Spanish monopoly was far from an unambiguous blessing, however. The tobacco prices were too low, and in 1771, the island’s tobacco producers protested and complained about the commercial conditions (Gutiérrez Escudero 1985: 111-2; Perez Peña 1986: 309). Three years later a Real Cedula was promulgated which limited the production of tobacco on Española to 12,000 arrobas. Overproduction in Spain itself led to this measure, and it incited widespread indignation in the colony. Only in 1778 was permission given to sell the excess production to French Saint-Domingue (Perez Peña 1986: 310). These events clearly demonstrate the contradictions of the Spanish imperial policy: it tried to increase agricultural production without giving free reign to the producers.

Nevertheless, the small-scale peasant production of tobacco persisted and may well have been increasing together with production by the larger farms. Sanchez Valverde wrote in 1785: “El Tabaco es tan natural que nace por si en todas partes y alrededor de las mismas casas” (1971: 63). Tobacco remained
principally a peasant crop, cultivated by independent families as an integrated part of their subsistence economy. They were agricultural producers who complemented their agricultural activities with herding of small animals and hunting and, if necessary, fought as soldiers—"habitantes que viven siempre en el campo, y esparciados aquí y allá" (Moreau de Saint-Méry 1944: 224). They were the monteros, described by Bonó in his short novel of 1856. Tobacco suited these ambulant and individualistic families very well because it could be grown within a relatively short time and always found a ready market.

THE REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD

The slave revolt in the French part of the island which began in 1791 had profound consequences for the entire island. The Haitian revolution brought the island to the center of international politics. When the French took possession of the Spanish part of the island in the 1795, they had already lost Saint-Domingue (for earlier attempts, see Christelow 1941: 529). Haitian leaders feared a military invasion from the east. In 1801 and 1805, Haitian armies invaded Santo Domingo; and in 1822, the Haitians annexed the Spanish colony. This occupation only ended in 1844, when a Dominican independence movement took advantage of the temporary disorganization of the Haitian state after the death of its president Boyer.

An important consequence of these events was the emigration of many of the affluent persons from the Spanish colony. They took most of their possessions with them. A period of economic contraction was the inevitable result. The number of cattle, the principal source of wealth on Española, decreased dramatically; and the hatero activity diminished to a minimum. When Moya Pons (1985a: 248) describes the Spanish colony in this period as a 'completely devastated' country, where "subsistence agriculture accounted for most visible activity", he must have this situation in mind.

A two-sided economic transformation took place in the Spanish colony during the first half of the 19th century. On the one side we can see a process of withdrawal from the market, due to extreme instability and intermittent warfare. The Dominican cultivators fell back on their subsistence production. On the other hand, the process of peasantization, which found its origins in the colonial period, continued and formed the base for new relations with the world market.

In many respects, the non-plantation economy on the Dominican side survived the historical circumstances much better than the French plantation economy. The land legislation of the Boyer government during the Haitian occupation promoted a class of smallholding agrarian producers. The disappearance of Spanish exclusivism and the weakening of the hatero elite provided opportuni-
ties for alternative export production. When many of the wealthier (Spanish) producers emigrated to the other Spanish islands, the small-scale producers held on and continued their agriculture (Franklin 1971: 359). Initially, Cibao tobacco could only be sold on the island itself. Although the export of tobacco to Haiti could not make up for the loss of the Spanish market, the export of andullos to Haiti offered ample opportunities for the cultivators. The French traveller Pedron, who visited the island in 1800, noticed that the production of tobacco in the Santiago-La Vega region had become the exclusive domain of smallholders. These peasant producers provided so much tobacco that its value amounted to one and half million pesos. The peasant economy maintained itself during the turbulent years of the beginning of the 19th century. During the Boyer government tobacco production grew significantly. According to MacKenzie (1971: II, 161), production increased to 6,000 quintales (300,000 pounds) in 1822. In the 1820s tobacco exports oscillated between approximately 400,000 and 700,000 pounds.

If we can believe the figures of Ardouin (1958: XI, 54), tobacco export started to increase in the years 1833-35, reaching some 20,000 quintales in 1835. Until 1843, the year that the Dominican struggle for independence gained force and the Haitian government started to crumble, production consolidated itself on an average of 2 million pounds (Marte 1984: 85). The Haitian leaders were very conscious of the need to acquire foreign money and actively promoted export activities. The high indemnification payments which the French had forced the Haitians to accept induced the Haitian authorities to stimulate the cultivation of cash crops. Boyer’s first public decision was the abolition of slavery on the island and the promise to distribute land to the liberated slaves. His main purpose, however, was the stimulation of agriculture. His instructions to his military commanders were very clear: “It is in the interest of the State as well of our brothers who have just received their liberty, that they be obliged to work, cultivating their land on which their survival depends”. He concluded by emphasizing that not only foodstuffs should be grown, but also products for the market, such as coffee or tobacco (Moya Pons 1985b: 186). In April, 1830, the Haitian government even announced that it would buy all the produced tobacco ‘a precio razonable’ (Moya Pons 1972: 98-9).

Although Garcia may be right to point at the widespread corruption and illegal trade of the Haitian officials and merchants, this law certainly stimulated tobacco production by more market-oriented producers. Marte (1948: 33) suggests that the low prices for coffee on the world market induced many Haitian peasants to migrate to the Cibao and dedicate themselves to the cultivation of tobacco. These internal developments coincided with the resumption of the European trade after the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars. German trading ships started to anchor regularly at the northern coast.
Hanseatic tobacco cities, Bremen and Hamburg, started to be regular buyers of Dominican tobacco. The increasing demand for tobacco in Europe and the establishment of stable trading relations with the German towns spurred Dominican production. These factors continued to stimulate the expansion of tobacco production in the newly formed Dominican Republic.

INDEPENDENCE

If one considers the clear 'developmentalist' ideology of the Boyer government in Santo Domingo, one can only conclude that the Dominican independence was a regressive movement toward the past. The struggle for independence had nationalistic and idealistic undertones, but its basic incentives were the frustrations of the old hatere elite and a deeply felt racist resistance of the urban middle class in the capital against the 'black' Haitian rule. It can be no coincidence that the Santiago elite and the Cibao in general, which would account for virtually all revolutionary activities in the remaining part of the 19th century, remained largely passive in the struggle against the Haitians. The Cibao had fared relatively well during the Haitian rule. Its population was only hesitantly prepared to huddle behind a vague and undefined struggle for national independence which was led by groups not likely to favor the Cibao's interests. These differences would manifest themselves all too quickly in the independent Dominican Republic. Brea (1983: 69-70) rightly notes that instead of unifying the island, as intended by Toussaint l'Ouverture, the Haitian occupation of Santo Domingo had only accentuated the regional divisions of the island.

The basic structures of the country remained the same, and another thirty years would pass before profound economic and social changes would take place in the country. One could say that the failure of the Spanish annexation (1861-1865) was the closing point of a century of pre-capitalist development in the eastern part of the island.

It is undeniable that the Cibao region developed quite differently from the south (Hoetink 1980). In the colonial period, the La Vega region had been the favored spot for agriculture, and in the 19th century it was to become the symbol of prosperity and economic development. The provinces of Santiago and La Vega are “mucho mas industriosas que las del Sur”, wrote the Spaniard Mariano Torrente, who added that the region exported 80,000 quintales of tobacco in 1851. A local newspaper wrote a few years later: “Los Cibaénos [...] forman la porción mas importante de la República, por su riqueza territorial, por su industriosa actividad, por sus ideas progresistas...”.
Tobacco formed the focal point of an agricultural sector which depended on a more or less autonomous position of the peasant cultivators and on a regular European market. The northern Santiago-La Vega region became the center of a smallholding economy. In this period many people, lured by the economic opportunities it offered and eager to gain economic independence, migrated from the south to the Cibao. This flow of immigrants probably fomented the increase of the Cibao tobacco production, which took place between 1830 and 1850. Although peasant production continued to provide the major part of the Dominican tobacco production, many larger landowners and richer peasants started to cultivate tobacco with the purpose of export. Production techniques improved somewhat, and the quality of the Dominican tobacco was widely eulogized. In this period, the Dominican tobacco was often used as wrapper for Cuban cigars and a French diplomat who investigated the Dominican tobacco sector in 1849 wrote: “La capa [tobacco leaf] de Santo Domingo es mas rica y mas agradable a la vista que cualquier otra y ofrece una elasticidad perfecta y una buena resistencia” (Place 1979: 194).

TOBACCO AND POLITICS

This economic development also had political consequences. The regionalistic feelings of the Cibao population became stronger, and the conflicts with the central government sharpened. This confrontation culminated in 1857. The Cibao never came closer to separation from the southern region than in that year.

Discontent with the presidency of the southern general Buenaventura Baez had been fermenting in the tobacco community since his ascendancy to power in October, 1856. From May, 1857, this feeling sharpened when the government - with the approach of one of the best tobacco harvests of the century - put into circulation an extra 14 million paper pesos above the already issued 4 million. Government purchasers started immediately to buy huge amounts of tobacco for high prices. The mercantile class of the Cibao did not have the cash to compete effectively. The issuing of these uncovered pesos caused a tremendous inflation within weeks. When it became clear that the high prices the producers had received for their tobacco amounted to nothing, civil war was inevitable. Regional chauvinism and commercial resentment exploded in a furious and determined revolutionary movement. The ‘Manifiesto de los pueblos del Cibao y de las causas que los han impulsado a reasumir sus derechos’, signed by virtually all leading men of the Cibao, succinctly summed up the grievances. The arbitrary printing of paper money ranked first, but the regional frustration was hardly less outspoken. Looking back at some fourteen years of indepen-
dence, the undersigned complained about ‘una serie de Administraciones tiranas y rapaces’. Their constitution ‘no ha sido mas que los baculos del despotismo y de la rapiña’. The insurgents no longer recognized the Baez government and created a provisional government seated in Santiago de los Caballeros (Rodríguez Demorizi 1944: 365-8. Dominguez 1977: 160-1). A couple of months later, Baez fled to Curacao.

This revolution is significant for more than one reason. It showed that political independence of the Dominican Republic did not solve the problem of political regionalism. The Cibao lived in constant friction with the central government and was tempted more than once to confront unfavorable intervention by the state. The most striking aspect of the revolutionary movement which pitted the Cibao against the government in Santo Domingo in 1857 was the strength of its regional consciousness. The revolutionaries were absolutely convinced of the legitimacy of their struggle and did not hesitate to stand up and defend their regional interests. More than once Santiago was proposed as alternative capital of the Republic.15

From another perspective, the 1857 revolution showed that important social changes had occurred in the Cibao. Lluberes (1973) has suggested that the popular mobilization in 1857 was the first social revolution of the country. It may be nearer the truth to conclude that it showed that a selfconscious commercial class had come into existence and entered into temporary alliances with the cultivators when their mutual interest, the tobacco economy, was threatened.

The 1857 revolution is especially interesting for its obvious relationship to the tobacco trade. In part, the revolution was a struggle of the tobacco interests in the Cibao against the hateros of the south. The revolution proved the importance for the regional economy of the yearly financial injection brought by the tobacco trade and, consequently, the economic distress which was the result of any obstacle to the smooth progress of the trade.

Nevertheless, the most significant outcome of the 1857 revolution was not its success but its eventual failure. After the flight of Buenaventura Baez, the revolutionaries did not succeed in consolidating their political position. Their financial and economic base remained too small to take the future of the country in their hands. It may well be that they did not even have such ambitions and that they were content to have safeguarded their regional autonomy. In any case, they relinquished the presidency to Pedro Santana in 1858, one of the staunchest representatives of the hatero-class, handing over political leadership of the country to the southern elite again. This proved to be a very short-sighted move and caused them to rebel again within a few years. Santana led the Dominican Republic into a Spanish annexation in 1861. The Cibao took up its arms once more to defend its interests and eventually chased away the Spaniards in 1865.
These events showed that the nascent export sector of tobacco in the Cibao was the basis for political mobilisation when its commercial operations were threatened. However, the regional elite lacked the political coherence - and perhaps the military strength - to maintain the political initiative after the economic grievances were removed. From the 1880s onwards, it therefore tried to defend its interests by joining the government and trying to influence legislation. This strategy probably began with the government of Ulises Heureaux (1882-1899), when many northern politicians were given important government positions. This created a growing gap between the cultivators and the mercantile community. In the 20th century, the exporters no longer looked for political support in the ranks of the cultivators but increasingly joined the state apparatus and became part of a regional establishment.

CONCLUSION

Spanish colonialism was characterized by a strong centralism. Colonial officials did all they could to maintain control over the economic system of their empire. However, they could not prevent autonomous processes of social and economic development taking place at a regional level. This meant not only that regions succeeded in keeping Spanish influence at bay but also that in some cases, regional economies created their own relationship with the Spanish and world markets. In the Spanish colony on Española this led to the creation of a tobacco economy in the north which maintained itself during three centuries. We have called this tobacco sector a 'counter-economy', because it existed in opposition to the Spanish colonial economy. Only during two short periods, 1610-1650 and 1765-1791, did the tobacco sector exist within the Spanish colonial system.

This Cibao peasant sector came into existence during three centuries of Spanish colonial neglect followed by another fifty years of peasantization (Machín 1973: 29). Because the majority of the cultivators were smallholders producing without capital and dependent on family labor, we may speak of a peasant sector. This sector was not the result of resistance to plantation agriculture as occurred in other parts of the Caribbean. Rather, the absence of a coherent economic policy of the Spanish authorities provided space for the rise of a peasant society producing in virtual autonomy. It consisted of a racially mixed population which developed its own cultural forms based on a dominant Spanish heritage. (Hoetink 1985: 58-61 speaks of a socioracial continuum.) This 'creole' peasantry - a type we may add to Mintz's now-famous typology of Caribbean peasants (Mintz 1974) - formed the foundation of tobacco production in the Cibao.
The autonomous character of the tobacco sector did not mean isolation. In spite of its relative isolation within the Spanish colonial economy, the tobacco sector had multifarious commercial relations with the international market. The particular organization of the tobacco cultivation, and especially its combination with food-crop cultivation, gave a special character to these market relations. The survival of the tobacco growing peasants depended above all on their subsistence agriculture. They were therefore able to continue the production of tobacco even when the terms of trade were relatively unfavorable.

The expansion of the tobacco cultivation had important consequences for the region. It created a dynamic mercantile class in the cities. The merchants became an important social force who started to aspire to influence political decision making. In the 19th century, the Cibao population took up arms twice to defend its autonomy and increase its impact on national politics. These two goals were contradictory, however. The warfare succeeded in safeguarding the autonomy of the Cibao tobacco sector, but it had to relinquish national political influence. The most important characteristic of the tobacco sector was that it existed not because of, but in opposition to, the central state. Integration in national politics meant losing economic autonomy and vice versa.

NOTES

* This article, first presented at the 9th AHILA conference (Sevilla, 1-5 October 1990), is a revised version of the first chapter of my Ph.D. thesis “Peasant society under siege: tobacco cultivators in the Cibao (Dominican Republic), 1870-1930” (University of Utrecht, 1991).

1. Karen Spalding quotes Santo Domingo authorities writing in the 1570s: “with the enormous news of the riches of Peru, we are hard put to stop the people of this island and even all the surrounding areas ... because all the people are aroused with plans to go to that land” (1984: 119).

2. 1572 was the year of the first voyage of Sir Francis Drake. See: Parry & Sherlock 1971: 39; Andrews 1978: 134.

3. The work of the Chaunu’s (1955-59) shows how the exclusive use of Spanish sources leads to an underestimation of the contraband trade.

4. The Governor of Caracas wrote in 1607 to the Spanish Crown: “Tobacco has been one of the chief factors causing these coasts to be so much frequented by pirates” (cited in Andrews 1978: 228).

5. In Costa Rica the same thing happened with the cacao beans (Seligson 1980: 17).

7. We only have to remember the termination of the Manila-galleon in this respect (Schurz 1959). Braudel writes "It is commonplace to ridicule the laws of the Indies (...), that is the illusion that the Catholic Kings exerted any real authority on the other side of the Atlantic. I agree that they did not invariably get their way in these far-flung countries. But the royal will did achieve certain objectives ..." (Braudel 1982: 176).


9. Also Moreau de Saint-Méry (1944: 98), who adds: "porque mezclado con otros tabacos, les comunica su calidad por el vigor de su savia".

10. The export figures during the six years of legitimate trade were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Arrobas</th>
<th>Libras</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1771</td>
<td>5,384</td>
<td>38 libras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1772</td>
<td>3,266 id.</td>
<td>22.5 id.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1773</td>
<td>11,403 id.</td>
<td>27 id.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1774</td>
<td>13,495 id.</td>
<td>50 id.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1775</td>
<td>8,592 id.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1776 | 10,709 id.| 3 id.     | (Sevilla Soler 1980: 114).

11. The equivalent of Pedrón’s “12 a 14.000 millares de peso” (Pedrón 1955: 171). Ferran (1976: 39) omits these ‘millares’. Although this is an accident, he is probably right that Pedron’s figures are exaggerated.

12. See the entirely different figures in Marte (1984: 72) and Cassá (1980: II, 19).

13. Memoria de Mariano Torrente, 6-1-1853; in: Archivo Histórico Nacional (Madrid), 3524, 66.


15. See for instance the report of the French consul Saint-André on the events of 1857: "el norte, es decir el único punto donde se trabaja, podría poner en ejecución la amenaza que ha hecho muchas veces de separarse de Santo Domingo, y son los ingresos (del Cibao) que permiten a la República saldar sus gastos" (cited in Boin & Serulle Ramía 1981: 174).

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